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Tribute: Roderick Ninian Smart

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TRIBUTE

Roderick Ninian Smart – 1927-2001

ALL of us will have special memories of Ninian Smart either as a person or as an author, and will want to affirm our gratitude to this stunningly brilliant teacher. I recall the handsome and eloquent junior lecturer at London University who introduced me and other beginners to the philosophy of religion. I recall too the first book I ever read by him, entitled *A Dialogue in Religions* (1960), later republished as a Penguin, *World Religions: A Dialogue* (1966). Revisiting this small paperback just a few days ago was a revelation to me (so that is where I got that idea from!). What is more important is that Ninian used the word “dialogue” years before it was in vogue in religious and academic circles: five years before *Nostra Aetate* and eleven before the establishment of the World Council of Churches Dialogue programs. In other places tributes will be paid to his work in establishing the disciplines of the academic study of religion and his amazing work at

the Universities of Lancaster and California, Santa Barbara. Others again will speak of his monumental contributions to the serious study of Indian thought: how much we all owe to *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy* (1964, revised edition 1992). But in these pages it is fitting that we remember him as a humble person of winsome Christian faith who delighted in learning from all that the Hindu traditions have to offer. In 1960 he wrote (as “C,” the Christian participant in dialogue with “H,” the Hindu), so presciently of the rest of his life’s work: “...you’ve half persuaded me to look upon doctrines in a more Hindu way. But I give notice that however Hindu I may be, I shall remain a Hindu Christian.” (*World Religions: A Dialogue*, p. 140). Forty-one years later we know how those words were fulfilled.

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