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THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS
Understanding Human Experience

by
Joseph M. Kitagawa

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THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS AT CHICAGO

Shortly after I came to Chicago in 1946, by chance I ran into Joachim Wach, who had come to the University of Chicago as Professor of the History of Religions (*Religionswissenschaft*) from Brown University. I thought at first that he must be the son of the Joachim Wach who had written many important books and articles in the Twenties and whose name had been well known to me before the war, while I was still in Japan. Needless to say, I was delighted to find that he was Joachim Wach himself. In 1947, I enrolled as a student of the history of religions with Noah Fehl (who died in Hong Kong while teaching at Chung Chi College), Philip H. Ashby (who is now retired from Princeton University), Harmon H. Bro (now a pastor in Park Ridge), and Richard Bush (currently Dean of Oklahoma City University). Wach's classes were open to students in other "fields" (which is what they were then called) of the Divinity School and from other segments of the university. Thus I often saw the faces of such currently well-known figures as Jerald C. Brauer (then a student of the history of Christianity in the Divinity School), Morris Philipson (then a philosophy student, now Director of the University of Chicago Press), Maurice Friedman (then in the Committee on Social Thought, who later wrote many books on Martin Buber), Arthur Cohen (a student in the college, to become later an active participant in the Jewish-Christian dialogue), Yoshio Fukuyama (now Dean of the Chicago Theological Seminary), Yoshiaki Fujitani (then an M.A. student, now Bishop of the Honpa Honganji Buddhist Mission in Hawaii). I discovered that Wach was deeply concerned with both the past and the present of *Religionswissenschaft* at the University of Chicago; thus it seems to me important to put down my recollections of those days as a historical record of the history of religions for the future.

THE PAST

In 1947, the University of Chicago was barely fifty-five years old, but it had already experienced three phases of orientation as far as *Religionswissenschaft* was concerned. The founding president of the young university, William Rainey Harper, was motivated to lead a second reformation of Christianity through scholarship. According to him, the center of the university was the life of the Divinity School, even though he had designed

the curriculum with Old Testament, New Testament, and Comparative Religion as part of the Liberal Arts (now called the Humanities), outside of the Divinity School. Convinced that the liberal spirit was the highest achievement of civilization, he regarded the liberal traditions of Judaism and Christianity as one unified religious tradition; and although trained in Hebraica but not in other branches of *Religionswissenschaft*, he had the strong feeling that what he called "Comparative Religion" was more inclusive and in keeping with the critical methods and scientific spirit needed for a university discipline than was the "history of religions," which other institutions, including Harvard, continued to require in their divinity schools.

Harper and his close personal friend, confidant, and colleague, Rabbi Emile Hirsch, agreed with the goal of, and fully supported, the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago. A child of his time, Harper never questioned that Western civilization would eventually dominate the world, and he was convinced that the Judeo-Christian conciliatory approach to other religions, as exemplified by the Parliament of Religions, would be the best—the most humane—solution for tensions and conflicts among religions of the world.

Thus it is understandable that the first phase of Comparative Religion at the University of Chicago closely echoed the spirit of the World's Parliament of Religions. Initially important was George Stephen Goodspeed (d. 1905), author of *A History of the Babylonians and Assyrians*, who in the early days of the university was appointed Professor of Comparative Religion and Ancient History. Indications exist that Goodspeed was not happy with the term "Comparative Religion," although he fully supported the World's Parliament of Religions. It is well known that Mrs. Caroline Haskell, a wealthy supporter of both the Parliament and the University of Chicago, donated the Haskell Lectureship on Comparative Religion and the Barrows Lectureship that sends Western Christian scholars to India and other parts of Asia, as well as the Haskell Oriental Museum, behind Swift Hall and the home of the Department of Anthropology in recent years. Goodspeed was assisted by Edmund Buckley (author of *Phallicism in Japan* [1895]), then docent; and when the Parliament was over, John Henry Barrows, permanent chairman of the Parliament, joined the Department of Comparative Religion as special professorial lecturer.

