

# Preface

At the end of a semester, my students in Hawai'i often write a single recommendation: Everyone should be obliged to take a course in world religions because the course helps people see so many things in new ways. I recently received reviews from people who used the first edition of this textbook and am glad to hear the same thought from other students, most of whom live quite far away from Hawai'i.

Students and teachers who used the first edition have confirmed, too, that this book really comes to life when the reading of it is accompanied by different kinds of direct experience. As one person told me, "The chapters of the textbook are like different maps, with each map taking me to interesting people, places, and events." I enjoyed that comparison very much. Like a map, this textbook is meant to help people find their way to new destinations and new sights, both near and far. Readers have reported the special pleasure that has come from experiences that are available close to home: visiting local religious buildings and attending their celebrations, listening to sacred music, watching festival dances, and viewing religious art. Students who have used this text and then traveled abroad have returned with enthusiasm for experiences they had while visiting temples, churches, monasteries, and mosques. Many students also enjoyed direct contact with some of the great, primary sacred texts—the Tao Te Ching, the Dhammapada, the Bible, the Qur'an, and the Bhagavad Gita—as they were reading this book. Some students have reported the value of keeping journals of their thoughts and experiences as their study of one religion after another led them into new worlds. And many students reported that they had unexpected insights while searching the web for information.

This new edition owes a big debt of gratitude to students and teachers who gave me their recommendations. Many wanted information on new religions. As a result, I've added a chapter that takes up Baha'i, Rastafarianism, the Yoruba-based religions, Wicca, Falun Gong, Cao Dai, and other new religious movements. Other people asked for more treatment of nontraditional forms of Christianity, critical questions about the study of religion, and ethical questions that today's religions must face. I've added this material in appropriate places. Still others sent me their ideas for rephrasing concepts and for adding new photos. I thank all of you who gave me your time and helpful advice.

I wrote this book for my students, and I was guided by five ideals:

1. *The ideal of the educated person.* What, I ask myself, should we expect "the educated person" to know about religions? What would a person seeking to be an "educated person" actually want to know about religions? What should the study of religions lead to for those who want to continue their education? This book tries to present that essential content, then point to places, texts, and people through which more can be discovered.
2. *The ideal of clarity.* I often think of the ironic axiom, "When you see the spark of ambition, water it." And indeed a student's initial enthusiasm for religions can quickly be smothered by wave upon wave of specialized terms, names of goddesses and gods, significant dates, and historical figures. Thus I have tried here to fan rather than water readers' natural inquisitiveness by emphasizing the social issues and human concerns that provide contexts for terms, names, and dates with detailed description. To enhance clarity, chapters include maps and timelines as well as key terms with definitions and pronunciation guides.
3. *The ideal of a multidisciplinary approach to religion studies.* A religion is not just a system of beliefs; it is also a combination of ways in which beliefs are expressed in ceremony, food, clothing, art, architecture, pilgrimage, scripture, and social organization—to name only a few. This book tries to make the multifaceted nature of religions explicit. The photographs have been chosen to help achieve this ideal.
4. *The ideal of experience.* Religions are better understood through firsthand experience. This book invites readers to imagine and to seek the experiences of many religions both at home and abroad. Each chapter begins with a First Encounter that encourages the reader to imaginatively apprehend some aspect of a religion. Later in each chapter a description of a personal experience suggests additional possibilities for experience. Each chapter ends with ideas for experiencing the focal religion at home and abroad.
5. *The ideal of scholarship blended with respect.* Adherents of a particular religion frequently assume that their histories and accounts of their tradition are factual, their texts unique and sacred, and their belief system literally true. While this inside view may be limited, it often provides adherents with deeply meaningful experiences. In contrast, scholars who study religions seek objectivity through the use of methods

that emphasize proof, emotional distance, and even doubt. Their approach—although it may downplay the fact that religions belong to the heart as well as the head—provides valuable tools for making significant distinctions and seeing shared patterns. Because this book is a secular textbook about multiple religions, I necessarily follow an academic approach and give precedence to the insights that come from modern scholarly inquiry. At the same time, I try to portray each religion in ways that convey some of the awareness of adherents. My hope is that through this blending of scholarship and respect I can accomplish the goal set forth by the book's title—to help readers understand the experience of each religion.

Supplemental materials, available to help students and teachers, include a study guide, an electronic study guide, and an instructor's manual. The study guide gives chapter summaries, learning objectives, and review questions in several formats. The unique CD-ROM Study Guide offers for each chapter: guided tours that highlight important concepts, pronunciation guides for key terms, flash cards, as well as true-false, multiple-choice, and fill-in-the-blank questions, and mini-lectures that provide an in-depth study of selected concepts. The study guide can be used with either Windows- or Macintosh-based computers. New to this edition is the Online Learning Center at [www.mhhe.com/Molloy2](http://www.mhhe.com/Molloy2). The web site contains resources for both instructors and students, including the Instructor's Manual, Power Point slides, chapter outlines and quizzes as well as interactive flash cards and extensive Web links. The instructor's manual provides learning objectives, chapter outlines, lecture supplements, notes on using exercises in the textbook, lists of relevant videos and web sites, sample examination questions, essay topics, and pages for use as transparencies or handouts.

Many teachers have shared their wisdom with me; I am grateful particularly to Lucy Molloy, Walter Daspit, Winfield Nagley, Sobharani Basu, and David Kidd. I thank Thomas Hilgers for the use of many fine photographs. A grant from the East-West Center in Honolulu made possible much of the initial travel and study necessary for this book. Several monasteries were kind in allowing me to stay and participate in their life: Songgwang-sa in South Korea, Engakuzan in Japan, Saint John's Abbey in Minnesota, and Saint Andrew's Abbey in California.

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Although it is a truism, this book has been shaped by hundreds of other people who are also owed my thanks. They planted in me seeds that I hope have come to flower in this book.