

# LIVED RELIGION AS AN EMERGING FIELD: AN ASSESSMENT OF ITS CONTOURS AND FRONTIERS

*Nancy T. Ammerman*

Professor, Ph.D., Sociology Department of the College of Arts and Sciences, School of  
Theology, Boston University, USA  
Email: nta@bu.edu

## *Abstract*

Over the last three decades, lived religion has emerged as a distinct field of study, with an identifiable “canon” of originating sources. With this body of work reaching maturity, a critical assessment is in order. This study analyzes sixty-four journal articles published in English, since 1997, which have used either “lived religion” or “everyday religion” in their titles, abstracts, or keywords. We find that the field has largely been defined by what it excludes. It includes attention to laity, not clergy or elites; to practices rather than beliefs; to practices outside religious institutions rather than inside; and to individual agency and autonomy rather than collectivities or traditions. Substantively, the focus on practice has encompassed dimensions of embodiment, discourse and materiality; and I argue here that these substantive foci can form the analytical structure for expanding the domain of lived religion to include the traditions and institutions that have so far largely been excluded from study. In doing so, lived religion’s attention to gender, power, and previously-excluded voices must be maintained. But that task cannot be accomplished without continuing to expand the field beyond the still-limited geographic and religious terrain it has so far covered.

Keywords: Lived religion, everyday religion, embodiment, gender, discourse, materiality

Over the last three decades, the study of religion has taken a cultural turn, giving attention to discourse and identity and ritual, but especially looking at the way religion is embedded in the practices of everyday life (Edgell 2012). The turn to lived religion in the 1990s marked a significant shift in the sociological study of religion, a shift that has been remarkably fruitful. In this article, I will step back to observe what this move has enabled us to do, as well as what it may be leading us to miss. Such an assessment is important both to build on and to go beyond the advances that have been made.

The turn to lived religion<sup>1</sup> arose out of a widespread recognition that our discipline had gotten itself mired in endless debates over whether the modern world was or was not secularizing, debates mostly relevant to the North Atlantic world that threatened to blind us to much of the very phenomenon we wanted to study, in that region and beyond (Warner 1993). At an opportune moment, new voices began to be heard in the

field, inviting us to pay attention to the way religion is lived. Not surprisingly, those voices came from the margins where the existing debates made the least sense.<sup>2</sup> They came first from the women who were finding their place in the study of religion. In the US, they also came from scholars of color whose work began to gain more credence (e.g., Gilkes 1985). They came from immigrants, whose religious communities began to be noticed (e.g., Min 1992). As scholars from the postcolonial world became a more frequent presence – and we spent more time in their locales – another channel opened (e.g., N’Guessan 2015). And today all these voices are joined by queer scholars whose questions further redefine our debates (e.g., Wilcox 2009).

In the US, a shift within the field of history took place alongside this shift in the other social sciences. Historians began to wonder about the missing parts of the story – the women who were passing along religious ways of life while the men preached the sermons (e.g., Braude 1997; Albanese 1992); the indigenous people whose relationship with the spirits was more immediate than the high doctrine of the Trinity; the healers and dreamers of all sorts who lived in an enchanted world that existed all around the apparently declining Puritan establishment (e.g., Schmidt 2005).

From every angle, sociologists have been asked – why are you so worried about how many people believe the Bible is literally true? Or how many attended church last Sunday? Or how many priests are being ordained? Why do you act as if only the officially established versions of religion count as “real” religion? We have been challenged to ask ourselves whether traditional doctrines, standard-brand affiliations and respect for religious authorities can tell us what we want to know about religion. The challenge to look at lived religion was an implicit answer to the criticism of the way religion had been studied (e.g., Bender et al. 2011).

The emphasis on lived religion has been incredibly fruitful. Drawing on a range of methods already at our disposal – ethnography, interviews, analysis of documents and archives – we have gathered data that has expanded our understanding of what religion is and where it occurs. We have added new attention to visual evidence (Williams 2015) and material culture (Vasquez 2010; McDannell 1995), as well. We have learned about food ways (Diamond 2002; Koepping 2008) and clothing that expresses religious identity (Arthur 1999; Furseth 2011). We have learned about spontaneous shrines and home altars (Grider 2006; Konieczny 2009). We have learned about rituals of birth and death (Klassen 2001; Laderman 1995; Prothero 1997) and about the ways people of all religious groups navigate among the expectations of the worlds in which they live and the traditions they have to draw on. We have learned about sacred spaces and healing and everyday rituals. Under the banner of lived religion, an incredible encyclopedia of knowledge is emerging.

