

# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

## **The essays in this volume describe key facets of the**

significant interactions between religion and culture. These relationships are constantly in flux historically, although our focus is from the premodern world to the contemporary, or what many would call the “postmodern world.” Our vision tries to be global in scope since the processes of religion and culture are not the specific property of the West or any one cultural area. European categories of knowledge, from the Renaissance and Reformation to the Enlightenment and Romanticism, ascribe only one particular form to these relationships. In other parts of the world, concepts of “church and state” or “secularism” have distinctive formulations. For example, we tend to see the impact of secularization as a central factor in differentiating between religion and culture in modern European nations. But this secularization approach is by no means universally shared. In southern Asia and Southeast Asia, secularization has been less influential, despite contrary goals by imperial powers. Instead, anticolonial political movements have harnessed religion, and in this process they reconfigure the religion and culture relationship.

In our global world, where everything seems intensely interconnected, the relationships between religion and culture allow for the maintenance of cultures, histories, and values. Indeed, some might argue that the last decades of the past century and our new century have witnessed a global religious renaissance, which many earlier social theorists might have found surprising since they saw the end of religion coming hand in hand with social and cultural development. And this new religious renaissance runs parallel to the rise of the global world. In the global world, the nation-state has increasingly lost power. New actors, like global businesses, rival the powers of nation-states. New forms of media go beyond the official forms of media that are critical to the legitimacy of nations. Religion is also a global phenomenon. In some cases, religions develop in private homes, but in the global world local

franchises or national headquarters can be equally powerful. Religion and culture appear more and more like multinational corporations.

The essays in this book also argue that the meeting points between religion and culture, the complex relationships, are in practices, some which are central to domestic life, while others are intensely public. Practice might be understood as that which forms the possibilities of religion and culture in much the same way as the sculptor works stone or wood, sees their potentialities, and produces an object. We will discuss the role of practice shortly, but we must also point to the multiple perspectives of the scholars who are collected here. Some might identify themselves with the social sciences and others the humanities. They bring different ways of understanding these complex relationships between religion and culture.

### FINDING RELIGION AND CULTURE

The very title of this book compels us first to think about the definitions of its two main subjects. We might shy away from definitions, believing that religion and culture are too complex or too variegated to be rendered by meaningful definitions. But let us try to think together about how both might be defined or identified. **There are two ways that we can think of religion.** First, when we use the term *religion*, we of course refer to the religious traditions of the world, the traditions that all of us already know something about, traditions, for example, like Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. Our knowledge of these traditions may arise from our experience or may result from having been brought up in one or another tradition or joining a tradition formally or informally. The transformations being wrought by globalization mean that we may now have many of these traditions in our own neighborhoods. Beginning in the early 1990s, radio stations, for example, began to announce the end of the daily fast of Ramadan because of the number of Muslims who populate the American landscape and might need to know when to break fast.

Many scholars object to using singular terms like Buddhism, as if Buddhism in history and today throughout the world is one common tradition. They might identify the two great streams of Buddhist thought and practice, the Mahayana and the Theravadan traditions. Even these must be supplemented by the Buddhist traditions of Japan, which give Buddhism their own Japanese identity. Buddhism, like other religious traditions, also reflects local or ethnic traditions. Driving on Sunset Boulevard as it runs down to the Los Angeles Civic Center, you will pass at least one Chinese Buddhist temple and a Cambodian Buddhist social center, which houses a Cambodian Buddhist temple. Everyone is welcome in both, but the sacred architecture is vastly different. **The scholars thus might correct us and say that there are only "Buddhisms" or "Judaisms" or "Hinduisms" because within each there are multitudes of perspectives, positions, and understandings of Buddhism, Judaism, or Hinduism.** These differences are not simply "denominations" or different names for the same thing, such as Methodists and Presbyterians. They are fundamentally different worldviews, which may reject other perspectives as inauthentic, false, incomplete, or even heretical.

