

# **AASR Update**

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## **Minutes of the AASR Annual General Meeting Adelaide, 6 July 1994**

The meeting opened at 5:30pm with the President in the Chair and 26 members in attendance.

### **1. Apologies**

Rod Bucknell, Robert Crotty, Richard Hutch, Neville Jarvis, Pauline Rae, Paul Rule, Juliette Sheen, Jane Simpson, Garry Trompf, Jim Tulip

### **2. Minutes**

The Minutes of the 1993 AGM as printed in REVIEW, 6, 2:36-40 were accepted as a true account of the meeting. (Habel, Wodarz) CARRIED

### **3. Business Arising from the Minutes**

**3.1 Membership fees** - 'Tricia Blombery reported the executive had investigated alternative fee structuring for membership but recommended no change at present. The earlier problem arising from the use of the term 'unwaged' had been eliminated by the redefinition of criteria for the concession category.

### **4. President's Report**

Alan Black presented the President's report. (See below)

### **5. Vice President's Report**

'Tricia Blombery presented Jane Simpson's report in her absence. (See below)

### **6. Secretary's Report**

'Tricia Blombery presented the Secretary's report. (See below)

### **7. Treasurer's Report**

The financial statement for the period 1 July 1993 to 30 June 1994 as prepared by Neville Jarvis was circulated to all members and presented in his absence by 'Tricia Blombery. (See below) It was resolved that the Treasurer's report be adopted. (Pratt, Adam) CARRIED

It was recommended that the membership fees for 1994/5 remain the same as for 1993/4 ie \$40 members, \$20 concession, \$45 overseas members (excluding

NZ). So moved (Franzmann, Noone)  
CARRIED

## 8. Publications' Committee report

Vic Hayes presented a report of stock and sales for the 1993/4 period. Accepted (Hayes, Jordan) CARRIED

## 9. Executive Election

The President stood down and a former President of AASR, Ed Conrad, was asked to take the Chair and call for nominations.

**President** - Alan Black re-elected unopposed

**Vice President** - Trevor Jordan elected unopposed

**Secretary** - 'Tricia Blombery re-elected unopposed

**Treasurer** - Neville Jarvis re-elected unopposed

Alan Black resumed the Chair.

## 10. Publications' and Editorial Committee

**10.1 Election of Committee** - Vic Hayes tendered his resignation as Chairman of the Publications' Committee and proposed that, in the light of changing requirements in University publications policy as reported by Alan Black in the President's report, a new Publications' and Editorial Committee be formed to ensure the most efficient conduct on AASR publication.

Vic proposed the Committee comprise Enid Adam, Alan Black, 'Tricia Blombery, Victor Hayes, Philip Hughes, Trevor Jordan, Elaine Lindsay and Penny Magee. The members as named were elected to form the Committee.

**10.2 Chair of Committee** - It was moved that Alan Black be Chair of the Publications' and Editorial Committee. (O'Donoghue, Moore) CARRIED

**10.3 Vote of thanks to Vic Hayes** - Alan Black reflected the enthusiasm of the meeting in proposing an official vote of thanks to Vic for his many years as Chair of the Publications' committee.

**10.4 Editorial Board for ARS REVIEW** - The meeting directed the Committee to investigate a system of refereeing for the ARS REVIEW to be implemented from Volume 8.

**10.5 Notice of AGM** - It was moved that the REVIEW should contain formal notice of the AGM and call for nominations for all Executive positions. (Magee, Joy) CARRIED

### 10.6 Publication of Conference Papers

Methods for reproducing, disseminating, and publicising conference papers were discussed. It was resolved that it was the responsibility of each member to contact authors to obtain copies of papers but that a list of papers with the author's address should be published in the REVIEW. 'Tricia Blombery to liaise with Ted Newing for details of 1994 conference.

