Book Reviews

Novel Histories: The Fiction of Biblical Criticism

Roland Boer, Playing the Texts No. 2, Sheffield Academic Press, 1997. RRP US$74 (hb), US$19.95 (pb) ISBN 1850758352 (hb), 1850758360 (pb)

Roland Boer makes the point early on in this stimulating book that biblical criticism has 'too often . . . been regarded by its practitioners as a distinct discipline' (p. 16). Historical criticism has become coopted by 'the ecclesial power structures' and has attained an 'orthodox status' in the theological academy where even the conservatives are doing it (p. 195). In this book Boer joins those voices calling for biblical criticism to drop its blinkers and join the larger field of literary and cultural studies that now typify the Humanities.

Boer's concern is with 'metacommentary' which means 'to interpret not only the "original text", or the text that is normally the focus of interpretive activity, but also to interpret or comment upon the interpretations of that "originating" text. Of course, as soon as this is done—interpreting the commentaries—the "originary" status of the text that lies at the bottom of the pile begins to slip away when . . . no longer the prime focus of attention' (pp. 12-13).

In the first three chapters Boer re-reads Martin Noth's *Deuteronomistic History* in light of Georg Lukác's *The Historical Novel* and concludes that Noth 'postulates a "Deuteronomistic History" . . . that bears a marked resemblance to the genre of the historical novel' (p. 102). This metacritical reading problematises 'the assumption that there is a direct referential relation between the works of biblical critics and the biblical text itself' (p. 14). For Boer Noth's Deuteronomistic History is a construct with 'complex connections and disconnections with the biblical text' (p. 102). The Deuteronomistic History is Noth's reading of Deuteronomy through II Kings; Deuteronomy through II Kings is not the Deuteronomistic History.

In chapters 4 and 5 Boer engages in what might be called, following the title of the series, 'playing the text'. After a discussion of a number of literary theorists on how 'the role of the historical novel has been taken over or transformed by science fiction' (p. 105), he does a reading of 'Chronicles as utopian literature and as science fiction' (p. 167). This playing the text is 'not so much to show that they (utopian literature and science fiction) are the generic determinants of Chronicles' (p. 167) but to point out in a kind of indirect way 'how much Noth's proposal for a "Deuteronomistic History" is a tentative proposal based on a host of literary conventions of his own day.'

The final chapter in the book titled 'Breakfast at McDonald's' attempts 'to historicize biblical criticism itself' (p. 169) understood as a perpetual interaction between realism, modernism and postmodernism.

Throughout the book there are interspersed dialogues involving characters encountered in the discussion including Martin Noth and Roland himself. These

dialogues represent a playfulness which caricatures the interpretive process highlighting not only the quasi-scientific language that characterises so much biblical criticism but also the recognition that postmodern biblical criticism takes place in a conflict zone where the best interpretation is the one that persuades the most people. Postmodern biblical criticism needs 'to dispense with the claim to truth . . . (T)ruth claims for the biblical text and of religion are no more than strategies to enhance the value of one's own interpretation and thereby of the text itself' (p. 196). ' (P)ostmodern biblical interpretation. . . (needs) to realize that it too works in a conflictual, contestatory and market fashion' (p. 198).

I recommend this book highly to anyone interested in the broader implications for reading the Bible in light of critical theory and cultural studies now found throughout the Humanities. I found it best to imagine myself as part of the dialogues so I took the book with me for a long stay at 'Wordsmiths', a café run by the University of Queensland book store. There in the midst of T-shirts and videos, where bookshelves used to be, this book about biblical interpretation as occupying a conflict zone was a weapon in my hand on my own battleground. When you can't find a book in the book shop, take one with you when you drink your coffee.

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Heathen in Godzone: Seventy Years of Rationalism in New Zealand
Bill Cooke, New Zealand Association of Rationalists and Humanists, Auckland, 1998 pp. 240.

For more than a century New Zealand has been regarded as a haven for rationalists, humanists, and the various shades of agnosticism and atheism. In the 1880s Freethinkers appeared to regard the country as a Mecca of secularity, as indicated in the following assessment by an English group: 'There is so much greater freedom for opinions in New Zealand than (in England), that what are called heterodox, do not stand as an insuperable obstacle to high office in the Chief Council of the Country.' Here the reference is to Robert Stout, the Premier, and John Ballance, the Minister of Defence and of Lands. It is indicative of the formal tolerance of unconventional religious opinion that the New Zealand Census from the start reports every variety of religious alignment and non-alignment, initially even for those designations which had only one adherent. Thus the Census reports the full spectrum of secularity, while those of Australia and Canada would not accept 'No' to the 'Religion' question until 1971.

It would be a mistake to generalise this formal tolerance of rationalism with the situation at a grass roots level, where the skirmishes with local clergy and politicians were often acrimonious and debilitating. This book shows how the New Zealand Rationalist Association, which was Auckland-based, came into constant conflict with the Auckland City Council over its activities, especially the lectures

and entertainment it organised on Sundays. It is an interesting comment on the influence of the evangelical Christian lobby in Auckland local politics that as recently as this year it was influential in denying financial support to a gay and lesbian street carnival.

The book is comparable to a denominational history, and as such it contains much detail and many names that will be of interest principally to the specialist reader. However, in two respects it is of wider interest. The first is in the links made between the vicissitudes of Rationalism in New Zealand and the inputs from significant outside sources. Thus the initial impetus to the founding of the Association came from the visit in 1923 of the prominent controversialist Joseph McCabe. Another outside source which was of constant financial assistance to the frequently struggling association was the Rationalist Press Association in the UK. Hence the reader is able to locate the progress of secularism in New Zealand within its broader international context.

The second area in which the book connects with wider themes can be seen in the way in which issues of importance to Rationalists mirror and refract broader public issues. The importance to the Association of leading politicians has already been indicated, but its close links with the Labour Party and the way in which internal disputes between Socialists and Communists mirrored frictions on the wider political scene is worthy of attention. Similarly, the way in which the Rationalist Association focussed a great deal of concern on the issue of secular education - a cornerstone of the 1870 Education Act - is a significant part of its contribution to wider debate on educational policy. Pacifism and attitudes to the Second World War also mirrored debates conducted in the wider society.

