

9th Edition

Anthology of World Scriptures

Robert E. Van Voorst



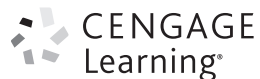


NINTH EDITION

ANTHOLOGY OF WORLD SCRIPTURES

ROBERT E. VAN VOORST

*Western Theological Seminary
Holland, Michigan*



Australia • Brazil • Mexico • Singapore • United Kingdom • United States

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To James and Genevieve Bos

My parents-in-law

*In gratitude for your
friendship*

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PREFACE

The major living religions of the world have all expressed their teachings and practices in writing. Over the course of time, some of these writings gained unique standing in their traditions and became scriptures. As scriptures, they continue to influence the course of their religions. To read the scriptures of the world, therefore, is to encounter world religions in a direct and meaningful way.

This book is designed to facilitate this encounter for the general reader and, especially, for the student of religion. Its pages contain the most notable and instructive sacred texts of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Shinto, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and five new religious movements from around the world: Baha'i, the Christian Science Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Unification Church, and Falun Gong. This anthology not only presents scripture readings, but also sets them in the context of their application in the traditions themselves, taking into account recent scholarship on the role of scriptures in religion. Moreover, it does this in one volume and in one format. It has an organization that is easily adaptable to most of the current methods of teaching world religions.

This ninth edition incorporates the following significant revisions:

- Chapter 1 now examines the role of the study of scriptures in interfaith dialogue, in particular the growing “Scriptural Reasoning” movement.
- Selections from the *Rig-Veda* in Chapter 2 have been put in poetic format. This will help students appreciate their genre.
- The introduction to Chapter 3, Buddhism, has been revised and expanded for greater clarity.
- A new translation of the *Daode Jing* has been used in Chapter 7. It expresses the meaning of that influential book in a more accessible way while retaining its poetically mystical qualities.
- New readings have been added to Chapters 3, 6, and 11. Chapter 3 now features a fuller selection of Zen koans, and a selection of Tibetan magical formulas to help students to understand popular Buddhism. Chapter 6 features a new reading on the Confucian concept of the mandate of Heaven, important for historic Chinese

attitudes to governments. Chapter 11 has a new section covering early Pauline views on special church ministry, important for understanding the varieties of ministries and church order in first-century Christianity, many of which continue today.

- Chapter 12 has new readings from the Shari'a, on Muslim laws governing almsgiving (zakat) and approved foods, with more-extensive-than-usual annotations to explain these legal readings to students. These selections deal with topics accessible to students, and less controversial and emotion-laden than the Shari'a laws on criminal punishments so much in the headlines recently.
- More than a dozen new photos have been added to help students visualize the uses of scripture treated in the text.
- All scholarship has been updated throughout, as have the vignettes that open most chapters.

Anthology of World Scriptures is organized as follows: The first chapter examines the general phenomenon of scripture in the world's religions, its nature, use, and place in modern scholarship. Chapter 1 also introduces the reader to the art of reading scripture with practical suggestions.

Chapters 2–7 and 9–12 present the scripture of a single religion and are organized as follows. (Chapter 8, Shinto, has a different internal order that is explained at the beginning of this chapter; Chapter 13 covers the five new religious movements given above, with chapter content in much the same organization as Chapters 2–7 and 9–12.) Vignettes about scripture and its usage draw the reader's interest and imagination. Then an introduction sets the context by explaining the overall structure, use, origin, and development of the scripture in its religion. (If the name of the scripture poses a problem for students, this is given a brief treatment before overall structure.) The first grouping of scripture passages concerns the history of the religion, especially the founder (if any) and early history of the tradition. The second grouping covers main doctrinal teachings, including divine or ultimate reality, creation and the environment, human nature, and human fulfillment. The third grouping deals with ethical systems, both personal and social; topics such as war and peace, justice, and the role of women are anthologized as fully as possible here. The fourth grouping focuses on organization, both the ways that religion orders itself and seeks to order its wider culture. The fifth grouping includes worship, devotion, ritual, and meditation. The final grouping in most chapters deals with later, post-scriptural developments of scriptural themes. Each chapter has full pedagogical aids—for example, concise introductions to each passage, tables listing scripture canons, full annotations to explain difficult items in the readings, questions for study and discussion, a glossary with pronunciations, and a brief treatment of recent films that deal with scriptures.

