

Book Reviews

In Search of Muhammad: A Review Essay

Clinton Bennett, In Search of Muhammad, London and New York, Cassell, October 1998, x + 276pp, appendices, indexes, ISBN pb 0-304-70401-6 (16.99 pounds sterling)/ hb 0-304-33700-5 (45 stg)

Christian scholars have long been fascinated and challenged by the figure of Muhammad, the founder of a faith which has represented Christianity's greatest competitor for almost 1400 years. Today, while around thirty-three percent of the world's population identifies itself as broadly Christian, eighteen percent of people in the world adhere to Islam as their faith.¹ Statistics such as these beg many questions, but they are useful at the macro level for various purposes, such as providing an indication of the number of people living today for whom Muhammad is a significant role model and faith guide. Thus if almost one person in five living today considers Muhammad as the founder of his/her faith, it is clearly a valid and necessary exercise for scholars to try and paint a reliable profile of Muhammad in terms of both his historical and theological identity. It is this which Clinton Bennett has set out to do in his recent book *In Search of Muhammad*.

The first challenge faced by an author in writing on Muhammad is that of achieving an original perspective on this much-studied figure. Muslim scholars and writers have produced a plethora of works on the life and legacy of Muhammad,² invariably based on the traditional Muslim sources: the Qur'an, the prophetic Traditions (Hadith), the biographical accounts of Muhammad's life (*sira*) as well as a range of other exegetical and narrative sources. Similarly, Muhammad's life has attracted considerable attention from non-Muslim writers, though they have often produced alternative viewpoints to those proposed by Muslim writers by raising important questions about the reliability of the traditional Muslim source materials.³

Bennett engages with this challenge by distinguishing between what he terms "insider" (i.e. Muslim) and "outsider" (i.e. non-Muslim) approaches to Muhammad and Islam in previous scholarship. In seeking his own original perspective, he determines at the outset to avoid producing what he sees as a characteristic outsider study, being a non-Muslim himself. He does this by setting a very specific goal in his declared motto (following Wilfred Cantwell Smith): "the aim of an outside scholar writing about Islam is to elicit Muslim approval" (p. 7). Thus Bennett determines to draw on wide-ranging materials in his study, but decides before embarking on that study that the result should be pleasing to a Muslim audience.

It should be noted that Bennett is aiming to produce a work which will access

a wide-ranging readership, including a scholarly audience. In this latter context, Bennett's methodology must be questioned. It would be equally questionable if his aim was to elicit Muslim disapproval, for the same reasons. The aim of scholarship should be to seek after historical fact and truth, and the resulting pleasure or displeasure of "insider" communities should not be the primary goal.

Moreover, Bennett's self-declared motto poses a clear risk relating to the nature of the eventual output. Though he may - and does - survey wide-ranging materials, including non-Muslim historical-critical studies, his motto really predetermines that the outcome of his study cannot affirm any materials which are at variance in a significant way with the traditional Muslim sources for the life of Muhammad. In other words, his motto determines in advance that his output will resemble previous Muslim studies - though this time produced by a non-Muslim.

Furthermore, one must ask which Muslims Bennett is seeking to please? Certainly a study which undermines the orthodox view of Muhammad would incur the displeasure of Muslim traditionalists or Islamist radicals. However some Muslim modernists, neo-modernists or nominal Muslims might receive such a study as a stimulating challenge. Bennett's very motto tends to stereotype Muslims and their responses in an unhelpful way. Moreover, it suggests that he is most concerned with seeking the approval of a sub-set of Muslims; namely, those groups given to loud protests whenever their religious dogmas are subjected to challenge.

In chapters one and two, Bennett surveys the traditional Muslim sources for the life of Muhammad. These include Islamic sacred scripture and biographies of Muhammad's life. Bennett asks questions about the reliability of these materials, and in doing so reports on the scholarship of a number of non-Muslim academics, including Wansbrough,⁴ Crone⁵ and Cook who have been posing searching challenges to these traditional Muslim materials during the last two decades. Bennett refers to these scholars as the group taking a "pessimistic approach" (p. 37), though a far more accurate (and common) description would be to refer to them as the revisionist school of historians on early Islamic history. The revisionist scholars have attracted vehement and emotional reactions from Muslims to their research, including death threats, according to Bennett (p. 21).

Given this hostile Muslim reaction to the revisionist scholars, it is refreshing and deserving of commendation that a scholar with Bennett's motto is ready to address in an unemotional way the revisionist school theories. However, one can't help suspecting that Bennett's motto predetermines to some degree his rejection of these revisionist theories because of the displeasure that they have incurred in Muslim circles. He presents a range of reasons for his rejection of the revisionist approach. For example, in discussing inconsistencies in the *sira* and Hadith records - a favourite subject of the revisionists - Bennett acknowledges that this does pose problems. But he resolves this issue with a common Muslim counter-argument that it is details of the events only, rather than the events described in the accounts, which are open to challenge (p40-41). Furthermore, regarding falsification of Hadith accounts, also a

common charge of the revisionists, Bennett points to the speculative nature of revisionist school claims (p. 59).⁶ He concludes, in concert with standard Muslim scholarship, that clearly some Hadith accounts were forgeries, but says there is no reason to believe that all were, stating “much of the [Hadith] material is authentic and historically reliable” (p. 63). In fact, revisionist scholars might generally agree with this, but would add that it is impossible to distinguish the authentic from the unauthentic accounts, a powerful observation which Bennett does not address.

