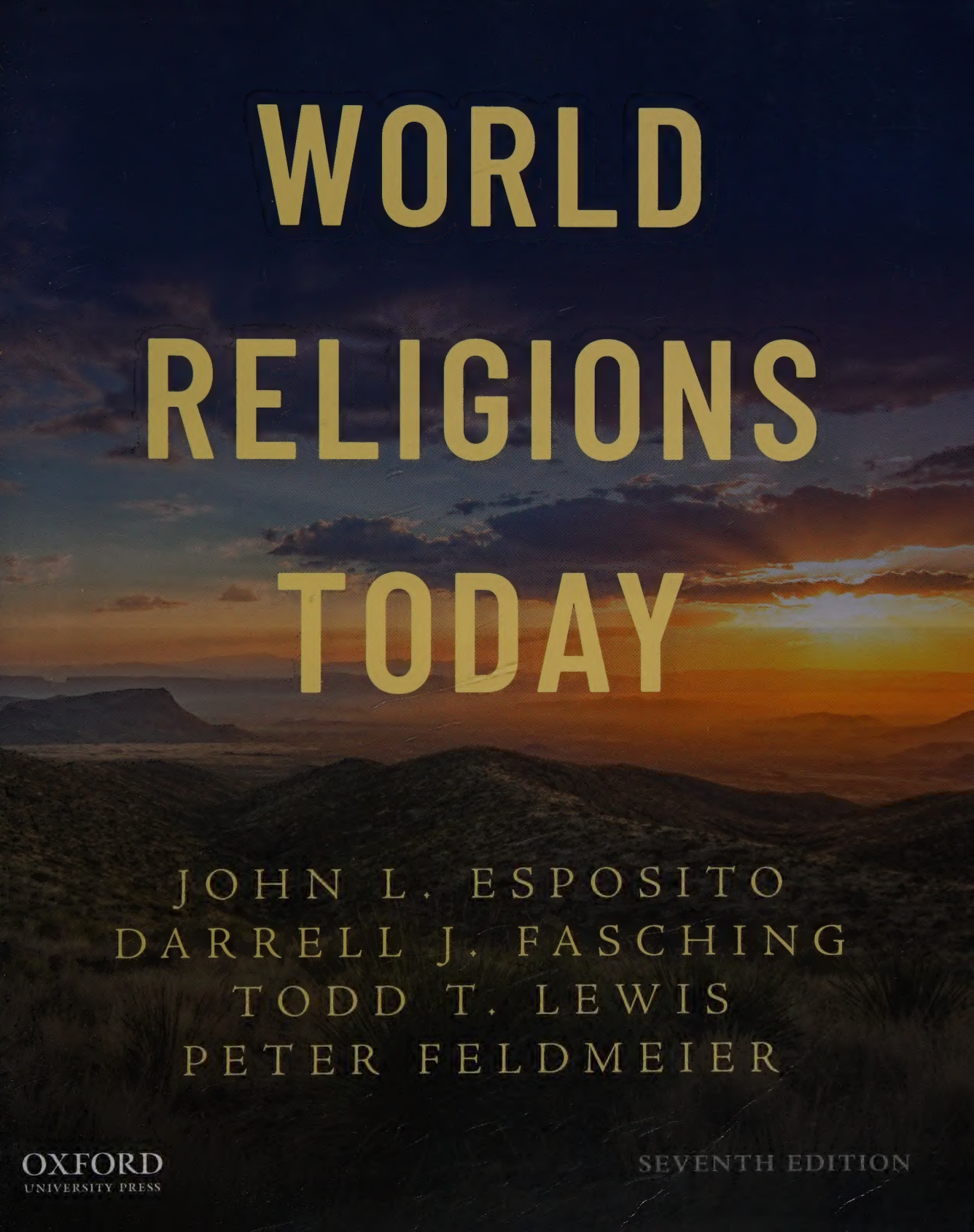




WORLD RELIGIONS TODAY

JOHN L. ESPOSITO
DARRELL J. FASCHING
TODD T. LEWIS
PETER FELDMEIER

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

SEVENTH EDITION

Not for Profit. All for Education.

Oxford University Press USA is a not-for-profit publisher dedicated to offering the highest quality textbooks at the best possible prices. We believe that it is important to provide everyone with access to superior textbooks at affordable prices. Oxford University Press textbooks are 30%-70% less expensive than comparable books from commercial publishers.

The press is a department of the University of Oxford, and our publishing proudly serves the university's mission: promoting excellence in research, scholarship, and education around the globe. We do not publish in order to generate revenue: we generate revenue in order to publish and also to fund scholarships, provide start-up grants to early-stage researchers, and refurbish libraries.

What does this mean to you?

It means that Oxford University Press USA published this book to best support your studies while also being mindful of your wallet.

Not for Profit. All for Education.

As a not-for-profit publisher, Oxford University Press USA is uniquely situated to offer the highest quality scholarship at the best possible prices.

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

WORLD RELIGIONS TODAY

Seventh Edition

JOHN L. ESPOSITO

Professor of Religion

DARRELL J. FASCHING

Professor of Religion

RODD T. LEWIS

Professor of Religion

PETER HEIDMÄIER

Professor of Religion

New York: Oxford

University Press

WORLD RELIGIONS TODAY

Seventh Edition

JOHN L. ESPOSITO

Georgetown University

DARRELL J. FASCHING

University of South Florida

TODD T. LEWIS

College of the Holy Cross

PETER FELDMEIER

The University of Toledo

New York Oxford

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press in the UK and certain other countries.

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

© 2022, 2018, 2015, 2012, 2009, 2006, 2002 by Oxford University Press

For titles covered by Section 112 of the US Higher Education Opportunity Act, please visit www.oup.com/us/he for the latest information about pricing and alternate formats.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted by law, by license, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reproduction rights organization. Inquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the address above.

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Esposito, John L., author. | Fasching, Darrell J., 1944- author. | Lewis, Todd, 1952- author. | Feldmeier, Peter, author.
Title: World religions today / John L Esposito, Georgetown University, Darrell J. Fasching, University of South Florida, Todd T. Lewis, College of the Holy Cross, Peter Feldmeier, The University of Toledo.
Description: Seventh edition. | New York, NY, United States of America : Oxford University Press, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021009026 (print) | LCCN 2021009027 (ebook) | ISBN 9780197537657 (paperback) | ISBN 9780197537725 (epub) | ISBN 9780197537664
Subjects: LCSH: Religions--Textbooks.
Classification: LCC BL80.3 .E88 2021 (print) | LCC BL80.3 (ebook) | DDC 200--dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021009026>
LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021009027>

Printing number: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Printed in Mexico by Quad/Mexico

BRIEF CONTENTS

	Preface	xix
Chapter 1	INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING WORLD RELIGIONS IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE	3
Chapter 2	INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS	35
Chapter 3	JEWISH IDENTITY AND FAITH	67
Chapter 4	THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION	113
Chapter 5	ISLAM: THE MANY FACES OF THE MUSLIM EXPERIENCE	173
Chapter 6	HINDUISM, JAINISM, AND SIKHISM: SOUTH ASIAN RELIGIONS	263
Chapter 7	BUDDHISM: PATHS TOWARD NIRVANA	339
Chapter 8	EAST ASIAN RELIGIONS: CONFUCIANISM, DAOISM, SHINTO, BUDDHISM	415
Chapter 9	GLOBALIZATION: FROM NEW RELIGIONS TO WORLD RELIGIONS ENGAGING GLOBAL CHALLENGES	491
	Glossary	G-1
	Art Credits	C-1
	Index	I-1

CONTENTS

Preface	xix
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING WORLD RELIGIONS IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE	3
Why Study World Religions?	4
Our Task	7
Understanding Religious Experience and Its Formative Elements	8
The Sacred	9
Myth, Scripture, and Beliefs	10
Ritual	13
Community and Morality	15
Religious Leaders/Experts	16
The Great Religious Stories of the World	17
The Myths of Nature	17
China and the Myths of Harmony	17
India and the Myths of Liberation	19
The Middle East and the Myths of History	19
The Fundamental Terms and Organization of This Book	21
Historical Overview: From Premodern to Postmodern	24
The Modern/Postmodern Transition: Colonialism and Socialism	28
Postmodern Trends in a Postcolonial World	31
Discussion Questions	32
Key Terms	33
Notes	33
Chapter 2 INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS	35
OVERVIEW	35
Origins of <i>Homo religiosus</i> : Prehistory	36
Encounter with Modernity	40

Religion's Origins Among Hunter-Gatherers	42
Fertility, Childbirth, and Survival	43
Religion in Prehistory: The Mystery of Early Cave Rituals	43
Indigenous Religious Traditions: Soul Belief and Afterlife	45
Circular Time	46
Ancestors: The Living Dead	47
Dani of New Guinea: Ghost Ancestors, Ritual Warfare	47
Totemism: Australian Aboriginal Religion	48
Shamans: "Technicians of the Sacred"	51
Case Studies of Indigenous Religions Today	52
Bear Sacrifice: A Widespread Arctic and Pacific Rim Tradition	53
Shamans Who Repair the World	55
The Cataclysms of Colonialism	56
Conclusion	62
<i>Discussion Questions</i>	63
• <i>Key Terms</i>	63
• <i>Suggested Readings</i>	64
• <i>Additional Resources</i>	64
• <i>Notes</i>	65

