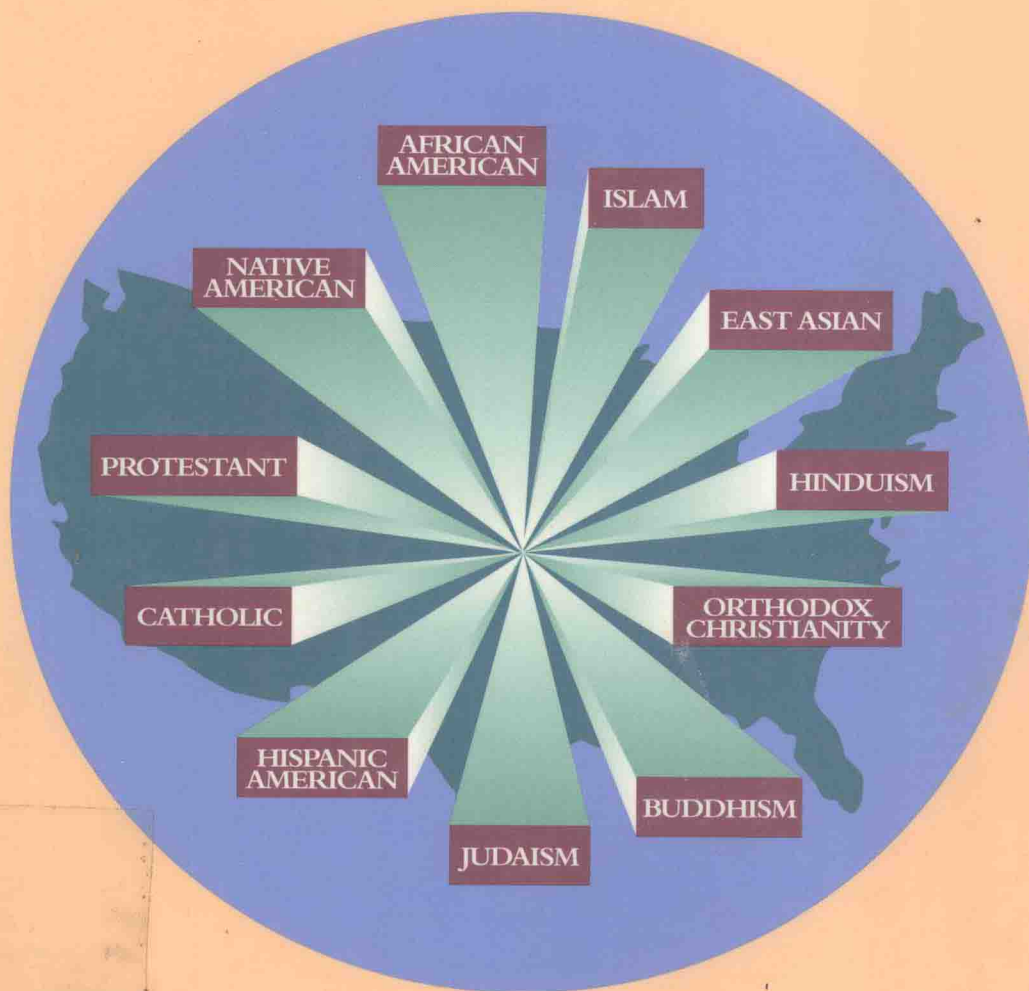


World Religions in America

AN INTRODUCTION



Outstanding contributors present the major world religions and important discussions on religion and women, religion and politics, religion and society

WORLD RELIGIONS IN AMERICA

An Introduction

JACOB NEUSNER
Editor

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As organizer and editor of this project, I acknowledge with real thanks the contributions of many people. It is right and proper to name each one.

The literary editor of this book is Naomi Pasachoff. She read each chapter as it came in and corresponded with the various authors, making numerous important suggestions for the improvement of the early drafts. An accomplished textbook writer in her own career, she brought to the study of religion those skills of presentation to students that have made her one of the country's leading writers of science textbooks, and textbooks for the synagogues' schools of Judaism. We were fortunate indeed for her participation in this volume, and all of the authors join me in expressing our thanks to her.

