

## Book Reviews

James A. Beckford, *Social Theory & Religion*.

Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. ix + 252.

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This book provides a refreshing approach to current practice in the social scientific study of religion. The discussion is mooted on two distinct, but related arguments. The first identifies ways in which recent developments in social theory can benefit a closer assessment in the studies of religion. The second outlines reasons explaining how social theories can become more sensitive to the findings of contemporary studies of religion. Overall, the book asserts that a strengthening of the links between the social scientific study of religion and current developments in social theory will result in better understandings of religious change and continuity.

The argument extends over six chapters and opens with an introduction of some recent developments in social theory. Beckford highlights a particular strategy, the *social constructionist approach* as a useful analytical tool in contemporary social scientific inquiry of religion. Describing religion as a “social and cultural construct with highly variable meaning” (p.5), Beckford claims that a social constructionist approach avoids the difficulties of any traditional presuppositions by offering an objective analytical strategy for analysing “religion as a complex variable category of human knowing, feeling, acting and relating” (p.4).

In the following chapters (2; 3; 4), Beckford reviews the current status of social scientific knowledge about religion. He outlines popular methods commonly employed in traditional social inquiries of religion and further examines their strengths and weaknesses in explaining current religious phenomena. Overall, these methods have tended to argue for increasing erosion of religious presence in modern times. Several arguments, mostly predicated on the thesis of modernity, have often been cited for the decline of religion. Beckford identifies three processes frequently used to explain and predict the demise of religion, namely: secularisation, pluralism and globalisation. Although these processes are distinct, they are nonetheless related and should be seen to operate within a consortium of influence.

Overall, social scientists have generally privileged one side of the argument, that growing secularity via modernity should imply a corresponding decrease in religious presence. However, in the new century, we are also witnessing greater interest in the religious and spiritual, commonly exemplified in contemporary renewed interest in fundamental religions – Judaism, Pentecostal Christianity and Islam. This does not even taken into account many new religious movements (NRM's), where few studies have been done. Amongst the NRM's, one of the fastest growing groups is the Church of the Latter Day Saints, also known as the Mormons.

Beckford argues that many traditional methods of inquiry in the social scientific studies of religion have tended to be short sighted and partial towards western modernity, or one form of it. Many of the difficulties are centred on the meaning of religion; which is often derived from conventional and culturally specific notions of the sacred.

Finally, in Chapters 5 and 6, Beckford concludes with a reassessment of current analyses of religion using the instruments of a social constructionist approach. These chapters attempt to address the rich diversity (or even seeming anomie) of social scientific studies of religion and provide a method of analysis that may side-step many of the old analytical quandaries. The new approach, it seems, will provide a clearer account of religious change and continuity both on a macro (global and organisational level) and micro level (personal level, such as self-identity). The discussion is somewhat ambitious and can be rather dense at times given the frequent references to a wide spectrum of social scientific research. For example, Beckford challenges some recent studies of self-identity and religion by drawing on the works of Anthony Giddens (1991) and David Lyons (1988), amongst others, to suggest useful alternative methods of analysis that will overcome the current limitations of social scientific studies of religion.

Overall, the last two chapters are by far the best part of the book. The discussion is rather meta-theoretical and would appeal to anyone with a distinct interest in social theory. I could not do enough justice to his argument in this short review and strongly recommend the readers to the reading. Another point to note is that whilst the earlier chapters tend to be repetitive given the profusion of similar materials currently available, the subsequent discussion is refreshing and deals with fairly unexplored territories in current analyses of religion and self-identity. Overall, the argument is convincing and offers a probable alternative to traditional analyses of religious phenomena.

However, there are some issues to consider. First, it may suffice to note that while a social constructionist approach is not new in social theory, particularly in the study of learning processes (such as education and related research), it is however a fairly new endeavour in the social studies of religion. Second, a social constructionist approach is sometimes criticised for being open-ended, inconclusive, and even positivistic in its emphasis on empirical evidence. In this manner, it falls under the banner of *sociology as a value-neutral approach* by privileging neither for or against religion. Beckford also noted this in his introduction:

The social scientific [constructionist] approach that underlies this book is only one... perspective on religion. It is not concerned with the reality status or the truth claims that are made about the objects of religious beliefs. Nor is it concerned with questions about the authenticity of personal experiences attributed to religion. And, while religious texts may provide valuable evidence of religious ideas, neither the exegesis of texts nor the creation of theological systems is directly relevant to my social scientific project ... (p.2).

Not everyone agrees with this approach. In fact, one can even argue that the social constructionist approach bears a strong resemblance to the traditional secularisation argument. For example, sociologist Alan Aldridge (2000) warns that in avoiding any value-judgements about religion, a value-neutral approach has nothing to offer either for or against the truth claims of religion. He further warns that this is not a bland middle ground between two stimulating extremes. On the contrary, and because of its “profound relativism and universalism, the value-neutral sociology of religion is acutely challenging” (p.9).

