

Butterfield, Herbert. *Writings on Christianity and History*. Ed. C. T. McIntire. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. viii + 273 pp. \$12.95.

The publication of this collection of essays by Herbert Butterfield, a well respected British historian, underlines the growing interest in the relationship between Christianity and history. The early Christians developed a world view including a specifically Christian conception of history which dominated historiography for over a millennium. The intellectual ferment of the Enlightenment undermined this view and paved the way for its replacement by the secular philosophies which dominated historical thinking at the beginning of the twentieth century. The crisis complex engendered by two world wars, the holocaust, the depression, and the threat of nuclear confrontation has brought a resurgence of interest in the Christian view of history. Herbert Butterfield stood in the vanguard of this resurgence.

The seventeen essays in this collection are divided into three sections: the divine and human in history, Christians and the interpretation of history, and Christianity in the twentieth century. The topics discussed range all the way from "The Originality of the Old Testament" (chap. 5) to "The Prospect for Christianity" (chap. 16). As is to be expected in a collection of essays, there is a great deal of repetition and duplication throughout this volume. Furthermore, many of these essays were obviously prepared for oral presentation rather than scholarly publication and their style reflects this difference. Nevertheless these essays do present a coherent and meaningful analysis of the relationship between Christianity and history and well repay reflective reading.

The most significant essay in this volume is the first, "God in History," originally published over twenty years ago. This essay contains Butterfield's key ideas on the relationship between God and History—ideas which are elaborated and clarified in the remaining essays. Butterfield's thesis is that historical explanation must not only account for decisions based upon individual free will and the operation of the "deep forces and tendencies" within human society, but must set all historical development within a pattern reflecting the Providence of God. Although he expresses his strong conviction that Providence plays a significant role in the development of human societies across the centuries, he displays caution in attributing any specific decision or action to Providence. "One discovers such things by faith, not by historical study," he points out (p. xxxviii; see also pp. 173-174). The ultimate basis of his belief in Providence emerges in the comment that, "Either you trace everything back in the long run to sheer blind Chance, or you trace everything to God" (p. 8). For Butterfield that provides only one reasonable alternative.

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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CEDRIC WARD

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