Book Reviews

Rainbow Spirit Theology: A Review Article

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(Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology. by the Rainbow Spirit Elders. Blackburn, Victoria: Harper Collins Religious. 1997. RRP $14.95. Pages xii, 100.)

Religions which claim universal validity have an inherent problem in that the passage of the message and forms of the religion from one culture to another does not take place in a vacuum. The transmitters of the message are influenced by the norms and values of their own culture and traditions and the recipients receive not just a 'pure' gospel but also, what has become known as the cultural baggage which the transmitters bring with the message. The New Testament documents show the early missionary church facing and dealing with this problem as the church moved from its Jewish roots into the gentile world. However the problem has remained through all the missionary eras of the Christian church. For example the British church was heavily influenced by the Latin traditions of those who first brought the message to that region. During the extensive missionary movement of the past two centuries the task of Christianising was accompanied often by the secular call to 'civilise,' and was influenced by attitudes of racial superiority. A few missiologists pointed to the dangers in the dominant approaches to missions. In recent decades the models of indigenisation, contextualisation and translation have been employed to challenge these earlier approaches.

In a recent paper, Professor Andrew Walls has traced some of the developments during the history of the Church, and the role of innovative thinkers such as St. Paul, Justin and Origen as they sought to draw on past concepts and symbols to interpret the Christian faith. He assumes that a true understanding of conversion means that "Christian conversion involves redirecting what is already there, turning it in the direction of Christ." (Walls, 1997: 148) The prevailing attitudes during most of the era of Aboriginal missionary endeavour in Australia meant that there was little or no recognition of positive value in what was 'already there', which could enhance Christian faith and worship. Aboriginal churches were expected to reflect the ideas, forms and symbols of European churches.[1] *Rainbow Spirit Theology* is an attempt to free Aboriginal Christians from this restraint and to encourage them

to draw on the treasures of both old and new. Such attempts always have an element of risk as they work between the extremes of attempting to comprehensively replace the old culture with the new gospel or seeking to accommodate the gospel message to the receivers' culture to the extent that the result is a form of syncretism in which essentials of the gospel are compromised.

This book is modest in its production and in its expressed aims. At the beginning of the Preface it is described as a theology in process. It does not claim to be complete or comprehensive but invites other Aborigines to explore their own culture as a source of mystery, meaning and theology, and aims to stimulate a rediscovery of the connections between Aboriginal spirituality and the Christian faith. The content of the book is based on two workshops held in North Queensland in 1994 and 1995. At these workshops, six Aboriginal Christians, representing four traditions, were assisted by Norman Habel and Robert Bos as facilitators, with Shirley Wurst functioning as a scribe. The Preface states that the main goal is to develop an indigenous theology and that the starting point for this theology is the land as a central spiritual reality for all the participants. The participants, having at first used the term "Kookaburra Theology," identified the Rainbow Spirit as a more profound and universal symbol for an indigenous Aboriginal theology.

In chapter 1, The Necessity of Rainbow Spirit Theology, good use is made of a local plant, the strangler fig, as a parable illustrating how Aboriginal Christians feel that the way in which the Christian faith was introduced to them, strangled their own cultural and spiritual traditions. They see the possibility of moulding a new spirituality now that they are freed from past domination. Chapter 2, Doing Rainbow Spirit Theology, assumes that God, the Creator Spirit, was present before European settlement and that as the Rainbow Spirit represents life and rebirth, it is an appropriate symbol for an indigenous Christian theology. The compass points are used as a model for thinking about God. The South represents truths from traditional Aboriginal culture, and is symbolised by the emu because of its curiosity. The North represents the ancient wisdom of Christians who came to Australia and is symbolised by the sheep brought in by the Europeans and used as a Christian symbol. The East represents the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. As the sun rises in the East, so Jesus comes as a new dawn. The kookaburra who welcomes the dawn, symbolises this good news. The West represents hope for the future, symbolised by the kangaroo which cannot jump backwards but moves forward towards its goal. To this reviewer this model appears rather too neatly structured and raises the question as to how influential was the facilitators' input into its construction.

In chapter 3, Land and Culture, comparisons are made between the Genesis accounts of creation and Aboriginal stories of the spirit beings who created and replenished the country. The comparison extends to the emphasis given in both traditions on the responsibility entrusted to humans to care for the land. The interference to the Aboriginal relationship to, and responsibility of care for, the land, arising from colonial invasion, is the subject of chapter 4, Land and Crying.

Reference is made to the destruction of sacred places and culture, and to the story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21), as a parallel to what has happened to Aboriginal people in Australia.

Chapter 5, Land and Christ, focuses on the concept of the logos and the way in which God came amongst us, or camped with us, in the coming of Christ. It assumes that the logos or word revealed in Christ was present in the activities of the Spirit Beings of the Australian landscape and thus affirmed past Aboriginal culture. The Christ introduced by missionaries was presented as a European Jesus. The task now is for Aboriginal people to discover how He is revealed as an Aboriginal Jesus. Chapter 6, Land and Reconciliation, takes up the theme of reconciliation and examines how, following past dispossession and suffering, Aboriginal people and their land can be reconciled to the Creator Spirit, and non-indigenous people can be reconciled to Aboriginal people.

The book concludes with four Appendices written by the facilitators to interpret key passages of Scripture in the light of their interaction with the Workshop participants. In Appendix 1, The Land and the Beginning: Comments on Genesis 1 and 2, parallels are drawn between the Genesis accounts of creation and Aboriginal creation stories. Appendix 2, Abraham and the Land: Comments on the Land as Host Country, suggests that in contrast to Joshua's method of conquest, which is compared to British colonial conquest, Abraham followed the way of peaceful coexistence as others shared their lands with him.

