



## Encyclopedia of Religion, 15 Volume Set

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## **Encyclopedia of Religion, 15 Volume Set From Macmillan Reference USA Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

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\*Starred Review\* *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, first published in 1987, sought "to introduce educated, nonspecialist readers to important ideas, practices, and persons in the religious experience of humankind from the Paleolithic past to our day." It had been some 65 years since the last volume of a similar effort, the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Scribner, 1911-22), was published, prompting two reviewers to prophesy that it was "extremely unlikely another encyclopedia of religion on this scale [would] appear in English for at least another generation." Just about a generation has passed, and the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* has appeared, right on schedule.

The second edition contains "well over five hundred new topics, nearly one thousand completely new articles, and 1.5 million more words than the original." In his preface, the editor provides an excellent service to readers by clearly distinguishing the differences in content between the two editions. All 2,750 entries from the first edition were examined for revision, 1,800 of them remaining essentially unchanged. While entries in both editions are signed, the name of the scholar is followed by the date 1987 in the new edition, thereby indicating the article is reprinted with few or no changes. When entries were updated for the second edition, either by the original author or by another scholar, a single name will be followed by two dates (1987 and 2005) or two names will be listed, each followed by one of the two years. The editors considered some articles from the first edition worthy of inclusion in the second but no longer state-of-the-art (e.g., *Mysticism*, *Rites of passage*, *Sexuality*). Here, the entry is reprinted with the title qualified by "First Edition" and is then followed by a completely new article with the same title but the qualifier "Further Considerations." Most, if not all, entries conclude with supplemental bibliographies, often updated even if the entry itself was not. When they have been updated, the new citations follow the original bibliography under the heading "New Sources."

Much is completely new to the second edition, most notably in the expansion of composite entries. Employed in the first edition, these composite entries consist of related sets of articles. Beginning with a general overview, articles that explore, for example, tradition-specific aspects of the *Afterlife* or geographical differences in *Buddhism* follow. Significant new composite entries have been added for *Ecology and religion* and *Gender and religion*, along with a significantly expanded composite entry for *Law and religion*. *New religious movements* is another area with enhanced coverage, including an expanded composite entry and new individual entries such as *Branch Davidians*; *Hubbard, L. Ron*; *UFO religions*; and *Wicca*. The important relationship between religion and science is explored in new entries for *Bioethics and Genetics and religion*, as well as a thoroughly revised entry for *Science and religion*. Each volume now contains a "visual essay"-basically plates of color illustrations with accompanying text on such topics as "Sacred Time" or "Efficacious Images"-that seeks "to demonstrate how pervasively visual culture permeates religion." Sadly, more than 50 new biographical entries have been added for scholars of religion who have passed away since the first edition was published. Included is the great Islamicist Annemarie Schimmel, one of the editors of the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* and this reviewer's teacher. *Requiescat in pace*.

Distinguishing content between the two editions is less clear when entries have been omitted or incorporated into another. A cursory review of one volume of the first edition produced a couple of examples. According to the excellent index, Muro Kyuso, a Japanese scholar of neo-Confucianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is nowhere to be found in the second edition. The entry for Nawrz, the Persian New Year, is now given brief mention in the article on *Islamic religious year*. Arguably, both are minor subjects

in the greater scheme of the encyclopedia as a whole, but their omission does suggest that consideration be given to keeping both editions handy.

Volume 15 contains, in addition to the index, a "Synoptic Outline of Contents" which sorts entry headings under topics related to either individual religions and religious traditions or religious studies. Also in this volume is an appendix with 21 entries that could not be included in the main A-Z portion of the encyclopedia "due to time constraints."

Academic specialists may uncover some factual errors in this second edition and may well quibble with the presentation of material by their colleagues. But as reviewers of the first edition remarked-an assessment equally true today-the *Encyclopedia of Religion* "will indeed provide a generation of users with valuable summaries and analyses of the best of current scholarship in the field of religion." If the encyclopedia has any major flaw, it is the choice of color for the binding. While the gold lettering against the white binding is handsome indeed, the volumes will soon be soiled should the set receive anything close to the use it so richly deserves. Highly recommended for academic and large public libraries *Christopher McConnell*  
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