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Sourcebook of the World's Religions



An Interfaith Guide to Religion and Spirituality



- ◆ Portrays more than twenty religious traditions and spiritual paths
- ◆ Explores building community among the religions
- ◆ Resource guides to religious and interfaith organizations
- ◆ Hundreds of articles, prayers, sacred texts, and quotations
- ◆ New material on the 1999 Parliament of the World's Religions

edited by Joel Beversluis

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*An Interfaith Guide to
Religion and Spirituality*

Edited by Joel Beversluis

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Symbols used on the cover:

Top: Wicca, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Taoism, Bahá'í faith, Native American, Christianity
Bottom: Judaism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, Unnamed religions

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INTRODUCTION

Joel D. Beversluis

The Editor of this Sourcebook, Joel Beversluis, has worked in academic religious publishing, volunteered in peace, ecology, and interfaith organizations, studied comparative religion at Western Michigan University, and is now Editor and Publisher of CoNexus Press.

Initially created as a resource for the participants in the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions, the *Sourcebook* was substantially revised and enlarged in 1995. In this Third Edition, many new articles, documents, reports up to the turn of the century, and resource listings such as a Directory make it a unique compilation.

Its pages are brim full of beliefs, wisdom, pioneering ideas, essays, prayers, scriptures, resource listings, organizational goals, projects, analysis, and visions. Through the contributions from members of many of the world's religions and spiritual traditions, the book also aims to reveal a variety of perceptions about the Source of all, about the meanings and purposes of our lives, and about the challenges and opportunities in the contemporary world. This book is also a resource through which readers may start to evaluate both the uniquenesses and commonalities of humanity's beliefs, truths, and wisdom.

We are not, however, proposing the deliberate mixing or watering-down of beliefs and traditions into a consensus or world religion. In this sense and in other ways, the book is an *Interfaith Guide*. The *Sourcebook* incorporates the standard of most major interfaith organizations: affirming the integrity of religious and spiritual traditions, and appreciating the diversity of the world's religions and cultures.

While the selection of the materials printed here inevitably reflects its Editor's values and interfaith experiences, the contents also showcase the distinctive beliefs, experience, and knowledge of hundreds of contributors. These members of different religions, professions, and ethnic backgrounds do not always agree with each other. Nevertheless, their inclusion here models an exciting,

"In this new ecological age of developing global community and interfaith dialogue, the world religions face what is perhaps the greatest challenge that they have ever encountered. Each is inspired by a unique vision of the divine and has a distinct cultural identity. At the same time, each perceives the divine as the source of unity and peace. The challenge is to preserve their religious and cultural uniqueness without letting it operate as a cause of narrow and divisive sectarianism that contradicts the vision of divine unity and peace.

"It is a question whether the healing light of religious vision will overcome the social and ideological issues that underlie much of the conflict between religions."

DR. STEVEN C. ROCKEFELLER
from *Spirit and Nature*, p. 169

“True spirituality—the authentic religious journey—can never be an escape from life’s problems. . . . Our spiritual journey . . . must be worked out now in a global context in the midst of global crises and global community.”

DR. PATRICIA MISCHE
Cofounder of Global Education Associates,
in *Towards a Global Spirituality*

“All the religions and all the people of the world are undergoing the most challenging transformation in history, leading to the birth of a new consciousness. Forces which have been at work for centuries are drawing the human race into a global network, and the religions of the world into a global spiritual community.”

DR. EWERT COUSINS
in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*

interfaith interaction. Out of this wide-ranging collage, arranged in four parts, each reader must draw out his or her own conclusions and, hopefully, enrich his or her own spiritual commitments.

Part One: Who Are We?

The first nineteen chapters offer portraits of major religions and spiritual philosophies. In most cases these were written by adherents of the community described. Contributors provided prayers, songs, and texts to give a flavor of their worship and beliefs. Many chapters also include perspectives on relationships with other religious communities and on how the community portrayed responds to one or more global issues. These articles provide the foundation for the book, the primary resources that support the explorations in its other parts and chapters.

Who are we? On the one hand, we are complex, wonderful, mysterious, diverse, creative seekers of divine truth, exploring who we are, why we’re here, and how we should live. On the other hand. . . see other chapters (e.g., Chapter 23) and other media.

