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Review of *Christ in the Early Christian Hymns*, by Daniel Liderbach

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and emotional reactions, has always coexisted, under the name of *lectio divina,* with the church's doctrinal reading of scripture" (p. 89). In short, Brown reminds us that Scripture lives not as regulated by academic grammarians but as it is read by real persons in a lively and sometimes messy conversation.

Three aspects of Brown's proposal also deserve fuller criticism than is possible in a short review. First, the model of reading remains private and individualistic; one hopes for a "biblical empirics" that can embrace the communal uses of Scripture in the church. Second, the precise enrichment offered by Jungian theory remains elusive; Brown is better at showing how sensitivity to emotion is important than he is at demonstrating how Jungian archetypes illumine specific texts. Third, Brown's characterization of Gnostic exegesis as "esoteric because their meaning depends not on the public conventions of rational discourse but on correspondences hidden in the deep structure of language, to which ego consciousness has no direct access" (p. 128) is debatable on several levels, but is particularly unfortunate for perpetuating the notion that in order to find transformative readings one must abandon the frame of tradition. Brown's effort to enlarge his readers' appreciation for a variety of legitimate readings of Scripture might have been more convincing if he had celebrated more fully examples that maintained the tension between the exoteric-esoteric, as in patristic and medieval interpreters whose private fantasies troped communal convictions rather than replaced them.

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Christ in the Early Christian Hymns. By Daniel Liderbach. New York: Paulist Press 1998. Pages, vii + 153. Softback, $14.95 ISBN: 0-8091-3809-3.

I had a professor years ago who, when she returned a paper I had labored over too much, recommended, "Save some of the universe for your second paper." It was advice that came to my mind again as I read this book, for author Daniel Liderbach introduces too many issues into *Christ in the Early Christian Hymns* without giving enough attention to the one topic that, I presume, might have been more fruitfully dealt with: Christ in the early Christian hymns.

If the book were larger, perhaps the reader would not so mind the occasional foray into Liderbachian opinions like why he thinks papal infallibility was a bad idea. Let us hope that when he does write that manuscript, he will entitle the treatment something like, well, *Why I Think Papal Infallibility Was A Bad Idea,* and then he can address the issue of the effect of

Pope Paul VI's birth control encyclical and its relationship to papal infallibility. (See pages 29–30.) Perhaps in still other future manuscripts he will write about Sir Ernest Shackleton's "extraordinary expedition to cross the South Pole" (see pages 124–27) and F. C. Happold's experience "on April 18, 1936, the evening before his son was born" after his first child had been stillborn (see pages 127–28). Not bad topics, one presumes, but in a spare book about the theology of early Christian hymns?

The book is short, its brevity manifested in disappointing places. For instance, Philippians 2:6-11, one of the key christological hymns of the New Testament, is dispatched in five sentences (and half the number of words in this review up to this point). Treatment of the prologue to John's Gospel is shorter than the prologue itself.

It is not bad news for all readers, however. Relief comes for those who have ever sought an interpretation of the Christian hymns of antiquity using nineteenth-century Georg W.F. Hegel's synthetic dialectic. They will find this interpretive method in chapters like "Early Hymns: A Preface to a Dialectical Interpretation of the Meaning of Christ Jesus" and "The Need for Tensive Dialectic to Express Mystery," and in philosophically enticing section-titles like "The Hymns' Tensive Confession of Christ," "Dialectical Christologies of Two Natures and One Person," "Tensive Belief for Twentieth-Century Westerners."

Such Hegelian interpretation probably disposed the author to find extremes — theses and antitheses — inventing them, if necessary, where they otherwise were not. Commenting on the Arian hymn "Thalia," for example, he writes, "For Arius either Christ was *not* divine, or he *was* divine" (emphasis not added). No; for Arius and early Arians, the author should know, Christ was indeed divine, but not so divine as to be what the Nicene Creed confesses, "one in being with the Father." Less divine, yes; not divine at all, no.

Moreover, the author adopts a naïve way of approaching the hymns, assuming, based on no evidence, that the earliest Christian hymns "reveal the active belief of the communities that were using those hymns" (translation: the author likes these) and that later hymns written by theologians and bishops were theological impositions that displaced earlier pristine compositions (translation: he does not like these). While it is true that more theologically nuanced hymns were composed (and even imposed) by bishops like Ambrose to inculcate orthodox Christologies into the liturgy and into the hearts of those assembled, it does not follow that the earlier hymns, even if anonymous to us, were not written by church leaders or that these were the spontaneous products of communal Christian faith. (Frankly, I cannot picture any communities of persons, Christian or not, spontaneously and lovingly working out the lyrics, music, and theol-

ogy of these earliest hymns. Even for Jesus and the disciples, I expect, such an initially romantic approach for hymn-writing would have resulted in a cat fight.)

In spite of these problems, the author is a good writer. His style would lend itself to making difficult theological or philosophical issues accessible to students, as the issues of this text were much of the time. If the method and content were held near the range suggested by the book's title, Liderbach would be an even better writer.

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Calendar: Humanity's Epic Struggle to Determine a True and Accurate Year. By David Ewing Duncan. New York: Avon Books 1998. Pages, xix + 328. Paper, $13.50. ISBN: 0-380-79324-5.

About fifteen years ago, reading the documents of Vatican II for a theology class, I was moved as I considered the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy from beginning to end. It was a rallying exercise, an energizing inspiration as I was absorbed into its chapters on general principles (1), the eucharist (2), other sacraments (3), the liturgy of the hours (4), the liturgical year (5), music (6), and art (7). I recall too how perplexed I was on coming upon the Appendix, "Concerning the Assignment of the Feast of Easter to a Fixed Sunday." It struck me as a too unnecessarily specific topic in a constitution that otherwise came off as a bird's-eye view of the reform of the liturgy. I wondered: So why the urgency and specificity all of a sudden about the date of Easter?

In the intervening decade and a half, I have learned more about the liturgical year, but never really got a sharp grasp as to how the various dates of Easter came to be settled variously by different Christian communions. How did it come to be, for example, that Protestants and Catholics observe the same day as one another for Easter but that these are usually out of sync with the Orthodox determination? Though a popularly accessible exposition, David Ewing Duncan's recent book on the calendar in general did more than any other work to prompt me to appreciate the complexity of the problems involved in determining a universally agreed-upon calendar and, in turn, a universal date for the observation of Easter by so many Christian communities in so many cultures of the seven continents of the globe.

Calendar is a wonderful book for many reasons, but I would suggest that the author's main gift here is in making primary texts on difficult issues come alive (in translation) by strong and amusing writing and by putting