The study-guide material is the work of Dr. Mark Ledbetter of Huntingdon College, Montgomery, Alabama. The weight of his contribution may be simply stated: Without it, the book would be much less effective as an instrument of teaching. All parties to the book concur that he has given us just what we needed, and it is his skill as a teacher that has shaped the study-guide material.

My thinking about the need for a project of just this kind—combining the study of world religions with a close reading of religions in America—was shaped in conversations with Professor William Scott Green of the University of Rochester. No detail of the planning of this book, the definition of its purpose, the outline of its chapters, and its execution throughout, was finally defined without discussion with him. He has served not only as a consultant, but as an active partner in the conception and completion of the book.

A word of thanks and admiration goes, also, to the authors of the various chapters. I learned about religion, as well as about the study and teaching of religion, from each chapter in succession as it reached me. First, all authors kept to our timetable, and none caused a day of delay, so we were able to produce the book within that precise schedule projected at the outset. Readers who have organized academic projects will know how high praise that simple sentence accords to every author in this book. Second, each one of them gave thought to the program and problems of the book, responding to my questions and taking up my intellectual challenge for them: Can we talk to young Americans about the things they see and know from day to day, so that out of the known they may learn about what the here and now represents? Can we discover the character of religion throughout the world through the facts of religions in America? Those who use this book will concur that every author answered these questions, and that all of them did so in an imaginative and passionate way.

I wanted the authors to write out of emotion and commitment, as well as objective learning—to tell young people what they cared about and why, not only what they know and how they know it. Every chapter in this book has met that aspiration. If the book engages its intended audience, it is because each of these authors has responded to the challenge, and I am proud of having worked with all of them.

Beyond what I owe to all of them equally, I am personally obligated to three of the authors. First, Professor Andrew M. Greeley of the University of Chicago was my other conversation partner in the formation of the book; most of what I know about religion in America, how it should be studied, and why it is important, I learned from his writings and from conversation and letters exchanged with him. It is from his imaginative and original thought that I got the idea for the book to begin with. Second, Professor Martin Marty made a contribution to my chapter that he cannot have realized he was offering. When I conceived of this book, I did not know whether or not anyone could carry it off. I wanted major scholars to write for young Americans. I wanted every American student to find himself or herself in the pages of this book. I wanted the book to express passion and commitment to learning about religion as a critical component of intellectual life. I also did not know whether I personally could write a chapter that would serve. I had no model in my own mind for what I needed to do; I knew only that we, and I, faced a mighty worthwhile challenge in writing. The first of the chapters to come back to me came—predictably—from Professor Marty, who is justly famed in the study of religion both for the quantity and the quality of his writing, and also for the vitality and

excellence of his thinking. His chapter assured me that the project was feasible, because he provided precisely the kind of writing that I had hoped to elicit for the book. Once I read his chapter, I knew the work could be done, and I also had a model for my own chapter. I do not claim to write nearly so powerfully as he does, but he at least gave me a standard by which to measure my own work. Third, I had invited the late Professor John Meyendorff to write the chapter on Orthodox Christianity. Shortly after he signed the contract, he died suddenly and unexpectedly. Left with a deadline I wanted to preserve and an unassigned chapter I deemed essential to the book—Orthodox Christianity sometimes being slighted in the study of Christianity in the world today—I turned to Professor Jaroslav Pelikan. Overburdened with a vast range of important scholarly projects, he accepted the assignment and produced a chapter that admirably met the needs of the book. Professor Pelikan's willingness to take up the burden at the last minute represents a gift beyond the measure of the law, and I am thankful to him for his understanding and cooperation.

It remains to express my thanks, finally, to my own university, the University of South Florida, and to its Department of Religious Studies. This book was born out of what I learned about teaching when I came to Florida. In a university shaped by a commitment to public service—we call ourselves “the full service university on the urban frontier”—and committed to excellence in teaching and scholarship for that massive public that we uniquely address, I undertook a different and, I think, a more *adult* kind of teaching: students of all ages, conventional and unconventional, bringing to me all sorts of commitments and motivations, capacities and concerns. In this university, which is more profoundly American than any that I knew before, and is more deeply committed to the future of this country than some places framed around considerations of preferment and status, a book such as this became possible. Indeed, it became necessary. Not only so, but in doing my work as organizer and editor of numerous projects in academic learning and teaching, I have found generous support. In times of fiscal crisis, the University of South Florida has provided a large research expense fund, as well as other media of practical assistance for my work. I express my thanks to the administration and faculty of the University of South Florida for giving to me and my work a warm welcome and for securing a long-term future in a most comfortable and generous setting in which to pursue it. Nothing that I have done since coming here in 1990 would have been possible in any prior setting in my career.