Appendix 3, The Beginning and the Rainbow Spirit: Comments on John 1, relates the logos of John 1 to the Rainbow Spirit and concludes that the Rainbow Spirit is revealed fully to us in Christ. Appendix 4, The Land in Travail, and Renewed: Comments on Romans 8, deals with the cosmic dimension of redemption and asserts that for us, the Rainbow Spirit, who has suffered in Christ, is now rising again to free our people. It concludes with a prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus, and renew your whole creation. Come, Rainbow Spirit, and rise again from our land and free it from bondage" (p.94). As I reflect later, some of the assumptions in the last two Appendices give cause for concern as to whether the border has been crossed into the realm of syncretism. There is acknowledgment in the book that some participants were uneasy with these ideas.

The book is welcome as an attempt to challenge past assumptions and to challenge Aboriginal Christians to reflect on what it means for them to be truly Aboriginal and truly Christian. There has been little literature of this nature previously. The brief writings of the Uniting Church Minister, Rev. Djiniyini Gondarra, quoted in this book, have been some of the few available texts. The book also challenges non-indigenous Australians, including Christians, to take seriously the history of cultural contact and conflict in Australia and the continuing effects of past dispossession and racism. The 1997 Report of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission on the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, has drawn attention of the role of churches in

implementing government policies which in many instances forcibly removed children from their mothers and discouraged or prevented later contact. This and other 'crimes' against Aboriginal peoples are listed on page 48. Christians need to understand and deal with these past actions as we seek to work towards Reconciliation in Australia.

This volume draws attention to several passages of Scripture which will be critical in the development of Aboriginal theologies, for example, the accounts of Creation and John 1. Although I have some problems with the treatment of John 1 in the book, I agree that the Aboriginal concept which is translated as word, story and Dreaming, has much in common with the concept of the Logos. The noted anthropologist, W.E.H. Stanner drew attention to the relevance of the concept of logos to the Aboriginal understanding of reality in his seminal paper, The Dreaming, first published in 1956. This is one area of many in which Aboriginal Christians bringing insights from their own cultures can illuminate the interpretation of passages of Scripture and enrich the wider church's understanding of them. I will return to the logos and some other examples later in this article.

While I commend this volume in its attempt to further the exploration of ways in which Aboriginal Christians can interpret the Scriptures in the light of their own cultural understandings, I find that it has limitations and some serious problems. However I find little in it that resonates with my experience of working over a long period with Aboriginal people from the Western Desert region who have retained much of their cultural values and structures and for whom their indigenous language remains as their mother tongue. One of the serious weaknesses is the lack of attention to terms from Aboriginal languages which have parallels with Biblical terms and provide dimensions of meaning which can illuminate the text of Scripture. For example, I have found Pitjantjatjara words such as the following helpful in expanding my understanding of Biblical texts: *tjukurpa* = word, story, Dreaming; *walytja* = relation; *kalypa* = reconciled; *kurunpa* - spirit; *miilmiilpa* = sacred, restricted; *ngura* = camp, place.

Although the authors have used the Rainbow Spirit as the central symbol in developing this theology, on the grounds of it being a more profound and universal symbol (pp. ix, 16), its centrality presents several problems. Firstly, although stories of serpents are universal throughout Australia, and writers such as Hiatt (1975: 143) refer to the rainbow serpent as "a creature of the imagination found throughout Australia," this reference to the rainbow is more common in the north than in some other regions. For example, Tunbridge writing of Flinders Ranges mythology notes that the Akurra of the Flinders Ranges "is a huge serpent which calls to mind the giant serpents of other parts of Australia (often called the Rainbow Serpents)" but comments further that no attempt "is made here, however, to equate Akurra with the Rainbow Serpent" (1988: 5). On page 16 it is stated that "The inspiration for discovering these truths comes from the Rainbow Spirit at the centre of our Aboriginal culture." While this claim may be true for some groups it is not so for many Aboriginal

cultures. This suggests that the search will be not for an indigenous Aboriginal theology, but for Aboriginal theologies which will reflect the diversity of Aboriginal cultures and histories, while not neglecting the commonalities.

Secondly, while we are asked to accept the Rainbow Spirit as like the God of the Old Testament (p.14) and as identical with the logos of John 1 (p.88), there are only very generalised references to Rainbow Serpent stories and no specific or extended exposition of these stories. The picture presented appears as a rather romantic image which overlooks many of the features of these stories. Details of some of these stories can be found in Berndt. R.M. & C.H. (1989: 73-125) Rainbow Spirit Theology fails to take account of the varieties of ways in which the Rainbow Spirit is expressed, of the fact that it represents the destructive as well as the creative forces of nature (Maddock, 1973, 120) and the ambiguities inherent in the ways in which it is portrayed. (Maddock, 1973: 120; Hiatt, 1996: 116) A Groote Eylandt version of the Rainbow Serpent mythology is of a feared being whom people wish to kill.

