



WAYS TO THE CENTER

AN INTRODUCTION
TO WORLD RELIGIONS

DENISE L. CARMODY

AND T. L. BRINK

FIFTH EDITION

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AN INTRODUCTION TO WORLD RELIGIONS

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PREFACE

TO THE INSTRUCTOR

In its previous editions, *The Way to the Center* earned a reputation for its distinctive twofold approach combining history and structural (philosophical and comparative) analysis, and that emphasis continues here. The introduction explains our rationale, which we hope gives the book its unique character.

A particular concern throughout all editions of this book has been women's experiences with the world religions, a subject that often been omitted or downplayed in textbook treatments. Religion has been a major influence on women's cultural roles everywhere, so such neglect can impede liberation.

The fifth edition adds several new pedagogic layers that help make the rich content of *The Way to the Center* accessible and student friendly:

- Streamlined main text with new case studies and summary worldview materials in each chapter
- A visually appealing design that includes extra summary charts, boxes, maps, and illustrations
- Chapter-specific pedagogy, including crossword puzzles and interactive games that reinforce learning in an enjoyable way

- A web page at Wadsworth.com with many useful resources, including discussion forums, devoted exclusively to this book
- A comprehensive end-of-book glossary for easy referencing
- An updated annotated end-of-book bibliography that directs students to interesting nontechnical works for further reading
- An updated comprehensive instructor's manual using the ExamFlow format

We organized this book in the way that made the most sense to us, but we hope that it is compatible with the organization that you, the instructor, prefer in the teaching of your course. It is designed for a fifteen-week semester; shorter courses might emphasize specific chapters.

The book and the web links that we have given you are a buffet of knowledge: choose what you want to feed your students. We hope that you will participate in our moderated forum at <<http://www.delphi.com/reli101>> and encourage your students to do so. We are especially interested in your feedback so that the sixth edition of this text can be even better. Write us at brink@uor.edu or tlbrink@yahoo.com

Our deepest hope, finally, is that the book invites the reader to the mysterious center of human experience, where authentic religion offers all of us our best names.

A NOTE TO STUDENTS

We hope that you will participate in our moderated forum at <<http://www.delphi.com/rel101>> and encourage your professor to do so. We are especially interested in your feedback so that the sixth edition of this text can be even better. Write us at brink@uor.edu or tlbrink@yahoo.com

As this book went to press, we were able to get another website where you can download the materials. Go to this URL

<http://blackboard.sbccd.cc.ca.us>

Click on LOGIN.

Click on PREVIEW.

Click on the gray COURSES tab.

Click on RELIGION.

Select Brink's REL 101.

Under the ASSIGNMENTS button you will find the unit materials described in this book, especially links to games and drills to be downloaded and run off line.

The following table shows some typical reactions to a course using this textbook. After you have finished the course, what can you add to these remarks?

T. L. Brink

Denise Lardner Carmody

REACTIONS TO THIS COURSE				
STUDENT	GENDER	AGE	DENOMINATION	REACTION
J	male	19	Mormon	"This class made it apparent to me just how important my religion is in my life. I was wondering whether I should take two years off and go on a mission, but now I am certain that this is an experience I do not want to miss."
S	female	24	Jehovah's Witness	"I was pretty quiet during most of the class but it made me think. About two years later, I just couldn't see the relevance of knocking on doors to tell people something they had already heard and did not want to hear again. I will probably go back to being a Roman Catholic."
T	female	38	Presbyterian	"Since my divorce, I have had serious depression and loneliness. The Presbyterians were the ones that seemed the friendliest church, at least in my small town. I still don't agree with Calvinism, but I don't think that should stop me from joining them."
V	female	19	Jewish	"My parents were Jewish, but we weren't strict or kosher. We made it to temple once or twice a year. Now, I don't want to ignore the value of my traditions."
Z	male	26	Calvary Chapel	"I was raised Lutheran, my wife Methodist, but I really haven't heard anything there that I disagree with: doctrine, rituals or ethics."



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CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS RELIGION?

DEFINITION OF RELIGION

We define religion as

a system of symbols, myths, doctrines, ethics, and rituals for the expression of ultimate relevance.

Memorize that definition now. We will give you a more precise understanding of each of its component terms later, but your success in this course depends upon your ability to comprehend what religion is (and is not) and apply that definition to specific phenomena in order to figure out what is religious and what is something else.

