

# Book Reviews

Reviews Editor: Victor Hayes

In this issue the Book Reviews section looks first at studies of sacred texts from three world religions by three Australian scholars: Norman Habel (Adelaide) on the Book of Job, John Painter (La Trobe) on the Gospel of John, and Arvind Sharma (formerly of Sydney) on the Bhagavad Gita. Second, we present a review article by Evan Zuesse of Adelaide who assesses the significance of three important books dealing with Judaism in Australia. Third, Ray Hartley notes the current growth in the number of Australian theological journals, selects eleven for special comment, and ponders the significance of all this Australian (Christian) theological activity. Fourth and last, we report on a major new reference service which promises to be of great benefit to all scholars in religion, namely, the now-being-prepared Australasian Religion Index (ARI). The first issue, due in June 1989, will index an initial list of 42 Australasian religious journals (from more than 200 listed in AULOTS).

## The Book of Job. A Commentary

Norman C. Habel  
London: SCM, 1985.  
586 pp. \$46.25

While the book of Job has been generally regarded, even in translation, as a literary masterpiece, many of the classical commentaries on it have barely treated it as such. Moreover, those who have admired it most as literature have often been least able to read it in its original Hebrew. Now Dr. N.C. Habel, Principal Lecturer, Religion Studies, SACAE, has produced a fine, new commentary which fills this gap both for the Biblical scholar and the general, literate reader.

The work has obviously had a long period of gestation, for the author has been studying and teaching the book of Job for many years, first to theological students in America and more recently to religious studies students in Australia. The process of gestation can be measured by comparing this mature commentary with the author's first commentary on Job (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). Many of the author's insights and judgments have also been gained and

tested under the pressure of personal suffering which has no doubt sensitised him to the agony of injustice and has driven him to interact personally with the text.

The general approach of the book owes much to the kind of literary analysis which was so brilliantly proposed and demonstrated by Robert Alter in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981). But it goes beyond his proposals in its concern for theology. The author describes his approach in these words:

"In a highly literary work like Job, the artistic and the theological are closely interwoven. Our interpretation takes into consideration how literary structures, imagery, motifs, and techniques are employed to convey and colour the message of the text. The meaning of the book of Job is found in the interplay of literary design and theological idea." (p. 10)

The aim of the commentary then is to give a literary, theological explication of Job. Consequently, the author does not explore the history of the book's development, but rather treats its final form as a

literary entity with the prose prologue and epilogue as integral and essential parts of its total design.

The literary, theological approach is spelled out clearly in a rather extensive introduction. After a description of the scope and format of the commentary the author first considers the narrative plot of the book. It is said to fall into three movements: the first, which sketches the hidden conflict between Job and his adversary God (1:1- 2:10); the second, which explores this conflict in Job's dispute with his friends (2:11-28) and then in his challenge to God (29-31); and the third, in which, after Elihu's inept attempt (32-37), the resolution is finally achieved by God himself in his theophany (38-42). All this is summarised in a useful, detailed appendix (pp. 70-73).

After the consideration of the narrative plot the author briefly treats the conventional questions of the book's integrity (a unified whole apart from some disruption in the third cycle of speeches), setting (the heroic world of antiquity before God's self-revelation to Israel), and the date (during or after the exile). After an illuminating section on the literary features of the book and their significance the introduction ends with an excellent summary of the theological message and meaning of Job.

The literary, theological aim of the commentary also shapes its formal approach in each section. After a poetically appropriate translation of each section with the addition of some textual notes for the student of Hebrew, the author elaborates on its design and message. While the summary of the message is helpful to any reader, and especially to the one interested in theology, the sections on design are especially useful and illuminating, in that they aid the reader's own understanding of the text. Besides a detailed discussion they contain a clear, concise outline of the argument in each section

which helps the reader follow each speaker in his train of thought, governed as it is by unfamiliar, ancient patterns of rhetoric. In his close reading of the text's design the author also traces a pattern of interwoven allusions between the speakers. So, for example, Job often picks up the language, imagery, and points of his friends and gives them a different twist in his speeches, while much of the material in the divine speeches echoes and so counters the arguments of Job. It is in this analysis of syntactical structure and literary design that the author has, it seems to me, made an original and significant contribution to the study of the book. This analysis of design not only makes the book more accessible to the modern reader but will, no doubt, stimulate subsequent scholarship.

