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# PATTERNS OF RELIGION

SECOND EDITION



# Patterns of Religion

SECOND EDITION

**THOMSON**  
——<sup>TM</sup>  
**WADSWORTH**

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United Kingdom • United States



Publisher: Holly J. Allen  
 Religion Editor: Steve Wainwright  
 Assistant Editors: Lee McCracken and Anna Lustig  
 Editorial Assistant: Barbara Hillaker  
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 Print/Media Buyer: Lisa Claudeanos  
 Composition Buyer: Ben Schroeter  
 Permissions Editor: Kiely Sexton  
 Production Service: The Book Company

Text Designer: William Seabright and Associates; John and Susan Edeen  
 Photo Researcher: Myrna Engler  
 Copy Editor: Kathy Smith  
 Illustrator: Impact Publications  
 Cover Designer: Yvo Riezebos  
 Cover Image: Rob Casey/Veer Incorporated  
 Compositor: G & S Typesetters  
 Printer: Malloy Lithographing, Inc.

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Printed in the United States of America  
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Library of Congress Control Number: 2004101220  
 ISBN 0-534- 62741-2

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# Preface

**P***atterns of Religion* is an introduction to the religions of the world with an emphasis on seven of the most influential traditions: Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Taoism. The book also includes chapters on ancient patterns of spirituality and indigenous religions in historical times; and appendixes on Jainism, Sikhism, and Shinto. Other traditions such as Zoroastrianism and Chinese folk religions are discussed at the points at which they intersect with the traditions that are the focus of the text. The book is comprehensive (it covers all of the major living traditions and touches on many lesser-known traditions) and includes readings from the scripture of each of the major traditions. With the exception of Chapters 1, 2, and 3 each chapter has the same four-part internal organization (history, belief, practice, and contemporary context).

*Patterns of Religion* has ten chapters. Chapter 1, "Discerning Patterns of Religion," introduces concepts important to the interpretation of religion. It begins with issues related to the terms *religion* and *religious*, as well as the definition of religion. Subsequent sections introduce the basic forms of religious expression and selected classifications of religions. Concluding sections distinguish between traditional and secular societies, discuss different approaches to the study of religion, and touch on the question of truth and religious belief.

Chapter 2, "Ancient Spirituality," focuses on prehistoric and ancient urban religions. The origins of religion are rooted in prehistory, thousands of years before the appearance of written texts. The story of ancient urban religions begins with the emergence of cities in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) approximately 5,500 years ago. Subsequently, at different times, urban civilizations and religious systems developed in Egypt, the Indian subcontinent, China, Europe, the

Americas, and sub-Saharan Africa. Chapter 2 begins with the problem of labeling ancient spirituality and then, in turn, covers prehistoric religion and ancient urban religions.

Chapter 3, "Indigenous World Religions, Past and Present," returns to the subject of oral religious traditions introduced in Chapter 2 but shifts the narrative from prehistoric to historical times. After the invention of writing and the rise of urban societies, oral peoples maintained their traditional ways in areas of the world where the influence of state systems either did not reach them or did not overwhelm them. Hundreds of tribal societies survived into modern times, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas, the Arctic, and Oceania, where only in the past four hundred years, and especially the past two hundred years, have traditional societies been deeply affected by the religions, technologies, economies, and political dominance of modern states.

The focus of Chapter 4 is Hinduism, India's principal religion and the third largest in the world, numbering nearly 786 million devotees.<sup>1</sup> The Indian subcontinent (the area of modern Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan) is the birthplace not only of Hinduism but also of Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism; it is also home to Christians, Muslims, and Zoroastrians. Jainism (with 3 million adherents) and Sikhism (with 16 million) are mentioned in Chapter 4 and covered in more detail in Appendix A.

Buddhism, the subject of Chapter 5, has around 362 million devotees and is the principal religion of Bhutan, Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar (formerly Burma), South Korea, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Thailand, Tibet, and Vietnam. Buddhism and Shinto are the dominant religious traditions in Japan; Buddhism and Chinese folk religion (a mixture of ancestor veneration, popular deities, Confucian values,

Buddhism, and religious Taoism) predominate in Taiwan. Significant Buddhist populations also exist in China, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Singapore, Europe, and the Americas.

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on traditions indigenous to China. Chapter 6 covers religion in prehistoric China, Chinese folk religion, and classical Chinese philosophy as contexts for understanding religious Taoism. Confucianism is the subject of Chapter 7. In spite of an inhospitable environment in the People's Republic of China, China's indigenous traditions continue to be part of Chinese life and culture on the mainland and among Chinese outside the mainland (for example, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and the United States).

Judaism, the focus of Chapter 8, shares with Hinduism the distinction of being the oldest of the major religious traditions. In numbers of adherents it is relatively small (18 million); however, the influence of its religious and ethical beliefs has been enormous. Judaic monotheism and prophecy (belief that God speaks through prophets) are historical antecedents directly linked to Christianity and Islam and indirectly linked to Sikhism and other monotheistic traditions, such as the Baha'i faith.