Given the Association's small size and sometimes precarious existence the fractious state of its internal politics sometimes makes for depressing reading. Ideology, obviously, can be as brittle and fervent when in concerns the non-transcendental as when it is directed to the other-worldly. But there are perhaps unintentional elements of humour in the book, and I could not escape the impression that Rationalist leaders devoted considerable time to travel in order to officiate at each other's funerals. I was reminded of Bryan Wilson's aphorism that 'a man needs extraordinary presence of mind at death if he is to avoid religious officiation at his burial.' (Incidentally, Wilson made this statement in *Religion in Secular Society*: Cooke mistakenly calls this volume in the New Thinker's Library *Religion in Contemporary Society*).

While this book will appeal most to specialist historians it will be of interest to those who have a more general interest in the environment of New Zealand religion in the present century.

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Swedenborg's Mighty Contribution to the Welfare of the Soul

Philip W Groves, The Swedenborg Lending Library and Enquiry Centre, North Ryde, 1997; 157; $20.00.

This slim volume contains eight lectures delivered by Philip Groves over the past decade at events of significance to the Sydney Swedenborgian community. Emanuel Swedenborg, born in Stockholm in 1688 to a pious Lutheran family, studied natural science and began his career as an author in 1734 with *The Mineral Kingdom*, a work which combined physical sciences with metaphysical questions of the origins of the universe. From the 1740s to his death in London in 1772 he concentrated on religious matters, producing a body of mystical writings which he believed expounded Christianity in its true form.

Each essay considers aspects of Swedenborg's theological system. The second piece, "Swedenborg's View of the Individual" commences with the quotation from Psalm 8, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? For thou has made him a little lower than the angels..." (p. 27), juxtaposed with the contemporary scientific view that a person is a complex biological organism and nothing more. In expounding the Swedenborgian position "that the individual is charged with the responsibility of living in harmony with Divine order" (p. 33) Groves employs the language of psychology discussing ego-states and artificial personalities. This is continued in the third essay "Spiritual Aspects of Swedenborg's Psychology". This engagement with major intellectual trends of the twentieth century makes these essays surprisingly easy to read, but they are decidedly confessional and apologetic in their conclusions.

Groves is critical of psychiatry and psychotherapy as a multi-million dollar industry which often merely patches up the problems of the patients. He cites Carl Jung (who studied Swedenborg's *Arcana Caelestia* and praised him as a mystic) and Maurice Nicoll (a student of Jung's) with approval because of their spiritual predisposition. However, despite the fact that Swedenborgianism may seem to have some similarities with certain New Age belief systems (for example the discussion of telepathy on p. 46), Groves is careful to separate them and delivers a strong critique of New Age psychological therapies: "Quite often these courses are weekend workshops or seminars lasting for a few weeks. What people fail to realise is that it has taken half a life-time to reach the disorganised state in which they find themselves..." (p. 44). Groves' comments about the excitement of pursuing these therapies distracting people from serious self-examination need to be said.

However, his solutions for the confused and troubled modern individual are theological ones: "the thoroughgoing Spiritual Psychology which is presented in (Swedenborg's) theological writings enables us to come to grips with, and resolve, any problem of self" (p. 51). Some of the essays, such as "Myths, Symbols and Parables" and "Phantasy and Reality" are more general in their scope, and "Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs - Symbols of Transformation" links Swedenborg's synthesis with religion in the ancient world. However, Groves is basically addressing the committed believer. This means that the volume is of interest to those readers who

are fascinated by Swedenborg himself, or the movement which follows him, but it can have little broad appeal. This being admitted, it is a readable study, commendable in its clarity and brevity. The volume is also attractively illustrated by a variety of colour mandala-like images by Rosemarie Lorenz.

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A Real Yet Imperfect Communion: the 1996 and 1997 Halifax-Portal Lectures
St Pauls Publications, 1998

Each of these papers is a lucid thoughtful contribution to the search for Anglican-Roman Catholic and wider church unity. Each was originally read as part of a two year lecture series which arose as an initiative of the joint annual NSW Anglican Catholic Bishops' meeting.

The lectures are an attempt by each church to explain part of its life to the other: a task probably as difficult as describing or analysing one's mother. It is very difficult to convey what makes each church special or unique and to capture not only the complexities and dynamism of the church in a time of change, but also the quirky idiosyncrasies which resonate for each of us about the church to which we belong. That poignancy, however, is captured by Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, commenting on the Roman Catholic Church:

> It is not easy to describe the beauty of the Catholic church to those who do not see it, but those who love that Church experience it frequently. I have seen many ugly things in the Church, but I constantly see the beautiful as well and it speaks to me of God. (:44)

The Reverend Dr Bruce Kaye, General Secretary of the Anglican Church of Australia, tries to pinpoint differences between the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches as follows:

> the institutional presumption tends, in the Roman Catholic Church, in the direction of centralised authority, whereas in the Anglican Communion the institutional presupposition tends in the direction of local autonomy. Furthermore, in Anglicanism there is a more profound commitment to a conciliar conception of the Church, a conception which includes necessarily a significant role for the laity in church governance. (:124)

This is indirectly counterpoised by Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, who describes the organisational reality of the Roman Catholic church as far from monolithic and "closer to anarchy" (:39) in the operation of both diverse and overlapping power centres such as religious orders, individual dioceses, commissions, lay organisations etc. which enable Roman Catholics to "guard so fiercely those areas of freedom and independence they do have" (:39). He points out that the Catholic Church in Australia (not to mention the world-wide church) is also large enough to accommodate

enormous diversity, which he amusingly and cannily characterises as Vatican I, II, and III positions. An impression is created that the Roman Catholic Church probably appears more centralised and authoritarian from the outside than for those who experience its lived realities.

That Anglican Bishop Donald Cameron consulted 35 Anglicans in preparing his wide-ranging lecture on the nature of the Anglican Church indicates a number of things: first, the seriousness with which he approached the task; secondly, his awareness of the diversity within the Anglican church; thirdly, the lack of assurance that any one Anglican can reflect or represent the whole Anglican church accurately; and fourthly the consultative, if not democratic, traditions of the church. It points to what Bruce Kaye identifies as a key issue facing the whole Anglican Communion, namely the tension between pluralism and unity, identity and diversity.

Diversity is also a reality for the Uniting Church in Australia, as the Reverend Dorothy McRae McMahon indicates, but she is able to state, more confidently than any Anglican could reasonably do, the shared understandings and theological views within the Uniting Church as to a number of specific Australian realities such as the environment, indigenous rights, multicultural Australia, without skirting points of tension such as the sexuality debate.