I am grateful for the strong reception this book has received. I trust that this new edition will stimulate its readers to explore the world of religion more deeply.

MINDTAP

This edition of *Anthology of World Scriptures* can be purchased with a MindTap that contains an array of online tools designed to reinforce the text's concepts and help students better prepare for class and for testing. These tools include quizzes, flashcards, videos, and more. Students should go to cengagebrain.com to gain access, and instructors should contact their Cengage Sales Representative.

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Finally, this ninth edition gives me the happy opportunity to renew my expression of gratitude to my family: to my wife, Mary, a scholar's ideal spouse; to our son Nicholas and daughter-in-law Jessica; and to our son Richard and daughter-in-law Bonnie, with their children William, Robert, and Camille.

CHAPTER ONE

Scripture Among the World's Religions



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Music during Scripture Recitation

Tibetan Buddhist monks in northern India sound their horns during a ceremony of scripture recitation. The scriptures, in the traditional format of long rectangular white pages, are laid out before them. This ceremony increases their merit and also brings a greater knowledge of Buddhist scriptures, a knowledge that is an essential part of a monk's progress toward enlightenment.

The influence of scripture is felt throughout the world in ways both extraordinary and commonplace. Not all contemporary examples of scripture usage are as dramatic or controversial as in these stories, but they do show the importance of scripture:

- In Dearborn, Michigan, players on Fordson High School's football team prepare in August for the start of their season by practicing from 11 P.M. until about 4 A.M. Dearborn is the home of one of the largest Muslim populations in North America, and the team is mostly Muslim, as is the head coach. They practice only at night because the preseason practice coincides with Ramadan, the month-long period of fasting in which observant Muslims may take no food or drink during daylight hours. Ramadan is a period of devotion, but from the earliest years of Islam, its particular meaning celebrates the giving of the *Qur'an*, the scripture of Islam.
- In New York City, the prominent Hollywood actor Denzel Washington is interviewed on the *Today* show by its lead host, Matt Lauer. The topic is the film *The Book of Eli*, which stars Washington and Mila Kunis. Eli's mission is to deliver this book—the last *Bible* in existence—safely to its destination, in the belief that this book is the key to rebuilding a better world. The book is a symbol of power and hope in a world that has suffered a near-total disaster. In the interview, Washington talks about how he reads the *Bible* as a spiritual exercise.
- In New Delhi, India, the lower house of the Indian Parliament had to be adjourned for the day when an uproar broke out over the pro-Hindu party in control of the government. The party tried to introduce legislation that would make the *Bhagavad Gita*, a part of a Hindu epic, the official sacred book of India. This was met by strong opposition from representatives of other religions in India, and even from some Hindu legislators. When the proposal was withdrawn, the assembly was opened again to relative calm, but many members of the Parliament are wary that other pro-Hindu measures might be introduced.
- In London, the publication of an audacious book by a prominent British atheist creates a stir—*The Good Book: A Humanist Bible* by University of London philosophy professor A. C. Grayling. This book bills itself as a “secular bible drawn from the wisdom and humanity in the world's great literature.” The main title plays on an informal Christian name for the *Bible*, “the Good Book.” Grayling's book is structured in fourteen chapters that are meant to imitate the structure of the *Bible*, including such well-known biblical terms as “Genesis,” “Wisdom,” “Lamentations,” “Acts,” and “Epistles.” Oddly enough, some of the figures that Grayling draws upon for his secular and humanist approach to life were themselves religious, and prominently so: Confucius; Laozi, the traditional founder of Daoism; and Rumi, the founder of the Sufi Muslim movement.

