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Book Reviews

BIBLICAL ERRANCY. An Analysis of Its Philosophical Roots. Edited by Norman Geisler. The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, 1981. Paper. 270 pages.

This book is an effort to point out the epistemological roots of the current denial of the inerrancy of the Bible. The essayists are Evangelical teachers, who heed the apostolic exhortation: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy" (Col. 2:8). But the authors feel that "to beware of philosophy" we must first be "aware" of it.

Many errantists have been influenced by the philosophers, catching their assumptions as one catches a cold. These assumptions include Bacon's inductivism, Heidegger's mysticism, Hume's skepticism, Kant's agnosticism, Hegel's transcendentalism, Kierkegaard's existentialism, Nietzsche's atheistic relativism, and Wittgenstein's linguistic noncognitivism. It is the earnest hope of the editor that by exposing these alien presuppositions, these essays will alert Evangelicals to the philosophical roots of the opposition to inerrancy.

These essays are well written by men very knowledgeable in their fields. This reviewer feels that this material could easily mislead the reader into the acceptance of the very error it warns against.

Otto F. Stahlke

FAITH AND ITS COUNTERFEITS. By Donald G. Bloesch. Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, 1981. Paper. 122 pages. \$3.95.

The author states that his purpose in this book is to print a handbook on evangelical spirituality that can be used by lay people as well as by clergy and theological students. His purpose is to show the difference between true Christianity and some counterfeit versions of the faith. Some of these counterfeits (such as legalism, ritualism or formalism, humanitarianism, enthusiasm, eclecticism, and heroism) are found also with the church. Donald G. Bloesch is professor of theology at Dubuque Theological Seminary. The author writes in a very lively style.

The reviewer recommends this book to lay readers for serious, prayerful study under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The church today needs an awakening in its zeal for Jesus and His work. A church that has become lukewarm in its faith requires a new heart and a new spirit, Ezek. 18:31. True religion will acknowledge that human salvation lies not in religion *per se*, but in the outpouring of God's mercy as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Otto F. Stahlke

LUTHER ON THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE AND CONGREGATIONAL FUNCTION. By Gert Haendler. Edited with an introduction by Eric W. Gritsch. Translated by Ruth C. Gritsch. Fortress Press, Philadelphia. 1980. 110 pages. Cloth. \$9.95.

Who can quarrel with Haendler's observation that Lutherans will always try to solve their problems by quoting Luther? This is especially true of the topic of church and ministry. Haendler, a theological professor at Rostock, leans, but not too heavily, toward assessing Luther as locating some sort of ultimate authority in the congregation. This assessment cannot be pressed too far because, in tracing Luther's thought, Haendler offers what he recognizes as contradictory evidence. On the one hand, Luther inveighed against a congregation who called Carlstadt as its pastor after he had maneuvered himself into

being selected by the congregation. On the other hand, the Reformer suggested that, where a congregation found it impossible to follow the ordinary procedures of pastoral selection, it should simply get up and move away with the pastor from the community. The author questions the practicality of this suggestion. Haendler does not really want to solve the controversy, and a little fuel for the fire which nobody really wants to put out is appreciated. Haendler's topic is important not because it speaks to ordinary situations, but because it addresses those critical situations when there are disputes about calling and deposing pastors. The Reformation period does not provide a uniform historic answer to the questions which arise in such situations. All can, however, agree with Haendler's final statement, "We feel particularly close to the Luther who, between 1522 and 1524, accepted and supported an active role on the part of the various congregations." This kind of statement almost concedes that Luther's enthusiasm for such a role may have dampened later.

David P. Scaer

CREATION, SCIENCE, AND THEOLOGY. By W. A. Whitehouse. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1981. Paperback. 247 pages. \$10.95.

A British theologian and clergyman in the United Reformed Church of England, Whitehouse (now retired) has gained considerable respect for the depth of his scholarly work, not least from the redoubtable T. F. Torrance. Half of the book is devoted to a perceptive and sympathetic evaluation of Barth's theology, first his *Dogmatics in Outline* and then selected volumes of his *Church Dogmatics* itself. Whitehouse clearly is an admirer of Barth and his theological methodology and system. This in itself is no detraction from the essays in this collection, for they are incisive and critical evaluations of one of the twentieth century's most notable theological voices, covering Barth's views on the doctrines of man, creation, divine providence, eschatology, Christology, the two kingdoms, ethics, etc.

