

history or a source collection, rather than as an admixture of the two.

Moreover, there are considerable sections in the volume that are extraneous to the main discussion, and that lead the reader into "blind alleys" as far as the main topic is concerned. The chapter about Gnostic antinomianism, mentioned above, is only one such example. Several chapters that deal with the Easter question in early church history fall into the same category. If in his discussion the author had related this particular question in a meaningful way to his main topic, the inclusion would have been good and justified; but Odom has generally failed to draw out the relationships.

In this connection, it may be observed that in his brief chapter on "Hippolytus" (pp. 210-214) he seems more interested in the paschal chronological tables than in Hippolytus' references to Sabbath and/or Sunday. It is unfortunate that precisely here he has missed calling attention to one of the most significant early statements about the weekly Sabbath fast (this indeed is one of the very few sources overlooked by Odom). Hippolytus, in his Daniel commentary, polemicizes against those who maintain the Sabbath fast. Incidentally, a recognition of this may have helped Odom avert another historical misunderstanding, in his chapter on Tertullian, where he quotes an outdated and erroneous opinion of Joseph Bingham in support of the idea that, to use Bingham's words, "it is next to impossible, that the sabbath should have been a fast in the Roman church at this time [the time of Tertullian's *On Fasting*], and yet not have been discerned by so acute a man as Tertullian" (p. 196, n. 26). (For a discussion of the Sabbath fast in early Christianity, see, e.g., Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome, 1977), pp. 187-196, and Kenneth A. Strand, "A Note on the Sabbath Fast in Early Christianity," *AUSS* 3 [1965]: 167-174.)

In conclusion, I would say that in spite of my criticism of Odom's book on some rather basic matters, the volume has considerable merit as a compendium of ancient source materials. It is evident that the author has put much effort and considerable research into locating such a comprehensive collection of primary source materials. Indeed, the overview of statements from the different writers up through Eusebius is excellent and can be used with profit by the careful reader who sifts historical judgments from the primary data given. The lack of an index and bibliography is unfortunate, as is also the fact that footnote references lack imprint information (even the dates of publication are omitted).

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Talbert, Charles H. *What Is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977. 147 pp. \$9.95.

Two views prevail concerning the literary genre of the canonical gospels. One view maintains that they are biographies in the same class as Graeco-Roman biographies. Another view affirms that they are not biographies but apostolic *kerygma* built up into a vivid narrative form. The author's purpose is to demonstrate that the gospels do indeed fit into the biographical genre, and he marshals a large amount of evidence for this purpose.

The three main arguments set forth against the view that the gospels are biographies are "(1) the gospels are mythical, the Graeco-Roman biographies are not; (2) the gospels are cultic, the Graeco-Roman biographies are not; and, (3) while the gospels emerge from a community with a world-negating outlook, the literary biographies are produced by and for a world-affirming people" (p. 2). The first provides the structure; the second, the function; and the third, the attitude—all of which in conjunction are necessary for a genre under which gospels can be classified. In

establishing his point that the gospels are biographies, the author accepts this set of criteria as valid. His task, therefore, is to demonstrate that the Graeco-Roman biographies have these three characteristics.

Chaps. 2 and 3 discuss mythical structure, but unfortunately the author does not define myth until chap. 4 under cultic function. He bases his definition on those of Malinowski and Eliade, who see it as a narrative involving supernatural beings and explaining the origin of the universe or some part of it. The myth serves as a model and legitimation for human activities today. The evidence for the presence of this mythical quality in Graeco-Roman biographies, Talbert finds in the stories of the immortals, men who because of some extraordinary qualities were believed to have been taken up into heaven and granted immortality. Included in the myth of the immortals are divine parentage (either father or mother), prediction that the individual would be taken up, no trace of physical remains after death, and appearances to people after death. Though there is absence of the parousia theme and the exclusiveness found in Jesus, the similarity between the two types of accounts is apparent.

With respect to the Fourth Gospel, the myth of the ascending-descending Redeemer originates not in Gnosticism but in the descent and ascent of wisdom and in the angelology of Hellenistic Judaism. Talbert, however, cannot find in the extant Graeco-Roman biographies any use of the descending-ascending redeemer such as is found in the Fourth Gospel. It seemed inconceivable to the Greek mind for a divine being to come down as a man. There are momentary epiphanies in human form, but there is no passing through human form till death. Talbert does not feel that the Fourth Gospel should be classified in a different genre because of its use of a different myth. The determining factor is its use of myth in the structure of its story.

