classification privileges those groups that are officially included in the category. The latter part of the book, titled “Wicca in everyday life,” presents insiders’ views on their lifestyle and beliefs. While some of these insiders’ views are valuable data for scholars, others do little to widen our knowledge about Wicca in Finland. The explicit aim of the book is to offer general information about Wicca and tame the wild and widespread prejudices people have towards it. After all, Finland is still quite a homogenous country where religious variety is a recent phenomenon. In this context, Wicca has been publicly associated to Satanism, sexual orgies, and other activities which are considered immoral. This becomes understandable if we consider the fact that the majority of Wiccans in Finland are young girls, whose parents are worried about their children’s behavior. All in all, this book is directed more to the general readers than to scholars of religion, although it does have some scholarly value as well.

Teemu Taira
University of Turku


A collection of essays written before he became Pope Benedict XVI, one of which dates from 1964 but most of which originally appeared in the 1990s, this book is essential reading for anyone who wants to know the pope’s thinking about Christianity and its relation to other religions. He believes that the Enlightenment legacy of autonomous reason has obstructed the quest for truth; he argues for the truth of Christian revelation; and he then situates that truth in the wider horizon of religions. He defends the 2000 Vatican document Dominus Iesus, decrees (what he considers) the relativism of much of contemporary Christian theology, and understands other religions as “provisional, and, in this respect, as preparatory to Christianity.” Culture should not replace religion or substitute for truth, a phenomenon he believes is happening in contemporary attempts by some religious leaders to accord equality to all religions or by Christian theologians who favor ecumenicity. He dismisses J. Hick’s notion of religion’s move from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness as “meaningless and void of content” and, similarly, characterizes P. Knitter’s attempt to fuse liberation theologies with pluralist theology of religions as “mere praxis [that] gives no light.” Meaning must be connected with truth and truth manifests itself in Christianity. Not everyone will agree with his analysis, but anyone who takes the pope seriously should know where he stands, and this book unambiguously defines Benedict’s theology of religions.

Chester Gillis
Georgetown University


This book is a worthwhile, interesting, and persuasive examination of liberation theology in the past, present, and future. Building on his premise that “Latin American liberation theology was born with the promise of being a theology that would not rest with merely talking about liberation but would actually help liberate people from material deprivation,” Petrella urges liberation theologians to aim beyond talking about liberation theology from the corridors of academia. This volume benefits from several significant features: First, it makes available a balanced amalgamation of the historical changes that have occurred in liberation theology in the past twenty years and offers strategies for challenging democracy and capitalism in light of institutional imagination; Second, the social analysis is quite substantial, offering evidence that since the fall of communism, liberation theology has wrestled with establishing a centered theological and historical worldview; Third, this book is convincing, leading the readers to agree, for the most part, with Petrella’s perspectives that utilize political theology, radical orthodoxy, and Latina (M. Aquino) and African-American (D. Hopkins) theology to move beyond the other liberation motifs suggested by G. Gutierrez, J. Sobrino, and L. Boff. This book is divided into seven reasonably sized chapters and of added benefit is a twenty-page bibliography that is a Who’s Who of Liberation Theology; a four-page appendix maps Petrella’s “manifesto” for the future of liberation theology. Finally, Petrella offers constructive criticisms and useful challenges for refashioning liberation theology for the twenty-first century church, but it is the same dilemma that faced liberation theology from its biblical days—liberation of the marginalized, disenfranchised, and the anaown: “For you will always have the poor with you” (Mark 14:7).

Arthur D. Canales
Silver Lake College of the Holy Family

Methodology and Theory


One of the practical challenges in teaching composition courses—and one that has become increasingly difficult in recent years—is to find texts that articulate a compelling rationale for the study and practice of writing and, at the same time, to provide substantial readings that will engage students from various majors. This new edition sets out to accomplish this feat in particularly ambitious terms, providing a “Christian view of rhetoric” along with a selection of essays organized around broadly Christian themes (e.g., “Living Ethically,” “Confrontation with Suffering,” “Living in the Environment”). Teachers inclined to proselytize for effective prose will appreciate the authors’ central assertion that “Good rhetoric is not simply an option for the Christian writer; it is a responsibility,” as well as their related claim that “no area of life is free from ethical responsibility.” The actual “rhetoric” is surprisingly brief (just over 50 pages) and basic, even by the standards of first-year college courses. The readings are far more substantial and include such various authors as Augustine, T. Paine, C. Darwin, F. Crick, and R. Dove, as well as a fine pair of essays on the moral and religious debates surrounding the Harry Potter books. While this book is not likely be used outside of Christian colleges, it does demonstrate one of the ways that intellectual and ethical rigor can reinvigorate the first-year writing course.

Brian Conniff
University of Dayton


Lee and Ackerman’s book is a contribution to the evergrowing literature on the “reenchantment” of the world. But unlike in most previous works, the secularization debate is approached from the perspective of a semiotic theory of symbols and signs, giving the book a distinctively “European” flavor. The argument is that enlightenment rationalism (disenchantment) is challenged by what the authors call “the immalance of charisma,” that is, the reenchantment of the world outside and beyond institutional structures (Weber’s “routinization” of charisma), or even individual actors. In the authors’ vocabulary, fundamentalism represents immanent charisma encoded into concrete reality through symbols such as the Qur’an, which reflects the original charisma of Muhammad. Signs, on the other hand, are self-referential. In the authors’ words: “In the case of New Age tantrism, the messages and methods of spiritual liberation have been disconnected from their traditional sources to constitute self-defining icons of religious experimentation.” This corresponds largely to what sociologists of religion refer to as “spirituality.” The examples of reenchantment that the authors provide offer few new ideas in terms of content, but the book does provide an innovative framework for analyzing religion and social change. However, the enlightening examples notwithstanding, the “postmodern” language used in the book prob-
ably limits its readership to scholars and advanced students.

