
VEFEYÂT

Ninian Smart (1927-2001)

Ninian Smart was born in Cambridge to Scottish parents and brought up in Glasgow where his father was Professor of Astronomy. After military service in London, Singapore and Sri Lanka, he read Classics, Ancient History and Philosophy at Oxford and then, with J.L.Austin and R.C.Zaehner, wrote his doctoral dissertation later published as *Reasons and Faiths* (1958). After teaching positions at the University College of Wales at Aberystwyth (1952-55), Yale University (1955-6), Kings College, London (1956-61) and Banares Hindu University (1960), he became the first H.G.Wood Professor of Theology at Birmingham (1961-7). In 1967 he was appointed founding Professor of Religious Studies at Lancaster University where he remained until his retirement in 1982. In 1976 he was appointed Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where in 1986 he became the first J.F.Rowny Professor in the Comparative Study of Religion. He retired in 1998.

Professor Smart devoted his life to communicating his unique expertise, his vision and his enthusiasm for the study of world religions to as many people and to as many educational institutions, at all levels, as he could. He helped to introduce the study of World Religions into the British school system, and directed the highly acclaimed BBC Television series *The Long Search* (1974-77). He published 35 books and more than 250 articles, essays, chapters and encyclopedia articles. *The Religious Experience* (1969) went through five revised and expanded editions. His immense contribution to Religious Studies - the subject he more or less invented in 1970s Britain - is perhaps most evident in *Worldviews: Cross-cultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (1981), *Concept and Empathy* (1986) and *Dimensions of the Sacred* (1996).

His life long commitment to phenomenology and his insistence on the aspectual nature of Religious Studies led him to argue continually that it must be multidisciplinary, incorporating history, languages, literature, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, politics, economics and art history.

It must always have a comparative element in it since there are, and have always been, many different religions in the world, not just one. Religious Studies is also a non-finite discipline, that must move away from narrow definitions to embrace nationalisms, rationalisms and ideologies which, though often classified as non-religious, operate in the world much like religious traditions. In this he anticipated by more than a decade the current interest in the globalisation of religion, diaspora studies and post-colonial studies in religion.

Countless thousands learnt from him in his classrooms and through his books. Most importantly, he was a man of immense humility and genuine love for his colleagues and students. He will be greatly missed, not only in Lancaster and Santa Barbara, where his beneficent presence for a good many years to come had been expected, but in educational institutions and associations all over the world.

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