

**Chapter 1 : Reflections on Sociology and Theology - David Martin - Oxford University Press**

*Reflections on Sociology and Theology is a collection of essays by a distinguished sociologist exploring the relationship between sociology and religious issues. After laying out the main themes to be explored, David Martin divides the essays into three sections.*

Theoretical perspectives[ edit ] Symbolic anthropology and phenomenology[ edit ] Symbolic anthropology and some versions of phenomenology argue that all humans require reassurance that the world is safe and ordered place – that is, they have a need for ontological security. The inability of science to offer psychological and emotional comfort explains the presence and influence of non-scientific knowledge in human lives, even in rational world. Functionalism[ edit ] Unlike symbolic anthropology and phenomenology , functionalism points to the benefits for social organization which non-scientific belief systems provide and which scientific knowledge fails to deliver. Belief systems are seen as encouraging social order and social stability in ways that rationally based knowledge cannot. From this perspective, the existence of non-rational accounts of reality can be explained by the benefits they offer to society. According to functionalists, "religion serves several purposes, like providing answers to spiritual mysteries, offering emotional comfort, and creating a place for social interaction and social control. It provides social support and social networking, offering a place to meet others who hold similar values and a place to seek help spiritual and material in times of need. We cannot explain forms of knowledge in terms of the beneficial psychological or societal effects that an outside observer may see them as producing. We have to look at the point of view of those who believe in them. People do not believe in God, practice magic, or think that witches cause misfortune because they think they are providing themselves with psychological reassurance, or to achieve greater cohesion for their social groups. They do so because they think their beliefs are correct – that they tell them the truth about the way the world is. Nineteenth-century rationalist writers, reflecting the evolutionist spirits of their times, tended to explain the lack of rationality and the dominance of false beliefs in pre-modern worlds in terms of the deficient mental equipment of their inhabitants. Such people were seen as possessing pre-logical, or non-rational, mentality. Rationalists see the history of modern societies as the rise of scientific knowledge and the subsequent decline of non-rational belief. Some of these beliefs, such as magic and witchcraft , had disappeared, while others, such as religion, had become marginalized. This rationalist perspective has led to secularization theories of various kinds. Sociological classifications of religious movements One common typology among sociologists, religious groups are classified as ecclesias , denominations , sects , or cults now more commonly referred to in scholarship as new religious movements. Note that sociologists give these words precise definitions which differ from how they are commonly used. For example, Charles Y. Glock is best known for his five-dimensional scheme of the nature of religious commitment. His list consist of the following variables: Secularization and Civil religion In relation to the processes of rationalization associated with the development of modernity , it was predicted in the works of many classical sociologists that religion would decline. In the United States, in particular, church attendance has remained relatively stable in the past 40 years. In Africa, the emergence of Christianity has occurred at a high rate. While Africa could claim roughly 10 million Christians in , recent estimates put that number closer to million. Furthermore, arguments may be presented regarding the concept of civil religion and new world belief systems. For instance, some sociologists have argued that steady church attendance and personal religious belief may coexist with a decline in the influence of religious authorities on social or political issues. Additionally, regular attendance or affiliation do not necessarily translate into a behaviour according to their doctrinal teachings. In other words, numbers of members might still be growing, but this does not mean that all members are faithfully following the rules of pious behaviours expected. In that sense, religion may be seen as declining because of its waning ability to influence behaviour. Religious economy[ edit ] According to Rodney Stark , David Martin was the first contemporary sociologist to reject the secularization theory outright. Martin even proposed that the concept of secularization be eliminated from social scientific discourse, on the grounds that it had only served ideological purposes and because there was no evidence of any general shift from a religious period in human

affairs to a secular period. Correspondingly, the more religions a society has, the more likely the population is to be religious. This points to the falsity of the secularization theory. On the other hand, Berger also notes that secularization may be indeed have taken hold in Europe, while the United States and other regions have continued to remain religious despite the increased modernity. Berger suggested that the reason for this may have to do with the education system; in Europe, teachers are sent by the educational authorities and European parents would have to put up with secular teaching, while in the United States, schools were for much of the time under local authorities, and American parents, however unenlightened, could fire their teachers. Berger also notes that unlike Europe, America has seen the rise of Evangelical Protestantism, or "born-again Christians".

