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Holy Wealth:
Accounting for This World
and The Next
in Religious Belief and Practice

Festschrift for John R. Hinnells

Edited by
Almut Hintze and Alan Williams

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Introduction

This book has come together in a spirit of acknowledgment and thanks to JOHN R. HINNELLS for a lifetime of scholarship and generous contribution to the academic and public domain of the study of religion and related fields. The editors first considered what particular theme contributors to this 75th Birthday *Festschrift* might bear in mind in offering their papers, and we settled on one that runs across many religions and cultures, namely the interface between material and spiritual wealth, which we entitled 'Holy Wealth'. The theme could also have been rendered as 'Religious Benevolence, Public and Private', incorporating a major strand of John's particular fascination with the Zoroastrians of ancient and modern times, and his more general interest in the positive and life-affirming aspects of religious traditions across many domains. We decided to stay with the title 'Holy Wealth,' in spite of the fact that many of us had strayed slightly from the initial theme, but I am sure we all had John in mind when we offered what we did, and we hope that the present collection does not displease him.

Within religious traditions, declared evaluations of worldly wealth and economic success range from the wholly negative to the enthusiastically positive: yet the division does not generally run *between*, but rather *across* and *within* traditions – witness the ancient and medieval ascetic ethos of Christianity, as compared with the Protestant ethic of later times, developing into the latter-day situation of simultaneous Christian endorsements and condemnations of capitalism in the modern world. 'Holy poverty' may be extolled as a fundamental religious principle and norm of the mainstream of religious traditions, or it may be confined to mendicant, ascetic and mystical tendencies, with rules that prohibit the accumulation of material wealth. One 'religion' may include all this range: at its far extremes, for example, an apparently 'worldly', capitalistic ethos nurtured by right wing Christian political factions coexists with a left wing 'Liberation Theology' that tends towards a Marxian world-view, both of which may earnestly claim, but differently interpret, the same scriptural sources of inspiration. The Americas, if not the world, have been divided by such a diversification of Christian theology, variously celebrating and condemning economic growth and success/exploitation as respectively virtuous or inimical to human happiness. This volume ventures no further into such a maelstrom of generality, but seeks insight in particularity.

JOHN R. HINNELLS has for many years been one of the foremost writers on the subject of the indigenous Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism and, more

particularly, the various communities in Iran, the Indian subcontinent and in a global diaspora that trace their cultural and religious identity to the ancient prophet Zarathustra. Zoroastrianism is sometimes upheld as a prime example of the view that worldly wealth is a token of spiritual as well as mundane attainment. It was, after all, the religion of several Iranian empires until the arrival of Islam in the 7th century CE. Zoroastrianism had begun with the ancient Gāthic ethos of protection of the poor and a definition of the creator divinity as a benevolent, Wise Lord, Ahura Mazdā, who sustains the world with an ‘incremental spirit’ (*spenta mainyu*). It developed an elaborate eschatological system of accountancy of spiritual and moral debit and credit, registered in the soul itself and evaluated in an individual judgment after death. JOHN R. HINNELLS has written extensively on the Parsi Zoroastrians as one of South Asia’s economically most successful communities with a great history of entrepreneurial achievement and religious philanthropy. In this volume of studies, modestly offered in honour of Professor HINNELLS, we bring together a number of historical studies exploring in depth concepts, attitudes and practices that account for the benevolent power of religion in the individual and society. These case studies of Zoroastrian, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist and other religious traditions display the variety and complexity of values relating to the subject of wealth, the world and the spirit of benevolence.

If a key concept in Zoroastrianism is the ‘incremental spirit’ which governs the faith, it is not surprising perhaps that this book too has increased in scope and range. This reflects, as it happens, the multi-faceted nature of the mind of the man to whom the book is offered, as he has ranged far beyond Iran, beyond religion, and beyond ivory-towered academe. One of the lessons the West learns from the Zoroastrian tradition is that it challenges our categories of the material and spiritual. The inter-connectedness and reciprocity represented in the paired Zoroastrian notions of *mēnōg* and *gētīg* (commonly translated as ‘spiritual’ and ‘physical’) are now well-known and help redefine our understanding of how Zoroastrians throughout history have conceived of spirit and matter in a different way from Western notions of philosophical, and hence theological, dualism. Such a Zoroastrian understanding of *pro-cosmic, eschatological dualism* is quite distinct from the gnostic, Manichaean and other ascetic systems of thought that may be described as *anti-cosmic dialectical dualism*.¹ So, most interestingly, energetic Zoroastrian development of the material world, through pastoral husbandry and agrarian cultivation, and through understanding the principles of growth and nurture of the natural world, has gone hand in hand with Zoroastrian support of the human, cultural and social world through mercantile enterprise and financial investment, furthering what

1 See further A. WILLIAMS, “Authority and Identity in the Pahlavi Books,” in: E. HERZIG/S. STEWART (eds.): *Early Islamic Iran*, London/New York 2012 (The Idea of Iran, vol. 5), pp. 139–152.

today we think of as the sustainability of both the biosphere and human environment.

The best summary of the attitude of Sasanian Zoroastrianism in general concerning the ‘things of this world’, and which has profound implications for our world today, is expressed by the Zoroastrian sage and high priest, Āturpāt-ī Ēmētān, in his 9th Century Pahlavi masterpiece:²

*xīr-ī gētīg a-paymān nē ārāyišn, če gētīg-a-paymān-ārāy mard mēnōg wišōb
bawēd*

“One should not embellish the things of the material world in excess of the measure, for a man who embellishes the material world in excess of the measure becomes a destroyer of the material world.”

This ‘measure’, or moderation, is of course something common to Iranian, Greek, Buddhist and other wisdom traditions, but in the Iranian understanding there is another dimension, which runs deep into the later Persian tradition and which is anticipated in another Zoroastrian text:

*če harw xīr bowandagīh paymān bē ān tis kē paymānigīh (andar) nēst: dānagīh
ud dōstīh ud kirbag*

“for the right measure is the completeness of everything, except those things in which there is no need for moderation: knowledge and friendliness and good deeds.”³

It is a cause of sadness that two of the contributors to this book, both close friends and colleagues of John during his 23 years at the University of Manchester, are no longer with us: NORAH FIRBY died on 28th January 2015, aged 97 years, and LANCE COUSINS on 14th March 2015, aged 72 years. LANCE COUSINS had at first most reluctantly declined the invitation to contribute to this volume for reasons of ill health after a heart attack, from which he subsequently recovered: fortunately, in a period of respite he was able to submit a most substantial scholarly essay on Early Buddhism, before he suffered a second heart attack. The fact that Lance was moved to offer one of his very last scholarly works to this *Festschrift*, in spite of failing health, is indicative of the affection and respect, personal and academic, which all the present contributors feel towards their friend and colleague, JOHN R. HINNELLS.

ALAN WILLIAMS

2 *Dēnkard* Book VI. *handarz* 149, cited in SH. SHAKED (ed. and tr.), *The Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages (Dēnkard VI)*, Boulder Colorado, Introduction, pp. xxxiv–xxxv, and 60–61.

3 *Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 62.18, ed. and tr. by A. V. WILLIAMS, Copenhagen 1990, I.225, II.108.