

**Alexandru Popescu**, *Petre Tutea: Between Sacrifice and Suicide*. Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004, 345pp., ISBN 0754635503 (hbk); 0754650065 (pbk). Review doi: 10.1558/arsr.v21i1.105.

'Without the idea of suicide it would be necessary for me to kill myself' kidded and threatened E.M. Cioran, that great master of melancholic bile.<sup>1</sup> Like his compatriots in the Romanian nation-in-exile, which included Eliade, it is easy to trace through their searching and restless minds that essence of *Dostoyevshina* that is the mark of the Eastern European psyche. It is a complex of thinking that can now be even more clearly understood because of Popescu's foundational work in English of the *œuvre* of Petre Tutea (pron. 'Tzutzea' [1902–1991]). Moreover, this work also provides a glimpse of what remains important for Christians in their study of other Christians. For the purposes of this review I will not detail Tutea's work in developing his ascetic theology, his death-cell ruminations on faith nor his Christian Anthropology.<sup>2</sup> I will, nevertheless, recommend these elements to those interested in East–West theological discourse. Rather, I would like to concentrate on a dark theme that haunts this work and which is germane to the contemporary *geist*.

Unlike those scholars noted above, Tutea remained at home and became a central figure in growth and development of pre-war Romania. He sought answers to his homeland's future from a huge range of possibilities that included socialism, communism, fascism, the development of economic policy, peasant movements, the creation of literature (with his own particular theory of theatre), philosophy and a growing fascination with his inherited religious tradition: Romanian Orthodoxy. The development, after World War II, of Romania's tyrannical 'peoples' dictatorship', made an enemy of Tutea. He was relentlessly and ruthlessly persecuted until the last two years of his life when he saw the deserved tearing of the Iron Curtain. Throughout his life he developed a Christianity that was solidly Orthodox in its practice but increasingly Catholic in its philosophy.<sup>3</sup> To this extent Tutea is lauded by the (English) archbishops and canons who preface this work as a bridge between Christianities. Indeed the book is obviously dedicated to a (Western) Christian audience, or perhaps the author assumes that all audiences are inherently Western and Christian. Despite the tight theological focus, this book will still appeal to a wider audience by dint of Tutea's startling personality, tenacious mind and general legacy.

Tutea was essential to the recent history of his country partly because of his liminality. A doctor of law, he kept out of the academy yet became a profound national thinker. Never a theologian he championed the rights of the thinking and praying laity to engage in theological concerns. In 1932 we find him co-founding the Marxist journal *Stanga*.<sup>4</sup> This was before his stint in Berlin (1933–34) where the importance of nationalism was strongly driven into him by various German thinkers. Upon his return we find Tutea stridently opposed to the internationalism of the communists, and in 1935 he co-authored the *Manifestul Revolutiei Nationale*, which is a shameful child of its times, a work of both Christian and fascistic intent. It reads in part:

1. E.M. Cioran, *Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).
2. Where, over five volumes, he attempts to demonstrate that the only rational response to the '...origin of the universe, life, and humankind...' is theism (p. 131).
3. 'Rooted in Orthodox practice and tradition, he nevertheless consistently went against the grain of his fellow Orthodox thinkers by using terms of Latin rather than Slav origin... His extensive knowledge of the Western tradition and formulation of profoundly Orthodox theology in such uncompromisingly Western terms have meant that his Orthodox "credentials" are sometimes questioned by those who, perhaps understandably, but nevertheless superficially, have a distrust of everything Western' (pp. xix-xx).
4. Cioran notes, 'Il était marxiste à l'époque; un marxiste enthousiaste, mystique' (p. 36).

The state of the Romanian Orthodox Church, of Christ and His teaching, in our country, has for centuries been dire. In the Romanian countryside sects multiply and superstition flourishes. In the towns there is indifference and blasphemy. Free thought, popular philosophical materialism, illuminist masonry, historical materialism, the irreconcilable hostility of Judaism towards the Crucified Christ, and the cultural mania of those who still maintain we would have been more cultivated had we been Catholic rather than Orthodox—all these have broken the fusion between Orthodoxy and the Romanian nation (p. 17).

