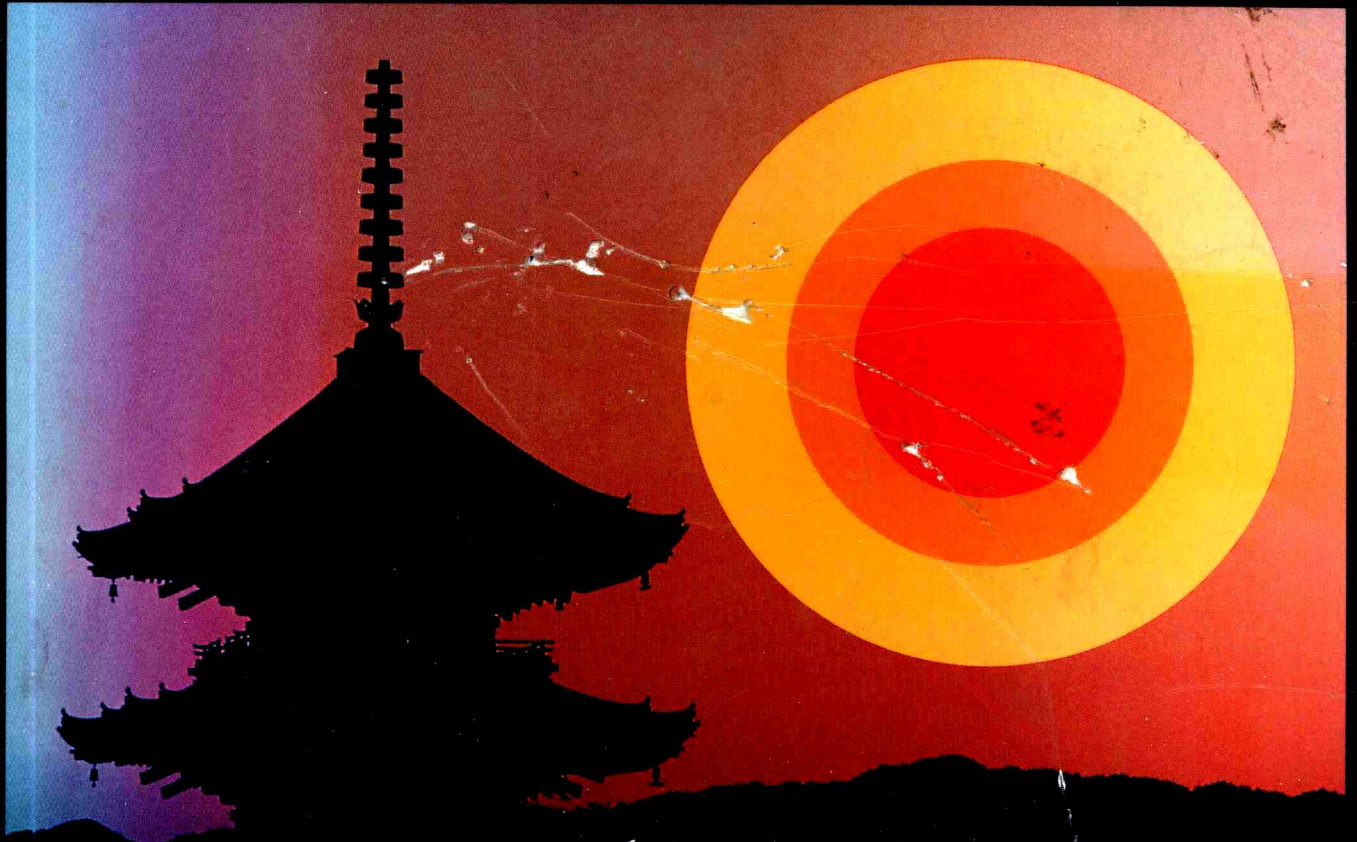


World Religions



Warren Matthews

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*World
Religions*

FOR VIRGINIA, JULIA, AND CHRISTOPHER

Preface

The purpose of this text is to help instructors introduce their students to world religions. Although based upon sound scholarship, it is written clearly and directly so that most readers can begin to understand the profound ideas and practices of world religions. Through the book, the instructor can help students initiate a lifetime of learning in religious studies.

