

# Concordia Theological Monthly



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## BOOK REVIEW

*All books reviewed in this periodical may be procured from or through Concordia Publishing House, 3558 South Jefferson Avenue, St. Louis 18, Missouri.*

COMMENTARY ON ROMANS. By Anders Nygren, Bishop of Lund, Sweden.  
Translated by Carl C. Rasmussen. Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia.  
457 pages, 6×9. \$5.00.

All who in 1948 heard the splendid addresses of Professor (now Bishop) Nygren of Lund, Sweden, will rejoice to be informed that a commentary on Romans has emanated from his study. While his field of special endeavor as university professor was Systematic Theology, he evidently did not neglect the careful and continuous study of the New Testament. One recalls that when his famous contemporary Karl Barth, likewise a dogmatician, entered the theological arena after World War I, it was with a commentary on Romans. Often the remark has been made that Barth's commentary tells us much about Barth's views, but little about those of St. Paul. We are happy to say that no similar charge can be made against the book of Bishop Nygren.

What strikes the reader most of all when opening the book, aside from its very engaging external features, such as clear type and good paper, is the simplicity of the style which the learned author employs. Here there is no striving for effect, no heaping up of colorful, gripping epithets, no attempt to dazzle by recourse to what is unusual, but a very straightforward, direct discussion of the content of this vital document, the Epistle to the Romans. Bishop Nygren, like Professor Luthardt of Leipzig many years ago and, more recently, our own Dr. Pieper, furnishes striking proof that a person can be learned without writing an obscure, baffling style. That simplicity does not involve a discarding of dignified language and true charm of speech is likewise demonstrated here. The work of the translator, Professor Carl Rasmussen, has been very well done and entitles him to our deep gratitude.

The aim of the author was not to give us a detailed commentary, shedding light on every linguistic phenomenon, problem, or difficulty that the epistle presents. His plan rather was to get at the heart of the thought of Paul. As a result the pages are not profusely studded with Greek words and expressions; the scholarly artillery (that is, quotations from other commentators, old and new) is brought to the fore sparingly. In his aim to give a thorough discussion of the great ideas that Paul presents, Professor Nygren, generally speaking, has succeeded. The leading thoughts of the Epistle are examined, false views that have arisen concerning them are described and refuted, and the net result is a clearly etched drawing of

the Apostle's meaning. One consequence is that this commentary is a very readable book. It can be perused from beginning to end without mental discomfort. One is not troubled by paragraphs concerned with the minutiae of expository procedure, such as special remarks on ordinary conjunctions and prepositions and the comments of, let us say, Oecumenius and Theophylact. While occasionally such details unavoidably are submitted, one is carried forward by a gently flowing current of interesting discussion, the subject always being some significant thought of the Apostle.

Nygren presents a definite and clear outline of the Epistle, dividing it into four sections: 1. The righteousness of faith, 1:18—4:25; 2. He who through faith is righteous shall live, 5:1—8:39; 3. The righteousness of faith does not violate God's promise, 9:1—11:36; 4. The behavior of those who through faith are righteous, 12:1—15:13, followed by the conclusion, 15:14—16:27. The righteousness of God he conceives to be the theme of the Epistle. To list all the details of interpretation which elicited my approval, and besides gave me a spiritual thrill, would require too long a review. Mention of a few points must suffice: Righteousness of God is explained as righteousness coming from God; Pelagianism and synergism are rigorously brushed aside; man in justification is pictured as the recipient; all human merit is excluded; Luther's "*allein durch den Glauben*" is defended; ch. 7:14-25 is interpreted as speaking of Paul *after* his conversion; the doctrine of predestination is treated in a Scriptural and edifying manner; ch. 9:5 is interpreted as ascribing deity to Christ, etc. It is the voice of conservative Lutheranism which is here heard.

