

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-43806-3 - Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture

E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Rethinking religion

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-43806-3 - Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture

E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Rethinking religion

Connecting
cognition
and culture

E. Thomas Lawson and
Robert N. McCauley



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-43806-3 - Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture
E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211 USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1990

First published 1990

First paperback edition 1993

Reprinted 1996

British Library cataloguing in publication data

Lawson, E. Thomas
Rethinking religion: connecting cognition and culture
I. Title II. McCauley, Robert N.
200

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Lawson, E. Thomas
Rethinking religion: connecting cognition and
culture/E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley
p. cm.
Bibliography
Includes index
ISBN 0 521 37370 0
1. Religion-Methodology. 2. Ritual. 3. Cognition and culture
I. McCauley, Robert N. II. Title
BL41.L39 1990
200-dc20 89-1020 CIP

ISBN 0 521 37370 0 hardback

ISBN 0 521 43806 3 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 1999

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-43806-3 - Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture

E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

This book is dedicated to
Robert Edward and
Emily Gertruida Lawson
and *Worthington Ernest Hurst*
who taught us that religion
need not be a force to be feared
nor a dogma to be embraced,
but simply a way of life

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-43806-3 - Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture

E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page ix</i>
Introduction	
i. Declarations and debts	1
ii. Loans and pursuits of an interdisciplinary sort	8
I Interpretation and explanation: problems and promise in the study of religion	
i. Introduction	12
ii. Explanation and interpretation: three accounts	14
Exclusivism	15
Inclusivism	18
Interactionism	22
2 Three theories of religion	
i. Introduction	32
ii. Intellectualism	33
iii. Symbolism	37
iv. Structuralism	41
v. Conclusion	43
3 Ritual as language	
i. Introduction	45
ii. Ritual as performative utterance	51
iii. Ritual as the communication of information	54
iv. Ritual as formal system	56
4 A cognitive approach to symbolic-cultural systems	
i. Introduction	60
ii. On the status of linguistic theory	61
iii. A cognitive approach to cultural materials	68
iv. In defense of a cognitive approach to religious ritual acts	77
	<i>vii</i>

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-43806-3 - Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture

E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

5	Outline of a theory of religious ritual systems	
i.	Introduction	84
ii.	Action elements and formation rules	87
iii.	Applications and illustrations	95
Two complications		96
The object agency filter		98
Ritual alterations of objects		102
Ritual implication of the superhuman		110
A further illustration		113
iv.	Universal principles of religious ritual structure	121
Substantive and formal universals		122
Functional universals		123
6	Semantics and ritual systems	
i.	Introduction	137
ii.	Semiotic ghosts and reflexive holism in semantics	138
iii.	Holism with multiple models	148
iv.	Comments on the semantics of religious ritual systems	157
v.	Staal and ritualization	166
7	Connecting the cognitive and the cultural	
i.	Introduction	170
ii.	The theory of religious ritual systems and explanation	172
iii.	Structural explanation	177
iv.	An integrated approach to cognitive and cultural systems	180
	<i>References</i>	185
	<i>Index</i>	191

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-43806-3 - Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture

E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

This book is a collaboration in every respect. Each author has taken primary responsibility for chapters or parts of chapters, but both have left their mark on every sentence in the course of revision.

Without the help and support of a number of people, this project would have taken much longer and been far more difficult. In the early stages Burt Loudon and David Kline provided much appreciated support as did the members of the Midwest Cognitive Science Study Group. Later on Bill Bechtel and Dick Neisser provided timely advice and welcome encouragement.

We are deeply indebted to a number of colleagues who have commented on part or all of this work or who have led us to helpful materials. Many colleagues have commented upon earlier versions of various chapters. We thank Hoyt Alverson, H. Byron Earhart, Nancy Falk, Michael Flynn, Adrienne Lehrer, William Lycan, Rudi Makkreel, Luther Martin, J. Samuel Preuss, Alexander Rosenberg, Elliott Sober, and James Thayer. We are especially grateful to Robert Richardson for his extensive and careful comments on Chapter 5. He has helped us to avoid numerous errors.

George Lakoff, Arthur Reber, and Bradd Shore provided especially helpful comments which have led to many improvements throughout the text. They have tried valiantly to prevent us from committing some of the transgressions that inevitably arise when outsiders presume to employ and criticize research from disciplines other than their own.

A special word of thanks to our editor, Wendy Guise. We are thankful also for the fine work of Ann Rex and Kay McKechnie.

Our debts to Mark Johnson and Hans Penner are profound. Both provided detailed criticisms of every chapter. The care and attention that each gave to the text are just the most recent indications of their faithfulness as friends. The mistakes that remain are exclusively our responsibility.

Robert McCauley wishes to express his gratitude to the Emory University Research Committee and Emory College for their support of this research.

We are profoundly grateful to our parents and parents-in-law – Leland and Muriel McCauley, Dorm and Joyce Conklin, and Earl and Ruth Jones – for their unflinching confidence in the importance of our labors and for their support. Finally, we wish to thank our wives and daughters – Ruth and Drindee and Sonya, Jennifer, and Ellen Amanda – for their patience, their encouragement, and their love, and, in Ruth's case, for her proof-reading!

E. Thomas Lawson

Robert N. McCauley