In the second part of the book Whitehouse's essays focus on the general theme of divine authority. Most significant perhaps for many readers will be the author's suggestion as to the way for science and religion to live together. Whitehouse notes that the "physical, chemical, geological, and biological accounts of our world's structure and of the functioning of all its components" no longer "easily harmonize with the accepted versions of religion, more particularly of Christianity" (169). No longer can theologians "dictate the terms of the struggle" between the two disciplines, says Whitehouse. It is his opinion that "in the present cultural climate it is the scientists who have come to rank as authoritative guides to human needs and possibilities." In making such a statement Whitehouse does not agree that science should have the final word. While he grants apparently that science should have the ultimate word in areas of its competence, he still insists "that nothing in the climate of scientific culture has a rightful claim to deflect Christian theology from fundamental fidelity to its own proper object, Jesus Christ and his Lordship" (p. 183). By so speaking, however, Whitehouse is hardly satisfying the existing tensions. Yielding the field, after to all, to evolutionary theories is to succumb to a rival theological system hostile to Christianity.

E.F. Klug

ANTWORTEN ZU FRAGEN UNSERER ZEIT. By Hans-Lutz Poetsch. Verlag Lutherischen Buchhandlung Heinrich Harms, Grosz Oesingen, 1981. Paperback. 116 pages.

Is life nothing but a play, and are we nothing but players on the stage, with a considerable amount of sound and fury, but in the end signifying nothing? An absurd existence? "Hardly," says Poetsch, the multi-talented director of the Lutheran Hour for Europe. God cares very much for each one of us, and our life is not an empty sort of happening, but a carefully orchestrated and graciously directed pilgrimage that takes a blessed meaning and purpose from the saving work of Christ in our behalf.

This and many other significant questions form the body of this sprightly little book that speaks meaningfully to many questions that people are asking today as they ponder their existence. Instead of the stock existentialist answers, which lead nowhere and which bring no real answer anyway, Poetsch offers the sound Biblical answers that provide life with rich meaning and purpose about topics like these: the dangerous misunderstanding of God's earnest exhortations in His Word; the blessings of Christian fellowship; the priceless worth of the human being; leisure time, to use or abuse; "golden" youth; marriage; dealing with anxiety; being sick and without hope; triumph over death. There is a present pertinence to each chapter, and we can be sure that the radio audiences which first heard these messages would testify to the reader that these are indeed words for our time.

E. F. Klug

DIONYSIUS VON ALEXANDRIEN: ZUR FRAGE DES ORIGENISMUS IM DRITTEN JAHRHUNDERT. By Wolfgang A. Bienert. *Patristische Texte und Studien*, Band 21. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 1978. 251 pages.

Scholars have long recognized the importance of the third century for the church's developing doctrine and practice. With renewed interest in the trinitarian and Christological debates of the fourth century, modern patristic scholarship is becoming even more conscious of the third century as a pivotal period. However, to a considerable extent we are ill informed in the third century. The scholar has a reasonably large amount of evidence from the western, Latin-speaking church and is blessed by rather extensive extant writings from several major figures (Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, Novatian). However, the eastern, Greek-speaking church yields its third-century evidence more begrudgingly. Here we have primarily the immense output of Origen and the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Methodius. Beyond these three we have relatively little from the third-century Greek figures, although some were quite evidently important, even leading figures (Firmilian, Paul of Samosata).

This dearth of material is especially acute in regards to the church at Alexandria, which is tantalizingly enshrouded in historical mist until the episcopate of Alexander and the outbreak of Arianism (c. 310). To be sure, both Clement and Origen were associated with Alexandria, but neither tells us much about the "official" Church of Alexandria. While some evidence indicates that Clement may have been a presbyter, his relations with the "official" leaders of Alexandria were largely tangential. However, Origen clearly had significant contact with bishops of his day, including the bishop at Alexandria. Bishop Demetrius (189-231) recognized the immense talent of the young Origen and chose him to be the leader of the famous catechetical school in Alexandria. Origen received great acclaim in Alexandria and abroad for his penetrating and

forceful speculations, but his relationship to the Alexandrian leadership was not always harmonious. In 215 Demetrius disciplined Origen for misconduct (Origen had as a *layman* expounded the Scriptures before bishops in Palestine!), and around 231 Origen was forced to leave Alexandria because of intense opposition to him in the church there.

Despite these troubles, however, scholars have usually assumed that the pervasive theological and heremeneutical influence which Origen did in fact exert on Christian thought after him was predominant in third-century Alexandria as well. It is this common viewpoint which Bienert examines and finds wanting in this informative and well-argued book. Bienert examines the presence and influence of Origen in third-century Alexandria by investigating the most important third-century Alexandrian bishop, Dionysius (247-265).