### 10.7 Brief and terms of reference of committee

Alan Black requested members to make suggestions regarding any aspects of AASR publishing or editing to members of the Publications' committee in order that the committee could develop a policy statement to be endorsed by 1995 AGM.

## 11. Conferences

### 11.1 1994 Joint Conferences

The President moved a vote of gratitude to members of the organising committee for the running of such a successful and enjoyable conference.

### **11.2 1995 AASR Conference - ACU Aquinas Campus Ballarat**

Rod Lacey reported that ACU are delighted to host the conference and that he plans to locate section convenors on different campuses. Conference dates: 6-9 July. A possible theme is 'Journeys and Landscapes'. Rod proposed that he negotiate to have the annual Aquinas lecture timetabled to coincide with the conference.

It was moved that the 1995 AASR Conference be held at the Aquinas Campus of ACU in Ballarat and that Rod Lacey be appointed Conference Convenor. (Habel, Hayes) CARRIED

Discussion followed as to whether the Conference should have a single theme or centre around a number of interest areas. It was resolved that a combination of theme and interest groups be organised. Rod will confer with other members of the Executive to finalise a theme. Details of this decision to appear in the next REVIEW.

### **11.3 1995 AASR Conference**

Jane Simpson (as presented by Tricia Blombery from Jane's fax) proposed that the University of Canterbury, Christchurch NZ should host a joint AASR/NZSSR conference to be held during the week ending July 9 1995. She requested a show of support from AASR members and permission to take the resolution and vote of support to the NZSSR conference in August 1994. The meeting expressed strong support for the proposal and directed the Secretary to convey this to Jane.

## **12. International Association for the History of Religions**

### **12.1 Continued membership of IAHR**

After lengthy discussion of the benefits, if any, of belonging to the IAHR, it was resolved that the AASR continue its membership but instead of paying the suggested \$US1 per member as requested should pay the minimum \$US100. (Magee, Pratt) CARRIED The Secretary was directed to convey the decision to the IAHR executive outlining our reasons for the reduced subscription.

### **12.2 Contribution to the IAHR Endowment Fund**

A letter of 30 March 1994 from the Treasurer of IAHR was tabled requesting contributions to the Endowment Fund. It was resolved that the 1992 resolution not to contribute to the fund stand. (Blombery, Almond) CARRIED

### **12.3 IAHR Executive meeting Brno**

A letter from Michael Pye, General Secretary IAHR, inviting AASR representatives to the meeting in Brno in August was tabled. The meeting was asked to inform other members of this invitation and direct them to the Secretary for details.

### **12.4 IAHR Meeting 1995 Mexico City**

The President asked any members considering attending to contact the Executive in order that they may be endorsed as AASR delegates at the meeting.

## **Other Business**

### **13.1 Collaboration with CanadianSSR**

The meeting congratulated AASR member Morny Joy on her election as

President of the CSSR. Morny assured the AASR of her continued personal interest in facilitating closer cooperation between the groups. The next meeting of

CSSR is 1-4 June 1995 at University of Quebec, Montreal and all AASR members were invited to attend.

The meeting closed at 6:45pm

## President's Report: Scholarly Publishing in Religion Studies

In this report I shall outline the background to a number of issues on the agenda for the 1994 Annual General Meeting of the AASR. Perhaps the most important is a recent development in the process of funding Australian universities. Earlier this year, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) gathered data on research publications from all Australian universities for the years 1992 and 1993. This information has subsequently been employed as one of the research output measures in a composite index of research performance. The index in turn has been used to allocate approximately \$208 million of funding to universities for 1995, funds which make up what is known as the Research Quantum. In each successive year, data on the previous year's publications will be gathered and fed into the funding formula.

In setting up the data-gathering process, an AVCC Working Party put forward definitions of the categories and subcategories of publications to be included. The three subcategories of journal article were defined as follows:

1. Article in refereed journal. A work of scholarship published after peer review in a refereed journal controlled by an editorial board. So-called Research Notes which are refereed, and Letters to *Nature*, for example, are included in this category, as are critical scholarly texts (e.g. medie-

val or classical texts which appear in article form).