As these stories indicate, the scriptures of world religions have a continuing profound impact on life and culture. This anthology introduces these scriptures and encourages a deep encounter with them in all their variety. Scriptures of the world are so vast in size that some sort of sampling is necessary for all but the expert specialist. This anthology offers from each religion excerpts that faithfully reflect that religion's history and continuing life.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCRIPTURE SCHOLARSHIP

In the last 150 years, the scholarly study of world scriptures has passed through three stages that have strongly influenced how we read scriptures.¹ In the first stage, around the middle 1800s, European scholars began a vast enterprise of making reliable translations of the sacred literature of the religions of the world. (See Map 1 in the center section for the distribution of the major world religions.) The most notable and influential effort was the Sacred Books of the East series founded around 1880 by F. Max Müller, a professor in Oxford University. Müller is recognized today as a founder of the field of religious studies. The aim of scholars in this stage was to translate and study individual texts, not to examine the general religious features of scripture—how they were formed and how they are used. A feature of this first stage that continues today is the popular anthology of world scriptures that uses scriptures as a mine for enlightenment, paying little attention to how scripture functions in religious communities.²

The academic movement known as the “History of Religions” school dominated the second stage of scripture study. This school of thought, which arose in the 1920s, analyzed the development of each religion using historical and social-scientific methods. Both Eastern and Western scriptures were largely neglected at this stage. Perhaps in reaction to the earlier reliance on world scriptures, scholars relied on the study of ritual, myth, symbols, and other elements of religion, not on scriptures. Such a respected treatment of comparative religion as Gerardus van der Leeuw’s *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* contains only a brief discussion of scripture as a feature of world religions.³ In addition, as social science methods increasingly entered the field of religious scholarship in this second stage, researchers turned away from studying literary sources from the past in favor of the social-scientific study of present-day living communities of faith.⁴ Mircea Eliade, a leading member of the History of Religions school, did pay attention to sacred texts, particularly in his *Essential Sacred Writings from Around the World*.⁵ However, this is “the

¹For an excellent comprehensive discussion of the history of the academic study of world religions, with some detailed comments on scripture study, see Eric Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, 2nd ed. (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Press, 1987). The best succinct presentation of this topic is by S. Cain, “History of the Study of Religion,” in Mircea Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 14 (New York: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 64–83.

²The first popular anthology is Moncure D. Conway, *The Sacred Anthology: A Book of Ethical Scriptures* (London: Trubner, 1873). Robert Ballou’s *The Bible of the World* (New York: Viking, 1939) and its abridgment in *World Bible* (New York: Viking, 1944) have remained in print continually, although never revised. Selwyn G. Champion and Dorothy Short compiled *Readings from World Religions* (Boston: Beacon, 1952), which was reprinted most recently as *The World’s Great Religions: An Anthology of Sacred Texts* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003). The Unification Church has published *World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts*, edited by Andrew Wilson (New York: Paragon House, 1991). Philip Novak has edited *The World’s Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World’s Religions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994). Robert Van de Weyer compiled *A World Religions Bible* (Berkeley, CA: O Books, 2003).

³Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938; German original, 1933). One short chapter, 64, deals with scripture.

⁴For example, the widely used *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*, ed. W. A. Lessa and E. Z. Vogt, 4th ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1997) has excellent readings in all the basic topics in the cultural-anthropological study of religion—symbol, myth, ritual, shamanism, magic—but no essay on scripture and its uses.

⁵Mircea Eliade, *Essential Sacred Writings from around the World* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); first published under the title *From Primitives to Zen: A Thematic Sourcebook of the History of Religions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

exception that proves the rule” that the History of Religions school was not interested in scriptures.

Although the History of Religions approach to world religions is still influential, a third stage has emerged since around 1960 in which scholars have rediscovered the value of scripture. The overreliance on scripture that was characteristic of the first stage, and the neglect of scripture in the second stage, are now being corrected as scholars increasingly view scripture as an important feature among the religions of the world. A healthy balance on the importance of scripture for the study of religion has now been achieved. Today, scripture is correctly seen as one religious facet among many and therefore not to be isolated from the others. Another new element is an emphasis on the actual ways in which scripture is viewed and used in world religions. To understand scripture, we must know not just the scriptural text, but also how it comes alive in the total life of the religion.

