

Who Owns Religion? focuses on a period—the late 1980s through the 1990s—when scholars of religion offended the very communities they had imagined themselves honoring through their work. While controversies involving scholarly claims about religion are nothing new, this period saw an increase in public disputes that continues today, with authors and their institutions the targets of hate mail and book-banning campaigns, and communities mistrustful of academics and the systems in which they work.

Taking the reader through compelling case studies, Laurie L. Patton identifies two trends that may have fueled this rise in controversies: the growth of multicultural identity politics and the advent of the internet—both challenging the rights of secular Western scholarship to interpret religions at all. Drawing on theories of the public sphere, Patton argues that scholars must move among multiple masters, and traces spaces that scholars might find for their work between their own institutions and the communities they study. *Who Owns Religion?* makes a case for sustained reflection about the public sphere in any project in the study of religion, whatever its theoretical approach.

“Who Owns Religion? boldly identifies and deftly navigates the complex ‘eruptive public space’ that arises when scholars of religion and their multiple publics collide. Patton presents a grounded understanding of particular controversies across multiple traditions, and provides a searching analysis of the larger question of whether religion can be theorized at all without concomitant theorization of the university, the nonacademic institution, and the public sphere. Patton’s constructive pathways across this entanglement make this deeply reflexive and well-written study powerfully relevant to any discipline that claims a public face.”

Leela Prasad, Duke University

*“Since its origins in the nineteenth century, the academic study of religion has mostly operated independently of the world of religious adherents. This changed in the late twentieth century, leaving scholars reeling from the intensity of the opprobrium to which their work was subjected. Patton explains the cultural and historical forces that led to the conflict, and, importantly, how we can move beyond the impasse. Filled with insights, *Who Owns Religion?* is a must-read for anyone interested in the study of religion at the turn of the millennium.”*

José Ignacio Cabezón, University of California, Santa Barbara

Laurie L. Patton is the author, editor, or translator of ten books in the study of religions, and has also authored three books of poems, most recently, *House Crossing*. She was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2018. From 2018 to 2019, she was president of the American Academy of Religion. She currently serves as professor of religion and president of Middlebury College.