I find myself in such agreement with the general approach of the commentary and its judgments, that my criticisms of it are more a matter of detail than of substance. One matter does, however, affect the general reading of the book. The third cycle of speeches may not be dislocated with 27:13-23 as the final speech of Zophar. The lack of a final speech by him is, I believe, a deliberate literary device to highlight how utterly Job has silenced his comforters. If that is so, then the lack of response after Job's reply to Bildad in chapter 26 leads logically to his appeal to God in his oath of integrity (27:1-6) and his imprecation against his adversary (27:7-23).

Dr. Habel has produced an excellent, literary theological commentary on Job. It should appeal to anybody interested in this work, either as a work of literature, or as a theological drama. His interpretation of the book combines literary sensitivity with theological acumen — a rare combination indeed. It is, I hope, a harbinger of a whole new series of similar commentaries.

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**John: Witness and Theologian**

John Painter

Mitcham, Victoria: Beacon Hill Books, 1986.

xxv, 160 pp. + forward by C.K. Barrett

John Painter is head of the Division of Religious Studies at Latrobe University. His book is already well known. It was first published in 1975 and the second edition appeared in 1979. Both editions were published in the United States and the United Kingdom, so this third edition, substantially identical with the second but with some added material on the fourth Gospel in recent study, is its first Australian publication.

The introductory survey of recent research is followed by three major sections. The first is a concise statement of the author's presuppositions. The second is a treatment of the theology of the gospel; this receives the lion's share of the space. The third is devoted to the theology of the first epistle of John. The final pages summarize the results.

In 1957 John Robinson wrote about "the new look of the fourth Gospel". Over a decade before, Bultmann had explained the characteristic features of the Gospel, the concepts, symbols, language so different from that of the Synoptics, to the origins of the stuff of the Gospel in a Jewish Gnostic sect. A little later Dodd saw it as written with adherents of the higher religion of Hellenistic paganism in view. The discovery of the Qumran texts commencing in 1947 showed that precisely this kind of language, concepts and symbols were very much at home in the native soil of Palestine in the time of Jesus and in a Jewish sect in isolation from the main stream of Judaism.

At the same time the discovery of authentic Gnostic sectarian materials at Nag Hamadi provided direct testimony to the thought-world of Gnosticism. It also

threw light on the pattern of the discourses in the Gospel and provided a basis for conjecture about Gnostic influence on the history of the community for which the Gospel was written. These characteristics of the "new look" the author outlines in eleven brief pages of new material.

Painter's basic working hypothesis is that the materials that finally reached written form in the fourth Gospel originated in the testimony of an eye-witness to the career of Jesus, John. His testimony was elaborated over decades within a group of his disciples. This material was first addressed to an audience of Palestinian Jews familiar with Old Testament themes and categories and of a mind-set similar to that which the Qumran materials show us, one at home with dualistic and antithetical thinking with its divisions into light and darkness, truth and falsehood, spirit and flesh.

Unlike the Synoptics the fourth Gospel is not a collection of traditional materials edited and arranged by the individual evangelist. It is the product of a far greater freedom of composition which shaped narratives and discourses into their present patterns and in categories congenial to the Johannine community but also, and most importantly, in response to the events of the developing history of the community. In the Gospel the history of the community is interwoven with that of Jesus.

So the story of Jesus is told in such a way as to present simultaneously the story of the community's relation with the Judaism of its time. We can see its gradual isolation from what was gradually asserting itself as normative Judaism, increasing with the destruction of Jerusalem up to the formal excommunication of the Jewish Christians in the mid-eighties through to the final stage of mutual execration. By the time the gospel reached its final form

the mission to the Gentiles had introduced pagan converts into the community.