Recent research gives evidence of this third stage. Large-scale studies such as Geo Widengren's *Phenomenology of Religion* and Friedrich Heiler's *Manifestations and Essence of Religion* deal extensively with scripture among the world's religions.⁶ Ninian Smart's *Sacred Texts of the World* uses scripture to approach several different religious phenomena in each world religion.⁷ Six current books deal with scripture and its role in religion: *The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective*, by Frederick Denny and Roderick Taylor; *Sacred Word and Sacred Text*, by Harold Coward; *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective*, by Miriam Levering; *Sacred Texts and Authority*, by Jacob Neusner; *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*, by Wilfred Cantwell Smith; and *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*, by Vincent Wimbush. A documentary film based on Wimbush's work is entitled “Finding God in the City of Angels: Scriptural Communities and Dynamics in Los Angeles.” Most recent and extensive is the two-volume, 1991-page *Norton Anthology of World Religions* edited by Jack Miles, which gives extensive selections from writings, many of them scriptures, in Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.⁸

Today, the comparative study of scripture is a leading feature in the study of world religions. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, of Harvard University, and some of his former doctoral students have had a strong impact on current scripture study. They argue for scripture study centered on the actual reception and use of scriptures. The work of William Graham on the oral dimensions of scripture has been especially influential.⁹ A measure of the strength of this stage is the attention now paid to

⁶Geo Widengren, *Religionsphänomenologie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969); Friedrich Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1979).

⁷Ninian Smart, *Sacred Texts of the World* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

⁸Frederick M. Denny and Rodney L. Taylor, eds., *The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective* (Charleston: University of South Carolina Press, 1985); Harold Coward, *Sacred Word and Sacred Text* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988); Miriam Levering, ed., *Rethinking Scripture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1993); Jacob Neusner, ed., *Sacred Texts and Authority* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1998); Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Jack Miles, ed., *Norton Anthology of World Religions* (New York: Norton, 2014).

⁹See especially William Graham's *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

scripture in textbooks.¹⁰ A few collections of world scriptures from different religions are now published for devotional, meditative reading.¹¹ As a representative of this third stage of scripture study, the present work offers students a wide range of scripture selections from the religions of the world. Introductions and annotations set the readings in the context of their actual usage.

THE DEFINITION OF SCRIPTURE

Now we must ask: What exactly is “scripture”? At first glance, defining it seems easy enough. We think of scripture as the holy writing, the sacred text of a religion. All religions seem to have scriptures, and all appear to use them in the same way. As a fixture among most religions, scripture seems—on the surface—to be a constant. On closer examination, however, these simple notions vanish, and “scripture” gets harder to define. Books that are traditionally regarded as scriptures vary in several important aspects. In fact, they are as varied in form and functions as the religions and cultures from which they come:

- Some scriptures, especially those of Judaism and Christianity, prominently feature historical **narratives** that tell events in story form. Scriptures from other religions vary a great deal in the number of narratives they contain.
- Some scriptures have codes of religious law, some feature more general moral precepts, and still others do not seem concerned about ethics.
- Poetry is the leading literary form of some scriptures (the *Qur’an*); others feature prose.
- Some scriptures have philosophy that reflect on the world (for example, the Hindu *Upanishads*), some have moral philosophy (the Confucian *Analects*, the Jewish and Christian *Bible*), but many have no philosophy at all.
- Some scriptures contain directions for rituals (the Hindu *Vedas*, the Jewish *Bible*), but others have no developed prescriptions for rites and ceremonies (the *Qur’an*).
- Also present in scriptures are many different **genres**, or literary forms: myth, legend, prophecy, sermons, love poems, divination, magic, and others.