Wilson is a writer on secularization who is interested in the nature of life in a society dominated by scientific knowledge. His work is in the tradition of Max Weber, who saw modern societies as places in which rationality dominates life and thought. Weber saw rationality as concerned with identifying causes and working out technical efficiency, with a focus on how things work and with calculating how they can be made to work more effectively, rather than why they are as they are. According to Weber, such rational worlds are disenchanted. Existential questions about the mysteries of human existence, about who we are and why we are here, have become less and less significant. Wilson [14] insists that non-scientific systems and religious ones in particular have experienced an irreversible decline in influence. He has engaged in a long debate with those who dispute the secularization thesis, some of which argue that the traditional religions, such as church-centered ones, have become displaced by an abundance of non-traditional ones, such as cults and sects of various kinds. Others argue that religion has become an individual, rather than a collective, organized affair. Still others suggest that functional alternatives to traditional religion, such as nationalism and patriotism, have emerged to promote social solidarity. Wilson does accept the presence of a large variety of non-scientific forms of meaning and knowledge, but he argues that this is actually evidence of the decline of religion. The increase in the number and diversity of such systems is proof of the removal of religion from the central structural location that it occupied in pre-modern times.

Ernest Gellner [edit ] Unlike Wilson and Weber, Ernest Gellner [29] acknowledges that there are drawbacks to living in a world whose main form of knowledge is confined to facts we can do nothing about and that provide us with no guidelines on how to live and how to organize ourselves. In this regard, we are worse off than pre-modern people, whose knowledge, while incorrect, at least provided them with prescriptions for living. However, Gellner insists that these disadvantages are far outweighed by the huge technological advances modern societies have experienced as a result of the application of scientific knowledge. For example, he accepts that religions in various forms continue to attract adherents. He also acknowledges that other forms of belief and meaning, such as those provided by art, music, literature, popular culture a specifically modern phenomenon , drug taking, political protest, and so on are important for many people. Nevertheless, he rejects the relativist interpretation of this situation that in modernity, scientific knowledge is just one of many accounts of existence, all of which have equal validity. This is because, for Gellner, such alternatives to science are profoundly insignificant since they are technically impotent, as opposed to science. He sees that modern preoccupations with meaning and being as a self-indulgence that is only possible because scientific knowledge has enabled our world to advance so far. Unlike those in pre-modern times, whose overriding priority is to get hold of scientific knowledge in order to begin to develop, we can afford to sit back in the luxury of our well-appointed world and ponder upon such questions because we can take for granted the kind of world science has constructed for us.

Michel Foucault [edit ] Michel Foucault was a post-structuralist who saw human existence as being dependent on forms of knowledge discourses that work like languages. In order to think at all, we are obliged to use these definitions. The knowledge we have about the world is provided for us by the languages and discourses we encounter in the times and places in which we live our lives. Thus, who we are, what we know to be true, and what we think are discursively constructed. Foucault defined history as the rise and fall of discourses. Social change is about changes in prevailing forms of knowledge. The job of the historian is to chart these changes and identify the reasons for them. Unlike rationalists, however, Foucault saw no element of progress in this process. To Foucault, what is distinctive about modernity is the emergence of discourses concerned with the control and regulation of the body. According to Foucault, the rise of body-centered discourses

necessarily involved a process of secularization. Pre-modern discourses were dominated by religion, where things were defined as good and evil, and social life was centered around these concepts. With the emergence of modern urban societies, scientific discourses took over, and medical science was a crucial element of this new knowledge. Modern life became increasingly subject to medical control – the medical gaze, as Foucault called it. The rise to power of science, and of medicine in particular, coincided with a progressive reduction of the power of religious forms of knowledge. For example, normality and deviance became more of a matter of health and illness than of good and evil, and the physician took over from the priest the role of defining, promoting, and healing deviance. The study suggests that religion is headed towards "extinction" in various nations where it has been on the decline: The model considers not only the changing number of people with certain beliefs, but also attempts to assign utility values of a belief in each nation. Luckmann points instead to the "religious problem" which is the "problem of individual existence. Two older approaches to globalization include modernization theory, a functionalist derivative, and world-systems theory, a Marxist approach. One of the differences between these theories is whether they view capitalism as positive or problematic. However, both assumed that modernization and capitalism would diminish the hold of religion. To the contrary, as globalization intensified many different cultures started to look into different religions and incorporate different beliefs into society. For example, according to Paul James and Peter Mandaville: Religion and globalization have been intertwined with each other since the early empires attempted to extend their reach across what they perceived to be world-space. Processes of globalization carried religious cosmologies – including traditional conceptions of universalism – to the corners of the world, while these cosmologies legitimated processes of globalization. This dynamic of inter-relation has continued to the present, but with changing and sometimes new and intensifying contradictions.

