

Reviews

Two Australian Atheisms: A Review Essay

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Beyond Belief: a Buddhist Critique of Fundamentalist Christianity by A.L. De Silva (*pseud.*) Sydney, Three Gem Publications, 1994. 96 pp., price unknown and

The Corruption of Reality: a Unified Theory of Religion, Hypnosis, and Psychopathology by John F. Schumaker. Amherst, Prometheus Books, 1995 276 pp. price unknown.

Edward Gibbon once remarked in his autobiography that he had yet to read a book which did not have some value. Much as I disagree with the general purport of these two books, I do not want to leave the impression that they have nothing to offer. The two works represent interesting developments in non-theistic thought in Australia, and they both reflect personal reactions against the forms of institutionalised Christianity very often lampooned by the 'thinking populace' of this country. It is a curious thing, however that while the two authors of these volumes had every opportunity to make measured and valid criticism about what is 'problematic' in contemporary religion, they have rather 'botched the job'.

Both have written about matters on which there is already a vast literature and simply been heedless towards most of it; both are guilty of the simplest of methodological errors: that of setting up 'straw men' or false stereotypes, and then meretriciously writing them into chaff. Both, after all that, fail to convince in their attempts to set up highly rational alternatives to the outlooks they oppose.

De Silva, appearing like a doughty Sri Lankan cricketer, believes he has 'bowled out' Christian fundamentalism on 'born again' Christianity. Actually it turns out that he is the Australian Buddhist monk Dhammika, formerly Paul Boston, who writes here under a pseudonym because his book, originally intended to counteract conservative Chinese Christian evangelists in Malaysia and Singapore, was debarred from reaching its intended audience, and so it has now passed on into our local market¹. But he does not seem to have read a single critical work on the subject (there is no Barr, Marsden, Hollenweger, etc. to be found). He imagines a monolithic way of thinking - that all fundamentalists hold there is a perfect consistency in the picturing of God in both the Old and New Testaments,

all hold the same understanding of creationism, Biblical prophecy, inerrancy, etc., - when in fact conservative Christian groups thrive on endless in-house even yeshiva-like, debates. And from the many books I have read or seen I know how protagonists for old-fashioned hermeneutics will still be able to come up with confident answers, often unexpectedly fascinating, to every objection De Silva/Boston proposes about the concrete anthropomorphic-looking images of God, Biblical self-contradiction, the apparent failure of prophecy, the paradox of inspiration, and so on - and could accuse him of unfair representation to boot.

There is a last-minute caveat inserted behind the title page of the De Silva/Boston work to the effect that "this book is not intended as an attack on Christianity or mainstream Christians", but "to counteract the dogmatic propaganda of the, so-called, 'born again' evangelists." Of course the trouble here is that when you dogmatically insist that there is no God because the world has so much misery in it (p.17), that Jesus was a "poor communicator" (p. 45), his ethical teaching not particularly enlightened, (pp. 55-61), his miracles often bizarre (pp. 58-59), that an increase in faith in Christ means an increase in bigotry (p. 57), and that the Bible has been tampered with on every page (p. 71), then your *average* Christian is going to feel a twinge of indignation. The penny will drop that the book has surreptitiously turned out to be anti-Christian pro-Buddhist propaganda. "Justice is the quality of being fair", the author writes (p. 29), but the more you contemplate it the less justice it does to its subject, and fair it is certainly not.

Beyond Belief, indeed, turns out to be the manifesto of an angry young monk,

who in voicing a quite understandable reaction to aggressive proselytism yields up a product not so dissimilar in flavour to the volatile chemistry he rejects. Our author acknowledges at the onset that he was "a Christian for many years", and that "Jesus's teachings were an important step", in his becoming a Buddhist (p. 7), although what he omits to tell us here is that he was a protégé of Natasha Jackson, an early figure in the history of the Australian Sangha, who transferred her virulent Russian atheism into an atheistical Buddhism, deploying the dharma as a rationalist weapon against religion². As a result, De Silva/Boston leaves us with his final solution to the world as the supremely rational Enlightened one. His Buddha is simply perfect, utterly clear in his dhamma, above miracle-making, and teaching a doctrine that is utterly sublime, peaceful, in tune with nature and the cycles of the cosmos, and most significantly is "the *logical* alternative" to the mixed messages offered by Jesus or the Bible. His Buddha, in his boundless compassion, does not even show any anger (knowledge of Gautama's sharp reproof in the *Udana* stories has evidently eluded him)³, and, without so much a mention of other De Silvas fighting the Tamils to our northeast, his Buddhists do not have wars on their hands. This is a piece of propaganda worthy of Dr. Bandaranaike's nationalism and of the hidebound unaccommodating "Protestant" Theravadinism he promoted⁴. The ploy does not work, however, because it cannot be in the truest spirit, let alone interests, of Buddhism, to judge others with so many deliberate twists of misunderstanding. Its unobtrusive but evident lack of compassion, even if readily explicable

(possibly actually justifiable!) renders it as unconvincing a case as the positions it assaults. That is not to say a Buddhist critique of Christianity is never defensible, only that this one is facile. It is an embarrassment to thoughtful Australian Buddhists themselves, some of whom tried to stop its publication as inimical to interreligious relations. They also rightly see dharmic discourse concerning the Uncreated and Unformed is deep-structurally equivalent to talk about God in the obviously theistic traditions, and that to peddle Buddhism as plain atheism is to distort it⁵.

The De Silva/Boston diatribe, curiously, is perhaps a useful foil to *The Corruption of Reality*, by Dr. John Schumaker, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Newcastle, an academic who in this new book has penned a very radical sequel to his *Wings of Illusion* (1990). Basically Schumaker seeks to present a unified theory in which "religion, hypnosis, and psychopathology ... can be regarded as essentially the same" (p. 11), or in other words strategies, founded on suggestion and delusion, that achieve a type of 'insanity' (p. 123). If in *Wings of Illusion*, the idea of a relatively greater suggestibility was the key to his critique of religion, now it is the exciting new concept *dissociation* that makes the unified theory possible. Seeking to place hypnosis in "Global Perspective", and generating the impression that hypnotic trance and shamanic auto-suggestion are basic to primitive religious traditions (ch.3), he links this ready detachment from reality to what James Braid and Mordecai Kaffman calls monoideistic behaviour, the widespread kind of mental disturbance in which people "sustain a dissociation from generalized reality" by

constantly repeating to themselves highly focussed ideas or images (p. 197). Religion sits in the same field. There is no coincidence that psychiatric wards are full of people with "religious delusions", and the endemic "private reality-skewing of religion" requires re-perceiving as "pathological" (following David Berman)⁶ (pp 124. 196). "The religions of many non-Western cultures are able to absorb even blatantly psychotic individuals" (p. 125) because their capacity to corrupt reality is greater than in the West. In the West we are wisely more discriminating - there is not a shred of a Szasz-like questioning of our asylum culture - since the West apparently has the good fortune to possess naturalistic and scientific thinkers who grasp and reckon with reality reliably (pp. 248ff.).

