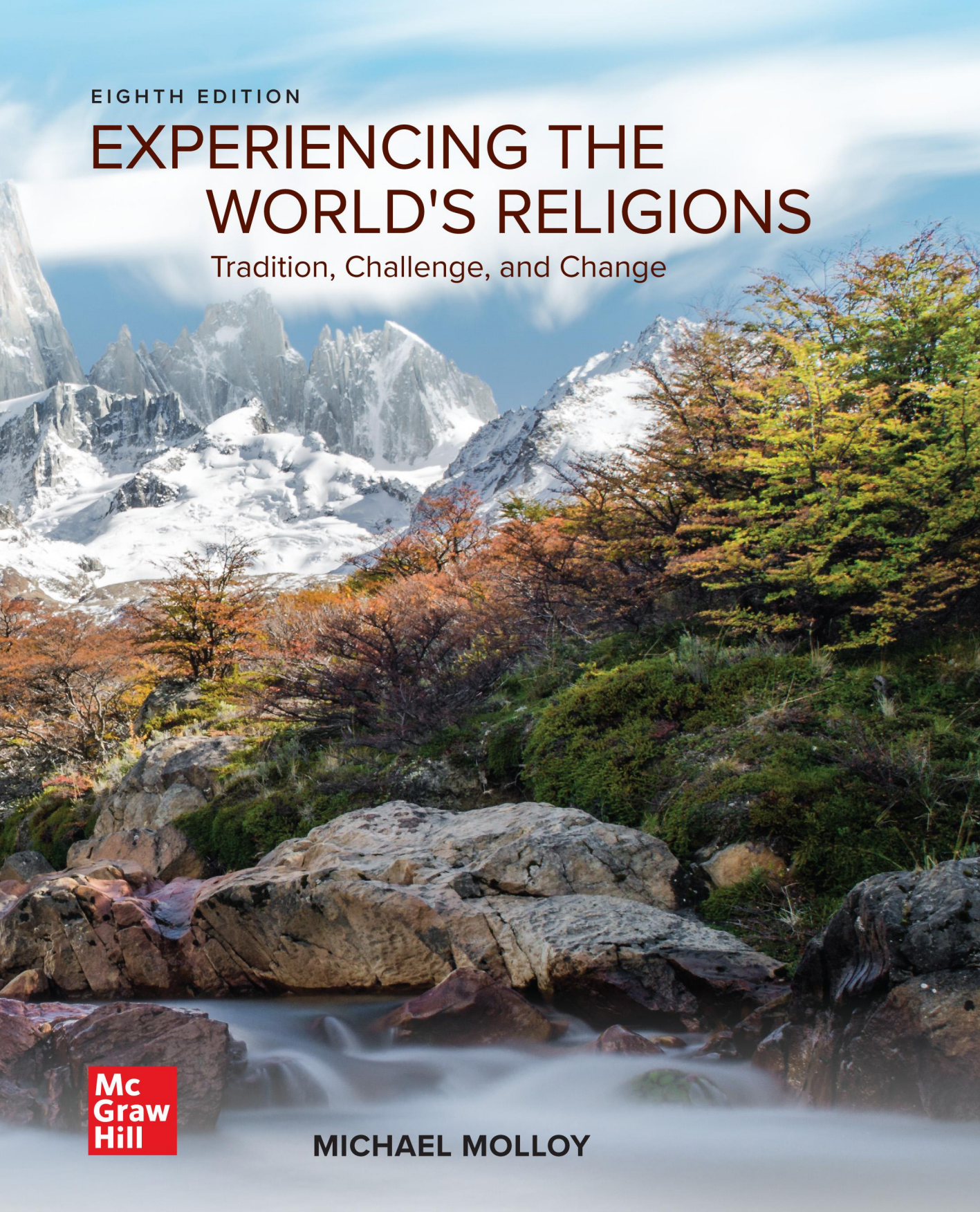
EIGHTH EDITION
EXPERIENCING THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS
Tradition, Challenge, and Change
Mc Graw Hill
MICHAEL MOLLOY

Experiencing the World's Religions

EIGHTH EDITION

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TRADITION, CHALLENGE, AND CHANGE

Michael Molloy

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EXPERIENCING THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS: TRADITION, CHALLENGE AND CHANGE, EIGHTH EDITION

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About the Author

Michael Molloy has made the study of religion his life's work. Fascination with religion began with interest in the architecture of temples, mosques, churches, and shrines. Experience of ceremonies at those places led to love of religious music and art. In his early graduate work, he focused on the imagery of cloud and darkness in mystical literature. In his doctoral work, he examined the mystical thought of Aldous Huxley, after Huxley had been influenced by Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism. To do this, he interviewed Huxley's wife Laura, Huxley's sister-in-law, and friends of Huxley.

Molloy received a grant from the East-West Center in Hawai'i to study there, and he received his doctorate from the University of Hawai'i. During this time, he studied in Japan with Abe Masao in Kyoto and with Sobharani Basu at Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi. He practiced Zen meditation at Bushinji in Shikoku and later received a certificate from the Omoto School of Traditional Japanese Arts in Kameoka, Japan. He has written *Experiencing the World's Religions* (McGraw-Hill) and *The Christian Experience* (Bloomsbury). Currently he is writing a memoir of his grandparents and parents and their religious background.

Molloy has taught many philosophy and religion courses, including World Religions, Asian Philosophies, Western Mysticism, Greek and Roman Philosophy, Ethics, Nietzsche, Religion and the Meaning of Existence, and Indian Philosophy. He is a Professor Emeritus of the University of Hawai'i. To complement his academic work, he has had three exhibitions of his paintings—"Landscapes of the Mind," "Luminous Darkness," and "Renaissance." He codirected two radio series of interviews with musicians, writers, and artists on KAIM-FM and Hawai'i Public Radio. He worked on the Inari Shrine Preservation Committee to move the shrine to a new location and then to renovate it.

To Jennie Meyer and Linming Qiu

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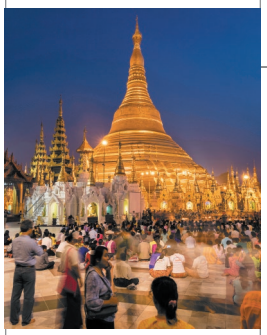
Thomas Hilgers



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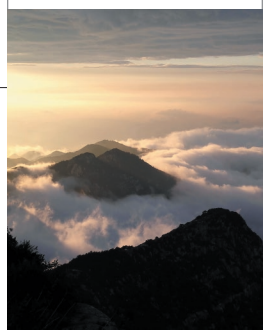

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Preface

Not long ago, most towns and cities had restaurants with the same kinds of food, and there was little choice, except for the decor. Now you find not only Chinese food, but also Italian, French, Mexican, Greek, Japanese, Indian, Vegetarian, Vietnamese, and Thai. In even larger cities, the possibilities expand like a waistline—even to Moroccan and Ethiopian.

The same thing is happening in our experience of religions. We encounter other religions effortlessly. I realized this when I had arrived by plane in Denver. I took a taxi from the airport to my hotel downtown. As I got in the taxi, I noticed what looked like a religious book on the passenger seat, next to the driver. As we were driving into town, I asked the driver about it.

"It is an Ethiopian book on the Psalms," he said. "I am using it for my own study of the Bible."

"Do you go to church here in Denver?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. I go to one church in particular, since it is in my neighborhood. But there are several Ethiopian churches in the city."

This was a surprise to me. I had no idea that there were a good number of Ethiopians in Denver.

"Would you like to come to our service this weekend?" he asked.

"I would love to do that. Please write down the name of your church, its address, and the time of the service, and I'll be there."

And so it happened that I took part in a service where women and men sat on opposite sides of the church, the altar area was hidden behind veils, and everyone wore white clothes. During the time there, an altar server carried around a gospel book, which each person kissed reverently. No one wore shoes. After the service, people put their shoes back on, gathering them from just outside the doors. They did not immediately drive home, but congregated instead under the nearby trees, where they talked with their relatives and friends.

The taxi driver saw me and waved. He looked deeply pleased that I had come to his church.

As I drove back to my hotel, I thought about the future. Would the children and grandchildren of these Ethiopian Christians continue their traditions, or would they mix them with other religious traditions in the city? Changes are inevitable, as the cover of this book suggests. Flowing water moves and cleanses but does not stay the same.

This book is meant to help you find, learn about, and experience some of the religions that we nowadays find flourishing—and changing—all around us.

