

which might enable the reader to gain a better understanding of the literary form of these documents. Instead the author concludes that 1 John is a literary-theological unity (unit?), addressed to a specific situation.

The second chapter, devoted to a discussion of the theology of the Epistles, is the most important. Here Lieu attempts to come to grips with key concepts of Johannine theology such as ecclesiology and Christology. True to her methodology she looks for a number of clues in the epistles—titles, names, and issues—for the purpose of reconstructing both the historical setting and the theology of the epistle. The scarcity of data makes the task of putting the jigsaw puzzle together rather difficult. In keeping with her overall thesis, she minimizes the eyewitness account of 1 John 1:1-4. Following R. E. Brown's model, Lieu argues that the author's real *Sitz im Leben* is to be found in the context of a later community of people still in line with the first witnesses. However, this reconstruction is somewhat contrived and fails to be convincing. In the course of her reconstruction the author does not take some textual details of 1 John 4:2 and 5:6 seriously, concluding that they were intended to declare that Jesus, as the one sent by God, is the source of forgiveness. Evidently she minimizes the Christ event in favor of a later Johannine community.

In chap. 3 the author discusses the relationship between the Epistles of John, the Fourth Gospel, and the Apocalypse, concluding that there is no literary dependency between the Gospel and 1 John. Nevertheless, she observes, all of these writings show a family likeness, which indicates their linkage to a common tradition.

She concludes her study by showing that the Johannine Epistles have a contemporary significance which has to be true to the original meaning.

In spite of its usefulness, the book has some problems. Its presentation lacks clarity, such as one finds in Bultmann's work. There is no summary or conclusion. Finally, more careful proofreading of the text could have eliminated a number of typographical errors.

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HERBERT KIESLER

Messer, Donald E. *A Conspiracy of Goodness: Contemporary Images of Christian Mission*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992. 176 pp. Paper, \$14.95.

Donald Messer is a man with a large vision of a large God who oversees a large mission in an increasingly smaller world. His is not an ecclesio-centric book. Messer does not write about a God who is confined within the four walls of a church, relating to Christian people. Thus, this is a book that will stretch many minds.

Conspiracy is related to a number of other books published lately, *Resident Aliens* (Willimon and Hauerwas), *Transforming Mission* (Bosch), *The*

Gospel in a Pluralistic Society (Newbiggin). All of these call Christians to understand the new post-Constantinian reality of the "Church of the Diaspora," the church cut off from political and even cultural support, the church that must defend itself in the open market of the public square.

In his introduction, Messer sets the stage by announcing that while he identifies with the conciliar tradition, he prays that "this book might be a small step in the process of ending the 'Cold War'" between conservative and liberal Christians. The book is an attempt to deal with a much larger picture than that limited by current theological labels.

In the first three chapters, Messer explores the necessary dialogue between biblical texts and such contemporary contexts as the mission of God (*Missio Dei*) in a pluralistic world, the precariousness of life on a threatened planet, and the growing spirituality of ecology. Christians who have not developed a spirituality of ecology as a base from which to critique others may be put off by Messer's spirituality which borders on "New Age" wholism.

Chapter 4 looks back to Eden and forward to the earth made new to develop an eco-theology built on the phrase "to destroy those who destroy the earth" (Rev 11:18). But this is drawn into a spirituality that does not separate ecology from theology, a view of Christian responsibility toward all people. This is in contrast to the all-too-common Evangelical attitude that views the material world as disposable, only utilitarian, and already doomed.

Chapters 5 and 6 will be particularly disturbing for many Christians. We like to be popular, we enjoy being comfortable, we almost make a doctrine of economic success. Socially upward-mobile people, as most conservative Christian groups are, feel embarrassed by Christians who are not well off. Sitting in our comfortable, padded-pew churches, listening to the sounds from our million dollar organs, we forget that most Christians are not well off, in fact they are hungry every evening. We have only contempt and very little compassion for the people of south central Los Angeles who looted the stores around them, but we are much more tolerant of those who looted the country through junk bond sales and savings and loan mismanagement. If Jesus knew that we would always have the poor with us, he may have meant that we will always have the poor as a test of the genuineness of our faith. "A Collegiality of Bridge Builders" explores the relationship of the church to the non-persons of society, the inhabitants of "Smokey Mountain," the favellas, the shanty towns of the megacities, and those suffering from AIDS, the 21st-century leprosy.

How can we become a company of "bridge builders" and "star throwers," people who believe in the non-persons, the cast-offs of society, the forgotten and marginalized, who treat all people on the level of their potential rather than on the level of their current reality? Who will join God in his mission of garbage collecting and recycling? Who will rejoice over the one sheep, the one coin, the one child who is found and rescued?

Christians will be challenged by Messer's insistence on the inclusivity of Christ, as well as his insistence that Jesus died, not for the church, but for the world. Readers will also have to accept that the gospel is much more inclusive than it is exclusive, and that Christians, followers of the inclusive Christ, should be inclusive also.

This book will broaden the spiritual and mission perspective of most readers. It will serve well as a textbook in classes dealing with the relationship of the church to the world, missions, and community service.

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BRUCE CAMPBELL MOYER

Neyrey, Jerome H. *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991. xvi + 436 pp. \$19.95.

Neyrey's seminal work, *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, is a major contribution to scholarship and will influence the study of Luke-Acts particularly, Gospel studies generally, and even biblical studies as a whole. It does what it purports to do: to present models for interpretation. In fact, it may even function as a handbook or desk reference for students and a paradigm for scholars.

Written by the Context Group, this volume is an attempt to apply the social sciences to biblical explication without disavowing the historical-critical method. Viewing any approach to biblical studies "which attends to the linear uncovering of the relations between separate facts" as inadequate, the authors propose a "systems approach," which pays attention to "'wholes' as well as 'parts,' to 'totalities' as well as 'facts'" (ix). The volume is a comprehensive work on Luke-Acts, which, it is hoped, will serve as a representative collection of materials and models for understanding biblical texts within their original cultures.

Contrived as more than just another collection of exegetical essays or a historical reconstruction, the work seeks the meaning implicit in Luke-Acts by examining the values, social structures, and customs of Luke's society. The aim is to give modern Western readers insights that can assist in better understanding the peoples of Luke's time—their values, attitudes, and behavior. Having accepted the presupposition that there is no such thing as objective history, the authors' concern was the historical-critical method, insofar as it could help to ascertain what was typical in Luke's society so as to highlight the particular and the distinctive. Thus, their interest was in common, recurrent patterns of conceptualization, perceiving, and behaving, and not with the unique or occasional.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I has four chapters dealing with social psychology. Part II contains five chapters treating social institutions, while Part III's four chapters analyze social dynamics.