What are we to make of all this? De Silva/Boston would obviously be quick to react because, belonging to a religious tradition he cherishes as supremely rational, he would see himself dumped in a vast human bloc of reality-corrupters. And Schumaker, after reading my review, might well agree he should be so dumped, although De Silva/Boston might regain the edge when he discovers that Schumaker leaves only a black hole when it comes to the major Eastern traditions, because either he knows nothing about them or they do not fit his theory. Whatever these two might make of each other, in any case, the run-of-the-mill believer in some religion or another is probably going to conclude, once Schumaker's views are distilled, that an arrogant psychologist has apparently divided the world into the 'religious-pathological' and the 'non-religious healthy', and foolishly left the severance unqualified. And they will have a point; perhaps a more acute one if

they say this dichotomy also corrupts reality. Perhaps Schumaker would have been fairer to conclude that we are all psychotic because we are all to some extent religious, which is the better argued view of Weston la Barre (whose *Human Animal* and *The Ghost Dance* unbelievably make no appearance in Schumaker's pages, and gives the first indication that he has really not read much into religious theory). At least La Barre lumped us all in together, though perhaps leaving the dreadful impression that he himself was the one true transcendent non-psychotic⁷. Schumaker creates a divided world, and he is attempting to persuade us to relinquish the madness called religion for the uncorruptibility of reason.

Once a Catholic, Schumaker cannot stand the thought of an institution which allows people to go on populating without using contraception (the only specific thing he ever criticises his old tradition for) (p. 246), but he is also intriguingly Catholic in his moral distaste for the new "sickly religion" of materialism and self-indulgence (pp. 242-45). He ends up admitting we have to have *some kind of religion* to avoid our blind dysfunctionality on planet earth while circumventing our conceptual delusions. This he calls Eupraxy (from Paul Kurtz),

"a system of beliefs born of critical awareness, reflective judgment, and skeptical enquiry. In turn, these beliefs would empower people to gain reliable knowledge and wisdom that could guide our earthly actions in self-serving and life-serving directions" (p. 245).

He is not sure, in the end, how to bring off this Walden II, or even if it is possible (pp 250ff.), which is understandable, because, if you can take it from an old

hand in Religious Studies, even were humanity to achieve such eupraxia, ninety per cent of the world's population would be ready to thank the divine for it.

Of course one avoids Schumaker's challenges to religion's psychopathic possibilities at one's peril. "Masters of Suspicion" like him are always useful if they reveal to us how shallow or counterfeit our spiritual life can be⁸. But the psychopathology of those who repress their religiosity is well known enough⁹, and the possibility of misconstruing reality by foreclosing, the presence of God or the spiritual in existence can be argued, very coldly, by great psychologists who do not share Schumaker's premises. Some of these psychologists might be quick to retort, too, that religion shows up in insanity precisely because it is such an existentially profound disruption.

Our second atheist, I concede, has the advantage of being blatantly 'reductionist', so that scientific paradigms to hand can apparently cover all contingencies (p. 11). Yet reductionism is always bad science: religion will become what the investigator limits it to be, and the more so as the selective nature of back-up examples manifests itself. But religion can include tough rationality, just as independent rationalism can engender hubris and an underlying emotiveness. In Schumaker's worry over hypnosis, moreover, he seems to have forgotten great traditions of music: I assume he will not want the custodians of eupraxia to censor their deeply religious, indeed oftentimes hypnotic affects. In his hurry to document hypnotic and auto-suggestive motifs in select African and North American tribes, he tells us nothing of Oceania, where one quarter of the known religions of the world do not square well

with his case, or of South America, where Roger Bastide undertook the first systematic sociology of dreams and trance¹⁰. In one fell swoop dissociation is used to cover for too much, when there are well-established psychological tests for it that have been used by others in a properly subtle and not 'blanket' fashion¹¹. Reductionism too often entails limitations on reading and coverage as well as on the object of investigation itself.

In the end, moreover, the alternative offered - the appeals to the rational and the 'realistically real' - do not convince any more than that of De Silva/Boston. Here, of course, the latter has the edge because he at least argues from within a great religious tradition. Schumaker argues from within a Western humanistic backwater in unusual Australia, out of touch with the massive resurgence of religiosity in the late twentieth century¹², and the brewing spiritually-based rejection of modernity and the Enlightenment project of Reason¹³. Weirdly, Schumaker seems the more out of touch with social reality, or is his the last gasp of a world-view that has no means of mystically resurrecting after it has been reduced to ashes by deconstruction? For all his special atheism, at least De Silva keeps his eternal Buddha, and I think he would be mad to throw him away. Then again, I suspect, his Buddhist rationalism only prevents him from grasping a healthier integration of the rational and non-rational that he misses in his own tradition, let alone in the Christian anthropology he chose to leave behind.

Notes

1. The Government of Malaysia and Singapore censor books deliberately intended to downgrade, let alone attack, anyone else's religion. Additional note: Boston/Dhammika did not choose his Lankan pseudonym: Buddhist associates suggested it as an alternative to his original choice of a much more difficult appellation.
2. For background P. Croucher, *A History of Buddhism in Australia, 1848 - 1988*, Sydney, 1989, pp.37-98. Natasha Jackson was a student of mine (1978-9), and was kind enough to release to me documents about competing approaches to Buddhism during its earlier phase in Australia.
3. These are now full and conveniently translated by Peter Masefield, *The Commentary on the Udana* (Pali Text Society), Oxford, 1994-5, 2 vols.
4. V. Rasanayakan, S. Thuraisingam and G.W. Trompf, "Three Nationalisms and the Island War on Sri Lanka", in Trompf (ed.), *Islands and Enclaves, nationalisms and separatist pressures in island and literal contexts*, New Delhi, 1993, pp 118, 121-22.
5. While warning here against inadequately argued (sometimes 'Hinduizing') attempts to turn the Buddha into a plain theist (cf. J. Fozdar, *The God of the Buddha*, New York, 1973), and conceding the world-wide diversity of Buddhism (In Japanese Shingon, for instance, the Supreme Being, Vairochina, is full incorporated)
6. The service Schumaker demands from Ber- man's inaccurate and unprofessional article ("Religion and Neurosis", *Free Enquiry* (Summer, 1993): esp 16), at this crucial turning-point in his argument, is very disturbing.
7. See Trompf, *In Search of Origins* (Studies in World Religions) London, 1990, pp 100-05
8. Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (trans. D. Savage), New Haven, 1970.
9. V. Frankl, *The Unconscious God*, New York,

10. Bastide, *La transe, le rêve, et la folie*, Paris, 1972. (not in Schumaker)

11. See M.H. Katchen, 'The Incidence of Hypnotisability, Dissociation and Dissociative Disorders in Former Members of High Demand Religions' (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sydney), Sydney, 1996, and the

wealth of literature there not used by Schumaker.

12 cf. e.g., G. Kepel, *The Revenge of God*, Cambridge, 1996.