2. Article in unrefereed journal. A work of scholarship published in an unrefereed journal controlled by an editorial board.

3. Letter or note. An unrefereed communication published in a journal controlled by an editorial board. Editorials will generally be included in this category.

Although these three subcategories were treated as of equivalent weighting in this year's data gathering, the Working Party's report stated that in future years the research output measure would include some assessment of journal impact. It envisaged that there could be about three different categories for journals because some journals have more status and impact than others and should therefore be accorded higher weightings. Presumably articles in subcategory 1 (refereed journals) would be accorded more weight than those in subcategory 2 (unrefereed journals), though this was not directly stated in the report.

To maintain and enhance the quality and impact of *Australian Religion Studies Review*, and to ensure that contributing authors' publications are accorded due weight in research indices, it is therefore important that the journal be controlled by an editorial board and that articles submitted for publication be subjected to peer review.

As published conference proceedings also form part of the national research index, the AASR should also examine whether some form of conference proceedings should be published. I do not envisage that all papers presented at a conference should be published in book form. It might, however, be possible to publish some or all of the papers in loose-leaf form or on computer disk. The practicalities of this merit further investigation.

I should add that research output per staff member in Religious Studies departments in Australia is far higher than for almost any other academic discipline. For every ten Religious Studies staff members, the publication rate per annum in recent years has been 9.03 authored books, 0.90 edited books, 12.64 book chapters and 25.27 journal articles. This compares

with a national average per 10 academics of 0.75 authored books, 0.19 edited books, 1.80 book chapters and 8.92 journal articles. The AASR should do all that it can to ensure that members continue to contribute so productively to international scholarship in this field.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to the outstanding contribution that Vic Hayes has made as Chair of the AASR Publications Committee from the time of its inception. It is due largely to his tireless efforts that the Association has had such a successful publication program, having now published about 20 books. He has ensured that these books meet the highest scholarly standards, an achievement which is central to the aims of the Association.

*Alan Black*

## Vice President's Report

My two year term as Vice President has come to a close at this conference.

In my first six months as Vice President, I sought to establish in Sydney an inter-campus, campus-based post-graduate seminar in Feminist Studies in Religion. This started in October 1993 and has run for eighteen months, drawing 50 to 60 people from a range of disciplines. While the bi-monthly seminar was very much appreciated by those attending, it lapsed recently, after Erin White relinquished her role as convener. There is still considerable interest on meeting on a regular basis.

After leaving Australia in February 1993 to take up my position at the University of Canterbury, I sought to liaise with AASR members in New Zealand and work towards a joint conference in 1996,

the next year that the NZASR will hold its conference. Given that it was not possible to hold a joint conference in 1994, the University of Canterbury is seriously considering offering to host this joint conference. This proposal is to be put to the NZASR AGM in August at Waikato, Hamilton. Canterbury's mid-term break from 1996 is provisionally scheduled to end on 9 July, so that should provide sufficient time for overlap with Australian tertiary institutions.

In November 1993 I met with colleagues from other Religious Studies Departments and discussed my proposals to strengthen NZASR, as a prerequisite to reinforcing links with the AASR. Given the rapidity of government reform in this country, it was agreed that the NZASR must become more than a loose network

of Religious Studies departments. However some felt that a more formal organisation may take too much energy to maintain. These matters will be discussed at the forth coming AGM.

In my eighteen months back in New Zealand, I have gained the impression that most Religious Studies scholars tend to rely on networks that are specific to the tradition they teach, rather than to Religious Studies *per se*. There are strong OZ/NZ networks in Asian Studies and theology. There are none in Religious Studies.

To facilitate stronger links between Religious Studies scholars in this part of the world, I propose:

1. That the AASR agree to work towards a joint conference with NZASR, provisionally scheduled to be held at the University of Canterbury in 1996.

