

prayer with the most personal of all private meditations, a fact also notable some years earlier in the revelation of the ontological argument to Anselm of Canterbury which took place not alone in his cell but in the choir of Bec while singing matins. Secondly, her revelations about St Ursula and the eleven thousand virgins of Cologne show an understanding of the meaning of legend beyond the historical demythologising of modern times. Certainly, the error of a scribe was responsible for the legend, but Elizabeth was affirming not the past but the present in her familiar dialogue with those who had suffered martyrdom for their faith and were 'alive unto God' and accessible here and now to help and encourage their successors.

It is clear from the texts that the anachronism of discussing visionary and mystical prayer as consciously structured by gender has little relevance to Elizabeth who saw herself rather as a recipient of prophecy in the biblical tradition. This makes it a refreshing book, in which the value of the writer is seen not because she was a woman but because she was a guide, as Ekbert said in writing his account of her death; 'she brought me forth into the light of untried newness, she led me to the intimate ministry of Jesus my lord., and made my heart taste the first fruits of the sweetness hidden from the saints in heaven' (p.255).

BENEDICTA WARD SLG

THE WORLD RELIGIONS READER edited by Gwilym Beckerlegge, 2nd ed., *Routledge with Open University*, 2001. Pp.490. £16.99 pbk.

When the Open University launched its pioneering course *Man's Religious Quest* (later *The Religious Quest*) in the late 1970s, a 'resource volume' to accompany the printed units, television and radio programmes was prepared and edited by Whitfield Foy. It covered the very large range of the early course: Seekers and Scholars; Hinduism; Buddhism; Sikhism; Greek and Roman Religion; Judaism; Christianity; Islam; Secular Alternatives to Religion; Zoroastrianism; and *Inter-religious Dialogue*. In 1998, with changes in the Open University's course on world religions, a new reader was prepared. It retained some of the material from the 1978 volume but was designed to support a course which now included only six traditions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism.

This current volume is the second edition of that 1998 reader. The changes in the second edition are, first, the inclusion of a general one-page introduction to each tradition, which explains the basis for the selection of readings for that tradition. Secondly, the translation of some Hindu texts have been replaced with more recent versions and, thirdly, the selection on Buddhism has been substantially revised. No one editor, or even a course team, could produce a selection of texts from traditions with such rich resources of written materials that would please every reader or potential teacher. But I, for one, feel very appreciative of the thinking behind the selection of texts in this volume, a selection which has been methodologically sophisticated and multi-layered.

There is a balance between text and context; history and interpretation; sacred scripture, foundational and classical documents; developmental

trends and contemporary voices; between the voices of believers/belongers and those of scholars (though see below on the evenness of this). Some of the preoccupations of those within the religions in the latter part of the 20th century are included as well as material focusing on themes such as sacred place, women in religions and making moral decisions. These latter are selected topics for the Open University Course. One comment I have on the theme of women in relation to the revised Buddhism section is that I missed the voices of women such as Rita Gross or Chatsumarn Kabilsingh who speak as contemporary Buddhist women on this theme. All the 'recent and contemporary concerns' voices seem to be male! Another omission for me concerning the theme of sacred place seemed to be a contemporary account of the Hejj or a visit to a sufi shrine. Of course themes alone should not mould or determine selection but rightly what emerges out of a religion's own literature, but these two examples of omissions are central to these faiths.

Quite differently, I found the critical scholarly essays in the Hinduism section on the whole concept of Hinduism; caste; theodicy and karma etc. very stimulating and I think that the inclusion of some analytical anthropological writing on the other traditions, of which there is a good amount in most cases, would have enriched the texts. Having said this, it is already a weighty volume. Finally I want to make a very different kind of point. The 1978 volume had at least one *visual* text, the ox-herding pictures. Visual, and aural, texts are as important in the communication and understanding of traditions as are words, and I should like to see more attempts to present at least some examples of these in such a volume as this. I realise that both the visual and the aural are present in the broadcasting support to the Open University's courses, and also that artwork is more expensive to produce than words, but this volume is obviously intended to be sold and used as a resource in its own right and independently of the rest of the course materials and should therefore highlight the place of the visual text.

These suggestions, and every reviewer will have her own, do not, however, detract from the contribution of a volume whose extensive index and well-presented table of contents make it usable in a variety of contexts.

PEGGY MORGAN

THE NEW TESTAMENT WORLD: INSIGHTS FROM CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY by Bruce Malina (Third Edition Revised and Expanded) *Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky 2001 Pp. xiv + 256, pbk.*

This is a reworked edition of a popular book intended primarily for beginners at tertiary level in America. The premise of the work is 'that to understand what people say and mean to say one must know their social system.' (xii) Cultural anthropology is presented as another tool, to be used along with more traditional exegetical disciplines, to help understand the world in which Jesus lived and moved, and from which the church was born. The inhabitants of the New Testament world are compared to a 'transplanted group of foreigners'(p.2) and this image recurs throughout the work. The modern student needs as many tools as possible to help them understand what these