BRIEF CONTENTS

List of Figures and Maps  xiii  
Timeline  xvi  
Acknowledgments  xxii  
Credits  xxiii

1  Introduction: Prepare to Be Surprised  2

PART I  THE TOOLS  15

2  An Overview of Religion: Making Sense of Life  16  
3  The Early Development of Religious Studies  44  
4  Religious Studies in the 20th Century  76

PART II  USING THE TOOLS: SURVEYING WORLD RELIGIONS  103

5  Early Traditions  104  
6  The Family of Western Monotheisms: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Traditions  124  
   UNIT I  Judaism  126  
   UNIT II  Christianity  151  
   UNIT III  Islam  167  
   UNIT IV  The Impact of Religious Studies on the Western Monotheisms  183  

7  330 Million Gods – or None: Two Traditions from India  206  
8  Balancing and Blending: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism in China  246

10  Closing Questions  308

Glossary  338

Index  344
CONTENTS

List of Figures and Maps  xiii
Timeline  xvi
Acknowledgments  xxii
Credits  xxiii

1   Introduction: Prepare to Be Surprised  2

PART I  THE TOOLS  15

2   An Overview of Religion: Making Sense of Life  16

   Explaining Suffering and Evil  18
   Explaining Death  22
   Ghosts  23
   Resurrection  24
   Souls  25
   Reincarnation  26

   The Importance of Order  26
   Order Out of Chaos  27
   Order and Predictability:
       Eschatology, Prophecy, Divination  27
   Social Order  30
   Group Identity  31
   Ethics/Morality and Law  34
   Authority and Power  37

   The Role of Ritual  39
   Conclusion  41

3   The Early Development of Religious Studies  44

   Philosophy, Theology, and Religious Studies  47
   The Relationship between Philosophy and Theology  48
   Two Kinds of Christian Theology  50

   Scriptural (Biblical) Studies and the Impact of the Printing Press  52
   Baruch Spinoza (d. 1677): The Beginnings of Source Criticism  53
   William Robertson Smith (d. 1894): Historical Criticism  54

   The Rise of Modernity and New Academic Disciplines: Oriental Studies,
   Anthropology, Sociology, and Psychology  55
   Max Müller (d. 1900): Oriental Studies and Religion  57
   Edward Burnett Tylor (d. 1917): Anthropology and Religion  58
   James Frazer (d. 1941): Evolution and Religion  61

   Negative Views of Religion  65
   Karl Marx (d. 1883): Religion as the Opiate of the Masses  65
   Sigmund Freud (d. 1939): Religion as Neurosis  68

   Sociology of Religion  71
   Emile Durkheim (d. 1917): Modernization Theory  71
Max Weber (d. 1920): The Protestant Ethic and the Secularization Thesis 72
Conclusion 74

4 Religious Studies in the 20th Century 76

Back to Philosophy 80
Analytic Philosophy: Antony Flew (d. 2010) 81
Phenomenology and Religious Studies 82
Rudolf Otto (d. 1937) 82
Mircea Eliade (d. 1986) 83

Philosophy of Religion 85
John Hick (b. 1922) 85
William Lane Craig (b. 1949) 87

Anthropology of Religion 89
Clifford Geertz (d. 2006) 89
Mary Douglas (d. 2007) 91

Sociology of Religion 94
Peter L. Berger (b. 1929) 94
Robert N. Bellah (b. 1927) 95

Psychology of Religion 96
William James (d. 1910) 96
Carl Jung (d. 1961) 98

Conclusion: Theories and Methods 99
Philosophical Theories 99
Genetic/Historical Theories 100
Functionalist Theories 100

PART II USING THE TOOLS: SURVEYING WORLD RELIGIONS 103

5 Early Traditions 104
Prehistoric Religions? 107
Animism and Anthropomorphism 108
Death Rituals 112

Fertility Goddesses 113
Hunting Rituals 114
Shamans 114
Ancient Traditions, Oral Traditions, and Religion 115
The Neolithic Revolution and the Rise of Historic Religions 118
Conclusion 121

6 The Family of Western Monotheisms: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Traditions 124

UNIT I Judaism 126
The Torah, the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament 127

The History and Teachings of Judaism 135
The First Five Centuries 135
The Middle Ages (500–1500 CE) 137
The Modern Period (1750 to the present) 141
The Enlightenment 141
The Development of Reform Judaism 142
Conservative Judaism 148
Reconstructionist Judaism 148

The Rituals of Judaism 149
Judaism Today 150

UNIT II Christianity 151

The History and Teachings of Christianity 151
Origins 151
The Development of Christian Doctrine 154
The Institutionalization and Politicization of Christianity 157
Eastern and Western Christians 159
The Western/Roman Church 160
The Eastern Orthodox Churches 163
The Protestant Reformation 164
Christian Rituals 166
Christianity Today 166

UNIT III  Islam 167
The History and Teachings of Islam 167
Core Teachings 167
Early History: The Life of Muhammad and the Rashidun Caliphs 174
The Dynastic Caliphates 176
The Modern Period: Reform and Recovery 179
Islamic Rituals 180
Major Divisions Today 182

UNIT IV  The Impact of Religious Studies on the Western Monotheisms 183
Biblical Studies 184
Rudolf Bultmann (d. 1976):
“Demythologizing” Scripture 185
John Dominic Crossan (b. 1934):
The Historicity of Scripture 186
Theology 192
Liberation Theology 192
Gustavo Gutierrez (b. 1928) 192
Farid Esack (b. 1959) 194
Feminist Theology 196
Judith Plaskow (b. 1947) 198
Rosemary Radford Ruether (b. 1936) 199
Amina Wadud (b. 1952) 201
Conclusion 203

8 Balancing and Blending: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism in China 246
The Tao, Yin and Yang 248
The History of Chinese Religious Thought 251
The Shang Period (18th–11th centuries BCE) 251
The Zhou Period (11th–3rd centuries BCE) 253
Confucius (551–479 BCE) 255
Taoism 258
Buddhism in China 260
Pure Land Buddhism 262
Chan (Zen) Buddhism 262

7 330 Million Gods – or None: Two Traditions from India 206
Hinduism and Buddhism 208
Hinduism 209
History and Teachings of Hinduism 211
Indus Valley Civilization (3000–1500 BCE) 211

The Aryans and the Vedas (1500–600 BCE) 211
The Mystical Worldview of the Upanishads 213
Classical Hinduism (3rd century BCE–7th century CE) 216
The Ramayana 216
The Mahabharata 217
The Puranas 221
The Laws of Manu 223
Hinduism Today 226
Rituals 226

Buddhism 229
History and Teachings of Buddhism 230
Understanding the Four Noble Truths 233
The Ethics of “Awakening” 235
The Core of All Buddhist Traditions 235
The Development of the Three Main Traditions 237
Theravada (Hinayana) 238
Mahayana 238
Vajrayana 240
Buddhism Today 242
Rituals 243
Conclusion: Religious Studies and Indian Traditions 244