As far as we can tell, Goodspeed was a well-trained historian of ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean religions. He was also a theological liberal, convinced that Christianity was the most liberal of all religions and capable of fulfilling the religious needs of all mankind. Thus he was entirely sincere when he expressed on behalf of Mrs. Haskell at the opening of the Haskell Oriental Museum the hope that "there will go forth from these halls enlightenment, inspiration, and guidance in that learning which has come from the East and West, culminating in the Book of Books and in the teachings of the Son of Man, [which] will ever abide as our most precious possession"

(quoted in *A History of the University of Chicago*, by Thomas W. Goodspeed [Chicago, 1916], pp. 299–300). He believed that the Department of Comparative Religion, and not the Divinity School, which he felt was not free from sectarian dogmatism, should serve as the central focus of the university's intellectual inquiry into religion. Unfortunately, however, the Department of Comparative Religion at this time did not attract many advanced degree candidates; its courses interested primarily students from the Divinity School and returned missionaries.

In 1902, Louis Henry Jordan, a Canadian scholar trained in Scotland, was appointed special lecturer in Comparative Religion, since Barrows had left Chicago to become the President of Oberlin College; Jordan stayed only one year, leaving to survey and write on the state of the discipline. His work includes *Comparative Religion: Its Genesis and Growth* (1905), *Comparative Religion: A Survey of Its Recent Literature* (1910), and *Comparative Religion: Its Adjuncts and Allies* (1915). With Goodspeed's death in 1905 and Harper's a year later, the first phase of *Religionswissenschaft*, which had welcomed critical methods but had been dominated by theological liberalism, passed.

The second phase of the discipline, best described as a period of interregnum, lasted until the end of World War I. During these years, the Divinity School, in sharp contrast to the Department of Comparative Religion, which had not produced a single doctoral candidate, was emerging as a national powerhouse and a center of liberalism, modernism, the social gospel, and the socio-historical method. Shailer Mathews (1963–1941), tireless Dean of the Divinity School from 1908 to 1933 and author, lecturer, and champion of the social gospel, assembled a group of able scholars including Gerald B. Smith, J. M. P. Smith, Galusha Anderson, Charles R. Henderson, Shirley Jackson Case, James Braested, Ira M. Price, and Edgar J. Goodspeed. Slowly, public attention shifted from the concerns of Comparative Religion to the controversies between fundamentalism and the social gospel, between conservatives and liberals; with this shift, the focus on the study of religion moved from the colleges and universities to the theological seminaries.

The discipline of *Religionswissenschaft* began to disappear from seminary curricula, except perhaps as a poor appendage to courses on world missions; however, the rigorous, disciplined study of *Missionswissenschaft* never took root in American seminaries. Even in those institutions where some form of *Religionswissenschaft* continued to exist—Boston, Cornell, and New York Universities; the Universities of Pennsylvania and Chicago; and Harvard Divinity School—it depended heavily on the expertise of individual professors rather than on the scholarly concern for religious phenomena as objectifications of the religious experience of mankind. It had come to be regarded as a kind of three-storied house. The first storey comprised a narrow historical study of specific religious traditions, conceived as the

simple study of "raw" religious data often colored by an evolutionary ideology; the second storey, "Comparative Religion," aimed to classify religious data in order to provide the basis for the third storey, a "philosophy of religion" or a "theology" which would provide a meaning for the enterprise of Comparative Religion as a whole. This three-level scheme met with relatively wide acceptance among students of Comparative Religion and *Missionswissenschaft* in Europe, and was advocated in North America by Morris Jastrow (1861-1921), Professor of Semitic Languages at the University of Pennsylvania; Louis Henry Jordan (1855-1923) of the University of Chicago; and George Burman Foster (d. 1918), also of Chicago and a specialist in the philosophy of religion. This domestication of the three-level European scheme lent a peculiar slant to the American approach to *Religionswissenschaft* in the sense of viewing all religious phenomena through the window of one religious and cultural tradition—usually one's own—which made for a unique blending—conscious or unconscious—of the insights of *Religionswissenschaft* and *Missionswissenschaft*.

Spearheaded by A. Eustace Haydon (d. 1975), sole member of the Department of Comparative Religion and an erudite scholar and eloquent speaker, the third and final phase of *Religionswissenschaft* at Chicago was a critique of and a reaction to the two preceding phases. Haydon had outgrown the fundamentalist faith of his childhood by the time he graduated from the Divinity School, and he realized that this loss of orthodoxy held three important implications. First, religious reality gave way to considerations of the ethical and the aesthetic, to use Kierkegaardian shorthand, and he increasingly stressed "ethical" rather than "religious" aspects, to the degree that there was little difference in his own mind between Comparative Religion and Comparative Ethics. (He later became a spokesman for the Ethical Culture movement.) Second, he became an ardent advocate of religious relativism as the only intellectual framework for the enterprise of Comparative Religion; and third, he supported Comparative Religion, which he understood as an umbrella term for a series of objective studies of specific religious traditions undertaken by specialists with little concern for the intra-religious or universal factors involved.

