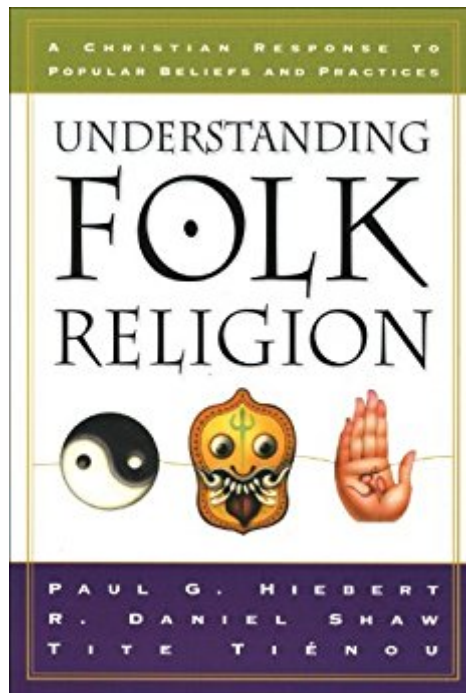


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# Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response To Popular Beliefs And Practices



## Synopsis

Provides a model for examining the beliefs folk religions around the world and suggests biblical principles missionaries can use to deal with them.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Don't be misled by the title. Don't be tempted to think this is a book only for missionaries ministering in contexts of tribal societies or among Folk Catholics, Muslims etc. What this book deals with is a plethora of religious ideas and questions that you will confront in any society, urban, rural or tribal. It is concerned with the everyday problems and issues experienced or sensed by ordinary people in any culture, and how they answer them with their folk beliefs (within or outside the stream of organized religion) -- what the writers call the "middle zone" between the high level divine/supernatural realm and the material/tangible world. The book looks at how Christians can address the questions people raise about this middle zone and it deals with four main areas: (1) What is the meaning of life, and how the living must contend with the problems of death; (2) The "good life" of health, prosperity, safety, welfare and progeny/descendants in the face of poverty, ill

health, suffering, danger, disaster, infant mortality etc; (3) Concern for knowledge of the past, understanding of the present and insight into the future, in order to know how to live; and (4) Questions of morality, right and wrong. I highly recommend this book. It is comprehensive in scope, theological as well as missiological, and above all it is practical and well illustrated with mini "case studies" and examples from the cultures the three authors are familiar with.

Understanding Folk Religion is a highly useful work for gaining and understanding of the dynamics involved in folk religion and how it plays out in the lives of people all around the world, even in America. In reading this book one comes to the understanding that as a whole the Church has failed to provide answers for the real life issues people deal with on a day to day basis. In so doing what has happened is the formation of a "split level Christianity." The authors write "the central concern of this book is the persistence of a two-tier Christianity around the world despite centuries of instructions and condemnations by missionaries and church leaders" (pg.15). Countless deeply committed Christians both worship God and attend church faithfully while also visiting the local shamans and witch doctors in hopes of being delivered from demonic oppression. One of the useful aspects of this book is how the authors present the critical issues and follow it up with a Christian response. With the issue of Split level Christianity the first section discusses the background of how this came to be (e.g., a modern worldview that denies the existence of a spirit realm and thus not addressing these issues in a missionary context). Many times missionaries either attempt to stamp it out or just let it go. Instead, the authors assert the need for critical contextualization that in the end brings about a transformation of the culture thereby providing real life solutions for the problems of everyday life (e.g., the gospel). (See Ch. 1). This is just one of many issues addressed in this important book. Don't let it fool you either, folk religion is not limited to traditional cultures, it is alive and well even in the Western world, why else would the daily newspaper have a section on horoscopes?

This book is way cooler than it sounds. I recently finished reading "Understanding Folk Religion" by Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou for the second time. In doing so I was reminded of why this book has had such an impact on my approach toward life, mission, people, evangelism, discipleship and church. This book is essentially a guide to understanding how and why people view the world as they do and how as Christians we should respond. At the same time it is more than a guide for understanding, it is a tool for understanding. The subtitle captures it well, "A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices." In these pages you will find direction in doing just that. The book is

broken up into four parts. The first section focuses on developing a model and method for understanding religion and culture. The next two sections focus on fundamental aspects of religious beliefs and practices respectively. Finally the book closes with a look into what a Christian response to "folk religions" should be. Don't let the term "folk religion" cause you to stumble or balk. This book has the potential to be immensely helpful in your overall understanding of any religion or culture whether around the world or here at home. I highly recommend "Understanding Folk Religion" to the person looking to better understand themselves and those around them with the intention of making disciples of all nations, including our own.

Understanding Folk Religion is more than just an analysis of the beliefs and practices of folk religion. It provides an entire paradigm through which to evaluate what and how people believe and think. It powerfully shows that amidst all our differences with those of profoundly different backgrounds and cultures, we are inescapably the same: made in the image of God and trying to figure out how to cope with sin in a sinful world. Hiebert and others show how our practices and rituals reinforce our beliefs and how contrary expressions can reveal an identical root belief. Admittedly the writing is a little technical and dry and times, but the information is profoundly helpful. Highly recommended to those desiring to better understand those of different beliefs (not just adherents to folk religion!). And highly recommended to those interested in how practices and rituals reinforce and undergird beliefs.

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