Throwing open the doors of our scholarship to the religion that might be found in everyday life has been challenging as well as fruitful, raising new methodological and theoretical questions. Do we still have definitional criteria that apply *a priori* to guide our study, or are all definitions now taken from the discursive schema of the individuals we study? Is an individual interpretation or ritual “social”, and how so? But more fundamentally, what exactly counts as lived religion?

After roughly a generation of work in lived religion, it is time to assess the operative

conceptual contours of this field. By looking at the studies that have been published in these years, what patterns emerge? Is there a scholarly canon? What are the operative parameters of the field? What are the substantive foci? And what are we missing?

## The Canon

In the US, the term lived religion is widely credited to David Hall, an American religious historian who convened a conference in the 1990s at Harvard Divinity School that resulted in an edited book called *Lived Religion in America* (Hall 1997). The conference and the book called scholars to turn their attention to “The everyday thinking and doing of lay men and women” (1997, vii). Contained in it were reports from an emerging generation of social historians and a few sociologists, each examining aspects of the practices of ordinary people’s lives, often groups of people not usually on the radar screens of historians. One of the contributors to that volume, Robert Orsi, had already published a widely-respected account of the history of an immigrant parish in New York, tracing especially the role of an annual *fiesta* celebrating the Madonna brought across the Atlantic by the Italians who emigrated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Orsi 1985). His attention to the rituals and meanings of that community became an exemplar held out by those who heeded Hall’s call to action.

Within sociology, the defining texts came somewhat later. Meredith McGuire’s book titled *Lived Religion* (2008) and my edited collection titled *Everyday Religion* (Ammerman 2006), each named a trend that was already underway, exemplified by Courtney Bender’s earlier *Heaven’s Kitchen* (2003) a study that served as the kind of model for younger sociologists that Orsi’s book had been for younger historians. Just as historians already had a long tradition of social history on which to draw, so sociologists had a long tradition of ethnography with which lived religion had great resonance. But lived religion was attempting to turn our attention to new things, and these early agenda-setting studies have become important touchstones.

Over the last year, with the help of two of my students – Kira Ganga Kieffer and Tim Snyder – I have surveyed the recent journal literature in English that places itself within this field of study. We have catalogued the publications that fall broadly within the social sciences and humanities that have used either “lived religion” or “everyday religion” in their title, abstract, or keywords. Through Google Scholar, library keyword searches, and targeted journal searches, we have identified 64 articles that fit those criteria. This excludes an important corpus of monographs – at least 41 that we have identified – that could be included, as well as many articles in edited collections, and a substantial number of articles in health, nursing, social work, and other clinical fields – not to mention the substantial work that has appeared in languages other than English. Important literature on lived religion has been published in each of these other genres and might have been included. It is also clear that many studies that do not use these terms might nevertheless be seen as contributing to the field. In spite of those limitations, what this particular body of material allows us to see are some of the patterns that are emerging in the published research literature.

One of those patterns is that roughly a third (23) of the 64 articles offer no explicit definition of lived religion. That is, they use the term and claim to be contributing to this body of knowledge, apparently assuming that the term has attained a kind of taken-for-granted meaning. It is established enough not to need special comment. On the other hand, seven other articles are themselves theoretical arguments for the value of studying lived religion and for how it should be done. As an emerging field, one of the relevant tasks is explicit elaboration of parameters and justification of methods. These prolegomena span all of the disciplines except history, heralding the expansion of the idea beyond its initial home. Indeed, lived religion has expanded significantly. The articles we analyzed include a smattering from disciplines as disparate as geography and archaeology. Still the majority are in history (15) and sociology (21), with practical theology (5) and religious studies (11) quickly catching up (see Table 1).

