

# IN SEARCH — OF THE — SACRED

ANTHROPOLOGY  
AND THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS



CLINTON BENNETT

# **In Search of the Sacred**

Anthropology and the Study  
of Religions

Clinton Bennett



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# Acknowledgements

Readers of this book will quickly become aware of my admiration for, and academic indebtedness to, the work of two North American scholars, respectively a student of religions and an anthropologist. The first, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, I have met; the second, Clifford Geertz I have not met. I acknowledge with gratitude the influence of both men on my own thought and writing. I hope they will approve of what follows. Geertz's latest book, however, *After the Fact: Two Countries, One Anthropologist* (Harvard University Press, 1995), appearing almost simultaneously with the completion of this text, has not been discussed in this work. Notices in any detail suggest that this book expresses pessimism about the future of anthropology as a 'much reduced science'. Having read the book, however, I think Geertz remains cautiously optimistic. My own book ends on a positive note. My indebtedness to other scholars – perhaps especially to Eric J. Sharpe and Brian Morris – will be obvious from my references to their work, and I would like to express appreciation for their invaluable contributions to this field of enquiry.

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## Acknowledgements

'founding fathers' in the classical texts, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, in the Birmingham Central Library and in the Central Library of the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, where I am an Associate Member of the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations. I am also grateful to Professor Mary Douglas for her willingness to discuss her work with two of my students, and myself. Her Highgate verandah on a warm Spring day was an ideal venue for exploring anthropological themes.

This book's content largely arises from my teaching, and aims to contribute to the future development of our programmes as well as to those of other institutions. Thus, since they have had to endure lectures on which some of this material is based, or have had to read open learning units in which I have tested some of my ideas, I conclude by dedicating this book to my students, past and present, residential and non-residential. What makes academic life such a wonderful privilege is interaction with other enquiring minds, full of questions which demand if not answers, then at least clarification and careful thought.

*Clinton Bennett*  
*The Vestry Study*  
*Westminster College*  
*Oxford OX2 9AT*

# Introduction

This book arises out of my teaching and research interests at Westminster College, Oxford. When I was appointed to my present post (in September, 1992) I joined an increasingly multidisciplinary team within the field of the study of religions. Although primarily trained as an Islamicist, my brief was to contribute an anthropological approach to the study of religions programme. Following current trends in the academic study of religions, Westminster was putting in place staff who would combine specialist knowledge of one or more religion with a distinctive methodological perspective. Our team now comprises a phenomenologist of religion, a sociologist and a psychologist, in addition to myself. Thus, our teaching team aims to fulfil the second task which Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950) set for the study of religions at the Amsterdam Congress for the Study of the History of Religions (1950): to maintain ‘contact with other branches of learning, such as philosophy, archaeology, anthropology, psychology and sociology’, whilst our location within a school of theology places us in a good position to fulfil his first task: ‘a friendly relationship between history of religions and theology’ (cited in Kitagawa, 1959: 25). My own first degree was in theology. Ordained in 1978, I remain an accredited minister of my denomination. Similarly, writing more recently about the task of the student of religions, Garry Trompf, who teaches religious studies in the University of Sydney, remarks:

To do it properly requires more skills, or more hermeneutical (= interpretive) tools than most, if not all, other disciplines ... one is encouraged to turn over as many stones as possible to look at religions from as many different angles as possible – the psychological, anthropological,

sociological, geographical, ecological, political, economical and the like – with some awareness of current theological debates as well. (1990: 8)

Similarly, Jacob Neusner, in his inaugural lecture at Arizona State University, Tempe: 'I am certain that there is no discipline of the academic curriculum in humanistic or social studies which Religious Studies can afford to neglect' (1979: 6). Ninian Smart, first Professor of Religious Studies in the pioneering Lancaster department (UK), in his sevenfold scheme outlining 'what has been said or implied about the modern study of religions' writes: 'it is polymethodic: it uses many methods drawn from various disciplines – history, art history, philology, archaeology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and so on' (1983: 16).