**Chapter 2 : Oxford University Press :: Reflections On Sociology And Theology ::**

*This is a book of essays written for various 'emergent occasions' but all having to do with the relationship between sociology and theology (or sociology and religion).*

Previous articles have explored issues of church growth, leadership, and some of the reasons behind the decline in church attendance. Imagine, for a moment, that all regular Sunday worshippers disappeared overnight, leaving only the clergy. Obviously there would be a financial crisis, the current parochial system would have to be radically reformed, a great number of churches and vicarages would need to be sold off, and the Synod would have to cease or change. But the Church would remain, and its most influential activities could continue! Yes, you read that! It reminded me of my bishop in a previous diocese, who once commented: Imagine what would happen if each parish hired 50 actors, dressed them in clerical collars, and paid them to wander around the parish. What an impact this would have on the profile of the Church! What a hideous idea! How do [people] connect with the Church? In descending order, the five most common points of contact are: Regular worship came in sixth place. This reminds me of the story John Wimber used to tell. A quarter of regular churchgoers among both Anglicans and other Christians separately are involved in voluntary community service outside the church. Perhaps the root of the issue is something that Linda Woodhead mentions at the very beginning of her article. The more I reflected on it, the less sense it made to think of a Church of England without England; it actually made more sense to think of a Church without congregations. The New Testament characterises the people of God in two paradoxical ways. He was a much better expositor than the two leading evangelicals who were speaking with him! We are to be embedded in society, and yet distinct from it. There is no more influential activity than being faithful disciples of Christ, making him known, in all the places God calls us. It is the difference between asking parents to have their child baptised in a Sunday service, among people they do not know, and making the family the centre of the event. It is the contrast between designing a funeral with the active participation of the bereaved, and telling them that they cannot even have the music they want. It is the difference between being a Church that works with other agents in society "and is open to being changed by them" to one that claims to be the sole repository of truth. In other words, we need to forget about baptism being the initiation into faith, funerals involving the possibility of Christian hope, and the presence of ordained leaders in schools being about making faith known—that is, we need to abandon the very things that have been the hallmarks of growing churches down the ages! What has gone wrong here is that theology has been subordinated to sociology, instead of sociology—with its crucial insights as it holds up a mirror of reality to the institution of the church—being shaped by and serving a theological vision. But Christian distinctiveness is the lifeblood of the people of God; without it, we wither and die. But a Church whose core business is baptisms, weddings, and funerals is actually very different from the traditional Anglican vision of a Church whose core business was the worship of God and the proclamation of the gospel. Another is to recognise that the Church is the people of God whose identity lies in their commitment to Jesus Christ which is what their baptism entails. It is the community of those who worship him together and dedicate themselves to living for him both in their life together as a community and in their life of witness and service in the world. Of course, the Church needs leadership, and it must, by its very nature, be orientated outwards to the rest of society. But what it is is the people of God. More from my site.

