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978-0-521-59927-6 - Religious Inventions: Four Essays

Max Charlesworth

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Many scholars assume that all genuine religions are basically similar and that it is possible to define the sphere of religion in terms of some fundamental characteristic such as the 'sacred' or the 'holy'. In his latest book, Max Charlesworth argues, instead, that we must take the diversity of religions as a primary fact. Any religion is an active response to a revelation of the divine, and human beings receive these revelations, interpret them and develop them in a variety of ways. This diversity is not, he emphasises, the result of human sin or ignorance, but is a primary datum of religions: the sphere of religion is ineluctably pluralistic. To illustrate his thesis, Charlesworth considers a number of examples of the 'invention' of religion, ranging from Australian Aboriginal religions, to the Rhineland mystical movement associated with Meister Eckhart in the early fourteenth century, to seventeenth-century sects like the Muggletonians, and to Roman Catholic attempts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to construct a theological account of doctrinal development and also to formulate a Christian ethic.

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‘Grace is . . . everywhere’.

George Bernanos, *Diary of a country priest*

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Contents

Introduction	<i>page</i> 1
1 The diversity of revelations	23
2 The invention of Australian Aboriginal religions	51
3 Universal and local elements in religion	81
4 The making of a Christian ethics	105
Conclusion	139
<i>Index</i>	155

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