I seek to reach an audience that includes the broad range of students engaged in higher education. From a wide variety of backgrounds in this country and abroad, they have entered colleges and universities in order to improve their study skills, their store of information, and their understanding of themselves and their world. The text is written so that these students can read, understand, and appreciate the rich contributions of religions to the cultural development of humankind. Although some students can read the text alone, most will appreciate guidance from a competent teacher. I have kept in mind that these students are encountering world religions in the media and in conversations with their fellow students. I am aware that within a few months of graduation many of the readers will be working with adherents of the religions described in the text.

Since it is planned for use in a one-semester introduction to world religions, the text is selective. It attempts to introduce important facts, ideas, and practices without overwhelming the reader with details. After introducing readers to the discipline of religious studies, the text leads students to some features found in religions of nonliterate peoples. Then it proceeds to features found among the religions of ancient city-states. Next it considers the major religions that have developed in India; three chapters are devoted to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and Sikhism. Another chapter discusses religions of China and Japan. The text then focuses on the Middle East and the religious tradition of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. More recent world religions—Baha’i, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Unification Church, Theosophy, and the International Society of Krishna Consciousness—are the subject of the next chapter. The concluding chapter calls attention to the world religions present in the United States. The student is invited to consider how these religions, all claiming to be true, can be related to each other. In the Appendix there is a brief discussion of Marxism and world religions. It will help readers understand the exciting changes occurring in countries that are abandoning their Marxist governments.

Each chapter is organized so that a religion can be outlined, analyzed, and compared with other religions. An introduction presents the religion as it is practiced. “Historical Development” describes sacred writings, the central personality and teachings, the institutions and divisions, thinkers, and leaders. Under “Worldview,” a more systematic, philosophical discussion of the Absolute, the world, humans, the problem for humans, the solution for humans, community and ethics, life after death, and relationships with other religions can be found. Most chapters have a brief discussion of the religion’s present and future developments. Each chapter has at least one section entitled “A Deeper Consideration” that focuses upon a major teaching or practice of religion.

In each chapter there are features to help students in their studies, including photographs, maps, and a time line. Terms that appear in the glossary at the back of the book are defined in margins as they occur in the text. At the end of each chapter there are terms for the vocabulary of world religions, questions for review, and questions for discussion. Notes and readings at the back of the book guide students to further information on topics of their interest. A select, annotated bibliography lists basic books, and “Readings for Research and Reports” guide students to further information on topics of their interest. Enough quotations appear in the contexts of chapters so that students can sample the contents of supplemental reading.

Although some students can benefit from reading the book alone, most can gain much more from it with the guidance of an instructor. Each instructor has special interests and areas of competence that can augment the text. Class discussion of the major ideas and practices of each religion increases enjoyment for all participants. The instructor’s assistance in pronouncing the names and terms of each religion reassures students who are beginning religious studies. If the instructor chooses, assignments can be made in reading the scriptures of the various world religions or in the writings of adherents and scholars.

To give credit to all the people who have helped write this book would take too many pages. Listing all the teachers, scholars, authors, and texts that have inspired and informed me over my lifetime would delay students in their learning. I must thank, nevertheless, the hundreds of students that I have taught in world religion courses—they have been very frank in discussing their needs, desires, hopes, likes and dislikes. Some have become professionals in religious studies. Others have excelled in other disciplines and gone to different parts of the world in business, professions, the military, and education. Their reports, questions, and suggestions have helped shape the contents and style of the book.