There is a second way of thinking about religion. Religion is also a complex system of symbols and meanings, which may exist apart from religious traditions. These symbols and

meanings may incorporate values and ethics, ways of self and social understanding. Here religion is about the fundamental questions of human existence: What happens when we die? Why are we here? Where do we come from? Why do good people suffer? Who are we? Paul Tillich (1886–1965), one of the great Protestant theologians of the twentieth century, sought to broaden the definition of religion by defining it as “ultimate concern.” Those activities, ideas, and ways of being that we think of as ultimately important constituted religion for Tillich. Those matters that are most meaningful to us are expressions of this ultimate concern. And he would not limit this ultimate concern to religious traditions. Other theologians, of course, throughout history have sought to restrict or limit religion. For example, Tillich’s contemporary Karl Barth (1886–1968) emphasized how official church institutions, beliefs, creeds, and dogmas provide answers to these fundamental questions. One need go no further than the walls of the church to find these authoritative answers. Tillich thought more expansively about religion so that a wider set of human activities and beliefs that were of ultimate concern to individuals could properly be called “religious.” For Tillich, many aspects of culture could reflect this ultimate concern, including contemporary art and film. This meant that culture could be read as religion. Culture was theology.

Tillich was an heir to a long tradition of Protestant thought. Indeed, many students of religion might begin their histories of the modern study of religion with another Protestant theologian, Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), who in 1917 published a slim volume title *Das Heilige* (its English title is *The Idea of the Holy*). Otto began by noting that in many languages of religious traditions, the words that are translated as “holy” or “sacred” suggest something else, that the holy or sacred are a different reality, separate from everything else. He used the phrase *ganz Andere*, “totally Other,” to capture this sense of the separation of the holy. Otto thought of his book as being a contribution to the psychology of religion, and thus the human response to the holy was a central element of his discussion. The response to the manifestation of the holy, Otto believed, is always contradictory. He used the term *mysterium tremendum* to describe the overwhelming fear that accompanies this manifestation. But while a human is frightened and repelled by this *mysterium tremendum*, we are also drawn to it, fascinated by it, and hence he called this aspect of the holy, the *fascinans*. We are simultaneously fearful of the holy and simultaneously drawn to it.

Otto believed that the very best example of these two simultaneous experiences—fear and fascination of, and with, the holy—was the well-known narrative of Moses and the burning bush in the book of Exodus (3:1ff). There we are told that Moses was herding the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, when suddenly a divine messenger appeared to him in a flaming bush, and more important, the bush was not consumed by the fire. He was drawn to it, and as he approached the bush, God called to him, telling him to take off his sandals because the place upon which he stood was *admat kodesh*, which most English translations render as “holy ground.” But what fascinated Otto in this text was the more fundamental meaning of a “separate ground” unlike everything around it. The sacred could not be reduced to the world or anything in it. It is something fundamentally different from the immanent world. Yet it can only be experienced through the specificity and particularity of the world. Moses is in the desert with a specific bush on specific ground. Otto’s analysis of the sacred remains an

important marker for students of religion nearly a century after its publication. The sacred is never abstract, but always experienced, contained, and embodied in local places in conversation with others.

There were contemporaries of Otto who also sought to define religion. Among them, Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) are among the most important. In 1912, Durkheim published his *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, which is one of the foundational works in the modern study of religion. The focus of this long study was the fundamental distinction between the sacred and the profane, which enabled Durkheim to describe how a symbol, or what he called a “collective representation,” carried enormous social power that could sustain and unify a community. Many understood Durkheim to suggest that religion was nothing more than a representation of the social, but he is far more complicated. That distinction between sacred and profane was the fundamental distinction in the experiential world, and thus Durkheim began to see its operations throughout the institutions of society or the social world, in law, economy, politics, and the family. Durkheim was not an evolutionary thinker who was interested in how “primitive” religions develop into more advanced religions. Instead, he understood “elementary” to refer to relatively undifferentiated societies, where religious functions could be observed easily and separate from other social functions. Durkheim understood his work as “religious sociology” precisely because he believed that all of society reflected the primary distinction between the sacred and profane.

Freud, however, was interested in human evolution and ultimately the vanquishing of religion as a deep-seated superstition through progress in science and culture. In his first major cultural study, *Totem and Taboo: Some Convergences in the Mental Life of Savages and Neurotics* (1913), Freud agreed that religious symbols hold enormous social power. From his work with patients and from reflecting on some of the same materials that Durkheim used, he was convinced that religious symbols also articulate repressed, powerful emotions such as those regarding parents, love, sex, and our deepest hopes and anxieties. He ingeniously posited that the relationships between humans and their gods were derived from their relationships with their fathers, so that totemism was a repressed cultural and religious form masking the primordial murder of a tyrannical father by his sons. We note in his later cultural works, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929), and *Moses and Monotheism* (1937 and 1939) written after World War I and during the rise of Nazism that Freud became increasingly critical of religion’s ability to improve peoples’ lives in a modern, industrial age. The destruction and violence he witnessed firsthand led Freud to reemphasize an older philosophical distinction between the blind faith of children and the more measured adult recognition of the importance of science and reason. However, his additional suggestion that psychoanalysis had the potential to help people more than religion was bound to offend religious people.

