

The World Religions Reader

2ND EDITION



EDITED BY GWILYM BECKERLEGG

WORLD RELIGIONS READER



Second edition

*Edited by
Gwilym Beckerlegge*



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THE WORLD RELIGIONS READER



The World Religions Reader includes material relating to six of the world's most influential faiths: Judaism; Christianity; Islam; Hinduism; Buddhism and Sikhism. Each is considered in a global context, and the selection of readings strikes a balance between providing an account of their historical development and exploring their beliefs and practices in the context of the latter half of the twentieth century. A study of three themes – sacred place; women in religion; making moral decisions – provides further perspectives on the same traditions.

The World Religions Reader includes examples from the foundational and classical texts of each religion, readings that signpost significant developments within the faiths and more recent statements from those within the traditions. Religion's resurgence as a political force in many parts of the world, during the latter half of the twentieth century, is also addressed in a number of readings.

Readings are grouped under each religion and arranged in chronological order under headings and sub-headings appropriate to the concerns of that religion. Revised and expanded for this new edition, *The World Religions Reader* now has new introductions to each tradition covered, as well as new readings on Hinduism and a completely new selection of readings on Buddhism. The comprehensive and diverse range of material gathered together here makes *The World Religions Reader* a superb resource for any student of religion.

GWILYM BECKERLEGG is a member of the Department of Religious Studies at the Open University.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION



This Reader examines six of the world's most influential religious traditions, namely, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Sikhism, considered in their global setting. The Reader endeavours to strike a balance between providing an account of their historical development and exploring their beliefs and practices in the context of the latter half of the twentieth century. A closer study of the thematic topics of sacred place, women in religion, and making moral decisions provides another perspective on these same faiths. The balance and arrangement of this book reflects these concerns. Though this Reader is designed to support students following the Open University course, *World Religions*, the prominence of the six chosen religions in the contemporary world and the centrality of the course's chosen themes to the study of religion means that this compilation should be of interest to a wider readership.

The present volume incorporates some materials included in a Reader compiled for an earlier Open University course on world religions, Whitfield Foy (ed.) *Man's Religious Quest: A Reader* (Croom Helm/The Open University, 1978). This new Reader, however, covers a more limited range of religious traditions than its predecessor and thus is able to offer a wider range of readings relating to its six chosen traditions. This volume includes examples from the foundational and classical sources of each religion, readings that signpost significant developments within the faiths, and more recent statements from those within these traditions. A more limited selection from critical studies by scholars is also included. When deciding upon what new materials to include, I have sought in particular readings that indicate something of the preoccupations of the six religions in the latter part of the twentieth century, as well as reflecting the themes that Open University students will study. The resurgence of religion as a political force in many parts of the world during the latter half of the twentieth century has been much discussed of late and a number of readings address this phenomenon.

Readings are grouped under each religion and arranged in chronological order under headings and sub-headings appropriate to the concerns of that religion.

Abridgements and editorial comment are clearly shown. The second edition of this Reader contains brief introductions to the six religions covered, which explain the basis for the selection of readings. The section on Buddhism has been substantially revised and translations of certain Hindu texts have been replaced with more recent versions.

Many people have had a hand in producing this Reader, not least the authors of the course units used in *World Religions* who were largely responsible for the materials that have been retained from the earlier Reader edited by Whitfield Foy. I am grateful to my course team colleagues, and in particular to David Herbert and Susan Mumm for suggesting new readings, which were included in the first edition, and to Helen Waterhouse who substantially revised the selection of extracts on Buddhism for the second edition. The revision of the section on Buddhism was carried out with advice from Peter Harvey, Cathy Cantwell and Kate Crosby. I am also indebted to Mary Baffoni for her considerable assistance in preparing the original manuscript of this Reader.

Gwilym Beckerlegge
The Open University
May, 2000

PREFACE



This Reader examines six of the world's most influential religious traditions, namely, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Sikhism, considered in their wider global setting. The Reader endeavours to strike a balance between providing an account of their historical development and exploring their beliefs and practices in the context of the latter half of the twentieth century. A closer study of the thematic topics of sacred place, women in religion, and making moral decisions provides another perspective on these same faiths. The balance and arrangement of this book reflects these concerns. Though this reader is designed to support students following the Open University course, *World Religions*, the prominence of the six chosen religions in the contemporary world and the centrality of the chosen themes to the study of religion mean that this compilation should be of interest to a wider readership.

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The Open University
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