

INVITATION TO World Religions

THIRD EDITION

JEFFREY BRODD

LAYNE LITTLE

BRADLEY NYSTROM

ROBERT PLATZNER

RICHARD SHEK

ERIN STILES

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BRIEF CONTENTS

Preface xvii

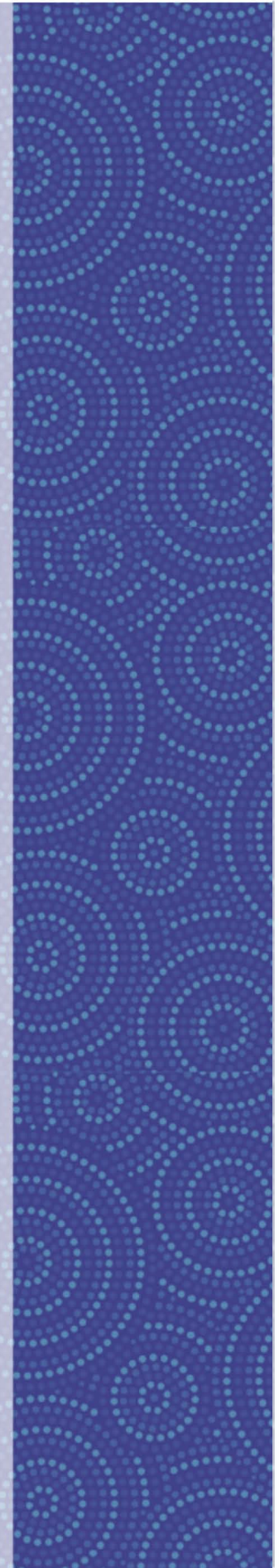
- 1** An Invitation to the Study of World Religions 3
- 2** Indigenous Religions of North America 31
- 3** Indigenous Religions of Africa 61
- 4** Hinduism 91
- 5** Buddhism 145
- 6** Jainism 193
- 7** Sikhism 223
- 8** Chinese Religions: Confucianism and Daoism 251
- 9** Shinto 303
- 10** Zoroastrianism 331
- 11** Judaism 361
- 12** Christianity 419
- 13** Islam 479
- 14** New Religious Movements 537

Notes N-1

Glossary G-1

Credits C-1

Index I-1



CONTENTS

Preface xvii

1 ● An Invitation to the Study of World Religions 3

APPROACHING THE STUDY OF WORLD RELIGIONS 4

Religion as a Subject of Academic Inquiry 5

WHAT RELIGIONS DO 10

Religious Questions and Challenges 11

Religion and Violence 18

Dimensions of Religions 19

Teachings 20

Historical Development 20

Way of Life 21

RELIGIONS IN THE MODERN WORLD 21

Modernization and Related Phenomena 22

The Changing Roles of Women in Religions 23

The Encounter of Religion and Science 24

AN ACADEMIC APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS 25

Balance and Empathy 25

Comparative and Multidisciplinary Approaches 25

CONCLUSION 27

2 ● Indigenous Religions of North America 31

THE TEACHINGS OF INDIGENOUS NORTH AMERICAN RELIGIONS 34

Creation and Origins 35

Life Lessons in Myths 38

The Importance of Balance: Humanity and the Natural World 39

Sacred Language and Sacred Time 41

VOICES: An Interview with Brian Melendez 43

THE HISTORY OF INDIGENOUS NORTH AMERICAN RELIGIONS 45
 Conquest, Colonization, and Christianity 45
 Resistance Movements 46
 GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: The World Turns to Standing Rock 49
 Indigenous North American Religions and Non-Native Practitioners 50
INDIGENOUS NORTH AMERICAN RELIGIONS AS A WAY OF LIFE 50
 Healing 50
 Women and Gender in Indigenous North American Religions 51
 Rites of Passage 52
 Rites of Renewal and Rites of Purification 54
CONCLUSION 56

3 ● Indigenous Religions of Africa 61

THE TEACHINGS OF INDIGENOUS AFRICAN RELIGIONS 65
 Myths 65
 Supernatural Beings: Gods and Spirits 66
 VOICES: Interviews with Sammy Letoole and Festus Ogunbitan 67
 Humanity and the Human Condition 71
THE HISTORY OF INDIGENOUS AFRICAN RELIGIONS 73
 The Spread of Islam 73
 Christianity and Colonialism 74
 Reform and Resistance 74
 GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: African Religions in the Americas 76
INDIGENOUS AFRICAN RELIGIONS AS A WAY OF LIFE 77
 Communicating with the Spirit World 77
 Using Supernatural Powers 80
 Women in Indigenous African Religions 81
 Life-Cycle Rituals 82
CONCLUSION 86

