

FOREWORD

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Until recently, most of us in the west thought of religion in what we can now see to be unjustifiably restrictive terms. For the typical western reader, religion meant the Christian religion, or more expansively the monotheistic religions, thus including Judaism and Islam. But today we can see this is much too narrow. This limited knowledge often functioned polemically to establish the superiority of Christianity or at least most of monotheism. But we also have to take into account the nontheistic religions of the east, including not only Buddhism but also Daoism and Confucianism. This new realization needs to be supported by new teaching material, which Fortress Press has now provided in the form of this volume. It distinguishes between major and minor religions and treats them accordingly. Judicious selection from these religions' literature give the reader an accurate account of each of these faiths in both its best and its worst features.

It is also of interest that these extractions enable one to see the varying criteria by which each faith judges both itself and others. In some cases these are mutually compatible, in others not. It is important to be able to identify these criteria and it can be a useful exercise to ask the student to do this. A further useful exercise can be to ask the student to identify elements within each faith which that faith does not itself recognize as good or bad, but which nevertheless are so under its own criteria. For the reader new to this subject it will be encouraging to know something of what Dr. Sharma has done in the past. His many publications have required a detailed knowledge of each of the world's religions -- major, minor, eastern and western. He has also engaged in comparative studies which have brought to light previously unnoticed points of both similarity and difference. He is therefore a guide to be trusted.