Book Reviews

Barthes's Mark: A Review of *Jesus Framed*

Aichele, George. *Jesus Framed.* Biblical Limits. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. Pp. x + 200. Bibliography and Indices.

In 1981 the English translation of Fernando Belo's *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* appeared. I remember first encountering this book in a course on political and liberation theologies in 1986 for the Bachelor of Divinity that was then taught at the University of Sydney. (The Divinity School has since closed down, after little more than fifty years of teaching, and folded into the School of Studies in Religion.) For those of us doing the Bachelor of Divinity at Sydney University as part of our training for the Christian ministry, Belo's book had the mixed appeal of Rudolph Otto's *mysterium tremendum*: it was both enticing in its effort to read a biblical text with Marx and Barthes as methodological informants (so different from the staple of either evangelical biblical scholarship or historical criticism), and frightening because with its materialist perspective it left little room for a personal faith. In short, it provided virtually nothing in the way of fodder for the weekly sermon students like myself were compelled to produce in order to keep body and soul together.

Now, little more than a decade later, with that faith in need of massive blood transfusions and the waning of a hope for anything progressive within the Church, Belo's book makes an awful lot of sense. But this is because George Aichele's *Jesus Framed* takes Belo's project well beyond what Belo himself was able to do. By "project" I refer to the recovery and transformation of the work of Roland Barthes for biblical interpretation. One of the many attractive dimensions of Aichele's book is the way it breathes the gentle scandal of Barthes's work, his fundamental challenge communicated in the calm and carefully argued sentences.

The basic assumption is that the gospel of Mark may be read as a postmodern piece of literature, that it is both open to and generates the uncertain, inconclusive readings that are sometimes termed "deconstructive" or "deconstructionist." Aichele prefers postmodern: "postmodern characteristics appear at many points in the gospel of Mark" (38). This means that Aichele is less interested in periodising perceptions of postmodernism, arguing that postmodernist elements appear well before postmodernism itself arrives as a dominant economic and cultural presence (a periodising approach that allows for emergent and residual elements may be able to deal with this). But Aichele follows Lyotard in designating postmodernism as that which brings out the deepest dimension of modernism — the ability to locate what cannot be represented within representation itself.

Pursuing this line, Aichele makes a number of forays in Mark's gospel in enigmatically titled chapters. The distinction in Mark 4:33-34 between those who

are inside and outside is fruitfully attached to Barthes distinction between connotation (insiders) and denotation (outsiders). Aichele reads from the outside, "as a thief, a violent, barbaric and illegitimate reader" (3; see also 141-145). But the outside is also the materiality of the text. Aichele's interest is in the very stuff of the text, its material substance, "the physical letter, the hule of the written word" (127). This stuff is the text. Aichele argues for a "materialist" exegesis of the Bible, one that is interested in the marks on the page, marks that precede writing. Aichele's slogan is taken from Derrida: "there will never be ... any theology of the Text" (quoted on p.121).

I have in fact taken these last points from the chapter "Reading Beyond Meaning," which is to me the lynch pin of the book. Here Aichele pursues the theoretical implications of the preceding chapters - Jesus Framed, Talitha Cum, Desire for an End, The Text Reads Itself, and Jesus's Frankness - particularly in the way they *resist* meaning. Aichele challenges the traditional, essentialist understanding of the "text" as a spiritual entity, as ideologically natural. The traditional text is constituted by three "owners" - reader, author and copyright holder - and meaning is found "in" the text. In order to wrestle with this "natural" notion of the text Aichele invokes the examples of Irnerio, who has taught himself how not to read in Italo Calvino's *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*, of the "literal" translation called for by Walter Benjamin and of Fernando Belo's "materialist" reading. And it is here that Aichele's work brings out the logic of Belo's own work by following the very materiality of the text, "the physical, concrete aspects of texts" (141). This chapter is the best in a very fine book, one that I first read on the electronic journal *Postmodern Culture* and one that I have read a few times since. It is the sort of chapter that will usefully unsettle any class whose task is that of interpretation/exegesis.

Yet what is interesting in the argument for a materialist reading, a reading of the "marks on the surface of a page" (144), is the way it echoes another, related dimension of materialism. Aichele touches on this with his recognition of Belo's Marxist approach that challenges his own white, male, North American position of privilege, but I want to suggest that the full range of meaning of "materialist" reading only comes out with Marx's historical and dialectical materialism, with the consideration not only of the physical materiality of the text itself, but also with the social and economic factors in its production and consumption.

I have inevitably focused on the part of this text that appeals to me most and that makes me think hardest. The other parts are also rich in issues for postmodern interpretation: "Jesus Framed" teases out the interpretive ambiguity of the framing of Jesus and Mark's text; "Desire for an End" plays on the very postmodern incompleteness of Mark (who most certainly had read Derrida, Foucault and Barthes); "Talitha Cum" works on the "rustling" relation between transliteration and translation; "The Text Reads Itself" reflects on the continuing and irresolvable question of signifier and signified, as well as the task of commentary; and "Jesus's Frankness" (which I first heard in San Francisco in 1992) turns on the issue of

denotation and connotation in the light of the word "frank" itself.

