

The Essential Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy grew up in late Victorian England, and was there in the splendid pre-war days of arts and crafts idealists, Blakean dreamers, and flourishing literary movements. As a young man, Coomaraswamy was a pioneer and authority in the field of Indian art, a spokesman for Indian nationalism, and a careful but popular writer on Hinduism and Buddhism. During World War I, he came to America and, as curator of Asiatic Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, built the first large collection of Indian art in this country.

In his later writings, which are represented in this collection, he turned his attention to metaphysics, tradition, and sacred art; however, unlike many who write about traditional cultures, he was a radical and controversial critic of modern “civilization.” This volume, edited by his son Rama Coomaraswamy, provides the reader with a comprehensive introduction to the work of this important 20th century philosopher and art historian. These selections of Coomaraswamy’s vast body of writing offer the new reader a clear and definitive point of entry into the mind of this great and early spokesman for the Perennial Philosophy.

What did Ananda K. Coomaraswamy write about?

There is no better authority to comment on the work of A. K. Coomaraswamy than A. K. Coomaraswamy himself...

I should like to emphasize that I have never built up a philosophy of my own or wished to establish a new school of thought. Perhaps the greatest thing I have learnt is never to think for myself; I fully agree with Andre Gide that “Toutes choses sont dites deja” [“Everything has already been said”], and what I have sought is to understand what has been said, while taking no account of the “inferior philosophers.” Holding with Heraclitus that the Word is common to all, and that Wisdom is to know the Will whereby all things are steered, I am convinced with Jeremias that the human cultures in all their apparent diversity are but the dialects of one and the same language of the spirit, that there is a “common universe of discourse” transcending the difference of tongues.

Ranjit Fernando, author of *The Unanimous Tradition*, describes Coomaraswamy’s work by saying:

The subject matter of all Coomaraswamy’s mature writings can be placed under one heading, namely, Tradition. The Tradition that he writes about has little to do with the current usage of this term to mean customs or social patterns that have prevailed for some time. Coomaraswamy’s theme is the unchanging Primordial and Universal Tradition which, as he shows, was the source from which all the true religions of the present as well as the past came forth, and likewise the forms of all those societies which were molded by religion.

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Why are the writings of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy still of interest to readers today?

Coomaraswamy dealt with grand ideas and eternal realities. He used many interesting examples of particular works of art, cultural practices, or ideas of great thinkers, but these examples were always chosen in order to point out universal truths that apply to all people in all times and places. Thus, for readers who are interested in the realities that underlie the nature of man and the universe, Coomaraswamy's words still resonate.

What others have said about *The Essential Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*

"Ananda K. Coomaraswamy [was] a man who spent his life in seeking out the eternal truths of almost every sacred tradition and who willingly shared the product of his efforts with the rest of us. In a day and age when the majority of people lack the educational and linguistic background to approach these sources directly, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy provides us—regardless of which traditional form God has called us to follow—with a well-spring of spiritual teachings as well as the practical implementation of such teachings on the social, political, and personal level—what is essentially a guide out of the morass of the modern world."

—**Dr. Rama Coomaraswamy**, excerpted from the Introduction

Which readers will be interested in this collection?

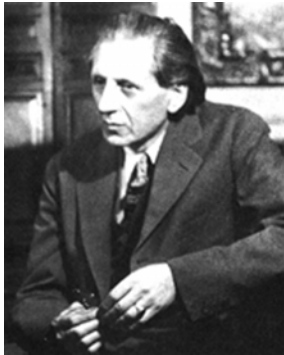
- ❖ **Students of the Perennialist school** will focus on Coomaraswamy's place among the most influential of the Perennialist authors during the formative years of the school.
- ❖ **Students of Art and Art History** will find Coomaraswamy's early work particularly interesting. He has been dubbed by many as the "Father of Indian Art" and is accredited with introducing the West to art from the Indian sub-continent.
- ❖ **Readers of Comparative Religion** will appreciate Coomaraswamy's profound expositions of specific aspects of Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim thought and practice.

Other publication information

The Essential Ananda K. Coomaraswamy will contain 16 pages of full color illustrations, and an introduction by Ananda Coomaraswamy's son, Rama, author of *The Invocation of the Name of Jesus*, and *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition*. *The Essential Ananda K. Coomaraswamy* has an expected publication date of Spring 2004 and an expected price of \$19.95.

Author of the new release by World Wisdom
The Essential Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy



Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, born in Ceylon in 1887, was a pioneer historian of Indian art and the foremost interpreter of Indian culture to the West. Of mixed Ceylonese and British parentage, he was raised in London, and educated at Wycliffe College and the University of London, where he earned a doctorate in geology. In his early 20s he returned to Ceylon, where he was named Director of Mineral Surveys for Ceylon in 1903, but soon transferred his interests to the arts of Ceylon and India. In 1910-11, Coomaraswamy was placed in charge of the art section of the great United Provinces Exhibition in Allahabad, India. Six years later, when the Dennison W. Ross Collection was donated to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, he was appointed the museum's fellow for research in Indian, Persian, and Muslim art, a post that he held until his death in 1947.

Coomaraswamy was one of the first scholars to recognize the importance of Rajput painting. His first major work, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* (1908), expressed ideas upon which he would elaborate in other writings throughout his life. He stressed the spiritual nature of Indian art and furthered the view that art was produced through meditative yogic practice. He was the first well-known author of the modern era to expound the importance of traditional arts, culture, and thought as more than simply relics of a bygone past—in all that he wrote, he pointed to their critical role in restoring to modern man his true intellectual and spiritual birthright. Dr. Coomaraswamy has often been credited with reintroducing the concept of the “Perennial Philosophy” to a West dazed by the endless multiplicity of the modern world.

