

**Review: *The World's Religions*, ed. Sir Norman Anderson, Inter-
Varsity Press, London, UK, 1950, 1975 edn.**

Pages: 244

Understanding Beliefs People Die For

A reference which has clearly stood the test of time, this is an informative look at the major non-Christian religions. For the specialist or well-read in any of these, he will find nuggets of information and fresh research paths to follow. Notwithstanding it isn't a Christian apologetic, there is some astute criticism on regarding Islam for example on Muhammad's special 'revelations' regarding his wives, Buddhism's avoidance of origins, and the absence of ethics in Shintoism.

Such study is incredibly beneficial for two reasons; 1. the subject matter is evergreen, 2. the religions drive most of the world's culture, laws, beliefs, and behaviours, and without an understanding anyone interacting with them will be ignorant.

The authors of each religion are experts in their field making information concise and trustworthy.

Introduction (pp. 7-9)

I) Religions of Pre-Literary Societies (PLS) [Edward G. Newing] (pp. 10-48)

PLS sources are: early explorers; colonial administrators; travellers; and missionaries. In sum, the West gave PLS history to their own societies!

PLS research aims to uncover: religious personages; prayers; songs; rituals; art; sanctuaries; language; taboos (from the Polynesian 'Tabu'; that which is prohibited).

The Ameru of Kenya holds God mustn't be bothered too much else he will get angry.

“There were once of 500 tribal groups on the sub-continent of Australia, each with its own language and occupying a tract of country over which religious and hunting rights were claimed by virtue of some supernatural or mythical sanction. Today ... it has been estimated that about 40,000 pure Aborigines are living.” [p23].

“Personality was a fluid thing ... An Ancestral Being ... may have existed not only as the progenitor of a particular human group, but also the first of a species of animal ... This relationship is ... ‘totemic’. The animal is a totem.” [p24]

Aboriginal mortuary rites include ‘burial cannibalism’. Humans possess a ‘trickster’ soul or malignant spirit. The Land of the Dead is identified with the ‘Eternal Dreaming; from whence all comes and to whence all returns.

Aboriginal ‘medicine-men’ used ‘pointing the bone’ as sorcery to assassinate any one they wished.

For the Qechuans, ‘Earth Mother’ (*Pachamama*) was the source and sustainer of life. When sickness or tragedy strikes, people turn to the *Paqo* or *shaman*. The Temple of the Sun at Cuzco was their most significant one. The Incan ruler was a son of the sun and his person was sacred.

Under PLS, the spirit-dominated world is never disputed.

Time as we know it does not exist in the PLS world; lateness and impatience are unknown. The Melanesian word *mana* to describe the permeating spirit has come to mean ‘sacred power.

W. Schmidt of Vienna theorised man in his primeval state was monotheistic, which he then corrupted into polytheism.

The Yorube of Nigeria have 1,700 divinities.

The earth is especially sacred to all PLSs as Mother Earth.

The Anglo-Saxon maypole ceremony is based on the belief of the fertilising powers of the sacred tree.

Good and evil in the PLS world are judged only by whether or not it harms the community. Banishment is really a death sentence as the person's name is unremembered.

II) Judaism [H. D. Leuner] (pp. 49-90)

Jewishness derives from being born of a Jewish mother.

“The god of the philosophers is all indifference.”

Pharisee derives from פרשים ('the Separated').

Sadducees derive from *Zadok*, Solomon's High Priest.

Targum: translation.

There are 613 commandments: 248 positive and 365 negative.

The Talmud consists of the *Mishnah* with added *Gemara* commentary material.

The Palestinian Talmud was superseded by the Babylonian recension 500 years after the crucifixion.

Halakah is abstract formation of the Jewish law, and the *Aggadah* are moral teachings.

Rabbis teach men are given a clean sheet at birth, but have the *yetzer ha-ra* (propensity to do evil) as well as the *yetzer ha-tobh* (good inclination).

In the Messianic Age, Israel will be released from bondage and foreign powers, and there will be a resurrection of the dead.

Reform Judaism rejects a personal Messiah.

A Jewish boy of thirteen becomes a 'Son of the Covenant' (a bar-Mitzvah').

There can be no missionary efforts since only the physical seed of Abraham can be Jews (“he who is born an Israelite is already in the Covenant by his physical descent”).

Jews may be grouped into: Zionists; Talmud scholars; and pacifist/human rights advocates.

Tallit: white silk or wool cloth with blue or black stripes on the fringes.

Tephillin: phylacteries which consist of two small leather boxes.

Amidah: eighteen blessings, which are first preceded by the *Shema*.

Psalms 2, 22, 31, 45, 69, and 110 are not in the Jewish Prayer Book.

Chanukkah (Dedication) is done in memory of the Second Temple dedication where the eight-branched candelabrum was used (modelled on the seven-branched one carried off to Rome by Titus in AD 70).

No gathering can occur without ten male Jews over thirteen, and no women can make up the difference.

Every Jewish home has a *Mezuzah* containing Dt 6.4-9 on the doorposts.

Reform Judaism has renounced the dietary laws on grounds they are mainly ‘ceremonial’.

