

# Book Reviews

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## **The Yogacara School of Buddhism: A Bibliography**

John Powers. ATLA Bibliography Series, 27. Metuchen, NJ: American Theological Library Association and Scarecrow Press, 1991. vii + 256pp. \$US29.50 cloth ISBN 0-8108-2502-3 (available from James Bennett Library Services)

This volume contains an introduction, a listing of primary sources in Yogacara Buddhism, then of secondary sources, which is mainly a listing of modern non-traditional scholarship. The volume concluded with several appendices. As the author emphasises, one of the main problems in the study of Buddhism is the lack of comprehensive bibliographies. With the publication of this bibliography this problem has been solved in the area of Yogacara Buddhism. For the reader with little knowledge of Buddhism the Yogacara School is one of the two major schools in Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, the other being Madhyamaka. These two schools originated in India in the first centuries of the Christian era.

This bibliography attempts to list every work on Yogacara in every language including Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, and such modern languages as English, French, German and Russian. The result is encyclopedic! As an example: the 'Lankavatara Sutra' is well known in the West in the D T Suzuki translation which was first published in

1932. This bibliography lists Tibetan publication, the Japanese catalogue number, the Korean catalogue number, some fifteen full or partial translations plus some thirty-four modern articles on this text. The bibliography also contains a list of general works on Buddhism which will be of value to the reader wanting an overview of this field. Of particular value to the reader new to this area is Charles Prebish *Buddhism: A Modern Perspective*, Pennsylvania University Press 1975. The indexes allow the reader to cross-reference authors and titles.

This book is essential for Buddhist scholars and for those interested in deepening their understanding of Yogacara Buddhism. The author is to be congratulated,

*John Cooper*  
*University of Sydney*

**Rediscovery of Creation: A Bibliographical Study of the Church's Response to the Environmental Crisis**  
Sheldon, Joseph K. ATLA Bibliographic Series, 29, Metuchen NJ. American Theological Library Association and Scarecrow Press, 1992. xvi + 282pp. \$US35 cloth ISBN 0-8108-2539-2 (Available from James Bennett Library Services)

The bulk of this book is an assemblage of English language titles having to do with the attitudes of concerned Christians to the whole range of environmental is-

sues with which most of us are by now thoroughly familiar, from A for Agriculture by way of J for Just Treatment of Animals to W for Wilderness. A very few titles are quoted from other religious traditions.

The bibliography proper is preceded by a forty-page 'historical overview', consisting largely of a sequence of twentieth century quotations. The perspective here is too short, though not untypical of the foreshortened way in which today's concerned citizens tend to operate. Generally the introductory material is marred by clumsy writing, the first paragraph on p. ix being especially bad. Also there are typos here and there.

To those who want to know what up-to-date North Atlantic English-speaking Christians (and a few others) have been writing on these questions, this book will serve as a useful checklist of source material. A good deal of this is obviously ephemeral, and therefore likely to disappear from public view fairly quickly. The topic(s) addressed by each title are labelled, but no real attempt is made to indicate the quality of the various contributions. Nor - and this is far more serious - has any attempt been made to escape from the North Atlantic perspective. 'The Church' after all is bigger than that, and Christians in many other parts of the world have environmental concerns of their own, not necessarily identical with those represented here, which sometimes they simply cannot afford.

In the end, therefore, this bibliography will be useful for some, but is quite unintentionally parochial.

*Eric Sharpe*  
*University of Sydney*

**Hellfire and Lightening Rods:  
Liberating Science, Technology and  
Religion**

Ferré, Frederick. Maryknoll NT: Orbis Books, 1993. 223pp. \$US24.55 cloth ISBN 0-88344-856-4

This book, written by a prominent philosopher of science, argues that science has provided the central 'mythic matrix' (:8) for the modern world. The twentieth century in particular has been 'an age of unusual faith' (:47). 'Scientism' as a powerful religious expression endorsing values of 'growth, progress and human control' (:99) has now reached a point of crisis. Our task is one of finding a worthy successor to this dominant 'scientistic consciousness, without abandoning the genuine virtues of science itself' (:8). One problem is that to question, even now, the modern mythology is to provoke, from some quarters, a reaction based not on reason but rather 'rooted in religious revulsion against blasphemy' (:105). Further, as the present impasse is largely of Western making, any satisfactory way through it must, in Ferré's view, be discovered in 'modes of consciousness...rooted deeply within the Western tradition' (:139). This allows Ferré to explore the possibilities for revisioning or 'remything' the Judeo-Christian tradition in such a way that its inherent themes of 'creativity, homeostasis and holism' (:106, :160) are rediscovered (:175ff).

This is a timely and valuable contribution to discussions both of the environmental crisis and of new paradigms both in cosmology and theology. It offers a cautious optimism - provided we in the First World can bring ourselves, without too much further delay, to grasp the nettle of demythologising science and implementing limits to growth. There are some minor points, eg the distinction between

eros and agapé (:56, :185), the appeal to the Christian 'anti-materialist heritage' (:182), that leave me saying 'yes, but...' With these small qualifications, I would recommend this as a very important book,

*Duncan Reid*  
*St Barnabas' College*

**The Cosmotheandric Experience:  
Emerging Religious Consciousness**

Pannikar, Raimon. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993. 160pp. \$24.95 ISBN 0-88344-862-9

In this book, consisting of two extended essays and an epilogue, Raimon Pannikar brings his great depth of scholarship and breadth of life experience to bear on some acutely contemporary issues, viz. the need for an integrated vision of reality (Part 1), and the paradigm shift we are experiencing - characterised here as a shift to a 'trans-historical consciousness' (Part 2). The epilogue explores the implications for spirituality. The major arguments are developed lucidly, and should be quite accessible to the educated general reader. More detailed discussion and referencing are relegated to the footnotes. The book has a useful introduction by Scott Eastham, and an extensive name and subject index. Footnote citations tend to be in the original languages, sometimes with translations appended.

