THE RELIGIONS
OF CANADIANS

EDITED BY JAMIE S. SCOTT

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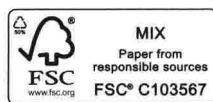
THE RELIGIONS
OF CANADIANS

For Josh, Nick, and Emily

Acknowledgements

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Two decades have passed between the conception and the appearance of *The Religions of Canadians*, so a great many people have helped to bring the book to the light of day. I first thought of the project in Palmerston North, New Zealand, in 1992. I was on sabbatical leave from my academic home base at York University in Toronto, conducting research on Christian missions in the South Pacific, and was invited to give a talk at Massey University on the state of Religious Studies as a scholarly field in Canada. As a "thank-you," my hosts Peter Donovan and Bronwyn Elsmore presented me with a copy of a book they had recently published titled *The Religions of New Zealanders*. The book brings together essays on the variety of religious traditions that have taken root in New Zealand's social and cultural landscape, dedicating separate chapters by different authors to disparate traditions. For a number of reasons, it seemed obvious that Canadians might enjoy a similar sort of volume, so it is to Peter and Bronwyn that my first thanks go for planting the idea for *The Religions of Canadians*. This idea remained dormant for a long while, though, as I finished other research. Then, in 1994, out came Jacob Neusner's *World Religions in America*, which followed more or less the same rubric as *The Religions of New Zealanders*. The time had

come to start the ball rolling in earnest for *The Religions of Canadians*. It took over two years to round up a complement of suitably qualified colleagues, and then almost five more years until we had first drafts of most of the material, all of which was reworked in an effort to achieve balance and continuity of content and style across the diverse chapters.

During this time, some contributors dropped out of the project and were replaced by others, in two or three cases necessitating the radical rewriting of chapters. My second vote of thanks, therefore, goes to those colleagues who stuck with *The Religions of Canadians* from my initial invitation to contribute to the book through all the revising to eventual publication, as well as to those colleagues who joined us late and were willing to undertake the difficult task of bringing to maturity the half-hatched work of others. Third, I must express my gratitude to the University of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia, in particular Terry Lovat, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education & Arts), and Stephen Webb, Director of the Research Institute of the Advanced Study for Humanity (now the Australian Institute for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing), for appointing me Visiting Research Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, 2008–2009, which allowed me to commit myself full-time to the final completion of the manuscript.

Fourth, I would like to recognize the influence of dozens of students who have taken my York University course "The Religions of Canadians" over the last two years. They have read much of the manuscript as part of their course material and the book is stronger for their feedback. Fifth, thanks go to the folks at the University of Toronto Press and their affiliates, especially Michael Harrison, for their encouragement, wisdom, and efficiency throughout the production and publishing process, as well as the anonymous manuscript readers for their many insightful and constructive comments. Sixth, due credit appears with photographs, but I would like to single out my York University colleague Candace Iron for special thanks: when we lacked pictures, she went out and took some, with remarkable results. Last but not least, of course, it is a delight to say "thank you" to Josh, Nick, and Emily for the countless ways, visible and invisible, that they have supported me throughout the long gestation of *The Religions of Canadians*.

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Religions and the
Making of Canada

JAMIE S. SCOTT, YORK UNIVERSITY

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S ome years ago, T. Sher Singh, an occasional columnist for the *Toronto Star* from Guelph, Ontario, wrote an "op-ed" piece on the coincidence of several sacred festivals occurring over a two-week period in the spring—the birthday of Hindu Lord Rama; Christian Easter; the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice; the birthday of Jain Lord Mahavira; Jewish Passover; Sikh Baisakhi; and Saka, the Buddhist New Year. This coincidence of sacred festivals may not be all that unusual. But a more searching set of questions underlies the prominence given to Singh's piece in the opinion and editorial pages of the newspaper: why did Singh and the editors of the *Toronto Star* think that a topic of this sort would be of interest to their readership? What kind of readership would be able to make sense of such a motley array of religious events, any-way? And more critically, why does this coincidence of sacred festivals merit "op-ed" commentary, rather than simply remaining a matter for the newspaper's section on religion, or perhaps the local news pages or what's-on notices?

