

Penelope Margaret Magee 7 June 1937 - 17 February 1998

On 17 February 1998, Penny Magee died of liver cancer, a month and a day after its first diagnosis. As friends, colleagues and students phoned one another to spread the news of her illness, and then of her death, they spontaneously recalled her influence, both personal and academic. Penny is remembered above all for her great generosity - of time, energy and passion - for her honesty and for her scholarly integrity.

Penny grew up in Brisbane, but moved to Melbourne to do an AMusA, intending to become a concert pianist. While working eight hours a day at the piano, she also found time to finish a

BA, graduating in 1957. As an early indication of her diverse talents, in 1958 and early 1959 she worked as a computer operator solving mathematical problems in aeronautical research. In 1959 she married John McKibbin, moving to Adelaide in February 1960. Also in 1960, Terry was born, to be followed by Jane in 1961, Kate in 1963 and Rory in 1966.

At the same time, Penny's career in education was getting underway: in 1964 and 1965 she taught at Enfield High School, while completing a DipEd at the University of Adelaide. In 1966, she joined what was then Western Teachers College as a lecturer in educational theory and philosophy of education. After the DipEd she began a Masters thesis on the implications of the doctrine of sin for western teaching methodology - all this, first with three children under four and then with four children under seven! Too interdisciplinary for the university's boundaries, the thesis remained unfinished; but by 1972 she was offering an elective in religion education, the beginning of a move into religion studies both for her and for the institution which would eventually mutate into Torrens College of Advanced Education and then University of South Australia. When the family moved to Lancaster in September 1975, Penny undertook an MA specialising in Eastern religions, studying under Ninian Smart and Eric Sharp, returning to Adelaide in January 1977.

Penny's work in religion was notable for its academic rigour; but it also stretched the boundaries of the 'academic'. Colleague Jack Cross recalls that



when the Underdale campus was being built, Penny fought vigorously for it to include a 'silent room' for reflection or meditation, to be used by people of any faith, or none. Barbara Kameniar, a PhD student under Penny's supervision at the time Penny died, recalled her first lessons from Penny, in a lecture on Hinduism:

Religious Studies was not just a cognitive exercise. It was also a spiritual exercise which asks a whole person to meet other whole people. The integrity of those people whose understandings we explored was to be maintained. People were not to be 'objects of study'. But nor were we to colonise their subjective experiences. The precarious position of the student of Religions was to be foregrounded at all times ... She demanded integrity from all of her students.

That integrity Penny also expected from the education system. She became increasingly disillusioned with the commodification of education in institutions which seemed more geared to money-making and empire building than to passing on the gift of knowledge. She believed that learning could never be put up for sale. Many will remember Penny as a fighter, for the well-being of individuals and against the dehumanising tendencies of educational institutions. Ex-husband John reflected, 'I don't think she had any enemies; her enemy was the system'.

Penny's commitment to scholarly integrity and refusal to compromise meant that she did not produce a publications list as long as those of academics more caught up in the drive for DEETYA points - but what she did produce was distinctive for its meticulousness, both in research and in wording. The concerns which fired her published work in Indology and feminist theory were also evident in her professional activities as a teacher and advocate for her discipline. She fought for the place of studies in religion in the academy and in particular for recognition of the importance of feminist studies in religion by a nascent field where - perhaps even more than usual - male scholars dominated. At the same time, she campaigned for recognition of feminist studies in religion by mainstream feminist scholarship.

AASR members will remember Penny as a driving force in the association, first as Secretary/Treasurer for many years, and then as founding editor of *ARS REVIEW*. When she stepped down from that position in 1990, Ed Conrad wrote of AASR's formative years that 'It is no exaggeration to say that Penny was the linchpin of the association for, while Presidents and Vice-Presidents served briefly and departed, it was Penny who gave stability to the organisation.' On her editorship of *ARS REVIEW* he wrote, 'What makes Penny's work so important is that, while we all recognise how significant it was after it began to appear, it was Penny's vision and creativity which made it happen'

(‘A Tribute to Ms Penny McKibbin’, *ARS REVIEW* 3(1) 1990: 40-41). Penny founded the AASR Women’s Caucus, and campaigned for the recognition of feminist studies in religion both in the AASR and in the International Association for the History of Religions.

In the book she co-edited with Morny Joy in 1994, Penny described herself as ‘a teacher rather than a career academic’. Even after her exodus from formal teaching posts into full-time research, she remained committed to sharing her knowledge and passion with a rising generation, especially of women scholars. She continued to supervise doctoral students, and to read and comment on the work of numerous others. Her academic interests in women translated into a ceaseless effort to encourage and inspire women scholars to enter academic work, and to fight for their rights once they got there.

In May 1994, she left Adelaide, first settling in Melbourne to work with the South Asian Women’s Studies Unit (affiliated with the National Centre for South Asian Studies). While at the University of South Australia, Penny had often described her imagined paradise on an ‘acre of bush’ by the sea. She found it at Rosedale, NSW, and moved there to build a house and pursue research in association with La Trobe University. ‘They offered me an office, and I realised that was the last thing I wanted’, she wrote in mid-1997, in an email headed ‘Notes from Paradise’. Her correspondence was as likely to describe building and tiling projects as her research about Buddhist women and work on a Pali concordance.

