

Holy Hodgepodge! Have You Thought about Your Religion Lately?

Paul E. Sago

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With its brilliant simplicity, Holy Hodgepodge! serves as a guide to a life of piety and sincerity.

Holy Hodgepodge! by Paul E. Sago works to break through the mess surrounding organized Western religion, arguing that most people culturally inherit religious beliefs that they rarely stop to challenge, and that they unquestioningly subscribe to the tenets of their denominations.

As a writer whose background consists of being president of a Christian university, an academic, a pastor, and a counselor, Sago brings his depth of experience and knowledge to bear. Clear and delightful prose critiques what he refers to as “churchianity,” or the political, financial, and bureaucratic garbage that churches consciously perpetuate, rather than focusing on the true message of the Bible.

In this sense, the book offers an informed and intelligent critique of contemporary Christianity that is free from pettiness and mudslinging. This most welcome analysis contextualizes problems with Western religion, slicing through the needless commentary of professional theologians that confuses more than it clarifies.

The work includes a refreshing, even ingenious, take on sin that states that the idea of original sin is ludicrous. If the death and redemption of Jesus obliterated this genetic stain on the soul, it asks, why do Western creeds still teach and emphasize it? Though the question is rather simple, the decision to start at a kind of theological ground level advances the book’s overarching implication that a basic approach is the best way to think about issues.

Other chapters examine similar concepts, including heaven, hell, the Bible, and the creation as featured in Genesis, the author’s favorite book of the Pentateuch. Sago analyzes long-standing assumptions about what they intellectually and historically represent. Through an orderly and intuitive structural organization, the book patiently unpacks concepts, even as it continues to adduce compelling evidence for an embellishment-free approach to reading the Bible and understanding one’s faith.

Short, concise chapters are followed by a series of vague questions that diminish the book’s authority, but that do not distract majorly from the profundity of the book’s recommendations for living an authentic life pervaded by a true relationship with God.

The book encourages a visceral, rather than mental, communion with God that echoes transcendentalist thought. It suggests experiencing God in the physical world—in the sublimity of the Grand Canyon, in the tiny fingers of a newborn baby, or in the agility of the hummingbird. This wisdom pierces the muddle of personal belief.

A work with a deist perspective in which God is the great cosmic watchmaker, the book concludes with a convincing and attractive recommendation to follow the advice of the prophet Micah, who advocated the pursuit of justice for other beings, the love of kindness for its own sake, and the practice of humility to escape the tyranny of the ego.

With its brilliant simplicity, *Holy Hodgepodge!* may serve as a guide to a life of piety and sincerity.

PHILIP J. KOWALSKI (May 25, 2017)

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