Deaconess Margaret Rodgers, CEO of the Anglican Media Council for the Diocese of Sydney, gives a very balanced account of women in the Anglican Church, covering clergy wives and couples, women's organisations, early 20th century feminism in England and women's ordination. Her impassioned plea for women to be fully recognised and represented in church decisionmaking at all levels would probably be equally strongly felt be many Catholic women. She says:

> It is not just a matter of the full membership of the body being truly represented in the decision-making processes (where women are not adequately involved). It can mean God-given gifts, especially of creativity, relationship and empathy are less allowed to infuse the ecclesiastical processes. The committees and decisions have therefore great danger of becoming coldly rational and cerebral, and they sometimes are. All the Gospels tell us that Christ was not so. (:72)

Whilst Dorothy McRae McMahon states that women in the Uniting Church comprise 50% of all decisionmaking bodies, Deaconess Rodgers indicates that women are usually a small minority in the Anglican church decision-making structures. Representations of Roman Catholic women in decision-making structures would form a lively topic for another paper, especially in light of the recent Australian Catholic Bishops' enquiry into the situation of women in the Roman Catholic Church.

Ms Denise Sullivan, a Nucleus Member of the Grail (a strong Roman Catholic women's organisation) and a lecturer in theology describes the work of lifelong friends Anglican Lord Halifax and Vincentian priest AEF Portal at the turn of this century. She vividly conveys the huge obstacles faced by these brave pioneers of early dialogue.

This is mirrored in the Australian context in the portrayal by Professor Patrick O'Farrell of the history of sectarianism as "imagination's stain". He argues that for Australia to succeed, its founders needed to control sectarianism and did this by constructing a society where religion was not the guiding principle for civil society, but cast to the fringes, where sectarianism ensured that it remained.

The Halifax-Portal vision of organisational amalgamation of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches differs from the vision of most of the contemporary ecumenical movement, which values the unique flavours, fragrances and nuances which diversity allows, but seeks, as the 'Lund principle' expresses it, that "we will do together all things which can be done together". Specifically, as a further development in mutual sharing, Bruce Kaye suggests that:

> there should be recognition that the ministries and sacraments of our churches should be accessible to each other, that we ought to be able to visit each other and participate fully as guests. (:126)

As well as detailing the history and practices of the Orthodox churches, His Eminence Archbishop Aghan Baliozian, Archbishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church for the Asia-Pacific region and first President of the National Council of Churches of Australia cuts through the kernel of the search for unity in a few short sentences. He makes a truly perceptive comment in relation to unity, namely that "our hearts need softening up" (:106) and challenges those who govern the churches in saying:

> true unity will come through love and **humility**....unity will come not through signed documents or treaties; unity will come through our hearts, because that is where the Holy Spirit works in us, not in our logical minds. (:106)

If the Reverend Bill Lawton's lessons in "love at the boundaries of society" are anything to go by, perhaps greater church involvement in church decision-making by women, indigenous and other people used to dealing with the underside of glorious structures would help soften the collective hearts of the churches. Of his partnership with nuns and priests of the inner city befriending drunks, prostitutes and those dying of AIDS, Bill Lawton says:

> we uncover an essential agreement in the Eucharist, but through a common theology of Incarnation and the life of the Body of Christ rather than through learned treatise and dispute. (:53)

In effect, he suggests an experiential learning method, because, for him, the friendship and mutual love and concern for the broken in the inner city brought the closeness which we all seek in the ecumenical movement.

The lifelong friendship of Halifax and Portal, the crucible in which so much was risked, endured and achieved, may also provide a clue to the way forward: the millennium Australia Halifax-Portal dialogues could include papers from situations

where joint work and friendship are developing. These would move the dialogues from description and analysis of where things are now to directions in which they may move. Such stories "from the coalface" could inspire others to emulate good examples and creatively develop their own.

I commend *A Real Yet Imperfect Communion* to you!

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Ethics and Religion in a Pluralistic Age: Collected Essays

Brian Hebblethwaite, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1997, pp. 216, index.
RRP £21.95 ISBN 0 567 08551 1

Brian Hebblethwaite is well known for his highly readable books on theology, philosophy and religion. This recent collection of twelve essays (five previously unpublished) is no exception.

In the first part, Hebblethwaite explores the close relationship between ethics and doctrine in the Christian way of life. For Hebblethwaite, 'the distinctiveness of the Christian way is bound up with and depends upon the truth of Christian doctrine.' He makes a case for taking doctrine seriously as 'providing a framework within which a distinctive vision of what human life might be arises and is sustained'.

He starts with natural theology, indicating those 'features of the human situation which might be held open to the spiritual dimension, fostered and realised in many different religious traditions'. He then explores what difference religion might make to morality and how religious ethics relate to secular ethics.

His view of the distinctiveness of Christian ethics does not impose uniformity. 'The divine goodness, spelled out in terms of love and of grace', he argues, 'is the basis, the model, and the resource of the myriad forms of finite, contingent, human goodness'. He explores varieties of Christian goodness that can be embraced in a Christian way of life.

This respect for the integrity and diversity of the Christian tradition provides a basis for his consideration, in the second half of the book, of the relationship between Christian ways of life and the ethical convictions of other world faiths.

He takes issue with both the Christian atheism of Don Cupitt and the extreme ethical pluralism of John Hick. These approaches attempt to salvage some remainder from historic Christianity, but Hebblethwaite prefers to recognise the theocentric and Christocentric core of Christianity which he sees as a living faith, a dependence on a living God, active and revealed in Christ and the Spirit.

It is Hebblethwaite's respect for the particularity of Christian faith which, I think, allows him to take seriously other faiths. Cupitt, he argues, for example, does not take Buddhism seriously when he refers to his non-realist theology as 'Christian Buddhism'. In Hebblethwaite's view, this can only be done by ignoring, or devaluing, the metaphysical elements of the Buddhist tradition.

In the contemporary encounter between faiths, and between faiths and non-

faith, much of the historical legacy of each tradition needs to be rethought. And it is clear that Hebblethwaite is a critical rethinker himself, offering new insights and submitting the tradition to critical analysis. This is clear, for example, in his essay. 'Does the doctrine of the atonement make moral sense'. Here, Hebblethwaite argues that what is wrong with many of the traditional models of the atonement - expiation, vicarious sacrifice and slave redemption - is that they are morally suspect. They attempted to root the Christ's death in some quasi-objective process rather than in a action of a living, loving God.

