

PREFACE

Jonathan Z. Smith deserves to be recognized as one of the towering intellectual figures of his generation in the study of religion. This, not only because of the impressive variety of data domains at his command and his ever startling theoretical thought concerning these data, but also because of his continued willingness to serve the academy as scholar, teacher, thoughtful leader in the proper role and place of education, and, yes, even gadfly. His work, spanning about four decades of publication, articulates the proper expertise of the scholar of religion within the academy, an expertise that demonstrates itself in vigilant and disciplined attention to the most fundamental categories, theories, and methods of the religion specialist in the academy.

In doing so, he has been a true introducer of religion in that he has charted a course for the study and teaching of religion that is coherent and in-step with the general intellectual and pedagogical mandate of the modern critical academy. It is in fact the persistent insistence on “introducing” in Smith’s work that suggested to us the title for this volume. “As college teachers,” he once said, “our profession, our primary expertise, is introducing” (“Religion in the Liberal Arts: Reflections on Teaching,” in *The Place of Religious Studies in the Liberal Arts* [The Chicago Forum on Pedagogy and the Study of Religion; Chicago: The Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago, 2005], 9). Obviously, if “introducing” is a key activity that marks our expertise, he is not using the term as a bit of everyday *koinē dialektos*. Rather, much like “imagining” and “relating,” each a key term in two of Smith’s book titles, “introducing” signals an intellectual and pedagogical agenda at the heart of which is to set up an encounter that is an “occasion for thought” on issues of conceptualization that have constituted religion as a disciplinary subject, for introducing classificatory procedures and their effects, for giving accounts of the historical and contemporary conditions that gave rise to and continue to give warrant for the study of religion. “Introducing,” thus, is not a matter of importing and displaying in a show-and-tell fashion the data for religion, *pace* numerous introductory textbooks and introductory courses that function as mere overviews for non-specialists. We might think, rather, of introducing in Smith’s terms on comparing: introducing is an operation of confronting the culturally familiar with

comparisons that adduce what he often calls the “elsewhere,” the “otherwise,” and the “strange,” so as to perturb the naturalness (and normativeness) of the familiar and to pull the mask of strangeness off the unfamiliar. Introducing, in this most serious sense, is therefore friendly with terms such as “intervening,” “intruding,” perhaps even “invading”—the latter conveying the use of the term “introduction” in the biological sciences where it means the “walking in” (*invadere*) of a plant, animal, or organism into new locations where it is not native and where it may have perturbing effects on organisms already located there. All this is to say that there is no costless way of knowing, no way for her or him who is relentlessly committed to thought not to disturb the habitat, not to mess with the habitus of the many human doings we call religious. We should add here, though, what we have overheard Smith say on occasion: along with such introducing, such intruding, should come some form of the Hippocratic oath to “do no harm.”

The contributors to this volume, despite being specialists in widely different data fields, geographical regions, and historical periods, have in common the fact that their scholarship on religion exemplifies this more technical sense of introducing. Their work has benefited from, been in conversation with, or moved through orbits that overlap with Smith’s own path-breaking thought. Some have known him personally for many years, a few had him as their teacher, several have worked alongside him on projects that unfolded at annual meetings of scholarly associations, while for yet others his is a name known only through his writings. This makes the volume to which they have contributed, though offered in honor of Jonathan Z. Smith, not a conventional *Festschrift*. In our instructions to those whom we invited to join this project we stressed that their essays should not be primarily *about* Smith, nor just about *his* work, whether in the form of synthetic descriptions of his intellectual project, exegetical elucidations of one or more of his essays, or encomiastic gushes. Instead, we suggested that their essays ought to be about *the work of studying religion*, for we thought that Smith would most fittingly be honored with a set of essays that exemplify *working with* him in whatever domain of specialized knowledge each contributor brings to her or his study and classroom. The result is a collection of essays from a diverse group of scholars that, when taken together, underscore, extend, and at times even critique Smith’s overarching agendum of introducing religion to the academy and introducing the academy to religion.

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It remains to name, and thereby to thank, a few people who helped to make this volume possible. First among them has to be Burton Mack, for it was he—with coyly coaxing hints and suggestions stashed in occasional emails to us—who first put the audacious thought into our heads that we ought to

consider tackling the making of this volume. It should go without mention, of course, that the contributors collectively take a huge load of credit for this book. We are deeply grateful to them, for in accepting our invitation to “work with Smith” many of them put other projects on hold. Janet Joyce, principal of Equinox Publishing and our longtime publisher and friend, leapt at the idea when something like this volume was suggested to her, and for that we’re grateful. She did much the same when we asked her to publish the *Guide to the Study of Religion* while she was working for a different publisher. Smith’s influence on the conceptual foundations and organization of that earlier volume was largely implicit, although easily recognized by astute readers. How fitting that, a decade later, she would now also publish a volume that explicitly remarks on Smith’s impact on how the field of religious studies might be, can be, ought to be, worked. Thanks also to Karissa Rinas, a student in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Alabama, and John Parrish, a student in the Program of Religious Studies at the University of Alberta, for assisting us in various editorial chores. Fortunately for us, also at Equinox Publishing in London, there is Valerie Hall: reliable, very able, and efficient in doing just about everything that needs to be done to get a book published. And finally, we offer a grateful nod to Elaine Smith for emailing advice to us, thus ensuring that Jonathan—a Renaissance man in the plainest and narrowest sense when it comes to electronic media—was none the wiser on the planning of this volume.

Finally, we’d like to thank “Jay Zee” himself. He has taught us more than he knows—perhaps not as well as he would have liked, but that is not his fault, for we might just be exceptions to Lévi-Strauss’s claim that people have always been thinking equally well.