In Haydon's view, human needs originally created various forms of religion. Throughout history, all religions had to wrestle with the problem of change, which he called the perennial problem of "modernism." The historic religions in the twentieth century had been compelled to come to terms with hitherto unknown revolutionary forces, namely, the "new scientific thinking" and "applied science." The former force held profound implications for all aspects of human life, and especially for traditional religions and their ancient cosmologies, theologies, and supernaturalisms. Applied science, especially modern machinery, communications, and systems of transportation, had already reshaped the face of the world.

In response to the new foci, as a comparative religionist Haydon orga-

nized in 1933 the World Fellowship of Faiths. This conference was concerned with six faiths that he felt shared common problems—Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Hinduism. It addressed four major topics: World Religions and Modern Scientific Thinking; World Religions and Modern Social-Economic Problems; World Religions and Inter-Cultural Contacts; and the Task of Modern Religion.

By far the most salient feature of the 1933 conference—and, by implication, of the third Chicago orientation—was the manner in which it equated religion and morality and Comparative Religion and science. To quote K. Nataraian of Bombay: "The task of religion in all ages has been to assert the supremacy of the moral law over the lives of individuals and nations" (in *Modern Trends in World-Religions*, ed. A. Eustace Haydon [Chicago, 1934], p. 221). Further, Haydon's close friend, Rabbi Solomon Goldman, stated, "The ancient techniques of prayer and ritual need be retained only insofar as they are aesthetically appealing. Modern religions must become the friend and not the enemy of science" (ibid., p. 220). Haydon agreed that the task of Comparative Religion was to help people to overcome the anti-scientific bias and to show them the synthesis of science and idealism that would become the religion of tomorrow. "The whole world," he said, "wrestles with the same problems, aspires toward the same ideas, and strives to adjust inherited thought-patterns to the same scientific ideas. In such times, the prophetic fire of religious aspiration flames anew and religions move into new embodiments . . . the religions of tomorrow are emerging surrounded by a multitude of modernization of the old" (ibid., p. ix).

It is interesting to note that the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, whose spirit dominated the first phase of Comparative Religion in Chicago, and the 1933 World Fellowship of Faiths, the brainchild of the third phase, both recognized religion only in organized forms such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Judaism. These conferences were "tone-deaf" to those religious experiences of the human race expressed in myths, symbols, and rituals, hence their complete indifference to "primitive" religions and to the religions of native and Meso-Americans. In treating historic religions, they divorced religious realities from human communities, so that participants spoke, for example, of Buddhism apart from Buddhist community life. The 1893 conference did at least indicate concern for the past of the various religions; the 1933 conference concerned itself solely with the modern phases and movements of "living" world religions.

Notwithstanding his personal convictions about the nature of Comparative Religion and the fact that he was a serious scholar, Haydon was an unhappy man, shouldering the responsibility of running the Department of Comparative Religion alone for two-and-a-half decades, with his office in the Divinity School (Swift 403) surrounded by philosophers, philosophers of religion, historians, theologians, and biblical scholars. Most of the students who took his courses were Divinity School students, and, by necessity, he

became an expert on non-Christian and non-Western religions, subjects which became identified as the scope or area of Comparative Religion. During his long tenure, he trained only a few degree candidates, and they were encouraged to become primarily experts on specific non-Western religions rather than students of a broader *Religionswissenschaft*. Comparative Religion finally ceased to exist as a department in the Division of the Humanities, and it was Haydon, fundamentalist-turned-skeptic, who brought the program into the Divinity School shortly before his retirement in 1945.