The final chapter, "Text, Intertext, Ideology" - a theoretical partner to the one that precedes it - performs the useful task of reflecting on what ideology might mean. The word is used so loosely in much theoretical discussion these days that Aichele's act of definition is a necessity. While working out the implications of his claim that "ideology is intertext" Aichele also indicates the sorts of political commitment ideological criticism bears in its very structure. As the chapter proceeds there is a gradual turn to that which always warms my own heart, namely a conflictual model of ideological criticism (my Marxist predilections come to the fore here). Aichele speaks of the counter-reader, the reader from outside as "a poet, a cheat, a saboteur" (163). Yet, at the same time he feels that his position as privileged in terms of gender, social class, economics and race blocks his ability to act as such a saboteur. "What then shall I do? My desire is nothing less than self- destructive, and my reading will end only in my own obliteration" (165). At the risk of being misunderstood (but is that not desirable in itself?) I would argue that the proper role of any literary or cultural (let alone biblical) critic is that of the terrorist, one who threatens in the very word itself, let alone in any act, the structures of privilege Aichele decries.

Aichele closes with some excremental reflections: I don't mean that his work is shit, but that the final discussion is of the uncomfortable remainder that is excrement. The material body, the material text is all that remains: the text of Mark with its blots and lines on pages, or alterations in an electromagnetic field, and the body of Jesus. Like bodily evacuation, they become sanitary problems rather than deep and meaningful entities, yet the tendency always, with both Mark and Jesus, has been to seek meaning and it is this search that is for Aichele most suspect ideologically.

Works cited

Belo, Fernando. 1981 *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark.* Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

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Many Religions, All Australian
Religious Settlement, Identity and Cultural Diversity
Gary D Bouma (Ed), Christian Research Association, Kew, Victoria.
ISBN 1 875223 14 2.

"Religion is among the cultural baggage brought to Australia by immigrants" (56) encapsulates it. Until the late 40's, when those waves of post-war newcomers began, this 'cultural baggage' had been predominantly Catholic, Anglican or 'OPD' (other Protestant denominations). In my teens boys were called Pat and Mick, John and George; today we have Thinh and Giovanni, Abdul and Panaghiotis - and their

faiths.

In the opening chapter Trevor Batrouney gives a succinct overview of the arrival and settlement of major religious communities from 1788 to the present, and sums up "Australia's multicultural plurality extends to religious plurality ... As a result of migration Australia has become a nation of many religions; has become religiously plural." (9)

Bouma, who contributes about one-third including editorial links between chapters, provides the central corpus of theory and analyses steps and stages in the complex reciprocity between migrant and receiving people. "Settlement has become understood as a mutual process involving adaptions made by both migrant and by the society and and culture which are receiving the migrant." (54-55).

Philip Hughes, indefatigable collector of statistics, gives the current religious profile of Australia, highlighting diversity both between and within religious communities. To illustrate, "Immigration has brought an enormous diversity of language and custom into the Catholic church. Twenty-three percent speak a language other than English at home ... In the Archdiocese of Melbourne, for example, 22000 people attend masses celebrated in a total of 29 languages apart from English." (44)

Unfortunately, bodies which are better referred to as 'new religious movements' are lumped by the ABC's Rachel Kohn as 'Cults and the New Age', reflecting her nervousness about them. Bouma cannot resist exercising his editor's perogative. "Most of the charges laid against these groups which Kohn considers dangerous would apply equally well to mainstream religious groups." (147) Tut, Tut, Gary! And are you quite sure you're "unconvinced that there exist clear criteria for the identification of dangerous religious groups"? (148)

Juliet Sheen, doughty warrior for religious liberty and other human rights, warns against a culture of intolerance "nurtured by some ideologies, such as extreme right-wing conservatism which, especially in rural districts, supports League of Rights campaigns for nationalism that are bolstered by concepts of racial purity and anti-Semitism." (177) She reserves her criticism of wayward and dangerous religion for the big ones, who have been lately tried and found wanting. "Credibility and respect for a religious institution are undermined by the failure of an institution to be self-critical, to be prompt and fair in investigating and resolving grievances ..." (179)

Bouma illustrates with interesting 'case' studies, but the best comes from his student Fatheena Mubarak. Her treatment of "Muslim women and religious identification: women and the veil" should be mandatory for those uniformed or misinformed who stereotype Muslim women as meek and downtrodden. For not a few Muslim women, wearing the hijab is a proud act of public witness in a society perceived as corrosive of Islamic piety and morality. "Some respondents even claimed that had they remained in their countries of origin, they may never have had the desire to wear the hijab." (128)

Two concluding chapters from John Baldock, former Secretary General of World Conference on Religion and Peace (Aust) reflect a well-informed and sagacious

overview of religious diversity and its difficulties, and issue a strong plea that government and bureaucracy be better informed. He finds "Governments are enormously hesitant about becoming involved in a general approach to promote religious tolerance and understanding. There is a basic desire to stay aloof from such issues in case they should be accused of favouring one group or disadvantaging another." (203)

Better proof-reading would have improved the end product. I counted 58 wrong words, stray words left in or out, typos, spelling errors and non-words. There are some clangers, like Kohn's misspelled 'Ayre's Rock' and Hughes' 'Armenian Baptists — which should read 'Arminian'. Also troublesome is some of the prose, suggestive of talking scripts or even of dictation later transcribed. More work could have been done to iron out some convoluted sentences, tidy the punctuation and bring about a little more stylistic consistency. After all, the book is not a collection of papers, but ostensibly a work put together by a team.

