

Because of the impossibility of tracing the actions of Providence in human affairs Butterfield concentrates on those aspects of history where the influence of Christianity is evident. He believes that Christian historians will emphasize the role of individuals in history and particularly the opportunities each one has to add to, or detract from, the happiness of mankind. He displays an awareness of the complications introduced by human cupidity and of the tensions created by the conflict between right and wrong in which everyone is involved. It is in this area that Butterfield provides his greatest service for those interested in the relationship between Christianity and history. He not only affirms a definite vibrant link between the two but suggests the lines of inquiry which will be most fruitful for Christian historians.

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Crenshaw, James L. *Samson: A Secret Betrayed, A Vow Ignored*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1978. 172 pp. \$7.95.

The novelty of Crenshaw's approach to the story of Samson lies in what he calls aesthetic criticism, which is sensitivity to the beauty and art of a piece of literature. Instead of asking about the logicity or absurdity of events or statements, the aesthetic critic attempts to view the story from the perspective of the author, and believes the story as story. However, this does not imply accepting the material as fact. Crenshaw believes the Samson narrative to be largely nonfactual, and therefore almost entirely lacking in historical basis. Rejecting the idea that the story of Samson belongs to solar myth or nature legend, Crenshaw classifies it as saga.

Crenshaw's task as interpreter is to discern as nearly as possible the intention of the author, recapture the ancient mind by imaginative reconstruction, and identify the themes or motifs in the narrative by studying recurring themes and other literary pointers in ancient texts and the entire Hebrew corpus. A final step is to bridge the gap between the ancient and modern world by presupposing that between them is a continuity at a deeper level of existence. True to his task, Crenshaw discusses the literary and stylistic traditions in the first chapter. In the second chapter he develops the unifying themes of the Samson saga, believing that the primary purpose of the saga is to examine competing loyalties. Thus, the chapter heading "Passion or Charisma" which addresses the tension between filial devotion and erotic attachment is an appropriate title. Chap. 4 is dedicated to explaining the riddles in the narrative; first by discussing the nature and function of riddles and similar literary types, and then using this information to interpret the riddles in the story of Samson. Crenshaw's interest in riddles is evident in this chapter; in fact, Crenshaw's study of the story of Samson grew out of his

interest in riddles. The last chapter deals with the tragic dimension of the narrative, discussing it in conjunction with interpretations of venerable authors of the past. Milton's *Samson Agonistes* is given the most generous treatment.

Crenshaw, adopting the view that the book of Judges is part of the Deuteronomistic history, attributes the theological ideas found in the book to the creative work of that school: God punished Israel for her sins, which were mostly of a cultic nature, and he used foreign powers for punishment. Although God does not ignore evil, he is compassionate; and in the Samson narrative it is a compassionate God, not Samson, who emerges as the real hero of the story.

One of the major contributions of this book is the identification and classification of the literary themes in the story of Samson. Yet, exclusive concentration on expounding themes as literary creations carries with it the tendency to neglect the possibility that some or many of these concerns actually grew out of the historical life of a specific individual, and are not necessarily merely common characteristics of ancient literature. The book could perhaps have made even more of a contribution to our knowledge of the narrative if Crenshaw had discussed the possibilities of how Samson's life transported him out of history and into legend.

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Dunn, James D. G. *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977. xvii + 470 pp. \$19.50.

Any student of the NT is aware of the diversity that exists, e.g., in the picture of Christ in the Synoptics compared to the Christ of the Gospel of John, the difference in eschatological expectation in 1 Thessalonians and 2 Peter, the difference in soteriology between Romans and Hebrews, and the difference in church order between 1 Corinthians and the Pastorals, to point out only the most prominent areas. Yet with all these differences, the feeling in the past was that the differences were not overly extensive and above all not contradictory; they could be fitted into a NT theology under major themes. In recent years, however, scholars have pointed out differences that appeared to be major — so serious, in fact, that the canonicity of some books was being questioned and serious doubts were raised concerning the possibility of writing a NT theology.

James Dunn has taken this theme, which had been treated in a limited fashion, and dealt with it in a comprehensive way. His thesis is that there is great diversity in the NT but there is an underlying unity. However, the basis of this unity is not a broad foundation of doctrines but has been reduced to