The book sounds an alarm bell, bringing a sharp critique to much of the contemporary environmental movement for **not being sufficiently radical** (eg :54, :113-117). What Pannikar recommends is a **qualitatively** new world order, based on a vision of humanity in cooperation with God and the cosmos, in which a 'new innocence' (:47) would take flesh by placing fundamental needs outside the domain of economics (:112). Some read-

ers may find themselves put off by Pannikar's decision (explained several times :8n3, :55, :82n13) against using inclusive language - not least in the book's title. This is not a book to be judged by its cover. It would profitably be read by those concerned with life issues on a large scale (ecologists, theologians, historians of culture); it should be read by economists and politicians.

*Duncan Reid*  
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**Texts Under Negotiation: the Bible and  
Postmodern Imagination**

Walter Brueggemann. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993. 117pp, indexes.

'Though this is only a short work, the author succeeds in presenting a very original approach to Biblical interpretation which is both refreshing and challenging. The length of the work makes it ideal as a core text for undergraduate programs in theology. However the telescopic nature of the discussion means that it would be best used in conjunction with more orthodox works devoted to this field which proceed at a more leisurely pace.

Brueggemann's three phase approach is lucid and inclusive. His overview in the first section of the evolution of post-modernism as the successor to rationalist historical criticism is one of the better encapsulations of recent theological developments available. His summary of the positions of a range of post-modernist writers is essential reading for students of theology. His depiction of the tension between positions of modernist hegemony and post-modernist local perspective is enlightening, and represents an effective challenge to the tyranny of rationalist critique which has characterised Biblical interpretation in the scientific age.

Nevertheless, his focus on local perspective runs the risk of resembling an approach of relativism which he in turn dismisses, though somewhat less convincingly. His turning away from "the great absolutes that are allied with a modernist hegemony" (:20) fails to acknowledge that in fact there are certain absolutes which could conveniently form the bedrock of his local perspectives. In a sense, Brueggemann is guilty of the criticism which he levels at previous approaches; namely, setting up a methodological tyranny. Even though his system is new, it runs the risk of being no less hegemonical than its modernist and absolutist predecessors.

The second section of this work presents the great themes which the author sees as underpinning his new approach to Biblical interpretation. These themes - memory, covenant, hope - are centred on the notion of reintroducing the past and future to a generation which has been condemned to an exclusive focus on the material present by a scientific, rationalist age. The author claims that we suffer from amnesia for the past due to the oppressiveness of the material world we live in, and we also despair for a future which has been torn from our world view by prevailing science-based ideologies. Contemporary theology, and Biblical criticism, has suffered from these same ills due to their need to speak the language of the modern, materialist hegemony.

These notions are indeed appealing and refreshing. Sadly, however, in this section the author at times makes his argumentation inaccessible by use of a laborious and exclusivist language style. Consider for example the following sentence on page 40: "The notion of consumption ... invites us to an act of futuring that refuses the closed developmentalism

that resists any notion of newness that is deeply discontinuous from the present."

It is thus with a degree of relief that the reader arrives at section three of this work, where the author applies his methodology of Biblical interpretation to actual texts from the Old Testament. Brueggemann commences by stating his point of departure; namely, that for him the Bible is the Word of God. He also bases his approach on a notion of Biblical holism, saying "the Bible provides a script ... for a lived drama that contains all the ingredients for a whole life" (:67). At this point he also returns to the notion of relativism, more clearly rejecting both it as a product of 19th century developmentalism and authoritarianism, a product of 18th century absolutism.

But it is in his exegesis of six Biblical texts that Brueggemann's work reaches its pinnacle of greatness. For his style is truly original, and he unveils a world which goes far beyond that revealed by the somewhat pedestrian though ruthlessly efficient exegetical style of a more orthodox modernist approach. Gone is the obsession with ascertaining the historical accuracy of a series of verses, or with philological detail surrounding differences between manuscripts X and Y. As Brueggemann claims, his voyage into the drama of the Biblical texts does indeed draw the reader near to the voices of the rabbis who composed and articulated these texts two millennia ago. His contribution in laying this methodology before a theological world which is tired of being on the back foot in facing the scientific challenge is welcome indeed.

The principle risk with great innovations is that they may be used to completely sweep away previous dominant methodologies. Those involved in Biblical interpretation should resist this vigor-

ously. Though Brueggemann's approach is revolutionary and refreshing, it would be best used as the latest layer on a multi-layered body of knowledge, rather than using it as the foundations for a new structure after a demolition job on its predecessors. The student of theology stands to gain immeasurably by adding the great in-

sights of Brueggemann's approach to the good qualities of prior methods of Biblical criticism which were developed in different social and theological circumstances.

*Peter Riddell*  
*World Vision Australia*

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