To a large degree, we may answer these questions by invoking the intertwined lexicons of constitutional equality and legitimated multicul-turalism that began to saturate the atmosphere of everyday life in Canada

in the last decades of the twentieth century.[1] Legislated on 17 April 1982, Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms includes extensive protections and guarantees for various kinds of rights and freedoms. Under "Fundamental Freedoms," the Charter lists "freedom of conscience and religion," "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press," "freedom of peaceful assembly," and "freedom of association," all of which play roles in individual and collective spiritual life.[2] After being delayed to allow provincial governments time to bring their own legislation into line with the Charter, section 15 dealing with "Equality Rights" took effect three years later, on 17 April 1985. This section includes religion among a number of social and cultural identifiers safeguarded in law: "Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability," though this subsection "does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability."[3]

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act passed into law on 21 July 1988, gaining royal assent after all political parties constituting Canada's federal Parliament supported the adoption of the legislation. The act takes its cue from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, reiterating that "the Constitution of Canada provides ... that everyone has the freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association and guarantees those rights and freedoms equally to male and female persons."[4] Once again including religion among various kinds of individual and collective identifiers, it goes on to state that "Canada is a party ... to the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,* which Covenant provides that persons belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion or

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1   What follows owes something to my essay "Religion, Literature and Canadian Cultural Identities," *Literature and Theology* 16, no. 2 (2002): 1–14.

2   Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Department of Justice Canada, accessed 11 January 2012 from http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/charter/.

3   Ibid., 3–4.

4   Canadian Multiculturalism Act, Department of Justice Canada, accessed 11 January 2012 from http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-18.7/.

to use their own language," and that "the Government of Canada rec-
ognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic
origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian
society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to
preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while
working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic,
social, cultural and political life of Canada."[5] The act then requires
the Canadian federal government to both "recognize and promote the
understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial
diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all
members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their
cultural heritage," and "recognize and promote the understanding
that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian
heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in
the shaping of Canada's future."[6] In this respect, the policy of multi-
culturalism does not just encourage communities of different ethnic
backgrounds to maintain the ways of life and customs of their coun-
tries of origin; it also lays a legal foundation for public subsidizing of
varieties of ethnic heritage with tax dollars—or perhaps with lottery
money, which you might say serves as a kind of voluntary tax.

At the heart of this multiculturalist agenda lies what Canadian social
philosopher Charles Taylor has called a "politics of recognition." For
Taylor, religious diversity is a key aspect of such politics; in his words,
" ... it is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the
horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse char-
acters and temperaments, over a long period of time—that have, in other
words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable—
are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and
respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and
reject."[7] In this spirit, where Americans have historically taken pride
in the United States as a melting pot of constituent immigrant legacies,
Canadians have preferred to speak of their country in less reduction-
ist ways; first in terms of English and French Canada, and now as a
mosaic—or perhaps a shifting kaleidoscope—of social and cultural

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5   Ibid., 2.
6   Ibid., 3.
7   Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University
     Press, 1992), 72–73.

identities.[8] This mosaic includes the various and vying beliefs and practices of the world's religions, as immigrant devotees have come to embody and express them across Canada over the decades. In turn, the more nuanced cultivation of diversity and difference in Canada's social and cultural life requires Canadians to continually assess and re-assess their appreciation of individual and collective religious beliefs and practices, especially when it comes to balancing the rights and responsibilities of new immigrant communities against the power and privilege of more established religious groups.

The legislative linkage between the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms marks what Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman have identified as "a growing awareness of the importance of certain interests that had typically been ignored by liberal theories of justice; *e.g.* interests in recognition, identity, language, and cultural membership."[9] Despite this insight, however, the policies associated with the act have attracted their naysayers. Such doubters hail from disparate quarters, but their arguments mostly share a common concern: "how to show respect for diversity in a pluralistic society without at the same time damaging or eroding the bonds and virtues of citizenship."[10] Wary that too much emphasis on social and cultural diversity risks undermining the stability and identity of Canada as a distinctive people constituting a unified nation, skeptics about the country's multicultural agenda often refer to Neil Bissoondath's book, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada,* first published in 1994, as a representative statement of the key aspects of their position. A Canadian of East Indian Trinidadian origin who publishes in English and lives in Quebec, Bissoondath offended the leaders of visible minority and liberal white communities alike with his description of multicultural Canada as "a zoo of exoticism."[11] His book

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8   Commonly associated with the Canadian ideal of multiculturalism, the image of the mosaic was coined in 1922 by an American travel writer, Victoria Hayward, who describes the varied "[c]hurch architecture" of the Prairies as "a mosaic of vast dimensions and great breadth" (Victoria Hayward, *Romantic Canada* [Toronto: Macmillan and Company, 1922], 187). John Murray Gibbon popularized the image in *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1938), and as Augie Fleras and John Leonard Elliott note, it has since become "ingrained in Canadian society" (in *The Challenge of Diversity: Multiculturalism in Canada* [Scarborough, ON: Nelson Canada, 1992], 64). On the figures of mosaic and kaleidoscope, see Janice Kulyk Keefer, "From Mosaic to Kaleidoscope," *Books in Canada* 20, no. 6 (1991): 13–16.

