

*Jesus and After: The First Eighty Years.* By E. Bruce Brooks. Pp. 191, Amherst, MA, University of Massachusetts, 2018, \$28.00.

This book is dedicated to Claude G. Montefiore, whom Brooks finds the ‘most interesting’ of the Jewish commentators on the Christian scriptures. Montefiore wrote: ‘A God who, without mediation or mediator, is equally near to, interested in, and approachable by, the entire human race, a Theism which should be both philosophic and intimate, both pure and warm – for this the Jews have become capable only by a slow process of time.’ (p. 180) The thesis of this book is that this message was the agenda Jesus came preaching. He was opposed to the priestly concerns for ritual purity and the labyrinthine complexities and unnatural contortions of the Jewish Law, retaining only the repentance, compassion or conversion commanded by the prophet Micah: ‘to act justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.’ This reduced and simplified agenda was recorded by the first evangelist, Mark, and a strength of Brooks’ text is to show how interpolations were made repeatedly to change Jesus’ status from a mere man, under the very human (not divine) pressures of assimilating the apparent defeat of his crucifixion (adding a ‘resurrection’), and then explaining the need for the entire ‘Passion, Death and Resurrection’ sequence as somehow required, beyond common sense ‘obedience’ to the Law and ‘repentance’ in Micah’s stripped down regimen or reformation, as an ‘Atonement’ for the otherwise insurmountable ‘debt’ for sin owed to God – the origin of the notion that we are, and must be, saved by a ‘grace’ as opposed to ‘good works’. The former was a ‘Beta’ – and somewhat regressive strain of otherworldly ‘magic’ to the astringent realistic purge of Jewish ethics promulgated by Jesus; the two would snipe at one another and fight fiercely at times over the centuries. Had there been no sudden and unexpected execution of Jesus, this never would have been needed.

Brooks is at his most insightful and persuasive in his description of how and when (upon what

provocations or embarrassments) such interpolations were made, to produce the final – and partially inconsistent – scriptures we now have. Jesus came as a teacher and (traditional) healer – not as a ‘saviour’ – but his message was progressively pushed back into the kind of mythologized, other-worldly phantasmagoria he was attempting to dismantle. However, he was enough of a Jewish nationalist to believe that if a majority of Jews could be converted to the modest ethical and psychological conversion described by Micah – as distinct from producing an occasion when all Jews would perfectly obey the ‘Law’ – such an act would force God’s hand and He would have to intervene to kick out the occupying Roman force and restore Jewish autonomy.

Most commentators have concluded that Jesus was enough of a ‘hellenist’ to realize that the traditional Jewish strategy of avoiding assimilation by separation, exclusion and turning inward with a smug sense of superiority, no matter how parlous their external circumstance, for being God’s ‘chosen people’, with the ‘gift’ or ‘burden’ of the Law which, in any case, was an effective defence and ‘hedge’ against encroachments by the ‘nations’ or foreign ways, was uncalled for, inappropriate and outdated. Israel was fated to remain a buffer state *between* the great nations; to have ever imagined otherwise was to have succumbed to fantasy and wishful thinking. It didn’t matter which ‘empire’ the Jews found themselves in; the modest ethical transformation and discipline Micah encouraged could be performed anywhere, and by gentiles as well as by Jews. Brooks could have freed his Jesus from jingoist patriotism. His revolutionary ambition was universal and (in its target impact and first influence) non-political.

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Patrick Madigan

*What Are the Gospels? (25th Anniversary Edition): a Comparison with Graeco-Roman biography.* By Richard A. Burridge. Pp. xvi, I. 112, 396. Waco, TX, Baylor University Press, 2018, \$49.95.

Can it really be a quarter of a century since this splendid book was first published? Now it is reissued, along with, by way of introduction, Burridge’s account of scholarly reactions to the first edition, as well as something on recent work on the gospels, and the addition of a piece on the genre of Acts, which Burridge indicates must be classed as either historiography or biography; he suggests that it is best

understood as a *bios* of the first Christians, their deeds and words, taking over from where Luke’s gospel left off. He also offers us a literary teleology of genres. Burridge makes (at least) two important points, first that it is absurd to claim, as the form-critics did, that ‘gospel’ is a genre *sui generis*, for if that were the case, there would be no contract between reader and author, and hence no way of

