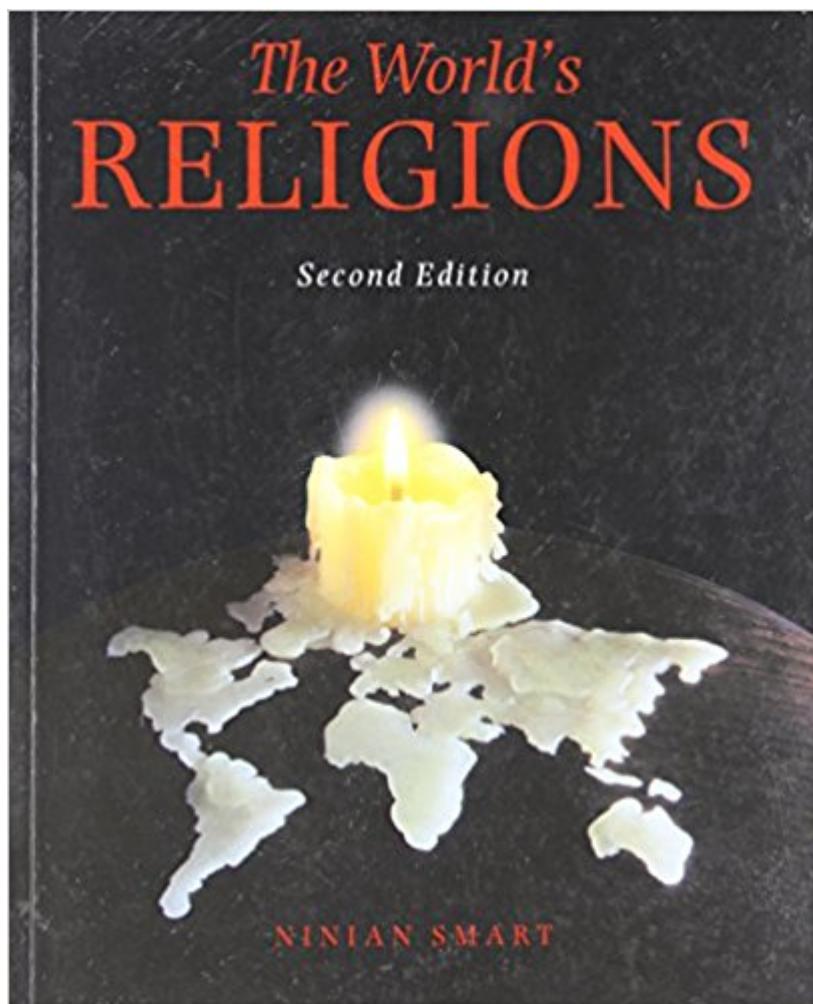


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The World's Religions



Synopsis

The World's Religions offers a fascinating insight into a wide range of faiths, their history and their followers. In the richly illustrated new edition of this popular book, religions are described through their symbols, rituals, followers, architecture and art. References, statistics, maps and pictures have been updated and added. The text has been thoroughly revised to highlight recent developments, such as the spread of Islam, African-American and Hispanic-American religious experience, and women priests.

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Customer Reviews

Smart (emeritus, Univ. of California, Santa Barbara) is one of the few public religious intellectuals who can be compared to the late Joseph Campbell. In this second edition of his study of world religions, he has expanded his discussion of the multifaceted dimensions of religious thought. This edition retains the same structure found in the earlier one: Part 1 charts the historical development of religions in the ancient worlds, while Part 2 follows how they changed after the Renaissance, the settling of the Americas, and other cultural shifts. In this version, he adds the effects of the breakup of the Soviet Union, the expansion of Islam, the spread of African American religious experiences, and the changes brought about by the introduction of female priests. It would be a mistake to assign this book as a primary textbook for a world religions class; Smart is primarily a historian, and the emphasis here is on world religions in terms of world history and constantly developing systems of faith, belief, and theology. Recommended for all libraries. Glenn Masuchika, Chaminade Univ. Lib.,

"The World's Religion's is recommended as a basic introduction, and quite possibly for the circulating as well as reference collection." Choice

A very thorough and detailed explanation of the religions. Not one for easy reading but contains everything that an interested reader could want. Especially if only one book were available.