Part Two: Becoming a Community of Religions

While the pages of this *Sourcebook* hold many different convictions, one guiding principle for compiling it is this: a critical task for leaders and members of all of the world’s religions and spiritual traditions is to enrich the sense of community and hospitality among us. We are part of the community of the Earth and, within it, we are becoming the community of religions.

As we learn more about the interaction of the systems of the Earth and, at the same time, discover their subtleties in the spiritual wisdom of the ages, we are also becoming aware of the primordial matrix that binds us together. We often don’t appreciate our dependence on Earth and our relationship with the cosmos, whose systems have given birth to us and nurtured us in all our mystery of body, consciousness, heart, mind, and soul.

Although this spiritual-physical matrix has always been evident to some peoples, contemporary cultures need the knowledge of these webs of interconnectedness and of the obligations that these place upon us. Taking responsibility for these obligations is one primary function of the emerging global community of religions. Other functions include learning to speak together in dialogue, defining and committing to principles of a global ethic, facing religious intolerance and other evils among us, and understanding spirituality and mysticism.

The interfaith movement, through its numerous organizations and participants throughout the world, is a symptom of the emer-

gence of community among religions. The movement is also helping to create that sense of community. Observers who focus on the evidence of conflict between religions may see this alleged community as little more than a fantasy. Clearly, it does have its dysfunctional aspects, as most communities do. Other observers, however, understand that naming the ideal provides a vision and reasons for hope.

And for many, including this writer, the emergence of a sense of community among religions is proved by the values and responses of numerous participants in religious and spiritual communities, in the interfaith movement, in numerous service organization—peace, ecology, justice, education, humanitarian, and many more—and in this book.

Part Three: Choosing Our Future

Without a vision, as the Jewish prophet warned, we will perish. Unfortunately, this prophecy is not warning against some future apocalyptic scenario. In fact, even now many of our brothers and sisters of all species are victims of ethical, political, economic and environmental disasters that are rooted in spiritual disorder.

Which future vision and reality shall we choose? It's clear that religious and spiritual communities do help create, and often lead the march toward, a culture of peace and justice when they draw on their highest ideals. Likewise, their wisdom and organizing capacities are now enriching the responses to environmental disasters and sustainable development. Basic ideas about human rights and human responsibilities are derived from and supported by religious and spiritual traditions.

At the same time, lest we overlook the abuses of religion, the interfaith movement and spiritually alert people everywhere are encouraging religious and spiritual communities to reflect on our own failures. Can we face these, too, and in so doing reshape our future?

Part Four: Resources

The phenomenon of global Internet use provides amazing new opportunities for religious and inter-

religious study, encounter, dialogue, and action. Those who have Web access can explore some of the many new Internet Web-sites and online indices listed in Part Four. Those who are curious about just what it is that religious, spiritual, and interfaith groups are doing should consult the nearly seven hundred organizations listed in the inspiring, one-of-a-kind "Directory of Faith and Interfaith Voices for Peace and Justice."

How to Read the *Sourcebook*

This book is a unique anthology, bringing together elements characteristic of many different kinds of publications. The *Sourcebook* deliberately crosses topical and stylistic boundaries, connecting content and disciplines that are too often kept apart. This not only meets the varying interests and needs of readers. It is, in short, a holistic exploration, seeking to provide readers with perspectives to help shape their own world-transforming vision.

Past readers of the *Sourcebook* have found it useful in many ways: for information, wisdom, and inspiration; for stimulating discussion groups and classes; and as a tool for reference. It serves not only members of the world's religions and spiritual traditions but also humanists, atheists, and agnostics. Indeed, some of the documents in the *Sourcebook*, such as "The Humanist Manifesto," "The Earth Charter," and "Towards a Global Ethic," were written for both religious and nonreligious consideration.

Although the book's contents do follow a progression, one need not read it front to back. Indeed, the book may be much more meaningful if readers follow their own interests, paging through it or choosing from the table of contents and indices.

A Challenge

Due in part to the media, to laborsaving devices, and to our evolving uses of leisure time, we can very easily become spectators of life or consumers of information. Modern education, media, and even our religious lives are so colored by the inclination to observation that we are seduced by the idea that pleasant thoughts and significant information—and even entertainment—are necessary and sufficient for

the good life. This book suggests that there is more, much more!