This brief overview shows that world scriptures vary first in *literary form*. We cannot open a book, examine its literary form, and pronounce it scriptural. Scripture is primarily a relational, not a literary, quality. As William Graham has written, the holiness of a book is not usually accepted immediately because of its literary form or contents, but it is “realized historically in the life of communities who respond to it as

¹⁰Kenneth Kramer, *World Scriptures: An Introduction to Comparative Religion* (New York: Paulist, 1986); Jean Holm and John Bowker, *Sacred Writings* (London: Pinter, 1994); Richard Viladesau and Mark Massa, *World Religions: A Sourcebook for the Student of Christian Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1994); Ian S. Markham, *A World Religions Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Terry D. Bilhartz, *Sacred Words* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006); Mary P. Fisher and Lee W. Bailey, *An Anthology of Living Religions*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2008); Joan Price, *Sacred Scriptures of the World Religions* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010); James Fieser and John Powers, *Scriptures of the World’s Religions*, 5th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2014).

¹¹The most popular of these devotional anthologies of world scripture is Eknath Easwaran, *God Makes the Rivers to Flow: Sacred Literature of the World*, 3rd ed. (Tomaes, CA: Nilgiri, 2003). See also Bonnie L. Kuchler, *One Heart: Universal Wisdom from the World’s Scriptures* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2004) and Joel Beversluis, *Sourcebook of the World’s Religions: An Interfaith Guide to Religion and Spirituality* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2000).

something sacred or holy.”¹² Communities shape and receive scripture in many different literary forms and styles, and scripture then shapes the life of faith. The relation between scripture and religion is reciprocal and dynamic.

The second variation among scriptures has to do with their *number*. Among the various world religions, they can range from one book to an entire library. Like the *Qur'an*, scriptures can be one unified text of moderate size between two covers. Like the Jewish and Christian scriptures, they can be collections of many short books between two covers. In Asian religions, they range in number from one book (the *Adi Granth* of Sikhism), to the dozen or so texts of Confucianism, to the hundreds of texts of Hinduism, and to the thousands of texts of Daoism (Taoism) and Buddhism. The number of books in any religion is a matter of a **canon**, a formal list or collection of books recognized as scriptural. The canon is closed in the three **Abrahamic monotheisms**—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—and in Zoroastrianism. All the scriptures of these religions were long ago officially identified, and nothing can now be added to or subtracted from them. In Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, and Daoism, however, the situation is quite different. The problems in defining a canon of scripture for a religion like Daoism, for example, which has about 1,200 sacred texts, are enormous. Moreover, the process of producing scripture has not officially ended. Where new scriptural revelations can be added—as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (a “Mormon” church) added two in the twentieth century—a closed canon cannot exist.

The large size of some scripture canons raises a question: How can believers use their religion's scriptures when no one person or group can know them all, let alone be expert in them all? In traditions with large canons, certain books are basic for everyone. In addition, different groups in a religion attach themselves to a few select scriptures that reflect their particular interests. This tendency to choose specific books from among the total body of scripture results in a “canon within the canon.” Most commonly, it occurs in religions with very large numbers of books, but it also can be found in religions with relatively smaller canons—in Christianity, for example, some churches prefer some biblical books, others prefer different groups. In sum, scripture canons can be either completely closed or open to development and change. No matter how readily they can be altered, canonical texts are still viewed and treated as scripture.

The third variation in scriptures lies in their *functions*. In some religions, scripture is so central—or seems so to outsiders—that the lives of believers seem almost dictated by scripture. Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all properly called “religions of the book” because of the high place and powerful function of their scriptures. New religious movements that occasionally branch off from these religions are also scripture-centered.¹³ In contrast, Asian religions usually have a more informal relationship to their scriptures, which lay devotees consult mainly for general guidance and inspiration. (Monks and nuns in Asian religions, however, have a more formal and developed relationship to their scriptures.)

¹²William A. Graham, “Scripture,” *Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 13, p. 134.

¹³For a collection of fifteen scriptures from new religious movements that arose in the United States, see Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, *American Scriptures: An Anthology of Sacred Writings* (New York: Penguin, 2010).

Given all this variety, is it possible to define the word *scripture* in a way that takes variety into account yet applies to all world religions? Although some scholars answer in the negative,¹⁴ most conclude that a comprehensive definition is possible and necessary. The definition we use here is this: *Scripture is writing that is accepted and used in a religious community as especially sacred and authoritative.* We now look closely at the key words and implications of this definition, discussing the formal and functional aspects of scriptures—what they are and how people use them.