Boxed Features

CONFLICT IN RELIGION

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS

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Although the core of religions remains fairly constant, change is always happening. Followers of different religions split and form new branches, religious values change, new leaders arise. These transitions are reflected in the new edition. New reading selections have been added to most chapters.

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Chapter 1, Understanding Religion

- New First Encounter
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- New First Encounter
- New Text Box: Bollywood
- New Reading: "Spiritual Greatness"

Chapter 4, Buddhism

- New First Encounter
- New Text Box: "The Mustard Seeds"
- New Reading: "The Wonder of Tea"

Chapter 5, Jainism and Sikhism

- New Reading: "God Is Found in Every Direction"

Chapter 6, Daoism and Confucianism

- New First Encounter

Chapter 7, Shinto

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- New Reading: "The Heian Shrines at Nikko"

Chapter 8, Judaism

- New Personal Experience: "A Visit to a Kibbutz in the North"
- New Reading: "Liberation"

Chapter 9, Christianity

- New Reading: "Discovering the Next Step"

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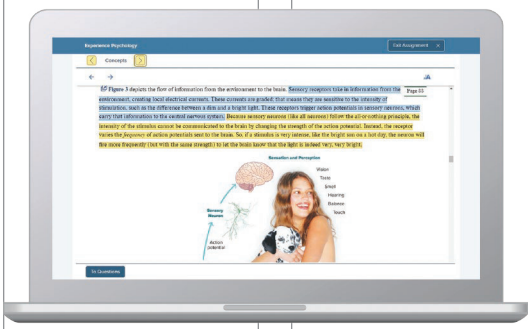

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Acknowledgments

We are all the product of kindness and insight shared with us by others. When I look back on the people of the religions and cultures that shaped me, I feel amazement and am full of gratitude. In some cases, though, I feel apologetic. At the time when I was receiving the gifts from these people, I was often not aware of the quality of the gifts and the generosity of the givers. One example will illustrate this. In high school I took a Latin course. The teacher, who loved to travel, had just been to Rome. One day, instead of teaching the regular material, he spent the time projecting large photos of the Roman Forum and he talked with enthusiasm about the Roman Empire. He said that it had spread roads, bridges, aqueducts, architectural patterns, law, writing, and ideas to as far away as Britain, Syria, and Egypt. Behind my hand, I yawned. Years later, though, I stood in the Roman Forum under a ceremonial arch. I looked at the stone road underneath my feet and the pillars around me. I remembered that teacher and that class. At last, I understood the lesson.

Another example occurred in Asia. My teacher in Japan arranged for me to live for a while in a Zen Buddhist temple in Shikoku. It was headed by a middle-aged monk with kind eyes and a brilliant smile. We meditated every morning before breakfast and every evening after supper. During the daytime, I cleaned the temple floors, moved rocks, and planted trees. The food was vegetarian, and we had a rough and unfussy tea ceremony every day after lunch. At night, I slept in the meditation hall, in the same place where I meditated. The large doors at each end of the hall were kept open all night.

To keep me warm, I was given two white comforters to use as blankets. They were so short, though, that I had to cover the top part of my body with one comforter, and the lower part of my body with the other. Every night, though, they came apart and the middle part of my body froze with cold.

After a few weeks, I told the monk that I had to leave. He looked shocked.

"Don't go. I can tell that you are the type."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He answered with a soulful look in his eyes. "If you stay here just ten years, I guarantee that you will reach enlightenment."

I thought to myself that, from his way of viewing life, this was a great compliment. I was tempted to say, "But in ten years I will have frozen to death." I stayed silent.

"Is there something wrong here?" he asked.

"No," I answered. "It has been wonderful, and so have you." Then I added, "But I must go. You see, the whole world is my temple."

He smiled and nodded that he understood.

To him I now apologize.

Thanks are due to some exceptional teachers. Among them have been Rev. Arthur Daspit, Dr. Jerome Theisen, Dr. Sobharani Basu, Dr. Winfield Nagley, and Dr. Eliot Deutsch. Because a book is not by a single person but is more like a quilt with many parts, thanks go to the development team at Lumina Datamatics, Inc. led by editor Mel Stafford and the production team at SPi Global, led by

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The book is far better as a result of their reviews. Although it is a truism, this book has also been influenced by hundreds of other people who are also owed my sincere thanks. They planted in me seeds that I hope have come to flower.


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CHAPTER 1

Understanding Religion

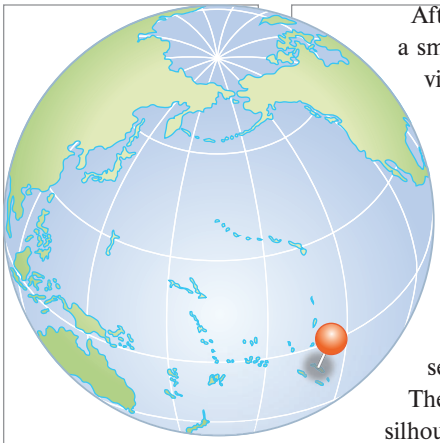
FIRST ENCOUNTER

You have heard from friends how beautiful Tahiti and the Marquesas are. One friend who was there last summer gives you some details.

"You should visit Papeete. I was there for Bastille Day on July 14. People gathered on the long mall near the ocean. There are food stalls all along the waterfront and small tables where you can sit. The stalls sell crepes filled with fruit jam, and they make thin waffles rolled with custard inside, and the people stay up all night listening to guitar music and singing. The cathedral is not far away and has some beautiful stained glass. The island of Moorea has wonderful views of the ocean. And the island of Bora Bora has one of the most beautiful volcanic mountains in the world. It is like Shangri-La. A road runs next to the ocean, and you can use it to bicycle around the island."

"Have you been to the Marquesas, too?" you ask.

"Not yet. I hope to do it, though. I hear that the Marquesas are like what Tahiti was fifty years ago—quiet and peaceful."



After this description, you decide to go first to the Marquesas. You take a small ship to one island, with a plan to stay there a week. Next, you will visit two more of the islands of the Marquesas and visit the tomb of the painter Gauguin. At the end of that tour, you will finally see some of the islands of Tahiti.

The first night in the Marquesas you go out walking after supper. Beyond the small town and its few lights, darkness is intense. You are overcome by the beauty and great number of stars overhead. Turning around, you almost lose your balance. You sit down under a palm tree in order to enjoy the sight. You sit with your back against the tree trunk. The sky is bright blue-black—but so dark that all you see is stars. The only thing close to you is one branch of the palm tree. The branch hangs down in front of you, blocking out some stars. It is a silhouette—a completely black palm branch in front of a starry sky. You stay for an hour, looking in all directions, entranced.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

The painting *Café Terrace at Night* depicts an outdoor café in the evening. About a dozen small round tables stand on an outdoor porch, facing the street. Customers sit at a few of the tables, while most tables are empty. At the back, a waiter in a long white apron stands ready to help. A few passersby walk in the cobblestone street. It is an ordinary evening. Overhead, though, the dark blue sky is crowded with luminous stars. Your eye is immediately drawn to them. Four or five of the stars are so large that they make you think that they seem like flying saucers that come from another world. On this ordinary night, the real world is above.

Vincent van Gogh's *Café Terrace at Night* offers a startling perspective. The world of everyday human life goes on against the background of a vast, starry cosmos.
Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

Painted near the end of its creator's life, the work summarizes the vision of Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890). Van Gogh was an intensely religious man who had planned to be an ordained minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, as was his father. But he struggled with his studies and had a falling-out with church authorities. For a time, he lived as a lay preacher, working with poor miners. When he was 27, his brother Theo, an art dealer, encouraged him to take up painting. Vincent did this with great energy.

Despite this new career in painting, van Gogh continued to think of himself as a minister. If he could not preach in words, he would preach in pictures. His subjects were the simple things of life: trees, sunflowers, a wicker chair, a bridge, his postman, a farmer sowing seeds, peasants eating a meal, workers

bringing in the harvest. His paintings express a quiet awe before the wonder that he sensed in everyday objects and ordinary people. It was his special sense of the sacredness he saw all around him that he wanted to share. Almost as a reminder, in *Café Terrace at Night,* van Gogh painted the simple activity of the town, but with his attention on the stars. The heavenly realm illuminates van Gogh's vision of the sacred character of the entire world.

