

the reader hopeful that Christians can reform the information society for the benefit of all. Christian social discourse can help technology users to rethink questions of freedom and democracy in the information age. The Church, in its teaching and policies, can serve as a kind of guardian or governor to help people reform the social conditions created by the information society.

Overall, this book is a helpful tool for ethical reflection about moral issues related to the topic of computers and information technology. Pullinger invites his readers to take their faith into the social spaces being created by telecommunications and to participate in government lobbying and forums on shaping technology. His book includes a helpful glossary that explains the technical vocabulary of online media. There is also a select annotated bibliography on general topics related to informatics. Readers can use this text as a starting point for further study of the ethical debates faced by Christians in the information age.

Warren Kappeler

McGill University

French Feminists on Religion: A Reader. Edited by Morny Joy, Kathleen O'Grady and Judith L. Poxon. New York: Routledge, 2002. ISBN 0-415-21538-2. Pp. 291.

The recent English publication of two French books, Julia Kristeva's and Catherine Clément's *The Feminine and the Sacred* (2001) and Luce Irigaray's *Between East and West: from Singularity to Community* (2002), may suggest that the appearance of this edited collection of writings by the "French feminists" on religion is a timely one. As any scholar who reads contemporary French philosophy knows, the question of religion in French thought has increasingly become a central one. For the Anglophone academy this interest in religion by French thinkers is epitomized by the recent work of Jacques Derrida and his contemplation of, what John D. Caputo has called, "religion without religion." Historically, the recent interest in this once disparaged and ignored arena by French intellectuals may be due to a final disillusionment with Enlightenment promises which followed the failed uprisings in Europe of May 1968 and the "end of Marxism" which followed the dismantling of the Eastern Bloc countries in 1989. The critical engagement with the logo-centrism of Western metaphysics that both precipitated and followed these historical events made a creative engagement with, and reassessment of, the socio-symbolic structures of religion inevitable.

The writings of the women collected in this volume can be said to represent just such a creative critical engagement and one that addresses the monumental significance of gender and sexual difference in the analysis, and potential re-envisioning, of religion. The editors (Morny Joy, Kathleen O'Grady and Judith

L. Poxon) chose to focus on the five women—Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Catherine Clément and Monique Wittig—whose French writings have been most influential in Anglo-academic discussions in regards to gender and religion. In their illuminating and comprehensive introduction, the editors defend this choice by addressing the categorical problem that arises when these women are presented as if they represent a cohesive “French feminism.” This is especially important because they must confront the fact that many of these women are themselves neither French nor feminist.

Of the five women included in the collection, only two—Clément and Wittig—were born in France, while the others—Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous—are Belgian, Bulgarian and Algerian, respectively. As well, most of these women reject the feminist label and are highly critically of the terms and practices of political feminism itself. This may be the most problematic aspect of such an anthology for those religious studies scholars who have issues with theorists in either of the two categories—prejudicing their appreciation of the important scholarship to be found in the reader. For it seems to suggest that there is a wilful distortion involved in the choice to place these writers into a category they may not fit. However, as the editor’s introduction clearly shows, rather than making any attempt at a collection of these women’s writings under the rubric “French feminists” a distortion, this categorization contains both an internal and external coherence.

For Anglo-feminist scholars, especially within religious studies, the work of these five has been highly productive for their own work by giving them new theoretical tools to move beyond the contradictions and problems of equality rhetoric that characterises much of Anglo-American liberation politics. This alone would justify referring to these women as a collective group based as it is on their impact on the Anglo-feminist academy. However, as the editors of this volume show, it is within the context of late 20th century French thought and politics that the works of these five women are linked. In that they share both a historical and political context as well as a set of similar theoretical concerns, approaches and aims.

In their highly informative introduction, the editors show how these five women can be categorized together by their participation within the *Psych et Po* (Psychanalyse et Politique) movement in 1970s Parisian politics. While allied under the banner of the French feminist group *Mouvement de libération des femmes* (MLF), the *Psych et Po* group were critical of the political strategies of liberal and socialist feminism and felt that only psychoanalysis as a political tool could adequately address the “psychosexual dynamic central to women’s oppression that the liberal rhetoric of egalitarian feminism was not able to encompass” (5). While most of them would later become critical of the *Psych et Po* group, the effect of their collectively being published by this group’s successful publishing house (*Éditions des femmes*) and having their writings promoted within the group’s Parisian bookstores, magazines and journals meant that these women would come to represent for many a specific

kind of *écriture féminine*—a psychoanalytically informed feminine literature of sexual difference. According to the editors, it is their critical engagement with psychoanalysis, and the work of Jacques Lacan in particular, which unites the thought of these women. What the selected works in this reader also suggest is how significant and important a feminist-inspired psychoanalytic approach to religion itself can be.

