

**An Outline Review**  
**of**  
**Huston Smith's**  
**The World's Religions**  
**(Our Great Wisdom Traditions)**

**Introductions**

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**Introductions**

**Foreword**

"Not of my doing! It all came from Above."

**Preface to the Second Edition**

The Book's aim: "to carry intelligent laypeople into the heart of the world's great enduring faiths to the point where they might see, and even feel, why and how they guide and motivate the lives of those who live by them."

**Acknowledgments**

the chief support ... "a wife's help"

**Chapter I. Point of Departure**

There are God-seekers in every land. Does one faith carry the lead? We cannot know. All we can do is try to listen. Such listening, listening for well defined themes defines the purpose of this book.

## A. What this book is not:

1. This book is not a textbook in the history of religions.
2. Even in the realm of meanings the book does not attempt to give a rounded view of the religions considered.
3. This book is not a balanced account of its subject but of religion at its best. The empowering theological and metaphysical truths of the world's religions are, this book is prepared to argue, inspired. Religious institutions are another story. When religions are sifted for those truths, a different, cleaner side appears. They become the world's wisdom traditions.
4. This book is not a book on comparative religions in the sense of seeking to compare their worth.

## B. What this book is:

1. It is a book that seeks to embrace the world. We have come to the point in history where we must all struggle to be a citizen of the world. The only thing that is unqualifiedly good is extended vision, the enlargement of one's understanding of the ultimate nature of things.
  2. It is a book that takes religion seriously. Religion is at work on the things that matter most. Authentic religion has power to inspire life's deepest creative centers.
  3. This book makes a real effort to communicate. The author has tried not to lose sight of the relevance this material has for the problems that human beings face today.
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# An Outline Review

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## The World's Religions

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### Chapter II. Hinduism

Gandhi wrote: "Such power as I possess for working in the political field has derived from my experiments in the spiritual field." In that spiritual field, he went on to say, "truth is the sovereign principle, and the *Bhagavad-Gita* is the book *par excellence* for knowledge of Truth."

#### **Part One: Hinduism in terms of its practical import, focusing on practice**

##### A. You can have what you want - The Path of Desire

1. We begin by wanting pleasure. This is natural, but it too trivial to satisfy one's total nature.

2. The time comes when the individual's interest shift to the second major goal of life, which is worldly success with its three prongs of wealth, fame, and power. This too is a worthy goal but individuals whose development is not arrested will move through delighting in success and the senses to the point where their attractions have been largely outgrown.

3. Hinduism does not say that everyone in their present life

will find the Path of Desire wanting, but at some point in their reincarnations they will renounce the ego's claim to finality and transfer all allegiance to a religion of duty. This marks the first great step in religion.

4. But in the end all worldly rewards prove insufficient and in some reincarnation we turn to the Path of Renunciation. This is the moment Hinduism has been waiting for.

## B. What People Really Want - The Path of Renunciation - The Beyond Within:

Hinduism sees the mind's hidden continents as stretching to infinity. Infinite in being, infinite in awareness, there is nothing beyond them that remains unknown. Infinite in joy, too, for there is nothing alien to them to mar their beatitude.

What the realization of our total being is like can no more be described than can a sunset to one born blind: it must be experienced.

### 1. Four Paths to the Goal. - The realization of our total being:

Hinduism's specific directions for actualizing the human potential come under the heading of yoga.

What is distinctive in Hinduism is the amount of attention it has devoted to identifying basic spiritual personality types and the disciplines that are most likely to work for each.

The number of the basic spiritual personality types, by Hindu count, is four.

The first step on every yoga involves the cultivation of such habits as non injury, truthfulness, non stealing, self

control, contentment, self discipline, and a compelling desire to reach the goal.

The four Paths are:

a. The Way to God through Knowledge.

*Jnana yoga*, intended for spiritual aspirants who have a strong reflected bent, is the path to oneness with the Godhead through knowledge. Such knowledge has nothing to do with factual information; it is not encyclopedic. It is, rather, an intuitive discernment that transforms, turning the knower eventually into that which she knows.

The yoga of knowledge is said to be the shortest path to divine realization. It is also the steepest. Requiring as it does a rare combination of rationality and spirituality, it is for a select few.

b. The Way to God through Love.

*Bhakti yoga* has countless followers, being, indeed, the most popular of the four.

The basic principles of bhakti yoga are richly exemplified in Christianity. Indeed, from the Hindu Point of view, Christianity is one great brilliantly lit bhakti highway toward God.



### c. The Way to God through Work.

The third path toward God, intended for persons of active bent is *karma yoga*, the path to God through work.

To such people Hinduism's says, you don't have to retire to a cloister to realize God. You can find God in the world of everyday affairs as readily as anywhere. Throw yourself into your work with everything you have; but do so wisely, in a way that will bring the highest rewards, not just trivia.

### d. The Way to God through Psychophysical Exercises.

*Raja yoga* is designed for people who are of scientific bent. It is the way to god through psychophysical experiments.

Hinduism encourages people to test all four yogas and combined them as best suits their needs.

## 2. The Stages of Life.

The preceding sections traced Hinduism's insistence that differences in human nature call for a variety of paths toward life's fulfillment. Not only do individuals differ from one another each individual moves through different stages, each of which calls for its own appropriate

conduct. The stages are:

- a. That of the student
- b. Beginning with marriage, that of the householder
- c. Eventually decline leads to the third stage - retirement -the time to leave family and home and plunge into the forest solitudes to launch a program of self-discovery.
- d. Beyond retirement, the final stage wherein the goal is actually reached, the state of the *sannyasin* where "one neither hates nor loves anything"

### 3. The Stations of Life. - The caste system

What is called for here is recognition that with respect to the ways they can best contribute to society and develop their own potentialities, people fall into four groups; at the top being the *brahmins* (intellectual and spiritual leaders) down to *shudras* (followers or servants).

Caste has decayed and is as offensive as any other corrupted corpse.

## **Part Two: Hinduism focusing on theory, the principal philosophical concepts that rib the Hindu religion**

### A. "Thou Before Whom All Words Recoil." - The concept of God

Concepts of God contain so much alloy to begin with that two contradictory ones may be true, each from a different angle, as both wave and particles may be equally accurate heuristic devices for describing the nature of light.

On the whole India has been content to encourage the devotee of *Brahman* as either personal or transpersonal, depending on which carries the most exalted meaning for the mind in question.

## B. Coming of Age in the Universe. - Reincarnation

The process by which an individual soul (*jiva*) passes through a sequence of bodies is known as reincarnation or transmigration of the soul - Sanskrit *samsara*, a word that signifies endless passage through cycles of life, death, and rebirth.

On the subhuman level the passage is through a series of increasingly complex bodies until at last a human one is attained.

With the soul's graduation into a human body, this automatic escalator-like mode of ascent comes to an end. the soul has reached self-consciousness, and with this estate come freedom, responsibility, and effort.

Each thought and deed delivers an unseen chisel blow that sculpts one's destiny. Everybody gets exactly what is deserved.

Never during its pilgrimage is the human spirit completely adrift and alone. From start to finish its nucleus is the Atman, the God within, exerting pressure to "out" like a jack-in-the-box. Never seen but is the Witness; never heard but is the Hearer; never thought but is the Thinker; never known but is the Knower.

In the end it is God's radiating warmth that melts the soul's icecap, turning it into a pure capacity for God.

What happens then? Some say the individual soul passes into complete identification with God and loses every trace of its former separateness. Other that some slight differentiation between the soul and God will still remain - a thin line upon the ocean that provides nevertheless a remnant of personal identity that some consider indispensable for the beatific vision.