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It is rooted, however, in a much older question about the relation of religion and society. More precise methodological reflection on the relation between theology and sociology began in the Protestant theological world in 19th-century Germany as part of the discussion about the relation of faith and history, since sociology was primarily understood as a branch of history. Ernst Troeltsch is the major figure in this discussion. Troeltsch transformed theology by his attention to the institutional prerequisites and correlates of Christianity and the way Christian ideas become word-historical, shaping forces only by their elective affinity with ascendant carrier groups and the transmutation and exfoliation of these ideas through their contact with pre-given societal structures, groups, and culture. Troeltsch scholars in the U. Richard Niebuhr and James Luther Adams, continued his theoretical impulse. On a more practical level the disciplines were related by the use of sociology for pastoral planning in Protestant seminaries and church research agencies. For its part, the American Sociological Association, especially under the early leadership of Lester Ward and Albion Small, was much influenced by the social gospel movement. Prior to , Catholics did little methodological reflection on the relation between the two disciplines, although the American Catholic Sociological Association operated in its early years on the assumption that there was a specifically Catholic sociology. In Europe, church sociology, in the tradition of Gabriel Le Bras, was seen as a pretheoretical, ancillary, "fact-finding" discipline, useful for pastoral theology. In the aftermath of Vatican Council II, Catholic theologians began to dialogue with the proponents of sociology of knowledge and to inquire into new social action models to relate Church and society. Increasingly, dogma and theology are understood as strategic responses to pressing needs and claims of very particular times and places. Sociological analysis becomes an essential tool for hermeneutics in understanding the context and meaning of reactive dogmatic statements. Evaluation of the Relationship. Many theologians now insist on social analysis as a necessary component in theological reflection. Theologians turn to sociology to understand such processes as secularization and the privatization of religion. Sociology is no longer understood as a value-free purveyor of "facts," in accord with a naive realism or positivism, but is seen to include a worldview, a special imagination, and a model of human understanding. Theology has shifted from an older hierarchical understanding of the division between the sciences with its notion of "input" disciplines to a new framework of interdisciplinary creative collaboration. Neither theology nor sociology is, strictly speaking, a unified discipline. Both are conflictive fields of competing theoretical and methodological positions, some of them simply contradictory. Every theology contains, implicitly, a sociology and a theory of the self. Every theological performance claim about this-worldly transformations of self and society is subject to empirical test. Every ecclesiology is also a theory about society. In the writings of some theologians, explicit theological motifs control the understanding of self and society. In others, secular theories of self and society determine theology. Richard Niebuhr precludes certain theological options. Not every theology and sociology is compatible. It seems possible to draw up a taxonomy of the logical affinities between definite theological options and corresponding social theories. On its part, sociology is not, in any simple sense, value-free. It includes hermeneutical presuppositions about the locus of the real, the flow of causality, and the power of value. Sociology sometimes slips from descriptive to prescriptive modes of analysis, since some vision of the future and the good society is operative in sociological and historical research.

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The conversation calls me to bring the whole of who I am - intellect and emotion, memory and hope, action and contemplation, wounds and prayer - in order that I may live out our common calling to love God and neighbor. We do not reflect on things within some kind of void but rather we ponder over things in the light of our encounters with real-life situations. Our theological viewpoints are constantly challenged by what we meet in real-life, thereby undergoing constant revision, enhancement and renewal. Often the event in which the individual is involved seems to carry with it an order which is independent of merit or demerit. This indeterminateness seems to suggest that in all living there is an element which may be regarded as random in the sense that it is outside of an orderly pattern of reaping and sowing. To accept all experience as raw material out of which the human spirit distills meanings and values is a part of the meaning of maturity. Most of them have been educated in a climate in which the behavioral sciences, such as psychology and sociology, so dominated the educational milieu that little true theology was being learned. Most Christian leaders today raise psychological and sociological questions even though they frame them in scriptural terms. Real theological thinking is. Without solid theological reflection, future leaders will be little more than pseudo-psychologists, pseudo-sociologists, pseudo-social workers. They will think of themselves as enablers, facilitators, role models, father or mother figures, big brothers or big sisters, and so on, and thus join the countless men and women who make a living by trying to help their fellow human beings to cope with the stresses and strains of everyday living. But that has little to do with Christian leadership because the Christian leader thinks, speaks and acts in the name of Jesus, who came to free humanity from the power of death and open the way to eternal life. To be such a leader it is essential to be able to discern from moment to moment how God acts in human history and how the personal, communal, national and international events that occur during our lives can make us more and more sensitive to the ways in which we are led to the cross and through the cross to the resurrection." Avery Dulles: The subject matter on which theological reflection focuses is not the doctrinal themes of traditional theology like, Trinity, Christology, church and sacraments , but great human problems of the day as, for instance, war, oppression, poverty, pollution, and the breakdown of human community on various levels. The assumption here is that Revelation is to be found not so much in clear directives from the past as in the dimension of ultimacy within our own experience. Theological reflection is perhaps our single most important task after direct care. Theological reflection is taking off the shoes of work and walking more gently and quietly in prayer toward the ever-burning love of God. Moreover, as we view that landscape from within a community committed to Christian ministry, some of the theological meanings lurking within the landscape may emerge. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead: We must discern how we are to be faithful to the gospel and effective in our mission: Theological reflection is an essential tool in this discernment of contemporary ministry." Theological reflection in ministry involves three sources of religiously relevant information - Christian Tradition, the experience of the community of faith, and the resources of the culture. Stone and James O. Wherever and whenever it occurs, theological reflection is not only a personal but also an interactive, dialogical and community-related process. The voices of others are heard. Some of these voices, like those of the biblical writers, come from texts of centuries past. Others are those of our contemporaries. Still others are our own. These voices offer us food for thought to be heeded or debated or improved upon or set aside as unhelpful. To engage in theological reflection is to join an ongoing conversation with others that began long before we ever came along and will continue long after we have passed away. Theological reflection is the discipline of exploring individual and corporate experience in conversation with the wisdom of a religious heritage. The conversation is a genuine dialogue that seeks to hear from our own beliefs, actions, and perspectives, as well as those of the tradition. It respects the integrity of both. Theological reflection therefore may confirm, challenge, clarify, and expand how we understand our