Chapter 3 JEWISH IDENTITY AND FAITH 67

OVERVIEW 67

Encounter with Modernity: Modern Judaism and the Challenge of Ultra-Orthodoxy	71
Premodern Judaism: The Formative Era (2000 BCE–500 CE)	73
Biblical Roots of Judaism	73
Rabbinic Judaism	79
Premodern Judaism: The Classical Era (500–1729)	82
Persecutions	82
Jewish Intellectualism and Mysticism	83
Hasidism	88
Sabbath and Synagogue	89
Judaism and Modernity (1729–1967)	93
The Emergence of Modern Religious Forms of Judaism	93
Judaism as a "Race" and Secular Jewish Movements	99
The Holocaust	99
Jewish Socialism and Zionism	103

Conclusion 108

Discussion Questions 109 • *Key Terms* 109 • *Suggested Readings* 110
 • *Additional Resources* 110 • *Notes* 111

Chapter 4 THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION 113

OVERVIEW 113

The Beliefs of Christians 114

Encounter with Modernity: The Fundamentalist–
 Modernist Controversy (1859–Present) 118

Protestant and Catholic Responses 119

Premodern Christianity:

The Formative Era (31–313) 121

The New Testament 121

The Ministry of Jesus 122

Early Disciples of the Faith 127

Split from Judaism 130

The Life of the Early Church 131

The Threefold Ministry and the Catholic Church 131

Persecutions and Apologists 132

Baptism and Eucharist 134

Christian Rigor, Asceticism, and Virginity 135

Veneration of Saints 136

Monasticism 137

Premodern Classical Era (313–1517) 138

The Imperial Church 138

Councils and Dogmas 140

Church and State 142

Patriarchal Sees 143

The Medieval Church 143

Christian Expansions in the East 143

Christian Expansions in the West 147

The Western Medieval Worldview 149

Just War and the Crusades 151

Christianity and Modernity (1517–1962) 153

Transformations from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance 153

The Protestant Reformation 154

The Catholic Reformation 158

The Enlightenment 160

Colonialism 161

Postmodern Trends (1962–Present) 163

Leaving Behind Eurocentrism 163

Africa and Asia 164

Other Postmodern Trends 165

Conclusion: The Challenge of Religious Pluralism 167

Discussion Questions 168 • *Key Terms* 169 • *Suggested Readings* 169

• *Additional Resources* 170 • *Notes* 170

Chapter 5 ISLAM: THE MANY FACES OF THE MUSLIM EXPERIENCE

173

OVERVIEW

173

Encounter with Modernity: The Challenge of Western Colonialism 180

The Islamic Resurgence 181

Islam in the West 182

Premodern Islam: The Formative Era 182

Muhammad's Early Life 183

After the *Hijra* 185

The Message of the Quran 188

A Golden Age of Expansion, Conquest, and Creativity 189

Diversity, Division, and Dissent 192

The Origins of the Sunni–Shiah Split 194

Premodern Islam: The Classical Era 195

Law and Mysticism: The Exterior and Interior Paths to God 196

The Five Pillars of Islam 197

Women and Muslim Family Law 204

The Interior Path of Love: Islamic Mysticism 207

Islam and the State	209
Islam and the West (Christendom): The Crusades	211
Premodern Revivalist Movements	214
Islam and Modernity	215
Islamic Modernism	216
Modern Islamic Revivalist Movements	216
Radical Islam	218
Islam and Postmodern Trends in a Postcolonial World	220
The Impact of the Islamic Resurgence	220
Islamic Fundamentalism	220
Islam in Modern State and Society	221
The Failure of Modernity and the Islamic Revival	222
The Religious Worldview of Contemporary Islamic Activism	223
From the Periphery to Mainstream Politics and Society	224
The Road to 9/11 and Beyond	226
ISIS	227
Globalization and Hijacking of <i>Jihad</i>	228
<i>Jihad</i> as Armed Struggle	228
Suicide Bombing: War of the <i>Fatwas</i>	230
Post 9/11: Impact and Response	231
European Muslims	234
A Common Word Between Us and You	235
Islam and the Arab Awakening: Between Authoritarianism and Democracy	236
Questions for Postmodern Times: Issues of Authority and Interpretation	237
Muslims in the West	238
Islam: Postmodern Challenges	244
Rethinking Islam: Reformers and Reformist Thought	246
Islamization of the Law	251
Women and Minorities	252
Islamic Reform	255
Conclusion	256
<i>Discussion Questions</i>	257 • <i>Key Terms</i>
<i>Readings</i>	258 • <i>Additional Resources</i>
	259 • <i>Notes</i>
	259

Chapter 6 HINDUISM, JAINISM, AND SIKHISM: SOUTH ASIAN RELIGIONS 263

OVERVIEW 263

- Defining Hinduism: Unity, Diversity, Localities 266
- Encounter with Modernity: Hindu Challenges to India as a Secular State 268
- Premodern Hinduism: The Formative Era 270
 - The Aryans and Religion in the Vedic Era 270
 - Vedic Religion 271
 - Karma and the Quest for Liberation 272
 - Yoga 273
- Premodern Hinduism: The Classical Era (180 BCE–900 CE) 276
 - Early Heterodox Indic Religions: Jainism and Buddhism 276
 - Jainism: The Tradition of Spiritual Conquerors 277
 - The Reality of Karma and Caste 278
 - The Four Stages and Four Aims of Life 280
 - Epics and the Development of Classical Hinduism 281
 - Mainstream Hinduism and the Rise of Devotion to the Great Deities 282
- Premodern Hinduism: The Postclassical Era (900–1500 CE) 286
 - The Formation of Major Hindu Schools of Thought 286
 - The Early Islamic Era: Delhi Sultanate (1192–1525) 290
 - Religion in the Mughal Era (1526–1707) 290
 - The Rise of Sikhism 290
- Hinduism and Modernity 294
 - Hinduism Under British Colonialism 294
 - Challenges and Responses to Colonialism 296
 - The Work of Gandhi: Hindu Elements in Indian Nationalism 301
- Hinduism and Postmodern Trends in a Postcolonial World 303
 - The Persistence of Traditional Religious Understandings 303
 - Contemporary Hindu Practices 305
- Hindu and Sikh Festival Practice 310
 - Hindu Pilgrimage Festivals 314
 - Sikh Festivals 317

The Religious Institutions of Contemporary Hinduism 317

Changes and Continuities: Examples of Postcolonial Hinduism 318

The Connection of Religion with Philanthropy and Social Reform 325

Religious Nationalism: Secular India and Its Discontents 325

A Growing Global Tradition 329

Conclusion 332

*Discussion Questions 334 • Key Terms 335 • Suggested
Readings 336 • Additional Resources 336 • Notes 337*

Chapter 7 BUDDHISM: PATHS TOWARD NIRVANA 339**OVERVIEW 339****Encounter with Modernity: Socially “Engaged Buddhism” 343****Premodern Buddhism: The Formative Era (600 BCE–100 CE) 344**

The Buddha: Context and Biography 344

Buddhism as the Path to Nirvana 350

The First Community and Its Development 353

How Buddhism Became a World Religion 354

Sangha and Monastery: The Institutional
Vehicles of Buddhism’s Expansion 355**Premodern Buddhism: The Classical Era (100–800 CE) 358**

The Pan-Asian Expansion of Buddhism 358

The Core Doctrines 358

The Classical Ideal: Buddhist Civilization 364

The Mahayana: Philosophies and East Asian Monastic Schools 365

Premodern Buddhism: Buddhist Expansion (400–1500 CE) 370

South Asia 371

China 372

Southeast Asia 373

Japan 374

The Himalayan Region 375

Buddhism and Modernity 376

Early Modern Buddhist Polities: Monastics, Householders, Kings 376

Buddhist Monasticism 377

Buddhism Under Colonialism (1500–1960) 382

Challenges from Colonialism, Communism, and Modern Crises (1800–Present)	384
The Twentieth-Century Buddhist Revival Gains Strength	385
Buddhism and Postmodern Trends in a Postcolonial World	386
South Asia	387
Theravada Buddhism Today in Southeast Asia	391
Tooth Relics and Anti-Muslim Riots in Myanmar	392
Three Contemporary Faces of Thai Buddhism	393
East Asia	397
Buddhism Today in Diaspora and in Asia	400
Buddhism’s Affinity for Modernization	402
The Sangha: Adaptive Reformism?	404
State Buddhism and the Poison of Ethnic Passion	405
Conclusion	408
<i>Discussion Questions</i>	<i>410</i>
• <i>Key Terms</i>	<i>411</i>
• <i>Suggested Readings</i>	<i>412</i>
• <i>Additional Resources</i>	<i>413</i>
• <i>Notes</i>	<i>413</i>
 Chapter 8 EAST ASIAN RELIGIONS: CONFUCIANISM, DAOISM, SHINTO, BUDDHISM	 415
OVERVIEW	415
Encounter with Modernity: The Fall and Return of Confucianism	422
East Asian Religions in the Formative Era (1500 BCE–617 CE)	423
Earliest History: Shang (1766–1122 BCE)	423
Development of the Multiple Traditions in Post-Han China	435
Religion Under the Early Japanese Imperial State: Buddhism and Shinto	436
East Asian Religions in the Classical Era (645–1800 CE)	438
Classical Imperial China (645–1271)	438
The Development of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism in Korea and Japan	441
East Asian Religions in the Late Classical Era (1400–1800)	442
East Asian Religions in the Early Modern Era	446
Disruptive European Intrusions	446
Traumatic Transitions of the Modern Era	447
The Appearance of New Religious Movements and Religions	451

