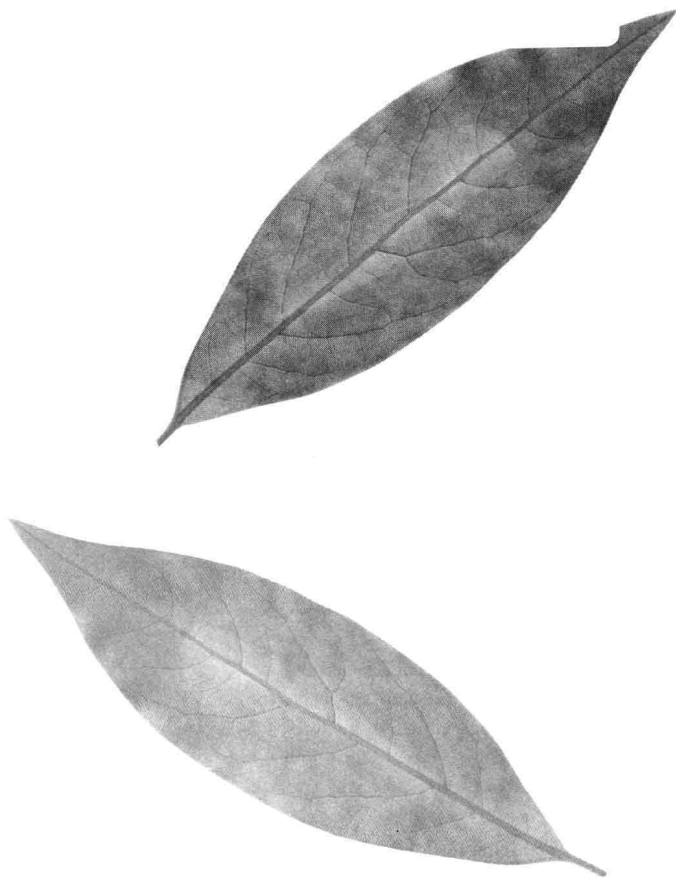




# WORLD RELIGIONS TODAY

*second edition*

JOHN L. ESPOSITO  
DARRELL J. FASCHING  
TODD LEWIS



# WORLD RELIGIONS TODAY

SECOND EDITION

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# PREFACE

Around the world, religion has become an increasingly important and pervasive force in personal and public life, and faith and politics now play a powerful role in international affairs. *World Religions Today* addresses this reality within the context of an introductory volume for college and university students of world religions.

*World Religions Today* grew out of several decades of experience in teaching world religions and the conviction that there was a more effective way to both attract and hold student interest from the very beginning of the course and to demonstrate the dynamism and relevance of the major world religious traditions not only in the past but also today. Textbooks on world religions, like those on individual traditions, too often tended to emphasize the historical origins and development of religions, focusing on the past and giving short shrift to the modern or contemporary period. Many stressed a textual, theological/philosophical, and legal approach with insufficient attention to the importance of social contexts. As a result, students came away with a maximum appreciation for the origins and development of the classical traditions and a minimal awareness of the continued dynamism and relevance today of so-called non-Western traditions in particular. However, despite the change in recent years with the growing visibility and impact of a global religious resurgence and of the globalization of religion, most world religion textbooks did not quite catch up.

This second edition of *World Religions Today* has been substantially revised in light of comments from colleagues across the country who have used it and in light of our own subsequent experiences and reflections. Oxford has also solicited comments from reviewers with regard to the overall plan, approach, breadth of coverage, and level of sophistication. Chapters were revised to make the amount of historical data more manageable and to make the writing style more accessible as an introductory volume for undergraduate students. The book's major theme and its chapters on Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and East Asian Religions have been retained (though revised), and two new chapters on Primal and New Religions have been added. All the chapters have been updated in light of recent events, especially the Islam chapter that addresses the impact of Osama bin Laden, global

terrorism, and the Iraq War on the contemporary Muslim experience. Furthermore, as should be obvious to anyone holding this book, the second edition features a dynamic new two-color design, twice as many photographs and illustrations as the first edition, and two sections of full-color photographs. It is our hope that this new treatment reflects and enhances the colorful and lively discussion of the text.