The answer, the document stated, was to move from constitutional monarchy back to monarchical absolutism. And indeed this did happen a few years later with the royal dictatorship of Carol II from 1938. However, as all rabid monarchists find, although the king himself remained blameless in Tutea's eyes, forces around the king undermined this chance for an ideal Christian-totalitarian state. By this stage the Ribbentrop–Molotov agreement saw Romania increasingly divided between German and Russian influence and great tensions began to throw Romania into turmoil. It is not surprising that this led Tutea to sympathise and possibly become actively involved with the Legionaries or Iron Guard, an extreme nationalist organization. Numerous forced declarations recently released suggest that Tutea joined this organization in 1940. Tutea, however, denied that he was a member. Certainly there is enough proof at this stage of his thinking to show that he would have had a strong *affinity* with this group if nothing else. When the Legionary Rebellion took place in Romania in 1941, unlike other employees in the Ministry of Foreign Trade, Tutea was not asked to resign; rather, the junta promoted him. Popescu notes that Tutea also published articles in pro-Legionary journals while the junta remained in power.

Oliver O'Donovan,<sup>5</sup> who is quoted in the publicity of the book, establishes a parallel with Bonhoeffer by suggesting that both worked at '...articulating the philosophy of Christian endurance'. Certainly the personal histories of the two men reflect similar experiences,<sup>6</sup> and similar sufferings; especially when we consider the tragic second half of Tutea's life. Politically, both were elitists; however, Bonhoeffer was quick to realise that Jesus' message of love was so universal Jews were included. His attitude at this time is surprising and it helps make Bonhoeffer a clear Christian martyr. Whereas the startling differences between these two men during the 1940s leads one to wonder that if Tutea had met Bonhoeffer would he have hugged him or shot him? The question is not as easy to answer as an O'Donovan or some other Christian theologian might retrospectively assume.

It is, then, fascinating to see, after fifty years of communist persecution, how far Tutea moves away from his disturbing right-wing ideas. Popescu gives us a clear idea: '[at the end] he condemned both Communist and Legionary extremism, and died a member of the National Liberal Party' (p. 42). Tutea, however, accepts Liberalism on his own terms. It did not necessarily entail democracy. Rather,

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6. Whereas Bonhoeffer wrote some pieces of literature in prison, including a play, Tutea developed a whole theory of expository theatre entitled 'Theatre as Seminar' from this theory. Tutea only had the chance to develop two works *Bios* and *Eros*. These were staged posthumously in 1993. Cf. John Moses, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Fiction from Tegel Prison 1943–45: His Reflection on the Dark Side of Cultural Protestantism in Nazi Germany', in *The Dark Side* (ed. Hartney and McGarrity; Sydney: RLA Press, 2004), 89–98.

...he was convinced that Romania's dominant Church could develop a national sense of personal freedom within community. The self-transcendence that made solidarity possible even in prison led Tutea to maintain that individuals are equal only in the sight of God (p. 43).

We can say then that democracy is never a social necessity as far as Tutea is concerned; rather, social freedom was always something dished out by Christians who, first, define 'love' and then determine how much of it should be allocated to non-Christians. Given the way Tutea is celebrated for his ability to layer Western thinking into his own Orthodox practise, it is a great shame that the concept of democracy remains an anathema to him. Tutea comes to accept that a society *can* contain atheists, agnostics, even Jews perhaps, but their freedom remains dependant on the majority remaining unified through the ideals of a strongly nationalist Christianity: social unity can only really come from God.

This book opens with paeans of praise from Anglican Church leaders and more generally specialised theologians in Britain<sup>7</sup> who focus on the many attempts of communist authorities to re-educate Tutea, a Christian who resolutely maintained faith and expressed his thoughts undaunted. Although Popescu is not wilfully obfuscating Tutea's political thoughts, it is significant that he refocuses our attention, in the concluding pages, on Tutea's suffering, which remains the central theme of the book, and obviously will become the dominant theme of his life if these Christians have their way: meditate on his endurance, do not cogitate on his warped political ideas. I too sympathise with his plight. Under the communists he suffered enormously and to a degree incomprehensible for most of us. But he is no Bonhoeffer; there are dark implications to his religious philosophy. After reading Marion Maddox's recent *God Under Howard*,<sup>8</sup> it seems increasingly that Christ's Kingdom is setting itself against pluralism and democracy.

It seems in our new century that Christians will be forced to take sides: are they for a world that includes and cherishes their faith or are they for a faith that needs to subsume the world? Those who discourage the 'good news' of pluralism and democracy must be identified as the traitors to our modern human spirit, no matter their suffering, no matter the complexity of their theology. It is disappointing and disturbing that those Christians who praise Tutea do so without reservation.