East Asian Religions and Postmodern Trends in a Postcolonial World 455

Continuities and Transformations in the East Asian Religions 456

The Religious Institutions: Monasteries, Temples, Shrines 460

The Return of Religion to China: Case Studies 465

Japan's Creative Diversity: Old Traditions and New 473

Korea's Strong Confucian Tradition Accommodates Diversity 479

Shamans in Modern Asia: A Division of Labor with the World Religions 481

Conclusion: Have We Entered a Third Confucian Age? 483

Discussion Questions 487 • *Key Terms* 487 • *Suggested Readings* 488

• *Additional Resources* 489 • *Notes* 489

Chapter 9 GLOBALIZATION: FROM NEW RELIGIONS TO WORLD RELIGIONS ENGAGING GLOBAL CHALLENGES 491

OVERVIEW 491

The Challenges of Global Diversity 492

Old Religions and New Religions in the History of Religions 493

Global Trends in World Religions Today 494

Rise of New Religions 494

Fundamentalism and the Global Religious Resurgence 499

"New Age" Religiosity 500

Rising Atheism and Individuals Without Religious Affiliation 502

Adaptive Traditionalism in the World Religions 503

The Postmodern Challenge in the West: An Alternative to Fundamentalism and Atheism 508

Religions Today and the Nation-State: Civil Religion 509

Civil Religion in Communist China: Diffuse Traditions and Marx's Secular Apocalyptic Vision 510

American Civil Religion: Vision of a "City on a Hill" 511

The Future of World Religions Amidst Global Crises 512

Ecological Crises and Global Climate Emergency 512

World Religions Today and the Covid Pandemic 513

“Passing Over”: World Citizenship Facing Global Challenges 515

Leo Tolstoy 516

Mohandas K. Gandhi 517

Martin Luther King Jr. 517

Thich Nhat Hanh 518

The Future of Religion in an Age of Globalization 520

Discussion Questions 520 • *Suggested Readings* 521

• *Additional Resources* 521 • *Notes* 522

Glossary G-1

Art Credits C-1

Index I-1

PREFACE

Religion remains a premier dynamic in the personal lives of most humans on the globe. It is also a social, spiritual, and political force in the world today. In the past century, some scholars anticipated a progressive decline in religion and virtually equated modernity with secularism. What we have seen from a worldwide perspective, however, is that religion has continued to ground collective human meaning and has even displayed a robust resurgence. This seventh edition of *World Religions Today* addresses religion's various roles as that ground, including religions' interdependence with the cultures they exist in, their influence on and how they are influenced by political and social realities, and their philosophical and theological visions.

World Religions Today has a history. Its authors have had decades of experience teaching courses in world religions. We have garnered a seasoned sense of what works in the classroom and what does not. Further, we have all had reservations about many world religion textbooks. Too often, one finds these textbooks emphasizing the historical origins and doctrinal developments of a given religion, as though religion is relevant or interesting principally on that score. Many stressed a textual, theological, or legal approach, one that gave insufficient attention to modern alterations of these traditions. Of course, origins, texts, and doctrines are highly valuable and necessary. But our approach is to make sure students understand religions as they exist today. Our method emphasizes the tensions and possibilities of religions as people today negotiate the dynamics of modernity, globalization, and postmodernity. Thus, our approach gives more attention to social institutions and the influence of political power.

Despite the growing visibility of religion, the impact of religious resurgence, and the globalization of all the world religions, most textbooks have not quite caught up. *World Religions Today*, Seventh Edition, continues our hallmark approach of using historical coverage of religious traditions as a framework to help students see how faiths have evolved and become what they are now. Most chapters begin with an "Encounter with Modernity" section, where we give students several snapshots of a world religion as it exists today. Those snapshots reveal the tensions and possibilities that are inherent in any dynamic religion. And they do so in a way that reveals the larger, globalized tension between modernity and postmodernity. We show how each tradition has changed because of modernity, and also how each religion has influenced the contemporary world.

NEW TO THE SEVENTH EDITION

The basic outline, format, and philosophy of this edition continue from earlier editions, though we have adjusted our categories and descriptions to better fit student learning. All of the material has been revised to reflect the latest scholarly research and ongoing historical changes at the time of writing. We have also relied on our valued reviewers whose wisdom and teaching experience guide our revisions. Thus, changes in this seventh edition include:

- edited and expanded chronologies
- more attention on lived experience in each religion
- dramatic revision of the Judaism and Christianity chapters
- significant updates to the Islam chapter, with sections on fundamentalism, reformers, ISIS, Islamophobia, and the Arab Spring
- significant revisions to the chapter on globalization and the dynamics of new age religiosity

FEATURES

Each chapter is enriched by thematic and special-topic boxes that explore ideas or practices in depth. We are convinced that such boxes catch the student's attention and facilitate a deeper religious imagination. By standing independently, they are experienced as an integral part of the presentation while highlighting something particularly unique or thoughtful.

- “Gender Focus” boxes present additional information, beyond that in the regular text, about different practices of believers regarding their gender.
- “Rituals and Rites” boxes describe the main ritual practices of the given religion and what these practices intend in the lives of believers. Often, these boxes also highlight how such practices have changed over time.
- “Contrasting Religious Visions” boxes contrast the perspectives of two significant modern figures. Both representatives are devout and grounded in their tradition, yet experience or interpret their religion far differently from each other. One sees the plurality of interpretations of faith as well as how those interpretations have often led to either conflict or peacemaking.
- “Teaching of Religious Wisdom” boxes offer some of the primary texts and formal teachings of the religion.

- “Tales of Spiritual Transformation” boxes offer descriptions of religious experiences in believers’ own words. Some of these are classical voices, and others are contemporary.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

For the instructor: Supplementary materials are available on the Oxford University Press **Oxford Learning Link (OLL)**, a convenient, instructor-focused, single destination for resources to accompany your text. Accessed online through individual user accounts, the OLL provides instructors with access to up-to-date ancillaries at any time, while guaranteeing the security of grade-significant resources. In addition, it allows Oxford University Press to keep instructors informed when new content becomes available. The OLL contains:

- The **Instructor’s Manual**, which includes the following:
 - Chapter summaries
 - Chapter goals
 - Lecture outlines
 - Key terms with definitions
 - Suggested web links and other resources
- An **Interoperable Test Bank**, including 40 multiple-choice, 40 true/false, 40 fill-in-the-blank, and 12 essay/discussion questions per chapter
- **Lecture Outlines** as PowerPoint-based slides

A link to the OLL is available on the Companion Website (www.oup.com/he/esposito-wrt7e).

For the student: The **Companion Website** (www.oup.com/he/esposito-wrt7e) includes the following student resources:

- Chapter goals
- Flashcard of key terms
- Suggested web links and other resources
- Self-quizzes, containing 20 multiple-choice, 20 true/false, 20 fill-in-the-blank, and 6 essay questions per chapter, selected from the test bank in the ARC

The Instructor’s Manual and Test Bank, as well as the student material from the Companion Website, is also available in **Learning Management Systems Cartridges**, in a fully downloadable format for instructors using a learning management system.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Along with our own experiences and reflections, this seventh edition of *World Religions Today* has been significantly revised in light of the valuable comments we continue to receive from colleagues across the country who have used it. This edition is stronger because of their thoughtful comments based on their rich experience. We offer special thanks to the following professors and other anonymous reviewers:

- Todd Brenneman, Faulkner University
- James Reich, Pace University
- Charles Mabee, Oakland University
- Jeffrey Wasserman, Harper College
- Scott Sargent, University of South Carolina
- Todd Tremlin, University of Central Michigan
- Laura Yares, Michigan State University
- Abhishek Ghosh, Grand Valley State University
- Michelle Maldonado, University of Miami

Thanks also to the reviewers of the previous editions for their lasting input on the work: Constantina Rhodes Bailly, Eckerd College; Kenneth Bass, Central Texas College; Herbert Berg, University of North Carolina–Wilmington; Todd M. Brenneman, Faulkner University; Sheila Briggs, University of Southern California; Robert Brown, James Madison University; Terry L. Burden, University of Louisville; Dexter E. Callender Jr., University of Miami; David Capes, Houston Baptist University; Clayton Crockett, University of Central Arkansas; Dennis G. Crump, Lindsey Wilson College; James E. Deitrick, University of Central Arkansas; Sergey Dolgopolski, University of Kansas; Joan Earley, State University of New York at Albany; Jonathan Ebel, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign; James Egge, Eastern Michigan University; John Farina, George Mason University; Debora Y. Fonteneau, Savannah State University; Liora Gubkin, California State University, Bakersfield; Jim Gustafson, Florida Southwestern State College; William David Hart, University of North Carolina, Greensboro; B. N. Hebbar, George Washington University; Samuel Hopkins, Northern Arizona University; William Hutchins, Appalachian State University; Ernest P. Janzen, University of Winnipeg; Father Brad Karelius, Saddleback Community College; Sandra T. Keating, Providence College; Scott Kenworthy, Miami University of Ohio; Mohammad Hassan Khalil, University of Illinois; Kristin Beise Kiblinger, Winthrop University; Louis Komjathy, University of San Diego; David Kitts, Carson–Newman University; Lee Krahenbuhl, Mercy College of Ohio; Ian Maclean, James Madison University; Peter David Lee, Columbia College, California; Sean McCloud, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Tim Murphy, University of Alabama; Nancy Nagra, Champlain College; Jason Neelis, University of Florida; Patrick Nnoromele, Eastern Kentucky University; Catherine

