**Chapter 1**

**Summary:**

Sociologist Peter Berger’s claim—that if India is the most religious country and Sweden the least, the United States is *a nation of Indians ruled by Swedes*—is inaccurate. On the contrary, modern political leaders have consistently used religious rhetoric, and most of the American public exhibits *religious illiteracy*. According to Christian Smith, many embrace a worldview of *moralistic, therapeutic deism* regardless of their professed religion. Religious illiteracy occurs because religion is avoided in public education and common discourse as “too hot to handle,” and because contemporary American religious traditions demand very little of their adherents. However, it is crucial for believers, atheists, and agnostics alike to develop a fuller *understanding* of religion. To understand the foundations of Western culture, the meaning of much art, music, and literature, and our common nature as *homo religiosus*, one must be well versed in religion. Religion offers an “all-embracing horizon of meaning” to its adherents, and its profound significance for humans in society cannot be ignored. This book examines the history and theological development of Christianity using an insider/outsider approach; both perspectives are necessary for a rich examination of the religious tradition.

As Alfred North Whitehead observed, Christianity is “a religion seeking a metaphysic.” It was formed around the person of Jesus Christ, and *later* developed theological doctrines. Albert Outler noticed four sources in John Wesley’s theology—the *Wesleyan Quadrilateral* of reason, experience, tradition, and scripture. Christian theology and practice is characterized by the dynamic between these four elements.

The Bible is considered broadly by Christians to be the *word of God,* and holds a great deal of authority (binding power) for believers. It is a collection of texts compiled in the several centuries after Jesus’s death, and certain texts were canonized or rejected based on their representation of the *authentic Christian tradition* as early bishops recognized it. Determining what domains the Bible holds authority over is wedded to issues of *interpretation*.

Interpretations of the Bible vary based on differing *approaches* that scholars come to the text with. The *secular approach* examines the Bible’s relationship to the Christian tradition, but does not discuss whether the Bible says anything true of God. So, it cannot represent Christianity as it sees itself. Another approach to the Bible, as Christian Smith noted, is the *biblicist* approach, which believes the Bible was essentially dictated by God. It affirms ten claims—found in the chapter—on the Bible’s inerrancy, universality, and literal meaning. However, Smith argued that biblicism cannot work because it overlooks the interpretive plurality even among biblicists, and simply ignores the difficulty of contradictory passages. In short, it is philosophically naïve.

A third approach, which steers clear of the shortcomings of the first two, examines the Bible through faithful critical analysis of the text and its relationship to tradition. It understands the Bible as revelation of a saving faith, but recognizes that it is *contextualized* and limited by the human authors and their place in culture and history. The richest interpretive approaches take the contexts and particularities of the text into account. *Form criticism* acknowledges the *genre* of the text at hand while interpreting it, *historical-critical method* identifies cultural assumptions and nuances in language given the time and place of authorship, *redaction criticism* examines the history of *edits* to the text, and so on. These forms of criticism aim to draw as much insight as possible from the Bible, which is *inexhaustible* and has a surplus of meaning.

**Multiple Choice Questions**:

1. \*According to Steven Prothero, how many American adults can name a Gospel?

(A) 25%

(B) 35%

(C) 50%

(D) 65%.

**Right answer is C**

1. Sociologist Christian Smith argued that Americans implicitly embrace a generic faith. What did he call that faith?

(A) Christianity lite

(B) Moralistic, therapeutic deism

(C) American civil religion

(D) *Homo religiosus*

**Right answer is B**

1. \*The author argues that understanding religion, particularly Christianity, is crucial for students. Which of the following is *not* one of the reasons he gives?

(A) Much of the cultural history of the West would be unintelligible without it

(B) Humans are religious by nature

(C) Not knowing about one’s religion keeps one from deeply engaging in one’s religious community

(D) The dynamics of religion need to be understood to understand what brings social harmony and what brings social conflict

**Right answer is C**

1. What comparison did the author use to distinguish religious from nonreligious demands?

(A) School

(B) Music

(C) Sports

(D) Watching TV

**Right answer is C**

1. \*The author argues that most Americans are religiously illiterate. Which reason was *not* given by the author to explain this?