2. The an email network for scholars in religion in OZ and NZ be set up as soon as possible. This need not necessarily be a 'news group'. It could be used in the first instance to send out the *ARSR* and the *Yana*.

Lastly, I thank the Association for giving me the opportunity as Vice President to enhance the role of Religious Studies in our part of the world. I hope to continue to be of service.

*Jane Simpson*

## Secretary's Report

The membership of the association currently stands at 317 of which 53 are institutional members and 35 are concessional members. I am delighted to report that at 30 June all but 30 of these were fully financial. Overall the response to the renewal notice was prompt and fewer members needed reminder notices.

I have been following up contacts to form reciprocal arrangements with groups overseas. Arrangements are in place with the Canadian ASR, the International Society for the Sociology of Religion, the Religion Subgroup of the British Sociological Association, the Society for Biblical Literature and the Harvard Theological Center. Contact has been made with the British Association for the Study of Religion and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religions but no decisions have been reach as yet. I will continue to pursue other contacts and will provide update information in the REVIEW.

Arrangements have been made to have copies of the REVIEW sent to appropriate libraries under the Statutory Deposit regulations. When this omission was discovered the relevant libraries were contacted and all were provided with back copies so that they hold a complete set of REVIEWS. Future issues will be sent automatically.

Interest remains high in the society and a steady stream of new members is better than replacing members dropping out. The roll is constantly monitored and members who have not responded after three reminder notices are eliminated from the records. I hope that the update system for the Directory is working successfully. Successive updates will appear with each REVIEW and diligent cutting, pasting and editing by each member will keep it up to date.

Thank you to all members for your continued interest and support in the past

year. Especially I would like to mention the valued contribution of Peter Bentley who has again taken over day to day run-

ning demands since my move to Armidale.

*'Tricia Blombery*

**Financial Report**

*Financial Statement for 1 July 1993 to 30 June 1994*

Balance brought forward	9692.81	<u>9692.81</u>
Add income		
Membership fees	12114.44	
Sale of books	7159.83	
Sale of REVIEW	49.00	
REVIEW advertising	60.00	
Bank interest	170.32	
1993 Conference surplus	<u>4252.65</u>	<u>23806.24</u>
Less expenditure		
Wages	970.00	
Administration	38.85	
Postage - administration	704.10	
Telephone - administration	198.18	
Bank charges	61.68	
REVIEW - Printing	5220.00	
- Production	3140.00	
- Stationery	47.00	
- Postage	1315.85	
DIRECTORY - Photocopying	827.00	
- Production	1050.00	
- Stationery	961.07	
- Postage	618.00	
- Wages	225.00	
BOOKS - Printing	2349.91	
- Retailing	755.73	
1993 Conference	33.50	
1994 Conference - Advance	1000.00	
- expenses	16.85	
IAHR membership 1994	<u>—</u>	<u>19530.72</u>
Balance carried forward 30 June 1994		
Westpac term deposit	10000.00	
Westpac advantage saver	<u>3968.33</u>	<u>13968.33</u>

*Neville Jarvis, Treasurer  
30 June 1994*

## AASR Publications Committee Report

*July 1 1993 - June 30 1994*

### AASR books in Stock

Title	No sold	No in stock	
Identity issues in World Religions	10	HB	41
		PB	260
Maori Religions	35		836
Religious Experience in World Religions	21		240
Ways of Transcendence	23		160
Religion in Australian Life	16		16
Powers, Plumes and Piglets	11		122
Let Sleeping Snakes Lie	24		65
Central Australian Religion	764		626
Aboriginal Australian & Xn Missions	50		OP
Multiculturalism & Religion in Oz	178		407

### Income 1993/4

SA Govt Printer	March - June	638.60	
	July - September	994.39	
Rainbow Books Agency	October	328.99	
	November	485.25	
	December-January	957.14	
	February	144.38	
	March	11.52	
AASR sales - books + REVIEWS		<u>3646.59</u>	<u>7206.83</u>

### Expenses 1993/4

Reprint Strelow 5th thousand	2349.91	
Transfer of stock to Melb & Sydney	489.15	
Admin costs + postage (recouped)	<u>266.58</u>	<u>3105.64</u>

### Notes

1. The September 'Fire Sale' was a success and enabled members to complete their collections of AASR titles and REVIEWS. We will have some more special offers with the membership renewal this year.

