



Joseph Camilleri and Deborah Guess (eds): *Towards a Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace: Navigating the Great Transition*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 363 pp.

The subtitle gives an indication of this book's urgency: as a global community we are facing a 'great transition' to a future that will of necessity be ecologically sustainable, because there is no alternative, and we have no option but to negotiate and 'navigate' this transition. The question is whether this transition and its outcome will be both peaceful and just. The diversity of approaches and foci for discussion in the essays included here demonstrates the intrinsic connections between the themes of peace, justice, and ecological sustainability. The book is a product of a series of symposia in Australia, beginning in 2015, organized by representatives of various religious communities, as well as secular agencies like the Medical Association for the Prevention of War and the local Peace and Conflict Studies Institute. The series, which is part of a larger research project on the ecological aspects of war, culminated in the 'Earth at Peace' conference in April 2019. Although the occasion for the book was the question of ecology and peace in Australia, both local and international contributors call attention to the global scope of these topics and their interconnections.

The book begins with an introduction, setting out the structure of the investigation, by one of the

editors, Deborah Guess, and concludes with a survey of the essays by biblical scholar Mark Brett and some pointers to the future by the other co-editor, Joseph Camilleri. Within these introductory and concluding brackets, as it were, the collection is divided into three large parts. The underlying axiom, voiced by Zuleyha Keskin and Mehmet Ozalp, is that religion can be and needs to be 'part of the solution rather than part of the problem' (159).

Part I is a philosophical search for a holistic approach to the interlocking issues of justice, peace, and sustainability, with essays by Joseph Camilleri, Heather Eaton, Ariel Salleh, and Freya Mathews. These essays concern themselves with the links between violence and forms of cultural objectifying, or 'othering'. This is to be counteracted by the development of global 'dialogical citizenship' (Camilleri, 40) based in 'social imaginaries' (Eaton, 51) or ways of seeing that foster respect and interdependence. A way towards this will be the overcoming of 'othering' and its replacement by essentially maternal acts of 'holding' (Salleh, 73ff). The final essay in this section revisits certain older strands of European religious thought and proposes a connection with the Indigenous experience of 'walking the land' (Mathews, 97ff).

Part II considers the roles of cosmology and religion, addressing the question of peace with the earth from several religious perspectives. Islamic approaches to the environment are introduced by Zuleyha

Keskin and Mehmet Ozalp. Salim Farrar surveys the theory and practice of reconciliation after conflict in the Islamic world, with particular attention to 'transitional justice'. Justice is not merely an end that may justify any means to attain it; justice is to be embedded in the transitional process itself. Christian approaches are offered by Norman Habel, the initiator of the Earth Bible Project, and Bruce Duncan, with his survey of responses to the papal encyclical *Laudato si'*. Duncan also emphasizes the vital role of Indigenous peoples worldwide: though only five percent of the world's population, they care for 22 per cent of the world's landmass and 80 per cent of its biodiversity (Duncan, 199). The theme of interconnectedness, especially in Hindu and Buddhist thought, is brought to bear on the issues by Shelini Harris and Chaiwat Satha-Anand, the latter drawing the trope of 'breathing' as the activity that draws all living things together. This sense of interconnectedness is the main criterion for a valid spirituality.

The essays in Part III are in some ways the most practical in their concerns, applying to local Australian circumstances (Camilleri, 337) the visionary proposals of the earlier essays. The Indigenous writer Tony Birch builds his contribution on the startling words that in some ways voice both the horrific experience and the calmly defiant aspirations of Indigenous people: 'we've seen the end of the world and we've decided not to accept it'. The essay is an

invitation to reconsider the baleful legacy of colonialism, and to show the maturity to listen to Indigenous voices in protecting country. Anne Elvey continues this line of thinking with her call to reimagine what it is to live on the island-continent, to truth telling about its past, and to the contextualizing of ecological action as a global citizen nation. The challenge is to 'respect Indigenous epistemologies', a huge potential turnabout in the typical ways Australians see their own country, and to acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty. In the final essay Allan Patience calls on Australia, as a matter of strategic priority, to move from seeing itself as a regional 'middle power' to being a good global citizen – again, a huge potential shift in self-perception. Patience sets out in detail the steps that such a move would involve, steps that are by no means beyond the imagination or the energy of the nation. At the top of the list, he concludes, must be the recognition of Indigenous peoples, hospitality to asylum seekers, and the swift transition to a carbon-free economy. These steps are also applicable, of course, in many countries.

It is significant that the initiatives in this book have emerged in Australia, a country often and with justification seen as lagging behind most other OECD countries in its national responses to climate change. The contributions are diverse in their interests, the platforms from which they start, and the particular interests that they evince. Some open themselves to criticism at

particular points, though each essay is supported by an exhaustive bibliography. As products of the 'wider ecumenism' of interreligious dialogue, however, they have a great deal more in common. They point to an emerging recognition of 'the inherent rights of land' (Birch, 257) and the need for a global 'dialogical citizenship' (Camilleri, 40). Their viewpoints may still be marginal, but this is an open marginality that sees itself at the threshold of a new vision for the country in which the conference was held, and even more significantly for the world at large. It is a world already embarking on 'the great transition', and therefore in need of navigating by those able to see further into this future than seems possible for many of our national leaders. These essays hold out a hope in an age in which people increasingly feel weighed down, the hope that things can and shall be different. This is no empty hope, for these essays offer both a grand vision and some practical steps towards achieving this vision. But the steps need to be taken by each one of us; this is not simply a book for reflective reading or even silent, indignant anger. 'Our grandchildren will not thank us,' says Mark Brett in his concluding comments, 'for righteous indignation that simply leaves our politics broken' (Brett, 331). This collection should be read by everyone who may at times feel despondent about the future, everyone who has caught a glimpse of the possibilities, everyone who wants a place at the helm in navigating the

great transition, and anyone who may doubt the role of religions as part of the way forward.

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