Orsborn, University of Denver; Robin L. Owens, Mount St. Mary's College; Andrew Pavelich, University of Houston–Downtown; Linda Pittman, College of William and Mary; Judith Poxon, California State University, Sacramento; Kris Pratt, Spartanburg Methodist College; Rick Rogers, Eastern Michigan University; Bassam Romaya, University of Massachusetts Lowell; Barry R. Sang, Catawba College; Brooke Schedneck, Arizona State University; D. Neil Schmid, North Carolina State University; Paul Schneider, University of South Florida; Martha Ann Selby, University of Texas at Austin; Caleb Simmons, University of Mississippi; Theresa S. Smith, Indiana University of Pennsylvania; Yushau Sodiq, Texas Christian University; Phillip Spivey, University of Central Arkansas; Bruce Sullivan, Northern Arizona University; Aaron J. Hahn Tapper, University of San Francisco; James H. Thrall, International College–University of Bridgeport; Eglute Trinkauske, Nazareth College; Peter Umoh, University of Bridgeport; Hugh B. Urban, Ohio State University; Anne Vallyely, University of Ottawa; Andrew Christian van Gorder, Baylor University; Glenn Wallis, University of Georgia; Patricia Walters, Rockford University; Tammie Wanta, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Mlen-Too Wesley, Penn State University; Catherine Wessinger, Loyola University New Orleans; Mark Whitters, Eastern Michigan University; Alice L. Wood, Bethune–Cookman University; Simon A. Wood, University of Nebraska–Lincoln. John Esposito would also like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions to the Islam chapter of Tasi Perkins, his research assistant.

We have been fortunate to work with an excellent, supportive, and creative team at Oxford University Press, led by Andrew Blitzer, Acquisitions Editor in Oxford's Higher Education Group.

John L. Esposito, Georgetown University

Peter Feldmeier, University of Toledo

Todd T. Lewis, College of the Holy Cross



GREENLAND

ICELAND

UNITED KINGDOM

IRELAND

PORTUGAL

MOROCCO

WESTERN
SAHARA

MAURITANIA

CAPE VERDE IS.

SENEGAL

GAMBIA

GUINEA BISSAU

GUINEA

SIERRA LEONE

LIBERIA

BURKINA FASO

IVORY COAST

SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

CANADA

UNITED STATES

NORTH
PACIFIC
OCEAN

NORTH
ATLANTIC
OCEAN

MEXICO

CUBA

HAITI

DOMINICAN
REPUBLIC

PUERTO RICO

JAMAICA

TRINIDAD
and TOBAGO

GUATEMALA

EL SALVADOR

NICARAGUA

COSTA RICA

PANAMA

COLOMBIA

ECUADOR

PERU

BRAZIL

BOLIVIA

PARAGUAY

CHILE

ARGENTINA

URUGUAY

SOUTH
PACIFIC
OCEAN

SOUTH
ATLANTIC
OCEAN

WESTERN
SAMOA

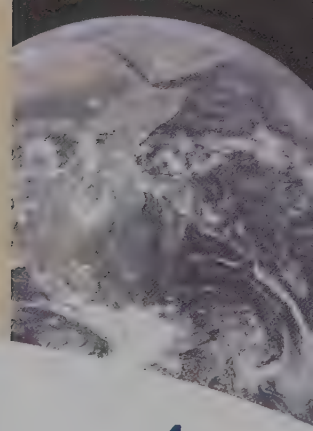
TONGA

ARCTIC
OCEAN



WORLD
RELIGIONS
TODAY





1

INTRODUCTION

Understanding World Religions in Global Perspective

In an age of **globalization**, human events reach through time and around the world to transform our personal, social, economic, and political lives. Until the modern period, the great world religions had largely divided the globe among them, with some modest overlap. But in our postmodern era, all the world's religions have members in every country or society. Just as Christians had migrated to every city in the world by 1850, Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims are now found in significant numbers in all large American and European cities, and increasingly in smaller ones as well. Today, anyone using the internet can observe and even participate in live webcam services in major temples, shrines, churches, mosques, and monasteries anywhere in the world; devotees can offer prayers, order rituals, or make monetary offerings through their websites. This is globalization.

Essential to understanding globalization in the United States is the Immigration Act of 1965, signed by President Lyndon Johnson. This act abolished the immigration system set up in 1924 and modified in 1952. The earlier system heavily favored immigration from Europe and severely restricted immigration from other parts of the world, especially Asia. The 1965 legislation dramatically changed the face of America. According to government figures, as of 1950 in the United States, about 3.6 percent of immigrants were from Asia; by the year 2000, more than 30 percent were.

In the 1950s, when people in the United States thought about religious diversity, it was limited largely to Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. In the twenty-first century, the

◆ **globalization:**
in terms of world religions, the idea that all religions have members in almost every country or society, and that technology affords access to all key religious sites, practices, and teachers

◀ With the Space Age, awareness that all humans share life in a global village has come to the religions and cultures of the earth.

situation is dramatically different. Almost daily, the American media take note of new religious members of local communities—for example, a meditation retreat at a Korean Zen center in the suburbs of Providence, Rhode Island; the opening of an Islamic mosque in St. Louis, Missouri; or the dedication of a Hindu temple in Tampa, Florida.

Figure 1.1, compiled from Pew Foundation reports, census data, and other studies, approximates the number of adherents of the various religions found in the world today and their numbers in relation to one another. No reliable, exact count is available—or even possible—for many reasons: the lack of surveys utilizing the same criteria, disagreements about what is a branch of a world religion and what is a “new religion,” and the paucity of thorough census/survey data from the world’s two most populous nations, India and China. Existing surveys that summarize religious identity on a global level are extremely problematic due to these issues of definition, limited global scope, and affiliation.

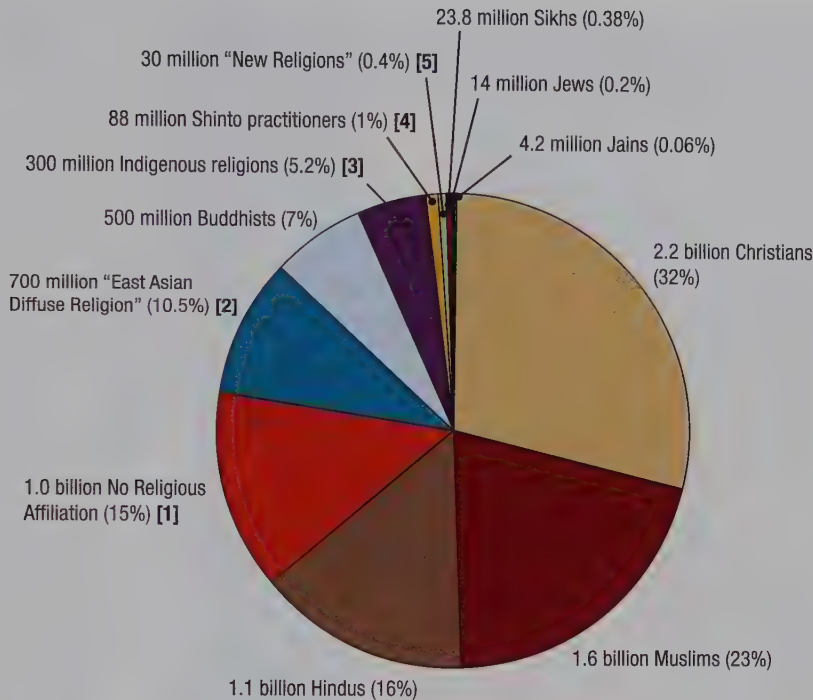
Another problem exists, too: Central to any survey data is the assumption that a person can be listed under one variable and be only that, but such an exclusive choice of one and only one religion does not capture the reality of world religions today. (For this reason, the estimated percentages assigned to each tradition in Figure 1.1 exceed 100 percent.) Even among those professing to be monotheists, there are now many hyphenated identities, such as Buddhist-Jew, Zen-Christian, or agnostic-Yoga devotee. Singular identity is even more problematic for representing the religious reality of most people in Asia and the various indigenous peoples across the world, where many follow more than one tradition. Demographers too often give a false sense of certainty to the pluralistic and fluid boundaries of the world’s religions today.

Why Study World Religions?

In the emerging global economy, most neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools reflect this diversity as well. The beliefs and practices of world religions have become part of the mosaic of American society. It is more and more likely that our neighbors, classmates, and colleagues are ethnically, politically, and, yes, even religiously diverse—coming from many parts of the globe (see Map 1.1). Understanding diverse religions is necessary because it is now about understanding our neighbors. If we do not understand each other, our misunderstandings may well lead to prejudice, conflict, and even violence.

The academic study of religion is one of the newest disciplines in the modern university. Its beginnings go back to the emergence of the social sciences in the nineteenth century, with the appearance of such fields as anthropology, sociology, and comparative linguistics. One of the great founding fathers of this comparative study of religion was the Indologist Max Müller (1825–1900), who argued that “the person who knows only one religion understands none.”¹ It is only by studying the diverse expressions of religion throughout history and across cultures that we come to understand its unity and diversity.

Figure 1.1 The world's major religions (percentage of global population).