After World War II, the great Romanian scholar Mircea Eliade brought the European discipline of the history of religions to the United States, where he generalized comparatively across cultures and time periods. According to Eliade, human beings require order and orientation in their lives. Religion is made up of the myths and rituals that help us to orient ourselves in time and space. Creation myths, for example, are often narrated during rituals

allowing the listeners in the religious community to reexperience the events of creation and to renew the world as it was at creation. Catholics, for example, during the weekly Eucharist remind themselves and relive the foundational meal that stands at the origin of their community and that identifies the simple foods of wine and bread with the blood and body of the Savior. Over the last half of the twentieth century, and beyond, the students of Eliade criticized his theory for being overly dependent upon generalities about complex religious traditions, while also overlooking the importance of particular historical and political contexts. For example, in an essay called “A Pearl of Great Price and a Cargo of Yams,” Jonathan Z. Smith points out that religious practices such as those on the island of West Ceram may reenact eternal truths, but they also may respond to recent sociopolitical traumas or what he calls “situational incongruities.” In this case, cargo cults, as many anthropologists who have studied the religious traditions and peoples of the South Pacific have called them, may reflect an ancient messianic hope and also be a response to recent colonial encounters with vast disparities in wealth and technology.

One of the founders of the contemporary discipline of religious studies, Ninian Smart (1927–2001), brought together many of the definitions already mentioned into what he called a “dimensional analysis of religion.” According to Smart’s definition, there is a part of culture that we can call religion when it contains several, but not necessarily all, of these dimensions. Initially, Smart believed that the appropriate number of dimensions was seven, including the mythic, doctrinal, ritual, institutional, ethical, experiential, and aesthetic dimensions. Later, he added the political and the economic, which were vital to understanding how secular ideologies like Communism or nationalism share striking resemblances with religion. Such a move is significant for our purposes since a discussion of both major and minor religious practices requires a broad definition of religion. Ninian Smart’s dimensional analysis is ideally suited to help us understand how the sacred is experienced in the practices of men and women in their daily lives.

Though each of these efforts to define religion may prove useful and intriguing, for most scholars of religion and members of religious traditions, religion means more than a specific function or an answer to the question of meaning. Defining culture is equally problematic and elusive. The cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926–2006) was one of the major figures in his generation to reconceptualize culture. In 1973, he published a collection of some of his most important essays and articles under the title *The Interpretation of Cultures*. This influential volume defined culture as a “semiotic system,” which he likened to the human being suspended in webs of meaning and significance spun by himself. Geertz took those webs to be culture, which could be understood through an interpretive quest for their meanings. Culture had become a matter of interpretation whose meanings could appear in the ethnographic method—or what he called “thick description”—described as when anthropologists construct something parallel to the reading of a text or a manuscript that is foreign to its reader, incomplete, with elements that seem completely incoherent, with questionable additions or emendations, and within a commentary tradition that seems impenetrable, but in structured behavior rather than in words. He interpreted religion as an element within this system or one component of the web of culture. Religion was something that was given

and awaited interpretation. For example, people are always spinning webs of meaning while drawing upon the cultural resources, or other parts of the web, to produce that meaning.

We might understand Geertz's interpretation of culture and religion by analogy, using the *auteur* theory in film studies. This French word means more than simply "author." *Auteur*, in film studies and in film criticism, refers to films that are dominated by the creative vision of their directors and makers. French filmmakers like François Truffaut might initially be thought of when the word *auteur* is used. However, the number of these filmmakers is extensive and not of course limited to French films and their makers. One can think of American filmmakers like Orson Welles, Quentin Tarantino, and Preston Sturges; of Italians like Federico Fellini or Roberto Rossellini; Japanese directors like Akira Kurosawa; and many, many more. It is the creative vision of these filmmakers that is impressed upon the film so strongly that even if you did not know the filmmaker before seeing a film, you might immediately recognize the vision of the director. Indeed, *auteur* films are strikingly different from films that are the result of large studios where the vision of the director or screenwriter is subordinated to other concerns such as run time, audience, or commercial spinoffs. The vision of the filmmaker is analogous to the meaning that is generated from spinning webs. Meaning is what gives reality or the phenomenal world its coherence in the same way that the artistic vision unifies a film and makes it immediately identifiable.

