

Book Reviews

Early Christianity. Origins and Evolution to AD 600

I Hazlett (ed.) SPCK, London, 1991. 324 pp. Map, indices

ISBN: 0-281-04476-7. £14.99

Almost every university and tertiary department of theology or religion, in the western world at least, will teach some kind of introductory unit to the early church and the development of Christian thought. Naturally, such units vary in methodology and flavour from the conservative to the radical. Some emphasise history and artefact, others language and text, or society and culture. Some students will grind their way from the Apostolic Fathers to the Apologists and the Alexandrians and on, in a manner that has hardly changed from their teacher's teachers. Others will be enthused and swept along by all manner of post-post and revisionist and synchronic approaches.

However, I suspect that most of us, as the lecturers concerned, do a good job of introducing new generations of students to this most traditional of disciplines, the 'Fathers'; which yet is a subject that has undergone many revolutions in recent decades. And increasingly the students have no context by which to understand the late classical world. I certainly have been searching for a good and balanced introduction for the undergraduate student: aware of the methodological issues, but not overly preoccupied; intelligently intro-

ductory, but not elementary; concerned not only with doctrine, but with archaeology and society and narrative form.

Of course we still have the standard introductions for the English-speaking world: starting with Henry Chadwick's or William Frend's introductions to the history of the early church, handily available and purchasable in paperback; and then J N D Kelly's dry but reliable account of doctrines; and Stevenson (and Frend)'s invaluable collections of text excerpts. Yet, all of these works are decades old! Occasionally revised, and frequently reprinted, they can appear again on the bibliography at the start of each semester.

Ian Hazlett and SPCK were certainly aware of these issues with the publication of this new volume. Formally it is a collection of twenty five essays presented to W. H. C. Frend on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday. Yet, it is not the usual *Festschrift*; but, with a nod to Frend's influence as a teacher and well-rounded interests in the early church, this book is clearly pitched to take place as a standard set text for the undergraduate of the 1990's.

There are good ideas here. A light and amusing introduction on 'Why Study Church History?' (Joseph Kelly). A colourful, if somewhat unavoidably journalistic, introduction to 'The World of the Roman Empire' (Jane Merdinger), for the student who has no ancient history. And a

broadening of methodological perspective: 'Archaeology' (Kenneth Painter); and geographical sweep: 'The Oriental Fathers' (Sebastian Brock), although this is little more than a list of names. And there are the leading figures you would expect: Christopher Stead on 'Greek Influence on Christian Thought'; Maurice Wiles on 'Orthodoxy and Heresy'. Although there is an understandable slant towards the pillars of the British establishment, there has clearly been an attempt to involve some North American and other specialists.

The question is: is this the book we have been waiting for? Unfortunately it is not. This is not because it is a poor or even average book. Indeed, the expertise of many of the authors clearly shows this. However, in the necessary abandonment of the traditional narrative and diachronic approach, substituted by the multi-disciplinary and thematic, the utility of the work is seriously weakened. While the editor declares himself aware that 'serious biblical and historical knowledge is being relegated rapidly to the general educational and cultural basement (p. xv)'; the book is still not able to overcome the problem that the inexperienced reader will not have enough to orientate her or himself in the field of study. That is, I strongly suspect, until they have first read an introduction to the history of the early church.

There are constant attempts to address this problem: the grouping of the essays evidences some implied framework of context, evolution and consolidation; a map and conspectus of early church history are provided; part eight is devoted to 'Aids for Further Study' (Diana Barclay), although this is just a rather uneven bibliography and glossary.

The difficulty is compounded by the uneven standard of the essays. For in-

stance, the reader is pulled up in essay three by John Riches' rather dense grapple with 'The Birth of Christianity'. Clearly some authors have really used the opportunity to work at a topic, while others have been content to draw the outlines of a subject they have dealt with often and at greater length elsewhere. This can be useful in a work of this sort, when well done; but a couple of the essays are rather disappointing. While the editor has undoubtedly provided clear direction to the authors on their audience, and attempted to prevent overlap, this is (not surprisingly) only partially successful.

In conclusion it should be re-emphasised that there are many good things here. A great deal of thought and effort is apparent in the overall design and construction of this volume. I certainly will point my students to the work, and some of the essays in particular. Early Christianity provides compact and reliable access to many important and difficult topics. However, we do still need that new direction for the Patristics student of the 1990s!

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A Whiff of Heresy: Samuel Angus and the Presbyterian Church in New South Wales

Susan E Emilsen, 1991, New South Wales University Press, pp.ix + 342

This is the best sort of religious history. Emilsen relates the inner history of the Presbyterian Church to Australian social history and culture between the two world wars. The focus is local and specific: the trials, in both senses of the word, of Australia's greatest heretical modernist, Samuel Angus. But the issues are big and perennial - what is the relationship between faith and tradition? what

is heresy? what is the best way of dealing with it? is too much disciplinary zeal in one case (the Strong case in Melbourne in the 1880s) usually followed by too much tentativeness, thus explaining fatal delays in Christendom such as the Catholic Church's failure to jump on Luther before it was too late?

It is essentially a sad story. The intensely religious and scholarly Angus - trained in Ulster, America, Germany, and Scotland - seems to have been marooned in an antipodean backwater, and the flaws in his character revealed by his response to the obscurantists and the wily ecclesiastical politicians were so conspicuous as to make him unemployable in the more hallowed halls of Presbyterian academe. His so-called prophetic utterances on many social and international political issues look remarkably like the utterance of the false prophets. His emphasis on the religion of Jesus instead of the religion about Jesus looked old-fashioned even to his contemporary colleagues of the 1930s. His picture of Jesus, for all its warmth and its capacity to move some to lifetimes of commitment, could not be dignified as a christology because basically he did not believe in the Christ and therefore he could not appeal to the conservatives.