I leave the last words to Cioran who provides us with a brief but remarkable key to Tutea's affection for dictatorships on earth that reflect God's centrality in the cosmos:

Tutea was not a man he was a universe... One had to recognise that his ego was a sort of absolute, and accept that this led him to speak as if he had just been elected head of state or head of the entire universe (p. vi).

Popescu has provided us with a very clear vision of Christian suffering. Reading between the lines the astute observer can also divine from this text a useful insight into the personality and thinking of an interesting category of person: the believer as traitor to the modern human project. More worrying still, one can also see the inability of other Christian commentators unequivocally to draw attention to such treason.

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7. They are: Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, The Reverend Canon Michael Bourdeaux, Founder of the Kenston Institute, Oxford, Christopher Rowland, Professor of Holy Scripture, Queen's College, Oxford, John Webster, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, Christ Church, Oxford.

8. Marion Maddox, *God Under Howard* (Allen & Unwin, 2005).

**Alister E. McGrath**, *Christianity: An Introduction*. 2nd ed., Blackwell Publishing, Oxford and Melbourne, 2006, pp. xvi + 379, ISBN 1405109017 (hbk). Review doi: 10.1558/arsr.v21i1.108.

Alistair McGrath is well known for his extensive theological writings. He is the Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford University. This is a very general introduction to Christianity and includes a history of Christianity, an outline of Christian theology, a description of Christian practices but, unusually for today, no detailed description of Christian ethics. In fact, 'ethics' does not get a mention in the index.

A good place to begin a review is to see how McGrath regards Christianity vis-à-vis other world religions. He makes use of the distinction between a Pluralist approach, a Particularist approach and an Inclusivist approach. He begins with the Pluralist approach, which is identified with the writing of John Hick. McGrath remarks that 'the suggestion that all religions are more or less talking about vaguely the same "God" finds itself in difficulty in relation to certain essentially Christian ideas—most notably, the doctrines of the incarnation and the Trinity' (p. 164). Pluralism is the only position to be put aside. Particularists (McGrath claims that the more familiar 'exclusivists' nomenclature 'has now been generally abandoned, mainly because it is considered to be polemical' [p. 165]) named are Hendrik Kraemer and Karl Barth. The midway position of inclusivism has as its exemplar Karl Rahner with his 'anonymous Christians'.

This rejection of pluralism goes together with a sound rejection of Richard Dawkins who is named as 'one of the world's most prominent atheists' (p. 102). In fact, McGrath is seemingly outraged by Dawkins' definition of religious faith: 'blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence': 'I don't accept this idea of faith and I have yet to meet a theologian who takes it seriously. It cannot be defended from any official declaration of faith from any Christian denomination' (p. 102). In short, this is a faith-based introduction to Christianity. The blurb says it is 'essential reading for anyone wanting to understand the dynamics of the world's largest religion'. However, the book itself '...assumes that those using it know little about Christianity, and would welcome an introduction to its ideas, development and distinctive ethos' (p. xvi.). I think that the constituency for reading the book should be narrowed to a conservative Western Christian public who have never had any in-depth introduction to their religion.

Even so, I have some reservations about the book. The back cover quotes a representative from Texas Christian University who says it is 'meticulous and memorable'. I am not sure of the memorable; I am sure that it is not meticulous. This is a second edition and there has been time to weed out the glitches. They are still there. There are too many typos (for example, Guisepppe Roncalli, neptitude) and there are duplications galore. Twice we have Erasmus criticizing the accuracy of the Vulgate on the basis of Matthew 4:17 (46 and 202); Ignatius Loyola's early history is duplicated in slightly different words on pp. 225 and 227; the Service of Nine Lessons and Carols (surely not a core Christian ritual?) is described on pp. 292-93 and 307; the symbolism of *ichthus* is laboriously explained on pp. 6 and 321.

The historiography is questionable. The Hebrew Scriptures are taken as literal history. On pp. 10-11 we are told that Psalm 22 is 'almost certainly linked with the personal difficulties of David'. Really? The occupation of Canaan is confidently dated to 1450–1350 BCE. Surely McGrath knows that there has been a sea of ink spilt over any such attempts at datation. Was there even an occupation? There is likewise a very literalistic approach to the gospels: Jesus actually entered into Jerusalem on a donkey (p. 23); there is a tired line of argumentation leading to an assertion of the historicity of the Empty Tomb (pp. 25-26). One does not need to be an expert in source criticism to know that this book has been the result of a hastily put together conglomeration of pre-existing writings.

