Book Reviews

By Computer and Spacecraft to God and Eternity

Essay-review by John Wren-Lewis

The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead by Frank Tipler. Macmillan, 1994, $39.95.

If you want to know what a real "new paradigm" scientific worldview might look like, as contrasted with the old-hat pseudo-scientific worldviews which often currently sail under the "new paradigm" flag, read this book by the professor of physics at Tulane University in New Orleans.

I don't mean read it as something to be believed - nothing scientific ever asks that. Only time and experiment can show whether Tipler's specific ideas are viable or not, as he himself continually insists (offering a 120-page Appendix for Scientists, with the equations they would have to examine and test). I mean read it to have your horizons expanded and some old-age prejudices blown apart, particularly prejudices about the supposedly necessary oppositions between materialism vs spirit, technology vs "small is beautiful", economic rationality vs social altruism, progress vs the here-and-now, and perhaps most important of all, reductionism vs holism. Where most contemporary spiritual, ecological and New Age thinkers start out by deploring scientific reductionism and end up calling for loyalty to Planet Earth, Tipler takes the reductionist bull by the horns and rides it all the way to transpersonal heaven, where he discovers the only Whole really worthy of loyalty, the universe itself, the All which is the ever-present Omega.

He makes this intention clear right from his very first paragraph, which should win some kind of prize for *chutzpah*: even if he doesn't get the Nobel Prize (as he well might) for his co-authorship, with Britain's John Barrow, of the so-called Strong Anthropic Principle in relativistic cosmology. Having recently spent months struggling to find an arresting opening for my own book (I think with some success), this one leaves mine for dead:

This book is a description of the Omega Point Theory, which is a testable physical theory for an omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent God who will....resurrect every single one of us to live forever in an abode which is in all essentials the Judeo-Christian Heaven.....I shall make no appeal, anywhere, to revelation. I shall appeal only to the solid results of

modern physical science.....I shall show exactly how physics will permit the resurrection to eternal life of everyone who has ever lived, is living, or will live. I shall show exactly why this power to resurrect, which modern physics allows,..... will in fact be used. (The italics are mine, but Tipler is completely serious about all these claims, and gives detailed calculations to back them up.)

Yet he's not trying to square science with any prior Christian belief, for he himself is not a Christian. He gives cogent reasons towards the end of the book why he can't personally accept formal Christianity, boiling down to the fact that it's too exclusive to encompass the sheer generosity, power and wonder of the Omega-Point Theory. Rather, he draws on top scholarly authorities on African and native American shamanism, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, to argue that all these religions are humanity's pre-scientific intuitions of a potential in the *physical* universe which science is at long last beginning to recognise - namely, the potential for eternal conscious life, ie conscious life not subject to "the thousand natural shocks the flesh is heir to" in organic life as it has so far evolved on Planet Earth.

And here, speaking as a former scientist and a born-again mystic (since my near-death experience in 1983), I would say that both the weakness and the strength of Tipler's book is that he takes no account - indeed seems largely unaware - of the fact that mystics all down the ages in all religions have actually experienced a timeless "dimension" of aliveness in and through the transience of organic human life, and have thereby been able to experience that transience without suffering. But I think the strength outweighs the weakness as far as the book's value is concerned, because my own extensive studies since getting reborn into eternity-consciousness have led me to the conclusion that about 99% of what is taught about mysticism is pie-in-the-sky fantasy, which does more injustice that justice to what mystical consciousness is really about.

Why? Because the whole structure of the human mind is "incarnational," ie, oriented to expressing eternity in finite or space-time terms - so unless you are by some "act of grace" already experiencing eternity-consciousness, your ideas about it are likely to be more false than true. Probably the only way to get any remotely realistic imagination of it (as distinct from escapist fantasy) is to think of how finite consciousness might find a way to survive *physically* without being subject to the organic limitations of "change and decay". This, as Tipler points out, was what the ancient religious ideas of "spiritual bodies" were trying to do, but they were only vague imaginings, because humanity's notions of the real potentialities of matter were then so limited.

The strength of his book is that it shows how modern science brings these ideas down from the realm of vague imagination to possibilities of practical realisation - so even if he's wrong in his specifics, he takes a major step forward in giving "a local habitation and a name" to what otherwise risk being "airy nothings".

Well, not exactly local in the ordinary sense, nor in the sense in which our contemporary ecologists want us to recover the sense of locality on Planet Earth. Yes, we are children of the earth along the line of time past, and technologies which render the planet unfit for human habitation must surely be curbed, yet there is something in the human soul which knows it is not just "of the earth, earthy," and philosophies which deny that impulse do so at a

psychological and spiritual peril every bit as great as the dangers of fouling our current ecological nest. And this is where Tipler, the self-styled unrepentant reductionist, speaks like a true mystic who knows there is more to matter than evolution has yet uncovered - but true to his scientific brief, he makes no appeal to magic or the supernatural. He appeals to what science and technology are already uncovering right here in our present earthly backyard about the potential of matter to support intelligence in non-organic forms, in machines such as the one on which I'm writing this review right now.

Flesh and blood, said St.Paul, cannot inherit the kingdom of God - and it's pretty unlikely, even with the greatest possible advances in space-travel, that they'll ever inherit much beyond our own solar system. But Tipler (who goes well beyond PhD level in Computer Complexity Theory) gives ground for thinking that well before the end of the next century, we shall have been able to transfer our whole minds *with the full sensuous enjoyment-capacity and feeling-capacity of our biological inheritance* inside self-replicating nanotechnological computers weighing no more than 100 grams each - and since they need experience no time-lapse while travelling, colonising the entire galaxy with (or rather as) them will be a piece of cake. With that much ecological space to play with (to say nothing of the fact that the energy-requirements of individual personal existence in that form are minimal), there is no question of scarcity, which Tipler argues (again drawing on some pretty formidable authorities) is the root of all so-called evil impulses. So those sci-fi- fantasies about inhuman Daleks turning against their human creators, or of Dallas-style soap-operas being carried on interstellarly, are just that - fantasies based on our as-yet-limited experience of finite consciousness.

