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Syncretism in Religion

Jacob Pandian

The investigation of the origin, history and use(s) of the concept of syncretism and the investigation of the phenomenon which the concept identifies are undoubtedly very important and significant in the anthropological, theological, historical, and philosophical studies of religion. This volume entitled "Syncretism in Religion: A Reader"¹ brings together diverse scholarly perspectives on the concept of syncretism, as well as on the operation of syncretism in the history of religious traditions, and sheds much light for an understanding of the historical, cultural, and cognitive processes that shape religious traditions.

The volume, as a whole, makes the reader reflect upon the validity of the concept of syncretism and provides useful information to explore the question of why the study of syncretism in particular religious traditions is important. The nineteen articles included in this volume examine various issues and questions on the concept of syncretism and seek to stimulate further research on the processes of syncretism. Some scholars doubt the usefulness of the concept of syncretism and do not see the need for a separate area of scholarship on syncretism in religious traditions because everything in culture (including religion as an aspect of culture) is syncretistic. Such a perspective suggests that scholarship on syncretism erroneously assumes the existence of "pure cultures" or "pure religions" or "pure religious doctrines" and that believers and theologians fallaciously attempt to identify immutable essences. However, most scholars would favor the retention of the concept and the analysis of the phenomenon of syncretism because doctrinal disputes over syncretism (by themselves) constitute foundational beliefs in most religious traditions. Also, most scholars would advocate the investigation of the origin and history of such disputes that result from syncretism in relation to the arguments of both the proponents and opponents of syncretism in the different religious traditions for an understanding of the dynamics of cultural, historical, and cognitive processes that promote or undermine syncretism.

1 Leopold, Anita Maria, and Jeppe Sinding Jensen (eds.): *Syncretism in Religion. A Reader*. London: Equinox Publishing, 2004. 402 pp. ISBN 1-904768-65-2.