Some historical phases get short shrift. The Avignon Papacy is covered in four sentences, the fall of Constantinople is an aside on p. 200. And yet why would a newcomer to Christian history need to know that Lefevre d'Etaples 'explored the relevance of Paul's understanding of faith for the individual'? And why should a neophyte appreciate that the results of Cisnerian reforms were the University of Alcalá and the Complutensian Polyglot?

We are told in the blurb to expect 'accessible and student-friendly design, including numerous illustrations'. Sorry to report, the photos are black and white and grainy (imagine including the Rose Window from Strasbourg and a stained glass window from Sainte-Chapelle in blurred black and white. Why?). Pope John Paul II ordains Nigerian priests and everyone's face is a blob of black or grey. The photos have been largely downloaded from online catalogues and most are outdated and irrelevant.

This book presents an introduction to Christianity in a context of confessionalism and Christian triumphalism. I could not recommend it to friend or foe of Christianity. I really think Blackwell's should take stock of their editing practice.

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**Manfred Oeming.** *Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction.* Translated by Joachim Vette. Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006, pp. x + 172, ISBN 0754656608 (pbk); 0754656594 (hbk). Review doi: 10.1558/ arsr.v21i1.102.110.

This introduction to biblical criticism by Manfred Oeming is a curious book. On the one hand it offers a bold new schema for understanding the myriad approaches to the Bible over some two millennia; on the other it is still caught in the closed and highly constricting scene of German scholarship. Before I will say more about both points, a few comments about the form.

*Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics* is a translation of Oeming's original German, although it is disconcerting to find no reference in this text to the earlier German text (it was originally published in 1998 by Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft). It is part of that never-ending search for a usable and popular textbook on biblical criticism. Presses want them since they guarantee base-line profits, while authors struggle to find the fine line between depth and accessibility. It is generally readable, although that may have as much to do with the translator as with the author. Occasionally I felt that a first-year student of biblical studies might find the assumed knowledge too great.

Back to content: the bold organizing structure is to produce a 'hermeneutical square'. This is really one of those diagrams where you join the dots to make a picture. There are four main dots (or perhaps compass points) and they help the author to organize the various methods of biblical interpretation into neat slots:

A. Authors and their worlds:

- historical-critical method
- historical sociology
- historical psychology
- new archaeology

B. Texts and their worlds

- Linguistic-Structuralist methods
- New Literary Criticism
- Canonical Interpretation
- Speech-Act and Word-Act

C. Readers and their worlds:

- history of effect (the very German *Wirkungseffekt* or *Wirkungsgeschichtliche Exegese*)
- psychological exegesis
- symbolic exegesis
- bibliodrama
- liberation theology
- feminist exegesis

D. Reality behind the Text

- dogmatic interpretation
- fundamentalist interpretation
- existential interpretation

Anyone who knows a little about biblical criticism will find some familiar methods as well as some rather odd ones, such as bibliodrama or speech-act interpretation. Most people would also want to ask, 'what about this method?' It is a bit like a pet-show: one's own Rover or Spot really deserves a place on the dais.

However, I would rather ask a few deeper questions about the hermeneutical square. I find it very odd that Oeming does not include medieval allegorical interpretation (the

dominant practice for some 1000 years before the arrival of 'modern' methods), especially when he actually discusses allegory in the third chapter. He also argues that the contemporary plethora of methods is very much like the time of allegorical interpretation. This is the most interesting point of the whole book: we have moved from plurality through singularity to plurality. In other words, the move is from allegorical interpretation, through the historical critical method to our postmodern situation of plurality. Then why not include medieval allegory in his neat diagram? The reason, I would suggest, is that his own four-fold schema is a contemporary version of the four levels of allegory (literal, allegorical, moral and anagogic). Once we have these four, we can find a place for every method.

I also mentioned that the book is caught in the myopia of German scholarship. A little like the British who haven't quite come to terms with the fact that their empire has gone, much German scholarship still likes to think that it is in the glory days before World War II when its influence spread from Korea and China across Russia to Scandinavia. Oeming struggles to escape from the assumptions of a very conservative system of scholarship. However, it shows up in his assertion that historical criticism (a peculiar German invention for specific historical reasons in the eighteenth century) is the 'academic standard' (p. 31) and basis of all other biblical interpretation. It also appears in his assertion that the method enables a high degree of objectivity. I thought that such an argument had been laid to rest long ago.