4 ● Hinduism 91

THE TEACHINGS OF HINDUISM 93
 Hindu Beliefs about Divine Reality 93
 The Individual and the Quest for Liberation 98
 Three Paths to Liberation 100
 Vedanta: The Predominant School of Hindu Philosophy 102
 Yoga 104
 The Individual and Society 104

VOICES: An Interview with Jayashree Venkatesan 108

Hindu Sacred Texts 108

The Sects of Hinduism 113

THE HISTORY OF HINDUISM 116

The Indus Valley Civilization 116

Who Are the Aryans? 118

The Vedic Period 119

The Age of the Guptas 119

The Development of Bhakti 120

Tantra 121

Hindus and Muslims During the Mughal Dynasty 121

Colonial Critique and the Hindu Reformers 122

Gandhi and the Struggle for Indian Independence 125

Hindutva and Hindu Nationalism 126

Hindu Nationalism and Violence 127

GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: From India to Iowa: Hinduism in the Heartland 128

The Future of Hinduism 128

HINDUISM AS A WAY OF LIFE 129

Temples and Icons 129

Forms of Worship 130

Rites of Passage 132

Pilgrimage 134

Women in Hinduism 135

Festivals and Holidays 136

Performance Traditions 138

CONCLUSION 139

5 ● Buddhism 145

THE TEACHINGS OF BUDDHISM 147

The Life of the Buddha 147

What Did the Buddha Teach? 150

VOICES: An Interview with Katherine Sei 155

THE HISTORY OF BUDDHISM 156

The Period of the Buddhist Councils 157

Theravada Buddhism 159

Mahayana Buddhism 160

Vajrayana Buddhism 166

Buddhism in India 169

Buddhism Beyond India 170



The Western Transmission 174
Buddhism and Sectarian Violence: Myanmar and Sri Lanka 175
Buddhists in the World Today 176

BUDDHISM AS A WAY OF LIFE 177

Who Is a Buddhist? 177
GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: The Emergence of Western Buddhism 178
The Buddha's Teachings on Ethics and "Skillful Means" 179
Meditation and the Cultivation of Mind 180
Mantra, Liturgical Ritual, and Chanting 182
Conversion and Ordination 182
Women in Buddhism 182
Sacred Places and Objects of Veneration 183
Holidays and Festivals 185
Funerary Rites 186
CONCLUSION 187

6 ● Jainism 193

THE TEACHINGS OF JAINISM 196

Mahavira, the Twenty-Fourth and Last Tirthankara of This World Cycle 196
An Eternal Succession of Tirthankaras 197
Jainism and Hinduism 198
Ahimsa and Asceticism: Jainism's Ideals 199
Theory of the Universe 200
Liberation and Salvation 203

THE HISTORY OF JAINISM 205

The Indian Historical Context 205
The Legacy of the Tirthankaras: Jainism through the Centuries 206
Jainism in Today's World 207
GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: Jains Beyond India 208

JAINISM AS A WAY OF LIFE 209

Digambaras and Shvetambaras 209
VOICES: An Interview with Girish Shah 210
The Ascetic Life 212
Jainism and Women 215
The Religious Life of the Jain Laity 215
CONCLUSION 218

7 ● Sikhism 223

THE TEACHINGS OF SIKHISM 225

The Life of Guru Nanak 226

- Sikh Scripture 229
- On God, the Human Condition, and Spiritual Liberation 230
- Teachings of Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa 233

THE HISTORY OF SIKHISM 234

- Guru Nanak's Successors 234
- Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa 235
- Sikhs in Conflict and in Search of Nationhood 237
- Sikhs in the Diaspora 237
- GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: A Century of Sikhs in America 239

SIKHISM AS A WAY OF LIFE 240

- VOICES:** An Interview with Onkar Singh 240
- Daily Devotional Practices 242
- Sikh Worship in the Gurdwara 242
- Life-Cycle Rituals 243
- Worship, Work, and Charity 245
- Women and Sikhism 245
- Sikh Identity 246
- CONCLUSION 247