Notes:

[1] Includes atheists, agnostics, and people who do not self-identify with any particular religion in surveys. Studies have also revealed that many of the "religiously unaffiliated" do have a set of religious beliefs. Some of the religiously unaffiliated, for example, do express belief in God or a higher power, a view shared, for example, by 7% of Chinese unaffiliated adults, 30% of French unaffiliated adults, and 68% of unaffiliated U.S. adults. Some of the unaffiliated also engage in certain kinds of religious practices. For example, 7% of unaffiliated adults in France and 27% of those in the United States say they attend religious services at least once a year.

[2] A combination of Confucian, Daoist, and local religious devotions. This figure was estimated based on a Chinese government statistic indicating that 44% of adults reported that they had worshipped at a graveside or tomb in the survey year.

[3] Practice various folk or traditional religions, including African traditional religions, Indian tribal traditions, Native American religions, and Australian aboriginal religions.

[4] This number for adherents to Shinto in Japan is based on recent surveys that have shown that 80% of Japanese register their newborn children at a Shinto shrine, and that roughly the same number visit these temples on New Year's Day and other major traditional holidays.

[5] The formation of new religions has been a key hallmark of global religious life since 1750, and it has been recorded on every continent. Some have come and gone, such as the "Shakers" in Colonial America; some have arisen but declined so that to this day few devotees remain; most have arisen and spread in a particular region; a few have become global in membership.

Prior to the 1960s in the United States, one could not have studied religions comparatively in secular and state universities. Only religious colleges and private universities offered courses and degrees in religion, and the former were typically in the tradition of their own denominations. Then, in the 1960s, departments of



Map 1.1 Distribution of world religions today.

religious studies began to appear in nonreligious colleges and secular state universities. Responding to the new diversity brought on by globalization, these departments began to offer courses on non-Western as well as comparative religions. What they attempted was completely new in history: They sought to understand and appreciate the diverse religious traditions of the world without preconceived biases toward any of them.

The academic study of religion requires the courage and compassion to empathetically understand the diverse worldviews of others and the willingness to learn from each. Its goal is not to show that one religion is “right” and all others “wrong,” but rather to show what humans have found compelling in each and how each tradition has shaped history. The task in the study of world religions today is to overcome stereotypes and glimpse the wisdom found in each of these traditions. To judge another’s religion without understanding both it and what it means to its members is to “pre-judge” them—that is the meaning of the word *prejudice*. When encountering beliefs and practices we do not understand, it is easy to fall into the trap of ridiculing them, saying, “How can anyone possibly believe that?” Certainly, each of us wants to be understood and respected, not stereotyped and dismissed. We need to extend that same courtesy to all others as well. So in the academic study of religion, we agree to set aside our own beliefs and prejudices and try to understand and appreciate the meaning others find in their beliefs and practices.

In surveying world religions today, we shall not be able to cover everything that could be said about them. Our selection will be governed primarily by the following question: What do we need to know about the past to understand the role of religion in the world we live in today?

Our Task

In this book, we focus on the diverse ways in which human beings have been religious in the past and are religious today. This is important since the last decades of the twentieth century brought a global religious resurgence. This development has impacted many aspects of contemporary life. The revitalization of religion defied earlier predictions that civilization was becoming more secular, with a worldview increasingly based on modern science. As a result, many scholars believed that religion would inevitably disappear. The ongoing clash of traditional religions with scientific and secular societies across the world is a major concern of this textbook. Every chapter thus begins with examples of a major controversy or significant tension each religion now faces.

We describe our present time as one in transition between “modernity” and a new “postmodern” era of globalization. To understand what is “new” about postmodernity, we first have to understand the premodern period of the different religious traditions and how the premodern worldview of each relates to and contrasts with the modern period. In particular, we will have to compare the premodern period in each tradition with the changes brought about by the “modern” era, which began with the rise of modern science and European colonialism after 1500 and declined after World War II.

In surveying world religions today, we shall not be able to cover everything that could be said about them. Our selection will be governed primarily by the following question: What do we need to know about the past to understand the role of religion in the world we live in today? To understand many of the conflicts that we hear about in the news, we first need to understand how religious traditions profoundly shaped the world to be the way it is today. Since religious beliefs are often at the center of the individual's identity, and because religious communities are major actors in our world today, studying world religions provides crucial insights for understanding our world. And to do that, we must begin by introducing some basic concepts.

Understanding Religious Experience and Its Formative Elements

Wherever we find religious practice, we will also find certain key elements:

The Experience of Sacredness

Myth or Symbolic Story (typically embodied in sacred writing or *scripture* and expressed in a system of *beliefs*)

Ritual

Community

Morality

Religious Leaders/Experts

religion: the sense of being tied or bound by sacred obligations to powers believed to govern our destiny

Let us begin with a working definition of the term *religion*. The word *religion* has its roots in Latin, the language of the ancient Romans. Although its exact root is uncertain, it is derived from two Latin words: the verb *religare*, which literally means “to tie or bind,” and the adjective *religere*, meaning “careful or respectful [to the supernatural].” Religion is that part of culture that expresses our sense of being “tied and bound” by relations of obligation to whatever powers we believe govern our destiny—whether these powers are natural or supernatural, personal or impersonal, one or many. Because our word *religion* comes from the Romans, it will be helpful to understand their use of the word.

Imagine you were to ask a group of Romans in the first century CE, “What religion do you follow?” They would not understand the question. Now, imagine you were to ask instead, “Are you religious?” They would understand immediately. They might even respond, “Of course, but who isn’t?”

In the first version of the question, the word *religion* is used as a noun. It suggests that *religion* is a social group to which some people can belong. This way of understanding religion naturally arises among monotheists, who by definition have chosen one god and excluded all others. However, the Romans did not have such a concept

of “a religion” followed exclusively and apart from others. In rephrasing the original question as “Are you religious?” you are no longer treating *religion* as a noun, describing something you join. Instead, you are treating it as an adjective, describing a way of seeing, acting, and experiencing all things. In many places throughout history, people did not think of their practices as “a religion”—a separate reality they had to choose to the exclusion of all others. Today in Japan, for instance, it is possible for a person to practice Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and Shintoism. This may seem odd from the monotheistic perspective of Western religions, where one can be, for instance, a Muslim, or a Christian, or a Jew, but not two or more at the same time. And yet paradoxically, Jews, Christians, and Muslims all claim to worship the same God.

The Sacred

Religion is about what people hold sacred, what matters more than anything else to them. For all human beings in all places and all times throughout history, religion has been about power and meaning in relation to human destiny, both personally and collectively.

Ancient humans believed that the forces of nature could govern their destiny. Why? Because nature was experienced as that awesome collection of powers that surround and, at times, overwhelm human beings. On the one hand, nature provides life and many of its necessities (food, clothing, shelter, etc.); on the other hand, nature may turn on people, destroying them through earthquakes, storms, or floods. Therefore, the powers inherent in nature evoke in human beings ambivalent feelings of both fascination and dread. Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), a pioneer in the comparative study of religions, argued that the presence of these two ambivalent emotions is a sure sign that one is in the presence of the sacred. A defining mark of religious experience across cultures, these emotions are stirred by the uncanny experience of being in the presence of a power or powers that determine not only how well one lives, but whether one lives or dies.

Religion, as a form of human experience and behavior, therefore is not just about purely “spiritual” things. Nor can the study of religion globally be defined only by gods or God. People’s religiousness has proven to be as diverse as the forms of power they believe govern human destiny. These powers have ranged from gods seen behind the forces of nature to the unseen ancestral spirits or spirits associated with sacred places; sacred powers can also be defined as impersonal sacred forces or energies, or even the mysterious power or powers that govern history. Hence, whatever uncanny powers we believe govern our destiny will elicit a religious response from us and inspire us to “to bind” ourselves to these powers through ritual. Thus tied or bound, we will act respectfully and carefully in relation to these powers, to ensure that we are in harmony with them. How do we know what our obligations to these powers are? Throughout history, this knowledge has been passed down from one generation to the next through myth and ritual.

Myth, Scripture, and Beliefs

myth: a symbolic story about the origins and destiny of human beings and their world

Our word **myth** comes from the Greek *mythos*, which means “story.” Myth, we could say, is a symbolic story about the origins of the world and what determines the destiny of human beings. Myth “ties and binds” human beings in a relationship to whatever powers govern their lives, and it often explains what these powers require of them. Unlike the contemporary English use of *myth* to indicate an untrue story or a misunderstanding based on ignorance, every religious tradition uses myth to convey the deepest and most profound truths about life. These truths are expressed through stories of creation and notable human actions rather than in abstract theories. After the invention of writing (about 3000 BCE), these formerly oral narratives were first written down, creating what we now call the “scriptures” of the various religions. Because these texts tell the stories about the power or powers that govern human destiny, communities have treated them as sacred; they preserved and painstakingly hand-copied them to be passed down from one generation to the next.

For students of world religions, understanding the symbolic nature of religious language is a key challenge. To understand a religious story literally can often lead to misunderstanding its meaning and make it seem false. For example, in Western biblical tradition, the Psalms say, “God is my shepherd,” just as Buddhist scriptures refer to their founder, the Buddha, as “a bull of a man.”

A Shinto priest and believers purify their bodies in icy water for the New Year's ceremony at the Teppozu Shrine in Tokyo.