9   Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, eds., *Citizenship in Diverse Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.

10   Ibid.

11   Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada,* rev. ed. (Toronto: Penguin Books Canada, 2002), 211.

claims that, far from advancing "a factual and clearminded view of our neighbours," Canada's multicultural policies depend on "stereotype, ensuring that ethnic groups will preserve their distinctiveness in a gentle and insidious form of cultural apartheid," thus leading "an already divided country down the path to further social divisiveness."[12]

Such skeptical critiques of Canada's multicultural policies assume a particular shape in the realm of the religious. On the one hand, the skeptic will admit, keeping company with Canadians of similar religious background may well help newcomers of different ethnic origins to adapt more comfortably to life in Canada, since familiar values will continue to shape everyday life, cushion the shock of the new, and provide shelter from discrimination, whether real or perceived. On the other hand, the skeptic will reply, such associations run the more undesirable risk of creating ghettoes of religious minorities made up mostly of relative newcomers to Canada. When marginalized in this way, the skeptic's argument goes, recent immigrants will inevitably experience frustration in their efforts to integrate into society and culture at large—or worse, they will find themselves subtly and silently excluded.

At the same time, the lines distinguishing religious from ethnic heritage are often difficult to identify. While Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act may offer formal redress against religious prejudice and encourage social and cultural diversity, today's media often include stories about religious leaders who claim to repesent local, regional, or even nationwide discomfort with perceived systemic prejudices against particular minority beliefs and practices. Such declared discomfort may pertain to all manner of issues, some purely domestic in nature, others involving overseas connections; some having to do with individual behaviours, others with collective activities. A random list of easily conceivable instances from the religious traditions discussed at length in the chapters that follow might include: a Roman Catholic, Irish Canadian priest in the Maritimes condemning all abortion, regardless of circumstances; a sermon decrying homosexuality by a Pentecostal Christian, Korean Canadian minister in Vancouver; an Orthodox Jewish Canadian rabbi rallying the support of Montrealers for Israel's tactics in Gaza; a Muslim, Pakistani Canadian imam advocating the right of schoolgirls to wear the hijab in Regina's city soccer leagues; a Hindu, East African Canadian Brahmin giving his blessing to marriages

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12 Ibid., 191.

arranged for teenagers in regional Toronto; a Buddhist, Myanmarese Canadian monk vowing to immolate himself on Parliament Hill unless the federal government expresses official support for Aung San Suu Kyi; a Sikh Canadian Granthi insisting that baptized males do not have to wear helmets when riding motorcycles around Winnipeg; or a Baha'i, Iranian Canadian elder in Calgary justifying the faith's refusal to promote women to its highest administrative ranks. We might find many examples, both historical and imaginable. What is more, it is an unwelcome irony that those skeptical of multiculturalism sometimes garner further support for their position by referring to the history of encounter, conflict, and occasional accommodation between Canada's Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.[13] In chapter 1, we see how the non-Aboriginal majority's "that's not the way we do things now" approach has for decades confronted Aboriginal peoples; in other chapters, we sometimes read about newcomers hearing "that's not the way we do things here" from groups with a more established presence upon Canada's religious landscape, regardless of whether such newcomers belong to a mainstream or a marginal religious community.