It is the uniqueness of the Christian faith, and the moral impulses which flow from it, which lead Hebblethwaite to not only engage with the other world religions from a starting point of respect for their particularity and difference, but also to consider the relationship between their doctrines and their ethical and political engagement with social evils. In particular, he considers the relationship between Buddhist, Christian and Hindu doctrines and responses to evil in the world. He treats the problem of evil as essentially a practical problem; one of engagement with suffering in history, informed by a way of life, arising out of doctrines about the nature of the world, ultimate reality and salvation. One central issue is whether each religious tradition sees this salvation as a matter for the individual or society. He shows the variety of responses within each tradition and reveals the complexities and nuances involved.

Overall, Hebblethwaite offers the reader a sound and stimulating introduction to the major issues at stake in religious pluralism and reveals them to be matters of ethics as well as truth. Supplemented with other material from a wider variety of traditions, the book would provide a useful text for a discussion of religious pluralism, particularly for those who share Hebblethwaite's concerns to develop a comparative religious social ethics and to uncover religious resources for the overcoming of social evils.

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Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity

Paul Heelas (ed.) with David Martin and Paul Morris, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1998; pp. vii, 338 (pb); RRP US$59.95 (hb), US$24.95 (pb); ISBN 0631198474 (hb), 0631198482 (pb)

This collection of fifteen essays from (mostly) distinguished scholars in a wide range of fields, from sociology through literature, to theology and 'religious studies', is in part genuinely stimulating and thought-provoking. However, there are problems, in that the vexed questions of what is 'postmodernity' and 'the postmodern'; and whether the religious development of the twentieth century needs to be viewed through the lens of postmodern philosophy in order to be rendered comprehensible, are far from settled and this volume is likely to fuel the debate, rather than assist in the

drawing of conclusions.

Heelas' "Introduction" discusses differentiation and dedifferentiation, long seen as central to the transition from the modern to the postmodern. The modern differentiates, the postmodern dedifferentiates, it has been claimed. Heelas demonstrates conclusively that both are present in modernity and postmodernity (the tendency to classify according to particulars, but to seek identity and unity within modernity; the 'super-liberalism' of postmodernity which takes notice of difference, combined with the deregulation which allows blending and fusing). What then is the difference? One view is that differentiation and dedifferentiation **operate** differently in the postmodern context, where there are no 'grand narratives'; yet this may be countered by arguing "that virtually everything discussed under the heading 'postmodernity' can be found within the setting of modernity" (p. 9). This definitional fluidity will plague many of the subsequent essays.

The philosophical differences between the volume's contributors are glaringly apparent in the juxtaposition of the essays by Steve Bruce and Mark C Taylor, placed immediately after Heelas' preliminary comments. Bruce in "Cathedrals to cults: the evolving forms of the religious life" uses the late Roy Wallis' typology of church, denomination, sect and cult to trace the changes to religious organisations as they struggled to adapt to the modernising, secularising culture of the post-medieval West. His conclusion as to whether this process is indicative of the emergence of 'postmodern religion' is emphatic: "my conclusion is that 'postmodernity' in this context is unnecessary, and, given the tendentious theoretical baggage associated with the term, best avoided" (p. 34). Lest any devotees of postmodernism condemn Steve Bruce to the flames immediately, it must be pointed out that he is willing to discuss and analyse the changes, and to account for them in theoretical terms; it is simply that his analytical framework is not 'postmodern'. As meta-narratives no longer have power, this should not disturb anyone unduly!

Mark C Taylor, in "Terminal Faith" is, by contrast, in full postmodern flight. One of the prophets of the English-speaking postmodern school, Taylor has produced several interesting works, including *Dis/Figuring* (about art) and *Erring* (about theology). Here he attempts to relate the ancient and medieval phenomenon of alchemy to the modernist philosophy of Hegel (in which the absolute "gradually reveals itself in nature and history" (p. 43)), and to suggest that the fusion of these ideas provides a blueprint, the implementation of which is cyberspace, virtual reality, the global telecommunications systems which presently exists and is ever-expanding. From this he moves to the cyborg, the fusion of flesh and machine; and finally concludes that technology, such as the telephone, becomes a surrogate for the mother. This is truly startling: "What man wants, in other words, is not only woman but incest. If his call goes through, if the circuit is completed, he becomes one with the mother goddess" (p. 52). The "terminal" of the title is the electronic interface, computer terminal or appliance through which one connects to the matrix. It is well to remember the postmodern wisdom on the nature of competing discourses and the absence of

meta-narratives which must be subscribed to, in that it is clear that logic and the scrupulous assemblage of evidence which characterise certain types of academic work are entirely absent here.

Leaving these philosophical/methodological issues aside, the volume has some virtues. Taylor is clearly the most hard-core postmodernist in the collection, and other essays group themselves according to discipline or method quite effortlessly. Zygmunt Bauman's "Postmodern Religion?" intelligently analyses the possibilities for religiosity within widespread atheism, in part philosophically justified, but mostly simply the lived condition of twentieth century people. He discusses non-ontological anxiety and this-wordly transcendence clearly, and contrasts the extreme privatisation of faith (characteristic of the New Age) with fundamentalism, demonstrating their interconnectedness. There are a set of essays concerned with post-colonial experience: Bernice Martin's very impressive "From pre- to postmodernity in Latin America: the case of Pentecostalism", which carefully distinguishes the ways in which the religious leaders of Pentecostal churches have a style "straight out of the secular mass media and popular culture" (p. 139), yet reject other aspects of postmodernity, such as "its refusal of moral certainty" (p. 137); Robert Hefner's "Secularization and citizenship in Muslim Indonesia", which considers Islam and pluralism; and Winston Davis' "Religion and National Identity in modern and postmodern Japan", which analyses Japan Theory, a body of literature which puts forward a view of Japanese culture as unique and superior. They are primarily sociological in orientation and focus chiefly on the construction of identity.

A lengthy section (six of fifteen essays) on theology concludes the collection. The difficulties with the concept of postmodernism, and separate but related problems concerning the arcane language in which much postmodern argumentation is couched re-appear with a vengeance here. The relationship between theology and "religious studies" has long been problematic, a clear example of modernist (?) differentiation. Theology was confessional, speaking of faith, and was therefore not susceptible of proof; religious studies was phenomenological, strove for objectivity, and concentrated on those aspects of religion which were observable, measurable. Postmodern dedifferentiation might be expected to herald the collapsing together of the two approaches: indeed, the decidedly non- postmodern Eric J Sharpe characterised them both as having lately turned into branches of existentialism, theological and secular (*ARS Review* 11, 2, Spring 1998, p. 132).