(A) Religion has been virtually eliminated from public schools

(B) Religion has been virtually eliminated from public discourse

(C) Religions in contemporary America demand little from their adherents

(D) Religions in contemporary America are too divided to have a coherent message

**Right answer is D**

1. How did sociologist Mircea Eliade describe human nature?

(A) *Deus magnus*

(B) *Homo dei*

(C) *Homo religious*

(D) *Perspectus transcendus*.

(**Right answer is C**)

1. \*According to the author, how many Christians are there worldwide?

(A) 1.5 billion

(B) 2.2 billion

(C) 3.1 billion

(D) 3.8 billion

**Right answer is B**

1. \*In just over the last 100 years, Christianity has grown in Africa by how much?

(A) Doubled

(B) Tripled

(C) Grown over ten times as large

(D) Grown almost 65 times as large

**Right answer is D**

1. The author claims that Christianity is fundamentally a religion about:

(A) Jesus

(B) Religion itself

(C) Religion for religion’s sake

(D) God.

**Right answer is A**

1. The author discusses biblical authority by parsing the Latin word *auctoritas*. What does *auctoritas* literally mean?

(A) Authority

(B) Dominance or control

(C) Origination or source

(D) Finality or completion

**Right answer is C**

1. \*Which of the following is *not* part of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral?

(A) Reason

(B) Revelation

(C) Tradition

(D) Scripture

**Right answer is B**

1. According to the author, on what basis did the church discern which texts should be part of the New Testament?

(A) Tradition

(B) They declared themselves written by apostles

(C) They were true

(D) They had authority.

**Right answer is A**

1. \*The author describes a secular scholarship’s approach to the Bible as

(A) The same way they treat other claimed canonical texts

(B) Not spiritually wise

(C) Necessarily not inspiring

(D) Inherently wrong.

**Right answer is A**

1. \*What is a *biblicist*?

(A) Someone who believes the Bible is the word of God

(B) Someone who believes the Bible is not the word of God

(C) Someone who believes the Bible was written by God

(D) Someone who thinks the Bible ought to be memorized.

**Right answer is C**

1. Which of the following best reflects the author’s comprehension about being a *Biblical Christian*?

(A) It is about exploring, appreciating, and applying biblical themes within the context of one’s spiritual life

(B) It is about seeing the Bible as the sole word of God and directing one’s life by its every teaching

(C) It is about allowing one’s soul to be dominated by the biblical word, so that every spiritual thought is biblically inspired and directed

(D) It is about being a biblical fundamentalist (which the author criticizes).

**Right answer is A**

**True or False Questions**:

1. Sociologist Peter Berger argued that the United States is a highly religious country ruled by nonreligious politicians. **True**
2. \*The last five presidents were practicing Christians. **True**
3. \*A real scholar of religion, whether a believer or not, has to work solely as an outsider so as not to be biased. **False**
4. The author believes that faith claims are, by their very nature, not aligned to reason. **False**
5. The author believes that most religious scholars are biblicists. **False**
6. \*The author describes various “criticisms” scholars use to interpret the Bible, for example, *form criticism*. By this he means that scholars criticize the Bible through various literary tools. **False**
7. There is a high correlation between religious observance and good citizenry. **True**
8. \*Most Christians give the Bible the pride of place as authority. **True**
9. \*One of the problems of modern Christian scholarship is that it reduces the Bible’s contents. **False**
10. The author claims that the greatest problem in Biblicism is that it is philosophically naïve about the nature of God. **True**

**Essay/Discussion Questions:**

1. \*The author believes that Americans are understudied regarding religion. In addition to the reasons provided, are there other factors in American culture that may have contributed to such a lack of understanding?
2. The author cites sociologist Christian Smith who believes many Americans embrace a type of generic faith, which Smith calls “moralistic, therapeutic deism.” This is a worldview of a kind of distant, benign God who demands little and offers little in this life. Do you think this assessment of American religiosity is correct? What do you think of this picture of American religiosity?
3. \*The author distinguishes between “insiders” and “outsiders” in scholarship. What are examples in your own life where you are privy to information or experience that is unobtainable from the outside? Are there any experiences in your life where others’ experience or commitments may have skewed their objectivity?
4. \*What is your view of the Biblicist position? Do you agree with the author’s critique? Why or why not?
5. The author’s apparent approach to the Bible is through various forms of biblical analysis, such as *form criticism, historical critical method*, and so on. From the perspective of religious believers, do you think this is an appropriate way to engage the Bible? Why or why not?