### C. The World Welcome and Farewell.

What kind of world do we have? Hinduism answers:

1. A multitude of worlds that includes innumerable galaxies horizontally, innumerable tiers vertically, innumerable cycles temporally.
2. A moral world in which the law of *karma* is never suspended.
3. A middling world that will never replace paradise as the spirits destination.
4. A world that is *maya*, deceptively tricky in passing off its multiplicity, materiality, and dualities as ultimate when they are actually provisional.
5. A training ground on which people can develop their highest capacities.
6. A world that is *lila*, the play of the divine in its cosmic dance - untiring, unending, resistless, yet ultimately beneficent with a grace born of infinite vitality.

### D. Many Paths to the Same Summit.

That Hinduism has shared her land for centuries with Jains,

Buddhists, Parsees, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians may help explain the final idea that comes out more clearly through her than through the other great religions; namely, her conviction that the various major religions are alternate paths to the same goal.

To claim salvation as the monopoly of any one religion is like claiming that God can be found in this room but not the next, in this attire but not another.

In practice India's sects have often been fanatically intolerant, but in principle most have been open.

### **Part Three: Appendix on Sikhism.**

Hindus are inclined to regard Sikhs as somewhat wayward members of their own extended family. Sikhs see their faith as having issued from an original divine revelation that inaugurated a new religion.

The revelation affirms the ultimacy of a supreme and formless God who is beyond human conceiving. It rejects the notion of divine incarnations, caste distinctions, images as aids to worship, and the sanctity of the Vedas. The Sikh revelations endorse the doctrine of reincarnation.

Sikhs seek salvation through union with God by realizing, through love, the Person of God, who dwells in depths of their own being. Union with God is the ultimate goal. Apart from God life has no meaning; it is separation from God that causes human suffering.

World renunciation does not figure in this faith. The Sikhs have no tradition of renunciation, asceticism, celibacy, or mendicancy.

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## **Chapter III. Buddhism**

### **Part One: Buddha the Man**

The Man Who Woke Up. - The Silent Sage.

Born around 563 B.C.

Heir to a throne, he deserted it at age twenty-nine.

Sensing that that a breakthrough was near, he seated himself one evening vowing not to arise until enlightenment was his. At morning his mind bubble of the universe and shattered it to naught, only, wonder of world miraculously restored with effulgence of true being.

Nearly half a century followed, during which the Buddha trudged the India preaching his ego-shattering, life-redeeming message.

### **Part Two: Buddhism the Religion**

A. The Rebel Saint.

Buddhism drew its lifeblood from Hinduism, but against its prevaili

Buddhism recoiled like a whiplash and hit back - hard.

Buddha preached a religion devoid of authority, devoid of ritual, a religion of speculation, devoid of tradition, a religion of intense self-effort, devoid of supernatural.

Original Buddhism can be characterized in the following terms:

empirical - experience was the final test of truth

scientific - quality of lived experience its final test

pragmatic - concerned with problem solving

therapeutic - "One thing I teach, suffering and the end of suffering.

psychological - begins with the human lot, its problems, and the way of coping with them

egalitarian - women as capable of enlightenment as men; rejected system's assumption that aptitudes were hereditary

directed to individuals - each should proceed toward enlightenment confronting his or her individual situation and predicaments

B. The Four Noble Truths. - the postulates from which the rest of his teaching derive

1. Life is suffering, is dislocated, something has gone wrong.

2. The cause - all forms of selfishness

Instead of linking our faith and love and destiny to the whole, we are strapping to puny burros of our separate selves, which are certain to give out eventually.



3. Since the cause of life's dislocation is selfish craving, its cure lies in overcoming of such craving.

4. The Fourth Noble Truth prescribes how the cure can be accomplished.

The way out of our captivity is through the Eightfold Path.

C. The Eightfold Path. - it is a treatment by training - by right association, associate with Truthwinners, converse with them, serve them, observe and imbibe by osmosis their spirit of love and compassion.

1. Right Views - The first step summons us to make up our minds as to what the problem basically is.

2. Right Intent - The second advises us to make up our hearts as to what we want.

3. Right Speech

first become aware of our speech

second move toward charity

4. Right Conduct

understand one's actions

change to the direction of selflessness and charity

do not drink intoxicants

5. Right Livelihood - For the lay person, Buddhism calls for engagements that promote life instead of destroying it.

6. Right Effort - A low level of volition, a mere wish not accompanied by action to obtain it - won't do.

## 7. Right Mindfulness

This seventh step summons the seeker to steady awareness of everything taken, and every content that turns up in one's stream of consciousness.

Special times should be allotted for undistracted introspection.

## 8. Right Concentration

This involves substantially the techniques of Hinduism's raja yoga substantially the same goal.

The final climactic state is the state in which the human mind is completely absorbed in God.

## D. Basic Buddhist Concepts. - Certain key notions in the Buddha's outlook

1. *nirvana* - Life's goal - boundless life
2. *anatta* - The human self has no soul
3. *karma* - One's acts considered as fixing one's lot in the future existence
4. *anicca* - impermanence, everything finite is transitory
5. *Arhat* - a Buddhist who has reached the stage of enlightenment

Do human beings survive bodily death? - his answer is equivocal

## E. Big Raft and Little. - Two main Paths in Buddhism

Buddhism divided over three questions: are people independent or interdependent, is the universe friendly or hostile toward creatures, and what is the best part of the self, its head or its heart.

One group says "Be lamps unto your selves, work out your salvation

For the other group, human beings are more social than individual, a greatest thing in the world.

The division into the two main paths is schematized as follows:

THERAVADA	MAHAYA
Human beings are emancipated by self-effort, with out supernatural aid.	Human aspirations are supported by supernatural powers and the grace they receive.
Key virtue: wisdom	Key virtue: compassion
Attainment requires constant commitment, and is primarily for monks and nuns.	Religious practice is relevant to the secular world, and therefore to lay people.
Ideal: the <i>Arhat</i> who remains in <i>nirvana</i> after death	Ideal: the <i>bodhisattva</i>
Buddha a saint, supreme teacher, and inspirer.	Buddha a savior
Minimizes metaphysics	Elaborates metaphysics
Minimizes ritual	Emphasizes ritual
Practice centers on meditation	Includes petitionary prayer

After Buddhism split into Theravada and Mahayana, Theravada continued as a unified tradition, whereas Mahayana divided into a number of different schools. The two with the most influence in western society, Zen and Tibetan Buddhism are discussed next.

#### F. The Secret of the Flower. - Zen Buddhism

Buddhism that Taoism profoundly influenced, *Ch'an* (*Zen* in Japan)

It makes breaking the language barrier its central concern.

Strains by every means to blast their novices out of solutions that are

Zen masters are determined that their students attain the experience in  
talk to take its place.

By paradox and non sequitur Zen provokes, excites, exasperates, and  
exhausts the mind until until it sees that thinking is never more than the  
feeling more than feeling *for*.

It counts on a flash of sudden insight to bridge the gap between second  
firsthand life.

Zen's object is to infuse the temporal *with* the eternal.

A condition in which life seems distinctly good

Also comes an objective outlook on one's relation to others.

The life of Zen does not draw one away from the world; it turns one

An attitude of generalized agreeableness

Even the dichotomy between life and death disappears.

## G. The Diamond Thunderbolt. - Tibetan Buddhism

The Tibetans say that their religion is nowise distinctive in its goal.  
their practice is that it enables one to reach *nervana* in a single lifetime  
the speed-up is effected by utilizing all the energies latent in the humors  
of the body emphatically included, and impressing them *all* into the  
spiritual quest.

The energy that interests the West most is sex, but the physical energies  
regularly work with are the ones that are involved with speech, vision

Tibetan Buddhism distinctiveness also includes a unique institution -

The Dalai Lama is a receiving station toward which the compassion Buddhism in all its cosmic amplitude is continuously channeled, to the Tibetan people most directly, but by extension to all sentient beings.

## H. The Image of the Crossing.

Do the various Paths of Buddhism deserve to be considered aspects of a single religion?