Key Characteristics of Religion

When people begin their study of religions, they bring ideas from the religion in which they were raised or from the predominant religion of their society. They may assume, for example, that every religion has a sacred book or that it worships a divine being or that it has a set of commandments. Indeed, many religions do share all of these characteristics, but some do not. Shinto, for example, does not have a set of commandments, nor does it preach a moral code; Zen Buddhism does not worship a divine being; and many tribal religions have no written sacred scripture. Nevertheless, we call them all religions. What, then—if not a common set of elements—must be present for something to be called a religion?

An obvious starting point for many scholars is to examine linguistic clues: What are the linguistic roots of the term *religion?* Intriguingly, the word's Latin roots are commonly thought to be *re-,* meaning "again," and *lig-,* meaning "join" or "connect" (as in the word *ligament*).[1] Thus the common translation of *religion* is "to join again," "to reconnect." If this derivation is correct, then the word *religion* suggests the joining of our natural, human world to the sacred world. In classical Latin, the term *religio* meant awe for the gods and concern for proper ritual.[2] We must recognize, though, that the term *religion* arose in Western culture and may not be entirely appropriate when applied across cultures. *Spiritual path,* for example, might be a more fitting designation to refer to other religious systems. We will keep these things in mind when we use the long-established term *religion.*

> Religion [is] a way of life founded upon the apprehension of sacredness in existence.
>
> —Julian Huxley, biologist[3]

People have constantly tried to define religion, and there are thus many notable attempts. These definitions may emphasize a sense of dependence on a higher power, awareness of the passing nature of life, the use of symbolism and ritual, the acceptance of moral rules, or the special structuring of time. Yet reading these definitions makes you aware of their limitations. The definitions often seem inadequate and time-bound, the product of a particular culture or period or discipline. Perhaps, for the time being, it is better simply to be open to many possible definitions, without as yet embracing any single one. After studying the major world religions, we will undoubtedly come closer to our own definition of religion.

The problem of how to define religion continues to plague scholars, who love definition. A definition may apply well to some religions, but not to others. A definition may apply to religions of the past, but may not be suitable for a religion of the present or of the future.

Traditional dictionary definitions of *religion* read something like this: a system of belief that involves worship of a God or gods, prayer, ritual, and a moral code. Yet there are so many exceptions to that definition that it is neither comprehensive nor accurate. So instead of saying that a religion *must* have certain characteristics,

it is more useful to list a series of characteristics that are found in what are commonly accepted as religions. Scholars note that what we ordinarily call religions manifest to some degree the following eight elements[4]:

Belief system Several beliefs fit together into a fairly complete and systematic interpretation of the universe and the human being's place in it. This is also called a *worldview.*

Community The belief system is shared, and its ideals are practiced by a group.

Central myths Stories that express the religious beliefs of a group are retold and often reenacted. Examples of central myths include the major events in the life of the Hindu god Krishna, the enlightenment experience of the Buddha, the exodus of the Israelites from oppression in Egypt, the death and resurrection of Jesus, or Muhammad's escape from Mecca to Medina. Scholars call such central stories *myths.* The term "myth," as scholars use it, is a specialized term. It does not in itself mean (as in popular usage) that the stories are historically untrue, but means only that the stories are central to the religion.

Ritual Beliefs are enacted and made real through ceremonies.

Ethics Rules about human behavior are established. These are often viewed as having been revealed from a supernatural realm, but they can also be viewed as socially generated guidelines.

Characteristic emotional experiences Among the emotional experiences typically associated with religions are dread, guilt, awe, mystery, devotion, conversion, "rebirth," liberation, ecstasy, bliss, and inner peace.

Material expression Religions make use of an astonishing variety of physical elements—statues, paintings, musical compositions, musical instruments, ritual objects, flowers, incense, clothing, architecture, and specific places.

Sacredness A distinction is made between the sacred and the ordinary. Ceremonies often emphasize this distinction through the deliberate use of different language, clothing, and architecture. Certain objects, actions, people, and places may share in the sacredness or express it.

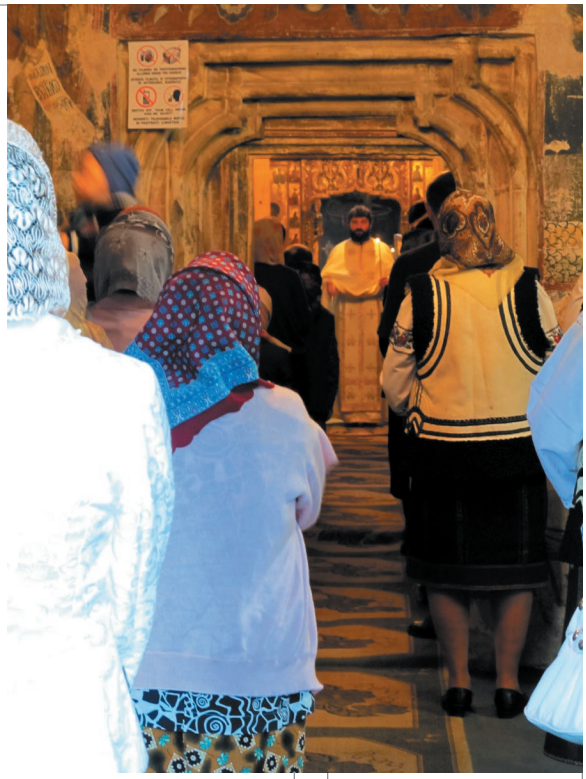
Each of the traditions that you will study in the pages ahead will exhibit most of these characteristics. Yet the religious traditions, like the people who practice them, will manifest the characteristics in different ways and at different times.

The Sacred

All religions are concerned with the deepest level of reality, and for most religions the core or origin of everything is sacred and mysterious. This sense of a mysterious, originating holiness is called by many names: Brahman, Dao, Great Mother, Divine Parent, Great Spirit, Ground of Being, Great Mystery, the Ultimate, the Absolute, the Divine, the Holy. People, however, experience and explain sacred reality in different ways, as you shall see in the chapters that follow.

One familiar term for the sacred reality, particularly in the Western world, is *God,* and **monotheism*** is the term that means a belief in one God. In some systems, the term *God* often carries with it the notion of a Cosmic Person—a divine being with will and intelligence who is just and compassionate and infinite in virtues. God is also called *omnipotent* ("having total power over the universe"). Although God may be said to have personal aspects, all monotheistic religions agree that the reality of God is beyond all categories: God is said to be pure spirit, not fully definable in words. This notion of a powerful God, distinct from the universe, describes a sacredness that is active in the world but also distinct from it. That is, God is **transcendent**—unlimited by the world and all ordinary reality.

In some religions, however, the sacred reality is not viewed as having personal attributes but is more like an energy or mysterious power. Frequently, the sacred is then spoken of as something **immanent** within the universe. In some religions, there is a tendency to speak of the universe not just as having been created but also as a manifestation of the sacred nature itself, in which nothing is separate from the sacred. This view, called **pantheism** (Greek: "all divine"), sees the sacred as being discoverable within the physical world and its processes. In other words, nature itself is holy.



Churchgoers in Romania wait to receive a blessing from a Romanian Orthodox priest. Thomas Hilgers.

Some religions worship the sacred reality in the form of many coexisting gods, a view called **polytheism.** The multiple gods may be fairly separate entities, each in charge of an aspect of reality (such as gods of nature), or they may be multiple manifestations of the same basic sacred reality.

In recent centuries, other views have become prominent. There can be a tendency to deny the existence of any God or gods (**atheism**), to argue that the existence of God cannot be proven (**agnosticism**), or simply to take no position (**nontheism**). (Such tendencies are not strictly modern; they can also be found in some ancient systems, such as Jainism; see Chapter 5.) However, if one sees religion broadly, as a "spiritual path," then even systems based on these three views—particularly if they show other typical characteristics of a religion—can also be called religions.

Religious Symbolism

Religions present views of reality, and most speak of the sacred. Nevertheless, because religions are so varied in their teachings and because the teachings of some religions,

Note: Words shown in boldface type are listed and defined in the "Key Terms" section at the end of each chapter.

when taken at face value, conflict with those of others, it is common to assert that religions express truth *symbolically.* A symbol is something fairly concrete, ordinary, and universal that can represent—and help human beings intensely experience—something of greater complexity. For example, water can represent spiritual cleansing; the sun, health; a mountain, strength; and a circle, eternity. It is common to find symbolism, both deliberate and unconscious, in religious art and ritual.