Colonising the rest of the universe will take a little longer - several million million years, in fact -but since the most basic of all life-drives at the root of consciousness is survival, colonised it surely will be, well before the point where the expansion of the universe goes into reverse towards the "big crunch." And at that stage, the vastly expanded collective intelligence of the colonised universe - the Omega-consciousness - will have at Its disposal the unimaginable energy of gravity-shear, which will give It the power to stop the contraction and create a stable cosmic paradise of truly eternal finite life. I was reminded at this point of a science-fiction story I once read about a day when a vast number of planetary supercomputers were linked up across the galaxy; when the resultant super-supercomputer was asked humanity's age-old question, "Is there a God?", the reply came back, "Yes there is - now!"

But Tipler explicitly denies the need for any sinister overtones in that answer, because he establishes, by appeal to game-theory, that Omega-consciousness must of Its very nature be utterly generous towards every sentient life-form that has contributed to Its own vast evolutionary struggle. So It will have both the power and the *imperative* to resurrect all who have ever lived, good and bad alike, into It's own blissful time-transcendence, with absolutely no problems of overcrowding or denial of space for individuality, and no kind of pressure on time for doing whatever each one wants to do (and hence no boredom). And here again, any feeling readers might have that this is all too far off (squillions of millennia) to be real, is simply due to lack of imagination

based on our present limited experience, for we shan't have been "hanging around" in any limbo during the interim. When Tipler talks of resurrection, he *means* resurrection, not immortality - which once again jibes completely with my own mystical experience. When I experienced "time-stop" in Thailand in 1983, I most emphatically had no experience of an immaterial soul existing apart from my body, but rather of a literal rebirth or resurrection - that is, of "Omega's" John Wren-Lewising starting up entirely afresh, with all its former memories, when the body was resuscitated before brain-decay set in.

In the book's concluding chapters, Tipler actually shows how his theory might be compatible with mysticism, though I don't think that was his intention. At several points he remarks how in modern physical cosmology, the Omega-state can validly be said to "reach back through time" to influence events leading up to its own evolution, and though he doesn't use the term, I was reminded of the "strange attractor" idea in Chaos Theory. This could indeed be one way of understanding the "beyond that is within" experienced by mystics. (As a gesture to Christians, Tipler suggests there's no logical reason why Omega shouldn't have resurrected Jesus from the dead, but he also can't see why, if It did, It stopped there - so he prefers to explain the Easter appearances as just visions.)

At first sight, it's something of a puzzle that this book hasn't gone off like a bomb in spiritual and religious circles, considering the popularity of other books linking modern science with spiritual issues, like Capra's *The Tao of Physics*. True, there are many points where Tipler overestimates the general reader's capacity for grasping even simple ideas in relativistic cosmology; even I, who did the subject for my degree, am still quite unable to say whether his assertions about the Bekenstein Bound or the Higgs Boson make sense or not. But that kind of difficulty applied equally to Capra's book, and even more to Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, which had a far more negative conclusion that Tipler's, yet became a bestseller. So why is Tipler's book still only trickling off the shelves?

I think he puts his finger on the answer in the very last sentence of his main text, when he asserts that "Religion is now a part of science." This is implied by his whole argument, and I think he just doesn't realise that the psychological effect is to leave the great majority of people feeling "left out," because it means there's no *significant* contribution they can make to humanity's "salvation". Since being born again as a mystic, I've come to recognise that the urge for personal significance is as fundamental to human consciousness as the urge for survival, and not to be dismissed as mere "ego". So I can quite see that it's not just clergy who might be less than wildly enthusiastic about Tipler's book because it could make them redundant; he may not intend his Omega Point to seem too distant from our lives to matter, but that's how it comes across if the evolution leading up to it from here on out is mainly a matter of high science and technology.

But do read it, all the same, for even if his peers eventually declare his conclusions doubtful or invalid, it's still very important in showing how even the most reductionist science today implies the spiritual perspective. And it should force us all to think again about whether current "green" attempts to curb scientific/technological advances in the name of love for

Planet Earth may not be theologically shortsighted estimates of humanity's spiritual destiny, which according to both St Paul and Tipler may be the only means whereby our undeniably spectacular home planet, necessarily perishable in the long term on current worldviews (and maybe the not-so-long term, if that wandering asteroid hits), could be resurrected to share God's eternity. Amidst the current timely outbreak of eco-prophesy, Tipler has given us an equally timely reminder of another (and surely more Basic) aspect of the religious story, a statement which simple conservatives like the Pope and Billy Graham are just not equipped to make.

Cast yourselves recklessly into the current of life! A Critical Response to Richard Leonard's *Beloved Daughters: 100 Years of Papal Teaching on Women*. (Melbourne: David Lovell, 1995; 120 pp., ISBN 1 86355 045 3).

In her foreword to Richard Leonard's book, Elizabeth Johnson writes that it "performs a real service in providing access to some of the primary material" needed for any intelligent conversation about both a possible nature and role of women in the church (p. v). Leonard covers primary material from the last hundred years of papal documents in three chapters, presenting the material helpfully in the categories of "Catholic social teaching" and "Mariological teaching", and giving a description of the context of each document. By far the greatest emphasis falls on the two documents from John Paul II - *Mulieris dignitatem* and *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*. In fact, only the first third of the book is really devoted to the "hundred years" of the title, and the book might be better described as an examination of the two documents of John Paul II, with the earlier material used as background to the understanding of the more current documents.

Chapter four, which comprises all of Part Three ("What have women gained and lost in this teaching?"), covers a variety of positive and negative reactions by commentators to the teaching (mostly of *Mulieris dignitatem*), and chapters five to seven are devoted to a study of the hermeneutics of John Paul II and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Chapter eight plots the basic lines of opposition drawn up between Schüssler Fiorenza and Joseph Ratzinger (Leonard's choice to represent the papal hermeneutic with regard to scripture). The chapter is rather curiously entitled "Towards a fruitful dialogue".

The concluding three and half page chapter, "Finding a middle ground", presents the difficulties Leonard perceives in the papal teaching (especially the teaching of John Paul II) about the vocation of women: lack of self-examination by the official church regarding its discrimination against women; an unhelpful Mariology; gender exclusive language. Leonard concludes by asking that the papal documents be taken on their own terms, calls for a continuation of the dialogue (one has to ask at this point "what dialogue?"), and gives warnings of disintegration within the church if there is no dialogue.

This is a slim volume, easy to read at a sitting, with a light style. Although brief, the book certainly covers enough material to give a good idea of the key themes and philosophical underpinnings that are under investigation. Of course, extracting from a longer work (Leonard's M. Theol. thesis) is always an exercise in compromise and one has to put up with the fact that the work of Schüssler Fiorenza (there are those who would want to question Leonard's description of her as "the lead-

ing and most influential figure in Christian feminist hermeneutical inquiry in the last decade", p. 71) is not situated within the broader context of feminist, womanist and majeurista liberation theologies. In this way the concern with hermeneutics is restricted to a discussion of the polarities of two individual methods.