Christianity, covered in Chapter 9, is the world's largest religion, numbering nearly 2 billion believers, or one-third of the total human population. It has expanded from its geographical and cultural base in ancient Palestine to nearly every nation on earth. A truly global movement, Christianity is established in Europe (538 million adherents), the Americas (715 million), Africa (360 million), Asia (327 million), and Oceania (22 million).

Islam, the most recent of the seven religions that are the focus of this text and second only to Christianity in number of adherents, is the subject of Chapter 10. Muslims, the followers of Islam, total about 1.3 billion people. Islam has spread from its birthplace in Arabia eastward throughout Asia and westward to Africa, Europe, and the Americas. It is the primary faith of over forty modern states, including Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Chad, Egypt, Guinea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Malaysia, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Syria, Tajikis-

tan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yemen. Large minority Muslim populations exist in many countries including Ethiopia, France, India, and the United States.

## The Organization of This Book

Chapters 4 through 10 are divided into four main sections: (1) history, (2) beliefs, (3) practice, and (4) the contemporary context. A similar format is followed in the treatment of Jainism, Sikhism, and Shinto in the appendixes. This innovative ordering permits readers to acquire an overview of a religious tradition's historical development before being plunged into the details of its beliefs and practices. Putting the initial focus on historical development has advantages for students and instructors. For students, this approach makes the reading of the history section a richer and more meaningful experience. Because the beliefs and practice sections are designed to stand alone, the four-part internal division of the chapters lends itself to teaching approaches and assignments that stress one or more of the divisions and that omit or give less attention to others. For instructors who stress beliefs and practice, the chapter organization provides greater flexibility in coverage and choice of reading assignments. This module approach is especially useful in one-semester courses that cover a range of religions; two-semester courses can draw on the full resources of the text.

## History

The history sections of the chapters cover the development and the major turning points of each of the seven major traditions plus Jainism, Sikhism, and Shinto in Appendixes A and B. They also provide an historical context for prehistoric, ancient urban, and recent tribal traditions. For traditions associated with a foundational figure, the history section begins with the period following the death of the founder. The histories introduce important figures, events, movements, and disputes that may have been neglected or passed over in the sections on beliefs, and they

also illustrate the point that all religions change over time. In dating events within a common chronology, we have substituted the religiously neutral acronyms B.C.E. (before the common era) and C.E. (of the common era) for the Christian conventions B.C. (before Christ) and A.D. (*Anno Domini*, “in the year of the Lord”).

## Beliefs

Each religious tradition includes a belief system or worldview through which adherents understand the world and their place in it. A religious worldview provides a view of the whole of things (beliefs about life and the cosmos) and of what is ultimately real. Sections on beliefs provide an overview of a tradition's doctrines about the ultimate (for example, God), the cosmos, the nature and destiny of human beings, and evil. In those traditions with an historical founder and master figure, the section on beliefs begins with the life and teaching of the foundational figure (for example, Buddha, Christ, Confucius, and Muhammad). This approach allows readers to learn something about the charismatic figure who inspired and continues to inspire believers and outsiders as well. The sections on beliefs concentrate on beliefs that are traditional and mainstream and give less attention to nontraditional and sectarian beliefs. This approach may convey a false sense of doctrinal agreement, because considerable variation in belief exists within the major religious traditions, and no single set of beliefs adequately expresses the diversity of beliefs of the major subgroups or of the individuals within a tradition. To offset the impression of doctrinal unity conveyed in the beliefs sections, a wider spectrum of beliefs is covered in the history sections.

## Practice

Lived religion is not simply a matter of believing; it is something that is done, an acting out in words and gestures of what ultimately matters. Thus, each religious tradition constitutes a way of life or ethos, as well as a worldview. Sections in the text on practice focus on the religions' moral, ritual, social, and institutional dimensions. Each religion involves moral

commands or guidelines respecting how life ought to be lived and a sense of what constitutes the good life. Each religion, to one degree or another, perform rituals or ceremonies. Ritual is the element of practice that gives each religion a distinctive social and cultural personality and that shapes a tradition's calendar. Each religion is a social and institutional entity with a set of values, codes of conduct, and relationships respecting gender, marriage, leadership, organization, governance, and decision making. The social character of a religion is reflected in the name by which it is identified as a communal entity: the Buddhist *sangha*, the Christian church, the Jewish *synagogue*, the Muslim *umma*, and so on.