The purpose of the Gospel is to promote authentic faith in Jesus on the part of Christians experiencing the pain of this severance from their Jewish roots as well as the feeling of abandonment by Jesus. It set out to clarify the significance of Jesus and the implications of faith in him to encourage Jewish believers to an open profession of faith, of a kind that would lead to a break with official Judaism. Why should one make such a momentous choice? Because it is not in the Law nor any of Israel's institutions, not even in Israel itself, but in the person of Jesus that God has finally revealed Himself for what He really is.

All this is briefly done so that the focus can remain on the message. In fact these fourteen pages could well be expanded into a helpful introduction to the Gospel. The treatment of the theology of the Gospel occupies nearly two-thirds of the book. The key to the thought of the evangelist lies in the correlated categories of revelation and response. So after a brief treatment of symbolism the author proceeds to treat of the revelation of the Word (its origin in the Father, creation through the Word and general revelation, revelation in the Law and the prophets, revelation of the Word made flesh as the light of the world), the self-revelation of Jesus, the revelation of the glory, revelation and Christology and revelation and the Spirit. The category of response is summarized in two chapters on faith, then knowledge, witness and love.

There is a great deal of ore to be mined in these pages. One might change the image and think of this material as already in ingot form. In short, almost staccato sentences we are offered all kinds of good things, brief exegetical summaries, clarification of central ideas, dialogue with other exegetes. It is intended as a

concise crystallization of Johannine theology and one gets the impression of a summary of other more extensive treatments, themselves perhaps summaries. There is, after all, a limit to what you can pack into ninety pages.

The same kind of thought and language is found again in the first epistle of John. Scholars differ as to the extent of the differences between Gospel and epistle but the similarities seem to suggest a common authorship and background. Painter judges that the two, Gospel and Epistle, were written by members of one Johannine school. The differences between them are best explained by the differences in the groups to whom they were addressed. Whereas the Gospel was addressed to Jewish Christians threatened by excommunication, the epistle is addressed to a later situation. Now pagans who had enthusiastically accepted the new teaching were interpreting it wrongly as a confirmation of their pagan religious experience. The letter is thus a clarification of terms familiar to us from the Gospel, but which this group had completely distorted.

Can this heresy be more precisely diagnosed? The affirmations, denials and behaviour of these heretics who have separated themselves from the community reveals a kind of Gnostic mysticism. A careful literary and theological analysis of the series of affirmations and antitheses in the epistle shows that they are claiming a direct mystical knowledge of God. The person with the divine spark within has no need of Christ to reveal God. Mystical love of God makes brotherly love mundane or irrelevant. These assertions are subjected to two tests, acceptance of the apostolic testimony expressed in the confession that Jesus Christ has come in real human flesh and love of the community. The person who does not love does not know God.

For many readers the most interesting aspect of the book will be the insights it offers into the history of that Christian community and the responses to its world that successive stages of its history called for. There are, of course, limits to the precision that can be expected in this kind of historical reconstruction — R.E. Brown was happy to settle for something like sixty percent in his work on the Johannine community. But this historical reconstruction is only one of the many merits of the book. C.K. Barrett recommends it in his foreword as a sure guide to “the average reader”. This presumed or implied reader will find that the book makes some demands and calls for some application. Perhaps that reader might be spared a little of the constant dialogue with Bultmann, but will certainly benefit from the clarity of the exposition. But there are at least two books in this material and we may surely hope that “the average reader” will be able to look forward to their separate appearance.

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### The Hindu Gita: Ancient and Classical Interpretations of the Bhagavadgita

Arvind Sharma

London: Duckworth, 1986.

xxx, 268 pp., £24.00

There has been in recent years a revival of writing on the *Bhagavadgita* both in India and outside. This volume is a very welcome addition to that literature. It concentrates on the treatment of the *Gita* in ancient and classical Hindu tradition. The very famous commentaries on the *Gita* by Shankara and Ramanuja have been available in English for a long time, but other important commentaries have remained accessible only in the original Sanskrit.