Finally, the book is deeply theological. Category D above is a giveaway here: I had thought that the 'reality' behind the text was history—the history out of which the texts arose and the history of the development of those texts. But no, the 'reality' in question is God. So we find dogmatic, fundamentalist and existential approaches. Oeming prefers the first and third, but to be fair he must also give space for the second. Many of his criticisms of the other methods are theologically driven. For example, the shortcomings of historical criticism may be overcome by a closer connection with theology and church (as if we need that!), and the attacks of feminist and liberation exegesis are invalid if they seek to demolish rather than interpret the Bible.

In sum, you will read this book with profit, but if it is used as a textbook, then another one will be needed as a balance.

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**David Keyworth**, *Troublesome Corpses: Vampires and Revenants from Antiquity to the Present*. Southend-on-Sea, Desert Island Books, pp. 320, ISBN 9781905328307. Review doi: 10.1558/ arsr.v21i1.102.112.

From his long history associated with vampire societies in Australia, David Keyworth has emerged as an enthusiastic scholar on this topic, and this work, covering several periods of history, traces the place of the posthumous in corporeal form throughout history and myth.

The tome opens with a general reading of the classical period. Although the author kindly reminds us in his Introduction that his study is limited to English-language sources alone, this section could have been better fleshed out (pun intended) with close readings of translations of classical works from Cicero to Horace, including Pliny's *Naturalis Historiae* (especially the famous book 29 of that work). Additionally, *Troublesome Corpses* could have benefited from reference to necromantic spells in the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* and other controversies relating to corpses such as Clement of Alexandria's attack on Simon Magus and the dead boy he supposedly kept in thrall, or the information one can glean from Audollent's collection of *Defixionum Tabellae*, and so forth. Reference back to Egyptian magic and Jewish necromancy could also have been helpful. In this context, the author's brief mentions of corpse re-animation in Lucan's *Pharsalia* would come through more strongly in its magical context.

A wider historical understanding of European social history is left in the grave as we pass through the centuries. We see how the undead manifest in Icelandic mythology or Late Medieval society, but the author does not consider the larger questions of why attitudes to the re-animated may have developed in these societies in the particular ways they did. For example, it can be argued that in certain periods tales of the undead were used as weapons of fear to keep the young in their place; when victims of the undead are said to all come from a certain section of society, such as young women, this is worth noting. At other times, tales of the undead were germinated to explain the passing of figures that loomed so large in a society's imagination that their presence remained long after their mortal remains had rotted. At times, the work seems to suggest the development of an idea from the Classical Age through to today; that is, a concept wholly within Western consciousness. This development is interrupted with unwelcome references to China, Turkey or Tibet, not because of strong thematic links, but because an English-language source is available and so is included.

These issues do not diminish the import of this work as a collection of events and happenings concerning corpses, but it does give this book the feeling of a compilation of facts, rather than an investigation into a particular theme; '...in another tale...' is the author's main methodology.

From an extensive reading of early English text databases, Keyworth is able to chart fascinating developments in Britain through to the nineteenth century with deviations to consider lycanthropy and the link between older folklore and more recent 'scientific' explanations for re-animation based on theories of premature burial. He does achieve his goal of correcting a number of mistakes as germinated by the (oftentimes) bane of vampire scholars, Montague Summers.

Additionally, Keyworth avoids a deep investigation of vampires, werewolves and zombies in popular literature, concentrating instead, in the main, on instances of accounts passed to us through historical texts and folklore. This sensible decision focuses the scope of Keyworth's discussions and makes the book far more useful to students in the area of religious studies, as opposed to literary or cultural studies. Regrettably, Keyworth must admit in the Introduction that 'I do not personally believe that corpses can arise from



their coffins and feed upon the blood of the living' (p. 9). Thus, this is not the participant-observer study of the undead for which, no doubt, the academy has been long waiting (ethics clearance pending!). It is, however, a well-researched compilation of tales and (pseudo) facts that significantly increases our understanding of the human imagination as spurred by the confronting phenomenon of death.

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**Lynne Hume and Kathleen McPhillips (eds.)**, *Popular Spiritualities: The Politics of Contemporary Enchantment*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006, pp. xxii + 203, ISBN 0754639991 (hbk). Review doi: 10.1558/arsr.v21i1.102.114.

