

Book Reviews

Believing in Australia. A Cultural History of Religions.

Hilary M. Carey. Allen and Unwin, 1996. Rrp, \$27.95

Hilary Carey (Senior Lecturer in History at Newcastle University and well-known writer on religious subjects) has produced an important contribution to the study of religion in Australia. This work will be of particular interest to AASR members because of the wide-ranging themes and its intimate references to works by AASR scholars. It is aimed at the general reader with some degree of informed understanding, which makes it different from more popular works of recent years.

This work is based around themes, rather than narrative history, but there is an essential chronological base.

The first chapter explores the religious foundations of European settlement, with three main groups: established religion, evangelicals and Catholics. This division is quite helpful as it allows these early thematic references to be developed throughout the book.

The evangelical focus is very relevant and perhaps surprising given Carey's background, but it symbolises the greater recognition and serious attention that evangelical historical study is now receiving in Australia.

Throughout all the early chapters is the broader picture of the impact of European colonisation on the Aboriginal people and most importantly Aboriginal religion. Chapters 2 and 3 focus more directly on Aboriginal issues, with firstly a comprehensive outline of Aboriginal religion in order to illustrate its integrity and status, before a focus on the missionary age (mainly in the late 19th century). The intimate references to AASR works are evident, particularly highlighting Tony Swain's pioneering historical pieces. These chapters also display Carey's leanings toward academic studies, with a downplaying of lauded more popular books like John Harris' *One Blood*. Chapter 3 concludes with a very helpful table outlining mission groups, areas of work and years involved.

Chapter 4 moves back to the focus on the different European groupings and then expands to examine the rise of the smaller groups in the late 19th century like the Quakers, and Adventists, as well as a brief exploration of esoteric religions and the religion and science debate. There is a very interesting note about the Kanakas of Queensland and another useful reference table outlining the establishment of Catholic religious orders in Australia.

Chapter 5 explores the theme of women and religion in the context of the feminisation of religious culture 1900 - 1945. This is an important chapter as it provides a useful picture of the move to greater female participation in institutional religious culture (particularly drawing on various statistical comparisons), as well as providing a survey of the denominational and non-denominational organisational influence of women, through a myriad of groups and organisations. Carey

demonstrates her wide reading through the references to both popular and academic studies and material about the involvement of women. The strength is on the side of Catholic groups, but there is material on a wider range of subjects, eg clergy wives, women's auxiliaries and Anglican sisterhoods. One slight problem is the summary style means that some references are too truncated, like the reference to the Presbyterian Church and the ordination of women.

The final two chapters explore the change in religious culture since World War II, particularly the effects of migration (6) and the rise of new religious movements (7). Here are brief religious and historical summaries of Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, as well as a survey of the impact of migration on the established Christian churches (given the period there is little reference to Protestant and Anglican groups). The main focus is on the diversity and development of Orthodoxy, including some reference to the internal politics of the Greek Orthodox Church and the impact and debate about ethnic religious culture within the Catholic Church.

New age religions, the rise of spirituality and various sects are profiled within the context of an ongoing discussion about the nature of religious culture and the influence of secular philosophy. Again there is reference to evangelicalism, but it is expanded this time to include Pentecostalism, which in itself is a sign of the shift that has taken place in the last 10 - 15 years in our religious culture. Given the development and influence of Pentecostalism I would have liked there to have been more of an analysis, particularly of the burgeoning school and semi-academic scene and connections through inter-church groups, but the basis for such a discussion is there.

The book finishes with a good set of statistical tables (census based) and extremely important endnotes and bibliography, which demonstrate the range of reading Carey has undertaken (though I again noticed an absence of reference to the resources of the National Church Life Survey and Christian Research Association material, but this may reflect the historical orientation of the book).