Third, and extending from the above comment, is that such an approach is typically post-modern. While this may not be an issue for some involved in post-modern studies of religions, for others it may lack structure. Typically, many social scientific studies of religion are concerned with what defines the religious and sacred from the irreligious and profane. When these boundaries become too subjective or fluid, it is nearly impossible to identify the religious from the irreligious. Perhaps, this is what Aldridge means by deeply *challenging*.

Despite these concerns with a social constructionist approach, Beckford's *Social Theory & Religion* is an essential reading for anyone engaged in the social scientific studies of religion. The book is targeted at an informed audience, such as members of the academic community and research students. Due to the broad spectrum of materials covered and rather jargonistic references, the reader will have to possess some level of command of the literature discussed. However, the discussion is clear and well constructed such that even a 'novice' reader will find this an interesting reading.

*Social Theory & Religion* should be read alongside other works by Charles Taylor and Richard Fenn. I particularly recommend Charles Taylor's (2004) *Modern Social Imaginaries*. The latter provides a succinct thesis of the modern condition, particularly focussing on issues surrounding self-identity, religious or otherwise. Taylor does this by tracing the history of modernity and illustrating how various conditions have led to current outcomes. His argument challenges the presuppositions of various studies of modernity and suggests a more fluid and diverse phenomenon. In this manner, his method of analysis is also compatible with a social constructionist approach.

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## References:

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Paul Coates, *Cinema, Religion and the Romantic Legacy*.

Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003, pp. 217.

ISBN 0 7546 1585 5 (hbk)

The exciting, interdisciplinary field of religion-and-film (aka celluloid religion, theo-film, cinematic theology, film-faith dialogue) has turned into a cottage industry producing numerous publications annually. For example, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (J. C. Lyden, 2003), *Genesis, the Movie* (R. F. Capon, 2003), *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films with Wisdom & Discernment* (Godawa, 2002), *How Hysterical: Identification and Resistance in the Bible and Film* (E. Runions, 2003), *Lights, Camera...Faith! A Movie Lover's Guide to Scripture. A Movie Lectionary - Cycle C* (P. Malone & R. Pacatte, 2003), *Praying the Movies II: More Daily Meditations from Classic Films* (E. McNulty, 2003), *Reading the Gospels in the Dark* (R. Walsh, 2003), *Screening Scripture: Intertextual Connections between Scripture and Film* (G. Aichele & R. Walsh, 2002) and *Scripture on the Silver Screen* (A. Reinhartz, 2003). These texts feed the many religion-and-film courses in screen studies, media, communication, religion, theology, education and popular culture departments worldwide. But alas, not in Australia, the home of one of the world's first religious films—*Soldiers of the Cross* (1900) by Joseph Perry of the Salvation Army.

*Cinema, Religion and the Romantic Legacy: Through a Glass Darkly* is another welcomed addition to this ever-expanding corpus catering to the video generation. Paul Coates, Reader in Film Studies at the University of Aberdeen is the author of *The Story of the Lost Reflection: The Alienation of the Image in Western and Polish Cinema* (1985); *The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism and the Image of Horror* (1991); *Film at the Intersection of High and Mass Culture* (1994) and *Lucid Dreams: The Films of Krzysztof Kieslowski* (1999).

However, his religious credentials are less stellar and reflected in the sometimes 'surface' nature of his discussions about spirituality, faith, religion etc. Although mentioning Buddhism (*Kundun*), the book focuses predominantly upon Western Christianity (e.g., Christ-figures, Jesus, Mary, Satan, Catholic priests). After savouring the initial delights per section, I found myself craving for something more substantial, as well as bursting to point out even greater religion-film parallels, possibilities and correspondences that were missed.

The author claims to be interested in religious films that are engaging, avoiding the duplication of previous work (p.8), little-known films except from India (p.8-9), and a liking for Polish cinema and auteurs (pp.9-11; 166-168). Unfortunately, the tension between little known foreign films and classics by famous directors while avoiding the scholarly work about them is not resolved. His various theoretically concepts, definitions and discussions are dispersed throughout the book, including his primary concept of "Romanticism" (pp.11-12; 15-43; 123-4; 144-5; 166-8), which makes for a difficult read.

His insights, ideas and arguments were interesting within their eclectic isolation (and too numerous to regurgitate accurately here—see Contents below),

nor were they developed progressively within or between sections. This disjointed nature left me feeling abandoned upon completion of a section, like reading a dictionary from cover-to-cover (i.e., hard to understand the story, but informative along the way). Maybe its subtitle: *Through a Glass Darkly* was describing the text itself? The range of scholarly references was not as wide as one might expect considering the wealth of material on *Birth of a Nation*, *Frankenstein*, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, *Intolerance*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Metropolis*, *The Terminator* etc.

