

4-1-2016

**James, P. (Ed.). Religion, Identity, and Global Governance: Ideas, Evidence, and Practice. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.**

Dale Walton Ph.D.  
Lindenwood University, [dwalton@lindenwood.edu](mailto:dwalton@lindenwood.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Walton, Dale Ph.D. (2016) "James, P. (Ed.). Religion, Identity, and Global Governance: Ideas, Evidence, and Practice. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 7: No. 2, Article 26.

DOI: 10.62608/2158-0669.1316

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol7/iss2/26>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of International and Global Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact [phuffman@lindenwood.edu](mailto:phuffman@lindenwood.edu).

**James, P. (Ed.). *Religion, Identity, and Global Governance: Ideas, Evidence, and Practice*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.**

Religious sentiment has been a problematic human trait for International Relations (IR) scholars, particularly theorists, for a very long time. The theorist living in a time and place in which belief—or, at least, the pretense thereof—is ubiquitous must take into consideration how his or her work will be received by the faithful. This reception often will determine not only whether the theorist's works circulate freely but also whether he or she subsequently enjoys esteem and affluence or suffers ignominy and poverty—and, in some instances, imprisonment, torture, and/or execution.

Despite the authority of religious institutions and their centuries of influence over the works of theorists, philosophers, and artists, for well more than a hundred years, clerics and their flocks have generally presented little personal threat to Western IR scholars. Instead, the absence of explicit discussion of religiosity from much of the policy debate occurring within Western IR scholars' own time has encouraged their intellectual community to treat religion as, at most, a minor factor in decisionmaking that might be mentioned in passing but which generally can be ignored. Worse still, it is not uncommon to encounter works in which the author implicitly (or, less commonly, explicitly) assumes that religiously-oriented statements and actions by policymakers are invariably just an illustration of hucksterism—an inexpensive way to rile up the *hoi polloi* and convince the masses to fight and die obtaining the objectives which the leader in question truly values. This treatment of religion as a ruse (and indeed the absence of critical analysis of religion in IR scholarship in general—what might be referred to as the field's "religion gap") oftentimes leads to bizarre analysis, with even clerics such as Ali Khamenei—the second and current Supreme Leader of Iran—being treated as though they passionately care about minor scraps of land and the like but are always exquisitely careful to leave supernatural matters outside their decisionmaking process. Of course, very strong evidence exists that the *actual* Supreme Leader Khamenei is anything but indifferent to the defense and propagation of his faith, and the same is true of many thousands of other political leaders past and present. Yet, broadly speaking, academic IR scholars as a group engage little with this central area of human experience. Why this is the case is itself a complex and fascinating question, but surely the difficulty of measuring and assessing spiritual motives has played an important role. Moreover, the fact that religious beliefs deeply complicate the quest for a universal theory of behavior on the international stage has encouraged many IR theorists in particular to do the intellectual equivalent of crossing their fingers and hoping that religion will just fade away quietly.

Regardless of the historical reasons for the religion gap in IR, the omission of religion from a majority of IR analyses is most certainly a significant barrier to understanding the role of religion in global politics in this century. *Religion, Identity, and Global Governance: Ideas, Evidence, and Practice*—a product of the Religion, Identity, and Global Governance (RIGG) Project at the University of Southern California (USC)—attempts to address this weakness. The book is divided into three main sections: "Ideas," "Evidence," and "Practice." The sections are made up, respectively, of three, four, and five chapters. In addition, editor Patrick James—the Director of USC's Center for International Studies—contributes an introduction and conclusion. "Ideas" is the first, and shortest, of the three sections. John F. Stack, Jr.'s chapter discusses, with admirable economy, why IR theorists have been so markedly inclined to ignore religion. His analysis is compelling and clear. (Notably, this chapter could be used in IR courses to introduce students to the "religion gap" in IR). Ron E. Hassner argues that broadly speaking, Western

academia and media have an anti-religious bias; he recommends that scholars pursue what he refers to as a “thick” approach to the study of religion. Such an approach would address a variety of factors relevant to a specific religious tradition: theology, hierarchy, iconography, ceremony, and belief (p. 49). Anthony Chase provides an interesting discussion of human rights activism in Muslim-majority countries and how human rights and Islamist discourses interact.

The “Evidence” section of *Religion, Identity, and Global Governance* includes a very interesting chapter by Jonathan Fox and Nukhet Sandel, addressing how governments that practice religious exclusivity—defined by the authors as “the propensity of a state to support a single religion to the exclusion of all others” (p. 87)—act in crises. Cecelia Lynch discusses the impact of “War on Terror” discourse on religious humanitarian efforts, while Manus I. Midlarsky addresses political extremism in South Asia, particularly in the context of the conflict in Sri Lanka. A chapter by Yasemin Akbaba and Zeynep Taydas offers a very stimulating analysis of the “security dilemma” facing Iraqi groups in the context of sectarian conflict in Iraq. Patrick M. Goff’s chapter examines the controversy over Islamic arbitration in Ontario as a case study of identification with a global religion in a specific local political context.

The first chapter in the “Practice” section of the book is by James L. Heft, who addresses Pope John Paul II’s interpretation of Catholic Just War doctrine. Robert B. Lloyd discusses the mediation of international conflicts by Christian organizations. Steven L. Lamy examines how the foreign policies of certain Western middle powers—*i.e.*, “Good Samaritan” states such as Sweden and Canada—are influenced by religious NGOs. Canadian efforts to promote religious pluralism globally are addressed by Evan H. Potter. Chris Seiple draws extensively on personal experience to discuss how religious believers can work together to build what the author calls “communities of the willing.” James’ introduction and conclusion tie the volume together nicely. (Indeed, the introduction stands well on its own; it includes, for instance, a brief but compelling discussion of the influence of religion on the foreign policy of the George W. Bush Administration.) Moreover, the book is well-structured, and most of the chapters are quite readable. Given the amount of time that has passed since the book was in production, some of the chapters are slightly dated, but in general the volume remains timely.

Overall, *Religion, Identity, and Global Governance* is a useful contribution to the literature on the influence of religion in the international arena. Those readers mainly interested in large conceptual questions related to how religion fits into the study of affairs may be somewhat disappointed with the narrow focus of most of the chapters; this reflects the degree to which religion has been marginalized in the study of IR. While it is generally fairly easy to slot case studies and similar material—the “micro” study of religion in international affairs, so to speak—into the existing scholarly framework, there is yet little evidence that the IR community is shaping a coherent way forward in addressing how religion shapes the international system overall.

Dale Walton PhD  
Lindenwood University  
[Dwalton@lindenwood.edu](mailto:Dwalton@lindenwood.edu)