Thirdly, the presentation of the Rainbow Spirit as the Creator Spirit, (pp.14, 31, 56) takes us back to the debates about Aboriginal High Gods of the late 19th Century. Those of us whose experience has been in the desert areas, with the emphasis on localised ancestral spirit beings leaving their tracks as the physical features of the country, find little in these presentations to resonate with what we have been told and have seen. The arguments of Rainbow Spirit Theology depend very much on the association of traditional Aboriginal beliefs in a Creator Spirit, variously known as Yiirmbal, Biame, Rainbow Spirit, Wandjina, etc., with the Christian concept of God as Creator. One of the Workshop participants, George Rosendale, is quoted as writing that "The God that our ancestors believed in is very much the same God that we (Christians) worship today." (p.18) This statement is at odds with the following comment of Stanner, one of the most insightful anthropological observers of Aboriginal religions, who having analysed the Murinbata religion, including the Rainbow Serpent stories, concluded as follows: "I have described the Murinbata as a people who had no idea of a god or gods that called life into being. Life always had been and, in spite of a mediating catastrophe, continued. Earthly life was supposed to cycle between mystical source and mystical goal, but there was no first cause or final end. Many spirit-beings were supposed to exist and to intervene in men's lives for good or ill, but nobody worshipped any of them or, in any formal sense, prayed or made offerings to any of them, even though dispositions to do so were implicit." (Stanner, 1963: 138) This statement accords with my own experience of hearing the stories and observing rituals at many Pitjantjatjara sacred sites. Bible translators of Aboriginal languages have struggled, and failed, to find indigenous terms that could be substituted for God, this further suggesting that the association, Rainbow Spirit = Creator Spirit = God is stretched.

The Roman Catholic Aboriginal Deacon, Boniface Perdjert, who was raised in the Murinbata region, while also seeking for "an "Aboriginal Theology" that is

truly catholic, Gospel theology, that sets up harmonizing chords in the soul of the Aboriginal," (Hendriks and Hefferan, 1993:40) avoids the romanticising of Aboriginal cultures. He recognises the bad things in traditional religion and the vices of Dreamtime figures, but emphasises that "their traditional religion did give my people a deep awareness of the spirit and the things of the spirit" (Hendriks & Hefferan, 1993:30).

My criticisms so far suggest that this book is based largely on a reformulation of traditional Aboriginal mythology and worldviews rather than on careful exposition and analysis of what has been recorded of this mythology and worldview. This reformulation is often expressed in current talk and writings by the overuse of the term 'spiritual.' Despite the declining affiliations with organised religions in contemporary Western society, there is an increasing fascination with the spiritual. We hear of New Age spirituality, Celtic spirituality, feminist spirituality, eco-spirituality and of course, Aboriginal spirituality. One of the Workshop participants is quoted as saying: "Aboriginal culture is spiritual. I am spiritual. Inside of me is spirit and land, both given to me by the Creator Spirit." (p.12) My concern is that the frequent contemporary references to Aboriginal spirituality are not based on an understanding of the traditional Aboriginal concept of 'spirit,' but on a Western understanding which assumes a dichotomy of spirit/matter. Deborah Bird Rose, having researched the worldviews of people in the Victoria River region of the Northern Territory, writes that "I use the term 'spirit' with some trepidation. The English term cannot but signal a body-soul dichotomy which is inappropriate to the Yarralin context. Were I able to find a better term, I would avoid 'spirit' altogether, but as it is, I must state emphatically that spirit is immanent in body and even death does not wholly disrupt this immediacy" (Rose, 1992: 58).

Also there is a common assumption that spirit/spiritual is good in contrast to matter/material as bad. This neglects both Aboriginal and Biblical understandings in which spirit is both good and bad. In both worldviews there are references to good spirits and bad spirits. My observations of Aboriginal people and their world is that they and their world are material. However they perceive of their own beings and all aspects of the material world as infused with spirit and people walk carefully on the land, recognising the presence of spirit/spirits within it. The right rituals must be performed to ensure that the spirits act kindly towards them. Taboos must be observed so that malevolent spirits do not molest them. There are similarities in the root meaning of the words for spirit in Aboriginal and Biblical languages and exploration of the Aboriginal meaning may enrich our understanding of the Biblical usage. For example, Pitjantjatjara Christians in their prayers and preaching often employed the analogy of *kurunpa* = spirit as *walpa* = wind.

This awareness of the presence of spirit and spiritual forces in the world is the result of education and enculturation in Aboriginal cultures. To suggest, as sometimes appears to be done, that Aboriginal people are in some way different from other humans as spiritual beings, is a dangerous return to earlier views of instinctive

behaviour which were the roots of racist ideologies. Aboriginal Christians have much to offer the church in its understanding of spirit and the relationship of spirit to land and other material objects, but it must be offered on a proper understanding of the meaning of spirit in Aboriginal societies and not on the basis of its confusion with a Western-type spirituality. When drawing parallels between Aboriginal and Biblical concepts attention should be given not only to the comparisons but to significant differences. In the chapter, Land and Culture, comparisons are made between Aboriginal and Biblical creation stories and the comment made that "These images in our stories are essentially the same as those depicted in Genesis 1:2 and 2:4. In the beginning the earth is specifically designated as formless and empty (*tohu wabohu*) but covered with water. Likewise in Genesis 2:4, the earth is depicted as a vast desert without life or form" (p.29). While there are illuminating parallels there is one essential difference between these stories. In the Genesis account, the Spirit hovers above the waters. In the Aboriginal stories the localised spirit beings emerge from within the formless substance of the earth and move over it to give it form. In the former there is an element of transcendence which is missing from the latter.

Rainbow Spirit Theology attempts to bridge this gap between the transcendent and immanent spirits and to identify the Creator of Genesis with the Rainbow Spirit. This is based partly on the interpretation of the Melchizedek story from Genesis 14 in Appendix 2, Abraham and the Land, where it is concluded that because Abraham swore an oath by the God, El Elyon, that he "recognised the God of the land as his own God" (p.84). It is dangerous to base too much on what von Rad describes as "uncertain textually." He adds that "Such a positive, tolerant evaluation of a Canaanite cult outside Israel is unparalleled in the Old Testament" (von Rad, 1972:180).

