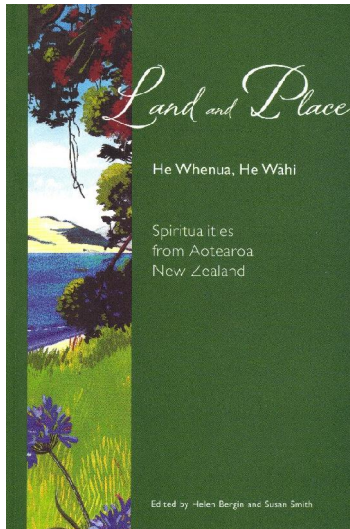


BOOK REVIEW

Bergin, Helen and Susan Smith eds. *Land and Place, He Whenua He Wāhi: Spiritualities from Aotearoa New Zealand*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003.



This is a diverse collection of essays on aspects of the human relationship to land and place. While the authors approach the topic from a variety of Christian and/or Maori perspectives, the book would be of interest to a much wider readership than simply Christian or Maori.

The way in which Maori people understand land has much in common with that of Australian Aboriginal peoples, and the issues with which Pakehas grapple in New Zealand are similar to those which engage non-indigenous Australians.

The Foreword to the book states that it "attempts to provoke a rethinking of our traditional attitudes to land and place. It also sets us down the path of rethinking the traditional spiritualities that would appear to have failed, at least in part, to animate and integrate our lives in this place and time."

Land and Place includes chapters on the European traditions of land and ownership, Maori relationships to the land, biblical views of land, the human relationship to landscape and rural countryside and water, involvement in gardens, and sacramental and mystical understandings of place.

One of my favourite is "Landscape as a Spiritual Classic: A Reading from Paekakariki" by Elizabeth Julian, in which she "invites readers to develop a Christian spirituality with the Bible in one hand and the shifting sand/sea of the lower North Island in the other".

Helen Bergin focuses on the multiple manifestations of water around and within Aotearoa New Zealand, and asks whether the traditional image of water as a Christian symbol for the Holy Spirit might not enable people to see in the waters close at hand special signs of divine presence.

Approaching the topic from a different angle, Mary Horn combines poetry and prose to reflect on seasons of life and death, of darkness and light as rhythms belonging to all creation.

This is a book with something for everyone. It is easy to read, and presents both Maori and Pakeha perspectives on their shared land. It does not gloss over the complexities of their sometimes-painful history of interactions with the land, but offers hope for a future built on justice for all, including the land itself.