Table 1. Disciplinary Distribution of Articles

Field	Number of Articles
Sociology	21
History	15
Religious Studies	11
Practical Theology	5
Other Social Sciences	9
Other Humanities	3

Perhaps not surprisingly, there are disciplinary influences in how authors situate themselves in the study of lived religion, patterns that are also shaped by the history of the field. The single most cited author is Robert Orsi (29 citations spread across his three decades of contributions). Both historians and sociologists (and everyone else) cite his work. Not far behind are citations to David Hall's inaugural volume and his definition (24). Having appeared more recently, McGuire (14) and Ammerman (19) are cited less often. While there is a good deal of disciplinary cross-fertilization, there are also disciplinary patterns, with historians more likely to cite Hall and sociologists more likely to cite McGuire and/or Ammerman. In addition, scholars outside the core fields of history, sociology, religious studies, and practical theology are less likely to cite any of the originating sources. In Ethnic Studies, Geography, Demography, or the humanities, the term has been imported, but without the obligation to cite sources from earlier fields. (It does not appear that there are competing canonical sources in these new fields.) Still, nearly two thirds of the articles (40 of the 64) cite at least one of the canonical sources, a rate that indicates the degree to which an identifiable scholarly conversation has emerged.<sup>3</sup>

## Definition by Contrast

But what is this conversation *about*? Edgell (2012) identifies lived religion with everyday practices of sacralization that may or may not coincide with institutionalized or collective definitions of the sacred. She points out that scholars who do this work tend to start with the religious person, playing down doctrine, and focusing on contexts that are not traditionally religious. That latter criterion is, in fact, widely invoked. Many scholars begin their analysis of lived religion by pointing to the need to pay attention to religion beyond traditional institutions and beliefs. As Neitz (2011) notes, this parallels the call to pay attention to people on the margins. If institutions have excluded and occluded much of religious life, then an intentional turn away from organized religion will allow us to see the rest of the picture. In the complicated religious landscape of today's Europe, for instance, Jeldtoft (2011) explicitly places her focus on forms of Islam which are not dependent on institutionalized settings. McGuire, too, is insistent that we should focus on the things that have not been included in past research. Religious officials and organizations are important, but she focuses her study of lived religion on "individuals' practices in everyday life" (McGuire 2008, 16). Similarly, Bender (in this volume) turns attention to cultural ideas and practices present in presumably-secular elite discourse.

What emerges as people have attempted to set the focus and boundaries of lived religion research, then, is an emphasis on what lived religion is NOT, a definition by contrasts. Most especially, lived religion is about ordinary people, not religious professionals, and it is about everyday life, not what happens in institutionalized religious settings. That set of contrasts is, in fact, reflected in the articles we have coded. Fifty-nine of the 64 focus either primarily (26) or exclusively (33) on non-elites, and 50 of the 64 focus either primarily (30) or exclusively (20) on non-institutionalized activities.

Ordinary people, in everyday life: Focusing here has been crucial to breaking down the secularization and declension narratives, since we find a lot of sacralization going on when we leave the empty churches and examine households and sidewalks and clinics. Ordinary people, in everyday life, is the research focus that has resulted in such a welcome and broad expansion of what we do as sociologists of religion.

The religion that is practiced in everyday life often stands in contrast to the prescribed beliefs and practices of the official institutions. In fact, it may not be focused on beliefs at all. My own initial contribution to this body of literature identified "Golden Rule Christians" as typical American churchgoers who were convinced that an ethical lifestyle was a better measure of their religiosity than strict adherence to doctrine (Ammerman 1997). Among the articles we have reviewed, 25 of the 64 were explicit that belief is not part of the lived religion equation. Sometimes that reflected a focus on religious traditions, such as Judaism or some Asian traditions, where belief is less central. Here there was good reason to eschew the Christian (especially Protestant) habit of defining religion in terms of belief (Bender et al. 2011). Equally sensibly, when the subject includes people of multiple religious traditions – or no religious affiliation – lived religion provides a way to make sense of religious life and spiritual practice without measuring participants against a Protestant definition that begins with belief.

A corollary to the non-institutional, not-belief, non-elite focus is an implicit argument about agency. By defining religion in personalized, individual terms, both the subject and the analyst are emphasizing that religion is not about the authority of traditions or institutions or clergy. Religion is what individuals choose on their own authority. Among these articles 28 (44%) argue that lived religion is about personalized, often hybridized practices that are chosen by the individual. This is religion where personal agency can be exercised. This particular way of framing lived religion is especially present when the focus of study is women's lives. The move to include women's experiences in the field of study has helped to fuel a different way of understanding what religion is, a definition that emphasizes the non-institutional and argues for the individual agency of religious actors (Avishai, Jafar, and Rinaldo 2015).