Several criticisms I shall submit briefly. Does Nygren explain clearly what is meant by the "righteousness of God"? He says many things about it which are fully in keeping with the Lutheran Confessions: This righteousness comes from without (p. 16); justification is not something which occurs within the soul (p. 18); the view is rejected that this righteousness is a state of ethical well-being (p. 19); Christ is the Righteousness of God (p. 29); faith is not a condition of justification (p. 69); the righteousness Paul speaks of is one which God has effected for us through His work in Christ (p. 74); it is an objective relationship proffered to us through Christ and into which we are received through faith in Him (p. 75); the essence of justification is the forgiveness of sins (p. 171). Many other quotations of like tenor can be brought. But there are some disconcerting sentences or expressions, too, leading one to believe that Nygren does not adhere simply to the teachings of our Confessions: The righteousness of God is a righteousness which He reveals to us and permits us to share (p. 75); the righteousness from God is not revealed just to give us knowledge of it, but that it may be shared with us and become ours (p. 149); by the grace of God man is included in God's own righteousness; just as wrath is an objective power which exerts its might for the destruction of man, so the righteousness of God is also an objective power which exerts its might for redemption and life (p. 152); "what

has happened through Christ is that we are now under the dominion of the righteousness of God. It is that which Paul means and nothing else when he says that we are justified through Christ" (p. 187). These statements are baffling. They make it practically impossible to hold that Nygren conceives of the righteousness of God as something that God bestows on the sinner, declaring him righteous, simply pardon, forgiveness, in spite of the sentence quoted above from p. 171. At any rate, in this area clarity is lacking.

Probably even more serious is the lack of an adequate portrayal of the role of Christ in the work of justification. One would expect a thorough discussion of this subject in the interpretation of ch. 3:21-31. Nygren says that the righteousness of God is revealed through Christ (p. 39). Is that all? we ask. "In Christ this righteousness has come to us, and he who through faith belongs to Him has it as his righteousness" (p. 76). This, too, is vague and indefinite. With full approval one reads that ch. 3:25 is interpreted as speaking of Christ as the "mercy seat" (p. 156). That, it will be recalled, was Luther's view. In unfolding the meaning of this metaphor, Nygren does not go beyond the view that Christ's work is a revelation of God. On p. 158 he comes as close as anywhere to a statement of the work that Christ performed for us: "The work of Christ is called redemption because by it we are delivered from bondage to the hostile powers. But since the same act of Christ delivers us from the wrath of God and gives us peace with Him, it can also be spoken of as reconciliation (cf. 5:1; 9 ff.)." Here as elsewhere it is affirmed that reconciliation is God's own work. The Biblical terms are used; their precise meaning is not explained. One does not learn whether Nygren believes Paul teaches the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Here, too, the reader is not given the insight he seeks. In reading the comments on ch. 1:17, where the Old Testament passage Hab. 2:4 is quoted, one wonders why Nygren has to conclude that Paul in addition to the native meaning of the Old Testament words finds a deeper sense in them, when scholars like B. Weiss do not charge Paul with departure from the original meaning of Habakkuk. In interpreting Rom. 11:26 Nygren holds that "all Israel" refers to the Jewish nation (that is, not merely to the spiritual Israel as described in ch. 9).

I hope that many readers will acquire this commentary, not because every statement in it is correct, but because it will help them in many ways to grow in their understanding and appreciation of Romans, the chief Epistle of the inspired Apostle Paul.

W. ARNDT

THE REIGN OF GRACE. From Its Rise to Its Consummation. By Abraham Booth. With an Introductory Essay by Thomas Chalmers, D. D. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Mich. 1949.

Until his early twenties, Abraham Booth, 1740—1805, was a lay preacher of the General, or Freewill (Arminian), Baptists in England,