Richard H Roberts' "The Construals of 'Europe'" has elevated intentions: to "grasp the ethical and theological dialectics of the postmodern condition, and seek, as Vaclav Havel wrote from the prison cell, to "live in truth" (p. 210), as opposed to "retreating" into premodernity or "escaping" into modernity. This loaded terminology reveals the moral muddle at the heart of this essay; how is postmodernity "living in truth" when truth has been demythologised, debunked? Roberts' vision for the future of theology seems to suggest that theology does not have a future as a separate discipline: indeed, as Sharpe observed, it has dissolved into an existential assertion.

After this, it is a relief to read Don Cupitt's "Post-Christianity", clear and elegant and hard-edged as Cupitt ever is. He also has grasped what the implications of post-modernity for Christianity are. There can be no otherworldly transcendence, God is not "out there"; and rather than being defeated by this he re-thinks how meaning and connection can be restored to human lives without the false consolations encouraged in the past. His philosophy is public and humane, not solipsistic and fragmented as much postmodern thought tends to be, and the result is hopeful, the hope founded on intelligent assessment of the problems and realistic suggestion of solutions.

It is interesting then to compare Phillip Blond's "The primacy of theology and the question of perception" with Cupitt's piece. Blond is clearly (though subtly) a "traditional" Christian, who still believes that otherworldly transcendence is real: one of those that Roberts scorns as retreating "into premodern tradition" (p. 210). However, his essay shows no sign of retreat; rather a willingness to engage with very difficult issues (principally the attempt to re-connect faith with reason) and a willingness to work **within** with the Enlightenment "rationalist" critique of theology. His philosophical mentors are (unsurprisingly) Kant, Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein, but his approach is so fresh and enthusiastic, as well as intellectually scrupulous, that it shows up the more "postmodern" theological efforts thoroughly. And the most interesting thing is that although his conclusions differ radically from those of Don Cupitt it is clear that they could "talk" to each other, where some of the theoretical approaches represented in the volume are not susceptible of communication.

Graham Ward's essay "*Kenosis* and naming: beyond analogy and towards *allegoria amoris*" displays the worst excesses of postmodernism as exposed recently by Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont in their book *Intellectual Impostures*. Ward, a theologian, plays around with ideas from anthropology and psychology with which he is clearly not *au fait*. Sokal and Bricmont have observed that postmodern writers often use terms from disciplines other than their own, especially the sciences, and produce syntactically correct sentences which are empty of content. Ward does this himself, and also makes substantial use of Julia Kristeva, the French psychologist/ feminist theorist, who is herself a major offender. For example, "This separation from the body of the mother, Kristeva views as a separation from the semiotic *chora*. This has to occur prior to the thetic or image stage and the arrival at the semantic concern with the proper name" (p. 246), and, more remarkably, "These are troubled waters in studies of Kristeva, for the 'imaginary', loving father prepares the subject for desiring the Phallus in which is the dynamic for entry in to the symbolic order and the Oedipus complex. For our purposes, this 'haunting' by the imaginary father - whatever the coherence of the idea in Kristeva's work and her dialogue with Freud and Lacan - is another example of how Kristeva's morphology of the self parallels the doctrine of kenosis in the *carmen Christi*" (p. 247). The mess of psychological theory, unsupported by any clinical observations; obscure and portentous style; and

the connecting of unrelated subjects are characteristic of the worst of postmodern "scholarship".

The final subject tackled in this volume is aesthetics and the arts: poetry in Kevin Hart's essay "The impossible"; and the relation between the sublime and the beautiful, with due deference to Kant, in John Milbank's "Sublimity". These are brief, clear meditations on the way that the beautiful and art may be windows for human beings into different dimensions, whether these be metaphysical realities or levels of experience. In conclusion, the cover notes celebrate *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* as a "very timely book" and it is that, in that it reflects certain intellectual trends which are prevalent in the field at the moment. However, it is hard to accept that it is at all significant: the postmodern philosophy (if that is what you as a reader admire and are looking for) is all secondhand quoting of the accepted authorities, and there is very little solid empirical research presented (Bernice Martin being the striking exception). The best pieces are those which (like Cupitt, Bauman and Blond) address the "postmodern condition" (what it is to exist in the late-twentieth century post-industrial First World as global capitalism collapses) and attempt to carefully propose possibilities which might emerge after postmodernism - something rarely envisaged by hard-core postmodernists who, in a rather old-fashioned way, apocalyptically imagine that they are going to have the last word.

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Pluralism and the Religions: The theological and political dimensions
John D'Arcy May, London: Cassell 1998; Hb 0-304-70258-7 96pp £30, pb 0-304-70259-5 £9.99

John D'Arcy May introduces six papers from an Irish School of Ecumenics symposium by reflecting that, in a world trying to throw off both political and cultural imperialism, it is not enough to be sensitive to religious diversity: one must also be sensitive to the different philosophical frameworks which inform how one understands it. So, he suggests, scholars might 'get used to asking "Whose pluralism?" as well as "Which religion?"' (p 1). The range of positions in the volume adds up to a multifaceted reflection upon it.

Prominent ecumenist Wesley Ariarajah reflects on the World Council of Churches' experience of interfaith dialogue. Seeing the Other as 'dialogue partner' rather than potential convert threatens a major break with the ecumenical movement's missionary roots, he suggests. Given the WCC's predominantly first world and Protestant-dominated history, it is not surprising that, even in these more inclusive days, the kind of pluralism into which the WCC seems to be struggling still largely shares the pattern identified by May as having 'tended to take as its point of reference understandings of pluralism which originated in the European Enlightenment'.

Comparing a variously-named fifteenth century Russian icon with a modern Indian painting allows Gavin D'Costa to explore non-Western pluralisms. In Jiyoti

Sahi's 'The Word Made Flesh', reproduced on the cover, D'Costa finds an Indian inclusivism which unpicks any assumed association between Christianity and Western cultures to draw, instead, a range of Indian cultural and religious references. This, D'Costa argues, expresses the painter's situation as a bearer of multiple personal identities - Indian, Christian, village-based - and challenges the viewer to reflect on these and other intersections.