### **My anthropological *bona fides***

Thus, the student of religions calls many 'auxiliary disciplines' into service and, since 'few claim competence in all phases', most choose to 'concentrate on one or two of the auxiliary disciplines' (Kitagawa, 1959: 12). Hence our interdisciplinary team. However, unlike my sociologist and psychologist colleagues, who are trained in their respective disciplines, I am not a trained anthropologist, although I did attend lectures by an anthropologist whilst a student in the Selly Oak Colleges (1978–79) prior to three years service as a field missionary in Bangladesh. During that academic year I took the Certificate in the Study of Islam (University of Birmingham) through the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations at the Selly Oak Colleges. This course placed much stress on encounter and dialogue so I did have some inkling of what it means to be a 'participant observer' (the dominant methodological technique in anthropological fieldwork) before I reached the subcontinent. There, I spent my first year in full-time language study. This is also the first requirement for anthropological fieldwork: 'The modern social anthropologist ... must know the local language sufficiently well to follow what is going on around him and to record it with accuracy and subtlety'. His aim is to 'immerse himself as thoroughly as he can in the life of the community he is trying to understand' (Lewis, 1992: 24). This was,

in fact, the task I set myself as I continued to 'try to understand' Bangladeshi Islam, Bengali culture and life in general, first encountered amongst the Bangladeshi community in Birmingham. Unlike the professional anthropologist, though, I was perhaps not very systematic in my observing, nor in my recording (I didn't keep the requisite 'field diary', for example) yet the following description would not too inaccurately describe my own experience:

the anthropological research worker seeks to seize the essence of life around him and to incarnate its animating spirit. He dashes about from place to place and function to function endeavouring to record all aspects of the local scene, trivial as well as tragic. His range of interests is as large as life; births, marriages, animal husbandry, home-crafts, rhetoric, religion, cultivation, all claim his interest. The minimum required of the social anthropologist is that he should write the biography of the people he studies. (Lewis: 25)

I was particularly interested in observing evidence of Hindu influence on Islam in Bangladesh, and, whilst stationed in the north-west district of Rangpur, I also had the opportunity of witnessing how local animist traditions continued within the Christian villages. This intermingling of cultures, or syncretism – 'the combination or blending of different religious (or cultural) traditions' (Seymour-Smith, 1986: 274) – is a common concern of anthropologists. In retrospect, having subsequently studied more anthropological handbooks and texts, I find myself in a good position to reconstruct an albeit impressionistic biography of the people amongst whom I lived. As we shall see in a later chapter, Clifford Geertz, the leading American anthropologist, suggests that:

the ability of anthropologists to get us to take what they say seriously has less to do with either a factual look or an air of conceptual elegance than it has to do with their capacity to convince us that what they say is a result of their having actually penetrated (or, if you prefer, been penetrated by) another form of life, of having, one way or another, truly 'been there'. (1988: 5f.)

Geertz himself, in much of his writing, unashamedly draws on literature, art and history, as well as on the social sciences, to inform his own quite often impressionistic accounts, or sketches. Geertz's

initial degree was in literature and philosophy. His *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*, for example, begins thus: 'bad poets borrow'; T.S. Eliot has said, 'good poets steal' (1968: v). Unlike his earlier books, especially *The Religion of Java* (1960) (his Harvard PhD thesis), *Islam Observed* does not systematically reproduce interview data, fieldwork notes and observations. Rather, as the dust cover says:

Geertz writes with clarity and charm on an immensely complicated and ambitious subject. His work is rooted in the comparative religious view of the fundamental and social theorists and their progenitors, but has a lucidity and persuasiveness that few of them have achieved. (citing Douglas E. Asford, *American Journal of Sociology*)

Later in this book, I shall suggest that the study of religions, too, can gain much from a less prosaic presentation of its subject matter. Travel writers and novelists may actually capture the essence of a belief or practice more poignantly than can an academic, factual description! To penetrate another language world, another world-view, to see through others' eyes, demands imagination. One reason, perhaps, why it is difficult to claim a purely scientific status for any subject in which the imagination plays a crucial role. This demands what Ninian Smart calls 'a process of structured empathy' or the crossing over of 'our own horizons into the worlds of other people' (1983: 16). 'It is', says Geertz, 'persuading us that this off-stage miracle has occurred, where the writing comes in' (1988: 5). Or, as one of my senior colleagues puts it, 'novelists do what phenomenologists and anthropologists think they do!' An excellent example of this genre, which we recommend to our students, is Heather Wood's *Third Class Ticket* (1980) which tells the story of the author's travels in India through the eyes of her fellow passengers. She travelled 15,000 kilometres over a period of seven months. In fact, it was anthropology that took Wood to India – she was working on a BLitt in Bengali anthropology.