Bennett’s rejection of the revisionist research does not extend to a call for a boycott; on the contrary, Bennett recommends that revisionist scholarship should be studied in order to get an alternative viewpoint to the traditional Muslim accounts of early Islamic history. His attention to alternative approaches is not all-encompassing, however. For example, he makes no reference to the ancient Yemeni manuscripts of the Qur’an discovered in 1972 in Sana which are posing new challenges, somewhat supportive of revisionist theories, regarding the traditional Muslim view of the Qur’anic text and thus of the normative claims regarding Muhammad.⁷ Indeed, Bennett’s statement that “The Qur’an is the Qur’an and will remain so eternally...” (p. 44) suggests that he is either unaware of the Yemeni manuscript find, or that the speculative nature of initial comment on these manuscripts is considered by him as being unworthy of attention.

In chapters 3 and 4, Bennett turns his attention to a step by step examination of the leading biographies of Muhammad produced by non-Muslim writers from the 7th century until today. He begins by observing that “...the context in which people write influences both their agenda and their attitude” (p. 69). This is indeed a pertinent observation, and one which applies as much to him as to earlier writers. His own approach clearly reflects prevailing trends in his own postmodernist pluralist society where minority voices are clearly amplified, often by members of majority groups. Thus Bennett reports that the Muslim Caliph Walid (705-715) destroyed churches and forced Christians to use Arabic in place of Greek (p. 71). His own comment on this is “Positively, this meant that Christians were subsequently able to play a fuller part in the intellectual life of the ‘Abbasid Khalifate” (p. 71). Here his motto flies at full mast, and he sounds like a Muslim apologist, straining to put a positive spin on an event which really deserves criticism. He has perhaps found the voice of the “insider”, but many “insiders” themselves would be uncomfortable providing such knee-jerk support to what was clearly the oppressive actions of a conquering power.

Bennett presents a useful survey of early Christian writers on Islam, though there is rarely any doubt where his sympathies lie when the Christian writer in focus engages in negative comment on Muhammad. Interestingly, he presents a more positive view of the Crusades than can be found in Muslim scholarship, and agrees with Watt that the deleterious impact of the Crusades has been over-estimated (p. 85-86). In moving on to more recent non-Muslim biographies of Muhammad, Bennett comments that “...the birth of serious non-Muslim scholarship of Islam begins with the Renaissance...” (p. 93). He seems to measure the seriousness of scholarship

according to the degree of priority accorded to Islamic sources. This appeals in one sense, in that scholarship should certainly be regarded with suspicion if it automatically dismisses Islamic source materials as being unreliable. By the same token, an uncritical acceptance of Islamic sources as authoritative seems to beg many questions as well, as discussed by the revisionist scholars.

In chapters five and six Bennett turns his attention to Muslim perspectives on the life of Muhammad. He undertakes a useful and well-researched survey of the concept of leadership within Sunni and Shi'ite Islam, and also deals with Sufi doctrines relating to leadership and the role of Muhammad within mystical thought. This is supplemented by a brief examination of writings on this theme by Islamic theologians, philosophers and political scientists. Bennett then puts on his anthropological hat and reports on a fascinating series of conversations about Muhammad which he had with diverse types of Muslims: urban and rural mosque authorities, a Sufi, and a liberal Muslim. The perceptions of these Muslims are certainly germane to the author's overall goal, yet the sudden change in style from scholarly discussion to popular newspaper anecdote is somewhat intrusive, and his method of reporting these conversations could have benefited from more skilful blending with the remainder of his book.

In his conclusion, the author assembles ingredients for what he terms "a Postmodern Theology of Religions". Here Bennett is trying to reconcile his own Christian faith with the faith of Islam in developing a view of Muhammad which will be acceptable to both Christians and Muslims. He begins with a lengthy discussion of the Rushdie affair, which again is germane to the discussion of perceptions of Muhammad, and which is perhaps more positive towards the *Satanic Verses* than many Muslims would be comfortable with. Then, turning his attention to the traditional choice offered by scholars and missionaries between Christ and Muhammad, Bennett asks "Is there any possibility that we are faced not with a choice between rivals but with complementary exemplars, both rooted in divine self-disclosure?" (p. 229). This is consistent with a comment made early in his book that "... we know much less about Jesus than we do about Muhammad" (p. 2). Bennett adds "... I do not know *how* the Qur'an was communicated by God through Muhammad, but I can accept that it was..." (p. 236).

These conclusions by Bennett seem on the surface to represent a compromise, the kind of compromise which is consistent with a multi-faith pluralist ideology prevalent in postmodern western society. However, one must question just how much of a compromise it really is. Islamic doctrine itself teaches that Christ and Muhammad are "complementary exemplars, both rooted in divine self-disclosure". Islamic doctrine would agree that "... we know much less about Jesus than we do about Muhammad" - though this statement only holds if we accept the authenticity of the traditional Islamic source materials, which have been so seriously challenged by revisionist scholarship. Moreover, many Muslims would themselves make the same statement as Bennett that "... I do not know *how* the Qur'an was communicated by

God through Muhammad, but I can accept that it was...”

In essence, Bennett’s conclusions are consistent with Islamic doctrine, but inconsistent with orthodox Christian doctrine. The one big area of doctrine where Bennett articulates a belief which would not “elicit Muslim approval”, to repeat his motto, relates to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Bennett comments “What remains problematical for me is Muslim denial of Christ’s crucifixion. This event is central to my faith. I have not addressed this issue in detail...” (p. 238). One must assume that this has not been addressed in substance as it is virtually impossible to reconcile with Bennett’s stated motto.

