

Smedes, Lewis B., ed. *Ministry and the Miraculous: A Case Study at Fuller Theological Seminary*. Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1987. 80 pp. Paperback, \$3.95.

A course at Fuller Theological Seminary setting forth “signs and wonders” as a part of Christian ministry engendered considerable controversy a few years ago, both on the Fuller campus and also among evangelical Christians more broadly. The course was suspended from the curriculum, pending the outcome of a study to be made by a taskforce of some twelve Fuller faculty members. The group gave careful study to the matter, and in the little booklet *Ministry and the Miraculous* Lewis B. Smedes provides the consensus statement. This booklet does not contain separate essays by various faculty. Smedes is “editor” in the sense that he has brought together into a cohesive whole the essence of the discussions that took place.

Smedes emphasizes that the study was not one intended to deal, or that did deal, with “signs and wonders” on a general basis, but rather that it probed specifically the question of whether or not it was valid and proper to have a course involving such “signs and wonders” as part of a seminary curriculum. In spite of this limited focus, it was hardly possible to avoid giving some attention to the questions of the reality of the miraculous, of what constitutes the miraculous, and of when to expect miracles. The approach used in the assessment was that of careful and very broadly based study of the *biblical* evidence, with due recognition also to the achievements of science, particularly in the realm of psychology.

Exegesis was carefully done, and dealt with a broad range of material that should not be overlooked when broaching the matter of “miraculous healing” and related issues. For instance, there is coverage of such topics as God’s relationship to his world, the place of suffering in Christian experience, the means that are available for restoring and maintaining health, and so on. In contrast to those who would set forth God’s desire and intent for well-being as decisive for Christians and as a sign of God’s presence with them, this group study has given due recognition to human existence in a world of sin where evil consequences in a general way hold sway, and to the fact that the promise of restoration to the full vitality of life and health is designated for the future age rather than this one. Also given due consideration is the fact that Scripture sets forth Christians as frequently enduring suffering—indeed that suffering itself can be, and often is, the greatest sign of discipleship to Christ. An abundance of biblical evidence is set forth to support this conclusion, but one of the Bible books holding forth a superlative degree of such evidence has been overlooked: the book of Revelation, which portrays in striking clarity that in the present age the true Christian can indeed expect suffering with Christ and that it is faithfulness in such suffering that becomes the great sign of loyalty to the

Master. In Revelation, the "signs and wonders" are, in fact, attributed to the anti-divine powers (see, e.g., Rev 12, 13).

Smedes and his colleagues repeatedly make the significant point that there must be *responsibility* in Christian ministry. A seminary curriculum, whose intent is to train ministers, must therefore weigh carefully *all* aspects of a matter and must be certain that what is said, done, or illustrated leads the seminarians into ministry that is both well informed and careful not to engender such things as unwarranted speculations and unfulfilled hopes. This book is indeed worthy of careful attention by all seminarians (not just those at Fuller), by all practitioners in the field of religion, and by all lay persons interested in the topic.

*Ministry and the Miraculous* provides excellent coverage on many relevant aspects of its general subject. Perhaps the most remarkable facet of the consensus statement it sets forth, however, is that consensus could be reached at all by a faculty taskforce representing a variety of Christian confessions, some which maintain rather diametrically opposed views on various of the issues treated. That this consensus should emerge in such a context is possibly in itself one of the greatest "signs and wonders"!

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Tabor, James D. *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in Its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts*. Studies in Judaism Series. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986. x + 154 pp. \$23.50/\$12.25.

This monograph, based on the author's 1981 Ph.D. dissertation at The University of Chicago, has been rewritten to escape the stylistic characteristics of that genre. As published, the argument is presented quite economically, delighting those looking for the author's conclusions, but frustrating those wishing more evidence. Frequently Tabor simply states, "I am convinced" or "I would argue." The work seeks to interpret the significance of 2 Cor 12:2-4, but the chapter devoted to examining that text "in some detail" (p. 113) is only twelve-and-a-half pages in length.

The work consists of a short introduction and three chapters. The introduction rejects the "'Eusebian' view of the past" (p. 4) and states Tabor's intention neither to paint Paul against a background, nor to prove Paul's uniqueness. Rather, he wishes to examine "certain structural similarities and differences discernible in texts which contain the idea of the heavenly journey, as clues to issues and questions which might otherwise be overlooked" (p. 5).

Chapter 2 describes what Tabor considers to be the core of "Paul's system of beliefs." He discovers four basic tenets: (1) A predetermined