

the oxford dictionary of world religions

the oxford dictionary of world religions stands as a comprehensive and authoritative reference work that meticulously explores the vast and diverse landscape of global faiths and spiritual traditions. This dictionary serves as an invaluable resource for scholars, students, and anyone interested in understanding the historical development, cultural contexts, and theological concepts of religions worldwide. Covering major world religions as well as lesser-known beliefs, it offers detailed definitions, biographical entries, and thematic explanations. The meticulous scholarship behind the oxford dictionary of world religions ensures accuracy and depth, making it a trusted guide in religious studies and comparative theology. This article will delve into its purpose, content structure, editorial expertise, and its significance in academic and general contexts. The following sections provide a detailed overview and insights into this essential scholarly resource.

- Overview and Purpose of the Oxford Dictionary of World Religions
- Content and Structure
- Editorial Team and Contributors
- Key Features and Unique Aspects
- Applications and Importance in Religious Studies

Overview and Purpose of the Oxford Dictionary of World Religions

The oxford dictionary of world religions is designed to offer a comprehensive and balanced portrayal of the myriad religious traditions practiced around the globe. Its primary purpose is to provide clear, concise, and well-researched entries that illuminate the beliefs, practices, historical development, and cultural significance of different religions. The dictionary aims to serve as a foundational text for academic inquiry in religious studies, anthropology, theology, and related disciplines, while also being accessible to general readers seeking to deepen their understanding of global spirituality.

By encompassing a wide range of religious traditions—from the major world religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism to indigenous, folk, and new religious movements—the dictionary promotes a pluralistic and inclusive approach to the study of religion. It addresses both historical and contemporary contexts, ensuring that users gain a dynamic and nuanced appreciation of religious diversity.

Content and Structure

The oxford dictionary of world religions comprises thousands of entries organized alphabetically, covering key terms, concepts, figures, rituals, sacred texts, and religious movements. Each entry is crafted to provide factual information alongside interpretive insights that reflect current scholarly consensus.

Entry Types

The dictionary includes a variety of entry types, which can be broadly categorized as follows:

- **Concepts and Terms:** Definitions and explanations of theological ideas, rituals, ethical principles, and doctrinal elements.
- **Religious Figures:** Biographical entries on significant leaders, saints, prophets, and founders.
- **Sacred Texts:** Descriptions and analyses of scriptures and canonical writings.
- **Religious Traditions and Movements:** Overviews of specific religions, sects, denominations, and spiritual groups.
- **Places and Events:** Important pilgrimage sites, festivals, and historical milestones within religious history.

Organization and Accessibility

The dictionary's organization allows for easy navigation, with cross-references to related entries that facilitate comprehensive research. Entries are generally concise yet detailed enough to provide a thorough understanding of complex topics. The inclusion of bibliographies or suggestions for further reading enhances its utility for academic study.

Editorial Team and Contributors

The editorial oversight of the oxford dictionary of world religions is provided by a team of distinguished scholars and experts in religious studies and related fields. Their collective expertise ensures the accuracy, impartiality, and scholarly rigor of the content. Contributors hail from diverse academic backgrounds, encompassing theology, anthropology, history, and cultural studies, which enriches the dictionary's interdisciplinary approach.

Editors carefully vet submissions and maintain high editorial standards,

updating entries to reflect new research and evolving perspectives. This commitment to academic excellence establishes the dictionary as a reliable and up-to-date resource.

Key Features and Unique Aspects

Several distinctive features set the oxford dictionary of world religions apart from other reference works in the field:

- **Comprehensive Coverage:** Inclusion of both widely practiced religions and lesser-known spiritual traditions worldwide.
- **Multidisciplinary Approach:** Integration of insights from history, sociology, anthropology, and theology.
- **Neutral and Balanced Tone:** Presentation of information without bias, respecting the diversity of religious beliefs.
- **Cross-Referencing System:** Extensive internal references that connect related topics for deeper exploration.
- **Up-to-Date Scholarship:** Regular revisions to incorporate contemporary developments and scholarship.

These attributes contribute to the dictionary's reputation as an essential tool for understanding the complexities of world religions in a globalized context.

Applications and Importance in Religious Studies

The oxford dictionary of world religions plays a critical role in both academic and educational settings. It is widely used by students and educators as a dependable reference for coursework, research projects, and teaching materials. Its clear and concise entries help demystify complex theological concepts and cultural practices, making it easier to engage with religious studies at multiple levels.

