

to social behavior from within, having learned to feel that way and to *want* to feel that way."

The comparison is open to many criticisms. Turnbull's depiction of the Mbuti as a virtually perfect society is likely to renew charges that he, and others who share his perception, are expressing personal bias rather than reporting anthropological fact. The bleak autobiographical episodes from his youth that he draws upon may strengthen the feeling that Turnbull's analysis is far from rigorous. And by no means does everyone in Western society have to be coerced into responsible social behavior.

These criticisms, well grounded or not, do not invalidate the main thrust of *The Human Cycle*. An overwhelming body of evidence indicates, for example, that many nonliterate cultures are far less violent than industrial societies, that they maintain a relationship to the environment that we have lost, and that they integrate the elderly into society more fully and more humanely than we do. People in industrial society are increasingly concerned about violence, about abuse of the environment, and about mis-

treatment of the rapidly growing number of elderly. More and more of them are searching for solutions to these problems. Turnbull sees nonliterate cultures as potential models that can help with the search.

The term long used to characterize these cultures, "primitive," implies a backwardness that has nothing to offer members of an advanced industrial society. Again and again Turnbull challenges that view. He invites us to explore the whole world around us to "learn about the many other things we might have become under different circumstances, or could still become if we so wished." Toward the end of the book he writes: "Just as we have the right to choose one life style over another, to prefer the American way of life to that of the French or Chinese or whatever, so we have the right to choose our own ideal of what 'society' should mean and be."

Certainly the Mbuti seem to be close to Turnbull's ideal, but he does not insist that we accept his choice. Rather, he urges us to fashion our own ideal from what we have learned and then to work toward making it a reality. **WV**

### **CHRIST UNMASKED: THE MEANING OF THE LIFE OF JESUS IN GERMAN POLITICS by Marilyn Chapin Massey**

(University of North Carolina Press: xi + 182 pp.: \$23.00)

*Hans Schwarz*

In this slim volume Marilyn Chapin Massey, an associate professor at the Harvard Divinity School, endeavors to recover the political meaning of *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, by David Friedrich Strauss. According to Massey, Strauss's work "is one of the most celebrated books of the nineteenth century," and "by its influence on the left-wing Hegelians and Karl Marx, the book changed the course of European and world history." She contends "that only when the Hegelian philosophy of religion is brought together with another type of interpretive guide can the political meaning of *The Life of Jesus* become evident." In order to give a political flavor to its theological and biblical content, she compares the book with a novel about a tragic young woman, Karl Gutzkow's *Wally the Skeptic*, published in 1936. Though the books have no direct literary dependence on each other, both were written in Germany at virtually the same time.

Massey devotes the first chapter to "Texts and Language," presenting a brief summary of the Strauss and Gutzkow books. In the

second chapter she escorts us through "Germany in the 1830s: Politics, Literature, and Religion," indicating the tension between the forces attempting to return Central Europe to its condition before the Napoleonic occupation and the forces leading to the 1848 revolution. She contrasts the Biedermeier culture, which was content with a very modest participation in political life, with the writers of Young Germany, who wanted to arouse Germany from its sleep. The writers of Young Germany, among whom was Gutzkow, soon got into trouble. Their works were banned in 1835, and even mention of them was considered a political crime. That this is the context in which *The Life of Jesus* must be read becomes evident when we hear that in 1830 the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm III declared that theology professors who do not feel bound by the dogmas of the Protestant Church as eternal truths are extremely dangerous to the state. Indeed, *The Life of Jesus* appeared in the midst of a growing confrontation between conservative and moderate political and theological forces. Massey concludes

that Strauss's *Life of Jesus* "would introduce democratic sentiments into German cultural life in the line of the Paris Revolution. Because *The Life of Jesus* did so as a Hegelian statement, its effects were not as easy to eliminate as were those of [Gutzkow's] novel. Hegel's theory of the monarchy, as well as his theory about Christ, would be unmasked [by Strauss] as containing at its core democratic implications that posed a direct threat to the union of throne and altar, which in the Prussia of the mid-1830s was also the union of monarchy and aristocracy."

In the next three chapters—"Irony: The Holy Principle of Spirit and Freedom," "Christ and Democracy," and "Aristocracy and Genius"—Massey's thesis is that Strauss was attempting to reinterpret Hegel by his assertion that humanity, not the individual, can receive the power of the Spirit. And contrary to Hegel's original intentions, Strauss makes the Hegelian principle supportive of a democratic one. The conservative, right-wing Hegelians had drawn a direct parallel between the God-man Jesus and the monarch. Strauss claimed this was untenable, since the divine had been incarnated in humanity as a whole.

According to Massey, *The Life of Jesus* was a "potent instrument of political protest," and it was immediately associated with the works of social and political radicals. Yet it did not inspire a successful democratic revolution, since in the third edition Strauss abandoned the notion of a democratic Christ through a changed assessment of the Gospel of John. He attributed greater historical accuracy to this gospel and came to view Jesus as belonging "to the category of highly gifted individuals who in the various spheres of life are called to raise the development of Spirit in humanity to higher levels"—in short, a religious genius. This third edition was marked by a pathos that destroyed the effect of irony.