Moving beyond the almost exclusive emphasis on premodern history in many books in the field, *World Religions Today*, Second Edition, continues to take the fresh approach of the first edition, using historical coverage of religious traditions as a framework to help students understand how faiths have evolved to the present day. To help students grasp what might be “new” about the emerging era of religious life in the twenty-first century, we open each discussion with a contemporary scenario of religious experience, “Encounter With Modernity,” that illustrates the tension between premodern views and modernity. Each chapter not only connects today’s religions to their classical beliefs and practices but also shows how they have responded to and been transformed by the modern world. Thus, the interconnectedness of faith, culture, politics, and society provide insights into the diverse ways in which contemporary human beings are religious.

Although this is a multiauthored text with each of us taking primary authorship of different chapters (John Esposito: Islam; Darrell Fasching: Judaism, Christianity, and New Religions; and Todd Lewis: Asian traditions and Primal Religions), it has truly been a collaborative project from start to finish. We have worked out our overall vision, which is articulated in the first chapter, and implemented it in the chapters on the religious traditions. Throughout the entire process we shared and commented on each other’s material. Oxford colleagues and outside reviewers provided feedback at every stage.

We have been fortunate to work with an excellent team at Oxford, led by Robert Miller, Executive Editor in Oxford’s Higher Education Group. Karen Shapiro, Emily Voigt, and Sarah Calabi have been extraordinarily supportive throughout a long and sometimes difficult production process.

*John L. Esposito  
Darrell J. Fasching  
Todd Lewis*





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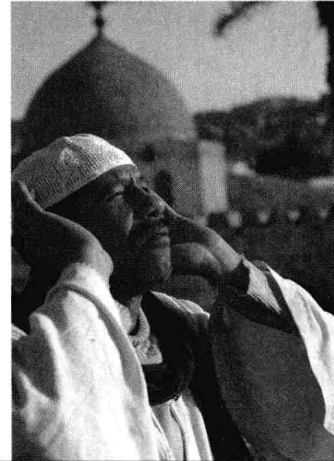


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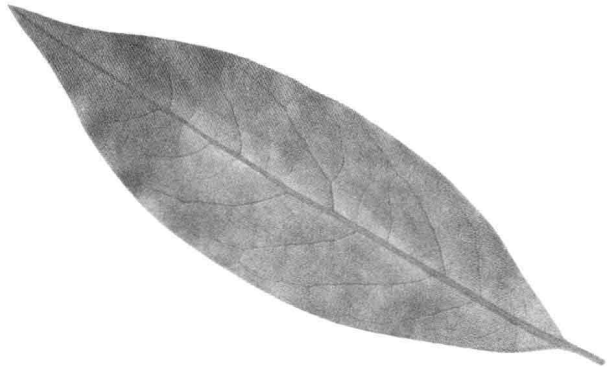
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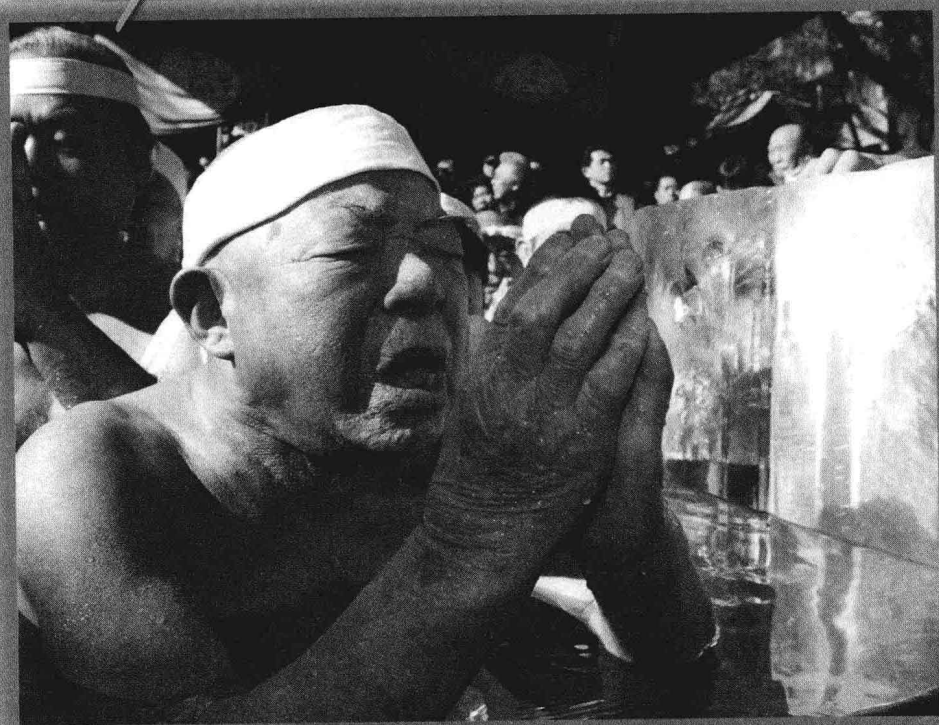
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WORLD RELIGIONS TODAY