Academic Research and Scholarship

Researchers benefit from the dictionary's authoritative entries that offer foundational knowledge and direct users to further scholarly resources. It supports comparative studies by providing standardized definitions and contextual background across diverse religious traditions.

Interfaith Dialogue and Cultural Understanding

Beyond academia, the dictionary facilitates interfaith dialogue and cultural literacy by promoting accurate knowledge of different religions. This promotes respect, tolerance, and informed discussion among individuals and communities from varied religious backgrounds.

1. Enhances academic rigor and research quality
2. Supports curriculum development in religious studies
3. Encourages inclusive and respectful understanding of global faiths
4. Assists in preparing educational and religious programming
5. Acts as a foundational tool for writers, journalists, and policymakers

Frequently Asked Questions

What is 'The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions'?

It is a comprehensive reference book that provides definitions, explanations, and information about various religions, religious terms, figures, and concepts from around the world.

Who is the editor of 'The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions'?

The dictionary is edited by John Bowker, a well-known scholar in the field of religious studies.

When was 'The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions' first published?

The first edition was published in 1997.

What types of entries are included in 'The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions'?

Entries include religious terms, biographies of significant religious figures, descriptions of religious practices, beliefs, festivals, and historical development of world religions.

Is 'The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions' useful for academic research?

Yes, it is widely used by students, scholars, and researchers as a reliable source for understanding religious concepts and contexts.

Does 'The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions' cover indigenous and lesser-known religions?

Yes, it includes entries on a broad range of religions, including indigenous, ancient, and lesser-known religious traditions alongside major world religions.

Are there digital or online versions of 'The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions'?

Yes, the dictionary is available in digital formats and can be accessed through various academic databases and platforms like Oxford Reference online.

How does 'The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions' handle differing religious perspectives?

The dictionary aims to present information neutrally and objectively, representing various religious perspectives fairly without promoting any particular viewpoint.

Can 'The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions' be used by general readers or is it only for specialists?

It is designed to be accessible to both general readers interested in religion and specialists, providing clear and concise explanations suitable for all levels.

Additional Resources

1. The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies

This book offers a comprehensive introduction to the academic study of religion, covering key theories, methodologies, and debates. It provides insights into various religious traditions and highlights the interdisciplinary nature of religious studies. Ideal for students and scholars seeking a broad understanding of the field.

2. The Routledge Dictionary of Religion

A detailed reference work that includes definitions and explanations of terms, concepts, and figures across world religions. It serves as an essential guide for students, researchers, and anyone interested in religious terminology. The dictionary covers both ancient and contemporary religious phenomena.

3. A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam by Karen Armstrong

This book explores the evolution of the concept of God in the three major monotheistic religions. Karen Armstrong traces historical developments and theological changes over millennia, providing a rich narrative of religious thought. It is accessible to both general readers and specialists.

4. The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion

This handbook presents a collection of essays by leading scholars on the

sociological aspects of religion. Topics include religious organizations, belief systems, secularization, and the role of religion in modern societies. It is a valuable resource for those interested in the social dimensions of religion.

5. *World Religions: The Great Faiths Explored & Explained* by John Bowker
John Bowker provides an engaging overview of the world's major religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and others. The book combines historical context with descriptions of beliefs, practices, and cultural impacts. It is richly illustrated and written for general readers.

6. *The Dictionary of Sacred Languages*
This specialized dictionary focuses on the languages used in religious texts and traditions, such as Sanskrit, Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin. It explains key terms and their religious significance, aiding readers in understanding sacred literature. Scholars of comparative religion and linguistics will find it particularly useful.

7. *Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices*
An extensive encyclopedia that covers a wide range of religious traditions, both major and minor. It provides detailed articles on beliefs, rituals, historical figures, and sacred texts. This work is designed as a thorough resource for academic research and personal study.

8. *The Penguin Dictionary of Religions* by John R. Hinnells
This dictionary offers concise entries on a broad spectrum of religious concepts, movements, and figures. It emphasizes inclusivity, covering indigenous and lesser-known religions alongside mainstream faiths. The accessible format makes it useful for students and casual readers alike.

9. *Sacred Texts of the World: An Anthology*
This anthology compiles essential religious writings from various traditions, providing translations and contextual introductions. It allows readers to engage directly with foundational scriptures and teachings. The book is a vital resource for understanding the textual basis of world religions.

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