**Weblinks and Additional Resources:**

1. For an assessment of religion in America, particularly regarding youths, see: Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
2. For the imperative that Americans need to understand religion, see: Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn’t*. New York: HarperOne, 2007.
3. For the best meta-study of religion in America, see: Robert Putman and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.
4. “Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life.” <http://www.pewforum.org/>. This site provides the most up-to-date research and statistics on religion in America.

**Chapter 2**

**Summary:**

This chapter introduces the Old Testament, or ***Tanakh*.** The Tanakh represents the **canon**, or authoritative body of texts, for Jews. *Tanakh* is a Hebrew acronym for the three parts of the Jewish Scriptures: *Torah* (law or teaching); *Nevi’im* (Prophets); and *Khetuvim* (Writings). Christians refer to it as the “Old Testament,” but this is not to mean that it is overwritten and replaced by the New Testament. **Torah** is the first five books, sometimes called the “Books of Moses”: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The ***Nevi’im*** is divided into the Former Prophets, which are historical books, and the Latter Prophets, which are saying of actual prophets. The ***Khetuvim*** consists of other miscellaneous texts. The **Septuagint**, the Greek Tanakh used by first-century Jews outside of Palestine, included some works in the *Khetuvim* that are not part of today’s Jewish canon. Old Testament canon differs among Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christian traditions.

Evaluating whether the Bible is *true* is a complicated question. Truth can apply differently depending on what is being looked for in the text. Criticisms that expect the Bible to use modern knowledge and methods are *anachronistic*. The Bible’s depictions of historical figures and events are frequently laden with historical, theological, and national meaning. We can see this in Genesis 2–11, in which biblical authors drew on an ancient Near East creation-flood story as a template to describe their own story and the relationship between God and man. Differences in New Testament accounts of Jesus’s ascension (Luke 24:50–53 vs. Acts 1:12) are the result of different theological aims. Biblical authors believed that history was sacred and expressed an overarching divine plan. For Christians, the Old Testament and the New Testament rely on each other for understanding. The New Testament builds on and fulfills the Old Testament’s foundational themes.

Genesis contains two different **cosmogonies**, or stories of creation. The oldest is the second, found in Genesis 2:4b–11:9, in which man is created from dust, Adam and Even sin and are expelled from the Garden of Eden, humanity multiplies beginning with Cain and Abel, and human wickedness prompts God to flood the Earth, saving only Noah and family. The first cosmogony, found in Genesis 1:1–2:4a, tells the six-day creation story. The second explains the human condition and God’s relationship with humanity using many **anthropomorphisms**. The first teaches that God is transcendent and perfect, and that humans have something of God’s holiness in their nature.

The rest of Genesis tells of the **patriarchs** of the Jewish people. God calls **Abraham** to migrate from Haran to Canaan, where he makes a covenant with him. Abraham’s son is **Isaac**, whose son is **Jacob**, who comes to be known as **Israel**. The people of Israel enter Egypt during a famine after Jacob’s son Joseph rises to a position of power there. God’s covenant with Abraham designates the Israelite people as uniquely belonging to God.

**Exodus** tells the story of Moses’s leadership of Israel and God’s miraculous intervention to lead the now enslaved Israelites out of Egypt to Mount Sinai. The people of Israel receive the **Ten Commandments** at Sinai and make a covenant of mutual loyalty with God. Israel journeys for forty years until they are led into the promised land of Canaan by Moses’s commander Joshua.

**Judges** recounts the Israelites’ conquest of Canaan and their organization as a loosely confederated people led by elders called *shofets* from the thirteenth to the eleventh centuries BCE. During this time, they undergo a cycle of unfaithfulness, suffering, repentance, and prosperity.