After returning to the United Kingdom in 1983 to pursue my doctoral research in Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations at the University of Birmingham, I continued to immerse myself in Bangladeshi society. Again, my encounter was with an expatriate community which enabled me to observe how a culture and a

religion copes with transplantation. This is another major concern of contemporary anthropologists. Also, having visited India regularly over recent years I have developed a particular interest in how Christianity in India is ‘inculturating’ (anthropologists tend to use ‘acculturate’) itself into Indian forms. I have included, at this stage, this brief resumé of my anthropological exploits, such as they are, to justify my appointment to our multidisciplinary team, and for writing a book on the interaction between anthropology and the study of religions. It may well be, though, that the most I can professionally claim for this book is what Geertz claims for much of his writing, that ‘in so far as it is more than archival (a function of anthropology much underrated)’ it is at least ‘ethnographically informed (or, God knows, misinformed)’ (1983: 5).

### What is the study of religions?

The poly-methodological approach, which has become characteristic of the study of religions (and which our Westminster team represents), has stimulated debate about whether the study of religions is a discrete discipline in its own right, or a field of studies. As anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and others may all study religion, are they students of religions, or ‘primarily scholars of the discipline concerned, or both’ asks Frank Whaling (1984a: 1: 24). On the one hand, some social scientists have questioned the ‘integrity of *Religionswissenschaft* ... as an academic discipline’ (Kitagawa, 1959: 5) usually by impugning its objectivity; on the other hand, Ninian Smart, who has often addressed methodological issues in his writing, comments that, ‘there seems no intrinsic reason why the history of religions and the sociology and anthropology of religion should not be treated as a single, investigatory enterprise’ (1984: 372). It becomes difficult, for example, to classify Clifford Geertz as an anthropologist with an interest in religion, and not as a *bona fide* student of religions (even though he holds his chair in social science). However, as Smart observes, whilst the distinction between these various disciplines is ‘somewhat artificial’, they do ‘create one advantage ... the institutionalization of differing approaches leads to effective intellectual lobbies against the neglect of certain areas’ (*ibid.*:

373). Frank Whaling concludes that, whilst anthropologists and sociologists usually study 'only one religion, or only one "aspect" of a religion . . . a specific theme or a specific society', students of religions study religions in their totality. Whaling also describes the study of religions as,

primarily the study of man, rather than the study of nature, or the study of transcendence – even though it retains an interest in man's view of nature, and man's views of transcendence (1984a: 1: 441).

This again highlights the close relationship between the two disciplines. Similarly, Wilfred Cantwell Smith writes: 'In comparative religion, man is studying himself. The fact of religious diversity is a human phenomena, common to us all' (1959: 55). Again, the study of religions is seen to be closely allied with the 'study of man', that is, with anthropology. Incidentally, there is no agreement amongst my own colleagues about whether the study of religions is a field or a discipline in its own right. My own view is that, whilst always drawing on other disciplines, the study of religions does have its own academic integrity – as a discrete discipline. The recent survey, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (1995) by Walter H. Capps, shares this view.

What I set out to explore in this book, therefore, is the cross-fertilization which has occurred (and which continues to occur) between these two closely related disciplines. I especially focus on ideological and methodological convergence and divergence between the two, demonstrating how their methodological and philosophical assumptions, research techniques, interests and agendas have critically interacted. A study of this interaction is, I believe, long overdue. Several books examine anthropological approaches to the study of religions, especially its search for the origin of human religiosity. Garry Trompf's *In Search of Origins* (1990), for example, deals mainly with anthropological, or with anthropologically inspired, theories. The often reprinted anthology, *A Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach* (1979) edited by W.A. Lessa and E.Z. Vogt contains numerous monographs dealing mainly with aspects of tribal religion, which – proving Smart's point – have often been neglected by students of religions who tend to focus on the so-called world religions. This

