



Introduction to
THE STUDY OF RELIGION



HILLARY RODRIGUES and JOHN S. HARDING

Praise for *Introduction to the Study of Religion*

‘Students and teachers of religion in colleges and universities have needed a book like this for a long time – and never more urgently than today when religious discourses are growing in influence on a global scale and when a cultural ethos of politically correct toleration and a hardening religious insistence on religious rights and correctness work together to protect religion and the religions from hard-headed analysis and criticism in the public sphere. This protectionism also plagues the scholarly study of religion, where it is compounded with a historic tendency of religion scholars and teachers to play a caretaker role when it comes to religion.

One of the dearest prices paid for this tendency is a predilection for curricula and pedagogical practices that not only permit but encourage an *idiot savant* mode of approaching religion by relegating theoretical and conceptual thought on religion to a mere option or by introducing students to theories of and analytic approaches to religion as a final exit or capstone requirement. The great virtue of this book is that it refuses to agree to all this.

Without much ado the authors assume that students are members of the academy from day one and that from day one the study of religion is an exercise in thought for which an earlier rather than later or optional introduction to the intellectual lineages and theoretical discourses on religion is indispensable.

Accessibly, clearly, firmly, and kindly written, this book reliably introduces students to the history of the study of religion, focusing on its most defining approaches and controversies and highlighting the difference between “insider” knowledge of religion(s) and “outsider” study of religion. A substantial chapter that surveys the recent spate of popular books by detractors of religion and supporters of religion adds to the book’s timeliness and clarity of argument. This book is a fine introduction to the study of religion that manages at the same time to be an important intervention in how that study is widely practiced.’

Willi Braun, *Director of the Interdisciplinary
Program of Religious Studies, University of Alberta, Canada*

‘Rodrigues and Harding give an overview of the study of religion that is at once inclusive and accessible. This book will help orient undergraduates to the field of Religious Studies, and will be a handy reference for graduate students and scholars of religion.’

E. Ann Matter, *University of Pennsylvania, USA*

‘What exactly is “religious studies”? What is its relationship to theology? What about those pesky “new atheists”? Rodrigues and Harding provide a critical overview of various approaches to the study of religion, past and present, that is as insightful as it is accessible. This still largely undefined field would benefit greatly from its wide adoption in its undergraduate (and graduate) courses of study.’

Luther H. Martin, *Professor of Religion, The University of Vermont, USA*