2. The transfer of distribution to the Rainbow Books Agency has gone smoothly and has increased the exposure of AASR books on the

open market. Our thanks go to Rob, Jock and the tireless team at Rainbow.

3. It is with pride we announce the launch of our newest title *Claiming our Rites: Studies in Religion by Australian Women Scholars*.

*Victor C Hayes*  
*Chair Publications Committee*

## REVIEW of Claiming Our Rites: Studies in Religion by Australian Women Scholars,

*eds Morny Joy and Penelope Magee, AASR Special Studies in Religions No 8, The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Sydney 1994*

I can't even begin to tell you how exciting and important this book is in concept, content and range.

In fields where gender has long been assumed to be a neutral term, the women scholars gathered together in *Claiming Our Rites* from around the world take up conscious and critical stances as women towards their material. The interdisciplinary nature of studies in religion demands a variety of methods and approaches and the essays are grouped with these in mind.

Morny Joy and Penelope Magee have provided the hungry reader with an invaluable guide which places the range of material within the context not only of the evolution of feminist studies of religion but most interestingly in the context of the struggle for acceptance of women's scholarship and concerns within professional associations of religion scholars.

In the section on myth and text, Anne Gardner argues convincingly that the text of Susannah is a polemic on male hypocrisy. Elaine Lindsay contrasts a male theology of journeying into barren lands with a female theology of settled areas in which multi-faceted artist Barbara Hanrahan's fecund images abound. I found Marion Maddox's study of sexual politics and Protestant pieties thought-provoking though Donne's work is so multilayered that I suspect he might somehow have anticipated twentieth-century dynamics. After reading what Maddox has to say about the practice, I have vowed never to kneel to anyone.

Elaine Wainwright gives us a meticulously signposted reading in contemporary feminist biblical hermeneutics of the Matthean Jesus myth, identifying the male character Jesus with the characteristics of the female gestalt of God, Sophia.

The second section, on philosophy, theology and feminist theory includes some substantial essays. Ricoeur recurs; as they say, it's location, location, location.

Dorothy Lee reclaims the sacred text in a superbly crafted piece, carefully paced. As readers our knowledgeable innocence is required. As women, our spirituality must discover a theology where women as well as men are created in the divine image and a religious experience which reveals the divine in them. Reclaiming the female imagery of God, Lee draws water from the well of the Bible, showing how it can draw women in selfhood, community and ministry 'deeper into the divine embrace'.

Since pain is the lot of humanity, Jocelyn Dunphy-Blomfield asks how the free woman comes to terms with suffering. She sees sufferings proper complement not as pleasure but in action and the shaping spirit. Tracing dilemmas, polarities and contradictions in philosophy and experience, she asks if the creative voices of women - such women philosophers and writers as Hannah Arendt and Angela Carter - give meaning to pain.

Morny Joy, in a lively essay, works against the grain of traditional female saintly virtues to locate the heretic in the

saint and vice versa. Women should be a disturbing presence in postmodernism of unflinching honesty and relentless integrity. Perhaps feminists are heretics, still a live issue since Taslima Nasrin certainly hasn't pleased daddy. Joy thinks there can be no real challenge to male institutional hegemony unless we heretics get inside and undermine the walls.

