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From: "David C. Hindley" <dhindley@...>

To: <crosstalk2@yahoogroups.com>

Sent: Saturday, February 10, 2001 9:01 PM

Subject: [XTalk] Freke & Gandy, _The Jesus Mysteries_

I was able to buy a copy of this book a couple days ago. According to the dust jacket, Timothy Freke has a BA in philosophy and Peter Gandy has a MA in classical civilizations, and [the two] have co-authored three previous books, _The Complete Guide to World Mysticism_, _Hermetica: The Lost Wisdom of the Pharoahs_ and _The Wisdom of the Pagan Philosophers_. Pretty much popular level stuff, it seems.

Usually when I check out a new book I look first at the critical notes. These take up about 64 pages out of a total of 343 (18% of the book), and it appears they want this book to be taken seriously. These cite all sorts of authorities, including primary sources, but rely heavily on secondary sources even for points that are seminal to their thesis. They also have a bibliography (7 pages with roughly 220 works cited), which features authors who are all over the map as far as orientation. I noticed J. Allegro, G. R. S. Mead, G. A. Wells, and Carl Jung mixed in with specialists on the Greek mysteries and translations of the classics (no LCL editions, only Penguin editions).

Another technique I like to employ is to look at the final chapter first, as this usually tells you the most about the authors' orientation and/or agendas. They appear to believe that "[m]ystics of all spiritual traditions have taught that there is only one Truth, ever present and never changing" (pg 255). To them, Christian mythology was created to serve the purposes of a mystery religion and is not based in any way on a real Jesus, but rather is synthesized from the common myths of mystery religions in general. This truth has been hijacked in the interests of "Literalist Christianity," which "has ... been the cause of deep divisions". They hope that their Jesus Mysteries Thesis (it's official, I guess) will offer an "opportunity to heal the wounds left in the Western soul by these dreadful schisms" (pg 254).

Reading through several chapters, I found them using generalities quite a bit more than made me comfortable. The portions on the mysteries themselves are less tedious than those on Christianity, which almost come across as a lecture (in the negative sense). They come across as people who "know" exactly what has going on in ancient minds, and all things seem to be interpreted from their perspective that a universal mystical truth existed (and exists).

As for the parallels between Christian traditions and the myths of the mystery religions, which on the face of things do make me scratch my head and ponder, I would think that the reader would derive most benefit by tracing back the footnotes to the primary source documents and creating a database of parallels as well as devising a means to grade their similarities and differences. The worse that could happen would be that the reader would know a whole lot more about such parallels than s/he did before. I am very probably going to do just this at some point in the future, solely due to the prompting of this book.

Regards,

Dave Hindley
Cleveland, Ohio, USA