Overall, this work poses serious methodological problems from a scholarly perspective. While populist writing may allow an author to decide to win approval from a particular audience before commencing writing, academic scholarship does not and should not allow this latitude to an author. On the positive side, Bennett has assembled a wide range of useful information relating to perceptions of Muhammad throughout history held by both Muslims and non-Muslims. As such his book should serve as a useful database for future research. However, Bennett’s conclusions were really decided from the outset, as a result of his decision to set his aim as eliciting Muslim approval. In this context, readers should see this book as reflecting Bennett’s personal journey in interfaith relations, but not as providing a blueprint for Christian-Muslims discussion of the role of Muhammad.

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Endnotes

1. Preston D. Hunter, *Major Religions Ranked by Number of Adherents* (1999), http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html (downloaded 24 May 1999).
2. Refer, for example to Muhammad Ali, *The Living Thoughts of the Prophet Muhammad* (London, Cassell, 1948); Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Lahore, Suhail Academy, 1983) and Rafiq Zakaria, *Muhammad and the Qur’an* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991).
3. See, for example, Tor Andrae, *Muhammad, the Man and his Faith* (London, George, Allen and Unwin, 1936); Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford, OUP, 1983) and F E Peters *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1994).
4. John Wansbrough, *Qur’anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford, OUP, 1977)
5. Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987)
6. It is true that revisionist research contains much speculative theorising, and for this reason I too am unconvinced by much comment produced by revisionist scholars. However, I firmly believe that this school is right to pose searching questions about the reliability of Muslim traditional materials, questions which are difficult for Muslim scholars to ask themselves

because of hostile reactions from within their communities.

7. For a useful summary of research into these manuscripts, refer Toby Lester, "What is the Koran?", *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 1999. For a vitriolic Muslim response to this research, refer Aisha Geissing, "Orientalists plot against the Qur'an under the guise of academic study and archive preservation", *Crescent International*, 28/5 (16-31 May 1999), p. 6.

Cosmos and Society in Oceania. Explorations in Anthropology

Daniel de Coppet and André Iteanu (eds) Berg, Oxford and Washington DC.
1995. vi+338pp

A not uninteresting collection. De Coppet and Iteanu work here somewhat under the shadow of Louis Dumont, author of *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966), and want to plot how preconceived levels of cosmic and social valency mirror each other, even in the apparently 'egalitarian' societies of Melanesia. Each contributor makes an important case. Alfred Gell writes on Polynesian back-and-front tattooing as the construction of another necessary body, to make up for intrinsic male incompleteness in contrast to females and to take on a social body for both war and marriage. Christina Toren explains Fijian sacrifices and cannibalism, among other ways by analysing the cosmogonic myth of two men who, sacrificing themselves to God, "become like chiefs" (:63). Nancy Munn mulls over the memory worlds of Kaluli songs presented in the context of the famous gisaro dances (already studied by Schieffelin and Feld), and argues these songs invoke a Symbolic space from the arena of past actions through which rememberers can better "find themselves" in their social world (:90). Denis Monnerie, skilfully reengaging with the older and partly unpublished ethnography of G C Wheeler, explores the analogous and conceptually relates rankings among Solomonese Mono Alu, commoners and chiefs being compared with the better remembered recently dead and longer deceased collective ancestors.

Iteanu, as one of the editors, leaves us with something of a 'methodological platform' article applied to the Papuan Orokaiva. It is his central argument that the great Orokaivan *jape* ceremony creates social relations - including those between men and women entering into exogamous marriages - "in an ontological esoteric form" (:150). Iteanu is already known for his monograph on exchange and ceremony (*La Ronde des Échanges* [1983]), and the next author Gilbert Lewis, explores cosmological aspects of the New Guinea Gnau's medical system that he has already documented in his study *Knowledge of Illness in a Sepik Society* (1978). For Lewis, Gnau attitudes to illness are an index to their cosmology.

Lisette Josephides is the one rebellious writer in the collection, wondering whether the 'organising principles' set for the book are "privileged representations" (:189) not doing justice to the multivalency and complex nuances of Melanesian life (as she has found it among the Southern Highlands Kewa of Papua New Guinea). Eric Hirsch tries to 'toe the line' more, though, in parallelling the "holding together" of people through the *gab* ceremony and the linking of persons, things and land in cosmologic perspective among the Papuan highland Fuyughe. De Coppet, the other

editor of the collection, produces the largest of the papers, and in a 'classic' Dumontian vogue. Are'are bigmen (from Malaita, the Solomons) organise pig-feasts as 'peacemasters'. Previously killers, they rise to the top of the social hierarchy, and that allows their access at these feasts, on behalf of their own and other tribes, to the renewing of proper socio-cosmic relations that have been marred by war and discord. In the last, also very long exposition, Annette Weiner refines previous work done by Malinowski and others on Trobriand gift exchanges, showing how a traditional chiefly and priestly hierarchy came to exploit female or sisters' productivity through heavy competition, actually subverting the islander's cosmological beliefs *before* the coming of Christianity or, for that matter, of the colonio-capitalist impetus.