Conservative Judaism seeks to foster unity of Israel, perpetuate Jewish tradition, and Jewish scholarship.

Chassidim: (‘pious ones’); originated in Poland and Ukraine in the 18thC (Khazar ancestry?).

Zohar: splendour.

Children learn secrecy from age four.

Secrecy conflict arises between concealing and revealing tension.

III) Islam (pp. 91-135)

At twelve, Muhammad went with his uncle to Syria, where he met the Christian monk Bahira. He married 40-year-old Khadijah from which Fatima was begotten and was his only surviving child.

Jews were strongly represented in al-Medina. However, they rejected his claims to prophethood.

“[Muhammad’s] personal (and other) problems were sometimes solved by a divine revelation of the most convenient kind: it was thus that he was granted the right, unlike other believers, to have more than four wives ... he escaped criticism when, in defiance of Arab custom, he married the divorced wife of his adopted son ... and that his wives ... were forbidden to remarry after his death.” [p98]

“I was Prophet when Adam was still between clay and water.”

Ali was cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet.

Abu Bakr’s short rule of two years was notable for the ‘Wars of Secession’.

Uthman when elected was an aged and pious ‘Early Believer’, a scion of the aristocratic house of Umayya. Ali succeeded him as the fourth and last of the ‘Rightly-Guided’ Caliphs. However, Aisha revolted against him but was defeated at the Battle of the Camel where 10,000 Muslims were killed. Ali had a more dangerous enemy in Mu’awiya, Governor of Syria; he avenged the assassination of Uthman for which Ali was held culpable. Ali eventually agreed to cede the Caliphate to arbitration of the believers (the Sunna) with the fittest ruling. Thus, the Sunni/Shia split was codified.

Kharaja: seceded; Ali was killed by a Khariji’s knife, and his eldest son al-Hasan renounced any succession in exchange for a ‘princely stipend’. The Shia then transferred allegiance to his younger brother al-Husayn, but he was killed at the battle of Karbala, celebrated each year on the 10th of Muharran.

The Twelvers hold the Imamate passed from father to son in the line of al-Husayn by a special a special form of transmission of a divine light-substance. This ‘divine light’ infuses each Imam and makes him infallible.

Shias also believe in a 'hidden' Imam one to re-emerge and usher in a Golden Age.

Shiaism predominates Yemen, India, Syria, and East Africa.

Qarmatians dominated Iraq at the end of the third century AH. It was they who carried off the black meteorite from the Ka'ba at Mecca ... the Druzes of Lebanon worship as God al-Hakam, one of the Fatimids of Egypt.

The four Sunni schools:

-Hanafi (Iraq) school: founded by Abu Hanifa (d. 130 AH) and used by the Ottomans and in northern India.

-Maliki (Hijaz) school: founded by Malik ibn Anas (d. 179 AH); north and west Africa, Upper Egypt, and the Sudan.

-Shafi'i school: founded by al-Shafi'i. 'father' of Muslim jurisprudence (d. 204 AH).

-Hanbali school: founded by Ahmad ibn Hanbal; localised to central Arabia.

All schools accept: the Quran; Sunna; Ijma (Muslim community agreement); Qiyas (analogical deduction).

Muhammad: "My people will never agree upon an error."

Muslims are divided on whether 'Allah' and his words in the Quran are separate, the latter being created, making it separate from his essence and so a created God. Some also hold the 99 names or attributes of Allah are *not* in the divine essence, and so are separate entities.

In 309 AH, al-Hallaj was put to death for claiming, "I am the truth".

Ulama: doctors of the law.

Mukhalafa: difference. This means it is impossible to say anything about him, e.g., he has hands, but they're not anything like normal hands!

Tanzih: removal. This means Allah can never be affected by his creation.

Allah is the source of good and evil.

Pious Muslims repeat the 99-names of Allah on their rosary beads. This is also a prayer aid, talisman, and healing agency.

“Israfil” is the summoner to the resurrection.

“Izra'il” is the messenger of death.

Munkar and Nankir are the recording angels.

Jinn: smokeless flame creatures who eat, drink, have children, and can believe and disbelieve in Allah. Disbelieving *jinn* are *shayatim*.

Sulayman was patron saint of ‘white’ magic.

Bibliomancy is popular in Islam; e.g., kissing the Quran,.performing ritual purification acts over it.

Fatalism in Islam is attributed to the lack of progress in Muslim countries.

“But it may be observed in passing that the average family spends nearly twice as much in Ramadan on the food they consume by night as in any other month on the food they eat by day.” [p118]

Zakat: legal alms.

Sadaqa: free-will offerings.

“He who dies on the way to mecca is enrolled in the list of martyrs.”

“He who dies in a Jihad is a martyr and assured of paradise.”

“Stanley Lane-Poole: It is not so much in the matter of wives as in that of concubines that Muhammad made an irretrievable mistake ... The female

white slave is kept solely for the master's sensual gratification and is sold when he is tired of her, and so she passes from master to master." [p124]

Coptic conversions to Islam were largely due to economic pressure.

IV) Hinduism [Bruce J. Nicholls] (pp. 136-168)

Hinduism grew over 5,000 years. It is the *sanatana dharma* ("eternal religion"). "Sindhu" is a region watered by the river Indus.