#### THE "CULTURAL TURN" FROM TEXT TO CONTEXT

The work of the theologians, historians, social theorists, and anthropologists we have discussed has led to an important sea change in scholarship on religion over the past forty years. Indeed, the focus of this volume on religion and culture is a reflection of that change. Scholars of religion have turned more and more to the interactions and relationships between religion and culture, and to do that requires embedding religion in its contexts. Some contemporary scholars refer to this contextualization as "religion in daily life" or "religion in lived experience," or just "lived religion." We will have more to say about this in just a moment. Certainly, the study of religion today is dramatically different than it was forty years ago at one of the great watershed events in the history of the study of religion in the United States. That event was the United States Supreme Court decision in the *Schempp v. Abington Township* case in 1963. The court ruled that teaching about religion in public schools and state-supported universities and colleges does not violate the constitutional separation of church and state. Justice Thomas Clark, writing for the majority, stated, "It might well be said that one's education is not complete without the study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such a study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be enacted consistently with the First Amendment."

The court sought to deflect the charge of its ruling being to enshrine a "religion of secularism" by pointing out that the study of the Bible or religion when pursued objectively and within the context of a "secular program of education" is consistent with the First

Amendment. This suggestion was underscored in the concurring opinions of Justices Brennan and Goldberg. Justice Brennan wrote that “the holding of the Court . . . plainly does not foreclose teaching about the Holy Scriptures or about the differences between religious sects in classes in literature or history.” Justice Goldberg wrote: “Government must inevitably take cognizance of the existence of religion and, indeed, under certain circumstances the First Amendment may require that it do so. And it seems clear to me from the opinions in the present and past cases that the Court would recognize the propriety of . . . the teaching *about* religion, as distinguished from the teaching *of* religion, in the public schools.”

The court’s decision led to a dramatic expansion of religion in public universities and colleges in the first two decades after the Schempp decision. In private universities, the study of religion often existed alongside of or was overshadowed by theological education, but the court’s decision also had impact here, contributing to an emancipation of the study of religion from its historical-theological context. But it was a more difficult struggle to create ways of studying religion that were not a continuation of theology. The study of religion in the first years after the Schempp decision was oriented toward elite understandings of religious traditions and toward religious “ideas” and the importance of the documents and texts of religious traditions. These texts were often embedded in long traditions of commentary and interpretation by religious leaders, and often these texts with their ideas were explored without deep analysis of their historical, political, economic, cultural, and social contexts. Texts oriented religion to the past and not the present. Here, we must note that the study of religion is not only a humanistic discipline. Sociologists of religion went about their work in the context of the social, but much of the study of religion at the time of the Schempp decision had a commitment to text and ideas, and not their contexts. Today, religion in daily life, or religion in lived experience, has provided a powerful reorientation of the discipline and has given primacy to efforts to reembed religion in the contexts of its practices, including increased attention to the role of ritual, the microenvironments of domestic life and the macrodimensions of public life. In 1978, Ninian Smart spoke to the Wingspread Conference on the state of religious studies sponsored by the Council on the Study of Religion. In his paper, assessing the future directions of the study of religion, Smart called for attention to what he described as “religion on the ground.” “Religion on the ground” became an important theoretical concern of his, alongside of his dimensional analysis of religions and his efforts to expand religion to include worldviews. Smart may have been among the first scholars of religion who examined the problem of religion and politics, which today is considered so critical.