Arvind Sharma offers in this volume text-studies of the commentaries, not only of Shankara and Ramanuja, but also of Bhaskara and Madhva. The detailed discussion with ample quotations of the latter two constitutes an important extension of the *Gita* literature available in English.

In his treatment of the three major classical commentaries the author has adopted a uniform approach: he takes them in their textual order, starting with Chapter I, and works his way through them, selecting those passages that most clearly reveal the particular approach of the authors. For comparative purposes this is a good method as it allows for easy cross-checking between the commentators. Bhaskara's commentary, however, is much smaller, as it covers only the first nine chapters of the *Gita*. In this case the author has preferred to adopt a thematic approach. The headings of the chapter on Bhaskara as a consequence reveal some of the major concerns of the author in this volume: “textual, polemical, liturgical, philosophical, hermeneutical, and social.”

The author's intention is not only to record the various ways in which the foremost Hindu theologians have interpreted the *Gita*, but also to show how their treatment of the text reveals their own conception of what it means to be “a sacred text.” They were faced with a text that was held in the highest regard by the tradition. Yet that text contained many apparent contradictions and abounded in ambiguities. Each of the theologians approached their commentary with a complex and clearly defined theological system. They wanted to find in that sacred text the justification for their ownologies, which differed greatly from each other. The volume shows how hard the commentators sometimes had to work in order to make the *Gita* support their theological tenets. In this process they

naturally often flatly contradicted one another, and sometimes demonstrated fantastic ingenuity of textual torture.

The exposé throws up some fundamental questions about the text of the *Gita* itself. In his Introduction and its Appendix 2, Sharma gives a short survey of the state of play regarding the question of interpolations in the *Gita*. A number of western scholars regarded the inconsistencies manifest in the text as the result of a history of successive interpolations. Some of them proceeded to unravel the tapestry and tried to reconstruct what they thought must have been the "original" *Gita*, a self-contained work with a clear logic of its own. This process was brought to the limits of utter absurdity by Rudolf Otto. Sharma shows how that approach is now out of favour on several sound grounds.

A more important question arises when the interpolation theory is rejected: is the text of the *Gita* "univalent" or "multivalent", in other words does it purposely project only one or several meanings? The author treats that question in his Introduction and Conclusion. The question has more than one facet. Does the *Gita* view itself as univalent or multivalent? How does the tradition view the *Gita* in this respect? In fact, the whole problem has even wider ramifications about the general attitude of the Hindu tradition towards all scriptural texts, and in particular towards the Vedas. This is a

fascinating question which touches the very core of Hinduism, its interpretation of scripture, and its conception of the authority of the pandit who interprets the texts. The question is particularly crucial in the context of *dharmashastra*, where scriptural authority is concretely applied to moral case studies.

Arvind Sharma's volume is certainly an important addition to the literature on the *Gita*. It complements very aptly other volumes recently published such as E.J. Sharpe's *The Universal Gita* and R. Minor's *Modern Interpreters of the Bhagavadgita*. The volume is somewhat uneven in quality, and the integration between chapters (some previously published) is not as strong as one would like it to be. Chapter II on the *Gitamahatmyas* offers a rather thin analysis. The proofreading of Sanskrit texts is also uneven: the chapter on Shankara has too many inaccuracies in the transcription. Nevertheless, the book offers a lot of excellent new material, and it usefully throws up some important questions about the Hindu tradition. Particularly fascinating is the question about the univalence or multivalence of ancient Hindu scriptures. One hopes the author may pursue that one some day in depth.

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## Review Article - Australian Jewish Historiography

*Chosen: The Jews in Australia.*

Hilary L. Rubinstein.

Sydney, London, Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987.

ISBN 0-04-994007-4 Hardback,

ISBN 0-04-994008-2 Paperback.

*Jews in the Sixth Continent.*

W.D. Rubinstein (ed.).

Sydney, London, Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987.

*Edge of the Diaspora: Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia.*

Suzanne D. Rutland.

