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CHAPTER ONE

Scripture among the World’s Religions

- In Great Britain, Salman Rushdie tentatively comes out of hiding from would-be killers. Rushdie’s controversial novel, The Satanic Verses, allegedly committed blasphemy against the Quran. In 1989, Iranian officials put a $2 million price on his head. In 1997, the reward was increased by a half million dollars, which Rushdie mocked as “just a cost-of-living increase.” In 1998, the official death threat was lifted, and Rushdie has since gone about openly for the first time in almost ten years, but he is still in some danger from those who would do him harm.

- In New York City, the government of Taiwan takes out a large, expensive advertisement on the op-ed page of the New York Times. It argues that Taiwan is an orderly, virtuous, and industrious society because it is founded on the principles of Confucius’ Analects and Great Learning, the key texts of Confucian scripture. Therefore, the advertisement says, Taiwan is an excellent partner in international trade.

- Near the federal prison in Terre Haute, Indiana, demonstrators gather at the execution of Timothy McVeigh for the bombing of the federal office building in Oklahoma City in which 169 people died. Some protest his execution by carrying signs with words from the Bible: “You shall not kill.” Some counterprotesters also carry signs with biblical words: “You shall not allow a murderer to live.”

- In an Indian city, Hindu priests and Sanskrit-language scholars call a news conference to criticize a song, “Shanti,” in an album by the American pop singer Madonna. Unlike most religious critiques of rock music, which focus on a supposed lack of moral values, the Hindus’ criticisms focus on Madonna’s pronouncement of that ancient divine name. Reflecting Hindu spoken use of scripture, the priests and scholars state that the spiritual power of this name is not effective unless it is pronounced correctly.

The influence of scripture is felt throughout the world in ways both extraordinary and commonplace. Not all contemporary examples of scripture usage are as dramatic or controversial as these sketches suggest. They do indicate, though, that the scriptures of the world’s religions have a continuing profound impact on life and culture. This anthology introduces the reader to these scriptures and encourages a deep encounter with them in all their variety. Scriptures of the world are so vast in number.
—Max Müller's Sacred Books of the East series had fifty volumes when it was finished in 1910, and its coverage of Asian scripture was still far from complete—that some sort of sampling is necessary for all but the most expert specialist. An anthology is by its very nature a selection; it includes some key passages, but unhappily many more must be left out. The best that can be hoped for is that the anthology selects excerpts from each tradition that faithfully reflect the history and continuing life of the tradition. These selections offer the reader the possibility of a meaningful insight into the religions of the world.

This introductory chapter is organized into several sections. "A Brief History of Scripture Scholarship" outlines the main periods of the study of world scriptures. "The Nature and Definition of Scripture" discusses the term scripture as a comprehensive generic label suitable to religious scholarship, followed by a consideration of the varied functions of scripture in "The Uses of Scripture." "Advantages and Disadvantages" deals with the important question of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach. "World Scriptures and Modern Scholarship" discusses the impact of Western academic study on how we understand world scriptures. "Scriptures on the World Wide Web" examines how students can best use the growing number of world scriptures on the Internet. "The Plan of This Book" explains how the scripture selections are organized, and "A Guide to Pronunciation" provides some general rules for saying aloud the proper nouns in the readings. Finally, "Suggestions on How to Read Scriptures" gives helpful hints on the process of reading scripture for the fullest possible comprehension.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCRIPTURE SCHOLARSHIP

The scholarly study of world scripture in the last hundred years has passed through three distinct stages that have strongly influenced how we read scriptures. Near the middle of the nineteenth century, European scholars began a vast enterprise of making critically reliable translations of the world's scriptures, with a special focus on the little-translated sacred literature of Asia. Their concern was to translate individual texts, an important and necessary first step, not to examine the general religious phenomenon of scripture. They treated scripture as a mine out of which to dig the history and doctrine of religions, with little regard for the ways scripture functioned in religious communities. Müller's Sacred Books of the East is the most prominent result of this movement.

The academic movement customarily known by its German name, Religionswissenschaft, dominated the second stage in the study of scriptures. Usually translated as "history of religion," this name means more accurately "science of religion." This school, which continues to exert a strong influence today, analyzes the historical development of each religion. Perhaps in reaction to the earlier methodological reliance on world scriptures, scholars like Joachim Wach and Mirece Eliade relied on the study of other, non-textual elements of religion, such as ritual, myth, symbols, and the like. Scripture was largely neglected at this stage. Such a magisterial treatment of comparative religion as Gerhard van der Leeuw's Religion in Essence and Manifestation contains only a spare discussion of scripture as a universal religious phenomenon. Moreover, as social-scientific methods increasingly entered the field of religious scholarship, researchers turned away from literary sources from the past in favor of the study of present-day living communities of faith.

Although this second stage is still very influential, a third stage is emerging in which religious studies are rediscovering the value of scripture. The overreliance on scripture characteristic of the first stage and the neglect of scripture in the second stage are being balanced as scholars increasingly view scripture as an important phenomenon among the religions of the world. One new element here is that scripture is correctly seen as one religious phenomenon among many and therefore not to be isolated from the others. Another new element is an emphasis on the actual ways in which scripture is viewed and used in world religions. To understand scripture, according to this view, we must know not just the text, but also how it comes alive in the total life of the religion.

Recent research in comparative religion gives evidence of this emerging third stage. Large-scale studies of comparative religion such as Geo Widengren's Religionspänomologie ("Phenomenology of Religion") and Friedrich Heiler's Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion ("Manifestations and Essence of Religion")

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2By "world scriptures" I mean scriptures of the major religions of the world, not necessarily scriptures that are spread throughout the world.
4A continuing manifestation of this first stage are the popular anthologies of world scriptures that have been published almost continually for many years. To cite only a few examples, Robert Ballou's The Bible of the World (New York: Viking, 1939) and its abridgment in World Bible (Viking Portable Library; New York: Viking, 1944) have remained in print continually, although not revised. The Unification Church has published World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts, ed. Andrew Wilson (New York: Paragon House, 1991). And Philip Novak has edited The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994). Popular anthologies, like the first scholarly stage of study, use world scriptures as a mine for enlightenment with little attention to how scripture functions in world religious communities.
5Gerhard van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938); German original, 1933. One short chapter, 64, deals almost exclusively with Western scripture.
6For example, the widely used Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach, ed. W. A. Lessa and E. Z. Vogt, 4th ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), has excellent readings in all the basic topics in the cultural-anthropological study of religion—symbol, myth, ritual, shamanism, magic—but not one essay on scripture and its uses.
7Geo Widengren, Religionspänomologie (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969).
both deal extensively with the nature and use of scripture among the world’s religions. Ninian Smart’s recent Sacred Texts of the World uses scripture to approach several different religious phenomena in each world religion. Five recent books deal with scripture and its role in religion: The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective, by Frederick Denny and Roderick Taylor; Sacred World and Sacred Text, by Harold Coward; Retracing Scripture: Essay from a Comparative Perspective, by Miriam Levering; Sacred Texts and Authority, by Jacob Neusner; and, most important, What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach, by Wilfred Cantwell Smith. As a result of this research, the comparative study of scripture is today one of the leading features in the study of world religions.