Certainly Schüssler Fiorenza's emphasis on an historical method means that her work is more easily brought into comparison with the papal/ Ratzinger hermeneutic, but how will the dialogue be carried out for those many feminist theologians in the church who are not historical critics? The issue of representation applies also to Leonard's attempt to speak for all women here. Statements like "Therefore Mary, for women, does not become..." (p. 58) make presumptions about representation which many women would find difficult.

Generally speaking, Leonard has given us a kind of handbook of information, comprising an outline of papal teaching and an outline of the two differing hermeneutics, but there is very little critical response to these, no real criticism of either Schüssler Fiorenza or Ratzinger. I found myself waiting, without result, for Leonard to commit himself in some way to a full critical response to the material he had gathered.

In the absence of this, let me take up a few of the areas that seem to call for a response. Beginning with pages 10 and 15, Leonard gives us examples of papal theologising based on certain biological perspectives, and examples of the camouflaging effect of "double-speak" in this theologising. One argument goes in this way: women and men do not have equal rights in marriage; the woman must be obedient to the man. If a woman wants equal rights, it means that she must lower herself from her truly regal throne and her status of rational and exalted liberty. That must mean, then, that being obedient to another human being means being the one who rules as queen and is free. Really? Somehow the logic appears to be lacking.

If we go further and look at later documents that seem to accept the equality of men and women, we find that women are higher than men by virtue of the fact that they have a womb, since in this way they mirror God. Once again, if women want the same rights as men (this time not in marriage, but in the ministerial priesthood), they would have to lower themselves from their supreme status. The logic here seems to be that women are higher than men because they mirror God, whereas men only represent Christ, having the necessary male genitalia to qualify. At this stage we have to ask, is God really after all female, or is it only for men that we should take the genitalia-mirroring business literally? Apart from all this, one wonders at a papal theology that might subordinate Christ to God in such a fashion.

Of course the major problem here is the ambiguity and naïvety of John Paul II's understanding of the use and function of symbolic language and the difficulty of the inconsistencies in the literal interpretation of such language. This shows up clearly in Leonard's section on "The Church as bride" (pp. 44-6). *Mulieris dignitatem* is at pains to be clear that using the metaphor of the bride for the Church should not be taken literally, since men constitute over half of the Church (and therefore one cannot think of them literally as being properly represented by the female metaphor of the Church). At the same time we read that Christ's love as the symbolically male bridegroom is par-

ticularly the model and pattern of men's love.

Thus, we seem to have moved the men from one side of the relationship of Christ and the Church (i.e. men and women together as the Church) to the other (i.e. men as more fully represented by Christ). When we add to that the way in which only (ordained) men can fully and properly image Christ because of their genitalia ("their maleness establishes a clear and unambiguous link with the *persona Christi*"), we are dangerously close to equating the Christ with (ordained) men and the Church with women. If this is so, then the idea previously expressed, that men and women in marriage are mutually subject to each other, is swallowed up in the concept that in the love relationship of Christ and the Church, only the Church is subject (p. 44).

Further in the argument, when the eucharist becomes the moment of consummation between the Christ and his bride - the Christ represented by the ordained priest and the Church really by the women - the distinctions somehow reach their lowest common denominator of ordained men and lay women. One has to ask at this point, what happens to the non-ordained men, since they seem to have dropped out of the equation. If they are not to be taken literally as the spouse, but the ordained clergy are to be taken literally as the Christ, there seems no room for them at all in the discussion.

This is an interesting point, because it helps to clarify that there is a great deal of oppression for (non-ordained) men implicit in the documents, not just for women. A patriarchal philosophy/anthropology that would reduce women/Mary to womb (used [mother] or unused [virgin] - and *Mulieris dignitatem* condemns the sexual objectification of women!), while holding before her an impossible biological state as model of spiritual perfection (virgin mother), also advocates a masculinity based on aggression and hierarchical one-up-man-ship. There is a very good example of this in Pius XII's view that a husband "must strive to exceed his equals and rise above them in his own field of endeavour" so that his wife may have honour and status.

Pages 58 to 60 bring us into the midst of the debate about masculinity and femininity, where philosophical positions in regard to "woman's nature" are crucial. Again it is disappointing that Leonard has chosen not to engage the issues critically, but rather left it to Johnson in the foreword to provide a brief outline (pp. iii-v). The issue of gender analysis in its interplay with socio-political analysis is surely of the highest importance to women in the Church. Thus, I do not agree with Leonard that woman's vocation is the crux. This is only a secondary issue that works out of the more basic debate about woman's nature. What Leonard fails to see are the implications of the Church's statements that women are equal in so far as they follow the nature ordained by God for them. What sort of qualifiers are put on that equality, by virtue of what the Church considers or interprets to be women's nature ordained by God?

One cannot assume, as Leonard seems to do, that the Church's statements about equality mean that everything is fine in that area and we have only to concern ourselves with the roles of women. *Gaudium et Spes* states that women ought to be able to play their part fully in all spheres of life "according to their own particular nature". Leonard's concluding comment that the document "endorsed and promoted a new era of thinking about women's role and status in the church and

the world" (p. 23) seems to be overly optimistic. More realistic is his (implicit) *caveat* about *Mulieris dignitatem* where liberation for the woman as a disciple is described in terms of her response out of a distinctly feminine disposition, as it is understood by the church (pp. 90, 95).

Page 73 brings us to the issue of women's experience and representation. The institutional church presumes to speak for women and to speak about what women are. Leonard characterises this process of speaking for women as one that uses the long line of apostolic continuity and interpretation as the basis of statements within the whole Christian community. He reiterates "whole" Christian community three times. *Mulieris dignitatem* "is retelling the story of the Christian church in relation to the particular situation of women, drawing on the whole community's experience and reflection on the life of Jesus and the example of Mary." When has the "whole community" been involved in such an interpretation and retelling?

There are many other issues that could be addressed; such as how one can do ecclesiology without a concern for its broader setting within social and political milieux (p. 76); the "double-speak" about the interpretation of scripture within the Church (the last word belongs to the Church, and the Church must give the last word to the Bible, which must be read within the Church...; p. 106); and the question of the relationship between the Church's concern to read the signs of the times and its concern to maintain the continuity of its tradition.