Rather than a book conceived as a whole, it is an *ad hoc* collection of the author's writing in the field or near it. This reader-like nature is attested to within his Acknowledgements (p.vi) and by his claim of methodological eclecticism (p.13) with a strong sub-strand of Polish cinema running throughout it (p.166). In addition to his use of postscripts (p.142; 176), his six tangentially related appendices, plus a brief excursion into nineteenth century Polish love poetry (pp.40-41) is of dubious film relevance. Its sheer eclecticism is exciting, but also frustrating because it detracts from the overall coherence of the book. Particularly annoying was the unhelpful Introduction (which may have been Appendix 6 transplanted). Overall, this scholarly faire is best enjoyed being picked at like a smorgasbord, but not totally consumed in one sumptuous sitting.

Stylistically, the use of foreign language phrases (p.103; 122), specialised film terms (p.72; 88) and theological descriptions (p.4; 55; 94; 107; 161) without English translations or a glossary works against the readability of the text. This makes it alienating and disruptive to both understanding and enjoyment, especially for monolinguals, undergraduates, and English readers whose first language is not English. The author frequently assumes familiarity with the films of Poland, Germany, France, America, Australia etc. He often leaps into commentary without contextualising the scene or film, which is disappointing given their sometimes little-know nature and the implicit aim to enlighten the reader. This limits the book to the already knowledgeable, advanced film studies, or world cinema buffs. Organisationally speaking, the book consists of multiple chapters with numerous sub- and sub-sub-divisions with Notes and Appendices. Regrettably, these valuable detailed headings are missing from its Contents (iv), but included below as a guide for curious readers:

— "Introduction: The Context: Millennial Dreams and Anxieties:" Problems of Representation. Words and Images; 'The Religious Film': a Genre?; Grounds of Selection. Why Kieslowski?; Organization. A Note on Method.

— "Chapter 1. Romanticism and Religion: From Horror to the Sublime:" Romanticism, Spirit and the Idea of Horror; Spirituality and the Disengagement of 'Spirit'; Negative Theology: *Gods and Monsters*; Star Systems. Communion and Horror: Luc Besson and Ingmar Bergman; The Look into the Sky: Cinema and the Sublime, and Romantic Aspiration; Divided Heaven and the Question of Gender: Christa Wolf and Wim Wenders; Cinema and the Varieties of the Sublime. The Sublime, the Beautiful and Projection; Versions of the Empty Sky: Monochrome and Color, Bresson and Godard. The Industrial Sublime: Clouds; *Assunta*.

— "Chapter 2 The Limits of Representation:" Cinema, Two-dimensionality and Representation: Sacramental Reality According to Andrei Tarkovsky; Jean-Luc Godard and Carl Dreyer; Poverty of (in) Representation. Painting, Cinema and Reincarnation: *The Sacrifice*; From Tarkovsky to Godard; Between Tarkovsky and Godard: *Ordet*; Cinema, Mystery and Ethics: Krzysztof Kieslowski and Julio Medem; Powers of Mystery: Reflections on *Dekalog 1* and *Dekalog 2*; The Ethical Dimension. Heaven and Earth and the Romantic Imagination: Julio Medem's *Tierra*; Mirrorworlds, Other Worlds: *Dekalog 9* and *The Double Life of Veronique*; From this World to the Next: Towards *The Double Life of Veronique*; Negative Theology and the Acoustic Mirror: *Weronika and Veronique*.

— "Chapter 3 Supernatural Persons:" Possibly Jesus: On Christ and 'Christ-figures;' Converting the Secular: 'Christ-figures' and Biblical Names; Dreams of Redemption: Conjugating the 'Primal Scene' of *Wild Strawberries*; 'Idiots' and Holy Fools: Akira Kurosawa and Lars Von Trier; The Jesus of the Late 1960s: *Jesus Christ Superstar* and Pilate and Others; Christ and Anti-Christ: *Lawnmower Man*; The Devil, Probably; *The Usual Suspect*; The Power of Evil: Kitsch and Myth; The Root of All Evil? *L'Argent*; Mother Joanna of the Angels: *les extreme se touchent*; Maria, Myth and the Other: Image, Worship and Taboo; Maria, Sacrifice and the (Jewish) Other: Some Thoughts on *Metropolis* and the Politico-Religious Imagination; The Text. Otherness: From Positive to Negative; Between Politics and Religion: The Nazi Naming of the Other; *Metropolis* and Sacrifice; Godard and the *Woman in the Moon*: Natural Supernaturalism; Inner Space/Outer Space: *Hail Mary*.

— "Chapter 4 Aspects of Popular Religion:" Popular Religion and Priesthood in Three Films by Agnieszka Holland; Some Conclusions; Postscript: *Angry Harvest*; Spirit-photographs: Ghosts; No End: Politics of Memory, Ghosts of Defeat; Everyday Speculative Theology 1: Through the Eyes of a Child; Rebuilding Religion: *The Spirit of the Beehive*; The Reality of Fantasy: Ponette; 'The Holocaust Game;' Everyday Speculative Theology 2: *Three Colours: Red*.