Comparably multileveled, Andrei Rublev's icon of Abraham and Sarah's hospitality to three strangers can be read as a direct representation of the story, or, as one of its titles suggests, as an 'Old Testament Trinity'. But where Sahi's plurality of reference arises out of lived experience at the meeting point of various traditions, Rublev's appropriation of a Jewish story into a Christian icon comes from a period of monoculture and anti-Semitism. The questions thus posed are thus moral as well as aesthetic; for D'Costa, they open up a model of pluralism based on 'negotiation'. He proposes that it is possible to read the icon in both its Trinitarian and Jewish meanings, avoiding the genocidal reading which sees the Abraham and Sarah story purely as a prefiguring of Christian symbolism by denying it any significance on its own terms. This can happen, D'Costa says, by holding the two readings 'in tension', so that the story 'allows us to glimpse, *before the incarnation of the Son, but only through the incarnation of the Son*, and this is all important, the presence and absence of the triune God' (p 24, emphasis in original). Rublev's icon, he says, 'is deeply sensitive to the *deep patterns* within the story', inviting 'a profound rereading of Genesis 18, which, rather than erasing the economic narrative in Genesis, reads it within the light of another narrative, the church of Jesus Christ, centred around the Eucharistic table, participating in the life of the triune God'. On such a reading, he italicises, '*neither narrative is quite the same after this negotiation, nor should nor could it be*' (p 25).

I found the pluralistic reading here less successful and more disturbing than in the Sahi painting. While the 'negotiation' approach is richly promising, the thing about negotiation is that both parties have to enter into it: you can't have a unilateral negotiation. Yet it is hard to see Christian readings of Jewish tradition as anything else. For all the effort to read the icon as two narratives in tension, the give-away admission that *neither* is quite the same after the tension has been acknowledged seems to suggest that here, the Jewish tradition has been appropriated into a unilateral process of reinterpretation whereby it, and thus its original force and resonance, is changed. The result may be deep, profound and suggestive for its Christian audience, but it is not 'negotiation' or 'pluralism'. D'Costa seems aware of this problem, referring to Rublev's 'imperialising tendency' (p 32); but his attempts to read beyond that tendency do not seem to me to have avoided it.

Ursula King turns the question 'Whose pluralism?' into a challenge that interfaith dialogue engage with feminist concerns. At the level of practical interactions, she points out that since 'dialogue' usually means encounters between religious leaders, who tend to be men, women become 'doubly Other' (p 45).

Meanwhile, myriad instances of co-operation and negotiation between women of different faiths remain invisible to the official dialogue movement. King also challenges the religions to question their own practice and ideology with respect to women: she points, for example, to the 1993 World's Parliament of Religions' critique of women's oppression in the family in a directive 'phrased as if the religions already had the answer to the oppression and exploitation of women' rather than being 'part of the problem and cause of this oppressive state of affairs' (p 51). King's contribution reads pluralism in several directions: as well as feminism's challenge to the interfaith movement, she sees in interreligious dialogue a challenge to feminism to develop an appreciation of religion as an important sphere of women's experience.

The kind of pluralism which would emerge from serious involvement of women and engagement with feminist concerns remains largely on the horizon for this collection. As one of two female contributors and the only one explicitly making gender the focus of her analysis, King has space only to point out the lacks and potentials, not to develop any of the possibilities to which her argument gestures. Feminists have long noticed that the first step towards change is to make visible the absences; but beyond that, there needs to be a critical mass of women's involvement for those absences' potential to be realised. It would have been encouraging, therefore, to have a greater number of feminist contributors, so that there would be space to see how feminist perspectives on dialogue would develop. King's caution about seeing women in the dialogue process as 'doubly other' because of their '*different* gender' (p 45) might ring bells as we read the Introduction's description of the volume's contributors as 'two keynote speakers ..., two theologians ... and two women ...' (p1).

For feminist voices to have an impact requires not only that they be present but that other voices be prepared seriously to engage with them. Paul Knitter's paper draws creatively on feminist critiques of Christian soteriology to point to areas in which various world religions might develop parallel or analogous sensitivities. Knitter's aim is to answer the postmodernist challenge to interfaith dialogue, namely, that any universalising goal will only lead to greater violences and exclusions in the attempt to reconcile irreconcilable diversity. His response, likely to find sympathy in at least the more materialist strands of postmodernism, is that a common orientation towards the survival and flourishing of the planet and its peoples can provide a focus for the mystical and prophetic dimensions of all the world religions.

If even that seems too bold a generalisation, Rosario Narchison's fascinating account puts flesh on the suggestion. The Indian School of Ecumenical Theology (ISET) in Bangalore takes interreligious co-operation beyond dialogue, to collaborative theological education. This is made possible, he suggests, by a strong commitment to secularism: ISET 'from the very beginning interpreted ecumenism for India as secularism, and only very secondarily as church unity'(p 67). But not the Western, liberal sense of secularism, with its insistence on keeping religion rigidly out of public debate; ISET relies on Indian secularism, which takes diversity

as given and emphasises the worldly dimension of all religious traditions. Religion and politics, far from separated, have a responsibility each to be the critic of the other, making 'religion more tolerant and politics more moral' (p 69).

The this-worldly focus is maintained in Pia Gyger's take on pluralism, which starts from an evolutionary perspective, seeing human diversity in the context of natural variety. Much of her paper is a reminder rather than innovation, recalling facts we might prefer to forget about the rate of environmental degradation. She concludes, however, with a novel story of Christian-Buddhist co-operation in Switzerland. The picture she paints of a marriage between politics and contemplation makes 'activism' seem an equally apposite description of either.

The papers add up to a rich series of reflections on the question 'Whose pluralism?', as much for the overall canvass of encounter between Western and non-Western frames of theology and philosophy as for their individual arguments. Within that, the book poses its own answer: the two Indian, one USA and three European contributors agree in locating the challenge of pluralism in encounters between the world religions. In Australia, Canada or Aotearoa-New Zealand, arguably the most politically pressing questions of pluralism arise not between Hindu and Muslim or Jew and Christian, but between Indigenous religious traditions and a secular state whose liberal presuppositions are firmly rooted in Protestantism. In that perspective, the answers to the question, 'Whose pluralism?' would be likely to take a different form; but the perspectives offered in this book could well prove instructive for such a different but comparable quest.

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Arts in the Religions of the Pacific: Symbols of Life

Albert C Moore. Cassell, London and Washington. 1997 (pb) xvii + 219pp

Albert Moore is a scholar and a gentleman; and nowhere more patently than in this handsome tome. This is not just an important work about Aboriginal, Melanesian and Polynesian art, it is useful, especially in its Introduction, for helping lay and undergraduate readers better understand what religion is generally.

