

Sabourin, Leopold. *The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning*. 2 vols. Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1969. xix + 626 pp. \$ 17.50.

In the books here reviewed Leopold Sabourin, S. J., presents before the wider circle of the reading public a critical introduction to the Psalter with special attention paid to the *Sitz im Leben*, *Gattungen*, and essential spiritual message of each psalm. Schooled in the Biblical norms set down by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) and nurtured in the liturgical reforms advocated by Vatican II, the author, who is professor of exegesis and theology at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and in Jerusalem, has as his aim not an exhaustive commentary but an introduction to the content and intent of the Psalter, which is viewed by him as an inspiring odyssey into Western man's religious heritage. Sabourin seeks to accomplish his aim by classifying the psalms into major categories which include hymns, enthronement psalms, Zion canticles, laments and thanksgiving psalms of the individual and the community, royal psalms, wisdom psalms, prophetic exhortation, historic psalms, and liturgies.

The author, in the preface, implies little originality, and it is true that the volumes, written with enthusiasm about an interesting subject, contain little which will enlighten the scholar who is acquainted with the vast literature that has poured forth in the last 60 years in regard to psalm studies. Essentially, Sabourin's work is based upon the research of a number of European scholars: H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (1926), and *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, completed by Begrich (1927; 1933²); S. Mowinckel, *Psalmstudien I-IV* (1921-1924); H.-J. Kraus, *Worship in Israel* (1966); R. Tournay and R. Schwab, *Les Psaumes* (1955²); A. Weiser, *The Psalms* (1962), and M. Dahood, *Psalms I and Psalms II* (1966 and 1968). The sensitive scholar will complain that Sabourin borrows and cites lavishly from his sources, but the method is desirable since the work is primarily intended for clergy, theological students, and intelligent laity. The great benefit of these volumes is that they give the English reader the results of some of the best contemporary scholarship on the psalms, and their major defect is a dearth of original statements on some of the basic problems of psalm study.

The author's chapters are not bogged down with limitless discussions of the date and authorship of individual psalms, such as often characterize the *zeitgeschichtliche* approach. The reader will correctly be left with the impression that the crowning achievement of the critical approach to the study of the Psalter is the classification of the psalms in categories of their original function. Each literary category is provided with a general introduction which is perceptively increased, but not at the expense of tedious repetition, when the individual psalm is investigated. Convenient appendices as to psalm category and the page reference to its text and introduction are found at the end of the second volume. The author is careful not to sacrifice the

traditional Christian message of the Psalter on the altar of Higher Criticism, and his observations on the religious experience, teaching, and social background of the psalmists are to be welcomed. He also demonstrates a familiarity with the research done on the psalms in light of Babylonian, Egyptian, and Canaanite-Ugaritic influences. Certainly it is a work that must be accorded worthy recognition in the literature on Psalms. Its mastery of the secondary literature, its ability to move from general introduction to textual minutiae, its cross textual references, and its extensive bibliography contribute to making it an important reserve source for the Bible student.

There are, however, a number of criticisms which must be made. In ch. 2 and following, Sabourin posits the belief in a cultic interpretation for a number of psalms. It is unfortunate that he has presented for the general reader without a meaningful critique the highly speculative theories of Mowinckel and the Myth-and-Ritual School, that there existed in ancient Israel the annual New Year enthronement of Yahweh influenced by the Babylonian *Akitu* festival, and the similar hypothetical views of Weiser who finds a pre-exilic *he-hâg* covenant festival as the true setting for many of the psalms. It should be stressed that there is no ostensible evidence for either ceremonial festivity in the Bible. Granted that the Hebrews made profitable use of a common Amorite, Ugaritic, Canaanite, and Mesopotamian vocabulary, this does not establish the fact that Israel shared similar institutional patterns, as was convincingly shown by Y. Kaufman in his classic *Toledoth Ha-Emunah Ha-Yisre'elith* (1947, II, 646-727).

There is a noticeable imbalance both in regard to coverage of certain psalms and in regard to methodology, which at times is a potpourri of literary-analytical, form-critical, and cult-functional approaches. The translation notes often represent a compendium of opinions, and Sabourin is almost exclusively restricted to the apparatus of the Confraternity Version. Furthermore, there is an apparent limit to the author's understanding of Hebrew stylistic rules, which include strophic structure, elements of form, meter, and to a lesser extent, rhythm.

M. Dahood, the author's teacher and colleague at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, has written much in the areas of *Biblica* and *Ugaritica*. But his usage of different philological evidence to explain difficult syntactical phrases in the Hebrew Bible and particularly in Psalms has been questioned by M. Pope (*JBL*, LXXXV [1966], 455-466), A. F. Rainy (*Leshonenu*, XXX [1966], 250-272), and recently J. C. Greenfield (*JAOS*, LXXXIX [1969], 174-178), and I object to Sabourin's indiscriminate application of his mentor's material.

Given the fact that he is writing for a Christian publication, the scholars whose works he cites are almost all Christians, so that the general reader might conclude that none but Catholics and Protestants are working in the field. It is intolerable for a work which claims to make available in readable form the best modern material on

Psalms not to include a coverage of the work done by U. Cassuto, Y. Kaufmann, H. L. Ginsburg, S. Gevitz, M. H. Segal, and A. Hurvitz on Ugaritica, psalmody, and Biblical Hebrew poetry. The author's defense, mentioned in the preface (and quoted sheepishly, I might add, by R. A. F. MacKenzie who wrote the foreword) that he was limited only to works to which "he had direct access," is inexcusable since his periodic presence in Jerusalem would permit him easy access to the books found at the Jewish National Library on the campus of the Hebrew University. It must be assumed that his knowledge of rabbinic tradition and contemporary Judaism is limited, since his usage of the Rabbinic Bible is restricted to a misplaced quotation from Ibn Ezra (not Aben Ezra as found in II, 189 and 313) and erroneous identifications of "verses of praise" in daily Jewish prayer. It may be objected that Sabourin's treatment of the foreign influences on the Psalter is not at all conclusive for the advanced student. The possible connection between Aramaic, Phoenician, and Moabite (*e.g.*, Moabite Stone, line 7, and Ps 59:11 and 118:7) with the psalms goes unnoticed. He fails to discuss the Sumero-Akkadian penitential psalms: *eršemma*, *eršahunga*, *šu'illa*, *ki'utukam*, and *dingiršadibba* prayer and their effect on Hebrew laments of the individual and the community. Also, errors were allowed to creep into the text: *e.g.*, incorrect spellings, Latinisms (Malachias, Machabees), and confusion of Hebrew vowel letters (*šo'n* and not *š'on* as found in II, 324).

In spite of the criticism expressed by this reviewer it is useful to have a Catholic view of the Psalter which treats quite seriously and sympathetically the findings of modern scholarship.

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ZEV GARBER

Trotter, F. Thomas, ed. *Jesus and the Historian*. Written in Honor of Ernest Cadman Colwell. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968. 176 pp. \$5.95.

It is very fitting for his colleagues at Claremont to honor Colwell with a *Festschrift*. Few among those dedicated to theological education in America deserve one as much as he does. It was, therefore, a felicitous idea to undertake the project.

The essays presented to Colwell, like most that find their way into a *Festschrift*, represent the scholarly interests of their authors. This means that the words in the title have to be stretched to their broadest sense in order to be applicable to all that follows. If there is a thread running through and holding the pieces together, it is the attempt to elucidate at some point the current understanding of Jesus in the light of further research or new hermeneutical presuppositions.

Besides words of appreciation addressed to Colwell by the editor, and