

185–88). But there are real advances here, not least in the demonstration of methods of characterization in ancient biography (pp. 143–44, pp. 175–77), which should lay to rest once and for all the old complaint that the gospels cannot be biographies because they are not interested in ‘character portrayal’. Perhaps Burridge’s single most illuminating contribution to the debate is his analysis of the subjects of the *Bioi* (pp. 134–38, pp. 162–67 & *Appendix*) and of the Gospels (pp. 195–99, pp. 223–25 and *Appendix*). This analysis will be confirmed, I believe, by more detailed analysis of transitivity patterns. In sociolinguistic terms, Jesus is the ‘subject’ of the Gospels to an extent that is hard to parallel, even in the acknowledged biographies.

In broad terms, then, I would concur with Burridge’s thesis: there will always be room for argument about details, but overall the cumulative effect of his analysis is impressive. If there is a sense of dissatisfaction on reaching the end of the book, it is probably simply because the classification of the Gospels as *Bioi* is too broad to answer many of the precise questions which many readers want answered. For Burridge, this breadth is quite deliberate: to achieve greater precision would be to discuss ‘subgenres’ (p. 247), and that is not part of the concern of this study. In fact the breadth is necessary to accommodate much of the Gospel evidence: often a correlation is expressed in negative terms (‘not dissimilar,’ p. 212; ‘there appears to be nothing about this generic feature preventing them being *Bioi*,’ p. 214). But the problem is that by using this technique Burridge risks failing to deliver the understanding he offered at the outset: if genre is an essential clue to the meaning of a text, what hermeneutical advances has this classification in the end enabled us to make? Burridge makes the point himself in his concluding paragraphs (pp. 255–6): ‘our solution may be easier to demonstrate [than a rival thesis put forward by Shuler], but produce less direct results, since *Bios* is a widely diverse and relatively flexible genre within which to place the gospels, without this conclusion dictating all that we need to know about their interpretation’.

Thus this is very much a book which opens up possibilities rather than one which solves problems. It will not answer questions about accuracy and the use of sources among the biographers, for example. There is a wide range within the genre in this respect: Plutarch or Nepos could draw on good historical sources, but the Alexander Romance (which Burridge does not discuss) is wildly imaginative despite the existence of sober historical accounts of Alexander, and the biographies of writers and philosophers

contain a lot which is described simply as ‘fiction’ by classical scholars like Mary Lefkowitz. Similarly the question of linguistic and cultural register is touched on, but left deliberately open: some biographers belong to (and write for) the literary élite, others are more ‘popular’ (p. 149, p. 185). Biographies could vary widely in purpose, too: some are written to praise their subject, some to attack, some to teach (pp. 149–52, pp. 185–88). Again, Burridge deliberately stresses the wide range of possibilities here, and readers who want a more precise analysis of the social functions of biography within a particular tradition will have to look elsewhere (see for example Talbert’s article on ‘Biography, Ancient’ in the new *Anchor Bible Dictionary*). There is room for much fruitful work on these and related areas before we can claim fully to appreciate the Gospel’s impact on their first readers.

But to say that more needs to be done is not to denigrate the achievement of this study. Burridge has done much to clarify a rather confused issue in Gospel studies, and students concerned with genre issues in many other areas of NT research should find this a helpful introduction. And it may be that he himself has underestimated the hermeneutical gain to be made from his demonstration of the centrality of Jesus to the Gospel form. Scholarly approaches to the Gospels in recent years have suggested a surprising number of different ‘subjects’ for the Gospels: Mark is ‘about’ discipleship, for example, or John is ‘about’ the community’s break with the synagogue. There is a lot to be said for reminding ourselves again of the obvious (but too easily forgotten) fact that first and foremost the Gospels are ‘books about Jesus’.

