The essay presented here is intended primarily as a contribution to 'method in the study of religion'. Although primarily a critical-analytical study of the concept of truth as a valuable and fruitful category in the interpretation and understanding of religion, it is also, insofar as my argument meets with success, a polemic for a 'new' paradigm in the study of religion - an alternative to the present dominant 'descriptivism' in the scholarly study of religion. The arguments to be found in the following pages find their origin in a course of undergraduate lectures delivered at the University of Lancaster in the 1973-1974 academic year. The course, entitled 'Theories of Religion' was methodology oriented, and aimed primarily at equipping the new student with questions with which he might approach the data and, more particularly, with questions he might ask of the theoretical frameworks, disguised or otherwise, within which the 'data' are presented. Throughout the period of my research for and preparation of those lectures I became increasingly convinced of the harm brought to the study of religion through ignorance of methodological issues - by the failure to examine critically and closely the various categories used (or avoided) in the interpretations of religion.

There is an old adage that suggests that those who cannot carry out the task of a given field of inquiry turn to a discussion of the method of its study as a kind of consolation prize. And there is, I have found, rather vehement opposition to methodology courses at the undergraduate level with the suggestion that such courses encourage students to jump immediately into hypothesizing and theorizing about religion without ever having come to grips
with the positive historical religions themselves. I strongly suggest, however, that in the case of the study of religion at least, the adage is absurd and that the opposition to method courses reveals more about the opponents (and their undiscovered assumptions and presuppositions) than about the courses and their effects. As one student of the subject has put it, 'every endeavour to deal just with the "stuff" of religion implies and, in fact, is a method'. (Bolle 1967: x). The analysis of 'truth' and 'religious truth' offered here will, I think, bear out the truth of the latter suggestion.

Being quite convinced, upon completion of the course, that the first step towards understanding religion is that of method, my initial impulse was to write a comprehensive introductory text on method in the study of religion, in which I might examine, systematically, the relationship of description, explanation, models, and theory in the study of religious phenomena and to clarify, especially for the new student, the relationships of the various approaches that are, and can be, taken to the data: the scientific-empirical, whether it be anthropological, psychological or sociological; the phenomenological; the historical-descriptive; the philosophical or theological, etc. More than this, I had intended the text to be a constructive essay and not only an 'analysis'; a constructive essay, not in the sense of elaborating some grand philosophical scheme 'about' religion but rather in the sense of contributing to the formation of a sound, critical approach to the study of religion. Needless to say, the vision far outstripped the resources of the author. Moreover, I found as I worked over the multifarious problems involved that many of them required treatments of their own rather more comprehensive than any one text could allow. Accordingly, I temporarily abandoned my original proposal and set about the appraisal of some key concepts in the study of religion. In this regard I found the refusal of the 'founding fathers' of this 'new' study to countenance any role for the concept of 'truth' in that study to be of particular interest. Indeed, in the claim that the truth question need not be raised in the study of religion I sensed the uncritical adoption of a methodological dogma, a dogma
that makes the study a mere descriptive exercise. Such 'descriptivism', as I have referred to it above, could not, I was convinced, fulfill the student's aspirations for a comprehensive understanding of religious phenomena (of religion and the various religious traditions). Consequently, I felt that an examination of that dogma and a close analysis of the concept of truth (and related conceptual matters) would present in embryo the 'framework' for study I had hoped to present in a more systematic fashion. I am now convinced that the study of religion can hope for little progress or exciting discovery until it rids itself of such methodological dogma. Only in moving beyond the methodological assumptions of the 'founding fathers' can the critical study of religion rid itself of a crippling methodological naivete.

I first set down my thoughts on religion, religions, and truth in a formal way in a paper read to the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion, which appeared in print, slightly revised, a few years later. The present essay is an expansion and further development of that paper. Since many of the assumptions upon which I proceeded were discussed elsewhere, I have included, in a section on 'preliminary considerations' my papers on 'Is a science of religion possible?' and 'Explanation and the scientific study of religion' here. I have also included a chapter on the question of the nature and definition of religion.

Although not in the form I should like it to be, I nevertheless present my discussion of religious truth to a wider community in the hope that it will alert the new student to the importance of philosophical and methodological clarity in the study of religion and that it might stimulate further discussion among established scholars about the nature of the study of religion and the need for further critical analysis of its, too often, hidden assumptions and presuppositions. I do not put it forward as a comprehensive and complete methodological framework for the study of religion. I do mean to suggest, however, that the argument presented here might well contain the seeds for an alternative and more adequate paradigm in terms of which that study might proceed.
Many people have been of assistance in the writing of this book and it is a pleasant duty to acknowledge their help here. I am especially indebted to Professor Ninian Smart for his encouragement in this and other projects and for his attention to and discussion of the arguments set out here. Various chapters were also read and helpfully commented upon by Mr. D. Miranda, Father J. Reinberger, and Dr. T. Day. Discussions of religion and the study of religion with Mr. John Franklin have not only been a great pleasure but have also greatly benefited me. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my students over the years for their patience and kindness in hearing me out on matters methodological and for their critical questions and appraisals of the thesis defended here. I, nevertheless, accept full responsibility for the work and must alone be held accountable for its shortcomings.

I wish to thank the following journals for permission to use material I have previously published in article form: Religion: Journal of Religion and Religions, for 'Explanation and the scientific study of religion'; Philosophical Studies, for 'Truth and the study of religion'; and Studies in Religion, for 'Is a science of religion possible?'

My final thanks must go to Mrs. Darlene Clare who, with a great deal of patience, skill, and energy, typed the manuscript in its many and various forms. Thanks is also expressed to Trinity College for liberally assisting this project both financially and in making time available for the final revision of the manuscript.