



# **Discovering God: The Origins of the Great Religions and the Evolution of Belief**

*Rodney Stark*

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*Discovering God* is a monumental history of the origins of the great religions from the Stone Age to the Modern Age. Sociologist Rodney Stark surveys the birth and growth of religions around the world—from the prehistoric era of primal beliefs; the history of the pyramids found in Iraq, Egypt, Mexico, and Cambodia; and the great "Axial Age" of Plato, Zoroaster, Confucius, and the Buddha, to the modern Christian missions and the global spread of Islam. He argues for a free-market theory of religion and for the controversial thesis that under the best, unimpeded conditions, the true, most authentic religions will survive and thrive. Among his many conclusions:

Despite decades of faulty reports that early religions were crude muddles of superstition, it turns out that primitive humans had surprisingly sophisticated notions about God and Creation.

The idea of "sin" appeared suddenly in the sixth century BCE and quickly reshaped religious ideas from Europe to China.

Some major world religions seem to lack any plausible traces of divine inspiration.

Ironically, some famous figures who attempted to found "Godless" religions ended up being worshiped as Gods.

Most people believe in the existence of God (or Gods), and this has apparently been so throughout human history. Many modern biologists and psychologists reject these spiritual ideas, especially those about the existence of God, as delusional. They claim that religion is a primitive survival mechanism that should have been discarded as humans evolved beyond the stage where belief in God served any useful purpose—that in modern societies, faith is a misleading crutch and an impediment to reason. In *Discovering God*, award-winning sociologist Rodney Stark responds to this position, arguing that it is our capacity to understand God that has evolved—that humans now know much more about God than they did in ancient times.

## **Discovering God: The Origins of the Great Religions and the Evolution of Belief Details**

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# From Reader Review Discovering God: The Origins of the Great Religions and the Evolution of Belief for online ebook

## Travis says

Most of the book consists of an interesting overview of the history and teachings of the world's major religions. The conclusion, however, seems to be heavily biased in favor of the superiority of Christianity, which was not well supported and not what I look for in scholarly works. The author's rails occasionally against "political correctness" and postmodernism, apparently to justify his biases against Islam, textual criticism of the Bible, and Christian "heresies". In short, while the historical information is interesting, it has an obvious agenda outside of applying sociology to the development of religion.

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## Inert1 says

Stark's survey of the evolution of world religions is interesting and thought-provoking. He combines his curmudgeonly criticisms of many of the agenda-driven social science and comparative religion scholars and their assumptions with clear explanations of his interpretations of the facts in scholarly work that is apt to make everyone who reads it a bit uncomfortable. I think this is a work that would be useful to persons of all religious persuasions.

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## Renee says

this is an overview of religions but I don't agree with many observations and certain events weren't accurate .

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## Eli says

One of the best books on the topic of the history of religions I've ever read.  
He dumps the Marxist materialist approach and sympathetically approaches religion as a universal phenomenon.

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## Erik says

As an introductory overview of the development of the world's major religions since the Axial Age, Stark's four hundred-some page book is a remarkably readable work next to Karen Armstrong's A History of God; the latter being, of course, a detailed treatise on the development of a monotheistic God, but long-winded and discursive at the same time. Stark, however, not only effortlessly covers the historical connection between the Big Three – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – but also ventures East by devoting time to Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. And let's not forget the myriad polytheistic religions of Antiquity, from the likes of the Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans that he also touches upon.

Although Stark is even-handed throughout most of his book, he firmly establishes his singular bias in favor of the divine revelations provided by Christianity in the last chapter. Thus, my trust in him as an intellectual scholar waned a bit there at the end. That is, he presupposes what he sets out to prove in that Christianity is the truest and superior religion. Which is a very poor, if not invalid, form of arguing. It is as if in making his argument, he conveniently forgets the Hundred Year's War, the Reformation and the subsequent Counter-Reformation, and the bizarre Second Awakening here in the United States, the latter of which gave rise to Mormonism -- which started as a radical, patriarchal polygamous sect.