The sea change taking place in the study of religion was a reflection of changes taking place in other disciplines, which also sought to recontextualize their explorations of human phenomena. Anthropology, long a discipline of the human past, became increasingly interested in the contemporary; sociology, a discipline that had long understood its practice as limited to the contemporary, became more and more interested in history. As we noted earlier, Clifford Geertz’s “thick description” and the hermeneutics of culture pushed the ethnographer deeper and deeper into the contexts of anthropological description and human life. Indeed, the emergence of “cultural studies” or “cultural analysis” challenged disciplinary

boundaries by returning to context to reembed culture in its lived experiences. "The cultural turn," as many call this analysis of context, has been one of the most significant transformations of academic disciplines in the last forty years, and the study of religion has also experienced this "cultural turn" no less than other disciplines. Jeffrey Alexander, the distinguished Yale professor of sociology, has explored how this cultural turn can be traced to Durkheim and provides one of the most potent theoretical contributions to the social sciences and the humanities. In the study of religion, the cultural turn has also allowed scholars to see more clearly the limitations of earlier theories and perspectives and thus to formulate and introduce new theoretical constructions that may have been concealed in the earlier emphasis upon textual and idea-oriented study that was inherited from theology. For example, Thomas Tweed notes in his discussion of many significant advances in the study of religion and in other disciplines since the 1970s that we can draw a parallel between the cultural turn and what he and others call the spatial turn. This development in scholarship has positioned spatial constructions of the social world in critical social theory. The cultural turn and the spatial turn have allowed Tweed to introduce a new way to understand religion on the basis of movement, crossing, and dwelling. Once we focus on movement and crossing, we begin to see how religion can be understood as creating and maintaining spatial frames of reference.

The cultural turn had other important results for the study of religion. First, the study of religion turned toward what Smart called the experiential dimension of religion, or how religion was and is experienced by regular people rather than by religious leaders and officials, like priests and rabbis and monks and sheiks, theologians and philosophers, all of whom understand how things are and should be via abstractions of religion. It has become more and more the case that scholars will use, as we noted earlier, the term "lived religion" to recalibrate this focus. David D. Hall, an American religions historian, edited a collection of essays that have had a very significant impact on how American religions are now studied. He titled his collection *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, and in his introduction he set out many of the important factors involved in studying lived religion. He pointed out, for example, that "lived religion" is not the same as popular religion, which often conjures an oppositional relationship between religious authorities and laity. Lived religion is not focused on this opposition between the high and the low within religious traditions. How religions are practiced is the central concern of this focus. The essays in Hall's volume are not longitudinal studies but windows that explore a number of distinctive religious moments in the history of American religions. There are, however, many excellent studies that provide these long historical views of lived religion. Among the best is Jennifer Scheper Hughes's *Biography of a Mexican Crucifix: Lived Religion and Local Faith from the Conquest to the Present*, which examines what has now become the oldest Mexican crucifix and the devotional practices that grew up around this crucifix, apart from the Catholic authorities, from the colonial period to the present. This focus on lived religion will be seen in a number of the essays that have been collected here.

Second, the cultural turn allowed scholars to interpret phenomena that might not have any overt religious characteristics so as to reveal the religious orientations of society. In 1957, the French semiotician and literary theorist Roland Barthes (1915–1980) was a significant

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trailblazer with his “The World of Wrestling.” There, Barthes demonstrated that something as profane as professional wrestling can perform and reveal larger, more sacred cultural and religious realities. Barthes noted, among other “signs,” how defeat is total, with its attendant suffering understood as a repetition of the crucifixion of Jesus. Forty years later, the historian of religions Bruce Lincoln returned to Barthes’ essay to demonstrate the central of wrestling, in which there are a number of matches in which the bad guys triumph using unscrupulous and sadistic means. They would strangle their opponents, bite them, hit them with chairs and concealed weapons, gouge their eyes, kick them in the groin, throw them against the metal posts that hold the ring’s ropes, throw them onto to the mat and stomp them, or throw them out of the ring so that they would crash on the cement floor of the auditorium. All of this was ritually presented to demonstrate that in the final match good would triumph over the evil spectacle that the viewers had seen. The struggle between good and evil in the match is not an intellectual abstraction. At the core of wrestling is ritual reenactment. Another example is Kathryn Lofton’s fascinating study of Oprah Winfrey and her company, including her television show, book club, store, magazine, Angel Network, and many other projects. Lofton reads these as providing a way to survive the disorienting plentitude of modernity and the overpowering materiality of the secular world by providing direction and meaning. Her television program is her “ministry,” Lofton argues, and her “religiosity, her brand of religion, is non-institutional and non-creedal. The most important part of her ministry is the many lives that have been changed or inspired to change by her television show and multiple spin offs. Oprah functions much like a religious icon, containing and manifesting powers to change lives.”