For the writers collected together in this volume, religion (and the Judeo-Christian tradition in particular) represents the ultimate example of the effect on society and on individuals of the totalizing logic of, what Jacques Lacan called, the “phallogocentrism” of Western culture. A phallic privileging in which a masculine signified (represented most obviously by a male God) becomes the centre and source of all meaning and structures the boundaries of that which can be thought. The effect of which not only abjects and elides the feminine from representation, and women themselves from becoming full human subjects, but perpetuates a “metaphysics of presence” in which gender itself signifies the destabilized and contested centre from which all attempts at truth and meaning remain elusively absent. The collected excerpts found in this volume show how potentially productive and creative the critical engagement with this “law of the Father” can be for the re-imagining, re-envisioning and reinvigorating of religion. In the Anglo-academy, it has been left up to feminist religious studies scholars to explore the creative possibilities suggested by an engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis primarily through their adoption of the theoretical strategies of the “French feminists.”

The book contains several samples of abridged writings from each author’s extensive *œuvre*. By choosing only those excerpts that pertain specifically and intentionally to religion and religious themes, the editors clearly show how religion has played a central, if often unacknowledged, role in the theoretical and critical strategies of these five writers. While the collecting together of only excerpts from a wide variety of larger works means potentially failing to represent the complexity and totality of each writer’s thought, this potential problem is overcome by the inclusion of not only introductory essays to the sections on each author but also the inclusion of short critical introductions for each excerpt. What these short essays show is how a need exists for another volume of critical reflections on the work of these five writers. Luckily, the same editors have also prepared a companion anthology entitled *French Feminisms and Religion: Critical Perspectives* that is due out by the same publisher in 2003.

The two largest sections are devoted to the work of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva—the two who have arguably had the most impact on feminist writings in religious studies. Irigaray’s technique of mimetically reading philosophical and religious texts, ironically mirroring that which is read, allows for the construction of a new and, according to Irigaray, specifically feminine mode of philosophizing. This is a method that attempts to avoid the impossible trap of seeking a unified and determinant meaning that has been the downfall of

Western metaphysics and theology. This has allowed her, and those she has inspired, to explore the creative possibilities of postulating a feminine/maternal divine which has reinvigorated the theological speculations of many women in religious studies.

Of the five, it is Julia Kristeva whose important contributions to structural linguistics make her arguably the most well known of the five writers and whose work directly addresses specific religious texts and figures. As the various selections included in the book show, Kristeva's semiotic analysis of linguistic constructs has led her to reflect on the many fundamental Judeo-Christian concepts that continue to impact Western culture. As well, included in this collection are several examples of Kristeva's critical engagements with various biblical texts and her psychoanalytic studies of the tradition's major female religious figures (most notably the Virgin Mary). For Kristeva, due perhaps to her early experiences with religion's tenacity in Communist Bulgaria, the revisioning of religious meaning and symbolism is a powerful force for the possible overcoming of the repression and alienation of women and the feminine. While Kristeva and Irigaray's contributions to religious studies may be the more significant, all three of the other writers (Cixous, Clément and Wittig) have written critical reflections on Western religion that reveal the creative depth that is repressed when women's voices in religion remain unheard. While some examples of these are included in the book, it is the literary and autobiographical explorations of female spirituality in their novels and dramatic works which have arguably made Cixous, Clément and Wittig so influential within Anglo-feminist religious studies.

The impact of these five French thinkers on feminist-inspired religious studies scholars makes a selected anthology of their writings an important contribution to the field of religious studies as a whole. The critical importance of deconstructing the negative effects of sexual differentiation in religious doctrines and philosophies, coupled with the exciting possibilities suggested by a "radical revisioning" of the sacred which the French feminists explore, make such an anthology a necessity.

Richard R. Walker

McGill University

Japanese Hermeneutics: Current Debates on Aesthetics and Interpretation.
 Edited by Michael F. Marra. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002.
 ISBN 0-8248-2457-1. Pp. 247.

Japanese Hermeneutics: Current Debates on Aesthetics and Interpretation gathers together the papers presented at a 1998 conference organized at UCLA by Michael Marra, sorting them into sections on Hermeneutics and Japan, which looks at how indigenous categories of interpretation can be discovered