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# Book Reviews

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## **Patterns of Faith in Australian Churches Report from the Combined Churches Survey for Faith and Mission**

Philip J. Hughes and Tricia Blombery  
 Christian Research Association  
 Hawthorn/ Wollstonecraft, 1990  
 pp. 158 Rpr \$16

This study is the last report from the Christian Research Association concerned with the Combined Churches Survey which was conducted in 1987 among Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Pentecostal, and Uniting churches. Seven other reports (including the preliminary report) have been produced. Like the preliminary report, this report provides an overview and touches on many areas which the more specialised reports examine in detail. It goes much further than the preliminary report, because it ties together accumulated insights gained from the other reports and also examines a number of areas in the context of a new typology of religiosity. In many ways the report could have been entitled *Developing Better Labels*.

*Patterns of Faith* is a sociological study. It examines aspects of the Christian faith in the context of categories which were developed from the questions on faith asked in the survey. It should be noted that not all people who completed

the survey were able to be categorised. Rather, this report examines only those people who met the stringent criteria for inclusion of the various scales. Though no actual numbers are given (it is indicated that 42% scored either higher or lower on one of the scales) and there was obvious selectivity involved in the formation of scales, this does not detract from the actual findings. Some decisions had to be made about the criteria in order to isolate groups. Otherwise the patterns noted in this report would have been diffused by the majority of the responses, which it appears cannot be categorised into one of the four areas: Conversionism, Conventionalism, Devotionalism, and Principlism.

One of the interesting areas in the report focused on the difference between conversionist and devotionalist groups on one hand, and the other two, conventionalist and principlist on the other. The report concludes that the first two are becoming the dominant expression of faith. Though it may have a conservative edge, conventionalism also has a conservative base. Principlism, which is concerned with the ethics or principles, has a more radical edge to it. Perhaps, many of you would have already worked out that Baptists and Pentecostals are conversionist and devotionalist, while Anglican, Catholic, and Uniting churches tend to centre on the waning patterns (with some significant differences). These denomina-

tional lines, however, tend to be blurred across several groups.

There are many interesting observations in the individual chapters. In the chapter on worship I was very interested to note that the Uniting Church received the highest number of criticisms of its services. This chapter also makes an important point regarding church attendance figures. It is indicated that decreasing attendance does not indicate a large loss in faith, but a decline in the number of people, particularly principlists, who attended because the church was at the centre of the life of community. The section 'The Church and Changing Community Patterns' is a very succinct summary of volumes of writing on this topic.

From 'The Core and the Fringe', I noted that there is less likelihood of someone being a fringe church attender at a Baptist or Pentecostal church. Obviously stricter membership criteria prevent the fringe dwellers who haunt many other denominations! An important point for those concerned in involving new people and those on the fringe is having those in the core of the church develop friendships with those who are not.

The chapter on women and men in the life of the church reflects the continuing debate and change which is evident in the wider community. The impact of 'working' women on church attendance figures is now beginning to consolidate. The chapter on different age groups illustrates again the different dimensions and patterns which the Joint Church Census exposed. Pentecostal churches do attract young people but not in the numbers which are usually thrown around.

The concluding chapter on issues and directions for the future raises a number of critical points. I question whether the

future of the denominations lies with the large church. I think there may be a move towards community oriented churches, which deliberately remain small.

This report is a very useful summary and expansion of some of the key aspects of the Combined Churches Survey. Like the other reports, it is well produced, with an excellent table of contents, and useful summaries at the start of each chapter. The report is also very easy to read which, considering its content and subject, is a credit to the authors. It successfully concludes the most significant wider church study conducted in Australia.

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(This and other CRA reports are available from:  
Philip Hughes, 8 Power Street, Hawthorn 3122, or  
'Tricia Blombery, 6 Balfour Street, Wollstonecraft 2065.)

## **Buddhism in Australia 1848-1988**

Paul Croucher  
New South Wales University Press, Sydney. 1989  
ix + 147 pp. Paper. ISBN 0-86840-195-1

The scope and intent of this book are summed up in the Foreword (written by Khantipalo, who is also one of the book's principal characters), as follows:

'This book represents the first attempt to chronicle the history of Buddhism in Australia and its influence on our poetry, art and religious life. It traces the threads of interest in nineteenth century Spiritualism and Theosophical Buddhism through the establishment of the first on-

going Buddhist societies in the early 1950s and beyond to the 'hippie trail' and Indochinese refugees.'

More precisely, this history of Australian Buddhism covers the period from 1848, when the first Chinese coolie labourers - and therefore probably the first Buddhists - landed on Australian soil, up to the bicentennial year, 1988. It is a detailed and full account that is clearly based on very thorough research. The book is generally well written; it is full of interest and makes wonderfully entertaining reading.

Of necessity the account presented is largely a mosaic of biographies. The people who were most influential in the development of Buddhism in Australia - David Maurice, Marie Byles, Natasha Jackson, Sister Dhammadinna, Charles Knight, and others - are portrayed in lively detail, warts and all. A large number of less significant characters, including such unexpected Australian Buddhists as former prime minister Alfred Deakin and actor Peter Finch, also make brief appearances.