My argument here is not really with the genre of Leonard's book. It is a good and informative handbook. There is certainly a place for purely descriptive material, but if Leonard wanted to provide such material, that should have been made clearer. One assumes that a Masters thesis is not just a descriptive exercise, and I am presuming that a large amount of critical material from that thesis has not been included, for whatever motive. This seems a shame, as even the non-specialist reader could have benefited from an inclusion of more critical work.

Leonard makes a plea that the papal documents must be taken on their own terms. I have to ask why this should be so. If I recognise the hermeneutic at work in these documents, it does not mean that I should not criticise it. Even reader response theory, which holds that there are an infinite number of readings of any text, would also want to talk about the ethical implications of each reading. There are not sufficient grounds for dialogue simply by saying that we have recognised the hermeneutic at work in the papal documents. Leonard has established that there are two conflicting hermeneutics at work. He has not suggested how this conflict can lead to dialogue or on what grounds dialogue can take place. What is taking place at the moment -condemnation of the feminist hermeneutic in the latest Vatican document on biblical interpretation - is not dialogue.

In conclusion, the following errata should be noted: p. 9, line 7; p. 59, line 22; p. 72, line 20; p. 81 1st paragraph, end of the quote?; p. 97, line 1; p. 103 fn. 90 "Küng"; p. 110, line 3. One expects to find most, if not all, the works referred to in the text in the bibliography. Certainly key works that inform a considerable section of the discussion should be included. It is surprising then to find many omissions here, such as Schüssler Fiorenza's "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation" and Ratzinger's "Biblical Interpretation in

Crisis", to mention just two such key works.

One final comment on a note of personal taste. I find the portrayal of the (to my eye) very tentative woman on the cover sums up quite well the negative aspects of the portrayal of women in the material under review. Perhaps this is what Leonard, or the publisher, intended. I would prefer a more positive portrayal of women as strong and capable dialogue partners - as they have always been, and as they will be in the ongoing discussion for which Leonard hopes. For women have always been slow to heed warnings like those of Benedict XV that they should not cast themselves recklessly into the current of life.

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The feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the Transcendent

Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, Cambridge University Press Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: 1993. 318pp. ISBN 0 521 43287 1.

This volume is the third in the Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions series, edited by John Clayton, Steven Collins and Nicholas de Lange and is a timely and erudite work based on a particular feminist construct of the Sikh religion. The author analyses both religious and secular Sikh literature with the explicit goal of countering current Sikh masculinist scholarship, and of blowing away the patriarchal cobwebs obliterating the strong emphasis on the 'feminine' and gender equality enunciated by the fifteenth century founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak.

Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh argues that in using a genetic approach to explain Sikhism, historians of religion categorise it with Hinduism or Islam, or as a syncretic faith, thus distorting and hiding its unique origin in the religious experience of Guru Nanak. She also rejects the imputed origins of Sikhism in the Sant tradition, especially the emphasis placed on the influence of Kabir. Further, she objects to explanations using the familiar 'devout Sikh' slogan (48-49) and rejects the usual methodological concerns of historians of religion in favour of the use of a literary-hermeneutical approach, specifically, that of Gaston Bachelard's poetics. For the historian of religion, this is very refreshing, even if the much debated question of essentialism is sidestepped in the process. The same problem occurs in her total reliance on western Christian feminism for validation of her feminist analysis, even attributing all women's scholarship in India, Pakistan, the Middle East and Asia in general to western 'guidance' and inspiration. In particular, the work of Indian women scholars and the long history of women's movements on the sub-continent seem to be unknown to her. In locating 'the feminine principle', Singh explains that this 'refers to qualities conventionally associated with women' (53), and in so doing, neglects analysis of the hierarchical dualism implicit in such frameworks. The male Sikh gurus, Singh maintains, understood that their poetic utterances were feminine, and that the revelation of the feminine is equal with their personae as masculine. What emerges from her analysis of Sikh scripture and secular writing is not, however, confined to the 'conventional' feminine.

Beginning with the wonderful poetry of the Granth, the 1630 pages of which are set in musical *ragas*, Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh explores the basic analogy of the *mata* (mother), and reveals the female

in the Sikh perspective as someone who 'exists as a person upon whom depend creation and nurturing' (58), is neither a goddess nor a voluptuous temptress, and whose sexuality is 'accepted as essential to life'. The Mother as 'Infinite Matrix' enables women's household chores such as churning butter, weaving, dyeing fabrics and sewing to become significant metaphors of transcendent activity. Another powerful feminine image evoked is that of the Bride who 'is essentially embodied, passionate, relational, communal and ... intimately connected with the Transcendent' (91). The omnipresence of the bridal symbol in the Guru Granth is seen to point to the sharedness and oneness of human experience as well as the link between the human and animal worlds (reminiscent of Indo-European myths of the sacred mare). The Bride is imaged as a conduit for achieving union with the Transcendent, there being no more need for a seer or Prophet, nor a hierarchy of power. The Transcendent is Formless and Singh highlights the genuine genderlessness of the Sikh concept in the language of the scriptures. The feminine principle then is not a female divine nor a Goddess; it is an expression of the dynamism of the union of the cosmos with the Formless divine. The Bride is thus seen to reflect the personal evolution that (Singh argues) is the hallmark of the western women's movement. The Sikh bride, in her vibrant red clothing is indeed dependent, but this dependency is shared by men, women and in fact, the entire cosmos.

In examining both Sikh scripture and secular poetry, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh opens up for the reader a rich world of feminine imagery. In particular, Chapter 4, 'Durga recalled: transition from mythos to ethos' is a fine literary critique of the place of the imagery of the Hindu Goddess as a model for the Sikh warrior in the writing of Guru Gobind Singh. The Punjabi verses glow with energy, even to the non-Punjabi speaker, and while quite defensive *vis à vis* the Hindu tradition, Kaur Singh's juxtaposition of the Hindu and Sikh Durga gives life and energy to analysis of the Goddess which is rare in even the most insightful scholarship. Similarly, the analysis of the work of the modern (1872-1957) poet, novelist and scholar Bhai Vir Singh shows a remarkable female energy and power in his heroines. His 'flesh and blood' women are models to be emulated; they experience and expound the presence of the Transcendent. The attainment of supreme knowledge becomes their quest, a goal to be reached, and the heroines in Bhai Vir Singh's writing make it clear that '*She* is the one made in the image of the Transcendent Creator', the one who searches, looks for her Beloved One, without any male intermediaries and she finds the answers *herself*.