THE ISSUES

The newly arrived Joachim Wach had to consider both how to adjust himself to and what to do in the situation as he found it at the University of Chicago and how to sort out the "past" of *Religionswissenschaft* here. In the mid-Forties, the University of Chicago was an intellectually alive and stimulating place. Robert Maynard Hutchins reigned over the campus as chancellor. Under him was President Ernest Cadmon "Pomp" Colewell, formerly Dean of the Divinity School. During World War II, the university had welcomed many refugee scholars from Germany and Italy who greatly enriched the scholarly atmosphere. At this time the Divinity School was in the midst of negotiations to form the Federated Theological Faculty (hereafter the FTF) from its staff and the faculties of Chicago Theological Seminary, Meadville Theological School, and the Disciples Divinity House. The FTF curriculum offered Constructive Theology (Bernard M. Loomer, Charles Hartshorne, Bernard E. Meland, Daniel Day Williams); Historical Theology (Wilhelm Pauck); Ethics and Society (James Luther Adams, Samuel Kinchloe, Victor Obenhaus); Bible (J. Coert Rylaarsdam, Amos Wilder, Ernest C. Colewell, Alan P. Wikgren, Paul Schubert); Church History (Sidney E. Meade, James H. Nichols); to these were added within a few years the fields of Religion and Personality and Religion and Arts. Wach proposed to use the designation of "history of religions" instead of "comparative religion" as a more appropriate translation of *Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft*, and his proposal was accepted. His great headache then became the development of the history of religions within the framework of the Divinity School curriculum.

This is not the place to trace the development of the discipline of the history of religions (see my *History of Religions: Retrospect and Prospect*, [Macmillan, 1985]). There is some truth to the statement that the history of religions has been particularly stimulated by three kinds of conversation partners: the philosophy of religion and theology, especially in Germany; the social sciences, especially in Germany and France; and *Missionswissenschaft*, especially in Scandinavia, The Netherlands, and the British Isles.

Wach for a long time thought of religion in primarily humanistic terms.

Although raised a Christian, he was proud of his ancestor, Moses Mendelssohn and of his own dual Jewish and Christian heritage. As a scholar, he spoke of the importance of faith, piety, and devotion to religion, but he did not feel that he was personally and existentially involved in religion. Thus, although he had studied thoroughly the philosophy of religion and theological hermeneutics (see his three-volume *Das Verstehen*), he pursued *Religionswissenschaft* by following the humanistic model of philology and the social scientific model of sociology successively. Indeed, his first book in English and the fruit of his research during his tenure at Brown, was a very sociological work entitled *Sociology of Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 1944).

Wach's flirtation with theology occurred much later, and in a strange manner. Although not politically minded, he soon realized that the action of the government of Saxony of dismissing him in 1935 from the faculty at Leipzig purely on the grounds of ethnicity was both an example of the terrifying phenomenon of Nazism in Germany and a colossal embodiment of human evil. The League of Nations and the enlightened cultural tradition and autonomy of the German universities were powerless before Hitler, but the church managed to maintain a stubborn resistance to the Nazification of Europe. To Wach, whose mother and sister were interned, this was an illuminating experience; and once awakened to the reality of the church as a living religious community, his interest in theology deepened. Yet even so, it took him ten years—his entire tenure at the University of Chicago—to sort out the relationship between *Religionswissenschaft* and theology; he was in a sense, pulled in opposing directions between the two. Unfortunately, his reflections on this issue were only partially recorded in his posthumous publication, *The Comparative Study of Religions* (New York, 1958).

In order to understand *Religionswissenschaft* at the University of Chicago in the mid-Forties, we must keep three things in mind. First, it was clear that Wach wanted to teach the history of religions or *Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft*, an autonomous discipline located between the normative studies of the philosophy of religion and theology and the descriptive studies of sociology, anthropology, and psychology. He was also clear that *Religionswissenschaft* consisted of two complementary dimensions, the "historical" and the "systematic" procedures of study. The "historical" task required a mutual interaction between the "general history" of religion and the "historical studies" of various specific religions; the "systematic" task aimed at disciplined generalizations and the structuring of data, and depended upon an application of phenomenological, comparative, sociological, and psychological studies of religions. That historical and systematic inquiries were two interdependent dimensions of one and the same discipline called the history of religions cannot be too heavily stressed.

Wach believed that the history of religions should ideally be taught as a part of human studies, but he also understood why in America it was taught

as a part of the divinity curriculum, as had been done at Harvard Divinity School and later at the University of Chicago. He liked to think that the example of Marburg, which had one chair in the philosophy faculty and another in the theological faculty, might be repeated at Chicago. Thus, he joyfully accepted the assignment of teaching the history of religions as a part of the FTF curriculum, but he also spent much energy in making it an important element in the university's Committee of the History of Culture.

