

New Trends and Recurring Issues in the Study of Religion. By Ábrahám Kovács and James L. Cox. Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2014. vi + 249 pp. (paperback). ISBN 978-963-236-850-4.

This edited volume collects the keynote addresses from the tenth conference of the European Association for the Study of Religion, which took place in Budapest in September 2011 and “was hosted by the Hungarian Association for the Study of Religions” (p. 1). The main interest for readers is the focus on Eastern Europe, particularly Hungary, which is usually not a focus of Anglophone scholarship. Kovács and Cox explicitly state in the introductory essay that “the contributions draw attention to certain emphases that might be considered characteristic of divisions between Eastern and Western European approaches to the study of religion” (p. 1). The first section is titled “Historical Background and Analysis of the Field” and contains Roberto Cipriani’s overview of recent innovations in method and theory, and two essays on Hungarian topics: Giovanni Casadio’s “Raffaele Pettazzoni and Károly Marót, Companions in Arms in the Field of the History of Religions” and editor Kovács’s “The First Hungarian Handbook on Comparative Religion: Liberal Theology, Science of Religion and the Issue of Classification,” which examines Ödön Kovács (1844–1895), who was educated in the Netherlands and made scholarly contributions to theology and the academic study of religion, the latter mainly through his two-volume *A Handbook of the Philosophy of Religion*, published in 1876–1877 (p. 61). For this reader, these two studies were fascinating, in that they pieced together aspects of the history of the discipline that are little-known or unknown in the English-speaking world.

The second section, “New Approaches and Issues in the Study of Religion,” is the largest in the book with five chapters. Methodological concerns predominate; András Máté-Tóth examines four models that may be used to clarify or explain religious change, Veikko Anttonen analyses landscape studies as a lens through which to view religion, and editor Cox tackles the vexed question of the “social responsibility of the scholar” (p. 133) through the application of phenomenology to a field situation he encountered, HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. Cox defends the traditional descriptive and neutral role of the scholar against those who would have all academics be advocates and activists. The fourth contribution is Vilmos Voigt’s provocatively titled, “Are There New Religions Today?,” a short piece proposing three “paradoxes” (eternity, continuity-discontinuity, and definition) in the identification of new religious movements. The final chapter by Balázs M. Mezei focuses the reader’s attention on the relationship between science and religion, as it addresses “Memes, Possible Worlds, and Quantum Theory: New Perspectives in the Study of Religion.” The third part, “Philosophical Reflections on Christian Belief and Practice,” does not sit entirely comfortably with what has

gone before. Martin Moors's chapter considers prayer as an art, and Josef Seifert in "Transcendental Holiness as Divine Perfection" addresses questions about interreligious dialogue. These theologically-inclined contributions may interest readers but are not really examples of religious studies scholarship.

This volume will be of interest to all scholars dealing with method and theory in the study of religion, and also to those who are committed to understanding and participating in a discipline that is genuinely global and not limited to English-speaking or Western European scholarship. There is an increasing number of books by Eastern European academics that are becoming accessible through translations or by being published in English or German in the first place. The challenge for scholars is to keep up with these contributions to the field and work to integrate insights from them into their teaching and research praxis.

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