Our definition of scripture begins with the fact that it is *writing*. Scriptures exercise much of their authority as books, and we encounter them as books. The word *scripture* comes from the Latin *scriptura*, or “writing.” Some scholars argue that **oral tradition**, the passing down of material by word of mouth, can be “scriptural.”¹⁵ Although oral and written sacred traditions do have some similar characteristics and functions, strictly speaking “oral scripture” is a contradiction in terms—scripture is, by definition, written. The scriptures of all religions, however, do have continuing, significant oral and aural (hearing) dimensions.¹⁶ Most scriptures originated in oral tradition, so the “imprint” of orality can be found in them. For example, David Carr has argued that Israelite (ancient Jewish) scripture emerged as a support for an educational process in which written and oral dimensions were intertwined, in particular as an aid to memorizing and reciting key traditions.¹⁷ The same is probably true for many other religions. Although the writing of scripture can obscure its oral dimensions (especially for us moderns, where the written word predominates), the orality of the text is still in the writing, waiting to be drawn out by faithful vocalizing of the words. Scripture comes more fully alive when believers read it aloud and hear it in worship. Most believers, even those in highly literate cultures, hear scripture in worship more often than they read it privately. In this book, as in any book, we encounter scriptures as texts, but these texts are meant to be spoken and heard.

Second, our definition states that scripture is *accepted and used in a religious community*. Scripture is recognized as such by an entire religious group, and it is used by whole groups. Scripture is not a private document or collection of documents. Individuals in many parts of the modern world have the option of inventing their own private religion, complete with their own favorite book or collection of books. This is not scripture as scholarship today understands it. Rather, scripture is a community thing.

Third, scriptures are *especially sacred*. They have special religious significance in pointing to ultimate reality and truth. Sacredness should not be seen simply as being of divine origin or even as the “wholly other,” Rudolf Otto’s influential conception of sacredness that suits Western religions but not many Eastern faiths.¹⁸ For example, the

¹⁴For example, in *Rethinking Scripture*, the essays by Coburn and Folkert reject the term *scripture* for *the Word* and *canon*. The other authors in this book keep “scripture” as a conceptual category, and it is the dominant category in the volume as a whole, as the title implies.

¹⁵See, for example, Roger Schmidt, *Exploring Religion*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Cengage, 1988), p. 208: “Broadly conceived, *scripture* refers to oral as well as written traditions that a people regard as sacred. Each religious community has a scripture, a body of sacred oral or written traditions.”

¹⁶See especially Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*. For a general treatment of orality, see Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1982), and Jack Goody, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹⁷David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁸Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1923; German original, 1917).

sacred “Way” witnessed by the *Daode Jing* (also spelled *Tao Te Ching*) is not wholly other but is hidden in the universe and the self, waiting to be discovered and “tuned in to.” Moreover, only a few books among world scriptures explicitly claim sacredness for themselves; the *Qur’an* is a notable example in Western religions. Most scriptures receive their sacred status only after they have been written, circulated, and widely accepted as reflecting the faith in some special sense. The relational aspect of all scripture comes to the fore in a religious community.

Notice that this definition of scriptures says that they are *especially* sacred. Most religions have a secondary religious literature that is also viewed as holy, instructive, or authoritative. For example, Judaism has its *Talmud*, books of religious law, and Islam its *Hadith*, traditions about Muhammad. This may seem to complicate the matter of defining the idea of scripture. On what basis can we say that a certain holy book in a religious tradition is scripture but another holy book is not? The answer lies in the special reception and usage that believers give to works that they see as *especially* sacred. Most religions explicitly or implicitly hold some works to be secondary to scripture. *Talmud* is not the Hebrew *Bible*; *Hadith* is not the *Qur’an*. Almost every religion has commentarial, devotional, or legal literature that follows up on scripture, and believers typically make a careful distinction between scripture and these works.