Praise for Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

“There was one person, to whose influence I am deeply grateful; I mean the philosopher and theologian, Ananda Coomaraswamy. Others have written the truth about life and religion and man's work. Others have written good clear English. Others have had the gift of witty exposition. Others have understood the metaphysics of Christianity and others have understood the metaphysics of Hinduism and Buddhism. Others have understood the true significance of erotic drawings and sculptures. Others have seen the relationships of the true and the good and the beautiful. Others have had apparently unlimited learning. Others have loved; others have been kind and generous. But I know of no one else in whom all these gifts and all these powers have been combined. I dare not confess myself his disciple; that would only embarrass him. I can only say that I believe that no other living writer has written the truth in matters of art and life and religion and piety with such wisdom and understanding.”

—**Eric Gill**, English artist-philosopher

“Coomaraswamy's essays [give] us a view of his scholarship and brilliant insight.”

—**Joseph Campbell**, author and scholar

“There are many who consider Coomaraswamy as one of the great seminal minds of this century....”

—**Kathleen Raine**, founder of the Temenos Academy and author

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“Over forty years have passed since the death of Ananda Coomaraswamy; yet his writings remain as pertinent today as when he wrote them and his voice echoes in the ears of present day seekers of truth and lovers of traditional art as it did a generation ago. In contrast to most scholarly works which become outmoded and current philosophical opuses which become stale, Coomaraswamy’s works possess a timeliness which flows from their being rooted in the eternal present.”

—**Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr**, philosopher, author, and educator

“Coomaraswamy was one of the first erudite practitioners of cross-cultural study and interpretation to be biased—if he was at all—towards the East. His later works initiate the reader unforgettably into both the general structure and the countless detail that constitute traditional religious culture in the postmodern world. No brief summary can do justice to his works It must suffice to say that they blend remarkable scholarship with the dispassionate quality of religious passion known in the Indian tradition as Jñana.”

—**The Encyclopedia of Religion**

“[Ananda Coomaraswamy is] that noble scholar upon whose shoulders we are still standing.”

—**Heinrich Zimmer**, Indologist and author

“There is a growing consensus among intellectuals worldwide that Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy is the finest contribution Sri Lanka has made to this planet’s intellectual culture in the last 100 years”

—**Manik Sandrasagra**, Executive Director of Cultural Survival of Sri Lanka Trust

Selected bibliography of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

- ❖ *The Door in the Sky: Coomaraswamy on Myth and Meaning*
- ❖ *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*
- ❖ *The Bugbear of Literacy*
- ❖ *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*
- ❖ *The Living Thoughts of Gotama the Buddha*
- ❖ *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*
- ❖ *Yaksas: Essays on Water Cosmology*
- ❖ *Time and Eternity*
- ❖ *Hinduism and Buddhism*
- ❖ *The Dance of Shiva*
- ❖ *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government*
- ❖ *A New Approach to the Vedas*

Editor of the new release by World Wisdom
The Essential Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

Dr. Rama P. Coomaraswamy



Dr. Rama P. Coomaraswamy is the son of the renowned perennialist author Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. He received his early education in India in an orthodox Hindu setting. He then spent several years in America, Canada, and England. Leaving Harvard University with a degree in Geology, he went on to medical school, graduating in 1959. Dr. Coomaraswamy spent eight years in post-graduate training and then some 30 years as a thoracic and cardiovascular surgeon. He held positions as Assistant Professor of Surgery at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Chief of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery at Stamford Hospital. After retiring from the practice of surgery, Dr. Coomaraswamy went into the field of psychiatry, in which he also holds an Assistant Professorship at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. For five years he was Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Saint Thomas Aquinas Seminary.

Dr. Coomaraswamy has published extensively both in the fields of medicine and theology. His works include the books *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition*, *The Problems with the New Mass*, and *The Invocation of the Name of Jesus: As Practiced in the Western Church*. He also carried on a correspondence with Mother Theresa for a number of years. Dr. Coomaraswamy has been married 50 years, has six children, many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. In 1987 he was ordained under the traditional rites of the Roman Catholic Church.

Praise for Dr. Rama Coomaraswamy

“In the stunning way it blends wisdom with erudition, the Introduction of this book could have appeared as a free standing book in its own right. As it is, it provides the framework for thirteen short chapters, each devoted to a giant of the Christian Church, which taken together put to rest the mistaken notion that the Jesus prayer belongs primarily if not exclusively to Eastern Orthodoxy.”

—**Huston Smith**, on *The Invocation of the Name of Jesus*

“True to its title, this treatise deals with the invocation of the name of Jesus, as practiced in the Western Church. It cannot but appeal to the serious Catholic reader; and for many who seek, it may mark a turning point in their life. Dr. Coomaraswamy has rendered a valuable service to us all in producing this beautiful and timely book.”

—**Dr. Wolfgang Smith**, on *The Invocation of the Name of Jesus*

“The Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians orders us to expose the unfruitful works of darkness. In *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition*, Dr. Coomaraswamy does just that clearly, decisively, brilliantly and, I dare say, inspiringly; for against the ugly backdrop of the new religion, one is shocked into a greater realization of the beauty of the true Religion. The good doctor demonstrates in a compelling way that ours is a Catholic heritage that is truly precious. This book deserves to be disseminated far and wide.”

—**Rev. Clarence J. Kelly**, Superior of the Society of St. Pius V,
on *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition*

“Brilliantly written and fully documented. The author shows clearly at what point, according to strictly traditional Catholic doctrine, obedience becomes a sin, and at what point authority, even that of a Pope, becomes null and void.”

—**Martin Lings**, on *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition*

“This is a really definitive work on the subject—a subject we have all talked about without really pinning it down.”

—**Mary Ball Martinez**, a Vatican correspondent, on *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition*

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