P 21 PERENNIAL LIBRARY \$3.50

HUSTON SMITH'S

She Religions Activity Of Man

The Religions of Man

By HUSTON SMITH

Professor of Philosophy

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

PERENNIAL LIBRARY

Harper & Row, Publishers
New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London

THE BELIGIONS OF MAN. Copyright © 1958 by Huston Smith. Printed in the United States of America. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information address Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 10 East 53d Street, New York, N.Y. 10022.

The Religions of Man was originally published by Harper & Row, Publishers, in 1958.

First PERENNIAL LIBRARY edition published 1965

Library of Congress catalog card number: 56-11923

ISBN: 0-06-080021-6

84 85 86 32 31 30

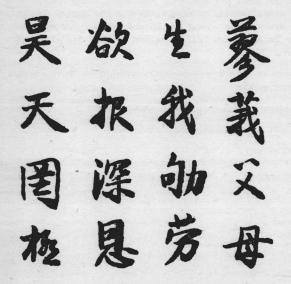
To

ALICE LONGDEN SMITH

AND

WESLEY MORELAND SMITH

Missionaries to China for forty-one years



When I behold the sacred liao wo* my thoughts return To those who begot me, raised me, and now are tired. I would repay the bounty they have given me, But it is as the sky: it can never be approached.

^{*} A species of grass symbolizing parenthood.

Preface

In the spring of 1955 I gave a course on *The Religions of Man* over KETC, the St. Louis educational television station. The response revealed a real hunger on the part of Americans to know the great faiths that have motivated and continue to motivate the peoples of the world. Over 1200 men and women in this one community enrolled as tuition-paying students while the viewing audience rose to

the neighborhood of 100,000.

The second thing the response revealed was the need for a different kind of book on world religions, a book which without sacrificing depth would move more rapidly than the usual survey into the meaning these religions carry for the lives of their adherents. Letters from all parts of the country which came to me as the series was subsequently shown by kinescopes in approximately twenty other cities almost invariably asked either for transcripts of the lectures themselves or for a book along the same lines. Transcripts were not available for the lectures had not been delivered from script. Nor was there a single book I felt would directly meet the needs of these inquirers. For, despite innumerable masterful books in the field, I knew of none which took this as its single object; against the backdrop of critical scholarship to carry the intelligent layman into the heart of the world's great living faiths to the point where he might see and even feel why and how they guide and motivate the lives of those who live by them.

This is the book I have tried to write. I have, in the process, received inestimable help from a number of directions. Swami Satprakashananda, Leader of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, has not only taught me almost everything I know about Hinduism, but has also labored painstakingly over the chapter by that title. Arthur Waley's writings have helped structure the feel for China built up

during my seventeen years in that land of my birth, while Dr. Henry Platov has corrected a number of inaccuracies in the first drafts of my chapters on Buddhism and Taoism. Special debts relating to my discussion of Zen Buddhism will be acknowledged in that section. Professor Joseph Kitagawa of the University of Chicago has improved the chapters on Confucianism and Islam; in the latter chapter his suggestions have been supplemented by those of Professor Fouad El Ehwany of Cairo University. Rabbis Robert Jacobs and Bernard Lipnick and the Rev. Dr. Allen Miller of St. Louis have been most helpful critics of the chapters on Judaism and Christianity respectively. Lewis Hahn, Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at Washington University, has improved the manuscript as a whole by his careful reading, while Mrs. Lorna Garmany as secretary and typist has been a cheerful and unflagging pace-setter. On reading the completed manuscript I am struck by how many of its ideas first came to me in lectures which for two semesters Gerald Heard gave in my course on comparative religions. To each of these my sincerest thanks and a waiver of responsibility for what has actually carried through into print.

In addition to the above, all but one of whom has contributed directly to the manuscript itself, I wish to thank the following for providing contexts of stimulus, encouragement, and provocation which urged this book forward: Professor Lewis Hahn, Dean Thomas Hall, and my students in Philosophy 221-222 over the past decade at Washington University; President Thomas Spragens, Dean James Rice, and Professor Ralph Leyden at Stephens College where the material was presented over closed-circuit television during the spring of 1956; the Danforth Fellows before whom portions were delivered in The Danforth Fellow Lectures of September 1956 at Camp Miniwanca, and the Danforth Foundation for providing a seven month trip around the world to corroborate and revise the manuscript's original

contents.