Yes, in two ways:

(1.) They all revere a single founder from whom they claim their teaching.

(2.) All can be subsumed under a single metaphor - the image of the

Buddhism is a voyage across life's river, a transport from the near shore of ignorance, grasping, and death, to the further bank of wisdom and enlightenment.

Before the river was crossed the two shores, human and divine, were distinct from each other, different as life and death, as day and night. After crossing has been made, no dichotomy remains. The realm of the former is a distinct place. It is where the traveler stands; and if that stance changes, this world, the world itself is transmuted.

## **Part Three: The Confluence of Buddhism and Hinduism in India.**

Today Buddhists abound in every Asian land except India, the land of their birth.

The deeper fact is that in India Buddhism was not so much defeated but accommodated within it.

Its contributions, accepted by Hindus in principle if not always practiced, renewed emphasis on kindness to all living things, on non-killing of an animal, on the elimination of caste barriers in matters religious and their reduction in their ethical emphasis generally.



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## **Chapter IV. Confucianism**

### **Part One: The First Teacher.**

Born around 551 B.C.

Prompted as if by call - "At fifty I perceived the divine mission" - he gave his next thirteen years, with many a backward look and resisting footsteps, to "the long trek," in which he wandered from state to state proffering unsolicited advice to rulers on how to improve their governing and seeking a real opportunity to put his ideas into practice. The opportunity never came.

Only a small band of faithful disciples stood by him through rebuff, discouragement, and near starvation.

He spent his last five years quietly teaching and editing the classics of China's past. In 479 B.C., at the age of seventy-two he died.

With his death began his glorification. Within a few generations he was regarded throughout China as "the mentor and model of ten thousand generations."

## **Part Two: The Problem Confucius Faced.**

By Confucius' time interminable warfare had degenerated from chivalry toward the unrestrained horror of the Period of the Warring States.

The old mortar that had held society together was chipping and flaking. Unreflective solidarity was a thing of the past.

## **Part Three: Rival Answers.**

As the alternative to tradition, the United States has proposed reason. Educate citizens and inform them, and they can be counted on to behave sensibly - this is the Jeffersonian-Enlightenment faith on which the United States was founded. It has not been fulfilled. Until recently the world's leader in education, the United States leads likewise in crime, delinquency, and divorce.

One option that ancient China proposed was put forward by the Realists. What do you do when people don't behave? Hit them. The Realists' philosophy of social order proceeded by way of an elaborate mechanism of "penalties and rewards".

A social philosophy as different from the Realists' as fire from ice existed alongside it in Confucius' China. Known as Mohism, it proposed as the solution to China's social problem not force but love - universal love. One should "feel toward all people under heaven exactly as one feels toward one's own people, and regard other states exactly as one regards one's own state."

Neither of these rival answers to the problem of social cohesion impressed Confucius. He rejected the Realists' answer of force because it was clumsy and external. As for the Mohists' reliance on love, Confucius agreed with the Realists in dismissing it as utopian. The West's current approach to the social problem -



through the cultivation of reason - probably did not occur to Confucius. If it had he would have dismissed it as not thought through.

## **Part Four: Confucius' Answer.- Deliberate Tradition**

Confucius was all but obsessed with tradition, he saw it as the chief shaper of inclinations and attitudes.

Spontaneous tradition- tradition that had emerged without conscious intent had ruled villages without dissent but could no longer be counted on.

The most appropriate solution must be continuous with the past and at the same time must take a clear-eyed account of developments that rendered the old answer unworkable.

The shift from spontaneous to deliberate tradition requires a power of suggestion that can prompt society's members to behave socially even when the law is not looking. The technique pivots around "patterns of prestige."

The interminable anecdotes and maxims of Confucius' *Analects* were designed to create the prototype of what the Chinese hoped the Chinese character would become.

### **A. The Content of Deliberate Tradition.**

Deliberate tradition requires attention first to maintain its force and second attention to the content of that education. The character of the social life Confucius intended to engender can be gathered under five key terms:

#### **1. *Jen*.-**

The ideal relationship that should pertain between people

Involves simultaneously a feeling of humanity toward others and respect for oneself

Expressed in courtesy, unselfishness, and empathy

"Do not do unto others what you would not want others to do unto you."

2. *Chun tzu* - The mature person

Opposite of a petty person, a mean person, a small-spirited person

Armed with self-respect that generates respect for others

Speech free of coarseness and vulgarity

Person who is entirely real

3. *Li* - Has two meanings:

a. Propriety, the way things should be done - Confucius taught this mainly by:

**the Rectification of Names** - the creation of a language in which key nouns carry the meaning they should carry if life is to be well ordered.

**the Doctrine of the Mean** - the way that is "constantly in the middle" between unworkable extremes

**the Five constant Relationships** - those between parent and child, husband and wife, elder and junior sibling, elder friend and junior friend, and ruler and subject -It is vital to the health of society that these key relationships be rightly constituted.

**the Family** - "The duty of children to their parents is the fountain from which all virtues spring.

**Age** - Confucius saw age as deserving veneration by reason of its intrinsic worth.

b. Ritual - When right behavior is detailed to Confucian lengths, the individual's entire life becomes stylized in a sacred dance, leaving little need for improvisation.

#### 4. *Te* - the power by which men are ruled

No state, Confucius was convinced, can constrain all its citizens all the time, nor even any large fraction of them a large part of the time. It must rely on acceptance of its will, an appreciable confidence in what it is doing.

This spontaneous consent arises only when people sense their leaders to be people of capacity, sincerely devoted to the common good and possessed of the kind of character that compels respect.

For the process to work, however, rulers must have no personal ambition. Only those are worthy to

govern who would rather be excused.

5. *Wen* - The arts of peace as contrasted to the arts of war

Music, art, poetry, the sum of culture in its aesthetic and spiritual mode

Ultimately, victory goes to the state that develops the highest *wen*, the most exalted culture - the state that has the finest art, the noblest philosophy, the grandest poetry.

B. The Confucian Project. - how life would appear to a Chinese set within it

As a never-ending project of self-cultivation toward the end of becoming more fully human

Apart from human relationships there is no self. The self is a center of relationships. It is constructed through its interactions with others and is defined by the sum of its social roles.

A notion very different from Western individualism - the human self as a node, not an entity.

Ascent means becoming a fully realized human being through expanding one's sympathy and empathy indefinitely.

The expansion is in concentric circles that begins with oneself and spreads from there to include successively one's family, one's face-to-face community, one's nation, and finally all humanity.

In shifting the center of one's empathic concern from

oneself to one's family one transcends selfishness. The move from family to community transcends nepotism. The move from community to nation overcomes parochialism, and the move to all humanity counters chauvinistic nationalism.

Inside and outside work together in the Confucian scheme.

Always the practice field is the Five Constant Relationships. Mastering a role in one of the five sheds light on the other roles. To improve as a parent throws light on what being a good child (of one's own parents) entails. The nuances of the other roles likewise illuminate one another.

### C. Ethics or Religion?

If religion is taken in its widest sense, as a way of life woven around a people's ultimate concerns, Confucianism clearly qualifies. Even if religion is taken in a narrower sense, as a concern to align humanity with the transcendental ground of its existence, Confucianism is still a religion.

To understand the total dimension of Confucianism as a religion it is important to see Confucius shifting his people's attention from Heaven to Earth without dropping Heaven from the picture entirely.

The Confucian project of becoming fully human involves transcending, sequentially, egoism, nepotism, parochialism, ethnocentrism, and chauvinistic nationalism and (we now add) isolating self-sufficient humanism.

## D. Impact on China.

For over two thousand years Confucius' teachings have profoundly affected a quarter of the population of this globe. Confucian values merged with the generic values of the Chinese people to the point where it is difficult to separate the two.

The features mentioned below pretty much blanket East Asia as a whole, for Japan, Korea, and much of Southeast Asia deliberately imported Confucian ethic.

