
Pro Rege

Volume 6 | Number 3

Article 8

March 1978

Masterpieces of Religious Verse (Book Review)

Merle Meeter
Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege

Recommended Citation

Meeter, Merle (1978) "Masterpieces of Religious Verse (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 6: No. 3, 31 - 32.

Available at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol6/iss3/8

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.



A quarterly faculty publication of
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa

human sexuality is reduced to a variety of techniques that are intended to produce pleasure.

Unfortunately, Dr. Wheat seems to have fallen into this secular reductionistic tradition. The total of the Bible's framework for sex in marriage is found in a list of eleven principles (pp. 23-30), each with specific Bible references given as a guide to finding God's design in marriage. Several of these principles, from a psychological viewpoint, are good advice, but they in no way serve as a foundation for a Christian perspective on sexuality.

After attempting to set the stage for a Christian understanding of sexuality, Dr. Wheat presents a series of techniques designed to help couples deal with typical sexual problems. Perhaps the most common problem, "the tortoise and the hare," is dealt with first. After the admonition that sex is intended to be pleasurable for both persons and the importance of praying about this problem, the Masters and Johnson technique for premature ejaculation is described in detail.

The authors next address themselves to the problems of orgasmic dysfunction for both men and women. With a promising title, "Fulfillment Ahead," the non-orgasmic wife is offered a series of techniques designed to allow her to experience pleasure and eventually orgasm. The techniques suggested involve touching and manual stimulation. The suggestions offered to the impotent (non-orgasmic) male are less complete. After summarizing the basic clinical components of impotence, the authors suggest that the husband forget his problem, and through talk, touch, and teasing learn to experience sexual pleasure.

Throughout these chapters, the focus is on experiencing pleasure by the person having difficulty; little or no attention is given to the fabric of the marital relationship, nor to the Biblical injunction to give oneself for the other's satisfaction (I Cor. 7). Clinically, these chapters and the manual as a whole are rather simplistic and inadequate. A comprehensive integration of the many possible emotional and psychological factors connected with man's sexuality is absent.

Can *Intended for Pleasure* be helpful to the Christian community? Yes, for the couple in need of practical guidance. Yes, for any couple too "uptight" sexually to discuss their difficulty. Yes, for use in conjunction with ongoing marital counseling. But no, for those seeking a clearly Reformed approach to man's sexuality. Believe in Christ, pray about your problems, and practice the correct technique do not provide an adequate Christian perspective on this subject.

Masterpieces of Religious Verse, James Dalton Morrison, Editor, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977, 701 pages, paperback, \$9.95. Reviewed by Merle Meeter, Associate Professor of English.

This well-bound edition, with a forest-brook scene on the cover, is a reprint of the 1948 Harper and Brothers' edition. Over 1,500 poems—most of them complete—by more than 900 poets are superbly indexed by Author, Title, First Line, and Topic in this excellent collection, the most comprehensive volume of religious poetry on the market. The years and years of compilation and correspondence necessary to prepare a work of this magnitude are awesome.

The contents are arranged under seven headings: Book I. God; Book II. Jesus; Book III. Man; Book IV. The Christian Life; Book V. The Kingdom of God; Book VI. The Nation, and the Nations; and Book VII. Death and Immortality. Moreover, there are ten to forty subheadings under each major rubric.

The word "religious" in the title is aptly chosen, for the poems do indeed reflect religious perspectives—as all of life is at root religious—albeit, of various types. Although the orientation of much of the poetry is Biblical-Christian, many of the collected poems were obviously written by pantheists, deists, unitarians, transcendentalists, humanists of various allegiances, and proponents of Hinduism and other mystical religions.

Among the more outspokenly non-Christian poets anthologized here are Aristophanes, Matthew Arnold, Emily Bronte, Robert Burns, Lord Byron, Stephen Crane, George Eliot, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Euripides, Thomas Hardy, William Ernest Henley, A.E. Housman, John Keats, D.H. Lawrence, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Omar Khayyám, Plotinus, Edgar Allen Poe, Carl Sandburg, George Santayana, Seneca, Percy Shelley, Sophocles, Charles Algernon Swinburne, Rabindranath Tagore, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and W.B. Yeats.

