



Religious Ceremonies and Customs Charles A. Goodrich (1834)

Charles Goodrich was a white Congregational minister in New England who wrote popular books on history and geography. One of his books was Religious Ceremonies and Customs, a survey of world religions based on an encyclopedic French work published in the early 1700s. Like its French source, Goodrich's book covers (in this order) Judaism, Islam, Orthodox and Catholic Christianity, Protestant movements, and then "Pagan" religions, including Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Shinto, Hinduism, Mongolian and Sámi shamanism, and indigenous religions of the Americas, Africa, and the Pacific islands. The following excerpts come from Goodrich's introduction to the book.

Each distinct portion of the human family, especially its larger divisions, has had its separate religious dogmas and practices, ranging from pure theism to the grossest idolatry. At the present time, there are at least four general forms, or departments, of religious belief among mankind: viz., the Christian, the Jewish, the Mahometan, and the Pagan, which, for the most part, are subdivided into many others. In regard to Paganism, it may be remarked that it is as various as the separate portions of people that constitute the Gentile world. [...]

A view of these religions, so far as they are departures from the truth, will furnish a sad detail of the extent and power of Satan's empire in the world. Mankind, having apostatized from God, have, in every nation and in every period of time, been successively brought under the dominion of Satan. They have been subject to his influence, obeyed his laws, and, in their religious rites, often directly paid him homage. In fine, they have been his slaves, and he has claimed them as his property. The wickedness in which he delights, they have in innumerable instances practiced. We may form some idea of the extent and power of Satan's empire from the fact that all the nations of antiquity, except the Israelites, were idolaters by profession, and even the latter were practically idolaters at times. [...]

An account of the clashing and absurd religions that have controlled such numbers of mankind will impart an exalted idea of the mercy of God in the promulgation of Christianity. As the only true religion—the great center of divine communications, the point where all the rays of revelation meet (the Jewish system being only preparatory to it, though very important in that view)—it will manifest God's benevolent desire to guide and influence mankind aright, in respect both to their present and future welfare. When we learn the spirit and the requirements of Christianity, when we become acquainted with its practical tendencies—how it prepares men, in the temper of their minds, not only for a better world but to enjoy greater happiness in this; how it elevates their understanding and improves their social condition—we cannot but be impressed with a sense of the divine mercy in the invaluable gift. Indeed, no finite mind can fully conceive the importance of the gospel as the instrument in God's hand of effecting the salvation of souls. But we might entertain something like an adequate conception of the temporal blessings conferred by this system on a fallen race.

There has been, however, even among those who have largely participated in these blessings, a remarkable failure duly to appreciate the benignant influence of Christianity in this world. Very incorrect ideas on this subject are entertained among the mass of mankind in Christian lands. The

error, however, is inexcusable. We believe the time is coming when a very different, and much higher, estimate will be formed of the gospel's effects not only on the spiritual but on the temporal and social condition of man. It will be felt how much we are indebted to it for all the real blessings we enjoy in this life.

A consideration of the kind we speak of will furnish Christians with a powerful incentive to unite in diffusing a knowledge of Christianity. Judging from their own experience of its power, they can but view this religion as the only corrective of a false faith and a wicked practice, and such indeed is the fact. It is the only religion which, by a moral influence, can displace others. It acknowledges no true religion except its own and never tolerates any other. Indeed, in its principles it is hostile to every other religion and makes a war of extermination against all superstition, idolatry, false worship, unbelief, and vice. In early times, it extinguished the religion of pagan Rome because it would have no competitor, because it would own no associate. And it has since extended itself only by displacing other religions through a moral influence. The peaceful exertions of its friends and subjects have been the means of its triumphs hitherto, and will doubtless continue so to be if those triumphs are continued.

Christians reading the sad story of the debasing superstitions and idolatries that still spread over the world must feel powerfully prompted to unite their energies in the wide and universal dissemination of their religion. And it is a pleasing reflection, constituting the great encouragement of their labors, that the divine light of Christianity will one day dispel all the deep moral darkness which still covers a large portion of the earth. That darkness will vanish as fast as the Sun of righteousness shall arise upon the world with healing in his wings.

Finally, it is delightful to go forward in our contemplations to the time when there shall be one religion among men, and but one. That time is destined to arrive. The voice of prophecy has declared it. [...] After all the conflicting views of mankind on the subject of religion, after all the diversified forms of error, there shall come a period of blessed unanimity and of the universal prevalence of the truth. There will be but one religion, and that one the glorious gospel of our salvation.

Source: Charles A. Goodrich, *Religious Ceremonies and Customs, Or the Forms of Worship Practised by the Several Nations of the Known World* [...] (Hartford, CT: Hutchison and Dwier, 1834) 11, 16-19, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/gri.ark:/13960/t4xh4253g>. Public domain.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. Marginal headings and the numbering of some paragraphs in the source publication omitted. Additional paragraph breaks inserted for readability. An awkward syntactic structure emended. Spelling Americanized. Punctuation emended in line with modern conventions. The capitalizing of *Sun* (in *Sun of righteousness*) and the inconsistent capitalizing of *Pagan* reproduce the usage of the source publication.

These edited excerpts from Goodrich's book are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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