Symbols and their interpretation have long played an important part in analyzing dreams. It was once thought that dreams were messages from a supernatural realm and that they could provide a key to the future. Although this type of interpretation is less common nowadays, many people still think that dreams are significant. Sigmund Freud introduced his view of the dream as a door into subconscious levels of the mind. He argued that, by understanding dreams symbolically, human beings can understand their own hidden needs and fears. For example, a dream of being lost in a forest might be interpreted as distress over losing one's sense of direction in life. A dream of flying could be interpreted as a need to seek freedom.

Carl Gustav Jung extended the symbol-focused method of dream interpretation to the interpretation of religion. Some religious leaders have been cautious about this approach—popularized by the mythologist Joseph Campbell—lest everything be turned into a symbol and all literal meaning be lost. And specialists in religion oppose the view that two religions are basically the same simply because they share similar symbols.

The mandala, according to Jung, illustrates "the path to the center, to individuation." Nujalee/Shutterstock

Nevertheless, there are many scholars and religious leaders who recognize the importance of symbolic interpretation, and they say that the use of religious symbols may point to some structure that underlies all religions. There is no doubt that many of the same symbolic images and actions appear repeatedly in religions throughout the world. Water, for instance, is used in all sorts of religious rituals: Hindus bathe in the Ganges River; Christians use water for baptism; Jews use water for ritual purification; and Muslims and followers of Shinto wash before prayer. Ashes also have widespread use among religious traditions in order to suggest death and the spirit world. Ashes are used by tribal religions in dance ceremonies, by Hindu ascetics to represent self-discipline and detachment, and by some Christians, whose foreheads are marked by ashes in observance of Ash Wednesday. Likewise, religious buildings are placed on hills or are raised on mounds and reached by stairs—all suggesting the symbol of the holy mountain, where the sacred can be encountered.

We also see in various religions the recurrence of a symbolic story of transformation. A state of original purity degenerates into pollution or disorder, or a battle to fight disorder culminates in a sacrificial death that results in a renewed sense of purity and order. Scholars point out, too, that religions frequently use words in a symbolic way. For example, the divine is often described as existing "up above," insight can be "awakened," and a person can feel "reborn."

When viewed this way, religious symbols, myths, and terminology at times suggest a universal symbolic "language" that all religions speak. Those who are interested in religious symbolism hope that understanding the "language" of symbols will help uncover what is universally important in all religions.

In Thailand, spirits of the land are honored with a spirit house and flowers in a grove of palm trees.
joloei/Shutterstock

Speculations on the Sources of Religion

Why does religion exist? The most evident answer is that it serves many human needs. One of our primary needs is having a means to deal with our mortality. Because we and our loved ones must die, we have to face the pain of death and the inevitable questions it brings about whether there is any soul, afterlife, or rebirth. People often look to religion for the answers. Religion can help us cope with death, and religious rituals can offer us comfort. Human beings also desire good health, a regular supply of food, and the conditions (such as suitable weather) necessary to ensure these things. Before the development of modern science, human beings looked to religion to bring about these practical benefits, and they often still do.

Temples such as this help to create a place for honoring indigenous gods. Chris Hepburn/Photodisc/Getty Images

Human beings are also social by nature, and religion offers companionship and the fulfillment that can come from belonging to a group. Moreover, religion often provides a structure for caring for the needy.

Human beings have a need to seek out and create artistic forms of expression. Religion stimulates art, music, and dance, and it has been the inspirational source of some of the most imaginative buildings in the world. Religion not only makes use of multiple arts, but it also integrates them into a living, often beautiful whole.

Perhaps the most basic function of religion is to respond to our natural wonder about ourselves and the cosmos—our musings on a starry night. Religion helps us relate to the unknown universe around us by answering the basic questions of who we are, where we come from, and where we are going.

Issues relating to the origins of religion have engaged thinkers with new urgency ever since the dawn of the age of science. Many have suggested that religion is a human attempt to feel more secure in an unfeeling universe. The English anthropologist E. B. Tylor (1832–1917), for example, believed religion was rooted in spirit worship. He noted how frequently religions see "spirits" as having some control over natural forces, and how commonly religions see those who die—the ancestors—as passing into the spirit world. Fear of the power of all these spirits, he thought, made it necessary for people to find ways to please their ancestors. Religion offered such ways, thus allowing the living to avoid the spirits' dangerous power and to convert that power into a force that worked for the good of human beings. Similarly, the Scottish anthropologist James Frazer (1854–1941), author of *The Golden Bough,* saw the origins of religion in early attempts by human beings to influence nature, and he identified religion as an intermediate stage between magic and science.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) theorized that belief in a God or gods arises from the long-lasting impressions made on adults by their childhood experiences, in which

their parents play a major part. These adults then project their sense of their parents into their image of their God or gods. According to Freud, these experiences—of fear as well as of security—are the basis for adults' attempts to deal with the anxieties of a complicated present and an unknown future. Freud argued that since a major function of religion is to help human beings feel secure in an unsafe universe, religion becomes less necessary as human beings gain greater physical and mental security. Freud's major works on religion include *The Future of an Illusion, Moses and Monotheism,* and *Totem and Taboo.*

Another psychologist, William James (1842–1910), came to his ideas on religion via an unusual course of study. Although he began his higher education as a student of art, he made a radical switch to the study of medicine. Finally, when he recognized the influence of the mind on the body, he was led to the study of psychology and then of religion, which he saw as growing out of psychological needs. James viewed religion as a positive way of fulfilling these needs and praised its positive influence on the lives of individuals. He wrote that religion brings "a new zest" to living, provides "an assurance of safety," and leads to a "harmonious relation with the universe."[5]

The German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) argued in his book *The Idea of the Holy* that religions emerge when people experience the aspect of reality that is

Who are we, where do we come from, and where are we going? Each religion offers answers to these questions, and graveyards often hint at believers' visions of what happens after death.
Thomas Hilgers

essentially mysterious. He called it the "mystery that causes trembling and fascination" (*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*). In general, we take our existence for granted and live with little wonder. Occasionally, though, something disturbs our ordinary view of reality. For example, a strong manifestation of nature—such as lightning or a violent thunderstorm—may startle us. It is an aspect of reality that is frightening, forcing us to tremble (*tremendum*). But it also brings a feeling of fascination (*fascinans*). The emotional result is what Otto called *numinous awe.*[6] He pointed out how often religious art depicts that which is terrifying—such as Durga, a powerful Hindu goddess.[7]

Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), an early disciple of Freud, broke with his mentor because of fundamental differences of interpretation, particularly about religion. In his books *Modern Man in Search of a Soul, Psychology and Alchemy,* and *Memories, Dreams, Reflections,* Jung described religion as something that grew out of the individual's need to arrive at personal fulfillment—which Jung called *individuation.* According to Jung, many religious insignia can be seen as symbols of personal integration and human wholeness: the circle is an unending line, the cross is made of lines that join at the center, and the sacred diagram of the mandala is often a circle within or enclosing a square. Jung called such signs "the path to the center, to individuation."[8] He pointed out that as people age, they can make a healthy use of religion to understand their place in the universe, and they can use it to prepare for death. For Jung, religion is a noble human response to the complexity and depth of reality.

The skeptical view of Karl Marx (1818–1883) about religion is often mentioned. Yet it may have been gentler than that of the Russian and Chinese forms of Marxism that emerged from it. While many types of Marxism have been strongly atheistic, Marx himself was not so militant. He indeed called religion an opiate of the masses. Yet for him religion had both a bad and a good side. Religion, he thought, emerged naturally because people felt poor, powerless, and alienated from their work. On the other hand, Marx also thought that religion gave great consolation, for it spoke of a suffering-free life after death. For Marx, religion was a symptom of the poverty and inadequacy of modern society. The need for religion, he thought, would dissolve when society improved.

Some recent theories do not look specifically at religion. However, their wide-ranging insights are applied in the study of the origin of religions, as well as in many other fields. Among these theoretical approaches are structuralism and post-structuralism, along with the technique of deconstruction. You will look at some of these ideas and applications later.

Various scholars have attempted to identify "stages" in the development of religions. Austrian ethnographer and philologist Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954) argued that all humankind once believed in a single High God and that to this simple monotheism later beliefs in lesser gods and spirits were added. The reverse has also been suggested—namely, that polytheism led to monotheism. Influenced by the notion of evolution, some people have speculated that religions "evolve" naturally from **animism** (a worldview that sees all elements of nature as being filled with spirit or spirits) to polytheism and then to monotheism. Critics of this view feel it is biased in favor of monotheism, in part because it is a view originally suggested by Christian scholars, who presented their belief system as the most advanced.

