

STUDY GUIDE TO ACCOMPANY

SECOND EDITION

Experiencing the World's Religions

TRADITION,
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and CHANGE

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**STUDY GUIDE
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*Experiencing the
World's Religions*

Second Edition

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 FGR/FGR 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN: 0-7674-2046-2

www.mhhe.com

*I'd like to dedicate this study guide to the one who has
accompanied me through much of my spiritual journey as a friend,
companion, and nudger—my wife, Nancy.*

RICHARD CURRAN TRUSSELL

PREFACE

This guide is designed to enhance your learning experience with Michael Molloy's text, *Experiencing the World's Religions*, Second Edition. The format is fairly straightforward. Learning objectives and chapter summaries carefully follow the text. Fill-in-the-blank test questions are selected primarily from the Key Terms lists and in the glossary at the end of the book. The multiple-choice questions further check your knowledge about ideas and concepts. Answers for both appear at the end of each chapter. The Short-Answer Study Questions, by Chapter sections form the largest part of this guide. Space is provided for you to write in your responses. If you can answer these, you have essentially mastered the textbook material.

Many students have difficulty choosing topics for papers. The possible paper topics in this guide will stimulate your thinking. Following these are interreligious comparisons, which could also serve as term paper topics. Even if you don't write a paper that compares and contrasts features of two different religions, it is good to think about these questions. Most of your time will be spent exploring particular religions and mastering their beliefs and practices. But it is certainly worthwhile to occasionally step back and consider the similarities and differences between the variety of religions practiced in the world today.

Each chapter of this guide concludes with reflection exercises. These won't provide further facts and details about religion, but they might engage your imagination and take you to a place where religion touches both the world and the heart. Welcome to the adventure.

Finally, your text includes many photographs and images depicting the artistic expression of religious faith. To find even more such images, visit some of the Web sites listed in the appendix, Internet Resources for World Art.

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CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING RELIGION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

- ◆ discuss the role and function of religion in human life.
- ◆ describe theories of the origin of religion.
- ◆ describe the series of characteristics used to identify a religion.
- ◆ discuss conceptions of the sacred.
- ◆ discuss the importance of symbolism in religion.
- ◆ explain the three patterns for comparing and contrasting religions.
- ◆ know the value and benefits of studying religion.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Religion is one of the most significant efforts to answer the most profound questions of human existence. Where do we come from? What should we do while we are here? Why is there so much suffering and pain in life? What is our ultimate destiny and how do we get there? Religion serves many human needs by helping cope with tragedy, by giving hope for practical benefits or blessings, and by drawing us into a community through which we can accomplish things we could not do on our own. Religion has inspired much of the greatest art in history and reflects our sense of wonder about ourselves and the universe.

Some scholars have speculated about the origins of religion. Some of these theories state that religion grew out of a prescientific attempt to manipulate nature for human ends, or that it was an attempt to appease ancestor spirits or was simply a projection of childhood fantasies and fears that make us feel more secure in an unfeeling universe. Others have seen religion in a more favorable light, noting that it has a positive influence on people, leads to an integrated relationship with others and the cosmos, that it represents a true encounter with the deepest levels of reality, or that it both reflects and prompts the highest levels of human growth and personal integration.

Scholars today strive to study religion in a way that is unbiased and that assumes all religions are worthy of study. This is difficult since we tend to bring assumptions from the religion in which we were raised or from the dominant culture. Because of the diversity among religions, scholars now talk about elements that appear in varying degrees in the different spiritual paths. They include a belief system, a community that embraces it, central stories called myths, ceremonies or rituals, material expressions, ethical guidelines, characteristic emotions or experiences that occur, and a sense of the

sacred. Conceptions of the sacred are very diverse. Examples are a transcendent personal God, an immanent pantheistic power, and polytheism, or multiple gods. Other paths embrace atheism or agnosticism or nontheism.

Use of symbolic images and actions convey religious truth or ideas in a powerful way and may suggest a sort of universal language spoken by religions. The comparative study of religion also has proposed three patterns of similarity and difference among religions. The first pattern concerns beliefs and practices in orientation toward the sacred. It identifies the sacramental, the prophetic, and the mystical orientation. The second pattern deals with views of the world and life, such as the nature of the sacred itself, the nature of the universe and humanity's place in it, conceptions of time, human purpose, the role of words and scriptures, and notions of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. The third pattern addresses views of male and female according to both prescribed social roles and conceptions of deity. These three patterns provide useful reference points for comparison and contrast between religions.