David Hall would be sympathetic to these moves to study religion beyond belief and belonging, but he also identifies a lingering danger. In making the move to study lived religion, he advocated overcoming the high/low binary that is often encoded in a distinction between official and "popular" religion. Religion is not more or less real or worthy of study based on where it is practiced or who is in focus. Ironically, much of the lived religion research that has followed has continued to encode that binary by making "official" religion the excluded category. Avoiding that binary, like avoiding the binary between religious and spiritual (Ammerman 2013a), requires adding another layer of analysis to the study of lived religion. By focusing on the substance of lived religious practice, rather than what it excludes, the gains made in this emerging field can be consolidated and extended.

## The "What" of Lived Religion

Rather than asking what lived religion is not, or insisting that it is personalized and non-institutional, what if we asked what we see when we look for lived religion? In his introduction to the 1997 book, David Hall says that "one term – 'practice' – does have particular importance" (1997, xi). Indeed, if all the articles we analyzed seem to agree on anything, it is that lived religion is about "practices," what people do. As Neitz (2011) noted, there is a good deal of overlap between lived religion research and the larger concern in the discipline with "practice theory".<sup>4</sup> As Aune (2015) demonstrates in her study of feminists in the UK, practice is central to their sense of what it means to be religious or spiritual. They, like the subjects of much lived religion research, freely adopt practices both from their own religious traditional origins and from others, but it is rituals and ways of living that matter. These rituals and ways of living are "everyday," but they are not always – or even mostly – disconnected from religious institutions and traditions. When lived religion scholars exclude actions that are tied to traditional religious institutions, they not only exclude much of what most people would think of as religious practice, but also much of what people are actually doing.

That line between "institutional" religion and "lived religion" is even more untenable when we enter worlds where religious institutions have been interwoven with the state, and thereby with many aspects of everyday life.<sup>5</sup> The European "folk" or "major-

ity” churches may have relatively empty pews on Sunday morning, but their yearly holidays, rituals, music, and service to the community have not disappeared from the everyday world (Davie 2000). In Europe, the boundary between institutional and non-institutional is not drawn solely in terms of buildings, organization, and service attendance. Nor are the churches themselves neglected in the study of lived religion. With large cadres of well-funded researchers, attention to lived religion includes experiences of baptism, confirmation, and church-based social welfare, among many other foci.<sup>6</sup> If lived religion is about what people *do*, starting with an artificial line between organized religion and everyday life is not especially helpful.

If the substance of lived religion is practice, we need a better guide to the kinds of practices and the dimensions of human experience that fall within this genre. Our work in the study of lived religion can more fruitfully be organized around *domains of life where sacred things are being produced, encountered, and shared*. A variety of categorizations along those lines has, in fact, begun to emerge. Edgell (2012) lists emotion, embodied practice, and narratives as the typical foci of study. Neitz (2011) pointed to spirituality, materiality, and locality, along with embodiment, as domains that have been the focus of lived religion research. My own list (Ammerman 2013b) included religion as embodied, material, placed, but also cognitive, emotional, and discursive. In other words, the study of lived religion is pointing toward an experiential set of domains in which to investigate religious and spiritual practice.

### Embodiment

In the set of articles we examined, embodiment was the most frequent substantive focus. Just over half of the articles (34 of the 64) give attention to ways that bodies enter into religious experience. Researchers have studied gardening, healing, dancing, mixed martial arts, and aging, among many other things. They have asked how bodies enter into and express connections with spirituality. Bodily sensations of touch, smell, movement, and more, are studied as vehicles for religious creativity (e.g., Løvland and Repstad 2014), but bodies are also sites of religious and political regulation (e.g., Gerber 2011). This emphasis on embodiment is most likely to be present where articles are also paying attention to gender (see Table 2). The turn to the experience of women – and to men as men, not just as the default universal – has been an important aspect of this first generation of studies of lived religion.

Table 2. Relationship between Gender and Embodiment in Article Focus

	No Gender Focus	Gender Focus Present	N
No Embodiment Focus	57%	29%	30
Focus on Embodiment	43%	71%	34
Total	100% N=40	100% N=24	100% N=64

This gendered pattern is also present in articles that focus on emotion. There are much fewer of those – just 12 of the 64 – but of the 24 articles that focus on gender, emotion is a central concern of roughly twice as many as when gender is not a category of analysis. The emotional dimensions of human life are highly complex, with sociological attention lagging somewhat behind the work of psychologists and cognitive scientists. Tanya Luhrmann (2012) has attempted to bring those two research agendas to bear on the experience of God “talking back”, and Riis and Woodhead (2010) have laid out a very helpful framework for the sociological study of religious emotion. These interventions have not yet fully informed the study of lived religion, but they highlight a critical domain of human experience where lived religion research can profitably expand. What are the individual and social patterns that shape intense human experiences? What can attention to emotion and experience as lived add to the speculations based on brain science?

