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From Primitive to Indigenous: The Academic Study of Indigenous Religions by James L. Cox. Ashgate, 2007. 206pp., 2 maps. Hb. £55.00 / $99.95. ISBN-13: 9780754655695.

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James Cox at the University of Edinburgh has contributed this volume to a series on the *Vitality of Indigenous Religions*: a series which "explores the development of contemporary indigenous religions from traditional, ancestral precursors," with a focus on "living and current manifestations." Cox states that his intention is "to analyze critically the history of and assumptions underlying the use of the category 'Indigenous Religions' as a distinct tradition alongside 'world religions'." Recognizing that the vast numbers of indigenous groups, each with their own tradition, requires educators to concentrate on a select few, Cox focuses his attention on the descriptive terms used by researchers to connote cultural practices. (Intro: *Problems, Research Context and Overview* 1–7.)

The first chapter, *The Academic Study of Indigenous Religions* (9–31), attends to the history and development of curricula to include Indigenous Religions, as well as to the influence those studies have had on popular conceptions. After highlighting the history of missionary societies Cox takes a look at the critique made by W. H. Ridgeway on subsequent articles, journals, and books authored by missionaries and anthropologists in the early to mid nineteenth century. He notes that Ridgeway argues for the equality of human beings and makes an important attempt to "summarize the main traditions, beliefs and practices of the Zulu people into a coherent picture to aid understanding of the pre-Christian 'religious system'"(10–13). Discussing the "Anti-Religionist Study of Religion by James G. Frazer" (13–16) Cox concludes that both Frazer and Ridgeway offer basic premises which would become the founding principles on which to build university level courses on Indigenous Religions. Stressed are the equality and commonality of cognitive processes in all human beings, as well as the recognition that all religions contain the same basic elements, leading to a call for a complete, comparative and non-racial, description of all religions, including so-called primitive religions. After looking at Geof-

frey Parrinder's work amongst the indigenous groups in Africa, and his subsequent pioneering 1954 text categorizing the conceptions according to the terminology used by the different Indigenous groups across Africa, such as "Supreme Being," "Witchcraft," "Magic," "High God," "Primal," "Nature," "Communal Ritual," "Ancestors," and "Sorcery," Cox concludes this chapter by highlighting the growth of research and study programmes at the universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh.

Cox moves on to discuss an imbalance of power between what he considers the Christian West and the non-western world. He argues that although all religions derived from the same universal essence, early "primitive" religious customs paved the way for the development of those which have become known as major religious traditions. Chapter two, *Essentialism and the World Religions Paradigm* (34–53), is devoted to delving into the use of the descriptor, "world religions." Cox concisely presents scholarly contributions to an ongoing discussion concerning the classification of "world religions," arguing that thinkers such as Tomoko Masuzawa, John Noss, Huston Smith, A. C. Bouquet, E. Kellett, and Carl Clemen, followed by Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Ninian Smart (33–47), aim to clarify, challenge, and contribute to the debate over the "world religions" paradigm.

Before proffering a new paradigm for consideration, Cox (chapter three, *Defining "Indigenous" Scientifically*, 53–75) considers "how Indigenous Religions currently are defined, understood and constituted, as a unified tradition comparable to other world faiths, like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity" (53). It has to be said at this point that researchers take their basic information from what they perceive to be "lived religion"; that is, current practice based on the traditions of culture, politics and production handed down generationally, and extolled through ritual, celebration, and/or prayer. Though Cox does acknowledge that within Indigenous societies worldwide, "every act, from eating to sexual intercourse, has religious implications" (Introduction, 3), he contends that such a consideration does not apply to a "Western dualistic model, where religion is dissected from the secular," suggesting instead that the term "religion" itself needs analysis and clarification. This, he takes up later in the volume.

Cox does not hesitate to critique either past or contemporary thinkers, and, though not completely discounting their contributions, he does suggest that many "authors commit the twin errors of perpetuating the world religions paradigm and of approaching the study of indigenous people under hidden essentialist assumptions" (53). He argues that to include

"indigenous religions" into the world religions paradigm, verifiable empirical studies must show comparative field studies and "stand on verifiable… scientific methods." To justify his conclusion Cox turns to J. G. Platvoet who, he contends, exemplifies the defining of "the religions of diverse people, extending over vast areas, as localized, kinship-based oral societies." Further, Platvoet contrasts community religions and world religions.

Up to this point Cox has taken a decidedly antagonistic approach to earlier studies, but finally, with Platvoet, he finds research with redeeming value. Cox builds on Platvoet's conclusions with a review of contemporary scholarship, and a discussion of what fuels religious feeling in diverse cultures, whether that be technology, agriculture, hunting or gathering. He postulates that indigenous religion is not characterized by its means of production, but by its "location and kinship system" (71), arguing that any viable empirical research must begin with a rudimentary definition and, from that place, develop theories and categorize findings.

Cox advocates "the separation of theological presuppositions from an empirically testable scientific definition of religion," to substantiate his theory that the study of Indigenous religions may be based on sociopolitical parameters. He argues that, whereas scholars of religion with "surreptitious theological assumptions" have had a "stranglehold" on the study of religious studies for "nearly one hundred years," he prefers instead to promote the idea of a *"science of religion,* which *includes* the academic study of Indigenous Religions" (74). Cox proposes a "dual definition of religion as transmitting an authoritative tradition about postulated nonfalsifiable alternative realities" (141). This, he fleshes out in the fourth chapter, *Towards a Socio-cultural, Non-essentialist Interpretation of Religion* (75–93), before going on in chapters five and six to apply his arguments as he analyses two distinct cultural case studies, *The Yupiit of Alaska: The "Real People"* (95–117), and *The Adaptive Nature of Indigenous Religions of Zimbabwe* (119–139).

Again, in chapter seven, *Indigenous Religions and the Debate over Primitivsim* (141–167), we return to review the hypotheses of other thinkers and the subsequent critique by James Cox. He contrasts neo-shamanism with what he has identified with being indigenous, concluding that any "study of Indigenous Religions should not be confused either with neo-shamanism or animist theology" (167). Cox stands by his premise, offered in the first chapters: that the study of Indigenous Religion includes a variety of human activities which is not covered in academic research or curricula elsewhere. In his conclusion, he offers suggestions for developing such cur-

ricula which would include methodology and case studies, as well as the issues which arise out of increasing globalization (*Afterword: A Practical Conclusion,* 169–171).

Is this volume a text book for lecturers? Does it provide adequate arguments for and against historical and contemporary research? Does it offer a model for curriculum development? I think that amongst his contentious arguments James Cox contributes insightful ideas on which to expand existing religious studies to include the dimension of human activity contained within Indigenous Religion. I think that this volume works well as a development tool for use within the education system, though the model offered in the final pages (169-71) would need to be tempered to expand the existing Religious Studies discipline offered in grade schools. For those engaged in graduate and post-graduate studies, ample resources are included to challenge and engage an enquiring mind.