

O'Neill's disappointment with Christians' failure to do so little (in terms of conventional political action) as citizens of postwar Guatemala and disappointment that Guatemala is a holy basket case. Neo-Pentecostals' own disappointment with their failure to end political corruption and violence despite their many hours of prayer and fasting. (O'Neill might well have added his disappointment in the role that some Pentecostals in rural areas have played in lynchings and extrajudicial violence in order to "cleanse" their villages of undesirable elements.) But in this final chapter, O'Neill tips his hand as an ethnographer who, despite long and very careful work and even close friendships with his informants, fails, in the final analysis to fully penetrate their worldview. Earlier, he has described himself as one who could truthfully answer his informants' urgent question: "are you a Christian?" with the words: "No, not yet. Not today" (xxxix). But Kevin Lewis O'Neill surely knows that to speak of "disappointment" is not the Pentecostal way. The surety of God's promise ever with them, they would almost certainly respond to the question: is Guatemala redeemed?, with these words: "No, not yet. Not today. But wait until tomorrow."

doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfq112

Advance Access publication March 8, 2011

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Readings of the Lotus Sūtra. Edited by Stephen F. Teiser and Jacqueline I. Stone. Columbia University Press, 2009. 284 pages. \$24.50.

Readings of the Lotus Sūtra aims above all to enrich undergraduate engagement with what is arguably the single most influential work in East Asian Buddhism, and the edited volume fulfills this task admirably. It assumes no prior knowledge of Buddhism, and is written in clear, accessible, and nontechnical prose. Comprised of an excellent and extensive introduction to the sūtra and seven additional chapters on specific trends in the history of its interpretation, not to mention several useful supplements, this book deserves a prominent place in any course that seeks to engage students with the *Lotus Sūtra* in some depth.

The introductory chapter on "Interpreting the *Lotus Sūtra*" by editors Stephen Teiser and Jacqueline Stone provides an up-to-date but accessible overview of *Lotus Sūtra* scholarship that will be of value to scholars as well as students with no prior knowledge of Buddhism. Most of the volume focuses on the interpretation of the sūtra in East Asia, but the introduction situates the sūtra within Buddhist literature, and considers briefly its South Asian roots and relation to broader trends within the Mahāyāna. It also surveys some of the "central claims" of the sūtra, including the ambiguous concept of the "one vehicle" and the Buddha's related use of "expedient devices" to lead beings to the truth, the notion that all beings can eventually attain buddhahood, and the revelation that the Buddha Śākyamuni is a cosmic figure with an incalculably long life span. Translation practices through which the text was transmitted are

also considered, especially the Chinese committee-based translation procedures that produced Kumārajīva's translation, the authoritative version of the text in East Asia. The editors then survey "movements" focused on the *Lotus Sūtra*, from the development of commentarial traditions and doctrinal classification schemas, to the production of "miracle tales" about the sūtra, to the establishment of premodern and modern schools with a particular focus on the sūtra in China and Japan. The chapter concludes with a consideration of those practices that expanded the influence of the sūtra "in a more diffuse fashion" (45), in particular through ritual practices embodying devotion to the text and the powerful beings described therein, but also through trends in literary and artistic production that extended beyond the *Lotus Sūtra* per se.

Carl Bielefeldt's chapter on "Expedient Devices, the One Vehicle, and the Life Span of the Buddha" examines the sūtra's representation of these core concepts and their interrelationships. Particularly insightful is Bielefeldt's analysis of the parables and similes through which the Buddha claims to demonstrate how and why he uses expedient devices to lead beings to the one vehicle. As Bielefeldt indicates, these stories by no means convey a clear and consistent message about the nature of the one vehicle and the Buddha himself, but the resulting tensions and uncertainties have proven highly productive. The chapter concludes with a summary of various interpretive traditions that arose to resolve such ambiguities.

In "Gender and Hierarchy in the *Lotus Sūtra*," Jan Nattier seeks to illuminate "how issues of gender and hierarchy were understood by the *Lotus*'s authors" (82). By situating the treatment of these issues in the sūtra in relation to their treatment in early Buddhism and in other Mahāyāna scriptures, Nattier identifies both significant ways in which previous hierarchic and androcentric assumptions continue to inflect the *Lotus Sūtra*'s vision, as well as ways in which the sūtra posits a fundamental equality among all who have faith in the sūtra itself, and who therefore are destined for Buddhahood. As Nattier points out, this radical inclusivity also functions to exclude, generating a hierarchical relationship between the faithful and those who reject the sūtra's vision.

James Benn's essay, "The *Lotus Sūtra* and Self-Immolation," examines Chinese interpretations of the chapter on "The Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King" and the practices of auto-cremation they inspired or justified. Benn traces readings of the chapter in commentaries and especially in the biographies of self-immolators, as well as in other Buddhist sūtras. Not all interpreters approved of the bodily imitation of the Medicine King; Benn also examines both the controversies generated by the prohibition of suicide in the monastic code and the apocryphal sūtras that were composed to justify self-immolation in the face of these restrictions.

