

Studying the anthropology or human aspects of religion has been an interest ever since I was introduced to the subject at San Jose State University in 2011. At *Triggered to Thinking*, I'm interested in exploring how different humans experience, interpret, and embody the various religious practices of our world. How can belief and religious symbols be demonstrated in the daily lives of their practitioners, and what role do sacred scriptures have for communities or individual believers? These are the questions that I find fascinating and that studying the anthropology of religion seeks to answer.

I have created my recommended reading list to give the reader a well-rounded foundation in the subject. This list doesn't claim to be exhaustive, and I'm willing to discuss any other titles not mentioned here. I just wanted to include some of my favorite texts that will serve as a good starting point for further study. Anyone is free to contact me at *Triggered to Thinking Blog* if you would like more recommendations or wish to discuss anything.

Recommended Reading List

- **Rebecca L. Stein, Philip L. Stein, Benjamin R. Kracht, & Marjorie M. Snipes – *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft* (2003 / 5th ed. 2024)**
A staple in many undergraduate anthropology courses. It provides an accessible, comprehensive survey of cross-cultural beliefs, rituals, magic, and witchcraft, along with a solid overview of core anthropological theories.
- **Fiona Bowie – *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction* (2000 / 2nd ed. 2006)**
A highly readable, thematic introduction to the field. Bowie explores major theoretical frameworks alongside clear discussions of ritual, myth, shamanism, witchcraft, and embodiment.
- **Mircea Eliade & Ioan P. Couliano – *The Eliade Guide to World Religions* (1991)**
A concise and accessible survey of the world's major religious traditions. It serves as an easy reference guide that includes coverage of ancient, prehistoric, and non-Western belief systems.
- **Dale C. Allison Jr. – *Encountering Mystery: Religious Experience in a Secular Age* (2022)**
An engaging examination of anomalous, spiritual, and religious experiences. Allison combines personal accounts with scholarly analysis to explore how individuals interpret encounters with the transcendent.
- **H. McKennie Goodpasture (Ed.) – *Cross and Sword: An Eyewitness History of Christianity in Latin America* (1989)**
An insightful collection of primary source documents and eyewitness accounts covering encounters between European missionaries and Indigenous peoples. It offers rich historical evidence of religious encounters, resistance, and syncretism.

- **James Mooney – *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (1896)**
A landmark classic in ethnography documenting the 19th-century Ghost Dance revitalization movement. Mooney provides firsthand accounts of the rituals, songs, and messianic hopes of Native American communities
- **Morton Klass & Maxine K. Weisgrau (Eds.) – *Across the Boundaries of Belief: Contemporary Issues in the Anthropology of Religion* (1999)**
An expansive collection of essays highlighting key anthropological debates. The selections cover altered states of consciousness, gender, healing, colonial encounters, and the survival of religious practices in modern states.
- **Alan Dundes (Ed.) – *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth* (1984)**
An essential anthology of essays exploring creation stories and sacred lore across cultures. The volume analyzes the psychological and social functions of myth, helping readers move past the misconception that myths are merely "false stories."
- **Mircea Eliade – *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (1952)**
A compact study focusing on religious archetypes and symbolic logic. Eliade examines sacred geography—such as the *axis mundi* (the center of the world)—cosmic time, and ritual imagery across global traditions.
- **Victor Turner – *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969)**
A foundational fieldwork study of ritual life among the Ndembu of northwestern Zambia. Turner elaborates on the concept of "liminality" (the transitional in-between state during rites of passage) and the formation of *communitas*.
- **Émile Durkheim – *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912)**
A foundational classic exploring the origins and social function of religion. Durkheim introduces the core distinction between the sacred and the profane, using Australian Aboriginal totemism to show how rituals generate collective energy and communal cohesion.
- **Claude Lévi-Strauss – *The Story of Lynx* (1991 / English trans. 1995)**
A masterclass in structural anthropology analyzing Indigenous mythologies of the Pacific Northwest. Lévi-Strauss traces variations of Salish creation stories to demonstrate how Native mythic structures explore twinhood, balance, and post-contact cultural changes.
- **Jan Assmann – *Religion and Cultural Memory* (2000 / English trans. 2006)**
A deep dive into how religious traditions preserve collective identity over generations. Assmann examines how sacred texts, institutionalized memory, and ritual repetition construct long-term cultural and religious continuity.
- **James A. Boon – *Other Tribes, Other Scribes: Symbolic Anthropology in the Comparative Study of Cultures, Histories, Religions, and Texts* (1982)**
A richly detailed, highly theoretical work on symbolic anthropology. Boon examines semiotics, structuralism, and comparative ethnography, exploring how cultures and scholars construct meaning through texts and symbols.