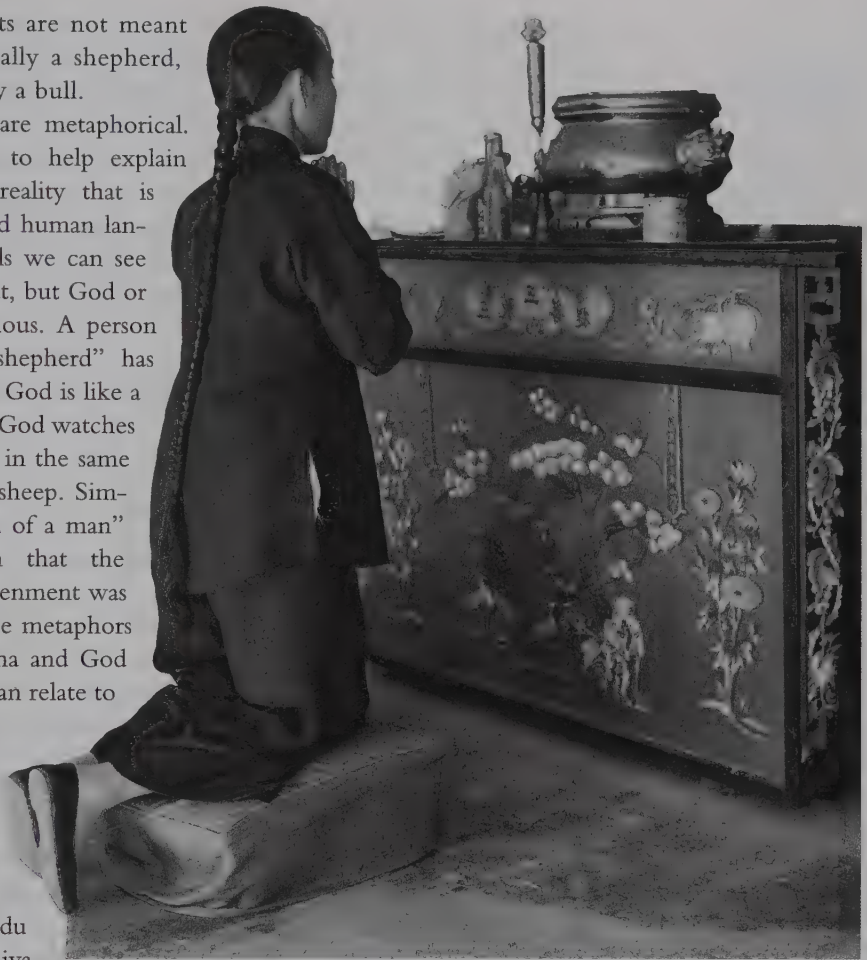


We know such statements are not meant literally: God is not literally a shepherd, nor is the Buddha literally a bull.

Statements like these are metaphorical. They use familiar things to help explain what is less familiar—a reality that is mysterious or even beyond human language. Shepherds and bulls we can see and know something about, but God or a Buddha is more mysterious. A person who says “God is our shepherd” has expressed the thought that God is like a shepherd, in the sense that God watches over and cares for persons in the same way a shepherd tends his sheep. Similarly, “Buddha was a bull of a man” expresses the conviction that the man who achieved enlightenment was strong and powerful. These metaphors both assert that the Buddha and God are realities that devotees can relate to and rely on.

Not all religious experiences are theistic, and not all religion is focused on a belief in God or gods. Buddhists in ancient India refused to use the Hindu word (*Ishvara*) roughly equivalent to the English word *God* to describe their religious understanding of the Buddha and the universe. Instead, they spoke of the inadequacy of all spoken words to explain either the flux of reality or their goal, the blissful state of *nirvana* (see Chapter 7). And yet they, too, used metaphors to try to help people understand what their founder had experienced as the “blowing out of the flame of desire,” which leads to liberation from all suffering.

In fact, the word *God*, which is so central to the Abrahamic religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), is just one of many diverse terms used in different religions and cultures across the world to designate the **ultimate reality**, that which is highest in value and meaning for humanity. This class of terms includes not only the personal God of Western monotheisms but also the impersonal world-spirit Brahman of Hinduism, the transpersonal nirvana of Buddhism, and the impersonal power of the *Dao* at work in all things that is central to Chinese religions.



To live well, have many descendants, and live a long life—these are three great treasures in Chinese culture. Here, a Chinese woman prays for prosperity, posterity, and longevity at a Buddhist temple on the island of Lantau.

◆ **ultimate reality:** that which has the highest value and meaning to a group

sympathetic

imagination: empathy; necessary to understand the religious languages and messages of different times and places

via analogia: a way of explaining spiritual reality by using analogies from particular finite qualities and characteristics

via negativa: a way of explaining spiritual reality by negating all finite qualities and characteristics

transcendent: beyond all finite things

Here lies the challenge, mystery, and fascination of studying the religions of the world: Do differences in religious terminology reflect separate underlying realities? Or are they different expressions or ways of describing the same reality? Because religious metaphors come out of particular historical contexts, and because they are symbolic forms of expression, to understand the religious languages and messages of different religious traditions requires that we put ourselves in the time and place of their origins. We must use our **sympathetic imagination** to understand the metaphors. Different religious traditions over many generations have contributed an extraordinarily rich variety of metaphors to illuminate the mystery and meaning of human existence.

Religious language, as symbolic language, can take one of two forms: analogy or negation. The metaphor “God is my shepherd” is an example of the way of analogy (**via analogia**). In these metaphors, we use familiar words to create an analogy that describes something less familiar. However, there is another form of religious language, the way of negation (**via negativa**). This way of speaking religiously proceeds not by asserting what God or ultimate reality is (or is like) but by saying what it is not. This approach is very typical of the religious traditions in which human beings seek a direct, embodied experience of the ultimate reality. For example, the Muslim mystic declares that Allah is “nothing,” stating that Allah (God) is beyond (i.e., transcends) or is different from anything in our material universe and experience. Allah is not this thing and not that thing. Allah is in fact no “thing” at all, being beyond all finite things and thus **transcendent**. So the best that humans using language can convey, without distorting the description of ultimate reality, is to say that Allah is no-thing.

Western monotheism has emphasized the way of analogy by saying that there is one God who is like humans, able to “know” and to “love,” but in a superior fashion. Thus, God is described as all-knowing, all-loving, or all-powerful. In this same way, some schools of Hinduism have referred to the ultimate reality as a cosmic person, or as a god with multiple arms and hands, rather than as an impersonal power. Asian religions also emphasize the way of negation, insisting that what is most valuable or true cannot be fully imagined. As the founding text of Daoism, the *Daodejing* begins: “The Dao that can be spoken of is not the true Dao.” Both modes of expression are in fact found in all traditions. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim mystics have referred to God as a “Nothingness,” with Jews and Muslims unwilling to depict Allah or Yahweh in images.

Our discussion of religious language should help us to appreciate just how challenging it can be to study and compare various religious traditions. Just as religious communities and religious traditions from different parts of the world use different metaphors and symbols, they also mix the way of analogy and the way of negation. Therefore, two different traditions sometimes talk about the same human experience in ways that seem to be totally contradictory. For example, it may seem that a Jewish theist and a Theravada Buddhist hold diametrically opposed religious beliefs, for Jews believe in a personal God who created the universe and Theravada Buddhists do not.

Yet when we look more closely at Jewish beliefs, we discover that Jews believe God is a reality that can be neither named nor reduced to an image, just like Buddhists believe that ultimate truth is beyond all names and images.

After learning about the traditions covered in this book, you might conclude that perhaps theistic and nontheistic religious experiences are really not far apart. However, it is also possible that they might be seen as truly different. To pursue this great human question, we must begin by withholding judgment and simply try to understand how religions' stories and rituals shape people's worldviews, moral values, and ritual behavior. Perhaps the real measure of comparison should be how people live their lives rather than the apparently diverse images they worship or the concepts they might express. If both Jews and Buddhists, for example, are led by their religious experiences and beliefs to express compassion for those who suffer or are in need, then clearly the two faiths are similar in a very important respect.

Ritual

Ritual actions, like myths, “tie and bind” the individual and the community to the sacred. They are transactions with the ultimate reality; across all traditions, rituals yield both transcendental blessings (related to salvation) as well as pragmatic, worldly benefit (health, prosperity). Typically, myth and ritual are closely tied to the major festivals or holy days of a religious tradition and illuminate the meaning of human destiny in relation to sacred powers. By celebrating a cycle of festivals spread throughout the year, people come to dwell in the stories that tell them who they are, where they came from, and where they are going.

Religious rituals recall important events in the history of each faith: the “Night Journey” of the Prophet Muhammad, the enlightenment of the Buddha, the death of Jesus Christ, the birthday of Confucius. In other rituals, the faithful offer gifts to the supernatural beings to whom they ascribe a power to profoundly affect their lives. Still other rituals require cutting off all the hair on the head, tattoos, or burn marks to set the believers apart from nonbelievers, fostering in-group solidarity. The consumption of certain foods as part of some rituals suggests that the believer can acquire the “same essence” as the **divine** through ingestion, as in the Christian communion, Hindu puja, or a tribal group eating its totemic animal. Ritual affirms common identity.