Mindful of these ambiguities, *The Religions of Canadians* attempts to trace the efforts of Canada's different spiritual constituencies to negotiate the often-rocky terrain between slavish perpetuation of the religious ways of "over there" and "back then" and creative adaptation of inherited beliefs and practices to the social and cultural demands of a new life in a new world. This negotiation includes the efforts of Aboriginal peoples, for whom "over there" and "back then" assume equally important, if obviously different significance, usually having to do with claims to traditional lands and natural resources appropriated by colonizing Europeans. The words "tradition" and "traditional" carry numerous meanings, of course. References to Aboriginal lands as "traditional" convey some sense of what the historian of religions Mircea Eliade (1907–86) called mythic time—that is, life *in illo tempore,* "in that time," the time of oral narratives, the time of the ancients, before the historical record of imperial

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13 Various terms have been and continue to be used to refer to the earliest inhabitants of North, Central, and South America, including "Aboriginal," "Amerindian," "Indian," "Indigenous," and "Native." In recent decades, "First Nations" has gained wide usage in Canada, but not in the United States or elsewhere. Except where specific Canadian communities are alluded to, as in the chapter on Bahá'ís, we use "Aboriginal" throughout *The Religions of Canadians,* partly because the last long-form Canadian census of 2001 uses this term in its statistical record of the way Canadians identify their religious affiliations, and partly because many of the spiritual traditions of Canada's first peoples transcend modern national boundaries, as shown in Chapter 1, "Aboriginals."

conquest and colonial settlement.[14] On the other hand, celebrated historian of Christianity Jaroslav Pelikan (1923–2006) draws an important distinction between "tradition" and "traditionalism." Discussing his book *The Vindication of Tradition*, Pelikan called "tradition" the living faith of dead people, and "traditionalism" the dead faith of living people.[15] In this context, to talk of Aboriginal lands as traditional is to perpetuate their significance as part of the living faith of dead people.

In perhaps the most helpful study of these notions, American sociologist Edward Shils (1910–95) draws directly upon the roots of the word "tradition" in the Latin verb *tradere*, which means "to transmit." Shils defines tradition as "anything that is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present," across the generations, including religious beliefs and practices.[16] As Shils points out, though, in certain intellectual circles the modern stress on "empirical science" and "rationality of judgement" has brought the notion of tradition into disrepute.[17] For many European Enlightenment thinkers and their heirs, "tradition embodies all that is obstructive of the growth and application of science and reason to the affairs of human beings."[18] In some ways, this viewpoint echoes Pelikan's "traditionalism," with its sense of the way authoritarian resistance to individual and collective freedoms may accompany religious dogma and hollow ritualism. On the other hand, as Shils stresses, "the appreciation of the accomplishments of the past and of the institutions especially impregnated with tradition, as well as the desirability of regarding patterns inherited from the past as valid guides, is one of the major patterns of human thought."[19] On occasion, such appreciation may even involve what social and cultural historians Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger have called "the invention of tradition," that is, the fabrication and development of "a set of practices normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically

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14 Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 20.

15 From an interview with Jaroslav Pelikan appearing in *US News & World Report*, 26 July 1989. For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

16 Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 12.

17 Ibid., 4.

18 Ibid., 7.

19 Ibid., 21.

implies continuity with the past."[20] Such innovations include both "'traditions' actually invented, constructed and formally instituted, and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period—a matter of few years perhaps—and establishing themselves with great rapidity."[21] These latter perspectives, less suspicious than the former, reflect Pelikan's notion of "tradition."

A kind of stock-taking of the role and status of the religious in Canada's founding, development, and ongoing formation, *The Religions of Canadians* identifies and examines the many ways in which the Canadian heirs of different religious legacies strive to keep alive the beliefs and practices of these traditions and to avoid the dead letter of traditionalism. Put another way, the chapters that follow may be read as extended accounts about religions on the move in the making of Canada, though over the centuries many different factors have propelled such movements. In some cases, religious mobility has originated in European imperial conquest, colonial settlement, and the accompanying phenomena. As we see in the second and third chapters of *The Religions of Canadians,* it was under such conditions that French and English adventurers founded the earliest Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian congregations in *la Nouvelle-France* and Nova Scotia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Associated missions extended this Christian presence westwards and northwards; most notably Roman Catholics in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries and evangelical Protestants in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. The European Christian legacy is everywhere to be seen in today's Canada; churches and chapels of all denominations continue to dominate the landscapes of the majority of communities—urban, suburban, rural, and remote, from coast to coast to coast. Christians have continued to find a home in Canada, though they are as likely to migrate from Africa, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Eastern Europe, or East and South Asia as from Great Britain, Ireland, or other parts of Western Europe. Though 16.2 per cent of Canadians declared themselves to be of "no religion" in the country's last long-form census in 2001, 72.5 per cent self-identified as Catholic Christian or as belonging to a Protestant Christian denomination. Other Christian groups included several Orthodox churches and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

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20   Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1 (emphasis added).