Iain Breward comments that with Angus's death his emphases became 'muted and secularise', and perhaps one of the saddest things about reading Dr Emilsen's book is the feeling that the thoughts of one of the finest minds ever to focus on religion in Australia have lost their importance for us. Perhaps it would be fairest to conclude that while some of Angus's solutions appear to have lost their credibility, his questions have not lost their importance and are, at this very moment, on the comeback trail: 'Was Jesus born of a virgin?' 'Was he both God and man?' 'How

did the cross save us from sin?'

In Truth and Tradition Angus gave this explicit listing of the total areas of controversy with the orthodox:

the Virgin birth; the physical resurrection of Jesus and the empty tomb; the death of Christ as a 'propitiation' and 'all-sufficient sacrifice' for the sins of the world; the Trinity, not of the New Testament, but of the fourth century speculation; the authority of Scripture; and whatever the Westminster divines excogitated and systemised during the years of codification of their statements of Christianity.

This was surely sufficient to give the orthodox apoplexy. But the problem for the evangelicals was that, it was one thing to be convinced in one's own mind that Angus was denying the orthodox position of all these things, but it was an entirely different matter to get him to concede that any divergence on his part from the orthodoxy was also a divergence from Scripture or even the standards of the Church rightly understood, and it was even more difficult to establish such divergence in any Presbyterian court.

In the 1920s the evangelicals seemed to have no answer to the rising tide of modernism represented within the NSW Presbyterian Church by Macintyre's 'potential immortality', Edwards' 'theological reconstruction', and Angus's 'Christianity bigger than the Bible' and beyond it by the giant figures which so influenced Angus, namely Fosdick and Major. But then the tide began to turn. With the onset of depression, the fortunes of optimistic liberalism ebbed and the evangelical movement in all the Protestant denominations and in non-denominational Bible Colleges started to win back lost territory. So the scene was set for the showdown with Angus who put 'the truth' first, a showdown led by McGowan who

put the gospel first and aided by Macintyre who put the church first.

The backdrop to this showdown, which does not perhaps appear as clearly in Dr Emilsen's book as it might because of the focus on Presbyterianism, was the conservative religious culture of all the NSW denominations, including the Roman Catholic, which has been a constant feature of NSW religion and which will have kept the liberalism of NSW Presbyterianism in check every bit as effectively as the Church's own courts. With Catholicism's Dr Rumble rumbling on about Professor Angus's not being allowed to continue in the Catholic Church, Presbyterians were kept to the unpleasant and unwelcome task of pursuing their heretic with the stick, so as to be seen to belong to a holy branch of the Holy Catholic Church. Perhaps the impact of Angus is to be found as much in the galvanised conservatism of evangelical culture as in the innovative ministries of those who embraced his teachings. Either way, Angus has left his mark perhaps on a few more than Dr Emilsen and her family and now on us through her fine study.

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Aztecs: An Interpretation

Inga Clendinnen

Melbourne: Cambridge University Press,
pp.398 + xii + maps and illustrations
R.pr. \$49.95

This is a handsome book in every way. Its prose is that of an elaborate, poetic reflection on things long past. Its illustrations, some in colour, inform the text well. There is a full complement of scholarly apparatus.

All of this acts as the means to present the compellingly horrific world of Tenochtitlan, the great city of pre-Cortés Mexico. The Mexica (the world 'Aztec' is reserved to the title) are shown as a fiercely competitive warrior people. Clendinnen explores the roles of wives and mothers as well as those of warriors, priests, merchants and artists. The women's roles were not in structural opposition to the male warrior ethos but, like all other roles, were subtly caught up in it. All human beings were expected to share the same virtues, courage above all.

The chapters on women's place in the culture acted for me as a relief from the appalling blood-letting of other chapters. The Mexica culture was soaked in blood. The complex metaphor which summed up the culture saw all life linked in the vegetable cycle of growth. Human blood was both the rain and the fertilising agent which the gods demanded to allow growth. The glory of the warrior was to capture victims whose blood would flow on the altars of Tenochtitlan. Clendinnen makes it clear that such blood flowed in rivers.

It is important to note that Clendinnen's book is an interpretation. She is not attempting a translation of Mexica experience-near concepts into the experience-distant concepts of specialists in the way Clifford Geertz understands the process. Unlike Geertz's Balinese, Clendinnen's Mexica are shadowy beings almost lost in the smog of colonial time. Clendinnen does not see herself as a cultural anthropologist but as an historian:

Historians of remote places and peoples are the romantics of the human sciences, Ahab pursuing our great white whale, dimly aware that the whole business is, if coolly considered, rather less than reasonable. We will

never catch him, and don't much want to: it is our own limitations of thought, of understandings, of imagination we test as we quarter those strange waters.(275)

How well do Clendinnen's 'limitations of thought ... of imagination' stand up to the test she imposes on them? Extremely well! Her scholarship, both wide and deep, enables her to catch more than a 'glimpse of the great white shape' of the Mexica world-view.

The reader is never left in doubt about the state of the argument. 'While there can be no certainty, the balance, I think, tilts to ...' (238) is a typical Clendinnen formula used, typically, to introduce or summarise the evidence for the preferred option.

There are one or two inconsistencies, the most important coming, disappointingly, at the crescendo of the book. Clendinnen presents Mexica ritual as a 'calculated (by priests) assault on the senses' in which chant, dancing, alcohol, fasting and blood-spilling create a 'delirium' in which the sacred is felt even by onlookers. But she immediately overturns this imaginative reconstruction by arguing that the real motivation behind Mexica ritual was a realisation of the transience of all things. In her first vision the victims provide the heady liquor of blood, but the blood of outsiders, of non-Mexica. These outsiders become insiders in her second vision. They are human beings like the Mexica, and now the stress is on warrior deaths which were

notably less heroic: trussed like deer to be lugged, heads lolling, up the pyramid steps.(261)

The ritual deaths become 'disturbing'. There is no delirium but a sense of the emptiness of the warrior ideal as high-

ranking warrior victims become 'undifferentiated bipeds being done to bloody death.'