Titus Hjelm
University of Helsinki


A good example of the recent “boom” in the study of contemporary paganism is the launching of AltaMira’s Pagan Studies series, of which Researching Paganisms is the first title. As an opening of the series, the book is an introduction to the study of paganism and, as such, a definition of the field. The book is divided into four parts which all more or less discuss the researcher’s position in ethnographic research. Delivered in personal narrative, the book is a powerful legitimation of the “insider” position in ethnography—not a very surprising detail considering that most of the contributors subscribe to some form of paganism. At the same time, it is a powerful delegitimation of what is expressed as “worship of objectivity” or the “myth of objectivity.” As an introduction to new ways of understanding ethnographic fieldwork, both in pagan studies and more generally, the book is invaluable. As an introduction to Pagan Studies it is more questionable: The representation of “proper” field methods is one-sided at best, and I don’t have difficulties in imagining that the book might discourage many students who are not interested in embracing pagan beliefs as an insider. After all, different questions require different approaches and not all approaches require one to take a stand regarding the reality of the object of worship. It is my sincere hope that, with this important opening, Pagan Studies is not shutting out many other important approaches to the study of religion.

Titus Hjelm
University of Helsinki


A collection of conference papers addressing national and regional differences in the study of religion and ways that it is shaped by ideology. It offers useful but uneven and limited coverage of national variation (Czech and Slovak Republics, Poland, China, the former Soviet Union, Holland, Germany, and the United States). Individual contributions vary widely, with some valuable thumbnail sketches of national trends in scholarship but with much (e.g., autobiographical narratives) of little general interest. The book makes a solid case for the enduring value of many studies of religion in communist block nations, despite Marxism’s “scientific atheism.” (M. Pye argues that the western surprise at, or continuing ignorance of, this work is itself an artifact of ideology.) Some contributions address causal relations between the ideologies and political structures of the Cold War and the academic study of religion: funding and the rise of area studies (L. Martin); “the Cold War fear of reductionism” and the privileging of Eliadean/sui generis approaches (W. Paden; cf. Martin, Wiebe, and Waardenburg); Nazi and Cold War uses of religious history to construct ethnic/national myths (Gustavo Benavides); relations to colonial and imperial attitudes (J. Waardenburg and D. Y. Mikulsiky on Islam). D. Wiebe soberly calls attention to the lack of solid evidence for specific effects on the study of religion in the United States. A valuable volume on the study of religion in its modern global context: essential for libraries and specialists.

Steven Engler
Mount Royal College

Psychology of Religion


Yet another volume from a theologian much appreciated by readers for his pellucid purveyance of theology’s profundities. In this perhaps overly ambitious book Macquarrie traces two millennia of Christian mystical experience, from its biblical roots to the early Christian Platonists, and on to the classic medieval mystics, the great Spanish mystics, the devoto moderna, and some twentieth-century mystics. Macquarrie moves through a gallery of thirty-one men and four women mystics, from Moses and Paul to Maritain and Merton. One may cavil at his selection, de Chardin but not Aquinas, Woolman but not Weil or Stein. Selection, however, entails exclusion. Macquarrie’s chosen, which includes Protestants and Catholics, give evidence, he thinks, of the ten distinguishing traits of the God-intoxicated mystic that he lucidly maps out in his opening chapter. Moreover, and perhaps decisive for Macquarrie’s selection, they exemplify a variety of lifestyles. This is important to Macquarrie, who sees mystical experience linked to ordinary religious experience, which varies in intensity from the quotidian to full-blown mysticism, in which, however, visions and locutions are, if anything, secondary phenomena to be distrusted, or creations of later reflection. Nor are mystics locked in themselves, cut off from the ordinary world. “No person,” says Meister Eckhart, “can reach the point at which he may be excused from outward service.” While Macquarrie intends to expound the teachings of his mystics “mainly in their own words,” this he does not and cannot do. The best this ambitious work can do given the space allotted is to provide an informative introductory sketch of each mystic. Thus an introduction to mysticism that will need supplementing by primary sources in courses on mysticism.

Stephen Duffy
Loyola University, New Orleans


This brief work attempts to introduce the life and writing of St. John of the Cross, a tall order for such a slim volume. The introduction offers a bare-bones survey of Christian mysticism. The author wisely avoids the “mysticism as exotic” approach, understanding the historical particularity of mystical experiences as rooted in canonical texts and communal practices. Chapters 1 and 2 present the historical and ecclesiastical contexts of John’s life, along with a brief biographical sketch. Chapters 3–7 explicate John’s writings, focusing on The Spiritual Canticle, The Dark Night, and The Living Flame of Love. These chapters, while brief, offer clear and helpful summations of each work’s overall structure and themes. They also comprise the strongest section of the book. Chapters 7 and 8 attempt to bring things together, reflecting on John’s relevance for the present. These chapters are less successful. The author’s choice of themes in this section reflects a background in philosophy, and makes little contribution to understanding John’s relevance for contemporary spirituality. Finally, the helpful appendix includes Spanish versions of The Living Flame of Love, The Spiritual Canticle, and The Dark Night along with the author’s English translations. Herrera’s work will serve as an accessible introduction to those unfamiliar with John of the Cross. However, those seeking a more thorough introduction or new insights are advised to turn to other recent and more challenging works on John of the Cross.

Timothy Hessel-Robinson
Graduate Theological Union

Sociology and Anthropology of Religion