The Israelites desire a king, so God chooses **Saul** to lead them. After Saul’s failure to obey God’s commands, **David** of Bethlehem is anointed king. David’s reign was a golden age, although complicated. The capital city of **Jerusalem** was established, and David’s son **Solomon** builds a temple there. After Solomon’s death, Israel splits into a northern and southern kingdom, which are eventually invaded by Assyria and Persia, respectively. The time from the repatriation of Judah until the year 70 CE is known as the **Second Temple Period**.

The Prophets were God’s spokespersons, and interpreted the signs of the time under God’s inspiration. Some predicted the future, but most called Israel to a return to greater fidelity. Some prophets advised the king directly, while some challenged and opposed the king. The prophets were primarily concerned about authentic worship (freedom from idolatry) and social justice (advocacy for the poor and weak). Christians look to the prophets’ sayings to interpret Jesus’s role, message, and ministry as a messianic figure.

The course of Old Testament history shows a number of theological themes and developments with regards to ancient Israel. Priesthood and sacrifice were central to bridging the distance between God and humanity through sacred ritual. Initially, Israel, as its neighbors, was polytheistic, worshipping Yahweh but believing that other, lesser gods did exist. By the end of the Old Testament, Israel is firmly monotheistic. Likewise, a belief in a place of universal afterlife called **Sheol** developed into a belief in a last judgment and a final destiny in heaven or hell. The belief that God controls both good and evil only develops into a belief in supernatural evil very late in Old Testament history. Israel develops a self-identity as a spiritual guide for other peoples in God’s plan for universal salvation.

**Multiple Choice Questions:**

1. What does the term *canon* refer to?

(A) Passages or verses in the Bible that are particularly important

(B) Dynamic passages or verses that are intended to *explode* in the reader’s soul

(C) Authoritative collection of texts in a religious tradition

(D) Texts and teachings that are true.

**Right Answer is C**

1. \*What is the Jewish Bible is called?

(A) Torah

(B) Books of Moses

(C) Tanakh

(D) Nevi’im.

**Right answer is C**

1. What is the Documentary Hypothesis?

(A) A theory that Jews documented their history in the Bible

(B) A theory that Jewish history could not be documented but was maintained in oral telling

(C) A theory that argues against the divine inspiration of the Old Testament

(D) A theory that argues for four main sources for the Old Testament.

**Right answer is D**

1. How did the author explain the discrepancy between Jesus’ ascension on Easter Sunday in the Gospel of Luke and Jesus’ ascension forty days later in Acts of the Apostles?

(A) They represent two different theological aims

(B) Jesus could have ascended twice

(C) They were written by two different witnesses

(D) One of them has to be historically false.

**Right answer is A**

1. \*What does *cosmogony* refer to?

(A) How the universe is structured

(B) How the universe was made

(C) The story of Adam and Eve

(D) The nature of the heavens.

**Right answer is B**

1. In the Story of Adam and Eve, why did God expel them from the Garden of Eden?

(A) They sinned

(B) They would ruin the Garden

(C) They might eat of the tree of knowledge again and thus become gods

(D) They might eat of the tree of life and live forever.

**Right answer is D**

1. \*Initially, Adam and Eve had Cain and Abel as their children. What happened to them?

(A) Cain taught Abel how to worship God, and God blessed Cain

(B) Abel rebelled against God and lost his birthright to Cain

(C) Cain was jealous of Abel and killed him

(D) Both Cain and Abel fell into a pit and died.

**Right answer is C**

1. \*What is an *anthropomorphism*?

(A) Attributing human characteristics to nonhumans

(B) Striving to find ways to become more human

(C) Humans trying to become like God

(D) The study of humanity from a theological point of view.

**Right answer is A**

1. \*Who was the first patriarch?

(A) Moses

(B) Jacob

(C) Abraham

(D) God.

**Right answer is C**

1. Israel is another name for whom?

(A) Moses

(B) Jacob

(C) Abraham

(D) God.

**Right answer is B**

1. \*What was the *binding of Isaac* about?

(A) Isaac was forced to be a slave

(B) Isaac was attacked, bound, and killed by his brothers

(C) Abraham bound him as a sacrifice to God

(D) It was actually Jacob who bound himself, but this was misunderstood by the text.