This is a scholarly work which is long overdue in the evolution of Sikh scholarship. The author points out the problems within the tradition in relation to the poor practice of the ideals of the Khalsa woman enunciated by Gobind Singh and the strong validation of women in all parts of the Sikh scriptures, a validation which has been ignored in Sikh scholarship to date. While one could have wished for both more alertness to feminist scholarship in the Indian sub-continent and less adulation of western feminism and also a more sophisticated angle on gender dualisms and oppositions, the quality of the literary critique and the way in which the texts of the Sikh tradition come to life on the page makes this an exciting work on a religious tradition which is too often given little attention in the west.

The author calls upon Sikh women, other Asian women and western feminist scholars 'to come close and understand one another and bring about change'. With which one can only voice a heartfelt solidarity, and a reminder that male scholars who see themselves as experts on the Sikh tradition will learn a great deal from Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh's pioneering work.

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Teaching and Learning Religion: A Phenomenological Approach

Terence Lovat. Social Science Press, Wentworth Falls. 1995. 88pp ISBN 0-949218-77-4

This book provides a useful overview of the phenomenological approach to religious education. It has two sections, the first dealing with the theoretical basis of the approach, the second and longer section dealing with how the approach works in practice which is particularly directed at the teacher of the new religious studies courses in Australian schools. The second section includes chapters on such topics as religious ritual, religious time and space, religious change. At the end of each of these chapters there is a summary of teaching points and a list of suggested tasks.

The book does not however include a critical evaluation of the phenomenological approach itself which was perhaps outside the scope of an introductory practically oriented work such as this. Nevertheless it is worth noting that the phenomenological approach is not immune from criticism, particularly if it becomes the dominant approach to the study of religion (as it has tended to do in the various Australian State Studies of Religion syllabuses). Because the methodology aims to achieve neutrality in the presentation of the various religious belief systems and not make any judgement as to their truth or moral acceptability, it does leave out one important aspect of the study of religion. This is the area which deals with the pupils' own search for meaning and purpose in life and the accompanying goal of religious autonomy in which the pupils have developed their own thought through response to the issues raised in religion. The phenomenological approach can provide useful data in achieving this goal but it needs to be supplemented by philosophically based modes of inquiry that raise the more difficult questions of the truth and acceptability of the various religious phenomena examined.

Allowing for this significant limitation in the phenomenological approach, the book does achieve well the goals it sets out to accomplish, namely to provide a succinct, clear and readable account of this approach and to show how it can be usefully employed in the teaching of religious studies.

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New Face of the Church in Latin America: Between Tradition and Change.

Cook, Guillermo, ed. American of Missiology Series, 18. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994. 289 pp. US$19.95 pap. ISBN 0-8-88344-937

The Church in Latin America is an area that is difficult to describe well. More often than not, complex sets of inter-locking realities are reduced to biased stereotypes. This work attempts to dispel

a number of myths about the topic by focusing on Latin American Protestantism.

Through the eyes of an amazing array of perspectives -including ecumenical, evangelical, grassroots, Protestant and Catholic, Latin and North American, and others the book succeeds in providing a broad overview of (relatively) recent developments, and thus exploding several popular misconceptions - for example, about the predominant influence of Catholicism, and the lack of theological depth and social engagement of Pentecostalism.

"The content is about evenly divided between unpublished papers, translated articles, and papers that have appeared in specialized journals. The twenty-one chapters, of varying lengths, have been divided into [five] sections" (p. xii). Part One ("1492-1992: Change and Continuity"), deals with the 500 years of Christianity in Latin America, and the legacy and implications of colonialism. Part Two ("The Dynamics of Change"), covers socioreligious change. Part Three ("Popular Religion: Tradition and Change"), deals with popular religion from the perspectives of an Indigenous culture, spirituality and base communities, among others. Part Four ("Area Studies"), provides case studies of recent developments in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Brazil. Part Five ("The Future of the Latin American Church"), looks at the prospects of Liberation Theology, Christianity and the Church in Latin America. There are chapters by such outstanding leaders as Justo Gonzalez, C. René Padilia, Maria Clara Luchetti Bingemer, José Comblin, Pablo Richard (and Team) and José Miguez Bonino. It is quite disappointing, however, to find what the editor himself describes as "a paucity of women and of native Americans among the contributors" (p. xiii). Several of the authors make extensive use of David Martin's *Tongues of Fire* and David Stoll's *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* (both published in 1990). The book amplifies and complements research found in older works such as *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, edited by Rosino Gibellini, published in Italian (1975) and English (1979), and the fuller treatment, *Faith Born in the Struggle for Life*, edited by Dow Kirkpatrick (1988).

The book has endnotes and a good bibliography of more recent works, but no index. There are some (rather annoying) technical problems almost as if the book was put together in a hurry. These include: repetition of several pages of text in two different chapters by the same author (e.g., Escobar, pp. 32-33 and 120-121); references to works that are not listed anywhere in the bibliography or notes; numerous typographical errors, in English, Spanish and Portuguese, especially in the bibliography; and, inconsistent use of notation styles. Nevertheless, the work is a necessary resource, and an important contribution to the field.

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AIDS, Ethics and Religion: Embracing a World of Suffering.

Overberg, Kenneth R., ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994. 284 pp. US$18.50 pap. ISBN 0-88344-949

In a decade and a half, one disease has generated both a pandemic and a massive industry. The inability to contain or cure HIV/AIDS on a world scale ensures that continued attention be paid to the manifold dimensions of the disease. This collection of essays edited by the Jesuit theologian, Kenneth Overberg, endeav-

ours to provide some of the most recent writings of policy formulators, doctors, scientists, specialists and pastors, both to enable us to keep pace with the burgeoning effects of HIV/AIDS and to measure our responses.