8 ● Chinese Religions: Confucianism and Daoism 251

THE TEACHINGS OF CONFUCIANISM AND DAOISM 254

- Ancient Chinese Religious Views 254
- The Teachings of Confucianism 258
- Confucianism and Women 267
- The Teachings of Daoism 268
- Daoism and Women 274

THE HISTORY OF CONFUCIANISM AND DAOISM 275

- The History of Confucianism 275
- GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: Confucianism in Korea 279
- The History of Daoism 282
- GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: Daoism in Feng Shui and Martial Arts 287

CONFUCIANISM AND DAOISM AS WAYS OF LIFE 288

- Confucian Rituals 289
- VOICES:** An Interview with Jason Ch'ui-hsiao Tseng 290
- Daoist Practices 292
- CONCLUSION 296

9 ● Shinto 303

THE TEACHINGS OF SHINTO 305

- The Meaning of Kami 306

Creation Myth in the *Kojiki* 306

VOICES: An Interview with Watanabe Minoru 310

THE HISTORY OF SHINTO 311

Ancient Shinto 311

Medieval Shinto 312

The Modern Period 313

Ultrationalism, Imperialism, and Conflict 314

GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: Anime and Shinto 316

SHINTO AS A WAY OF LIFE 317

Fertility Rites 317

Women in Shinto 318

Rites of Purification, Presentation, Petition, and Participation 319

Religious Observances throughout the Year 323

Shinto in Japan Today 325

CONCLUSION 326

10 ● Zoroastrianism 331

THE TEACHINGS OF ZOROASTRIANISM 333

Monotheism and Dualism 333

The Divine Realm 335

Creation and the Nature of the World 336

Human Nature and Human Destiny 338

THE HISTORY OF ZOROASTRIANISM 339

The Background of Zoroastrianism 339

Zarathushtra 340

Zoroastrian Scriptures 341

Zoroastrianism through the Centuries 342

Zoroastrianism in the Modern World 346

ZOROASTRIANISM AS A WAY OF LIFE 348

GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: Zoroastrianism in New York 349

Ritual Practices 350

VOICES: An Interview with Rustom Ghadiali 350

Women and Zoroastrianism 353

Holy Days and Rites of Passage 354

The Zoroastrian Community: Social and Ethical Responsibilities 356

CONCLUSION 357

11 ● Judaism 361

THE TEACHINGS OF JUDAISM 363

God 363

Torah 364

Covenant and Election 366
 Israel 368
 The Messiah and the Messianic Age 369
 The Afterlife 369
 Jewish Mysticism 370

THE HISTORY OF JUDAISM 372

Dispersion, Assimilation, and Collective Identity 373
 The Biblical Period 373
 The Second Temple Period 375
 The Formative Age 377
 The Conflict between Judaism and Christianity 379
 The Age of Philosophy and Mysticism 380
 The Modern Era 385
 Reform Movements in Europe and the United States 386
 The Shoah and the State of Israel 390
 Religious Violence and the Future of Zionism 393
 The Future of Judaism in the Contemporary World 394
 Women and Judaism 395
 GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: Judaism in India 396
 Judaism as a Way of Life 397
 The Major Festivals 397
VOICES: An Interview with Rabbi Brad Bloom 399
 The Minor Festivals 402
 The Sabbath 404
 Life-Cycle Events 405
 Other Sacred Practices 409
 Prayer 410
 CONCLUSION 412

12 ● Christianity 419

THE TEACHINGS OF CHRISTIANITY 421

The Life of Jesus 422
 The Teachings of Jesus 424
 Paul and the Mission to the Gentiles 426
 God, Creation, and Original Humanity 427
 God as Trinity 429
 The Consequences of Sin 430
 Grace and Salvation 431
 The Church 432
VOICES: An Interview with Terrie M. and Father Art 432
 Scripture 433

Tradition 435
"Last Things" 436
The Afterlife 436
Christianity and Other Religions: Points of Conflict 440

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY 441

Christianity in the Roman World 441
The Church in the Middle Ages 446
The Reformation: Protestant Challenge and Roman Catholic Response 450
Christianity in the Modern World 454
Women in Christianity 459
Christianity Today and Tomorrow: Trends and Prospects 459
GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: The Kimbanguist Church in Africa 461

CHRISTIANITY AS A WAY OF LIFE 462

Worship 463
Sacraments 464
Church Interiors: Sacred Space 466
Prayer 468
The Liturgical Year 469
Veneration of Saints 470
Social and Political Activism 471
CONCLUSION 472

