

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

secret plan exists to bring about the glorification of God in the universe. The evidence for this is two instances of Paul's use of the verb *proorizō* (to determine) in connection with *doxa* (glory). (2) Christ as the *eikōn* (image) of God transforms human beings in his image, thus creating a cosmic family that shares the image (*summorphos*) and is glorified. "The reason for 'the sending of the Son' was that believers might receive this 'sonship'" (p. 13). This is described as "the heart of Paul's system of thought" (p. 12). (3) The plan is already in its full implementation phase, as described by the five aorist verbs in Rom 8:29-30 ("foreknow," "predestine," "call," "justify," "glorify"—the "key elements . . . of God's cosmic plan"). (4) As the last Adam, Jesus (as earthly) is the first of a transformed race of immortals and (as heavenly) is the prototype of those who are to be glorified. The point Tabor wishes to make is that the glorification of the sons of God is to be understood in terms of "a particularly Jewish notion of *apothēōsis*" (p. 19).

The rest of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of Paul's apostolic authority, demanded by the need to establish the proper context for 2 Cor 12:2-4. Tabor claims that 2 Cor 10-13 is unique in tone and represents "an outright *demand* for . . . obedience and submission" to Paul (p. 28). At issue is the question of the role played by Paul's appeal to "visions and revelations" and his journey to Paradise. Here Tabor takes a position markedly different from that of most, who say that Paul disparaged pneumatic experiences in his defense. Tabor argues that Paul valued most highly his journey to Paradise as the basis for his apostolic authority. Taking his cue from Schweitzer, he writes, "I would maintain that this journey to heaven is a higher and more privileged experience than that of the epiphany at his conversion" (p. 37). Tabor argues also that Paul had a special eschatological hope for himself and saw his mission on earth in the light of Isaiah's Suffering Servant songs, considering himself a facsimile of Jesus in a very special sense.

Noting that the internal evidence is insufficient to settle the issue, chapter 3 surveys the ascent motif in the pagan, Jewish, and Christian literature of the period. Tabor suggests that the motif's popularity resulted from the cosmological shift brought about by the conquests of Alexander the Great. Central to this shift is the change from earth to heaven as the true home of human beings. This means that death ceases to be seen as a journey down to *sheol*, but comes to be viewed as a return to the heavenly spheres. Tabor covers the literature well and contributes a typology of the heavenly ascent. He suggests four types: (1) ascent as an invasion of heaven, (2) ascent to receive revelation, (3) ascent to heavenly immortality, and (4) ascent as a foretaste of the heavenly world. Some stories could be classified in more than one type.

Of particular interest in this classification is that authors who claim to have been to heaven are really trying to gain a heavenly endorsement for

the content of their work. Without negating that, Tabor wishes to gain a special place for his type 4, and to point out that it argues for the transformation of the individual who had such an experience (p. 95). It is important for him, therefore, to go beyond the study of a literary motif that serves a particular rhetorical purpose and to argue that what is being considered is a particular person's experience. Such an experience may have been connected with cultic practices and may have included preparation techniques, such as amulets, potions, secret formulas, and so on. Jews of various stripes, for different reasons, at particular times, in likely and unlikely places, showed an interest in these practices, as demonstrated by Scholem. It is, therefore, not improbable to see Paul in that context.

Chapter 4 examines Paul's account of his heavenly journey. In spite of the use of the third person, Tabor has no doubts that Paul is writing about himself. He finds the chronological reference ("fourteen years ago") impossible to specify. At most, it argues that the experience "is vividly remembered and obviously important." Tabor understands the double reference to the third heaven and to Paradise to mean that the journey reached first the third heaven (something which Paul's opponents also may have claimed), but that then it continued on to Paradise, where Paul was in the presence of God and heard unutterable things (something none of his opponents could claim). By means of this two-stage journey Paul builds on ground he shares with his opponents, but then leaves them behind by his most privileged journey to the highest heaven. Whether it was in or out of the body is a "mildly apologetic" (p. 121) statement, to be taken at face value, as it admits ignorance as to the "how" of the journey, and thereby serves to establish the genuineness of the experience. The unutterable things make the point that while his opponents claim to share with "spirituals" heavenly secrets (a phenomenon common to hellenistic religions in general), what Paul received in Paradise "was *neither shared by, nor to be shared with*, others who possessed the Spirit" (p. 122). The price he paid for this daring accomplishment through the heavenly spheres was harassment ever after by a messenger of Satan, as a thorn in the flesh. Paul boasts of that accomplishment, even if he recognizes it was granted by God's grace. That recognition, however, does not preclude that Paul may have been involved in a cultic practice that included some preparation techniques. Because of this experience, Paul has had a very special taste of ultimate power and glory that fired his apocalyptic "particulars." His understanding of salvation as a form of apotheosis, or "immortalization," was, however, hellenistic. "His was not a scheme of salvation for any place or for all time" (p. 124).

Tabor's work represents a rather challenging rereading of Paul's letters, which takes seriously what we know about the hellenistic religious world and brushes aside what Christian theology, beginning soon after the destruction of the Temple, began to make of Paul. Thus Tabor finds a

different candidate for the position of "the center" of Paul, namely: the glorification of a small group of sons of God. To his credit, Tabor confesses to be "acutely aware that the results of this study are in the end largely theoretical" (p. 5). He claims no more than to have taken two insights, one from Schweitzer and the other from Scholem, and to have carried them a bit further. In the process he has written a book that is at times quite provocative and at times quite frustrating, especially the latter because of the brevity of the discussion of important issues and the opinionated handling of difficult texts. Moreover, part of the argument is based on a hypothetical knowledge of "the dynamics of Paul's apostolic consciousness" (p. 40). To claim that the mission to the Gentiles is supported by appeals to Isaianic passages of the Hebrew Bible is one thing. To claim that Paul "literally *finds himself and his apostolic mission* in these texts" (p. 40) is quite another. To cover one's flanks with disclaimers, like "he likely has in mind" Isa. 2:2-4; 60:5-9 (p. 42), just will not do. On the other hand, there is no doubt that Paul, the hellenistic Christian Jew, shall remain to Christians of the twentieth century a stranger and an enigma.

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