— "Chapter 5 Spirituality and Religion: From the Eastern Block to the USA:" The Opium of the People, Religion and Romanticism: A Note on 'Polishness;' The Last Thing before Last: Eastern and Western Encounters with Death; The East: Zanussi's Trilogy of Spirituality; Postscript. The New American Spirituality, *The Thin Red Line*; Suburbia as Utopia and Nightmare: *The Truman Show*. *American Beauty* and the Sublime. This chapter is followed by six appendices on: (1) Blasphemy, (2) The Gospel Kerygma and Multiple Textuality, (3) Cinema and the Holy City, (4) Religion, Idealization and Exoticism: Two Test Cases, (5) St Veronica and the Photographer, and (7 [sic]) Documentary and Utopian Truth.

The thematic diversity, style and vast complexity (and thus potential superficiality for a thin 217-page book) is both its strength and weakness. As a Paul Coates reader or an *ad hoc* introductory survey of the field, it is acceptable. However, as a deep analysis of a set theme (Romanticism), genre, national cinema or group of directors, it is not as substantial or as focused as it could be.

Many minor blemishes mar the work. For example, misspelling Kieslowski's name (p.13, n.8) and losing its diacritical mark (p.215) [not reproducible herein], mislabelling Appendix 6 as "7" (iv, 205) and using Bible quotes without identifying the version (p.5; 25; 87; 94). Yet, "New International Version" (p. 86), "King James Version" (p.62) and "KJV" (p.140) were mentioned elsewhere. Using different Scripture quoting formats (p.62 vs.140). The numerous style inconsistencies did not help either. For example, the differing case sizes of the first letter of the header (p.109 vs.111) and differing journal title capitalisations (e.g., "*Camera obscura*"—p.131, n.54 vs. "*Camera Obscura*"— p.132, n.70). In the Index, referring to "*Frankenstein (Mary Shelley)*" (p.214) with a Christian name, whereas the other entries use only a surname.

There are also a disappointing number of omissions, for example, no conclusion chapter to crown his general argument(s). Apart from the front dust cover, there are no stills from any of the films or pictures mentioned in the text. This is very disappointing for a book devoted to moving images in this age of Hollywood. The lack of a consolidated Reference, although legitimate, is annoying and not scholar friendly. A consolidated Filmography would also be desirable. This is a more appropriate place to provide important secondary information such as director names, release dates, foreign spellings, alternative and truncated titles etc. It would also unclutter the main text by avoiding the needless repeating of release dates (e.g., "*Hail Mary (1985)*"—p.11; 50; 109; 124; 188).

Important information is also missing and/or incomplete. For example, *Battleship Potemkin* (163) has no release date. "*Terminator 2*" (p.81; 216) is actually "*Terminator 2: Judgment Day.*" "*Lawnmower Man*" (p.94; 95; 215) is actually "*The Lawnmower Man*" and although Steven King, the film and his novel are mentioned, the director (Brett Leonard) and the actors who played Angelo (Pierce Brosnan) and Job (Jeff Fahey) are not. The entire book suffers from this defect. Yet, these details are important for accuracy, memory retention, and to avoid confusing actor's names with character names, especially with unfamiliar foreign films. Similarly, the Index has "*Hail Mary (Godard)*, 50, 51, 109, 123-29, 188, 190" (p.214) when it is more accurately "*Hail Mary (Godard)*, 11, 50, 51, 109, 124-29, 188, 190." This does not inspire much confidence, just like the inexplicable omission of important terms, titles, subjects etc. For example, "Christ-figure" is frequently mentioned within the text (p.11; 37; 79-81; 129-130; 163-64; 174), but it is missing from the Index (p.212). As was for example, "Christ," "*The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*," "*Gremlins*," "Jesus," "*Lonely Boy*," "*Sans soleil*," "Superman." Physically its covers are sturdy, the print clear, but the glue binding looks fragile. Not all of these blemishes, omissions and weaknesses are fatal, but they are annoying, especially considering the high cost of the book.

In conclusion, this is a useful, introductory contribution to the religion-and-film field and valuable because of its strong European cinema flavour in an area traditionally dominated by Hollywood cinema. Although it is not likely to appeal to a general audience, it deserves a niche in any research library catering to the field,

if not necessarily the first item to be bought with ever-dwindling research funds. A revised and updated second edition plus any sequels would be welcomed.

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**Grace Davie, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (eds) *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures*. Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003, pp. 266 ISBN 0754630102 (pbk)**

This is one of the most engaging, readable and valuable sets of essays I have read for a long time. Leading scholars – e.g. Casanova, Martin, Wilson, Bruce and more – have been asked to “make a prediction about the state of religion in 30 to 50 years from now and to be as bold and as concrete as you can” (p1). Most rise to this challenge magnificently providing very helpful potted versions of their theories of religion, religion and society and secularisation and then declaring what the future of religion looks like should their theories be correct. This makes for a refreshing mixture of carefully and crisply crafted theory and explicit predictions.