Would that he ditched his poorly reasoned and defended "Conclusion: Discovering God?," this would have been an much better book.

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### **Julya says**

I liked this book because it did cover many religions worldwide and was rather very informative. However, stark is biased toward Christianity (which I knew before I even read the book merely by reading his biography and titles of other works). I tried to remember while reading any part of the book that mentioned Christianity (bias comes out in its own chapter and in the conclusion). Keeping that in mind was simple- there are other books that are more critical of Christianity that I can read. This book is still very valuable for its wide base of information. Stark is also rather easy to read - dense but not convoluted.

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### **George Mills says**

Rarely have I been so disappointed by a book - even 'Evolving God' was less disappointing. I am just under halfway through and I can't stand it any more. Stark totally dismisses Ancient Egyptian religion as a polytheistic 'temple faith' that gave nothing to its people. The only thing he deems of any worth is Akhenaten's heresy because it is somehow obvious that monotheism is much better than polytheism. For Stark, the only worthwhile discoveries of God are those of a capricious deity who deems his creations to have no value whatsoever and who consigns the overwhelming majority to eternal damnation for the edification of the infinitesimal elect. Oh, I forgot, the other acceptable and valid discovery is of a deity who takes one very insignificant group of human beings as his 'chosen people' - the rest of humanity being completely unworthy of the attention of the supreme being and who should furthermore be subject to periodic genocides because of (among other terribly important factors) their inability to say shibboleth. Greek religion is also dismissed as degenerate as that of the Egyptians. A tradition that gave us philosophy, science, math, ethics, and democracy is summarily judged to be worthless superstition. (I wonder if one could even find an Athenian of the 5th century BCE who actually believed in the their creation myths as literal truth. But, suppose one could; how is that any different from the belief of many 21st century Americans that an apple and snake determined the fate of humanity?)

The faith of the Egyptians led to a civilization that lasted for 3,000 years and that left for all humanity some of its most meaningful monuments and symbols. Even the cross as a symbol of divinely granted life is something we owe as much to the Egyptians as to the Romans. The Egyptians were also the first (as far as we know) to develop the archetype of the godman whose death and resurrection redeems creation. As for their 'temple faith that had nothing to do with the common man', the Egyptians enthusiastically participated in every celebration of every 'god.' They knew that they formed a valued part of the order of creation and that

the pharaoh and priests carried out rituals necessary to maintain that order just as they carried out similar rituals that were also essential to that same divinely mandated order. Religion was an integral part of their lives - so integral that they would not understand the question; 'What is your religion?' The Egyptians also understood the need for dualism in creation. They understood that it was not possible for Horus to destroy Seth because they knew that chaos was just as necessary to creation as order. If chaos seemingly gained the upper hand, Egyptians knew that that was the way of creation. They did not assume that they were worthless worms in the sight of God and that any setback or illness was because they had angered their 'god.' They also knew that what we take as their 'gods' were nothing more than attributes of God and that their myths were just ways of finding some understanding of that which is essentially unknowable. Before you decide to jump on me, I should point out that I know that Egypt was not a paradise and that there were many priests who encouraged every superstition so that they could benefit from it. What I am referring to are their ideas - I understand that a lot was lost in their application. However, one should always keep in mind that, of all the peoples and religious systems in the world, the Egyptians were unique in one way. When they thought of paradise, they saw it as being just like Egypt, only a little better. I suppose that is of no importance to Stark. Just as it is of no importance that almost everyone who was privileged enough to experience Ancient Egypt said that the Egyptians were the 'happiest and most satisfied people in the world.'

I regret buying the electronic version of the book. I just don't think that returning it in an email to the publishers would have the same effect as sending back the book itself. I do not think that I should agree with the author of every book I buy, to the contrary. However, an author who publishes a book with a title such as this one should give the religions of the Greeks and Egyptians an honest review. Otherwise he should make it clear on the cover of the book that he believes that the only great religions are those that are monotheistic and that engender things like pogroms, inquisitions, jihads, and genocide.