Many Religions, All Australian is for leaders of religious communities, teachers of social studies at secondary level, and public servants whose work reminds them daily of the 'mosaic' Australia has become. That they are prone to get it wrong is brough out in Sheen's documenting of the Family's families being taken into protective care, and the ongoing efforts to achieve compensation. On the same issue, Baldock suggests we "imagine the community reaction and the effect on community relations if the Department of Health and Community Services had acted in a similar way against a Jewish group." (188)

His point, of course, is that this would not have happened. It would not have happened for the reason that we are yet to be totally even-handed in our treatment of all religious communities. There is plenty of work still to be done. And that is why we need books like this one.

John Bodycomb

Sanskrit manual.

A Quick-reference guide to the Phonology and Grammar of Classical Sanskrit

Roderick S Bucknell. Motilal Banarsidass Publishing, Delhi. 1996. pp xv, 256

The first comment that should be made about this book is that it is not a new grammar of Sanskrit. Enough grammars exist already. The second point of comment is the book's success is already apparent due to the reprinting of this first edition of 1994.

The purpose of the book " is to present, mainly in the form of easily read tables, essential reference information such as the rules of sandhi, the declensional and conjugational paradigms, and the principal parts of major verbs". This is done by the inclusion of thirty tables which offer us all of the major Sanskrit declensional classes, verbal classes in all their tenses, moods and voices and charts summarising the principal phonological changes which come into play when, for a variety of

reasons, particular sounds are brought into contact with other sounds. All modern grammars of Sanskrit contain all of these features, except for the list of verb stems (Table 29), verb endings (Table 29) and noun endings (Table 30). So in what sense does Bucknell's Manual differ from such well known grammars as MacDonnell's, Gonda's, both of which are intended for students, and those of Goldman and Aklujkar, both designed for a clear pedagogical function in focusing upon spoken Sanskrit and using traditional grammatical categories in their teaching? To begin with, Bucknell's book is much more comprehensive in its offering of morphological forms. The eighteen pages of noun declensions, where nouns are given in their entirety and not just in the nominative and accusative, give a comprehensive coverage of all the major nominative groups. As such they will provide a very valuable aid to beginning students who have not yet mastered these declensions yet who need to begin reading Sanskrit texts. Similarly is its treatment of verbal conjugations which are more comprehensive than any I have ever seen. In the case of the latter it will have as a competitor W D Whitney's, *The Roots, Verb-forms and Primary Derivatives of the Sanskrit Language* and a more recent two volume work published in madras in the late sixties and listing derivatives of verb stems. The latter work is unobtainable outside India and the former, whilst used by generations of Sanskrit students, lacks the full listing of paradigms as found in Bucknell and does not contain the explanatory material about verbal conjugation found on pp 34-65.

Where it is unique is in its treatment of verbs by focusing on their endings and conjugational stems rather than just on roots and stems as is the practice in indigenous and other European grammars. In this respect Table 28 is very comprehensive in that it includes verb stems as they will appear *actually in use* and not just artificially in a grammar. Accordingly, Bucknell lists as stems all of the imperfect and aorist forms as well as the reduplicated forms of verbs. These can never take the place of learning how these forms are created from the raw roots, yet it will allow beginning students easily to locate a particular form which they would not be able to locate in a dictionary or a grammar. Table 29 is a complement to this. For both of these full instructions on their use are needed and these are provided with singular clarity on pp 68-69.

Of criticisms, I have few. I would ask, though, why on Table 15, which gives the conjugation of the verb *nayati*, the causative is left out? One can understand why the intensive and the desiderative might be left out, but the causative is very common in actual use. And, on Table 2 the right hand column would be easier for students to use if the heading "following word initial consonants" were placed above it.

In my edition of the book the first sixteen pages are printed in the wrong order when compared with the first edition of the book. Nonetheless, they are all there.

In brief this is a valuable edition to the available aids for the teaching of Sanskrit. Dr Bucknell is to be congratulated on producing such a book derived from direct experience of teaching the language.

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A Community of Exiles: Exploring Australian spirituality
Michael Goonan. 1997. St Paul Publications, Strathfield. $14.95

Michael Goonan, a priest of the Society of St Paul, has used his time of study in America to look at the human experience of 'exile' as the focus for discussion about the uniquely Australian spiritual response to the universal search for God, for community and for home.

The concept of exile is built up through the pattern woven from three different strands - the biblical experience of the Hebrew Scriptures, the treatment of exile in two Australian novels by Tim Winton and Thomas Keneally and the personal reflection of Goonan about his life and that of Australians generally.

The book begins with the Hebrew experience of living the Diaspora and the way the Jewish people responded to their situation as exiles. Questions such as 'Have we been abandoned by God?' and "How do we find God in this situation?' are looked at through the stories of Esther and Tobit in particular. Both had to grapple with a life that was far removed from their traditional experience and to find ways of relating to a God who was both absent and different at the same time. Goonan examines the particular way that each responds to life situations at a spiritual and physical level. He concludes by drawing up a 'spirituality of exile', whereby the survival of the Jewish people became dependent upon the recognition that God is found in the community. For the continuing existence of the Jews in exile, the ultimate good is found in the transcendence of self for good of the community. The time of exile can become a time for purification and a new understanding of the community's relationship with God. He goes on to identify other possibilities for growth out of exile. Through the *marginalisation* of being separated from the traditional structures of support , *inner personal resources* are developed to extent that would be unthought of otherwise. The experience of *remembering* the past and *anticipating* the future return becomes the opportunity for *celebrating survival* in the present moment. (pp 46-49)

