

# Book Reviews

**Joseph Camilleri (Ed) 2001 *Religion and Culture in Asia-Pacific: Violence or Healing?* Melbourne: Vista. Xiv + 228.**

Religion has a bad name as a promoter and cause of social conflict. From the Crusades through the European Wars of Religion in the past to the Balkans and Ache today religious difference has been blamed for wars. While some have used more detailed analyses of events to point out that most violent social conflicts have a multiplicity of causes, this book argues that religion can serve the cause of promoting peace and harmony.

The product of a major conference of the same title convened in Melbourne in late 2000 the chapters of Camilleri's book provide very helpful increased detail on many of the conflicts besetting the Asia-Pacific region. Its great strength is a wide diversity of first hand accounts, detailed analyses of conflicts and the role of religion in each. As a casebook of religion and the management of religious diversity the book is excellent.

For example, I found the description of the nature of conflict in Indonesia and the highly varied role of religion on all sides to be eye opening. Similar revelations are available for Fiji, Sri Lanka, Burma and Cambodia. I recommend reading all these chapters to anyone interested in social conflict and the role of religion.

The various authors are at pains not to demonise religion, recognising that religion is all too easily made to bear responsibility for conflict, for originating and exacerbating conflict. The descriptions here are a welcome balanced corrective. The many sources of conflict are outlined as well as the roles of religion both as legitimization of conflict and as active agent for peace and harmony. Many of the case studies presented in the rest of the book came the positive roles played by religious groups in securing peace and justice in certain conflicts. These cameos provide windows into possible roles for religion in conflict resolution.

The book has a message – religion, any and all of the world's major religions can become effective sources of peace, mutual understanding and social harmony. The declaration of this message begins with the opening papers on 'Religion and Culture'. I have no issue with the intellectual truth of this message. However, much of it takes the form 'If they all were like us, there would be peace'.

The form of religion upheld as the source of peace in the universalising, liberal, intellectual and highly rational forms of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism usually associated with comfortable elites who use religion to justify their positions of power and the larger slice of the economic action that is theirs. The forms of religion that legitimate opposition to injustice, rising in rebellion against the oppressor, and condemning socio-economic inequalities do not get a look in. One author attacks

other forms of religion as having defective (concepts of) deities. ‘What kind of a god is it that demands.....?’ While my theological sentiments are similar, not all my co-religionists would agree.

Elsewhere the argument is made that so long as Christians cease trying to convert Muslims there will be peace in some areas. It is difficult to practice well any religion without attracting some others to it. The parallel call would have been for state enforced monopolistic Islam to extend freedom of religious practice to other groups. But these points were not made.

The overall argument of the book is that the religions of the world can be so organised as to serve the ends of humanity as defined by those wanting peace. This is an echo of late Christendom when religion, in this case State Church Christianity, was seen as a civilising force both at home and in the colonies. In this context religious diversity is neither appreciated nor tolerated. The proposal amounts to papering over the reality of religious diversity by naïve theological agreements discovered to exist between religious groups by experts who are comfortably outside the situation of the conflict. Such efforts are very unlikely to be greeted with great enthusiasm by those caught up in the conflict.

Read this book for the insights it provides into current conflicts in Asia Pacific. Note carefully its many recommendations on conflict resolution, the role of the media, the need for inter-faith respect (forgetting that the need often for intra-faith respect), and how religious groups can take effective initiative in promoting peace. But be wary of the increasingly heard voice that religion can be bent to the will of social and public policy.

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**Ronald L. Numbers & John Stenhouse (eds.), *Disseminating Darwinism: The Role of Place, Race, Religion, and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. xi + 300 (HB \$99.00).**

It is at times difficult to imagine that there is much more that can fruitfully be said about the phenomenon of Darwinism and its impact on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ideas and institutions. This collection is a salutary demonstration of the fact that there remain unexplored avenues of historical research which can yield new insights into the ways in which various groups reacted to the ideas of Charles Darwin and his disciples. Rather than presenting itself as a general account of the ‘reception’ of Darwinism—a task creditably performed in existing works by Thomas Glick and David Kohn—this anthology takes up the question of how the factors of geographic location, race, religion, and gender shaped responses to Darwin’s ideas.

Over half of the book is given over to a consideration of the impact of place. In the first chapter, David N. Livingstone shows how in three nineteenth-century Calvinist strongholds—Edinburgh, Belfast, and Princeton—distinct responses to Darwinism arose: ‘the theory of evolution was absorbed in Edinburgh, repudiated in Belfast, and tolerated in Princeton’ (p. 16). Livingstone thus neatly illustrates the point that it is misleading to speak simply of ‘the Calvinist’ reaction to Darwinism.

