

Carole
Cusack
1995

Religious Experience

in

World

Religions



THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION
FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

Selected Papers

edited by
Victor C. Hayes

Already Published

- Australian Essays in World Religions
- Toward Theology in an Australian Context

Number 3

Religious Experience
in World Religions

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Edited and Introduction
by
Victor C. Hayes



A.A.S.R.
Publications

The Australian Association for the Study of Religions

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Sturt College of Advanced Education, Bedford Park, South
Australia, 5042.

Cover design by Rosemary Sae
Typesetting by Beryl Fisher

Printed by University Relations Unit, Flinders University

Published in March 1980

National Library of Australia card number and ISBN
ISBN 0 908083 06 8

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Foreword

This volume presents a series of explorations, analyses and assessments of Religious Experiences across various world religions. It is the third volume of Selected Papers prepared by Religion Studies scholars working in Australia and published by The Australian Association for the Study of Religions. It fulfils the desire, expressed in our first volume, that these anthologies should focus on single broad themes or topics.

Religious Experience is an elusive concept because religious experiences are multiform, dependent for their shapes and expressions on the differences in people and on the variety of world religious contexts in which they appear. Religious experiences have brought subjective religious surety to countless people across the centuries, and today—especially today—in contemporary as well as traditional forms, they represent the royal road to spirituality or growth or transformation for vast numbers of people.

Religious Experience has advantages over Authority, Reason and Tradition as a cornerstone of religion. In one form or another it is accessible to all, regardless of intelligence, education or social status. It has immediacy, involves the whole person, brings conviction, and provides religious motivation.

There are problems, however, concerning the meaning, origin and truth of Religious Experiences. Different experiences occasion strong convictions about often incompatible propositions, and they all seem susceptible of psychological, sociological or biological explanations. What is more, we see contemporary ways of forming and interpreting experience offering strong challenge to all traditional (including theistic) ways. None of this, however, denies to Experience the last word! Whatever its new shapes, flavours and meanings, says Gordon Kaufman (1975: 8), it is Experience which “will sit in judgment on our traditions and histories to see whether they can still make sense of our lives.”

V.C.H.