1. Confucius' social emphasis produced, in the Chinese, a conspicuous social effectiveness - a capacity to get things done in a large scale when need arose.
2. Unique among the world's civilizations, China syncretized her religions. Traditionally, every Chinese was Confucian in ethics and public life, Taoist in private life and hygiene, and Buddhist at the time of death, with a healthy dash of shamanistic folk religion thrown in along the way.
3. The importance of the family in China - Strong family bonds can smother, but they also bring benefits, and these work for East Asians right down to the present.
4. East Asian respect for age borders on veneration.
5. Confucius' Doctrine of the Mean continues to this day in the Chinese preference for negotiation, mediation, and the "middle man" as against resorting to rigid, impersonal statutes.
6. China honors Confucius' conviction that learning and

the arts are not mere veneer but are powers that transform societies and the human heart.

7. The East Asian economic miracle of the last forty years, shaped by the Confucian ethic, constitutes the dynamic center of economic growth in the latter twentieth century.

8. The courtesy for which Orientals have been famous echoes the Confucian spirit.

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## **Chapter V. Taoism**

No civilization is monochrome. In China the classical tones of Confucianism have been balanced by the spiritual shades of Buddhism but also by the romantic hues of Taoism

### **Part One: The Old Master. - Lao Tzu**

Taoism, according to tradition originated with a man named Lao Tzu.

A shadowy figure, born about 604 B. C.

Before his retirement from society, he left a slim volume of five thousand characters titled *Tao Te Ching*, or *The Way and Its Power*.

A testament to humanity's at home-ness in the universe, it can be read in half an hour or a lifetime, and remains to this day the basic text of Taoist thought.

He didn't preach he didn't organize or promote, he wrote a few pages on request, rode off on a water buffalo, and that was it as far



as he was concerned.

## Part Two: The Religion He Founded - Taoism

A. The Three Meanings of *Tao*. - Literally, this word means path or way.

1. The *way of ultimate reality* - This *Tao* cannot be perceived or even clearly conceived, for it is too vast for human rationality to fathom.

2. It is also immanent. - In this secondary sense it is the *way of the universe*, the norm, the rhythm, the driving power in all nature, the ordering principle behind all life.

3. In its third sense *Tao* refers to the *way of human life* when it meshes with the *Tao* of the universe as just described. Most of what follows in this chapter will detail what the Taoists propose that this way of life should be.

First, however, it is necessary to point out that there have been in China not one but three Taoisms.

B. Three Approaches to Power and the *Taoisms* That Follow. - *Tao Te Ching*, the title of Taoism's basic text, has been translated **The Way** and its **Power**. Just as the first term **Way** can be taken in three senses, so can the second term **Power**.

Corresponding to the three ways *Te* or power and be approached, there have arisen in China three species of Taoism so dissimilar that initially they seem to have no more in common than homonyms like blew/blue or sun/son, that sound alike but have different meanings. We shall find that this is not the case.

All were engaged in vitalizing programs that were intended to

facilitate Tao's power, its *te*, as it flows through human beings.

## 1. Efficient Power: Philosophical Taoism.

Philosophical Taoists try to conserve their *te* by expanding it efficiently, whereas the other two "vitality" Taoists work to increase its supply.

It is essentially an attitude toward life, it is the most "exportable" Taoism of the three, the one that has the most to say to the world at large.

## 2. Augmented Power: Taoist Hygiene and Yoga.

These Taoists want to go beyond conserving to increasing the quota of the Tao they had to work with.

They worked with three things: matter, movement, and their minds.

They tried eating virtually everything to see if *ch'i* could be augmented nutritionally.

They sought to draw *ch'i* from the atmosphere by breathing exercises.

They used programs of bodily movement such as *t'ai chi chuan*, which gathers calisthenics, dance, meditation, *yin/yang* philosophy, martial arts, and acupuncture into synthesis that was designed to draw *ch'i* from the cosmos and dislodge blocks to its internal flow.

Taoist meditation, (the physical postures and concentration techniques are reminiscent of Indian *reja yoga*), was designed to reach realization with which comes truth, joy, and power.

The Taoist yogis recognized that they could not hope for much understanding from the masses, and they made no attempt to publicize their position.

### 3. Vicarious Power: Religious Taoism.

Reflection and health programs take time, and the average Chinese lacked that commodity. Yet they too needed help.

Taoists responded to such problems. Using the unchanging landscape of Chinese folk religion, Religious Taoism institutionalized such activities.

Popular, Religious Taoism is a murky affair. Much of it looks - from the outside, we must always keep in mind - like crude superstition; but we must remember that we have little idea what energy is, how it proceeds, or the means by which (and extent to which) it can be augmented.

It was under the rubric of magic as traditionally conceived that the Taoist church - dividing the territory with freelance wizards, exorcists, and shamans - devised way to harness higher powers for humane ends.

### C. The Mingling of the Powers.

In the interest of clarity, the lines between the above three divisions have been drawn too sharply. No solid walls separate them; the three are better regarded as currents in a common river.

Where these three things come together there is a "school", and in China the school this chapter describes is Taoism.

## D. Creative Quietude. - The object of Philosophical Taoism

The object of Philosophical Taoism is to align one's daily life to the *Tao*, to ride its boundless tide and delight in its flow.

The basic way to do this is to perfect a life of *wu wei*.

Creative quietude combines within a single individual two seemingly incompatible conditions - supreme activity and supreme relaxation. This happens when our private egos and conscious efforts yield to a power not their own.

Effectiveness of this order obviously requires an extraordinary skill.

Clarity can come to the inner eye only insofar as life attains a quiet that equals that of a deep and silent pool.

## E. Other Taoist Values.

The Taoists rejected all forms of self-assertiveness and competition.

People should avoid being strident and aggressive not only toward other people but also toward nature.

This Taoist approach to nature deeply affected Chinese art.

Pomp and extravagance were regarded as silly.

It was this preference for naturalness and simplicity that most separated the Taoist from the Confucian.

All formalism, show and ceremony left them cold. What could be hoped for from punctiliousness or the meticulous observance of propriety?

Another feature of Taoism is its notion of the relativity of all values and, as its correlative, the identity of opposites. Here Taoism tied in with the traditional Chinese *yin/yang* symbol.

This polarity sums up all life's basic oppositions: good/evil, active/passive, positive/negative/negative, light/dark, summer/winter, male/female. But though the halves are in tension, they are not flatly opposed; they complement and balance each other. Each invades the other's hemisphere and takes up its abode in the deepest recess of its partner's domain. In the end both find themselves resolved by the circle that surrounds them.

In the Taoist perspective even good and evil are not head-on opposites.

If this all sounds very much like Zen, it should; for Buddhism processed through Taoism became Zen.

That in China the scholar ranked at the top of the social scale may have been Confucius' doing, but Taoism is fully as responsible for placing the soldier at the bottom. "The way for a vital person to go is not the way of a soldier."

### **Part Three - Conclusion.**

Circling around each other like yin and yang themselves, Taoism and Confucianism represent the two indigenous poles of the Chinese character. Confucius represents the classical, Lao Tzu the romantic. Confucius stresses social responsibility, Lao Tzu praises spontaneity and naturalness. Confucius' focus is on the human, Lao Tzu's on what transcends the human.

Confucius roams within society, Lao Tzu wanders beyond. Something in life reaches out in each of these directions, and

Chinese civilization would certainly have been poorer if either had not appeared.

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# **An Outline Review**

## **of**

### Huston Smith's

# **The World's Religions**

(Our Great Wisdom Traditions)

## **Chapter VI. Islam**

Named after the attribute it seeks to cultivate, life's total surrender to God

### **Part One: Background.**

If asked how their religion came into being, the Muslims' answer is Islam begins not with Muhammad in the sixth-century Arabia, but with God. "In the beginning God ....." the book of Genesis tells us. The Koran agrees.