All this aside, I should be grateful to Mr. Stark. I had been debating whether I should leave my Judeo-Christian traditions and beliefs completely behind and embrace Perennial Philosophy or not. Mr. Stark made me see the choice in the starkest of terms and, because of him, there is no longer any debate within me. He made me see that I want nothing to do with certainties of this kind of monotheism as they are false certainties that have given the human beings little in exchange for all that they have cost us.

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## **Peter Krol says**

"I have tried to write everything in plain English. I do not concede that this in any way compromises sophistication. What it does do is prevent me from hiding incomprehension behind a screen of academic jargon."

Stark had me hooked from page viii of the preface (where this quote is from). His writing style was not only easy to follow, it was a sheer delight to read. This book was so good that it was my "fun book" to read at bedtime each night (which ALWAYS - except in this case - is fiction).

Stark (not, I think, a Christian) is a sociologist of religion at Baylor University. In this book, he is addressing the question: have we discovered God, or have we invented him? And if we have discovered him, then which of the world's religions can be considered a part of the "inspired core" of God's revelation. In my own words, Stark is looking at world religions to see which ones could potentially be legitimate or authentic in their claims to know God. You'll have to read the book if you want to know which religion(s) Stark includes in his concept of the "inspired core"!

Although there is much in this book I would disagree with, I also learned much from it about world religions. I also had great fun reading an author who is pretty fair towards the sociological and scientific data. This book really made me want to read *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*; *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal, Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force*; and *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery*; all also by Stark. I've moved them to the top of my Amazon wishlist.

This review is already pretty long, but if you care to continue, following are some of my favorite quotes.

"As for Greece, subsidization of the temple offered everyone a 'free' religion, thereby setting the norm for religious commitment at a very low level of intensity - when little is asked, little is given" (p.122).

"No one competent now doubts that most of Paul's letters are authentic" (p.284).

"To make miracles plausible, all that is needed is to postulate the existence of a God who created the universe, nothing more" (p. 285).

"Frankly, the search for the 'Historic Jesus' is in many ways a fool's errand since scripture is the only direct source and it tells us so very little about his life. It is his death and resurrection that dominate Christian thought" (p.289).

"It should be noted that this skeptical activity [seeking to discredit the Bible] began when New Testament scholarship became primarily an academic field. In order to enjoy academic success one must innovate; novelty at almost any cost is the key to a big reputation. This rule holds across the board and has often inflicted remarkably foolish new approaches on many fields [footnote by Stark: consider the damage done to the social sciences recently by Postmodernism or to physics by String Theory]. This academic thirst for novelty has disfigured much modern writing about the New Testament. But even greater damage has been done by the very large number of Bible 'scholars' who are motivated by angry atheism. Many of those participating in the Jesus Seminar, for example, were once very committed Christians, many having been clergy, who have lost their faith and are now bitter about ever having believed" (pp.294-295).

"There are no compelling reasons to believe that 'problems' of transmission distorted the Gospels. They may have been written by actual participants in the events in question, and if not, the Gospels certainly met the approval of such eyewitnesses" (p.302).

"At the very least, the New Testament provides a truthful and reliable account of what the first generation of Christians believed to have taken place" (p.305).

"European claims to religious freedom are false. For one thing, the governments and especially the bureaucrats work hard at impeding religious competition....The Grim and Finke favoritism scale varies from 0 (absolute lack of favoritism) to 10 (total favoritism) and is based on objective measures. The United States, Australia, and Taiwan score 0, meaning there is no government bias in favor of any particular religious group. In contrast, Afghanistan, where anyone who converts from Islam to Christianity risks execution, has a score of 7.8 on this scale. Now consider this: Iceland and Spain also score 7.8, Belgium and Greece score 7.5, Denmark gets a 6.7, and Finland 7.5. In fact, *every* Western European nation scores well above the score achieved by Syria. And that's that!" (p.331).

