The subject of this book is a particular, but very basic problem in the philosophy of religion, that of trying to arrive at an adequate theory of the nature of religion. I have approached this problem in three main ways; methodologically, by laying out the task of what I call 'interpretive' theories of religion and identifying some possible types of such theories; historically, by presenting, comparing, and criticizing four important theories of religion from the past; and constructively, by developing a theory of my own, exploring its relations to the other four theories, and discussing certain advantages I believe it to have over the other theories. By combining these three approaches, the book should serve as a useful overview of this problem in the philosophy of religion, and of the relations of this problem to other aspects of the discipline. It should also contribute to an understanding of the nature of religion itself, a contribution that is of obvious importance in its own right and has implications for areas of study other than the philosophy of religion.

I began writing this book during a year's sabbatical leave at Yale University which extended from the Fall of 1971 through the Spring of 1972. Yale graciously accorded me the privilege of being a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Religious Studies, where I worked primarily with William A. Christian, who was then a member of the
faculty of that department and whose writings and general outlook on the philosophy of religion have influenced me greatly. Professor Christian has read this book in various stages of its development and has offered many insightful suggestions and criticisms. Also, several of my past or present colleagues in the Department of Philosophy at Colorado State University have read parts of the manuscript and made valuable comments: Winston King, Richard Kitchener, and Patrick McKee. And three other colleagues, James Boyd, Bernard Rollin, and Holmes Rolston III, have read and criticized the book in its entirety. I am grateful to all of these friends for their interest in this project and for their very able assistance in helping me to bring it to completion. Lastly, I wish to express my thanks to Colorado State University for its grant of a sabbatical leave.

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