Like the Jews, the Arabs consider themselves a Semitic people. The descendants of Shem led to Abraham. Abraham married Sarah. Sarah had no son, so Abraham, wanting to continue his line, took Hagar for his second wife. Hagar bore him a son, Ishmael, whereupon Sarah conceived and likewise had a son, named Isaac.

Here we come to the first divergence between the koranic and biblical accounts. According to the Koran, Ishmael went to the place where Mecca was to rise. His descendents, flourishing in Arabia, become Muslims; whereas those of Isaac, who remained in Palestine, were Hebrews and became Jews.

## Part Two: The Religion

### A. The Seal of the Prophets. - Muhammad

Following Ismael's line in Arabia, we come in the latter half of the sixth century A.D. to Muhammad, the prophet through whom Islam reached its definitive form.

Muslims believe there had been authentic prophets of God before him, but he was their culmination; hence he is called "The Seal of the Prophets." No valid prophets will follow him.

He was born approximately A.D. 570.

Peering into the mysteries of good and evil, " great fiery heart, seething, simmering like a great furnace of thought," was reaching out for God.

The desert jinn were irrelevant to this quest, but one deity was not. Named Allah, He was what his name literally claimed: He was the God, One and only, One without rival.

Around 610, this prophet received his commission. It was the same command that had fallen earlier on Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, and Jesus. There came to him an angel in the form of a man. The angel said to his: "Proclaim!"

Muhammad's life was no more his own. From that time forth it was given to God and to humanity, preaching with unswerving purpose in face of relentless persecution, insult, and outrage, the words that God was to transmit for twenty-three years. These words became the Koran.

Muhammad claimed only one miracle, that of the Koran itself. (The content of the revelation, the Koran will be describe in



section C, below.)

At first he made few converts, by the end of a decade, only several hundred families were acclaiming him as God's authentic spokesman.

## B. The Migration That Led to Victory.

Muhammad was suddenly waited on by a delegation of the leading citizens of Yathrib, a city 280 miles to Mecca's north. They wished him to move his ministry to their city.

Muhammad received a sign from God to accept the charge. The year was 622. The migration, known in Arabic as the *Hijra*, is regarded by Muslims as the turning point in world history. Yathrib soon came to be known as Medina, "the city."

Muhammad died in A.D. 632 with virtually all of Arabia under his control and laid the basis of an empire that was soon to embrace within its far-flung boundaries the fairest provinces of the then civilized world.

## C. The Standing Miracle. - the Koran

The blend of admiration, respect, and affection that the Muslim feels for Muhammad is an impressive fact of history. Even so, they never mistake him for the earthly center of their faith. That place is reserved for the bible of Islam, the Koran.

So great was Muhammad's regard for its contents that he considered it the only major miracle God worked through him - God's "standing miracle," as he called it.

The words of the Koran came to Muhammad in manageable segments over twenty-three years through voices that seemed at first to vary and sometimes sounded like "reverberating

bells," but which gradually condensed into a single voice that identified itself as Gabriel's.

The Koran continues the Old and New Testament, God's earlier revelations, and presents itself as their culmination: "We made a covenant of old with the Children of Israel (and you have nothing of guidance until you observe the Torah and the Gospel". This entitles Jews and Christians to be included with Muslims as "People of the Book."

However the Koran claims final and infallible revelation of God's will. "This is the Scripture whereof there is no doubt."

In the Koran God speaks in the first person. Allah describes himself and makes known his laws. The Muslim is therefore inclined to consider each individual sentence of the Holy Book as a separate revelation and to experience of the words themselves, even their sounds, as a means of grace. "It is not about the truth; it is the truth."

By contrast the Jewish and Christian Bibles seem more distant from God for placing religious meaning in reports of events instead of God's direct pronouncements.

#### D. Teachings of the Koran

1. Basic Theological Concepts.- the basic theological concepts of Islam are virtually identical with those of Judaism and Christianity, its forerunners. The four that are most important are:

##### a. God

The Koran's innovation was to remove idols from the religious scene and focus the divine in a single

God for everyone. Judaism removed idols but its teachings were confined to the people of Israel. Christians, for their part, compromised their monotheism by deifying Christ.

The Koran depicts God's nature as awesome, of infinite power, of great mercy.

## b. Creation

The world is presented as created by a deliberate act of Allah's will; as the handiwork of a perfect God, the material world must likewise be good.

## c. The Human Self - Foremost among God's creations

As koranically defined, this creation is soundly constituted. The closest Islam comes to the Christian doctrine of original sin is in its concept of *ghaflah*, or forgetting. People do forget their divine origin, and this mistake needs repeatedly to be corrected.

With life acknowledged as a gift from its Creator comes two obligations:

Gratitude for the life that has been received

Surrender or commitment in which nothing is withheld from the Divine

Two more features of the human self are:

Its individuality - its uniqueness and the responsibility that devolves on it alone; never is its distinctness more acutely sensed than on the Day of Judgment.

The issue of the soul's freedom - Whoever gets to himself a sin, gets it solely on his own responsibility.

#### d. The Day of Judgment

It is the tearing away of all illusions of security that characterizes the doctrine of the Last Judgment and its anticipation in the Koran. Depending on how it fares in its Reckoning, the soul will repair to either the heavens or the hells.

God, Creation, the Human Self, and the Day of Judgment - these are the chief theological pegs on which the Koran's teachings hang. In spite of their importance, however, the Koran is "a book which emphasizes deed rather than idea". The next two sections turn to these deeds.

### 2. The Five Pillars.- The principles that regulate the private life of Muslims in their dealings with God.

a. Islam's creed, or confession of faith known as the *Shahadah*. "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Prophet."

b. The canonical prayer, in which the Koran adjures the faithful to "be constant".

Muslims are admonished to be constant in prayer to keep their lives in perspective. There are five stipulated prayer times: on arising, when the sun reaches its zenith, its mid-decline, sunset, and before retiring.

As for prayer's content, its standard themes are praise, gratitude, and supplication.

c. The third pillar of Islam is charity. Those who have much should help lift the burden of those who are less fortunate.

d. The fourth pillar of Islam is the observance of Ramadan, a month of fasting.

e. Islam's fifth pillar is pilgrimage. Once during his or her lifetime every Muslim who is physically and economically in a position to do so is expected to journey to Mecca, where God's climactic revelation was first disclosed.

The Five Pillars of Islam consist of things Muslims do to keep the house of Islam erect. There are also things they should not do. Gambling, thieving, lying, eating pork, drinking intoxicants, and being sexually promiscuous are some of these.

### 3. Social Teachings.

Before Muhammad there was virtually no restraint on internal violence. Glaring inequities in wealth and possession were accepted as the natural order of things. Women were regarded more as possessions than as human beings. Drunkenness and large-scale gambling was widespread. Thanks to Islamic law, within a half-century there was effected a remarkable change in the moral climate on all of these counts.

Islamic law is of enormous scope. Its provisions are here summarized in four areas of collective life:

## a. Economics

Society's health requires that material goods be widely and appropriately distributed. These are the basic principles of Islamic economics. It simply insists that acquisitiveness and competition be balanced by fair play and by compassion for the poor.

b. The Status of Women - The koranic reforms improved woman's status incalculably.

c. Race Relations - Islam stresses racial equality and has achieved a remarkable degree of interracial coexistence.

## d. The Use of Force

Far from requiring the Muslim to turn himself into a doormat for the ruthless, the Koran allows punishment of wonton wrongdoers to the full extent of the injury they impart. The Koran does not counsel turning the other cheek, or pacifism.

Muhammad incorporated into his charter for Medina the principle of religious toleration. Islam's record on the use of force is no darker than that of Christianity.

Muslims deny that the blots in their record should be charged against their religion whose presiding ideal they affirm in their standard greeting, *as-salami 'alaykum* ("Peace be upon you").