"Change has been the singular constant in Christian history. Who among the apostles could possibly have anticipated the Roman Catholic Church? What medieval pope could have foretold the Southern Baptist

Convention? And what Baptist preacher could have imagined that early in the twenty-first century, formal ties would be sustained between Baylor University and the University of Beijing?" (pp.335-336).

"Although traditional Muslims contend that Yahweh and Jehovah are simply other names for Allah, they also believe that Jews and Christians have so corrupted their understanding of God, that in effect they worship different Gods" (p.365).

"Nothing may be assumed about Allah, not even that he loves us, as that, too, might be a limiting factor. Whereas Christians assume that Jehovah is the epitome of rationality, Muslims deny that Allah is rational or even virtuous, these being human judgments entirely - some Muslim thinkers even have denied the existence of 'causality altogether,' even in earthly matters, on grounds that it is contrary to God's unlimited freedom to act" (p.367).

"Real science arose only once: in Europe, not in China, Islam, India, Ancient Greece, or Rome. All of these societies had a highly developed alchemy, but only in Europe did alchemy develop into chemistry. By the same token, many societies developed elaborate systems of astrology based on excellent observations of the stars, but only in Europe did astrology lead to scientific astronomy. Why? Again, the answer has to do with images of God" (p.396).

"Let us assume that the militant 'scientific' materialists are right and that eventually we can identify sets of scientific rules sufficient to explain everything in the universe. These questions would still persist: Where did the rules come from? Why is the universe rational and orderly? It seems to me the most remarkable 'retreat' from reason is to cling to the belief that the principles that underlie the universe came out of nowhere, that everything is one big, meaningless accident.

"I am no longer sufficiently arrogant or gullible to make that leap of faith. Instead, I find it far more rational to regard the universe itself as the ultimate revelation of God and to agree with Kepler that in the most fundamental sense, science *is* theology and thereby serves as another method for the discovery of God" (p.399).

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## **Mary says**

I love this writer's breadth of historical understanding, alongside his unapologetic commitment to a Biblically informed worldview. He says in his intro in regard to militant atheism that "contempt is not a scholarly virtue." The data is clear that "when given a choice, humans prefer gods over divine essences like nature or lady luck." If the gods are crazy, religion is futile but if the gods are rational the possibilities are immense. He covers the broad span of human time, and the major religious developments with dignity and depth. I used this as a valuable resource when teaching Art History at the University level.

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## **Terence says**

Rodney Stark's *Discovering God* is wide ranging work that attempts to explain the emergence of "revealed" and/or "moralistic" religions beginning in the Axial Age of the 6th and 7th centuries BC, when many of the great religious figures and movements arose.

I really enjoyed his earlier book, *On the Rise of Christianity*, where he applied sociological techniques to



explain the appeal and success of Christianity. Above and beyond that, his description of life in an ancient city (in this case Antioch) was breathtaking and horrifying. It's amazing the conditions in which human beings will consent to live.

Lately, alas, his books have tended to be Christian apologias that detract from the force of his objective arguments regarding why religions appeal to people and how they effect conversion, diluting the power of his insights.

This is true of the last third or so of *Discovering God*. The first two-thirds, where he deals with non-Christian/non-Islamic religions, argues persuasively for his theory that a "free market" of religious ideas creates a population that is more intensely religious and committed to "discovering God," however that concept may be defined since many East Asian traditions can dispense with god figures entirely, and that such situations occurred during the Axial Age, under Roman rule before Constantine, and in America. The last hundred pages of the book, focusing on Christ and Mohammad, clearly show his pro-Christian bias and are the weakest part of the book. In the conclusion, he drops all pretense of neutrality and asserts that what he's been chronicling is a "discovery" of God, not an "evolution" of the concept of deity. He even has the gall to dismiss all East Asian religions because they don't "reveal" god, and Islam is inferior because it's a regression from the Christian advances made in understanding God.