## The Contemporary Context

The concluding sections of Chapters 4 through 10 and Appendixes A and B place each religion in its contemporary context. Violence, racism, sexism, and poverty are some of the features of modern life that have profound implications for religious life. The concluding sections touch on some of these issues and on the challenges that secularism, science, and religious pluralism pose for religion. However, they primarily focus on areas of concern that are internally vexing, such as conversion, religious intermarriage, the role of women, ordination, homosexuality, reproductive issues, and the clash of fundamentalists and modernists. Because the religions introduced in Chapter 2 are dead rather than living entities, this chapter's concluding section introduces modern assessments of ancient spirituality that involve issues and judgments respecting social and religious primitivism, the origin of religion, and gender roles and goddesses in prehistoric and ancient urban religions.

## Readings

A special feature of *Patterns of Religion* is the inclusion of readings at the end of each chapter, including selections from scriptures and other important texts that are usually unavailable in surveys of the religions of the world. An introduction to each reading provides a context for the reading's interpretation and includes questions about content. Each chapter also

includes a glossary and bibliographical suggestions for further study.

## Tables and Time Lines

Chapters 2 through 10 include time lines that provide a chronological overview of important events or persons, as well as tables that delineate the principal scriptures and internal divisions or movements within each of the major religious traditions.

## Geopolitical Framework

Geopolitical references are made throughout the text, and maps are provided to help readers locate themselves spatially and temporally. The world map on the next page identifies the six humanly inhabited continents (Africa, the Americas, the Arctic, Asia, Australia, and Europe) and the area known as Oceania. The map also identifies the major geographical and cultural regions that are referred to frequently in the text, along with the birthplaces of twelve of the major living religions.

The areas north and south of the Sahara Desert constitute the two main geographical and cultural regions of the African continent: *North Africa* and *sub-Saharan Africa*. *The Americas* is a collective term for North and South America and the Caribbean islands. The *Arctic* comprises the region surrounding the North Pole and a cultural area that includes Greenland and northern portions of Russia, Scandinavia, Canada, and Alaska. *Europe* is separated from Asia in the east by the Ural Mountains and is bounded to the west by the Atlantic Ocean and to the South by the Mediterranean Sea. *Europe* includes the insular cultures of Ireland, Britain, and Iceland. *Eurasia* is a term for the conjoined continents Europe and Asia. *Oceania* refers to the islands and cultures of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia and, in this text, includes *Australia*.

*Asia* is a geographical term for the continent bounded to the west by Europe and the Red Sea, to the east by the Pacific Ocean, to the north by the Arctic Ocean, and to the south by the Indian Ocean. Scholars have subdivided Asia by culture and geography into five main regions: East, South, South-

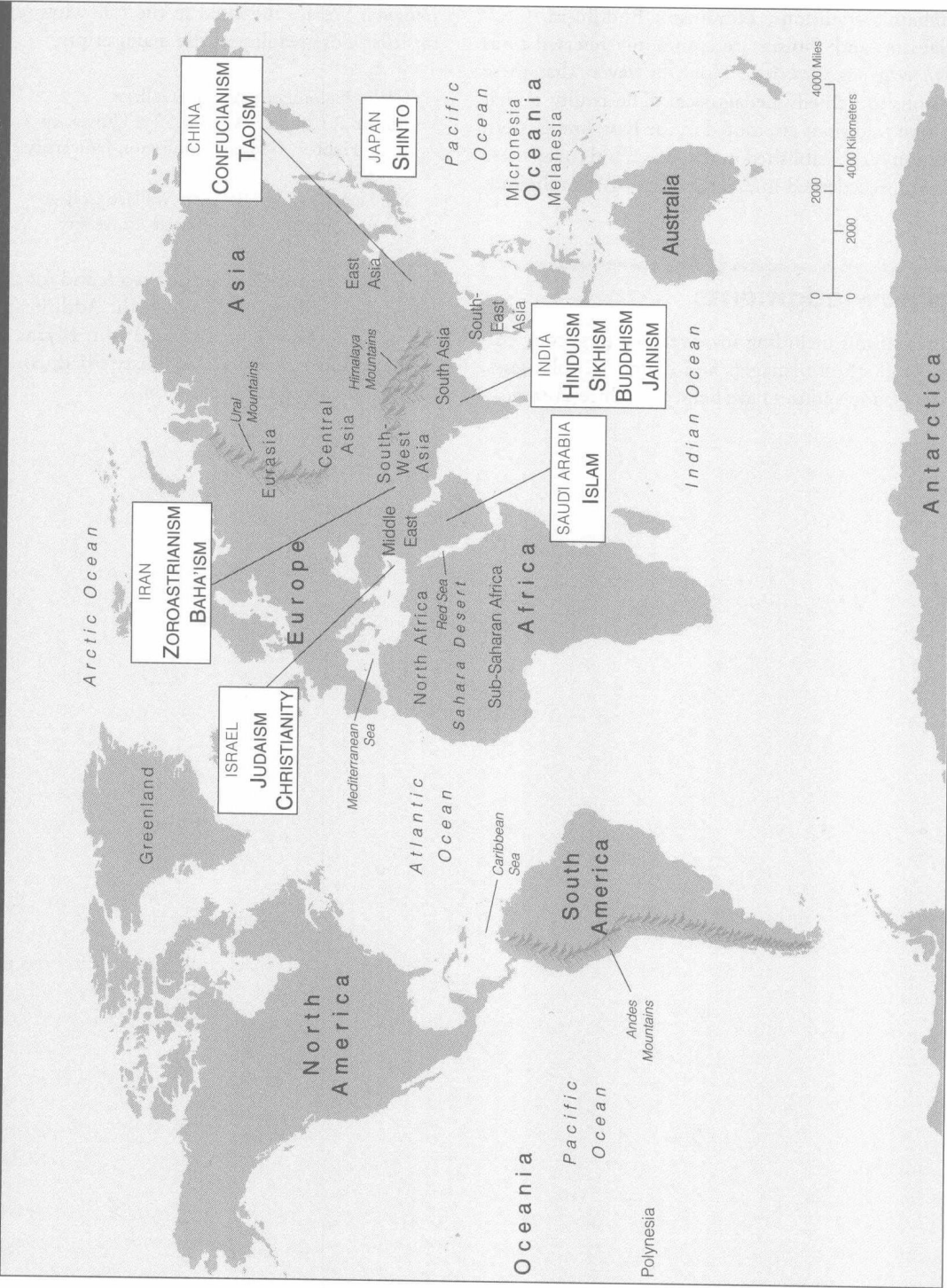
west, Southeast, and Central Asia. *Southwest Asia* and Africa's Nile River valley gave rise to the civilizations of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia and to Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam, and the Baha'i faith. Southwest Asia and North Africa constitute the *Middle East*. China and Japan were the principal centers of the civilizations and indigenous religions of *East Asia* (Confucianism, Taoism, and Shinto). The Indian subcontinent gave birth to the civilizations of *South Asia* and to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Indian and Chinese influences on the cultures of *Southeast Asia* (for example, Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam) are reflected in the older designation of the region as Indochina. *Central Asia* is a designation for western China, Tibet, and Mongolia.

