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Returning: A Spiritual Journey (Book Review)

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power on the one hand, and that of reliance-on-other-power on the other hand. In a provocative, and rather startling final observation, he argues that the traditional Western characterization of Buddhism as a basically pessimistic worldview has been inaccurate; in Lester's view, Buddhism is strongly world-affirming (145).

The map and chronology in the front part of the book, and the glossary at the back, are useful in understanding facts concerning Buddhism, and in

The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam. Cyril Glasse. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., March 1989). Introduction by Huston Smith. Hardcover, 472 pp. \$59.95. Reviewed by Anne C. Kwantes, visiting instructor in history/theology.

Islam is said to be the fastest growing world religion today; it is expected that, by the year 2000, the world's Muslim population will number one billion. In spite of this, Islam is generally not well-known in the United States many Americans are surprised to discover that there are some three million Muslims in the United States. Into this general lack of knowledge regarding Islam Dr. Cyril Glasse's *Encyclopedia* is a welcome newcomer.

The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam is especially welcome because it is directed at a Western audience, and readable even to a beginning student of Islam. This becomes obvious when, e.g., one notices both Hegiran and Gregorian calendar dates recorded for historic events. The Western reader is given an unexpected bonus in the literal English translation of Arabic terms, furthering an understanding of these terms. Notes (page 7) explain the system of Arabic transliteration as it is used in this volume. Non-Arabic speakers appreciate entries entitled, "Koran," or "Mosque," rather than their Arabic equivalents.

A chronology of significant events in Islamic history forms a convenient and quick reference section; it is featured in fourteen pages towards the end of the book. The many and detailed cross-references

placing this world religion within its context of time and space.

Books on Asian philosophies and religions are often difficult to comprehend. This one is different. One is not expected to have prior knowledge of Buddhism in order to profit from the book's discussions. This volume is in the *Religious Traditions of the World* series, edited by H. Byron Earhart, the well-known scholar in Asian religions. To date, this series includes nine monographs on various religious traditions.

in this volume encourage readers to continue research of their topics, while the five-page bibliography at the end of the *Encyclopedia* offer information concerning other available works on Islam.

Numerous entries (e.g., "Arabic" and "philosophy") constitute comprehensive essays by themselves in both scope and content, while current entries include up-to-date facts and information even of the late 1980s.

This handsomely bound book is made more attractive by its numerous color photographs. Forty-five superb plates exhibit Islamic subjects such as art, architecture, people, and calligraphy, realistically and in vivid color. Maps, schematic presentations, and genealogical tables provide clear illustrations of important themes.

The author, who is affiliated with Columbia University's Department of Middle East Languages and Culture and with the Middle East Institute, has done a real service to students of Islam in presenting the *Encyclopedia*. It is an excellent reference work, is heartily recommended for general reading and more serious research, and will be an asset to any library which houses works on the world's religions.

Returning: A Spiritual Journey. Dan Wakefield. New York: Penguin Books, 1989, 250 pp., paperback. Reviewed by James C. Schaap, Associate Professor of English.

Something in Dan Wakefield's spiritual biography, *Returning*, is all too familiar and thus predictable to readers who are professing Christians: his bittersweet Sunday School memories of early childhood, his flirtation with mysterious religious experience in adolescence, his liberation as a

headstrong young scholar who quite gleefully rejects God and all such parochialism once he steps into in the spirited intellectualism of academia.

If there is anything unique about Wakefield's pilgrimage it may be his own *vitae*. Wakefield is a celebrated journalist, screenwriter, and author,

whose work includes two bestselling novels, a classic study of Spanish Harlem, and numerous articles in major American magazines.

But his friends in the publishing world have little time for religious conversions, especially Christian “returns.” In remembering his own timidity about his reassembled Christian conscience, Wakefield cites William F. Buckley’s line: “If you mention God more than once at New York dinner parties you aren’t invited back.” The story of his conversion—his return—is bravely told.

In its design, however, Dan Wakefield’s life is just another variation of the prodigal son parable. His American protestant stock—partly Presbyterian, partly Baptist, partly Lutheran—fell victim to the assault mounted by his own temperament, his problematic adolescence, his fine education at Columbia College, and his obvious successes in what his grandfather, a Southern Baptist preacher, might have called “the world.”

What drew him back to faith was a hollowness that became a maelstrom, a dizzying life of alcohol, drugs, and money, that once seemed to him the proof of his achievements and his freedom from the provincial faith of his parents.

In the first chapter of his book, he remembers waking up screaming one morning in Hollywood, “a response,” he says, “to the reality that another morning had broken in a life I could only deal with sedated by wine, loud noise, moving images, and wired to electronic games that further distracted my fragmented attention from a growing sense of blank, nameless pain in the pit of my very being, my most essential self.” Thus his return began.

But the return progressed slowly, partly through

almost instinctive incantations of Psalm 23, a passage of scripture he could never quite bring himself to forget; partly through a difficult peace he made with his past and his deceased parents; partly through the concerted efforts of Christians in a local parish, Christians whom he began to identify by their love and concern as his real family. And it occurred in spite of the fact that he, like most of his friends, thought himself rid forever of the childish notions of God and Jesus.

Five years of Freudian psychotherapy did little but sicken him. Success left him cold, lifeless. What drew him back, finally, was the loss of something he could only begin to identify as meaning and truth, something to build a life upon. When he bottomed out, he could only look up.

So few surprises emerge from the story of Wakefield’s pilgrimage. The solid truth is that he was returned to faith by a loving God, through the haze of cocaine and too many empty bottles, came to him with a new clearer vision of Christ’s love.

But if the story itself seems predictable and even clichéd, perhaps Christian readers are the ones who’ve lost their enthusiasm. We have Christ’s word, after all, that the heavenly roof rises higher when one lost soul is found than it does for the ninety-nine who never scraped a knee.

Wakefield fell and was slowly brought back to his feet by the hand of the Almighty. His book is a testament to a loving God and to the truth of a plot line that’s been around for years but will never grow old. Dan Wakefield was lost and now he’s found.

It’s a fine book, written beautifully and courageously.