

How Often Haydon Said It First!

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Peden, W. Creighton. *A Good Life in a World Made Good: Albert Eustace Haydon, 1880–1975*. New York: Peter Lang, 2006.

Haydon, A. Eustace, Creighton Peden, and John N. Gaston. *Pragmatism and the Rise of Religious Humanism: The Writings of Albert Eustace Haydon (1880–1975)*. Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 2006.

We owe enormous thanks to W. Creighton Peden for his comprehensive biography of Albert Eustace Haydon and for the critical edition in three volumes of Haydon's writings. Many religious liberals are familiar with the three main works from Haydon's pen, *The Quest of the Ages* (1929); *Man's Search for the Good Life: An Inquiry into the Nature of Religions* (1937); and *Biography of the Gods* (1941). Peden not only gives us summaries of these major works but also reminds us of the rich human being behind not only these books but an enormous output of papers, book reviews, lectures, and radio addresses during the long lifetime of this Canadian scholar transplanted to the United States at the University of Chicago where he had a long, creative, and influential career.

After his degree at McMaster (then in Toronto), Haydon went to the University of Chicago for his Ph.D. Summers were spent back in Canada as a Baptist minister.

Haydon succeeded George Burman Foster at Chicago as the professor of world religions and brought a new set of interest to this neglected field. Foster had so upset Baptist authorities that President Harper transferred him out of the Divinity School to the philosophy department. Whereas the late nineteenth century had begun to become curious about other religions, the approach typically was that of linguistic scholarship, translating Scriptures into European languages. For Haydon this was not enough. Religion had to be studied through the experiences of the men and women who lived within religious traditions, and thus Haydon was doing for the higher religions what contemporary anthropologists were doing for folk religions. A brilliant administrator, Harper appointed Haydon in the University but gave him an office in the Divinity School.

But Haydon went even further. He used the category of folk religions to apply to the major world religions and their actual manifestations. As a result, the insights of psychology and sociology were brought to bear on the description of what people have been up to. Haydon was quite willing to describe his approach as naturalistic, and to describe the religious stories told around the world as products of human imagination rather than any kind of supernatural intrusion or revelation. While the Divinity School could handle this radical approach, it did create a certain uneasiness, and at one point a young scholar was appointed who could balance this approach. That scholar was Henry Nelson Wieman, and readers of this journal will realize that he quickly became as radical as Haydon in his own way.

Where Haydon stands out, however, is in the effort he made to understand a variety of human religions as they were lived out by their adherents. Since religions were, to Haydon, created by humans, this approach allowed for comparisons in terms of

human needs and human values common to all. These then took on cultural colorations as they formed religions.

This reviewer is reminded of a former colleague's phrase: "Any damn fool can be original if he is ignorant enough!" Morton Scott Enslin, distinguished maverick New Testament scholar, also moved from his Baptist background to a Universalist seminary. Reading Haydon today, many of us will be surprised to find some of our thoughts articulated long ago. John Dewey in 1909 had noted the fate of many old ideas: "But in fact intellectual progress usually occurs through sheer abandonment of questions together with both of the alternatives they assume an abandonment that results from their decreasing vitality and a change of urgent interest. We do not solve them: we get over them."

As Haydon studies the religions of the world—and the attempts of scholars to describe them—he senses the biases that too often operated. Christian thought, focused on belief in a god, is not typical of all religions. The origins of religions were in the sets of moral behaviors that societies selected if they were to survive. When these failed, other power and other realms of possible satisfaction were imagined that could reassure people that all would eventually be well.

For Haydon, differentiations begin at this point. In India, at least for the elite, a mystical escape emerged. Buddhists found bliss in withdrawal from the world. Zoroastrians explained problems in terms of the power of an older, bad god and saw a cosmic struggle in which the good god would finally be victor. And this was the seedbed for many ideas in the subsequent Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Since the created god(s) of any particular society reflected its needs and desires at some particular time, it would be fruitless to look for some common predecessor god. And when one looked closely, the characteristics of any particular god might change sharply when circumstances changed—military defeat, invasion.

The important shift in history was from attempting to fulfill needs and desires in a very dangerous ancient world to the stage of postponing fulfillment to some other world. This is what is behind the key phrase that Peden chose for his title. Humans seek "a good life in a world made good."

By this time, a second generation of religious humanists was developing. Although Haydon never became a Unitarian minister, he did serve the Unitarian church in Madison, Wisconsin, from 1918 to 1924. One parishioner was the future progressive senator, Robert La Follette. Haydon was not only a signer of the Humanist Manifesto of 1933, he had been on the drafting committee with Roy Wood Sellars, Curtis Reese, Raymond Bragg, and Edwin Wilson. He was vice president of the Humanist Press Association, and instrumental in transforming this into the American Humanist Association.