## **Part Three: Sufism.**

Islam is not monolithic, like every religious tradition it divides. Its

main historical division is between the mainstream Sunnis and the Shi'ites which turns on an in-house dispute. Here we take up instead a division that has universal overtones. It is the vertical division between the mystics of Islam, called Sufis and the remaining majority of the faith, who are equally good Muslims but are not mystics.

It stands to reason that not many Muslims will have the time, or the inclination, to do more than keep up with the Divine Law that orders their lives. Their fidelity is not in vain; in the end their reward will be as great as the Sufis'. But the Sufis were impatient for their reward, if we may put the matter thus. They wanted to encounter God directly in this very lifetime. Now.

This called for special methods. They developed three overlapping but distinguishing routes, the mysticisms of love, of ecstasy, and of intuition.

A. The mysticism of love - Sufi love poetry is world famous. Persian poets in particular dwelt on the pangs of separation to deepen their love of God and thereby draw close to him.

B. The mysticism of ecstasy

The approach to the divine presence that turns on experiences that differ, not just in degree but in kind, from usual ones

The content of what ecstatic Sufis experience engrosses them so completely that their states become trancelike because of their total abstraction from self.

Deliberate inducement of such states required practice.

C. The mysticism of intuition

Love mysticism yields "heart knowledge", and ecstasy "visual

or visionary knowledge" because extraterrestrial realities are seen.

Intuitive mysticism brings "mental knowledge" obtained through an organ of discernment called "the eye of the heart."

To the eye of the heart, the world is God-in-disguise, God veiled.

The principal method the Sufis employed for penetrating the disguise is symbolism. In using visible objects to speak of invisible things, symbolism is the language of religion generally; it is to religion what numbers are to science.

Symbolism, though powerful, works somewhat abstractly, so the Sufis supplement it with *dhikr* (to remember), the practice of remembering Allah through repeating his Name.

On the whole, esoterism and exoterism have achieved a healthy balance in Islam.

#### **Part Four: Whither Islam?**

For long periods since Muhammad called his people to God's oneness, Muslims have wandered from the spirit of the Prophet.

But having thrown off the colonial yoke, Islam is stirring with some of the vigor of its former youth.

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**An Outline Review**  
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Huston Smith's  
**The World's Religions**  
(Our Great Wisdom Traditions)  
**Chapter VII. Judaism**

**Part One: Their Passion for Meaning**

One-third of our Western civilization bears the mark of its Jewish ancestry. What lifted the Jews from obscurity to permanent religious greatness was their passion for meaning.

A. Meaning in God.

From a very early date, possibly from the very beginning of the biblical record, the Jews were monotheists.

The supreme achievement of Jewish thought was not in its monotheism as such, but in the character it ascribed to the God it intuited as One. God is a God of righteousness, whose loving-kindness is from everlasting to everlasting and whose tender mercies are in all his works.

B. Meaning in Creation.

Judaism affirms the world's goodness, arriving at that conclusion through its assumption that God created it. "In the

beginning God created the heavens and the earth" and pronounced it to be good.

To affirm that existence is God-created is to affirm its unimpeachable worth.

The Semantically originated religions emerge as exceptional in insisting that human beings are ineradicably body as well as spirit and that this coupling is not a liability.

### C. Meaning in Human Existence.

The striking feature of the Jewish view of human nature is that without blinking at its frailty, it went on to affirm its unspeakable grandeur. We are a blend of dust and divinity.

Human beings, once created, make or break themselves, forging their own destinies through their decisions.

People are God's beloved children.

The ingredients of the most creatively meaningful image of human existence that the mind can conceive - grandeur, sin, freedom, divine parentage; it is difficult to find a flaw in this assessment.

### D Meaning in History.

1. For the Bible, history is neither Hinduism *maya*, illusion or a Greek circular process of nature; it is the arena of God's purposive activity.

2. Second, if contexts are crucial for life, so is collective action; social action.

3. Third, nothing in history happens accidentally; God shapes

each sequence as a teaching experience for his people.

4. Finally, all events are important but not equally important. Each opportunity is unique, but some are decisive. For India, human destiny lies outside history altogether. Judaism, by contrast laid the groundwork for social protest. It is in the lands influenced by the Jewish historical perspective that the chief thrusts for social betterment have occurred.

#### E. Meaning in Morality.

Without moral constraints, human relations would become as snarled as traffic in the Chicago loop if everyone drove at will. The Jewish formulation of "those wise restraints that make men free" is contained in her Law. The Hebrew Bible contains no less than 613 commandments that regulate human behavior. Four of these will suffice for our purposes: the four ethical precepts of the Ten Commandments, for it is through these that Hebraic morality has had its greatest impact.

Appropriated by Christianity and Islam, four of the Ten Commandments constitute the moral foundation of most of the Western world. There are four danger zones in human life that can cause unlimited trouble if they get out of hand:

1. Force - You can bicker and fight, but killing within the in-group will not be permitted, for it instigates blood feuds that shred community. Therefore *thou shalt not murder*.

2. Wealth - As for possessions, you may make your pile as large as you please and be shrewd and cunning in enterprise. One thing, though, you may not do, and that is pilfer directly off someone else's pile, for this outrages the sense of fair play and builds animosities that become ungovernable. Therefore *thou shalt not steal*.

3. Sex - You can be a rounder, flirtatious, even promiscuous, and though we do not comment such behavior, we will not get the law after you. But at one point we draw the line: Sexual indulgence of married persons outside the nuptial bond will not be allowed, for it rouses passions the community cannot tolerate. Therefore *thou shalt not commit adultery*.

4. Speech - You may dissemble and equivocate, but there is one time when we require that you tell the truth, and nothing but the truth. If a dispute reaches such proportions as to be brought before a tribunal, on such occasions the judges must know what happened. If you lie then, while under oath to tell the truth, the penalty will be severe. *Thou shalt not bear false witness*.

#### F. Meaning in Justice.

It is to a remarkable group of men we call the prophets more than to any others that Western civilization owes its convictions (1) that the future of any people depends in large part on the justice of its social order, and (2) that individuals are responsible for the social structures of their society as well as for their direct personal dealings.

Whereas the Pre-Writing Prophets Such as Elijah and Elisha challenged individuals the Writing Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah challenged corruptions in the social order and oppressive institutions.

Thanks to the Prophets, what other nations would have interpreted as simply a power squeeze, the Jews saw as God's warning to clean up their national life: establish justice throughout the land, or be destroyed.

Stated abstractly, the Prophetic Principle can be put as

follows: The prerequisite of political stability is social justice, for it is in the nature of things that injustice will not endure.

Stated theologically the point reads: God has high standards. God will not put up forever with exploitation, corruption, and mediocrity.

One thing is common to all the Jewish prophets: the conviction that every human being, simply by virtue of his or her humanity, is a child of God and therefore in possession of rights that even kings must respect. Wealth and splendor count for nothing compared with purity, justice, and mercy.

#### G. Meaning in Suffering.

From the eighth to the sixth centuries B. C., during which Israel and Judah tottered before the aggressive power of Syria, Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon, the prophets found meaning in their predicament by seeing it as God's way of underscoring the demand for righteousness.

God was using Israel's enemies against her. The experience of defeat and exile was teaching the Jews the true worth of freedom.

Another lesson was that those who remain faithful in adversity will be vindicated.

Stated abstractly, the deepest meaning the Jews found in their Exile was the meaning of vicarious suffering: meaning that enters lives that are willing to endure pain that others might be spared it. "*the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*"

#### H. Meaning in Messianism.

## **Part Two: The Hallowing of Life. - Jewish ceremonies and observances**

The West, influenced by the Greek partiality for abstract reason, emphasizes theology and creed, the East has approached religion through ritual and narrative.

Ritual plays a part in life that nothing else can fill. In Judaism it aims to hallow life - ideally, all life.