understanding it; and second that the years since 1992 have shown that work on the gospels has been irrevocably shifted by his work. The newly added 'Introduction', if one were to be critical, gives the book a slightly awkward shape; it has a more up-to-date bibliography than the central section, which stands more or less as it did. It does however demonstrate the impact that Burridge's original work has had in the intervening years, and how at times scholars have not understood what he was saying. He makes a useful (and for this thesis absolutely central) distinction between 'genre', which requires a noun, and 'mode', which is adjectival: so a particular part of a gospel might be 'tragic', but it would not follow from this that the genre of it is 'tragedy'. One of the difficulties that arise out of adding this introduction is that there is a good deal of repetition throughout the book; but perhaps that makes it easier to grasp the overall argument. There is an interesting section on Catholic reactions to his work; and in particular the fact that Joseph Ratzinger and the author concur in seeing Jesus as the hermeneutical key to the entire New Testament, both of them 'in reaction to the earlier impact of form-critical views' (p. I. 74); although it must be said that Burridge is quite clear about the importance of the insights of the Form Critics; it is just that they got things wrong in classing the gospels as Kleinliteratur. Though, as I say, the additions to the original book give the present volume a slightly untidy appearance, the chapters themselves are admirably organised, and there has been serious work on the question of genre, and especially that of the *bios* in Graeco-Roman literature; Burridge's classical background is very important here, enabling him to identify the 'personal focus of the work's settings on an individual, rather than a place or a topic' (p. 200), so that like classical *bioi* the gospels concentrate on the ancestry, birth, boyhood, education, great deeds, virtues and the death – and

its consequences – of the book's hero. Interestingly, Burridge argues convincingly, on the basis of solid statistics, and some impressive pie-charts, that this is as true of the Fourth Gospel as of the Synoptics, since 20% of verbs in John have Jesus as their subject, and 34% of the verbs are part of Jesus' teaching. Therefore all four gospels are, despite what is sometimes argued, of the same genre. I have to say that, twenty-five years on (unless I am forgetting what it was like a quarter of a century ago) this book seems much 'weightier', and not just because of the increase in the number of pages – it feels altogether more cogent. He makes one very important point, which runs through the entire book: 'If genre is the key to a work's interpretation, and the genre of the gospel is *bios*, then the key to their interpretation must be the person of their subject, Jesus of Nazareth' (p. 248). There is a (relatively) new chapter considering scholarly reactions to the book, ten years after its publication, which finds most people quite pleased with what Burridge had done, and wanting more of the same. There are three helpful appendices: in the first there are 'analysis charts', which gain added weight by appearing after the argument is over; the second considers the genre of gospels, underlining the importance of Christology and the interesting and significant lack of rabbinic *bioi*. The verbal structure of the gospels reveals that they are preaching about Jesus ('Christology [or Christologies?] in narrative form', p. 326). It is a pleasure to welcome this new version of a book that has clearly had a lasting impact on gospel studies. The third appendix is that on the genre of Acts. On a personal note, it was a reassuring and pleasurable discovery, in a remote footnote, that the author shares with Professor David Catchpole and the present reviewer a devotion to the Somerset County Cricket Club.

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*Jesus as Philosopher: the Moral Sage in the Synoptic Gospels.* By Runar M. Thorsteinsson. Pp. x, 212, Oxford University Press, 2018, \$20.49.

We have been aware for some time that it is no longer proper to make too neatly that old division between Jerusalem and Athens, and that therefore it may be possible to ask if Jesus sounds like a philosopher in Graeco-Roman antiquity. At least since the work of Hengel we have been made aware that Palestine in Jesus' time was already profoundly Hellenised. For Runar Thorsteinsson, however, there is still a reluctance among NT scholars to bring philosophy into their craft. This book is intended to fill the gap, although the author cheerfully admits that there is a shortage of sources satisfactorily linking (for

example) the Cynics with Jesus, and some readers may feel that the gap remains unfilled. His question is about the portrayal of Jesus in the Synoptic gospels in connection with the portrayal of leading philosophers, especially among the Stoics, in the depiction of Jesus as the 'ideal moral person'. In his view, which may not win unstinting applause, the Synoptic Gospels 'draw ... on ancient virtue theory in their attempt to interpret and present the moral message and character of their ideal figure, Jesus Christ' (p. 14). The endeavour begins in the first chapter, which presents us with the depiction of philosophical