13 ● Islam 479

THE TEACHINGS OF ISLAM 482

Muhammad and the Revelations 483
The Holy Qur'an 484
The Teachings of the Qur'an 485
Commentary on the Qur'an 489
The Sunnah: The Example of the Prophet 489
The Five Pillars 490

THE HISTORY OF ISLAM 498

The Hijra and the Growth of the Muslim Community 499
The Crisis of Succession and the Rightly Guided Caliphs 502
The Umayyads and the Abbasids 503
Later Islamic Empires: The Ottomans, the Mughals, and the Safavids 505
Islam and Nationalism 506
Islamic Reform Movements 508
Varieties of Islam: Sunni and Shi'a 511
Islam and Political Conflict Today 513
Muslims in North America 514
GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: Muslims in the West 516

ISLAM AS A WAY OF LIFE 517

- VOICES:** An Interview with Dola K. and Taslima S. 517
- The Qur'an in Daily Life 519
- What Is Jihad? 520
- The Islamic Year and Holidays 521
- The Shari'a: Islamic Law 522
- Sufism 523
- Marriage and Family 526
- Women and Islam 528
- CONCLUSION 532

14 ● New Religious Movements 537**WHAT IS "NEW" ABOUT NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS? 538**

- Modernization, Globalization, and Secularization 539
- Theoretical Models and Social Typologies 541

ALTERNATIVE CHRISTIANITIES AND THEIR OFFSHOOTS 544

- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 545
- GLOBAL SNAPSHOT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Africa 547
- Christian Science and New Thought 548
- Adventism 550
- Jehovah's Witnesses 551
- The Family (Children of God) 552
- The Unification Church 553
- Rastafarianism 554

THE REDISCOVERY OF EASTERN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT 556

- The Theosophical Society 556
- ISKCON: The International Society for Krishna Consciousness 557
- The Osho Rajneesh Movement 558
- Transcendental Meditation 560
- Falun Gong 561
- VOICES: An Interview with Dr. Xinyu David Zhang 562
- Aum Shinrikyo: A Cult of Violence 563

THE REVIVAL OF ESOTERIC AND NEOPAGAN THOUGHT 564

- Eckankar 564
- The Raelian Movement 565
- The Church of Scientology 567
- Wicca 569

THE EMERGENCE OF UNIVERSALIST RELIGIOUS THOUGHT 571

- The Baha'i Faith 572
- Unitarian Universalism 574

THE NEW ATHEISM 575

CONCLUSION 577

Notes N-1

Glossary G-1

Credits C-1

Index I-1

PREFACE

THE WORLD'S RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS have offered answers to the weightiest questions of human existence, contributed to the formation of political and social institutions, inspired masterpieces of art and literature, and provided many of the cultural values and ideals on which entire civilizations have been based. Today, religions continue to play a powerful role in shaping the ways in which people understand themselves, the world they live in, and how they should live.

Invitation to World Religions welcomes students to the study of religion. In these pages, we open the doors and invite the reader to explore with wonder and respect. We describe the essential features of the world's great religions and show how they have responded to basic human needs and to the cultural settings in which they developed. We also compare the answers religions have offered us regarding some of the most essential human questions: Why are we here? What is the nature of the universe? How should we live? Our aim has been to balance concision and substance in an introductory text that is accessible, as well as challenging.

A team of authors cooperated in writing this book, each one of us bringing a particular scholarly expertise—as well as years of teaching experience—to the respective chapters. We wrote with important learning goals in mind. We want students to gain an objective understanding of the beliefs and practices associated with the world's religions, but we also encourage an empathetic appreciation of what their beliefs and actions actually *mean* to adherents. By emphasizing the connections between religious traditions and their cultural contexts, we seek to heighten awareness of the extent to which religions have influenced, and been influenced by, politics and society, literature, the arts, and philosophy. We also examine the role of religions in our contemporary world, particularly the frequently uneasy boundaries between religion and science, urbanization, and globalization. A thoughtful reading of this book will provide a clear understanding of the characteristics that are unique to individual religions and highlight many of their shared qualities and concerns. Finally, we trust that every reader will find here a means of making sense of other ways of believing and living and of finding a solid basis for the tolerance and respect that are so critically important in times like ours.