Smith, of Harvard University, and some of his former doctoral students have had a strong influence on current scripture study. They argue for scripture study centered on the actual reception and use of scriptures. The work of William Graham on the oral dimensions of scripture has been especially influential. A measure of the strength of this stage is that it is now appearing in textbooks, where several works are notable: T. W. Hall, R. B. Pilgrim, and R. R. Cavanagh, Religion: An Introduction; Kenneth Kramer, World Scriptures: An Introduction to Comparative Religion; Roger Schmidt, Exploring Religion; Jean Holm and John Bower, Sacred Writings; and Richard Viladesau and Mark Massa, World Religions: A Sourcebook for Students of Christian Theology, and most recently, Ian Markham, A World Religions Reader.

As a representative of this third stage of scripture study, the present work offers a wide range of scripture selections from the religions of the world, with introductions and annotations to set the readings in the context of their actual usage.

The Nature and Definition of Scripture

At first glance, defining our term seems easy enough. Scripture is the holy writing, the sacred text of a religion. All religions seem to have scriptures, and all appear to use them in the same way. As a phenomenon among religions, scripture seems on the surface to be a constant. On closer examination, however, these simple notions vanish. Books of world religions that are traditionally regarded as scriptures vary in several important aspects. The content of this anthology will bear this out, but it would be well to sketch in some of it here.

The first variation among scriptures is in literary form. Scripture as a general category implies that all scriptures look alike in literary form and content. Persons who come from religious traditions with scriptures naturally tend to assume that the sacred texts of others look and function exactly like theirs. Scripture, however, has a literary variety as numerous as the religions and cultures from which it comes. Some scriptures, especially those of the three main Western religions (Judaism, Christianity, and to a lesser degree Islam), prominently feature historical narratives, the telling of an event in story form, in which God’s self-disclosure comes in history. Scriptures from other religions, especially those Asian faiths that consider salvation a release from historical existence, have few narratives or none at all. Some scriptures have their vision of a moral life enshrined in law codes, some feature mere loosely bound moral precepts, and still others do not seem concerned about ethics. Poetry is the leading literary form of some scriptures; others feature prose. Some scriptural books (the Hindu Upanishads) have metaphysical philosophy, others (the Confucian Analects, the wisdom literature of the Bible) moral philosophy, but many have no explicit philosophy at all. Some scriptures (the Hindu Vedas) contain directions and songs for sacrifice, whereas others (the Analects) have no prescriptions for rites and ceremonies. We also find myth, legend, prophecy, sermons, love poems, divination, and magic, among many other such genres, or types of literary forms, in the scriptures of the world.

Even this cursory overview of the world’s sacred literature shows that scriptures do not entail a fixed literary form, because almost every type of form can be found in them. Therefore, we cannot open a book, browse through its contents, and pronounce it scriptural. Scripture is primarily a relational, not a literary, phenomenon. As William Graham has written, “The sacredness of a whole is not an a priori attribute but one that is realized historically in the life of communities who respond to it as something sacred or holy.” Communities shape and receive scripture, and scripture shapes the life of faith. The relation between scripture and religion is reciprocal and dynamic. The second variation among world scriptures has to do with their number within any one religion, which can range from one book to an entire library. Like the Quran, scriptures can be one unified book of moderate size under two covers.Like the Jewish and Christian scriptures, they can be many different short books collected into one scripture corpus, usually of a larger size. In Asian religions, they can be different books ranging in number from the many Hindu texts, to the dozen or so Confucian texts (depending on how the Classics are numbered), and to the more than 1,000 texts found in Taoism and in some forms of Mahayana Buddhism.
The third variation in scripture lies in function. In some religions, scripture is so central—or so it may look to the outsider—that the life of the believer seems virtually dictated by scripture. Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all properly called “religions of the book” because of the high place and powerful function their scriptures have. Islam is often said to be most fully a “religion of the book” because of the all-pervasive influence of the Quran in Muslim life. Asian religions often have a more informal relationship to their scripture, which devotes consult mainly for general guidance and inspiration.

The varying oral and textual dimensions of scripture also lead to differences in function. Some religions—as, for example, Hinduism—view the spoken word of scripture as primary. Hindus regard the Vedas essentially as speech rather than as printed word and see the written text as inferior to the “oral text.” In other religions, the power and function of the book seem to depend upon its written, textual nature. Muslims, for example, believe that the Quran is a transcription of a book already written in heaven. A later section of this chapter will deal more fully with the topic of the uses of scripture, but enough has been said here to suggest that they function in different ways.

Given all this variety, it is possible to define scripture in a way that can take variety into account and yet serve as a valid conceptual category for all world religions. Although some scholars of world religions answer in the negative, 

23 most would argue that a comprehensive definition of scripture is possible and necessary. Despite its inherent ambiguities and difficulties, scholars commonly accept and use this term generically. The definition we will use here is this: Scripture is the writing accepted by and used in a religious community as especially sacred and authoritative. We can follow up on this definition by looking more closely at its key words and its implications. In what follows we will discuss both the formal and functional aspects of scriptures—what they are and how they are used.

First, all scripture is a writing. Scripture exercises much of its authority as a book, and we encounter it as such. Some scholars argue that oral tradition, the passing down of material by word of mouth only, is “scriptural.”

24 Although oral and written traditions do have some similar characteristics and functions, strictly speaking “oral scripture” is a contradiction in terms—all scripture is by definition written. The scripture of every religion, however, does have continuing, significant oral and aural dimensions.

25 Speaking and hearing the scriptural words are essential to the meaning and function of scripture. Most scriptures originated in oral tradition and stayed in oral tradition for several generations before being put down in writing. Although the writing down of scripture obscures its oral dimensions, the orality of the text is still embedded in the writing, waiting to be drawn out by faithful vocalizing of the words. Scripture comes most fully alive when believers read it aloud and hear it in worship. Most believers, even those in highly literate cultures, hear scripture in worship more often and more meaningfully than they read it privately. In this book, as in any book, we encounter scriptures as texts. The reader must always remember that these texts are also meant to be spoken and heard.