The *Sourcebook* had its genesis in the vision of the Parliament of the World's Religions. A primary theme of the 1993 Chicago Parliament and of the 1999 Parliament in Cape Town was a question: "What shall we do?" The question mirrors back to us the demands of our changing times, our future focus, and the need for ethical and appropriate action. Now, as we move across the threshold into a new century and millennium, through the swirling nexus of beliefs, wisdom, conflicts, challenges, and opportunities, we must each begin to answer that question.

The *Sourcebook of the World's Religions* is designed to nurture a process of reflection and action, in what can be a transformative process. In presenting who we humans claim to be and hope to become, the *Sourcebook* seeks to help readers appreciate humanity's strengths, promote the many gifts of religion and spirituality, and identify some of our tasks and commitments. If the book helps readers move into more intriguing reflections on powerful ideas and beliefs, and then into appropriate responses, its goals will be accomplished.

Now it is in your hands.

—January 2000

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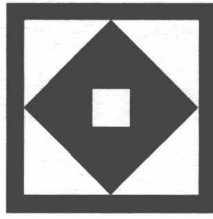
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Part One



WHO ARE WE?

Major Religions, Spiritual Traditions, and Philosophies of the World

Introduction

Joel Beversluis

We—the members of major religions, spiritual traditions, and philosophies of the world—are beyond accurate counting and beyond comprehensive descriptions. Our local and individual variations cannot be circumscribed, in part because we are always in flux. We are influenced by each other, by our experiences in the world, and by our own changing perceptions. So we are also beyond definition.

Nevertheless, we may describe some of our diverse characteristics and thus begin to develop a picture of the whole. One such image guiding this survey is that a sense of community is—and should be—emerging among the religions, spiritual traditions, and philosophies, within the larger community of the Earth.

Those who read this *Sourcebook* may conclude with its Editor that indeed there is a “community” and that, furthermore, one of its most significant characteristics is that this community has many wondrous yet underutilized gifts within it. The sense of commitment engendered by the religions and spiritual philosophies, their organizational and motiva-

tional resources, the wisdom and insight in their heritages, and their practical experience with real life issues are all portions of a substantial cultural and spiritual legacy. These gifts must be given freedom and put to work!

The authors of nearly all the essays in Part One have written not as official representatives, nor as disinterested specialists (though most of them are scholars), but as committed participants within the traditions they describe. In addition to the essays, most contributors also provided selections of scriptures, prayers, and commentary valued by their traditions, and some even made original translations.

Most of the major religious and spiritual traditions of the Earth—and some of their movements and branches—are portrayed here. Yet, since the traditions and their many manifestations are so numerous, this work must be seen as an introduction and survey. Much more detail is available in other works.

Despite enhancements in this Revised Edition, there remain imbalances. The alphabetical listing of

so many traditions and movements side by side does not do justice to disproportions in the numbers of adherents, their global presence, and their complexity. The following criteria guided the choices of what to include

1. Religious and spiritual traditions that are historic and worldwide
2. Representative indigenous traditions
3. Examples of spiritual and esoteric philosophies
4. Examples of influential new movements or branches off historic traditions
5. Groups that were accessible and whose members responded to the invitation to participate.

This last factor led to an emphasis on those groups with a substantial presence in North America; this emphasis is, of course, unfortunate in a book purporting to have a global outlook. It is also unfortunate because so many traditions have religious and cultural ties to the land itself—outside of North America. Yet, because the rich and increasingly pluralistic North American culture has adherents from

so many traditions and lands of origin, we offer their beliefs and experience as a starting point.

Authors of the Portraits were invited to write short essays and provide materials on

1. The origins, beliefs, and membership of their tradition
2. Its approach to interreligious encounter and cooperation
3. Its understanding of, and responses to, critical issues
4. Selected wisdom, scriptures, prayers, or commentary relating to the above.

Other articles offer insights into important aspects of a tradition or movement. The Editor has also selected previously printed articles, reflections, scriptures, or prayers that provide further insight into the self-understanding of some members of a tradition. All materials are intended to add depth to our understanding and to provide insights about the challenges and opportunities we face in today's world.



Chapter One

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

Introduction to African Traditional Religions

Rev. Dr. Abraham Akrong

Professor of Religion

The Term “Africa”

Since the time of Pliny the Elder, who is reputed to have first used it, the term “Africa” has been a bone of contention because it means different things to different people—for many people Africa is essentially a racial group; for some, Africa is a geopolitical entity carved up in the last century at the Berlin conference of 1884–85; for others, Africa is a linguistic-cultural entity that describes the life of the African peoples that belong to these communities: the Niger-Congo, the Nilo-Sahara, the Afro-Asiatic, and the Khoisan linguistic groups.