Religions are multidimensional. Accordingly, all but the first and last chapters examine three primary aspects of each religion: **teachings**, **historical development**, and **way of life** (practices and experiences). These three aspects are presented in the same order in every chapter in which they appear. Although they appear in the same order, we do not devote equal attention to each category. To do so would be to ignore the varying nature of the religious traditions. Judaism, for example, naturally calls for extensive attention to historical development; Jainism, for which an early historical record barely exists, does not. In each case, we shape our coverage in the way that seems most natural given the characteristics of the tradition under discussion.

Teachings. Commonly found in scriptures, myths, creeds, and ethical codes, the basic teachings of a religious tradition convey its answers to fundamental questions, such as: What is the human condition? How can the human condition be improved or transcended? What is the nature of the world? What is ultimate reality, and how is it revealed? The authority on which a religion answers questions such as these is also important. Are its truths revealed? Are they the products of intellectual effort? Are they insights gained in moments of profound psychological experience? Or are they simply traditional ways of looking at reality and our place within it that have been passed down from generation to generation?

Historical Development. Every religious tradition has a history that reveals how and why it developed its distinctive features, including its system of beliefs, leadership and governance structures, social institutions, and forms of artistic expression. Sometimes the forces that generate change arise largely from within a tradition, as in the case of conflict between opposing sects or schools of thought. At other times they operate from the outside, as with the influence exerted by Western powers on foreign colonies and spheres of influence or through the expansion of a tradition into a new cultural milieu. A religion's history also functions to unite the individual with others in a shared memory of the past that helps to explain the present.

Way of Life. By way of life we mean practices—the things people *do* in making practical application of their beliefs, such as engaging in prayer, meditation, communal worship, or various other forms of ritual. Closely related to practices are modes of experience, the ways in which a religion's adherents actually experience the consequences of applying its teachings. These might include a sense of inner peace, a more acute sense of community with others, a greater awareness of the divine, or a state of profound enlightenment.

ORGANIZATION

Our survey begins in Chapter 1 with an introductory essay on the academic study of religions. After considering what religion *is*, the chapter identifies some of the other

important questions scholars ask: What do religions do? What issues of universal concern do they address? What do scholars mean when they speak of mystical experience or of transcendence? What are the constituent parts of religious traditions? How are religions today being affected by the forces of modernization, urbanization, globalization, and science? Finally, the chapter explains why a multidisciplinary approach is necessary in any serious attempt to understand the world's religions.

Chapter 1 is followed by two chapters on indigenous traditions. The book concludes with a chapter on new religions. The ten chapters in the middle are organized according to geographical and (roughly) chronological order, as follows: first, the religions of South Asian origin (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism); next, those of East Asian origin (Chinese religions, Japanese religions); and, finally, those of West Asian (or Middle Eastern) origin (Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam). By studying the indigenous traditions first, students will gain an appreciation not only for the many living traditions that continue to thrive but also for certain ways of being religious (such as emphasis on oral transference of myths and other sacred lore) that at one time were predominant in most of today's major world religions. By studying new religions last, students will likewise gain an appreciation for living traditions, along with glimpsing the sorts of innovations that occur within the old traditions, too, as religions respond to the cultural, technological, social, and cultural changes and challenges of the world around them.

NEW TO THE THIRD EDITION

- **Global Snapshot boxes** We've created a new illustrated feature (called "Global Snapshot") highlighting how religions are reflected in a globalized world or as they are lived in diasporic communities. Examples include the rich and surprising relationship between Shinto and anime; the use of social media by indigenous Pacific Islanders to support Sioux peoples protesting at Standing Rock; Jain involvement in contemporary environmentalist movements in the United States; and the marvelously diverse Jewish communities of India.
 - **Enhanced coverage of religion and conflict** In response to reviewer suggestions, the third edition features clear and balanced explorations of the ways in which religion has sometimes been used to justify oppression and conflict. For example, the intertwining of religion and increased nationalism in contemporary politics across the globe is explored in contexts as diverse as Shinto, Buddhism, and Judaism.
 - **Vibrant, diverse new "Voices"** Several new interviews in the popular "Voices" feature provide further evidence of the diversity of contemporary religious practices. For example, in Chapter 13, "Islam," two young Muslim women discuss their faith, their families, and their ambitions. And in Chapter 2, "Indigenous Religions of North America," a young man of Northern-Southern Paiute and Western Shoshone descent movingly describes his participation in "cry ceremonies" and how Indians of his generation are restoring traditional beliefs and practices.
-

- **A more uniform writing style** We have worked throughout to streamline and clarify the text, particularly in response to many helpful reviewer suggestions. The use of italics as well as the spelling of non-English terms has been regularized, and information in the “Notes” that may be of immediate interest to students has been incorporated into the main text.
- **A more inviting look** The overall design of this third edition has been refreshed for readability as well as beauty. In addition, abundant new photographs were selected to emphasize the diversity of how religions are lived today.