This identification of the Aboriginal and Biblical Creator Spirits reaches it climax in the treatment of the logos concept of John 1, where the text is paraphrased as follows: "In the beginning was the Rainbow Spirit, deep in the land. And the Rainbow Spirit was with God, the Creator Spirit, and the Rainbow Spirit was God. The Rainbow Spirit was in the beginning with God. The Rainbow Spirit emerged from the land, transformed the land and brought all things into being on the land. With the Rainbow Spirit came life, and the life is the light of all people" (p.88; See also p.59). This appears to cross the line into syncretism. Wherever this identification is made in the book, it is acknowledged that some of the participants felt uncomfortable with it. For example following one comment that "In Jesus Christ, we see the true nature of the Rainbow Spirit as a life-giving God of love," it is stated that "For others, the Rainbow Spirit is not the same as God or the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ, but is one of our creative ancestors" (p.59; See also pp.57, 88). The reservations of those who felt uncomfortable require more explicit treatment in the book as they appear to question some of the core assertions. Surely if it is legitimate to insert Rainbow Spirit into a paraphrase of this text it is equally legitimate for other groups to insert the terms for other ancestor beings such as kangaroo-man, emu-man, brolga-

woman. However my experience suggests that Aboriginal Christians from other groups would find such insertions inappropriate and confusing. They have tended to compartmentalise the two worldviews and have not seen the need, as do people from the Western traditions, to rationalise and harmonise them. Over time Aboriginal Christians need to deal with these issues, as do Christians from all cultural backgrounds. Institutions such as Nungalinya College have an important role in facilitating this process.

While I question the appropriateness of this identification of Rainbow Spirit with the logos, I agree that this passage is one that offers great possibilities in the development of a theology which draws on the insights of Aboriginal cultures. In fact I am surprised by the statement that "all of us see the need to recognise that logos is a Greek term which does not readily translate into our culture" (p.88). It has seemed to me that the Aboriginal words used to translate logos are much nearer to the original meaning than the English 'word' and that this passage is one which is pregnant with meaning for Aboriginal people who bring to it a deep understanding of their worldview. I found encouragement to explore the Pitjantjatjara concept from the treatment of *The Doctrine of the Logos* by A.C. Bouquet in a book published in 1958, the year in which I commenced my missionary work with Aboriginal people. The Gospel of John had already been translated into Pitjantjatjara as follows: *"Kuwaripatjara mulapa Tjukurnga nyinangi, munu Tjukurnga Godala nyinangi, munu Tjukurnga Godanya nyinangi....Ka Tjukurnga iltjanaringu."* (Bible Society, 1960:69-70) The Pitjantjatjara word for 'word,' 'story,' 'saying,' 'Dreaming,' is *tjukurpa*. It is a common noun, the stem being *tjukur-* and *-pa* the suffix for use as a subject with an intransitive verb. What the translation team was able to do was to turn it into a proper noun by replacing the common noun suffix *-pa* with the proper noun suffix used with intransitive verbs, *-nga*. The result, *Tjukurnga* suggests that the Word Person/Logos/Dreaming Person was in the beginning and was with God and was God. It is not tied to any specific ancestor beings but allows for the possibility of God being present with Aboriginal people through their past history, even though they had no concept of God as a single Creator Being of the whole universe.

My experiences with Pitjantjatjara people, their culture and language gave me new insights into other Biblical passages, for example, Amos 5:24, Isaiah 52:7, Matthew 13:13. I worked with Pitjantjatjara preachers and Elders to find analogies between Biblical stories and events and objects from their own experience to make the message relevant and meaningful. In 1965, in a paper presented at a Centralian Missions Conference I wrote that of "the 51 parables listed in Scroggie's *Guide To The Gospels,* five of these would have been relevant to traditional aboriginal life (although not related to everyday happenings), thirty refer to aspects of life to which these people have been introduced through contact with our culture (some of these, such as the parables of the Shepherd, have become very meaningful to the people in our area because of the Mission's introduction of sheep), and sixteen would still have little relevance for these people; As the purpose of the Biblical parable is to be

intelligible and interesting in itself, we may be permitted to introduce other analogies which are relevant and will convey the same ideas" (Edwards, 1967: 13). I found that the Pitjantjatjara preachers developed such analogies with great skill and understanding. In this book Pastor George Rosendale has made good use of a traditional story of the black and white cockatoos to illustrate the Gospel message of reconciliation. (pp. 70-2) Another example of an Aboriginal person living in an urban setting attempting to apply stories from her tradition to her understanding of the message of Jesus is found in a recent issue of Nelen Yubu. (Pike, 1997: 33-37)

There are dangers however in going beyond analogy to the accommodation of the essential meaning of the Gospel to Aboriginal (or any other) culture. Rainbow Spirit Theology will serve a good purpose if it encourages others, and especially Aboriginal Christians, to enter into the kind of dialogue with it that I have attempted. Despite my reservations about some core assumptions of Rainbow Spirit Theology, I note their clear statement that we "affirm the Gospel message which proclaims the good news of redemption for all". (p. 63) I referred earlier to the recent article by Walls. He concluded that "(E)ach stage of the journey has seen expanded understanding of the significance of Christ as he was translated successively into the languages and cultures of the peoples where he was received by faith. The study of the signposts irresistibly suggests that there are yet further expansions of the understanding of Christ to be expected from his present engagement with the cultures of Africa and Asia. They assuredly indicate also that the faith of the twenty-first century will require a devout, vigorous Christian scholarship rooted in the soil of Africa, Asia, and Latin America." (Walls, 1997: 153) The general thrust of Rainbow Spirit Theology encourages us to hope and pray that Aboriginal Australia will yet be able to make its unique contribution on this journey.