A whole review article could be written about the strengths and weaknesses of these papers. Respectful of these studies as I am, and the more educated by them, I will simply conclude with a brief warning of various methodological pitfalls I detected in my reading, presenting these as a specialist in Oceanian religions to help those overwhelmed by the ethnographic learning, theory and complexity of the book. The Gell paper suffers from what I call the Hocartian method (see my *In Search of Origins* [1990]). Bits and pieces of separate Polynesian cultures have been welded together to construct too much common Polynesian 'cosmology and body theory' when what was basically meant to be explained was the whole body tattooing virtually confined to the Marquesas. The supporting materials are therefore selective; why take T Henry's account of the cosmos as a shell from Tahiti, for instance, and not ones about it as a coconut from Rarotonga? (see Swain and Trompf, *Religions of Oceania* :128). Iteanu's paper is somewhat problematic for generalising about the Orokaiva, when the material is really basically from the Asigi grouping, and his study should have counted variations across the board of this large cultural complex by using the writings of such native Orokaivans as Willington Jojoga (on the Jaua) and John Waiko (on the Binandere). Both Iteanu and de Coppet tend to suffer from the weakness of applying the Dumontian paradigm too earnestly and consistently; in her writings Josephides is most pertinent when it comes to their two papers.

Lewis hardly adds anything that we do not already possess from him in his monographs. Hirsch's piece rather lacks both depth and ethnographic comparison with others' approaches to the Fuyughe; Fastré's 'Moeurs et coutumes' (1937), my own *Prophets* (1986), Seehofer-Guise's doctoral thesis on dance 'power tracks' in the Chirima (1993) are sadly not in evidence. I found the pieces by Munn and Weiner over-theoretical, even bordering on the arcane. Toren would have accentuated the significance of her interesting work by relating and comparing her findings to better-known theories of Fijian sacrifice (such as that of Sahlin's *Raw Women, Cooked Men*); and Monnerie would have done better had he looked at other Melanesian peoples distinguishing the recent from the long departed (cf Trompf *Melanesian Religion* [1991], ch 1). That all the authors clearly and convincingly show commensurability between cosmological picturing and social activity, however, makes the whole enterprise remarkable and worth the endeavour.

Between Folk and Liturgy

Alan J. Fletcher and Wim Husken (eds), *Ludus Medieval and Renaissance Theatre and Drama 3*, Rodopi, Amsterdam-Atlanta, 1997; paperback; 186

This collection of essays, six in English, five in French, addresses the issue of medieval drama from the British Isles in the west to Poland in the east. The title refers to the polar opposition of 'folk', illiterate, secular culture and the written, fixed forms of 'liturgy'. Konrad Schoell's "Sur la Notion de Theatre Populaire Applique au Moyen Age" courageously attempts to disentangle what precisely "popular" means in the context of the theatre. He concludes that there are several kinds of theatre in France in the Middle Ages that are popular, from the acrobats and performers at fairs to the communal enterprises of mounting the 'mystery' plays.

Alan Knight's "Magical Transformation: A Folk Tale Motif in the Farce" concentrates on the instances of 'low' transformations in farces, making instructive comparisons with Shakespeare and the fables of La Fontaine along the way. He also considers transformations from 'lower' to 'higher' forms, and locates the farce in the "carnival world of deceit, disguise, folly, and topsy-turvydom" (p. 71). "His Majesty shall have tribute of me": The King Game in England" by Nicholas M. Davis revisits E. K. Chambers' *The Mediaeval Stage* (1903) and notes how scholarly understanding of phenomena such as the 'King game' (where a socially lowly figure is made temporary 'King' or 'Lord of Misrule') has moved on from the Frazerian belief that such rituals constitutes 'survivals' of pagan beliefs to the contemporary focus on stressing "the purposiveness of popular disports in their immediate social context: they were performed not out of unthinking respect for tradition but because they held the promise of meeting the very clearly-defined needs or purposes of their participants" (p. 98). This conclusion accords well with that of Ronald Hutton, in his mammoth *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford 1996), which Davis does not mention, possibly as it was not yet published when copy for this volume was finalised.

The lengthiest English piece, Merle Fifield's "Structural and Thematic Recurrence in *Beunans Meriasek*", examines a fascinating fifteenth century Cornish play, concerning the local saint Meriasek. Saints plays are common in the middle ages, and what distinguishes this one (apart from the Cornish setting) is that it does not focus on one dramatic incident, but has three plot strands, "the life of Meriasek, two acts of Silvester, and the Marian miracle of the Woman's Son" (p. 109) This play was performed at the International Congress of Celtic Studies at the University of Sydney in 1992, and it is fascinating to follow Fifield's examination of the structure, which has been traditionally considered defective by scholars such as Whitley Stokes, Robert Meyer and Charles Thomas. Fifield views the unity of the play in terms of the motif of the hunted protagonist, which appears in all three strands. Her analysis is convincing.

E. Catherine Dunn's "Clerics and Juglaria: A Study in Medieval Attitudes" contrasts the tradition of European scholarship which sees the medieval jongleurs

as descendants of the Roman *mimi* and *joculatores* with that of the Anglo-Americans, which is hostile toward the invocation of such a lineage. She supports the European position, noting that the stigma in ancient Rome usually derived from the fact that actors and performers were generally slaves. She demonstrates that “the range of medieval attitudes towards *juglaria* is a very broad one, from the ancient Roman stigma of *infamia* placed upon all actors, to the respectful imitation of *joculatores* by medieval friars in the Franciscan tradition (p. 160).