Sydney: Collins Australia, 1987.

ISBN 0-7322-2404-7.

Within the past two years, an astonishing number of major works have been published on Australian Jewish history, of which the three works under review are the most significant. The last period in which works of such importance were published on Australian Jewry was in the late 1960s and first half of the 1970s, when a number of studies appeared, especially from Peter Y. Medding, who presently teaches at Hebrew University and has broadened his research to include contemporary Jewish affairs generally.<sup>1</sup> With the departure of Peter Medding from Australia, and despite some occasional studies from various scholars on Australian Jewry since then, there has been a hiatus in the production of large-scale monographs in this area.

Now, however, we have with the publication of these books major productions from an entirely new generation of scholarship on Australian Jewry. Each of these authors already has distinguished works to her or to his credit: Suzanne Rut-

land has written a brief history of New South Wales Jewry, among other works,<sup>2</sup> while Hilary Rubinstein recently published a comprehensive history of Victorian Jewry,<sup>3</sup> and W.D. Rubinstein has, apart from work in other areas, produced a variety of political science and demographic studies of Australian Jewry, as well as a recent brief survey of the community.<sup>4</sup> The three books are complementary to each other, even though they cover the same field.

Suzanne Rutland's magisterial *Edge of the Diaspora: Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia* offers 479 pages (including the notes, bibliography and index) of concisely written historical data on the persons and institutions of Australian Jewry. Every significant cultural or social leader is named and his or her contribution carefully noted; the history of every organization is told, and an account of every important controversy is presented. Despite the rich detail, a remarkable clarity of exposition is retained. One gets the feeling that an immense and complex drama is being unfolded, with a cast of thousands.

Hilary Rubinstein's *Chosen: The Jews in Australia*, on the other hand, while naming and giving attention to the most important figures in Australian Jewish history, devotes itself more in its 308 pages to general social history, with reflective chapters on "The image of the Jews in colonial Australia" (Chapter 4), cultural problems and social values amongst Australian Jews up to the 1920s ("Sunshine and Shadow," Chapter 8), and so on.

The volume edited by W.D. Rubinstein, *Jews in the Sixth Continent*, however, takes up specific issues within Australian Jewish history, from the early

nineteenth century to the present with 15 articles, each devoted to an important issue or representative person. The format allows for more detailed examination of topics that a historical survey might have to skim over: the history of Jewish communities in small towns in the outback; the changing self-perceptions of Jewish status in Australia as indicated by the community response to antisemitic incidents; the role of philosemitism, Gentile championing of Jewish causes, in Australian Jewish history, including an important article showing the fundamental role of H.V. Evatt in establishing the state of Israel; the role and status of women in Australian Jewry; varying responses to Zionism, and to the Holocaust, in the Australian Jewish community, and so on. The authors of the essays are a "who's who" of the major researchers into Australian Jewish history today, and include Hilary Rubinstein, Suzanne Rutland, and the editor himself, W.D. Rubinstein. Despite the specificity of each essay, the collection coheres together very well, and affords an enlightening overview of the Australian Jewish experience.

A person wishing a well-grounded knowledge of Australian Jewry could not do better than to start with Hilary Rubinstein's *Chosen*, to get a clear idea of the major issues and themes in the social history of Australian Jewry, then go on to the extraordinarily thorough general history by Suzanne Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, and finally end with the vignettes into specific issues of *Jews of the Sixth Continent*.

Hilary Rubinstein tells us in her "Preface" to *Chosen* that she wrote her book especially for the use of senior students at Australia's burgeoning Jewish day schools; although it is therefore a survey, it is certainly not over-simplified and is most informative for university researchers as well. Nevertheless, I have

been told that Hilary and her husband W.D. Rubinstein are at work on a more exhaustive "thematic" social and political history of Australian Jewry, to be published sometime in 1989, which will carry on from where *Chosen* leaves off.