Clendinnen has convinced me that an Elizabethan absorption with 'mutabilitie' was one element in Mexica thought. She has also convinced me that a Jacobean revelling in blood, which was always the blood of the 'other', the unlucky one who had lost in competition, was another. The balance, on the evidence presented, tilts to the latter as the more important underlying motif in Mexica ritual, I think.

More importantly, I thank Professor Clendinnen for raising the question, and scores of other intriguing questions like it.

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The Jew Accused: Three Anti-Semitic Affairs, Dreyfus, Beilis, Frank, 1894-1915.

Albert S Lindermann

Cambridge University Press, Sydney, 1991. x + 301pp.

The Jew Accused is not an exposé of antisemitism, three times over. Neither is it an examination of the determinative role that antisemitism played in three infamous cases. Most books on these three cases of 'affairs' have been written in that vein, another would not provide much that is new to the student of antisemitism. But Albert Lindermann's study does offer us substantially more than the title would have us expect. For Lindermann is one of a new breed of historians who have broken with a 'received version' of antisemitism, which has been disturbingly black and white and overly reliant intuition at the expense of evidence.

It has been commonplace, for example, to mention the names Dreyfus, Beilis

and Frank as synonymous with Christian antisemitism during the Great War. But sweeping generalisations of this sort do not do justice to the complexity of the cases themselves nor to the breadth of opinion that was expressed among Jews and Christians in respect to the accused and the court verdicts. By bringing his careful analysis to bear on this tryptic of court cases, which saw a French Jewish officer accused of treason, a Russian Jewish factory owner accused of Blood libel, and an American Jewish factory superintendent accused of rape-murder, Lindermann gives a human dimension to the individuals involved in each case, offers a sensitive appraisal of the reactions to the accused, and provided a larger picture of the variegated experience of Christian Jewish relations in each society.

While Lindermann is sensitive to the evidence of antisemitism in each case, he is equally aware that such evidence in itself is insufficient to prove that the course of justice was subverted on account of it. He strongly suggests that the evidence was subverted in the Leo Frank case by another vice, more critical to the prosecuting lawyer, whose seriously flagging reputation stood to gain from what was an easy and popular case to win, given the enormous publicity that the victim's family generated. Lindermann is also aware that 'dyed in the wool' antisemites do not necessarily invert their eyes from injustice, and in the cases of Alfred Dreyfus and Mendel Beilis, key witnesses, whose anti-Jewish sentiments were known, nonetheless acted on *behalf* of the accused. Furthermore, Lindermann emphasises that the false accusation of a Jew is not proof that his conviction is the will of the populace, irrespective of how antisemitic it has been shown itself to be on other occasions. Nowhere is this more evident

than in the case of Mendel Beilis, for whom the verdict of 'innocent' in 1913 was cause for spontaneous celebration by the Russian populace, such that: 'Strangers embraced on the streets with shining faces and streaming eyes; Jews and gentiles congratulated each other, proud of their country and its "simple citizens", gloating over the happy ending and the humiliation of the administration" (:191). Yet this was the same Russia which had seen over six hundred pogroms against Jews between the years 1903 and 1906, beginning with the horrific assault on Kishinev.

Undeniably, these cases disclose a staggering degree of clumsy machination on the part of the prosecutions, but clumsiness and poor judgement was also to be found on the defence side, particularly in respect to Leo Frank. Moreover, Lindermann does not shy away from the unpleasant details of the accused, noting that Dreyfus and Frank were partly indicted by their unfortunate personalities and, in the case of Frank, appearance. Leo Frank's sexual proclivities, which made him well known in the local bordello, could not but cast serious doubt on him in Atlanta, Georgia where certain heterosexual practices, now considered routine, were punishable by death in 1913.

The importance of the contextual setting of the cases themselves, cannot be overemphasised. Lindermann manages to provide this with a fair amount of detail and a genuine sensitivity to the course of Christian Jewish relations in each community. Regarding both the European and the American contexts, Lindermann wishes to remind students of antisemitism that a very crucial factor in its germination was the 'real fact' of the rise of the Jews themselves. To be sure, not all societies which had experienced the inflow of

Jewish migrants and their prosperity reacted in the same ways. Lindermann is also keen to point out that the negative propaganda about Jews was overwhelmingly countered by positive appraisals and rhetoric, not to mention concrete demonstrations of support.

The Jew Accused is an extremely valuable study, not only because of the considerable light it sheds on three much quoted cases in the annals of antisemitism, but also, more profoundly, because it demystifies antisemitism, and refuses it a place 'essentially beyond human ken'. While fully aware of the aspects of Jew-hatred, Lindermann is convinced that 'hatred of Jews can be studied just as hatred of other peoples - and understood' (:279). This is one volume that has gone a long way to furthering that understanding.

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**Current Studies on Rituals:
Perspectives for the Psychology of
Religion**

Hans-Günter Heimbrock & H. Barbara
Boudewijnse(eds)

Amsterdam-Atlanta, Ga: Rodopi, 1990
pp.196 + v, ISBN 90-5183-178-1

Price: \$US30.

This book from the Netherlands is representative of material coming from small European nations in English. Its scholarship is eclectic (as is Australia's), depending on a variety of traditions (British, French, North American and German - some of the writers are, indeed, German). Its language is occasionally quaint. But there is a richness and freshness which quaintness ought not distract us from. In the introduction the editors promise an exploration of ritual which will open up pos-

sible ways of approaching psychology of religion. The promise is kept.

The book has three sections: chapters on theoretical considerations; empirical studies of Christian rituals; and a series of psychological interpretations of Christian rituals.

Boudewijnse's opening paper is a useful rehearsal of Victor Turner's theories on ritual. Geertz' contrast of Turner and Peirce is less successful. It is confused and seemingly pointless. This tendency to wander about aimlessly is a general problem with the weaker essays. But there is more strength than weakness. Heimbrock gives a framework of mediation between inner and outer which is useful for examining what does take place in ritual. Wikström's careful analysis of emotional, social and religious elements in religious experience is typical of the book's care to avoid simplistic reductionism.