The next strand of the pattern comes from the modern experience of exile - living in Australia. Goonan asks the same questions of the Australian experience as he did for the Jewish people and uses *Cloudstreet* by Tim Winton and *Woman of the Inner Sea* by Thomas Keneally to find his answers. Using the main characters of the two novels, Goonan builds up a realistic picture of what it means to be an alien in a new continent that is harsh, unwelcoming and somehow cut off from the God of 'home'. By telling the stories of those exiled in Australia, Goonan builds up a parallel pattern to that of the Jewish people. However, he identifies those differences that make an Australian response to exile unique. Unlike the Jewish people, Goonan argues, Australians have found it difficult to build community. 'It is a place of pain and guilt and sin. It is very difficult to remain within it.' (p108). He reflects that Australians have tended to run away from their own community, travelling overseas in order to 'find themselves'. But the time away from the place that seems to be a

place of exile produces the ultimate realisation that it is only through moving back to Australia that healing and new understanding of our ourselves in relation to others can take place. He uses the experiences of the characters in the novels and his own story of exile, the third strand, to develop the thesis that the unique Australian experience is indeed an opportunity for a growth in relationship with each other and with God in order to make this alien continent 'home'. He concludes his reflection with the words of the Aboriginal, the bearer of the wisdom of more than forty thousand years, in *Cloudstreet,* "You've got a home to go to. Go there".

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Talk of the Devil: Repressed Memory and the Ritual Abuse Witch-Hunt
Richard Guilliatt, The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 1996.

Though a range of ideas and influences which have historically distant origins contributed to its development, the genesis of the 'satanism scare' can be dated quite precisely to 1980. In that year a spurious tale of satanic child abuse was published with the title *Michelle Remembers*. Also in 1980 the highly influential third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-III) of the American Psychiatric Association was published containing two new diagnostic labels which were to propel the 'discovery' of thousands of 'victims' of bizarre forms of ritual child abuse: these were Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Influenced by the propaganda of a small group of activists, there now followed a remarkable series of allegations and investigations of satanic ritual abuse (SRA), beginning in the United States in 1983 with the McMartin preschool case. In 1986 the same activists exported the scenario to Australia, and it arrived in Britain shortly afterwards. Its arrival in New Zealand happened later still, in 1990.

An interesting feature of the international spread of SRA is the different impact it made in the societies to which it was conveyed. In the United States its most significant target was childcare facilities, while in Britain - as La Fontaine has demonstrated - it was the marginal poor who were demonised. The import of SRA to New Zealand came direct from the States, and once again childcare facilities were the target. By contrast, a more substantial focus of Australian claims has been on adult MPD and dissociation (MPD is labelled Dissociative Identity Disorder in the latest DSM), often linked to claims of satanic incest in childhood.

Any attempt to understand the dissemination of the SRA scenario is confronted at the outset two major obstacles. First, some grasp of psychotherapy and psychology - and especially the ongoing debate about the nature of memory - is essential. The area is replete with dogmatic and sometimes outrageous claims about the validity of 'recovered' memories, and their status requires critical evaluation. Secondly, it is essential to trace the routes by which particular ideas have travelled, the networks of individuals and organisations (often publicly funded) which have facilitated their

spread, and the literature which they have produced. This can be extremely difficult, given the secretive and sect-like nature of a number of these groups.

Yet paradoxically, the SRA phenomenon has been particularly well researched by investigative journalists so that our understanding of it is much fuller than it was five years ago. In the United States, Debbie Nathan has produced a comprehensive account of its origin and spread; in Britain, Rosie Waterhouse has been a constant source of insight; and Richard Guilliatt's painstakingly researched account of its Australian manifestation can be placed alongside these excellent examples of journalism.

His book looks at a number of repressed memory or ritual abuse prosecutions in Australia and shows how the SRA scenario was readily adopted by a surprising number of police, psychiatrists, and social workers. He then traces in some depth the course of the 1994 incest trial in Bunbury, Western Australia. The court narratives are set firmly against a well-researched background which traces the arrival of the scenario in Australia and the organizations and personalities involved in its propagation. The apocalyptic four who brought SRA to Australia, specifically to the Sixth International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect in 1986, are now more publicly known and their credentials have been critically scrutinised by Debbie Nathan in *Satan's Silence* as well as in the present book. All four - Roland Summit, Kee MacFarlane, Astrid Heger, and David Finkelhor - were closely involved in the unsuccessful prosecution of the McMartin preschool staff, and their congress accounts of the procedures adopted in that case seem to have provided a model for the 'Mr Bubbles' case in Sydney less than two years later.

The account then highlights the importance of the adult 'survivor' movement in proliferating the SRA scenario and in precipitating further prosecutions. Aiding the process were organizations such as Dympna House and therapy centres run by Christian organizations, at which point Guilliatt provides appropriate critical commentary on the concept of repressed and recovered memory. There are even moments of grim humour in this otherwise unremitting catalogue of psychozealotry, as for instance:

In the Dympna House counselling program, women who have 'stories' of abuse are encouraged to invent 'new stories' in order to empower themselves. The philosophy behind this program is explained in a 174-page guide called *Discoveries* which is literally sprinkled with deconstructionist jargon, and which contains a helpful glossary explaining words such as 'discourse' and 'post-structuralism' to sexual assault victims who have not read Michel Foucault.