I reserve two names for mention in special categories. The first is that of Mayo Simon who was producer and director of the television series from which this book has grown most directly. Mayo and I were at ease together; we respected each other; we got fresh ideas from each other. As we struggled with the enormous problems in-

volved in trying to convey over a mass communication medium some of the profoundest insights that have occurred to man, the material came to new life for us. In view of the quickening effect this had on the lectures, it was our original hope to write this book together as well. Mayo's subsequent involvement as a playwright made this impossible, but if here and there the book speaks directly to the mind of the reader it will be in large part due to his ideas as they have continued to bubble up in every chapter and nearly every page.

When authors acknowledge a wife's help the picture usually conjured up is that of a patient spouse respectfully tiptoeing through the household tasks, exuding, perhaps, an ineffable aura of admiration and support. While these virtues are not absent from my wife, something must be added to the image; a partner happily involved in every sentence, pruning with zeal, revising with skill and imagination. It is because of this that "her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land."

HUSTON SMITH

St. Louis, Missouri

Contents

Preface : ix

1. Point of Departure : 1

2. Hinduism: 14

The Wants of Man. What Men Really Want. The Beyond that is Within. Four Paths to the Goal. The Way to God Through Knowledge. The Way to God Through Love. The Way to God Through Work. The Way to God Through Psychological Exercises. The Four Stages. The Stations of Life. "He Before Whom All Words Recoil." Coming of Age in the Universe. The World—Welcome and Farewell. Many Paths to the Same Summit. Suggestions for Further Reading.

3. Buddhism: 90

The Man Who Woke Up. "The Silent Sage." The Rebel Saint. The Four Noble Truths. The Eightfold Path. Basic Buddhist Concepts. Big Raft and Little. The Secret of the Flower. The Image of the Crossing. The Conflux of Buddhism and Hinduism in India. Suggestions for Further Reading.

4. Confucianism: 160

The First Teacher. The Problem Confucius Faced. Rival Answers. Confucius' Answer. The Content of Deliberate Tradition. Ethics or Religion? Impact on China. Suggestions for Further Reading.

5. Taoism : 197

The Old Master. The Three Meanings of Tao. Three Interpretations of Power and the Different Taoisms to which

They Led. Creative Quietude. Other Taoist Values. Conclusion. Suggestions for Further Reading.

6. Islam : 217

Background. The Seal of the Prophets. The Flight that Led to Victory. The Standing Miracle. Basic Theological Concepts. The Five Pillars of Islam. The Brotherhood of Islam. Whither Islam? Suggestions for Further Reading.

7. Judaism : 254

Meaning in God. Meaning in Creation. Meaning in Man. Meaning in History. Meaning in Morality. Meaning in Justice. Meaning in Suffering. The Hallowing of Life. Revelation. The Chosen People. Israel. Suggestions for Further Reading.

8. Christianity: 301

The Anointed. "He Went About Doing Good." "Never Spake Man Thus." "We Beheld His Glory." The End and the Beginning. The Good News. The Mystical Body of Christ. The Mind of the Church. Roman Catholicism. Eastern Orthodoxy. Protestantism. Suggestions for Further Reading.

9. A Final Examination: 350

Notes : 356

Index : 367

1. Point of Departure

I write these opening lines on a day widely celebrated throughout Christendom as World-Wide Communion Sunday. The sermon in the service I attended this morning dwelt on Christianity as a world phenomenon. From mud huts in Africa to igloos in Labrador Christians are kneeling today to receive the elements of the Holy Eucharist. It was

an impressive picture.

Still, as I listened with half my mind the other half wandered to the wider company of God-seekers. I thought of the Yemenite Jews as I watched them six months ago in their Synagogue in Jerusalem: dark-skinned men sitting shoeless and cross-legged on the floor, wrapped in the prayer-shawls their ancestors wore in the desert. They are there today, at least a quorum of ten, morning and evening, swaving backwards and forwards like camel-riders as they recite their Torah, following a form they inherit unconsciously from the centuries when their fathers were forbidden to ride the desert-horse and developed this pretense in compensation. Yalcin, the Muslim architect who guided me through the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, has completed his month's Ramazan fast that was beginning while we were together, but he too is praying today, five times as he prostrates himself toward Mecca. Swami Ramakrishna in his tiny house by the Ganges at the foot of the Himalayas will not speak today. He will continue the devotional silence which, with the exception of three days each year, he has kept for five years. By this hour U Nu is probably facing the delegations, crises, and cabinet meetings that are the lot of a Prime Minister, but from four to six this morning, before the world broke upon him, he too was alone with the eternal in the privacy of the Buddhist shrine that adjoins his home in Rangoon. At that, Dai Jo and Lai San, Zen monks in Kyoto, were ahead of him an hour. They have been up since three this morning, and until eleven tonight will spend most of the day sitting cross-legged and immovable as they seek with intense absorption to plumb the Buddha-nature that lies at the center of their being.