The second element of our definition is that scriptures are especially sacred. They have special religious significance in pointing to ultimate reality and truth. Sacredness should not be seen simply as of divine origin, or even as the “wholly other,” Rudolf Otto’s influential conception of sacredness that suits Western religions but not many Eastern faiths. For example, the sacred Tao (“Way”) witnessed by the Tao Te Ching is not wholly other but is hidden in the universe and the self, waiting to be discovered and “tuned into.” Moreover, only a few books among world scriptures explicitly claim sacredness for themselves, with the Quran and the Adi Granth of Sikhism the most notable examples. Most scriptures receive their sacred status only after they have been written, circulated, and widely accepted as reflecting the faith in some special sense. Again, the relational aspect of all scripture comes to the fore. Writings become scripture as they are recognized, received, and used as authoritative in a religious community.

Notice that scriptures are books held to be especially sacred. Most religions have a secondary religious literature that is also viewed as holy, instructive, or authoritative. For example, Jews believe that their Talmud (the law code of Judaism written down in the fifth century C.E.) is the “oral Torah,” the fully inspired and holy counterpart of the Bible. Until recent times many Jews have spent as much effort to understand the Talmud as the Bible. 

26 In Islam, the Hadith are collected traditions about Muhammad that supplement the Quran and are often used to explain its difficulties. Some new religious movements place their especially sacred books alongside other sacred literature. For example, the Book of Mormon is called “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” in reference to the Christian New Testament. This may seem to complicate the matter of defining the idea of scripture. On what basis can one say that a certain holy book in a religious tradition (e.g., the Quran) is scripture but another (the Hadith) is not? The answer lies in the special reception and usage given to works seen as especially sacred. Most religions explicitly or implicitly hold other works to be secondary to scripture. The Talmud may be “oral Torah,” but it is still not the Bible; the Hadith is not the Quran. Almost every religion has commemorative, devotional, or legal literature that follows up on scripture, but it makes a distinction between scripture and these works with some care.

Another mark of special holiness is use in ritual. When believers read books aloud in worship, when they speak their words to carry out sacrifice, and especially when they venerate books during worship, we have a sure indication that these books are especially sacred. (Secondary religious literature as described earlier rarely makes its

way into worship.) Different types of veneration are practiced in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Sikhism. Even in everyday life, scripture enjoys special respect: The Christian Bible is the only book in the West still often bound in leather; Muslims wrap the Qur'an in silk and store it in a special place; Buddhist scriptures for monastic use are still handwritten on palm leaves. In the new religious movements, the key writings of their founders that function as scripture are often printed and bound to resemble more traditional holy books.

The third element of our definition is the authority of scripture. Just as sacredness is an aspect of all scripture, scripture is also especially authoritative for its communities. Among all written texts, scripture is always the most authoritative and is often the court of final appeal in religious matters. The range of this authority and the way it is exercised vary depending on the nature of the religion and the content of its scriptures. In the Western "religions of the book," scripture is comprehensive in content and regulates much of life. In the Eastern religions, scripture is often not authoritative in the same way as scripture in the Abrahamic traditions. Yet Asian scriptures often express the heart of their faith, the way of salvation. The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Nichiren Buddhism is a prominent example of a book with a limited theme and purpose that has great standing in the sect because it addresses what is perceived as the heart of the religion. Moreover, "at least four of the six South Asian or Far Eastern fundamentalist-like movements...do in fact privilege a sacred text and presume to draw certain fundamentals—beliefs and behaviors—from it." The authority of scripture for most followers of a given religion is paradoxically acknowledged even when some occasionally reject it. For example, some Hindu Brahmins burn their Vedas books when they become ascetics. For the sake of greater enlightenment, some Zen Buddhist monks make disparaging comments about the Buddha (e.g., "That old degenerate!") and his scriptural teachings.

Scriptures are generally authoritative for their communities alone, who accept them as expressing the heart of the religion. One prominent exception to this rule is Christianity's acceptance of the Jewish scriptures, which it has renamed the Old Testament. Another exception is in Chinese religion, where some older Classics like the I Ching are used to some degree as scripture by both Confucians and Taoists. More typically among the world's religions, to receive one's texts as scripture is automatically to exclude the texts of others. For example, most Muslims do not read the Jewish or Christian scriptures because the Qur'an fulfills and corrects the Bible of the Jews and Christians. Confucian scriptures like the Analects are generally not given scriptural authority by Taoists, even though Confucian texts form the basis of education for all Chinese, including Taoists. As the Tao Te Ching cuturally remarks against two Confucian virtues in the Analects, "When the great way (Tao) falls into disuse, there are benevolence and rectitude."

The authority of scripture comes with a special class of scholars who are the guardians of scripture and recognized experts in its interpretation. In Islam, certain scholars become masters of taqfi', the science of Qur’anic interpretation that forms an entire branch of religious scholarship. In Buddhism, monks with special training and ability teach the sacred writings to other monks and inquiring laypeople. The Confucian scholar is the master of the Classics and teaches them to others. In virtually every faith, including new religious movements, therefore, the authority of its scripture is mediated largely by those recognized as its official interpreters. Commentary has a large role in the history of many religions and regulates how scriptures are received and used, especially at the official level. As John Henderson states, "commentaries and commentarial modes of thinking dominated the intellectual history of most pre-modern civilizations...Until the seventeenth century in Europe, and even later in China, India, and the Near East, thought, especially within high intellectual traditions, was primarily exegetical in character and expression." Moreover, only quite recently in the sweep of human history have books appeared and mass literacy become possible. This is another reason for having a special class to read, comment on, and relate sacred books to a religious community. Of course, the uses of scriptures at the level of the ordinary follower of a religion will at times be quite different from this official interpretation.

Two other features of scripture not directly related to our definition should be stated here. First, scriptures of each religion are often heterogeneous but are nonetheless seen as a unity by their communities. This is obvious for scriptures, such as the Jewish and Christian, that comprise different documents—many books bound as a single book, diverse yet one. Some religions recognize different levels of authority and originality in their scriptures, as Judaism does for the first five books of the Bible, the Torah. Still, Jews considered their Bible to be one book. This is also the case with Asian religions, as in Hinduism's distinction between Vedic scripture, which is called Shruti ("what is heard" from the beginning) and the post-Vedic Smriti ("what is remembered"). All of it is the scripture of Hinduism, and believers see it as speaking essentially the same message. In China, the principle holds even in reverse. The secondary scriptures are the earlier Classics, and Confucians see the later Analects and Taoteching as one with earlier tradition. Modern scholarship has shown that the Qur'an has passed through different phases of development during and after the life of Muhammad. But neither the researches of scholars nor the acknowledged inconsistencies and difficulties of the Qur'an calls its unity into question for a Muslim.