Speaking with great clarity, Erin White's analytical and deductive essay focusses on Ricoeur and Schussler-Fiorenza's approaches. White proposes a process, not a completed but an evolving dialogue which asks gender questions of narrative in the context of the hermeneutical tradition and hermeneutical questions in the context of feminist biblical work in which the self-identified woman listens to the xxx of women living and dead and imagines the xxx of women to come. Together, women and men may refigure the hierarchical gender plot of the Western narrative tradition.

Penelope Magee has brought insecurity to the state of a fine art in a complex study of sex and secularism, Indian women and the politics of a discourse where intersections of multiple dangerous locations may indeed result in "the death of the subject". Colonial, imperial and orientalist approaches to Indian religion and the place of women in it make tradition hidebound and designate lower-caste/class women as ignorant and helpless. It is altogether too tempting for Western scholars to simplify complexities and propose Western models to resolve structural and politico-religious tensions of the secular Indian state.

Critique by the colonised cuts much closer to the bone. To the dilemmas faced by Indian feminists I uttered a truly Western secularist response: "Oh holy hell!" Indeed, the Indian Supreme Court in Shah

Bano (a maintenance case under religious personal law) tossed off some obiter about needing a uniform civil code and all hell did break loose twinning tradition with religion to further communalist political ends.

Magee talks about feminist reactions to both the Shah Bano and the Roop Kanwar sati case, which both show cultural and religious identity stressed at the expense of gender identity. Both opposition to and respect for 'tradition' present traps for the Indian feminist perceived as selling out to Western tradition, or to orientalism and patriarchy, respectively. How to move beyond dichotomies of religion and secularity (among others) to engage with dynamic and complex cultural processes is the question. The tiger of tradition is not turned into a fireside tabby overnight.

Beginning the final section on social sciences, Kalpana Ram gives an exciting account of Virgin fighting goddess/demon, both of which possess female bodies, among Tamil Nadu's Mukkuvar women, a Christian fishing people. Healers of illness and demonic possession are mostly women as are those they heal in public rituals at healers' and saints' shrines. This is no tame affair. Ram's account is pulsing with exuberant unruly dancing, dramatic raiillery and hectic laughter, challenging settled views and relations not only between male priests and the women, but between Christianity and Hinduism. Critiquing various disciplines' interpretations of popular religious consciousness, Ram finds a dynamic challenging of hegemony within Indian culture.

In her sinewy, direct address to the reader, Diane Bell is still in there and fighting for a feminist ethnography enmeshed in expanding political contexts. Australian Aboriginal women's rites are

inseparable from their rights. In her account of a women's ceremonial gathering in the Roper River district, dancing marks out the interrelationships between women and their land; dancing and singing track the route of ancestral Dreamtime women to the site of the jarrada. Women have more wide-ranging responsibilities for land than men because they marry into their husband's country while retaining the responsibilities of their birth country. However, their more diffuse involvement with the land is little recognised in land claim procedures based on male models as the norm.

Though religious and economic values no longer reinforce each other in Aboriginal life, the jarrada ceremony showed how the women had introduced new elements; they had adapted and survived. Tracks, gatherings, networks+all may lead to Aboriginal women as spiritually empowered politicians recognised by Aboriginal men as having a legitimate place in the self-determination agenda.

My feeling that Kath McPhillips' essay, on reclaiming womens religious agency and on Schussler Fiorenza's ekklesia community of women, had been misplaced in the book vanished when I read Ursula Jan O'Shea's following essay on Quakers from the inside. Here was the location in which McPhillips' critical questions and directions might be explored leaving Weber, Durkheim et al far behind. O'Shea's essay is a wee purler. She writes on the Quaker philosophy of equality and Quakers experience of some subtle and not so subtle sexism since the foundation of the Religious Society of Friends in the seventeenth century. Back to the escatalogical tradition at once, say I! But that, says O'Shea, can only belong to Quakers who convert their hearts and

lives in anticipation of the second coming as radically as did the early Friends.