Another mark of special sacredness is use in ritual. When believers read books aloud in worship, when they speak their words to carry out sacrifice, and especially when they venerate (pay formal respect to) books during worship, we have a sure indication that these books are especially sacred. Secondary religious literature rarely makes its way into worship. Different types of veneration are practiced in every world religion and in the new religious movements. Even in everyday life, scriptures enjoy special respect: The Christian *Bible* is the only book in the West still often bound in leather; Muslims wrap the *Qur’an* in silk and store it in a special place. In the new religious movements, the key writings of the founders that function as scriptures are often printed and bound to resemble more traditional holy books.

The final part of our definition is that scriptures are *especially authoritative* in their communities. Among all written texts in a community, a scripture is always the most authoritative and is often the court of final appeal in religious matters. The range of this authority and the way it is exercised vary depending on the nature of the religion and the content of its scriptures. In the Western “religions of the book,” scriptures are comprehensive in content and regulate much of life. In the Eastern religions, scriptures are often not authoritative in the same way as in the Abrahamic traditions. Yet Asian scriptures often express the heart of their faith. Moreover, “at least four of the six South Asian or Far Eastern fundamentalist-like movements ... do in fact privilege a sacred text and presume to draw certain fundamentals—beliefs and behaviors—from it.”¹⁹ The authority of scripture for most followers of a given religion is paradoxically acknowledged even when some occasionally reject it. Typically among Western religions, to receive one religion’s texts as scripture is automatically to exclude the texts of other religions. For example, the presentation of Jewish *Bible* material in the *Qur’an* means that Muslims should not look directly to the Jewish *Bible* and read it. An exception to this is the Christian *Bible*, which contains the Jewish *Bible* renamed as the “Old Testament.”

¹⁹Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 820.

The authority of scripture in both East and West is established by a special class of scholars who are the guardians of scripture and recognized experts in its interpretation. In Buddhism, monks with special training and ability teach the sacred writings to other monks and inquiring laypeople. The Jewish rabbi, the Christian pastor, and the Muslim mullah—all leaders of local congregations—are experts in interpreting and teaching their scriptures. We must also remember that only quite recently in the sweep of human history have mass-produced books appeared and has mass literacy become possible. This is another reason for the existence of a special class to read, comment on, and relate sacred books to a religious community. Of course, the uses of scriptures by ordinary followers of a religion are, at times, quite different from the official, prescribed use.

The authority of scripture in nearly every faith, including new religious movements, therefore, is mediated largely by individuals considered its official interpreters. Some of these individuals have written a **commentary**, a book written to explain another book, especially scripture. Commentary has had a large role in the history of many religions and regulates how scriptures are received and used, especially at the official level. Influential commentaries influence official reading and interpretation of the text. As John Henderson states, “Commentaries and commentarial modes of thinking dominated the intellectual history of most premodern civilizations.... Until the seventeenth century in Europe, and even later in China, India, and the Near East, thought, especially within high intellectual traditions, was primarily exegetical [text-interpretive] in character and expression.”²⁰ Commentaries are found for ancient scripture, not for new religious movements.

THE USES OF SCRIPTURE

When scripture is set in the full context of the everyday life of believers, its uses become plain. How believers use scripture shows its status and role in a religion. In this section, we discuss some basic dimensions of the comparative study of scripture usage.

We begin with four uses that are primarily *cognitive*, understanding and thinking in some way about the words and their meaning. First, scripture is a source for establishing and defending key doctrines. Scriptures can be used doctrinally because they typically contain the key teachings of the faith and because believers usually see them as continuing the voice of the founder(s). They have primary importance as statements of the deep truths of the universe and the right way to live in it. These teachings can assume different forms: God(s) and humanity, human imperfections and salvation, beginnings and ends of the individual and the cosmos, the moral life and how to achieve it. When scripture is used to establish doctrine, its official interpreters—monks, priests, scholars, and the like—usually do this. Sometimes, formal debate in councils or assemblies sets down doctrines, often within the confines of a monastery or temple. Defending doctrine occurs less often at the popular level, but even here scripture can function authoritatively. An appeal to a passage of holy writ is often the final word in any argument about religion.

²⁰John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 3.