My intent in the above listing is to suggest the comprehensiveness of the selection, but also to indicate the diversity of religious commitments and the multiplicity of gods formed in *man's* image and designed to supplant the one true Sovereign, the Triune God, Creator of heaven and earth, and Jesus Christ the Savior-King. Nonetheless, the careful study of these representative poems can lead to enlightening comparisons and contrasts. Teachers, pastors,

literary critics, reviewers, anyone who enjoys poetry will find such activity rewarding.

Of course, hundreds of well-crafted, distinctively Christian poems are also included in this collection. I recommend especially the poems of Richard Baxter, the 37 poetic passages from the Bible, Anne Bradstreet, Thomas Browne, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, John Bunyan, John Byrom, John Calvin, G.K. Chesterton, William Cowper, Richard Crashaw, Fanny Crosby, John Donne, John Dryden, T.S. Eliot, Giles Fletcher, Paul Gerhardt, Reginald Heber, Felicia Hemans, George Herbert, Katherine Tynan Hinkson, G.M. Hopkins, John of Damascus, James Weldon Johnson, John Keble, Martin Luther, George MacDonald, Alice Meynell, John Milton, John Newton, Francis Quarles, Christina Rossetti, Dorothy L. Sayers, Edmund Spenser, Francis Thompson, Thomas Traherne, Henry Vaughan, Isaac Watts, the Wesleys, and Dorothy Clarke Wilson.

The only limitation of this valuable volume is that, necessarily, as a reprint of the 1948 Harper edition, it does not survey the last thirty years of Christian poetry.

Richard Mather of Dorchester, by B.R. Burg. The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky 1976. 207 pages, \$15.95. Reviewed by James A. De Jong, Associate Professor of Theology.

Although not of the historical stature of John Cotton or Thomas Hooker, Richard Mather was an important first-generation Puritan in the Bay Colony. He wrote several polemical pieces defending the "New England way" of gathering churches. He represented a position on ecclesiastical office and authority that had definite Presbyterian leanings. His criteria for church membership were predicated less on the subjective, regenerative experience than were those of John Cotton. He was instrumental in drafting the Cambridge Platform, formulating the half-way covenant, and reversing the Erastian direction of colonial church-state relations. Mather is worthy of this monograph, therefore, and Professor Burg of the Arizona State University history department has placed us in his debt by producing it.

Two chapters are given to Mather's youth, education, early career, and settlement in New England in the 1630's. The third chapter investigates his coming to terms with and defense of congregationalism. There follows a chapter on Mather's style of ministry. And the last two chapters focus on Mather's mature career in

terms of his role in formulating the Cambridge Platform and the half-way covenant. The Epilogue rounds out Mather's contributions to New England life and religion. Notes, a fine bibliographical essay, and an index follow.

Burg's reconstructive interpretation of Mather's life is in the genre of much current historiography which employs sociological, psychological, and anthropological models. It is patterned on the insights of such men as Erik Erikson and Claude Levi-Strauss. Its character is most evident when Burg explains Mather's conversion as emerging out of an adolescent identity crisis, several shifts in his theological position as rather calculated attempts to gain the acceptance of the ecclesiastical establishment, and tensions between himself and his congregation as a manifestation of differences between an intellectual and the peasant society he served.

The credibility of such a historical (psychological-sociological) methodology in this case is strained by the notable absence of diaries, journals—with the exception of a travel journal that Mather kept on his Atlantic crossing—and letters, which would have brought us a step closer to Mather's motivation. Virtually all his writings were theological. It is unfortunate that Burg does not do more in the way of interpreting Mather from the perspective of the Puritan sense of mystical experience and doctrine of conversion, both of which undoubtedly shaped Mather's anthropology and his motivation more than some of the forces stressed by the twentieth-century models that Burg employs. In short, one wonders whether Burg has shown us the real Richard Mather or whether such a recent biographer as Robert Middlekauff, in his book, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals: 1596-1728* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1971), has not painted a truer portrait.

Burg traces with commendable precision the evolution of major New England theological controversies and Mather's role in them. Deftly and convincingly he disabuses us of the myth of clerical solidarity in New England. Yet, in reaching back for the English roots of New England Puritanism, Burg is less than reliable. Richard Sibbes's doctrine of universal calling, Burg would have us believe, commits him to a position of universal salvation (pages 77, 78, 80). Sibbes's sermons "The Ungodly's Misery" and even "The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax" show how preposterous and inexcusable Burg's interpretation is on this point.

Withal, however, the Burg study is a valuable addition to our understanding of early New England religion.