when he became an ardent defender of the Five Points of Calvinism, particularly the doctrine of the sovereignty of grace, and joined the Particular, or Calvinistic, Baptists. At the age of 28 years Booth published *The Reign of Grace*. The sections in this book dealing with the work of Christ (p. 261), justification as a forensic act (p. 113 ff.), sanctification, have a genuinely evangelical ring. Booth sets at naught all human co-operation and ascribes man's salvation entirely to God; he places the theocentric theology of Calvinism into sharp antithesis to the egocentric theology of Pelagianism and Arminianism. Nevertheless the central theme of Calvinism — the Calvinistic "sovereign grace" — permeates the entire book. Sovereign grace, however, ignores, at least relegates to the background, the Scriptural concept of grace as the favor of God for Christ's sake. According to Booth, God's sovereign act of election is the first link in the golden chain of our salvation (p. 53). The starting point of Booth's theology is "distinguishing grace," a sovereign act of God for a specific number of people whom He has chosen by His sovereign act. In reality, the election is *fait accompli* prior to God's decree concerning the work of Christ (p. 144). This doctrine of "distinguishing grace" is said to glorify God, since it ascribes to Him and to His sovereign majesty man's salvation, but in reality it leads either to despair or to human pride. This doctrine furthermore fails to observe the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, because it does not take seriously the holiness of God and therefore views God's grace not as pure grace in Christ, but actually as an arbitrary grace (p. 70), nor does it do justice to God's sovereignty, which when isolated from God's other attributes ignores the dogmatic axiom that God is the sum of His attributes (p. 91). For the adherents of historic Calvinism this is still a charming book, though first published almost 200 years ago.

F. E. MAYER

**THE SON OF GOD AMONG THE SONS OF MEN.** Studies in the Gospel according to John. By Everett F. Harrison, A. M., Th. D., Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary. W. A. Wilde Company, Boston. 251 pages, 5½ × 8. \$2.50.

Here we have a number of discussions based on the Fourth Gospel. The connecting link is that all of them treat of the contact of Jesus with some person mentioned in the Gospel. The people who are brought before us are John the Baptist, Andrew, Simon Peter, Nathanael, Nicodemus, woman of Samaria, impotent man, man born blind, Lazarus, Martha, Mary of Bethany, Judas, Pilate, Mary Magdalene, Thomas, John the Apostle. Dr. Harrison, before accepting a chair at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif., served as professor of New Testament at Dallas Seminary. One soon finds, as chapter after chapter is read, that the author writes simply and beautifully and that he has an excellent knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. His occasional references to the Greek are of a nature to bear out the statement of Dr. H. J. Ockenga in the Preface that

Dr. Harrison is a fine Greek scholar. Biographical preaching should not be engaged in often, but now and then a minister may well have recourse to it in his endeavor to bring effective messages to his congregation. In this volume excellent material is offered for this type of sermons. The author accepts the Scriptures as the inerrant Word of God and wishes to bow to their authority. My dissent was aroused by the comments on John 3:5 (p. 69), which do not do justice to this important passage. W. ARNDT

CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS. By Alan Richardson. Harper & Brothers, New York. 256 pages, 8½×5½. \$3.00.

This new and also novel apologetic has been favorably received both in England and in America. John C. Bennett has hailed it as "the most satisfactory statement that has yet come out of the present confusion concerning faith, revelation, and reason." The conservative theologian can hardly accord it such high, unqualified praise. The author, formerly editor of the *Student Christian* and now Canon of Durham Cathedral, whose five previous works on apologetic theology have enjoyed great popularity, follows somewhat the line of thought projected by William Temple, although his leanings to neo-orthodoxy are more pronounced. Broadly speaking, he seeks to build up out of the confusion of Modernist negativism a more or less positive system of Christian belief. To him theology is essentially an empirical science and so capable of demonstration. He denies the divine inspiration of the Bible, but, nevertheless, holds that Scripture is authoritative, since it is the means by which the Holy Spirit imparts to men and assures men of divine truth. His methodology might be outlined as follows: He first defines apologetics with regard to its scope, object, and rightful place in theological science. He next shows that theology is an empirical science, though by no means an ideology, yet a historical religion both in its origin and in its promulgation. Then he defends the reality of divine revelation, in particular the Bible, as a special and unique revelation, proves that the arguments from miracle and prophecy still hold, though not in the sense of the old-fashioned literalists; that the Bible's authority dare not be denied; that Christianity is absolute; and that not reason but faith only can grapple with the problem of the mysteries of faith. The author shows a wide acquaintance with ancient and modern Continental and American literature; and while moving throughout in philosophical thought, his language is relatively easy to understand. Nevertheless, his work is hardly suited to theological beginners. For the student trained in apologetics and philosophy of religion the thesis that there is positive truth, comprehended by faith, and that theological negativism can have no place in religious thinking is most challenging, though the writer's compromising, halfway, and in itself liberal approach cannot satisfy believing Christians, whose faith is directly rooted in the divine Word and who accept the mysteries of Christianity as these are given in Scripture in simple, childlike faith. The conservative is