The second thing we might remember is that, irenic in temper, Wach wanted to relate his new enterprise to each orientation of the three phases of comparative religion at Chicago. Accordingly, he paid special attention to (1) the special place of Judaism and Christianity in Western civilization, which the *Religionswissenschaft's* first phase in Chicago stressed, reflecting as it did the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions; (2) the relationship between the *Religionswissenschaft* and the philosophy of religion (or theology), stressed during the second phase, by George Burman Foster especially; and (3) the concern for specific religious traditions—Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam—as exemplified in the orientation of the third phase. He always lamented, however, the lack of interest in the so-called "primitive religions" in North America or, rather, the fact that "primitive religions" was regarded as the private preserve of anthropologists and not the concern of students of religion in North America. He was particularly sensitive to the fact that the usual variety of comparative religion in North America, which in effect was a peculiar halfway house between the *Religionswissenschaft* and *Missionswissenschaft*, tended to regard, for example, Hinduism and Buddhism as the expressions of solely Hindu or Buddhist religious experiences. He was persuaded that behind Hinduism or Buddhism lay the underlying religious experience of humankind, described as the experience of the "holy" by Rudolf Otto and as the experience of "power" by G. van der Leeuw. He was also sympathetic to the desire to find a special place for Judaism and Christianity in the study of religion, a hope which the 1893 Parliament had stressed. But unlike those who viewed all religions through the window of the Judeo-Christian tradition, Wach insisted that Judaism and Christianity, like all other religions, must be seen as parts of the "whole" religious experience of the human race. It is interesting that in the last ten years of his life Wach was often mistakenly thought to be in the camp of the second Chicago orientation, a situation which necessitated his stating repeatedly that while the philosophy of religion often applies an abstract philosophical idea of what religion is to the data of empirical, historical studies, the history of religions must begin with the investigation of religious phenomena, from which, it is hoped, a pattern of "meaning" might emerge. We should keep in mind, however, that the history of religion's inquiry into the "meaning" of religious phenomena leads one to questions of a philosophical and metaphysical nature, but the history of religions as such cannot deal with those questions philosophically.

The third thing to be kept in mind is that the situation of the history of religions at Chicago in the mid-Forties was further complicated both by Wach's new interest in theology and by the emergence of a strong theological ethos based on Whiteheadian process philosophy in the FTF. (Incidentally, Wach dedicated his volume, *Types of Religious Experience: Christian and Non-Christian*, to his colleagues of "The Federated Theological Faculty of the University of Chicago." Chapter 1 of this volume is significantly entitled, "The Place of the History of Religions in the Study of Theology," the subject which most occupied his thoughts during the last ten years of his life.) Wach, who had many questions about the neo-Kantianism that had influenced him earlier, read Whitehead seriously in hopes—or wishful thinking—that process thought might give new insight into the raw stuff of human experience unconditioned by separate cultural and religious traditions. He was persuaded that underneath religious and cultural divisions was the truth and life, which somehow must be united. Thus, in his words, "interpretation of expressions of religious experience means an integral understanding, that is, full linguistic, historical, psychological, technological, and sociological enquiry, in which full justice is done to the intention of the expression and to the context in which it occurs, and in which this expression is related to the experience of which it testifies" (*Types of Religious Experience*, pp. 28–29). He wanted to go beyond just an "integral understanding," however: he aspired to become an "integrated person" for whom all branches of knowledge, especially the history of religions and theology, could become parts of the larger unity. He was not trying to find a new coherence following his earlier work, *Religionswissenschaft: Prolegomena zu ihrer wissenschaft-theoretischen Grundlegung* (1924). He was not trying to formulate one more "Theological History of Religions" after the manner of Paul Tillich, one more "Missionswissenschaft" after the manner of Hendrick Kraemer, or another social scientific approach to religion as a cultural, social, or psychological system. He simply wanted to explore the possible linkage between two legitimate studies of religious reality, namely the history of religions and theology. He must have known that there was no miraculous resolution for such inquiries, but he sensed that the mere fact that we wrestle with these quests makes them worthwhile.