Talbert believes that the didactic biographies which employ myth were either cult legends or expanded cult legends. A clue to the cultic setting of certain biographies is the close connection made between the life and the teaching of the biographee. These biographies were preserved for the sake of the religious values of the community.

In regard to the third criterion noted above, the author denies that the Gospels reflect a world-negating mood. But he maintains also that it is possible to have an eschatological perspective and to employ literary genres without eschatological perspectives, such as in letters. Then through a rather subtle argument, which really does not establish his point, the author affirms that the attitude of the Gospels "is not at all a world-negating one which prohibits Christian self-expression in the literary forms of the profane world" (p. 127).

It seems to this reviewer that the arguments of the author become progressively weaker and, in fact, he seems to change his approach at the end. His first point, that the Graeco-Roman biographies have mythical structure, is valid, though at one point his presentation in this regard is confusing. On p. 55 he states that "the descent-ascent mythology could be used by Graeco-Roman authors to interpret the lives of historical figures," but on p. 77 he says that this motif was not used and that such descents were only momentary. It seems strange that when he needs to show that Graeco-Roman biographies had a descending-ascending redeemer such as is found in the Fourth Gospel, much of his time is spent in giving evidence of the presence of this motif in Judaism. He ends up with the problem of not finding this motif in Graeco-Roman biographies, and thus he falls back upon the argument that it is not necessary to have this particular myth but only that these biographies have a mythical structure (the myth of the immortals). One wonders, then, why all this material about the presence of the descending-ascending redeemer in Judaism is being presented, at all. On the other hand, the argument concerning the cultic *Sitz im Leben* of the Graeco-Roman biographies is plausible, though it appears that the word "cultic" has to be stretched somewhat for Talbert's purpose.

Talbert's last argument is somewhat puzzling in several respects. His approach changes from showing how the Graeco-Roman biographies are like the Gospels to how the Gospels are like the Graeco-Roman biographies; i.e., they are both world-affirming rather than world-negating. The obvious reason for this shift is the fact that the burden of proof is to show that the Gospels are world-affirming. At the outset it would seem difficult to claim that the Gospels have the same attitude toward the world as the secular biographies. How does the author seek to accomplish this *tour de force*? He does it by reference to the compositional method of the Gospels. He attempts to show through this method that the attitude of the Gospels was inclusive rather than exclusive; i.e., they did not totally reject material with a different point of view, but reinterpreted it within a larger whole with another point of view. His discussion here is not entirely clear. For instance, how absolutizing in intent is a simple collection of sayings or miracles? Or what limits are there to the principle of inclusion? At any rate, how the fact that the Gospels are similar to the secular biographies in their compositional method demonstrates that they are both world-affirming in the same way and satisfies Bultmann's third criterion is difficult to see. Furthermore, is this the type of attitude that Bultmann had in mind when he called the secular biographies world-affirming? The determination of contrast has become a problem of semantics.

While some of Talbert's arguments are questionable, he has provided very helpful material and insights that may also be useful in other directions than for his own specific purpose.

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Taylor, Michael J., S.J., ed. *A Companion to John: Readings in Johannine Theology (John's Gospel and Epistles)*. New York: Alba, 1977. xv + 281 pp. Paperback, \$5.95.

This is the second *Companion* that the editor has compiled, his first being a *Companion to Paul* (1975). The readings are taken from previously published articles in journals and books. He has included more Protestant authors in this volume than his previous one, which was heavily dominated by Catholics. While some of the Catholic authors selected for the present book would be included in most, if not all, selections dealing with John, a selection made by a Protestant would probably not have included some of the lesser known Catholic writers. The editor has chosen his material to give to the beginning student a kind of introductory guide to the understanding of the basic themes and problems of the Johannine writings. Because the readings were directed to this type of student, the editor selected those articles which "combined acceptable scholarship with an easier readability and clarity of expression than is normally found in essays on the subject" (p. xiv). For the same reason, too, footnotes have been reduced to a bare minimum. To make this volume more useful, the editor has provided an "Introduction" and has at the end added "Review Questions: Material for Comment and Discussion."

The authors and articles included in the volume are: John Marsh, "John: A Very Different Gospel?"; T. W. Manson, "The Johannine Jesus as Logos"; Basil de Pinto, "John's Jesus: Biblical Wisdom and the Word Embodied"; Raymond E. Brown, "The Qumran Scrolls and John: A Comparison in Thought and Expression"; W. D. Davies, "The Johannine 'Signs' of Jesus"; Raymond E. Brown, "The Ego Eimi ('I Am') Passages in the Fourth Gospel"; Karl Schelkle, "John's Theology of Man and the World"; Andre Feuillet, "Man's Participation in God's Life: A Key Concept in John";