We are beings at the limit . . .

Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters*

Indian tradition has always offered a way to "cross over" whatever the situation, be it overcoming a personal problem, passing over to a new stage of life *(āśrama),* crossing from one life to rebirth, traversing the realms *(loka)* for a temporary visit to heaven *(svarga)* or hell *(naraka),* or ultimately transcending the cycle of reincarnation itself.

Katherine Y. Young, "Tīrtha and the Metaphor of Crossing Over"

CROSSING

The Kinetics of Itinerancy

I have analyzed how dwelling practices situate the religious in time and space, positioning them in four chronotopes: the body, the home, and the homeland, and the cosmos. Yet religions, I suggest, are not only about being in place but also about moving across. They employ tropes, artifacts, rituals, codes, and institutions to mark boundaries, and they prescribe and proscribe different kinds of movements across those boundaries. I argue that religions enable and constrain *terrestrial crossings,* as devotees traverse natural terrain and social space beyond the home and across the homeland; *corporeal crossings,* as the religious fix their attention on the limits of embodied existence; and *cosmic crossings,* as the pious imagine and cross the ultimate horizon of human life.

TERRESTRIAL CROSSINGS

A prominent historian once noted that U.S. religious history had been characterized by three centuries during which "people in general did an incredible amount of moving around." The movement of peoples within and across the boundaries of the homeland is not new, and it is not confined to the modern West. Although the pace and form of the movements have changed, people have been on the move since the wanderings of the first humanoid species out of Africa. Population geneticists have traced the migrations of genes, just as students of culture have traced the movements of languages, artifacts, and practices across the globe. As world historian Peter N. Stearns suggested in *Cultures in Motion,* each period of human history has brought new crossings, from the development of agriculture about 9000 B.C.E. and the emergence of civilizations along river valleys in Asia and Africa about 3500 B.C.E. to the sustained exchanges along the medieval trade routes and the colonialist encounters between 1450 and 1750 C.E. Focusing on more recent movements, James Clifford proposed that "everyone is on the move, and has been for centuries: dwelling-in-travel." And from the wanderings of nomadic clans to the round-trip journey of jet-plane pilgrims, religions have prompted travel.[1]

➛ Mediating Terrestrial Crossings

To highlight the differences between nomads wandering on foot—or by camel or horse—and contemporary pilgrims resorting to air travel is to acknowledge that terrestrial crossings vary according to the shifts in travel and communication technology. Technology mediates religious crossings. Oxen and asses drew wheeled carts in Mesopotamia as early as 3000 B.C.E., and camels were a primary means of transport in the Sahara 2,500 years later. In other parts of the world other animals, including the horse, were used to transport people, goods, and practices across the terrain. For aquatic crossings, water craft have been around for at least 5,000 years, and the form of religious travel shifted with changes in sea transport. Ocean travel was easier for the Chinese at an earlier date

than for European ships, and their junks were the most advanced ships in the world at the end of the fourteenth century. A century later, when the Portuguese developed the caravel, a small three-masted ship, it opened new possibilities for transcultural contact and exchange. In 1497 Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope, and made it all the way to the west coast of India. Catholic priests were on that ship, and later in the sixteenth century Portuguese mariners brought missionaries to all parts of their colonial empire in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The same happened with the widespread use of the four-masted galleon in the seventeenth century and the steamboat in the nineteenth century. Each technological change prompted increased, and transformed, contacts. For example, the steamship allowed less dangerous and more frequent oceanic crossings and mediated the transnational exchanges with America and Europe that transformed Buddhism, Shintō, and Christianity in Meiji Japan. Rail, automobile, and air travel also transformed transportation—and the transported religions. Despite ongoing segregation and occasional lynchings on trains, many ex-slaves in late-nineteenth-century America commonly symbolized spiritual journeys as railway travel, viewed the train as a means of escape northward toward liberty, and imagined conversion as the moment when "Jesus handed me a ticket." Turning to other forms of transport, many middle-class Hindu migrants to the United States in the late twentieth century used regular air travel to maintain connections between India and the diaspora, and this affected religious practice in both places. So even though there is no simple linear progression in transportation technology in any region or across the globe, since multiple technologies co-exist at the same time, and even though religious practice is not determined only by mode of transport, we can distinguish biped and quadruped religion, galleon and steamship religion, railroad and airplane religion. We can even talk about motorcycle religion, as with the Unchained Gang, a Pentecostal outreach ministry that has traveled to Indiana prisons and biker rallies to spread the Christian gospel (Figure 16).[2]

In the same way, changes in communication technology have had

16. The blessing of the bikes. In 1996 at the House of Prayer in Ellettsville, Indiana, Irv Goldman, a traveling evangelist, lays his hand on the chest of Pastor Larry Mitchell, president of the Unchained Gang, before Mitchell and others set out on a journey to bring others to Christianity.

implications for the sorts of crossings available to the religious. To note only a few of the Western innovations since the early modern period, the introduction of movable type made texts available to many more people, just as the electric telegraph (1836), telephone (1876), radio (1899), television (1926), and computer (1949) expanded and transformed how technology mediated interpersonal contacts and virtual transits. As with travel technology, the Chinese were ahead of the Europeans: they had paper a thousand years earlier and printing as early as the late seventh century. Yet as many scholars have noted, the Western introduction of the printing press had enormous implications in Europe and around the world. The Protestant Reformation, for instance, was the first self-conscious attempt to use that recently invented media to channel a mass religious movement. As historian Mark U. Edwards has noted, "The

printing press allowed Evangelical publicists to do what had been previously impossible, quickly and effectively reach a large audience with a message intended to change Christianity. For several crucial years, these Evangelical publicists issued thousands of pamphlets discrediting the old faith and advocating the new." In the twentieth century, radio, television, and film also opened new possibilities for religious communication, including appeals for conversion during Charles E. Fuller's "Old Fashioned Revival Hour" radio program in the United States, representations of the sacred and the demonic in Ghanaian popular cinema, and dramatization of Hindu classics in the televised *Mahābhārata* in India. With the widespread use of the computer in the late twentieth century came other changes, as Internet technology and electronic mail mediated traditional and new forms of religious practice: devotees could hear the Muslim call to prayer online, email "cybermonk" to ask about Buddhist meditation practice, or attend a virtual Roman Catholic mass on their home computer. As with travel technology, multiple media forms have co-existed at the same time, and none fully determines religious practice, but it can be illuminating to consider the differences among print religion, telegraph religion, radio religion, television religion, and computer religion.[3]

↠ Round-Trip Travel: Pilgrimage and Missions

Terrestrial crossings are mediated by divergent transport and communication technologies, and they also vary according to the nature of the journey and the motive for the transit. That travel can be one-way, as when persecuted Puritans sought permanent shelter in the British colonies or when Hindu devotees have journeyed to the holy city of Banaras to die—and begin a different kind of journey. Yet much religiously motivated travel is a round-trip passage for one purpose or another. The Hindu *sadhu* Ludkan Baba, the Rolling Saint, made an unconventional terrestrial crossing in 2004 when, as part of his ascetic practice and moral strategy, he vowed to roll the eight hundred miles from his home in central India's Madhya Pradesh state to the Pakistani city of Lahore,

17. Mohan Singh, whom some followers and reporters have called Ludkan Baba or the Rolling Saint, makes his way through Hodal on his way north toward Pakistan in 2004.

where he hoped to urge the Pakistani president to reach a lasting peace with his homeland (Figure 17).[4]