own experience and how we understand the religious tradition. The outcome is new truth and meaning for living.

Chapter 5 : Sociology as Theology by Thomas Joseph White | Articles | First Things

*Reflections on Sociology and Theology by David Martin* This collection of essays by a distinguished sociologist explores the relationship between sociology and religious issues. After looking at main themes, the author explores the theoretical considerations of the relationship, practical issues of interest to theologians, and sociological.

He was brought up in a revivalist family and attended Barnes Methodist Church. He won a scholarship to East Sheen Grammar School 1947 , and after national service as a conscientious objector in the Non-Combatant Corps 1950 he trained as a primary school teacher at Westminster Teacher Training College. He taught in primary schools in London and Somerset and, while teaching, from he studied by correspondence course, with Wolsey Hall, Oxford [1] for a London external degree in Sociology. He won the University Postgraduate Scholarship after gaining a first-class degree in This enabled him to study for a Ph. He was awarded his Ph. He has continued to contribute to the conversation about secularization and the resilience of religion to the present. Berger at Boston University in and Martin received an honorary doctorate from the University of Helsinki in He was elected Fellow of the British Academy in Private life[ edit ] David Martin was a Methodist Local Preacher from to , after which he was confirmed in the Anglican Church. In he attended Westcott House Theological College in Cambridge and became deacon in that year and priest in , serving as Honorary Assistant Priest at Guildford Cathedral until the present. The marriage was dissolved in Reflections on Sociology and Theology Clarendon, Does Christianity Cause War? Christian Language and Its Mutations: Essays in Sociological Understanding Ashgate, The World Their Parish Blackwell, Christian Language in the Secular City Ashgate Towards a Revised General Theory Ashgate, Sacred History and Sacred Geography: The Future of Christianity: The Education of David Martin: Andrew Walker and Martyn Percy, eds.