## Asian and Western Religious Traditions

Although Asia is the birthplace of the seven religions that are the chief subjects of *Patterns of Religion*, these religions are frequently divided into Asian and Western traditions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam originated in Southwest Asia, but because formative periods in the histories of Judaism and Christianity have been grounded in Europe, and because Judaism and Christianity have profoundly influenced Western cultures, they are often referred to as *Western religious traditions*. This classification also includes Islam, a tradition theologically and historically related to Judaism and Christianity, but one whose peoples and cultures have been primarily non-Western. Reflecting their historical and theological interconnectedness, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are sometimes referred to as *Abrahamic religions* (because of their shared connection to the Israelite patriarch Abraham and to the religion of ancient Israel) or as *monotheistic religions* (a category that includes Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, Baha'ism, and other religions).

Like the Abrahamic traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism originated in Asia, but unlike them, these traditions remained in an Asian context until the twentieth century. Because they profoundly shaped the civilizations of Asia and have less historical and theological affinity to the

# GEOPOLITICAL REGIONS OF THE WORLD AND THE BIRTHPLACES OF TWELVE MAJOR LIVING RELIGIONS





Abrahamic traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism are commonly referred to as *Asian religious traditions*. Note, however, that these divisions are chiefly pedagogical. The reality is that Western traditions are rooted in the East, and Eastern traditions are established in the West, and today there is an unprecedented interaction among the religions.

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## Acknowledgments

Many persons including reviewers, editors, copy editors, production managers and designers, colleagues, students, and spouses have helped produce *Patterns of*

*Religion*. We are indebted to the following reviewers for their close reading of the manuscript:

Carlos Colombetti, Skyline College  
Allison P. Coudert, Arizona State University  
B. N. Hebbert, George Washington University Honors Program  
Michael McClure, Baldwin-Wallace College  
Sherifa Zuhur, Cleveland State University

We are appreciative of their work and for the support of our editors at Wadsworth. Additionally, we thank Kathy Smith for her final edit; Myrna Engler for her photo selection, and Dusty Friedman for her superlative project coordination.

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Carney is deeply grateful to Sri Purushottama Goswami and to Dr. Srivatsa Goswami, director of Sri Caitanya Prema Santhana in Vrindaban, for many

extraordinary opportunities to experience the Hindu religious tradition. He acknowledges the contributions of many other Goswamis of Radha Raman Temple; of colleagues at Jai Singh Ghera; and, in a particular way, of the late Asim Krishna Das, for deepening his experience of Hindu life and practice. In the deepest way, he cherishes the companionship of his wife, Ellen DeLuca, on their shared personal and spiritual journey with their son Peter.

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