Note

1. Aboriginal churches are of course not the only ones which have this problem in Australia. For example, in a recent issue of *On Being*, Mal Garvin wrote that "the story of the search for a uniquely Australian expression Christianity is not over". (Garvin, 1997. 63) One of the facilitators of *Rainbow Spirit Theology*, Norm Habel, has been to the fore in this search with his writings such as Outback Christmas. (Habel, 1981)

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Through a Woman's Eyes: Encounters with Jesus.

Christine Burke. (1997). Melbourne: Harper Collins Religious
ISBN 1-86371-721-8 RRP $16.95

This is a book for readers with imagination. Christine Burke, a Loreto sister based in Adelaide, has grounded her work on the writings of feminist Scripture scholars such as Schussler-Fiorenza, Johnson, and Moltmann-Wendel as well as those who explore different aspects of the gospels such as Brown and Nolan and Australia's Frank Moloney. In doing so she has provided a strong foundation for this second edition of reflections on what life may have been like for the early church communities who 'struggle with their own issues and try to find their way by reference to the life of Jesus, whom they follow.' (p.1). The bibliography included at the end of the book offers readers who are not Scripture scholars an opportunity to engage with exciting and challenging writers.

This edition includes suggestions for personal or small group reflections on each of the encounters with Jesus. Written for mixed voice reading but able to be

considered on one's own, each chapter takes one incident from a Gospel and retells the story from the perspective of the person involved or someone who knew that person. It is a wonderful way of meeting members of the earliest communities before the Gospels were written down. Themes such as the role of women, reconciliation, authority and how to be a disciple of Jesus are fleshed out in such a way that they are considered in their own setting as well as for Christians today.

The chapters are introduced by a background section that places the story following in a realistic context of people and places. The reader is challenged to look beyond the more traditional understandings of the gospel to take up current scholarship and interpretations. The story of the widow's mite from Mark 12: 38-44, for example, becomes the story of the conflict between Jesus' teaching and the power exercised by the temple officials - the widow becomes an example not of generosity as has been the traditional interpretation, but an example of the misuse of power that sees those who should be given support by the temple, actually becoming poorer in order to live according to unjust rules. Jesus is portrayed as challenging the society (and its religious leaders) that doesn't care for its poor and outcast, that takes the last coin of the poor as its due, that grows rich at the expense of those who can least afford it.

In the different chapters, the reader meets through a imaginative dialogue between members of the early communities people such as Mary of Magdala, Mary, the mother of Jesus, Jairus' daughter, the Samaritan woman at the well, the woman cured of a haemorrhage as well as the blind man cured on the Sabbath. In each case, the reader is given opportunities for personal reflection, prayer and journalling, while for small groups there are reflection questions, discussion starters and opportunities for action that is in response to the particular gospel passage. The experience of involving oneself in this book will surely lead to personal change in attitude to being a Christian in today's world and as a member of the Christian community - the result of an encounter with Jesus!

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From a Roman Window - Five Decades:
the World, the Church and the Catholic Laity

Rosemary Goldie. 1998. HarperCollins Religious, Blackburn.
ISBN 1 86371 697 1 RRP $26.95

To have been one of the 13 lay women invited belatedly to be an auditor at the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church must have indeed been extraordinary but to have been the first woman in the Roman Curia, even more so.

These are but two of the milestones which line the life journey of Rosemary Goldie, an Australian woman whose second scholarship to Paris in 1995 led not to a doctorate from the Sorbonne as planned, but rather into work with Pax Romana, an international movement of Catholic students, the pathway towards lifelong

involvement in the development of the Catholic lay apostolate at the international level and within structures of the Vatican. It is this journey which is relayed to the readers of Goldie's book, *From a Roman Window*. It is, however, as she herself claims, not her memoirs but rather an account of five decades of the world, the church and the Catholic laity, as her subtitle indicates, seen through the eyes of one viewing each of these from an international vantage point.

An historical schema shapes the outline of this book, divided into five parts together with a Prologue and Epilogue. The Prologue introduces the reader to the writer and her Australian context and to her two scholarships to Paris, both of which were instrumental in setting the course of her life on its international trajectory. Part One "Laity: Post-war-pre-Council", details the beginning recognition that the laity are church and the subsequent struggle to define the lay apostolate in two world congresses (1951 and 1957) and the interim work or the Permanent Committee for International Congresses of the Lay Apostolate (COPECIAL), established by Pius XII in January 1952, of which Goldie was a member. The final chapter of this section highlights briefly the emerging theology which would lead to Vatican II, the topic of Part Two of the book. In this she focuses on the contribution of lay Auditors to particular consular deliberations, noting, however, that women were not permitted to speak on the floor of the Aula. She does, on the other hand, draw attention to the role of women and the ecumenical dimension of the church as two significant aspects of the council.

Part Three addresses "Laity in the Post-Conciliar Church" and what Goldie sees as confusion in regard to the laity together with the emergence of a plethora of new associations, movements, communities and 'charisms'. It was also a time when attention was focussed on the establishment of a more permanent structure within the Curia and the question of how useful such a structure would be to the development of the lay apostolate. It is as part of the newly established Council of the Laity that Goldie becomes the first woman to be a member of the Curia. Part Four details this ongoing post-Conciliar history continent by continent.

The reader will find this book organised around events but given significant human interest by the personal association of the writer. For those, however, who are not adept at the structures of the Vatican, its international organisations and its layers of documentation, simply read for the thread of the story unless you need the more detailed information of which you will find a rich fare.