The empirical studies provide examples of research methodology. The work on prayer in a Dutch High School and on family rituals seems to call out for replication in Australia.

The final section is the richest in the book. It presents interpretations of the 1985 Live Aid Rock Marathon as a ritual for moral change (Reich), of women's rituals (Ouwehand), of rituals used in therapy (Vandermeersch) and of the motivations for pilgrimage (Van Uden and Pieper). Readers will find many threads worth following in these papers. I was particularly interested by the religious motivation named by the young in Reich and in the research on pilgrimage.

Ritual is very much 'in' after the publication of Frits Staal's *Rules Without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras and the Human Sciences* (New York: Lang, 1989).

This book, despite its ignoring of religions other than Christianity - and in a country with a strong Islamic minority - will take you further in.

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The Power of Symbols

F W Dillistone. SCM Press, London, 1986
ISBN 334-02261-4 pp246 \$29.50

The author of this comprehensive, clear and coherent study of symbols is a former Dean of Liverpool and Emeritus Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford. His 1955 book *Christianity and Symbolism* was reissued in 1985.

This present work, however, is a completely new book and challenges the reader to come to terms with balancing both the literal and the symbolic elements in culture in general and in the Christian Bible in particular. He sets out his contents in twelve chapters organised in three parts and his introduction presents definitions and examples of the literal and symbolic approaches.

The first section deals with some visual and written examples of symbolic forms, including the body, food, land, clothes, light and darkness, fire and water, and, most importantly, blood and sacrifice.

He then presents important and helpful theories about symbolism by such social anthropologists as Raymond Firth, Mary Douglas, Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz and by such philosophers, theologians and historians as Ernst Cassirer, Paul Tillich, Paul Ricoeur, Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, Austin Farrar, Mercea Eliade and Ernst Gombrich.

Finally he presents some issues relating to symbolism, including the controversial degree of symbolism in the Christian Bible, the ongoing conflict between the Letter and the Spirit, the relation of symbols to culture, the life and death of symbols, and the double paradox of symbols.

These contents leave no doubt as to the influential power of symbols amongst humans, as suggested by the book's apt title, and further detailed references to other scholars investigating symbols are set out in the five pages of notes which serve as bibliography.

The author freely acknowledges his debt and gratitude to the philosopher-theologian Paul Tillich. Australians will be pleased to find several references to Australia and to the impact on the author of Patrick White's symbols. Those interested in the depth-psychology of Carl Jung will also welcome the author's reference to the collective unconscious, the inheritance of symbols and "a kind of gene pool of forms which can exercise a powerful influence on human psyches" (:5).

This book is a very valuable resource for exploring both the intellectual or factual and the imaginative or fictional aspects of the Bible as well as other literature, and for exploring the very rich and rewarding realms of symbols in human life and existence.

This valuable study of symbols will no doubt remain an indispensable, accessible and very readable guide to this symbolic realm and those who read, study, and inwardly digest it will not be disappointed.

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Studies on Religions in the Context of Social Sciences. Methodological and Theoretical Relations

Witold Tyloch, Polish Society for the Science of Religions, Warsaw, 1990, pp226.

Arising from a conference of the same name, this book comprises a diverse collection of 20 papers. It rather has the sense of a collection of academic dipsticks giving the measure of the oil of erudition in a variety of scholarly engines. Some motors are clearly running well, others I am not too sure about. Certainly this is a meta- [not 'metta', if the Buddhists will pardon the pun] discussion. A swirl of ideas, critiques, and views pulsate around methodological and related issues, and the relation of *religionswissenschaft* to other social sciences. The conference was held in Warsaw; the book has been published in conjunction with the IAHR.

Despite its credentials and international flavour the final production of the book leaves much to be desired. In an age of word-processing and automatic spell-checks one could have expected better. Even allowing for translation into English, the grammatical, typological, and simple spelling errors would be amusing were they not so prevalent and distracting. However, this criticism aside, the contents make for interesting reading on the whole.

Two papers on Islam begin the book. Peter Antes delves into Islamic Mysticism in the context of Social Studies, and Janusz Danecki looks at Islam in the context of Political Science. This latter usefully addresses the issue of the primal holism of religion and politics, versus the modern intention to divide the two. Contemporary resurgence, for example, of Islamic fundamentalism reflects the political pull of an earlier holistic unity in

Islamic life. Later, Islam receives further treatment by Jacques Waardenburg. He identifies a number of significant theoretical and empirical contributions that the social sciences may make to Islamic studies.

The Study of Indigenous Religions in the History of Religions, is addressed by Armin W Geetz from Denmark who proposes that a combination of anthropological, historical and linguistic methods be applied to the study of the indigenous act of constructing meaningful interpretations. He argues:

...one cannot understand the meaning of Others, without squarely confronting that area of their culture which provides most of the paradigms of meaning, namely, religion. Contrary to most of the social sciences, I suggest that we focus our interpretations where the Other finds meaning, if we wish to portray them at all. (33)

Topics as diverse as the Study of Religion in Czechoslovakia, the relationship between the History of Religions and current issues in anthropology, the problem of faith in the sociology of religion, and theories of the religious change in Black Africa lend an almost encyclopedic flavour. The only paper neither written in English nor translated is Hans Kippenberg's *Die Funktion der Religionswissenschaft in der Soziologie von Max Weber*.

