

intellectual leaps, as the views of (say) Peter Lombard, Aquinas, Gabriel Biel, the Sorbonne, Luther, Calvin and Hooker on a particular topic are briefly summarised with only limited attempts at contextualisation. The result for the reader is often confusing, a feeling not of integration but of fragmentation.

Part of the difficulty, of course, is the confusion and fissiparousness of the sixteenth century debates themselves, and the inability of any of the participants to come up with a systematic theology of authority. An accurate rendition of such debates as a result does not in fact take one very much farther in the search for the lines of the battle over authority in the reformation period. What is needed is a more synthetic approach and a much narrower focus, concentrating upon the overarching questions, perhaps rather in the manner of Brian Gogan's splendid treatment of mediaeval and early-modern ecclesiology in *The Common Corps of Christendom*, or along the lines sketched out by Evans in her concluding chapter 'The authority of common sense'.

To see this work as solely a study in early-modern historical theology would, however, be to do it an injustice. It also demonstrates an awareness of contemporary ecumenical debates over authority, and, indeed, had its genesis in the attempt to tackle such questions on the Anglican side. Sixteenth century polemic is therefore seen as merely an interim stage, as marking 'a contribution in a continuing process', which, though initially intensely divisive and, indeed, categorisable as a *culpa*, can now be seen as a *felix culpa*, leading, through its criticism of mediaeval assumptions and institutions, to the modern reassessment of Reformation differences and rapprochement between differing ecclesial communities epitomised by Vatican II and ARCIC. For a curmudgeonly reformation historian, however, the optimism about modern rapprochement is, unfortunately, difficult to share, in the light of the reality of the sixteenth century debates and their continuing relevance.

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*What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography.* By RICHARD A. BURRIDGE. Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. xiii + 292. No price.

WITH great self-confidence Burridge offers this close study of Graeco-Roman biography. His grasp of the classical side of his work is undoubted, and as a resource for non-classicists this work will be helpful. Burridge is admittedly limiting his choice of texts and other classicists may wish to challenge his selection, which may become self-serving. His conclusion is that there are family resemblances

between the Graeco-Roman biographies he examines. The features include; the stylistic and structural, an analysis of verb subjects, length of the whole and elements within it, content and authorial intention. The genre of biography thus broadly drawn he performs a similar analysis of the Gospels and claims that there are sufficient overlapping features so to classify them. They are yet a distinct sub-genre (p. 239) and have their individual meaning residing in themselves (p. 247).

The genre of Gospel is the focus of this study, yet less than fifty pages are *specifically* given over to them. With only a nod towards other styles of literary criticism Burridge cites Hirsch and utilises authorial intention unquestioningly. He has insufficient philosophical references to back up his generalisations on the inability of a writer or reader to produce or grasp work with a high degree of novelty and all but rejects this from the beginning. Redaction Criticism assumes a rather outmoded importance within Gospel studies and he does not consider the implications of recent hermeneutical work such as semantic autonomy, surplus of meaning and the demands of synchronic approaches which must affect *all* the texts he examines. Although many would agree with his eschewing of Form Criticism we ought still to acknowledge the role of the oral period before Gospel writing started and the continuing impact of oral tradition thereafter. There is, therefore, a naive approach to epistemological and hermeneutical issues, and there does not seem to be the same depth to Biblical Studies expertise as Burridge brings from his classical background.

Burridge must be correct that some grasp of genre is necessary to guide interpretation, and his work will be a good foil for recent narrative approaches by re-emphasising the historical. One must, however, question whether the features he draws from the biographies become imposed reading grids for the Gospels and how far the Gospels are allowed to speak as individual testimonies.

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*The Open Text: New Directions for Biblical Studies?* Edited by FRANCIS WATSON. London, SCM Press, 1993. Pp. ix + 177. £12.50.

THE common denominator in this volume, in Watson's words, is that the contributors 'are in different ways all advocating a pluralist hermeneutic ...' (p. 8). The 'open text' is 'the site of a proliferation of meanings' (p. 3), recovering the feel of a never-exhausted sacred text (p. 4). Young, for example, says 'the Bible must be regarded as a "classic" with a plenitude