Many of these characters appear to have been odd and colourful eccentrics, which accounts in large part for the entertainment value of the book. Indeed, one suspects that the author may perhaps be unduly highlighting idiosyncrasies at the expense of less amusing but more significant qualities and achievements. Generally the characters and their exploits are allowed to speak for themselves; occasionally Croucher adds his own interpretative comments, which are always insightful and thought-provoking.

A few long-standing misconceptions about the history of Australian Buddhism are corrected in this book. One such is the often-repeated statement that the first visit to Australia by an ordained Buddhist

monk was that of the Burmese U Thittila in 1954. In fact, Croucher informs us, the first such visit took place some four decades earlier. In 1915 the eminent German scholar-monk Nyanatiloka, then living in Ceylon, came here - but not of his own free will. He was interned, following the outbreak of World War I, and, along with four other less well known German monks, was brought to Australia and held in the Holdsworth Concentration Camp at Liverpool near Sydney. Nyanatiloka was subsequently permitted to move to a beach-side hut, where he spent a year writing before moving on to Hawaii.

According to Croucher's findings, the first visit by a Buddhist monk may even have occurred five years earlier again, in 1910. The monk in question was an Englishman, calling himself U Sasana Dhaja and claiming to have been ordained in Burma, who went about giving lectures to packed houses from Perth to Sydney. But his monastic credentials are rendered doubtful by the fact that he was 'subsidising his visit by selling alabaster Buddha images, which he claimed were 700 years old,' and because it seems "he had several years previously made a lecture tour of Australia under some other guise'.

Such fascinating snippets abound in the book, and a good many of them are associated with members - and pseudo-members - of the Sangha. For example, Croucher tells of how the elderly American-born, Ceylon-trained nun Dhammadinna (who lectured and taught here in 1952-53) 'laid claim to extra-sensory powers and would let out a yell during meditations to let her students know that she was experiencing a 'realisation''. In a different vein, he recounts how the Panchen Lama, while

visiting Australia in 1986, made his first verbal contact with the Dalai Lama since the latter's flight from Tibet in 1959. Members of Melbourne's Tibetan Information Service, who were entertaining the party, managed to keep the Panchen Lama's Chinese minders so well plied with wine that he was enabled to slip out and take a pre-arranged phone call to Bonn, where the Dalai Lama was at the time.

Much equally entertaining information is given regarding the activities of the various lay people who figured prominently in Australia's Buddhist history. There are inspiring stories of great dedication, such as that of the scholar-translator F.L. Woodward. And there are unedifying accounts of self-serving, power-seeking plots and intrigues. Reading Croucher's account of what went on in some of the regional Buddhist societies, one is repeatedly baffled that these people could have devoted so much energy to the study of Buddhism, and so little to its practice.

Croucher supports his account with an impressive array of sources, ranging from reports in obscure country newspapers of the early 1900s down to tape-recorded interviews with contemporary figures. He shows himself remarkably conversant with his subject matter. He also displays great perceptivity, as he seeks to capture the spirit of the periods he is dealing with, and to identify what made those early Australian Buddhists 'tick'.

A small and perhaps forgivable defect in the book is a marked unevenness in the account of ethnic Buddhism. The history of the many large Vietnamese groups receives far less attention than that of the much less numerous Sri Lankan, Burmese, and Thai/Lao centres. This is no doubt partly due to a problem that the author himself draws attention to: a ten-

dency for the Vietnamese groups to be isolated from the mainstream by the barriers of language and cultural difference.

In his last two paragraphs Croucher lapses into a mildly proselytising mode of discourse - incongruously, because with this small exception the entire historical account is presented with what comes across as admirable detachment and even-handedness.

*Buddhism in Australia* is a great piece of work on a previously neglected aspect of religion in this country. And one doesn't have to have a special interest in Buddhism, or in Australian religious history, to find it a really good read.

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## A Dictionary of Religious Quotations

Margaret Pepper (ed)  
Andre Deutsch, London. 1989.  
496pp. Cloth. \$39.95 (available from  
Lothian Books)

In a half-page introduction the compiler presents this dictionary unpretentiously as a collection which grew out of a personal collection of favourite religious quotations. Without further ado the remainder of the book presents an alphabetical arrangement of subjects (each in bold capitals) from 'abandonment', 'abiding', and 'abortion' to 'yesterday', 'youth', and 'zeal', followed by a subject index and an index of authors and major works. Each subject entry is followed by one or more quotations which are numbered on each page (there are over 4000 in the volume). A lengthy entry may run over several pages; thus there are four and a half pages selected as relevant to

'heaven'. Sources of the quotations are many and varied; apart from scriptural passages there are selections from writers from ancient and modern times, representing many traditions as well as the secular and the sacred. A few examples illustrate the catholicity of the collection: Bertholt Brecht, Emily Bronte, Rupert Brooke, Albert Camus, Miguel de Cervantes, Jean Cocteau, Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Erasmus, Euripides, Billy Graham, Franz Kafka, Horatio Nelson, Ovid, the *Qur'an*, and Joseph Stalin.

This collection contains a wealth of material for those who find anthologies valuable as a source of inspiration or en-

lightenment. It might have been helpful if the compiler had been more forthcoming about the parameters and rationale for choice of authors/sources. Also the subject index seems to be superfluous in a collection in dictionary format (it adds nothing to the alphabetical subject listing, containing no cross references). Further the numbering of main subject entries and then numbering quotations within each entry takes some getting used to.

The volume does have the advantage of being ecumenical!

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