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JACOB NEUSNER

Introduction

This book introduces you to the world's religions in the United States today. Such an introduction is important because to understand America,* you have to know about religion. Most, though not all, Americans say they are religious, and the world's religions flourish in today's America. Most Americans would agree that "in God we trust." But each does so in his or her quite special way, and that is what makes religion in America interesting. This book does not advocate religion, or any particular religion. Its purpose is only to describe and explain religion as an important factor in American society.

AMERICANS ARE A RELIGIOUS PEOPLE

Most Americans are religious. They believe in God. They pray. They practice a religion. They explain what happens in their lives by appeal to God's will and word and work, and they form their ideal for the American nation by reference to the teachings of religion: "one nation, under God." This statement, from the Pledge of Allegiance, describes how most Americans view our country. Americans act on their religious beliefs. Nearly all Americans (92.5 percent) profess belief in God. A majority prays from day to day and week to week. Most Christians go to church every week; nearly all Jews observe the Passover festival and most keep

*Although Canadians, Mexicans, and Latin Americans of South America also are Americans, this work concentrates on the United States in particular, and in these pages we use "Americans" to mean citizens of the United States.

the Days of Awe (New Year, Day of Atonement) and other religious celebrations. Religiosity is a fundamental trait of the American people and has been from the very beginning.

THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD FLOURISH IN TODAY'S AMERICA

Americans are not only a religious people. We also are a people of many religions. Most of the religions of the world are practiced in America. About 60 percent of the American people are Protestants (among them, 19 percent are Baptists, 8 percent Methodists, 5 percent Lutherans, and the other 28 percent divided among many groups). Another 26 percent are Roman Catholics. About 2.5 percent are Jews, most of whom practice Judaism. Somewhat less than 1 percent practice Hinduism, and about the same number practice Buddhism. Only 7.5 percent of the American people profess no religion at all.

One cannot understand America without making some sense of its diverse religious life. The marvel of America is its capacity to give a home to nearly every religion in the world, and the will of the American people to get along with one another, with the rich mixture of religions that flourish here. This book presents not only the better-known religions of America, Christianity and Judaism, but also the religious world of Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanic or Latin Americans, as well as the old religions newly arrived in this country, such as Islam (0.5 percent of the American people), Hinduism, and Buddhism.

America Began Because of Religion: Religion played a fundamental role in America's development by Europeans. The eastern part of this country was settled by people from Great Britain as an act of religion. The Southwest was founded by people from Spain and Latin America as an act of religion.

New England was settled by British Puritans from East Anglia; Virginia and the Chesapeake area, by British Anglicans (Episcopalians); Pennsylvania and New Jersey, by British Quakers; and the Appalachian South, from West Virginia and western Pennsylvania south through Piedmont North and South Carolina, by British Presbyterians from the area around the Irish Sea, the border regions of Scotland and Northern England, and the Irish counties of Ulster, in particular.

The first European settlements in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and

California were established by Roman Catholic missionaries and soldiers coming north from Mexico, who wanted to bring Christianity to the native peoples. Many of the place-names in the American Southwest were given by Hispanic pioneers, who acted in the name of Jesus Christ and the Roman Catholic faith. The earliest European explorers and settlers in the Midwest, from Detroit to New Orleans, were Roman Catholic missionaries and traders from Quebec, in French Canada.

From colonial times onward, many groups that joined in the adventure of building the American nation brought with them their religious hopes and founded in this country a particularly American expression of religions from all parts of the world: Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Entire American states and regions took shape because of religiously motivated groups—for example, Utah and the intermontane West through the Latter-day Saints (“Mormons”). So our country is a fundamentally religious nation, and in our country today, nearly every living religion is now represented in a significant way.

IS AMERICA A CHRISTIAN COUNTRY?

