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Global Religions: An Introduction

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Global Religions: An Introduction By Mark Juergensmeyer, Editor. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Pp. xii + 155. Paper, N.p., ISBN 0-19-515874-1

Ten essays contextualize Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, African Religion and Local Religious Societies within the category globalism. The “bookends” are a prefatorial introduction followed by three concluding chapters on theoretical issues (ch 9), the antiglobalization movement’s impact on religion (ch 10), and the future of religion (ch 11).

The essays on Judaism and Hinduism are rather standard historical summaries. Those treating Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, African Religion and Local Religious Societies connect more explicitly to the topic of globalism. Taken as a whole, these essays are excellent introductions to globalism as an *uber* reality.

Three of the essays deserve special attention. Mark Juergensmeyer’s introduction succinctly characterizes globalism as the near-universal experience where almost everyone and everything is everywhere. One outcome is “transnational religions” which increasingly are found in modern diasporas. Martin Riesebradt theorizes about “Religion in Global Perspective” (ch 9) and notes that “religion” and “tradition” are not to be reified but used for heuristic purposes. In search of a viable “general theory of religion” he proposes to study religious practice as the symbiotic side of religious belief. His method, however, becomes vulnerable if asked “what is religious about this practice?” Though he eschews essentialism, he ultimately resorts to it in his core assumptions. Nonetheless, the essay is, methodologically speaking, highly stimulating. Ninian Smart concludes the book with an optimistic futurology predicting that the necessities of religious global interaction may bring about a global religion, or should we say ideology, which will provide “some overarching sense of order and respect.” (130)

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