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Kingdom Concerns: A Theology of Mission Today

Ken Gnanakan

IVP, Leicester, 1993, £6.99

RÉSUMÉ

Il ne s'agit pas là d'un traité académique sur la mission, mais d'un ouvrage écrit par un missionnaire engagé. Il a été publié à l'intention de lecteurs asiatiques, mais il mérite une diffusion plus étendue. Gnanakan présente une grande vision de l'effort missionnaire sur le plan de l'évangélisation et de l'action sociale. L'ouvrage présente des points faibles,

par exemple une certaine confusion au sujet des relations entre l'Eglise et le Royaume, comme aussi la déclaration contestable que 'la mission était presque totalement négligée dans la compréhension réformée de l'ecclésiologie' (p. 175). Mais ce n'en est pas moins un livre tonique et stimulant.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Geschrieben von einem aktiven Missionar, ist dieser Band keine theoretische Abhandlung über Missiologie. Er ist vor allem für ein asiatisches Publikum geschrieben, doch ist dem Verlag dafür zu danken, daß er es einem breiteren Publikum zugänglich macht. Gnanakan bietet eine großangelegte Vision missionarischen Einsatzes, in der sowohl Evangelisierung als auch soziale Aktivität mit eingeschlossen sind. Das Buch hat seine Schwächen, wie z.B. das unklare Verhältnis zwischen Reich Gottes und Kirche und die umstrittene These, daß Missiologie in der reformierten Ekklesiologie fast unbekannt war (S. 175). Trotzdem ist es ein anregendes und herausforderndes Buch.

This volume is not an academic treatise on mission but the thinking of an active missionary. Though very much involved with advanced theological education, Gnanakan's vision is embodied in the ACTs Institute which he established on the outskirts of Bangalore in South India as a church/missionary training centre which reaches out to the Hindu communities nearby and much further afield. The book was originally published in India in 1989 with an Asian readership in mind. IVP is to be congratulated for making it more widely available, because we have much to learn from our brothers and sisters in the Third World.

Gnanakan's starting point is his dissatisfaction with the heavy emphasis on contextualisation that characterised the deliberations of the Asia Theological association Consultation in Seoul in 1982. He does not dispute the need for contextualising the gospel but he felt that the emphasis was focused too much on human effort. He went in search of a theology of mission that would be more God centred and biblical. This volume is the result.

He begins by tracing the development of missionary theory since the epoch-making missionary conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. His conclusion to this section is that there is an urgent need to return to a biblical view of mission. The bulk of the volume is then given over to developing such a view.

Beginning with creation, he examines a host of themes which make up the massive canvas of God's intention and purpose for the world which

He made. The main themes considered are creation, election, covenant, the character of God, promise and history, the kingdom, Paul's universal perspective, John's missiology and the role of the Holy Spirit. The volume ends with a short section on contemporary mission.

The breadth of the missionary vision presented is impressive. One feels excited and humbled when confronted with the scale of what God wants us to be involved with in his world through Jesus. The proper place given to the Old Testament, to the church and to the Holy Spirit also makes this a very full and balanced outline of God's mission. Given his original intention to find a theology of mission that is more God centred and biblical, this volume is unquestionably a success.

But that does not mean that it is devoid of weaknesses. The section of 'dialogue' could have been more incisive, showing more clearly that inclusivism and pluralism are only possible when the historical particularity of Jesus is ignored (pp. 37-43). The excellent section on Jesus Christ and creation does not fit very well in the chapter on 'The Old Testament Foundation'. Given the book's title, the crucial chapter on the kingdom ('The Kingdom Horizon' p. 113ff.) is patchy and I was left still wondering about the relationship between the kingdom and the church. I doubt whether the 'whole universe has been separated from God because of its sin' (p. 141) or that 'missiology was almost totally absent in the Reformed understanding of ecclesiology' (p. 175). In the case of the last point I would think that the Reformed view of mission is very close to Gnanakan's. The book as a whole is not easy reading and meaning has to be extracted with effort at times—but it is worth the effort.

One of the burning issues in evangelical missiology since the Lausanne Congree in particular has been the relationship between 'evangelism' and 'social action'. This issue is addressed towards the end of this volume. By that point the noble view of mission that has been expounded makes conflict between those two aspects of the life of the church impossible. 'Our preoccupation with the elements of mission,' he says, 'has led us to forge a partnership between evangelism and social action, implicitly accepting that the two elements are alien. Making known the kingdom of God consists of both proclamation and demonstration, however, and they constitute one whole-mission, which is an act of obedience to God's call to be rather than simply to do.'

This is a book to challenge and inspire as we seek the Lord Jesus' kingdom and righteousness.

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