The collection itself is divided into four sections touching on the global reality of HIV/AIDS, ethics, society, and religion. The essays in the sections appear to have been selected with a view to highlight how important it is to maintain and increase attention to the control and cure of the virus, and so ensure that a compassionate response is both practically and ethically based. Of particular emphasis in this effort is the demonstration that HIV/AIDS is far more than simply a epidemiological or medical problem. Chapters 4,9, 21 and 22 especially bring out the key conjunction between AIDS and socio-economic realities. The Western inspired and controlled economic practices in Africa and Asia are demonstrated to have laid the foundation conditions necessary to enhance and accelerate the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Far from the thinly-disguised blame of cultural behaviours emanating from the west, there are constant reminders of the enormous disparities in allocation of research monies, of the use of Africa as a testing ground for trial drugs (with no commitment to ongoing supply should they be found successful), of refusal to control the West's constant intrusion into tourism and business ventures which facilitate an infectious environment. Women in third and first world are seen to be the new bearers of the pain this disease ushers in.

For these observations alone the book is a worthwhile contribution to the ongoing battle against the disease and against human greed and self-righteousness that foster its progress. Nevertheless, the plea for global consciousness that much in the collection contains does not see a match in selection criteria. The two unacknowledged criteria that seem to govern selection are that Roman Catholic concerns be well-aired and that it have a centripetal focus on the United States. As to the former there is an effort to include in the religion section a nod towards ecumenical responses. Essays from a Methodist, Orthodox and Lutheran perspective are included here, but each one pales against the excellent contribution of the Catholic sociologist Andrew Greeley. Striking by absence is any writing from an Episcopalian. It is noteworthy that the Episcopalian Church in the United States has been grappling with issues of sexuality occasioned by the historical accident of the transmission of HIV in that country. Such analysis is lacking in this volume apart from a few asides, and Sanders and Sambo's chapter dealing with the behaviours of men in impoverished parts of Africa, where heterosexual transmission is the pattern. The work in San Francisco of Grace Cathedral staff under the leadership of its Dean, the Very Rev'd Alan Jones, is but one of many examples of Episcopalian response.

More seriously however, is the assumption that the United States, if not the Northern hemisphere, leads the fight against HIV/AIDS, and this in spite of figures dotted through the book of continued rises in HIV transmission and AIDS deaths. In this regard, Australia has a claim to offer examples of so-called "best practice", whether in demographic and epidemiological study, scientific research, palliative responses, or ethical and spiritual reflection. I counted two passing references to Australia in the entire volume, which were not sufficient to warrant an in-

dex entry. The *HIV/AIDS Research Register*, published by the Federal Government, and the *National Church HIV/AIDS Bibliography* published by the National Churches Working Group on AIDS provide ready access to a multiplicity of resources, such as would have assisted Kenneth Overberg in overcoming the unwitting Northern first-world leanings of the collection.

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Women, the Earth, the Divine.
Rae, Eleanor. Ecology and Justice Series. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994. 160 pp. US$14.95 pap. ISBN 0-88344-952

As the title indicates there are three parts to this book and each segment contains two chapters. The first segment on women addresses the present situation of women and issue of eco-feminism. The second segment on the earth is concerned with an earth centred ethic and the world as it is being disclosed to us from within the paradigm of the new cosmology. The third segment deals with the Holy Spirit as the feminine divine and then continues to develop the relationship between the feminine divine principle and the religions of Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.

That there is a connection between women, the earth and the divine is not immediately obvious, neither is the significance of such a connection obvious. The author's task is to show just how these three realities can and should be related. She argues that there must be an attempt made to reclaim the feminine but that this should not come from within a patriarchal paradigm. She writes, "What is needed today is for women both to look within themselves and to come together in order to define what the feminine is." (p.2). Thus it is not surprising that she begins with the present situation of women. There is an emphasis on bodiliness and materiality in the feminine which has been usually subordinated to the rational in a patriarchal society. This feminine emphasis leads naturally enough into issues of ecology and indeed into eco-feminism which seeks to overcome some of the problems bequeathed to us by dualism and instrumentalism.

The reader is invited (expected?) to accept that a patriarchal society has alienated us from God, the earth and one another. New currents in thought, especially the new cosmology and bio-regionalism are promoted as comporting easily with the feminine principle while being poorly suited to the tenets of classical theism.

The plausibility in Rae's book results from the fact that much damage was done in the past by alienating and dualistic theologies and philosophies. The solution which she proposes is the recovery of the feminist principle using the key areas of Women, the Earth and Divinity. Admittedly not the only ones, but the ones which nevertheless "both factually and symbolically offer us the deepest insights into the meaning of the feminine." (p.1). I suspect that although the connections she makes are well known and accepted (eg Griffin, Santamir), she is also indebted to the insights of Process philosophy, especially that of Hartshorne of whom there is no acknowledgment despite her use of the term *panentheism.*

The book has very full endnotes and has been well researched and is well organised. But despite this, and despite the fact that she may be the first person to make *explicit* the connection between women, the earth and the divine, I think

that much of what is said here has been said before. Therefore I found as much value in the endnotes as I did in the actual text. If the reader has not read anything in the field then this book is an excellent introduction because it covers an enormous (too much?) amount of ground. But this coverage is also its weakness for it must fail to deal with most of these issues in sufficient depth - hence the need for compendious endnotes.

Has she been able to "provide momentum for the movement into a viable future"? Yes, I believe the author has been able to provide an accessible account of the issues which are generated by the continuing attempt to reclaim the feminine.

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Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process. The African Dimension.

Sanneh, Lamin. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993. 286 pp. US$24.95 cloth
ISBN 0-88344-929

The author, who is Professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale University, states at the outset that his book treats the encounter between Africans and others with the modern West. It is this, but also much more. *Encountering the West* is a study of the relations between religion and culture, taking the spread, growth, and permutations of world Christianity for its subject matter. It is a defence of Christian world mission, and an attack on uncritical modernist perspectives; and it is a survey of the genesis of Christian attitudes toward culture and language.

Sanneh argues that religion and culture are not rivals (in the way that virtually all post-enlightenment intellectual currents would have it), but that culture is the very medium through which religion is mediated. Thus religion "in general" is particularised to specific human groups through language. At the outset (chap 1. "Religion and the Cultural Project: An Examination of Thought and Action") Sanneh examines the finds against purely materialist conceptions of culture: "The 'culture problem' is not simply a matter of arguing for what is necessary and useful, but of conceiving the human enterprise in such terms as are compatible with our over-whelming sense of moral truth. Therefore, we may ask: can the human instrument, without a sense of transcendence, achieve a fulfilment that is different from murky self-centredness? What is to prevent intellectual egoism from becoming a creed for self-centredness?" A purely mechanistic and materialist notion of culture, the argument concludes, can only result in a "contest of national wills and individual endowment, with culture theory serving to promote a sentiment of cultural destiny and imperial grandeur." (p45)

Having highlighted the "flaws" in the Western "cultural project", Sanneh turns to deconstruction of literary stereotypes in depictions of Western approaches to other cultures (eg, oppressor and oppressed, victimiser and victim). His second chapter ("They Stooped to Conquer: Cultural Vitality and the Narrative Impulse in Missionary Translations") points to the emphasis on "mother tongue literacy" in the work of European missionaries - whether in early Greece and Egypt, medieval Europe, or nineteenth century Africa. The author's sound grasp of western philosophy is now matched by a close familiarity with missionary practice.