More conventional round-trip religious travel includes pilgrimage to sacred sites and missions to spread the faith. From a family's circumambulation of the small holy well at Glendalough in pre-Famine Ireland to a contemporary bus ride around the eighty-eight sacred places of Shikoku, where Japanese devotees venerate Kūkai, founder of Shingon Buddhism, pilgrimage has been an important ritual practice in a number of cultures and religions. Pilgrims travel to sites they consider sacred for a variety of reasons. As one anthropologist has suggested, devotees embark on instrumental, devotional, normative, wandering, initiatory, and obligatory journeys. For example, some pilgrims go for

instrumental purposes such as healing, as they do at the Grotto in Lourdes, the transnational Roman Catholic shrine in southwestern France. Soon after Bernadette had her visions of the Immaculate Conception on the site in 1858, water from the nearby spring began to be celebrated for its curative powers. Since then the injured and the ill have drunk from the Grotto's fountains and bathed in its pools as they have sought miraculous intervention. Although some Muslim pilgrims to the Ka'ba, the flat-roofed shrine in Mecca, have drunk water from the *Zamzam,* a well that is known to grant blessings to those on *ḥajj,* most have traveled to the Arabian Peninsula not only for instrumental reasons but also to fulfill a fundamental religious obligation (Figure 18).[5]

Like pilgrims to Mecca and Lourdes, most missionaries also go on round-trip journeys beyond the homeland's borders. The term *missionary* is of Latin and French origin, and it refers to a person sent on a mission. It has referred more narrowly to a Christian charged with spreading the faith, though by extension scholars have used it to label emissaries of other traditions as well. Not all religious traditions have dispatched representatives to convert others, and even those that have a history of such activity—especially Christianity—have not supported religious emissaries as vigorously in all times and places. However, trying to follow Jesus' scriptural injunction to "make disciples of all nations" and emulate Paul, who proclaimed the gospel in Rome "with all boldness and without hindrance," some Christians have done their best to "make disciples" beyond the homeland's boundaries. Some have evangelized with little ecclesiastical or governmental support and by attempting to entice converts by appeals to reason, as with Ramón Lull (ca. 1232–1316), the Franciscan tertiary and lay missionary who preached to Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula and northern Africa. At other times missionaries were representatives of the state and used coercion, even violence, to win converts. Charlemagne, whom Pope Leo III crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800, turned to coercion to bring the Saxons to the faith, even laying out penalties in the *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* that included death for any Saxon who refused bap-

18. Muslim pilgrims circumambulating the *Kaʿba.*

tism. Missionaries have been less prominent during most of Islamic history, yet there are some instances of systematic attempts to seek converts. For example, the Ismāʿīlī Shīʾī caliph-imāms of the Fāṭimid Dynasty, especially al-Muʾizz (r. 953–975), the Fāṭimid ruler who transformed the caliphate from a regional power to an expansive empire, did draw on a network of *dāʾīs* or "religio-political missionaries" within and outside the boundaries of the Islamic state. Before and after al-Muʾizz's rule, those missionaries managed to gain Ismāʿīlī converts from north-

ern Africa to the Indian subcontinent. As with Islam and Christianity, at some moments in its history, Buddhism also has been spread by state-sponsored representatives of the faith. Buddhists, for example, have trumpeted Aśoka's role in the tradition's early expansion. They have suggested that Aśoka (ca. 300–232 B.C.E.), who was the third ruler of the Indian Mauryan Empire, sent missionary-monks, including his own son Mahinda, to regions within and beyond his empire, including Sri Lanka.[6]

The fact that some missionaries have been directly or indirectly linked with a sponsoring state—such as Aśoka's Mauryan Empire, al-Mu'izz's Ismā'īlī empire, or Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire—indicates how the concern to spread the faith often has intertwined with political, cultural, and economic motives. These sorts of religious crossings have negotiated power as well as meaning.

Religious and Other Crossings

In turn, other itinerant practices—colonization, war, trade, tourism, and migration—sometimes have been linked with religiously inspired travel in complex ways. Sometimes the gods consecrate the soldiers' march to foreign soil; sometimes tourism overlaps with pilgrimage as consumers of aesthetic pleasures and leisure diversions invest their travel with spiritual significance. Migrants sometimes have been propelled by visions of religious utopias, traders have carried their faith along with their bartered goods, and colonizers have venerated the flag as well as the cross or the crescent. In some cases, they have been lured by coins as well as by converts. As I suggested in Chapter 3, religion, economy, society, and politics are transfluvial currents, transverse flows that cross and, thereby, impel new cultural streams. And multiple motives converge in some terrestrial crossings. Cubans' migration to South Florida after 1959 had political and economic causes—as they boarded planes, ships, or rafts to flee Castro's socialism—but many imagined that crossing (and their dwelling in the new land) using religious tropes: the symbol of the patroness and the metaphor of exile, as with the

balsero who holds an image of the Virgin aloft as rescuers approach his raft after the dangerous passage by sea to South Florida (Figure 19). Florida and Cuba were once part of New Spain, and early Spanish Catholic colonization in Mesoamerica also was propelled and sustained by multiple overlapping motives, even if Aztec narratives of the conquest emphasized that the Spaniards' "bodies swelled with greed" for Moctezuma's gold. The colonizers were driven by nationalist competition for territory, Catholic obligation to the "heathen," and the male quest for adventure—as well as the potent allure of minerals, gold at first and silver later.[7]

Silver was discovered in Mexico in the mid-sixteenth century, but other trade goods were more important in the economic exchanges along the Silk Road, the ancient and medieval trans-Asian network of roads where commercial, military, diplomatic, cultural, and religious interests crossed. That complex overland route, mostly east and west, lasted from the second century B.C.E. to the fifteenth century C.E. and stretched from the Mediterranean to China. Biped and quadruped religions traversed that path, as merchants transported multiple religious practices—Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Manichaean, and Zoroastrian. Sogdian and Iranian merchants had brought Nestorian Christianity to China by the seventh century. Missionaries also used the opportunity the route afforded, and at least as early as the tenth century, Sufi masters traveled with Silk Road caravans to spread their practices to Central Asia. Buddhist merchants and monks also took the overland route, and, as one interpreter has noted, sometimes religion and trade became mutually reinforcing: "the expansion of Buddhism brought an increased demand for silk, which was used in Buddhist ceremonies, thereby further stimulating the long-distance trading activity that had facilitated the spread of Buddhism in the first place." The transregional pathway, which had been cleared by the desire for economic exchange and the concern for military security, also allowed other forms of religious travel, including pilgrimage: Christian Turks from Mongolia made their way to the holy sites in Palestine by the fif-

19. A Cuban *balsero* holds an image of Our Lady of Charity aloft as rescuers approach his raft in 1994. © Walt Michot/The Miami Herald.

teenth century, and as early as the fifth century Chinese Buddhist pilgrims like Faxian had followed the Silk Road west and south to seek the origins of their faith in India.[8]

Crossing Social Space and Constituting Social Roles

The Indian society those medieval travelers encountered classified residents according to a more or less fluid hierarchy of social distinctions—the four primary *varṇas* or classes and the hundreds, even thousands, of *jātis* or castes. And religions not only mark those shifting economic and social boundaries, but prompt crossings that traverse social space, just as some leaders in India—for instance, Mohandās Gāndhi and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar—have appealed to religion to challenge the class and caste systems. Sometimes religions propel devotees across lines of social stratification and transport them to altered social status. Although women remained subservient to men in most ways and class lines sometimes proved intransgressable—as when Hildegard of Bingen defended the exclusion of non-nobles from the noble convents by arguing that "the lower class should not elevate itself above the higher"—some marginalized women in the twelfth century who joined religious communities found that Catholicism allowed nuns temporary and incomplete passage over some social obstacles. Even if the color line remained in place back home, Malcolm X reported that the pilgrimage to Mecca allowed him to cross racial boundaries: "Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and the overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practiced by people of all colors and races here in this Ancient Holy Land." In a similar way, the religious sometimes have claimed that their faith has prompted economic mobility as well. In a lecture that he delivered more than six thousand times across the United States and around the world, Russell Conwell, founder of Philadelphia's Baptist Temple, claimed that even the poorest of his listeners had "acres of diamonds" within their reach, and it was their "Christian godly duty" to get them.[9]