13. J. Evola, *The Revolt against the Modern World* (trans. G. Stucco), Rochester, 1995.

Collectively Postmodern: a Review of *The Postmodern Bible*

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There is something curiously ambivalent about a survey-introduction volume: not only do such books function as surveys of and gateways into areas or disciplines by the very desire to be introductions to those disciplines, they also have a more foundational and constructive role. Apart from providing coverage of a specific field, the survey-introduction often (re)defines and (re)establishes the very field or discipline in question. To take a few examples from the recent past: in the emergent area of postcolonial studies volumes such as *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1989), and *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* (Williams, Chrisman 1993) have become necessary entry texts for any beginning students but also foundation texts for postcolonial theory as such. A similar situation holds for cultural studies with *The Cultural Studies Reader* (During 1993) and for queer theory with *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (Abelove, Barale, Halperin 1993).

It seems to me that *The Postmodern Bible* (henceforth PMB) may well play a similar role (although it is not an

anthology of significant essays as such, but I will return to this issue below) in biblical studies, serving both to survey and bring together some of the disparate elements of biblical studies in the 1990s, and to establish postmodern biblical studies in itself. In doing so, PMB revisits, as in earlier phases of biblical studies, the interaction between biblical studies and wider literary studies: "[t]he impulse most basic to the writing of this book is that the practices of biblical criticism need to be brought into the fullest possible mutual critique with the practices of current literary criticism (as these have transcended their traditional bounds in the direction of a general cultural critique...)" (PMB:110).

Apart from covering PMB's presentation and critique of a number of methods in contemporary biblical interpretation, I am also interested in the questions of postmodernism and the nature and function of collectives. Both of these later issues are all the more interesting since they are out of focus for most of the book, yet seem to me to inform much of what is going on in the more ostensible content.

I

To begin with the explicit content of PMB, there are, after a rather interesting introduction, chapters on reader-response criticism, structuralist and narratological criticism, poststructuralist criticism, rhetorical criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, feminist and womanist criticism, and ideological criticism. While there is a rough plan followed in each chapter it is not so rigid as to exclude variation in presentation for methods that are quite disparate. Thus, for those methods that have had some time to develop a number of readings of biblical texts, there is a discussion of the more important of these readings, a presentation of the major features of the approach under scrutiny, and whatever criticisms are felt to be appropriate. This applies to the chapters on reader-response, structuralist and narratological, rhetorical, and feminist and womanist criticisms. In those areas without the exegetical weight (however slight) of these criticisms, the approach is more sporadic and thus, for me, more interesting. The discussions of poststructuralist, psychoanalytic and ideological criticism fall into this second category, opening up all sorts of possibilities for biblical criticism due to the very absence of constraints that already existing studies produce.¹ All of the chapters close out with a consideration of the future in the respective criticism (except for the final chapter on ideological criticism) and a useful section on recommended further reading. This is apart from the long final bibliography (81 pages) and index.

My description has already indicated something of a bifurcation in the chapter structures that I would like to pursue a little further. There are, basically, two

types of chapters: those that enter into the debate of already established field in biblical studies, and those that have no field with which to debate. The chapter on reader-response criticism falls into the first group, beginning with a consideration of the feeding stories in Mark, where some of the more important names of the intersection between the older historical critical approaches and reader-response criticism appear. The subsequent section usefully “maps” the theoretical situation, adapting a taxonomy from Steven Mailloux (PMB:26-27) that delineates three groups or types: psychological or subjective (Norman Holland), interactive or phenomenological (early Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, and Wayne Booth), and social or structural models (later Stanley Fish, Jonathan Culler, Gerald Prince, Seymour Chatman, Hans Robert Jauss, and Judith Fetterley). There then follows a critique of the reception and use of reader-response criticism among biblical, mainly NT, critics. The polemic here is quite sharp: reader-response criticism, insofar as it tends to remain mesmerised by the question of the past or original reader (or hearer), has “stayed within the theoretical boundaries of a philologically oriented historical criticism” (PMB:39). Despite a widespread use of the theories of Wolfgang Iser, biblical reader-response criticism has not challenged the assumptions of an established text with its own determinate meaning. The argument of this chapter is then that those who use this approach need both to reflect on the ideological assumptions and construction of the method and, in order to make this ideological move, acquaint themselves with more properly postmodern currents — poststructuralism, feminism,

womanism, and liberation approaches — which assist in understanding that “both the text and critic [object and subject] are constituted by interpretive conventions,” (PMB:51). This means that critics/readers are also gendered, racially determined, ideologically constituted and class based. But this argument (the need for contact with poststructuralist approaches et al) in itself raises a crucial question about the inclusion of reader-response criticism in this volume: why include it in a presentation of postmodern approaches to the Bible if it has been coopted by the modernist patterns of historical criticism? This raises the issue of how postmodernism itself might be understood (see below), but the reasons for inclusion seem to me to be twofold. First, reader-response criticism is understood by many in biblical studies as the mark of postmodern discourse (a critical consideration is thus mandatory). Second, this approach is in many respects transitional, heralding the emergent properly postmodern approaches yet containing many contacts with older ways of reading: by arguing for a connection with other postmodern discourses, reader-response criticism may thus be drawn into the postmodern orbit. Quoting Fred Burnett, “reader-response has become the last ‘decompression chamber’ for many redaction critics before they surface into [post]modern criticism” (PMB:13).

Comparable to reader-response criticism in regard to its recognisable status as an approach that has some interpretive history, structuralist and narratological criticism is the concern of Chapter Two. The form of the chapter is the same — examples, coverage of the field outside biblical criticism, a critique of the uses by biblical critics and of the

field itself, and considerations for the future — but the content is different. Structuralism (under which narratology is rapidly subsumed, as are the closely related formalism, semiotics and poetics) is quite distinct from reader-response criticism, being “a general theory of the intelligibility of the products of mind based on the view that what makes things intelligible is their perceived relatedness, rather than their qualities as separate items” (PMB:70-71). After investigating the possibilities and limits of three “high” structuralist readings of 1 Kings 17-18 and a narratological (“low” structuralist) reading of Genesis 38, the survey moves through the obligatory names of Saussure, Propp, Greimas, and Levi-Strauss for high structuralism (and then the development by Daniel Patte, CADIR and Guttgemanns for biblical studies), and Genette and Seymour Chatman for low structuralism. The development from this latter tradition has produced a range of readings of the gospels, which are too many to enumerate here (see pp. 85-89), and a sub-field of Hebrew Bible studies designated “poetics,” where the names of James Muilenberg, Shimon Bar Efrat, Robert Alter, Adele Berlin, Jan Fokkelman, and Robert Polzin take second place to the major contributions of Meir Sternberg’s *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, Mieke Bal and Hugh White.