Along with the general features described above, chapter-specific revisions of particular note include:

- Chapter 1, “An Invitation to the Study of World Religions,” features more extensive consideration of contemporary trends in religious studies scholarship; expanded coverage of atheism, agnosticism, and the growing prevalence of religious “nones”; and a new section on the “downside” of religion, including violence and terrorism perpetrated in its name.
- Chapter 2, “Indigenous Religions of North America,” includes a new “Voices” interview with supporting coverage of the Southern Paiute. A new section on the 2016–2017 protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock Indian Reservation demonstrates the alignment of political, cultural, and spiritual interests among indigenous peoples in North America and globally.
- Chapter 4, “Hinduism,” features a new opening vignette set during the annual festival Ganesh Chaturthi; an improved organizational scheme that situates Yoga along with the major philosophical systems as significant components of Jnana Marga; enhanced treatment of gurus and saints; and expanded coverage of the role of British colonialism in shaping and challenging the practice of Hinduism.
- Chapter 10, “Zoroastrianism,” includes a new opening vignette set in Mumbai, the city with the largest Zoroastrian population, as well as a revised “Teachings” section that represents Zoroastrianism as a lived religion in today’s world.
- Chapter 14, “New Religious Movements,” features a new section on Falun Gong.

FEATURES AND PEDAGOGY

Because the concepts and contexts of the world’s religions are immeasurably complex, we have worked to present a clear and accessible introductory text. Our tone throughout, while deeply informed by scholarship, is both accessible and appropriate for a wide range of undergraduate students. Consistent chapter structure also helps students to focus on *content* inasmuch as they do not have to renavigate each chapter anew. With the exception of Chapters 1 and 14, every chapter in the book includes three core modules: the teachings of the religion, the history of the religion, and the religion as a way of life. This modular and predictable structure is also highly flexible, allowing

instructors to easily create a syllabus that best reflects their own scholarly interests, as well as their students' learning needs.

The study of religions can be daunting to newcomers, who must plunge into a sea of unfamiliar words, concepts, and cultures. For this reason, we have provided a variety of ways for students to engage with important ideas, personalities, and visuals, such as:

Voices: In personal, candid interviews, a diverse array of people share the ways they live their faith.

Visual Guide: A key to important religious symbols, provided in an easy-to-read table for quick reference and comparison, is included in each “Way of Life” section.

Maps and Timelines: Each chapter begins with a map to provide geographical context for a religion's development. Key features and places mentioned in the chapter are called out on the map. A timeline at the beginning of each chapter provides social and political context to help students situate each religion and trace its development. Finally, a comprehensive timeline of all the main religions covered in the book appears on the inside front and back covers.

Seeking Answers: After each chapter's Conclusion, we revisit three essential questions that religions strive to answer. This feature helps students to review the chapter's key concepts and informs their ability to *compare* constructively the ways in which different religions address the same fundamental human questions:

What is ultimate reality?

How should we live in this world?

What is our ultimate purpose?

Other elements that facilitate teaching and learning include:

Glossary: Important terms are printed in bold type at their first occurrence and are explained in the Glossary that follows each chapter. In addition, a glossary at the back of the book includes all of the key terms from the entire text.

End-of-Chapter Questions: Each chapter concludes with two sets of questions to help students review, retain, and reflect upon chapter content. For Review questions prompt students to recall and rehearse key chapter concepts; For Further Reflection questions require students to think critically about the chapter's nuances and encourage both discussion and personal response by inviting students to engage in a more penetrating analysis of a tradition or taking a comparative approach.

Suggestions for Further Reading: These annotated lists of some of the best and most recent works on each tradition, as well as online resources, encourage students to pursue their exploration of the world's religions.

Rich, robust, and relevant visuals: Finally, we have filled the pages of *Invitation to World Religions* with an abundance of color photographs and illustrations that add visual experience to our verbal descriptions of sacred objects, buildings, art, and other material aspects of religious life.

SUPPLEMENTS

A rich set of supplemental resources is available to support teaching and learning in this course. These supplements include an Instructor's Manual, Computerized Test Bank, PowerPoint lecture outlines, and Student Resources on the Oxford University Press **Ancillary Resource Center (ARC)** and **Learning Management System Cartridges** with Instructor and Student Resources.