This is a very interesting volume, though the title is slightly misleading in that liturgy receives much less coverage than folk traditions. It is, however, reasonably specialised and would expect therefore to reach only a limited audience.

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The Years of the Year.

The Paschal Mystery Celebration in Christian Worship

Russell Hardiman, Editor 1997. Pastoral Liturgy Publications
(ii+213pp., ISBN 0 646 31377 0)

The Years of the Year is a collection of over forty essays which come together under the guiding hand of Hardiman to make up a manual of liturgical ministry and theology. The book is divided into five major sections: the first deals with the major seasons of the Christian liturgical year, Advent, Christmas, Lent, Tridium and Easter; the second section Ordinary Time includes the lectionary readings from years A, B and C; and the third section covers the order of the Mass. The final two sections are particularly useful providing some basic background and planning ideas on funerals and cremations and popular devotions such as Stations of the Cross and the Rosary. An Australian flavour is hinted at with a short paper on Anzac Day liturgies.

Each of the forty essays is clearly set out providing significant theological background materials for the seasons as well as a brief overview of the biblical texts available for the feast. The background readings give an historical perspective to the worship pattern while the suggested hymns locate the feast in the present day.

The pre-reading materials for each liturgical event provide liturgy teams with a simple but solid grounding from which to work. One noticeable omission, however, is the failure of the authors to deal in any significant way with the issue of Inclusive Language particularly in relation to the Biblical text, formal prayers and references to God. Parish liturgy teams, usually comprised of volunteers, not only need education in this vital area but also need to be provided with appropriate examples of inclusive texts.

Hardiman's book is a very detailed collection of essays providing useful information for priest presiders, preachers, musicians and parish liturgy teams. The book would serve such groups well and from the point of view of church provide many practical ideas based on sound liturgical principles.

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Christian Unity: an ecumenical second spring?

Michael Hurley SJ, Dublin: Veritas, 1998, pb. pp420, rrp.\$41.00.

Michael Hurley is a Jesuit and originally known to many as the author of *The Theology of Ecumenism* (1969). He is also known as the first director of the Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE) which he founded in 1970. In addition he was the founder of the Columbanus Community for Reconciliation (1983). His contribution to ecumenism over the years has thus been enormous both through writings and personal witness. *Christian Unity*, is dedicated to the Jesuit community at Milltown "in gratitude for forty years of membership".

This book is a remarkable achievement at recording not only what the ecumenical movement has achieved over recent decades but also, unconsciously, a chronicle of Hurley's own contributions. He records for example all the Milltown Park Public Lectures given in the period 1960-1969.

Christian Unity is divided in an orderly fashion into ecumenical visions (Part I), ecumenical issues (Part II) and ecumenical initiatives (Part III) which means there is something in the book for everyone. I started with Part III and worked my way through Ecumenical Issues (Part II) to Ecumenical Vision (Part I) without feeling lost. Hurley moves from the scholarly mode of presenting theology with copious footnotes to the chronicle mode of describing how he set up certain projects, to the more journalistic and personal account of his travels in China and Greece. The person that emerges from all this, is that of a humble, gifted person totally committed to the ecumenical journey. Indeed that is one insight that I gained from this tome: a conversion to the ecumenism is needed, a bit like repentance from sin. For many Christians it would seem that this need to convert and repent of the divisions in Christianity is lacking. I think this is unfortunately especially striking among the clergy.

Within regard to the section on ecumenical issues, three topics that I want to comment on relate to baptism, Eucharist and ecumenical tithing. The question of the baptism of a child of a interchurch marriage is raised. Given that one ceremony performed by two ministers is possible, Hurley asks why the child could not be regarded as being a member of both denominations rather than having to choose one and thus create more tension? It seems that this kind of issue is what the Association of Interchurch Families is raising and by so doing advancing the dialogue. The second topic relates to intercommunion. With the One Bread One Body controversy in the U K this chapter is most relevant. Here Hurley brings some new thinking to the question about the Eucharist being a sign of unity or a means to unity that is worth reading. Another novel and provocative issue that struck me was ecumenical tithing from Part I on ecumenical vision. The idea that all Christians should spend one-tenth of their church activity time and energy in another Christian church was new to me and exciting.

Part III is all about ecumenical initiatives and there are some eye-opening chapters here. For anyone who tends to be over optimistic about ecumenism, the

chapter in this book on Hurley's visit to several monasteries on Mount Athos will be like a cold shower. One opinion expressed to him was that Christian churches had to return to the church of the first millennium which some claim the Orthodox had preserved. Not being allowed to join in the prayers with the monks was also a blow for this keen Jesuit and ecumenist. Other than the Orthodox encounter, Hurley's visit to China brings before our eyes something we perhaps do not think about much: the Catholic Church in China which is divided into the Patriotic Church (government aligned) and the Vatican aligned Church. Here Hurley can see some light at the end of the tunnel having spoken to several priests and people on both sides of the divide.

Overall this is a most readable book. Hurley's scholarship is convincing, his theological ideas provocative and his narratives entertaining. I was glad to see an index for ready consultation, 47 pages of scholarly notes and an appendix. The four prefaces (although the sequencing is quaint, 1, 2, 4, 3!), are written by the leaders of the Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in Ireland, and significant in providing the ecclesial public endorsement that is so essential if churches are to move forward as a body.

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Rhetoric and Galatians. Assessing an Approach to Paul's Epistle.

Philip H. Kern. Cambridge University Press. December 1998. A\$110.