What a strange fellowship this is: the God-seekers of every clime, lifting their voices in the most diverse ways imaginable to the God of all men. How does it all sound to Him? Like bedlam? Or, in some mysterious way, does it blend into harmony? Does one faith carry the melody, the lead, or do the parts share in counterpoint and antiphony when not in solid chorus?

We cannot know. All we can do is try to listen, carefully and with full attention, to each voice in turn as it is raised

to the divine.

This defines the purpose of this book. It may be wondered if it is not too broad. The religions we propose to consider belt the world. Their histories stretch back thousands of years, in addition to which they are motivating more men today than ever before. Is it possible to listen seriously to them within the compass of a single book?

The answer is that it is, because we shall be approaching them with special and limited intents. These must be seen and kept in mind or the picture that emerges from the

pages that follow will mislead and distort.

Before saying what this book is, or at least tries to be,

let us make as clear as possible what it is not.

1. It is not a textbook in the history of religions. This will explain the scarcity of names, dates, movements, and social crosscurrents in what follows. There are excellent books that focus on precisely this material. * They are invaluable. This book, too, could have been swollen prodigiously with the facts they present. But it is not its intent to do their job in addition to its own. Historical facts, as a consequence, have been held to the minimum needed to give the ideas discussed some grounding in space and time. Beyond this, every fact to escape deletion has had to be one that made an appreciable difference to the outlook in question. The book is written against the background of what scholars have uncovered about the history of religions, but their material has been built upon without allowing it to clutter or eclipse the meaning the religions held and

^{*} Superior numbers refer to a section of notes beginning on page 356.

hold for human life. Every attempt has been made to keep scholarship in the foundations, essential to the strength of the structure but out of sight, instead of letting it rise in scaffolding which would obstruct the view of the mansions

themselves.

2. Even in the realm of meaning, the book does not attempt to give a rounded view of the religions discussed. To do so would have required writing either a huge book or a choppy one. For people differ even when nurtured by the same culture, and as religion must try to speak to the needs of them all it has no choice but to spread out in almost endless diversity even within the same tradition. One need think only of Christianity. Eastern Orthodox Christians worship in ornate cathedrals while Quakers regard even a steeple as a desecration. St. Thomas finds no theological doctrine acceptable if it goes against reason while Tertullian cries "I believe because it is absurd." There are Christian mystics and Christians who denounce mysticism as beginning in "mist," centering in "I," and ending in "scism." Albertus Magnus finds religious meaning in cracking the hard nut of a theological argument, St. Francis in preaching to birds and flowers. There are Christian Holy Rollers and Christian Unitarians. How is it possible to say in a single chapter what Christianity means to all Christians?

The answer, of course, is that it is not possible. Selection is unavoidable. The question facing an author is not whether to select among points of view within a given religion; the questions are how many to present and which ones. In this book the first question has been answered by the principle of economy. Forced to choose, the attempt has been to do reasonable justice to a modest array of perspectives instead of crowding in, catalogue fashion, a more complete spectrum. In some cases (for example Islam) this has meant confining myself to a single statement, ignoring differences between Sunnis and Sheites or between traditionalists and modernists. In other cases (the Big and Little Rafts of Buddhism, for instance) two or three of the most important differences within a religion have been set forth. The number never goes above three lest the trees obscure the wood. Put the matter this way: if you were trying to describe Christianity to an intelligent and interested but busy Thailander, how many versions would you include?

You could hardly pass over the differences between Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant. But you would probably not try to bring in at one sitting what divides Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, and Episcopalians.