The strength of this book lies in its ability to show the influence of religion within a changing society, even within a secular culture with what could be interpreted as a religious veneer. This is not a book for the uninformed reader, but also one should not think the reader needs to be an expert. I believe religious scholars will generally find it a helpful exploration, but as already noted it will certainly be a stimulating text for people with a more academic focus and interest, but for whom religion is not their speciality. Rather than insult their intelligence it will encourage them to think about the broader aspects of culture in our society, namely that of religion within the context of Australia's history.

Peter Bentley

Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings

Majella Franzmann, T and T Clark: Edinburgh, 1996

In 1945 some forty separate Gnostic treatises were discovered by an Egyptian peasant near the Nag Hammadi region in Egypt. They opened up the literary world of early Gnosticism and provided a new insight into early Christian history. The texts derived from Coptic Christians of Gnostic bent from the fourth century CE although they would have been copies of much earlier treatises. No doubt they had been hidden away because of the orthodox Christian reaction against Gnosticism. Because of the difficulties in procuring the texts in the 1940s and 1950s and subsequently publishing them, they never acquired the popular aura of the Dead Sea Scrolls. I recall pointing out a battered road sign that indicated (in both Arabic and English) that Nag Hammadi was off to the right to a study group who were broadly very well educated. Only one had heard of Nag Hammadi or of its texts.

Some of the names popularly associated with the study of the Nag Hammadi writings have been James M. Robinson (whose lectures on the texts I attended as a student at the American Schools of Oriental Research in Jerusalem in 1965) and Elaine Pagels. I expect that Majella Franzmann will become equally well known if she is not already so.

From the onset the texts have offered the tantalising possibility of revealing more about the historical Jesus than was previously known. Some modern scholars, like J. Dominic Crossan would maintain that especially the *Gospel of Thomas*, one of the Nag Hammadi texts, is an earlier and more reliable text of Jesus-sayings than the canonical gospels. On the other hand John P. Meier rejects all these texts as historical sources because he claims they are later than and dependent on the canonical gospels.

Amid this debate over the search for an historical Jesus, Franzmann's book must become an invaluable resource. She situates it clearly:

The study is not an attempt to present one picture of a single Jesus, not an attempt to produce a unified christology of the Nag Hammadi writings, even if that were possible. Rather it is an attempt to summarise the variety of portraits of Jesus with an emphasis on common themes. (p. xiii)

Franzmann makes it clear that in order to construct an historical Jesus there is need for sources, but there are no 'objective' sources available. There are, however, a variety of interpretations of Jesus, some in the canonical literature and some outside in the so-called apocryphal writings which include the Nag Hammadi cache. If the earlier stages of the interpretation of Jesus within early Christianity are to be uncovered then all of this material, including the Nag Hammadi texts, needs to be considered.

In short, what Franzmann offers in this book is a description, using the Gnostic texts from Nag Hammadi themselves, of the many interpretations of Jesus. She sees the texts as unveiling one broad strand of interpretation, even if not one single interpretation.

She accomplishes her purpose by summarising the Nag Hammadi corpus in a series of themes relating to Jesus. The broad themes are: the origin and entrance of Jesus into the earthly context; the world to which Jesus comes; being and nature of Jesus; reasons for the coming of the Saviour: Jesus as Revealer and Liberator; activity of Jesus and its setting; positive and negative relationships of Jesus; the close of the earthly context of Jesus.

In a final section of the book, Franzmann relates these writings and its Jesus interpretations to the community that produced it, a section which makes use of modern anthropological models and theory.

I would consider that the author has done a wonderful service to those interested in the Nag Hammadi writings and most particularly those who want to relate them to the search for an historical Jesus and the history of early Christianity. At times the central section of the book may become a little tedious, but it has to be remembered that its purpose is to be a compendium. It is certainly an orderly and scholarly compendium. It lies somewhere between a translation of texts with a formal commentary on them, for example in the sterling work of James M. Robinson (*The Nag Hammadi Library in English*), and the popular, sometimes contentious reconstructions of Gnostic thought by Elaine Pagels (*The Gnostic Gospels; Adam, Eve and the Serpent; The Origin of Satan*).