Daniel Stevenson's chapter on "Buddhist Practice and the *Lotus Sūtra* in China" focuses on the diverse practices that develop from the sūtra's status as an object of devotion and locus of power. Miracle tales and hagiographies preserve stories of the powers of the sūtra and the practices that activated them, in accordance with the principle of "stimulus and response" (*ganying*). Five

general categories identified in the chapter on the “Merits of the Dharma Preacher” serve to organize these practices: upholding, reading, reciting, explaining, and copying the sūtra. Stevenson’s lively recounting of specific practices in each of these categories emphasizes the fundamentally relational nature of stimulus and response, whereby “miracles” are not wholly attributable to the sūtra itself, but are rather “the product of organic negotiations *between* devotee and text” (147).

The material text in East Asia is also a theme in the subsequent essay on “The Art of the *Lotus Sūtra*,” by Willa Jane Tanabe. The chapter is structured according to the nature of the relationship of the art to the text of the sūtra. Thus, Tanabe begins by examining the production of frequently lavish manuscripts and blockprints of the sūtra itself, moves to consider illustrated frontispieces to the scrolls, then jeweled stūpa maṇḍalas, in which the text of the *Lotus Sūtra* is written in the form of the stūpa that emerges from the earth in the sūtra’s eleventh chapter. Next she examines “transformation pictures” that represent the content of the texts through images, and finally describes images that are considered “emblematic of the scripture as a whole” (180). The chapter includes figures that exemplify these different forms of art.

The “Bodily Reading of the *Lotus Sūtra*” discussed by Ruben Habito refers to a mode of interpretation developed by Nichiren, a thirteenth-century Japanese Buddhist figure whose teachings have proven highly influential. Nichiren’s conviction that the *Lotus Sūtra* was uniquely powerful and pertinent to his own time and place led him to insist on its recitation and to denounce actively all other texts and practices, even at the cost of his life. Nichiren saw the resulting persecution he suffered and all events of his life as both confirming and confirmed by predictions in the *Lotus Sūtra*. Habito describes this bodily reading “as a circular hermeneutic, in which the text and the reader authenticate and bear witness to each other in the very act of reading” (198). He concludes the essay by examining the influence of Nichiren’s bodily reading on new religious movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The final essay in the collection, “Realizing This World as the Buddha Land,” by Jacqueline Stone, focuses on readings of the Lotus that see it as affirming the identity of the world, or a specific realm within it, with a perfect Buddha land—and in many cases, as offering the means for realizing that identity. Stone traces the development of this line of interpretation from Chinese exegetes who interpreted the sūtra in terms of the doctrine of nonduality through a series of further elaborations in Japan. The notion that not only sentient beings, but also the natural world (these being nondual) is originally enlightened prompted the development of a complex sacred geography in which sites in Japan were identified with the realm of the *Lotus Sūtra*. The sūtra was viewed as offering protection to the nation, and even as having a special karmic connection to Japan. Stone examines how the “millennial element” (223) that Nichiren contributed to this conception influenced both modern Japanese nationalism and postwar Buddhist movements focused on the Lotus, such as Sōka Gakkai and Risshō Kōseikai.

This impressive collection of essays has been carefully edited for consistency in terminology and structure, and includes a number of supplements that enhance the usefulness of the volume in a classroom setting: a list of translations of the sūtra into European languages, an especially valuable chart in which all passages from the sūtra that are cited in the volume are cross-referenced with commonly used English translations and Kumārajīva's Chinese text, a "Character Glossary" of Chinese and Japanese terms, an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources, and a thorough and accurate index. *Readings of the Lotus Sūtra* is not only a valuable addition to existing courses on Buddhism or Mahāyāna literature, but might also serve as an excellent foundation for the development of a course on the *Lotus Sūtra* as a lens through which to understand the complex intersection of East Asian Buddhist exegetical traditions, doctrinal debates, social structures, ritual practices, and visual and material culture, from the early centuries of the common era through the present day.

doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfr028

Advance Access publication August 3, 2011

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Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam. By Fred M. Donner. The Belknap Press, 2010. 280 pages. \$25.95.

IN HIS LATEST BOOK, Fred Donner offers a provocative and comprehensive reinterpretation of the origins of Islam that will remain influential for decades to come. In *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Donner argues that the religion we now know as Islam emerged gradually over a number of decades and that its final form differed in many ways from Muhammad's initial message. Donner asserts that Muhammad began a "Believers' movement" that was monotheistic, pietistic, and ecumenical in nature. This nascent movement included Jews and Christians along with newly converted polytheists. Its objective was not to create a separate faith, but rather to spark a revival of pietistic monotheism. Over nearly a century, the Believers' movement evolved to become the distinct faith known today as Islam. The crucial phase of this evolution occurred during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik, when Jews and Christians were increasingly excluded from the community.

Donner stakes out a position between the traditional Muslim vision of a pristine Islam that appeared in its fully developed form during the life of Muhammad (or at least under the direction of his companions) and the skeptical view that Islam (and even the Qur'an) emerged much later, possibly through the manipulation of Arab leaders. Significant portions of Donner's work focus on the complexities of tribal alliances and loyalties among the Believers' movement. These tribal explanations at times appear extraneous, but are essential for explaining the apparent contradiction between the Believers' acceptance of Christians and Jews as members of their movement and their military attacks on these same communities. For Donner, the expansion into