## POLITICS, ETHICS, AND AESTHETICS

One of the most important threads running through the new studies of lived religion is practice, or what many have called performance. Religions are matters of practice. Likewise, culture is never an abstraction, but like religion, is a practice. Anthropologists like Talal Asad have questioned how well theories actually explain religion if we understand religion to be a matter of practice. Theory and practice do not necessarily form an unbroken continuum with practice at one end and theory at the other. Religion as practice or performance requires new methods of study, including ethnographic fieldwork and the deep description that we have inherited from Clifford Geertz. Ethnography and fieldwork seem, then, to limit our exploration of religion and culture to the present. But is that true? We think the answer is no. There are many ethnographic accounts from the past two centuries that perhaps can be reread with new interests, attuning our reading to how religions are performed. Of course, we need to be very sensitive to all of the negative baggage that these descriptions contain, such as the dichotomy of “primitive” versus “the developed” or “advanced,” which was one way that ethnographers distinguished tribal and traditional religions from Christianity, or interpretive theories that have been discredited, such as “animism.”

We suggest here that another way to understand the relationships between religion and culture is to consider the different kinds of spaces in which religion and culture are performed

and influence our daily lives. It is in these spaces that lived religion is played out. We will argue that there are three spaces that provide the arenas of performance. In much the same way that the French theorist Michel de Certeau saw three spaces of everyday life, marked by production, consumption, and then a third space between these marked by syntheses, we identify first a space where power and politics are performed, a second space where ethics are performed, and a third space where aesthetics are performed creatively and in response to the first two. All three are social spaces in which performance takes place. In some cases, the performance is acted in physical space, in some cases the performance takes place in temporal space, and finally, some performances are enacted in virtual time and space. Some would argue that the most fundamental distinction is between public and private space. The French sociologist and Marxist social theorist Henri Lefebvre (1905–1991) spent a considerable part of his scholarly career examining and interpreting everyday life and argued that this distinction between public and private collapses because all of our decisions, even those that seem the most private, have significant public implications.

Lefebvre, however, took care to underscore that the relationships between public and private are complex. Significantly, the public and private separation includes the relationship of religion and politics, or what in the United States is commonly referred to as the church-state debate. That debate seeks to balance the powers of the religious traditions or institutions with the state or to restrain their interconnection. This is one of the most hotly contested issues here in the United States and also in many other modern nation-states. Though many of us tend to think of religion as a largely individual matter, we must remember that this is a relatively recent phenomenon that is no older than the Enlightenment tradition in Europe and the United States during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Enlightenment thinkers sought to separate religion and the public sphere so as to restrict religion, to make it an individual denominational or confessional matter. The citizen of a modern nation-state might have been Catholic or Protestant, but that was not the prime definition of their identity. They were citizens as the state defined them. In their private homes, they would retain a religious identity if they so chose. Prior to the Enlightenment, religion defined identity. It was impossible before the nation-state for identity to be constructed apart from religion. It was the sole frame of reference for questions of identity. Enlightenment thinkers like the Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), Voltaire (1694–1778), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), among many others, contemplated a nonreligious identity because of the long history of religious warfare in Europe and also because of their commitment to the dictates of reason and universalism. (But despite this separation, we recognize how personal morality influences public morality and how public morality also affects personal morality.) This separation transformed religion. Religion's claim to organize both the public and the private was rejected, and religion became only a private confessional matter. The citizen of the new enlightened world would be defined only by the state.

This was not an easy transition for Christianity and Judaism in Europe and in the Americas. Many of the struggles that we have today between religion and state are the result of that separation. Some might argue that a central problem of the new century will be whether that high wall of separation between church and state will be maintained.

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Indeed, there is a multifront culture war going on over the place of religion in the modern state. But it is more than a struggle between science and faith, secularism and religion, or sacred and profane. It is a more complicated struggle involving liberal religious traditions that have normalized the separation and their position in the modern state as particularistic confessions. Small religious minorities cling to the separation in order to protect themselves from the demands of a majoritarian religion. Jews and Catholics in the United States have traditionally been supporters of the separation so as to avoid greater conflicts over the definition of who really is a member of the state and the pressure to conform to the majority Protestant tradition.

Durkheim recognized that the secular nationalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was competing with religious nationalism in providing unifying symbols for the nation-state. Following Durkheim's insight, the sociologist Robert Bellah analyzed this relationship in the use of religious language by US Presidents. In a famous essay published in 1967 titled "Civil Religion in America," Bellah argued that the separation of church and state in the United States provided a social or religious space for the emergence of an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion, which was clearly differentiated from church and synagogue. The beginning point for his essay was John Fitzgerald Kennedy's inaugural address on January 20, 1961, where he made reference to God three times.