# CHAPTER ONE



# Introduction

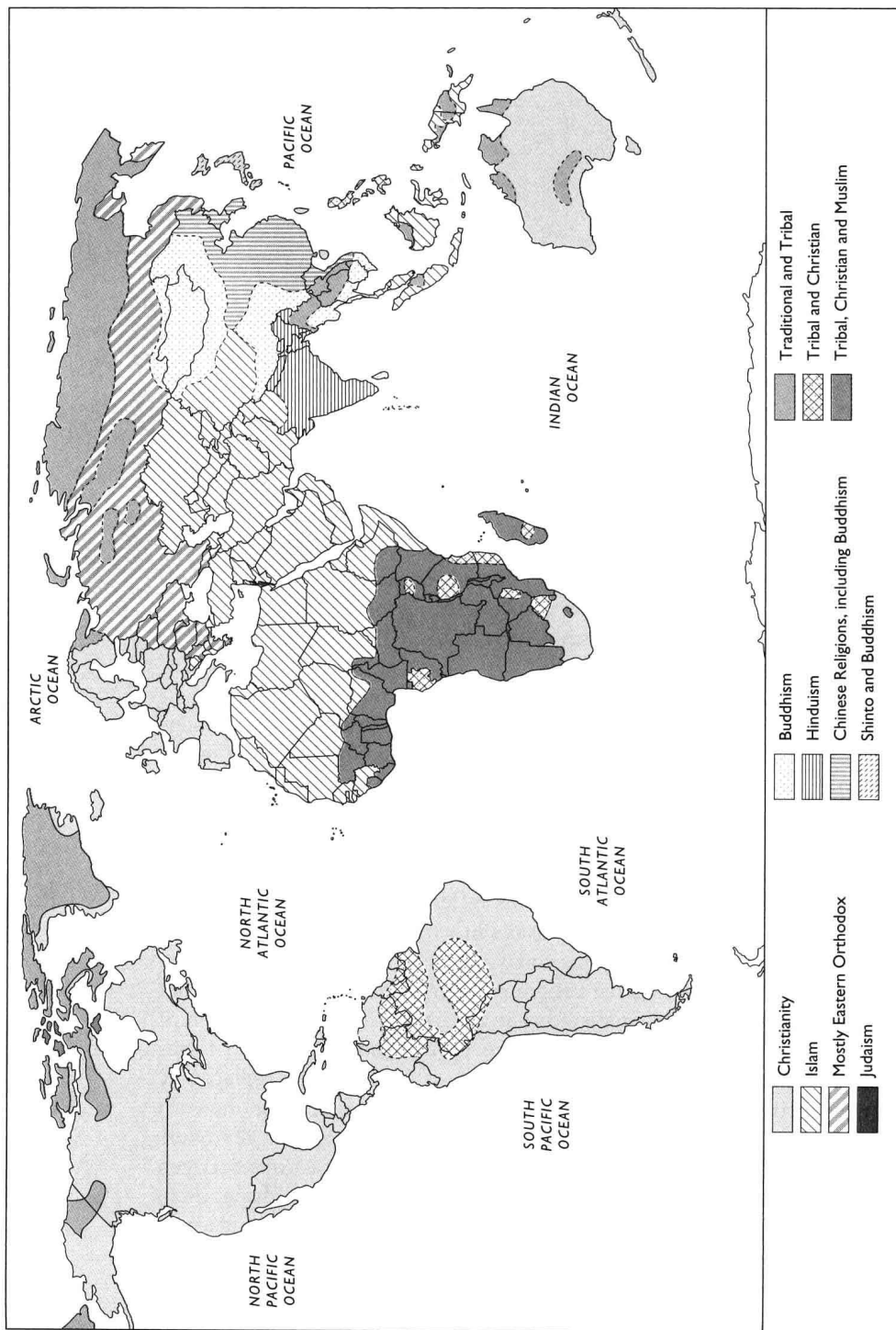


## *Globalization: World Religions in Everyone's Hometown*

In the 1950s, if you walked down the streets of almost any city in the United States, you would have expected to find churches, both Catholic and Protestant, and Jewish synagogues. When people thought about religious diversity, it was limited largely to Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. In the twenty-first century, a new millennium, the situation is dramatically different. Almost daily the newspapers take note of new religious members of the community—announcing a retreat at a Korean Zen center in the suburbs of Providence, Rhode Island; the opening of an Islamic mosque in St. Louis, Missouri; or the dedication of a Hindu temple in Tampa, Florida.