All of this is of course necessary (if somewhat mundane) in a volume that wishes to be introductory, yet what is more interesting for the development of structuralism in biblical studies is the section which offers some critical assessment. Its strategy is to set two narratives of structuralism over against one another: the canonical one (exemplified by Terence Hawkes) in which structuralism has risen and now

fallen, falling prey to the flaws of being overly scientific, objectively reductive, ahistoricist, antimaterialist, and positivist; and an alternative one told by Peter Caws (*Structuralism: the Art of the Intelligible*) in which structuralism's potential is yet to be realised as a major philosophical option concerned with the structures of the human mind. One of the main burdens of this section turns out to be - after the citations of various writers such as Bal, Derrida and Jameson - a comprehensive challenge to the divide between structuralism and poststructuralism/deconstruction. Although it is part of the story of structuralism itself, the difficulties of the divide soon become apparent if one tries to place writers on either side of the divide: is Althusser's or Jameson's Marxism structuralist or poststructuralist? Now that he has written a book on both, is Jonathan Culler one or the other? Or what of Mieke Bal's work, which invokes structuralist strategies such as Greimas's square alongside a poststructural awareness of the textualised nature of the texts she deals with? The same applies to David Jobling: in his earlier structuralist analyses of biblical texts may be found the seeds of his later poststructural and ideological emphases.

While it might be expected that a consideration of the future would press for the realisation of the radical implications of structuralism, such a consideration faces a recognised split in the collective itself over the inherent positivism or radical potential of structuralism. Thus, the discussion turns around the strong conservative tendencies of biblical structuralism (with its submission to the authority of a unified biblical text) and the need for a radical critique. Yet the close connection

between structuralism and poststructuralism is realised in the transition to the next chapter on poststructuralism itself. The transition is also from the form used for the more established biblical practices (such as reader-response and structuralism) to the second form noted above, a more open form characteristic of the newer areas like poststructuralism.

The issue of course in any discussion of poststructuralism is not only its relationship with structuralism, but also its relationship with deconstruction, particularly as championed in the work of Jacques Derrida. PMB attempts the impossible - a concise insight into Derrida's work - and seems to me to succeed. Deconstruction is concerned to identify the constructed nature of all positions. The consequence of this is to recover what has been excluded in such constructions - a concern with difference and the margins that has political dimensions more fully realised in Foucault's work. But it is Derrida's inheritance of Heidegger's mantle in critiquing western metaphysics that is most noteworthy: the by now classic move of questioning the fundamental oppositions of western thought is reiterated, with a particular focus on the opposition speech-writing. Derrida seeks, by passing through the crucial place of Saussure in French thought, to subvert the privileging of the first term in such oppositions.

But the foregrounding of the speech/writing opposition in PMB is the first part of a different pattern to this chapter (a pattern that disconcerts the established one of the previous two chapters), namely, the exploration of a disparate range of options for, or contributions to, biblical

poststructuralism. Derrida's concern with speech/writing is exemplified briefly in some work by Regina Schwartz on re-writing/re-remembering in the Hebrew Bible, and by Derrida on Edmond Jabes. A related possibility then comes from a consideration of an essay by Roland Barthes on Genesis 32, where the issues of reading, translation, intertextuality, indeterminacy, ambiguity and multiplicity are foregrounded. Alternatively, the work of Mark Taylor is explored for an inroad by poststructuralism via a/theology, and finally the possibilities of Foucault's work on power are mediated through the writing of Elizabeth Castelli on the New Testament. However, the very form of the chapter generates questions about its own exclusions: Paul de Man is mentioned in passing, but has no section devoted to his work, to note perhaps the most obvious omission. Prescriptions for the future are quite modest: a recovery of historical criticism through the "New Historicism" and the looming question of ethics — particularly political ethics — in poststructural thought (with an appropriate flagging of Levinas).

The welcome foraging of the chapter on poststructuralism gives way to the pattern established earlier: Chapter Four, on rhetorical criticism, has sections on readings, a narrative of its development, some critique and a view to the future. The only change is a foldback to the biblical text (1 Corinthians) later in the chapter, and a short consideration of rhetoric and religion. A few things stand out in this section. To begin with, the over-riding concern of rhetorical criticism is with the techniques of persuasion. This is particularly pertinent to the Bible which is, due to its enormous influence in Western culture, a persuading text par excellence. But the crucial step for a

postmodern appropriation of rhetorical criticism is the recognition that rhetoric is at work as much in the critical task as in the text under analysis. Further, rhetoric works to efface the presence of the Other and control the situation, whether in the analysed text or in the critical task (the example used here is the rereading of 1 Corinthians by Antoinette Wire [PMB:178-183]). Another major interest is the long history of rhetoric and rhetorical criticism: it can in fact claim a continuous if somewhat chequered heritage from a Greek world before the time of the New Testament itself (see PMB:156-161). This means that rhetorical criticism is by no means a new approach in the postmodern dispensation, but is rather a "recovered" approach - a little like allegory - whose moment seems to have returned under postmodernism. This ability to pillage the past is a feature I will note below. Finally, there is a concern regarding - for want of better terms - the radical or conservative use of rhetorical criticism, with a desire to shift away from the conservative tendency in much appropriation by biblical critics (Robert Alter and Meir Sternberg come in for some further criticism here) by advocating an approach that is self-critical, ideologically suspicious, collectively focused, decentred and indeterminate. (These points are made in what is surely the best section of this chapter: the critique of the "new rhetoric" [PMB:162-169].)

If rhetorical criticism comprises the oldest critical stratum in this volume, then psychoanalytic criticism in Chapter Five vies for the most recent, at least in terms of biblical studies. In this respect it belongs with the chapter on poststructuralist criticism, a connection marked by the structure of the two. In the

same way that the poststructuralist chapter mounts a series of forays into biblical criticism from different angles, this chapter on psychoanalysis outlines, critically responds to, and suggests lines to follow in biblical analysis on the basis of the work of Freud, Jacques Lacan, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. If there is a difference with the former chapter, then it lies in a particular tradition of psychoanalysis that is traced with these names. This is the Freudian tradition (although it might be said that all psychoanalysis belongs ultimately to the Freudian tradition) mediated through Lacan. Kristeva and Irigaray respond to the tradition as it is mediated by Lacan, Kristeva recovering and developing Freud's interest in the realm of the pre-articulate, and Irigaray attacking the inherent masculinity of the work of Freud and Lacan (Kristeva and Irigaray thus embody the two main lines of response to Freud and Lacan: development or rejection). Despite the greater attention of biblical scholars to Jung -incited perhaps by Jung's more favourable writings on religion - PMB wisely does not trace this line of work. Jung's work may best be described as "psychoanalytic fascism": of historical interest perhaps, but of little use. The only name missing from the tradition traced in this chapter is that of Slavoj Zizek, although his star has been in the ascendancy only of late. While this chapter is an excellent introduction to the psychoanalytic tradition of Freud, Lacan, Kristeva and Irigaray, there is little if any development of psychoanalytic criticism for interpreting biblical texts. The chapter restricts itself to the reflections made by these people on the Bible, theology and religion, without stepping beyond description. Areas where this development might take place include

repression, wish fulfilment, Lacan's *objet petit a*, and the formula of sexualisation as that has been critiqued by Kristeva and Irigaray.