It is impossible to read these volumes without entering into reflections concerning Australia and the Jewish minority experience in it. Many of these reflections also inevitably have a great deal of light to shed on the situation of other minority groups in Australia (the "multiculturalism" debate, etc.), and even elsewhere. And they stimulate thought on the implications for the wider Jewish experience in the modern period.

For example, these histories demonstrate that the Australian Jewish community has been deeply, even fundamentally, shaped by its concern for good relations with the wider community. Of course, antisemitism in Australia has never been as severe as it often was in Europe: individuals were well-integrated into society, and social mobility was possible for able persons even to the highest positions of government, although interestingly not to positions within central economic institutions such as banks or Australia's major industries; friendships between Gentile and Jew were the rule rather than the exception; and there has been a strong philosemitic tradition in Australia as well (as Serge Liberman documents in his contribution to *Jews in the Sixth Continent*). Recent studies show that there is remarkably little antisemitism in the contemporary Australian population.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it is evident from these discussions that the climate of prejudice, both local and international, was probably the most powerful factor in determining the tone and even many of the details of Jewish minority existence in Australia during this period. For even at the best of times in Australia, the influence of antisemitic



stereotypes in British-derived literature, society and religion continued to be felt in Australia, and occasionally cropped up in fairly raw form in the media. Moreover, Australian Jews were constantly kept aware of the sometimes very precarious situation of Jews elsewhere by news and travellers from abroad and perhaps even from letters from friends and relatives. It would therefore be a serious error to ignore the enormous impact knowledge of the international situation had on Australian Jewry's own attitudes. On numerous occasions throughout the nineteenth century, antisemitic incidents abroad were major international scandals, discussed in all the newspapers. This knowledge, when reinforced by the occasional poignant antisemitic slur in Australia, made the possibility of the thorough integration of Jews into Australian society even more precious and gratefully sought after.

This, inevitably, also intimately affected the shaping of Jewish religious observance. Although the Anglo-Jewish community before World War II was Orthodox in religious affiliation, this "Orthodoxy" was not dissimilar from the majority Anglican affiliation: as the Jewish version of establishment religion, Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy was well-mannered, low-keyed, and publicly hardly distinguishable. It was observant in the synagogue, but it quietly dropped genuinely separatist or stigmatising social ritual. Although there was a quiet pride in and love of Judaism, intensity of religion was discouraged. The ideology was strongly assimilationist, with the individual identity often being emphasized above group identity, and the high intermarriage rate bore this out.

The arrival of eastern European immigrants of a much more traditionally distinctive eastern European Orthodoxy just before and after the Second World War therefore presented a profound di-

lemma to the Jewish establishment. They felt a painful contradiction between their establishment Orthodoxy and the forthrightly "Jewish" assertiveness of the newcomers. This group assertiveness (seen as provocative and dangerous by the Anglo-Jewish leadership) extended beyond the public differentness of Orthodox practice to the creation of a wide range of distinctively Jewish socio-political associations, prominently including Zionism. The Anglo-Jewish leadership tended to be frightened of the implication of Zionism that the Jews constituted a distinct people, and not just a religious persuasion. Among others (including the leading rabbi of Melbourne, Rabbi Jacob Danglow), Sir Isaac Isaacs devoted considerable energy in his declining years to attacking Zionism publicly, raising the double loyalties charge, and claiming that it was contrary to the Jewish religion.

The agitated response of such leaders as Sir Isaac Isaacs and Rabbi Jacob Danglow reflected a very predictable reaction to the pressures operating on the Jewish community, and was part of a larger dynamic. When antisemitism was not strongly pronounced in Australia, as was the case, according to all our authors, throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century, and as has been the case over the past two decades as well, the Jews have felt secure enough as individuals as well as a group to protest strongly against any manifestations of prejudice in the media or in society generally. The strength of the protests signified a confidence that the complaints would be heard with sympathy by some large portion of the population and the political leaders. But when antisemitism was more strongly pronounced, as it was from the late 1880s on, and increasingly from the 1920s, Jewish protests were often either given no airing at all by Gentile media or authorities, or were even made the "cause" of