I'm with Stark when he argues that the concepts of "sin" and "salvation" successfully helped instill a superior form of social control during a violent era in world history (Karen Armstrong makes much the same argument in *The Great Transformation*, highly recommended). I also agree that these concepts arose on the peripheries of the ancient civilizations (Egypt and Sumer) because all transformative movements start at the margins, in relatively "chaotic" environments. He makes the point nicely when he writes: "[b]ecause these once-great civilizations [Egypt and Sumer] took no part in this historical turning point, we are infinitely closer [culturally and religiously] to the Chinese and Indians' than to Egyptians and Mesopotamian..." (p. 389)

On the other hand, Stark's cavalier dismissal of the Buddha's, Laozi's and Confucius' spiritual insights two pages later is insulting and uncalled for. Simply because Gautama, the Old Master and Master Kung may have dismissed the questions Stark considers important and appropriate doesn't render them irrelevant.

In the introduction, Stark says that his argument can be used by believers and nonbelievers alike since it "works" whether God actually exists and humans are simply discovering his nature or whether the idea of "God" is a human attempt to make sense of our world. This pretense is dropped when he argues that only a religion that can claim to be "inspired" has any claim to legitimacy. Thus, "truer" religions must satisfy three criteria:

1. They must be revelations
2. They must be logically compatible
3. They must be progressively complex

As to the first, there is no need for a conscious divinity to construct a morality. It appears to help immensely in getting people to accept it (after all, it's easier to believe "God" has more insight into what constitutes moral behavior than Joe Schmo, your neighbor) but from my perspective that's about all it does. My attraction to the more intellectually rigorous forms of Buddhism (i.e., Zen) arises from that severance of dependence upon an external source to enforce "right action."

The second criterion simply baffles me. If religions arise in response to perceived spiritual needs that are not being satisfied (which is what Stark argues for earlier in the book), then whether God or gods is invoked is

irrelevant. Monotheism may ultimately be the most logical/rational explanation of any divine existence/plan for the universe but why is the "golden rule" any less legitimate if promulgated by an Olympian Council, Taoist Immortals, the Son of God or Islamic mullahs?

The third criterion also seems nonsensical. Islam may have begun as a relatively uncomplex revelation geared to the understanding of Bedouin tribesmen but many, many imams and philosophers have elaborated upon it in the interim. And the same is true of Christianity. The early Church Fathers turned somersaults developing Christian theology from the sketchy sayings of the Jewish carpenter. The first three centuries of the Christian era were a "Wild West" of competing and increasingly complex theologies. Even after it became Rome's state religion, the educated elites continued to dispute (viz., the controversy over "homoousias" vs. "homoiousias").

And, let's face it, only a small minority of any religious faith really get deeply involved in such disputes (at least on their merits, plenty can be convinced to spill blood if their leaders tell them to). Which is not to detract from the worth of nonacademic/nonelite spirituality -- just that it's not as well thought out and coherent as your typical Jesuit's or imam's or lama's. (Actually, one of Stark's strengths is his insistence that humans have always been intensely spiritual; it's just that, for much of history, that religious fervor has been private and unrecorded.)

Stark goes off the deep end starting on p. 394, where he asserts, with no proof (of course, since it's a matter of faith) that "Christianity epitomizes revealed religion and offers a substantially more complex and nuanced vision of God...." He condemns Islam for its support of theocracies, repression of innovation, and belief in an ultimately irrational and unpredictable God. Examples with which Christianity also abounds. But the faults he lays at Islam's feet seem to be endemic to the "human condition." Anytime a faith, or a polity or a corporation gets a monopoly or near-monopoly it then goes about stifling the competition. Democracy developed in the West despite Christianity, not because of it; we have the utterly pagan Athenians to thank for the seeds that eventually grew into the Western democracies.