Running through all the chapters thus far is a critical approach which coagulates in the penultimate chapter on feminist and womanist criticism. Although womanism is more recent, feminist biblical criticism precedes the more recent explosion of postmodernism, and so it joins the group of reader-response, structuralist and rhetorical criticisms in which at least a scattered tradition of biblical interpretation exists. This chapter's structure also falls into the pattern of the others: some examples of biblical criticism, a consideration of the field beyond biblical studies in terms of womanism and feminism, a critical engagement with feminist and womanist biblical criticism, and a future look. Yet, this chapter seems to me to be one of the most integrated in the book (I say this without the usual assumptions that integration is better): the two middle sections interweave the wider critical field and biblical studies in an astute manner, and the organisation (always a difficult move) of feminist and womanist biblical criticism in terms of a hermeneutics of recuperation, of suspicion, and of survival is extremely useful. These "leaking" categories also have a rough chronological feel about them, moving from the earliest efforts to recover the women of the biblical text, through the large-scale historical critical projects of Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Carol Meyers (suspicion), to the more properly womanist hermeneutics of survival by African American interpreters and those from Latin America, Africa and Asia. Although the net of the last category is cast wide, it still excludes, by

its very continental focus, the peoples of the islands and oceans of the world (for example, the Pacific Islander peoples). There is in fact a fourth category, but it sits loosely with the other three - postmodern feminist critique. Its existence here raises questions about the postmodern status of the other approaches, which in turn raises the question about the perception of postmodernism in PMB (but I will return to this below). After some consideration of the crucial contribution by Mieke Bal to biblical studies, along with some other examples, the chapter gives way to a broader reflection of feminism and postmodernism as such. It challenges the opposition between theory and politics that is common in parts of the feminism/postmodernism discussion. Perhaps the most interesting, and to some extent most satisfying, aspect of this section is the broadside delivered to Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza's work, who takes up the popular argument that the postmodern interest in theory loses touch with the hard politics of the women's movement. Not unexpectedly the opposition of theory and politics, academy and world, is itself deconstructed in PMB, thereby contributing more directly to the question of postmodernism itself.

The final chapter is faced with what is by now a standard postmodern dilemma: how to generate an inclusive category without making it into a totalising move. Thus, while there is a drive to move away from the totalising dimensions of Marxist approaches to ideology (PMB:304-305), the basic question of ideological criticism embraces the other methods dealt with in the book: "[t]he important question that ideological criticism raises in this culture of criticism is how does criticism -

narrative, feminist, poststructuralist, rhetorical, and so on - make a difference in the texture of lived relations in a postmodern world today" (PMB:279-280)? Yet such a permeability is not restricted to ideological criticism, since similar moves are made for feminism and womanism, and poststructuralism. This is important, since it finally restrains ideological criticism from becoming the over-arching theoretical context of the other approaches.

As far as ideological criticism itself is concerned, there seem to be three main elements in its formation. First, the crucial step of identifying what ideology might mean. This is undertaken in a rather useful section, dipping into Althusser ("ideology is to be understood as the system of representations located in the everyday practices ... of a society" [PMB:273]), Saussurian semiotics and the relation of signifier and signified, discourse and power (Foucault), and ethics (although these different contributions are heavily mediated by Terry Eagleton). Second, ideological criticism is so self-critical that it continually subjects itself to the same critique it directs at other methods. Finally, this approach has a distinct ethical dimension, working to become conscious of questions of justice and political change. Ideological criticism "demands a high level of self-consciousness and makes an explicit, unabashed appeal to justice" (275). Questions need to be raised here, particularly regarding the ontological appeal to what appears to be a "transcendental" justice (although in using this term I imply the opposition with "imminent"). This impression dissipates somewhat with the extended

discussion of samples of biblical liberation readings, ranging from the crucial role of the Exodus narrative in liberation theology, through the native North American reading of the conquest of Canaan, Gottwald's revolt model of Israelite origins, African American, womanist and Jewish liberation hermeneutics, the readings of Mark's gospel by Ched Myers and Ferdinand Belo, and feminist rereadings of the cross. All of which means that while this final chapter takes on a distinct structure - more like the chapters on poststructuralism and psychoanalysis - it also relates a range of already existing readings, something reminiscent of those chapters that are concerned with relatively more established approaches.

In some respects this final chapter is the face of a Marxist criticism that has moved beyond the narrower confines with which it is usually associated - the founding role of Jameson and Eagleton is a signal of this. Nevertheless, what is lost in this process is the useful connection made by Marxism between ideology, class and socio-economics. So much of the liberation material discussed relies precisely on such connections.

II

There are some inevitable questions that need to be asked (inevitable in terms of the form of reviews as such). The first question is whether any methods have been neglected. Perhaps the archetypal approach of Northrop Frye (is it structural, rhetorical, or psychological?), or the various species of ethical criticism, or queer approaches, or postcolonial studies. The first two are not as consequential as the queer criticism, which is fast becoming a field in its own right. As for postcolonial approaches, it is not clear yet whether ideological criticism

will be a sufficient home, or whether this too is a colonising move.

Another question is the proposed readership for a volume such as this: the stretches of descriptive material clearly suggest a textbook market, especially the methods course in biblical studies that deals with more contemporary approaches to the biblical text. PMB attempts to be more than this at the same time, particularly in the sections of heavier theoretical engagement with the various critical approaches. It desires, then, to be a critical contribution to biblical studies as such, something that redefines the field in terms set out in the volume. But if this is the case, PMB comes into conflict with at least one other effort to chart and determine the newer directions in biblical studies - Alter's and Kermode's *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. This is in fact the third question I want to raise here (one that is not so common in reviews), namely, the polemical context of PMB. A good part of the drive in PMB is to oppose the dominant way so-called "newer literary" theories have made their way into biblical studies, that is, as largely de-politicised and often anti-theoretical. The explicit exclusion of "the origins of a text in ideology or social structure," of "Marxist criticism ... or psychoanalytic criticism," or "critics who use the text as a springboard for cultural or metaphysical ruminations," or "Deconstructionists and some feminist critics who seek to demonstrate that the text is necessarily divided against itself" (Alter and Kermode:5-6; see PMB:4, 110-111) is almost an exact counter-image to PMB.² Another writer who comes in for some repeated criticism is Meir Sternberg, especially *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, where ideology is restricted to

the univocal ideological voice of the text/God in its effort to persuade the reader to its point of view. The wide influence of Alter and Sternberg in unsettling historical critical orthodoxy has had a lasting effect on the nature of the field PMB seeks to address and challenge. For this reason PMB is much more theoretically conscious and politically left than either of these other volumes.

I have, however, been holding off the most interesting elements of PMB - postmodernism and the idea and practice of the collective. This involves a closer reading of the "Introduction" where both of these questions are broached more directly. Where postmodernism is theorised, it is described in terms of a "suspicion of mastery" (PMB:2-3), of power plays and innocent readings, an awareness of modernism itself, and the return of ethics and the politics of reading. "The postmodern has to do with transformation in the local ways we understand ourselves in relation to modernity and to contemporary culture and history, the social and personal dimensions of that awareness, and the ethical and political responses that it generates" (PMB:9). Apart from its dependence on Lyotard (my own preference is for the Marxist approach of Fredric Jameson) the two most commendable features of the discussion of postmodernism are the focus on a dialectical understanding of the relation between it and modernism, and the argument for an ethics and politics generated out of the postmodern moment itself.