increased hostility and public criticism, thus underlining Jewish impotence and vulnerability all the more. So we find that from the 1890s on for a generation, and again during the 1930s and 1940s, the Jewish leadership maintained silence in the face of major antisemitic attacks, because they had learned to be fearful of giving occasion for making Jewish matters a persistent major media or political issue, in such an unfavourable, and to them "no-win," climate. Those leaders preferred, in such circumstances, to keep a very low group profile, and to make use of "quiet diplomacy" and personal appeals to those persons in power who were known to be sympathetic. Hilary Rubinstein offers extensive documentation of this process in *Chosen* (particularly pp. 77-81, 159-167), and devotes an important essay to it in *Jews in the Sixth Continent*.

The paradoxical conclusion to be drawn from this is that when we find the Australian Jewish community asserting group identity and protesting against antisemitism the most vigorously and publicly, the general position of the Jews at least up to that time is likely to have been relatively quite good, and when they have met attacks with silence, and with resistance to taking a distinct group stance, the situation has been much worse. The implications for other minority groups is clear. In our own day, Aborigines are speaking out boldly about the "rights" which they insist are denied them — one might imagine from the persistence of the protests, the radicalization of some activists and the stark and unqualified language in which the present Aboriginal situation is described, that things have never been worse for Aborigines than now. The opposite is certainly the case: this is the first generation for which there has been real improvement, and in which there is justified hope for more improvement. The very appeal to "rights" indi-

cates a greater integration into mainstream Australian society, and internalization of its perspective, than has ever occurred before. Similarly, when the Black civil rights movement began to be heard in the United States, this signified an enormous advance had already taken place in Black status, and in the general American appreciation of Black rights and Black dignity. The silence of earlier generations of Blacks, including Black leaders, their cooptation and cowardice, as some Black activists now put it, was on the contrary all too well grounded in the all-pervasive impotence and vulnerability of Blacks, and the extremely fragile and depressed nature of Black status in that period. Protest would have been disastrous. That there is today a strong multicultural protest by ethnic groups in Australia against the attitudes and occasionally prejudiced statements of some Australian media figures, politicians and community leaders, does not mean that Australia is very prejudiced and especially prone to monoculturalism (despite the claims of some ethnic representatives), but the very reverse.

The struggle of the Jews as a group in Australia also provokes some reflections concerning the changing nature of Western society. Up until the past generation, all democratic Western countries were orientated toward a monocultural perspective. The "melting pot" ideology held sway even in the United States; monoculturalism was much stronger elsewhere. There was an assumption that the general community was still a relatively simple one, a union that would be threatened by differences that were too great. This outlook was reflected in a pervasive stereotyping of culturally different groups, and "foreigners." Jews were often identified with both kinds of outsiders, as the paradigmatic "other" in Western culture. The widespread antisemitism in Western

countries over the past two centuries, then, even if on a very low-keyed, occasional and abstract level in Australia most of the time, tended to make Jews hesitate to insist on distinct communal interests and identity. This was all the more the case, in that Australians were unusually willing to accept Jews as individuals, so long as they were not too "unAustralian." There is an egalitarian, pragmatic and concrete orientation to Australian cultural mores, a disinterest in romantic symbols and abstractions, encapsulated in the belief that one should give a person a "fair go," which has meant that although abstract antisemitic conceptions and symbolisms were often taken for granted, they were not often connected with particular individuals or allowed to affect actual relationships. The monocultural bias of Australian society strongly increased these pressures.

