

Reaching back through time and space, the *Encyclopedia* becomes an illustration of the continuity and unity of Christian spirituality throughout the ages, reminding us how much today's church can find inspiration in the old and traditional expressions of liturgy. The *Encyclopedia* also becomes an inspiring devotional book: by offering its prayers, reflections, and meditations like cameos of past prayer life and experience, it brings enrichment to present-day personal spirituality and prayer practice. In a time when more and more congregations are looking for a solid framework for their liturgy, when many individuals long for a better structuring of their personal prayer life, this book provides abundant material for both purposes.

Andrews University

LILIANNE DOUKHAN

Witherington, Ben, III. *The New Testament Story*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004. x + 283 pp. Paper, \$18.00.

In this book, Ben Witherington III, Professor of New Testament Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary, in a sense complements his *New Testament History: A Narrative Account* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001). Intending to provide an "introduction in miniature" (ix) to the NT, Witherington consistently avoids the traditional schemes and critical jargons common to more technical introductions. The book focuses on the story of the NT and the stories within the NT in their relation to the life of Jesus.

Part 1 traces the development of the NT story in the scriptural canon. The first chapter discusses the oral culture in which the NT originated and suggests that an oral NT preceded the written one (4). During this oral period the first sacred traditions (e.g., hymns, creedal fragments, prayers, and sermon summaries) began to take shape (17-20). The extant fragments of such traditions in the NT documents demonstrate, among other things, the inadequacy of theories of a Christology that evolved from primitive to more sophisticated forms as Christianity moved away from its Jewish Palestinian roots (20-21). At an early period, apparently for worship and teaching purposes, the sacred traditions were written down in what can be called pre-NT narratives (chap. 2), which were basically collections of Jesus' sayings and stories (e.g., Q, M, L, miracle stories, and passion narratives). As the church began to spread to foreign territories and the eyewitness generation began to die, such narratives were then used to produce the NT as we know it (chaps. 3 and 4). Witherington begins by discussing Paul's letters, which were the first NT documents to be written. The transmission of early traditions by teaching and preaching is what secures the continuity between Jesus and Paul, who is not to be understood as the founder of Christianity (48). This section includes helpful discussions on the dating, authorship, and literary genre of the Epistles and Gospels, as well as their main literary and theological traits. Part 1 ends with a summary of the historical process through which the NT documents were collected into the canon (chap. 5). Witherington's view is that the canon was not imposed, but recognized, though "orthodoxy preceded the canon, and helped the process of discerning what the canon should look like" (103).

Part 2 studies the stories that are alluded to or told in the NT. The discussion follows a narratological approach and the stories are presented in a roughly chronological order. The purpose is to investigate the NT narratives in order to discover "the story" they are trying to tell (109, n. 1). Again Witherington begins with Paul (chap. 6) and how he uses the stories of OT characters, such as God, Adam, and Abraham, to tell the story of Jesus. After Paul, the discussion moves to other parts of the NT; and then to Paul's own story, as told first by himself and then by Luke in

Acts, is examined (chap. 7). Witherington offers a basic sketch of Paul's life in a way that combines exegesis with a more homiletical style. Other stories that receive attention include the "holy family" (Joseph, Mary, and James) (chap. 8) and Jesus, as related outside the Gospels (chap. 9) and within the Gospels (chap. 10). The book ends with a poem (271), two chronological tables, a chart with units of weight and measure, and maps.

The book contains helpful information for the beginner who wants to explore the NT more deeply, yet more demanding readers may also benefit from discussions on academic issues, such as the Synoptic problem, the character of NT Christology, and Paul's role in earliest Christianity. Witherington's vast learning is evident throughout the book, and footnote references to his earlier works indicate where more detailed discussions can be found. What is surprising is that references to his own work total almost 50 percent of the footnotes and bibliography.

Witherington's approach is basically conservative, but conservative readers may not feel comfortable, for example, with the idea that Peter was not the author of 2 Peter (67, 94) or that the Beloved Disciple, who was the author but not the editor of the Fourth Gospel, was not John the son of Zebedee (82-84). In the main, however, Witherington's positions are not polemical and will be accepted by most readers irrespective of their theological orientation. Exceptions to this are a few exegetical statements that are not well justified; references to fuller discussions by the author elsewhere may give the impression that the issue is settled, when it is not. For example, Witherington insists that Jesus is especially presented in John's Gospel as Wisdom incarnate (37-39, 82, 254; cf. his *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995]). Though it is true that some aspects of the Johannine Logos can be explained in light of a wisdom motif, precise correspondence between the two is lacking. With respect to the incarnation, no parallel whatsoever to this concept can be demonstrated in any part of the Jewish sapiential literature or, for that matter, in the wide spectrum of pre-Christian Jewish thought.

Two important omissions are rather disturbing. The first is a discussion on the text of the NT in Part 1. No story that is based on the text of the NT itself can possibly be traced unless it can be shown with enough confidence that this text was handed down without essential loss throughout the centuries. The second is the story of John the Baptist, whose intimate association with the NT story has been recognized since the time of early Christian preaching (Acts 1:21-22; 10:37; 13:24-25).

Overall, this study will certainly find a ready audience among university-level readers and laypersons seeking to understand where the NT came from and what it is about.

São Paulo Adventist University College
São Paulo, Brazil

WILSON PAROSCHI

Yarchin, William. *History of Biblical Interpretation: A Reader*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004. xxx + 444 pp. Hardcover, \$34.95.

If it ever was, it is no longer enough to interpret Scripture without consideration of how it has been interpreted in the past. Many of the assumptions about the obvious meanings of texts reflect millennia-long experience with the text by a surprisingly diverse cadre of interpreters. It is to make available an introduction to this wealth of interpretive experience that William Yarchin addresses a serious lacuna in scholarly reference by presenting, in a single volume, a host of Jewish and Christian interpreters covering twenty-two centuries.