Yet I would like to trace postmodernism in a slightly different fashion in PMB by picking up the bifurcation in the chapter structures that I

traced in the previous section. Here the distinction between those methods with a longer pedigree in biblical studies and those with a more recent origin was marked in the structure of these chapters. The former group worked with a reasonably standard pattern in which examples of textual readings preceded a description of the discipline in general and its appropriation by biblical studies. These chapters include a critical assessment of the method in question and possibilities for the future (only the chapter on rhetorical criticism adds a section that rereads the biblical text after critically recasting the method). The latter group of chapters - those on poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and ideological criticism - operate in a less stylised fashion, although it seems to me that the underlying drive is to sample the various possibilities for biblical interpretation in these areas. What is interesting is that both formal patterns give out to postmodernism. While I initially had hoped to be able to use this split in order to undermine the book's positioning in the postmodern debate, the split itself is more interesting than that. For one of the features of postmodernism that has been reiterated time and again is its plundering of the past in a joyous disregard for the incompatibility or overdetermination of those features being plundered and then joined together in strikingly new ways. Depending upon one's emphasis, this might be designated as a "loss of affect," or "pastiche," or "depthlessness" (all of which apply in their own way). Now, while this may be happening with the four chapters that pick up established practices, those chapters where newer criticisms are broached would seem to form the quarantine area through which the others must pass in

order to be truly postmodern. Thus, reader-response, structuralism, rhetorical criticism, and feminist and womanist criticism, need to be interrogated and reassessed by poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and ideological criticism in order to gain their postmodern credentials.

Yet even these disciplines have their own traditions - poststructuralism in structuralism, psychoanalysis in itself, and ideological criticism in Marxism - outside biblical studies, in which the postmodern form is more of a mutation on the tradition than anything new as such. This point leads me to two final reflections concerning postmodernism. First, one of the antinomies of postmodernism is that this new epoch (assuming for a moment the periodising implications of *postmodernism*) is precisely one in which nothing is new; what is "new" turns out to be a remix or mutation of what is available. Thus, inevitably, traditions from modernism, realism, romanticism and earlier, find themselves recycled with strange bedfellows. Second, this dialectical relationship with other cultural phases is related to the economic situation, in which the capitalism we have now (late capitalism) is but another phase within the larger capitalist project. In the same way that monopoly capitalism has made the transition to late capitalism, so modernism has passed into postmodernism. For these reasons it is appropriate for PMB to pass older practices through the fire of postmodernism.

There is one final element of this volume that is the most interesting of all - it is a collective project. However, in assessing the appeal of this feature, I want to move past the section where it is

expressly theorised (PMB:15-19). The discussion in these pages turns around the contrast between (modernist) individual scholarship and collective (postmodern) scholarship, and then it explores the benefits and drawbacks of the collective experience. I am not so sure that the individual/collective distinction can be so easily lined up with the modern/postmodern division. The difficulties become clearer if I introduce political and economic concerns at this point. To begin with the political: the distinction between individual and collective belongs more properly to the conflict between liberal and socialist intellectual traditions, the former providing formidable theoretical backing for the notion of the private, individual consumer, and the latter working hard to oppose this through the valorisation of the collective. Of course, in setting it up this way, the distinction falls victim to the inevitable favouring of one over the other: over against the overbearing weight of pressure on the individual, the "Bible and Culture Collective" seeks to shift the emphasis a little in the other direction (following in a well-established tradition in left publishing with its editorial and authorial collectives). From this perspective, it is then relatively easy to undermine the liberal focus on the individual by pointing out that such a notion relies upon the collective affirmation of the middle class.

The political dimensions soon push on to the economic, since the economic system in which the individual consumer is the favoured construct is capitalism. Now, since capitalism is not restricted to modernism or postmodernism alone, but includes the earlier cultural phases of romanticism and realism, this means that the notion of the individual goes back

beyond modernism into these earlier cultural periods. The idea of the collective then quite clearly belongs to, or at least it signals, the only alternative socio-economic system that we are able to think at this moment - socialism. This recasts the distinction between individual and collective away from the modern/postmodern relation to that between capitalism and socialism. Here I want to pick up an idea from Fredric Jameson, namely, that in our present political and economic climate socialism remains a utopian dream in all the best senses of the word, rather than a faded and lost cause, and that the very existence of collectives, with all their inherent problems, is a mark of this utopian wish fulfilment. This is for me the strongest message of PMB: in their very work as a collective, the "Bible and Culture Collective" embodies the utopian hope that postmodernism is not the last asphyxiating grasp of capitalism, but the beginning of its breakup. The nature of that breakup, generated out of the contradictions of the postmodern capitalism we know, may be traced by comparing the activity of the collective to the role of political pressure groups or micro-groups - as theorised by Chantal Moufe and Ernesto Laclau - who work in politics not according the older formulae of large political parties but as highly effective and mobile strike forces - the Greens, various feminist groups, gay and lesbian activists are but a few examples. These are the sort of politically and ethically astute groups that I am reminded of by this particular collective.

III

Nevertheless, I need not delude myself too much, for one of the main purposes of a review is to publicise the item in question. Taking my own desires and

wishes into account, the reader of this review will be able to assess the value of this book for his or her own use. PMB cannot but help be part of the book market: this is to my mind neither to be decried nor praised. What is interesting for me is how it is able to give voice to something beyond the present market system while being very much enmeshed within it (but then such contradictions are dear to my own intellectual tradition).

With this in mind, I can say that despite some of the shortfalls I noted in my discussion I like this book. I will use it as a text in my classes on biblical interpretation, and I will refer readers to the various chapters as useful introductions and critiques. I cannot pretend that I have mastery over all that is covered in the book, and so I appreciate what I have learned in the process of reading. The most significant contribution for me, at least, is to generate reflection not only on the methods dealt with but also on the nature of biblical studies, postmodernism and the collective endeavour.

Notes

1. I am interested in slightly different features of these chapters than those outlined in the "Introduction": "our chapters amount to discussions of what you can know and how you can know it (structuralism and poststructuralism); how you as a subject of knowledge are shaped (reader-response, rhetorical, and psychoanalytic criticisms): and who benefits ultimately from what you claim to know (ideological and feminist/womanist criticisms)" (PMB:4).

2. See also the negative review of PMB by Kermode.

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Potential and Opportunity: Critical

Issues for Australian Catholic Education into the 21st century

Helen Raduntz, 1995, Auslib Press, Blackwood South Australia. \$29

Religious education in Australia is emerging into an academic discipline that stands independently yet inextricably linked to the fields of religion and education. Just as the educational world is at a pivotal point in its development, so too is the Australian religious education

world. No longer willing to pick up and follow trends emerging from other parts of the world, Australian religious educators today are developing their own philosophy that suits the Australian situation. *Potential and opportunity* reflects this development in that it looks at religious education in and from the Australian context.