Some people think America is basically a Christian country because different forms of Christianity have predominated through its history and have defined much of its culture and society. The vast majority of Americans who are religious—and that means most of us—are Christians. But to be a true American, one can hold another religion or no religion at all. The first religions of America were those of the Native Americans. And although Protestant and Roman Catholic Christianity laid the foundations of American society, America had a Jewish community from nearly the beginning; the first synagogues date back to the mid-seventeenth century. Today this country has become the meeting place for nearly all of the living religions of the world, with the Zoroastrian, Shinto, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu religions well represented. Various religious groups from the Caribbean and from Africa and Latin America likewise flourish. What you learn in this book is that nearly every religion in the world is practiced by some Americans.

AMERICA IS DIFFERENT

Other countries have difficulty dealing with more than a single skin color, or with more than a single religion or ethnic group, and nations today

break apart because of ethnic and religious difference. But America holds together because of the American ideal that anyone, of any race, creed, color, language, religion, gender, sexual preference, or country of origin, can become a good American under this nation's Constitution and Bill of Rights, its political institutions and social ideals. And while religions separate people from one another, shared religious attitudes, such as a belief in God, unite people as well.

America is different because, except for Native Americans, it has always been a land of immigrants. From the very beginning, but especially since World War II, people have come to this country from all parts of the world. Today the great religious traditions of the world are practiced in America, where many of them have become distinctively American. This book presents the world's religions both as they flourish universally and also in their distinctively American forms.

WHY STUDY THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS IN THE AMERICAN SETTING?

America is the right place in which to study the religions of the world because nearly all of them can be found here (and in nearby Canada). But America is religiously more interesting than most countries in another way. Not only do we have Judaism and the various kinds of European Christianity, we also have Christian traditions deriving from places besides Europe, for instance, from Africa, China, Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands. To give one example, the Unification Church, which began in Korea, flourishes in America today. Distinctive forms of Christianity from Latin America, both Pentecostal and Roman Catholic, have also become part of the tapestry woven by world religions into the fabric of American society. All of these important components of religion in America are described in this book.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS BOOK ABOUT RELIGIONS IN PARTICULAR

This book first examines religions one by one, and then religion in America in general. We start with the first set of religions to exist in America, the diverse faiths of Native Americans. We turn next to Protestant Christianity, because the founders of the earliest American settlements, in Virginia and Massachusetts, were Protestants. Because Protestants form the most complex and also the largest single component of religious life in America,

Protestant Christianity is treated in a chapter twice as long as those devoted to the other American representatives of the religions of the world. African Americans have formulated a distinctive religious expression within Protestant Christianity, and they were among the earliest settlers, so we turn next to African American religious life.

Next we discuss Catholic Christianity, represented in the eastern part of the United States nearly from the beginning, and also the foundation religion of the great Southwest. Because Hispanic Americans today comprise nearly half of all Roman Catholic Christians in the United States, we take up Hispanic religious life in America, both Roman Catholic and Protestant.

We then turn to Judaism, a most ancient religion that has produced a strikingly contemporary and distinctively American statement of its own. We learn much about America from how Judaism has evolved within this country's open society.

We then turn to the American religions that have achieved importance on the national scene in our own day—newer religions of this country, but older religions of humanity—Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. We pay attention, also, to the religious traditions brought to the United States by Japanese, Korean, and Chinese immigrants, many of whom are Christian but some of whom practice other religious traditions of the eastern shores of Asia.

Each chapter treats its subject in accord with a single plan: How do we encounter this religion today? What is its definition and history? In what ways does the American expression of this religion teach us about religion in America and what being religious in America means? In answering these questions, the authors tell you about world religions in general and also about world religions in America in particular. Having mastered the contents of these chapters, you should be able to make sense out of the great religions of the world as America knows them, and also the diverse meanings of religious life in America.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS BOOK ABOUT RELIGION IN GENERAL

To make sense of our country's complex life—its politics, culture, society—we need generalizations. An understanding of religion in general, and not just particular faiths, sheds light on these aspects of American life. We therefore consider three questions that pertain to all religions. The first concerns the relationship between religion and society:

How does religion shape American life? The second concerns how religion is shaped in this country by women: What do we learn about religion from the ways in which women are religious? Finally, we turn to the immediate question of politics: How does religion affect the political life of this country? Our political system carefully distinguishes state from church, so that no governing body may favor or discriminate against a particular religion or religion in general. But religious people—that is, nearly all Americans—bring to politics important religious beliefs and commitments. How religion comes to expression in American political life teaches us much about religion.