Towards the end of her time at the University of SA, Penny was diagnosed with breast cancer. Surgery arrested it and subsequent checks showed her to be clear; but in late 1997 she began to experience pains which at the time she attributed to the strain of building. In fact, it indicated a secondary cancer. Family and close friends travelled to Rosedale to visit in her last weeks, and were with her when she died.

Marion Maddox

Conferences

Australian Conferences

Black Diasporas in the Western Hemisphere

7-9 April 1998, ANU

Contact: Barry Higman, History Program, Research School of Social Sciences, ANU, ACT 0200 (bhighman@coombs.anu.edu.au)

Managing Religious Diversity (AASR Conference - See opposite)

2-5 July 1998, Newman College, Melbourne

Contact: Philip Hughes, Locked Bag 23, Kew, Victoria, 3101.

Email: pjh@ariel.its.unimelb.edu.au

Beyond 2000 - Theological Education in an Ecumenical, Plural and Global Context

5-10 July, Melbourne

Contact: Melbourne College of Divinity, 21 Highbury Grove, Kew 3101. Tel: +61 3 9853 3177; Fax: +61 3 9853 6695; email: mcd@ariel.unimelb.edu.au

Millennium Meeting

5-10 July, Sydney

Contact: Joan Patrick, History, University of Sydney 2006. Fax: +61 2 9351 3918; email: Joan.Patrick@history.usyd.edu.au

Adventures of Identity: Constructing the Multicultural Subject

30 July - 2 August 1998, Goethe Institut, German Cultural Centre

Contact: Dr Gerhard Fischer, UNSW Tel: 02-9385-2325

(G.Fischer@unsw.edu.au)

Scatterings of Empire: Anglo-Celtic Migrations and Exchanges

24-27 September 1998, ANU

Contact: Prof Wilfred Prest, History, U Adelaide. Tel: 08-8303-5605

(wprest@arts.adelaide.edu.au)

**AASR Conference
2nd - 5th July 1998**

**Managing Religious
Diversity**

Newman College, Melbourne

Conference speakers include:

Prof Max Charlesworth

Judith Berling,

Professor of Chinese and Comparative Religions at the Graduate
Theological Union, Berkeley, San Francisco

A Panel Discussion

on the theme of the conference will be chaired by **Paul Collins**,
author and former head of the ABC Department of Religious
Affairs

Papers invited: please send abstracts by 15th May 1998

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Overseas Conferences Coming Up !

BSA Annual Conference

6-9 April Edinburgh

Theme: The Body and Mind: Beliefs, Practices and Religion

Contact: Michael Northcott email: m.northcott@ed.ac.uk

IAHR regional conference;

European Association for the Academic Study of Religions

June 1998, Hildesheim, Germany

Contact: Prof Dr Peter Antes, Seminar für Religionswissenschaft, Universität Hannover, Im Moore 21, D-30167 Hannover, Germany

BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group

September

Contact: Sophie.Gilliat@btinternet.com

Religion and Locality

8-10 September, Leeds

Contact: Kim Knott, Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds, LEEDS LS2 9JT. Email: k.knott@leeds.ac.uk

Millennialism Study Day

21 November, Bath

Contact: Marion Bowman, Study of Religions, Bath Spa University College, Newton Park BA2 9BN

AASR Books in Print

Special Studies in Religion (Series)

1. *Let sleeping snakes lie: Central Enga religious beliefs and rituals*. Paul Brennan. 1977
A major analysis of religion based on anthropological research in the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea.
Bibliography, 64 pages, paper. ISBN 0-908187-01-3. \$ 6.95
2. *Central Australian religion: Personal monototemism in a polytotemic community*. T G H Strehlow. First printed 1978, 1980, 1983 and following, latest 1994.
Professor Strehlow's major study of Aboriginal religion in the Centre.
64 pages, paper. ISBN 0-0908083-03-3. \$6.95
3. *Powers, plumes and piglets: Phenomena of Melanesian religion*. Norman Habel (ed) 1979 (reprinted 1983)
A series of articles examining various types of religious phenomena (rites and customs) in different Melanesian communities.
Glossary, 240 pages, paper ISBN 0-908083-07-6. \$10.95
4. *An introduction to Maori religion: Its character before European contact and its survival in contemporary Maori and New Zealand culture*. James Irwin, 1984
Illustrated, bibliography, glossary, 96 pages, paper. ISBN 0-908083-11-4 \$7.95
7. *Religion and multiculturalism in Australia: Essays in honour of Victor C Hayes*. Norman Habel (ed) 1992 361 pages, paper ISBN 0-908083-16-5 \$29.95
8. *Claiming our rites: Studies in religion by Australian women scholars*. Morny Joy and Penny Magee (eds) 1994. ISBN pbk 0-908083-18-1 \$25.00; ISBN hbk 0-908083-17-3 \$35.00
9. *Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation*. Three of seven books translated and reduced with introduction. Victor C Hayes. 1995. 390 pages hbk ISBN 0-908083-19-X \$35.00

Selected Paper Series

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Essays covering various world religions and the notion of religious experience.
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4. *Ways of transcendence: Insights from major religions and modern thoughts*. E Dowdy (ed) 1982
An exploration of transcendence and experience in Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, tribal religions and modern industrial

society.

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Identity issues and world religions: Selected proceedings of the 15th Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (1985). Vic Hayes (ed) 1986

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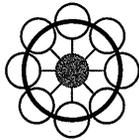
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Wuthnow, R. 1978. *Experimentation in American religion*. University of California Press, Berkeley

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