After a career as a lawyer, in 1879 Conwell had been ordained as a

Baptist minister, an example of the way in which religions also mediate devotees' transitions to new social roles. Religious rituals authenticate some religious specialists—including ministers, priests, nuns, monks, rabbis, imāms, healers, diviners, and shamans. In some cultures where politics and religion intertwine, spiritual rites consecrate rulers too, and not only the pope's establishing of Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor. In ancient Mesoamerica, for example, rituals marked the transition to the new social roles of priest and warrior, and the Mayan kings ascended to the throne through an elaborate religious rite that included bloodletting, whereby the gods passed into the world to be reborn and the royal person achieved new spiritual and political status. Rituals also mark the shift of status among the Yorùbá in contemporary western Africa—including the *oba* or chief, who serves as political and religious authority for the town, the *oloogun* or medicine specialist, who prescribes cures for physical and spiritual maladies, and the *babalawo* or diviner, who communicates with the gods to discern future events.[10]

↠ Compelled Passages and Constrained Crossings

In earlier centuries, the ancestors of the Yorùbá were sold into slavery and forced to make the harsh transatlantic passage chained in slave ships, and it is important to note that religions do not only enable crossings of the natural landscape or social space. They also *compel* passages and *constrain* movements. They justify the forced or coerced migration of peoples, as with slavery to the United States and Latin America, where slavery's Christian advocates in the Atlantic World appealed to sacred narratives to defend their practices. For example, citing scriptural passages (such as Timothy 6:1–5) for support, the Reformed minister Samuel B. How published a volume in 1856 entitled *Slaveholding Not Sinful,* and, as Frederick Douglass noted, some masters "found religious sanction for [their] cruelty": one of his own masters even recited a scriptural passage—"He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes"—as he whipped a lame young woman until she bled. We do not know if that young woman ever made

the passage out of slavery, as Douglass did, but religions also slow or block terrestrial crossings of other kinds as well. In most Orthodox Jewish synagogues, custom has prescribed that women cannot cross the line that divides them from the male worshipers, and men were discouraged from visiting some sacred sites in Okinawa. Dutch Calvinist sermons buttressed racial apartheid in South Africa, where blacks could not cross into whites-only neighborhoods. In India, even though religiously sanctioned social taboos have eased in urban areas, Hindu marriages across caste lines are still proscribed in some rural villages, and religious institutions have restricted or discouraged interreligious marriages—and lineage crossings—in many other cultures and periods.[11]

CORPOREAL CROSSINGS

As the betrothed, with their garments tied together, circumambulate a sacred fire at the climax of the traditional Hindu wedding *(vivāha),* they make a crossing of a different kind. In a literal sense, as the man and woman walk around the fire, they make a terrestrial crossing, but they are doing more than that. They are performing a rite of passage *(saṃskāra),* and the religious also cross the limits of embodied life and traverse the transitions through the life cycle.[12]

➛ Confronting Embodied Limits

We are "beings at the limit," as Richard Kearney suggested in the passage I quoted at the start of this chapter, and religions confront limit situations of various kinds. One limit is the boundary between the embodied self and the natural world, and encountering that limit can evoke joy or sadness, or a range of other emotions. It is the line where the individual encounters, to use Max Weber's language again, the world's perfections and imperfections (Figure 20). It's where the individual meets corporeal limitations (illness and death) and suffers natural disasters (floods and earthquakes). It's where questions mount and answers fail. At the same time, the limit is the bridge to sexual intimacy,

20. Sitting in front of a skull and bones in 1989, a Theravadin Buddhist monk meditates on the inevitability of death. Dondanduwa, Sri Lanka.

where embodied selves meet, and the path to natural wonders, where the self moves outside itself—the meaning of *ecstatic*—and encounters the world's perfections. It is the line that, when crossed, allows religiously mediated encounters with the natural world that generate delight. So as I am using the term here, limit situations are culturally mediated moments—or time-spaces—when selves approach the threshold of the humanly possible and face the limitations of embodied existence. The limit is the zone where theodicies are born and nature mystics exhalt.[13]

To say that religions *confront* limit situations and that encounters at the limit of the embodied self are *mediated* is to suggest that religions

provide tropes, narratives, codes, artifacts, and rituals that mark those boundaries and clear paths across them. Religions interpret limits and promote crossings. As long as we don't go too far toward an epistemology that denies any stubborn reality beyond the self, we could even say that religions constitute or create the limits they seek to cross. A life-threatening fever could be confirmation of the sufferer's sinfulness, for example, or the welcome passage to a better world. A comet's trail across the winter sky could be a sign of divine wonder or a millennial warning of the world's impending doom. There are no culturally unmediated experiences, and religions mediate encounters with corporeal and natural limits.[14]

Some of those encounters are painful, and, as I noted in Chapter 3, religions confront suffering, including natural evil. Religions make sense of life-threatening fevers, and other natural evils like floods and tsunamis, famines and hurricanes, plagues and tumors. To put it differently, natural evils pose questions that religions formulate and answer. Why did the flood wash away my village? Why did my daughter die from that fever? The formulation of the problem of evil varies across and within religious traditions: For example, should we ask which deeds in my daughter's past life led to the karmic retribution that brought on the fever or should we ask why a good, omnipotent God would allow it? And the answers also vary among and within traditions. Weber offered a typology of theodicies, explanations for evil. He pointed to (1) "messianic eschatologies," which promise it will all work out in the end; (2) deterministic views, which suggest that humans cannot do much about the course of events; (3) "dualism," which posits two co-eternal forces, Good and Evil or Light and Darkness, that struggle for control in the universe; and (4) "the doctrine of karma," which suggests that humans get what they deserve since "guilt and merit within this world are unfailingly compensated by fate in the successive lives of the soul." We could add a few other types to Weber's list, including approaches that suggest natural evil tests, improves, or punishes the sufferer or those that appeal to mystery and note the distance between the human and

the divine. Consider, for example, God's "thundering" answer to the lament of Job, a righteous man who had lost his children and his flocks and had contracted leprosy: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?"[15]

Job, who is eventually silenced by God's counterinterrogation, had begun by asking a simple question that expressed his frustration: "Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?" Although religious elites in systematized traditions sometimes have framed the questions—and answers—about natural evil abstractly, often disease and disaster have prompted pragmatic questions: How can we avoid another flood in the village? Didn't we perform the rite properly? Have we transgressed the will of the gods? And since religions offer healing, as well as relief from other natural evil, the devout also have asked not only why the child got the fever but what they can do about it. As when a Yorùbá *oloogun* serves as a conduit for the healing power of the *òrìṣàs* or a Pentecostal minister enacts the transforming power of Christ's atonement on the cross, religions diagnose maladies and prescribe cures. Religions sometimes try to propel devotees across natural barriers, such as injury and disease.[16]

