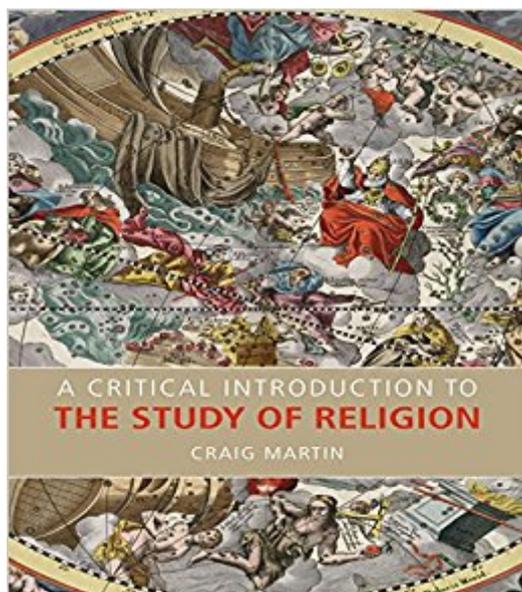


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A Critical Introduction To The Study Of Religion



Synopsis

'A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion' explains the key ideas and methods in the study of religion and demonstrates how they can be used. The aim is to provide students with a tool-kit of critical concepts for studying religious belief and behaviour. Throughout the discussion all ideas and methods are illustrated with clear case material.

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Customer Reviews

When one reads a book on comparative religion there are a few things they might expect. The first is an interesting read that is written in such a manner that you have trouble putting it down. In this regard, Martin succeeds perfectly. His book is written in such a way that it sucks you in and you've read it all in the space of roughly a day and aren't sure quite how that happened. So a point to this book there. Another thing you might expect is critical thinking in regards to the topics at hand. Martin certainly rises to the challenge, but I feel he falls short. He often starts looking at something in a novel and critical way, and then rapidly switches to another example that seems only loosely

connected. It was as if he wanted to look at all the major faiths of the world, but then decided to only give them a cursory glance and assume he was an expert. Definitely loses points here, he may be clear about what he believes, but he is, in my opinion, bad at his follow through and bad at backing up his claims. Finally, you might (and should) expect that, regardless of personal beliefs, the author and text would, at least, be respectful of and, hopefully, be reverent of the faiths and cultures which are being investigated. As any good ethnographer knows, it is crucial to remain in an objective standpoint while also actively participating and respect is paramount. Martin, however, completely falls apart here. The entire book uses language and sentence structures that imply, very strongly, that no matter what one believes, this belief is flawed and foolish. The author comes off as arrogant and very clearly an atheist who only performed and gathered what little research they did in order to pick specific points to scoff at and belittle.

To call this a "critical introduction" to something as sacred and significant as the study of religion would, in my opinion, do a disservice to the academic field of religion itself. Throughout the book, Martin utilizes his book to advance his personal beliefs as to what should and should not be considered in one's critical analysis of religion and reasserts his extremely outdated perspective of social systems that exist in the world. Though he did attempt to introduce some key terms such as animism, functionalism, habitus, and hermeneutics, Martin, unfortunately, has a gross misunderstanding of what these ideas actually mean and gives a false explanation of each of them in this book. For example, in his chapter on "classification", Martin tries to make a point about how animism and essentialism share similar qualities. However, this is a huge assertion to make and one that he does not explain nor argue well. To save myself from trying to explain this poorly thought out point, I'll just include the abhorrent statement (which, ironically essentializes the idea of animism itself) here: "presuming all women share a hidden essence that determines their behavior (gender essentialism) is exactly like presuming that the rain gods are behind the rain (animism)." Another huge weakness of Martin's book is the examples he chooses to use. They are distasteful, essentialist, and misogynistic to say the least. As a young woman reading this in my undergraduate class, I was appalled to see that Martin thought it was okay to utilize examples of women finding their dominance in the kitchen or using stereotypes examples about how some perceive blonde women as dumb in his critical introduction.

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