

largely embraced an ethic of self-denial as the highest style of life for many centuries” (p. 67). What was this “Christian society”?

Some assumptions about literacy and the status of women are problematic. Referring to the conversion of Europe, he writes “the language of Christianity was entirely incomprehensible to untrained laypeople” (p. 15) which assumes that information remains only with the literate, an assumption belied by recent understandings of the complexity and sophistication of information exchange in oral societies and by the extant translations of the Bible, prayers and sermons in Anglo Saxon and Gothic, for instance. The book appears to equate literacy and Latin with intelligence and understanding. For Cameron, fruitful participation in the Eucharist is only possible for those who know the language; a point which dismisses the varieties of religious experience. Rather, the Reformation enlightened Christians who had hitherto known only obscure “mysteries in incomprehensible Latin” (p. 34). Apparently all women were kept in subjugation until the Reformation when “the sudden release of women from monasteries prompted some to venture into print with their ideas” (p. 51).

Although Cameron does comment on the complexity of the past, the writing itself undermines this perception by creating simple binaries. He rejects the idea that the Christian “essence” can be equated with any particular historic manifestation (p. 239), but the book does not make clear that there have been “historic manifestations” of this essence. Rather, anecdotal illustrations are cited. The very selection of “representative” authors to indicate historical influence can beg several philosophical questions. One would certainly agree that religion is “a constituent part of culture” (p. 55) and needs to be considered in that complex of kin structure, legal and political systems, and art, but Cameron has not made clear how Christian theology interacts with these cultural and contingent forces.

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FENELLA CANNELL, ed.: *The Anthropology of Christianity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

A latecomer as a field of inquiry, the Anthropology of Christianity has been developed to a large degree when processes of globalisation came to be understood as both hermeneutical framework and the object of socio-cultural discernment. All essays in *The Anthropology of Christianity* are profound contributions to the subject matter and all but one concern issues in Christian communities from specific regions — Bolivia (O. Harris), Fiji (C. Toren), India (C. Busby and D. Mosse), Indonesia, including Irian Jaya (W. Keane and D. Rutherford), Madagascar (E. Keller), Melanesia, mostly Papua New Guinea (H. Whitehouse), Amazonian Peru (P. Gow), the Philippines (F. Cannell), and Sweden (S. Coleman). However, the editor’s remark of regret (5) that “no contribution solely devoted to continental Africa” is included amounts to an unnecessary apology. After all, most of the essays are ethnographically focused and lack wider cross-cultural discussions, although the authors do consider either comparative data within their chosen Christian domain (with awareness of the historical dimensions of their research), or draw on generalising points to validate their own ethnographic findings.

Both the concern for comparative material and general principle are relevant in recent discussions of the whole area of inquiry, as obvious from Cannell’s Introduction

to the book and also J. Robbins's recent paper "Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture" (*Current Anthropology* 48, no. 1 [2007]: 5–38; with comments and reply). Although I do not want to compare these two particular survey papers in detail, it is worth mentioning that they share the discussion's current middle-ground. They both explore the concept of conversion and the resulting relative balance of cultural continuity and discontinuity within the perspectives of those appropriating Christian values. (Dependent on the commonly held view that transcendence is a central idea of Christianity, the discontinuity could be radical.) Cannell offers measured consideration of the varied array of topics by her contributors and avoids interpretations that could override their assessments of specific historical processes; a viewpoint also included as quiet words of caution regarding Robbins's paper (18–19).

While covering the research history in her Introduction, Cannell finds the roots of scholars' prior reluctance to consider Christianity as a subject of inquiry in the general attitudes of the Social Scientists and especially in their long-established reservations about theology. (The clerical contributions from the mission fields are hardly assessed in their own right.) A prevailing "salvage" anthropology, consequently, has kept its focus entirely on features of traditional cultures, and even when, later on, notice was taken in anthropological research of social changes, inquiries into Christian cultural aspects remained marginalised for a long time. Approaches to the latter research arena were too often affected by ideological stances. To meet this problem, Cannell maintains that all anthropologists should take the interest the founding fathers of their discipline had in the history of Christianity as an example to follow for deepening their insights into the complexities of the Christian tradition.