We should not assume that rituals only communicate ideas or beliefs, however. Religions are not confined to philosophical doctrines regarding the sacred. Rather, they include rituals that, in their own right, tie and bind people to each other and to cosmic meaning. Being religious thus entails taking decisive action at certain times while abstaining from activities at others. For example, at specific times, we may be expected to offer ritual gifts of food or fragrant smoke to supernatural beings; at other times, we must abstain from eating food (fasting). The ritual of pilgrimage guides devotees to travel, often at great distance, to sacred

ritual: actions that link the individual and the community in engaging with the sacred

divine: the highest spiritual reality; representative of the gods

orthopraxy: practice of “right actions” as prescribed by sacred traditions

orthodoxy: acceptance of “right beliefs” based on sacred texts as explained by religious authorities

religious institutions:

A social organization designed to insure support for essential religious specialists, providing resources (financial, architectural, educational) to insure the perpetuation of a tradition

places for blessings; at other times, religious ritual requires remaining completely still (meditation).

For many believers, acting in the prescribed manner, called **orthopraxy** (correct practice), is more important than accepting the central doctrines set forth in texts and formulated by scholars, called **orthodoxy** (correct belief). Performing the five daily Muslim prayers, visiting a Buddhist or Hindu temple to offer flowers on the full moon day, cleaning a Chinese family’s ancestral grave during the spring festival, or being baptized as a Christian—all these acts are as central to “being religious” as is adopting beliefs or doctrines defined as orthodox.

The great annual festivals in the world’s religions give devotees a break from the profane time of normal working life. Providing a clear time to do rituals connecting with the ultimate reality, festivals reinforce important ties with family and fellow devotees. The need to orchestrate such crucial ritual actions leads followers to create the **religious institutions** that occupy central places in their societies.

Comparing Religions Through Rituals

Recently, historians have shown that certain religious amulets were very popular among Christians living in eleventh-century Egypt, as seen in both archaeological finds and popular texts. The most popular amulet worn by many Christians to safeguard their health was a “cylinder necklace” into which certain Bible passages or prayers were written and sealed inside. Other scholars working in the Middle East have shown that this necklace amulet was also being worn by Jews and Muslims, and modern scholars focusing on the material culture of Hindus in South Asia and Buddhism across Asia

were wearing the very same amulet! Of course, the contents were different (Jewish prayers in Hebrew, Islamic prayers in Arabic, and Hindu and Buddhist mantras in Sanskrit). So in the year 1000, we had human beings across Eurasia doing the same ritual practice: having empowered sacred words written on a tiny piece of paper, inserted in a common piece of jewelry.

What is remarkable is that this same style of amulet is still available today across the world, with varying sizes, surface decoration, and cost. Of course, silver workers across the world have



Necklace capsule used by devotees of every religion across the ancient world to hold prayers, mantras, or sacred text passages. This protective practice and this type of simple amulet is still common today.

prospered for a thousand years due to this practice; those religious specialists who supply the empowered contents for a donation have benefitted from this tradition as well. In addition to showing the interrelationship between economy and religion, artisans and priests, it provides an illuminating insight about what is always a central part of religion: providing worldly benefits for believers.

In this textbook, we provide a holistic understanding of religion; the study of world religions therefore cannot be limited to what people believe, but also what people do (ritual and morality). Doctrine provides a shared belief system, but ritual is also essential for understanding the power of religion.

Community and Morality

Religious leaders and institutions have passed down myth and ritual to shape communities that live according to the central ideas and norms of each tradition. Religion not only ties us to the sacred powers we believe govern our destiny, it binds us to each other. Consequently, in most religious traditions, ritual and **morality** have been closely intertwined. “Right” is often defined by “rite”—the ritual patterns of behavior that keep life sacred. Morality is an inherent dimension of religious experience, for religion not only concerns sacred powers but also describes the way of life to be followed.

• **morality:** right action

The sacred—what matters most to a given community—is what provides the foundation for humans to live a virtuous life. The blueprint for what is just or moral has its roots in myths and rituals, as interpreted by generations of religious authorities. Take, for example, the Jewish festival of Yom Kippur. Showing gratitude for God’s forgiveness, this is the beginning of a new year when each person should fast, repent, seek forgiveness for the times one has harmed others, and offer forgiveness to others. Each person should also resolve to live more compassionately and justly in the new year.

Once we realize that religion is about what people hold sacred and the way of life that is called for by such beliefs, it then makes sense to say that all morality has a religious dimension. In this way, even the morality of atheists or agnostics, who may not think of themselves as “religious,” can be said to have a religious dimension—at least to the degree that certain ethical principles are held sacred.

A Tlingit shaman performs healing ceremony.



Religious Leaders/Experts

In every religion, we will find specialists—shamans, priests, ministers, monks, rabbis, scholars, and *ulama* (Muslim teachers)—who mediate between the sacred power(s) and the community by explaining the myths and performing the rituals. The world's oldest religious specialist is the shaman, a man or woman who goes into a trance to communicate with sacred ancestors and supernatural beings (spirits, gods, demons, ghosts, etc.). Practitioners of this art (also called mediums or oracles) are depicted on cave walls across Eurasia from the Neolithic period 25,000 years ago. Shamans still exist in many parts of the world, not only among indigenous peoples but also within or alongside the great world religions (see Chapter 2).

Since the invention of writing in 3000 BCE, the great world religions have relied on written materials and on scholars who have learned to write and read and thereby interpret the sacred texts. These keepers of the sacred writings had to convey their meanings for the great majority of followers, most of whom, until the modern era, were illiterate. The Confucian masters, the Muslim *ulama*, and the Hindu brahmin are examples of this religious specialist. And then there are those who specialize in being spiritual teachers, such as the Hindu guru, the Jewish rabbi, or the Sufi Muslim *shaykh*. Although we can point to interesting comparative patterns among religious rituals and between religious teachers, it is also true that each tradition can and must be known by its own unique set of religious practitioners and institutions.

A two-year-old Muslim boy, living in predominantly Catholic East Timor, prays alongside his father at a mosque in Dili.



The Great Religious Stories of the World

As human beings, we are not just “story tellers”: We are “story dwellers.” Humans live in our stories and make sense of the world through them. Even our understanding of what is good and evil is shaped by the kind of story we see ourselves in and the role we see ourselves playing in that story. Although not all religious myths are stories only about gods, spiritual beings, and humans, most of them have been.

There are four main types of religious stories, each of which presents a symbolic story of the origins and destiny of human beings and the challenges they face in striving to realize their sacred destiny. (Consult Figure 1.2, the “World Religions in Perspective” chart, when reading this section.) These four main types of sacred story are:

- myths of nature
- myths of harmony
- myths of liberation
- myths of history

The Myths of Nature

The earliest religious stories are myths of nature. These are stories about the powers of nature that are central to human destiny and portray them as either personal beings (gods, spirits, and sacred ancestors) or impersonal powers. Such religions tend to see time as cyclical, always returning to the moment right before creation. Just as winter and death are followed by spring and new life, starting the earthly cycles all over again, time is an endless loop. Myth and ritual are the means to erase the distance between “now” and the time of origins, “in the beginning,” when the gods or ancestral spirits first created the world. In such stories, the problem of life is time: Its passage inevitably brings sickness, decline, and death. The ideal of human life in the myths of nature is to return to the newness of life at the beginning of creation, before time began.

The means for bringing about this return is the recitation of the myths and the performance of rituals reenacting creation. Hunter-gatherer stories emphasize the fertility of the earth, the sacred relations with animals and plants, the need for the ritual renewal of life in harmony with the seasons, and the role the tribe plays in maintaining the eternal cosmic order. In many of these societies, a shaman is the spiritual leader; as will be seen in Chapter 2, the shaman’s trance journeys can restore harmony between the human community, spirits, and the forces of nature.

China and the Myths of Harmony

In China, the great cosmic story was that of the Dao (sometimes rendered Tao). The universal Dao, which all beings share, is the source of harmony in the universe.