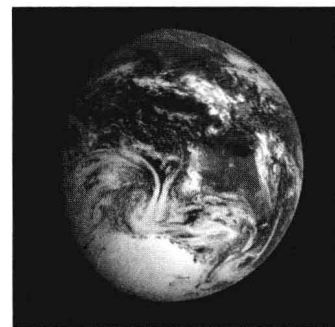
The beliefs and practices of world religions have become part of the mosaic of American society. “Karma” has become part of the American vocabulary, Hindu visualization practices are used in sports training, and Buddhist meditation techniques have been adopted in programs of stress management. No matter where we live today, it is more and more likely that our next-door neighbors are ethnically, politically, and yes even religiously diverse—coming from many parts of the globe (see Map 1.1). In an emerging global economy, most neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools reflect this diversity as well.

In this book we focus on the diverse ways in which we humans have been religious in the past and are religious today. Indeed, the last decades of the twentieth century brought a global religious resurgence, a development that defies countless theorists who predicted that the irresistible secularization of civilization would lead to the disappearance of religion. Religions, it was thought, are tied to ancient premodern worldviews that have been replaced by a modern scientific worldview. Indeed, the clash of traditional religions with modern scientific and secular society is a major concern of this textbook. Awareness of this is essential if we are to understand the interactions between religions and cultures in the world today. Starting with Chapter Three, then, we will begin each chapter not with a discussion of the origins and early history of religious communities but with examples of the encounter of each religion with the “modern” world that illustrate the tension between religion and modern states and societies.



Map 1.1 Distribution of world religions today.

We describe our present time as one in transition between “modernity” and a new, or “postmodern,” era that seems to be emerging. To understand what is “new” about our situation, we will have to understand the premodern period of the different religious traditions and how the premodern worldview of each relates to and contrasts with the modern period. In particular we will have to compare the premodern period in each tradition with the changes brought about by an era that began with the rise of science after 1500 and declined after World War II. In surveying the great world religions, we shall not be able to cover everything that could be said about them. Our selection will be governed primarily by the following question: What do we need to know about the past to understand the role of religion in the world we live in today? To begin, we must introduce some core concepts.



*With the Space Age, awareness that all humans share life in a global village has come to the religions and cultures of the earth.*

## UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND ITS EXPRESSIONS

The first thing we need is a working definition of the term “religion.” To help explain how we are using the term, let’s suppose we have a time machine and can transport ourselves back to the city of Rome in the first century. Why are we interested in that time and place? Because the word “religion” has its roots in Latin, the language of the Romans, understanding how the Romans defined the concept should help us understand our topic.

Imagine yourself now walking down a street in Rome in the first century. When you approach a small group of people on a street corner and ask them: “What religion are you?” they look at you strangely. They understand the individual words you have spoken, but they don’t normally put those words together as you have done. Some give you blank stares, while others just look puzzled. Frustrated, you try rephrasing your question: “Are you religious?” Suddenly their faces light up and they smile and say, “Of course, isn’t everyone?”

By its wording, the original question assumes that religion is a noun applied to distinct social bodies in the world, such that you can be a member of one only if you are not a member of another. So the question seeks to find out the distinct religious group to which you belong. This way of understanding religion naturally arises among monotheists, who by definition have chosen one god and excluded all others. However, such an exclusiveness was foreign to antiquity, and it also is not appropriate today for studying religious traditions among many African and Asian peoples.

In rephrasing the original question as “Are you religious?” you are no longer treating “religion” as a noun, describing something you join. Instead, you are treating it as an adjective, describing an attitude toward the human condition—a way of seeing, acting, and experiencing all things. In most times and places throughout history, religion and culture were like two sides of the same coin. Therefore people did not think of their practices as “a religion”