anthology includes extracts from the writing of many anthropologists whose contributions we discuss in this book: amongst others Tylor, Frazer, Geertz, Leach. These represent important contributions. From Africa comes *Expressing the Sacred: An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* (1992) by James L. Cox. However, whilst this clearly and usefully focuses on methodology, and refers *en passant* to significant anthropologists, it fails to identify them as anthropologists! Similarly, Sharpe's *Comparative Religion: A History* (second edition 1986) shows, by its frequent references to anthropologists, how anthropology has assisted and influenced the development of the scientific study of religions. Waardenburg's impressive *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion* (1973) includes biographical sketches of, and extracts from, eminent anthropologists. As a source of primary texts, it makes a good companion to my own survey. The best discussion of anthropological theories of religion is Brian Morris' *Anthropological Studies of Religion* (1987), which has been described as 'an invaluable guide to the writings on religion of all the major figures in anthropology' (back cover). That the book is 'indispensable for all students of anthropology and of the social sciences generally as well as for those interested in comparative religion' is, I think, no exaggeration. However, none of these writers, including Morris, attempt to place the development of the study of religions, its assumptions, agendas, methodological techniques, alongside those of anthropology with a view to systematically examining their interaction as an aid to teaching and studying religions today. This has occupied much of my time at Westminster, and forms the subject matter of this book. Whilst what follows does not even pretend to cover everything that has preoccupied the two disciplines since their inception, it does aim to discuss some of their main themes, issues, problematics, and personalities. Although I have tried, wherever possible, to use primary sources I have also turned to the works of those who have spent more time than I have wrestling with the contributions of my subjects. Where I am more indebted to these scholars than to primary sources will, I hope, be clear from my text. Anyone interested in anthropology *per se*, or in the study of religions *per se*, should also familiarize themselves with some basic introductory texts. It may be invidious

to offer a recommendation, but for the former I recommend I.M. Lewis' *Social Anthropology in Perspective* (second edition, 1992), for the latter, Eric J. Sharpe's *Understanding Religion* (1983).

Even though my own preference is to regard the study of religions as a discrete discipline, the fact remains that it is often taught as a sub-branch of theology; debate also continues about whether it properly belongs within the social sciences, within the liberal arts, or within humanities. In fact, departments of religion, of religious studies, of comparative religion or of the study of (or history of) religions will be found located in all these faculties (and sometimes in philosophy as well). It varies from university to university. Of all fields of study, this has perhaps had the greatest difficulty finding a name for itself. Fashions change, and what was once understood as 'comparative religion' is now more commonly known either as religious studies or as the study of religions. As we shall see, this is because some of the presuppositions of the 'comparative method' used in the first phase of scholarship in this field were later discredited. In this book, since my own teaching at Westminster College is within a 'study of religions' strand, I use this designation. However, where I cite from writers who use 'comparative religion' (Wilfred Cantwell Smith prefers this term, for example) or 'religious studies' they are, at least in my reckoning, alternatives to my preferred term. Some of the different implications of the various names by which the field is, or has been, known will be discussed elsewhere in this book. The discipline's academic or faculty location is not a question which will concern us very much in this book, although the premium which I myself place on imagination perhaps suggests that I veer towards placing my subject within the liberal arts. We shall see, too, that anthropology has had a similar debate.

### **Theology and the study of religions**

Generally, the study of religions has been anxious to differentiate itself from theology (albeit also, as we have already noted, keen to maintain close links with theology, even sometimes to broaden the remit of that discipline). Eric J. Sharpe discusses the relationship between theology and religious studies in his *Understanding Religion* (1983). 'Theology', he suggests,

is normally able to assume that students hold a secure place within the tradition being studied, while religious studies is able to assume only that the student wishes to grasp something of the role of the religion as an aspect of life, and is prepared in pursuit of this quest to turn to cultural areas remote from his own. (1983: 16)

Earlier, Joachim Wach of Chicago University (1898–1955) suggested that theology is ‘a normative discipline . . . concerned with the analysis, interpretation, and exposition of one particular faith’ whilst ‘the general science of religion’ is ‘essentially descriptive, aiming to understand the nature of all religions’ (1944: 1). As we shall see, the pioneers of the academic study of religions (who certainly claimed scientific status) wanted to break away from the polemical, apologetical, or philosophical brief of earlier writers on the religions, whose aim was often to assert the superiority of the Christian religion over and against all others. Description was to take the place of evaluation. More recently, Julius Lipner of Cambridge University, also addressing the distinction between theology and religious studies, writes:

Religious studies I take to be the understanding, and then the expounding of this understanding, of the various kinds of religious phenomena (doctrines, beliefs, texts, institutions, forms of worship, etc.) and their interplay. Here, one does not seek to determine enduring truth and value; one’s aim is primarily to explain and classify, one applies the so-called phenomenological *epoche* in respect of the religious commitment one may (or may not!) have, together with those canons of ‘objective’ academic inquiry which are generally regarded to be conducive to as faithful an interpretation of the available data as possible. (1983: 200)

In Chapter 5, we shall return to this discussion about the relationship between the study of religions and theology, arguing for a different understanding from the distinction drawn by Lipner.

Our next chapter traces the emergence of the study of religions in the late nineteenth century. It was, as we shall see, very much a product of Romanticism and of the Enlightenment. It claimed to be ‘value-free’ but actually brought many ideological presuppositions to bear on its subject. This was paralleled by anthropology; also a product of the Enlightenment, and supposedly value free, anthropology applied its own preconceptions to the study of mankind. As

Hendrik Kraemer (1888–1965), for many years Professor of the History of Religion at Leiden, observed:

In its infancy, the Science of Religion operated consciously or unconsciously – the last case is the most difficult to get to terms with – on the assumption that it was purely objective, scientific, an assumption which was pervaded by a sincere longing for truth and at the same time oblivious of the problematics implied in the matter of objective truth. Like all sciences in the human field, the Science of Religion was born out of a very definite life-situation, a fact which is nearly always forgotten, as most people treat it as if it had been born of a neutral vacuum. This life-situation was the emancipation from unquestionable and dogmatic thinking and the confidence that reason would be able to master all the problems and remove all mysteries. (1956: 45)

We visit this 'life-situation' in much more detail in Chapter 1. Another problematic, almost as difficult as finding a name for the discipline, is the question of identifying its subject matter. In the following pages, we shall visit many different definitions of religion, some contradictory. As we shall see, anthropology and the social sciences have often preferred 'reductionist definitions' which explain religion as something other than religion: for example, as the result of human neurosis, or of ignorance, or as a product or creation of society. Whilst aiming to avoid what Lipner describes as 'value judgements in the course of' their work about 'which religious response, or part thereof, is better or worse, more or less adequate, for human living in the light of the transcendent', many students of religions have yet argued that the transcendent and the sacred (or holy) do exist as (*a priori*) categories in themselves, and cannot be explained away as something else. Thus, Mircea Eliade (1907–86) wrote:

To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon [religion] by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false; it misses the one unique, and irreducible element in it – the element of the sacred. (cited in Kitagawa, 1959: 21)

Therefore, whilst remaining 'faithful to descriptive principles' the study of religions directs its enquiry to 'the meaning of religious phenomena' (*ibid.*: 21). Of course, terms such as 'reductionist' and 'non-reductionist' definitions of religions are not value-free, so

perhaps good social scientists should avoid their use. However, the former does usefully distinguish definitions which religious people, generally, find acceptable from those which they usually consider inadequate, or wrong, so in a book concerned with insiders' perspectives these terms may have their place. Since both students of religions and anthropologists have found the concept of the sacred useful, whether understood as a human concept or as something which exists in and of itself, *In Search of the Sacred* suggested itself as an appropriate title for this comparative survey.

### **Anthropology's subject matter**

For its part, anthropology has had less difficulty distinguishing itself as a discrete social, scientific discipline (although it, too, may be located in various faculties). However, given that the modern sociologist and other social scientists now employ, quite often, the methodological techniques which were pioneered by anthropology, it, too, is not without its identity crisis. As Whitten and Hunter put it, currently, 'the field is struggling with many fundamental questions about its very nature and its future as a social science is not certain' (1993: vii). Despite such debate, and its traditional subdivision into psychological, archaeological, cultural, social (and sometimes also into physical) anthropology, as the science of man, anthropology's subject matter is reasonably self-evident. One useful way of distinguishing between these subdivisions is to regard social anthropology as concerned with human relationships, cultural with what men/women make or produce, psychological with what they think, and archaeological with the study of human remains. Physical anthropology has its roots in nineteenth-century craniology, which measured the head sizes of different racial groups and compared them. An issue which attracted much discussion was whether all people sprang from common progenitors or from many. Many ascribed 'to their own stock superior mental abilities' (1993: 4). Whilst the racist overtones of this are obvious, physical (sometimes called biological) anthropology today remains interested in the variations of appearance between different ethnic groups. The search for the 'missing link' was another quest that has occupied both archaeological and physical anthropologists. Early

anthropologists were also much concerned with the classification and distribution of races.