Comparative religions as a discipline has grown in complexity and sophistication in over two hundred years of development. It draws on many disciplines because religion has influenced so many areas of human life. Today the study of religion offers many insights and pleasures. It assists us in understanding the experiences of others and helps us to better interpret the complexity of the world and our place in it.

FILL IN THE BLANK

1. Literally meaning "not God," _____ holds that there is no God or gods.
2. The belief in one God is called _____.
3. _____ is the position that God may or may not exist, but the existence of God really cannot be proven.
4. The belief that everything in the universe is divine is called _____.
5. The belief in many gods is called _____.
6. A power existing and operating within nature is said to be _____.
7. A power beyond or not limited by the physical world is said to be _____.
8. Other than the ordinary, the _____ is sometimes expressed or experienced in certain objects, actions, or places.
9. A synonym for a belief system, a _____ implies several beliefs fitting together into a fairly complete and systematic interpretation of the universe and humanity's place in it.
10. A _____ is something fairly concrete and ordinary that can represent and help human beings intensely experience something of greater complexity.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. The word *religion* is usually interpreted by scholars to mean
 - a. renewal.
 - b. worship.
 - c. reconnecting.
 - d. belief in a higher power.
2. Beliefs enacted and made real through ceremonies, certain objects, or specialized locations or buildings define the characteristic of
 - a. ritual.
 - b. sacredness.
 - c. ethics.
 - d. community.
3. Familiar term for the sacred reality, particularly in the Western world.
 - a. monotheism
 - b. polytheism
 - c. transcendent
 - d. God
4. Many scholars think that religious symbols
 - a. point to some structure that underlies all religions.
 - b. account for the origin of religion.
 - c. have a literal meaning only.
 - d. are a projection of the fear and insecurity of childhood.
5. A state of original purity, a battle to fight disorder, a sacrificial death are examples of
 - a. the sacred.
 - b. ritual.
 - c. projected beliefs.
 - d. symbolic stories of transformation.
6. One of the three orientations of religions, focusing on rituals and ceremonies as the path to salvation.
 - a. sacramental
 - b. prophetic
 - c. mystical
 - d. communal
7. The orientation that seeks union with a reality greater than oneself.
 - a. sacramental
 - b. prophetic
 - c. mystical
 - d. communal

8. The orientation that stresses contact with the sacred by proper belief and by adherence to moral rules.
 - a. sacramental
 - b. prophetic
 - c. mystical
 - d. communal
9. Religions that emphasize a creation and a history that is limited and unrepeatably conceive time as
 - a. cyclical.
 - b. central.
 - c. linear.
 - d. peripheral.
10. Religions that believe the universe simply moves through endless changes that often repeat themselves conceive time as
 - a. cyclical.
 - b. central.
 - c. linear.
 - d. sacred.
11. Religions that are inclusive frequently
 - a. emphasize the sacred as distinct from the world and believe that order must be imposed through separation.
 - b. gather believers together for elaborate rites and ceremonies.
 - c. admit many types of beliefs and practices and stress social harmony.
 - d. worship a sole male deity.
12. The female divine is sometimes symbolized by
 - a. daggers and trees.
 - b. eggs and spirals.
 - c. long hair and stars.
 - d. rocks and clouds.
13. This common approach to religion stresses following reason rather than religious authority and tries to fit answers into a systematic whole.
 - a. mythology
 - b. psychology
 - c. archeology
 - d. philosophy

3. Why are scholars today hesitant to speak of an evolution of religion from one form to another? (p. 5)

Key Characteristics of Religion

1. What is the problem with the traditional dictionary definition of religion? (p. 6)

2. List the eight elements manifested in varying degrees in religions. (pp. 6–7)

The Sacred

1. Define what is meant by the sacred in religion. (pp. 7–8)

2. Offer some examples of how the sacred is variously understood. (p. 8)

3. How can atheism or agnosticism be considered a religion? (p. 8)

Religious Symbolism

1. Offer some examples of religious symbols and discuss their meaning. (pp. 8–10)

2. How are symbols important in dreams? (pp. 8–9)

4. Describe the spectrum of attitudes toward nature found in religions. (pp. 12–13)

5. Define linear and cyclical time and the concerns that accompany each. (p. 13)

6. Offer views of human purpose seen in different religions. (p. 13)

7. What place do words and scriptures occupy in religion? (p. 13)