WHY THIS BOOK DIFFERS FROM OTHER BOOKS ABOUT THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS IN AMERICAN LIFE

In general, up to the end of World War II people defined the three religions of the United States as Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism. The other great world religions, such as Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, were not broadly represented here. In addition, it was not widely recognized that African Americans had formed a powerful and distinctive statement of Protestant Christianity, and that Latin Americans had formed in this country an equally important and distinctive expression of Catholic Christianity; and the importance of Pentecostal Christianity in Latin America was just then emerging. So chapters on how other world religions, besides Christianity and Judaism, or on how other non-European formulations of great religions flourished in America would not likely have been written just a few decades ago.

And, if the truth be told, half a century ago chapters on Catholic Christianity and on Judaism might also have been left out, since not a few people saw America as not only Christian, but also—and exclusively—Protestant. According to this school of thought, “others”—not white, not Protestant, not Christian, not European, not English-speaking, or not from the northwestern part of Europe (Britain, excluding Ireland, Germany, or Scandinavia)—really were not authentic Americans at all. That is what made them different and somehow abnormal, just as in that time people thought it was “normal” to be a man and not “normal” to be a woman. But that narrow conception of what it means to be an American—and normal—is no longer taken seriously. We now accept that Americans come in all colors, shapes, and sizes, in both genders, and from every corner of the world. We now know that anyone can become a real

American. And America has the power to make its own all the religions of the world. In America, there is no “other.” Everyone is one of us. That is the message of this book: we all belong. Therefore, all of us bear the same tasks and responsibilities to make this a better country.

HOW TO STUDY ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS

The future of America depends on the answer to the question, How are religions going to relate to one another in this country? Shall we refight in our own country the world’s religious wars, Protestant against Catholic, Christian against Jew, Muslim against Hindu, and so on?

Religions think about outsiders, that is, other religions, in four ways.

1. *Exclusivist*: “My religion is not only true, but it is the only truth.” This view of religious truth is natural to many believers, whether or not their religion officially takes such a position. If I believe something about God, how can I imagine any other belief is valid?
2. *Inclusivist*: “My religion is true for me; your religion is true for you.” This position is common in a tolerant society, such as, in general, America is. It is sometimes called “relativism,” meaning that truth is relative to the person who holds it; if you think up and I think down, for you it’s up and for me it’s down. Religious beliefs can be true only for those who hold them.
3. *Pluralist*: “Every religion has something true to tell us.” God works in ways we do not always understand. We had best try to make sense of each of those ways. One way of doing so is to realize that different religions ask different questions, so you really cannot compare the statements of one religion with those of another.
4. *Empathetic Interest in Other People*: The way taken in the pages of this book concerns not whether religions are true (which in the end is for God to decide) but how all religions are interesting and important. We maintain here that every religion has something to teach us about what it means to be a human being. Here we take a different path from the one that leads us to questions about religious truth. It is a path that carries us to a position of empathy for our fellow Americans, in all their rich difference.

We are trying to understand others and to explain ourselves in terms others can understand. That is the American way: to learn to live happily

with difference, and not only to respect but to value the other. We teach the lesson that religion is a powerful force in shaping society, making history, and defining the life and purpose of individuals and entire groups. That is why we want to understand religion—and, among the many true and valuable things about religion that there are to comprehend, that is what we in particular want to teach in these pages.

HOW WILL YOU KNOW WHETHER THIS BOOK HAS SUCCEEDED?

If, when you meet someone of another religion, you find yourself able to understand what is important to that person about the religion he or she believes, then the course in which this book has been used is a success for you. The goal of this course is to help you better understand the world you live in, which means understanding the people you meet. America is a huge and diverse country, and the secret of its national unity lies in its power to teach people to respect one another, not despite difference but in full regard for difference. We like one another as we are, or, at least, we try to. And when we do not succeed, we know we have failed our country. A good American is a person who cares for the other with all due regard for the way in which the other is different.