In "Gospel and Culture: Theological and Religious Reflections" (chap.3), the

author continues the argument that "the pure gospel, stripped of all cultural entanglements, would evaporate in a vague abstraction" (p117). To the contrary, Sanneh argues in opposition to Frazer, Gibbon, and others, and in support of Newbigin in particular, Christianity was received into so many indigenous cultures as a revitalising agency, one that promoted pluralism while established a pancultural sense of unity. The author then advances a "striking paradox" of missionary agency (chap. 4 "Religious Insiders and Cultural Outsiders, or Religious Outsiders and Cultural Insiders? The Intercultural Critique"): that missionaries, having learnt the vernacular language of the group they had sought to enter and influence, soon became peripheral to "indigenous claims on Christianity", and were forced gradually to "relinquish control into local hands" (p153). In considerable detail Sanneh demonstrates the appropriation of the Christian message by indigenous causes, whether of nationalism, or of cultural or religious reassertion.

Ultimately, Sanneh is urging that world Christianity be seen as an important source for the realisation of human potential and global awareness. This is a serious book, tightly argued, and relevant to questions of social theory and religion far beyond the boundaries of its already expansive title.

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Dictionary of American Religious Biography.

Bowden, Henry. 2nd ed. rev. and enlarged. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993. 687 pp. US$75.00 cloth ISBN 0-313-27825-3 (available from DA Information Services)

The first edition of the *Dictionary*(1977) featured biographical accounts of 425 American religious figures from all denominations who played a significant role in America's past and who died before 1 July 1976. This work was well received and has proved a valuable resource for church historians and general readers alike. This revised and enlarged edition has updated original articles, added 125 new biographies, and considers persons who died before 1 July 1992. Each entry includes brief details of the subject's statistics, education and career; then a narrative account of their accomplishments and significance; and, finally, a bibliography of representative works, including primary and secondary sources. References to biographical entries in standard sources, such as the *Dictionary of American Biography*, are also given.

The entries are engagingly written. Bowden, Professor of Religion at Rutgers University, has written and edited several books on American religious history, and here he displays the techniques of an experienced historian. He has the ability to interpret leadership and to highlight the lasting significance of his subjects. Selection, of course, is the key consideration. Bowden's perspective is quite clear when he affirms that pluralism has always been a key element of the American religious experience. This means that his selection is much more representative than one based on consensus. It also means that the selection task is more difficult and, of necessity, leaves Bowden open to charges of randomness, subjectivity and omission.

But one could hardly quarrel with Bowden's conviction. The American experience has been complex and diverse and, as he says, 'the good and the bad, the ponderous and the mystical, the steady and the flashy are all representative fig-

ures in the kaleidoscope of components that make up religion in this country, past and present' (p. ix). Reformers, visionaries and scholars are accompanied by charlatans and con artists. Women, Native Americans, blacks and Asians are well represented; and there are lay people, minority leaders and cultists of many stripes. Persons of foreign birth, who flourished in America, are included. One would expect this for the early centuries, but the inclusion of names like Abraham Heschel, Thomas Merton and Paul Tillich indicates the broad scope of the work. All these figures are included because they changed life around them to an appreciable degree. Every reviewer would have to express surprise at certain omissions; this reviewer wondered immediately why Susan B. Anthony was not included among the Quakers, and Will Herberg among the Jews.

Appendices include listings by denominational affiliation and by birthplace, and there is a general bibliography and an index to persons and organisations. This is a clear and concise guide; Bowden writes with admirable objectivity and evenness of concern. The work is enthusiastically recommended for major collections supporting religious studies and, in particular, American studies.

Lawrence D. McIntosh
Joint Theological Library

Judaism and Human Rights in Contemporary Thought A Bibliographical Survey.

Breslauer, S. Daniel. Bibliographies and Indexes in Religious Studies, 25. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993. 195 pp. US$49.95 cloth ISBN 0-313-27994-2 (available from DA Information Services)

Daniel Breslauer, Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas, is respected for his writings and bibliographic surveys covering Jewish understandings of covenant and community, modern morality and contemporary ethics. Here he concentrates on human rights in Judaism and documents developments and trends. The intention is to deal with both theoretical discussions about the nature and substance of human rights and the practical application of theory either by Jews or to Jews.

The work begins with an informative survey analysing the problems involved in studying Judaism and human rights. It proceeds to sketch the classical sources of Jewish thinking, to introduce the specific rights generated by Jewish theory and, finally, to look at the moral dilemmas facing Jews today. The bibliography is divided into five areas: general works, human rights in the Bible and Talmud, Jewish theories, Judaism and specific rights, human rights and contemporary Judaism.

This is a valuable, comprehensive reference work designed for scholars working in religious ethics and in modern Jewish intellectual history. The seventeen specific rights covered in Section 4 include considerations of the rights of the community, of women, and the right to freedom from racism. Other rights, such as those relating to equality under the law and the freedom of movement, are also here. All told, there are some 800 entries for items drawn from scholarly books and periodical literature. Each entry comprises a full citation and a descriptive annotation. Items are mostly in English or Hebrew, but studies in other languages, especially French and German, have also been included. All annotations, however, are in English. There are author, title and subject indexes and numerous cross-references. The work is highly recommended

for all libraries specialising in Jewish studies and for major theological collections.

Lawrence McIntosh
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Chinese Religions.
Ching, Julia. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993. 275 pp. US$18.95 pap.
ISBN 0-88344-875

Besides translations of older classics by ethnographers (Dore and de Groot) and sociologists (Weber and Granet), and a few minor works, there are essentially three serious contenders for the English reader seeking an overview of Chinese religions. Two of them (C.K. Yang's *Religion in Chinese Society* and L.G. Thompson's *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*) take a socio-anthropological approach. The other (D. Howard Smith's *Chinese Religion*) is an historical work. Any introduction to Chinese religion that focuses primarily on either anthropology or history will have shortcomings, yet a rapprochement between the disciplines seems amazingly difficult to achieve.