It would be a cumbersome and lengthy task to review each paper individually, but one or two particularly caught my eye. A case study of Leeds and Bradford forms the heart of Kim Knott's 'The Role of Religious Studies in Understanding the Ethnic Experience'. Knott makes the point that

The business of assessing the functions of religion should(sic) not be left solely to sociologists, social psychologists or social

anthropologists but should be undertaken also by scholars(sic) who have investigated(sic) the beliefs and practices of religious people in their historical development. (90)

Knott usefully reports on the Community Religions Project in Great Britain concerning which, he argues, it is necessary to view religion 'both as historical process and in interaction with other areas of human concern ... care must be taken(sic) [you see what I mean about irritating typos! - Reviewer] to observe religion diachronically and synchronically'.(85)

E Thomas Lawson's paper on the crisis in the scientific study of religion is a stimulating discussion. He identifies the crisis in social sciences as a 'crisis of method' whereas 'the crisis in the history of religions is a crisis of identity'(92). The latter, he argues, has the prospect of progressing forward 'to join the chastened social sciences'(96). The social sciences are 'chastened', Lawson argues, in so far as they have largely abandoned their positivistic presuppositions.

Michael Pye's discussion of philology and fieldwork in the study of Japanese religion not only introduces an Asian dimension, it is an insightful and very useful contribution - especially in our part of the world. This paper ought to be standard reading for anyone contemplating advanced study of Japanese religion. Pye offers the challenge that '*the specialist in religion must be the historian-philologist and the social scientist at one and the same time*'(149). Certainly these two dimensions cannot avoid each other in the study of Japanese religion so far as Pye is concerned. But apart from this methodological consideration, Pye gives informative insight into the patterns of social structures and language such that, without

a clear grasp of them, the potential field researcher would hardly be able to proceed.

This diverse conference collection closes with two theoretical discussions. Andrzej Wojtowicz reviews the problem of the definition of religion, and Donald Wiebe concludes that

The dominance of the history and phenomenology of religion in the history of our 'discipline', as beneficial as it has been in helping to achieve academic legitimation for the field, now stand as impediments to its further development. ... For however important a descriptive account - empirical and phenomenological - of religious phenomena and traditions are, they are not sufficient for the intelligent explanation for which science seeks. And without an infusion of theory this is not likely to be achieved. (217)

Substantial regional conferences allow for a wide cross-section of papers of substance, albeit invariably of differing quality and depth. Nonetheless, the published products of such conferences will always be useful: most scholars in the field will find at least some highly pertinent contributions. *Studies on Religions in the Context of Social Sciences* is no exception.

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The Quest for the Messiah. The History, Literature and Theology of the Johannine Community.

John Painter

Edinburgh:T&T Clark, 1991,xiv+425

John Painter is the Reader of Religious Studies at Latrobe University. This study arises from his own quest for a more adequate grasp of John's distinctive understanding of belief in Jesus the Messiah in the context of early Christianity.

The Fourth Gospel he sees as the product of a long and specific history, that of a community of Jewish believers in Jesus. By a close analysis of the text the development of this relationship can be traced from an initial stage of dialogue through one of increasing conflict to a final stage of ostracism and mutual execration.

The Gospel is the work of a profound and creative interpreter of the Christian tradition whose work developed in several stages. It originated in the thought-world of the syncretistic Judaism of first century Palestine that is illustrated by the materials from Qumran. The tradition was shaped in Palestine for some thirty years by the evangelist before a move to the Diaspora and then for perhaps another thirty years in some such place as Ephesus.

The evangelist re-thought and re-wrote his Gospel in the changing situations of his community. His work incorporates successive interpretations, new presentations of Jesus, in response to the major crises of its history, the crucifixion of the Messiah, the failure of his imminent return and their expulsion from the synagogue with its consequent persecution. Painter distinguishes three consecutive editions by the evangelist, reflected, for example, in the three versions of the Farewell Discourse. After his death the evangelist's thought was re-worked by a disciple or member of a Johannine school.

Of first importance in establishing these conclusions are the characteristic Johannine quest stories, such as those of chapters 1-4. The evangelist has transformed the individual call or vocation stories of the Synoptic tradition into a series of episodes in which various persons go on a variety of quests, for the Messiah, for wine, the Kingdom, water, healing, life and ultimately for Jesus. In other stories Jesus himself is engaged on the quest

which is his mission. Underlying their quest for the Messiah is the Messiah's quest for them. Paradoxically, both quests are successful only when the Messiah has been rejected.

It is in these quest stories and their counterpart, rejection stories such as those of chapters 5-12, that John's characteristic Christology is expressed. He conceives of human life as a quest and Jesus as the fulfilment of the quest of all who were searching. He is the reality symbolised by the various objects of their quest.

The book's fourteen chapters include a lengthy introduction to Johannine Christianity, detailed studies of the first ten chapters of the Gospel as well as the Farewell Discourse, and a chapter on eschatological faith. A study of the 'opponents' in I John follows the history of the community to a period of internal dissension due to an influx of Gentile converts unfamiliar with the Jewish context and conflict in which the Johannine tradition was formed.

The book is an impressive monument to a career in Johannine studies which already spans a quarter of a century. It pays homage to the masters of a previous generation, Bultmann, Barrett and Dodd, but is much more in the mood of the moderns, Martyn, Meeks and Brown. It is not for the faint-hearted; a generous use of Greek font doubtless delights the connoisseur but deters the general reader.

The great contribution of studies such as this is to demonstrate how contextual Christian theology has been from its very origins. Shaped in response to the different conditions of a changing environment the Gospel of John incorporates successive presentations of Jesus and his work from Palestinian Judaism, the various phases of the community's relationship with the synagogue, into the Hellenistic world and nascent Gnosticism.

Boon though this may be, however, to social historians and historians of doctrine, it heightens the hermeneutical problem of the contemporary reader seeking to shape a Christian response to a vastly different world. How do you go about nourishing yourself from a theological layer-cake baked in such diverse first century ovens?

While we admire, then, the surgical skills that separate layer upon layer of tradition and open a window on the world of a fascinating Christian community of antiquity we look

forward to John Painter's deferred commentary which will combine historical, literary, social and theological perspectives. There, we hope, the Fourth Gospel will serve as a mirror of our own world.