Scholars today hesitate to speak of any "evolution" from one form of religion to another. To apply the biological notion of evolution to human belief systems seems biased, oversimple, and speculative. Even more important, such a point of view leads to subjective judgments that one religion is more "highly evolved" than another—a shortsightedness that has kept many people from appreciating the unique insights and contributions of every religion. Consequently, the focus of religious studies has moved from the study of religion in general to the study of individual religions, a field that assumes that all religions are equally worthy of study.

PATTERNS AMONG RELIGIONS

When we study religions in a comparative and historical sense, we are not looking to validate them or to disprove them or to enhance our own belief or practice—as we might if we were studying our personal religious tradition. Instead, we want to comprehend the particular religions as thoroughly as possible and to understand the experience of people within each religion. Part of that process of understanding leads us to see patterns of similarity and difference among religions.

Although we do look for patterns, we must recognize that these patterns are not conceptual straitjackets. Religions, especially those with long histories and extensive followings, are usually quite complex. Furthermore, religions are not permanent theoretical constructs. Rather, they are constantly in a process of change—influenced by religious leaders, governments, historical events, changing technology, and the shifting values of the cultures in which they exist.

Religion is the substance of culture, and culture the form of religion.
—Paul Tillich, theologian[9]

First Pattern: Views of the World and Life

Religions must provide answers to the great questions that people ask. How did the universe come into existence, does it have a purpose, and will it end? What is time, and how should we make use of it? What should be our relationship to the world of nature? Why do human beings exist? How do we reach fulfillment, transformation, or salvation? Why is there suffering in the world, and how should we deal with it? What happens when we die? What should we hold as sacred? The questions do not vary, but the answers do.

Given the great variety in their worldviews, religions, not surprisingly, define differently the nature of sacred reality, the universe, the natural world, time, and human purpose. Religions also differ in their attitudes toward the role of words in expressing the sacred and in their relations to other religious traditions. By examining different views on these concepts, we will have further bases for comparison that will lead us to a more complete understanding of the world's religions.

The nature of sacred reality Some religions, as you have seen, speak of the sacred as transcendent, existing primarily in a realm beyond the everyday world. In other religions, though, sacred reality is spoken of as being immanent—that is, it is within nature and human beings and can be experienced as energy or holiness. Sometimes the sacred is viewed as having personal attributes, while elsewhere it is seen as an impersonal entity. And in certain

religious traditions, particularly in some forms of Buddhism, it is hard to point to a sacred reality at all. Such facts raise the question as to whether "the sacred" exists outside ourselves or if it is better to speak of the sacred simply as "what people hold to be sacred."

The nature of the universe Some religions see the universe as having been begun by an intelligent, personal Creator who continues to guide the universe according to a cosmic plan. Other religions view the universe as being eternal; that is, having no beginning or end. The implications of these two positions are quite important to what is central in a religion and to how the human being acts in regard to this central belief. If the universe is created, especially by a transcendent deity, the center of sacredness is the Creator rather than the universe, but human beings imitate the Creator by changing and perfecting the world. If, however, the universe is eternal, the material universe itself is sacred and perfect, and it requires no change.

The human attitude toward nature At one end of the spectrum, some religions or religious schools see nature as the realm of evil forces that must be overcome. For them, nature is gross and contaminating, existing in opposition to the nonmaterial world of the spirit—a view, known as **dualism,** held by some forms of Christianity, Jainism, and Hinduism. At the other end of the spectrum, as in Daoism and Shinto, nature is considered to be sacred and needs no change. Other religions, such as Judaism and Islam, take a middle ground, holding that the natural world originated from a divine action, but that human beings are called upon to continue to shape the world.

A Muslim student studies the Qur'an.
Eric Lafforgue/Art in All of Us/Corbis News/Getty Images

Time Religions that emphasize a creation, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, tend to see time as being linear, moving in a straight line from the beginning of the universe to its end. Being limited and unrepeatable, time is important. In some other religions, such as Buddhism, however, time is cyclical. The universe simply moves through endless changes, which repeat themselves over grand periods of time. In such a religion, time is not as crucial or "real" because, ultimately, the universe is not moving to some final point. Consequently, appreciating the present may be more important than being oriented to the future.

Human purpose In some religions, human beings are part of a great divine plan, and although each person is unique, individual meaning comes also from the cosmic plan. The cosmic plan may be viewed as a struggle between forces of good and evil, with human beings at the center of the stage and the forces of good and evil at work within

them. Because human actions are so important, they must be guided by a prescribed moral code that is meant to be internalized by the individual. This view is significant in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In contrast, other religions do not see human life in similarly dramatic terms, and the individual is only part of much larger realities. In Daoism and Shinto, a human being is a small part of the natural universe, and in Confucianism, an individual is part of the family and of society. Such religions place less emphasis on individual rights and more emphasis on how the individual can maintain harmony with the whole. Actions are not guided by an internalized moral system but by society, tradition, and a sense of mutual obligation.

Words and scriptures In some religions, the sacred is to be found in written and spoken words, and for those religions that use writing and create scriptures, what is important is the reading, copying, and using of sacred words in ceremony, music, and art. You see the importance of words in indigenous religions—which primarily pass on their traditions orally. You also see it in Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Other religions—such as Daoism and Zen Buddhism—show a certain mistrust of words. They instead value silence and wordless meditation. Although Zen and Daoism utilize language in their practices and have produced significant literature, each of these religions finds language limited in expressing the richness or totality of reality.

Exclusiveness and inclusiveness Some religions emphasize that the sacred is distinct from the world and that order must be imposed by separating good from bad, true from false. In that view, to share in sacredness means separation—for example, withdrawal from certain foods, places, people, practices, or beliefs. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are among the religions that have been generally exclusive, making it impossible to belong to more than one religion at the same time. In contrast, other religions have stressed inclusiveness. Frequently, such religions also have emphasized social harmony, the inadequacy of language, or the relativity of truth, and they have accepted belief in many deities. Their inclusiveness has led them to admit many types of beliefs and practices into their religions, to the point that it is possible for an individual to belong to several religions—such as Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism—all at the same time. Such inclusiveness has led to misunderstanding at times, as in the case of a Christian missionary having "converted" a Japanese follower only to find the new convert still visiting a Shinto shrine.

Second Pattern: Focus of Beliefs and Practices

Realizing the limitations of all generalizing, you nonetheless might gain some perspective by examining the orientations exhibited by individual religions. When you look at the world's dominant religions, you see in their conception and location of the sacred three basic orientations.[10]

Sacramental orientation The sacramental orientation emphasizes carrying out rituals and ceremonies regularly and correctly as the path to salvation. In some religions, correct ritual is even believed to influence the processes of nature.

All religions have some degree of ritual, but the ceremonial tendency is predominant, for example, in most indigenous religions, in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christianity, in Vedic Hinduism, and in Vajrayana Buddhism. Making the Christian sign of the cross, for example, is done in a certain way: only with the right hand, beginning with a touch on the forehead, then on one's chest, and finally on each shoulder.[11]

Prophetic orientation The prophetic orientation stresses that contact with the sacred is ensured by proper belief and by adherence to moral rules. This orientation also implies that a human being may be an important intermediary between the believer and the sacred. For example, a prophet may speak to believers on behalf of the sacred. Prophetic orientation is a prominent aspect of Judaism, Protestant Christianity, and Islam, which all see the sacred as being transcendent but personal. The television crusades of evangelistic ministers are good examples of the prophetic orientation in action.

Mystical orientation The mystical orientation seeks union with a reality greater than oneself, such as with God, the process of nature, the universe, or reality as a whole. There are often techniques—such as seated meditation—for lessening the sense of one's individual identity. These techniques help the individual to experience a greater unity. The mystical orientation is a prominent aspect of Upanishadic Hinduism, Daoism, and some schools of Buddhism. (Master Kusan [1909–1983], a Korean teacher of Buddhism, described the disappearance of self in the enlightenment experience of unity with this memorable question: "Could a snowflake survive inside a burning flame?"[12]) Although the mystical orientation is more common in religions that stress the immanence of the sacred or that are nontheistic, it is an important but less prominent tendency in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well.

Any one of these three orientations may be dominant in a religion, yet the other two orientations might also be found in the same religion to a lesser extent and possibly be subsumed into a different purpose. For example, ceremony can be utilized to help induce mystical experience, as in Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, Japanese Shingon Buddhism, Vajrayana Buddhism, Daoism, and even Zen Buddhism, which has a strongly ritualistic aspect of its own.