Each makes clear the level of analysis addressed by their theories and predictions – global, societal, group or individual. The necessity to do this when analysing religion and change in things religious has been evident for sometime, but few have maintained the discipline implied. The discussion of religion and its current and future forms is greatly enhanced by the discipline these authors and editors maintain in their writing.

The book begins with a helpful introduction and a review of secularisation theories. Casanova argues that we must see the concept of secularisation as grounded in Western church-state relations and be very careful not to confuse the change in these institutional arrangements with all of religion. With globalisation Western definitions of religion and the state become relativised and localised. Religion is taking on new forms and demonstrating much vitality in places other than the West. David Martin expands this argument calling for a new form of thinking that radically questions viewing the religious and the secular as zero-sum spaces.

The second section makes predictions about Christianity, to be precise, British Christianity. Bruce focuses on the (former) power and prestige of Christian churches in Europe and predicts that this arrangement will not return. He predicts the gradual withering away of what currently remains of the organisational forms of power and influence, followed by the loss of not only individual commitment but of both religious knowledge and spiritual inclination. His most radically negative set of predictions while grounded in Britain, he extends to the rest of the West including the United States. Most of these authors do not address the problems posed by the United States to the secularisation hypothesis, or when they do, fail to take into their thinking what this case implies for predictions. Bryan Wilson differs only in that he sees some global possibility for the persistence of sectarian forms of religious life. Several more authors make similarly bleak predictions and it is

left to Jenny Taylor to develop Casanovan approach to religious decline in Britain arguing that “religious marginalisation is not the inevitable precursor to extinction” (p.129) using data examining inter-faith activities and other newer forms of religious life to point to change as opposed to demise. But no one predicts a return to the power and prestige of the past of Christendom.

The Third section of the book makes predictions about ‘alternatives.’ Yip provides a very valuable theory of one of the emerging forms of religion as being focussed on the self – one’s own experience providing the basis for authentic and authoritative choice, and the self as the project of religious life. He does this in a way that makes clear that individualising religion is a social process with social consequences that are not trivial. Others address issues of sacred space, spontaneous grieving/celebration and other forms of non-organisational spiritual life or religious life on the margins of formal organisations.

While I have intimated some of the predictions made. While interesting in themselves, the best part of the book is learning how these scholars move from their careful thinking about religion to explicit predictions.

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**Douglas Ezzy (ed), *Practising the Witch’s Craft: Real Magic Under a Southern Sky*. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003.  
p. 264, ISBN 1 86508 912 5**

This book is an anthology about Witchcraft as it is practised in Australia, and is written by contemporary Witches. Each chapter is written by a different contributor, and addresses different aspects of the practise of Witchcraft in many of its manifestations. Some of these would apply to Witchcraft in general; some are specific to Australia. It gives insights into belief and practice, it lays out some rituals and spells, and it gives some indications as to why people are drawn to Witchcraft. The authors have widely differing backgrounds, follow different Traditions, and vary greatly in the length of time that they have been practising Witches.

There are considerable variations in style between the different chapters, as one would expect in such a compilation. Nevertheless, they are generally well and simply written, with a minimum of jargon. This book is not a philosophical or theological treatise aimed at a highbrow readership, intent on displaying the authors’ grasp of esoteric theories and the complex minutiae of their topic. Rather, it is an interesting and informative look at contemporary Witchcraft from an insider’s point of view. It would be of interest to anyone interested in knowing more about Witchcraft, whether that person is a Witch or neo-Pagan, a student or academic, or a member of the general public. It would be particularly useful for those with little knowledge of the topic, although even the experienced or knowledgeable might find new and interesting information. Furthermore, it would give Australian Witches particularly useful information about the practice of

Witchcraft in their own country – and Witches from other countries an insight into a different experience of Witchcraft.

A glance at the titles of the various chapters gives an idea of the breadth of topics covered:

“What is a Witch?; When magickal things begin to happen; Sabbat wine of the Witches; A Pagan birth; Feminist spirituality and the power of ritual; Goddess/Witch/Womon; Sex and death; The magical universe; Spells and magic; Bewitched by tarot; The sabbats; Sacred landscapes; A Witch’s garden: herbs and incense; Training and finding a working group; Pagans in the bush.”

