

AUTEUR PRODUCTIONS, LTD.

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ASIAN AND ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS: A DIVINE ENCOUNTER IN AMERICA

PUBLIC TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY

REVIEWS & AWARDS: (Download MS Word Version)

“The Asian & Abrahamic Religions: A Divine Encounter in America.” The documentary is being broadcast on public television stations nationwide. The documentary was the Official selection Sun Valley Spiritual Film Festival, dedicated to the exploration of the human spirit through the medium of film and discourse. The Program won the Gabriel Interfaith Award, The Hermes Platinum Award and the Communicator Award of Excellence.

Toronto Globe and Mail Weekend TV

The Asian & Abrahamic Religion: A Divine Encounter in America

“This excellent, thoughtful and educational doc, attempts to explain Indic traditions and religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism) and compare the core belief with those of other religions. It points out that while many people in North America are familiar with yoga, meditation and various martial arts, they have little knowledge of the religions from which these practices are derived. There is footage of religious events, with the details explained, and interviews with many gurus, swamis and faith leaders who are given an opportunity to explain the tenets of their faiths, comparing them to those of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Beautifully made and meant to educate solidly about shared religious beliefs, it’s one of those important docs to be aired and seen at a time when various non-Christian religions are either demonized or misunderstood.” - John Doyle: TV Critic

Newsday - OpEd (Long Island, New York) Keeler: Understanding the faiths of Asia

By BOB KEELER

A lot of temporary insanity broke out after 9/11, and perhaps the craziest was the persecution of Sikhs. As it became known that the hijackers were Muslims, and images of Osama bin Laden appeared everywhere, often wearing a turban, life became miserable for Sikhs. Their faith requires them to wear unshorn hair and turbans, and too many Americans mistook them for Muslims and tormented them. That was doubly wrong. To persecute Muslims because of the actions of a fanatic few was deeply unfair. To attack Sikhs was also unfair -- and ignorant. Sikhs not only are not Muslims, but suffered centuries ago in conflict with fundamentalist Muslims in India.

"We're mistaken for the fundamentalists that we fought against," said Jessi Kaur, a Sikh from California. In an interview, she recalled examples of ignorance about Sikhs. In one case, the gurdwara, or temple, in San Jose held a fundraiser for 9/11 victims. The hosts outlined Sikh history and beliefs, but the guests somehow didn't comprehend. "As we were taking them back to their cars, they asked us what sect of Islam we belong to," Kaur recalled. Now she and adherents of other Asian faiths have a chance to dispel ignorance in a valuable new documentary, "The Asian & Abrahamic Religions: A Divine Encounter in America." The two-part film airs this Saturday and next Saturday on WNET/13. It's the third in a series from Auteur Productions in Maryland. The others were "Jews & Christians: A Journey of Faith" and "Three Faiths, One God: Judaism, Christianity, Islam." This latest film examines the beliefs and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism. It features members of those religions and of the three Abrahamic faiths. One of them, Bishop John Bryson Chane, former bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, says in the film: "If I were to go into a church and say, 'Do you know that Sikhs are very theistic, they are very monotheistic?' they would not believe me." In the film, Chane and other Christians, Jews and Muslims dispel erroneous ideas about the Asian religions. "These films are really meant to change attitudes in terms of misconceptions and stereotypes about the groups," said producer Gerald Krell, in an interview. The film, produced by Krell, Meyer Odze and Krell's son, Adam, takes viewers on that journey, with interviews and live action. "There's only 20 seconds of narrative in two hours," Krell said. "We try to let people who know what they're talking about tell us the story." That story will have a life beyond these two weeks. Krell's previous films are still shown in high schools and play a role in interfaith dialogues. And the Henry Luce Foundation has given Auteur a grant to put a DVD and study guide of the new film in divinity schools, to foster understanding. "The core message of all our interfaith films is that pluralism is critical to human survival," Krell said. "If religious conflicts of the past are to be avoided in the future, religious pluralism and serious interreligious conversations are essential to the global community." Kaur added: "What he's doing is highly commendable. He's eradicating ignorance." If this film had been shown widely before 9/11, perhaps there would have been just a tiny bit less of the ignorance that led to Sikhs being harassed, and even killed. But it's never too late for us to learn more about the nation's increasing religious diversity. This documentary is a good start.

Bob Keeler is on the Newsday editorial board and a Pulitzer Prize winner.

THE ASIAN ERA NEWS SERVICES

“The Asian & Abrahamic Religions: A Divine Encounter in America ”

For decades in America, formal interfaith conversations have typically involved Christians and Jews, or Christians, Jews and Muslims. Increasingly, however, adherents of these traditional “Abrahamic faiths” are becoming aware of and thoughtfully beginning to engage devout representatives of various Asian religions. In neighborhoods, in classrooms, in professional settings and in the public square, Americans are discovering the need to understand the religious values and customs of, Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists and others. Many peoples of the Western world are hard pressed to begin to understand and appreciate these seemingly strange and unfamiliar eastern religions whose presence is well