Now let's see if you can apply that definition to a specific case. Picture yourself in New Delhi. You are outside Rajghat, the memorial to Mahatma Gandhi, the politician and holy man who led India to freedom from British colonial rule. Before you, squatting on the broken sidewalk, are three small boys with wooden flutes. They are piping tunes toward round wicker baskets. When they lift the baskets' covers, three silver cobras slowly weave their way out. You watch for several minutes, fearful but entranced. Then the boys shove the cobras back into their baskets and

RELIGIOUS WISDOM: TWENTY-FIVE KEY DATES

when?	where?	what?
ca. 1500 B.C.E.	India	<i>Vedas</i>
ca. 1360 B.C.E.	Egypt	<i>Hymns of Akhenaton</i>
1000–500 B.C.E.	Palestine	<i>Redactions of Pentateuch</i>
800–400 B.C.E.	India	<i>Upanishads</i>
750–550 B.C.E.	Palestine	<i>Hebrew Prophets</i>
ca. 550 B.C.E.	Persia	oldest parts of Zoroastrian <i>Avesta</i>
ca. 500 B.C.E.	China	oldest parts of Confucian <i>Analects</i>
400–250 B.C.E.	Palestine, India	<i>Job; Ecclesiastes, Bhagavad Gita</i>
ca. 350 B.C.E.	Greece, China	Plato's <i>Laws</i> ; Tao De <i>Jing</i>
ca. 330 B.C.E.	Greece	Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i>
160–80 B.C.E.	India	earliest Buddhist scriptures
50–90 C.E.	Roman Empire	New Testament writings
413–426 C.E.	Rome	Augustine's <i>City of God</i>
ca. 500 C.E.	Babylon	Talmud
ca. 650 C.E.	Arabia	canonization of the <i>Qur'an</i>
712–720 C.E.	Japan	<i>Shinto Chronicles</i>
ca. 1100 C.E.	Baghdad	Al-Ghazzali's <i>Revivification of the Sciences</i>
1175 C.E.	China	Ju Xi's <i>Neo-Confucian Synthesis</i>
1190 C.E.	Cordoba	Maimonides' <i>Guide for the Perplexed</i>
1270 C.E.	Paris	Aquinas' <i>Summa Theologica</i>
1536 C.E.	Geneva	Calvin's <i>Institutes</i>
1581 C.E.	India	compilation of Sikh Scripture, <i>Adi Granth</i>

◀ Why is only one of these buildings considered religious? They both involve people gathering for ceremonies. They both instill a sense of awe.

Come up with your own definition of religion. Is it too broad or too narrow? (or both, or neither)? Let's try these examples.

DEFINITION 1: Religion is the acceptance of the existence of God.

PROBLEM: This is too narrow, because some religions do not have one supreme Deity but may recognize many lesser gods.

DEFINITION 2: Religion is a Sunday "get-together" to celebrate common values.

PROBLEM: This definition is too narrow because some religious denominations meet on Saturday or Friday for their religious services.

PROBLEM: This definition is too broad because it would also include some nonreligious get-togethers, such as a Super Bowl party.

Contribute to this discussion at
<http://www.delphi.com/rel101>

approach you for their fee. A few rupees seem fair enough—you don't want to upset those cobras.

Come back to the classroom and visualize your professor putting forth this question:

"Did you just witness (and maybe even participate in) something religious?"

The right answer is not a docile "yes" or a defiant "no" (and it is certainly not a dubious "maybe"). The right answer in this sort of course is analogous to the right answer in the field of jurisprudence; the product of the deliberation is less important than the process. Here is the way to proceed: Identify the pertinent issues to be resolved in determining the appropriate answer to the question by raising some other questions.

Are the youthful snake charmers just merchants trying to put on a show for the tourists, or are they recognized religious functionaries in some religious denomination?

Are the snakes just performing animals (akin to circus seals or an organ grinder's monkey), or are they seen as symbols of something religious (or even incarnations of gods)?

Is the music just a catchy tune to put the tourist in a generous mood, or does it have an established tradition in Indian religious rituals?

Is there something about the location (so close to the statue of Gandhi) that creates a religious context?

Of course, another issue is whether you can really *know* what is going on in other people's hearts and minds. All you can really do is observe what they do, listen to what they say, read what they have written. Anything beyond that is a matter of *inference* (reasoning from something directly observed to something else not directly observed).