In two introductory chapters Bienert attempts to define "Origenism" as it would have been in the third century (pp. 1-27) (too often the Origenism of the fifth century, which occasioned such strong reaction, is anachronistically read back into the third century) and discusses the early church witness about Dionysius and the nature of the extant works of Dionysius (pp. 28-70). Chapter 3 (pp. 71-133) establishes the primary historical thesis of the book: contrary to the general scholarly consensus that Dionysius was a follower and student of Origen, the evidence indicates that Dionysius was Origenistic in neither exegesis nor theology. The evidence is primarily two-fold: (1) The opposition which forced Origen's departure from Alexandria was led by Heraclas, leader after Origen of the catechetical school and bishop of Alexandria (231-247). It was Heraclas who as bishop gave the leadership of the catechetical school to Dionysius, which is hardly understandable were Dionysius a follower of Origen. (2) Examination of the extant writings of Dionysius show that they differ from Origen in exegetical method and specific theological opinion. While Origen allegorized the Biblical text, seeking the spiritual meaning hidden under the literal word, Dionysius was strongly philological in his exegetical approach. Dionysius also differed from Origen on the question of the pre-existence of the soul which was a central teaching of Origen and one which infected his entire system.

The last part of the book (pp. 134-221) discusses the role Dionysius played in the various disputes and problems which arose during his own episcopacy (247-265). Of special interest here is the moderate and mediatorial role played by Dionysius in the Novatian schism, the dispute with Egyptian chiliasm, and the trinitarian discussions of the mid-third century.

After this book scholarship can no longer unqualifiedly assert the "Origenistic" character of the Alexandrian Church. The "official" church of the bishop appears throughout the third century to be somewhat cool to Origen and his teaching (we know that Peter (300-311) was strongly opposed to Origen). Yet Origen had his followers in Alexandria. But these appear to have been principally independent philosopher-teachers. Needless to say, this book cannot be overlooked in the contemporary interest in the origins of Arianism and its early development.

William C. Weinrich

THE BIBLE AND HIGHER CRITICISM. By Harry R. Boer. Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1981. 108 pages. Paper. \$3.95.

Already printed three times under the title *Above the Bible? The Bible and Its Critics*, Boer's contribution is one of the many attempts to find a middle

road between contemporary Biblical criticism and the traditional views of inspiration and inerrancy. Hypothetically a convincing case is made for Biblical criticism. The homogenization of four Gospels does destroy each evangelist's individual contribution. His treatment of the pericope of the rich young ruler in the three synoptics punctuates the contribution of each writer in handling the same episode. Had Boer ended his study with his deft handling of this pericope, an unequivocal recommendation might have been given. The final three chapters, however, reveal a deeper philosophical problem which virtually necessitates error when the divine participated in the human. Supporting this view from Jesus' own lack of omniscience not only indicates a faulty Christology, but a faulty understanding of omniscience or the lack of it. Jesus may have acknowledged His intellectual limitations in regard to the last day, but even from a human point of view this was not a mistake. To confuse matters further Boer insists that his views are compatible with the traditional ones. They are not. A blockbuster is delivered for anyone still tied down to the sanctity of the *Textus Receptus*. Did you know that the last six verses of the Book of Revelation are only Erasmus' translation of the Vulgate's Latin back into Greek?

David P. Scaer

THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD. The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther. By Siegbert Becker. Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1982.

Neo-orthodoxy has called upon Dr. Martin Luther as a witness for its denial of the doctrine of the natural knowledge of God. Against this ill-founded attempt, rooted in Kierkegaard in the nineteenth century and developed by Barth and others in this century, Dr. Siegbert Becker provides a thoroughly captivating study of Luther's concept of reason. The reformer's stinging rebuke of Aristotle concerned the use of philosophy in religion and was not intended to be a total rebuke of that Greek philosopher or philosophy in general. Quite to the contrary, Luther had such a high appreciation of secular knowledge that he could confidently assert that in matters outside of faith, unbelievers could far excel Christians. Even Aristotle received accolades from Luther. Here was an endorsement and not a condemnation of human knowledge.

Professor Becker shows that Luther drew a sharp line between matters of reason and faith, so that reason in its highest form was incapable of establishing faith in the heart. This did not mean that for Luther reason was incapable of any knowledge of God at all. God's existence can be discovered by reason, but who that God is and what He is remains unknown to man. While Becker readily recognizes certain apparent similarities between Luther and the twentieth century neo-orthodox theologians regarding the inability of human reason to find a gracious God, Becker clearly points out that for Luther the failure to find God is the responsibility of sinful human nature and does not result from God's failure to disclose Himself in the world (contrary to neo-orthodoxy).

Becker points out that, while the presupposition for Luther is God's existence, the question of overarching importance for him was God's personal acceptance of him. Rational arguments for God's existence could result only in probabilities and not in the absolute certainties provided by God's special revelation in Christ. Faith feeds not on the probabilities of human reason, but on the certain revelation of Christ in the Bible.