In the light of what has already been said, my appraisal of the ethnographic contributions will focus on how the aforementioned "middle-ground" concepts are utilised to elucidate specific situations. Harris aptly calls her paper "The Eternal Return of Conversion." She deals with sentiments of the Laymi of highland Bolivia, whose commitment to Catholicism of some 400 years still bears an uneasiness because of their unresolved close ties with the ancestors (so important for agriculturalists) and with other kin relations to be affirmed through traditional rituals. C. Busby writes on a southern Indian Kerala population that has a long history as Catholics as well: the Mukkavar of Marianad are a fishing community amid agriculturalists and are Catholics among Hindus, both factors intensifying their identity. They are Christians because Christ is *their* God, although many local Catholics do not question the reality of other (i.e., Hindu) deities and have space for them in their cosmology. C. Toren, who worked with the Sawaieke people of Fiji, explains that their ritual practice is all about "attendance to one another . . . implicat[ing] the mana of the ancestors" (203), whether in aspects of the socialisation process of children or in ceremonies surrounding a death. This ethnographic context for Methodism facilitates a positive attitude to Christian teaching and church authorities and, furthermore, has proven expandable to a relational accommodation of ancestors and God. This selection from three papers will suffice for a synopsis but data from most of the other contributions would have equally qualified.

A book of many merits, providing insights into the enormous variety of themes and problems the anthropology of Christianity has to address, although I miss an attempt to discuss the fledgling indigenous theologies and their implications. Cannell's collection is a valuable contribution to an anthropological field gaining momentum.

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As Fenella Cannell contends in her powerful introduction, Christianity is the critical "repressed" of anthropology. To a great extent, anthropology first defined itself as a rational, empirically based enterprise quite different from theology. The theology it repudiated was, for the most part, Christian. "This collection, edited by anthropologist Cannell, presents engaging case studies that illustrate how putatively universal faith is localized in specific contexts: Protestants in Indonesia, Sweden, Melanesia, Amazonia, and Madagascar; Catholics in India, Bolivia, and the Philippines. At the same time, the authors in different ways critically evaluate the relationship between anthropology and Christianity." Academic journal article *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. The Christianity of Anthropology\*. By Cannell, Fenella. Read preview. Academic journal article *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. The Christianity of Anthropology\*. By Cannell, Fenella. Read preview. Article excerpt. In *The Anthropology of Christianity*. Edited by Fenella Cannell. Durham: Duke University Press. Pp. 77-98. (NYU Classes). Friday, February 2 Recitation Discussion: Incarnation & Presence. Week 3: Resurrection & Absence With the passion and resurrection, God's incarnated existence on earth ended and "having entered human history" he then departed. His absence brought both pain and possibility. In *The Anthropology of Catholicism: A Reader*. Edited by Kristen Norget, Valentina Napolitano, and Maya Mayblin. Oakland: University of California Press. Pp. 155-179. (NYU Classes). Wednesday, May 2 REVIEW SESSION. Friday, May 4. Buy *The Anthropology of Christianity* by Fenella Cannell (ISBN: 9780822336464) from Amazon's Book Store. Everyday low prices and free delivery on eligible orders. "This collection, edited by anthropologist Cannell, presents engaging case studies that illustrate how putatively universal faith is localized in specific contexts: Protestants in Indonesia, Sweden, Melanesia, Amazonia, and Madagascar; Catholics in India, Bolivia, and the Philippines. At the same time, the authors in different ways critically evaluate the relationship between anthropology and Christianity." - C. J. MacKenzie, "Choice". Edited by Fenella Cannell. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006. ix, 373 pp. \$84.95 (cloth); \$23.95 (paper). Deirdre de la Cruz (a1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911807001313>. Published online by Cambridge University Press: 29 October 2007. Export citation Request permission. Abstract.

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