When we turn to the second question-which views are to be presented—the guiding principle has been relevance to the interests of the intended readers. Such relevance has been determined by weighing three considerations. The first is sheer numbers. There are some faiths with which every alert world citizen should be acquainted, simply because of the hundreds of millions of persons who live by them. Second, there is the question of relevance to the modern mind. Because the ultimate good that might come from a book like this, even beyond that of world understanding, is help to the reader in ordering and quickening his own life, priority has been given to what, with caution yet a certain confidence, we may regard as these religions' contemporary expressions. The third consideration is universality. Every religion is a blend of universal principles and local setting. The former, when lifted out and made clear, speak to man as man, whatever his time or place. The latter, a rich compound of myth and rite, can never make its way into the emotional life of an outsider and can reach his understanding only with the help of a poet or skilled anthropologist. It is one of the illusions of rationalism that the universal principles of religion are more important than the rites and rituals from which they grow. To say this is like saying that a tree is more important than the sun and soil from which it draws its life. But for this book principles are more important than contexts if for no other reason than that they are what the author has been trained to work with.

I have read books that have transplanted contexts themselves, an entire ecological environment of the spirit, and made them live: Nectar in a Sieve for India, My Country and My People for China, The Old Country for Eastern European Jews. Someday I hope someone will write a book on the religions of man which conveys these intimate living contexts out of which they have grown. But this is a book I shall read not write. I know my limitations and stick to those perspectives where ideological elements either predominate or can be readily extracted.

3. This book is not a balanced view of its subject. The

warning is important. I wince to think of the shock if the reader were to close the chapter on Hinduism and step directly into the Hinduism described by Nehru as "a religion that enslaves you": her Kali Temple in Calcutta, the curse of her caste system, her two million cows revered to the point of nuisance, her fakirs deliberately offering their bodies as living sacrifice to bedbugs. Or what if he were to find himself in the streets of the leading city of Bali with one of its two movie houses named the Vishnu-Hollywood after the second god in the Hindu trinity and bookstores doing brisk business in KLASIK COMIKS in which Hindu gods and goddesses mow down hosts of unsightly demons with cosmic ray guns? I know the contrast. I feel it vividly between what I have written of Taoism and the Taoism that surrounded me during the years of my youth in China: its almost complete submergence in augury, necromancy, and superstition. It is like the contrast between the Silent Christ and the Grand Inquisitor, between the Sermon on the Mount and the wars of Christendom, between the stillness of Bethlehem and department stores blaring "Silent Night" in the rush of Christmas shopping. The full story of religion is not rose-colored. It is not all insight and inspiration. It is often crude; charity and wisdom are often rare, and the net expressions bizarre when not revolting. A balanced view of man's religions would record its perversions as well as its glories. It would include human sacrifice and scapegoating, fanaticism and persecution, the Christian Crusades and the holy wars of Islam. It would include witch hunts in Massachusetts, monkey trials in Tennessee, and snake worship in the Ozarks-the list would have no end.

Why then are these things not included in the pages that follow? My answer is so simple that it may sound ingenuous. This is a book about values. Probably as much bad music as good has been written in the course of human history, but we do not ask that a course in music appreciation give it equal space. Time being limited, we expect no apology for spending it with the best. I have taken a similar position with regard to religion. A recent book on legal science carries the author's confession that he has written lovingly of the law. If something as impersonal as the law has captured one author's love, it should be no surprise that religion has captured another's. Others will be interested in

trying to balance the record to determine if religion in its entirety has been more of a blessing than a curse. This has

not been my concern.

4. This is not a book on comparative religions in the sense of speaking of their comparative worth. Comparisons among things men hold dear always tend to be odious, those among religions most odious of all. Hence there is no assumption in this book either that one religion is or is not superior to others. Comparative religion which takes such questions for its concern usually degenerates into competitive religion. What is more, the growth in knowledge of all religions together with the appearance of new sects in many make the standard contrasts which have been built up thus far daily more insecure. "There is no one alive today," observes Arnold Toynbee, "who knows enough to say with confidence whether one religion has been greater than all others." Coming from the man who should be able to pronounce on this point if anyone could, the statement carries weight. For my part I have approached all the religious history treated in these pages as sacred history: questions of degree I have, with Toynbee, felt I had not the God's-eye view to speak to. I have tried to let the best in each religion come through; the reader may draw his own comparisons from there.

Thus far we have been saying what this book is not.