It's difficult to say where the natural world ends and the human community begins, and the religious, drawing on figurative language, moral codes, and ritual practices, also identify and transform moral evil, suffering that arises not from impersonal forces in the natural world but from the free actions of persons in human communities. The Confucian thinker Mengzi, who lived in China in the fourth century B.C.E., turned to horticultural images to explain moral evil and seek a solution. Humans are born with inclinations to do the good—as our spontaneous reactions to suffering, for instance the sight of a child falling into a well, show us. However, Mengzi proposed, these inclinations are "sprouts" that must be "cultivated" by proper moral education, just as farmers must tend to seeds for them to grow. Turning to a very different metaphor—and offering an alternate diagnosis and cure for moral evil—the North African Christian theologian Augustine pointed to the

ways that the inherited constraints of original sin couple with the added constraints of habit to restrain humans as they try to do the good. Augustine was "held fast" by the "fetters" of habit, which "had the strength of iron chains," he told readers of the autobiography he wrote at the end of the fourth century. Moral education is not enough, in other words, and the only way to escape moral evil, to be "set free from a nature thus doomed to death," is to find your will transformed by "the grace of God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord."[17]

Augustine and Mengzi both recognized the challenge of accounting for evil, and religious responses to the world's imperfections are not always satisfying and not always simple. Sometimes the religious complain that moral and natural evil seems too horrific to be contained by the usual explanations. Sometimes situations bring answers to a limit, as when some Jews shook an angry fist at the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who seemed to abandon the six million during the Holocaust. Many—though not all—post-Holocaust Jews made their way back to the synagogue, if only to continue the argument with their god. However, especially after the late 1960s, some Jews suggested that the usual explanations fail to make sense of that event. In *After Auschwitz,* Richard Rubenstein claimed that God is dead after the concentration camps, and even those who have offered more moderate responses have remained troubled by that instance of moral evil. For example, Conservative rabbi and Jewish historian Arthur Hertzburg acknowledged that "I have never found a way to absolve God." In a similar way, natural evil sometimes has brought answers to a limit, as with the great Lisbon earthquake, which shook the earth on All Saints Day in 1755 and killed approximately 60,000 people in southern Iberia and northwest Morocco. Many Christians at the time might have sided with John Wesley, Methodism's founder, when he discerned "the hand of the Almighty" at work in that earthquake. Like other natural interventions of the divine, Wesley proposed, it was designed to convey a message: "Love not the world." Yet other contemporaries, including Voltaire, found the traditional theological explanations wanting. In his "Poem on the Lisbon

Disaster" Voltaire lamented "the scattered limbs beneath the marble shafts" and the tens of thousands who had been "entombed beneath their hospitable roofs." He also challenged the certainty of contemporary interpreters of the "hellish gulf in Portugal" who could discern meaning or absolve God:

> Are ye so sure the great eternal cause,
> That knows all things, and for itself creates,
> Could not have placed us in this dreary clime
> Without volcanoes seething 'neath our feet?[18]

The religious in many traditions also have acknowledged, and sometimes celebrated, the moral ambivalence and emotional complexity of human life, with its mix of perfections and imperfections, delight and grief. The twentieth-century Catholic writer Flannery O'Connor explored that ambivalence in her work, suggesting that even the immoral and the grotesque can be revelatory. In one short story she presented a vain and hypocritical woman as a vehicle of grace, and in another she portrayed "freaks"—midgets and hermaphrodites—as "temples of the Holy Ghost," sites where "God's spirit has a dwelling." Some Buddhists, despite their acute awareness of the inevitability of suffering, have pointed to a similar complexity. Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophers have turned to abstract language to signal the presence of goodness and beauty amid the suffering of *saṃsāra,* the cycles of birth, death, and rebirth—for example, by affirming the ultimate identity of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa.* Yet Bashō, the Japanese Buddhist itinerant with whom we began this theoretical journey, put it more vividly in one of his poems:

> Come, see real
> flowers,
> of this painful world.

In this Zen-inspired haiku, Bashō expresses delight—and perhaps surprise—at coming upon beauty. He invites the reader to discover joy in

"this painful world." There's no denying the pain, the Japanese poet suggests, but the flowers are real enough.[19]

With some notable exceptions—for instance Manichaeism—most religions join Bashō in inviting devotees to notice the flowers, to recognize perfections and enhance delight. Religions, as I argued in Chapter 3, are about intensifying joy as well as overcoming sadness. They are about celebrating wonders as much as wondering about evil. Of course, it is not only religions that celebrate wonders. Sometimes artists and scientists—whether shaped by religious worldviews or not—have imagined a world teeming with wonders. Giambattista della Porta, the sixteenth-century Italian natural philosopher and researcher in optics who founded the first European scientific society, reflected on "the Causes of Wonderful Things" in the introduction to his major work, and Michael Faraday, the nineteenth-century British chemist and physicist known for his experiments in electricity and magnetism, remarked that "nothing is too wonderful to be true." From Tang Dynasty Chinese landscape painters to nineteenth-century Romantic poets, artists also have found—or imagined—wonders in the natural world. Daoism, which imagined mountains as the dwelling place of the immortals, inspired many of those Chinese painters, just as Christian themes informed the verse of Romantic poets like Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who proposed that "Nature is ever an ally of Religion." In his famous 1836 essay "Nature," Emerson also exhorted readers to take a closer look at the stars in particular, since they "awaken a certain reverence." Yet many natural forms have awakened reverence among the religious—not only Bashō's flowers and Emerson's stars but other celestial, terrestrial, and maritime wonders. Some traditions, collapsing the distance between the sacred and the secular, have venerated the divine in nature or the nature as divine. There are sun gods and moon goddesses, holy rivers and sacred mountains. The sites of veneration also vary according to the topography of the homeland—so the tides, the desert, the forest, or the mountains become holy. For example, long-standing traditions in Japan affirm that *kami,* deities or sacred powers, reside

temporarily or permanently in mountains, and across the landscape. The rice *kami,* one of many that inhabit the landscape, dwells in the rice fields during the growing season, ascends to the mountains in the autumn, and descends again to the fields every spring.[20]

In a similar way, religions in many cultures mark transitions in the seasonal cycle, including rituals celebrating the solstices, and sometimes devotees offer requests and gratitude to the gods for the harvest or the hunt. For example, the Green Corn Ceremony, performed by precontact tribes throughout the southeastern woodlands of the United States when the late corn crop ripened, was a rite of renewal and thanksgiving dedicated to the Corn Mother. The Bladder Feast, a midwinter ceremony celebrated among Alaskan Inuit hunters, returned the bladders of all the seals caught during the year to the sea, so that their souls might find new bodies and be caught again in the coming year.[21]

So religions confront the limitations of embodied human life, including disease and disaster, as the religious wonder about suffering, and spiritual flows transport the individual beyond the confines of the self to celebrate—and constitute—the wonders of the natural world, the blossoms near Bashō's hut in Edo and the stars above Emerson's home in Concord, from the bounty of the midwinter seal hunt to the abundance of the corn harvest in the summer field.