I recommend the book and would hope it is the forerunner of more from the same hand.

Robert Crotty
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Bishop in the Dock. The Sedition Trial of James Liston

Rory Sweetman, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1997

On St Patrick's Day (17 March) 1922 the new auxiliary bishop of Auckland, James Liston, addressed a Town Hall full of Irish Catholics celebrating the feast day. The British government had only recently conceded self-governing dominion status to the Irish Free State. Opponents of the treaty in Ireland itself, who refused to accept the separation of the six northern counties, were already mobilising for a civil war which was to divide the country even further. The bishop, a native of New Zealand of Irish parentage, spoke to audience about the turbulent years since the Easter rebellion of 1916 in Dublin. He expressed support for De Valera, who was opposing the treaty, and referred to the many Irish martyrs of British repression, blaming the "foreign murderers" involved. Did he mean the regular British troops who had put down the rebellion in 1916, or the rather more irregular "Black and Tans" of the early 1920s? (The difference was to be the crucial issue in the subsequent trial.) Reports of the speech so inflamed the local Protestant establishment that Liston was charged with sedition for his contempt of the Empire and the implied inciting of violence.

Rory Sweetman's book gives a detailed account of the trial of Liston, who was

eventually acquitted of sedition, while being reprimanded for his “grave indiscretion” which had caused such great offence. The trial is placed into a context of Irishism and sectarianism which reached a high level in the years between 1916 and 1922 in most countries of the Irish diaspora, but especially in Australia and New Zealand. The Australian context of the trial was explicit, since many New Zealanders were appalled at the anti-imperial politics of Archbishop Daniel Mannix in Melbourne over the same period, and were determined to prevent similar excesses on their side of the Tasman Sea. Sweetman’s account is balanced and fair to all sides in the Liston incident.

The book is full of interesting comparisons for Australian readers. During those years overt sectarianism seemed to be less intense in New Zealand than in an Australian political environment overheated by the involvement of Mannix in the conscription campaigns. Irish Catholics in New Zealand made up only about 14% of the population compared to over 20% in Australia. Yet, the Protestant majority was even more aggressive in New Zealand than in Australia. After all, Mannix himself, although arrested on the high seas by the British Navy, never had to defend himself against sedition charges in Australia. Moreover, the Catholic *Ne Temere* marriage legislation, which was already outlawed in New Zealand, survived a challenge in the NSW Parliament a year or so later. Was this because New Zealand Protestants were more devotedly imperial than Australians? Or because their majority was greater? Or because Irish Catholics in Australia were better organised to defend themselves in the political system?

Even for an understanding of contemporary Australia the issues exposed in this study are suggestive. Was the fundamental issue in 1922 about religion, or ethnicity, or a disagreement about the primary focus of national loyalty? Was the promotion of an Irish republic just one step away from separating New Zealand from the Empire? There was an assertion of multicultural values in a society whose majority establishment overwhelmingly rejected those values. Was the problem reducible to just one factor? The Irish Catholic minority was seen as having an allegiance to Rome rather than the British Empire, as trying to be New Zealanders without being British, as perverting local politics with the contagion of the Irish question, and as being allies of a Labour Party which many in the establishment associated with Tammany-style graft and corruption, if not with class war and bolshevism. Perhaps the most remarkable thing is that, despite the overwhelming weight of public opinion and press bias, the bishop received a very fair trial, and his acquittal was generally received favourably within the general community. It was the legal system, rather than the political system, which protected the rights of the minority. (Shades of Mabo and Wik!)

