

promise of socio-rhetorical criticism, including a brief outline for the rewriting of earliest Christian history that socio-rhetorical readings will make possible.

Socio-rhetorical criticism's potential for redefining our understanding of early Christian history is an important underlying theme of the book. Although Robbins proposes socio-rhetorical criticism as a way of bridging hermeneutical and historical approaches to early Christian texts, he clearly stays closer to historical concerns. Socio-rhetorical criticism is a demanding and complex method, requiring of the interpreter that he or she go outside of the rather self-contained world of NT studies and engage some of the developments that have taken place in the field of semiotics, cultural studies, and other fields that have not traditionally been the playground of interpreters of the NT. Because of this, readers may find the book somewhat difficult, even though it is well organized and well written.

While not every reader (particularly those of a conservative bent) will be able to follow all of Robbins' presuppositions, most readers, especially those interested in hermeneutical issues, will find Robbins' attempt to systematize an interdisciplinary approach challenging and enlightening.

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Russell, Jeffrey Burton. *A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997. 230 pp. Hardcover, \$24.95.

Jeffrey Burton Russell has devoted much of his scholarly career to writing about the devil and hell. Such volumes as *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (1977); *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (1981); *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (1984); *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (1986); and *The Prince of Darkness: Evil and the Power of Good in History* (1988) have been leading scholarly contributions in the field.

With *A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence* Russell has set a new direction for his scholarly endeavors. He intends this volume to be a prolegomenon to a detailed, multivolume study of the topic that one presumes will follow somewhat the pattern laid out in his work on the devil.

It is probably no accident that Russell's history of the evil side of the supernatural received priority in treatment. After all, as he perceptively notes, "to the modern mind heaven often seems bland or boring." Thus, "evil and the Devil seem to get the best lines" (xiii). That appears to be true in both history (e.g., destruction) and the daily newspaper, where good news seems to be no news at all.

But Russell has come to the place where he sees another viewpoint. In the tradition of Dante he desires to show how nothing could possibly be as exciting as heaven itself. Thus the purpose of *A History of Heaven* is to deepen his readers' understanding of heaven as a blessed otherworld by examining the Christian tradition on the topic. His central theme "is the fulfillment of the human longing for unity, body and soul, in ourselves, with one another, and with the cosmos" (xiii).

The book's title is somewhat misleading, since it seems to promise a comprehensive history of ideas about heaven but only takes its readers from about

200 B.C. through Dante's *Paradiso* in the fourteenth century. Beyond that, Russell has generally limited himself to Christian insights and has only minimally dealt with the constructions of Judaism and Islam. The thought of Eastern and animistic religions has been avoided altogether. Those delimitations are quite understandable and defensible, but the volume could have been made richer by cross-cultural comparison and especially contrasts, even if the cross-cultural aspects were kept to a minimum.

The key to Russell's treatment of his topic is his understanding of "metaphorical ontology." "Metaphorical ontology," he writes, "is the use of figures of speech to go beyond science, history, and poetry to indicate the deepest, divine, heavenly reality" (8). Russell argues that the literalistic language of science and history cannot capture the depth and complexity of heavenly realities. There are other ways of looking at things beyond those thought of as modern. Traditional Christian and Jewish thinkers realized that metaphor expressed a deeper insight into reality than could be expressed in the pedestrian language of science and history. Russell suggests that the facts of eternity can only be approximated through metaphor, since they soar beyond human imagination and reason.

A History of Heaven's subtitle, *The Singing Silence*, highlights both the fact of human limitation and the metaphorical ontology to which writers on the topic were driven in their desire to express the inexpressible. But even metaphor can't really do the job of enabling people to fully understand heaven. The depth of the topic extends even beyond the flight of metaphor. As a result, suggests Russell, the metaphors continued to become richer and more complex through Dante's masterpiece, the discussion of which provides the crescendo on which the book ends.

A History of Heaven is a genuine contribution to a neglected field. Readers can look forward with anticipation to further treatment of the topic as Russell expands the beachhead established by this work.

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Ryken, Leland. *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995. 301 pp. \$17.99.

Contemporary views and attitudes toward work and leisure are affected by false values of consumerism, materialism, and the idolatry of eternal youth. The historical currents of modernization, urbanization, and technologization have helped to bring great pressures, even upon Christians, to accept false values. For many Christians, work is treated as a curse, except where it produces wealth, and leisure is approached with guilt. These negative attitudes to work and leisure are the reasons why Leland Ryken wrote *Redeeming the Time*. It is a most significant work and one of the boldest attempts of the late twentieth century to seek the rehabilitation of work and leisure while encouraging Christians to contribute to the process of their rehabilitation.

It is Ryken's view that while contemporary secular authors have published