"For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago," "the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God," and "With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

Bellah rejected understanding these references as an example of what every American president must do or risk losing support; nor were these references ceremonial formalities. They told Bellah something important about the nature of religion in American life. Bellah noted that the references are more problematic and more illuminating because Kennedy was a Catholic and chose not to give his references a distinctively Catholic form. Kennedy did not present a doctrinal deity, Bellah pointed out, because this was a matter of his own private religious beliefs; they are not matters relevant in any direct way to the conduct of his public office. Others with different religious views and commitments to different churches or denominations are equally qualified participants in the political process.

The principle of separation of church and state guarantees the freedom of religious belief and association but at the same time clearly segregates the religious sphere, which is considered to be essentially private, from the political one. Given this separation of church and state, Bellah asked, how could the president be justified in using the word "God"? He quickly answered this question—the separation of church and state does not deny the political realm a religious dimension. That separation of the state and particular and private religious claims provided the social space for public religious dimension, and it is the set

of beliefs, symbols, and rituals of this public religious dimension that Bellah described as "American civil religion."

Indeed, the force of this civil religion is demonstrated by the theological meanings of Kennedy's statements, especially the third reference, where the young President reiterated that it is the nation's task on earth to work out the blessing of God or that God's work is our work. Bellah described this as an "activist and non-contemplative conception of the fundamental religious obligation," which he believed was associated with American Protestantism. Civil religion had become so much a part of America that it overruled any theology that the president as a Catholic might have wanted to give it. Thus for Bellah the importance of the references is how deeply established civil religion is in the American outlook. Of course, the actual term "civil religion" was drawn from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract*, where Rousseau explained its central ingredients—the existence of deity, the life to come, reward and punishment for virtue and vice, and exclusion of religious intolerance. But Bellah quickly admitted that there is no necessary causal connection between Rousseau and the founders of the nation. Similar ideas were a part of the climate of the late-eighteenth century, and thus Rousseau and the founders of the nation shared a similar worldview.

Bellah argued that American civil religion has its own myths, rituals, sacred places, and sacred objects. He commented on our myth and how it has integrated traumatic events. The assassination of Abraham Lincoln was understood as a sacrificial death that guaranteed the unity of the nation. The ritual calendar of American civil religion includes Thanksgiving and July 4, and in both celebrations, the myth of the nation is retold to new generations, just as any authoritative myth would be renarrated again in a religious tradition.

By the mid-1970s and in the wake of the divisive Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, Bellah concluded that American civil religion was an "empty and broken shell." Civil religion was an external covenant in order to guarantee social existence, but this covenant must be loved by the citizens of the nation and not merely obeyed. The spiritual rhythms of the nation did not merely decline during the 1970s, according to Bellah. Rather, the covenant had been betrayed by its most responsible servants. He reasoned that not only had our political leaders betrayed the covenant, but they also did not realize what it was or how that betrayal had affected the entire nation. Their betrayal was much worse, for they knew that there would be no punishment for their breaking of the covenant. The covenant itself had lost any meaning. A decade later, Bellah, along with several colleagues from the University of California, Berkeley, published *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, where they noted that American civil religion had its own opposite, a religious individualism they called "Sheilaism," after a young nurse by the name of Sheila Larson, who told them, "I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice." The church-state and civil-religion debates are two examples of how private religion can influence public daily life on a national level. But as civil religion receded, individualistic religion like Sheilaism became more significant.

Though the relationship of religion and politics is a complex one, and debates over the separation of church and state and the line separating the public and private spheres will

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not be settled once and for all in this volume and its essays, we do hope to provide the raw material that can support the various sides in these debates. The broad definitions of religion outlined above, the Supreme Court decision in the Schempp case, Ninian Smart's call for a study of religion on the ground, and the cultural turn in the study of religion from text to context, attest to the continuing importance of religion and the study of religion in the first decades of the twenty-first century.