In Julia Ching's *Chinese Religions* we are fortunate to have an introductory work which, while following an historical model, is constantly drawing out the *li*(essence, principle) embedded in *ch'i*(psycho-physical energy, manifestations), if I might thus appropriate Chu Hsi's terms. The thirteen chapters move from prehistory to the philosophies of the Warring States, from Buddhism's envy to Confucian responses, and from the arrival of Western prophetic traditions to Maoism. Throughout, Ching teases out the ongoing contributions of each age with discussions of divination, ancestors, gods, shamans, kinship, Confucian morality, Taoist cults and the many other elements which form the kaleidoscope of Chinese religious thought and practice.

While the dominant structure is historical, Ching manages to avoid presenting an elite view of events which so marred Smith's work. Thankfully, she also avoids his Christian reading of Chinese religions, but perhaps at a price. For while Ching never conflates, she constantly compares, particularly with Judaeo-Christian traditions (a legacy from her dialogue with Hans Küng in their *Christianity and Chinese Religion*). Some of her comparisons are insightful enough, but on the whole the methodology feels uncomfortable, compulsive and piecemeal. Ching is too careful a scholar to allow false equations and so ends up making comparisons only to destroy them with endless qualifications. I wish she had abandoned comparisons. I also wish she had omitted considering the legacy of Chinese religions in Japan and Korea. The latter is, of course, a most important topic in its own right, but it distracts from her story. With a history spanning millennia and with the largest population on earth, Chinese religions seem in themselves enough for one short introductory book without pointing out every obvious contrast or following every path that leads to a new digression.

This book, with its useful bibliography, notes and indexes, is hailed on the back cover as 'the most comprehensive and concise history of Chinese religions ever written'. This is undeniably true, but is it victory by default? Had it focused more on its theme, it could have been more concise; and had it re-employed space, it could have been more comprehensive. Nevertheless, Ching's is still a very fine introductory text.

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Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology. Ellacuria, Ignacio, and Sobrino, Jon, eds. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993. 752 pp. US$44.95 cloth ISBN 0-88344-917-X

All you ever wanted to know about liberation theology and now know why you were afraid to ask - and with good reason! It's not easy to find one's way through more than 700 pages of material. This is a truly compendious work, and one which deals with a wide range of topics as they bear on the theology of liberation. There are thirty-five essays classified under the two major headings of 'History and Methodology' and 'Systematic Contents'. Subjects such as history, hermeneutics, women in liberation theology, the Holy Spirit, grace, sin and sacraments are just a brief selection of what the book contains in addition to the more usual material on Christology and the Kingdom of God (the trademarks of liberation theology). One of the drawbacks of the book is that there is a certain amount of repetition since each of the essays is self-contained. But this is unlikely to pose too much difficulty since most readers will choose to examine specific concepts in which they have an interest. In this they will be assisted by numerous indexes and a six-page bibliography which has been translated into English.

When this book was compiled, Ignacio Ellacuria had already been murdered by government forces (as was his companion, Juan Roman Moreno); therefore, the articles which appear under their names were not originally intended for this volume, but were included as substitutes by Jon Sobrino. The fact that their martyrdom (and others') is mentioned in the preface stands as a powerful witness to the theology that the reader finds in the book. Liberation theology is a continual critique and reflection on a situation where people are being crucified daily. Behind such essays as 'Spirituality and the Following of Jesus', or 'Hope, Utopia, Resurrection', stands the passion of contemporary martyrs.

As an illustration of one short essay in the collection, I have chosen to look at 'Women and the Theology of Liberation', co-authored by Ann Maria Tepedino and Margarida Ribeiro Brandao. Feminist theology is still to reach its high point in the theology of liberation, and much in this essay could be found among issues addressed by first world feminists. However, there are some points which seem especially pertinent to the Latin American situation. First, there is the 'praxis of tenderness' which issues in a quest for new relations between women and men. This approach first saw the light of day at a Women's Perspective conference at Buenos Aires in 1985, and it sought to join the experience of the home with pastoral commitment and theological reflection. Second, the well-known 'option for the poor' has been found to have its most concrete and dramatic expression in the poor women who are the poorest of the poor. The expression 'the feminization of poverty', while originally deriving from North America, has been used by Latin American feminist theologians to describe a situation in which 'a disproportionate number of poor families, especially at the lowest poverty levels, are single-mother families.' It is appropriate to note that this is really the only essay in the entire volume which deals with women, and it is one of the briefest. In the essay (a longer one) which deals with Mary, the reader is treated to a conservative approach, one which emphasises faithfulness to God following the steps of Mary the handmaiden.

This is an indispensable volume for theological libraries, where its value will be primarily as source material. For personal purchase readers may prefer books which will give them a fuller treatment of some of the themes found in this work.

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Australian Catholics: The Social Justice Tradition.

Hogan, Michael. Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1993. 150 pp. $34.95 pap. ISBN 1-86371-236-4

Michael Hogan has done it again. His *Sectarian Strand* was a very readable, highly informative history of Australian churches written around the organising principle of sectarian conflict. This time the theme is social justice. Hogan begins by noting that what passes for social justice differs from age to age, and that it is both impossible and unprofitable to judge one age by the issues and standards of another. He reminds the reader that even the most enlightened orientation of this age will be judged as hopelessly inadequate and benighted in the future. Given this starting point, he delineates both the issues and the approaches to these issues at ten periods of Australian history. He attempts to keep critical comments to those which could be made by someone living at the time. That is, the way in which the church identifies issues of social justice and responds to them is assessed in terms of the existing theological orientations of the time. This is a big challenge, but Hogan succeeds for the most part, and in so doing provides an excellent model for the assessment of social justice issues throughout history. The rise and decline of certain types of issues in the social justice domain throughout the history of Catholicism in Australia is very interesting. The conflicts between emphasis on private or on social moral issues, between overseas and local perceptions of issues, and between laity and clergy and hierarchy feature in the telling of this history.

This is an excellent little book, but it is difficult to determine the target market. It would be a good resource for VCE subjects on religion and society, and on ethics. It is a bit thin for advanced university work, but would provide a resource for courses focusing on religion in Australia; or it could be recommended as additional reading in church history subjects or moral theology subjects in schools of theology. The informed lay person and church leader would find it a good read.

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