The study of lived religion has distinctly turned our attention to the way bodies, emotions and extraordinary experiences are critical to any analysis of how religion is situated in social life. What our study has thus far largely missed is how those same foci need to be part of studying religious practice that occurs *inside* religious organizations. If lived religion has substance beyond its call to include what has been excluded, this attention to embodiment and experience is surely one of its most critical contributions. If our task is to examine the human dimensions through which sacred things are being produced, encountered, and shared, then we will look for the bodily expressions and emotional resonances that shape those practices – wherever they happen and whoever the actors are (e.g., Heider and Warner 2010). We will be as interested in the embodied experience of Eucharist or Friday prayers as in the embodied experience of a home birth.

### *Discourse*

This first generation of lived religion research turns our attention to other dimensions of everyday lived spiritual practice, as well. Nearly as common as attention to embodiment in the articles we examined was attention to talk (present in exactly half the articles). From hip hop lyrics to internet interactions to stories about fatherhood, these studies of lived religion include attention to the ways people put their connection to everyday transcendence into words. These are studies that agree with Robert Wuthnow (2011) that we should “take talk seriously”. My own work has focused on how people tell stories about their everyday lives (Ammerman 2013b). What all of us have been attempting to do is listen for how ordinary people make meaning – not grand coherent theories of life, but small stories that weave together pieces of a life and connect them to something bigger. When Robert Orsi wrote *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street* (1985), he called these attempts to talk about divine presence in ordinary life “theologies of the street,” and theologians themselves have begun to take up the task of working from grassroots experience.<sup>7</sup>

As we continue to study lived religion, the discursive practices of storytelling, writing, and singing will be a valuable focus. People use words in all sorts of ways to trace the contours of their social worlds and make the links to spiritual life. Here the emphasis is not so much on establishing the meanings and belief structures reflected in those



words as in examining the practices that use words. Like other practices, discursive work is portable, occurring across the social contexts in which people live their lives. Some practices are deeply embedded in religious tradition, while others engage sacred realities with words and forms that borrow widely. While lived religion research has very helpfully opened the door to a wider range of talk, we might do well to apply some of those same discourse questions to praying and preaching, and even formal theologizing. How are sacred things being produced, encountered, and shared in those contexts, as well? If we grant that even the most apparently staid and hierarchical religious tradition is nevertheless enacted – practiced – then there is room to study the way elite religious discourses are lived, using the methodological and theoretical tools lived religion research has taught us.

### *Materiality*

As previous reviews of lived religion have noted, one of its primary contributions is participating in a cultural turn to the material (Neitz 2011; Edgell 2012). In the articles we analyzed, over one third give attention to the sacralization of things (42%) and places (36%). Chapel spaces in secular hospitals, natural settings, and urban streets were among the places that made explicit appearances in this group of articles. My own research has demonstrated that spiritual experience can be embedded in everything from clothing and jewelry to mementos on a desk and a favorite chair by a window (Ammerman 2013b). Places and things are a critical dimension of lived religion, ways that people literally touch transcendence. The people we interviewed needed no grand theory to explain what was important about an object or place, although there was almost always a story. This thing or this place participated in producing, encountering, and often sharing something sacred about life. Careful analysis of how the material cultural world does its work will continue to be an important component of lived religion research.

This is a dimension of religious cultural life where comparisons between what is lived outside religious institutions and what is lived within traditional contexts might be fruitful. If we shed the Protestant preoccupation with sermons, and pay attention to all the ways in which institutional religion is itself material, we may learn a great deal. I have long advocated that students of congregational life ask their informants to take them on a walking tour of the space the congregation occupies (Ammerman 1998). The artifacts unearthed on such a tour may bear little resemblance to the official guide to the congregation's building. They represent instead the way the people in the congregation live in its space. They are using that material environment as part of their production of and encounter with the sacred they share, and their different appropriations of the space may reflect the different cultures they bring in (Hoover 2014), as well as what they have collectively created. Across the world, religious spaces play constantly evolving roles in the cultures they inhabit. This is a rich field for study of the material practices of lived religion (e.g., Vasquez and Marquardt 2003).