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**The Trespass of the Sign:
Deconstruction, Theology and
Philosophy**

Kevin Hart. Cambridge University Press,
Cambridge. 1989

xii + 292pp, \$29.95 pb

This is a book about Jacques Derrida and deconstruction - the radical method of reading which, having unseated the new criticism, held sway in literary theory at least through the 70s. It involves a denial that any one meaning can be found for texts. And it denies that words have any meaning free from context dependence, so that there is always overplus of meaning and never of closure. This has implications for any metaphysics - there is no *reality*, no *ground*, undergirding the words once supposed to reveal it. Writing is all on one level and meaning is all a

matter of constant cross-reference, and so is anti foundational.

This is by no means a good introduction to Derrida, however. For this there is Jonathan Culler *On Deconstruction* (1982), which one might approach after beginning with Terry Eagleton *Literary Theory* (1983) and Richard Harland *Superstructuralism* (1987) (a more general introduction to structuralism and Derrida's post-structuralism). Instead, Hart discusses the *reception* of Derrida's work in subsequent philosophy and theology, for its influence is wide and significant indeed. His point is to confute those interpreters who declare deconstructionism atheistic. While it is anti-metaphysical, disallowing any 'trespass of the sign' (Dant ) by which one might get past the play of signifiers to anything more concrete behind them, Hart will not allow that it is anti-theological. With T J J Althizer, Hart reads Derrida as ironically Jewish (kabbalistic) and mystical, denying only metaphysics and natural theology. But a non-metaphysical theology fuelled by mystical knowing is certainly on the cards, with nothing in Derrida prohibiting the existence of a hidden God (Hart's AMDG dedication makes his intention plain from the start). For theology and religious studies types this provides an important reassurance that deconstruction does not mean the death of God, as secularising readings by philosophers and atheistic readings by postmodern theologians would have it. The long third part of Hart's book discussing mysticism (philosophy's 'other') will be of interest to many.

Definitely **not** a text book, Hart's study is for researchers using hermeneutics and metaphilosophy as important tools of their trade, or else for those general readers *au fait* with the sweep of con-

tinental philosophy and interested in how this late-twentieth century movement might influence religious belief. An advanced graduate seminar might profitably discuss this book, too. But if you're not up on Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche and (particularly) Heidegger you will be constantly frustrated. This modern *defensor fidei* might have made his important point more effectively, therefore, if he had made his book more accessible to a less specialist audience.

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The New Universalism: Foundations for a Global Theology

David J Krieger. Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY, 1991

ISBN 0-88355-727-4 pp219 \$29.95

The author teaches at a Christian theological faculty in Lucerne Switzerland but his book takes the reader well beyond traditional dogmatic, systematic and speculative Christian theology. He in fact addresses humanity's present vital task of formulating a 'theology of religions', partly in response to our increasing local and global contact with other religions and worldviews and partly out of respect for the valuable traditional insights within these religions which can be appreciated on many different levels and appropriated diatopically.

This very relevant book is set out in four chapters which seek to establish a suitable hermeneutic for coming to terms with our present 'radical pluralism' of competing, total all-encompassing worldviews and with a 'theology of religions'.

These chapters include, first, the opening of the horizon for a global theology against the background of the great western split between Humanistic, Scientific

Secularism and Dogmatic, Christian Orthodoxy and of the emergence from colonial days of many other religions in the world, both very influential and relatively local in character.

Foundations are then laid with the exploration of ideology, the objectivism versus relativism issue and the rationality versus irrationality issue. Finally, a New Universalism is presented on the basis of argumentation, the diatopical hermeneutic and Ghandi's respect for life and non-violence for the establishment of a Global form of Life.

The author is clearly familiar with the West's recent influential thinkers in the field of sociology, philosophy, and hermeneutics and he provides within his text and footnotes useful and concise summaries of some of the main ideas and insights of such thinkers. Each chapter contains a wealth of valuable insights into the present and past ideological, philosophical, or spiritual quests of humanity and a wealth of scholarly references and summaries of these very influential thinkers.

This is clearly an important book in our present stage of intellectual and spiritual development, especially for those of us engaged in the study or teaching of Comparative Religion and World Religions.

However, those emerged in their specific Jewish, Islamic, Hindu or Christian theological investigations and proclamations also concern themselves with the religious beliefs and practices of their fellow humans, albeit sometimes in the context of 'contrastive' religion.

Conflicts between worldviews naturally arise but the author stresses that discourse is convincing only when all parties express their myths non-violently. In this context of non-violence, the author indi-

cates that the pragmatic, existential, diatopical, third-level of discourse provides space for encounter between religions and for subjective personal experiences of initiation, conversion, and socialisation which are part of all religions and are possibilities for anyone who chooses within one or more religions (:201).

Students and adherents of religion both within specific theologies or in the more general area of religion studies will have much to work on as they take up and apply this book's four levels-of-discourse to their hermeneutical endeavours and as they continue to meet and attempt to hold dialogue with the growing number of religions and worldviews now so much part of our multi-cultural society.

Parts of this book are certainly heavy going and deep but despite this, it is clearly an important book for our times and readers will find its contents both challenging and richly rewarding.

John Noack

Trinity Grammar, Kew

Grace and Disgrace: A Theology of Self-Esteem, Society and History

Neil Ormerod, 1992

E J Dwyer, Newtown, p 195+append+bib+index

Ormerod proposes to make sense of the human experience of sin and grace, or disgrace and grace, to use his terminology. His approach is speculative, but he aims to stay within the boundaries of the Catholic dogmatic tradition. He is indebted to Karl Rahner; his mentors are Bernard Lonergan and Sebastian Moore.

Grace, for Ormerod, must be understood in the context of human freedom, or the lack of it. Divine grace, far from limiting human freedom, actually allows for greater freedom; it completes and perfects

freedom.