Hume and McPhillips' Introduction weaves together re-enchantment, issues of identity, new religious forms, spirituality, the New Age, postmodernism and magic, asserting that 'this book is unique in that it provides a focus on case studies of enchantment in action' (p. xvi). Politics is present in investigations of community, ecology and activism. The fifteen essays range widely and are often intriguing; indeed, some of them fizz with ideas. Yet there is a frustrating quality to the collection, perhaps because of its eclectic nature and determined tilting at academic windmills. The editors are aware that their contributors are 'on the borderlands of religion and popular imagination' (p. xvii) and they celebrate the bizarreness and 'seemingly limitless creativity' (p. xxi) of the spiritualities that feature in the volume. Such sentiments may be admirable, but they may also generate frustration in those readers who balk at the arbitrariness and idiosyncratic nature of the product.

With edited collections it is difficult to single out particular contributions as superior or inferior; another problem is the brevity of these essays (the longest is sixteen pages, the shortest is ten). This generally vitiates the possibility of sustained scholarly investigation. Patricia Rose's 'The Quest for Female Identity: Spiritual Feminist Ritual as an Enactment of Medieval Romance' concentrates on the late medieval alliterative romance 'Sir Gawain and the Greene Knight', reading it as a vindication of female power. The essay is engaging and elegantly written; the problem is that a trained medievalist knows that the poem is not about female empowerment and that the apparent power of Morgan le Fay and Bertilak's wife is just that—apparent. Of course, a poem may be used for purposes quite different to those it originally served. Similarly, Graham Harvey's 'Discworld and Otherworld: the Imaginative Use of Fantasy Literature among Pagans' is charming and attractively written. However, it is troubled by terminological confusion. Despite the use of 'Pagans' in the title, it is really about 'Heathens'. This creates a problem because, within the pagan community, Heathens are probably the *least* likely to use modern fictions as spiritual tools. Further, Harvey references works on paganism rather than Heathenry (and Jenny Blain's book, which is definitely about Heathenry, is not about the use of fantasy fictions). Had the essay stuck to 'Pagans' it would have been consistent and genuinely academically useful. As a contribution to knowledge about Heathen beliefs and practices it is something else.

The lengthier contributions of Margaret Gibson ('Memorialization and Immortality: Religion, Community and the Internet') and Steven J. Sutcliffe ('Practising New Age Soteriologies in the Rational Order') are more satisfying as they conform more closely to established scholarly expectations while still exploring the frontiers of new spiritualities and identities. Gibson's exploration of death, bereavement, and communities of grief in a digital culture where faith in traditional understandings of immortality have lost ground is fascinating—carefully constructed and scrupulously argued. Sutcliffe's essay is the most intellectually demanding in the collection, beginning with a theoretical orientation that is complex and multi-layered. His case studies of guidance, meditation and healing as they appear in New Age contexts in contemporary Scotland are concerned to demonstrate that these practices are soteriological and, as such, adherence to them disrupts 'the dominant epistemological order of instrumental rationality in post-Christian societies' (p. 159).

The contributions of the two editors, Lynne Hume ('Liminal Beings and the Undead: Vampires in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century') and Kathleen McPhillips ('Believing in Post-modernity: Technologies of Enchantment in Contemporary Marian Devotion') also contain much of interest, though Hume puzzlingly does not connect her vampire-identifying young people with religion at all, despite there being much evidence to suggest that the vampire is a

figure of religious significance. Her perspective takes into account spirituality and identity but does not weave those issues into a broader religious argument. McPhillips's analysis of three apparitions of the Virgin Mary in contemporary Australia is valuable in that it demonstrates the ways in which religious images and figures that have specific meanings for established religions can become 'floating signs' for the unchurched. This is a vital aspect of the contemporary New Age and spiritual matrix.

In conclusion, these essays are generally interesting, lively and readable, but the value of some clearly outweighs that of others. It is true that new spiritualities can be intensely personal and thus need only one person (or a very small number of persons) to adhere to them, rather than the tens or hundreds of thousands that usually constitute a traditional religious community. The problem then becomes the enduringness of such views, their validity for a broader audience and whether concentrating on them results in a severe skewing of the research concerning contemporary religion. For my money, McPhillips, Gibson and Sutcliffe are talking about phenomena that have the potential to endure and to affect larger groups. Most of the essays in this volume are very narrow, and the findings of the authors are only generalizable in very limited ways. That being said, any student wishing for a basic awareness of the contemporary religio-spiritual spectrum will no doubt be enlightened by the variety and eccentricity showcased in this volume.