Vedas belonged to the Aryan migrations after 2,000BC.

Upanishads: man-centred philosophies.

Manu is the oldest law giver.

Vishnu has had ten incarnations, of which Kalki is the coming Hindu messiah.

God is never creator of the universe in Hinduism.

Evolution periods ("days and nights") last a 1,000-god years (one god-year is 12,000 man years).

The aim of all Hindus is escape from the wheel of *samsara* from *karma*., thereby achieving *Moksha* (the atman unifies with Brahmin in a 'dreamless sleep').

Swami Vivekananda: "It is a sin to call a man a sinner."

There is no bodily resurrection in Hinduism.

Karma magra: path of religious duty.

Bhakti magra: path of love.

Jnana magra: path of intellectualism.

Yoga is meant to produce a radical alteration in consciousness which transcends space and time. There are eight steps:

Restraint; observances posture; breath regulation; withdrawing of senses; concentration; meditation; trance.

Sankara (788-820 AD) identifies the *atman* (soul) with *Brahman*.

The appearance of the Absolute as real is *avidya* (ignorance).

The fair-skinned Aryans entered India from the north-west and suppressed the dark-skinned Dravidians.

Jainism is a sect of Hinduism, although it rejects the caste system.

Brahma-worship is the *least* popular.

Saivism: exultation of Siva.

Nanak (1469-1538) founded Sikhism; he sought to harmonise Islam and Hinduism.

Annie Besant more than any other foreigner helped promote a Hindu renaissance.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1834-86) was a life-long Kali devotee at the temple near Calcutta. His heir Swami Vivekananda opened the World Parliament of Religion in 1893.

Satya: truth.

V) Buddhism [David Bentley-Taylor and Clark B. Offner] (pp. 169-190)

Thravada: “Teaching of the Elders”.

Hinayana: “Little Vehicle”.

Mahayana: “Great Vehicle”.

Siddhartha Gautama was born 563 BC near Kapilavastu on the Nepalese border. He renounced his existing life age 29.

The Four Noble Truths:

1. Existence of suffering.
2. Cause of suffering is desire.
3. Solution to suffering is elimination of desire.
4. Following the eightfold path leads to cessation of suffering.

The first step is acknowledging the individual self is real.

Theravada does not accept soul transmigration, only 'karma' transmigrates.

There is no permanent ego.

Buddha died aged 80 at Kusinara.

Muslims dealt the death blow to Buddhism in the 11thC by invading.

Japan's Kobo Daishi syncretised the Shinto deities as emanations of the eternal Buddha.

"Buddha is all and I am Buddha."

Nichiren Buddhism and Soka Gakkai rely upon the "Lotus Sutra", and worshipping before the Nichiren *mandala*.

VI) Shinto [Clark B. Offner] (pp. 191-217)

Origins are hazy in Japan's history.

There is "Folk Shinto", "Sect Shinto", and "Shrine Shinto".

Shinto is, "Way of the Kami".

In the 8thC, the *Kojiki* ("Records of the Ancient Masters") and the *Nihon Shoki* ("Chronicles of Japan") were written.

In the beginning, there was spontaneous generation of an original *kami* trio. From them descending the two important Kami Inazagi and Izanami. One of their descendants was the sun goddess Amaterasu; her grandson Ninigo was told to rule Japan and was given a mirror, jewels, and a sword. Emperor Jimmu was his grandson.

There is no moral code, although purity and harmony rank the highest.

Man is “basically good” since he shares the same *kami* essence as nature.

Contact with blood, sickness, and death brings defilement.

Shrines are houses for the *kami* and places of worship. Bells are rung to drive off evil spirits and arouse the *kami* to worship.

Worship involves: purification, offering, prayer, and a sacred meal.

Offerings to *kami* at the home altar are rice, water, salt, and fish.

Buddhism really came to power in the Kamakura Period (1185-1333), and not until the Tokugawa period (1600-1868) did Shinto revive under the Emperor cult.

Ethics are not necessary for people descended from *kami*!

National Foundation Day on 11 February commemorates the mythical accession of Emperor Jimmu.

Present-day Shinto is: shrine devotion; serving society; and aligning with the Emperor’s thoughts.

Much like Judaism, there is no Shinto evangelism as it is an ethno-religion.

VIII) Confucianism [Leslie Lyall] (pp. 219-227)

Confucius is the “patron saint of humanists”.

“Kung Fu-tzu (“Kung the Sage”) was born 551 BC, contemporary of Gautama Buddha.

At the Court of Chou he met his senior citizen Lao-tzu, founder of Taoism.

Confucianism was dealt a fatal blow with the fall of the empire in 1911.

Mencius: “One of the three great sins is to be without posterity, because then there is no-one to provide for the ancestral spirits.”

Ancestor-worship is the real religion of China, as was the cult of Mao in the the 20thC.

T'ai chi: “primal matter”.

Taoism quickly corrupted into spiritualism, demonism, and superstition.

VIII) A Christian Approach to Comparative Religion [Norman Anderson] (pp. 228-237)