**Chapter 6 : Sociology of religion - Wikipedia**

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Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age is about the evolutionary roots of religious behavior. It is a magnificent treatment of ancient human religiosity, with particular focus on the civilizations of Israel, Greece, China, and India. So why try to characterize it as a theology? The liberal Protestant tradition was concerned to defend the integrity and value of religion after the Enlightenment rejection of traditional Christianity. It insisted that we should no longer seek to defend religion by appeal to divine revelation and turned instead to the sociological role that religion plays in giving life a sense of ultimate purpose and in instilling ethical attitudes. Jesus teaches us what it means to be human and to love in an authentic way, and in that sense he brings the ethical project of humanity to its completion. How could one credibly update such a vision today? Nowhere does he treat Jesus or Christianity, nor does he offer explicit theological or apologetic theses. Nonetheless, he does something Schleiermacher, Harnack, and Tillich never could. He sets their now somewhat dated vision of Christian humanism in successful dialogue with the two most important contemporary challenges to religious belief: The former flatly denies any legitimate basis in human beings for religious behavior: Why should a haphazard, randomly formed bundle of matter be religious? The latter asks why we should privilege Western, Christian canons of rationality and ethics over, say, those of ancient India. What Bellah does in both cases is genuinely intriguing and theologically significant. Bellah begins his treatment of evolution with the study of Big Bang cosmology, to which he adds astute sociological insights into the religious and the areligious views of contemporary cosmologists. He then goes on to offer a detailed and eloquent portrait of the evolutionary origins of living things, from the single-celled prokaryotes and eukaryotes, the only living things for perhaps two billion years, to the development of complex mammals, progressing from chimpanzees to homo erectus and eventually to homo sapiens. Following biologists Marc Kirschner and John Gerhart, he suggests ways in which living things succeed more or less well owing to their new material adaptations. Consequently, it is the whole organism and not just its collection of genes that evolves through time. In natural selection, living things make use of their genetic alterations to engage their environment more successfully. We are not simply organic media through which genetic mutation makes its merry way. We are animals with adapted social features that permit us to pursue better forms of survival. Animals communicate to one another through mimicry, signaling, and even interactive play, and group membership becomes an advantage to the survival of the species. Out of animal play come the capacities to mime, narrate, engage in ritual, and, ultimately, theorize. Such is the basis in human society for religion and philosophy, as well as modern science. We are still animals able to tell stories, even as our stories change over thousands of years, and even when we are narrating the history of the cosmos in a modern university lecture hall. What is wrong with this picture? From a biological point of view, perhaps very little. What about from a religious point of view? For a Thomist, it does no harm to underscore the animal character of human thought and religiosity. By all means, invite the neuroscientists to measure every jot and tittle of brain activity present in a human being reciting the Nicene Creed. Aquinas himself affirms that rational animals always think conceptually through recourse to images and sense phantasms. One would expect, then, corollary events in the cerebrum for every intellectual, spiritual act. Do we not pray on our knees or with our hands extended, or communicate meaning with the use of narrated stories and gestures? Only a Manichean would deny our embodied spiritual lives. Bellah has done a wonderful job of creating a space for profound conversation between biology and theology, in ways that are in fact implicitly consonant with the Catholic tradition. The problem is that Bellah refuses the larger metaphysical questions that are always in the background of our modern cosmological storytelling. Our understanding of the cosmos and our biological development as animals have undergone an irreversible revolution: Bellah offers sharp and persuasive criticisms of reductive and materialist interpretations of this revolution. But in the end, the atheists who claim,