A second main feature of scripture is that it has a degree of closure. This closure is often called a canon, a list or collection of books recognized as scriptural. This canon is absolutely fixed in Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism. All the scriptures of these religions have long ago been officially identified, and nothing can now be added or subtracted from their canons. With Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, and Taoism, however, the situation is quite different. First, their sacred literature is vast, and the problems in defining a canon for a religion like Taoism, which has 1,200 sacred texts, are enormous. Second, the process of producing scripture has not officially ended. Where new books can be added, as Taoists added one at the beginning of the twentieth century, a closed canon cannot exist.

23Religion scholars prefer the term Hebrew Scriptures over the more partisan Old Testament.
24Tao Te Ching 18:1.
26For a general discussion of the idea of canon, see the article under that heading by G. T. Sheppard in Encyclopedia of Religion, vol. 3, pp. 62-68.
How can a religion relate to its scriptures when they are so vast that no one person or group can know them all, let alone be expert in them all? In traditions with large canons, certain books, such as the Tao Te Ching, are basic for almost everyone. Also, different groups in a religion attach themselves to a few select scriptures that reflect their particular interests. In Taoism, as L. G. Thompson explains, "the practitioner or priest would usually be an adherent to one of the several major ‘schools’ or traditions of Taoism, and would specialize in those texts relevant to his school’s interests."

This tendency to choose one’s own books from among the total corpus of scripture results in a “canon within the canon.” Most commonly it occurs in religions with very large numbers of books, but it also can be found in religions with smaller canons. For example, although all Christians accept the whole New Testament as the capstone of their scripture, each of the three main branches seems especially attracted to one part of the New Testament. Eastern Orthodox Christians have a special affinity to the gospel and letters of John, Roman Catholics have an affinity to the gospel of Matthew and the later letters, and Protestants have historically fastened on the letters of Paul. In sum, scripture canons can be either completely closed or open to development and change. No matter how readily they can be altered, canonical texts are still viewed and treated as scripture.

THE USES OF SCRIPTURE

When scripture is set in the full context of the everyday life of its religion, its uses become plain. How believers use scripture shows its status and role in a religion. The following chapters of this book will outline the varied uses of scripture in each religion. In this section, we will discuss some basic dimensions of the comparative study of scripture usage.

First, scripture is a source for establishing and defending key doctrines. Scriptures can be used doctrinally because they typically contain the key teachings of the faith and because believers usually see them as continuing the voice of the founders. They have primary importance as statements of the deep truths of the universe and the right way to live in it. These teachings can assume different forms: God(s) and humanity; human imperfections and salvation; beginnings and ends of the individual and the cosmos; the moral life and how to achieve it. When scripture is used to establish doctrine, this is most often done by its official interpreters—monks, priests, scholars, and the like. Sometimes it is done by formal debate in councils or assemblies, sometimes within the confines of a monastery or temple. Defending doctrine occurs less often at the popular level, but even here scripture can function authoritatively. An appeal to a passage of holy writ is often the final word in any argument about religion.

Second, scripture is also prominently used in public worship. Worshippers often display and read it aloud. Although this is characteristic especially of the so-called "religions of the book," it is also significant in religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism that are not so much book oriented. The worship that goes on in a Buddhist monastery, for example, prominently features the scriptures. Monks read them, chant them, meditate on them, and walk around them in solemn procession. Even when the book is not prominent in worship, its content often permeates the ceremonies of most scripturalizing religions. Prayers, sacrifices, and hymns come from and echo the language of scripture. Many lyrics of the music of worship are drawn from the scripture text. Hymns and chants, with the several emotional power, are significant vehicles for use of scripture in most religious traditions in the East and West.

Perhaps the place and function of scripture are never so prominent as when worshippers formally venerate it. Almost every religion in the world with scripture pays its ritual respect in some way. Hindus speak the words of a Veda with great care. These words are the center of holiness in worship, though the Veda book is usually not to be seen. In certain Taoist and Confucian temples, the location of the scripture collection is itself holy. In Judaism, the scrolls are removed from their ark at the front center of the synagogue with great solemnity and on certain festival days are paraded around the synagogue. In many Christian churches, everyone stands for the gospel reading. Bibliolatry (bib-lee-AHL-ah-tree) results when believers give excessive veneration to their scriptures or become absolutely dependent on them.

A third typical use of scripture is in meditation and devotion. This is usually private and individual, but it can also occur in group settings, as when Buddhist monks meditate in session on sutra passages or on mantras drawn from scripture. Sometimes they meditate on the words and other times "look through" the words to find the truth "behind" them. The conclusions of many Hindu scriptures specify a blessing on those who listen or read faithfully. In Western religions, the scripture books are often marked into sections for devotional reading; it is the duty of believers to read, ponder, and often memorize the words. In meditation and devotion, the scriptures teach the truth of the religion and promote the growth of the reader into the fullness of the faith.

All these uses of scripture can be described as primarily cognitive, understanding and thinking in some way about the words and their meaning. Another important dimension of the usage of scripture, one often overlooked, is noncognitive usage. Here the words are used in a variety of ways without any attempt to understand their meaning rationally.

A first noncognitive type of usage occurs when scriptures are used in a language that cannot be understood by the follower of the faith. This is especially the case when a religion like Hinduism or Islam holds that its scriptures are so essentially bound to their original language that they cannot be translated and retain their sacred nature. Arabic is a foreign tongue for most Muslims, yet Muslims in Turkey, Africa, Indonesia, and America can be found memorizing passages from the Qur'an and then using them in life and worship with very little notion of what their Arabic words mean. The Qur'an has power to transform the life of believers whether they understand the words or not.

A second noncognitive use of scripture is decorative and iconic, or revered as a holy object. Many Hindus cannot read their sacred literature, but images and pictures of the gods and their stories are all around them. One cannot live in any Muslim area without encountering Qur'anic verses everywhere. They are displayed on private houses and public buildings, often in a stylized calligraphy that is a mainstay of art in

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Muslim lands. These word decorations are not meant to be read so much as to be felt, thereby exercising their holy presence for the blessing of the community. In these and other iconic usages of scripture, the appeal is more to the imagination and emotion than to the mind.