These chapters are varied in subject matter and style, and also in the depth and clarity of their writing. Caroline Tully’s chapter, ‘The sabbats’, was outstanding: lucid, well written, and fascinating. It outlined the origins of the sabbats in the Northern hemisphere and the changes needed to make them relevant and meaningful for Australians. Three other chapters were excellent: ‘Feminist spirituality and the power of ritual’ by Kathleen McPhillips, ‘Sex and death’ by Olvar and Yavanna, and ‘A Witch’s garden: herbs and incense’ by Lesley-Caron Veater. Olvar and Yavanna’s chapter is open, honest, somewhat confronting, enlightening, and beautiful. McPhillips’ chapter is clearly expressed, revealing, both thoughtful and thought provoking. Veater’s chapter is lucid, if somewhat surreal, and both informative and interesting. These four chapters alone would make the book worth reading.

Also particularly good are ‘What is a Witch?’ by Douglas Ezzy, ‘Goddess/Witch/Womon’ by thea Gaia, ‘Spells and magic’ by Don McLeod, and ‘Training and finding a working group’ by Gabby Cleary. These chapters are also well written, informative, easy to read, and insightful. The other chapters, although not reaching quite such high standards, do not fall far behind. Depending on the reader’s areas of interest and depth of knowledge, all could provide enlightening or useful information, interesting viewpoints, and food for thought.

This book achieves its professed aims admirably and is definitely a step in the right direction. After reading this book with an open mind, it would be difficult to maintain the stereotypical images of the Witch that are so prevalent in popular culture – evil people operating on the margins of society and the gorgeous young women who are obsessed with fighting demons.

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**Bruce Kaye (ed), *Anglicanism in Australia: A History*,  
Melbourne, Melbourne University Press. 2002 pp. 432,  
ISBN 0522850030**

This substantial volume provides an excellent and readable history of what has become the Anglican Church of Australia. Although not an explicit aim of the book, readers will not only know more of the past but will be well informed about the background of the debates that currently reflect the vitality of this church. It is

divided into two sections, one providing a narrative history and the second addressing themes such as Australian Anglican Identity, Australian Anglican Theology, Architecture and the Arts, Church and Society.

I found the first half of the volume, a narrative history, to be engaging and much more univocal, or more accurately, homovocal, than I had expected in an edited volume. This is an excellent, well-grounded history that adds to our understanding of the origins and journey of Anglicans in Australia. The story is told with a minimum of repetition and at a level of detail that I found informative yet easy to read. The chapters in this section are attributed to individual authors but they have clearly been carefully and intensively workshopped and edited to achieve a high standard of prose and scholarship. For this alone the General Editor and contributors who worked together over several years should be thanked.

I found the chapters addressing themes to be much more mixed in quality, voicing and interest. I suspect others would agree that they are mixed but might prefer a different selection of chapters, this is a matter of taste and interest.

I would like to have seen a more systematic treatment of the role of Irish clergy in shaping Anglicanism in Australia. There is ample reference to clergy from Ireland, but their contribution is not treated with the care it probably warrants.

While three of the authors are female, this is a bloke's story and the role of women still reads as a very secondary theme – 'oh dear we had better think of something to say about women here'. To argue that until recently the story of Anglicanism in Australia was a bloke's story would be to add insult to injury. The failure to systematically and convincingly write women in to this story fails an opportunity to redress the writing out of women to which the church is so accustomed to its own detriment.

Several of the thematic chapters try to address issues of church and society in an analytical way, but essentially fail to see beyond the church, do not really demonstrate as well as could have been done the enormous influence, direct and indirect, on Australian society of the Anglican Church and an Anglican ethos. These sections remain too churchy, describing the actions of clergy and organisations, but failing to continue the description to outline the effects of the actions. It also fails to present a picture of Australia from without the church but looking at the place of the Anglican Church in this society. While some will say that the intent was a history and not a sociology, the claim is to a social history and what is not developed to the extent that it could have been is this larger framing picture. Indeed, the narrative section does a better job of this.

To argue that the central institutional genius of the Anglican Church is found in its dioceses can certainly be done, but it is done at the expense of a much wider vision of what is the church. It reflects a high theology of the episcopate and some really interesting episcopal leadership during the frame of this history. It also reflects the bulk of the most readily accessible historical records – diocesan archives. But these facts distract the historian from a wider view of church and its involvement with society, a view that also falls easily prey to cruder forms of secularisation thinking. This central premise of this history needs to be discussed vigorously, because it reflects an ecclesiology that may be less than helpful in this

post-modern, post-Christendom era of the church's life. Prince bishops patriarchally redolent with the moth-eaten trappings of empire and Edwardian mores will not provide the way forward for the Anglican Church of Australia.

The volume lacks a critical edge. Yes, considerable and helpful attention is paid to the self-critique evident in the Anglican Church's internal controversies during this history. But there is no critique overall, nor is there an attempt to address the cutting edge of this history in the light of the extremely helpful story of its past. I suppose to do so would necessarily force an author to more clearly show partisan allegiance, of which this review will be rightly accused. For example, the church is riddled with patriarchy – has been and still is. While there is a chapter on gender issues, it is a very sanitised reading of the history of the church. I thought the genius of the Anglican Church, including its Australian expression was and is the capacity to contain difference and to draw life from the very tensions inherent in these differences rather than papering them over.