Textbook used for undergrad studies. Excellent price, especially when compared to other sites for the same book. Great buy at the time.

So helpful for myclass

I found this book to be very helpful and detailed without being boring. I learned a lot from the book and my course.

Interesting book.

In our time, when religion is often dominating our headlines and influencing politics, a sound understanding of religion is more important than ever. Ninian Smart in this book gives an excellent overview of the major world religions and their beliefs and ideas. He also organises religion into several dimensions into which religious behaviour and forms of belief can be understood. Smart covers Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and also Greek mystery religion and secular systems which share some features with religion. This work is an excellent introduction to world religions and essential reading for anyone interested in this subject.

Religion can be like sex and money, a touchy subject for many people. And like the other two, it provokes extremes in behaviour and is often difficult to make sense of. And many of us never read anything about religions other than our own, if we have one. When I began religious studies at university three years ago, this remarkable book was not on the reading list and my set texts were biased towards Western Christianity and virtually ignored Eastern Orthodoxy. Then I discovered Ninian Smart's eloquent, accessible books and I cannot recommend this one highly enough as a

place to start understanding religion, whether you are a student of philosophy, science, sociology or just looking for a good read. Understanding our world's religions and ideologies is a key to comprehending mankind's development and what propels many current global conflicts. Despite our increasingly secularised societies, religion still drives many human beings. Religions remain practices and ideas that move mankind, they are a window to understanding cultures and perhaps your next door neighbour. And in an age where globalization virtually rules, it is worth noting that religions are interacting in ways they never have before and out of this comes new faiths - as well as conflict. Smart discusses the importance of understanding religions, the nature of them and of secular world views and the roots, formations and reformations of religions. So you think religions divide us in their dissimilarity? It is remarkable, Smart writes, that in doctrine, a number of faiths have a virtual similarity in regard to the idea of creation. The book is well organized. Smart uses timelines to divide the book into two parts: The first from around 3000BC to around 1400AD, and the second from 1500AD. In the first part, Smart works his way from India's diversity of Buddhism, Brahmanism, classical Hinduism, Islam and Sramanic alternatives, to the confusion over what was and is religion in China, dimensions of Polynesian religion, the contribution of South-East Asia, the diversity of the Americas, the ancient Near East, spiritual values in the Ancient Greece and Roman worlds, classical and medieval Judaism, classical African religions to classical and medieval Islam. In part two, he examines the effects of science and secularism on religion, the reforming of Christianity, reactions to colonial intervention, developments in Islam including fundamentalism, the results of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, new religious movements in Africa, Latin America's turmoil, China, Japan and Korea in modern times. As the book was published towards the close of the 20th century, it contains a more comparative view than was thought possible in the Western world half way through the 20th century. It is not easy to write of religion without bias but Smart, in my humble view, is refreshingly free of prejudice. I believe he encourages us to look at religion similarly and this is what makes *The World's Religions* such a joy to read.

Outside of Mircea Eliade, Smart is the one academic I would highly recommend for a very good overview of world faiths. He covers this area thoroughly, with respect, and with a detailed academic fervour. Having met Professor Smart at a Seminar in the 80s, I found him to be an amazingly knowledgeable fellow. Typical of many academics, his best form of expression seems to be in the written word. Basically, any person with a broad interest in religion needs some of Professor Ninian Smart's works in their collection since they are very comprehensive, and written in an accessible

manner. If you can get Mircea Eliade's collection of secondary reference works and material, in 2 or 3 volumes, you will have an excellent reference source set.

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