

A serene night landscape featuring a starry sky, a forest of evergreen trees, and a body of water reflecting the scene. The text "WORLD RELIGIONS" is centered in the image.

WORLD RELIGIONS

THE WORLD RELIGIONS

- **Christianity** (2.3 billion)
- **Islam** (1.5 billion)
- **Hinduism** (1 billion)
- **Buddhism** (500 million)
- **Judaism** (14.5 million)





THE WORLD RELIGIONS

Hallmarks of studying religions:

- Accuracy
- Fairness
- Objectivity
- Respect

Christian distinctives:

- Imagination
- Framework of questions
- Goal



THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

“The theology of religions is an attempt to understand and explain the broad range of religious phenomena in terms of Christian categories and assumptions, which are derived from God’s revelation and the church’s reflection upon this revelation through the ages.”

“It seeks to explain theologically both by human beings are religious and the diverse ways that human religiosity is expressed (specific beliefs and practices). But the theology of religions also includes thinking theologically about how Christians ought to live among people of other faiths.” (Harold Netland)



THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

A Christian theology of religions should be:

- **Faithful** to and shaped by the teachings, values, and assumptions of the Bible
- **Informed** by the central confessions of the church throughout the centuries
- **Phenomenologically accurate** in how it depicts the beliefs, institutions, and practices of other religious traditions



THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

There are three Christian perspectives on other religions:

- **Exclusivism:** Religious truth and salvation are restricted exclusively to Christianity
- **Inclusivism:** God's grace and salvation, which are based in Christ, are available and efficacious through other religions (though Christianity is superior)
- **Pluralism:** Major religions are all more or less equally effective and legitimate alternative ways of responding to the one divine reality



THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

There are five key Christian themes for explaining religious phenomena:

- Creation
- General revelation
- Common grace
- Sin
- Demonic influence



CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic

- **Old:** The largest world religions are thousands of years old. This type of endurance suggests strong social utility
- **Large:** World religions must be million members strong
- **Cross-cultural:** A world religion must have the capacity to cross cultures and grow in areas in which it did not originate



CHARACTERISTICS

Essential

- **Universal:** World religions not only have the capacity to cross cultures, but also teach that their doctrines and/or practices have validity for all peoples, everywhere
- **Transformational:** World religions operate in a two-tier cosmology (spiritual/material). The material realm is to be merely coped with so that the spiritual realm may be attained
- **Differentiated:** World religions tend to have defined sectors in complex, differentiated societies, and operate alongside other sectors

CHARACTERISTICS

Phenomenological

- **Traditionalism:** Importance of original creative acts or words of the founder
- **Myth and symbol:** Stories about origins carried in symbols
- **Ideas of salvation:** saving people from something, to something (a better reality)
- **Sacred objects and places:** objects and places set apart from ordinary objects and places



CHARACTERISTICS

Phenomenological

- **Sacred actions:** ritual actions that communicate with the divine or reality
- **Sacred writings:** recorded words of the founder or early disciples
- **Sacred community:** sense of belonging that provides structure and place of worship
- **Sacred experience:** varieties of perceptions or transcendence or depth

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