PROGRAMS

Joachim Wach was not asked by the University of Chicago to teach a well-established discipline such as sociology or philosophy. He was aware that the state of *Religionswissenschaft* in the Division of the Humanities at Chicago had not been lively, to say the least, for a long time. While it was in one sense good to start with a clean slate, including the new nomenclature of the "history of religions," Wach could not count on either the faculty or the students to understand what his discipline entailed. Actually, many people assumed that the history of religions was a historical discipline dealing

largely with non-Christian and non-Western religions, whereas those who remembered the old comparative religion thought of it as either a branch of philosophy of religion or some form of apologetics.

Wach attracted a variety of students who constituted the so-called "Sangha." He regarded his early students as the pioneers, interpreters, and builders of the intellectual resources of the history of religions in North America. With this in mind, he almost arbitrarily assigned as topics for Ph.D. theses those subjects which would be necessary to the young discipline in the coming years. For instance, if my memory serves me correctly, he assigned to Noah E. Fehl the subject of Greek and Christian approaches to the study of religion during the Patristic period; to Philip H. Ashby, the topic of the relationship between *Missionswissenschaft* and *Religionswissenschaft*; to Charles J. Adams, the method of Nathan Soderblom; to Jay Fussel, the primitive religions; and to F. Stanley Lusby, the development of *Religionswissenschaft* in North America. His fame was soon such that students came from other continents—two at least from Europe, two or three from India, and two from Japan.

In post-war America, Wach found both an enormous openness to humanistic and social scientific studies of religion and the temptation to look for an easy way out, or to trivialize, the complex subject of religion. On both accounts he was right. Few people then predicted the mushrooming of departments of religion or of religious studies, usually as part of the arts and sciences curriculum of American colleges and universities, which became a new fashion in the post-war period. The popularity of religious studies, however, unfortunately was accompanied by intellectual sloppiness in some quarters. Wach was particularly sensitive to the mental attitudes of historians of religions—to their emotional stability, maturity, and empathy—and not just to their intellectual preparation in the knowledge of languages, cultural background, and history. He was also clear about the distinction between two often confused legitimate studies, namely, the studies of individual religions such as Islam, Hinduism, or any of the primitive native religions, and the study of the history of religions; and he urged those interested in Islam to go to the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill and those interested in Buddhism to enroll in the University of Wisconsin at Madison's program in Buddhist Studies. Yet realizing that other institutions would undertake much more easily understood approaches to individual religions, Wach wanted to reserve a program at Chicago for those interested in the more demanding discipline of the history of religions. It was his aim that Chicago graduates combine *Religionswissenschaft* with the study of individual religions. I still remember the words of exhortation I received from him shortly after I joined the faculty in 1951:

If one wants to study a specific religion, one has to make certain that one's views of that religion are acceptable to those who are inside that

tradition; if one is an historian of religions, one has to make sure that one's views make sense to his peers or the fellow historians of religions beyond the level of information in which one's knowledge of religions can be checked by those inside those communities.

FROM WACH TO ELIADE

During the first half of Wach's tenure at Chicago during the Forties, the FTF provided scholarly stimulation to both Wach and his students. He also was active in the degree-granting Committee of the History of Culture and in various seminars, including that on the "birth of civilizations" organized by Robert Redfield, and in numerous lecture series; he was always "on the go." In spring, he and his students had their annual outing at the beach house of Professor and Mrs. Robert Platt at the Indiana Dunes. Every summer he visited his mother and sister in Orselina, Switzerland. His less than robust health was threatened in 1950 by a heart ailment, but he was well enough to go to India in 1952 as the Barrows Lecturer.

Wach received many visitors, including Martin Buber, Gershom G. Scholem (Wach's fellow student at Munich), D. T. Suzuki, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, A. A. Fyzee, and H. Kishimoto, all of whom delighted Wach's students by appearing in his classes. He was vitally interested in strengthening the program of the history of religions through inviting great scholars as Haskell Lecturers, notably his own teacher, Friedrich Heiler, who came after Wach's death; Louis Massignon, who came during Wach's visit to India; and Mircea Eliade, whom Wach considered the most astute historian of religions in his time.

