

Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life

By Nancy Tatom Ammerman


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Nancy Tatom Ammerman examines the stories Americans tell of their everyday lives, from dinner table to office and shopping mall to doctor's office, about the things that matter most to them and the routines they take for granted, and the times and places where the everyday and ordinary meet the spiritual.

In addition to interviews and observation, Ammerman bases her findings on a photo elicitation exercise and oral diaries, offering a window into the presence and absence of religion and spirituality in ordinary lives and in ordinary physical and social spaces. The stories come from a diverse array of ninety-five Americans -- both conservative and liberal white Protestants, African American Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Mormons, Wiccans, and people who claim no religious or spiritual proclivities -- across a range that stretches from committed religious believers to the spiritually neutral. Ammerman surveys how these people talk about what spirituality is, how they seek and find experiences they deem spiritual, and whether and how religious traditions and institutions are part of their spiritual lives.

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Editorial Review

Review

"An interesting, organized and well-written book. Ammerman's masterful work will reward a patient and thoughtful reader with a close contour map of everyday religion."--*Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*

"Remarkable...Ammerman's empirical findings are an important addition to the growing body of literature challenging scholarly attempts to delineate religion from spirituality that have tended to align the former with traditional religious institutions and practices and the latter with individualized private spirituality."--*Catholic Books Review*

"Provides a helpful glimpse into how 'non experts' in America talk about and practice religion in their everyday lives...Besides making a wonderful addition to the syllabus of different graduate courses such as practical theology, spirituality, and the sociology of religion, *Sacred Stories* could be helpful for church book group discussions on everyday religion." --*Ecclesial Practices*

"*Sacred Stories* brings to light the myriad ways our contemporaries find religious meaning in their twenty-first century lives. It succeeds in launching readers into new conversations about what spirituality is, how we go about identifying activities and experiences as in some way spiritual, and how existing traditions connect with specific moments of everyday religion." --*Church History*

"This comprehensive, thought-provoking work adds immeasurably to scholarship in sociology of religion and will help set agendas in sociology of religion for years to come." --*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*

"By setting aside the typical categories academic researchers use when studying contemporary religion, Ammerman and her team document the complex ways religion shows up in a wide range of domains: in communities and conversations, in homes, at work and in public life, and not surprisingly around matters of health, illness and death." --*Religion Dispatches*

"Nancy Ammerman's *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes* offers the most in-depth, yet wide-ranging mapping of religious/spiritual/secular sensibilities in the everyday lives of contemporary Americans yet to emerge. She weaves a tapestry that shatters many of our taken-for-granted assumptions about people's circumscribed life-worlds. The book deserves a serious reading on the part of anyone who would try to describe this emerging, but exceedingly complex mix of the sacred and the secular." --Wade Clark Roof, J.F. Rowny Professor of

"Ammerman's innovative account of religiosity in the United States uses qualitative methods, especially elicited narratives, in an original way that combines depth with considerable breadth... A fascinating set of portraits of religiousness and spirituality among a highly diverse group that mirrors major portions of the U.S. religious landscape." --*Sociology of Religion*

"A book this packed with ideas and data will certainly pay back more than one reading as we sociologists of religion continue to move beyond the impasse between secularization theory and the rational choice paradigm, beyond the idea that spirituality is limited to the "spiritual not religious," and beyond the oppositional distinction between the sacred and profane. *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes* will undoubtedly help sociologists get our minds around the fact that mapping American religion today requires abandoning false dichotomies and embracing the messy (but nonetheless patterned) realities of religion in and out of various God boxes." --*American Journal of Sociology*

"Nancy Ammerman's recent work has helped to lead a growing group of scholars who, disenchanted with the perceived dead ends of the secularization versus rational choice debate of the 1990s, recommend new ways of thinking about and studying religion. *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes*, which uses a lived religion approach, is a welcome addition to these efforts. Ammerman's innovative account of religiosity in the United States uses qualitative methods, especially 20 elicited narratives, in an original way that combines depth with considerable breadth." --*Sociology of Religion*

About the Author

Nancy Ammerman is Professor of Sociology of Religion at Boston University, where she teaches in the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Theology. She has written award-winning books on America's conservative religious movements and on the role of religious organizations in community life.

Users Review

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Jason Urso:

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Jenna Springer:

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