Traversing the Life Cycle

Although the death of an infant or mother during childbirth can bring suffering, religious traditions have celebrated the arrival of a child as one of the world's wonders. Religions mark not only the cycle of the seasons but also the transitions in the life cycle, conveying the individual from birth to death. The anthropologist Arnold van Gennep called the rituals that mark those transitions *les rites de passage,* drawing on analogies between societies and houses. Just as dwellers pass through rooms, corridors, and doorways in their home, members of a society cross thresholds *(limen)* that lead from one social status to another. Through rites of passage the individual leaves one status, passes through

21. Birth of the Hindu god Kṛṣṇa. Nineteenth-century miniature painting, North India.

a liminal, or transitional, state, and arrives at a new developmental stage and social role. Religions imagine those transitions differently—just as the design and structure of homes vary across cultures—and traditions mark them by drawing on narratives, tropes, and artifacts as well as rituals. Whatever the variations—for example, the Inuit ritually celebrate a boy's killing of his first seal as an important developmental stage—most religions have erected thresholds at birth, puberty, marriage, and death.[22]

Birth is the first of those thresholds (Figure 21). In childbirth, a woman—although the Wana in Indonesia claim men get pregnant and carry the fetus for seven days before it enters the womb—brings a new life into the home and the homeland. Like other rites of passage, childbirth actually involves several moments, each marked ritually in some religious traditions: conception, pregnancy, birth, naming, and

initiation. Initiation might mean, for example, Christian infant baptism or Jewish male circumcision, or some other postpartum ritual. The Bukidnon people of the northern mountains on Mindanao in the Philippines have several postpartum rituals designed to exorcise evil spirits and encourage benevolent ones. Those spirits have been involved in the process since conception, according to Bukidnon beliefs. When a woman becomes pregnant, the spirit *(magbabaya)* at the "navel" of heaven sends one of his subordinate spirits as the human soul, *gimukod.* After the birth of that child with the heaven-sent soul, the father buries the placenta beneath the home's floor or hangs it from a tree. Then *magbabaya* transports the placenta to heaven and infuses it with a guardian spirit, which becomes a sibling of the newborn. Sometimes after birth the midwife detects evil omens in the umbilical cord, and in those cases the *datu,* or ritual specialist, performs another ceremony that includes animal sacrifice to petition the spirits and safeguard the infant.[23]

Muslims safeguard the infant in other ways. Islamic postpartum rites include circumcision for boys, from a week to thirteen years after birth, and Islamic custom prescribes other practices at the birth of a child. As soon as possible after that birth, comes the first rite: the father or an imām recites the *shahādah*—the first pillar of faith—in the child's right ear and then the left. Usually the whispering in the right ear takes the more elaborate form of the *adhān,* or the call to prayer that Muslims hear five times a day. It begins with the *takbīr,* "God is Great" *(Allāhu Akbar),* repeated three times, then the *shahādah* itself: "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his messenger." In this way, the name of God is the first word the child hears, and then a chewed date is placed in the child's mouth, signaling the beginning of life outside the womb. Seven days later, many Muslims perform another ritual, *'aqīqah,* which gathers family and friends to welcome the new family member. At that ceremony, the parents usually name the child, who now has identity as a full member of the family and the community.[24]

Islam does not have an elaborate initiation rite at puberty, but many

other religions do. In many of those ritualized transitions to adulthood, the young woman or young man has special power at the threshold moment, and moral codes and ritual prescriptions exhort community members to either approach or avoid the person—and objects associated with him or her. Among North American tribes, for example, pubescent Apache girls wear a copy of the beaded buckskin dress of White Painted Woman, the goddess of life who originally received the gift of menstruation, and the community aims to touch objects she has handled and eat foods she has blessed. In a slightly different Chinook rite, the menstruating daughter of the chief is hidden from the community and attended only by a postmenopausal woman. She engages in prolonged fasting and ritualized bathing, in a creek far from the village, and she is encouraged to keep her distance during this long transitional period: "She must never look at people. She must not look at the sky, she must not pick berries. It is forbidden. When she looks at the sky it becomes bad weather. When she picks berries it will rain." Other religious traditions include fewer prohibitions, but still mark the passage to adulthood, as with the Bar Mitzvah ceremony for thirteen-year-old Jewish boys. In the months before that ceremony, the boy masters the skills—including chanting the *Haftarah,* or selection from the Book of the Prophets—that prepares him to be an adult member of the community with the responsibility to observe the *Mitzvat,* or religious acts.[25]

The next major transition in that young man's life is marriage, and religions mark this transition too, by publicly sealing the union, establishing new kin relations, and constituting the new family. The Shintō wedding ceremony does all those things. That ceremony, which has long roots in indigenous and Chinese traditions but was not standardized until the twentieth century in Japan, invokes the *kami* as witnesses to the public ritual. As one recent version of the rite prescribes, the participants offer the *kami* food and sake, and the bride and groom take vows that bind them together: "Growing old together, until our hair is long and white, we have been caused to be tied." It also links them with the

wider world: "So does our bond exist in the universe, just as the sun and moon exist in the heavens, just as the mountains and rivers exist on earth." Those natural bonds form social ones as well, reaffirming a lineage of ancestors and descendants:

> The connection to the ancestors is to be continued and not neglected.
> The family name should flourish, be highly respected and widely known.
> Our grandchildren and grandchildren should continue forever.

The Latter Day Saints (LDS), who dedicated a temple in Tokyo in 1980 and have built more than sixty others outside the United States, affirm the eternity of marriage in another way. According to LDS doctrine, Adam and Eve were given to each other in the Garden of Eden, at the culmination of God's creative process, and in a "celestial marriage" in the temple Mormon couples also make an eternal covenant with God, each other, and future generations, who will form a family in the celestial kingdom after the resurrection. The eternity of the couple's bonds is vividly symbolized by the mirrors on the opposite sides of the temple's celestial room: as they kneel to face each other across an altar in the middle of the room, the mirrors reflect an endless series of images of the couple, who will remain together after death.[26]

Even if the LDS couple will reunite in the celestial kingdom for all eternity, at some point they will die, and Mormonism, like other traditions, also propels adherents across that final threshold of the life cycle. The Latter Day Saint funeral serves several functions, as one church leader noted: "It helps console the bereaved and establishes a transition from mourning to the reality that we must move forward with life. Whether death is expected or a sudden shock, an inspirational funeral, where the doctrines of resurrection, the mediation of Christ, and certainty of life after death are taught strengthens those who must now move on with life." In turn, as ethnologist Louis-Vincent Thomas has proposed, most other funeral rites serve these same functions: (1) they preside over the future of the departed; (2) attend to the surviving close kin; and (3) revitalize the group, which has been disturbed by the death

of one of its own. The community moves from disintegration to integration, the family moves from grief to acceptance, and the deceased moves from death to the afterlife.[27]

Even if they have served similar functions, rituals that mark the passing of the dead have varied widely across cultures, from a tenth-century Viking's conflagration in which the deceased, accompanied by a female slave, was burned along with his ship, to a contemporary American Catholic burial, which usually involves solitary interment in a coffin. As with the Scandinavian and American rites, funerals usually include multiple practices, from rites of separation to rites of integration. The community prepares, displays, and disposes of the corpse and then reintegrates the mourners as it replenishes the community and conveys the dead to another state or place. For example, separation from the dead and restoration of the community began for early-nineteenth-century Moravians, a Christian sect organized in 1457, when the *posaunenchor,* or trombone choir, played a hymn from the church's tower or entrance to announce the death. The hymn even identified the age, status, and gender of the deceased: "Hayn" meant it was a little boy, for example, and "Nassau" told the community a widow had passed on. The funeral service, which helped the family mourn and the community heal, provided more particulars about the departed, as it also reassured them about her ultimate fate. During that service, which included responsive reading and hymn singing, the minister read a memoir, the traditional Moravian biographical or autobiographical account of the deceased's life. Consider the memoir read aloud at the funeral of Susanna Zeisberger in 1824. The account, most of it in Zeisberger's German script and the rest finished after her death by an anonymous community member, recounted her birth in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1744 and her marriage in 1781. Like other missionary-minded Moravians, soon after that "she embarked on a journey with her dear husband to Indian land," where they endured capture by "terrible savages" and enjoyed the kindness of her "faithful Indian Sisters" who slipped her food.