In this powerful book Guilliatt has drawn together the many strands which combined to produce the satanic panic and its grotesque accompaniments. He does so articulately, explaining concepts, demonstrating how they relate to some other aspect of his account, and establishing a distinct chronology. The book is eminently readable - I finished it in one session - and it covers its terrain comprehensively; indeed, its most lasting impression is of having completed a particularly intricate jigsaw and discerned an image which had hitherto been confused and fragmented.

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The New Age Movement:
The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity
Paul Heelas, Blackwell, Oxford, 1996.
ISBN 0-631-19331-6 HB, ISBN 0-631-19332-4 PB

Heelas sets out in this book to challenge the initial impression of the New Age Movement as 'an eclectic hotch-potch of beliefs, practices and ways of life'. He does this initially by collapsing the variety of expressions of the New Age into the generic concept 'Self-spirituality', emphasising that a common thread is the elevation of the Self to the level of the sacred (in much the form that Durkheim predicted). At this point he quotes Shirley MacLaine's aphorism that 'Everyone is God. Everyone'. The book is then structured into three sections: Portrayal; Appeal; and Effectiveness.

In Portrayal he introduces some basic assumptions of constituent parts of the movement while emphasizing significant variations on the linking theme of Self-spirituality. Of particular value is his account of the movement's *lingua franca*: under such motifs as 'Your lives do not work'; 'You are Gods and Goddesses in exile'; 'Let go/ drop it', and 'I am my own authority' he encapsulates some of the central themes within the New Age. Each is illustrated with appropriate quotations from the literature of the movement. There is an interesting reworking of the familiar typology - world-rejecting/ world-affirming/ world accommodating - around the experience which participants in the movement seek. Some seek 'the best of the inner world', some 'the best of the outer world' and some 'the best of both worlds'.

There is also an historical portrayal of the movement, which Heelas prefaces with the observation that 'the New Age - so to speak - has been around for a very long time indeed'. Even so, he chooses to limit his treatment to the past hundred years (from *fin de siecle* to *fin de siecle*), which truncates attractive possibilities such as a comparison with the English Civil War period, to which David Martin has drawn attention. The key players in this account are Blavatsky, Jung, and Gurdjieff, followed by the counter-culture and Eastern imports of the 1960s. In assessing the significance of the movement, there is focus on the decline of the counter-culture - now perpetuated principally by 'Travellers' - and on the New Age's routinisation and absorption into mainstream culture, so that its values are able to tune into some of the central assumptions of modernity. It is in the analysis of entrepreneurial New Ageism that the book offers some of its most telling insights.

In accounting for the appeal of the movement, a number of familiar interpretations are revisited - liberation from 'the iron cage'; mistrust of materialism; the fragilities of the technological age; and the privatisation of the self. The possibility that the New Age represents a 'spirituality for "baby boomers"' is one appealing insight, which Heelas highlights as part of the detraditionalisation of culture. Combined with an internalisation of authority there is an enhanced belief in the 'utilitarian self', a belief that something powerful **and useful** lies within the self.

An assessment of the effectiveness of the New Age movement suggests that

among participants there is change with regard to self-understanding and experience. At this point Heelas might have incorporated some of Hochschild's insights on the appeal of choreographed spontaneity - what he earlier refers to as a 'spiritual discipline' - to those who have a sense of distorted authenticity in their personal lives. The role of therapeutic groups in providing narratives or 'scripts' for those who feel that their lives are not working is a further avenue which might creatively have been explored. One of the features of New Age beliefs is the blurring of the distinction between historical and narrative truth, even the denial of historical truth in a ceaseless attempt to 'rewrite the soul'. While some seekers may find in their new scripts a source of empowerment, others have found themselves drawn into a narrative of Gothic horror. Thus the drama of victimhood deserves a rather more prominent place in an account of the New Age, as is hinted at by a quote from Arianna Stassinopoulos who speaks of 'the melodrama which goes on in many of our heads most of the time, the fear, anxiety, guilt and recrimination; the burden of the past which continues to dominate our present responses, and produces exaggerated or inappropriate reactions to current circumstances'.

In a concluding chapter the question, What of the future? is posed. Here Heelas anticipates the growth of a 'structured Self-ethic' - simultaneously noting the contradiction inherent in an ethic which teaches the sovereignty of the Self while marrying it to some external source of authority. His hunch is that the New Age will continue to recruit younger members and hence has a promising future, though the possibility that it could be undermined by hedonistic consumerism is always present.

This is a detailed and broadly positive account of the New Age movement which draws particular attention to its ideological links with aspects of modernity. In the process it identifies the genealogy of ideas which comprise it and the points of appeal it has for participants. Its presentation is clear and jargon-free and its structure is well signposted. Not only will the book find a prominent place in the religious literature, but it ought also to find a congenial home in Management bookshops among the self-transformation videos and the manuals on how to become a creative or black-belt manager.

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The Passionate Intellect: Dorothy L. Sayers' Encounter with Dante
Barbara Reynolds. Kent State University Press,
Kent, Ohio, and London, UK, 1989.

This book is much more than a lively and moving portrait of a fascinating personality. It uses that portrait to open up an issue which badly needs discussion, in religious studies, namely the moral and religious importance of intellect.

Western society is still living, at the end of the twentieth century, under the oppressive shadow created by Freudian debunking of intellect at the beginning. That debunking arose from psychological insight into the terrifying capacity of intellectual

structures to provide a kind of emotional satisfaction in their own right irrespective of any relationship to reality outside of themselves, which allows people to adopt them as a kind of larger identity, in defence of which all kinds of destructive actions can be committed, from self-repression to holy war against unbelievers. And Freud himself, for all his many faults, never threw out the baby of intellect as such with the bathwater made dirty by his analyses of human rationalisations; indeed it was precisely on the quiet, persistent voice of reason that he pinned what little hope he had for the future of civilisation.