As a woman reader with Goldie, I appreciated her concern for women's participation and the brief gendered analysis scattered throughout the book. I was saddened, therefore, when I encountered the content of Part Five, "Concerning Women", to which I had looked forward with anticipation. What I discovered here was not the somewhat impartial account of events with never an explicit critique -- to this point in the narrative of a single church structure or official. Rather one finds in this section the only critique in the book and it a significantly biased critique of her contemporary sisters in the church who are labelled 'feminist' or 'radical feminist'

without any definition. This undefined 'radical feminism' is blamed for the lack of smooth progress towards both ecumenism and women's participation in the church through the late seventies into the nineties.

It is clear here that a Roman window does not look out on and into the lives of countless deeply committed Catholic women around the globe who would count themselves feminists and whose life journey through these last twenty years has been characterised by a profound commitment to the transformation of the world and the church which they love for the sake of the gospel vision of justice, a continuation of the work of the lay apostolate. Nor does it look onto the lives of the women who have made a deeply discerned conscientious decision that they must leave the Catholic church because of the sexism which now explicitly and consciously characterises the heart of its ministerial structure and is counted among its official teaching. Perhaps it is not to these women but elsewhere that one must look for what it is that currently "impedes dialogue and divides the church" (:227).

This is truly a remarkable story and one which will be read by many interested in the search for a church of the laity not only within Catholicism but within the ecumenical christian movement. It will give a profound insight into the journey of one particular Catholic lay woman through Catholic history of the lay apostolate during more than the second half of this century, the close of the millennium. Sadly, however, it will finally disappoint many contemporary Catholic women who have learned as lay women to "see", to "judge" or critique, as well as "act" that their story which spans the last two decades of this period is both silenced and harshly critiqued in favour of the traditionalist papal theology of which there is no critique.

Elaine Wainwright

Pat Jalland. ***Death in the Victorian Family.***
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 464 pp, 20 plates, hb,
recommended retail price $59.95.

The stated aim of this book is to expand knowledge of ways in which dying, death, grief and mourning were experienced by members of the middle and upper classes in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain. In this it succeeds admirably, for it is a meticulous and detailed study, reporting research that draws upon private diaries, correspondence, wills, and memorials of death from the archives of 55 families. The present volume follows an earlier study by Professor Jalland published as *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914* and covers much the same period, although some use is made of both earlier and later archival material.

The first part of the book is a discussion of dying centred around the Victorian Evangelical ideal of a good death which emphasised the need for time to complete both temporal and spiritual business and take farewell of the family. The dying person's faith was to be evident in his or her resignation to fate and fortitude in the face of suffering, with all members of the family sharing the hope of reunion in heaven. Jalland discusses both those accounts of death which conformed to the

ideal and the ways in which family attempted to understand and accept deaths which did not conform. She traces changes in the ideal over the latter part of the century, shown in the decline of memorialisation and an increasing concern that dying be free from physical suffering, in contrast to an earlier period where the primary concern was for the state of the dying person's soul in the final days of life.

In the second part of the book a series of detailed case studies demonstrates Victorian mourning practices. Again there is a sympathetic presentation of family members' interpretations, and the social construction of differing gendered responses is clearly detailed. The discussion also confronts stereotypes of Victorian mourning that have been presented by some social historians, such as a tendency to present Queen Victoria's mourning as typical of its day. Jalland shows that this is far from being the case; Queen Victoria's prolonged public grief was regarded as abnormal by her own society. Similarly, the oft-repeated claim that the Victorians experienced less distress over a child's death because such deaths were more common is not borne out by this evidence. Finally, the findings are extended by smaller studies of Victorian agnostics, and of the impact of the Great War which, Professor Jalland suggests, instigated chronic grief at a social level.

The book provides a masterly synthesis of sources. My only reservations are at some points where Professor Jalland moves from the particular to the general. She makes, for example, occasional illustrative links between the nineteenth century accounts and the findings of some contemporary psychiatrists (not psychologists as they are often referred to in the text). These links do not by and large contribute further insight, in part because of the unbridged gulf between the historical particularity of her materials and the abstract generalisations of the psychiatric models. It might however be worth noting that the data of the book connect more readily with recent British literature in the sociology of death and dying.

A similar problem is present with her repeated claim that changes in social practices concerning death are due to the decline in Evangelical fervour and the increase in secularism and agnosticism (pp. 183, 314, 358). I am not yet convinced by this statement. Evangelical fervour certainly declined among the families in the study, but the disappearance of memorial literature seems to have been universal in the west, even in those societies such as New England where evangelical fervour remained. I would like to see Professor Jalland explore the connections further in the historical data, perhaps by developing her engagement with the work of Phillipe Ariès.

I agree with Jalland's strong critique of Ariès concerning his typologies of nineteenth century death. Her data carry the day, particularly given Ariès lack of any comparable historical grounding (although it might be noted that his discussion is of Continental, rather than English, society). But for Jalland to dismiss the influence of Victorian medicine as a force for change because of its limited power to cure (p. 6) is to overlook the central thrust of Ariès' argument. According to him, it was the doctor's increasing diagnostic and prognostic ability, his power to pronounce for

life or death even if not to affect the outcome, that reshaped social perceptions and behaviours. At a number of points Jalland's findings could be seen to support this argument. We see in her materials, particularly in family memorials, the increasing prominence of a clinical (medical) narrative, frequently juxtaposed uneasily with a spiritual discourse. She documents for us the decline in clergy influence and the increasing authority that permits doctors to dispense "in the patient's interest" with spiritual practices such as administering sacraments. These factors contribute to revising the ideal of a good death from one in which family reunions around the death bed anticipate the reunions to come in the next life, to one in which a this-wordly hope of an easy (pain-free) dying predominates. The shift appears to result from the growing power of a medical discourse in comparison with religious discourse, so that dying comes to be managed as a medical problem rather than a spiritual passage. Whether this is best characterised as an outcome of secularism and agnosticism is an open question.

