

and respectful atmosphere; the tension between the stereotype and the real in the portrait of Jesus. Chapter 9 shows that the Fourth Gospel shares these features too. Burrige concludes that the gospel genre is the same as that of Graeco-Roman biography, and that the gospels belong to the sub-genre of ancient religious or philosophical biography.

Burrige has performed a useful service in drawing out these general similarities between the gospels and Graeco-Roman biographies. Since, however, these general features are shared with the narratives about prophets in the Jewish scriptures, it would have been helpful had Burrige shown whether anything distinguished Graeco-Roman biographies from those older Jewish narratives, and if so, whether the gospels are closer to one or the other.

Burrige has certainly shown that there are biographical elements in the gospels, but has he shown that their genre is Graeco-Roman biography? From reading Burrige's list of features, no one would guess that the gospels are theological narratives, and that they set the life of Jesus in the context of what God, the Creator and Sustainer of the world, is achieving through him. Is not this the organising principle which makes sense of the parts, parts which include not only a theological interpretation of Jesus' birth, life and death, but also, for example, God's dealings with Israel in the past and present, Jesus' resurrection, and the expectation of an imminent end of history?

MEG DAVIES.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF MYSTICISM. ORIGINS TO THE FIFTH CENTURY by Bernard McGinn *SCM Press*, 1992. Pp. xxii + 494. £25.00

This is the first volume of a projected 4-volume work to cover the history of Western Christian mysticism. In it McGinn lays his foundations. There is a series of introductory chapters on the Jewish background (largely apocalyptic), the Greek contemplative tradition (Plato *et al.*), the New Testament and some other early Christian literature, 'Mystical elements in early Greek Christianity' (mainly devoted to Origen), and the influence of monasticism (mainly Evagrius and Denys the Areopagite). Part Two, 'The Birth of Western Mysticism', has two chapters: one mainly on Ambrose and Cassian, and one devoted to Augustine. In addition there is a general introduction and an appendix entitled 'Theoretical Foundations: The Modern Study of Mysticism'. Professor McGinn presents himself as an historian, and if one ignores the scaffolding and goes to the book for its discussion of historical movements and figures, there is much here to enjoy and profit from. In particular, his discussions of Denys the Areopagite, Ambrose and Cassian are brilliant and full of insights. But one can't ignore the scaffolding. For one thing, there is an awful lot of it: the general introduction and the appendix alone run to 90 pages (out of 353 pages of text), and the questions they raise keep on cropping up in the historical sections (often in a rather tiresomely self-conscious way). Anyway, as McGinn fully recognizes, even an historical approach to mysticism has to face questions of a philosophical and theological order, and even if, as McGinn maintains (surely with

justification), questions of the definition of mysticism depend on the history of mysticism for their full resolution (he quotes Chenu's remark: 'a perfect history of theology, if one existed, would yield a theology of history'), that history would need to be written with an adequate awareness of the philosophical and theological issues involved. Hence the long appendix, which otherwise seems out of place (we lurch from Augustine to Schleiermacher, by way of David Lodge and Dean Inge, in a page or two). The appendix seems to be intended to provide a theoretical foundation for the conclusion explored (rather than reached) in the general introduction that the 'mystical element' in religion is to be defined as 'consciousness of the immediate or direct presence of God'. But it does nothing of the sort: it simply surveys approaches to the study of mysticism over the last century, under three categories, theological, philosophical, and comparative and psychological. This categorization seems to me unnecessarily confusing, so that Troeltsch, von Hügel and Heiler appear in different sections despite the personal links between them. The discussion is also necessarily summary: hardly any names are missing (though Buber is absent) and there are only 80 pages! It hardly supports McGinn's position, except in so far as it reveals his predilections. But there is, of course, a problem, and one that McGinn is fully aware of: the final volume dealing with the period from the seventeenth century onwards—the only period when one can speak of mysticism without foisting on to our authors terminology they would not have understood—is to be called 'The Crisis of Mysticism'. The emergence of 'mysticism' is a 'crisis' for mysticism only if one has created a 'mystical tradition' by retrojecting the modern notion of mysticism back through the history of the Christian Tradition. It seems to me that McGinn half-accepts the logic of this but is unwilling to carry it through, partly because it would make the task he has set himself—of writing the history of Western mysticism— even more formidable than it is already. One can only sympathize, but it does mean that the first three volumes of his work have inevitably to judge (as to both selection and approach) Christian writers by criteria they would not have understood, let alone recognized. It also produces more palpable oddities: Jerome is excluded as 'not a mystic, either by temperament or training' (p.216). I wonder what training he lacked, and even more what a mystical temperament might be.

McGinn has read very widely, but two books seem to have escaped his attention. One is Nicholas Lash's *Easter in Ordinary*. This may have appeared too late for McGinn's purposes (1988), but, Lash's discussion of some strands of reflection on mysticism over the last century raises some questions more incisively than McGinn does, though I suspect that McGinn would find much that Lash says congenial. Another is Tugwell's *Ways of Imperfection* (1984), which, apart from the excellence of its historical analyses, through them raises doubts about the whole notion of Christian 'mysticism'.

This review has been largely critical, so let me end by repeating that, no-one will fail to benefit from the learning and insight of McGinn's exposition of some of the great figures of the Patristic period.

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