Researchers into the history of Christian thought are today more prone to see their subject in a wide sociopolitical context. The same method also bears fruit in other areas of theology, such as the exegetical and practical disciplines. Massey has shown us its value in New Testament studies, and for this she must be commended. But we hear relatively little from her about the third edition of Strauss's *Life of Jesus*. Could it be that Strauss's change to conservatism in the third edition did not fit Massey's conception? Is this also why the reader is not told more about Strauss's explicit venture into politics? Though Massey may occasionally have overstated the significance of Strauss's

book, she has demonstrated that it was more than a repetition of positions inherited from the Enlightenment. 'WV

**IN SEARCH OF HISTORY:  
HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE  
ANCIENT WORLD AND THE  
ORIGINS OF BIBLICAL HISTORY**  
by John Van Seters

(Yale University Press: xiii + 399 pp.: \$30.00)

Tamara M. Green

Every man, no matter what his philosophical or theological inclinations, tries to understand the nature of his world and his place in it, not only at the particular moment in which he lives but, just as important, in the much larger framework of the continuing process of history. Sainte-Beuve remarked that "history seen from a distance undergoes a strange metamorphosis; it produces the illusion—most dangerous of all—that it is rational." To write good history, then, is to try to understand the present as well as the past—an attempt to make sense of the process of history in order to make the past and the present and even the future seem comprehensible.

How to make rational the history contained within the Old Testament is a problem that has occupied biblical scholars for generations, but so complex are the puzzles of Israelite historiography that solutions seem at times unattainable. Even armed with the intellectual weapons of textual analysis, anthropological and sociological theory, philology, comparative linguistics, and archaeology, the critic who would wade into battle must first struggle with the armies of scholars that have preceded him. The resulting confrontations range from the petty skirmishes of etymology to the major engagements of source criticism to the Armageddon of methodology.

From the beginnings of modern biblical scholarship, fierce wars have been waged over the issue of how best to approach the process of historical analysis; and the difficulties of establishing a methodology have been complicated for the Jewish or Christian critic by the theological implications of the message of the text itself. Traditionally, students of biblical historiography have begun by positing a dichotomy between the Israelite view of history and that of other contemporary ancient cultures. This position maintains that Old Testament history, unlike any other, is teleological and even eschatological in intent and therefore must

be considered separately from other historiographical traditions. But, as John Van Seters, James A. Gray Professor of Biblical Literature at the University of North Carolina, rightly points out in this, his most recent book, such a dichotomy is not very helpful and, in fact, in many ways incorrect.

Professor Van Seters declares that "the primary concern of this book is to understand the origins and nature of history writing in ancient Israel... against the background of the Near Eastern and classical world." To that end, he has made an elaborate survey of the nature of historical documents and writing in classical Greece (primarily Herodotus), Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Levant, and among the Hittites, providing the reader with both genre analysis and literary history, as well as a critique of previous scholarship in each particular area. Having scrutinized these comparative materials, he is then ready to investigate his major concern: historiography in the Old Testament. More specifically, Van Seters is intent on uncovering the first Israelite historian and, "by implication, the first in the intellectual tradition of the west."

This sixth-century B.C. writer, whom the author calls the Deuteronomistic historian (Dtr), was the first to collect, organize, and utilize critically the materials that form the

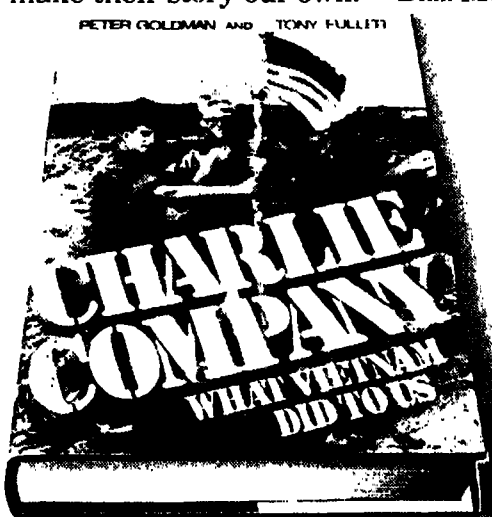
historical continuum of Deuteronomy to 2 Kings. What Dtr was attempting was "not merely a chronicle of events. Dtr's purpose, above all, is to communicate through this story of the people's past a sense of their identity—and that is the *sine qua non* of history writing." In order to establish the reality of Dtr as a conscious historian, Van Seters has to prove the thematic, literary, and theological unity of the text; and the reader must decide whether he does so convincingly.

The traditional view, with various modifications, has been that the earliest attempt at historical composition in the Old Testament was that of the author called J (the Yahwist), who constructed the core of the narrative that begins with the second chapter of Genesis and continues through 1 Kings 4:25 and the reign of Solomon. The Yahwist lived during or shortly after the reign of Solomon, that is, during the tenth century B.C., and it is into his account that later authors redacted other materials. In addition, combined with and perhaps contemporary with J is E (Elohim). Several centuries later, another author or authors continued the story of Israel down to the fall of the monarchy and the exile, incorporating not only J and E but other independent sources, including historical records from the court

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