A third noncognitive application mixes religion and magic. The power of scripture is such that it can bring blessing and keep away evil; it has an objective supernatural power quite by itself. We have already spoken of scripture as used in charms or talismans, a manifestation of the magical power of scripture. Perhaps this was the function of the oldest surviving archeological fragment of the scripture of a modern religion, a tiny Israelite silver scroll from the seventh century B.C.E. with a priestly blessing written on the inside, probably worn on a necklace. The mere possession of a holy book also has power to bless and ward off evil. For example, putting a certain Taoist text in the hands of a woman undergoing a perilous childbirth is said to cause the immediate safe birth of her child. In many religions, those who can afford it will often buy a holy book for possession in the home. Often family genealogical records will be written into the front of this scripture in the home; this practice is especially common in Christianity and Islam.

Perhaps the most striking popular use of scripture is bibliomancy [BIB-lee-oh-man-see], the use of holy books to foresee the future and guide one's response to it. Many religions feature the informal practice of opening a scripture book at random and reading the first passage that meets the eye. This passage, it is thought, has special power to direct the believer through an uncertain or difficult situation in life or just through the difficulties of the new day. One of the most famous ancient conversions to Christianity, that of St. Augustine, featured such bibliomancy. Some printed editions of the Qur'an have symbols at the top of the page by which a reader opening the book at random can discern whether a planned action is advisable, inadvisable, or neutral. Sikhism has formalized bibliomancy in its "taking the word" ceremony. Some Taoists read the I Ching philosophically, but more use it in divination. Its many hexagrams and their fortunetelling interpretations are selected by a special procedure with sticks. All these forms of bibliomancy assume that a supernatural guidance is exercised in and through the book for the blessing of the believer.

The usages described here have been categorized in other ways (beyond cognitive and noncognitive) by scholars of religion. Perhaps the most helpful is that of Sam D. Gill, who proposed that uses of scripture are informative and transformative. Informative means imparting information in various ways, such as in doctrine and history. Transformative, in contrast, does something, as for example when scripture is used to make sacrifice, to make the laws of a religious or civil community, or to bless and curse. In both its informative and transformative aspects, scripture is also used for transformation. This transformative power is a result of its sacredness and authority. Scriptures come from a sacred source and are themselves sacred. This sacred quality generally entails some power to make holy those who read or listen to them.

The transformative power of scripture occurs in both an individual and communal way—for example, to gain insight on personal or group problems and find the resources to solve them. Not all religions consider their scriptures to be divinely inspired, but all hold them to be inspiring and transformative in some way. This transformative power can be based on cognition, in which believers directly encounter the scriptures and experience their life-changing meaning. It can also happen just as often in noncognitive ways, as described earlier.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

The study of the world’s religions through their sacred scriptures has both advantages and disadvantages. We need to be aware of the limitations of this method and work from strengths to ameliorate the weaknesses as much as possible.

The first disadvantage is that scriptures are not universal. Some religions do not have them—if a culture has no writing, it obviously can have no scripture. This is the case with most of the traditional indigenous religions of Africa and North America. Of course, not having a scripture does not invalidate a religion. The religions and cultures of nonliterate peoples do have oral traditions that function prominently in storytelling and in rituals that enact myths. A religion based on oral traditions is every bit as living and real for its followers as a religion that produces and uses scripture.

Second, as we saw earlier, the reception and use of scripture is not uniform across religions. Religious regard their scriptures in different ways, and scriptures function differently in each religion. Students of world religions must take note of these variations and learn to look at each religion’s scriptures in a fresh way. Readers of scripture who come from a “religion of the book” must especially try to lay aside their preconceptions. Protestant Christians, for example, must beware of assuming that certain qualities of scripture and its function to which they are accustomed (e.g., that scripture is best absorbed by individual silent reading and meditation) will be true of every religion’s scripture. Moreover, the use of new scriptures in new religious movements such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the “Mormons”) and the Unification Church will often differ from usage in older, classical religious movements. The more we genuinely encounter world scriptures in their full range of reception and use, the less likely we will be to inject our own bias into the scriptures of others. Then “scripture” itself will become a fuller, more useful category.

A third disadvantage is that we must read translations, which cannot fully capture the literary characteristics or meaning of the original. An old Italian proverb says, “A translator is a traitor,” and all scriptures are betrayed in some way by translation. Some religions are acutely aware of this betrayal. Islam, for example, holds that use of the Qur’an must be in Arabic, a translation is no longer the Qur’an itself. Among Brahmanic Hindus, the oral power of the Vedas in their Sanskrit language is such that it would be unthinkable to translate them into another language for use in worship. Brahmins use them in that ancient language even though they do not fully understand the words. As we read in translation, we must remember that some of the original meaning and resonance of the words is thereby lost.

A fourth disadvantage is that scriptures tend to reflect only the patriarchal and elite perspectives of their traditions. They come from times and cultures that are more or
less patriarchal, where the voices of women are muted and filtered. Scriptures strongly tend to embody official and elite ideas, the "mainstream" that feminist scholars call "mainsleme." Comparatively little of popular religion can be found in them. Although the contents of scripture are patriarchal and elitist, feminist scholars today can make contemporary understanding and use of these scriptures more egalitarian. This book will offer some coverage of social justice and the role of women, but the perspective through which these scriptures are filtered is necessarily that of the elite males.

Finally, and perhaps most seriously, we lack the living context of scripture when we encounter only its textual form. Scripture, which for most traditions (except new religious movements, of course) comes from ancient times, comes alive as it is appropriated in the life of religious communities. Despite growing religious pluralism, many North American readers of scripture do not have access to these communities. They cannot visit a mosque, see the ritual of a Hindu home temple, or live for a time in a Buddhist monastery. They cannot directly see the broad ways that scripture is reflected in religious life, or the more specific ways it is used in worship, devotions, or law. What can be reproduced in a book like this is primarily the written text itself. The uses of scripture can be outlined here, but a printed book will inevitably emphasize the written, textual aspects of scripture over the oral and living.

These disadvantages might seem strong enough to cause the reader to give up the encounter with world scriptures. The advantages of studying religions through their scripture are compelling, however. By working from the strengths of this approach, the reader can overcome the weaknesses to some extent and use scripture appropriately to enter the world of other religions.

The first advantage of this approach is that scripture is widespread among religions. Even though it is not fully universal, each "major" (to use a traditional but rather prejudicial term) living religion has a scripture. Scriptures naturally vary in form, content, and usage, but they are usually present in a religion. As we have seen, recent researchers emphasize that they form a distinct and important element in the life of most religions. The tendency to scripturalize, to make and use scriptures, is strong among religions. Indeed, almost every contemporary religion that is based in a literate culture produces and uses scriptures of some sort. New religious movements also express themselves in writings that have a scriptural status.

Second, scriptures tend to be comprehensive for their faiths. Matters that a religion considers of great importance for its life are generally written down for the continu-

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8See the introductory section of Sennett Young, ed., An Anthology of Sacred Texts by and about Women (New York: Crossroad, 1993), for good treatment of this issue.