My overall assessment is that the authors and the editors have done Australian Anglicans an enormous favour. This is a history well worth reading, re-reading and arguing about. I recommend it to any reader of history, to all leaders within and beyond the church and to students of Australia. There is much to learn and this volume provides a terrific way into the material while whetting the appetite for more.

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**Alan Race and Ingrid Shafer (eds) *Religions In Dialogue: From Theocracy To Democracy*, Ashgate, 2002, pp. 228, ISBN 0 7546 0479 9.**

In examining this book, the reviewer was drawn to a particular saying which goes, "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time." There is no way of digesting *Religions In Dialogue: From Theocracy to Democracy* in just one bite.

Race and Schafer have collected an impressive set of essays in this volume that serve as a source book for scholars, students and religious communities interested in examining interreligious dialogue as praxis. They have consciously chosen to break out of the doldrums of the field by addressing issues other than those commonly associated with multi faith dialogue. Topics such as 'truth,' 'revelation,' and 'salvation' have been replaced with an examination of the interconnectedness between religion and democracy that is contextually sensitive. In particular, Race and Schafer have carefully assembled the unique perspectives of scholars representing each of the Abrahamic faiths — Islam, Christianity and Judaism; religions actively participating in the public realm and who display a constructive commitment to democracy. In the preface, bin Talal lays bare the intentions of the editors with the essays they have chosen, i.e.

These essays reflect different histories and different struggles with the notion of democracy itself; but each participates in that 'common human privilege' which is our shared inheritance ... the essays are placed

dialogically in concert, so that Jews and Christians and Muslims read one another's wrestling with the truth of religious adherence in our day...  
(p.xix)

Under the conditions of a radical plurality and a global community, the editors hold that the Abrahamic religions can make a worthwhile contribution to the contemporary discussion on the meaning and purpose of shared values, good governance and human rights in a democratic state. Although admitting that many of the problems in the world contain a portion of religious complicity, the editors think that religion still plays an important and positive role in people's lives. It represents, for them, a distinct and valuable viewpoint, that cannot be confined to a role which is private or 'other-worldly'. Democracy and religion, from their point of view, need each other in the formulation of a better world. The book is divided into four sections: (1) Setting The Dialogic Scene (2) Religions In The Democratic Way (3) Testing The Theory In Practice (4) The Bigger Picture. Together they contain a total of nineteen essays. In the first section, "Setting The Dialogic Scene," Jewish and Christian readers are forewarned of "... the inherent problems attached to entering into dialogue with Muslims ... the heritage of colonialism, ignorance about Islam; distorted images of Muslims; and a culture gap" (p.14). These words of caution, are especially salient when matched with the repeated Islamophobic images depicted in the media. According to Race and Schafer, we need to find ways of overcoming that fear of the OTHER. To achieve that goal, dialogue and critical thinking are suggested as worthwhile tools in fostering mutual respect, cooperation as well as the recognition and upliftment of each cultural identity. In "Section II, Religions In The Democratic Way," Race and Schafer argue that whatever critical support religion should offer democracy in the search for a common moral vocabulary, is counterbalanced by the need of any religion to maintain it's own unique identity. According to the editors, religion needs to be mindful of avoiding both absolutism and relativism in that pursuit of that universalist paradigm. They claim that in dialoguing, we should resist any attempt to characterize the debates over democracy and religion as bound "between a monolithic and reactionary religious mentality and an open-ended and progressive secular mentality" (p.20). As a whole, this section includes essays from differing religious viewpoints, all wrestling with the impact of democracy on religion. One of the essays, Duran's "How Democratic Is Islam," attempts to distinguish between 'Islam' the religion and 'Islamism' the ideology. According to him, Islamism is the more recent development — embracing a kind of 'nativism' that denounces all ideologies other than its own, as being imported. Duran claims that Islamists call for a democracy which bears little or no resemblance to that found in western society. A case in point is drawn from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Duran states that under the current dispensation, only those political parties who subscribe to the principle of *valayat-e faghih* (rule by the supreme religious guide) are allowed to exist (p.112). Even when majority decisions are made in the legislature, they are not binding upon the country's Supreme Guide. Despite claims to represent true Islam, the author states that such groups rarely find support with the vast majority of the population. The notion of *shura* (consultation), although sparingly referred to in the *Qur'an*, is suggested by Duran, as possibly serving as an appropriate