The Oxford University Press **Ancillary Resource Center (ARC)** at oup-arc.com houses the following **Instructor's Resources**:

- A Computerized Test Bank, including multiple-choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and essay questions
- An Instructor's Manual, including
 - A "pencil and paper" version of the Computerized Test Bank
 - Chapter Summaries
 - Chapter Learning Objectives
 - Suggested Web Links and other Media Resources
 - Web Links to Sacred Texts, accompanied by brief descriptions of their content
 - Lists of Key Terms and their definitions from the text
- PowerPoint lecture outlines
- PowerPoint art database
- CNN video clips on significant beliefs, practices, and places related to a variety of traditions covered in *Invitation to World Religions*. Each clip is approximately five to ten minutes in length and accompanied by a summary and series of discussion and multiple-choice questions.

The **Student Resources** on the **ARC** contain the following:

- Level one and level two Student Quizzes taken from the Test Bank
- Chapter Learning Objectives
- Suggested Web Links and other Media Resources
- Web Links to Sacred Texts
- Flashcards of Key Terms from the text

Learning Management System Cartridges are also available for *Invitation to World Religions*. For more information on this, please contact your OUP representative or call 1-800-280-0280.

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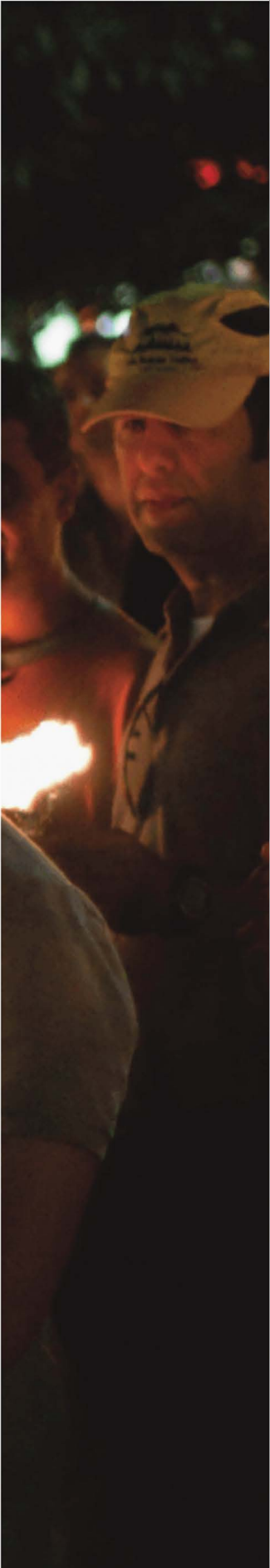
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INVITATION TO **World**
Religions






An Invitation to the Study of World Religions

ON MOST AMERICAN COLLEGE CAMPUSES, signs of the world's religions are readily observable. Bulletin boards display fliers announcing upcoming events pertaining to Buddhist meditation or Hindu sacred art or the Islamic observance of Ramadan. Campus religious groups engage in outreach activities at tables alongside walkways or in student unions, often with posters quoting scripture or displaying religious icons. Some icons even commonly adorn the students themselves—a cross necklace, for example, or a tattoo of the yin/yang symbol.

To study the world's religions is to progress from mere observation of outward signs to understanding their meaning and relevance. Anyone who observes the yin-yang symbol can appreciate the beauty of its spiraling symmetry, but studying Chinese religion reveals a much more complex meaning. Mysterious in their origins, yin and yang are complementary primal energies that give rise to all creation. For the human being, to maintain a perfect balance of yin and yang is to live an ideal life. The nearly ubiquitous symbol of the cross similarly takes on new depths of meaning, even for many who identify themselves as Christian, when approached through the study of world religions. To Christians, God, the creator of all things, having taken on human form in the person of Jesus Christ, willingly suffered the painful death of crucifixion on the cross to save humanity from the power of sin. We can expand on our understanding of the meaning and cultural relevance of these two icons through a comparative study. Chinese religion, with its belief in the creative, complementary energies of yin and

Candlelight vigils typically draw together people of different religious perspectives in times of sorrow as well as celebration.

yang, has no need for a creator such as the Christian God. The Christian concept of sin and the corresponding need for salvation are alien to the Chinese quest for balance of yin and yang. These two icons, in other words, signify profoundly different cultural orientations.