attracted to the book, nevertheless, by its proof that secular humanism, which denies revelation and faith, is neither reasonable nor in agreement with the evident religious facts which theology as an empirical science is able to demonstrate. It is no doubt this emphasis on positive truth that has won for the work many friends also among conservative theologians.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

THE SMALL SECTS IN AMERICA. Revised Edition. By Elmer T. Clark. Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, New York, Nashville. 1949. 256 pages, 6×9. \$3.00.

The first edition appeared in 1937 and was reviewed in this journal, Vol. IX, p. 234. This is a revised and somewhat enlarged edition. The author discusses the small sects under the following headings: 1. The Pessimistic Group (millenarian); 2. The Perfectionist Sects; 3. The Charismatic Church of the Holy Roller Type; 4. The Communistic Societies; 5. The Legalistic Sects. Naturally such a division results in much overlapping. The author is not interested primarily in the theological background of the small, and sometimes bizarre, sects, but in an attempt to explain the rise of these sects from an economic and particularly from a psychological viewpoint. We can heartily recommend the book for the factual information which the author presents in an interesting manner.

F. E. MAYER

THESE ALSO BELIEVE. A Study of Modern American Cults, Minority Religious Movements. By Charles Samuel Braden, Ph. D. The Macmillan Company, New York. 1949. XV and 491 pages, 5¼×8¼. \$6.00.

The author is professor of History and Literature of Religions at Northwestern University and has done extensive work in this field. To understand his "sympathetic" approach to religious groups which are evidently outside the pale of Christendom, it is essential to keep in mind that the author is a liberal theologian. His theological orientation is probably best exemplified in the fact that he is co-author of the 1936 edition of G. G. Atkins' *The Procession of the Gods*. (We are acquainted with the 1930 edition, in which Atkins traces the alleged growth of the idea of God according to the principles of the School of Comparative Religion, the rankest type of the evolutionary hypothesis. We assume that the 1936 edition, of which Braden is co-author, does not deviate basically from the first edition.) In the Preface of the book under review Professor Braden characterizes himself as "a graduate of liberal schools [who] remains an 'unrepentant liberal' to the present; [who] holds no brief for any particular cult nor is violently opposed to any; who believes that in general the cults represent the earnest attempt of millions of people to find the fulfillment of deep and legitimate needs of the human spirit, which most of them seem not to have found in the established churches." It is Braden's purpose to set forth the origin and the chief tenets of the

following groups: The Peace Mission Movement of Father Divine; Psychiana; New Thought; Unity School of Christianity; Christian Science; Theosophy; The I Am Movement; The Liberal Catholic Church; Spiritualism; Jehovah's Witnesses; Anglo-Israel; The Oxford Group Movement; Mormonism. In our opinion this book is the most reliable and most thorough study of these metaphysical cults and religious groups on the market. The book by Marcus Bach, *They Have Found a Faith*, is based entirely on personal interviews with the leaders of the various cults. Charles W. Ferguson, *The New Book of Revelations* (1929), now out of print, describes some thirty cults in a very interesting manner, though he frequently resorts to ridicule, a procedure which may be in place at times, but which never convinces. E. E. Clark's book, reviewed above, deals almost exclusively with such minority groups as are still listed as "Christian." G. G. Atkins' *Modern Cults and Religious Movements* was published almost twenty-five years ago. Braden's studies are based in part on personal interviews, but primarily on the official publications of the respective cults. He has succeeded admirably in presenting the chief religious tenets of each group. The author shows that a relatively large number of cults have accepted the basic principles of Unity. Unity is essentially the modern form of Satan's first temptation to Adam and Eve: "Ye shall be like God," especially as it was developed in Oriental philosophy, which views man as nothing less than a divine spark, a fragment of the Cosmic Soul, an image of God with divine potentialities. In an Appendix the reader will find a short description of a large number of groups, some of which, for example, Bahaism, in the reviewer's opinion, merit a more thorough study.

