ficial if the editors had decided to use this commemoration as an opportunity to challenge future research to focus upon such lesser studied texts as the *Interpretation of Knowledge, Prayer of the Apostle Paul, Apocalypse of Peter,* and *Asclepius* (among others) rather than simply reinforce the emphasis upon such widely studied texts as the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Gospel of Thomas* (and to a lesser degree, the *Gospel of Philip*).

These caveats aside, what emerges is a solid collection of essays for the study of Gnosticism. Over the past fifty years, the study of Gnosticism has flourished and matured. This collection, both as indicated by the quality of the essays as well as the diverse voices involved, is an excellent indication that this field of study is still full of vitality and creativity–indeed, it is possible that the study of Gnosticism has never been as healthy as it is today.

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Early Christian Historiography: Narratives of Retributive Justice. By G. W. Trompf. New York: Continuum, 2000. ISBN 0-8264-5294-9. Pp. xx+362.

G. W. Trompf has produced a painstaking analysis of early Christian historiographical methods. As a backdrop, Trompf overviews the principles of historiography in Hebraic and Graeco-Roman societies. He identifies patterns of "retributive logic" driving the ancient narratives—patterns which, according to Trompf, are deeply embedded even in modern historiography. Since antiquity, historians have generally held "there are *reasons* why a certain group runs into trouble, or an individual falls ill and dies, or *per contra* some great 'blessing' is felt" (4). In short, retributive logic holds that the righteous will receive reward for their goodness and the wicked will receive judgment for their evil.

Of course, a problem with the logic of retribution is the longstanding recognition that sometimes the good suffer and the evil prosper. Thus, Trompf's book explores both how early Christian historians applied retributive logic to their historiography and how they dealt with what often appears to be a breakdown of the basic principles of retributive logic. In other words, Trompf argues that the early Christian historians, rather than abandoning the principle of retributive logic in the face of evidence to the contrary, upheld and modified the principle in creative ways.

Trompf's investigation begins with an examination of the biblical author, Luke, and the two books credited to him: *The Gospel of Luke* and *Acts.* Trompf believes Luke-Acts is so significant a start to Christian historiography that at no point in the following Patristic periods is the "emotive vibrancy" and "unmistakable authority" ever really matched (90). For Luke, retributive logic is operative both in the present and the future, but there are no clear-cut guarantees whether this logic will come to fruition either in the immediate or eschatological sense. Though several incidents in Luke's accounts seem to illustrate an

immediate retribution for evil (e.g., the death of Ananias and Sapphira), others are left unresolved, though framed in such a way that the reader is left with hope for eventual justice (e.g., the imprisonment of righteous Paul at the end of *Acts*).

Despite the "virtual non-existence" of historiography in the immediate post-apostolic period (109), Eusebius of Caesarea picks up the logic of retribution in his *Ecclesiastical History*, but is forced "to meet the preconceptions of two audiences: those steeped in the knowledge and traditions of the Bible, and those familiar with the devices of Greek historiography" (127). Unlike his predecessors who had to contend with the problem of why Christians consistently faced persecution, despite what was assumed to be their generally righteous character, Eusebius has the advantage of having witnessed the rise of a "Christian empire" under Constantine the Great. Thus, for Eusebius (and for Lactantius), "the notion of retributive justice passes from the old defensive to the new aggressive, from providing hope for the desperate and oppressed to equipping the 'winners of the day' with a vibrant ideology," (121). Eusebius' ecclesiastical history, then, is a history of refining; persecution prepared the Church for God's victory in establishing a "political monotheism" (135). This is not to say that Eusebius abandoned all historiographical caution, but Trompf argues that Eusebius' retributive logic is ultimately more "this-worldly" than eschatological.

The remainder of Trompf's book surveys several other Christian historians (or theologians writing historiographical material) following Eusebius, and includes chapters on Rufinus of Aquileia (Ch.4); Athanasius and Philostorgius (Ch.5); Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret (Ch.6); Sulpicius, Orosius (Ch.8); and a surprisingly short chapter on Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (Ch.7). In all of these Trompf perceives the application of retributive logic, though with various nuances. Rufinius, for example, is a "man in the middle" (173) who tried to restrain from too retributive an emphasis while still seeking in his *Historia* to encourage and foster Christian piety founded upon the immutable principle of retribution (172). Augustine, too, uses a sophisticated form of retributive justice. He simultaneously acknowledges that sometimes the good face adversity and the evil prosperity, but that it is nevertheless true that were it not for the historical consequences of the Incarnation of Christ and the coming of Christianity, things would be much worse (271-2).

In the end, we have to ask whether the retributive motif itself does justice to the complexity of the work of these early Christian historians. Trompf undeniably identifies retributive elements throughout each of the historians he examines, but is retribution always the foremost pattern driving the writing of their histories? Even Luke, the historian who Trompf identifies as paradigmatic, explicitly identifies a different purpose for his narratives: "to write an orderly account ... so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed" (Luke 1:3-4 NRSV). Given the characteristic emphasis on catechism of the faithful in the patristic period, one must ask whether the principle of retributive justice, while undeniably present, is not finally too narrow a motif by which to interpret the historians examined.

This criticism aside, however, Trompf's work deserves careful attention, not only from church historians, but also theologians, ethicists, classicists, and those engaged in comparative religious studies. Unfortunately, one may become lost in Trompf's extensive detail and intricate primary source work and this may discourage non-specialists from reading the book, but Trompf is to be commended for producing a thoroughly researched, eminently readable and excellent work that pays rich dividends to those willing to read it carefully and thoughtfully.

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***The Bible: A Very Short Introduction*. By John Riches. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. ISBN 0-19-285343-0. Pp. 157.**

The self-stated purpose of the Very Short Introductions series it to provide "stimulating ways into new subjects," and this book attempts with relative success to live up this aim. It begins with the Bible as a "great book." Riches points out that the Bible is the world's all time best seller (3) and goes on to introduce the topic which will be primary in the rest of his work, the role of the interpreter in understanding the Bible. Chapter two consists of a brief introduction to historical-critical biblical study. Examples given make sense to a biblical scholar but might be less meaningful to someone to whom the biblical narrative is unknown. No outline of the biblical story is ever given, so that references to "the flood ... Abraham's migration ... God's covenant with Abraham" (17) and other biblical narratives might be baffling to readers who have no familiarity with these stories. The third chapter, on the process of canonisation, is clear and provides useful basic information on how the texts came together in the various canons. The remaining six chapters, out of a total of nine, continue the primary theme of the book, how the Bible has been and continues to be received by a variety of readers. The first of these chapters consists largely of a discussion of the reception of the Akedah throughout the centuries. The Jewish tradition of interpretation of this story is followed by a suggestion that gospel narratives of the suffering of Jesus before his crucifixion refer to the Akedah. The next chapter looks at the traditional attribution of wide-ranging authority to the Bible in the Christian West, gradually challenged and eventually destroyed by the growth of new scientific methods and principles, from Copernicus to Darwin, which tended to limit the authority of the Bible to the religious and ethical domains, narrowly defined. Riches continues with a brief discussion of how enlightenment principles led to the rise of historical criticism as applied to the Bible and to the related "Quest for the historical Jesus."

The remaining chapters focus on the socio-political and cultural use of the Bible, both in the past and today. The Bible in the realm of politics has been used to justify both oppression of indigenous peoples and their liberation from