To study the world's religions is to enhance one's understanding and appreciation of the rich variety of cultures around the globe. This chapter introduces this field of study by exploring the significance, examining the foundational concepts, and describing appropriate strategies for the academic exploration of religion. 

APPROACHING THE STUDY OF WORLD RELIGIONS

In order to be an educated person today, one must have an awareness of world religions. To learn about world religions is to increase one's cultural literacy—the objective that lies at the heart of this study. The religious traditions examined in this book are foundational aspects of cultures around the globe. Religion plays a crucial role in shaping, transforming, and transmitting cultures. Interacting with other cultural aspects—politics, economics, aesthetics—religion is a potent force in culture, in ways both constructive and destructive. When people believe they are acting in a manner that is condoned by a transcendent power or is in keeping with timeless tradition, they tend to act more fervently and with greater conviction. In other words, religions are powerful, sometimes even dangerous. Knowing about them is crucial for negotiating our complex world.

“World Religions” has been a course of study in American colleges and universities for nearly a century. Recently, the category has come under scrutiny by some scholars, as has the so-called world religions discourse that often accompanies it.¹ Although such scrutiny sometimes loses sight of the obvious—that “world religions” as an academic category is here to stay and that learning about its subject matter is vitally important—critics are correct to demand sound academic approaches to the study. A primary concern is that the study of world religions, and indeed the entire enterprise of the academic study of religion, arose within the nominally Christian European intellectual culture that assumed that Christianity was a model of what a religion ought to be and, commonly, that it was the only *true* religion. Until the late decades of the nineteenth century, theorists applied the term *world religion* (in the singular) only to Christianity. Eventually Buddhism, Judaism, and occasionally Islam were grouped with Christianity as “world religions” (or “the world's religions”). By the 1930s, the list had grown to include the ten to twelve religions that still today are normally categorized as world religions.

And so, to the basic need for knowing about the world religions (however they came to be categorized), we can add another vital need: that we go about studying them appropriately through awareness of what we might call the “do's and don'ts” of religious studies, which this chapter explores in some detail. We can begin by noting that an appropriate study of world religions does not privilege any religion as being somehow exemplary or the model with which others are to be compared. On a related note, we need to avoid terms and categories that are rooted in such privileging. For example, “faith”

is a natural term to use when studying Christianity, but it is far less applicable to the study of Confucianism or Shinto. Other important issues involve underlying motives or assumptions that can too easily creep in. A common assumption is this: All religions ultimately say the same thing. This possibility is an intriguing one, but in fact, it is impossible to prove by way of a sound academic approach—that is, well-reasoned theorizing based on careful analysis of the evidence.

The challenge of mastering the “do’s” and avoiding the “don’ts” only enriches our study. We begin by considering the rise of the modern academic field of religious studies.

Religion as a Subject of Academic Inquiry

The academic study of religion, commonly known as “religious studies” (or sometimes as “comparative religion” or “history of religions”) is a relatively recent development. Prior to the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, it rarely occurred to anyone to think of a religion as an entity that could be separated from other aspects of culture, and therefore as something that could be defined as a distinct category and studied as such. Enlightenment thinkers, most influentially the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), conceived of religion as something separate from the various phenomena the human mind is capable of perceiving.² This impulse toward categorically separating religion, coupled with European exploration of distant lands and their unfamiliar “religions,” launched efforts to understand religion that have continued to the present day. This shift means that we modern observers need to be cautious when appraising the religious aspects of other cultures, lest we make the error of assuming that all peoples have recognized religion as a distinctive category. Most cultures throughout history have had neither the conceptual category nor a term meaning “religion.”

The academic study of religion is generally distinct from theology, the field of inquiry that focuses on considering the nature of the divine. Unlike religious studies, theology is an important example of *doing* and *being* religious, which naturally invites consideration of the supernatural and of the “truth” of religious claims. Religious studies, like most other academic pursuits, is to a large extent based on an approach to knowledge that depends on analysis of empirical data. The discourse and actions of human beings can be observed and studied through normal means of academic inquiry; empirical evidence can be gathered, and through rational argumentation hypotheses can be formulated and supported. Supernatural beings and events normally are held to be beyond the reach of academic inquiry. The academic study of religion, as understood by the authors of this book, is therefore not theology, however much we might admire theologians and enjoy studying their work, which is itself an important human enterprise and a major component of religion.



William James defined religion as “the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude.” This Orthodox Christian priest sits alone in the Amhara region of northwestern Ethiopia.