Now we must say what it is.

1. It is a book that seeks to embrace the world. In one sense, of course, such a wish must remain frustrated. Being finite, man's arms even when spread to the maximum reach only a certain distance and his feet must be planted somewhere; there must always be some base on which he stands and from which his vision proceeds. To begin with the obvious, this book is written in English which from the start anchors it to some extent. Next come cross-references introduced to facilitate entry into the reader's understanding. There are proverbs from China, myths from India, paradoxes from Japan, but most of the illustrations come from the West. A line from Shakespeare, a verse from the Bible, a suggestion from psychoanalysis, the idiom is Western throughout. Beyond idiom, however, the book is inescapably Western in being directed to the mind-set of the contemporary Western reader. This has been due to necessity; this being the writer's own mind-set, it was the only book he could write. But one must recognize it as a limitation and understand that the book would have been different if written by a Zen Buddhist, a Muslim Sufi, or a

Polish Jew.

This book, then, has a home—a home whose door swings freely both in and out, a base from which to journey forth and return only to hit the road again in study and imaginings when not in actual fact. If it is possible to be home-sick for the world, even places one has never been and suspects one will never see, this book is the child of such homesickness.

We live in a fantastic century. I leave aside the incredible discoveries of science, the narrow ridge between doom and fulfillment onto which they have pushed us, and speak only of the new situation among peoples. Lands across the planet have become our neighbors, China across the street, Egypt at our doorstep. Radio and air traffic have shriveled space until the only barrier is cost. Even where plane fare is lacking there is a never-ending stream of books, documentaries, and visitors from abroad. A random issue of a metropolitan daily carries word of yesterday's doings in seventeen countries. We hear on all sides that East and West are meeting but it is an understatement. They are being flung at one another, hurled with the force of atoms, the speed of jets, the restlessness of minds impatient to learn of ways that differ from their own. From the perspective of history this may prove to be the most important fact about the twentieth century. When historians look back upon our years they may remember them not for the release of nuclear power nor the spread of Communism but as the time in which all the peoples of the world first had to take one another seriously.

The change in role this new situation requires of us all—we who have been suddenly catapulted from town and country onto a world stage—is enormous. Twenty-five hundred years ago it took an exceptional man like Socrates to say on his deathbed, "I am not an Athenian or a Greek but a citizen of the world." Today we must all be struggling toward these words. We have come to the point in history when anyone who is only a Japanese or only an American, only an Oriental or only a Westerner, is but half human; the other half of his being which beats with the

pulse of all mankind has yet to be born.

To borrow Nietzsche's image, we have all been summoned to become Cosmic Dancers who do not rest heavily in a single spot but lightly turn and leap from one position to another. We shall all have our own perspectives, but they can no longer be cast in the hard molds of oblivion to the rest. The Cosmic Dancer, the World Citizen, will be an authentic child of his parent culture but related closely to all. He will not identify his whole being with any one land however dear. Where he prides himself on his culture or nationality, as he well may, his will be an affirming pride born of gratitude for the values he has gained, not a defensive pride whose only device for achieving the sense of superiority it pathetically needs is by grinding down others through invidious comparison. His roots in his family, his community, his civilization will be deep, but in that very depth he will strike the water table of man's common humanity and thus nourished will reach out in more active curiosity, more open vision, to discover and understand what others have seen. For is he not also man? If only he might see what has interested others, might it not interest him as well? It is an exciting prospect. The classic ruts between native and foreign, barbarian and Greek, East and West, will be softened if not effaced. Instead of crude and boastful contrasts there will be borrowings and exchange, mutual help, cross-fertilization that leads sometimes to good strong hybrids but for the most part simply enriches the species in question and continues its vigor.

The motives that impel us toward world understanding may be several. Recently I was taxied by bomber to the Air Command and Staff College at the Maxwell Air Force Base outside Montgomery, Alabama, to lecture to a thousand selected officers on the religions of other peoples. I have never had students more eager to learn. What was their motivation? Individually I am sure it went beyond this in many cases, but as a unit they were concerned because someday they were likely to be dealing with the peoples they were studying as allies, antagonists, or subjects of military occupation. Under such circumstances it would be crucial for them to predict their behavior, conquer them if worse came to worst, and control them during the aftermath of reconstruction. This is one reason for coming to know people. It may be a necessary reason; certainly we