guide of what is desired by God – the need to settle affairs by mutual consultation. Duran claims that there is no reason to believe that Islam is non-conducive to democracy, even when considering the history of the caliphate after the Prophet's death. He says, "To refer to the caliphate as symptomatic of 'Oriental despotism' is absurd because medieval Europe was not different" (p.113). According to Duran, the move from absolutist rule to increasingly democratic form of government is a universal phenomenon. He also holds that the picture most often painted by scholars regarding the fundamental differences between Christian and Islamic ethics, is centered on a dichotomous belief that Christianity is primarily focused on altruism, whereas Islam is primarily focused on justice. Duran believes, however, that both religions have elements of both. Believers are therefore encouraged to find a form of government that is the most just. In another essay in this section, In "Taking Democracy into Global Ethic: The Christian Next Step," Race examines the ambivalent relationship between democracy and the Christian faith. From a historical perspective, he admits that the Christian faith has acted as both a millstone, and as a catalyst in the quest for democratic transformation. Living in Southern Africa, the reviewer found this observation especially true, when reflecting on the religious establishment during the time when the apartheid South Africa government held power. That is to say, some members the religious establishment actively supported the apartheid regime. It helped in legitimatizing its cultural, social and economic interests; and was guilty of complicity in limiting the aspirations of all non-white ethnic and racial groups. Hegemony and Christian ideology became inseparable. On the other hand, another portion of the religious establishment actively participated in the freedom struggle, sometimes under the threat of torture and death. Along with others, they helped to bring down the apartheid government by the early 1990s. How might the Christian faith be supportive to democracy? Race calls for a model that is both dialogic and built around the notion of a global ethic. This global ethic, according to him, could possibly be modeled along the lines of the one proposed at the second Parliament for the World's Religions, held in Chicago in 1993. He cautions, however, that such an ethic is limited to pursuing a "fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes" (p.77). Race also suggests that a global ethic could serve as a catalyst for the Christian community needing to engage a plurality of world-views, cultures and religious viewpoints. "The feasibility or even the desire to use a global ethic raises numerous warning flags" (p.77), according to the author. He argues that whenever a global ethic is embraced as the dominant ideology, it runs the risk of reinforcing the values that explain and justify its domination and superiority. According to Race, a global ethic enhances the possibilities of participation by all religious institutions. He candidly admits, however, that the directives of the Parliament's global ethic are almost too generalized, especially when attempting to engage in negotiations between particular religious values in the public place. Nonetheless, he does believe it can lead to an openness in understanding different forms of the truth and to respecting the full range of diversified traditions. In what sense does Christian thought support a global ethic? Race believes that it would be nearly impossible to endorse any one political system as being wholly reflective of the will of God.

Nonetheless, according to him, many would say that democracy and Christian beliefs and values are in line with the general thrust of what is found in the Chicago global ethic. Both can help to influence next phase of democratic life. In "Section III, Religions In The Democratic Way," the editors explore the tensions existing between religion and democracy in three specific countries: Indonesia, India and Turkey. Although informative and well-written, these articles lack, according to this reviewer, the necessary depth for promoting dialogue and critical thought. When examining the dynamics of a country as complex as India, Race and Schaefer selected one essay, Omar's "Secular India: Striving Towards A Pluralist Ethos." This decision on the part of the editors appears to be more encouraging of a monologue rather than a dialogic understanding of the issues. India is just too multicultural, multifaith and multiethnic. Whatever shortcomings are found in the first part of Section III, is made up with the sterling articles offered in the second part, i.e. "Human Rights: A Testing Ground Of The Religious Support For Democracy." Here, varying authors put forward their understanding of the human condition and the need by all to have basic human rights. For example, Weiman in his article, "Human Dignity And Rights As Essential Values In Judaism" says, "Halakhah (Jewish law) is a contract between God and the Jewish people, but its values are to be applied to all people, universally" (168). A common thread found in all of the essays of this sub-section is the sacredness of humankind and the need to protect both freedom and human rights; principles also supported by all of the Abrahamic religions. On a practical level, Weiman reminds the reader, "Religious traditions' 'theoretical' teachings on the preciousness of all humanity must be translated into practice" (p.173). He further proclaims that there can be no dominant groups, i.e. "No matter how dominant a particular group is in one country, it is inevitably part of a minority somewhere else in our pluralistic world, and rights of collectives are a new challenge" (p.171). In the last section, "The Bigger Picture," Race and Schaefer readily admit that democracy is a 'contested sight', with several shortcomings. Nonetheless, they believe it can help in empowering people, and make leaders more accountable for their actions. According to them, "As world history enters into a new phase of unavoidable interconnectedness, democracy too will need to develop accordingly"(p.191). As the book suggests, the Abrahamic religions offer a unique and valuable perspective that can help with this next phase of its evolution. Whether in dealing with conflict or involved in negotiation, it should best be handled in the spirit and framework of dialogical relationships. By grappling with the interconnectedness of religion and democracy, Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars in *Religions in Dialogue: From Theocracy To Democracy*, have helped readers to examine the bigger picture, one bit at a time. There is no doubt that Schaefer and Race have not fully explored interreligious dialogue and democracy to their fullest. Nonetheless, through substantive engagement they have done a fairly good job.

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