

The Gospel of John in Christian History: Essays for Interpreters. By J. Louis Martyn. New York: Paulist, 1979, pp. vii + 147, \$4.95 paper.

More than ten years ago Martyn wrote a little book called *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*. The book enjoyed wide influence among Johannine scholars and was recently published in a revised edition. In that book Martyn argued that small units of material can be identified as referring to the historical Jesus (at the *einmalig* level) but that most of it uses the story of Jesus to describe the conflict between Church and synagogue in some major city of the empire toward the end of the first century. Others of course had been saying this in general terms for years, but Martyn sought to establish the point on a literary basis, taking as his starting point the miracle of John 9.

This present book brings together three essays by the same author, all of them published elsewhere. Only the second essay has been substantially rewritten. The first essay argues that the fourth evangelist used a source with an Elijah Christology but that the evangelist changed the source to provide a Christology of eternal preexistence. He is therefore respon-

sible "for the disappearance from subsequent Christian thought of the identification of Jesus as the eschatological Elijah" (p. 53). In the second chapter Martyn attempts, on the basis of studying several chapters of the Pseudo-Clementines (a translation of which is found in the appendix), to reconstruct something of the history of the persecution in the Johannine community and to delineate the accompanying traditions. In the final essay Martyn outlines what he takes to be some of the main turning points in the history of the Johannine community.

Martyn writes with rare grace and clarity. His work is always provocative. Yet it must be said with regret that Martyn is a gifted scholar whose speculative hypotheses reveal more about his fertile imagination than about the texts on which he comments. He is able, for instance, to assign with remarkable confidence this snippet or that to the early period, middle period or late period of the Johannine community's history as he reconstructs it and to build new speculations on the shoulders of his earlier speculations. Detailed challenge is not possible here, but it is remarkable that no Christian has ever read John's gospel this way before. Perhaps the Holy Scriptures are an esoteric group of secret writings after all, badly in need of a twentieth-century key even to begin to understand them.

D.A.C.

John the Gospel of Life. By D. George Vanderlip. Valley Forge: Judson, 1979, 144 pp., \$5.95 paper.

Vanderlip has been writing in the area of Johannine studies for some years. Now he has written a brief commentary on the gospel of John. In ten graceful chapters he surveys the fourth gospel paragraph by paragraph, delineating the major themes with an eye open to modern application. Pitched at the level of layman or pastor, this little book deserves wide circulation.

No doubt the brevity of this commentary disqualifies the book when it comes to a close study of a host of historical and theological questions. Vanderlip tends to weave his way with literary agility around such questions, focusing exclusively on the major themes. But that is not necessarily a fault. If he does not comment with precision on many interesting trees, he does give us a very useful outline of the forest.

D.A.C.

Songs of Heaven. By Robert E. Coleman. Old Tappan: Revell, 1980, 159 pp., \$6.95.

Here is another gem from the pen of Coleman, who offers 14 meditations on the "songs" of the book of Revelation. With each one he combines simple but telling exposition, thoughtful illustration and analogy, frequent allusion to the Church's hymns, and a warm heart. This is devotional literature at its best. The book deserves to become a classic and will certainly refresh many a saint. *Songs of Heaven* will restore the joy of the Lord to you and tune your heart and mind to sing with the choirs of the King.

D.A.C.