often in the names of these indisputable scientific discoveries, to have resolved the meaning of life are repropounding something old-fashioned: They are all formidable philosophical theories, but at the end of the day, they are also just philosophical. The perennial questions of classical philosophy must be addressed, and addressed in close connection with expansive scientific reflections of the sort Bellah offers. For example, it is certainly the case that the human frontal lobe, throat, tongue, and jaw bone underwent an evolutionary development that made human speech and cognition possible. We find imperfect intimations of these developments in less sophisticated mammals, some of which are our ancestors. But the passage from the linguistic sign to the conceptual universal and to intentional signification reflexive thought is another matter. When human beings begin to think about the essences of things, or about what numbers or values are, or why the universe exists which turns us toward the question of immaterial being, they do something that moves from the world of sensible singulars into the world of immaterial universals. Here the human spiritual animal acquires a new interiority alien to that of the other animals. Human beings rise up above the flux of nonrational beings. They judge their inner meaning and worth, as well as their ultimate causes. To which the right response is: In fact, our human capacity to study our universe scientifically, including our neurological system and its evolution, is the product of our uniquely abstractive, spiritual capacity. And what is more, we alone among the animals can not only understand that history but also pass back behind it, as it were, to the deeper question of why the cosmos exists at all. We can look as Aquinas does in the five ways at the universe as a web of interconnected finite forms and interdependent causes and see that it is an inherently question-raising cosmos. Whence does all this come, and upon what or whom does it actually depend? As the only rational animal, we enjoy the privilege of asking the question of the existence of God. Bellah rightly underscores the animality that undergirds all our intellectual, moral, and religious activities. But he does not engage the philosophical arguments that reflect on these same activities and that lead us to think about the immaterial soul, with its powers of intelligence and free will. There is a principle in the core of our being that comes from God directly and that is called to return to God. Consequently, it is the spiritual person as both body and soul who remains religiously restless and active in the material world. Each human being is a precarious bridge that runs between the visible world of matter and the invisible world of God. Of course, Bellah will say that such thoughts outrun the limits of science and the disciplines of biology and sociology. That is quite true. But the excitement of reading *Religion in Human Evolution* stems in large part from the sheer ambition of the project—a genealogy of human culture that reaches toward universality. This quality leads Bellah to press beyond the narrow range of modern science. He is an academic pluralist who transgresses disciplinary boundaries. It is an indication of the deep taboos of our contemporary academic culture that the classical questions of metaphysics have no role to play in this book about the origins and purposes of all our religious beliefs, actions, and rituals. What are we to make of the fact that there are many religions? Is there one true religion toward which all the others tend? Is there some one truth that gathers in all the other partial truths? Bonaventure, the medieval Franciscan theologian, seems to think so. Augustine, he claims that the essence of religion consists in right worship: The prayer of Christ is such devotion offered perfectly, and Christ stands over history as the model of all religious and ethical endeavors. Other religions need not be rejected, then, as entirely false. Rather, the partial truths we find in them take on their ultimate value when they are purified by the illuminating light of Christ. Christianity, for Hegel, is a religious precursor to the age of philosophical Enlightenment. Myth gives way to dogma and dogma to reason. Christianity itself eventually leads to secularization, and the perfection of secular reason is found not in Christ but in modern, democratic liberalism. The history of human culture begins in cave painting and finds its perfection in a globalized market economy, governed by the political principles of John Rawls. Moreover, unlike Hegel and many other modern theorists, he insists that religious doctrines and rituals have enduring importance in sustaining culture. They are not merely a prehistoric skin that modern reason needs eventually to shed. Bellah spends almost three hundred and fifty pages on ancient Israel, Greece, China, and India. In each case, he seeks to show that the archaic religions of the past established a framework from which universal, critical thinking emerged. For example, ancient Greek religious rituals and Homeric legends provided a cradle for the development of civic democracy. The religious practice of ancient theater—Aeschylus and Euripides were

originally performed in a liturgical contextâ€”created a symbolic form of reflection on human existence, which prepared the way for ancient philosophy particularly that of Plato and Aristotle. Similarly, the ancient ethical reflections of the Hebrew prophets gave rise to normative legal theories about the meaning of the state and its obligations and its limitations in the face of human dignity. Confucian and Daoist theorists debated the relative importance of the political community with respect to the larger natural order and the environment. In India, as Bellah notes, the criticisms of Brahman culture made by the Buddha led to egalitarian ethical reforms within Brahmanism itself. This commitment to pluralism distinguishes Bellah from his liberal Protestant forebears. Their theologies were organized around philosophical anthropology, a general theory of man as a religious animal. But in substantive and sometimes covert ways, they retained a christological center or end point. The fully religious and human way of living invariably ended up taking a Christian form, however remotely. Unlike Schleiermacher and Hegel, Bellah wants to avoid the promotion of a uniquely Christian vision of the religious essence of man. He is weary of a cheap religious syncretism that ignores the real differences of belief and practice among the ancient religions. In the end, then, he decides for the multicultural option: The essence of human religion is not identified comprehensively by any one tradition but is refracted to us through a multiplicity of traditions. Each offers partially convergent, partially incompatible visions of the meaning of reality. The search for a universal ethics characterizes them all. Each of the axial religious traditions narrates after its own fashion a social life governed by moral norms. But we cannot distill an essence.

### Chapter 7 : David Martin (sociologist) - Wikipedia

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### Chapter 8 : [PDF/ePub Download] sociology and theology eBook

*More precise methodological reflection on the relation between theology and sociology began in the Protestant theological world in 19th-century Germany as part of the discussion about the relation of faith and history, since sociology was primarily understood as a branch of history.*

### Chapter 9 : State of the Church: sociology or theology? | Psephizo

*Sociology as Theology Robert Bellah's book renews the liberal Protestant project by Thomas Joseph White June J ust when you thought liberal Protestantism was dead, Robert Bellah writes what is arguably the greatest work of liberal Protestant theology ever.*