I should protect myself, at this point, from possible criticism; in this survey, I tend to ride roughshod over the distinctions between anthropology's subdivisions. However, since I shall focus on fieldwork methodology, which does not differ overmuch across the social, cultural and psychological sub-branches, which are the three on which we draw, this somewhat cavalier attitude is, I believe, not unjustified. Lewis, in fact, suggests that the distinction between 'social anthropology' and 'cultural anthropology', at least, is nowadays somewhat arbitrary; they are, he says, 'two sides of the same coin' – 'one treats culture as a medium for social relations (or, sometimes, as their content) while the other treats society as a display of culture' (1992: 380–1). I should also mention here the distinction, or lack of it, between anthropology and ethnography. The first refers, technically, to the general science of man (or of humankind), the second to the study of particular groups. Consequently, ethnography is often used as a 'doing word' (what one does in the field), whilst anthropology is used to describe thinking about human life generally. However, both Lewis and Levi-Strauss consider that social anthropology, and what is usually called ethnography in non-English-speaking countries, are actually the same, 'in Anglo-Saxon countries . . . the term ethnography has become obsolete – as social and cultural anthropology' (Levi-Strauss: 2, see also pp. 356–9; Lewis: 37n). Levi-Strauss also calls ethnography and anthropology different 'moments in time' in 'the same line of investigation' (*ibid.*: 356). Also, as we shall see in this survey, since anthropologists have, on the whole, expressed caution before moving beyond the study of particular people towards drawing any general scientific principles about human life universally, 'the traditional distinction between ethnography and anthropology' may be 'spurious' (Seymour-Smith: 99). In other words, all ethnography is anthropology and all anthropology is ethnography!

### **The study of religions' subject matter**

As I have already suggested, the subject matter of the study of religions, for its part, is much more difficult to pinpoint. Religion

has proved itself remarkably elusive of a definitive definition. Kraemer put it like this: 'religion . . . is perhaps the most elusive, intriguing and difficult subject for scientific treatment' (*op. cit.* 37). Geertz writes: 'The comparative study of religion has always been plagued by this peculiar embarrassment; the elusiveness of its subject matter' (1968: 1). Eric Sharpe devoted a chapter of his *Understanding Religion* to 'The Question of Definition'. After addressing some significant attempts to define what religion is (most of which we shall discuss in this book), he concludes:

Definitions of religion, in a sense, remind one of the fable of the blind men attempting to define an elephant. One touches its trunk and describes it as a snake; another touches its ear and describes it as a winnowing-fan; another touches its leg and describes it as a tree; another its tail and describes it as a broom. (1983: 46)

Nevertheless, says Sharpe, most of us can actually recognize a religion when we 'see' one, since, unlike the men in the fable, we are not 'blind'. We know, for example, that religions tend to possess books, to have histories, rituals, buildings, which can be read, studied, observed or visited. We can at least recognize these as products of religiosity when we encounter them. Thus, says Sharpe, 'to define religion is . . . far less important than to possess the ability to recognise it when we come across it', whilst 'to impose an inadequate or one-sided definition may well lead to a refusal to acknowledge whatever does not appear to conform to that definition' (*ibid.*: 47). For example, any definition of religion which includes 'belief in God' disqualifies non-theistic traditions, such as Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta Hinduism. I find, for example, that some of my students who hold to this definition are reluctant to concede that Buddhism is a religion, and not a philosophy of life. Given the problematic of identifying a sufficiently inclusive definition, Sharpe and others have instead identified various characteristics, or dimensions, which we might expect to 'recognize' when we 'see' a religion. These also provide useful schemes of ideas to facilitate the systematic study of each religion. The scheme which I find most useful (and often employ in my teaching) is the one proposed by Frank Whaling of Edinburgh University. It is worth quoting this at some length in order to convey the flavour of