



The World's Religions

Huston Smith (Author and Foreword)

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The World's Religions, by beloved author and pioneering professor Huston Smith (*Tales of Wonder*), is the definitive classic for introducing the essential elements and teachings of the world's predominant faiths, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, as well as regional native traditions.

This revised and updated edition provides sympathetic descriptions of the various traditions, explaining how they work “from the inside,” which is a big reason why this cherished classic has sold more than two million copies since it first appeared in 1958.

The World's Religions Details

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From Reader Review The World's Religions for online ebook

Paul says

No doubt a popular book in terms of numbers of copies sold. The author is a highly respected scholar on world religions who has taught at some of the most prestigious universities in America. He also grew up in China and has imbibed the rituals of most of the religions he's studied. So why the two stars:

* Smith is a pluralist. I find this position doesn't allow for the most rigorous and critical analysis of the religious positions presented.

Indeed, I find this position ironically gives the least respect to other religions. When everyone become special and unique, no one is special and unique.

* Smith barely delves into the *doctrines* of the world's religions, and this is what I'm interested in leaning and knowing.

This, of course, helps out with the pluralism. If we mainly look at the moral aspects of religions, well, they seem quite similar. Confucius say nice things and Jesus does nice things too. After all, WWJD, baby!

* Smith was raised a Christian (well, a moralist), but ironically he seems to know the least about Christianity.

He reads the OT prophets as proto advocates of a social gospel, and he reads the NT like a liberal protestant.

But if that weren't enough, he tries to "defend" the trinity by comparing the triune God of the Bible water's three stages. But the good doctor fails to see that this is simply the modalist heresy.

And if that weren't enough, he misquotes the Bible more than once.

* The book is depressing, but upon reflection, uplifting. One is sad for the adherents of the other religions and the constant *working* they do so as to "get saved" (however that is cashed out in their particular religion). How tiring. How impossible a task.

But then the Christian reflects. Christianity is based on something it claims actually happened in history. This is Jesus, the God-man, who fulfilled the demands of the law, and then took the punishment due lawbreakers, and then rose from the dead. By faith the Christian believes that these things were done for him and he simply rests and trusts in the work of another. How utterly beautiful is the gospel of Christianity to the ears of weary sinners tired of doing what Confucius say, or bending and contorting their bodies in hopes that the yogic rituals will make them ready to enter nirvana.

I would not recommend this book for anyone who wants to take a serious looks at the beliefs of the world's religions and wants to know why the adherents of those religions find those beliefs compelling and true.

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Deena Katma says

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The seminal inaccurate "world religions" volume for the ages. While Smith's coverage of the Judeo-Christian tradition is excellent and his treatment of Islam is adequate, he has a hard time getting away from the Middle

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This book will provide a strong foundational backbone for anyone interested in learning about the world's religions. There is also a special chapter towards the end that talks about early man's 'primitive' or 'tribal' religions, before man became established on this earth (during prelithic and neolithic periods). This chapter alone is worth reading this book. Also on a side note, this book goes real well with Robert Van Voorst Anthology of World's Scriptures. For Huston skims over religion's doctrines and cultural rituals, where Voorst delves more into these aspects.

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Paul says

Huston Smith's "The World's Religions" is one of the most significant books I've ever read. Smith digs underneath the rituals, theology, and cold historical facts to capture why some of these major religious traditions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, are so deeply and meaningfully profound to billions and billions of people. One may disagree about whether any of these religious faiths speak the the absolute or partial truth regarding the meaning of our existence or reality, but each faith does speak directly to our human condition and try to sustain meaning in a world that often feels cold or hostile to us. This book is not an attempt to convert, but to appreciate the richness of traditions and thought found in religions to answer the fundamental questions posed from the very depths of our lives. Using an analogy popularized by John Hick, we are all simply people blindfolded and feeling this great elephant in the room and just trying to figure out what it is.

Heba says

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Grace says

I picked up this book thinking that this would be a good refresher, after all I'm a worldly woman who knows so much about other religions! Right? Yeah, I'm embarrassed about how smug that sounds, too. After perusing (in the truly correct use of that word) its pages, I honestly cannot believe how little I knew. And to be completely honest, I am still struggling to grasp all of the information presented by Smith.

This book is amazing. Smith readily admits that his work is not comprehensive (and really, how could it be?), but what I really appreciated was how effectively he ties in the history of each religion with its spirit. He delves into the core beliefs of each major religion, beginning with Hinduism and ending with Christianity, with a chapter at the end on the primal religions.

His parting advice to us is simply to listen. That in listening we are communicating, and in communicating we are loving. It doesn't get more beautiful than that.

It took me much longer to read than I initially assumed it would, so give yourself some time. But it was totally worth it, and I will read it again.