Third Pattern: Views of Male and Female

Because gender is such an important part of human life, religions have had much to say about the roles of men and women, both on earth and in the divine spheres. Because of differences in how religions view these differences, they may constitute another underlying pattern that we can investigate when studying religions. Thus, conceptions of what is male and what is female provide another basis for comparing religions.

In many influential religions today, male imagery and control seem to dominate. In them, the sacred is considered male, and the full-time religious specialists are frequently male. Yet this may not always have been the case. Tantalizing evidence suggests that female divinities once played an important role in many cultures and religions.

Deeper Insights

MULTIPLE IMAGES OF THE FEMALE

Religions frequently have been criticized for the dominant places of males, both in religious leadership and in images of the sacred. While there is truth to such criticism, scholarly attention helps us to note the multitude of female roles and images to be found among religions. Consider these examples:

- In India, the divine is worshiped in its female aspects as the Great Mother (also known as Devi) or as other female deities.
- In Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, Mary, the mother of Jesus, receives special veneration; she is held to possess superhuman powers and is a strong role model for women's behavior.
- In the Mahayana Buddhist pantheon, Guanyin (Kannon) is worshiped as a female ideal of mercy.
- In Japan, the premier Shinto divinity is the goddess Amaterasu, protector of the imperial family. In contrast to many other religious systems, the goddess Amaterasu is associated with the sun, and a male god is associated with the moon.
- In Korea and Japan, shamans are frequently female.
- In Africa, India, and elsewhere, some tribal cultures remain matriarchal.

Female deities, such as Guanyin, are honored in many religions.
SPmemory/iStock/Getty Images

- In Wicca—a contemporary restoration of ancient, nature-based religion—devotees worship a female deity they refer to as the Goddess.
- Symbolic forms of the female divine are still prominent in the rites of several religions. Common symbols include the moon, the snake, spirals and labyrinths, the egg, ***yoni*** (symbolic vagina), water, and earth. These symbolic representations of the female suggest generation, growth, nurturance, intuition, and wisdom.

The most significant female deity was particularly associated with fertility and motherhood and has been known by many names, such as Astarte, Asherah, Aphrodite, and Freia (the origin of the word *Friday*). Statues of a Mother-Goddess have been found throughout Europe, as well as in the Middle East.

Is it possible that female images of the divine were once more common and that female religious leadership once played a more important role? It has been argued that male dominance in religion became more common as the result of the growth of city-states, which needed organized defense. In this argument, city-states elevated the status of men because of their fighting ability. In Israel, worship of a female deity was stamped out by prophets who preached exclusive worship of the male god Yahweh and by kings who wanted loyalty paid to them and their offspring. We read passages like this in the Hebrew scriptures: "They abandoned the Lord and worshipped Baal and the Astartes. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel" (Judg. 2:13–14).[13] The Christian New Testament contains words that sometimes have been interpreted to mean that women should not play a prominent role

Increasingly, positions of religious authority are being exercised by women. Here a female priest of the Church of England presides at a Eucharistic service.
Yui Mok/PA Wire/AP Images

in public worship: "I do not allow them to teach or to have authority over men; they must keep quiet. For Adam was created first, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and broke God's law" (1 Tim. 2:12–14).[14] In Asia, Confucianism has been distrustful of women in general and has ordinarily refused them leadership roles. In Buddhism, despite recognition in scripture that women can be enlightened, in practice the great majority of leaders have been men.[15]

A century ago, great numbers of people across the world had little experience of the different beliefs and practices in other regions. Yet radio, television, the internet, cell phones, and other technologies have changed this. Thus it is no surprise that long-established customs regarding gender should now be challenged and changed.

Such changes may not come easily. In some religious traditions, the possibility of changes can produce a rift. This is happening today—for example, in the Christian Anglican Communion and several other Christian denominations. You can expect similar disruptions in other religious traditions, as technological changes bring knowledge of different cultures.

Knowledge of other cultures will continue to grow, and the study of other religions will contribute to this process. Such study will open people's eyes not only to the gender expectations in religions of the past, but also to today's evolving practices. This is nudging several religious traditions to accept women in areas where in earlier centuries they were not expected to have a role. There are many resultant tensions—those in Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam are currently receiving publicity. However, you can expect that women will be widely successful in receiving full acceptance in roles of leadership.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Religion has influenced so many areas of human life that it is a subject not only of religious studies but of other disciplines, as well. As you have seen, the social sciences have long studied religion. More recently, linguistics, literary theory, and cultural studies have offered new ways of seeing and interpreting religion.

There are other approaches, too. You can focus your study on a single religion or look at several religions at the same time. Believers may opt to explore their own religion "from the inside." On the other hand, nonbelievers may want to concentrate on the answers that several religions have given to a single question, such as the purpose of human life. Following is a list of some common approaches to religion:

Psychology Psychology (Greek: "soul study") deals with human mental states, emotions, and behaviors. Despite being a fairly young discipline, psychology has taken a close look at religion because it offers such rich human "material" to explore. A few areas of study include religious influences on child rearing, human behavior, gender expectations, and self-identity; group dynamics in religion; trance states; and comparative mystical experiences.

Mythology The study of religious tales, texts, and art has uncovered some universal patterns. Mythology is full of the recurrent images and themes found in religions, such as the tree of knowledge, the ladder to heaven, the fountain of life, the labyrinth, the secret garden, the holy mountain, the newborn child, the suffering hero, initiation, rebirth, the cosmic battle, the female spirit guide, and the aged teacher of wisdom.

Philosophy Philosophy (Greek: "love of wisdom") in some ways originated from a struggle with religion. Although both arenas pose many of the same questions, philosophy does not automatically accept the answers given by any religion to the great questions. Instead, philosophy seeks answers independently. Following reason rather than religious authority, it tries to fit its answers into a rational, systematic whole. Some questions philosophy asks are these: Does human life have any purpose? Is there an afterlife? How should we live? Philosophy is essentially the work of individuals, while religion is a community experience. Philosophy tries to avoid emotion, while religion often nurtures it. And philosophy is carried on without ritual, while religion naturally expresses itself in ceremony.

Theology Theology (Greek: "study of the divine") is the study of topics as they relate to one particular religious tradition. A theologian is an individual who usually studies her or his own belief system. For example, a person who is in training to become a Christian minister might study Christian theology.

The arts Comparing patterns in religious art makes an intriguing study. For example, religious architecture often uses symmetry, height, and archaic styles to suggest the sacred. Religious music frequently employs a slow pace and repeated rhythms, which induce tranquillity. Religious art often incorporates gold, haloes, equilateral designs, and circles, which suggest otherworldliness and perfection.

Archeology, such as at this excavation in China, now provides insight into past religious and cultural practice.
Sovfoto/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

Anthropology Anthropology (Greek: "study of human beings") has been interested in how religions influence the ways different cultures deal with issues such as family interaction, individual roles, property rights, marriage, child rearing, social hierarchies, and division of labor.

Archeology Archeology (Greek: "study of origins") explores the remains of earlier civilizations. In its work, it often uncovers the remains of religious buildings from ancient cultures. When possible, archeologists translate writings left by these earlier people, much of which can be religious in origin. Archeology occasionally sheds light on how one religion has influenced another. For example, the excavation of a cuneiform library at Nineveh revealed a story (in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*) that is similar to—and may have influenced—the biblical story of Noah and the flood. Archeology can also reveal religious material that enables scholars to decipher an entire writing system. For example, the discovery in the early nineteenth century of the Rosetta Stone—because it contained the same inscription in three different scripts—helped lead researchers to unlock the meaning of Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Linguistics and literary theory The study of linguistics has sometimes involved a search for patterns that may underlie all languages. Linguistics has also suggested general patterns and structures that may underlie something broader than language alone: human consciousness. This interest in underlying patterns has brought new attention to the possible structures behind religious tales, rituals, and other expressions of religious beliefs and attitudes. Linguistics has also examined religious language for its implications and often-hidden values. (Consider, for example, the various implications of the religious words *sin* and *sacred*.) Literary theory, on the other hand, has studied the written texts of

religions as reflections of the cultural assumptions and values that produced the texts. Literary theory, for example, has pointed out some of the ways in which religions have treated women and minorities as different from more dominant groups. Literary theory also has shown that non-written material—such as religious statues, paintings, songs, television shows, and films—can be viewed as forms of communication and that they can be studied in many ways that written texts are studied.