As an afterthought (or so it seems to this reader), Stark tacks on a final argument for the existence of God by invoking the specious arguments of the Intelligent Design movement, whose theories about the irreducible complexity of organisms like the eye or wings have been demolished time after time in the scientific literature.

In sum, Dr. Stark reaches some very convincing insights in the development and propagation of religious ideas but his otherwise worthy effort is undermined by his obvious bias toward Christianity as the definitive answer to man's search for meaning in the universe.

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## **Tintinrulz says**

"Discovering God: The Origins of the Great Religions and the Evolution of Belief" by Rodney Stark is the first book I've ever read on comparative religions. It's quite comprehensive in its coverage of the ancient religions of Sumer, Egypt, Greece and Rome, along with the five major religions around still today - Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

This is an intriguing book, but, at times, it can be an incredibly frustrating read. Stark holds a Christian bias throughout, and yet, it would have been better if he were more overt and didn't try to appear neutral. Despite this Christian bias, he clearly disbelieves the early chapters of Genesis (chapters 1-11), which provide

answers to many of his questions eg. most gods and goddesses having been sophisticated and not so sophisticated forms of ancestor worship, combined with a corrupted understanding of God and nature, the similarities between religions in Sumer, Egypt, Greece etc. being there because all people dispersed from the tower of Babel and took what they knew with them.

On top of this, he doesn't seem to have a problem with miracles, but divine revelation (prophecies etc.) must be retconned prophecies (they couldn't possibly have been written prior to the event! and he arrives at strange conclusions that Babylonian Jews must have written the Torah and the rest of the OT. Stark doesn't believe that the biblical patriarchs even existed, or if they did, that they were nothing special and the books were purposefully attributed to them to give them gravitas. He has many problems with the Old Testament and not so many with the New Testament, with some big reservations (eg. Stark seems to have a complete lack of comprehension of Christ's atonement).

Stark does acknowledge that the worship of a High God - creator of universe and lesser gods and ruler of lesser gods, later led to the worship of these lesser gods and even spirits, but he doesn't seem to equate this original worship with the worship of the one true God, found in the Bible. In his discussion about China, there is no talk about Shang Di being the one true God of ancient China for much of its history.

In short, this is a good book - thought-provoking, yes, but also comprehensive. I did learn many things, especially about Islam, but there was much I disagreed with in regards to many of Stark's presuppositions and conclusions (because he writes from a theistic evolutionist perspective).

Yes, I believe it's important to read books with which you don't always agree, but I can't help wondering what it would be like to read a comparative religions book from a biblical creation perspective. Now, that would be refreshing.

8/10

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### **Will says**

I learned a lot from this book but it was longer than it needed to be. The author spent too much time citing other author's interpretations of belief systems and then refuting them. I wish he had described the history and beliefs of the various religions and left it at that. That said, there is enough great content that it is worth a read. I will need to read it again as it is quite dense and detailed at parts.

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### **Julie Salyards says**

I enjoy learning about early religious and social history and this book is rich in detail. I was especially intrigued by the brief biography of Mohammad given in Chapter 8; it is a fascinating and eye-opening chapter. The information on Zoroastrianism was equally interesting. Finally, I appreciated the detailed timeline, glossary, notes, bibliography, and index sections.

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## Vimal Kodai says

Rodney Stark raises various issues about the beliefs in God while he maintains a clear but concise picture of the evolution of such a belief with the passage of time. *Discovering God: The origins of the great religions and the evolution of belief* is a book that has been written after thorough and arduous research was done on many subject matters evolving around the theme of the origins and nature of great religions on our planet. Having examined various religious beliefs and all the several origins of the beliefs surrounding the idea of the presence of a divine being, Stark is very admirable as he masters many aspects of this subject with true conviction. He is an author whose insights and aspirations about such a topic is far from being underestimated. His research and profound studies on this theme gives rise to a perfect intuition about how the idea of *Discovering God* can be very illuminating and truly enlightening. He perceives religious beliefs and the evolution of religions as a ideal which surpasses the very touch which we, humans, can always rely upon while we can always depend on possessing such a perception which is only truly adapted to the glory of this divine presence's omnipotence. Stark has a theoretical model which is setup in such a way that it will address the evolution of human cultures from its biological roots to its mechanical and social perceptions.

