

inconsiderable journalistic skills in order to paint a picture of past and present events rather to prophesy future ones. I would have loved to have smelt an Angolan morning in Moorcraft's book; tasted a meal of whatever with whomever around a table in Salisbury as Ken Flower gave his often amazing version of things that happened and things about to come; and experienced what it felt like to be on a long march in UNITA country during the Angolan Civil War.

To conclude: it's worth having this book for its factual information — in which month did Mandela get released? When was the Jameson Raid? Pass me my Moorcraft, will you?

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Religion and Society: A Text for Africa By M. F. C. Bourdillon. Gweru, Mambo Press, 1990, 406 pp., ISBN 0-86922-492-1, Z\$39.50.

Bourdillon is interested in the functions of religions in various societies and in the processes by which religions fulfil these functions. This well-organized, well-written book is also well designed to fill the purpose implied in the subtitle. It is 'for Africa' partly because some themes which provide the focus for the chapters, for example witchcraft, are of particular, though not exclusive, interest in Africa, and partly because a larger than usual number of illustrative examples are drawn from African societies.

Beginners in the study of religion will welcome the book's overall thematic structure as it leads them fairly easily to subjects of interest, for example, 'Authority and Power', 'Ritual', and 'Religious Change and Secularization'. Teachers will appreciate the way Bourdillon has integrated theoretical material with accounts of religious practices in various societies. Each chapter presents a selection of societal examples of the chapter's theme and offers theoretical perspectives for interpreting them. These two aspects make it well suited for a college or university course introducing religious studies from a sociological perspective or introducing the sociology of religion as a discipline.

A further strength of the book as a scholarly tool is its documentation, which leads the reader on to a wide range of relevant literature, both studies of particular religious traditions (in Africa and elsewhere) and methodological works. Thus it can guide the student beyond the beginning particularly if he or she has access to an adequate library.

As I am trained in philosophy and theology I am not equipped to criticize the author's approach or treatment of his subject itself. I can observe, however, that his approach seems inclusive, if not comprehensive, in as much as interpreters cited cover a broad range of analytical models. I like this. Bourdillon's approach does not appear to be doctrinaire. He finds value for some interpretive purpose in all the methods to which he refers. Teachers with particular methodological preferences (or axes to grind) will thus not find their students confused by another strong bias but simply informed.

Also significant for the student of religion is Bourdillon's attitude towards his subject. While he appropriately suspends judgement when suggesting possible meanings or functions of a society's religious practices, he also allows explicitly for those meanings religious practitioners find in their modes of belief. That is, he does not reduce religious practice to merely social significance. Part of his concluding paragraph may serve to indicate the tone of the book in this regard:

One of the reasons for studying religion is to understand better how it works and what it does . . . The sociological study of religion is not primarily concerned with the truth value of different religions. We as individuals, however, must be concerned with the truth value of our own ways of thinking. This study is wasted if it does not help us critically to assess our own ideologies, in an endeavour to improve them (p. 373).

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