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Morality in Classical European Sociology: The Denial of Social PluralitySteven Thiele, *Mellen Studies in Sociology* Vol. 12,

The Edward Mellen Press, 1996; 164

This monograph addresses a fascinating issue - the extent to which in classical sociological thought morality has been 'quarantined' from investigation by being classified as 'above' social life. Thiele argues that it has traditionally been asserted that "to entertain a sociological investigation of morality is to deny this 'aboveness'....And, to deny morality any extraordinariness...is to undermine its foundations. So, from a moral standpoint, a sociology of morality will be judged at best nonsensical, and at worst immoral or something it ought not to be" (p. 2). This seeming impossibility of developing a sociology of morality has functioned to disguise the presence of unacknowledged moral authorities in the works of the great European sociologists. The bulk of this study is a review of the role of morality in the writings of Durkheim, Marx and Weber. Thiele's own reflections on morality have been influenced by the philosophers Nietzsche and Anderson. Nietzsche, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, assumes that morality has a history; and Anderson argues for the irreducible plurality of social life.

Armed with these tools, Chapter 2 "Durkheim: secular sociologist" analyses Durkheim's formulation of the relationship between the individual and society, exposing the non-scientific nature of his claim "that society is the universal moral authority of humanity" (p. 30). Much of this chapter is careful explication of the terminology Durkheim employs, and the way in which he links his notion of society as a moral authority to his theory of the origin of religion. Thiele notes the paradox that the atheistic Durkheim is often perceived to be 'sympathetic' to religion; and demonstrates clearly that Durkheim's explanation of religion is mere reductionism, with the sacred being redefined as a 'this-worldly' phenomenon. The argument of the book is quite complicated at this point: with multi-layered strands concerning the relationship of Durkheim's moral authority to religious moral authorities; his concern to deny social plurality by asserting the monolithic nature of society; and his efforts to resolve the dualisms inherent in secular thought. Thiele's style is dry, and occasionally laboured, but he is to be congratulated on the clarity which he brings to a complicated subject.

Chapter 3 "Marx: moralist with a critique of morality" concentrates on the moral stance of much Marxism, and how it obscures the fact that Marx was himself a trenchant critic of morality. He argued for the irreducible plurality of existence, and maintained that morality is therefore a form of alienation. Marx's insistence on class as fundamental to human society leads him to posit morality as a product of class conflict and to assert that moral dualisms operate only in societies which are class divided. However, Marx in his insistence that communism will come and capitalism will be destroyed, becomes trapped in an ought-ought not dualism which constitutes a moral imperative. Again Thiele displays a good deal of interest in Marx's attitude to religion, which perhaps is justified when Marx's attitude to atheism

(that atheistic secular morality is the last phase of theism) is noted.

Chapter 4 “Weber: genuinely living the fact-value paradox” suggests that Weber’s problem and his solution are both to be found in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, published in 1904. Here, Weber argues that fact and value are antagonistic, but both are necessary for a full human life. Thiele classifies Weber’s reconciliation of these opposites as existential: “by practising the rational activity of sociology as a vocation, he is, in his terms, living a genuine way of life; he is thereby holding fact and value together despite their incompatibility” (p. 100). Weber’s significant studies of religion are investigations of the realm of value; his concern with science, empiricism and the rational are investigations of the realm of fact. His insistence that individuals must locate themselves in the realm of values and morality explicitly denies morality any transcendent quality.

The brief fifth chapter “Concluding Remarks” gives sketches of three types of sociology which are not moral: anti-moral sociology; non-moral sociology; and amoral sociology. The first of these deliberately strikes out against moral authority; is characterised as ‘perspectivist’ (in that it claims that all theory is value-laden); and Thiele locates much of postmodern thinking within this category. The second, non-moral sociology, is not perspectivist: it views itself as a particular social phenomenon in a pluralist context, and is non-essentialist. The third, amoral sociology, “occurs where interest in moral authority is minimal” (p. 148) These concluding remarks are somewhat frustrating, because of their brevity. The overall impression gained is that Thiele has identified a significant problem; traced the history of this problem through a sequence of classic thinkers (with some rather interesting digressions); but has no solutions to offer, merely pointing in the direction of possible solutions.

It is hoped that scholars will accept the challenge and further the enquiry begun in this monograph.

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