Conversion, in Ormerod's view, is the main effect of grace. It means a radical change in one's personal horizon, a movement from a horizon 'determined by inadequate, false, and distorted self-esteem to one determined by proper, undistorted self-esteem' (:26, cf :35).

Sin is dis-grace; it stands in opposition to grace. Original sin is Ormerod's particular focus here. Grace and original sin 'are the two poles between which our concrete human existence oscillates' (:87). These two - grace and original sin - are intimately related, inasmuch as grace is God's solution to the radical human problem of sin. Ormerod expresses this relationship in the single sentence which he uses as a heuristic device to discover exactly is original sin: 'Original sin is what Jesus saves us from' (:115).

After surveying the traditional Catechism approach to the doctrine of original sin, and critiquing the Augustinian view, Ormerod discusses what he calls the Scriptural witness. This is a misnomer, for he looks at only two passages: Genesis 3 and Romans 5:12-17. Overall, one gains the impression that Ormerod is not at home in biblical theology. Roman Catholic tradition, Rahner, Lonergan, Moore, psychology? Yes. Biblical theology? No.

In the end Ormerod produces a model of original sin which involves a psychological reading of the human condition, prompted by the work of Sebastian Moore. The book concludes with views on how the death and resurrection of Jesus saves us from the 'radical self-disesteem' which is at the heart of original sin.

This is a fascinating attempt to reinterpret traditional dogma in language and thought-frames which carry meaning for men and women in the 1990s. Anyone

who makes such an effort deserves commendation and encouragement. Which I wish I could give. But Ormerod's reinterpretation, by his own account, is largely psychological in nature (:8); it certainly owes more to psychology than it does to theology. A psychological hermeneutic tends to distort theological texts. Ormerod's work is no exception; it is essentially anthropocentric, not theocentric, and not Christocentric.

Thus 'conversion' means a change in *my* horizon. The basic principle which determines my horizon is my self-esteem. God becomes involved when I experience 'grace', that is my own value plus 'divine transcendent value'. When I experience this value, I find myself loving a value which is the source of all goodness.

And faith? 'Faith is ... a commitment, heart, mind, and body to transcendent value and its consequences' (:62). It seems, then, that instead of loving a personal god, I love a transcendent value. My faith is not in a person, Jesus Christ, but in a transcendent value. With the best will in the world, I am hard put to match this with biblical theology. Likewise, I am battling to understand how Ormerod can speak at length of divine grace without serious reflection on the person and work of Christ, who is the mirror of the Father's heart, and through whom grace and truth come (John 1:14-17).

Again, Ormerod writes approvingly of Moore's view that God's wrath is 'nothing but our projection of our own anger at God, our anger at being what we are' (:165). And to complete the move from theocentricity to anthropocentricity: 'Jesus' death is then a sacrifice ... not to God, but to us' (:166). So 'at last we have a victim who is equal to the depth of our anger, a victim who willingly takes on that anger and bears our sins though inno-

cent himself' (:172). It is difficult to see how God-in-Christ fits into all this. Anselm's question comes to mind: *Cur deus homo?*

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The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth

Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor

Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1987.

ISBN 0-06-250791-5, pp 501, \$29.99

From the first millennium BCE to the end of the 1700s CE, those people influenced by the literal reading of the Hebrew and Christian Bible held that about a week after the universe was created in the beginning Adam, the first human and a male, was formed from the mud and Eve, the first woman, soon after from his rib by the Hebrew tribal male deity Yahweh-El in his role as the Universal Creator. Not surprisingly, the female Co-creatrix Hokmah or Wisdom was hidden away in Proverbs 8.

Genesis also told these Bible readers that Eve, along with the Paradise trees and snake, brought only human suffering and cosmic evil.

In contrast to this, Monica Sjoo, a Swedish artist and theoretician of the re-emerging Goddess religion, and Barbara Mor, an American writer and poet, have assembled together much historical and archeological evidence published over the past century which goes back well beyond Bishop Usher's once popular date of 4004 BCE for the origin of our universe to the emergence of the cosmos, life, and humans in terms of millions and even billions of years.

This is very clear from the contents of 52 chapters in four main sections, only introducing the patriarchal Hebrew jealous tribal deity and the split in the Garden of Eden nearly at the end in Chapters 42 and 43.

The basic thesis is that while the male members of the tribes or communities were out hunting or fishing for food, the women at home were busy bearing and nurturing their young, domesticating plants and animals, and developing both handicrafts and a rich culture and religion. The contents clearly indicate the wide scope and historically lengthy role of women in the religious and cultural life of the tribe, and the many images of female deities expressing this involvement.

The first five chapters look back to pre-historic evolutionary phases of development and see the predominance of the feminine in early life forms and the eventual emergence in Africa of the Black Mother and other cultural creators.

The next nine chapters explore women's early religions and the feminine elements in them. What emerges is the first mother, early organic religion, female cosmologies involving the cosmic life-renewing serpent and the world life-producing egg, the female mysteries, and mother of wild animals.

This is followed by twenty three chapters on the female influence on religion in Neolithic times and includes discussion of small villages, the Bird-and-Snake Goddess, the earth mound, serpent spirals, underground caverns, moon time, the cow goddess, moon blood, menstrual rites, the Goddess of witches, Crete in the Bronze Age, and Tantra.

Although much of the material used is derived from the published research of others and not on original archeological work, these sources are very well docu-

mented and provide 227 pages of well-assembled information about the feminine principle in the Form of the Cosmic Mother or Great Goddess.

The well-known and, to many, the oppressive patriarchal cultures and religions fashioned and still maintained by "hard-core patriarchal fundamentalists" (:187) take up the next 200 pages where the emerging male deity, given the male's recognised role in parenthood, gradually dominates the scene as the Heavenly Father, the Olympian King, the Sun God, and the Jealous God, particularly hostile towards the nourishing and fruitful Earth Mothers, so tragically depicted in the Hebrew Scriptures. There is also the split in the Garden of Eden, the grotesque witch hunts in which millions were burned to death by male, priestly witch-hunters and torturers, the machine, and the need to spell the earth.