Haydon sees the two change agents operating in the modern world as science and democracy. The sciences have rendered much of ancient theologies as untenable, even as knowledge of the world helped us realize that there were indeed many theologies with conflicting claims. Democracy has broken the authoritarian powers of bishop and king who could create controls over human inquiry and thought.

What trajectories brought Haydon to these themes? In 1903 he is ordained as a

Baptist minister, and he serves pulpits in Ontario. He marries a cousin and they shift to a larger pulpit. Then, in 1910, they shift to the University of Chicago for doctoral studies. After his degree is completed, he joins the faculty. Those next years see the flowering of an instrumentalist drawing upon Ames, Kallen, and Dewey—all of whom have taken Darwin seriously. Peden's paraphrase: "humans are animals that have evolved the ability to take some things as signs for other, to understand meanings, and to act in a purposive, intelligent way. With this ability, humans have undertaken the task of transforming the natural environment to meet their needs" (*A Good Life*, 47).

Haydon's humanism avoided the atheist label since there was no universal meaning of a god that could be refuted or denied. In 1925 lectures at Hebrew Union College, he proclaimed, "religion becomes idealism in action under the guidance of intelligence, using the tools of science" (*Pragmatism*, 92).

The Quest of the Ages (1929) describes ancient religions as "living embodiments of a great hope—the hope of a good life in a good world." Note how far he had moved from the idea of gods, prophets, and revelations. At later stages, when these emerged, he noted that "around about the great mediators of divine revelation the faith of their followers wove myths of marvelous deeds, of supernatural birth and superhuman power. The eager desire to be sure made belief easy" (*Pragmatism*, 181). Despite some earlier sympathies, he is now ready to say that the experiential mystical "state provides no information from another world and is purely subjective. The claimed wisdom of a mystic is only the social wisdom complicated with emotion" (*Pragmatism*, 130).

In 1930, Haydon addressed the First International Congress on Mental Hygiene, where he differentiated three phases of religions: "(1) the ideal, a vision of the desired values of the completely satisfying life; (2) the cult, that is, the technique by means of which the group feels confident the values may be attained; (3) the ideology, which as cosmology and theology interprets the way in which the environing universe is related to man's hopes and ideals" (*Pragmatism*, 140). Two years later Haydon was in on the founding of the New Orient Society and analyzed some Eastern religions in terms of the ways that they fulfilled these functions in the past and in the challenges of the modern world. His focus now is clearly on transforming social orders.

Reviewing Dewey's *A Common Faith*, Haydon is critical of the concession there to god-talk, however attenuated. In 1937 *Man's Search for the Good Life: An Inquiry into the Nature of Religions* is published. "A good life in a world made good" is the slight revision of the continuing theme in his mature works (*Good Life*, 10). Here Haydon reviews the ways that religions have been studied, and endorses the Chicago pragmatists. "Here at last the interpretation of religion was freed from its long imprisonment in the theology and cult, and focused on the vital needs of human beings seeking values in the winning of which ideas and cult forms found their natural places as instruments. From this point of view religion was no longer a narrow segment of human culture dealing with man's relation to the supernatural" (*Pragmatism*, 73).

Biography of the Gods appeared in 1941—a detailed study of the different gods of the major religions. How they emerged, how they changed in changing circumstances. Haydon is careful to describe the absence of significant gods in much of Chinese tradition. His conclusion: "More needful than faith in God is faith that man can give love, justice, peace and his beloved moral values embodiment in human relations.

Denial of this faith is the only real atheism" (*Good Life*, 329).

In 1935 Haydon had joined the Chicago Ethical Society, and in 1945 upon his university retirement he became officially a Leader. This sustained his contact with others in this "deed not creed" movement.

The rest of Peden's volume makes valuable research available to the rest of us. He summarizes many of the addresses during the next ten years and also summarizes many of the radio addresses Haydon gave during that time.

This book is a must for anyone studying religions in America, and is essential for those who are interested in the impact of scientific development and studies, as well as democratizing, on religions. For Unitarian Universalists and humanists, it is an absolute must! The three source volumes are also made available to us by Peden's diligence. We are already indebted to him for the excellent previous volumes on Francis Ellingwood Abbott and William James Potter, along with numerous studies of religious liberalism in America. Enjoy this, and eagerly await his next exercise in excellence!