The name for the right approach to life and the world is piety. The secret of piety consists in seeing the entire world as belonging to God and reflecting God's glory.

The Jews preserve this sense of the sanctity of all things through tradition. Judaism the most historically minded of all religions finds holiness and history inseparable.

The basic manual for the hallowing of life is the Law, the first five books of the Bible.

## **Part Three: Revelation.**

The Jews in their interpretation of the major areas of human experience arrived at a more profound grasp of meaning than any of their Mediterranean neighbors; a grasp that in its essentials has not been surpassed.

The Jew's say they did not reach these insight on their own. They were revealed to them.

For the Jews God revealed himself first and foremost in actions - not words but deeds. It was through miracles, divine intervention.

God took the imitative.

The God that the Exodus disclosed was powerful and a God of goodness and love. A God who was intensely concerned with human affairs. It followed that God would want people to be good as well.

Finally, suffering must carry significance because it was unthinkable that a God who had miraculously saved his people would ever abandon them completely. All this took shape for the Jews around the idea of the covenant.

Yahweh would continue to bless the Israelites if they, for their part, would honor the laws they had been given.

#### **Part Four :The Chosen People.**

The idea that a universal god decided that the divine nature should be uniquely and incomparably disclosed to a single people is among the most difficult notions to take seriously in the entire study of religion.

The Jews did not see themselves as singled out for privileges. They were chosen to serve, and to suffer the trials that service would often exact.

Isaiah's doctrine of vicarious suffering meant that the Jews were elected to shoulder a suffering that would otherwise have been distributed more widely.

It is the doctrine that God's doings can focus like a burning glass on particular times, places, and peoples - in the interest, to be sure, of intentions that embrace human beings universally.

#### **Part Five: Israel.**

Judaism cannot be reduced to its biblical period. In 70 A.D. the

Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and the focus of Judaism shifted to Rabbinic Judaism - from the sacrificial rite of the Temple to the study of the Torah and its accompanying Oral Tradition in academies and synagogues around the world.

Today, almost two thousand years later, there are four great sectors of Judaism that still constitute its spiritual anatomy - faith, observance, culture, and nation.

The reasons for the establishment of the modern of Israel in 1948 present complex problems. Without presuming to answer these problems, we can appreciate the burdens they place on the conscience of this exceptionally conscientious people.

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# **The World's Religions**

(Our Great Wisdom Traditions)

## **Chapter VIII. Christianity**

Nearly two thousand years of history have brought an astonishing diversity to this religion. From this dazzling and often bewildering complex, first will be indicated the central strands that unite this religion, and then part two will deal with its three major divisions: Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism.

### **Part One: The central strands that unite this religion**

A. The Historical Jesus. - What Jesus said about himself

1. "The Spirit of the Lord Is Upon Me."

Jesus opened his ministry by quoting this statement from Isaiah and adding, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled." We must attend to this Spirit that Jesus experienced as empowering him, for there can be no understanding of his life and work if it is omitted.

Not only was Spirit not spatially removed; though invisible, it could be known.

Often it would take the initiative and announce itself. It did this supremely to Moses on Mount Sinai, but it also spoke in a small voice to Elijah, in lions' roars to other prophets, and in dramatic events like the Exodus.

That Jesus stood in the Jewish tradition of Spirit-filled mediators is the most important fact for understanding his historical career.

His immediate predecessor in this tradition was John the Baptist; and at his initiation / baptism he (John) saw "the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him (Jesus) like a dove."

Having descended, the Spirit "drove" Jesus into the wilderness where, during forty days of prayer and fasting, he consolidated the Spirit that had entered him. Having done so he reentered the world, empowered.

## 2. "By the Spirit of God I Cast Out Demons."

The Spirit-filled personages of the Bible have power, exceptional power, something ordinary mortals lack. The Gospels attribute these powers to Jesus copiously.

He used the Spirit that coursed through him not just to heal individuals but, and this was his aspiration, to heal all humanity, beginning with his own people.

## 3. "Thy Kingdom Come, on Earth."

Jesus' mission was to crack the shell of Judaism in which revelation was encased and release that revelation to a ready and waiting world.

Putting it this way does not cancel the need for a

continuing Jewish presence. Until the world is regenerated, the witness of a nation of priests remain relevant.

## B. The Christ of Faith. - What his disciples said about Jesus

What they heard him say, and what they sensed him to be caused his followers to believe they had seen God in human form.

### 1. "He Went About Doing Good."

Almost all of his extraordinary deeds were performed quietly, apart from the crowds, and as a demonstration of the power of faith.

### 2. "Never Spoke Man Thus."

The teachings of Jesus have an urgency, an ardent, vivid quality, an abandon, a complete absence of second-rate material.

His teachings carry an extravagance that invited people to see things differently, confident that if they did so their behavior would change accordingly.

His teachings focused on the two most important facts about life: God's overwhelming love of humanity, and the need for people to accept that love and let it flow through them to others.

Jesus tried to convey God's absolute love for every single human being.

### 3. "We Have Seen His Glory."

But what he did and what he said would not have been enough to edge his disciples toward the conclusion that he was divine.

It came to the point where they felt that as they looked at Jesus they were looking at something resembling God in human form.

### C. The End and the Beginning. - The way that Jesus' earthly ministry ended

He was crucified.

Within a short time his followers were preaching the gospel of their Risen Lord.

His disciples were convinced of Jesus, resurrection.

He did not simply resume his former physical body; resurrection was not resuscitation. It was entry into another mode of being.

Jesus' followers experienced him in a new way; as having the qualities of God.

Faith in Jesus' resurrection produced the Church and its Christology.

This faith extended ultimately to the status of goodness in the universe, contending that it was all-powerful, victorious over everything, even death itself.

### D. The Good News.

Conventional love is evoked by loveable qualities in the beloved, but the love people encountered from Christ

embraced sinners and outcasts, Samaritans and enemies. It gave not prudentially in order to receive, but because giving was its nature.

Once that love of Christ reached the first Christians it could not be stopped.

Three intolerable burdens had suddenly and dramatically lifted from their shoulders:

The fear of death

The burden of guilt

The cramping confines of the ego

#### E. The Mystical Body of Christ.

The disciples went out to possess a world they believed God had already possessed for them.

Images came to mind to characterize the intense corporate identity they felt. The first came from Christ himself: "I am the vine, you are the branches."

Saint Paul adapted Christ's image by using the human body instead of a vine to symbolize the Church. Christ is the head; individual Christians are its cells.

In what sense there is salvation apart from the Body of Christ is a question on which Christians differ.

#### F. The Mind of the Church.

It was not the disciples' minds that were first drawn to Jesus; it was their experience.

It was only a matter of time before Christians felt the need to understand this mystery in order to explain it to themselves and to others. Christian theology was born, and from then on the Church was head as well as heart.

Christianity's three most distinctive tenets are:

1. The Incarnation - In Christ God assumed a human body, it is affirmed that Christ was God-Man; simultaneously both fully God and fully man.

2. The Atonement

Its root meaning is reconciliation. Two metaphors have dominated the Church's understanding of this occurrence.

a. One, legalistic, runs as follows: all people sin, sin demands infinite recompense. God made this payment through the Person of Christ and the debt is canceled.

b. Christendom's presiding metaphor on this topic has been release from the bondage. The bondage that imprisons us is ego, an attachment to ourselves, with the fear and guilt that trail in its wake.

3. The Trinity

This doctrine holds that while God is fully one, God is also three: God the father, Christ the Son and The Holy Spirit.

"The Godhead is a Society of three divine persons, knowing and loving each other so entirely that not merely can none exist without the others, but in some mysterious way each is what the other is."

## Part Two: The three major divisions of Christianity

What has gone before is an interpretation of the points that, substantially at least, Christians hold in common. For roughly half its history the church remained substantially one institution. Starting in 1054, however, great divisions began to occur. Our concern now is to try to understand the central perspectives of Christendom's three great branches.