The inability of reason to find Christ did not mean that Luther deserted reason to the philosophers. At the Coburg in 1530 he translated Aesop's *Fables*,

and he could recommend the wisdom sayings of the philosophers. Even faith was not a leap into irrationality, but reason illumined by faith could grasp Christ. Becker points out that faith does not eradicate the reasonable powers of a man, but transforms them for God's purposes. Becker convincingly points out that Luther did not hold to a contradictory position on reason. His condemnations of reason were directed against its autonomous use separated from faith. In secular matters reason could excel, and through conversion it could be used as the vehicle of faith, but in no way can it be instrumental in creating faith. Luther can even use rational arguments in destroying the positions of his opponents, but he would never concede that rational arguments had value in creating faith. Only within these sharply defined parameters did Luther find a purpose for apologetics. Against the view that a man could be lead to faith through a series of rational arguments, Luther cited the example of children, upon whom God could most easily work His grace since their reason had not yet developed. Dr. Becker rounds out his book by showing how Luther and subsequently his followers held to their particular understandings of the two natures in Christ, the real presence in the Lord's Supper, and universal grace and election against opponents who found these positions rationally unacceptable.

Luther has been so falsely painted in our century as the enemy of reason that he has been made to appear as purely emotional, operating on his instincts to the point of irrationality. Dr. Becker has gone a long way toward clearing up the confusion over Luther's concept of reason, a confusion which has plagued Luther research since the advent of neo-orthodoxy. Not only has he located the Luther citations discussing the reformer's understanding of reason, but he has tied down his discussion to such Lutheran doctrines as the natural knowledge of God, the person of Christ, the Lord's Supper, and election against the background of universal grace. All who read Dr. Becker's monograph will be convinced that Luther may have been anti-rationalistic, but he was not irrational. It would be difficult to find a better description of Luther's view of reason than Becker's: "It is not Christianity that needs to be made reasonable. It is reason that needs to be made Christian."

David P. Scaer

MINISTRY, WORD, AND SACRAMENTS: AN ENCHIRIDION. By Martin Chemnitz. Edited, translated, and briefly annotated by Luther Poellet. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 1981. 173 pages. Cloth. \$14.95.

Concordia Publishing House must hold the record for making sixteenth and seventeenth century Lutheran dogmatic literature available to the contemporary church. If historic Lutheranism fails, no blame can be placed at the feet of Concordia. Chemnitz's *Enchiridion* was devised for the regular examination of the clergy by the church superintendents, the Lutheran substitutes for bishops. This theological handbook is divided into four parts, of which only the first two parts, on the call and on the Word and the Sacraments, are developed — through the use of 333 questions and answers. The last two headings are hardly more than titles. It seems that the traditional Missouri Synod instruction of children through the question and answer method of the Schwann catechism probably evolved from Chemnitz's handbook. The question and answer method, which has now been popularized nationally through the advice columns of the newspaper, has the advantage of directly centering the material on a specific problem without the obfuscation of lengthy introductions, frequently irrelevant

to the urgent reader. The Lutheran pastor should not expect anything outstandingly original in the *Enchiridion*. He will more probably realize that the form of Lutheran theology which has indelibly stamped his psyche is as much from the hand of Chemnitz as from anyone. The *Enchiridion* came from that period in Lutheran theology when the periodic doctrinal examination of the clergy was considered necessary. Though the LCMS *Handbook* requires similar duties of counsellors, it would be difficult to find an area where the practice is still extant.

Like all handbooks (on gardening, plumbing, medicine, civil service, etc.) the *Enchiridion* can be picked up, understood without preliminaries, and be put to immediate use. Consider this random example: "219. *Is absolution a sacrament of the New Testament?*" Chemnitz answers that it cannot be a sacrament like Baptism and the Lord's Supper but that disputes about terminology should not hinder the teaching of it. Fifty-three questions are devoted to the subject of the ministry alone. Other sections into which the questions are divided include the Word of God, repentance, law, sin, contrition, Gospel, justifications, faith, predestination, good works, baptism, Lord's Supper, purgatory, invocation of saints, the last day, and the universal church. The LCMS distributes many documents with out direct charge to its clergy. If the publishers were to produce a paperback edition, this is one book that could well be distributed as a gift of the synod to every pastor. It deserves to be at every pastor's right hand. Though it is nearly three hundred years old, it still provides simple, direct answers to what still appear as complicated questions. As no angels are currently appearing in the skies, most readers will not begrudge the somewhat inflated cost of \$14.95. A more reasonable way for providing good printed theology to the clergy should be found.

David P. Scaer