This book is a 'first' in a number of areas. It aims to broaden the dialogue regarding Catholic religious education and its role in effecting change toward a socially just world. The book brings together the research and practical experiences of religious educators from all states, from primary to tertiary levels, from a wide variety of themes including social justice, Aboriginal education, gender issues in education, multicultural issues in schools, critical theory, praxis and liberation theology.

The book is divided into five sections, each one explores a particular focus that reflects these issues: policy, curriculum issues, social justice and religious education, gender and religious education and critical teaching in religious education. Within each section the different authors have presented their own point of view and understanding of the issues. Each writer challenges the reader to critically reflect on why and how the Christian message can be presented to students in such a way that they can respond in a way that both helps to bring about the 'now in the not-yet' kingdom and at the same time develops Christian commitment to justice and faith.

What makes this book valuable is that it does not allow the reader to sit comfortably with current practice. It is intended to promote 'critical dialogue and transformative action'. It is not content with consideration of current trends but

throws down the challenge to prepare students (and their teachers) to act justly in the future world of rapid social and religious change.

Contributions to the book come from key Australian religious educators, including Basil Moore and Terry Lovat as well as University lecturers, teachers and Catholic Education Officers. Each person brings a personal viewpoint to issues that confront all educators. While some chapters look at issues that are concerned with local issues, such as Maryka Spurling Jones' critical evaluation of the Melbourne guidelines implementation, and Nigel Mitchell's chapter on teaching theology as religious education in a secondary school, other chapters consider issues that face all Australian Catholic schools, Margaret O'Toole's chapter on sexism in religious education and Valerie DeBrenni's possible approaches to the Catechism of the Catholic church by religious educators, for example.

Described by Helen Raduntz as 'a book which should sit as comfortably on a teacher's desk as in an academic library', *Potential and opportunity* leaves the reader open to new/other ways of thinking and doing religious education -the Australian way.

A History of Australian Churches.

Ian Breward, Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

1993. xii + 303pp. \$24.95 pb

Typical of antipodean cultural cringe is the cover of this Australian history. What does a huge full-colour icon of the Virgin and Jesus with a small inset black and white photo of a wooden rural church circa 1962 tell us about the history of Australian churches? It refers neither to the central sources of Australian Christianity nor to its essential urban reality in 1962. The back cover is no

more central to Australian Christianity but at least seems to be looking into the future as it portrays the ordination of an Aboriginal woman in a clearly Aboriginal Christian setting. This is not a good start for what is in fact a very solid institutional history of Australian churches.

However, by including the Orthodox, the bush and Aboriginals the cover does point to the major new contribution of this book; Ian Breward includes a wide range of Christian denominations in a comparative perspective, covers the development of Aboriginal and Islander Christianity (as well as their ongoing relationships with Christian Australia) and keeps the contribution of women to this history very much before the reader in appropriate ways. Catholic, Anglican and various Protestant strands are traced through from the first fleet to 1992 with the ordinations of the first Anglican women priests and the decision of Presbyterians to stop doing so. The coverage is balanced, albeit from a liberal Protestant point of view. Several maps and a smattering of interesting photos assist in telling this Australian story. The various groups are given fair and sensitive coverage, as are such movements as ecumenism, pentecostalism and charismatic revival. Reactions to and the effects of migration are discussed. However, to refer to the Dutch Reformed migrants as Presbyterians is inexcusable (p222).

It is a pity that the 1991 census figures came out about 3 months too late to be incorporated. Such data as are cited are largely handled well, aside from lumping those who claim to have no religion with those who refuse to answer the religious identification question in the census and devising a chart (p 235) which utterly

misrepresents Uniting Church growth from 1981 - 1986 as being from 0% to over 10% while it was from 4.9 to 7.6 and due entirely to the inclusion of all those who had called themselves Methodists who in previous censuses had been separately enumerated. Presbyterians are also dropped from the pie graphs representing religious affiliations (actually identifications) for each state in 1986 even though they do continue at sizeable percentages.

Breward avoids the pitfall of secularisation while describing sensitively the kinds of changes the churches have been through since World War II. His post-war history of the churches is an important contribution to the self-understanding of the churches at this time. The treatment of the impact of women in recent decades is limited to the ordination debate, omitting reference to their major contributions in liturgy, theology and biblical studies. However, as this is an institutional history, questions about the history of faith and belief in Australia are not touched. None the less, feminism is not given as careful coverage as the 'modernism and liberalism' debates in the late 19th century.

I recommend this book heartily to anyone wishing a satisfying history of Australian churches. Students will find it a considerable help in contextualising whatever theme or event they may be studying. Clergy and laity will find it a good way to gain depth and perspective on issues confronting the churches today. It is a good and informative read.

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Religion and Modernization in China: Proceedings of the Regional Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions held in Beijing, China, April 1992.
Dai Kangsheng, Zhang Xinying, Michael Pye, eds. Cambridge: Roots and Branches for the International Association for the History of Religions, 1995. pp.346.
ISBN 0 9525772 0 8.

The April 1992 regional conference of the IAHR in Beijing was the first such in Asia, and appropriately focused on the themes of 'Religion and Modernization' and 'Foreign Religions and Chinese Culture'. As with all such conference volumes, the contents vary enormously in scope and weight, and are testimony as much to the diversity of activities covered by the rubric 'history of religions' as to its commonality.

What is distinctive, however, is the introduction it provides to the orientation of religious studies in China. Some of the Chinese contributions are in a Marxist mode, most in a more international *religionswissenschaft* style. But what marks them all is a concern for religion as a source of cultural values, the main theme of recent Chinese writing about religion, and a reflection of the current spiritual crisis in China.

Kong Fan, Director of the Institute for the Study of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, puts it succinctly in his Preface: 'Since religion is both a historico-cultural phenomenon and a phenomenon of social life, its study helps to focus and develop excellent cultural traditions'. This is, of course, partly a justification for the study of religion in an overtly Marxist society - 'know thy enemy' - but partly also an acknowledgment of a role for religious studies in the development of what is

called in China 'socialist spiritual civilization'.

It is impossible to mention all 34 papers included, so I shall focus on just a few of special interest. First, however, I think some comment is required on the editing of the volume. Some of the contributions, Chinese and western, really required considerable working over. There may have been political and other considerations at work, but it does not do the reputation of IAHR any good to leave so many raw edges.

Some of the Western contributions were dated and perfunctory in approach to Chinese religions. One, at least of the Chinese papers, that of Fu Lean on 'The Issue of Modernization of Catholic theology' seems to have been based on retranslating, into English, Chinese translations of western documents. The results are bizarre. 'Revelation' is constantly confused with 'apocalyptic' (from confusion over *The Book of Revelation*?). The titles of books published in English are often given erroneously. Bernard Lonergan's *Collection* becomes his *Excellent Articles* - which they are but not under that title; and Schillebeeckx's book on the Second Session of Vatican II becomes *The Realistic Achievements of the Vatican Second Grand Duke* [sic] *Session*. I mean no disrespect to Mr. Fu whose paper I found stimulating and interesting; but his editors should have saved him, and themselves, from embarrassment.