Off to Turkey, and Julie Marcuss evocative essay on women who are at once subordinate and powerful, a teaser for feminists everywhere who may find these Muslim womens autonomy baffling. As Marcus says, the 'truth' of difference is ever elusive. In Turkish women's world view, birth is central, symbolically associated with white and purity. Although men control the public rites of death, the major commemoration of a death takes place in women's domain, the household. Women are the ones who make the connection between birth, death and resurrection through readings (known as mevlut) of a poem of the birth and life of the Prophet.

Women's household mevlut ceremonies emphasise the role of Eve as Adam's wife and mother of prophets in a rite which is full of mingling and touching. While standing water and blood are impure, flowing water and blood are considered pure, and so Turkish women's open, egalitarian, flowing and mingling world challenges the male world of hierarchical control. In contrast to male-dominated mosque society, women may travel by themselves to make pilgrimages to shrines around Turkey. Their rites should not be dismissed as simple superstition because they are integrated within Turkish culture and the unity of Islam. In them, past flows into present in one continuous eternal presence.

A world of five cultures and three religions is invoked by Santi Rosario to examine Doria, a Bangladeshi village, unveiled in her study of female sexuality and the practice of parda. This study examines the concepts of honour and shame, purity and pollution. In the Mediterranean, Middle East and Bangladesh

both Muslims and non-Muslims associate *parda* with family honour, placing restrictions on both men and women, but especially on women.

*Parda* can be a status symbol. In Bangladesh only the wealthy can afford not to have women in the family working outside the home, whereas poorer classes cannot exist without women's income. Economic independence, however, comes at the price of social marginality, so much is *parda* the norm in Bangladesh where its presentation as an Islamic ideal has an impact on Christian and Hindu women as well.

In turn, Bengali concepts of purity, impurity and hierarchical caste differences have influenced Muslims and Christians living in Doria. Even though menstruation and childbirth pollute, the honour and status of the men depends on the purity of their women and purity of caste depends on the sexual purity of the women who bear children. Women, being creatures of nature, cannot control what they exude in menstruation and childbirth (both *sati* and child-marriage are related to these beliefs). Men, higher in Hindu hierarchy, are associated with culture and control. In Doria, Muslims, Hindus and Christians alike associated purity with good fortune and impurity with ill fortune. However, Muslims see female sexuality as active (tempting men), whereas Hindus and Christians see it as passive (men must be protectors of women).

Doria's men are preoccupied with controlling women because female impurity is associated with danger. This reminds me of a headline to a review of Ayatollah Khomeini's book on pollution and religious practice, which said, "If a man forgets, it's OK". But if a woman forgets, it's not OK for her family and for her

least of all. So both women and men must be watchful.

Deborah Bird Rose's powerful essay on the Black Python woman of the Victoria River district of Australia brings the book to a dramatic and moving close. As a non-Aboriginal woman, Bird Rose senses her own relative incapacity to convey the sense of creative Dreaming women making and shaping the world. But she speaks directly to the reader both about women's sacred, creative power and urgently about violence that continues to occur as the colonising process still works through Australia.

For Aboriginal peoples, the essential mystery is life and life is always bodied. In the Victoria River district, the tracks and travels of the Black Python woman have created the country, the plants and animals, the water, the people, the language and the Law, just as other Dreamings create in their travels, occasionally intersecting with the Python, harmfully or otherwise. Everything there is was brought forth from the earth by the Dreamings and women's blood is integral to the birth process, a gift from the Dreaming which is powerfully related to life. When Aboriginal women celebrate and regenerate Dreaming women, they regenerate themselves, their countries, their knowledge, power and community.

The story of how Bird Rose saw the Python woman brings us close to her own experience of life in the flesh and the spirit. To her belong the words which truly sum up the impact of this remarkable book: "I think we will not truly see God in our flesh unless we also contest the policies and practices which violate women's bodied, spiritual and godly experience."