According to the theory of everyday life articulated by Henri Lefebvre, and his contemporary the political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) would agree, a vital public arena where these living debates are encouraged may contribute to preserving democracy and preventing mass destruction and genocides. In fact, the scholarship on everyday life or daily life emerged after World War II in response to intellectual and historical factors. During the height of the age of empires, or what some scholars mean by “modernity,” the initial European followers of the founders of what became the social sciences or human sciences, Marx, Durkheim, Freud, and Weber, emphasized the aspects of their work that coincided with a secularization hypothesis influenced by social evolution. It was tempting for Europeans to connect their military superiority with increased secularization. For many intellectuals, however, two world wars that were “total wars,” because civilians had no refuge, and that also included the Nazi destruction of European Jewry with the mass killings of hundreds of thousands of others, were sufficient proof that modernity and progress did not correspond. Instead, modernity came to mean an otherworldly quest for homogeneity, a desire for which scholars of religion were not immune.

The spiritual vacuum, after secularization failed to create peace, has coincided with a new religious pluralism produced by postcolonial immigration since the 1960s. One of the great migrations in world history, which appears to be a permanent global transformation as a result of advances in transportation and communications, is considered by some a threat and by others an opportunity. After analyzing the causes of the rise of Nazism, Hannah Arendt concluded that only a diverse populace who actively participates in politics can prevent other episodes of genocide from occurring in the future.

While Arendt's political analysis of the rise of Nazism does not talk a great deal about the role of religion, her theory of the importance of democratic public spaces for face-to-face communication was also advanced by Lefebvre, who developed a theory of everyday life that includes major traditional religious practices as well as the seemingly minute repetitive details upon which we spend so much time and energy. According to Lefebvre's hypothesis, even decisions as simple as how to get to work or what to eat for breakfast have revolutionary implications for religion and culture. To give only two examples, the importance of automobile transportation in American culture significantly raised the value of oil discovered in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian government has used some of the funds from American consumers to train religious leaders and translate Islamic texts to be disseminated worldwide. As a result, one particular interpretation of Islamic doctrine has spread widely. Secondly the desire to eat bananas for breakfast resulted in the control of Guatemala by the United Fruit Company during the first half of the twentieth century. This economic and political arrangement contributed to the appeal of liberation theology, which had a direct

impact on the official doctrines of the Vatican. Thus the everyday decisions to eat bananas or take the drive-through lane have influenced the religious lives of half of humanity.

We have organized the contributions to this volume according to the three spaces where religion and culture are performed. These include, first, the public, or civil, space of performance competitions and, second, the private space of moral courage and ethical consequence. Of course, the first and second spaces work in tension to synthesize the third, aesthetic space. Power relationships dominate the first space, which can structure the types of performance that are available in the second and third spaces. In the first political space, this volume contains essays that take up issues of conflict and peacebuilding, civil religion, zones of contact, conflict and creativity, science, women, sexuality, and forms of traditional healing. Each of these chapters takes different perspectives on how religion and culture are performed, but each contributes to our understanding of how religions and cultures create societies and communities. The second is private space, which contains the home and domestic space. It is in this second space that individuals are molded. We might think of this creation of individuals using the Catholic educational term *formation*. In the second ethical space, individuals are formed and ideas are performed as a part of that formation. This section includes contributions on economics, nature, tourism, education, and children. The aesthetic third space keeps the public and private, or political and ethical, in creative tension. Aesthetics involve greater creative synthesis than politics or ethics. Consider how a jazz funeral turns the intensely private experience of death into a public event. Or think of how the death of kings, presidents, and other political and cultural figures results in a demand to have these figures viewed in death by the public, so that the public preservation of Elvis Presley's grave at Graceland in Memphis becomes intensely private for individual visitors. Or Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington successfully draws formerly private, individual mourning into the public space. These creative syntheses prove themselves to be extraordinarily powerful in overturning or subverting the relationships struck in the first and second spaces. Political and intellectual leaders cannot control all creative performance. Here, the third, aesthetic section includes essays on contemporary art, contemporary music, humor, film, material and popular culture, memorialization, and death and dying.

Each part of *Religion and Culture: Contemporary Practices and Perspectives* demonstrates the interweaving of religion and culture. Each chapter helps us to understand why religion cannot be separated or compartmentalized so that it operates only within the walls of religious institutions or during religious events and dates within the calendar. Neither is culture something isolated, belonging to certain classes, groups, and institutions of the social world. Each chapter also demonstrates multiple perspectives in the study of religion. Readers will see how human life is immersed in religion and culture where local daily life practices are laboratories for observing the processes of human meaning-creation.

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