These comments should however not be seen so much as a criticism of the book as reflections on ways in which this resource could be put to use by practitioners of disciplines other than history. Let me conclude as I began. This book is well worth reading. It is a wonderfully detailed resource, providing a rich description of nineteenth century practices and beliefs, illustrated with poignant and moving accounts. Its strength is its basis in primary sources, and the compelling tapestry woven from them.

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Newman and Conversion

Ian Ker (ed) T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1997, ISBN 0 567 08553 8

This interesting and wide-ranging collection of essays resulted from an international conference held at Oriel College, Oxford in August 1995, to mark the 150th anniversary of the reception of Newman into the Roman Catholic Church. All but one of the papers included in this volume were plenary lectures, and all seem intent on demonstrating Ker's assertion that "Newman is easily the most important convert to Rome from the Churches of the Reformation" (p. 1).

The contributions can be broadly divided into the biographical and the philosophical. Sheridan Gilley's opening piece, "Newman and the Convert Mind", argues that the influence of Newman is felt still by those educated people contemplating conversion to Catholicism, through his persuasive literary output and intellectual appeal. He cites the conversions of literary figures as disparate as G. K. Chesterton and Muriel Spark, and makes a case for Newman as "Rome's greatest converter in England" (p. 5). Avery Dulles' "Newman: The Anatomy of a Conversion" traces the changing character of Newman's Christian faith, from the Evangelicalism of his adolescence, through the Anglo-Catholicism of his twenties, to his "third conversion" to Catholicism in 1845. This paper opens up questions

about the nature of conversion, and the nature of those factors which encourage such spiritual change in people.

Ker's own contribution, "Newman's Post-Conversion Discovery of Catholicism", is particularly interesting in that it argues that the Roman Catholicism that Newman was won over by was not that of the nineteenth century, but the faith of the Church Fathers. Of medieval and modern Catholicism "Newman was still remarkably ignorant at the time of his conversion' (p.42). There is an extended discussion of Newman's two now little-read works of fiction, *Loss and Gain: The Story of a Convert* (1848) and *Callista* (1856). The former is the story of Willis, a modern convert from the Church of England, and the latter is set in the third century and demonstrates the attraction of Catholic Christianity for a virtuous pagan young woman.

At this point the volume becomes less concerned with Newman's life and begins to consider his philosophical contribution, to locate him in various intellectual environments. John Macquarrie compares Newman to Kierkegaard, and focuses on the approaches of these two great nineteenth century Christians to the act of faith, and sees a similarity in the fact that they were both "seeking to break out of narrowly abstract rationalism" (p. 86). Cyril Barrett contrasts the approaches of Newman and Ludwig Wittgenstein to the question of the rationality of religious belief, and Aidan Nichols considers Newman's *Essay on Development* from the perspective of Balthasar, Switzerland's most distinguished modern theologian.

The one non-plenary paper in the collection, Ronald Begley's "Metaphor in the *Apologia* and Newman's Conversion", betrays its origins as a seminar presentation. The other contributions range widely over a number of interesting social, religious and cultural developments of the nineteenth century. Begley closely analyses one paragraph of the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* and shows its debt to Virgil's *Aeneid* Book VIII, the portrait of the Lord of Fire and master metalworker, Vulcan. The final paper, Terrence Merrigan's "The Anthropology of Conversion: Newman and the Contemporary Theology of Religions", aims to confront "Newman with a distinctly postmodern theological problem, namely the problem of plurality of religious traditions, or more positively expressed, the question of interreligious dialogue" (p. 118).

Merrigan then contrasts notions of pluralism, present religious experience, the celebration of otherness and the relativity of religious traditions with the Vatican's developments in the twentieth century. He finds that the Vatican's model is "inclusivist", leaving little room for the individual character of other religions. However, when he examines Newman's ideas on conversion, he notes with pleasure his interest in the religious experience of the "naturally" religious man or woman, something which allows for authentic religious experience outside of the Church. It seems odd to read the very nineteenth century Newman in the light of these very culture-specific views, especially as the conclusion reached is scarcely earth-shattering. In conclusion, this is an interesting and informative collection of essays, somewhat uneven in quality, but recommended as a whole.

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Foundations of Religious Education in Catholic Schools: An Australian Perspective

Maurice Ryan. Social Science Press, 1997.

Ryan's book is an easy-to-read work that is accessible to the religious studies scholar, even to one who may be unfamiliar with either religious education or Catholic schools. The book serves well as an introduction to what is probably the most influential religious movement in this country.

Reading the work, one finds Ryan summarising with clarity the history of religious education in Catholic schools and presenting well the current state of affairs. One appreciates Ryan's sympathetic, though critical, study of the pre-Vatican II era, which is often ignored or unduly demonised in less informed studies. Ryan's balanced approach deals effectively with both the richness of this period, and its oftentimes poverty. We note that, in this work, Ryan does not present his own theory of religious education, nor does he set out a prescriptive set of foundations for what religious education should be. That he has not done so allows him the freedom to comment critically and dispassionately upon the variety of religious education approaches, both past and current.

