

“enlightenment” as descriptive of some of the central issues in the spiritual life.

If anything is lacking in this work, it is a greater measure of self-criticism of the premises on which S. builds his study. The work provides a sharp critique of traditional approaches to Christian spirituality. This is a critique with which it is difficult to take issue. There remains, however, a hint of suspicion that greater attention might have been given to the critical function that the tradition itself might serve vis-à-vis some of S.’s presuppositions and guiding convictions.

The merits of this work lie primarily in the methodological form that S. gives to the interpretation of the history of Christian spirituality. S. creates room for hearing the story—and thus the voices—of those groups and persons who have been marginalized and disenfranchised not only by historical processes, but even more by the way in which accounts of history have traditionally been constructed.

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SHORTER NOTICES

WHAT ARE THE GOSPELS? A COMPARISON WITH GRAECO-ROMAN BIOGRAPHY. By Richard A. Burrige. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series. New York: Cambridge University, 1992. Pp. xiii + 292. \$54.95.

Burrige’s revised dissertation re-examines the question of the genre “gospel” and affirms that our Gospels are lives of Jesus. He thus agrees with, but also corrects, defenders of the biography genre against its (largely German) critics who saw the Gospels as *Kleinliteratur* unlike contemporary literary biographies, or with no literary character at all due both to their origins in oral sources and to their kerygmatic focus. Further failed attempts to relate them to other genres, like encomia or aretalogies, led the Gospels to be considered writings *sui generis*.

B. first clarifies the notion of genre with the aid of contemporary and classical literary theory. As a conventional (sometimes unconscious) con-

tract, a genre guides the author’s production and the audience’s expectations. Despite prescriptive claims in literary theory, genre describes a flexible range of literary productions with general similarities overshadowing particular differences. After outlining external and internal characteristics for determining particular genres, B. finds how these function in ten examples of Graeco-Roman biographies, from before and after the Gospels, some of which have been cited as comparable to the Gospels but none studied thoroughly. He then examines the Gospels in light of these characteristics of ancient biographies and finds that all four Gospels manifest them.

The evangelists’ choice of the biographical genre over that of the sayings collection or letter is taken as one indication of the general awareness of the literary genre, however humble the Christian community might have been. The development of the Gospels into a sub-category akin

to the lives of philosophers and the multiple uses of the biography genre (e.g. encomium, polemic, apology, entertainment, instruction) are also discussed. Concluding hermeneutical considerations focus on the centrality of the figure of Jesus and his historical existence. In all, the case for biography as the Gospel genre is reasonably argued and amply substantiated.

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PHILOSOPHY AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION. By Peter Addinall. New York: Cambridge University, 1991. Pp. xii + 330. \$54.50.

Nineteenth-century British theology was hardly a moment of great distinction in the West's long reflection on matters pertaining to God. Nevertheless, it had some importance, and Addinall tells its story with an erudition that is careful not to suffocate the reader with trivia. In fact, the exceptional literary and historical talents displayed by A. seem to outclass completely their subject. The give-and-take of the protracted debate that occupied the period's theological attention is traced in a manner that keeps its plot clear, interesting, and subject to A.'s critical eye.

His story, however, no matter how well it was told, would appeal to only a very limited audience except for the fact that it is connected with a claim of truly breathtaking scope that must touch a nerve in any philosopher or theologian who reads it: "It must be admitted that he (Kant) . . . did lay a firm foundation for religious belief in general human experience, and his critical philosophy is directly relevant to the construction of a theology which is meaningful and persuasive to men and women belonging to a science-dominated culture" (2). The case for this claim is presented in chaps. 9 and 10, with the first carrying most of the burden of proof. The results are

less than satisfying. One gets the impression that A. had not taken the measure of the task this claim placed on him before introducing it as part of his prescription for curing the ills of the theological speculation he has just so ably reviewed.

This is scholarship at its best: thorough, selective, intelligently critical, and highly readable. It is a very fine book that would have been even better if it had been just two chapters shorter.

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PARABLES IN MIDRASH: NARRATIVE AND EXEGESIS IN RABBINIC LITERATURE. By David Stern. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1991. Pp. xii + 347.

The parable, one of numerous small literary units found in various rabbinic collections, serves as an entrée to a literary-historical investigation of the relationship between exegesis and narrative. Stern first shows the stereotyped form of the parable, especially in the Amoraic period, and its relationship to its interpretation (*nimshal*) and midrashic context. He then argues that the rabbinic parable is used as a rhetorical narrative to persuade its audience of "the value of a certain idea or approach or feeling." One chapter reviews the poetics or narrative strategies used in parables, including intentional ambiguity, editorial guidance toward interpretation, characterization, and anthropomorphism. Another, on thematics, treats parables as ideological narratives used for apologetics, polemics, eulogy, consolation, complaint, regret, and warning. Finally, Stern reviews the midrashic contexts in which parables appear and presents a sketch of the history of the parable in Jewish literature. Each point is illustrated by a series of texts, many drawn from Lamantations Rabbah, which receive detailed interpretation.