The anonymous narrator picks up the tale of terrestrial and corporeal crossings with her later years and last weeks, when she suffered from "a consumptive cough." Finally, at eighty years of age, she "blessedly went home." The next step in her "homeward journey"—and the community's reintegration—was the burial itself, when they interred Susanna's corpse in "God's Acre," the unadorned graveyard whose entrance bore an inscription attesting to the risen Christ's power over death and whose uniform marble gravestones signaled the deceased's spiritual equality before God.[28]

Moravian missionaries like Zeisberger have preached the gospel on the Indian subcontinent too, and the religious traditions that have flourished there have very different funeral rites. Sikh death rituals, for example, involve cremation—and a more elaborate series of separation and integration practices. The Sikhs, who predominate in the Punjab, imagine death using several different tropes: they say the deceased has finished her life span *(purā ho giyā)* or, employing metaphors about dwelling and crossing, they say the departed has taken abode in heaven *(surgwās ho giyā)* or completed the pilgrimage of this world *(sansār yātrā poori kar giyā)*. The pilgrimage to the next world begins with the ritual of *dharti te paunā,* lifting the corpse from the bed to the ground, which reconnects the deceased with *dharti-matā,* mother earth, and secures a more auspicious death. Then in a series of practices that constitute the funeral *(atam-sanskār)* they give the corpse a ritual bath, which purifies the body, thereby making it ready to be carried on the bier by the sons and brothers of the deceased. When the procession approaches the cremation ground, the chief mourner, the eldest son, makes a circle around the bier with water from an earthen pot, which he shatters on the ground to symbolize the release of the corpse's soul. Then the procession continues to the cremation ground, where they perform the ritual burning of the corpse *(agni-bhaint)*. All that is left then is to restore the community and secure the fate of the deceased. If it was a father who died, the son receives the turban, symbol of household authority,

at the ritual feast after the funeral, and, if it is in India, three days later the ashes are scattered in the sacred Ganges River, from where the deceased crosses beyond death's threshold.[29]

↠ Compelled Passages and Constrained Crossings (Again)

Yet religions also compel and constrain corporeal crossings at transitions in the life cycle. The menstruating Chinook daughter must leave the village and cannot return until after a series of purification rites, and—as with a widow burning on her husband's funeral pyre in the Hindu practice of *satī*—though the surviving tenth-century account of the Viking funeral recounts that they asked for volunteers among the dead master's slaves, the slave's passing hardly seems voluntary. Usually the Muslim father—not the mother—whispers the *shahādah* in the newborn's ear, and the girl preparing for her Bat Mitzvah is exempted from some of the commandments required of her male counterpart after the Jewish puberty rite. Caste restrictions have prohibited lineage crossings in Hindu—and Sikh—marriages, and other prescribed codes and rituals enforce limits on sexuality as well as on marriage. Although temporary homosexuality occurs in some male and female puberty rites and gender inversion accompanies some communal festivals, religions often have prohibited sexual relations—and marital bonds—between those of the same gender or the same family. Other codes constrain and compel crossings at funeral rites. In the Sikh ritual, for example, women cannot carry the bier or enter the cremation ground.[30]

COSMIC CROSSINGS

Some Sikhs within and outside the cremation ground have imagined death as the completion of an earthly pilgrimage, and all religions propose that death is not a barrier but a transition. Not only do religions enable and constrain terrestrial and corporeal crossings, but they also permit and restrict other sorts of crossings. As I suggested in the last

chapter, religions produce teleographies, representations of the end, the temporal and spatial limit of human life, the ultimate horizon. Those teleographies are cartographies of desire. They map what the religious want. What do they want? One Hindu account detailed the four "ends" of humans: they want to fulfill moral obligations *(dharma),* secure material well-being *(artha),* find sensual pleasure *(kāma),* and achieve final liberation *(mokṣa).* Yet there are many more ends, and even when traditions seem to agree—on liberation as a goal, for instance, among Indian religions—the religious differ about what that might entail. So no single or simple answer is possible. Religious women and men have wanted lots of things. The ends vary across cultures, among religions, within sects, and across the lifespan—and even from hour to hour. But a theory of religion—if it is to explain not just how religions function but why they manage their hold on people—must offer some account of what the religious want and what religions offer. The previous chapter offered a partial answer to that question: they want to find their own place. Like the displaced Cubans in Miami, humans don't have their bearings, and they want to be oriented in the body, the home, the homeland, and the cosmos. But we can say more, and here is where religion as *dwelling* meets religion as *crossing.* As I have suggested, the religious want to negotiate the limits of embodied existence, confronting suffering and intensifying joy—and traversing the stages of life. And the religious seek ways to imagine and realize the zenith of human flourishing, however that is conceived. They draw on tropes, artifacts, and rituals to produce teleographies, representations of the ultimate horizon and the means of crossing it.[31]

↠ Transporting and Transforming Teleographies

There are two prominent types of religious teleographies, even if there is enormous variation within each type, most traditions include both, some individuals alternate between the two, and this typology fails to include some ways of imagining religious means and ends. These two

Table 5.1 A typology of religious teleographies.

	Transporting	Transforming
Horizon	Horizon as *boundary* between this world and another world.	Horizon as a personal or social limit or *limitation.*
Space	Focused more on the *home* and the *cosmos,* on domestic and cosmic space.	Focused more on the *body* and the *homeland,* on corporeal and social space.
Crossing	Crossing as change in *location:* ascent, descent, rebirth, encounter, communication.	Crossing as change in *condition:* insight, purification, healing, reform, revolution.

types—transporting teleographies and transforming teleographies—can be analyzed according to the horizon they imagine, the space they highlight, and the crossing they propose (see table).

As I noted in the last chapter, spiritual homemaking maps the farthest horizon of human existence, and *transporting* traditions imagine that horizon as a boundary between this world and another world. For the Hopi it is the boundary that separates them from the underworld, from which they emerged and where they will return. The Aztecs imagined an earthly realm separated from thirteen celestial and nine subterranean realms. For ancestor cults, like the Baktaman of New Guinea, it is the border between the realm of the living beings and the realm of absent spirits, as it is in different ways for traditions that highlight shamanism, spirit possession, or spirit mediumship, such as nineteenth-century American Spiritualism, which marked a line between this world and the "other world." For dualist traditions like Manichaeism, the horizon separates two eternal realms, matter and spirit, or the realm of light and the realm of darkness. For many monotheists—most Muslims and Christians, including Cuban Catholics at the shrine—it is the boundary between earth and heaven, however that celestial realm is imagined. Indian teleographies—Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist—often have

imagined a boundary between the "near shore" and the "farther shore": the ultimate horizon is the division between the round of rebirths *(saṃsāra)* and the realm where those cosmic transmigrations—and all they bring—come to an end *(mokṣa)*.[32]