But on this topic, as indeed on many others, it was the negative rather than the positive views of Freud which overtook Western culture, and the belittling of intellect continued even in the large sections of society which in the second half of our century came to repudiate Freud for his narrow materialism, his male chauvinism and his overemphasis on sexuality in psychology. For example, in the many modern "human potential" movements which take pride in restoring the soul to psychology and rediscovering life's religious dimension, it is almost an article of faith that "understanding is the booby-prize", while in the huge upsurge of popular interest in mystical ideas, intellect is almost always treated as the great barrier to enlightenment. In contemporary protests against the tyranny of "patriarchal culture", and efforts to get a greater balance of "feminine values", rationality is very commonly linked with violence and indifference to nature.

The time is long overdue for a clearing of the air in which there is recognition not just of the **value** of intellect, but also of the fact that it can itself be a vehicle for love and self-transcendence - and it is particularly good to have this task undertaken by a woman, using the life of another woman intellectual to argue the point. If I have a minor quarrel with this book, it is that Barbara Reynolds limits her potential readership unnecessarily by assuming that it can't include folk not already acquainted with Sayers through her detective fiction: her case would have gained a good deal, in my opinion, if she'd given at least half a chapter at the start to that small masterpiece of *defacto* feminist literature, Dorothy's own favourite novel, *Gaudy Night* (1935), instead of assuming that her readers will already know about its fighting statement of intellectual passion as a virtue.

This would have made an admirable introduction to Reynolds' main theme, for what she does in this book is precisely what Sayers could only hint at within the confines of her novel, namely, to **display** the virtue of passionate intellect by showing it actually at work *in extenso* in the life of this remarkable woman scholar who undertook to bring Dante to life for modern English readers. (Sayers' astonishing success in that enterprise - which Reynolds herself had to complete when Sayers died suddenly in 1957 - can be reckoned by the fact that the *Divine Comedy* has had more English-speaking readers in these last decades of our century than in all preceding centuries put together.) Not least of the significant points to emerge from this treatment, which Dorothy herself never quite managed to put across in describing any of her Oxford dons in *Gaudy Night*, is the sheer life-energy of intellect in full

cry. Reynolds describes Dorothy's "Chestertonian gusto for life," which for both Sayers and Chesterton included the life of intellect itself, as well as the incidental enjoyment of good food, wine, humour and company.

Reynolds introduces the note of Dorothy's exuberant enjoyment of Dante right at the start of her story, from the moment in 1943 when she read Charles Williams' *The Figure of Beatrice (1943),*" not because it was about Dante but because it was by Charles Williams". Williams was already something of an intellectual hero to her because he had formulated what was to become one of her great theological themes - the notion of a **positive** Christian mysticism wherein the soul finds its way to God through affirming the divine image and likeness in nature and humanity, rather than denying them in the name of God's transcendent otherness, as in the classic *via negativa*. In *The Figure of Beatrice* he analyses Dante's work as the supreme expression of this *via positiva* in European literature, and Dorothy was so captivated that she was impelled to plunge into reading Dante himself in the original - while waiting out the world's first guided missile attacks (Hitlers V1 and V2 rockets, known by the British as "doodle-bugs") in the air-raid shelter of her home in Essex.

The outcome was a flood of letters to Williams in which intellectual delight in Dante's ideas is matched by enthusiasm for his style: she'd only known **about** Dante before, she says, and never realised from English renderings that he wasn't at all Miltonically solemn, but "just like someone sitting there and telling you a story". Williams responded to her enthusiasm, and the die was cast: it was only months later that she sent him her own attempt at an English translation of the first five cantos of the *Inferno*, in which she tried to do a new kind of justice to what Dante had been about, both as a poet and as a religious thinker. Their exchanges make fascinating reading (typically, she never manages to draw him out on the question of how far Dante's "Beatrician experience" might have been compatible, for Dante himself, with any kind of real sexual involvement), and they quickly led to thoughts of a joint publication. In the event, Williams' untimely death very shortly after the war in Japan was brought to its climactic end, meant that Dorothy had to rise to the challenge of going it alone, acting not only as poet but as theological scholar as well.

Reynolds' story of how she did it is detailed, but never for one instant dull. She succeeds brilliantly in conveying how even highly technical issues, in both philosophy and poetics, were for Dorothy matters of real libido, and hence of both energy and pleasure. This is illustrated from letters which Dorothy wrote to all and sundry as she wrestled with her many problems - of getting the right English word to convey Dante's meaning and also fit the English poetic necessities, of capturing Dante's distinctive poetic force in a language with very different characteristics, and of getting across to twentieth century readers that his theology wasn't just "primitive medieval superstition". She was forced to study astronomy, for instance, by some of Dante's references to where the sun stood in the Antipodes (then of course *terra incognita*), and records her delight over Dante's precision in stating where exactly shadows fall on Mount Purgatory. "Her letters were full of such exchanges of pleasure",

Reynolds writes. "Enjoyment was not much in vogue in academic circles then - or now. I found her letters a tonic." And, one might add, an antidote against that terrible betrayal of intellect by dullness which so often occurs in academia.