The different attitude to Jewish identity in our present generation testifies to a new cultural environment in Australia, and in Western democracies generally which strongly affects all minority groups. In recent decades a far more complex kind of society has evolved in the West, one in which the "melting pot" has turned into a "salad bowl."<sup>6</sup> In this kind of society, unity now requires a highly articulated differentiation, integration and interdependence of its component groups. Moreover, the extraordinary diversity of "mass society" and the mobility of its individual "atoms" often produces an illusion of bewilderingly vague amorphousness. To identify oneself merely as a person belonging to that mass society produces no distinct image of the self at all. As a result, from the 1960s on, individuals have felt the need to choose a distinct social identity that is perforce different from, and to a degree therefore *opposed* to, the amorphous "mainstream" one.<sup>7</sup> This individual need is also a com-

munal one, and it is reflected even within mainstream cultural institutions. For example, and most strikingly, mainstream churches have become counter-culture institutions.<sup>8</sup> Throughout our culture, precisely the oppositional modes of identity have become typical. "Mass society" individual and group identity is now as such oppositional or counter-cultural in nature. Ironically, the pervasiveness of this counter-cultural appeal is no doubt greatly enhanced by the unprecedented prosperity of Western culture. Adversity would certainly tend to simplify societal structures, and along with it reduce the general tolerance of difference.

The efflorescence of Australian Jewish culture in the past generation, therefore, is not just related to the obvious contributing factors of the dedication to Jewish survival and warmth of tradition among the immigrants from Holocaust Europe and their children, or the inspirational rise of Israel, or the influence from an American Jewry now going through its own renaissance. This efflorescence, which the three marvellous historical and cultural surveys under review testify to both in their text and by their very existence, also arises, it would seem, from a new dynamic of differentiation, interdependence and prosperity in Western democracies which bodes well for all minority groups and religions in them, and which suggests that multiculturalism is present in Australia to stay.

#### Notes

1. See Medding, Peter Y. (1968), *From Assimilation to Group Survival: A Political and Sociological Study of an Australian Jewish Community*, Melbourne: Cheshire, a sociological study of Melbourne Jewry that has not yet been equalled, and the collection of essays

- edited by him, *Jews in Australian Society*, South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1973. Medding more recently co-authored with Daniel Elazar, the well-known sociologist of contemporary Jewry, an important comparative study entitled *Jewish Communities in Frontier Societies: Argentina, Australia and South Africa*, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983.
2. Rutland, Suzanne D. (1978), "Historical Chapters" in *The New South Wales Jewish Community: A Survey*, edited by S. Encel and B. Buckley, Sydney: Kensington Press, The University of New South Wales.
  3. Rubinstein, Hilary L. (1986), *The Jews in Victoria: 1835-1985*, Sydney, London: George Allen and Unwin.
  4. Rubinstein, W.D. (1986), *The Jews in Australia*, Australian Ethnic Heritage Series, Melbourne: AE Press.
  5. Cf. Rubinstein, W.D. (1987), "The McNair-Anderson Survey of March, 1984 on Australian Attitudes to Jews and Anti-Semitism" in *Menorah: Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 1, August 1987: 54-73, and the references there.
  6. Rubinstein, Hilary, *Chosen*, *op. cit.*, p. 263, quoting Eve Mahlab.
  7. Cf. Karalis, Rebecca M. (1986), "Transcending the Commodity: Subcultural Strategies," MA Preliminary Thesis, Department of Anthropology, Monash University, February, 1986; Poggioli, Renato (1986), *The Theory of the Avante-Garde*, Boston: The Belknap Press; and my application of this to modern Jewish identity, with further bibliographic references, in "The Phoenix People: Jewish Identity in the Modern World" in *Menorah: Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 1, 1987: 6-25.
  8. Troeltsch's famous distinction, in his *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1931, between "Church" and "Sect," is now appearing to be increasingly obsolete. This is of course still very recent, occurring only over the past two decades. The mainstream churches are now taking on sectarian characteristics, defining themselves as being over against the status quo, and critical of general social mores, ideals and institutions. In the face of declining interest, attendance, and membership, these churches have evidently felt the need to modify earlier inclusive and conservative affirmations (now felt to be vague, irrelevant and even "unspiritual"), and to underline their distinctiveness. "Liberation theology" in all its manifestations offers a useful theological justification for this process. That identity is now redefined as being with the symbolically or actually marginal against the central Western powers and institutions that are said to victimize them. It is not a matter, any more, of "rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's," but of attacking Caesar.

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