Philip Kern has written a closely argued thesis rejecting the current arguments that Galatians is an example of classical oratory reflected in the guides found in the Graeco-Roman rhetorical handbooks. The book is a rewrite of Kern's doctoral dissertation and the technical detail contained in the argument makes for intensive and slow reading. Nevertheless the author's broad and deep reading of the literature is gathered together and synthesised in an exemplary manner to offer a most persuasive point of view.

The book opens with the comment that the inquiry being undertaken is focused at the intersection of rhetorical criticism and rhetorical analysis. The former is concerned with how the text, in this case Galatians, affects the reader through its innate shape and impulse, while the latter attempts to measure how closely the text conforms to the classical handbooks on rhetoric. To understand the nature of this intersection Kern first develops a definition of rhetoric refining it to four levels each of which is somewhat more narrowly focused than its predecessor and each having parallels beyond Graeco-Roman examples. Once a preliminary understanding of classical rhetoric has been reached Kern looks at the rhetorical handbooks used by Hans Betz and George Kennedy to prove that Galatians is shaped in the Graeco-Roman manner. With analytical precision he proceeds to dismantle the arguments put forward by these scholars and others who follow. While generous to Betz, although disagreeing with him, Kern maintains that others argue that Galatians fits the classical rhetorical mould without considering the sociological setting of Paul. Kennedy,

especially, would want to use handbook rhetoric as an interpretive tool for all literature.

Having demolished those using the classical rhetoricians as a model for Paul's letter Kern next turns to the early Christian writers to search out their viewpoints. Generally he observes that the early Christian fathers not only ignored any propensity of Paul to use classical rhetoric in Galatians but were cold to the idea that rhetoric should figure at all. Rather it is the message of the epistle that is paramount. Theologians had to wait until the Reformation for any hint of rhetoric being forced on the Pauline texts. In his last chapter Kern looks at modern studies. He rests heavily on the work of the turn-of-the-century philologist, Adolf Deissmann, who is of the firm opinion that Paul did not use artistic prose of the kind used by the Graeco-Roman rhetoricians. For Deissmann the New Testament is a "monument of late colloquial Greek". The writer, Martin Hengel, suggests that Paul used Jewish form of style based on the notion of Paul's Jewish education. Other scholars, such as Nock, would support this argument. Ultimately, what Kern does not deny is that Paul is a persuasive writer and in that context he is a skilful rhetorician. What he does reject is that his talents rest, somehow, on the classical orators of the old Graeco-Roman world.

Kern does not leave his argument at the end of a brick wall but rather points the way forward to further studies relating to Galatians including the social world of Paul and his writing, further examination of the tropes he uses, the shape of the epistle and the communicative force it evokes, the sense of story and the arguments of logic found in the writing. Finally he suggests that modern approaches to rhetoric may well open Galatians to new insights.

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Justitia Dei - A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification History.

Alister E. McGrath, Cambridge University Press 1998 (2nd Edition) Australian

Rrp \$52.95 pbk.

The publisher's claim that this work is an essential resource for anyone wanting to understand historical theology, sixteenth century church history and modern ecumenical debates is fully justified, no pun intended. Indeed, no clergyperson's library should be without it, especially in the revised and up-dated form. The author has taken some pains to augment the 1986 edition with reference to more recent discussion, although even this could have been extended.

Justification is at the heart of the current ecumenical dialogue. Bishop Mark Santer, a leading Anglican ecumenist remarked when on a lecture tour of Australia some years ago, that regardless of our denominational origins, we are *all* now pursuing "the Lutheran agenda". This is undeniable, and in order to be able to comprehend that agenda we need such scholarship as that provided by Alister McGrath. Indeed, without this knowledge one is scarcely qualified to participate in the all-important ecumenical dialogue of the present time.

McGrath's tracing through of the central idea of *justification* from its New Testament origins, the Patristic era, the Middle Ages, the Reformation and Post-Reformation periods down to the present day is quite masterly, the product of profound scholarship with a particular ability to evaluate the all-important German contribution. Each of us will read this text with a view to discovering how it will impact on our previous superficial comprehension of the issue.

In the case of this reviewer, one formed in the Anglo-Catholic tradition, the section, "The Legacy of the English Reformation" is particularly instructive. Generally speaking, Anglo-Catholics have not paid sufficient attention to Luther, whereas of course, Roman Catholics have until recently regarded him as a heresiarch. Much of this misunderstanding in both the latter traditions is attributable to John Henry Newman's false interpretation of Luther as others such as Paul Avis (*Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, 1989) have ably shown. McGrath has indeed rendered a service in "historicising" Luther and his complex legacy. On the other hand, McGrath, being a committed Evangelical, can see no virtues in the concept of the *via media*, once a central tenet in Anglicanism's *raison d' être*. One suspects that McGrath in his attempt to set up an ecclesiological polarity between Catholic and Protestant ideas of grace has an agenda to discredit the entire Anglo-Catholic project from its beginnings.

One may go along with McGrath and agree that to construct a *via media* theology of justification is artificial and rests on unacceptable historical and theological presuppositions [p.321], but the *via media* was not solely concerned with basing itself on a consensus about justification. One would have to take issue with McGrath's assertion that it was/is an "obsolete concept". It still serves its usefulness for many people, and may indeed be the bridge across the denominational divide that will prove essential for the current ecumenical project. In short, one may accept all of McGrath's findings about the confusion regarding *justification* that characterised, and still does characterise the entire catholic world, (witness the current Roman Catholic turmoil over 'reconciliation' in the Eucharist) and not feel obliged to adopt evangelical churchmanship. There is no contradiction between holding a "reformed" position on *justification* on the one hand and continuing to worship in the traditional catholic manner provided one does not assume that thereby one is performing a savioric "work" on one's own behalf. The liturgy still needs to be prioritised for its role in *sanctification*.

