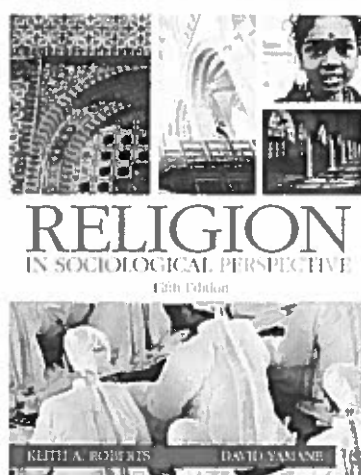


# Thoughts on Teaching on the Occasion of Publishing a Sociology of Religion Textbook

or

## Textbook Pedagogy

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Throughout my education – and, indeed, to this day – I encounter people who look down on the use of textbooks in college classrooms. True scholars assign original texts (book chapters, articles) and provide their own intellectual framework within which to interpret those texts in class. When I first began teaching, I modeled this approach. I spent the bulk of my class time lecturing at students so that they could know what sociologists were saying about a particular topic and therefore understand the primary documents I had assigned them to read.

In lecturing extensively, I was not only following in the footsteps of my mentors in college and graduate school. I was working in a venerable tradition of higher education dating back to the Medieval university in Paris, Vienna, Bologna and elsewhere. In the pre-Gutenberg era, students had limited access to books and where they were available they were often too expensive for students to purchase. Consequently faculty had to lecture to them – which typically amounted to dictating books – as a precondition of analysis (Gieysztor 1992; Haskins 1923; Rait 1918).

Things could not be more different today. Ready access to textual material means students do not need professors to dictate information so they can copy it down (McKeachie 1999), and yet the bulk of all instruction in the typical university is still by the lecture method. There has been "no general appreciation of the fact that the printing press [has] been invented in the years since the rise of the Medieval university" (Edwin Slosson, quoted in Smith 1990:214). We're mired in the instructional methods of the 12th century.

In order to move toward a more active, problem-solving, discussion-based pedagogy, I turned to textbooks as the primary reading material I assign to students. This allows me to assume a broad "first exposure" of students to the fundamental material in a particular

area, and to spend class time engaging that material at a higher-level than if I had to lecture that same material to the students first (for more on my strategy for creating discussion-based courses see Yamane 2006).

Having used textbooks so frequently, the thought occurred to me to write my own sociology of religion text. But writing a textbook from scratch seemed too daunting a task. I was lucky, therefore, that Keith Roberts of Hanover College approached a few years ago about joining him as a co-author on the 5th edition of his textbook, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*. I knew this textbook as far back as graduate school, and knew Keith as a master teacher. He has received both the American Sociological Association's Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Award and the ASA Teaching and Learning Section's Hans Mauksch Award for Distinguished Contribution to Teaching. He knew me as someone interested in pedagogy from our time together on the editorial board of the ASA journal *Teaching Sociology* and as someone abreast of the field because I was editing the journal *Sociology of Religion* at the time.

I am happy to report that the fruit of our collaboration is now available from Sage/Pine Forge Press at a (IMHO) very fair price of \$49.95 for the 450 page book. Moreover, faculty who use the textbook have the benefit of an online instructor site ([www.pineforge.com/rsp5e](http://www.pineforge.com/rsp5e)) which includes nearly 300 active-learning strategies to go beyond lecturing in class, annotated video suggestions correlated to relevant chapters, sample syllabi, and a test bank with over 500 questions.

Freeing myself from the anti-textbook prejudice I knew as a student has allowed me to become a better teacher and helped my students learn more. Whether you try *Religion in Sociological Perspective* or another sociology of religion textbook, I hope you will consider what a textbook-based pedagogy can do for you.