9An excellent new series edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Princeton Readings in Religions," seeks to rectify this male–elite perspective with anthologies that draw on more popular writings and anthropological field reports. Its first volume, Religions of India in Practice (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), deals with Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, and Jainism. The second volume is Buddhism in Practice (1995), the third is Religions of China in Practice (1996); the fourth is Religions of Tibet in Practice (1997). Other volumes are planned for the religions of Japan, Islam, Africa, Judaism, and Christianity.

10Only Shinto does not treat its holy books as scripture in the full sense. Thus Shinto is "the exception that proves the rule" that religions based in literate cultures produce and use scriptures.

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14Hall et al., Religion, p. 109.
Fifth, scriptures are accessible in translation to English-language readers. Most of the important religious books of the world have been translated into English, and many of those that have not are now being translated. Sometimes the translations of a certain scripture are few, but others can boast a virtual riot of English versions. The Tao Te Ching, for example, had more than twenty English versions in print in 2001. Although no translation can convey the full meaning and feeling of the original, a good translation can suggest it. Finally, scriptures as literary texts are open to critical analysis. Both the specialist scholar and the beginning reader can analyze them directly or, better yet, enter a conversation with them. Although most religious texts will range from mildy strange to completely baffling for those who come from other cultures and religious traditions, the same intellectual and scholarly skills used to read any other text can be put to use on world scriptures. With some effort, the North American reader can understand scriptures and use them as a pathway into other faiths.

WORLD SCRIPTURES AND MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

The earlier discussion of critical analysis of scripture leads us to an important but often neglected topic. How does the modern academic study of scripture influence how religions use world scriptures and how we read them?

Historical and critical literary scholarship is largely Western and European in origin, stemming from various methods of interpreting literature developed in the Renaissance. Textual criticism methodically judges manuscripts to find the likely original reading; grammatical criticism analyzes the content and style of the wording of a work in its original language; literary criticism studies genres. Most important is historical criticism, which probes the developmental genesis of works from the past, their original meaning and authenticity. In the early nineteenth century this approach began to be applied to the Bible. Critical study of the Christian scripture has uncovered development, diversity, and even some disagreement within it. Christianity’s effort to understand the Bible critically has suffered reversals from time to time. Yet many Protestant groups accept this critical study, perceiving that it offers a fuller understanding of scripture that is compatible with faith.

In the early twentieth century biblical criticism spread to Judaism, and today Conservative and Reform Jews widely accept it, with only Orthodox Jews still opposing it. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), Roman Catholics have also embraced the historical-critical method of biblical study, which derives meaning from the earlier phases of the Bible’s literature. Today the basic methods of literary study still are largely European academic methods. Scholars and students read sacred texts through Western eyes and by Western methods.

The effort to collect, edit, and publish the literature of world religions is also a Western academic enterprise. It had its roots in the eighteenth century, when the first copies of Chinese and Indian scripture made their way to Europe and were greeted with great interest, even enthusiasm, in some circles. A part of this enthusiasm was an Enlightenment hope that these scriptures might be a religious or philosophical alternative to what some saw as the hidebound clericalism of Christianity. The Vedas, for example, were at first viewed as religious expressions from near the dawn of time, pristine and unspoiled by priestcraft. Gradually Europeans realized that they reflect a priestly system as traditional as that of Christianity, and even older. By the middle of the nineteenth century, as we saw, a more mature scholarly interest in world scripture blossomed into a systematic effort to publish reliable translations of scriptures. The editing and publishing of sacred texts continue today, especially with religions that have large canons. The methods used to edit, translate, publish, and interpret these scriptures draw generally from the Western tradition.

With scholarship in comparative religion coming from a background that was largely Protestant in orientation, over the last century an inevitable “Protestant bias” has crept into the way scholarship has looked at the scriptures of other faiths. Certain mainstream Protestant ideas about the nature of scripture colored the study of the scriptures of other religions and only today are being identified and corrected. They can be listed serially: a preoccupation with textuality to the exclusion of orality; from the Protestant emphasis on the scripture as written; an individualistic orientation that assumes that scriptures are to be read mainly by the individual, from Protestant ideas of the “priesthood of all believers” and universal literacy; the notion that scriptures are widely authoritative over every aspect of religious life, from the Protestant assertion that the scriptures are the sole authority in the Christian faith; and the assumption that scriptures are best understood by academically recognized methods of study, from the mainstream Protestant attachment to sound academic procedures.

Of course, believers of the other religions of the world do not share this bias, as we can see as often reflect comparatively on each of these assumptions. In some religions, such as Islam, written and oral are more in balance. Next, most religions do not share the Protestant notion that scriptures should be read by the individual; rather, their adherents speak and hear their scriptures in groups, usually in worship and ritual. Indeed, it comes as a striking realization for modern North Americans that most followers of many religions throughout history (and even today!) cannot read, and therefore cannot read their sacred texts. For the typical follower of most faiths, texts must be spoken (often from memory) and heard.

We examined earlier the next Protestant assumption, that scriptures seek to regulate every aspect of religious life, and we concluded that they seek to regulate the center of religious life as their religion conceives that center. For most religions of the world, the Western academic approach to scripture goes against the grain of faith and is consequently viewed as alien. Other literature may be studied critically, but to study scripture historically and critically is to question its sacredness because such study

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45M. Levering, in her introduction to Rethinking Scripture, pp. 3–5, has some good comments on this Protestant bias.
SCRIPTURES AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB

The last ten years have seen an explosive growth in the World Wide Web, the linked computer system on the Internet. Much information about religion can be found on the Web, it seems to be one of the leading topics of discussion and inquiry. As a part of this interest in religion, many sites on the Web feature scriptures in translation or sometimes in the original.

Many positive features of this new opportunity to encounter world scriptures can be adduced. The access is almost always free. The amount of scripture on the Web is growing rapidly and may someday encompass most world scriptures. The Internet is an appealing way for most young, computer-oriented students (but not always their professors!) to encounter scriptures. It presents different ways of studying and learning—for example, the ability to search a text electronically. The Internet by its structure encourages exploration. Some sites are fully interactive, allowing students to ask questions and participate in online discussion groups. Finally, but not least, when students explore a religion site sponsored by its followers, the encounter is likely to be a bit more that of an “insider” than classroom or textbook descriptions.