Focused more on the body and the homeland than on the cosmos—and, so, more "this-worldly" in Weber's language—*transforming* teleographies imagine the ultimate horizon as a personal or social limit. Both teleographies can imagine the horizon as an individual or a collective end, and for transforming traditions that focus on the individual, the horizon is represented as an ideal personal condition: for example, insight, purity, or health. In Sōtō Zen, the horizon is a transforming insight into the true nature of things, just as it is in forms of Advaita Vedānta, and sometimes that insight concerns the past or the future, as in traditions, like the Yorùbá, that use divination practices. Humans in the Manichaean worldview are a mixture of light and darkness, and the first step to full flourishing, the liberation of the eternal soul, is an awakening of the *psuché* to its true divine origin in the realm of light. In healing cults, including some forms of religious Daoism, the horizon is health or longevity. In twelve-step programs, which can be quasi-religious, the horizon is some other form of mental or physical well-being: sobriety, for example. In clan traditions where spiritual or material pollution is a central concern, purity is the imagined personal horizon. Where the religious propose a collective end, the horizon can be imagined in a variety of ways. It can be the borders of the chosen land, as in some forms of Judaism; and, as with Cuban Catholics in Miami and other diasporic groups, it can be the boundaries of the homeland. With more or less abstract ends in mind, transforming teleographies can imagine the horizon as a collective condition—from shared prosperity to social justice—as with millennialist cargo cults and the Protestant Social Gospel—and a range of quasi-religious practices, including civil religion, environmental activism, and Marxist utopianism.[33]

Readers will have noticed that Cuban Catholics appeared in my discussion of both types of teleographies, and this signals that these ideal

types do not mirror any particular tradition perfectly. Both modes often are found within the same religion. Most Cubans I interviewed at the shrine seemed more focused on the horizon as the shoreline of their island nation, but I encountered them at the shrine of their national patroness, and it seems natural that a collective transformative end predominated in our conversations. Yet when I talked long enough I also found—often when they mentioned illness or death—that they embraced a traditional Christian cosmography and eventually hoped to cross the boundary that separated them from a future life in heaven, which was usually, though not always, imagined as another cosmic realm.

So among Cuban Catholics—and many others—these two teleographies imagine different kinds of crossing, different paths to the religious end. All traditions seem to share—to use theorist Kenneth Surin's phrase—a "desire for the new." In one way or another, they presuppose that things as they are—or as they appear—are not all they could be. Seeking to heighten joy or ease suffering, they presuppose that some change is necessary. Transforming teleographies imagine religious crossing as a change in *condition:* it is personal insight, healing, or purification. *The Platform Sutra,* for example, champions wisdom or insight—"seeing into your own nature"—as the necessary transformation. Using meteorological tropes, the eighth-century Chan text attributed to Huineng compares the human condition to a cloudy day: "sun and moon are always bright, yet if they are covered by clouds" we cannot see the light. In a similar way, humans have "inherent enlightenment," and they must penetrate the clouds of delusion and awaken to their true nature as enlightened beings, or buddhas. Or, in other times and places, the cosmic crossing is a collective transformation that brings reform, uplift, revolution, and, in the end, more just and satisfying social relations, as with the Kingdom of God that some American Social Gospel Protestants and Latin American Catholic liberation theologians have hoped Jesus will inaugurate. For example, in his 1917 volume *A Theology for the Social Gospel,* the American Baptist theologian Walter Rauschenbusch imagined salvation as "the regeneration of the social

order." It is "the necessity and the possibility of redeeming the historical life of humanity from the social wrongs which now pervade it."[34]

On the other hand, for transporting traditions cosmic crossing is imagined as a change in *location:* it is ascent or descent—or transversal movement across some border. It is rebirth in another realm, up or down, or it is an encounter or communication with supernatural agents or suprapersonal forces that inhabit some other celestial, terrestrial, or subterranean world. For the Inuit in Alaska it is passage to the land of the dead in the sky or in the sea; for Pure Land Buddhists in Japan it is rebirth in Amida's Western Paradise; and for the Yorùbá in western Africa it is transport to the good heaven *(orun rere)* to dwell among the ancestors. The Qur'án promises Muslims who traverse the "straight road" that they will be transported after death to 'Illiyyín, where they will enjoy a royal banquet and "laugh on couches," while at the day of reckoning *(yawm ad-dīn)* those who went astray will be transported to Jahím, where they will burn in its fire. Sister Susanna, the Moravian missionary remembered at the 1824 funeral, made "her homeward journey" to heaven, where "her redeemed soul went over into Jesus' arms and lap." And other Christians have used the journey metaphor to imagine the cosmic crossing, as with Bonaventure of Bagnoregio's thirteenth-century work, *The Mind's Road to God,* which charted the path to a mystical vision of the divine, and John Bunyan's seventeenth-century allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress,* which traced the itinerary of Christian on his travel from the earthly realm to the celestial city.[35]

Relying on the journey metaphor but figuring it as aquatic passage rather than terrestrial travel, religions in India have emphasized the importance of *tīrthas,* a term that originally referred to a ford, or a place to cross a river. Extending the metaphor, some Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains have talked about crossing the river of existence, and those fords can be places, persons, or practices. So Hindus have imagined pilgrimage sites as *tīrthas,* places where a crossing occurs, just as gurus and devotional practices ferry the devotee across to the other shore. In Buddhism, the Buddha's *dharma,* or teaching, is the vehicle that carries the

22. Statues of the Twenty-Four Tīrthaṅkaras at Śatruñjaya, a Jain pilgrimage site above the town of Palitana in Gujarat, India, that includes 863 temples.

follower across, and even the body can function as a means of transport: for example, Śāntideva exhorted readers of his poetic reflection on the bodhisattva path, *Bodhicaryāvatāra,* to "take advantage of this human boat / free yourself from sorrow's stream," and the eighth-century Indian Buddhist hoped that "for those who want to go across the water" he could "be a boat, a raft, a bridge." Jains venerate twenty-four beings—the most recent is Nataputta Vardhamāna, known as Mahāvīra, who lived a little over 2,500 years ago in northern India—who have made the passage themselves and ferried others across, and the Jain tradition explicitly appeals to aquatic tropes by calling the venerated *tīrthaṅkaras,* because they establish *(kara)* the ford *(tīrtha)* to cross the river of rebirth and reach the other shore of liberation (Figure 22).[36]

Concealed Crossings

In this chapter I have analyzed terrestrial, corporeal, and cosmic crossings, and I hope the usefulness of the crossing metaphor seems clear in the interpretation of Muslim pilgrims, Shintō marriages, Sikh funerals, and Jain liberation. Those examples, and the others I have offered, seem to be about movement, about crossing of some sort. However, using one theorist—Bruno Latour—and two case studies—one Christian and one Buddhist—I want to suggest that the trope of crossing has even wider application in the study of religion, even with narratives, rituals, codes, and artifacts that are less obviously about movement.

Playing with the twin themes of *close* and *distant,* Bruno Latour's Templeton Lecture, "Another Take on the Science and Religion Debate," opens ways of talking about religion that, with some revision, can interpret these more subtle dynamics. Religions don't transfer information, Latour suggests; they transport persons. So the "conditions of felicity" for religious language, the grounds on which one might say it is "true," require that religious speech-acts produce new states that make the distant close. Drawing on analogies with lovers' talk and emphasizing the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, the notion that the consecrated host embodies the "real presence" of Christ, Latour suggests that religions do not deal with *the beyond,* as most interpreters suggest. *The near* is religion's domain. "Religion does not even attempt to race to know the beyond, but attempts at breaking all habits of thoughts that direct our attention to the far away, to the absent, to the overworld, in order to bring attention back to the incarnate, the renewed presence of what was before misunderstood." Religious speech-acts initiate movement "which aims at jumping, dancing towards the present and the close, to redirect attention away from indifference and habituation, to prepare oneself to be seized again by this presence that breaks the usual, habituated passage of time." And *truth* in this context means the ability to mediate between the distant and the near, the past and the present. Emphasizing the "flowing character" of religious language, action, and artifact, Latour suggests that "freeze framing, isolat-

ing a mediator out of its chains, out of its series, instantly forbids the meaning to be carried in truth." "Truth," he continues, "is not to be found in correspondence—either between the word and the world in the case of science or between the original and the copy in the case of religion—but in taking up again the task of continuing the flow of prolongating the cascade of mediations one step further." So religions, analogized as rivers or waterfalls, generate and sustain a "cascade" of mediators that transform persons as they bring close what was imagined as distant.[37]