One major issue for Dorothy was her decision to persist in her original use of Dante's own peculiar Italian rhyming form (*terza rima*), against the almost universal opinion of poets and critics alike that it couldn't be done in English. A prose translation, however, would have done Dante scarcely any justice at all, since his medium **was** his message, and any other rhyme-scheme would miss out on the way he uses rhymes between verses to carry his argument over. So she stuck to her guns, and Reynolds brings some noted Italian witnesses to testify to Sayer's success in conveying the feel of Dante, as against highbrow English critics who deplored her style as too jolly and too free in its use of the vernacular. Later on in this story, when Reynolds has herself become directly involved in the work on the *Paradiso* (which in the event she had to finish when Dorothy died), she devotes a large chunk of one chapter to their discussion of no less then eleven different ways of rendering the marvellous beginning of CantoXXVII when Dante refers to "the smile of the universe" - and it truly had me on the edge of my seat.

When it comes to theology, Reynolds neatly avoids any possibility of stodginess by turning, quite literally, to drama - for it was just when Dorothy had got firmly stuck into the *Inferno* in 1945 that she had to turn aside to honour her agreement to write a religious play for the 750th anniversary of Litchfield cathedral. The result was *The Just Vengeance*, which she considered her masterpiece. Modern scholars have speculated that the *Divine Comedy* may have sprung not just from Dante's Aquinas-inspired poetic imagination, but from something like a near death experience; *The Just Vengeance* took the form of a dramatised post-death experience, a modernised Dantesque allegory of a young airman's posthumous fate after being shot down while defending his native city of Lichfield. Using this vehicle, Dorothy gave dramatic expression to all the theology she'd been learning from Dante, and Reynolds shows how the play's verse echoes that which Dante wrote just a century after the cathedral's foundation.

Reynolds rounds off her Dante-view of Sayers by drawing extensively on some interesting unpublished material in which Dorothy indulges her personal speculations, as a novelist, about what Dante the man was like. One, an unfinished story written about 1945, is a venture into fantasy-fiction, in which a young twentieth century British officer involved in the allied capture of Ravenna is wounded and transported back to Dante's time, to meet and have discussions with the Master himself about their respective worldviews. (Reynolds compares this with an imaginary dialogue on science between Dante and Sir Arthur Eddington in a published essay by Sayers on "Dante's Cosmos".) Another is an unfinished novel, written about 1950, about Dante in exile meeting the long-unseen daughter who carries the name of that first love who inspired the *Comedy* Beatrice. One of Reynolds' comments on this is that while she doubts if Dorothy was ever secretly in love with Lord Peter Whimsey, as

many have suggested, she may indeed have fallen in love with her image of Dante. In an Appendix, Reynolds prints for the first time Sayers' 1946 translation of Dante's poem about one of his earthly (but uncomsumated) loves, appropriately entitled *The Heart of Stone*.

But whatever Dorothy's personal fantasies about Dante the man may have been, there's no doubt that it was the man's intellectual and artistic achievements rather than his personality that really captured her libido. Reynolds doesn't mention that Dorothy ever dreamed about Dante the man but she does tell of her writing that she "dreamed in *terza rima*". In her closing chapter, Reynold's discusses Dorothy's concern about whether she was "really a Christian" or simply "in love with the pattern" of Christian doctrine. I'm very grateful to Barbara Reynolds for giving me a fresh glimpse of the mind of that particular image of the Maker called Dorothy Sayers.

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In the Midst of Life . . . The Australian Response to Death

Graeme M . Griffin and Des Tobin, Melbourne University Press, 1982, revised/second edition 1997, i-xiii & 278pp & 28 illustrations; paperback, (ISBN 0 522 84719 6)

Des Tobin, the managing director of Tobin Brothers, Funeral Directors, Melbourne, and Graeme Griffin, professor of church and community, Uniting Church Theological Hall, Melbourne, have teamed up and produced an important revised death and dying text for Australian consumption. Not only is this book a helpful reminder that the Australian response to death has its own distinctive cultural aspects which, themselves, have heightened meaning at the moment given recent takeovers by American firms of large sectors of the Australian funeral industry. Griffin and Tobin also offer a practical manual about responses to death in the historical past, with an aim to focus interest on how present practice has changed for better or for worse. Originally published in 1982, this revised/second edition results from rapid and important shifts in the Australian response to death since then: changing patterns of disease and the appearance of HIV/AIDS and skyrocketing numbers of Alzheimer's cases, polarised social attitudes that paradoxically involve more openness but also more denial of death in life, increased sensitivity towards the care of the dying and the bereaved in institutional settings (including increased interest in palliative care and euthanasia), more awareness amongst professionals about the needs of persons who must deal with still-birth and neo-natal death, changes in the ritual management of death by the major churches and the emergence of non-religious alternatives, new recognition by managers of cemeteries and crematoria of the needs of a more knowledgeable and less gullible public, heightened community interest in "death

education," and structural changes in the funeral industry which have established industry-wide standards and training for employees.