The Marxist perspectives are, as one would expect, most evident in the treatment of the contemporary religious situation in China, and in general theoretical contributions. It is notable, however, especially in the final paper, Lü Daji's 'On the Nature of Religion', that it is a sophisticated not uncritical Marxism

that is operative. It is only occasionally, as in Huang Xinchuan's 'China's Religions and China's traditional Culture', where we are told that 18,000 years ago Upper Cave man in China 'worshipped soul with nature' that the old Marxist assumptions predominate over the evidence.

The papers on modernisation and secularisation cover fairly familiar ground but to some extent the Chinese and Western participants are talking past each other. For the Europeans, the question is an interesting theoretical problem; for the Chinese much more existential and urgent. Christian Jochim gives a nice overview of the renewed debate in China over the last decade on Confucianism and modernization, but strangely omits any mention of Tu Weiming's work. Zwi Weblosky revisits Weber's theses on China in typically provocative fashion.

Some of the most useful contributions are on specific China-related topics. I found especially useful Alan Hunter's analysis of recent Chinese work on motives for conversion to Christianity in the post-Mao era; Kristofer Schipper's 'Liturgical Structures of Ancient Peking' which trenchantly repeats his familiar arguments about the misidentification of Taoism as 'popular religion'; and Paul Badham's analysis of John Hick's theoretical pilgrim's progress.

Several of the comparative papers grapple with the issue of Western paradigms for Chinese religion. Much is made of the absence of a concept of 'religion' in Chinese language prior to the modern period, but, of course, the same is true of Europe. But what seemed absent from most contributions - Chinese and Western - was the experiential, spiritual dimension of Chinese religion, and, in my view, it is here that common ground is to

be found rather than in what the ancient Chinese called *geyi*, 'matching concepts'. It is meetings such as this that may ultimately break through the conceptual barriers, or rather, enable all to see that this is indeed all they are.

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**Women of Spirit: Contemporary
Religious Leaders in Australia**

Deborah Selway. Melbourne: Longman,
1995. pp. xiii, 142.

Selway presents the stories of seven women from six different traditions whom she identifies as religious leaders in the Australian context. It is an important book because it adds to our growing store of Australian women's religious stories. The women chosen by Selway to tell their stories are Hope Neill (Aboriginal spirituality), Adrienne Howley (Buddhism), Angela Solling (Christianity: Anglican), Pat Quinn (Christianity: Roman Catholic), Swami Sarasvati (Hinduism), Silma Ihram (Islam), and Betsy Torop (Judaism).

The aim of the book, Selway writes, is not to place these seven women on a pedestal but to present them in their "human-ness" and personal struggle for success and liberation, and thereby "to touch others' lives, to encourage other women to reclaim their spiritual dignity, to have faith in themselves and in their respective religious paths..." (xiii). "Religious leadership" is not defined by Selway: the women are simply described as "women of spirit". Although Selway tells us of some of the misgivings she had as to whether certain women would be suitable for her study, she does not actually say how she came to consider them

in the first place as leaders, except that she was looking for role models.

That the women are leaders is clear, but I would have difficulty in identifying every woman represented as a religious leader, except in the very broadest sense. Silma Ihram, for example, is certainly an educational leader in her efforts on behalf of Islamic education in Australia, but she quite clearly considers the initiative and direction of religious leadership in her community to belong to the male believers. Thus she is a religious leader only in so far as one can say that Islamic belief pervades every aspect of Islamic life, including education.

Selway gives a short introduction to each person and includes her own first meetings with them and her own experience of the interview process. The woman's story follows, sometimes told through Selway, sometimes in the woman's own words. The balance between Selway's mediation and the woman's own voice is generally good. It was only in the case of Hope Neill that I felt the woman's voice was not sufficiently heard.

The inclusion of two women from the Christian tradition seems perfectly reasonable from the point of view of balance when we consider the majority of Christian believers in Australia. However, what is not so easy to understand is why Selway chose Anglican (and not even the evangelical end of the Anglican spectrum) and Catholic rather than a representative from the larger group of Uniting Church, and why she chose two women who live a celibate community lifestyle within a religious order. This seems a very limited view of women's religious leadership within the Christian community in Australia.

The women's stories capture a broad range of experience from the intensely personal experiences of solitude of the Buddhist to the very social/public experiences of the Jewish rabbi. There is a

rich variety to the individual maps of the life journey/spiritual journey which these women lay before the reader, and numerous and unexpected twists in the trails they have followed. One of the most fascinating to me was Silma Ihram's move from Christian fundamentalism to Islamic fundamentalism via a spiritual experience within a Sufi gathering!

Selway obviously went to her interviews with some stock questions and these are rather easy to identify within each section. Differences of personality and religious adherence make the answers to the question "Is there a difference between feminine and masculine spirituality?" very interesting, the more "patriarchally" minded Ihram opting for a more positive view of men's religious experience than women's ("...I tend to find that there are more males that are spiritually aware than there are females. They have a deeper awareness...", p. 118); the less demonstrative/openly emotional Torop disagreeing that women tend to have a more emotional relationship with God (p. 136). Both of these were minority views in the overall context of the other stories.

Sometimes Selway finds that her questions are not answered in a way she expects. There seems to have been an assumption from Selway that all the women would have some story of mystical experience to relate, and she is brought up short by Torop telling her that she is "not very mystically inclined" (p. 125). The questions not answered are interesting as well. Pat Quinn's option not to comment publicly on the issue of women's ordination within her particular tradition is itself telling and raises questions of a woman's need for prudence within the limitations of the authority structures of the tradition even when the woman is a leader herself and has achieved a certain degree of personal liberation.

After reading the statements in the foreword by Patricia Brennan about the women in the book and noting what titles were appended to her name (Convenor of the Australian Feminist Theology Foundation; Founding President of the Movement for the Ordination of Women), I was unprepared for the stories from women who believed in patriarchy and its "equal but different" theory. This is essentially a woman's book, not a feminist book, and there is no critique of any of the women's positions by the author. In fact I wonder why the author chose Brennan to write the foreword, and further, I wonder why she chose to single out statements in her own introduction which emphasised feminist issues which were not applicable to all her subjects: "Most of the women in this book seem to have reclaimed the wholeness of their feminist spiritual selves... Some have stood firm against patriarchal influence... [they want] to walk hand in hand with all people and thus restore the balance of the sexes, the balance of humanity." (xiii)

A summary of major issues to arise or some comment in general about the women's stories would have been good at the conclusion of the book. I would like to see some comparison, for example, of the effect on the women of a close or distant relationship to the mainstream tradition or of a life as an officially recognised religious professional. Torop, for example, speaks of herself becoming more conservative as she gets older (p. 137), and the context of her increasing conservatism is her concern for the life of her Jewish community which takes precedence over the life of the individual member and his/her particular spirituality.

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