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**Anne Elvey**, *An Ecological Feminist Reading of the Gospel of Luke: A Gestational Paradigm*. Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, 2005, pp. 388, ISBN 077345974X. Review doi: 10.1558/arsr.v21i1.102.116.

The significance of Anne Elvey's reading of Luke lies not only in the fresh insights derived from her interpretation of the text, but also in the way in which she extends the boundaries of emerging ecological, feminist and post-colonial hermeneutics.

As a person deeply involved in the current hermeneutical explorations, I am delighted to see how the author has built upon and extended the ecojustice principles of the Earth Bible. What I also found challenging is that the biblical text, as material stuff, is viewed as indebted to and imbedded in Earth. When we read the text we are 'reading Earth', a line that recalls how Indigenous people 'read the landscape'. Elvey rightly presses the need to hear the voices of Earth as a multiplicity of subjects in the text.

Elvey also extends the meaning of inter-textuality by emphasizing the traces of multiple voices in the text, some remembered and some forgotten. She argues that 'like the repressed in a psychoanalytical framework, the trace of the forgotten is what returns most strongly as inter-text to unsettle the text' (p. 26). And the voice of the forgotten is more than metaphor; it is the other of the Earth community upsetting the apple cart!

A further hermeneutical move is the introduction of the paradigm of gestation. It is now recognized that we may read from the perspective of Earth, oppressed women or victims of abuse. Elvey invites us to read in a way that 'respects the plural otherness of Earth by attending to a particular matrix of origin, namely the pregnant body' (p. 27).

At this point I ask myself what the specific hermeneutical steps in the gestational model are. Do I begin by suspecting that Earth, text, bodies have been colonized by interpreters or authors as 'commodity'? With whom do I identify? Earth as pregnant mother? A body within the body, or within the text? What voices am I hoping to hear when applying the gestation paradigm?

Chapter 2 explores some of the representations of the pregnant body in the ancient Near East and Mediterranean worlds from paleolithic to biblical times, including the understanding of the woman's body as a writing text on which the male 'inscribes a woman with his seed' and which must thereafter be deciphered (p. 51). Chapter 3 argues that pregnant bodies, as Earth, can be viewed not as property but as givens, materially necessary for human and other forms of life. In the next five chapters, key texts of Luke are read in the light of Elvey's gestational paradigm—including the birth narrative of Luke 2.1-20, the theme of 'keeping' and 'divine necessity', the parable of the Good Samaritan and the expectation of the *basileia* of God (e.g. 10.9, 11).

For this review I will focus on her analysis of the Lukan birth narrative. In pregnancy, argues Elvey, a woman is different *within* herself, experiencing the other within the self as intimately connected with, but different from, the self. She is both different *from* her self and knows difference *between* her self and other women who are not pregnant. The pregnant body is a safe haven for the foetus, a metaphor for home. Elvey seeks to read the birth narrative remembering this understanding of the pregnant body. In that body the space and the time of the divine promise come together. In the narrative that follows she also becomes 'the keeping woman', keeping all that happens to her within her body. Mary's keeping creates points in the narrative for memory to function and reflect on these things. Elvey concludes that when the 'mother as keeping woman becomes the prototype of the disciple as mother, the pregnant body is at risk of being forgotten' (p. 141), but is remembered in the characters, plots and perspective of the rest of Luke.

Elvey's gestational reading discerns a range of subtleties, nuances and associations that arise from an awareness of the dimensions of meaning and mystery that spell pregnant body. Her sophisticated exploration makes us aware of associations with the pregnant

body, inter-connections with the material and remembering ambiguous elements of the other within. For me, however, as an ecological interpreter, I would like to have heard the suppressed voices of Earth and the Earth community rising more forcefully from the 'body of the text' even if they upset the text. Nevertheless, the 'keeping woman' motif ought to move us to 'keep' the domains of Mother Earth, affirm the blessedness of matter, and welcome Earth as a gift and a host of the other.

This book is an important contribution to the development of biblical hermeneutics in our current ecological crisis.

