Some faiths embrace the attainment of material wealth and enjoyment of sexuality, while others opt for more ascetic lifestyles. Meditation and prayer, and the goal of maintaining order and harmony in human relations, are constants in many religions, even when God is not. Exploring the world’s 12 most influential religions, O’Callaghan’s guide explains geographic and political origins, core beliefs, rituals, observances, attitudes toward women and marriage, and even related personal grooming and attire. This fascinating work conveys that some religious devotees grow their hair long and conceal it, while others pull it out or shave it, and more than one religion practices rituals to dispel demons and evil spirits. The book profiles Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Baha’i, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shinto, concluding each chapter by summarizing contemporary challenges of each faith and listing additional resources. For those wanting to compare universal truths and common customs, this colorfully illustrated reference is a helpful tool. --Susan DeGrane