**Right answer is C**

1. According to the Book of Exodus, why were Jews enslaved in Egypt?

(A) Pharaoh was afraid they would join Egypt’s enemies in war

(B) Pharaoh demanded that they leave, which they refused

(C) Pharaoh wanted to adopt Moses and the Jews refused

(D) Pharaoh needed workers.

**Right answer is A**

1. Which of the following did God give as his own name to Moses?

(A) THE LORD

(B) I AM WHO AM

(C) ALMIGHTY

(D) MASTER.

**Right answer is B**

1. \*Where did Moses receive the Law of God and make a covenant with his people?

(A) Jerusalem

(B) Egypt

(C) Sinai

(D) Moses did not do this.

**Right answer is C**

1. \*How long did the period of the Judges last?

(A) 50 years

(B) 100 years

(C) 200 years

(D) 500 years.

**Right answer is C**

1. What best characterizes Israel’s society during the time of the Judges?

(A) It was local and egalitarian, with little centralized power

(B) It was united but often brutal under a universal judge

(C) It was deeply religiously faithful, but socially weak

(D) It was structured under universal laws which the judges oversaw.

**Right answer is A**

1. What was the reason that Israel became a monarchy?

(A) The elders of Israel believed that this was the people’s destiny

(B) The elders of Israel were afraid of other nations’ gods

(C) The elders of Israel wanted the community to be like other nations, and Samuel’s sons were untrustworthy

(D) The judge Samuel demanded it because the people were unmanageable.

**Right answer is C**

1. \*Who was the first king of Israel?

(A) Abraham

(B) David

(C) Moses

(D) Saul.

**Right answer is D**

1. What was the great promise God made to David?

(A) His dynasty would last forever

(B) He would be remembered forever as God’s favored son

(C) He would defeat the dreaded Philistines

(D) His temple would last forever.

**Right answer is A**

1. \*Which foreign dynasty was the first to conquer and control Judah and Jerusalem?

(A) Assyrian

(B) Babylonian

(C) Persian

(D) Greek.

**Right answer is B**

1. What is Hellenization?

(A) The first belief in an afterlife

(B) Taking up Greek culture

(C) Rejecting Satan in ancient Israel

(D) Forming a hatred for outsiders.

**Right answer is B**

1. Who were the Hasmoneans?

(A) Dynasty from the East that ruled over Israel

(B) Family of prophets who reinvigorated Jewish worship

(C) Jewish family who reclaimed Israel from the Greek dynasty

(D) Overlords from Syria who controlled Israel.

**Right answer is C**

1. \*According to the author, what was the typical role of a prophet?

(A) Predicting the future under God’s inspiration

(B) Calling the people and leaders to greater fidelity to the covenant

(C) Performing miracles, for example, healing, to show God’s present power

(D) Offering sacrifices at the temple.

**Right answer is B**

1. \*According to the author, which two issues dominated the prophets’ concerns?

(A) Future telling and right sacrifices

(B) Future telling and challenging the king

(C) Authentic worship and social justice

(D) Ensuring the people heard the word of God and predicting the future.

**Right answer is C**

1. \*Which of the following does not reflect the meaning of the term *Torah*?

(A) Law

(B) First five books of the Bible

(C) Teaching

(D) Piety or devotion.

**Right answer is D**

1. What does *Sheol* refer to?

(A) A place where every soul rests after death

(B) The first *and* last official tabernacle devoted to God

(C) God’s ancient rival

(D) Jerusalem’s temple.

**Right answer is A**

1. \*What does the literal term *Satan* mean?

(A) The destroyer

(B) The steadfast one

(C) The accuser

(D) The liar

**Right answer is C**

1. According to the author, did ancient Jews believe in fallen angels?

(A) No, only late in the Second Temple period did they believe this

(B) Yes, and they believed they were the gods of their enemies

(C) No, fallen angels only come to be believed in the New Testament

(D) Yes, and they were believed to have given human beings diseases such as leprosy.