Generally, today, we are conditioned to view Africa as a conglomeration of different ethnic groups bound together by the colonial divisions of Africa, which still persist today in independent Africa.

The Concept of African Religion

Related to this geopolitical and cultural view of Africa is the 19th-century classification based on the so-called evolutionary theory of culture and religion. This classification of religions based on belief systems puts African religion and culture on the lowest level of the evolutionary ladder, because, it was believed, African primitive culture can only produce the most elementary and primitive belief systems. Until recently, this treatment of African religions in the Western intellectual tradition has made it impossible for African traditional religion to speak for

itself except in terms of 19th-century evolutionism or the Western anthropological theories of primitive religions and cultures.

From History to Culture

Today the liberation from the classifications of the last century has given an intellectual autonomy to African religion and culture. They can now be understood as self-contained systems that are internally coherent without reference to any grand theories. This has allowed us to face up to the plurality of religions and cultures. Therefore in any discourse about African religion we must start from the perspective of the worshipers and devotees of African traditional religion.

African Religion from Within

A study of the beliefs and practices of the African peoples leads to the theological observation that African traditional religion is a religion of salvation and wholeness. A careful analysis shows an emphasis on this-worldly salvation and wholeness as the *raison d'être* of African traditional religion. Because Africans believe that life is a complex web of relationships that may either enhance and preserve life or diminish and destroy it, the goal of religion is to maintain those relationships that protect and preserve life. For it is the harmony and stability provided by these relationships, both spiritual and material, that create the conditions for well-being and wholeness.

The threat to life both physical and spiritual is the premise of the quest for salvation. The threat is so near and real because, for the African, life is a continuum of power points that are transformed into being and life is constantly under threat from evil forces.

This logic of the relationality of being and cosmic life gives rise to the view that all reality is interrelated like a family. This same relational metaphysics is what undergirds the life of the individual in community.

Individual in Community

J. S. Mbiti captures this relational metaphysics succinctly in the dictum: "I am because we are and because we are therefore I am." The life of the individual comes into fruition through the social ritual of rites of passage. These rites are the process that can help the individual to attain the goals of his or her destiny, given at birth by God. Those who successfully go through the rites of passage become candidates for ancestorhood—the goal of the ideal life. For the African, ancestors are much more than dead parents of the living. They are the embodiment of what it means to live the full life that is contained in one's destiny.

God, Creation, and Cosmic Life

God in Africa is a relational being who is known through various levels of relationship with creation. In relation to humanity, God is the great ancestor of the human race. Therefore, all over Africa God is portrayed more in terms of parent than as sovereign. In relation to the earth, God is a husband who stands behind the creative fecundity of the earth that sustains human life. God in relation to creation is the creator from whom life flows and is sustained. In relation to the divinities, God is their father who requires them to care for the cosmic processes.

Unity and Diversity

The various elements of African religion that make what I call the transcendental structure of African religion are expressed differently by the various African peoples on the basis of their social organization and environment.

A Definition

One can describe African religion as a this-worldly religion of salvation that promises well-being and wholeness here and now. It is a religion that affirms

life and celebrates life in its fullness; this accounts for the lively and celebrative mood that characterizes African worship in all its manifestations.



Prayers and Religious Expression

Dr. M. Darrol Bryant

Professor of Religion, Waterloo University, and Secretary General of the Inter Religious Federation for World Peace

The expressions of African traditional religion are manifold. They have shaped the lives of African peoples from the dawn of history down to the present time. They have lived as oral traditions in the memory and practice of countless generations. The name of God varies across traditions as do the names of the divinities and the practices of the spiritual life. The Nuer of East Africa, for example, believe that prayer is appropriate at any time because "they like to speak to God when they are happy."

A typical Nuer prayer is

Our Father, it is thy universe, it is thy will,
let us be at peace,
let the soul of thy people be cool.
Thou art our Father,
remove all evil from our path.