The use of theory for the study of religion is not limited to the fields of linguistics and literature. In fact, an increasing number of academic disciplines are studying religions as part of the human search for understanding. Thus a scholar in the field of art may see and interpret religions as forms of art. Specialists in psychology may interpret religions primarily as expressions of individual human needs. Sociologists may see religions as ways of shaping groups and of promoting and maintaining group identity. The viewpoints of these and other disciplines can also be adopted by scholars of religion as keys to understanding the complexities of religions.

The Study of Religion

Originally, religions were studied primarily within their own religious traditions. The goal of this approach was that faith and devotion would be illuminated by intellectual search. Although this approach continues in denominational schools, the study of religion began to take new form two centuries ago.

There were several causes for the change. First, the early scientific movement accepted belief in a creator-god, but it rejected belief in miracles, and it demanded scientific proof for beliefs. The emerging scientific movement thus forced people to revise some of their traditional religious beliefs. Second, because of the growth of historical studies, academic experts began to question the literal truth of some statements and stories presented in the scriptures. (For example, did the tale of Noah and the Ark actually happen, or was it meant mainly to be a teaching parable whose real purpose was moral?) Third, because of the growth of trade and travel, even faraway cultures were becoming known. Their religions proved to be not only colorful but also wise. The morality taught by Buddhism, the sense of duty found in Confucianism, the love of nature taught in Shinto—all these seemed admirable. Yet what did this mean for other religions? In the next two centuries this question intensified, as more information became available through history, anthropology, and sociology. Scriptures and ritual texts were translated, and anthropologists began to have direct experience of even small and rare religions.

In the university world, the study of religions was at first fragmented. The great questions of religion were studied in philosophy departments. Other aspects of religion could be found in departments of history, psychology, anthropology, and art. There was as yet no department of religious studies that unified these interests.

The fragmented academic approach changed in the middle of the twentieth century, as departments of religious studies were formed and became a regular part of academic life. At first it was uncertain if these departments of religion would survive. However, the popularity of some courses in religion—particularly those in

world religions, death and dying, and the psychology of religion—demonstrated the worth of having separate, permanent departments of religious studies.

The study of religion has further expanded, and in the present century we are able to examine religions from additional and sometimes unexpected points of view. For example, one of the most provocative new perspectives is neurology. Are religious beliefs and practices a part of our genetic makeup, or are they merely manufactured by cultures and learned by people? Is a religious experience the intrusion of a sacred being on individual consciousness, or is it the activity of a particular chemical in the brain? Similar questions may be asked about morality. Are moral demands a part of our physical constitution, or are they simply rules taught by society? As academic disciplines expand and additional disciplines emerge, new aspects of religion will be discovered.

Recent Theories

Recent thinking about religion has been influenced by the field studies of anthropologists and other behavioral scientists. Archeology has also contributed much to newer thinking.

At one time it was thought that religions were best traced to a "great founder," such as Moses, the Buddha, Jesus, or Muhammad. This is no longer the common approach. Rather, sociologists have pointed out how religions seem to emerge from whole tribes and peoples. One of the first thinkers to speak of this was the French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917).[16] He noted how religions reinforce the values of groups, and his approach was empirical, based on research. His approach has been continued by later French thinkers, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) did fieldwork in Brazil, where he studied the mythology of tribal groups. There he began to see great similarities in the myths of indigenous peoples. This led him to see large structural similarities among kinship patterns, languages, and social relations. He theorized that structures in the human mind formed these similarities. His thought, called **structuralism,** has influenced the study of religion, particularly regarding taboos, marriage, and laws about food purity.

A countermovement, called **post-structuralism,** soon emerged. It emphasized the individuality of each experience and argued that belief in grand structures may keep investigators from appreciating that individuality. Michel Foucault (1926–1984) is thought of as its primary exponent. His work especially focused on those marginalized by society—prisoners, medical patients, and the insane.

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) began with a structuralist approach, but he moved away from grand theories in order to focus on language, meaning, and interpretation. He is known for going behind the ordinary interpretation of texts in order to discover new cultural meanings. This method is known as **deconstruction.** In the area of religion, it can be quite effective. For example, traditional religious texts can be looked at from many new points of view. For example, you can look at scriptural passages to investigate underlying attitudes toward the treatment of women, slaves, indigenous people, children, and the old. Deconstructive principles can also be used to investigate religious art, architecture, and music.

Increasingly, religious investigation relies on anthropologists who have lived with native peoples and learned their languages. One researcher of this type was

Conflict in Religion

RELIGIOUS BLENDS

A book like this has to treat religions as somewhat separate. While there is truth to that separateness, it is also true that religions are constantly borrowing from each other. One example that we know of occurs in the Catholic practice of Mexico. Our Lady of Guadalupe is not only one form of the Virgin Mary; she is also a continuation of the pre-Christian deity Tonantzin, who was once worshiped at the modern-day site of the main church of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Other native beliefs and practices continue in the Christianity of South America. For example, the veneration of earlier nature deities has influenced the current veneration of saints. In Zen Buddhism, there is influence from Daoism and Confucianism; the Daoist love of nature appears in Zen flower arrangement and garden design, and the Confucian respect for a teacher appears in the obedience given to a Zen master. The Shiite Islam of Iraq contains practices that can be traced back to Zoroastrianism. In recent times, Scientology seems to have elements very similar to those found in Hinduism and Buddhism, and the Vietnamese religion of Cao Dai unites beliefs of Asian religions with elements of Christianity and spiritism. As we study the religions of the world, we must remember this tendency to borrow and blend, which enriches them all.

E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1902–1973), who lived among the Azande and Nuer people in Africa. Another esteemed anthropologist was Clifford Geertz (1926–2006), who lived in Indonesia and Morocco and wrote about practices there. Geertz championed what he called *thick description*—a description not only of the appearances of rituals and religious objects, but also of their meaning for the practitioners.

The so-called phenomenological approach to religious studies has been very popular. This approach emphasizes direct experiential research to gather data. It seeks to understand religious acts and objects from the consciousness of the believers,

Shamans, who are sometimes female, work to end sickness and to learn the future. Dance, as here in Mongolia, is frequently used as an element of healing.
Kevin Frayer/Stringer/Getty Images

Deeper Insight

DO RELIGIONS OPPOSE SCIENCE?

It is common to hear that science and religion are in conflict. The usual suspects are brought out. One is the condemnation that religious leaders made of the astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), who held that the earth revolves around the sun. A second example is the early rejection by ministers and priests of the theory of evolution.

On the other hand, there are examples that show the opposite. For example, the numerical system of dating the years that is now used throughout the world was proposed by a monk. Also, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543)—the person who argued during the Renaissance that the earth revolves around the sun—was a cleric and cathedral canon. In addition, the modern calendar, which is used today throughout the world, is called the Gregorian calendar. Its name comes from the fact that it was promulgated in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII.

Some religions, in fact, have been quite open to investigation of the physical world. Confucianists in seventeenth-century China welcomed outsiders who could teach them about astronomy, mathematics, geometry, and clock-making. Daoists showed a similar openness to empirical observation because they based their religious system on the major stars and on the ever-present movement that they saw in the changing seasons, the winds, and the flow of water. Buddhists, especially in China, although they had their own vision of the universe, were open to new conceptions of the world. This is equally true today, when many Buddhists say that there need be no conflict between science and religion.

To resolve the seeming conflict, it has been argued that science and religion rule over two separate domains. Science describes the physical world, while religion tells us about the less-visible world of love and moral rules. There are also, of course, other explanations of the differences. Commentators say that in cases of apparent conflict, we should recognize that religious statements can sometimes be interpreted symbolically, rather than literally. They thus hope to derive insight from both realms. Increasingly, conversation is taking the place of conflict.

and it tries to avoid projecting the researcher's beliefs and expectations into the data. Specialists of this type have sometimes focused on one religion. Contemporary examples are Wendy Doniger (O'Flaherty, b. 1940) and Diana Eck (b. 1945). Both of them have specialized in Hinduism, but their writings and other work have incorporated other world religions.

KEY CRITICAL ISSUES

The research-based approach to the study of religions, although valuable, brings problems and questions. Are we genuinely listening to the voices of the practitioners, or are we only paying attention to the experiences of the observer? Can outsiders be truly objective, or are outside observers merely imposing the theories of their own culture? Doesn't scientific observation contaminate the people and culture being observed? Could informants give deliberately false answers to questions that they think are inappropriate? (They do.)

