

Goldman, Ari L. *The Search for God at Harvard*. New York: Times Books/Random House, 1991. xii + 283 pp.\*

In 1985, Ari Goldman, the religion correspondent of *The New York Times*, realized his dream of a lifetime—a year’s sabbatical leave to study at Harvard Divinity School. Goldman’s story provides fascinating glimpses into the inner workings of Harvard, as well as telling the tale of a young Jewish journalist who, without giving up his Jewishness, embraced broadmindedness at one of America’s foremost bastions of religious pluralism.

This book reads like the ultimate guide in modern religious correctness. “If you know only one religion, you know none at all,” asserts the most important line Goldman gleaned from his year at Harvard. Consequently the author, by intermingling factoids with anecdotes written in a casual, animated style, presents with considerable sympathy all the major world religions.

The intellectual climate at Harvard Goldman characterizes alternately as outmoded, radical, and pluralistic. Goldman regretted the lack of spirituality in the class approach to religion and found the use of John A. T. Robinson’s *Honest to God*, in a class on world religions, not only outdated but hardly representative of the Christian faith as a whole.

Overall, however, Harvard, the original training ground for evangelical Christian ministers, is hailed for its pluralism, its positive inclusion of gays, lesbians, Unitarians, Muslims, and feminists. While the author himself steers clear of some of the extremes he encounters, he accepts the basic premise on which today’s Harvard is based—the view that no religion is intrinsically superior and that therefore every person has to find a religious truth of his or her own.

Goldman’s interest in other people’s religious views and his effort to understand them from within their own frame of reference are commendable. His broad-mindedness, nonetheless, may relegate to irrelevance, not only evangelical Christianity, but his own spiritual heritage. By definition, one would not expect Goldman to share the exclusive views of Christians whose Lord claimed to be alone the truth, the way, and the life. Yet perhaps one may ask legitimately whether Goldman’s own Jewish ancestors would have shared the religious pluralism that he claims to be true to his heritage. Did not Abraham leave behind his pagan moorings in Ur of the Chaldees to follow Yahweh? Did Moses write of the God of the Israelites as the Creator God, The god whom Israel was to worship as the One and only in the Shema? Did not Isaiah denounce the pagan nations surrounding Israel for failing to honor Israel’s God, and for worshipping idols and images of their own devising? Goldman clearly should reconsider whether the God he found at Harvard is truly the God of the Hebrew Scriptures.

But despite these shortcomings, this account will make very illuminating reading. For those who want to understand modern pluralism or for those who are interested in a “front report” on American religious education, there are not many better books than *The Search for God at Harvard* by the religion editor of *The New York Times*.

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