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**Bentley Layton**, *Coptic in 20 Lessons: Introduction to Sahidic Coptic with Exercises and Vocabularies*. Paris, Dudley; Peeters, Leuven, 2006, pp. viii + 204, ISBN 9042918101. Review doi: 10.1558/arsr.v21i1.118.

The dramatic finds of recent times and the fields that they have opened up (most notably the 'Coptic Gnostic Library' from Nag Hammadi, continuing to gather pace since the 2006 publication of the *Gospel of Judas* from the Tchachos codex, but also so-called magical literature, Manichaean texts, and so on) have brought a whole new generation of students who wish to know at least some Coptic. A great many of these have no background whatsoever in Egyptology, and some have no knowledge of ancient Greek nor even perhaps of early Christian literature in general. A work such as this *Coptic in 20 Lessons* by Bentley Layton will have an immediate appeal to such students, as well as serving as a new-generation introduction for the more traditional cohort.

So, one can easily see the need; but does this slim volume answer to the market? Layton's reputation is secure as the author of most respected contemporary English-language work in the field (*A Coptic Grammar*, 2d ed., Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 2004), and he has brought many of the advances found in that work to this briefer distillation of a lifetime's experience in the teaching of the language. Certainly, it evidences his mastery of syntax and morphology, so that the 'reference list of Coptic forms' (pp. 187-200) is especially helpful. The focus on Sahidic Coptic itself without deference either to other forms of ancient Egyptian or Greek (apart from lexicon, of course) is suitable. There is a real attempt to elucidate contemporary grammatical analysis which (to be frank) is nearly past the point of comprehension to the casual reader from another field. The presentation is always precise, ordered (into 155 sub-sections within the 20 'lessons'), and with carefully chosen vocabularies and regular exercises. The stated goal is to enable the student to read *The Gospel of Mark* at the end of one academic year's study; and it is encouraging that a photograph of the opening verses in regular uncial script on parchment (P. Palau Ribes inv. 182) is used and discussed as at least a first introduction to the reading of ancient texts as actual artefacts. This is all to the good.

As a practical exercise I have this year recommended the use of Layton's book for a beginner student starting Coptic virtually from scratch, working largely by themselves but with occasional advice from myself. This is someone with an expertise in modern esoteric traditions, but otherwise no background in the fields that have traditionally led students to a study of Coptic. It therefore seemed most appropriate for the 'new' type of student I discussed at the start. The exercise has been interesting. In the Foreword it is suggested that the book can be used 'to teach yourself Coptic', but this has proved rather difficult. For a start, the exercises have no answers, and the questions are often rather open-ended; e.g. p. 31: '[Question] F. Form the negative of each sentence in (E), giving alternate forms where possible'. Also, despite (or possibly because of?) my own thirty years experience reading Coptic, I have found it problematic to answer what are supposed to be basic starter items; e.g. p. 23 exercise 2Ad, translate (again 'giving alternate translations where possible'): 'ouei. nei-eiote. hoeine. n-eiōt. n-eiote. nei-eiōt'. I apologise for not using the proper font or diacriticals in this context; but, if 'nei-eiote' is the plural demonstrative article with the plural noun in agreement (thus 'these parents'), what is 'nei-eiōt'? Further, there are instructions such as the following on p. 30: 'Learn the gendered prefixes forming composite nouns (above, box)'. However, to find these you need to track back to p. 16.

These are probably rather minor instances, but there are enough of them to suggest that a second edition with revisions and certainly a key would be very welcome. When Professor Layton considers this, may I make one further plea? Although in some respects his explanations are models of clarity, they condense a considerable number of technical terms that will draw a blank with the many students (probably a majority) who have no

linguistic training and often (in contemporary Australia at least) hardly any formal grammatical training even in English. Almost at random I choose the following paragraph:

The infinitive can be expanded by a direct object, various prepositional phrases, adverbs, subordinate clauses, etc. There are ten non-durative conjugation bases. Five of these form main clauses (independent sentences), and five form subordinate (dependent) clauses... You will learn the main clause bases in this lesson (p. 79).

Certainly this is comprehensible, even precisely clear; and I am sure that many colleagues will be exasperated at me for 'dumbing-down' the topic. But I have shown the book to a number of students, and they find it overly dense. With an experienced and well-prepared classroom teacher to hand, the book would probably serve its function well. However, I do think that it can be made more user-friendly; and my own hope certainly is that it can be fine-tuned to become the standard introduction to Coptic for this coming generation of students.

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