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## POSTS

# Is there a history of lived religion ?

BY ANNE PAGE · PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 6, 2018 · UPDATED SEPTEMBER 7, 2018

Writing various chapters and introductions recently made me realise how difficult it is to determine what historians in general, and early modern historians in particular, mean by 'lived' religion. While French sociologists would immediately recognize contributions such as Gabriel Le Bras's *enquête* devoted to Catholic France, his work has not necessarily percolated down through studies of lived religion in *le monde anglo-saxon*, let alone through historical studies, with notable exceptions such as the work of David Hall and Robert Orsi. They both reminded us, almost twenty years ago, that the term 'lived religion' was still 'an awkward neologism' in the United States. Has the concept therefore simply ceased to be useful in early modern historiography, as written by anglophone scholars, or was it never so ? More broadly, is there no such thing as *l'histoire du vécu religieux* and no scholar wishing to be seen as a 'historian of lived religion'? Partly, one imagines, the complex relationship between lived and popular religion is to blame.

Anglophone scholars have nonetheless found inspiration in French writing, but not necessarily in those emanating from the French school of sociology. Meredith McGuire, for instance, refers to Merleau-Ponty, while Robert Orsi explains that his fondness for the term 'lived religion' derives from Sartre's 'lived experience' (*le vécu*) (Hall, ed. 1997). That allowed Orsi to emphasize a number of things, including the multiplicity of lived experience *places*, not only 'churches, temples, shrines, class meetings', but also 'workplaces, homes, and streets'. He was also able to underline the similarities between religious experiences and profane experiences, for 'religion comes into being in an ongoing, dynamic relationship with the realities of everyday life'. Finally, he was able to avoid the vexing issue of 'popular' religion and its nagging oppositions between rich/poor, emotional/rational, institutionalised/domestic, illiterate/lettered... Orsi, of course, is a historian of the Italian Catholic community, but with the exception of David Hall it is far more difficult to find early modern historians entirely at ease with the phrase 'lived religion', and especially not British historians. They have embraced 'lived experience' instead, especially in the wake of developments in the history of emotions during the last decade. A case in point is Alec Ryrie's *Being Protestant in Reformation England* (2013). However, it should be noted that historians of early modern France and Northern Europe have recently begun to use the term 'lived religion' in the titles of edited collections, which often examine the question of lay vs. clerical engagement, but without necessarily defining the term. Perhaps more historical studies in the future will find a home in the new Palgrave MacMillan series on Lived Religion.

Let us hope so, for the relationship between 'lived religion' and 'lived experiences of religion' could be further investigated. Can the 'experiences' (and which experiences ?) of early modern believers be retrieved, and through which sources ? In which contexts ? How are we to incorporate recent

historiography on everyday life, material studies, architecture, devotional practices, history of the book (to name only a few), and how can we give lived religion a firmer methodological basis, drawing from theology, sociology and anthropology but also literary studies? These issues are increasingly well covered in studies of post-industrial and secularised societies but not in historical scholarship.

With that in mind, we have set up in Aix-en-Provence a research programme which will explore these issues in the next few years, in league with the Queen Mary Centre for Religion and Literature in English (Queen Mary University of London). There will be a series of events centered on lived religion, with particular but not exclusive reference to the early modern period. We began with a couple of study days in 2017 that examined lived religion across borders and times and we will continue by focusing more precisely on methodology and practice (2018), lived religion and the book (2019) then lived religion and the arts (2020). We hope a final conference will be held in 2021 in London to tie all these threads together and show how lived religion could be successfully (re)claimed for the religious history of Britain.

A few titles/reviews that I've found particularly useful:

Ammerman, Nancy T. (ed), *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religion Lives*, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Ammerman, Nancy T. 'Finding Religion in Everyday Life', *Sociology of Religion*, 75. 2 (2014), 189–207, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sru013>

Ammerman, Nancy T. 'Lived Religion as an Emerging Field: An Assessment of its Contours and Frontiers', *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, 29.2 (2016), 83-99.

Azria, Régine and Danièle Hervieu-Léger (eds), *Dictionnaire des faits religieux*, Paris, PUF, 2010.

Collinson, Patrick, 'Towards a Broader Understanding of the Early Dissenting Tradition' (1975), repr. in *Godly People. Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism*, London, Hambledon Press, 1983, 527-62.

Croq, Laurence et David Garrioch (dir.), *La religion vécue. Les laïcs dans l'Europe moderne*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2013, collection 'Histoire'.

Desroches, Henri, Gabriel Le Bras, 'Religion légale et religion vécue' : Entretien avec G. Le Bras, *Archives de sociologie des religions*, 29 (1970), 15–20.

Dunan-Page, Anne. *L'Expérience puritaine. Vies et récits de dissidents (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles)*, Paris, Cerf, 2017.

Ganzevoort, Ruan and Srdjan Sremac, *Lived Religion and the Politics of (In)tolerance*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2017. Palgrave Studies in Lived Religion and Societal Challenges Series.

Hall, David D. (ed.). *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice*, Princeton, Princeton

University Press, 1997. Esp. chapters by Anne Brown and David Hall, Robert Orsi and Danièle Hervieu-Léger.

Katajala-Peltomaa Sari and Raisa Maria Toivo (eds), *Lived Religion and the Long Reformation in Northern Europe*, Leyden, Brill, 2016.

McGuire, Meredith B., *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.

Mossière, Géraldine, 'Meredith B. McGuire, Lived Religion. Faith and Practice in Everyday Life', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* [En ligne], 148 | octobre-décembre 2009, document 148-90, mis en ligne le 03 juin 2009, consulté le 02 septembre 2018. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/assr/21167>

Orsi, Robert A., *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (1985) ; New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2010.

Orsi, Robert A., 'is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in?', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 42/2 (June 2003), 169–74.

Richet, Isabelle, 'HALL (David D.) éd., *Lived Religion in America. Toward a History of Practice*', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* [En ligne], 110 | avril-juin 2000, document 110-26, mis en ligne le 19 août 2009, consulté le 02 septembre 2018. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/assr/20563>

Ryrie, Alec, *Being Protestant in Reformation England*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

Lux-Sterritt, Laurence, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile in the Seventeenth-Century: Living Spirituality*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017.

Streib, Heinz, Astrid Dinter and Kerstin Söderblom (eds), *Lived religion : Conceptual, Empirical and Practical-Theological Approaches. Essays in honor of Hans-Günter Heimbrock*, Leyden and Boston, Brill, 2008.

Tracy, James D and Marguerite Ragnow (eds), *Religion and the Early Modern State. Views from China, Russia, and the West*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.



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