

I'm a Believer—But I'll Be Damned If I'm Religious: Belief and Religion in the Greater Copenhagen Area—A Focus Group Study, by Ina Rosen. Lund Studies in Sociology of Religion, Volume 8. Lunds Universitet, 2009. 196pp, pb., NPG. ISBN-10: 9197476056.

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Keywords

confirmation, implicit religion, practise, focus groups

This book begins with a question based on empirical surveys of Danish religiosity, wherein Danes seem to have relatively positive kinds of things to say about religion when measured by various kinds of surveys across the population, and Danish participation in organized religion at a formal level remains relatively high—particularly in regard to rituals such as baptisms and confirmations. Young people in the confirmation-preparation age bracket (10–14) in fact have the highest levels of church-joining, while those in the 24–44 age bracket show the opposite. These statistics, however, pertain solely to the State Church, which are the only official statistics available. However 82 percent of the Danish population considered themselves members of the State Church in 2008—a drop of but six percent from a decade earlier. Rosen then particularly wishes to raise the question of the relationship of belief to religion, which she does through a series of focus-group studies, wherein three or four people in different occupational/status groups gather to discuss both their religiosity and their actual beliefs. In all, she ends up with a series of different concepts that “ordinary people” (her phrase) have in this respect: “belief, routinized religion, religion-as-heritage, practice and tradition” (154). All of which may be summed up by saying that *religion is multidimensional*. I think this is something Stark, Glock and company recognized two generations ago, although the sociocultural setting, and hence the naming of the dimensions by them and by her, differ, both because the United States is not Denmark and significant time has passed from their work to hers.

We know certain things about Denmark today: First, it continues to have a State Church, to which a good deal of the population relates. In this respect, several kinds of religiosity that in the United States might well come under the rubric of “civil religion” are operationalized through the State Church, without any necessary connection to the finer points of—in this case—Lutheran theology. On the other hand, the fact that the

confirmation-age population has the highest level of joining suggests that making this civil-religious step is important, and not only to them—in fact, perhaps less so to them than to their parents. Confirmation has more of a civil religious function than in the United States, where it has relatively declined and is increasingly happening, when it happens, at a later age—i.e., not as a part of an age-group social expectation. Not surprisingly, in the same way, the dominant form of baptism in Evangelical America is that of “adults”—whose actual age can begin as early as 12 or 13, but for others will not occur until 30, 40, or beyond—and is considered a “personal” decision. The United States is increasingly a “bi-polar” religious culture in this respect, inasmuch as the largest single denomination is Roman Catholic, but the largest percentage of the population is Evangelical Protestant, most specifically Baptist.

From the sociology of religion standpoint, I find it particularly problematic that Rosen gets rather deeply tied up in the matter of belief. Of course, beliefs are part of all sociocultural milieux, but an individual's belief is a psychology-of-religion question, not a sociology-of-religion question, and in this respect I think the book becomes confused and confusing. “Religion is itself only in practice,” and practice takes place in society. What Rosen points to that is of importance is that different sociocultural systems will raise up different kinds of patterns of practice, and that these will impact both things like church attendance and financial giving, as well as the extent to which people do or do not view personal experiences through theologico-religious lenses. My own relatively frequent experiences back and forth between the UK and the US about a decade ago, pointed this out to me in one case particularly, which I think Rosen would also be likely to find fits Denmark. A friend of mine, whom I would often see when I was in the UK, said to me at one point, “Guess what?” I made the appropriate facial gesture. She went on, “I'm going to be a godmother.” I didn't even know she thought of herself as a Christian. “Isn't that something!” I replied. “How'd that happen?” and the conversation went on. So, the next time I saw her, I asked, “How'd the baptism go?” She replied, “Oh, really well, we had a lovely party [etc....]” Then she added, “But I didn't really like the [C of E] service too much—you know it was like so *religious*.” I asked, “What did you expect?” She said, “Well, you know, you just get it done, but there were altar boys and the whole congregation and a procession and hymns. Such a big deal!” I suspect this person is typical of many of Rosen's subjects *mutatis mutandis*. I don't think the same reaction would have occurred in the United States, though it is perhaps by now the

case that the majority of baptisms that take place in the United States are not infant baptisms. In this respect I am most intrigued by the high percentage of young people in Denmark in confirmation classes for whatever reason, and I think from a comparative sociology of religion perspective, that that's worth pursuing further.

Several observations *seriatim*, positive and negative:

For those of us who read this journal regularly, I think we would find that Rosen pays more competent attention to Edward Bailey's work on implicit religion than anyone has done outside of what might be called the Denton circle, and I think she understands his work well. High marks there.

On the other hand, there are some dissertations that would make a better contribution as a highly focused article than in full bloom. The book tries to relate itself to far too many scholars doing far too many different things in the social scientific study of religion. One doesn't necessarily have to relate one's research to everybody in the field. That becomes tedious, and the focus of the specific work becomes lost in a welter of tangential detail.

I liked the focus group concept, and I was especially favorably impressed that she included caregivers at a psychiatric institution, where much can often be learned. (I recalled, especially fondly, here the work of our colleague Roger Grainger.) I also appreciated the fact that she included sanitation staff in the psychiatric hospital as another focus group, but I wondered how they would compare to the sanitation staff in the public schools. Three missing groups concerned me: no group of those young people who are the most religiously involved of all Danes, if I understand her presentation of the data correctly; no housewives (or "homemakers" as we were taught was politically correct, when I was in high school); no elderly. In addition, the only university students were *sociology* students. Talk about self-selecting! I would have liked to have seen physics students, art students, and business students, each as separate focus groups.

Specifically, as I read this, I felt an enormous desire to know what goes on between 14 and 24. Is it sex? Denmark is supposed to be so sexually open that I should think not. Is it university education? Is it career (*i.e.*, having to earn a living)? Or is confirmation seen as "graduation from religion"? Once you've been confirmed, you don't have to do it any more. I'm sure we have all known college students, for example, who have never read a book after graduation. Specifically, I remember selling the first house I owned to a couple who were both college graduates, the wife a school teacher—who had actually taught one of my children. As we were removing our last

things, they stopped by. We had bookshelves that were technically “built into” the house, hence were by law to remain with it, and we intended to leave them accordingly. The wife said, “Oh, you can take those shelves if you want. We don’t read books.”

With real regret, I also have to throw a little cold water on what I would rather have applauded, for this is the first of the Lund Studies in the Sociology of Religion series to have been published in English. That intent is highly laudable, since it introduces the work of Lund graduates to a wider audience and, in turn, the rest of us to them. Unfortunately, this text is very second-rate English. Commas appear to have been assigned by a random-number sequence, and simple words—*lead* for *led*—for example, are confused. As a whole, I think the book would have had a better reception as an English-language article in a high-quality American or British journal that provided competent copy-editing.

Finally, the next step: I would like to see what results a similar project would produce in, for example, Aalborg. In Illinois we have a saying that I know has analogs in many parts of the world: “Just because you’ve been to Chicago doesn’t mean you’ve seen Illinois.” Urban centers are important, of course, but it is worth looking at how things play out in the hinterland as well. This is not to say that Rosen’s data are biased by their locale, but to say that a comparative analysis both by statistics and by focus groups might help tease out the differences among the underlying variables that contribute to her results.