

# Introduction

This book is a major revision of the first edition of *Faith, Religion & Theology*, originally published in 1990. The need for the original book arose out of our ongoing search for useful materials for our introductory course at Xavier University in Cincinnati. When we could not find a text that dealt adequately with the range of topics we thought important and that was easily understood by our students, we decided to write our own book. We were happy to discover that most of our students found that original book highly readable and interesting. We were pleased that many colleges and universities around the country chose to use the book in their religious studies courses. And we were grateful that the book received recognition from the Catholic Press Association as the best educational book in 1991. Since that time, however, the world has changed dramatically and theological scholarship has developed. A new edition of *Faith, Religion & Theology* was clearly desirable.

While adding entirely new sections and revising original material, our text retains many of the valuable features of the first edition. First, this book continues to make what we consider to be a proper distinction between *faith*, as a human response to the experience of Transcendent Mystery; *religion*, the context wherein most people express, nurture, and live out such a response; and *theology*, the process of critical reflection upon the response of faith and its expression in religion. Second, we continue to address our

book to the average reader, who may be unfamiliar with the vocabulary and methods of religious studies. Although we have used the best scholarly resources available, we have made great efforts to avoid the use of overly technical language and jargon. Moreover, we have used the comments and questions of our own students as valuable resources. The learners using these materials will hear the voices of their peers, honestly struggling with questions concerning a wide range of religious issues. Third, we continue to attempt to balance theoretical and practical concerns. On the one hand, we synthesize what we consider to be the best theoretical work on faith, religion, and theology. On the other hand, we consistently address “practical” issues, especially issues of social justice and world peace.

Among the new elements in this edition are a detailed analysis of human faith as basic to a meaningful life; an expanded exposition of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam as well as the inclusion of an entirely new section on Native American religions; an interpretation of how the world’s religions contribute to global responsibility; a section on conscience and the kind of response Christian believers owe to the official teachings of their church; and a new exploration of the effects of “social location”—especially gender, race, and class—upon theological reflection. In addition, the rest of the original text has been thoroughly updated. There are new questions for discussion, new bibliographies, and new charts and appendices to accompany the main text.

The following is a brief overview of the three major parts of the book.

### **Faith as Human Activity**

Brennan R. Hill begins this section with a thorough examination of the human phenomenon of faith. He explores how faith in ourselves and in others is necessary to healthy human development. Focusing upon such experiences of trust, Chapter One comes to describe human faith as a response of the whole person and as a relational commitment that is both personal and communal. Faith is distinguished from belief and is related to actions and

commitment. The chapter concludes by explaining how human faith moves us to ask ultimate questions. Religious faith, which deals with ultimate questions, builds upon the foundation of human faith. Religious faith places its trust in an ultimate reality, develops a relationship with that reality, and moves people to adopt a way of life that flows from that relationship. Chapter Two examines Christian faith as one form of religious faith. Here Christian faith is presented as a free, gifted response to the experience of God in Jesus the Christ. Integral Christian faith implies a response of the mind, the heart, and the will. It entails a way of life and requires ongoing nourishment. Like human faith, Christian faith is intimately related to the stages of human development. These stages are discussed in Chapter Three. Hill points out that the more we know about our growth as persons, the better we are able to understand the dynamics of faith. Chapter Three examines the main stages of human development—childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and adulthood—with an eye to their bearing on the growth of religious or Christian faith. The final chapter in the first section of the book deals with faith and action. Hill begins Chapter Four by describing how the world's religions pay attention to issues of social, political, and economic responsibility. He then considers Catholic social teaching in the twentieth century. The chapter ends with a description of how different young people have successfully connected their faith life with some involvement in social and global issues.

### **Religion as Context for Faith and Action**

Paul Knitter begins his introduction to religion by facing the many modern criticisms of religion. While admitting the validity of some of the charges against organized religion, he counters with a number of positive values that religious traditions exhibit. Specifically, Chapter Five describes the personal and social value of religion. In Chapter Six, Knitter examines the nature of religion and the connection between religious belief and behavior. Religion is structured in terms of creed, code, and ceremony. And this chapter analyzes how those structures are both necessary and problematic. Chapter Seven reflects upon the diversity of religions

and what religious pluralism means for Christianity today. How a faith commitment to Christ can be united with a respect for other religions is sensitively explored. Knitter points out here the value of engaging in dialogue with other religious traditions. In the final chapter of this section, he describes the creeds, codes, and ceremonies of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and Native American religions. In addition, he highlights the contributions of each religion to the present crises that confront our world. This chapter mirrors the closing chapter of the first part of the book by detailing specifically the connections between religious faith and global responsibility.

### **Theology as Interpretation, Construction, and Transformation**

William Madges begins this section of the book with a discussion of what theology is and who engages in theological reflection. Christian theology is presented as the process and the product of conversation between the Christian tradition and our contemporary situation. The goal of theology is to deepen our understanding of Christian faith and our commitment to transform the world for the better. Chapter Nine also examines the relationship between the individual and the community, the role of conscience, the different kinds of theology, and the criteria for distinguishing good theology from bad. Chapter Ten addresses the relationship between Scripture and tradition, dealing with the Protestant and Catholic points of view. The literal and the contextual-critical approaches to understanding the Bible are compared. Chapter Ten also identifies the reasons why some people find fundamentalism attractive, and it explains why biblical stories are stories that matter. Chapter Eleven examines the relationship between our experiences and theology. The chapter addresses in particular how the experiences of women, people of color, and poor people challenge the traditional understanding of Christian beliefs. The doctrines of God, Christ, and the church are seen in a new light when viewed from the perspectives of these marginalized groups. The final chapter of this section examines the problems of sin, evil, and violence. Some of the different ways in which theology has attempt-

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ed to make sense of evil are explored. In addition, different Christian responses to the many forms of violence—personal, military, and ecological—are compared. Chapter Twelve also highlights the relevance of theological reflection for dealing with important contemporary issues in culture and society.

Through our choice of issues and the range of viewpoints presented in this book, we have attempted to provide a truly contemporary introduction to faith, religion, and theology. Our aim has been not only to inform, but also to stimulate critical thinking about these important realities. It is our hope that this text will offer educators the materials they need to introduce many learners, whether college students or other interested adults, to the challenges and opportunities that the religious dimension of life offers.