The drawbacks of studying world scriptures on the Web are also significant. Some sites are not well constructed; they may have poor layout, little eye appeal, out-of-date links, or other technical deficiencies. While Internet coverage of world scripture is growing, it is still largely incomplete. The translations used are usually public-domain works that are out of date. When representatives of religions post that reli-

gion's writings for missionary and/or public relations purposes, the "spin" put on them may not agree with the current academic consensus on that religion. Most significantly, these electronic publications are subject to little or no scholarly control, such as editorial or peer review before publication, so their quality varies greatly. Some sites are excellent, some average, and some poor.

The result of this mixed situation is that many students need help in finding, using, and especially analyzing critically these Web-based scripture sites. The few books on this topic are of some value, especially Patrick Durusso’s High Places in Cyberspace. For readers of this antholgy of world scriptures, I have designed a special website to further their use of the Web in religious studies. It has links to short, helpful essays on using the Internet in an academically appropriate way. It also has links to sites that my students and I have found useful in the study of scriptures. This listing cannot pretend to be comprehensive, but it does offer a starting place to surf and learn. The address is: http://religion.wadsworth.com/edlinks.html.

THE PLAN OF THIS BOOK

This book contains excerpts of world scriptures in the following order of religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and selected new religious movements. This progression keeps the religions of India, China, Japan, and the Near East together in their family groups. Moreover, the reader can see the relationships among religions and scriptures more easily when related bodies of texts are dealt with in succession. For example, when the Jewish scriptures are followed by the Christian and then the Islamic, the deep relationship among them becomes apparent. The same is true to a significant degree with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, and to a lesser degree with Confucianism and Taoism. A final chapter, new to this edition, gives excerpts from the scriptures of new religious movements treated in order of their time of origin: Baha’i, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Christian Science, the Unification Church, and the Church of Scientology.

Each chapter except the last is structured as follows. An introduction outlines the scriptures included, setting them in the context of the whole religion by examining briefly their name(s), overall structure, origin and growth, and use. The first grouping of scripture passages deals with the history of the religion. If the faith has a founder, special attention will be given to him or her; any subsequent history of the religion that scripture reflects will also be excerpted. Second are passages covering the main doctrinal teaching of the religion. These topics include divine or ultimate reality, creation and the environment, the nature of humanity, and achieving human fulfillment (salvation, release, harmony, etc.). Third are passages about the moral/
ethical structure of the scriptures: good, evil, and the authentic human life. Personal morality is probably more widely treated in world scriptures, but social ethics are also prominent. Such topics as war and peace, violence and nonviolence, tolerance and intolerance of people of other faiths, the status of women, and a just society will be represented as fully as possible. Fourth are passages about the organization of the religion, either in its internal organization (e.g., monks and laity in Buddhism) or in its attempts to organize its wider culture (e.g., the Hindu caste system in India). Last are passages about religious worship, ritual, devotion, and meditation. Of course, some religions will have more in some of these categories than others, but most do fit into them without significant distortion. Where they do not fully fit, this format will be adapted as necessary to do justice to the particular nature of the texts.

The last chapter of the present book follows a different organization. Because the new religious movements treated there differ significantly from each other, we will not combine their scriptures into categories of “history,” “teachings,” “ethics,” and the rest. Rather, each new religious movement will be treated in a separate section, with as much attention to history, teaching, ethics, organization, and worship as befits each movement.

The predominant rationale for this organization is pedagogical. It is meant to further the learning of readers, especially students being introduced to the religions of the world. North American readers are familiar with the categories used here, and both teachers and students of world religions will recognize them as a standard paradigm for research and teaching in religion. Moreover, they are categories that seem to “fit” world scriptures themselves. But why not discard any attempt to use categories of organization and simply provide one or two longer excerpts from each religion’s body of scripture? A rather uniform scripture like the Quran may be possible to encompass in a few long readings. Even Islamic tradition says that the whole Quranic message is contained in each of its chapters, so to read one is in a sense to read them all! However, what Paul Muller-Ortega says about Hinduism is true of many religions including the new religious movements: “It is not possible to put a single sacred text in the hands of students and expect the reading of that one text to allow students to encompass the tradition.” Thus, the preferred method of exposing students to the variety of the Hindu sacred literature has been by means of anthologies. 447

A GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION

The languages in which the scriptures of this book are written include, among others, Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Hebrew, Arabic, and Greek. With the single exception of Greek, these languages have scripts very different from our alphabet. Many translations from these languages use a system of diacritical marks to translate proper nouns, especially on the consonants in personal names. For example, in Hinduism one often finds the names Krsna or Shiva. These marks serve to indicate their rather exact pronunciation.

This method, though fully appropriate for scholars, is confusing for most beginning readers. Therefore, this book uses a simplified method of translation with no diacritical symbols or marks. Here each word is spelled in a way that permits the reader to pronounce proper nouns directly and more easily. Instead of Krsna, the reader will see the more pronounceable Krsna; Shiva becomes Shiva. The pronunciation that results is more approximate, but it is fully appropriate for beginning readers of world scriptures. Of course, students should follow the lead of their teachers in pronouncing these words.

Pronouncing foreign language words correctly is challenging, and here the student needs some specific guidance. In what follows we will proceed religion by religion, beginning with the easiest to pronounce. In this section, we will deal only with the rules that come into play in this anthology.

Judaisn and Christianity

The pronunciation of Jewish and Christian personal names is usually apparent to North American readers. Most translations, including those used here, use no diacritical marks, and the words are pronounced the way they look in English. The only slight challenge comes in the chapter on Judaism, when Hebrew words are occasionally not translated but transliterated, spelled letter for letter in the English alphabet. In these cases, the following rules apply: (1) $y$ = the initial throaty sound of escaping breath before a vowel is sounded, as in the English apple; (2) the plural suffix -im = “een,” as in Kibbutzim, “Writings.”

Islam

Arabic is, like Hebrew, a Semitic language. Therefore the rule just given on the throaty sound also applies to Arabic and is used more often than in English translations of the Hebrew Bible. The plural suffix -in, “een,” dh is pronounced as the English th, as in the. kh is pronounced as the guttural (throat-clearing sound) ch, as in the Scottish loch or the German machen. All other vowels and consonants in the Arabic proper nouns of this book are similar to their English equivalents.

Hinduism and Buddhism

Sanskrit is the main language of Hindu scripture and of much Buddhist scripture. Buddhism also employs the Pali language, which is closely related to Sanskrit. Sanskrit itself is an Indo-European language and as such is pronounced in much the same way as modern European languages. The main exceptions are as follows: $kh$ is pronounced $ch$, as in chair, $g$ is usually hard, as the first (not second) $g$ in garage. $b$ is pronounced separately from the preceding consonant, as the second $b$ in house, not

the *b* in *think*. The vowels are much the same as in German or Spanish, except that a short *a* (found in an unstressed syllable) is vocalized as *u* in *but*.

