

rhetoricians, Greco-Roman philosophers such as Aristotle and Epictetus, and the like) that gives depth and credibility to this work. He asserts, rightly, that he works abductively from the model derived from modern cultural anthropologists to the classical informants and back again to refine the model—but this is a most welcome dialogue, one that assures that the reading is well grounded in its own native context.

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Nyirongo, Lenard. *The Gods of Africa or the God of the Bible: The Snares of African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, Brochures of the Institute for Reformational Studies, No. 70. South Africa: Potchefstroom University, 1997. ii + 212 pp. Paperback, 55 Rand.

The author boldly sets forth the main motive and aim of his book at the very outset: "What worries me . . . is the denial of the cardinal truths of the Gospel by some well-known African theologians. . . . The denial can be briefly summarized in one proposition: that the African religious beliefs should be regarded as a foundation for faith in Christ" (1). Eighteen informative chapters that deal with various aspects of pre-Christian ancestral and modern religious faith and life in Africa are grouped into four main divisions: "Knowing God and Worshiping Him Aright," "Man's State and Destiny," "Man's Identity in the Community," and "Suffering, Health and Prosperity." Each chapter begins with a helpful outline of the main ideas and issues to be discussed. This is followed by "the [traditional] African's view" of the subject, a perspective that is often uncritically adopted by sympathetic contemporary theologians. Then "the biblical view" is presented and supported by a wide selection of Scripture references.

Many noteworthy features of this book commend its selection as a basic textbook in Christian apologetics for theological schools and seminaries throughout Africa or as an introduction to "Religion in Africa." These features include a clearly developed, contrastive outline approach to the various topics discussed; an easy, nontechnical style of writing; many citations from prominent pan-African theologians to allow them to "speak for themselves"; a number of useful summary outlines and charts (e.g., on different concepts of "time," 90-92; or matrilineality versus patrilineality, 132-134); and a broad, well-balanced ("evangelical") theological position. The author incisively and succinctly calls attention to the insidious danger of syncretism that threatens the vitality and progress of biblically-based Christianity virtually everywhere in Africa. He does not hesitate to criticize certain antibiblical Western influences as well—e.g., Western notions of "progress" (chap. 9). It is hard to believe that the author, a Zambian management consultant, has received no formal theological training when one reads his perceptive treatment of a wide variety of crucial religious issues—e.g., suffering (chap. 15), healing (chap. 16), witchcraft (chap. 17), and the often overlooked subject of African "art" (chap. 18).

Readers may not always agree with Nyirongo's theological position, but they will certainly admire the clarity and Christian conviction with which he has presented it in terms of African traditional religion, key biblical texts, and certain

deviant contemporary viewpoints. The book's bibliography is somewhat dated, but that is a rather small quibble to make concerning a text that may be highly recommended in just about every other respect.

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Pérez Fernández, Miguel. *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew*. Trans. John Elwolde. Leiden: Brill, 1997. xxii + 327 pp. Paperback, \$130.00.

A knowledge of rabbinic Hebrew (RH) is a great asset, a logical next step after mastery of biblical Hebrew (BH). It affords an understanding of development in the language. It exposes one to the impact of Aramaic, Greek, and Latin on the Hebrew language and is an entrance into rabbinic culture: both its world in general, and the rabbinic mind in particular. The best translation is no substitute for reading the original: what was said and how it was said, including formulaic expressions as well as the various nuances.

In reality, classes are usually difficult to come by, since the "step" to RH turns out to be more of a gulf or chasm. Until now the only available resource has been Segal's *Mishnaic Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford, 1927). However, this is a reference work not adapted or adaptable to progressive learning. Fernández's volume is a conscious sequel to Segal, interacting with and updating his work to current scholarship. *Inter alia*, a major difference between the two is Fernández's decision to base his book on actual manuscripts, especially Codex Kaufmann, rather than on printed editions as Segal had done.

A vast amount of material could come under the purview of such a book, extending all the way down to medieval commentators such as Rashi and Sforno. Since RH continued to develop over time in terms of both what was said and how it was said (syntax, morphology, and vocabulary), wisely Fernández has chosen to confine himself to the Tannaitic literature (first and second centuries C.E.) against the background of BH, and especially late biblical Hebrew (LBH), where RH forms are either present or in early development.

Following the Introduction, which is a valuable resource both in its own right and as a prelude to the rest of the work, the book is arranged topically in four major divisions dealing with nouns (including pronouns and adjectives), verbs, particles (prepositions, conjunctions, and adverbs), and clauses. It is not the typical teaching grammar that cycles among the various parts of speech as successively more difficult issues are addressed. Each of the four major divisions is divided into units (thirty-two total); that cover texts in sections dealing with morphology (including diachronic issues), grammar and usage, phraseology, vocabulary, and exercises.

The introductory text of each unit is selected to illustrate typical word and thought patterns, and then the reader is walked through issues such as hermeneutics, special vocabulary, concepts, and phraseology. More than BH, RH is a stylized, idiomatic, terse language. So Fernández includes not only RH, but also rabbinic thought.

The Morphology sections introduce the topics pertaining to the units, such as nouns, interrogatives, and prepositions. Where relevant, RH, LBH, and BH