Stark adopts a frank and structured emphasis on the plausible evidences of a divine being. This has been instated and well-framed by human beings. Mr. Stark examines many stages that are initiated by the primitive societies of the ancient times, he focuses on the idea of our becoming accustomed to cultures that have evolved from extensive accounts on how creation came into being, the author even emphasizes on the universal features of human societies; and, he explores contemporary approaches to the biological, cultural and theological implantation of religions on our planet.

While he fetches for many thematic solutions that are always pervasive in the minds of humans, he handles the idea of *How to Discover God* with such enthusiasm that his book does not escape from the readers' mind without any boundaries. The writer has a very socio-theological way of handling the many appointed religions on our planet.

While being adapted to the idea of "Credibility", and by accepting such a theme as the basis and source to the acceptance of a divine being, Rodney Stark states: "*It is one thing to possess a religious culture, but it is something else to convince others to accept it.*" (p. 51) Stark also feels that mysticism and mystical experiences have revealed parallels to the paranoid darkness in which many humans identify themselves with the supernatural and unbalanced forces. Thus, as he even states that in every society, people differ in their religious tastes, he mentions that the intensity of our faiths and beliefs depend upon our religious preferences.

As he frontiers the many areas which encompass religions and religious beliefs, the writer of *Discovering God: The origins of the great religions and the evolution of belief* attacks many key themes that evolve around many extensive accounts of how creation came into being; these are namely: *many cultural evolutions, inventions of God, Ghost Theories, Fairy Tales, Revelations, Catholic Saints, Epic of Gilgamesh; Aztec, Mayan & Inca religious practices, tribal practices in Tigris-Euphrates Valley, Greco-Roman Cybelene narratives, Greek Gods, Cults and Mithraic faiths; The Pharaoh God, Monotheism, Rulers and Priests, Sacrifices and its several origins and purposes; Roman religions, Moses, Polytheism, Missionizing, Religions in the Indus Valley, Vedic Gods, The Vedas, Sin and Salvation, Upanishads and Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Chinese Gods, Religion in ancient China, Gods and ancestors, Priest and Rituals, Taoism, Confucianism, Folk religion, The Rise of Christianity, The historical Jesus, The theological Christ, the Christian Doctrines, Sacraments, The Pagan intellectuals, Mecca and its admirable traditions, The Prophet Muhammad, The Medina, The Qur'an, Allah, Building an Arab State, Muslim Sectarianism, Social*

*Control of religions and Divine Inspiration.*

With such themes and main topics well-addressed in this book of his, Rodney Stark provides a concise and thorough study of many profound religious beliefs of our planet. This book analyzes many various religious roots and many religious faiths all with a melodiously honest approach. Stark's broad study and in-depth analysis of the subject matter undertaken in his masterpiece does not leave his readers without any further doubts. The latter is able to maintain a perfect discipline while going through each and every chapter of this writer's esteemed book.

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### **Claire Belberg says**

Most entertaining sociology book I've ever read. I found Stark's personal journey of growing faith in the God of the Christians quite compelling. His commitment to rationality (genuinely examining all sides, not just the one he prefers) speaks of integrity, and his close reading of religion fascinating. I appreciated his upfront acknowledgement of his personal faith; I wish more non-fiction authors who are presenting something in an apparently objective way would acknowledge their bias this way. To me, that makes the man and his research a whole lot more credible. And I appreciate the way this book does not simply run with the religion narrative of the twenty-first century English-speaking world, which is increasingly polarised and far from objective.

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