The response of the authors to these significant changes is twofold. On the one hand, the early Australian history of the practical management of dying and death is described and used as a basis for updating a cultural response to death. We are lured into a comfort zone to learn that from first European settlement most people assumed that it was the norm to die at home. Only when the authors unmask the practice, and we realise that dying at home was forced upon the public mainly because hospitals refused to admit patients they suspected they might die or whose condition made them susceptible to hospital diseases like puerperal fever following childbirth, is a clear response elicited. The "hip pocket nerve" knew little compassion then, and not much could be said to have changed over the years, to which recent debates over the costs of public health programs and the reluctance of many people to take out private health cover may attest. Because most hospitals received funding by public and government subscriptions, too many deaths made fundraising difficult—best to keep mortality statistics low, so to home you went to grin and bear it. No grand high-tech hospital heroics to prolong life in all that, just the grace and grit of the individual human being facing his or her last days. How times have changed! Or have they? As the authors have well put it, "Death is an alien presence in a technological world, to be banished as far as possible to the periphery of life, but death stands near the centre of ecological consciousness. In the technological world death is avoided wherever possible; in the ecological world it is to be embraced, despite the pain it brings. Australia is clearly a technologically dominated nation, but it is also one with a developing openness to the ecological" (p 252). The book is about pursuing such a cultural paradox or, rather, giving in to it not only with some trepidation but also with a sense of humour. After all, how can you take seriously the early nineteenth century practice of hiring "mutes and feathermen" to assist silently at funeral processions whilst, in the case of feathermen, balancing plumes of ostrich feathers on trays on their heads as they walked to the cemetery? "Black plumes were usual but, when the deceased had been either young or unmarried, white was often employed" (p. 158).

On the other hand, the book invites us into and offers a map through that part of our human ecology that most people usually enter only during times of crisis and, to say the least, unwillingly. The authors simplify the central dynamic of death. "Death," they write, "has two basic directions: the person who dies goes from us and the people who remain lose that person. The going and the losing are different actions which may draw different responses from us, depending on how we see them" (p 238). What is basically an historical treatise gets pulled to a purpose that has potential to have impact on the present. A final chapter on "Why Funerals?" serves the book as a telos, drawing our attention to the "going and the losing" of people. Practical tips are given about what to expect at times of personal loss and grief, funeral expenses that could be incurred, what to expect during funerals for dead (and living) Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists

and Muslims and the non-religious. The distinctive nature of aboriginal burials and ceremonies is hardly neglected, and it gives rise to perhaps interesting thought about current discussions of state government backed limited tenure provisions for grave sites in and around Australia's capital cities, where real estate values keep on escalating--indeed, is the land really sacred?! If not, should it be? If so, how might such sacrality be conferred upon land? (This is the High Court's Wik decision literally brought "down to earth," is it not?!)

In general, funeral practice in the foreseeable future will express a distinctive Australian cultural consciousness, one that is structured mainly by the polarity set up between dual commitments by the public to technology and ecology. As the authors suggest, "On the one hand there are felt pressures to minimise ritual and ceremony and even to do away with it altogether and, on the other hand, the last few years have seen a great deal of energy put into the review of liturgies and rituals with the intention of deepening their potential for being helpful both to individuals and to society" (p. 252). Even leading funeral firms have been forced to offer "no frills" funerals. However, at the same time public interest also appears keen to celebrate life in the presence of death in increasingly creative ways, both religious and secular: "The church funeral of the Scottish-born abortion reformer, Bertram Wainer, in 1987 featured bagpipes, an opera star singing secular songs ('The Impossible Dream' and 'The Scottish Solider') and a leading actor reading one of Wainer's favourite poems. By way of contrast, writer and rebel Frank Hardy's funeral was a two-hour celebration in the Collingwood Town Hall which climaxed in his being 'borne away beneath the Eureka flag with the words of the "Internationale," the socialist anthem, ringing from the Trades Hall Council choir' (pp 252-253). The "going" and the "losing" of people could be worse.

Next time I order textbooks for my popular subject, "Death and Dying," I intend to list this book first. It is a practical and distinctive social history of *The Australian Response to Death* that is accessible to the intelligent reader who wants not only a self-help manual *In the Midst of Life*, but also a broad overview that may help to convert the darkness of death into the light of full living in our unique cultural and ecological context.

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A Search for the Christian God

A.H. Willis, Minerva Press, ISBN 1 86106 026 2, London, 1996. $19.95

A.H. Willis has taken on an impossible task. To deal with "Christianity" in a single book and from the vantage point simply of an intelligent and well-read layperson is daunting. That he succeeds as well as he does says much for the genuineness of his approach, his maturity of judgment and insight, and the generally scientific temper of the writing.

There is a plainness and honesty of approach which marks Willis' writing. He fronts up to almost everything, his book reading like a personalised encyclopedia characterised by English commonsense, courtesy and respectful scepticism. His reflections come (after apparently a lifetime as an engineer) with a sober rationalism, always on the edge of agnosticism yet willing to consider Christianity on its merits and on its own grounds. A serious enquirer into the Christian faith will benefit from reading Willis' book.

Early on, the book shows an interest in modern scientific approaches to religion as in Charles Birch and Paul Davies. Yet Whitehead and Hartshorne's "process theology" is described as 'an esoteric subject mainly of interest to theologians but of little help in the search for the Christian God'.(p56). The book ends with a paean of praise for Unitarian thinking, which perhaps points to Willis' preferred view.

The Bible plays a large part in Willis' search for faith. The Church, apparently, plays relatively little. This is symptomatic of his keeping Christianity at arm's length, and of strongly objectifying the issues. The sense of a community of believers shaping and constructing their faith would seem to be too subjective. He needs hard facts such as texts, doctrines and skeletal histories to work on.

Not much of the passion of believers, the artistic imagination that has been energised by the Christian faith in the West, and the intensity of conflict over points of interpretation and belief get foregrounded in the pages of *A Search for the Christian God.*

A surprising amount of reference to Australia, however, does find its way into the book.

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