Apart from those studies that one may expect in a history of religious education, Ryan presents two most welcome chapters. The first is on religious education in the whole school context. In this chapter Ryan explores religious education beyond the specific religion class. This chapter is important because evidence would suggest that in terms of some important indicators, Catholic schools have been most successful in the context outside of the religious education class and curriculum. While certain church authorities may lament that most Catholic school students graduate as non-Mass attending theological illiterates, it remains that those same students generally carry with them a lifelong spirit of fairness, commitment to justice and a sense of God, even if this attitude does not translate into orthodox belief and practice.

The second welcome chapter examines Church documents pertaining to religious education. The chapter is not only a good overview of the documents, with a friendly hint that most of them remain unrecognised by some religious educators, it presents a most helpful section on "How to read a Church document". In the light of the gross misapplication or misunderstanding of some church documents, most notably the Catechism of the Catholic Church, one can comment Ryan's work not only to interested students of religion, but also to many religious educators.

By way of a criticism of Ryan's work, one could say that he leaves unresolved the dilemma he poses at the beginning of the book concerning the most effective means of ensuring continuity with the life and teachings of Jesus. For the experienced religious educator, one would have little trouble gleaning from Ryan's work what may be his answer. To the practitioner of religious studies, answering the question may be more difficult. One may also have liked to see more dialogue or comparison with religious education as it has existed outside the Catholic schools in Australia. While Ryan's book is specifically about religious education in Catholic schools one

would imagine that if not most Catholic students attend Catholic schools, it would be interesting to at least compare the methods, strategies and effectiveness of the approaches taken with these students with the contents of Ryan's study. Having said that, these criticisms are minor in comparison to the value of the work.

For the student or practitioner of religious education, Ryan's book provides a valuable introduction to the realities of religious education and the path that has brought Australian schools to their current state. For the religious studies scholar, the work is a valuable introduction to the religious movement that has probably done more to shape the Australian religious landscape than any other.

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Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism:
a Translation and Critical Analysis of "Social Justice in Islam"

William E Shepard, Leiden: Brill, 1996, lxii + 378 pp., [Social, economic and political studies of the Middle East and Asia, Vol 54], ISBN 90 04 10152 7.

Scholars are well-used to the idea of having critical editions of ancient texts, be they scriptural texts such as the Old and New Testaments or works of other kinds of literature such as Aristotle's works on Ethics, but the idea of having a critical edition of a modern text, that is one written during the course of the last fifty years, may appear to many scholars to be rather strange. In the case of a considerable body of modern Islamic literature, however, there is a serious need for such editions, partly because of the fact that many books are produced as cheaply as possible without any sort of critical apparatus but more particularly because of the tendency for authors to undertake frequent revisions of their work as a result of small print runs. Thus one of the most influential modern Muslim writers, originally from South Asia but influential throughout the world, Abu'l-A'la Maududi, saw many of his works appear in several editions in their original language and then in some cases in several different translations into other languages; and in the case of his *Tafhim al-Qur'an* [Commentary on the Qur'an] it has been "translated [into English] and edited by Z.I. Ansari, assisted by A.R. Kidwai", and it is not always clear where Maududi has been translated and where he has been edited.

If this is true of Maududi, who generally used peaceful means to disseminate his views, even if he was arrested twice, in 1948 and 1953, and spent a number of months in prison on each occasion, it is even more true of Sayyid Qutb, who spent most of his life between his first arrest in 1954 and his execution by hanging in 1966 in prison, and who is thought by many to be the figure who has inspired those Islamic revivalists who see the use of violence as legitimate for, if not required of true Muslims, against many of the governments of the Muslim world. William Shepard has therefore performed a great service in producing a critical edition of one of Qutb's, most significant works, which shows clearly the evolution of Qutb's thought over the crucial period between 1949 and 1964.

Six editions of *Social Justice in Islam* have been produced, in 1949, 1950,

1953, 1954, 1958, and 1964, and given the momentous developments in Egyptian politics during that time - the Free Officers' Revolution of 1952 and the Suez Conflict of 1956 to name but two - as well as the significant happenings in Qutb's own life - his two-year trip to America and his joining the Muslim Brotherhood on his return to Egypt - it is not surprising that he made quite extensive changes to the text. The main edition Shepard has used is the sixth and final edition, and it is this that forms the continuous translation throughout the book, but with the exception of the fourth edition, which the author was not able to locate, all the differences between the final edition and the earlier editions are recorded, either in foot-notes if they are comparatively minor changes of wording or phraseology, or in Appendices to each chapter where whole paragraphs have changed. Readers are thus presented with a comprehensive account of how the text changed and developed. Sometimes, however, it would have been easier for the reader to discern this process of development if columns had been used, so that, for example, where the first and sixth editions differ they could have been juxtaposed in two columns in order to make the differences between them even more clear.

In an extensive introduction the author outlines Sayyid Qutb's biography and analyses the main changes between the different editions of the text, such as increased theocentrism, a greater emphasis on Islam as a distinctive religio-social order, and a revised assessment of Islamic History; the passing of time thus clearly induced in Qutb a greater pessimism about the state of the Muslim World of his day and a greater optimism about the prospects for the Islamic Revival. The introduction also makes clear that Shepard was able to benefit from the co-operation and help of Qutb's brother Muhammad Qutb on a number of points, and so the book is not presented as the commentary of an all-knowing non-Muslim outsider on a somehow rather primitive Muslim tract.

Books from Brill are never cheap, but this one is a very worthwhile addition to the publications available in English on Modern Islamic Thought, not least because its critical analysis and commentary make it much more than a translation. The ten years that the author has spent working on the project have put all English-speaking Islamicists very much in his debt.

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