The link between secularization and Modernity has long been debated, but only someone with the acuity and deep learning of Jan Bremmer could succeed in making us look with fresh eyes at this crucial issue. There would be no secularization without religion in the first place, and religion itself has become a highly contested concept. Do all cultures have religion, or is religion a concept that only has meaning in the now secularized Christian world? That is to say, does religion exist as a distinct phenomenon only where church and state are separated as they are in the West? In the spirit of contributing to the genealogy of the concept religion and its relationship to Modernity, we propose to look in depth at one of the earliest European works that offered a comparative analysis of religious ceremonies and customs throughout the world.¹

Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde [Religious Ceremonies and Customs of All the Peoples of the World, hereafter Religious Ceremonies and Customs] was published in seven huge folio volumes between 1723 and 1737, that is, in the early years of the European Enlightenment. Referred to by many readers simply as ‘Picart’, the last name of the engraver cited in bold red letters on the title page of every volume, the work included more than 3,000 pages and 250 plates of engravings on religious practices around the globe. Translated immediately into Dutch and English, it exercised an undeniable influence on Enlightenment attitudes toward religion and remained a touchstone of the study of religion for generations. We had the good fortune to begin our in-depth collaborative study of this work as Getty Scholars the same year that Jan Bremmer was the Getty Villa Professor. Since

he so generously shared his insights with us on many occasions during that year, it is only fitting that we offer this version of ‘Picart’ as a tribute to his influence on us and on the question of religion and Modernity.  

*Religious Ceremonies and Customs* marked a major turning point in European attitudes toward religious belief. At a time when most Europeans had faith in one unique, absolute, and God-given Christian truth (though they differed as to the content of that one truth), the work pointed to the multiplicity of practices that might be called religious. It sowed the radical idea that these religious practices could be compared on equal terms and therefore that all of them were equally worthy of respect—and criticism. In other words, it turned belonging to a faith community into ‘religion’, that is, discrete ceremonies and customs that reflected the truths relative to each people and culture. While present-day commentators may lament the artificiality of the concept so constructed and the way it distorts other practices (especially Islam), there can be no question that this endeavor opened the door to the attitudes associated with Modernity: skepticism about absolute claims to religious truth, which led in turn to support for religious toleration and more liberal forms of Protestantism, as well as to deism, pantheism, and even, some would argue, materialism and atheism. Comparative study of religious ceremonies and customs proved to be far from an academic exercise. It was a truth filled with consequences.

Who prepared this work, what was in it, and how could a long encyclopedia lure readers into such dangerous territory? The engraver whose name figured on the title pages was Bernard Picart, the most famous engraver of the eighteenth century after Hogarth. He had made his reputation in Paris producing copies of famous paintings (Rubens and Le Brun in particular), fashion engravings, and prints of stock figures in the wildly popular *commedia dell’arte*. When Picart moved to Holland he spent more time producing illustrations for Dutch Bibles and frontispieces for books. His name guaranteed success when *Religious Cere-