F. E. MAYER

THE EFFICIENT CHURCH WORKER. By Eugene Dinsmore Dolloff. Fleming H. Revell Company, New York 175 pages, 5×7½. \$2.00.

Here we have a book teeming with practical suggestions to the various officeholders of a Christian congregation. While it is true that church polity varies in the Protestant Churches, church officers are similar and the suggestions offered here for the functioning of these officers can readily be adapted.

Some, among them this reviewer, dislike such titles as "The Ministry of Music" and "The Floral Ministry." The Church has one divinely ordained ministry, and that is the ministry of the Word. In the chapter on the Christian Education Officials one misses reference to the best agency in Christian education, the good Christian parochial school. Others besides Lutherans have or are establishing Christian day schools. Therefore any discussion of the educational program of a church today calls for inclusion of this type of school.

The author is pastor of the First Baptist Church, New Bedford, Mass., and has been a director of the Evangelistic Association of New England for more than twenty years.

L. J. SIECK



**A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF MISSIONS.** By Harold Lindsell, Ph. D. Van Kampen Press, Wheaton, Ill. 238 pages,  $5\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{3}{4}$ . \$2.50.

Dr. Lindsell is at present professor of Missions and Church History at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif. He was ordained by the Southern Baptist Convention.

His book is refreshing reading. It is built up on Scriptural foundations. The author insists throughout that a Christian philosophy of missions must insist on men and women who themselves have a true saving faith in the Redeemer Jesus Christ as the only Mediator between God and man and who then preach this Christ to the non-Christian world. His views on the second advent of Jesus Christ are those of millennialists. His chapters on the Word of God, on the nature and function of the Church, on the individual, on sin, as well as other sections, rest solidly on the Holy Scriptures. "The Gospel is still the power of God unto salvation. But until that Gospel is mediated to men by men, it has no power and can produce no salvation."

E. C. ZIMMERMANN

#### BOOKS RECEIVED

*From Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo.:*

**PORTALS OF PRAYER.** No. 95. COMPLETE IN HIM. Daily Devotions from January 1 to February 21, 1950. By Rev. Charles A. Behnke, D.D. 10 cents.

**ANDACHTSBUECHLEIN.** No. 95. IN GOTTES HAND. January 1 to February 21, 1950. By Rev. N. P. Uhlig. 10 cents.

**PORTALS OF PRAYER,** No. 96. "Christ for Us." Daily Devotions from February 22 to April 16, 1950. By Rev. Edwin L. Wilson. 10 cents each.

**ANDACHTSBUECHLEIN,** No. 96. "Jesus Christus, unsere Hoffnung." Andachten fuer die Zeit vom 22. Februar bis zum 16. April 1950. By Rev. Theo. L. Blanken, p. em. 10 cents each.

**THE LUTHERAN ANNUAL,** 1950. O. A. Dorn, editor, and Armin Schroeder, statistical editor. 276 pages,  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ . 50 cents.

**AMERIKANISCHER KALENDER,** 1950. Dr. J. T. Mueller, literary editor, and the Rev. Armin Schroeder, statistical editor. 276 pages,  $8\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ . 50 cents.

**A CHILD'S GARDEN OF SONG.** Compiled and edited by Theodore G. Stelzer. 81 pages,  $8 \times 9$ . \$1.50 An excellent collection of 82 religious songs for children in the age of 6—8 years.

**CONCORDIA BIBLE TEACHER.** Vol. XI, January-March 1950, No. 2. \$1.00 per annum. — **CONCORDIA BIBLE STUDENT.** Vol. XXXIX, January-March 1950, No. 2. 65 cents per annum. — "Studies in the Book of Genesis." Part I. Edited by Rev. John M. Weidenschilling, S. T. D., under the auspices of the Board for Parish Education, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.