Antipodean readers, who in the past have been ill served by studies of the international impact of Darwinism, will be particularly gratified by the inclusion of separate chapters on the reception of Darwin’s ideas in Australia and New Zealand. Barry Butcher gives an interesting account of reactions to Darwinism in Australia, and shows how by the end of the nineteenth century Darwin’s thought was firmly entrenched in the universities and had achieved general acceptance in the mainstream churches. In closing, Butcher refers to a *Bulletin* article which predicted the demise of the ‘uncivilized’ indigenous population and its displacement by more ‘developed’ Anglo-Saxon race, thus hinting at a role for evolutionary theory in questions of race. Such issues are explored in more depth in John Stenhouse’s piece on Darwinism in New Zealand. Stenhouse argues that New Zealanders embraced evolutionary ideas with an enthusiasm unparalleled in English-speaking countries. Moreover, he provides a nuanced account of the ways in which evolutionary racism played a significant role in discussions of the status and fate of the indigenous Maori peoples.

North America is allocated two chapters. Suzanne Zeller’s contribution, on the reception of Darwin in Canada, reminds us that movements against Darwin’s theories came not only from those with particular religious convictions, but from the scientific establishment itself. Thus geologists at Laval University ‘rejected Darwinian evolution or falling short of inductivist standards of science’ (p. 94). This essay, like others in this book, shows how much of the controversy surrounding Darwinism was concerned with the very nature of science and its practitioners. Ronald Numbers and Lester Stephens focus their attention on the opposite end of the continent and issue a challenge to the long-standing assumption that the American South was from the outset uniformly opposed to Darwin’s ideas. They point out that in the 1920s the majority of Southern jurisdictions thought it unnecessary to outlaw the teaching of evolution, and that a contributing factor to the rise of a militant antievolutionism in the South was ‘the growing popularity of Darwinism among the educated classes in the region’ (p. 137).

Three chapters deal respectively with Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism, largely in the American context. The response of American Protestants to Darwin’s ideas is explored by Jon H. Roberts, who shows how important it is to distinguish between ‘evolution’ and ‘natural selection’. Thus Protestant thinkers tended to reflect the views of the scientific community in being more receptive to the notion of biological development than to Darwin’s proposed mechanism, natural selection.

R. Scott Appleby’s chapter on Catholicism again serves as a reminder of how misleading the standard ‘science vs religion’ interpretation of the impact of Darwinism

can be. Darwin's theories, he demonstrates, fuelled controversies within both scientific and ecclesiastical establishments. This is demonstrated in the career of Notre Dame priest-scientist John Zahm, who asserted that 'evolution is not contrary to Catholic faith' (p. 186), and at the same time recognised the novel view of 'science' which the hypothetical and probabilistic approach of Darwin represented. Amongst American Jews, Marc Swelitz shows, interest focused more on Darwin's claims about human evolution than on general phylogeny. Thus it was *The Descent of Man* (1871) rather than *The Origin of Species* (1859) which attracted attention. In a fascinating account of the fortunes of Darwinism in Jewish communities, Swelitz shows that while Darwinism had little impact on theological discussions, it was used by both Reform and traditional Jews 'to reinforce already established positions' (p. 234). Evolutionary theory was thus enlisted in support of internal disputes within American Judaism.

The last two essays deal with the relatively neglected areas of race and gender. Detailing black responses to Darwinism, Eric D. Anderson shows how, in spite of its lending credibility to scientific racism, evolutionary theory did not attract the censure of African Americans as might have been expected. Black Americans, for the most part, were concerned with more pressing practical matters, and in any case polygenetic theories of human origins constituted more of a threat to their status than did the Darwinian position. In the final chapter, Sally Gregory Kohlstedt and Mark R. Jorgensen demonstrate the extent to which the new scientific ideas of human origins could be used to reinforce prevailing conceptions of gender differences. Darwin implied that 'woman's nature' was largely biologically determined, and determined in ways which coincided with the traditional role of women in Victorian England. Only at the turn of the century did women scientists begin successfully to challenge these notions.

In sum, this valuable collection sets a new agenda for studies of the reception of Darwinism, provides a good model for this agenda, and introduces many new insights into an important debate which even today retains much of its original vigour.

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