### A. Roman Catholicism.

The two most important concepts for the understanding of this branch of Christendom:

1. The Church as Teaching Authority - The Church points the way in which we should live.

Ultimately, this idea of the Church as teaching authority shapes the idea of papal infallibility.

After studying a problem that relates to faith or morals, he emerges with the Church's answer - on these rare occasions it is not strictly speaking *an* answer, it is *the* answer and binding on Roman Catholics.

For such occasions the Holy Spirit protects him from the possibility of error.

2. The Church as Sacramental Agent - The Church empowers us to live in accordance with its teachings.

Christ called his followers to live lives far above the average in charity and service. Help, therefore, is needed and The Church provides it by means of its seven Sacraments:

a. Baptism

b. Confirmation

c. Holy Matrimony

d. Holy Orders

e. the Sacrament of the Sick (extreme unction)

f. Reconciliation (confession)

g. the Mass

## B. Eastern Orthodoxy.

In most ways the Eastern Orthodox Church stands close to the Roman Catholic. It honors the same seven Sacraments

On the teaching authority there is some difference. The Eastern Church has no Pope; it holds that God's truth is disclosed through "the conscience of the Church."

It stands midway between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Two clearly distinctive features are:

1. Its exceptionally corporate view of the Church - Each Christian is working out his or her salvation in conjunction with the rest of the Church, not individually to save a separate soul.

2. Its mysticism: The Eastern Church encourages the mystical life more actively. Mysticism is a practical program even for the laity.

## C. Protestantism.

The bulk of its faith and practices it shares with Catholicism and



Orthodoxy but with two great enduring themes:

## 1. Justification by Faith

When Protestantism says that human beings are justified - that is, restored to right relations with the ground of their being, and with their associates - by faith, it is saying that such restoration requires a movement of the total self, in mind, will and affections, all three.

It is a mark of the strength of the ecumenical movement in our time that the Roman Catholic theologians now increasingly understand faith in the same way.

Faith is a personal phenomenon. No number of religious observances, no record of good deeds, no roster of doctrines believed could guarantee that an individual would reach his or her desired state.

It does not mean that the Creeds or the Sacraments are unimportant. It means that unless these are accompanied by the experience of God's love and a returning love for God, they are insufficient. Similarly with good works.

## 2. The Protestant Principle

Stated philosophically, it warns against absolutizing the relative. Stated theologically, it warns against idolatry.

Human allegiance belongs to God. God, however is beyond nature and history and cannot be equated with either or any of his parts. God is infinite.

People, however, continually slip; first deifying wood and stone idols and later Christians fell to absolutizing dogmas, the Sacraments, the Church, the Bible, or

personal religious experience.

None of them is God. They point beyond themselves to God, but let any of them claim absolute or unreserved allegiance and it becomes diabolical.

God transcends all the limitations and distortions of finite existence. Therefore, in the Protestant view, every human claim to absolute truth or finality must be rejected.

This brings the need for continual self-criticism and reformation to the door of Protestantism itself.

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**An Outline Review**  
**of**  
Huston Smith's  
**The World's Religions**

(Our Great Wisdom Traditions)

**Chapter IX. The Primal Religions**

The historical religions span less than four thousand years as compared with the three million years or so the religions that preceded them. This mode of religiosity continues in Africa, Australia, Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, Siberia, and among the Indians of North and South America.

Tribes without depending on writing may have retained insights and virtues that urbanized, industrial civilizations have allowed to fall by the wayside.

**Part One: The Australian Experience.**

God does not evolve; everything that we find flowering in the historical religions - monotheism, for example - is prefigure in the primal ones in faint but discernable patterns.

The muted character of distinctions in the primal religions is nicely illustrated by the religion of the Australian aborigines.

Aboriginal religion turns not on worship but on identification, a "participation in," and acting out of, archetypal paradigms. The

entire life of the aborigine, insofar as it rises above triviality and becomes authentic, is ritual.

Here there are no priests, no congregations, no mediating officiants, no spectators. There is only the Dreaming and conformance to it.

## **Part Two: Features that the Primal Religions Share**

### **A. Orality, Place, and Time.**

#### **1. Orality - Literacy is unknown to the primal religions**

Exclusive orality protects human memory.

It increases the capacity to sense the sacred through nonverbal channels such as virgin nature and sacred art.

Not being written, information that is useless and irrelevant is quickly weeded out.

#### **2. Place versus Space - Primal religion is embedded in place.**

No historical religion, not even Judaism and Shinto, is embedded in place to the extent that tribal religions are.

The exact and rightful place is a feature of sanctity.

#### **3. Eternal time**

Primal time is a temporal; an eternal now.

For primal peoples, "past" means preeminently closer to the originating Source of things. Closer-to-the-source means to be in some sense better.

### **B. The Primal World.**

Primal peoples are embedded in their world, starting with their tribe. They are related to their own tribe almost the way that a biological organ is related to its host's body.

The tribe is embedded in nature.

Even the line between animate and "inanimate" is broken. Rocks are alive.

Everything is alive; nature extends itself to enter deeply into them, infusing them in order to be fathomed by them.

In the primal world there is an absence of a line separating this world from another world that stands over and against it. In historical religions this division emerges and much comes to be made of it.

Primal peoples are oriented to a single cosmos, which sustains them like a living womb.

The overriding goal of salvation that dominates the historical religions is virtually absent from Primal people.

### C. The Symbolic Mind.

A common stereotype pegs primal religions as polytheistic. The issue is not whether tribal peoples explicitly identify a Supreme Being who coordinates the gods but instead, whether they sense such a being whether they name and personify it or not. The evidence suggests that they do.

The most important single feature of living primal spirituality is its symbolist mentality, a vision that sees the things of the world as transparent to their divine source.

Mysticism and symbolism are more frequently utilized among

them than among Western Europeans today. Only when we have fully grasped the mystic and symbolic meaning inherent in most activities of primitive man can we hope to understand him.

This section should not end without mentioning a distinctive personality type, the shaman. They are heavily engaged in healing, and appear to have preternatural powers to foretell the future and discern lost objects.

### **Part Three: Conclusion.**

Though millions would now like to see the primal way of life continue, it seems unlikely that it will do so.

There is still time for us to learn some things from them.

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## **Chapter X. A Final Examination**

What have we gotten out of this inquiry? Has it done any good? Three answers are suggested:

### **A. The Relation between Religions.**

This book has found nothing that privileges one tradition above the others, but that could be due to the kind of book it is: It eschews comparisons in principle. Nothing in the comparative study of religions requires that they cross the finishing line of the reader's regard in a dead heat.

There is a second position that holds that the religions are all basically alike. It is suggested that if we were to find ourselves with a single religion tomorrow, it is likely that there would be two the day after.

A third conception of the way the religions are related says that for God to be heard and understood divine revelations would have had to be couched in the idioms of its respective hearers.

### **B. The Wisdom Traditions. - What wisdom do they offer the world?**

1. Ethics - The Decalogue pretty much tells the cross-cultural story: we should avoid murder, thieving, lying, and adultery.
2. Virtues - The wisdom traditions identify as basically three: humility, charity, and veracity.
3. Vision - The wisdom traditions' rendering of the ultimate character of things
  - a. Things are pervaded by a grand design.
  - b. Things are better than they seem.
  - c. Reality is steeped in mystery for which the human mind has no solution except to be transformed by flashes of insight into abiding light.

## C. Listening.

If one of the wisdom traditions claims us, we begin by listening to it. We listen not uncritically but we listen expectantly, knowing that it houses more truth than can be encompassed in a single lifetime.

But we also listen to the faith of others, including the secularists. We listen for understanding, understanding can lead to love. But the reverse is also true, love brings understanding; the two are reciprocal.

God speaks to us in three places: in scripture, in our deepest selves, and in the voice of the stranger.

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