established, and growing on American soil. To many Americans the Asian religions remain a mystery. Yet the presence of the Asian religions has been growing on American soil almost from the country's beginning. Over time Asian religious practices began to influence and transform everyday life for ordinary Americans who discovered Yoga, meditation and the martial arts and healing. "The Asian and Abrahamic Religions: A Divine Encounter in America," a documentary, explores the beliefs, practices and rituals of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, showcasing how these religions are similar to and yet different from Christianity, Judaism and Islam. A decade of spiritual research has led three filmmakers to their third film in a documentary series that discusses the similarities and differences of seven religions in the United States. In this 105-minute documentary Auteur Productions filmmakers Gerald Krell, his son, Adam Krell, and Meyer Odze examine the similarities and differences with the Abrahamic religions, how they perceive each other, confront prejudice and stereotypes and how they can understand and respect one another. The primary aim of the documentary is to demystify the Asian religions; the misconceptions and stereotypes that many Americans have about them, and to show the deep historical roots of the Asian religions in America. The documentary will help create a broader acceptance of religious pluralism in the United States and the world, and serve as a catalyst for interfaith dialogue, understanding and respect. The documentary is also meant to help audiences find greater understanding of these religions as ways to refine and deepen their faith in their own religions; and clarify how they define their own identity. Prominent world renowned personalities in the documentary include: Noted author Karen Armstrong; Robert Thurman, Professor of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Studies in the Department of Religion at Columbia University, President of the Tibet House, and The first American to be ordained a Tibetan Monk by the Dalai Lama. Diana Eck, Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at the Harvard Divinity School and Director of The Pluralism Project; famous historian Romila Thapar, winner of the Library of Congress, Kluge prize; Stephen Prothero, Professor of Religion, Boston University and co-editor "Asian Religions In America.", Professor Islamic Studies Akbar Ahmed, American University. Distinguished theologians including The Right Rev. John Bryson Chane, Bishop of Washington, Diocese of Washington; Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee; Professor Francis Clooney, Harvard Divinity School, Director of the Center for World Religions, and internationally revered swamis and gurus from the Asian religions. The documentary and the accompanying study guide, allows students to explore some of the holy texts and sacred practices of the not-so-familiar major Asian religions found in America. Through interviews with scholars and spiritual leaders, and the filming of on-site religious observances, the documentary uncovers those timeless strands common to the human condition and expressed in parallel ways in different religions. While no two religions are identical, the discovery and highlighting of many of these existential, universal strands is vital to understanding culture, religion and the self-quest that historically binds the human family together. These common concerns and connecting religious links include perceptions of the Divine or Ultimate Truth, spirituality, worship, nature of religious leadership, communal life-cycle events, the after-life, the challenge of modernity, engagement of the religious "other," and approaches toward establishing a global community of justice and peace. The program's educational outreach message is clear. The Asian populations in America provide a great challenge, and opportunity. We can no longer choose to ignore or simply tolerate the other.

Rather we must celebrate the opportunity for interreligious understanding this brings. “The Asian and Abrahamic Religions: A Divine Encounter in America ” cuts to the very core of cross-cultural awareness. Its cogent content of religious, and cultural diversity should lead to changed perspectives and changed behavior toward the other. The documentary is being broadcast on public television stations nation- wide. The documentary was the official selection at the Sun Valley Spiritual Film Festival, dedicated to the exploration of the human spirit through the medium of film and discourse. Praises and rave reviews have come in from critics and religious leaders. John Doyle, a TV Critic, wrote: “This excellent, thoughtful and educational doc, attempts to explain Indic traditions and religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism) and compare the core belief with those of other religions.

The Rev. Paul Chafee, Executive Director of the Interfaith Center at the Presidio in San Francisco reporting on a preview screening at the North American Interfaith Network, National Conference:

“The simplistic, often unfortunate divide between Abrahamic and Asian religions was challenged with the premier screening of *The Asian and Abrahamic Religions: A Divine Encounter in America...the film was emotionally overwhelming, a movie I’ve waited my whole life to see...told from the perspective of Abrahamic and Asian religions in the United States, it demonstrates how the nation’s emergent interfaith community is so much bigger than even interfaith activists have realized. May it be seen over and over again as the children of Abraham and the children of Asia get to know each other better.”*

Mr. James Friedman of the Connecticut Council for Interreligious Understanding (CCIU)

“It was a thrilling experience, a very special step in our interreligious journey. Your production is absolutely stunning and unusually informative, especially about the Asian religions...Through words and pictures in your remarkable film I learned a great deal more about some of our religions than in many conversations we’ve held over the years...I believe your work can educate many about our Asian and Abrahamic religions, some of which are unknown to so many in America, and can help move us forward to an expanded level of interreligious understanding.”

American University Washington Semester Program: “My two Cross-cultural Communication classes, considers the cultural dynamics of religion and faith. In my opinion, your film was just the vehicle I need to help introduce the subject. What pleased me was that the movie is an excellent teaching tool on three levels: From an artistic standpoint (exquisite cinematography and skilled craftsmanship), from a historical standpoint (learning about the arrival of various religions in America connecting the religions like the Civil Rights Movement and the Beat Generation.), and from a substantive standpoint (interviews with eminent scholars, practitioners, and religious authorities provided invaluable insight and context to the rich visual tapestry of the film.)” - Claudia E. Anyaso, Professor, Washington Mentorship Program.

Dr. David Shaner, Professor of Asian Studies and Philosophy, Furman University:

“Simply a first rate documentary with critically important information shared by the world’s foremost authorities, a must for college professors, high school teachers, and religious leaders.”

Awards

The Communicator Award of Excellence: The leading international awards program honoring creative excellence for Communications Professionals. , The Award of Excellence, our highest honor, is given to those entries whose ability to communicate puts them among the best in the field. The Communicator Awards is judged by the International Academy of the Visual Arts, an invitation-only body consisting of top-tier professionals from a "Who's Who" of acclaimed media, communications, advertising, creative and marketing firms.

The Hermes Platinum Award: It is the highest honor given by the Intl. Assoc. of Marketing and Communication Professionals. Honors the Messengers and Creators of traditional and Emerging Media.

The Gabriel Award: Ecumenical and Interreligious TV National Release winner. Presented by the Catholic Academy for Communication Arts Professionals.

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