In Germany at the present time Roman Catholics have by and large (*pace* Cardinal Ratzinger) taken Luther on board. Hans Küng has recently spelled this out most forcibly in his *Christianity: Its Essence and History*, 1995. McGrath would have done well to investigate more the extent of Roman/Lutheran convergence in Germany and at least inform his readership about the significance of the joint RC/Lutheran statement of February 1980 on the *Confession of Augsburg*, **All under one Christ**. This reviewer considers this a major deficiency in a work that purports to be an up-date on the key ecumenical statements He does, of course, pay due attention to

the subsequent US Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue which produced a 24, 000 word document in September 1983, *Justification by Faith*. McGrath is undoubtedly correct in observing that this is the most important ecumenical document on the theme of *justification* to date. He then states unequivocally that anyone who wishes to deal with the dialogue between Roman and non-Roman theologians on the issue will have to use this document as his point of departure [p.389]. Before that, however, one may affirm that McGrath's study is a major and essential building block for the continuing ecumenical dialogue that helps the enquiring Christian of whatever denomination to achieve clarity about the complex issues that split the church and then to enable him/her to engage afresh in a new spirit of conciliation in the process of reconstructing church unity.

Finally, McGrath makes the crucial observation about Roman/Lutheran convergence when he appears to query the sincerity of the present Roman statement that "the Tridentine decree on justification ... is not necessarily incompatible with the Lutheran doctrine of justification *sola fide*, even though Trent excluded this phrase" At that time the Lutheran position was certainly regarded as unacceptable. "Does that mean" McGrath queries, "that Trent was wrong? Or that Trent has been misunderstood by Roman Catholic theologians since 1547, and is only now being interpreted in the right manner?" [p.393] The present reviewer's discussion with Lutheran theologians in Germany, for example, suggest that there the Roman theologians are indeed ready to admit that they were wrong. Conservative Australian Romans would do well to follow this example.

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Silk and Potatoes

Adam Roberts, Costern New Series, Rodopi, Amsterdam-Atlanta, 1998;
paperback; 188

This interesting study has a dual focus in that Roberts offers close readings of certain influential Arthurian novels (Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*) but also attempts to evaluate the Arthurian phenomenon in 'popular culture', a much broader issue. The continuing popularity of the legends surrounding King Arthur, which developed in the pre-medieval and medieval periods, is somewhat puzzling at face value. The basis of society has radically changed from feudalism to capitalism; kingship has given way to democracy, and the military ideal for men is no longer compelling.

Roberts identifies four ideological positions which Arthurian authors might adopt towards the Middle Ages: to portray a fictional world with no reference to present reality; to be aware of the differences between the present and the past but to advocate the past as superior; to adopt a self-consciously modern slant on the story; and to exploit the 'ironic' gap between the periods. These positions may connect to

political and spiritual movements in contemporary culture, such as Environmentalism, New Age spirituality, feminism and Paganism. Roberts' "Introduction" sensitively explores some of the tensions in Arthurian representations: the 'racist' attitude that the Celts are superior to the Anglo-Saxons; the pagan attempts to discredit the Christian aspects of the medieval legends; the gender conflict in feminist re-workings; and the hostility between Jungian archetypal readings and those concerned with ethical issues such as the relationship between love and honour.

The witty title refers to the fact that medieval nobles (and particularly Celts) did not wear silk, an eastern fabric; and medieval peasants did not eat potatoes (which were yet to arrive from the New World). However, Roberts is not overly concerned with the failure of most Arthurian creations to meet rigorous historical standards; he is interested in "the way silk functions in the imaginative world of today" (p. 37). The literary critical focus shifts from book to book, with *The Mists of Avalon* being praised for its sophisticated plotting but condemned for the 'Mills and Boon' nature of its sex scenes; and Mary Stewart's Merlin trilogy being praised for its "imaginative commitment to the world she is recreating" (p. 43) but criticised because the effect she creates is that of "a superior historical film from the 1950s" (p. 44).

There is an intriguing discussion of the different 'heroes' and 'heroines' of various Arthurian retellings: novels focussing on Arthur, Lancelot, Merlin or Mordred; novels with Morgan le Fay or Guinevere as the central consciousness. Roberts here makes the important point that these novels are chiefly escapist fantasy, and the differing perspectives ensure that there is a version of the legend for every reader, regardless of her/his political or social reality. Chapter 3, "Arthurian SF and Arthurian Fantasy", considers 'hard' and 'soft' reworkings, the former being those which combine space travel, aliens, and advanced technology, and the latter positing magic rather than technology while utilising psychological terminology from the present. Authors discussed here include Guy Gavriel Kay, Patricia Keneally, Jack Vance, A. A. Attanasio, and there is an excellent analysis of C. J. Cherryh's *Port Eternity* (1982), where the elements of the Arthurian legend are employed in a virtual reality game for wealthy, bored future humans.