The text is well supported by 43 pages of useful and scholarly references to many sources and the 12 pages of bibliography provide much additional reading.

I found the reading of this book very exciting and each chapter opened up a different and sometimes new area in this vast and vital field of knowledge. Many of the books referred to have been available for many years but the value of this work lies in the well-organised presentation of the now widely recognised early Goddess religion, of reactions to her, and of this vital aspect of our own human experience, history, and ancient knowledge as we highly-critically demythologise ancient texts for history but also re-mythologise and re-symbolise them spiritually and anagogically to express and represent our-story and my-story.

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Trinity Grammar, Kew*

The Meanings of Death

John Bowker

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991. Pages i-xii; 243. \$45.00 (hard)

This book is a refreshing affirmation of death awareness as a source of value in living, which religion serves to pass on to future generations. The argument is pitched against the popular understanding that the origin of religion is human mortality, and that religious belief and practice are merely illusory hedges against the inevitable death. For Bowker, religions hold no 'pie in the sky, by and by', just the possibility that what in the end we consider valuable in living may be affirmed, and that such an affirmation might be launched into the future. Theorists like Marx and Freud, who argue that religion is an 'illusion', or just a palliating compensation in the face of death, are, for Bowker, dead wrong.

Bowker, who is Adjunct Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Adjunct Professor at North Carolina State University, and Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, offers a 'this-worldly' view. Contrary to the views of Marx, Freud and others, death is understood in the history of religions as 'something to be postponed as long as possible' because 'there is nothing after death to which one might look forward as a place of compensation or bliss' (:30). For our ancestors, writes Bowker, 'there was definitely no future in dying' (:30). The religious exploration of death is basically an 'assertion of value in human life and relationships' which does not deny, and is not denied by, the 'absolute fact and reality of death' (:37). Thus, religion does not originate in the denial of death by means of compensatory illusions or projections. Rather, death responsive-

ness is gauged when questions of value are raised: why affirm a particular view if we do, in fact, go into oblivion? If we do go into oblivion, then why resist the 'callousing' (:39) of the emotional and moral self, that so readily signifies death denial? The answer Bowker gives is **sacrifice**, value is affirmed insofar as one makes of their death 'a sacrifice for the benefit of others' (:41). If death is really a sacrifice which propels emotional and moral value into the future, then Bowker is able to argue overall that there is now 'an important congruence of the religious and secular' and that these can now 'reinforce each other in a human attitude to death' (:42).

This line is traced through Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, a highly successful formula used by Bowker in his well known work, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World* (1970). Although such a formula has grown stale over the two decades or so since it was first employed, Bowker continues to raise the comparative spectre with it.

Thus, eyes West: The Jewish understanding of death (29 pages) is an 'affirmation of affinity' (:71), to be with the dying person, to be present at ceremonies for the departure of the soul, and to recite the *Shema*. Customs of mourning and remembrance are at least as important as those of the funeral. Christians view death (26 pages) whilst holding fast to the incarnational event. This is why the New Testament does not relate the believer to the death and resurrection of Jesus 'in any way that is evasive of life here and now' (:90), by offering a compensatory paradise. Islam (26 pages) differs somewhat because of the status of *Quran* as revelation, with its florid descriptions of heaven and hell. These the faithful are inclined to

take literally in daily rituals of sacrifice. Death itself is never a sacrifice; rather it sustains 'liminality' (:126), or the period in the grave. Islam moves the Judeo-Christian tradition in the direction of **literalism**, in which 'sacrifice is marginalised' in comparison with a 'literal description of after-death states' and ways to attain goodness and avoid evil (:204).

Now, eyes East: for Hinduism (42 pages), death is never 'a matter of great moment' (:142), because in the long process of *samsara* (rebirth) death happens many times and therefore should not be cause for anxiety. Each life is a sacrifice for the sake of living the next in a higher formative key. In Buddhism (37 pages), 'death is transition' (:204), only to cease when the recognition, that nothing is immune from transience, is real and absolute. Buddhism moves the Hindu tradition towards **metaphor**, where sacrifice is important at the level of folk religion, but is otherwise 'demythologised' (:205). Unlike vistas west, the East makes virtually impossible an understanding of religion as compensatory 'illusion' linked to denying death.

Three things annoy me about Bowker's work in general, and this book prompts each of them: first, persistent is the lack of clear systematic thought, in this case about the category of sacrifice in world religions (he begins clarifying this only one the last two pages of the book); second, whatever else may be unique about Bowker's work, his use of idiosyncratic sources and interruptive quotations from the western literary tradition (which cuts against his intention to be systematic) sets his effort apart, for better or worse, from others; third, the continuous

reference Bowker makes to his own work throughout the book (and omitting some of the more interesting things he has written on religion and information processing) makes for unnecessary 'grandstanding' on his part. Overall, if greater attention had been given to alleviating the first annoyance, then I could live with the other two. Thus, I commend **what** Bowker does with death in the world's religions (although the absence of primal religions is glaring), but I remain disappointed about **how** he goes about it.

Nonetheless, the book is more subtle and rigorous than a similar work by Kenneth Kramer, *The Sacred Art of Dying* (Paulist Press, New York, 1988), even though Kramer's work would provide an excellent point of entry into the topic of death in world religions for the general reader. However, Bowker's considerable achievement falls short of another similar work, this one by David Chidester, *Patterns of Transcendence: Religion, Death and Dying* (Wadsworth, Belmont, CA, 1990). Unlike Bowker, Chidester has a much less idiosyncratic approach. He casts a wider net as to the religions considered, offers more conceptual sophistication and ideas similar to historians and phenomenologists of religion, and manages the topic of death in world religions in a far more systematic and useful manner for general readers and for scholars alike. Bowker's work seems tired by contrast, but it is recognised around the traps that Cambridge University Press is not all it once was, even on behalf of one of their own.

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