### *The Analytical Task*

Students of lived religion have often shunned this sort of attention to official religious contexts, at least in part on the grounds that the institutional power of religious authorities prevents or masks the agentic actions and experiences of ordinary people. The turn to lived religion has been importantly intertwined with attention to cultural power, to gender, and to excluded voices. What I am suggesting is not an abandonment of that critical perspective. Rather, I want to expand it so that the material, and the embodied, and the storied social interaction of lived religion can be studied across all the places where it happens. Indeed, that enlarged scope better allows us to ask how some of those stories and objects move from the margins to official status, while others are suppressed. Or, what forms of shared collective practice can be sustained on the margins, and which forms need more institutionalized support? Attention to what happens inside institutions need not change any of the concerns or foci that have emerged from this fruitful generation of research on lived religion, but an expansion of the loci of our work can open new opportunities for analysis.

Nor will this expansion change the gains that have been made by paying attention to religion beyond the boundaries of institutions. One of the most important of those is examining how everyday practices blur the institutional boundaries themselves. As we have already noted, cultures with historical majority churches in Europe call that distinction into question, but so do cultures elsewhere in the world. In their introduction to a set of articles on lived religion in Latin American “zones of crisis,” Rubin, Smilde, and Jung (2014) note that “the denaturalization of the religious/secular divide is essential for scholars who aim to understand religiosity in the global South” (2014, 14). Attention to practices allows just such a denaturalization. Prayers can happen anywhere. Healing can be understood in both medical and spiritual terms. Social movements can intertwine practices of pilgrimage with social media organizing. As Ziad Munson (2008) reminds us, movement activism itself may be both political and religious at the same time. A lived religion perspective – one that takes institutional religious contexts into account – is following, not ignoring, the call to denaturalize the sacred-secular binary.

Edgell (2012) says the “core task for the sociological study of religion is analyzing the empirical variation in practices, ... the institutions (religious and other) that facilitate such practices, and the resulting religious experiences and moral orders that emerge in specific times and places” (2012, 255). Lived religion has taught us to pay attention to embodiment, to gender and power, to materiality, and to everyday forms of discourse – forms of cultural practice that can be portable across institutional boundaries. Those substantive foci can now inform the larger task of understanding religion in both its everyday, non-institutional forms, and in its more formal and regularized contexts, as well.

## Continuing Frontiers

What I have argued so far is that a lived religion perspective has turned our attention to the embodied, discursive, and material dimensions of life where sacred things are being produced, encountered, and shared. We have learned a great deal by intentionally looking beyond institutions, beyond elites, and beyond beliefs, but we may learn more by putting those “outside the box” insights into dialogue with a similar set of questions addressed to the settings in which societies have institutionalized religion.

Table 3. Religious Traditions Analyzed in Lived Religion Articles

	Number of Articles
Christianity	
Generic Christian	11
Catholic	6
Evangelical Protestant	3
Latter-day Saints	2
Black Protestant	1
Islam	8
Asian (any)	1
Wicca	1
Multiple traditions	27
No Affiliation (nones)	4

What also remains to be engaged is a much broader religious and geographic range of experience. In a widely cited article, Smilde and May (2015) argued that Sociology of Religion has slipped into ways of understanding religion’s effects that are subtly shaped by the dominance of Protestant Christianity, especially in North America and the Advanced Industrial World. They echo, of course, the anthropological argument on that score made by Asad (1993) and others. Sadly, these concerns about narrowness of focus are only minimally overcome in the lived religion literature to date (see Table 3). The focus on embodiment and materiality and the blurring of boundaries has certainly been informed by the new voices and new life experiences of people entering the field; but at least in the 64 articles under consideration here, the actual focus of study has shifted very little.

Twenty concern Christian populations, although only a few of those were explicitly Protestant. Eight of the articles focused on Muslims, and a tiny smattering ranged across Latter-day Saints, Wiccans, and Buddhists, with four articles devoted specifically to people who have no religious affiliation. Most common, however, were studies (27

of the total) that did not base the research in any specific tradition, and more than half of the studies that focus on Christianity (11 out of 20) had no specific focus on any particular religious tradition within Christianity. Subjects of study were selected for other reasons and often spanned multiple affiliations and non-affiliation. While no single tradition shaped the lived religion being studied, it may still be that religious traditions should be in view and not systematically assumed to be irrelevant. These studies use lived religion as a paradigm for moving beyond traditional religious boundaries, but they do not examine the boundary crossing activity itself. By decentering official religious tradition, we run the risk of missing one of the social sources for the practices of lived religion being studied.