During the second half of Wach's tenure at Chicago in the Fifties, the seams of the once solid FTF began to ravel. The departure of some of his close colleagues and friends from Chicago, especially Wilhelm Pauck to New York, was hard on the emotionally sensitive Wach. He was invited to assume the coveted chair of his mentor, Rudolf Otto, at Marburg, but after much deliberation, he declined this honor. He participated in the Seventh Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions held in Rome in the spring of 1955. He died in Switzerland in the summer of 1955 while visiting his mother and sister.

In the autumn of 1955, Friedrich Heiler taught at the University of Chicago; in 1956, Mircea Eliade agreed to deliver the Haskell Lectures and to teach at the University of Chicago, and he remained for thirty years as a professor in both the Divinity School and the degree-granting Committee on Social Thought. It was fortuitous that Eliade came to Chicago during the years of the expanding religious studies movement in North America. Many of his books were translated into English and were widely read by people in all walks of life. His name attracted a large number of students from various continents, and many Chicago graduates assumed positions of leadership in educational institutions, on committees, and in associations of local, national,

and international reputation. In 1961, Eliade was instrumental in inaugurating *History of Religions: An International Journal for Comparative Historical Studies*. Although he and Wach were very different in personality, approach, and academic orientation, the fact that they agreed wholeheartedly on the nature of the history of religions made for a smooth transition after Wach's death. The following statement, penned by Eliade in *History of Religions* 1, no. 1, could have been made without qualification by Wach; it eloquently addresses the problems and challenges of the history of religions which we in Chicago are destined to nurture for the sake of North America and the whole world:

Despite the manuals, periodicals, and bibliographies today available to scholars, it is progressively more difficult to keep up with the advances being made in all departments of the *History of Religions* [*Religionswissenschaft*]. Hence it is progressively more difficult to become a historian of religions. A scholar regrettably finds himself becoming a specialist in *one* religion or even in a particular period or a single aspect of that religion.

This situation has induced us to bring out a new periodical. . . . (*History of Religions* 1, no. 1 [Summer 1961]:1)

In retrospect, the program of the history of religions at Chicago in recent decades has been fortunate in attracting successfully Professors Charles H. Long, Gösta Ahlström, Frank E. Reynolds, Jonathan Z. Smith, Wendy D. O'Flaherty, and Lawrence Sullivan. Granted there will always be unavoidable differences of opinion among both faculty and students in the coming years; still, I consider it a great privilege to have been associated with this program for four decades, first as a student and then as a faculty member. As I close my eyes, I am overwhelmed by the memories of so many wonderful and talented men and women who have gone through our program. Many of them have cooperated with Eliade in recent years on his monumental enterprise, the sixteen-volume *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), which will remain for many years to come a minor classic in the history of religions and in the humanistic and social scientific study of religion.

7

RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

INTRODUCTION

In the autumn of 1981, I went to China as a member of the University of Chicago delegation invited by the Chinese Academy of Science. Much to my personal embarrassment, many of our Chinese colleagues were intensely curious about the fact that the Chicago delegation included a person like myself, born and raised in Japan. They kept asking me, as a "fellow Oriental," what I thought of American universities in comparison with their Chinese and Japanese counterparts. And realizing that I was teaching the history of religions, they pressed me as to why and how religion is taught as an academic subject in American educational institutions. In fact, they raised many questions which I had not thought through before, and since then I have been trying to sort out some of the issues in my own mind.

When I studied the history of religions in the mid-1940s under Joachim Wach at the University of Chicago, the history of religions and religious studies were hardly established in North America. Since then I have witnessed the growing popularity of the *History of Religions* and the sudden mushrooming of religious studies in various colleges and universities, both public and private. There is no question in my mind that the establishment of the academic study of religion in recent decades is one of the most salutary innovations in American institutions of higher learning. However, the all-too-sudden flowering of religious studies has left many of the ambiguities involved in the enterprise unresolved. Thus, before we undertake the task of "revisiting" the study of religion, we might profitably reflect on some of the unresolved issues.

I am reminded of Heidegger's criticism of Marx's statement: "The philosophers have interpreted the world, but it is up to us to change it." Heidegger commented that to change the world, one needs another—a new or a different—philosophical interpretation of the world.¹ Similarly, "revisiting the study of religion" requires more than simply adjusting to changing factors in our society such as economic retrenchment or anti-

¹ See R. J. Z. Werblowsky, "Crisis Consciousness and the Future," *Diogenes* 113–114 (Spring-Summer 1981): 69.