

**Religious Change,
Conversion and Culture**

In memory of Bill Jobling

**Religious Change,
Conversion and Culture**

edited by Lynette Olson

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Editor's Preface

This book publishes the papers from a conference which grew out of an undergraduate course. The Department of History of the University of Sydney is proud of its Thematic Courses, which are deliberately designed to stretch students by studying chosen historical subjects in terms of themes which can be applied to other historical subjects. One of the original courses of this type examines Christian conversion in Medieval Europe, Modern India and Aboriginal Australia. Very few, if any, courses combine these three areas! Yet the themes in common are legion. For example, the link of Christian conversion with 'civilisation' is of great importance in all of these societies, and is only significantly modified by the Industrial Revolution. For another example, the indigenisation of Christianity is seen in all of the societies studied, and the creative role of the convert in the conversion process has emerged as perhaps the most important theme of all.

After teaching this course for a number of years, we had the idea of holding a short conference (9-10 April, 1994) in which scholars with some past or present connection with the University of Sydney in a variety of disciplines would examine conversion in a wider context. Thus, although we started with Christian conversion in the three areas of Medieval Europe, Modern India and Aboriginal Australia, the scope expanded religiously, culturally and geographically to take in Medieval Islam, Judaism, the Middle East and New Guinea as well. Following the conference, Dr Bill Jobling spoke to me at length about its value in bringing people together and promoting communication about its subject. Not long afterwards, he died suddenly, and the book of the conference is dedicated to his memory.

