To Mark R. Woodward, for his work on this Tenth Edition,
and

To Charis Margaret Heintz, too young to have known her grandfather, but who will know of his contribution to students and pilgrims of religious studies.
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PREFACE

to the Tenth Edition

In 1985, when I first taught World Religions, many of us felt compelled to begin the course with a lecture about why studying religion is an important part of a liberal education. Many of our students were unconvinced. The events of the last two decades proved them wrong. Even if it were not for the role of religion in domestic and international conflict, the study of religion would be an important part of a liberal education because it has been an important part of virtually every human civilization. Even for people who are not themselves religious, religion provides much of the background for the arts, literature, politics and other aspects of cultural life. One need not be religious to recognize the importance of religion and the need to study and understand it, just as one need not be British to recognize that one cannot hope to understand the politics of the contemporary Middle East without understanding that of the late British Empire.

In the post Cold War and post September 11 eras, the study of religion is more important than ever. Today, most of the world’s armed conflicts are rooted in some combination of religion and ethnicity. Just as religions can foster tolerance and acceptance of others, they can be used to promote intolerance and hatred. Mutual distrust and violence can occur as easily between differing variants of a single religion as between adherents of wholly different religious traditions. It is sadly ironic that varying interpretations of Jesus’s message incited violence for almost as long as there has been Christianity and that differences within the Muslim community led to violence shortly after Prophet Muhammad’s death. Understanding these differences is essential if we are to hope to resolve or at least ameliorate the conflicts they spark. The study of religion can also help to avoid the natural but unfortunate tendency for the uninformed to stereotype all members of a faith because of the actions of a few.

In preparing the tenth edition of Religions of the World, I have drawn on my experience of teaching an introductory world religions course to thousands of undergraduates over the last two decades, living and working, for extended periods in Buddhist and Muslim cultures, and on conversations with friends and colleagues in the Arizona Native American community. This book presumes no prior knowledge of any religious tradition. While it is impossible to cover all of the religions that have shaped the course of human history, it does cover those of the vast majority of people. In this edition I have edited the text closely for clarity and readability and made other changes to keep it up-to-date and accurate. Changes include updating all sections on religion today for each tradition, bringing statistical data up-to-date, increasing coverage of religion and conflict and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and of the role of the Anabaptists in the Protestant Reformation.
This edition of *Religions of the World* is dedicated to those of all faiths who have had the courage to speak out against religious bigotry and violence, even when doing so has placed them in grave danger.

My thanks to the reviewers of the tenth edition: Thomas H. Pearce, Mesa Community College; Lucien W. Stone, Jr., Ball State University; Michael Krogman, Chattanooga State University; Susan Tower Hollis, Empire State College, SUNY; and Barry R. Sang, Catawba College.

Mark R. Woodward