Moore is a doyen in exploring the iconographic expression of spiritual life in the world's religious traditions (witness his *Iconography of Religions*, 1977). In this later book (first published in 1995 and now in paperback) he shows his skill best of all in combining clear exposition with analytical depth. This high achievement is because he has had years of experience researching Polynesian, and especially Aotearoan, artistry and spirituality; has by now invested solid fieldwork for a better understanding of Melanesian materials; and has acquired discernment and judiciousness in his handling of the complex Aboriginal data. The book is copiously illustrated, with text and pictures intelligently interconnected. Moore has a trained eye, moreover, to see the persistence of traditional design and sensibility in Christian and post-Christian artworks.

The book is least sophisticated in the Aboriginal chapter, which is to be expected because Moore has less expertise in this area, yet unfortunately because it is the region dealt with first. Micronesia seems too thoroughly absorbed into Polynesia (given only four pages); and too little space is left for comparative analysis in the conclusion.

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The Kamilaroi Lands:
North-central New South Wales in the Early 19th century.
Michael O'Rourke, Griffith, ACT: self published, 1997.
289 pages. 23 maps. 20 illustrations. pb. RRP $39

The first two chapters of this volume reflect a meticulous technical study of the location and place names of the Kamilaroi peoples in North-central NSW. O'Rourke analyses the records of Tindale to test the tribal names and locations of the region, making a number of corrections. He also reviews the various place names of the region by analysing the 19th century source material available. These two chapters provide valuable data on the languages, location and geography of the Kamilaroi peoples.

Those of us involved in Religion Studies will find his summary of the Kamilaroi way of life in chapter three quite interesting. After surveying territories, boundaries, food sources, population, seasonal movements, law, government, kinship and related areas, O'Rourke analyses Kamilaroi religion. This section reflects a dialogue with Tony Swain and some of his views about early colonial influence on beliefs of the region.

O'Rourke describes Baiame as a sky deity, half human and half crystal in form, a thunder god. He maintains the Baiame was a transcendent sky deity known as the creator and Father of All, long before any colonial influence. In this he follows Eliade in viewing Baiame as a high god, like Zeus, dwelling eternally in the Sky Above. He is not ready to downgrade him to a 'culture hero' in the face of 'chauvinistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam'. (p. 176)

Nor does he believe that Dharramulan, the evil one-legged son or brother of Baiame, has been transformed under the influence of Christian concepts of the devil. This deity presided over the Bora initiation ceremonies which O'Rourke also discusses. The third major Being is the Rainbow Serpent, the teacher of songs, who lives in one form in the Milky Way and in another in deep waterholes. O'Rourke concludes 'I agree with Ian Keen who sees the associations between Baayama, quartz crystals and so on as "too deeply embedded, complex, widespread and varied" to have come into being as a swift response to the white invasion'. (p. 180)

Chapter Four discusses the effects of settlement from 1826-1925, focussing especially on the early years. O'Rourke seeks to demonstrate that the rapid decline in the Aboriginal population was not primarily due to the violence of the squatters,

but to disease, loss of resources and dislocation. Massacres and shootings were relatively few and usually arose over killing of sheep or appropriation of Aboriginal women. O'Rourke estimates that there was a rapid decline in population of the Kamilaroi from 10,000 in 1826 to 1,000 by 1856. They maintained their traditional culture for many years, but by the turn of the century, almost all had been 'Europeanised.' O'Rourke claims that the last Bora ceremony was performed in 1905. This event symbolises the last throes of a 'high culture' from the past.

O'Rourke's fresh analysis of this Aboriginal people avoids moralisation and seeks to present 'history' fairly. It is hard to escape the implication, however, that while there may have been little warfare or killing, the process of settling the land of the Kamilaroi by the Europeans, was another form of violence that destroyed the lives, culture and hope of a great people.

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Note. The book is available from the author email mjor@u030.aone.net.au

Tunnel to Eternity: Beyond Near-Death

Leon Rhodes, with a foreword by Kenneth Ring, Chrysalis Books Pennsylvania/ Swedenborg Centre Sydney, 1998. xvii, 107; $15.00.

Near-death experiences (NDEs) have received a wide coverage in 'alternative' religious circles since the 1960s. Swedenborgian thought was first introduced into the debate by Raymond Moody, whose *Life after Life* published in 1975, used extracts from *A Compendium of the Theological and Spiritual Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg* which had been compiled in 1853.

Leon Rhodes has followed this thread for over twenty years, recording accounts of near-death experiences and matching them to accounts of mystical journeys in Swedenborg's writings. The United States is a fertile environment for all sorts of unusual religious experiences, and Rhodes notes that in 1982 approximately eight million Americans claimed to have experienced an NDE. Recently attention has been drawn to accounts of alien abductions, and approximately three million Americans in 1997 claimed to have had such an experience. One way to interpret these experiences is in terms of the traditional vocabulary of mysticism. NDEs can usually be connected with a physical state (accident, heart attack, stroke and so on) where alien abduction accounts are generally unverifiable, but the descriptions frequently match accounts of mystics very closely.

Rhodes' book is clearly and simply written in informal language. He introduces the reader to the thought of Swedenborg and his attitude to death, then notes that NDEs are not the afterlife or experiences of actual death. While acknowledging that NDEs have astonishing variety and detail, Rhodes asserts that the confidence and calmness with which most NDE experiencers meet the process of dying is a significant element. He notes Swedenborg's assertion that the newly arrived souls he witnessed

on his mystical journeys "appear to be beyond pain - fearless, and quite dispassionate about the situation that ended their physical existence" (pp. 11-12).

This book is written from an avowedly Swedenborgian standpoint, so it will not appeal to those who deny the existence of the spiritual realm, or who assert the existence of a different kind of spiritual realm (for example, that of Buddhism). This confessional approach becomes apparent in Sections 3 "The Real World" and continues to the end of the book. In conclusion, *Tunnel to Eternity* is an eccentric work, useful to those with an interest in either Swedenborg or NDEs but otherwise with limited appeal.

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The World's Religions, 2nd edition

Ninian Smart, 1998, Cambridge University Press, 608 pp; paper; RRP $49.95.

The first edition of this general textbook was published in 1989. Smart, one of the giants of the international Religious Studies community, has also written *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (2nd edition 1976), a quite different introduction to world religions. The first edition of *The World's Religions* was subtitled "Old Traditions and Modern Transformations" and this is absent in the new edition. This points to the major difference between the two versions: the Berlin Wall has fallen and the Communist bloc is no more, and Smart has rethought his conclusions on the future of religion and its relationship to politics.