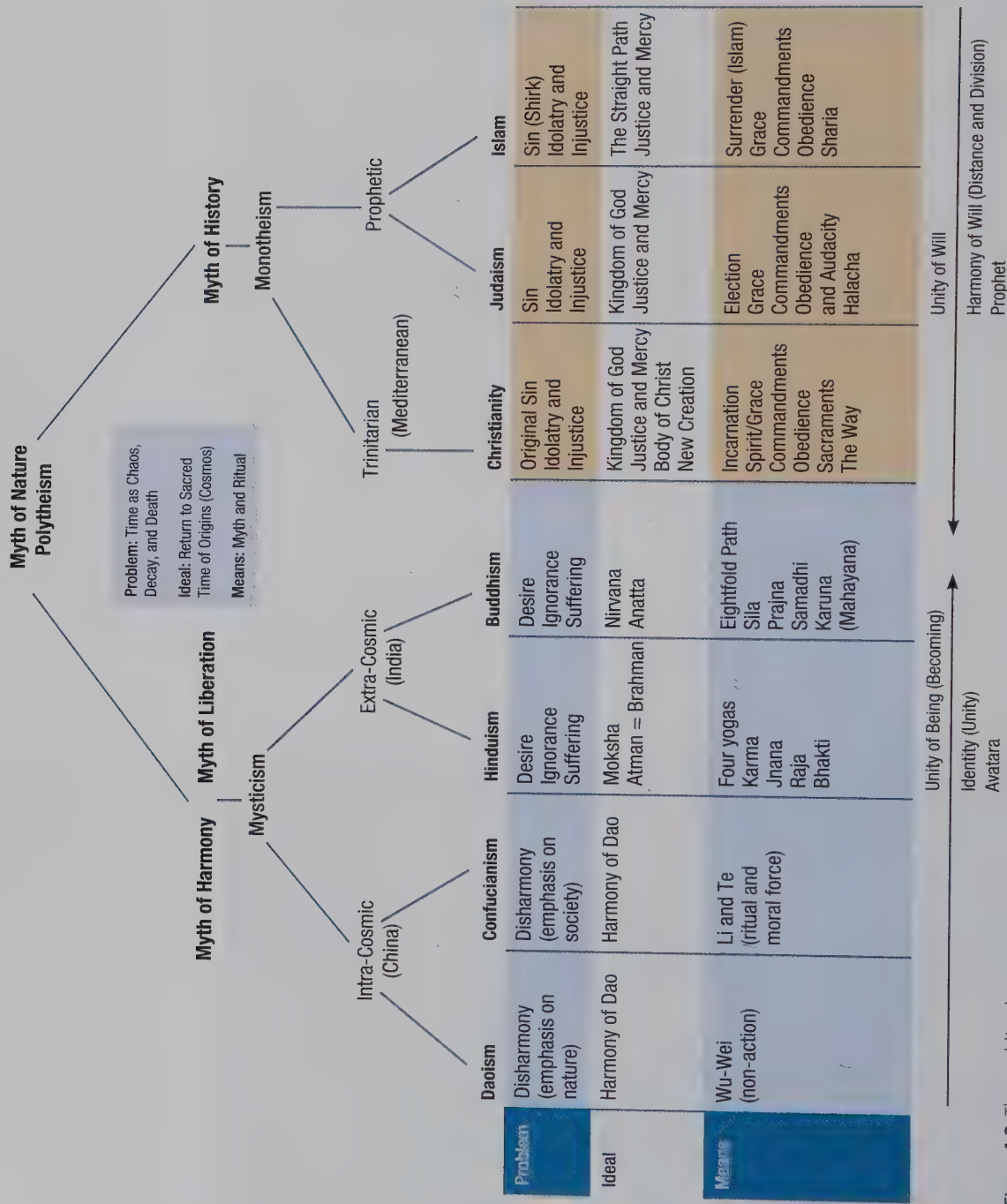


Figure 1.2 The world's religions in perspective.

The Dao is at work, hidden in all the forces of nature. One's true self is knowable only in relation to the Dao. All of creation works through combinations of complementary opposites of *yin* and *yang*, of dark and light, of earth and heaven, of female and male. But yin and yang are never polar opposites; rather, each flows into the other with no absolute division, the way day flows into night and night into day. The ideal for human life, then, is balance and harmony. The great problem of existence is the disharmony that occurs when the elements of self, society, and/or the universe are out of balance.

To restore balance, two different religions emerged in China: Daoism and Confucianism. Both sought to bring harmony between heaven and earth, self and society. Yet these two traditions offered very different means to overcome the problem and realize the ideal. Daoist sages urged humans to seek harmony with the rhythms of nature through cultivating *wu-wei*, the art of "not doing," or not interfering with the flow of life in nature. By contrast, the Confucian sages urged humans to establish harmony in society through the practice of *li*, the rituals and customs that fulfill obligations to kin, community, and ruler based upon one's station in society. By cultivating their character, they sacrifice their self-interest for the good of the whole society.

India and the Myths of Liberation

In ancient India, life was also seen in relation to the cycles of existence. Its priests enacted powerful rituals to control the gods affecting human life, from the weather to personal fortune and group destiny. But in India, these rhythms were ultimately to be escaped, not affirmed. Human existence was seen as ultimately unsatisfactory not because there is nothing good about life but because it is transient and always ends in old age, sickness, and death. The problem of life is human entrapment in an endless cycle of suffering and rebirth, so the highest goal was to overcome this bondage. Thus, the great religions originating in India all seek to destroy the delusions fostered by selfish desires, for only when these are mastered can humans be freed from the wheel of death and rebirth. A host of spiritual traditions discovered by the sages have shown many paths to salvation, the blissful liberation from rebirth.

Hinduism and Buddhism developed a variety of means, called *yogas*, for achieving liberation or enlightenment. These range from disciplined ritual activity and the selfless performance of one's duties to seeking spiritual knowledge through meditation or cultivating selfless devotion toward a particular god or goddess.

The Middle East and the Myths of History

The myths of nature, of harmony, and of liberation use the human experience of the rhythms and cycles of nature as the basis for religious metaphors and symbolic language expressed in sacred stories. In the myths of history, by contrast, it is not nature but human history from which the metaphors for religious experience are primarily drawn. While all religions communicate their traditions by telling stories, only the



Hindu women pay homage to the god of the sun during the Chat Puja festival on the banks of the Hooghly River in the eastern Indian city of Calcutta. Thousands of Hindu devotees reach the riverside at sunset and will spend the night praying.

religions of the Middle East, beginning with Judaism, make “story” itself the central metaphor of religious expression. Unlike the eternally cyclical rhythms of nature, stories have a beginning and an end. Ancient Judaism conceived of the cosmos as a great unfolding story told by a great divine storyteller (God): In the beginning, God spoke, the world was created, and the story of revelation began.

Three versions of this story of revelation arose in the Middle East—first the Judaic, then the Christian, and finally, the Islamic. For each version, human beings are considered human by virtue of being children of the one God who created all things. All three traditions tell the myth of Adam and Eve as the first human beings and venerate the patriarch Abraham, whom each considers the true model of faith and obedience to divine revelation. And in all three, the problem of life is viewed as “sin”—failing to follow God’s will or laws, a combination of idolatry and human selfishness that leads to injustice. The ideal goal of life is for humans to be in harmony with the will of God, whereupon peace and justice will reign and death will be overcome.

While all three religions believe that the means for bringing about this era of peace and triumph over death are obedience to the will of God, each has its own unique understanding of that obedience. In Judaism, it is living according to divine law, Torah; in Christianity, it is acceptance of divine grace offered by the incarnation



All that remains of the great temple in Jerusalem, destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, is the Western Wall. It is considered to be the holiest of sites where observant Jews come to pray.

of God, in the person of Jesus, the messiah; and in Islam, it is proclaiming the reality of God, his last prophet Muhammed, and submitting to his law, *Sharia*. Although the three Abrahamic religions have their own stories of the cosmos, full of many trials, triumphs, and tragedies, each tells of the human–divine story having a happy ending. In contrast to the myths of nature, harmony, and liberation, traditions founded on the myths of history regard time not as the enemy but as the very place for encountering the ultimate reality, which is God. The goal for them is neither to escape time by returning to the beginning through ritual, nor to rise above time in mystical ecstasy, but to meet God in time, to live righteously, and at the end of time, to reside in paradise with God. Time for the faithful is promising, and the future is ultimately hopeful.

The Fundamental Terms and Organization of This Book

Each of the great world religions speaks to the problem of morality by guiding individuals beyond the confusion, self-centeredness, and suffering that came with the origin of urbanism and the new individualism that arose in early Eurasian history, from 3500 BCE and onward. Each posited a new path to grasp the essential unity and interdependence of all human beings. And each sought to provide life with meaning by depicting individuals and communities as participating in a great cosmic story that can provide drama and purpose to human life. In addition, these stories show individuals a way to overcome the finality of death.

When we stand back at a great distance, we can use the four types of myth or story outlined earlier—those of nature, harmony, liberation, and history—to provide a simplified overview of the major world religions. As we get closer, however, we discover that each of these stories has variations expressing internal differences in doctrine and in practice. This textbook explores the most important and central aspects of these traditions, a first treatment.

In this book, we examine how human beings in each instance struggled to continue the religiousness of their ancestors over the millennia, but we devote more extensive discussion to the history of these world religions in the radically different, fast-changing, and globalizing world since 1500, the beginning of the modern era. We will see how Western civilization gave birth to modernity and, through its colonial expansion, spread its religious and cultural influences around the world, disrupting premodern religious cultures everywhere. **Colonialism** is part of the story of virtually all religions and civilizations, East and West. But after 1492, modern Western colonialism came closest to achieving global domination. Propelled by European colonialism, Christianity became the first faith to span the globe, forcing every religion to reckon with its beliefs, its practices, and its critiques of other religions.

We will also describe how colonialism, in turn, provoked postcolonial reactions that have divided those within each religious tradition into three groups. Recurring in this textbook, each merits special attention and definition:

1. **Fundamentalists**, who reject important aspects of modernity and want to go back to what they perceive as the purity of an “authentic” social/political order manifested in the sacred way of life of their ancestors.
2. **Modernists**, who seek an accommodation of their religious tradition with the insights of science and the social and political realities of modern life.
3. **Postmodernists**, who while rejecting the dominance of science and Western modernity seek a new situation that affirms the role of religion in public life in a way that embraces religious and cultural diversity.

While some fundamentalists reject everything modern, most nonetheless accept modern technology while rejecting any ideas derived from the sciences that would call into question the foundations of their religious worldview. Fundamentalists tend to interpret their scriptures literally; they typically reject interpreting the texts allegorically or symbolically. For instance, a modernist Christian might interpret the seven days of creation as symbolic periods of uncertain length; a fundamentalist, however, would be inclined to say, “No, we are talking about creating the world literally in seven 24-hour periods of time, so scientific accounts of the origin and development of the universe over millennia are false.”

Among modernists and postmodernists, most argue that some parts of the religious tradition must change. What is distinctive about the modernist view is that any human understanding of religious truth and practice can be subject to historical change and development, but this is a notion that fundamentalists find utterly unacceptable.

colonialism: the political, social, cultural, and economic domination of one society by another

fundamentalist: one who rejects aspects of modernity and wants to return to the perceived foundational purity of an ancestral sacred social/political order or way of life