### Taoism and Confucianism

The Chinese language presents the most challenge to English speakers. A tonal language, Chinese contains sounds that are difficult to capture in other languages. Chinese words are given here in the Wade-Giles system, which despite the newer and generally more accurate *pinyin* system is still the choice in most scholarly literature and the one students will find in most other books. (Because it is becoming more common, we will note the *pinyin* spelling in the glossaries.) Consonants, especially when not immediately followed by an apostrophe, are as follows: *j* = ʃ, as for example the Chinese word for “humaneness,” *jen*, is pronounced *ren*. *k* = ꞌ, as for example the goddess Kwan (“Gwan”) Yin. *p*, especially at the beginning of a word, is pronounced *b*. *ch* is pronounced *j* as in the word for “classic scripture,” Ching (“Jing”). *t* is pronounced *d*, as in Tão (“Dow”).

### SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO READ SCRIPTURES

Those who are reading world scriptures for the first time often feel they are entering a strange new world. Sometimes one’s preconceived notion of what reading a given scripture will be like turns out to be quite wrong. Students of world religion are especially susceptible to the difficulties of reading scripture. Their textbooks usually try to make scriptures easier to encounter by simplifying and summarizing the contents. To encounter scriptures more directly and in their original form is a harder process. As Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren once wrote, “The problem of reading the Holy Book . . . is the most difficult problem in the field of reading.”

In the end, however, it is more profitable for readers to wrestle as directly as possible with the text. Of course, an anthology such as this does not present world scriptures in their totality but serves as a bridge to the full scripture text.

Each reader must ultimately find an individually suitable method for reading world scriptures. But these suggestions drawn from my experience and the experience of others may be helpful.

1. Use your knowledge of religion to set these readings in a fuller context. Try to relate scriptures as fully as possible to the life of the religions from which they come. For example, when you are reading a passage about ritual, visualize how the ritual is carried out.

2. Read the introductions to each chapter before you turn to the passages. They will provide an important background for understanding the passages.

3. Next, take a few moments to skim the selections. Having a general feel for the “lay of the land” will help you when you begin to read in detail.

4. Read the scripture passages with the same intellectual skills as you would any other text, religious or nonreligious. Remember their holy status in their religions, but don’t be intimidated by it.

5. Mark the text as you read. Research on reading shows that students who mark the text, underlining or highlighting as few as three or four items per page, understand and remember more than readers who do not mark their text. Marking the text helps to make it your own.

6. Pay attention to literary genre. The form and content of any literary passage will reflect its genre. Read with a feeling for the differences among myth, poetry, narrative, law, and other literary forms.

7. Make a personal glossary of unfamiliar terms and names as you go along. You can do this quite easily by circling them in the text and writing the in the bottom margin. Use circles or other type of marking that will distinguish them from all the other marked material. Then you can go back later to make a short note of their meaning, also in the margin. The unfamiliarity and difficulty of many words, both technical terms and personal names, is a large obstacle for many students of world religions. With a little extra effort, you can minimize this difficulty.

8. Be careful to pronounce the proper nouns correctly and consistently. Take an extra moment to sound them out and make them familiar. If necessary, use the pronunciation guide in this chapter and the glossary at the end of each chapter.

9. Read each selection repeatedly until you are familiar with it and can identify any problems you have in understanding it. View these problems as opportunities, not roadblocks, to achieving greater understanding.

10. Read the selections aloud as much as possible. This may feel embarrassing at first because you are not accustomed to it. Listen to the sounds of the words, and try to get a sense of the oral dimensions of the text. You cannot reproduce the feeling of the original language, but reading aloud will at least remind you that the text does have an oral dimension.

11. Put yourself, as well as you can, inside the faith of the scripture. What could these writings mean to you if you were among those who first heard them? What could they mean to you today if you were a typical follower of that faith? By using your knowledge and imagination, you can participate in the unique use of scripture in each religion and become—partially and temporarily—an insider.

12. Memorize short, selected passages as a way of internalizing scriptures.

13. If you wish to explore the scriptures more fully, begin by comparing the translations found here with other translations. Next, you can study other books and commentaries about the scriptures, many of which can be found in the Suggestions for Further Reading section of each chapter.

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49“By an act of historical imagination we can actually participate up to a certain point in the aspirations and devotions of other times and places. Yet this truly is only up to a certain point, for the curtain is suddenly lowered and we realize with a shock just how far away those places and times really are. That experience has been called ‘the paradox of understanding.’” Jaroslav Pelikan, *On Searching the Scriptures: Your Own or Someone Else’s* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1992), p. 7.
14. As time permits, read other scriptures besides those passages anthologized here. Best of all, read entire texts of scripture.

GLOSSARY
bibliomancy [bib-li-oh-man-se] the use of scripture to foresee future events and guide one's control of them.
canon a more or less fixed collection of books regarded as scriptural.
commentary a book written to explain another book, often passage by passage. Many religions possess commentaries on their scriptures.
genre a type of literary form, such as poetry, proverb, narrative history, philosophical meditation, and so on.
historical-critical method the scholarly study of a text that derives its meaning from its earliest phases and traces its historical development.
icon a holy picture. Metaphorically, scripture is an icon when it is revered as a sacred object apart from its contents.
narrative the telling of an event or series of events in story form.
oral tradition the passing down, usually through many generations, of myths, narratives, poems, and the like by word of mouth.
scripture texts that a religion holds to be especially sacred and authoritative.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION
1. What does the word scripture mean to you?
2. “Scripture is more a Western concept than an Asian concept.” To what extent do you agree or disagree with this common statement?
3. What special problems and opportunities are posed by having a very large scripture canon, such as in Taoism or Buddhism?
4. Suppose that a new potential scripture—a new gospel book about Jesus, or a collection of new sayings from Buddha or Confucius—were discovered and shown to be authentic. Would such a potential scripture actually get into the scripture canons of these religions? Why?
5. What uses of scripture seem most important and/or interesting to you? Why?
6. What disadvantages are posed by the ancient character of scriptures? Can these be overcome? If so, how?
7. Reflect on this description of Mohandas Gandhi’s teachings on studying others' scriptures: “One should read others’ scriptures with respect and reverence even to be enriched in one’s own religious convictions.”
8. What other advantages and disadvantages to using the Internet in religious studies occur to you, besides the ones given here?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING
L. J. Ballas, “Teaching World Religions through Their Scriptures.” Horizons (Villanova University) 17 (1990): 76-91. Especially useful to teachers, but students can profit from it as well, centers on narrative forms.


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