21   Ibid., 1.

Saints, whose members are commonly known as Mormons; together, these groups total another 1.8 per cent of Canadians.[22]

As the other chapters of *The Religions of Canadians* reveal, however, recent decades have seen varieties of not only Christian, but also Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, and Baha'i communities begin to feature prominently upon Canada's social and cultural landscapes, albeit in far fewer numbers to date. Though they do not directly have to do with the centuries of Europe's high imperial and colonial ambition, the reasons that members of these communities move to Canada vary widely. Changes in economic, social, or political circumstances have obliged— or perhaps enticed—individuals, families, and even whole communities from all parts of the globe to seek more secure and prosperous lives for themselves in Canada. Sometimes, political oppression or religious persecution has driven people from their homelands: Jews have fled the shock and aftershock of recurrent anti-Semitism in Europe, and to a greater or lesser degree various Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Baha'is have sought refuge in Canada from discrimination in their countries of origin. On other occasions, Canada has welcomed the survivors of catastrophe. Such events may be of human making, like the Vietnam War (1955–75) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88), or the protracted, internecine conflicts in Cambodia (1970–75), Eritrea (1972–81), Ethiopia (1974–91), Lebanon (1975–90), Nigeria (1967–70), Sri Lanka (1983–2009), Somalia (1991–present), Sudan (1983–2005), and the former Yugoslavia (1991–95), all of which were to a large extent fuelled by a toxic mix of ethnic and religious antagonisms. In other instances, disasters may be of nature's making, like the tsunami that swept over Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and Muslims alike from Indonesia to Sri Lanka (2004), or the earthquake that devastated predominantly Catholic Haiti (2010).

More generally, from the 1960s to the present day, the intertwined processes of decolonizing development and transnational globalization have contributed to the movement and mutation of religions across continents and oceans, producing diaspora communities linked in complex networks of shifting economic interdependence and social and political influence. In Canada, the availability and sophistication of modern transportation and information technologies has enabled local and regional

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22 Statistics Canada, accessed 27 June 2011 from http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/ products/highlight/Religion/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo=PR&View=1a&Code=01&Table=1&Star tRec=1&Sort=2&B1=Canada&B2=1. Here and for all future references to the 2001 census, see Appendices A and B.

religious communities to raise national and even worldwide fund-raising drives for building grand places of worship and for recruiting clerics and other professionals to staff them. Following models established by Christian institutions, Jewish synagogues, Muslim mosques, Hindu and Buddhist temples, Sikh *gurdwaras,* and Baha'i houses of worship and attendant facilities have come to provide not just liturgical, ritual, and other formal religious services, but also economic assistance and educational and social programs.

From chapter to chapter, *The Religions of Canadians* tries to capture these diverse aspects of religions on the move, at once shaping and being shaped by fresh challenges and new horizons in the making of Canada. With the exception of Chapter 1, which discusses Aboriginal traditions, each chapter tells the story of a religious community, albeit in many cases a complicated story involving a number of different ethnic groups, sometimes stretching over many centuries, and taking us to several different regions of the world as well as many parts of Canada. Mindful of these complexities, each chapter is divided into five sections. An introductory statement and a summary afterword form bookends for three longer sections. To establish context, the first longer section provides the essential elements of a religious tradition, outlining its history, geography, doctrines, and rituals. Exploring similarities and differences between classical and Canadian forms of the tradition, a second section then traces the ways in which its adherents have come to Canadian shores and the ways in which setting up a new home in a new land has perpetuated, transformed, or occasionally led to the abandoning of inherited beliefs and practices. A third section visits two or three contemporary communities, describing what the tradition looks like in the here and now and suggesting likely directions of future development within Canada and in relation to the tradition's global constituency. The three main sections of Chapter 1 mirror rather than mimic the other chapters. The first section outlines the religious life of Canada's Aboriginal communities before the arrival of Europeans; the second describes the effects of colonial and imperial hegemony upon important Pan-Indian traditions maintained by Aboriginal Canadians; and the third, how Aboriginal Canadian peoples continue to transform their religious heritage amidst the challenges of the contemporary world. A glossary of key terms, a list of key dates, a bibliography of key readings, a directory of key websites, and a list of key questions for critical reflection close out each chapter. Throughout *The Religions of Canadians,* photographs illustrate the stories told.