**Right answer is A**

1. According to the author, what best depicts Israel’s understanding of other peoples?

(A) They always found themselves oppressed by others and believed them heretics who deserve damnation

(B) They initially thought of them as rivals, but came to see their gods as good for them even as Israel had the highest God

(C) They initially thought of them as good, but came to see them as harming Israel’s religion

(D) They initially thought of them as rivals, but came to see that God loved them and wanted Israel to be a light for them.

**Right answer is D**

1. \*What constitutes the *Second Temple period*?

(A) From the 11th century BCE to the 9th century BCE

(B) From the 8th century BCE to the 6th century BCE

(C) From the 6th century BCE to the 1st century CE

(D) From the 1st century CE to the 5th century CE.

**Right answer is C**

**True or False Questions:**

1. The author claims that the creation accounts in Genesis are not historically true. **True**
2. The author claims that the creation accounts in Genesis are not true. **False**
3. \*Genesis depicts two creation stories, the first one being the oldest in Jewish oral history. **False**
4. \*After Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, human wickedness increased. **True**
5. For devout Jews to speak God’s revealed name is the highest religious practice. **False**
6. \*Most ancient covenants were actually much like business deals. **False**
7. Becoming a monarchy led to the cultural advancement of the people. **True**
8. \*David’s rule included a dysfunctional household. **True**
9. The most religiously devout king in Israel’s history was Solomon. **False**
10. The single monarchy broke up quickly after Solomon’s death. **True**
11. \*Once the Jews were sent into exile, the Holy Land remained in foreign control for the next four hundred years. **True**
12. \*Kings literally had guilds of prophets working for them. **True**
13. Not only did many ancient Jews believe in other gods, but there is good deal of the Old Testament that demonstrates the biblical authors did as well. **True**
14. \*According to the author, most ancient Jews followed God’s law not as much to get into heaven than to avoid going to hell. **False**
15. \*Ancient Jews confused fallen angels with other gods. **False**

**Essay/Discussion Questions:**

1. In discussing the historicity of the Bible, the author cites two texts reporting the ascension of Jesus, one from the Gospel of Luke and the other from Acts of the Apostles, both of which were written by the same author. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus ascends on Easter evening, and in Acts he ascends after forty days. The author claims that the biblical author intended to make theological points by depicting the ascension in two different ways. If this is the case, how do you think the reader of the Bible can trust any historical claim in the text?
2. \*What do you make of the plagues in Exodus? What does this imply about God?
3. \*The author says that Christians interpret Old Testament prophetic texts as foretelling the person and ministry of Jesus. He concedes that some of these texts may have intended historical persons at the time of the prophecy, but also that it is legitimate for Christians to see that the “fullness of these prophesies unfolds with Jesus.” Do you think this is a position that is intellectually defensible? Why or why not?
4. \*What is most surprising to you in the history of ancient Israel and why?
5. The author says that Israel’s faith and the Bible which depicts that faith changed over time in key ways, such as belief in gods to belief in monotheism and the shift from embracing no appreciable afterlife to embracing the belief in heaven and hell. Do you think he makes a good case? If not, how would you interpret the texts he cited? If so, what does this imply about the revelatory quality of the Bible?

**Weblinks and Additional Resources:**

1. “The Hebrew Bible.” <https://astudyoftheoldtestament.wordpress.com/resources/biographies/glossary/tanakh/>. This site provides more information on the Tanakh along with images of Tanakh scrolls.
2. “Study Bible Tools.com.” <http://www.biblestudytools.com/encyclopedias/isbe/sacrifice-in-the-old-testament-2.html>. This site provides more information on the nature and practice of sacrifice in the Old Testament period.
3. “Holy Temples of Jerusalem and the Ark of the Covenant.” <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=videos+of+archaeology+of+early+eucharist&view=detail&mid=ADE38261E26B565BB109ADE38261E26B565BB109&FORM=VIRE7>. This site contains a video describing the first and second temples, and priestly sacrifices.
4. “Interactive Virtual Tour of the Model of Jerusalem.” <http://www.imj.org.il/panavision/model_pre_3eng.html>. This site provides a virtual tour of Jerusalem in the late second temple period.
5. “Jerusalem.com.” <http://jerusalem.com/tour/jewish_temple_3D>. This site provides a virtual tour of the second temple period.

**Chapter 3**