For African traditional religion there is a daily intercourse between the living and the dead, the ancestral spirits. The interaction with these realities is facilitated through prayers, rites, incantations, and libations. Many of these practices involve elements of nature such as water, foodstuffs like cassava or nuts, or animals like chickens in sacrificial rites. Yoruba practices involve all types of foods and drinks in their offerings. A Yoruba chant cries out:

O God of heaven, O God of earth,
I pray thee uphold my hand,
My ancestors and ancestresses
Lean upon earth and succor me
That I may not quickly come to you.

This tradition celebrates the spirits present in the natural world and seeks to maintain proper relations between the living community and the living cosmos. Drums and dancing often figure prominently in its rites and practices. There is often a great concern for healing and health. Expressions of this tradition are too diverse to allow easy generalizations.

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Zulu Traditional Religion of Southern Africa

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One of the basic human experiences is that a human being is a dependent creature; therefore, the contingency of being human demands that one should properly relate oneself to the environment upon which one depends. Thus the human sense of dependence becomes the root religion.

One becomes aware that one did not create the universe; one found the universe already created. This awe-inspiring universe with its boundless spaces and measureless forces occasions God-consciousness. Natural events in particular are occasions of God-consciousness among the Zulu people. The changes in the clouds, the highness of the heavens, the overflowing rivers, the frightening lightning and thunderstorms side-by-side with religious ceremonies are all occasions of God-consciousness. In these events God is experienced as the One, the Other, the Divine, and the Many. The key word is experience. [...]

The Zulu notion of God-consciousness . . . says that God lives in, through, and beyond everything and everyone, but that God is most clearly apprehended through those spirits who are always around, below, above, and in them. . . . When the Zulus see the Deity in every place and all the time, they are acknowledging the ubiquitous nature of God as well as their constant sojourn within the realm of the divine presence.

—excerpted from “The One, the Other, the Divine, the Many in Zulu Traditional Religion of Southern Africa” in *Dialogue and Alliance*, Summer 1992, pp. 79–89



Chapter Two

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi

"Know thou of a certainty that Love is the secret of God's holy Dispensation, the manifestation of the All-Merciful, the fountain of spiritual outpourings. Love is heaven's kindly light, the Holy Spirit's eternal breath that vivifieth the human soul. Love is the cause of God's revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things. Love is the one means that ensureth true felicity both in this world and the next. Love is the light that guideth in darkness, the living link that uniteth God with man, that assureth the progress of every illumined soul. . . .

"Love is the most great law that ruleth this mighty and heavenly cycle, the unique power that bindeth together the diverse elements of this material world, the supreme magnetic force that directeth the movements of the spheres in the celestial realms. Love revealeth with unfailing and limitless power the mysteries latent in the universe. Love is the spirit of life unto the adorned body of mankind, the establisher of true civilization in this mortal world, and the shedder of imperishable glory upon every high-aiming race and nation."

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ,
Selections from the Writings
of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 27

A Portrait

Dr. Robert H. Stockman

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The Bahá'í Faith is an independent world religion now in the 150th year of its existence. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica Yearbook* it is the second most widely spread religion in the world, with five million members residing in 232 countries and dependent territories, and national spiritual assemblies (national Bahá'í governing bodies) in 172.

The Bahá'í Faith began in Iran. Its history is intimately connected with the lives of its leading figures:

'Alí-Muhammad, Titled *the Báb*.

Born in southern Iran in 1819, in 1844 he announced that he was the promised one or Mahdi expected by Muslims. He wrote scriptures in which he promulgated a new calendar, new religious laws, and new social norms. Opposed by Iran's Muslim clergy and ultimately by its government, thousands of the Báb's followers were killed; in 1850 the Báb himself was put to death.

Mirzá Husayn-'Alí, Titled *Bahá'u'lláh*.

Born in northern Iran in 1817, Bahá'u'lláh became a follower of the Báb in 1844 and was imprisoned for his beliefs. In 1853 he had a vision that he was the divine teacher the Báb had promised; he publicly declared himself as a messenger of God in 1863. He spent the rest of his life in exile and prison, where he wrote over 100 volumes of scripture.

'Abbas Effendi, Titled *'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

Son of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was born in 1844 and accompanied his father on his exile to Palestine. Bahá'u'lláh appointed 'Abdu'l-Bahá his successor, the exemplar of his teachings, and the interpreter of his revelation. Under 'Abdu'l-Bahá the Bahá'í Faith spread beyond the Middle East, India, and Burma to Europe, the