Latour gets religion moving, but we can accelerate and multiply the movements even more. His account needs one more nudge, since religions don't only dwell in presence and bring the distant near. He commits one of the sins he chiseled onto his own tablet of prohibitions: Latour "freeze frames" religious movements. Religions bring the distant close, as he suggests, but they are flows that also propel adherents back and forth between the close and the distant. Religions move between what is imagined as the most distant horizon and what is imagined as the most intimate domain. To use traditional Christian language, they travel vertically back and forth between transcendence and immanence. They bring the gods to earth and transport the faithful to the heavens. And they move horizontally, back and forth in social space. The religious also are propelled through time, allowing travel among imagined pasts, presents, and futures. As itinerants, the religious never remain anywhere or anytime for long. It is in this sense, I suggest, that religions are flows, translocative and transtemporal crossings.

Let me illustrate those crossings, and extend the usefulness of this trope for the study of religion, by interpreting a Christian artifact and a Buddhist narrative that don't seem to have much to do with crossing. First, consider an artifact that Latour interprets in his Templeton Lecture: Fra Angelico's "The Resurrection of Christ and the Women at the Tomb," a fifteenth-century fresco he painted, with the assistance of an apprentice, in the convent of San Marco, Florence (Figure 23). The image does not approximate multiple-exposure photography's capturing

23. Fra Angelico, "The Resurrection of Christ and the Women at the Tomb," 1440–41. Fresco, 189 × 164 cm, on the wall of cell 8 at the Convento di San Marco, Florence.

of movement, or even Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase,* which puts Cubist cartography in motion. There are few overt signs of movement in the Dominican friar's painting of Christ's empty tomb: the heavenly messenger points, and the four women gathered at the tomb gesture in ways that indicate surprise or disappointment or awe. Yet as Latour suggests, there is redirection going on in this representation of a scene from the Gospel of Mark. Note that "the angel's finger points to an apparition of the resurrected Christ which is not directly visible to the women because it shines in their back." As the passage from Mark's Gospel suggests, the fresco nudges viewers to find presence amid absence:

> As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man [a heavenly messenger], dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."[38]

In an indirect way, the image, which would have been in conversation with the scriptural passage for many fifteenth-century Christian viewers, transports the women (and the viewers) to Galilee, where Jesus awaits them all. Yet even more prominent in the fresco, the large and central image of the risen Christ is the elephant in the room. It is the presence misread as absence. This hovering image brings the divine close, and transports pious viewers—since there seems little immediate hope for the women, who persist in their inattention—to the here and now. As Latour proposes, the visual redirects viewers: "there is nothing to see *there,* but you should look *here* through the inward eye of piety to what this fresco is supposed to mean: elsewhere, not in a tomb, not among the dead but among the living."[39]

And I would suggest that the painting can move viewers in other ways, and not only by stirring affect. The image directs viewers out from

the empty tomb to find the sacred among the living, in Galilee and everywhere else, but viewers also cross back and forth, as their attention shifts—to the hovering Christ, to the alarmed women below, to the angel's finger pointing upward, back to the Christ again, and then to the apparent absence that surrounds the viewers themselves. There in the cavernous emptiness, the image invites them to ask: where can I find the risen Christ? It transports them across social space to seek him among others outside the tomb, and—with Christ's apparition chastising them for their inattention—the fresco brings viewers back to the here and now to seek presence in absence.

Consider another religious trace that illumines concealed crossings, even if at first it also might seem to have little to say about movement of any kind. It is a narrative from the *Mumonkan,* a thirteenth-century collection of forty-eight cases (Chinese: *gong'an;* Japanese: *kōan*) edited by a Chinese Chan master in the Song Dynasty and used for generations in ritual settings, the private interviews with teachers, as a tool for understanding reality as it is. This *kōan* recounts an encounter between the Tang Dynasty Chan master Zhaozhou Congshen, or Joshu in Japanese, and a monk who came to him one day for advice about how to attain enlightenment:

> Once a monk made a request of Joshu. "I have entered the monastery," he said. "Please give me instructions, Master." Joshu said, "Have you had your breakfast?" "Yes, I have," replied the monk. "Then," said Joshu, "wash your bowls." The monk had an insight.[40]

There has been a great deal of commentary on this enigmatic story, but most interpretations point to the ways that the *kōan,* as Latour might say, redirects the monk's attention from absence to presence, from the distant to the near. It transports the earnest monk to where he already is. Seeking a distant state, he gazes upward and outward. Yet the Chan teacher's response propels him back toward the here and now. As one Japanese interpreter, Zenkei Shibayama, suggested in a lecture *(teisho),* the conclusion of the narrative—"the monk had an insight"—docu-

ments the monk's transformative redirection. "His spiritual eye was opened to the fact that it is as it is—that he, as he is, is 'it'; that 'it' cannot be outside himself. Once having awakened, he has always been 'it.' Essentially he has always been 'it,' the Truth. His walking, standing, or sitting are nothing but 'it.' "[41]

As I have noted, there is a long tradition in Chan Buddhism of emphasizing that all beings have Buddha-nature, original enlightenment, so to look outside the self is silly, even if you are seeking human or suprahuman exemplars of wisdom and compassion, buddhas and bodhisattvas. Explaining the source of most spiritual confusion, the Chinese Chan teacher Linji, who founded the lineage that came to emphasize *kōan* practice, put it this way in one lecture attributed to him: "When students today fail to make progress, where's the fault? The fault lies in the fact that they don't have faith in themselves! . . . But if you can just stop this mind that goes rushing around looking for something, then you'll be no different from the patriarchs and buddhas. Do you want to get to know the patriarchs and buddhas? They're none other than you, the people standing in front of me listening to this lecture on the Dharma!" Just as Linji tried to redirect and transport his monastic students, so the *kōan* of Joshu's Bowl enacts a movement. It shifts devotees from there to here. It says: what you seek is not distant or outside yourself. It is close. It is *here.* However—and here Latour's theoretical vision reaches its interpretive limits—the monk requires the redirecting response from the master, and subsequent adherents need to hear the narrative again and again, because they don't spend much time *here.* If they ever manage it temporarily and partially, they always slip back to *there.* If not, why would subsequent generations need to ponder this *kōan,* and others, again and again? The religious not only need to be propelled to imagined pasts and desired futures, they need to be called back, summoned to the present. Narratives, rituals, codes, and artifacts do that. In the Linji Chan tradition, that is also what *kōan* practices do. But to remain where the story of Joshu positions hearers, fixed in the here and now of enlightened *presence,* is to "freeze frame" the dynamics

of religion in practice, which always shifts back and forth in time and space. The sweet torture that some mystics have reported—that the transforming and transporting presence never lasts—is a shared fate. Immanence is no less fleeting than transcendence. Like the shimmering divine presence barely noticed and then forgotten in Fra Angelico's fresco, the "insight" pursued in Chan stories doesn't bring rest for long. Religions' translocative and transtemporal work is never done. The religious, even in these and other less obvious ways, are on the move. Whether lamenting at Christ's empty tomb or carrying the monk's breakfast bowl, in pilgrimage and in marriage, and as they traverse the ultimate horizon of human life, the devout are crossing.[42]