Colleagues have helped by discussing the material with me; some of them have read earlier versions of chapters. Their corrections and suggestions have been helpful. I am particularly grateful to Professors Judith Andre, Jerome Bookin-Weiner, William Brenner, Joong Fang, Lewis Ford, David James, William Jones, Baine Harris, Lawrence Hatab, Richard McCleary, Arthur Nudelman, and Marian Pauson. Rabbi Stuart Altshuler helped with comment on Judaism and on religious pluralism. Professor Wayne Bowman read early versions of the manuscript and suggested changes that have made the book easier to read. Deans of the College of Arts and Letters, Professors Charles Burgess and Heinz Meier, have helped with monetary and released-time grants. I benefited from study supported by the National Endowment for Humanities at the Summer Institute for Comparative Philosophy at the University of Hawaii.

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Introduction

*I*ntense interest in world religions springs from multiple sources. One source stimulating this interest is economic. When stock markets around the world rapidly rise or fall, news media invite the general public to examine conditions in different nations. Before the market opens in New York, the attention of traders and the public is focused on their screens to watch prices of stocks, bonds, commodities, and currencies change in Tokyo, Hong Kong, and London. Because of purchases and sales made by investors on the other side of the world, a widow in Chicago or a student in Los Angeles may be hundreds of dollars richer or poorer. Investors and spectators are astounded to realize that there is one financial world.

Workers from nations that once had a monopoly in the world market on certain products, such as automobiles, television sets, and leisure clothing, find that they are competing for jobs with workers on the other side of the globe. Who are these people who have invaded our markets? What do they believe? Why are they so successful? Are their values different from ours? How do they worship? Is it true that their businesses operating in our country offer better financial opportunities for thousands of people?

A second source of intense interest in world religions has resulted from world travel, which has become much easier in recent years. Along with business and professional travel abroad, academic and recreational travel has blossomed. In the smallest towns as well as in the largest cities are people of ordinary means who enjoy traveling to other cultures. Their assignments and vacations have taken them to exotic places and put them in contact with people of very different customs and beliefs. These travelers are curious about other peoples. Before they go, while they are abroad, or after they return they try to learn about parts of the world different from their own. Travel is addictive. People who have traveled abroad often want to see and learn more. They become interested in foreign visitors. Life in the whole world becomes an exciting adventure.

A third source of interest in world religions is academic study abroad. From its inception, university education has been international. Now, ease of travel and prosperity in more countries have given scholars and students greater opportunities to study abroad. Exchanges of faculty and students, together with economic and political interests, have led to keen interest in international studies. This trend is equally evident in economics, politics, philosophy, and religious studies.

Although many of the great universities founded their curricula upon religion, adding other studies within that context, many more recent institutions began without religious studies. State institutions have realized that religion is such an important part of every culture that religious studies must be available to help students obtain a complete understanding of their own culture and cultures of other nations.

Currency Traders in New York. The rising or falling values of currency of nations affects prices that consumers pay for imported goods and for travel abroad.



Students who will be leaders in the twenty-first century are seeking better understanding of the peoples of the world. Religious studies, once a quiet discipline among university courses, is now taking its place among the most lively subjects.

At a time when the United States is launching probes for scientific exploration of planets of our solar system, its students and scholars are renewing their attempts to understand other cultures on earth. Many countries are moving away from isolationism to the spirit of adventure that lured explorers to the Western Hemisphere. Students are rediscovering the spirit of inquiry that led intellectuals such as Emerson and Thoreau to appreciate the scriptures of the Hindus. New generations have developed the interest in learning that motivated anthropologists, archaeologists, and sociologists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to understand how religion began and how it functions. Now the whole enterprise of religious studies has come together in a delightful way. In a single classroom at almost any college or university, students from two or more religions can be found explaining their beliefs to each other and exploring those faiths not represented among students in the class—many that may be present elsewhere on campus.

Religious Studies

What is religious studies? It is an academic discipline that studies all forms of religion. The discipline has designed methods of studying various religions and presenting reasoned theories on the beginning, development, and current forms of religion. A distinct discipline, religious studies relies, nevertheless, on many methods developed in other disciplines.