Table 4. Geographic Region in Lived Religion Articles

	Number of Articles
North America	30
Europe	16
Latin America	3
South Asia	3
Africa	1
Internet	2
Multiple regions	2
No location specified	7

It is not clear whether the field’s coverage of geography is any better than our coverage of traditions. Because the literature we have examined is exclusively in English, there very well may be more global coverage in other languages. Of our 64 articles, almost half (30) had a North American focus, and a quarter covered Europe. Of the quarter that remains, over half had no specific geographic focus, or they examined lived religion on the internet. In other words, just as many lived religion studies disembled practice from tradition, many also disembled practice from specific places. If the core of a lived religion approach includes attention to embodiment and materiality, then we cannot do our work as if place does not matter.

More than a linguistic bias may be at work in the geographic gaps we observed. This may also be partly a matter of a disciplinary division of labor. The historic assignment of the “Global North” to sociology and the “Global South” to anthropology is rapidly disappearing, but this survey hints that traces remain. Of 64 articles, there were just 3 focused on Latin America, 3 on South Asia, and 1 with a focus on the African continent. This may well be a place where we need to make common cause with our anthropology colleagues. To build up a parallel body of research on the everyday religious practices

of people in the world beyond the North Atlantic will require an interdisciplinary effort that goes beyond the core disciplines where lived religion has taken root.

## The Future

What I have begun to identify here are the categories of practice that make up the focus for the study of lived religion: embodiment, materiality, and discourse, with their cross-cutting emphases on gender and power. These emphases have arisen from the margins, from women, people of color, and post-colonial populations. Approaching religion in this way has helped us make sense of religious ways of life that were previously hidden or suppressed. By insisting that we begin with experiences among ordinary people in everyday life, our field has been significantly transformed.

The work that remains, I have argued, is both a wider geographic scope that allows increased comparative and analytical power, and a wider institutional focus that might bring the religious settings and traditions back in. Not only can lived religion sensibilities enrich the study of religious communities themselves, but attention to the lived religious practices of those communities can remind us again that symbols and rituals and myths – no matter how individual or chosen they appear – are collective productions and travel beyond the places where they are originally produced. Practices that are lived in everyday contexts have roots back into collective gatherings where they are invented, nurtured, and adapted. And practices evolving in everyday contexts may be taking root inside religious institutions. Opening the boundaries makes those collective processes and pathways – in and out – possible for us to see.

## Notes

- 1 While there are significant nuances that differentiate a cultural focus from an everyday life focus, and both of them from lived religion, I will use lived religion as an umbrella term, placing it within these larger theoretical and methodological movements.
- 2 I will explore these trends in more detail in “On Things Seen and Unseen” in preparation for Luke Doggett and Alp Arat, eds., *Foundations and Futures in the Sociology of Religion*.
- 3 This is a fairly simple version of the kind of network analysis designed to identify “co-citation” networks (White and McCain 1998).
- 4 Surprisingly, perhaps, only nine of these articles cite Bourdieu (1998) in their discussion of practice, nor is MacIntyre (1984) often mentioned. Theorizing “practice” may be an important frontier for lived religion scholars.
- 5 We will return below to the question of how lived religion makes sense in settings where “institutional religion” is an oxymoron, and religion is simply part of everyday life (Asad 1993).
- 6 One might cite, for example the work of Ida Marie Høeg, a researcher at KIFO, the Institute for Church, Religion, and Worldview Research in Oslo, whose dissertation focused on practices of baptism (Høeg 2009). Similarly, Erika Willander, working at the Church of Sweden’s Unit for Analysis, has helped to produce a significant body of work around Nordic patterns

- of religious practice, and Anna Sofia Salonen, of University of Helsinki's Faculty of Theology has given attention to the intersection of lived religion and church social service delivery (Salonen 2016). Many others – studying music, confirmation, religious education, and more – presented on-going research at the 2016 Nordic Conference for the Sociology of Religion.
- 7 See, for example scholarship emerging from the University of Virginia's Project on Lived Theology (<http://www.livedtheology.org/>).

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