Chapter 4 "Arthurian Cinema" enters the broader arena of popular culture. Roberts' analysis of John Boorman's film "Excalibur" is fresh and incisive, seeing beyond the superficially 'fascist' politics to his deeper critique of power and the corruption which results from its misuse: the glittering armour of the knights is repeatedly contrasted with the naked skin of the women, hammering home the vulnerability of those without power and their victimisation in this hyper-masculine world. Sex is presented as an act which is more connected with death than life; there is a sense in which "Excalibur" is the inverse of all the softened, feminised literary forms of the legends treated in earlier chapters. The latter part of the film (Perceval's wanderings) deconstructs this vision of masculinity, and it is only after he has shed his armour that Perceval can see the Grail.

Robert Zemeckis' "First Knight" (1995) and Bresson's "Lancelot du Lac" (1974) are also criticised in the light of the "aesthetic fascism" discourse Roberts has developed. The next chapter deals with Arthurian comedy, and here "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" is evaluated alongside T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* and the work of the Terry Pratchett imitator Colin Webber. It is rightly pointed out that what makes "Holy Grail" so funny is that the disjunction between modern and medieval is used to reveal things which are true - supreme executive power does come from a mandate from the masses and to base a system of government on the giving of a sword by a 'watery tart' is absurd. Here is an Arthurian re-working quite free from the right wing overtones which are so prevalent in the genre.

Roberts, perhaps rather sentimentally, sees the efforts of Arthur and his knights to maintain 'high seriousness' in the face of these criticisms as heroic; "heroism of a Sartrean or Beckettian sort" (p. 153). There is also a brief discussion of Robert Nye's bawdy comedy *Merlin*.

The final chapter, "New Age: The Cultural Consumption of Arthur" briefly surveys popular music (Rick Wakeman, Julian Cope, John Lennon); New Age spirituality (John and Caitlin Matthews, Nikolai Tolstoy, Deepak Chopra); and the 'Camelot' associations of the John F. Kennedy era. It is a pity that there is no discussion of cartoon (manga and anime) versions of the legends, and that Roberts ignores computer games and virtual reality. This is an entertaining and well-written study, and may encourage readers to explore more widely the range of Arthurian products on the market.

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Mehregan in Sydney. Proceedings of the seminar in Persian Studies during the Mehregan Persian Cultural Festival Sydney, Australia, 28 October - 6 November 1994.

Garry Trompf and Morteza Honari (eds) with Homer Abramian. Sydney Studies in Religion 1, The University of Sydney with The Persian Cultural Foundation of Australia. 1998. ISBN 1 86457 3608

This volume is a record of the Sydney celebration of Mehregan in 1994. Papers presented in Persian are published in Persian and with English translation. Not all papers presented are published in this volume since some have been published elsewhere, others are beyond the resources of the printer. We are offered 20 papers in English (144) pages and 14 in Persian (179 pages).

The contents are varied covering themes from the pre-history of Iran to the present day drawn from history, literature and religion. It is an interesting and valuable collection to which a brief review cannot do full justice.

It seems best to offer some account of papers concerned with Ancient Persia as a sample of the quality of the volume.

G W Trompf **An Agenda for Persian Studies** - after a chronological account

of the development of Persian studies lists the problems that remain in history, literature and religion.

Pireyeh Yaghmaei **Mehr and Mehregan** is a paper not presented at the seminar but requested by the editors. It explains the pre-Islamic origin of the Mehregan festival. Mehr, in Sanskrit Mitra = "friendship", is a god in India and in Persia as Mithras extended his influence as far as Roman Britain. This paper traces the Persian cult from its origin to the present day.

G Gropp, **The development of a Near Eastern culture during the Persian Empire** present the evidence for the 300 years of the Median Empire using cuneiform records to supplement the incomplete record in Herodotus. The Persian Empire is then considered and its humane influence well beyond its borders in time and space. Even the Greeks conceded that Medes and Persians spoke the truth.

Tooran Shahriari Bahrami, **The social position of women in old Persia**, goes even further into the past in considering the human occupation of the Iranian plateau about 10,000BC. During this matriarchal era the women were in charge, but the establishment of the Median dynasty led to the end of matriarchy. Men and women enjoyed equal rights throughout the Achaemenid period and were equal in Mazdai teaching. After the Achaemenids Greek rule brought subordination of women, but the Sasanian period with the revival of Zoroastrianism enabled women to regain their rights and privileges. The *Shahnameh* a reflection of the manners and customs of old Persia presents not only great men, but also women of wisdom and intelligence.

G Gropp, **The Zoroastrian endeavour to venerate and care for the Earth** - the roots of the Iranian love of nature seem much more profound than the modern trends and fashions of politics. This concern for nature can be traced back to the Avestan texts.

Zhosro Khazai, **A journey through the Zoroastrian experience** - the three leitmotifs of Zoroastra's philosophy established 3000 years ago are right thinking, right speaking and right acting. How does one, since no-one is born a "Zoroastrian", attain this ideal in one's spiritual development?

Mohamad Ebrahim Bastrani-Parizi, **Kurosh, Cyrus the Great**, considers the moral qualities that underlay the successful empire-building of Cyrus.

Ruth Lewin, **Cooking up a storm: some preliminary remarks concerning Zoroastrian and Jewish domesticity**, considers the Persian influence on Jews in captivity with special reference to the relations Ezra makes between the community of priests and cultic purity in relation to women.

There is no space to go on to papers on Manu, the *Shahnameh*, Hafiz and other aspects of the later periods of Persian civilisation, but perhaps enough has been written to show the great value of this book.

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