Moral questions also arise. Does the research arise from respect for a different culture and religion, or is it just a more contemporary form of domination and colonialism? Also, doesn't research introduce new ideas and new objects—such as cell phones, recording devices, and different clothing? Don't these objects alter cultures that may have been unchanged for centuries?

In addition, research has revealed to investigators the enormous variety within major religions. Because some major religions have blended with earlier religions to produce unique hybrids, can we really speak of single great religions, such as "Buddhism" or "Christianity"? Do they really exist, or are they just useful fictions?

Some scholars also have pointed out that the religious experience of women within a religious tradition may be quite different from that of men. In Islam, for example, women's religious experience may be centered primarily in the home, while men's may be centered more on the mosque. The religious experience will be quite different, also, for a child, a teenager, or an adult. In addition, the varying meaning of being a Buddhist or a Christian or a Hindu will depend considerably on the culture and the period. Think, for example, of the difference of being a Christian in first-century Rome and twenty-first-century North America, or of being a Hindu in medieval India and modern-day New York City.

Although this book obviously has not abandoned the category of religions, it tries to show that religions are not separate and unchanging. It sees world religions as grand patterns, but it recognizes that we are true to these religions only when we see the great diversity and change within them.

WHY STUDY THE MAJOR RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD?

Because religions are so wide-ranging and influential, study of them helps round out a person's education. It also enriches your experience of many other related subjects. Let's now consider some additional pleasures and rewards of studying religions.

Insight into religious traditions Each religion is interesting in its own right as a complex system of values, relationships, personalities, and human creativity.

Insight into what religions share The study of religions requires sympathy and objectivity. While it is true that being a believer of a particular religion brings a special insight that an outsider cannot have, it is also true that an outsider can appreciate things that are not always obvious to the insider. This is particularly true of shared patterns of imagery, belief, and practice.

Insight into people Understanding a person's religious background tells you more about that person's attitudes and values. Such understanding is valuable for successful human relations—in both public life and private life.

Tolerance and appreciation of differences Because human beings are emotional beings, their religions can sometimes allow inflamed feelings to override common decency. As we see daily, religions can be employed to justify immense cruelty. Examining the major religions of the world helps you to develop tolerance toward people of varying religious traditions. In a multicultural world, tolerance of differences is valuable, but enjoyment of differences is even better. Variety is a fact of nature, and the person who can enjoy variety—in religion and elsewhere—is a person who will never be tired of life.

Intellectual questioning Religions make claims about truth, yet some of their views are not easy to reconcile. For example, doesn't the theory of reincarnation of the soul, as found in Hinduism, conflict with the teaching of several

An intense experience of mystery is what one has to regard as the ultimate religious experience.

—Joseph Campbell[17]

other religions that a soul has only one lifetime on earth? And how can the notion of an immortal soul be reconciled with the Buddhist teaching that nothing has a permanent essence or soul? We must also ask questions about tolerance itself. Must we be tolerant of intolerance, even if it is preached by a religion? Questions such as these arise naturally when we study religions side by side. Such study sharpens our perception of the claims of religions and invites us to examine important intellectual questions more closely.

Insight into everyday life Religious influences can be found everywhere in modern culture—not just within religious buildings. Politicians make use of religious images, for example, when they speak of a "new covenant" with voters. Specific religions and religious denominations take public positions on moral issues, such as abortion and war. Our weekly routines are regulated by the originally Jewish practice of a six-day work week followed by a day of rest, and the European-American school calendar is generally divided into two by the originally Christian Christmas holidays. Even comic strips use religious imagery: animals crowded onto a wooden boat, a man holding two tablets, angels on clouds, a person meditating on a mountaintop. The study of religions is valuable for helping us recognize and appreciate the religious influences that are everywhere.

Appreciation for the arts If you are attracted to painting, sculpture, music, or architecture, you will be drawn to the study of religions. Because numerous

A road can be a powerful symbol of finding direction in one's life.
Eloi_Omella/E+/Getty Images

TRAVEL AND PILGRIMAGE

One of the most universal religious practices is pilgrimage—travel undertaken by believers to important religious sites. You do not have to belong to a specific religion to benefit from this ancient practice. Travel to religious sites is a wonderful way to experience directly the varieties of human belief, and it is especially memorable at times of religious celebration. Travel that is not specifically religious can also offer similar benefits, because it allows you to experience religious art and architecture in the places and contexts for which they were created.

Travel programs abound. Many colleges offer study-abroad programs, including summer courses that incorporate travel, as well as semester- and year-long study programs. Scholarships and other financial aid may be available for these programs. Large travel companies also offer summer tours for students, particularly to Europe and Asia. These companies are able to offer affordable tours by using charter flights and affordable hotel accommodations. For students, programs such as these often make an excellent first trip abroad. Younger travelers touring on their own can also join a youth hostel association, such as Hostelling International, and make use of a worldwide network of inexpensive youth hostels. Older travelers can take advantage of organizations such as Road Scholar. These travel programs encompass a wide variety of activities—educational courses, excursions, and service projects—all around the world.

Information on travel, youth hostels, and home exchanges can be found on the internet, as well as in newspapers and travel books. The internet is also a good source for the dates of religious festivals in other countries.

religious traditions have been among the most significant patrons of art, their study provides a gateway to discovering and appreciating these rich works.

Enriched experience of travel Study of religion allows you to see cultural forms in new ways. One of the great gifts of our age is the ability to travel. Visiting the temple of Angkor Wat in Cambodia or a Mayan pyramid in Mexico is quite different from just reading about them. The study of world religions gives you the background necessary to fully enjoy the many wonderful places that you can now experience directly.

Insight into family traditions Religions have influenced many cultures so strongly that their effects are readily identifiable in the values of one's parents and grandparents–even if they are not actively religious individuals. These values include attitudes toward education, individual rights, gender roles, time, money, food, and leisure.

Help in one's own religious quest Not everyone is destined to become an artist or a musician or a poet, yet each one of us has some ability to appreciate visual arts, music, and poetry. In the same way, although some people may not be explicitly religious, they may have a sense of the sacred and a desire to seek ways to feel at home in the universe. Those who belong to a religion will have their beliefs and practices enriched by the study of the world's religions, because they will learn about their religion's history, major figures, scriptures, and influences from new points of view. Others who have little interest in traditional religions yet nonetheless have a strong interest in spirituality may view

their lives as a spiritual quest. For any person involved in a spiritual search, it is extremely helpful to study a variety of religions. Stories of others' spiritual quests provide insights that we may draw on for your own spiritual journey.

THE JOURNEY

You now begin an intellectual pilgrimage to many of the world's important living religions. You will first look at a sample of religions often associated with native peoples across the globe. You will then go on to study religions that emerged on the Indian subcontinent and then to the religions that arose in China and Japan. Next you will travel to the area east of the Mediterranean Sea—a region that has been fertile ground for new religious ideas. Finally, you will encounter some of the newest religious movements and will consider the religious search today.

This journey, although academic and intellectual, may prompt strong emotions in some readers. For some of you, it will be an intellectual pilgrimage that will provoke both doubt and insight. For others, it will be a prelude to an actual physical pilgrimage.

We begin with the knowledge that at the end of every journey people are not quite the same as when they started. This journey is one of discovery, and through discovery, you can hope to become more appreciative of the experience of being human in the universe.

Reading THE WARMTH AND LIGHT OF FIRE

In this indigenous description, we not only recognize the physical effects of fire, but see fire as a symbol of something mysterious, great, and even otherworldly. This is an example of the importance of symbolism to be found in religious imagery.

Why do we adore the one who is not of this world, whom we call *Tatewari,* the one who is the Fire? We have him because we believe in him in this form. *Tai,* that is fire, only fire, flames. Tatewari, that is the Fire. That is the *marakame* from ancient times, the one who warms us, who burns the brush, who cooks our food, who hunted the deer, the peyote, that one who is with Kauyumari. We believe in him. Without him, where would we get warmth? How would we cook? All would be cold. To keep warm Our Sun Father would have to come close to the earth. And that cannot be so.

Imagine. One is in the Sierra, there where we Huichols live. One walks, one follows one's paths. Then it becomes dark. One is alone there walking; one sees nothing. What is it there in the dark? One hears something? It is not to be seen. All is cold. Then one makes camp there. One gathers a little wood, food for Tatewari. One strikes a light. One brings out Tatewari. Ah, what a fine thing! What warmth! What light! The darkness disappears. It is safe.[18]