The first section of the book traces the origins of religion from prehistoric evidence, through the religions of the Ancient World, and examines the foundation and development of the "great" traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam) within the context of a number of influential "minor" traditions (Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, Pacific and African religion, among others). This section is largely unchanged, save for matters of format and presentation. It is an improvement on the first edition, in that the typeface and presentation are more attractive and more readable, and several useful tables have been added. Some of the illustrations have been altered for the better: for example the illustration of a *marae*, a Polynesian sacred enclosure, opposite page 170 has been replaced by a different image of a *marae*, and a reproduction of Gauguin's marvellous painting "The Spirit of the Dead Watches"; and parts of the text dealing with important individuals have been placed in frames, drawing the reader's attention more readily (see "Plotinus" on p. 241). These framed biographies are also interesting in that Smart appears to have taken pains to include significant women from assorted traditions - so those featured include Hildegard of Bingen (p. 279), Nakayama Miki, the founder of Tenrikyo(p. 475), and Rabi'ah of Basra (p. 299). Also included are religious leaders from colonially oppressed peoples: Simon Kimbangu of Democratic Congo, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth and through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu (p. 547); and the Oglala Lakota mystic Black Elk, who re-enacted

the Horse Dance and was present at the Battle of Wounded Knee, the sad and bloody ending to the Ghost Dance movement (p. 389).

The second section of the book deals with the changes to faiths and cultures after the Renaissance and the voyages of discovery and colonial conquest and settlement. Here the same format changes have also been implemented, with resulting advantages: the illustrations for the subsection "Evangelicals and Fundamentalists" are vastly superior to those of the first edition, as are those of other subsections; and the increased use of maps, charts and framed biographies to break up the text mass and increase accessibility is laudable. Minor changes, such as the adoption of the revised spelling of Chinese (in the discussion of the Taiping Movement, the older-style "Hung-hsiu Ch'uan" is replaced with "Hongxiu Quan"), indicate a lively interest in cultural perceptions and changing attitudes.

The greatest change is in the concluding chapter. Chapter 25, "Some Final Reflections on Global Religion", discussed new forms of religion, reactions to the West, religion and global communication, worldview analysis and the future of education. The final chapter in the revised edition is called "Reflections on the Twentieth Century", and it discusses the unity of religions, diasporas in the modern world, and worldview analysis and plural societies. Here Smart reflects on the fact that a unity of religions has not emerged, and that people are gradually becoming comfortable in communities and nations where one single view no longer dominates, but where a multiplicity of views are present. This is facilitated by global communications, tourism, the translation of novels into many languages, mass migration, and a growing awareness of human rights issues.

The second edition is some fifty pages longer than its predecessor, and reflects Smart's continuing engagement with religion, and its effect on human lives and political entities. Some years ago I reviewed the first edition of *The World's Religions* for *Intersections*, the Journal of the Association for Studies of Religion (Volume 2, No. 1, December 1996, pp. 48-50), with a view to assessing its appropriateness as a school textbook and as a teacher's resource. In that review I concluded that "it manages to approach a complex subject without abandoning critical intelligence, and covers a vast span of history and range of religious traditions without retreating into over-simplification and structures which deny the particularity of specific religions. It offers a thoughtful and thought-provoking picture of human religious activity and challenges the reader to think further when the act of reading is over".

The second edition still provokes the same response. This book is highly recommended. Granted that general textbooks are some of the most difficult books to write, in that someone is always still not satisfied, this must be one of the best introductions to religion, its history, and its interactions with the contemporary world, presently available.

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Recasting the Stone: Human Suffering and the Business of Blame

Rosemary Williams, Harper Collins Religious, 1998 I-IX & 134pp; paperback
ISBN 1 86371 734 X; RRP $18.95

This book is about blame, "the reproach visited upon people who suffer" (p. 11). Why is it that more often than not people who suffer are "found guilty for their own affliction" (p. 11)? This central reality of everyday life, which the author takes for granted, serves as the basis for her reflections on the "theology of trial" (p. 64). The air of contemporary society is rife with the foul smell of "trial." This odour wafts out of three contemporary bogs, namely, the theological, the psychological and the corporate: "people's suffering is viewed as being a consequence of their sin, psychological limitation or failure in the marketplace" (p. 90). The author indicates that a theology of trial stands in crisp contradiction to the Old Testament Book of Job, in which a paradox linking together human suffering and human innocence marks the righteous person. What Job represents is hardly a theology of trial, but a "theology of project" which never lets go of that human paradox, which itself makes the suffering of the world "humanity's finest teachers" (p. 77). The reason for this, writes the author, is that far from "subjecting the afflicted to any sort of trial and far from finding them guilty and blaming them, this theology begins with their pain, trusts its darkness, declares its validity and asks questions about it" (p. 77). A theology of project is all about social justice. Perhaps building on the example of Helen Garner's book, *The First Stone*, which concerns blame over alleged sexual misconduct in a university college setting, the author carries the matter of blame into Christian theology. She says that the "Kingdom of God is thwarted by the dominance given to the ideology of trial in theology, psychology and corporatism and in our spontaneous attitudes to suffering human beings" (p. 99). Although central to Christianity, a theology of project is always eclipsed by a theology of trial: "Western civilisation has lost sight of Jesus' bold veto of this ideology (of project), or perhaps it didn't grasp it in the first place" (p. 99). Getting back to basics? For the ideology of project to replace the ideology of trial, "the stone is recast by being hurled back to its blame-mongering origins so that it may be recast into a bedrock of liberation . . ." (p. 122). That the author often interchanges the words "theology" and "ideology", making them synonyms, is telling. After all, she is proud to point out that she has for many years lived as a volunteer-in-residence in an inner city community of homeless women in Melbourne. The overall thesis of the book is indeed worthy, but scholars may find disappointing the author's style of writing and limited range of sources used in the book. The writing style is journalistic, but impassioned language that commands attention without sensationalising human suffering "on trial". Sections of chapters are perhaps too short, but this underscores the author's decision to hammer home her moral statement about victims of blame. Most of the sources come from the author's conversations and letters, popular books on liberation theology, local newspapers, magazines and journals, movies, TV and videos, reports and a host of poetry. The book can be located in "self-help / spirituality" sections of bookshops.

Overall, it is a simple and accessible rallying cry for commitment by the Christian community to engage in liberating all who suffer from misplaced blame and seek social justice.

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