These are the types of questions that would help you apply the definition of religion to the case at hand, but in order to answer those questions you would have to know a lot more about the culture and history of India. That is one of our central points: any religion can only be understood within the context of the people who live it. A study of religion must become a study of society, culture, and history.

Can we ever really *know* what another person is thinking? Or how committed he or she is to God? We observe what people say and do, and then *infer* something about their religious ideas and practices. Give an example of a time when you (or someone else) made an inference about religion based upon some observation that was made:

WHAT WAS OBSERVED? (describe a scene, event, or a person's behavior, speech or attire)

WHO MADE THE INFERENCE? (was it you or someone else who saw something and then came to a conclusion)

WHAT INFERENCE WAS MADE? (what conclusion was reached as to motive, cause, affiliation, etc.)

HOW APPROPRIATE WAS THE INFERENCE? IF IT WAS APPROPRIATE, WHAT FACTORS FACILITATED IT? IF IT WAS NOT APPROPRIATE, WHAT MISLED THE CONCLUSION?

Contribute to this discussion at
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RELIGION VERSUS SCIENCE?

If you have already had a course in the physical sciences (e.g., physics), the life sciences (e.g., biology), or the social sciences (e.g., sociology), then you know something about how scientists go about trying to study and prove something. They use a method based upon objective and precise observation known as the **empirical method**. We are to believe a fact if it can be confirmed by a laboratory experiment or statistically analyzed survey. Truth is equated with **verifiable** factual data.

Although the sciences can often present useful perspectives on religious phenomena, we prefer to anchor our approach within the humanities—disciplines such as philosophy, art, and literature. Such an approach demands more self-awareness and personal engagement with materials than the scientific disciplines do. Pure science does not make great demands on a student's inner experiences of suffering or love. The humanities are disciplines that study our efforts at self-expression and self-understanding. The humanities involve more of such inner experiences because suffering and love shape so much of history and literature, yet even the humanities seldom deal with direct claims about ultimate relevance.

Only in the disciplines of philosophy and religion do we directly encounter systems about God, evil, and humanity's origin and end. Philosophy deals with such concepts principally in their rational forms, while religious studies meet them more directly in the myths, rituals, doctrines, behavior patterns, and institutions through which most human beings have been both drawn to the ultimate and yet terrified of it. More than in any other discipline, the student in a religious studies course is confronted with imperative claims. The religions are not normally warehouses where you pay your money and take your choice. Rather, they are impassioned heralds of ways of life. More than most people initially like, the religions speak of death, ignorance, and human viciousness. However, they also speak of peace and joy, forgiveness and harmony.

In order to understand the key differences between the scientific and the religious perspectives, let's set up an appropriate terminology to be used with each. Only in that way can we overcome the inherent

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS DISCUSSION?

ERIC: I can't understand why you belong to the XXX church. Their **beliefs** are just so ignorant.

ASHLEY: But we base everything on the Bible.

ERIC: That's just a book of **myths** and fairy tales.

ASHLEY: But the Bible is **truth**.

ERIC: That's just your **faith**. You can't **prove** that the Bible is **true**.

ASHLEY: You can't **prove** that the Bible isn't **true**, and until you do I am going to **believe** it.

Eric and Ashley will get nowhere until they start using a little more care with terms like *truth*, *proof*, *faith*, *belief*, and *myths*.

vagueness in the use of terms such as *truth*, *proof*, and *faith*. If we do not make these clarifications, some people will end up dismissing religion by saying, "Science deals with things you can prove, the truth, but religion is just faith." Both science and religion seek the truth, both have techniques for proof, and both involve faith. The difference between science and religion lies in the kind of truth, proof, and faith.

Suppose I make the statement: "I believe that it is about 70 degrees in this room." Is that statement true? Scientific truth must be descriptive (i.e., describe something in the physical world). Scientific truth must be *objective* (i.e., true whether I say it or someone else in the room says it, because it is the same temperature for both of us). The type of meaning involved is *cognitive* (i.e., it must involve precisely defined concepts). In other words, I am obligated to define what I mean by "70 degrees" (Fahrenheit? Celsius?). I would also have to describe those empirical procedures that would verify (prove) my claim: perhaps the use of a mercury thermometer. After making this measurement, I could discover if my initial statement was valid. But this type of belief is not something for which I would fight a holy crusade. Indeed, if someone else came up with a more precise measure of temperature, perhaps a digital