

10-1-1933

Proselytizing, a New Problem

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Recommended Citation

Graebner, Theo. (1933) "Proselytizing, a New Problem," *Concordia Theological Monthly*: Vol. 4 , Article 102.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol4/iss1/102>

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fallen, was dem ganzen Ablassstreit eine neue Wendung gab. Zunächst waren die 95 Thesen gedruckt worden. In bezug hierauf scheint Böhmer ohne genügenden Beweis geschrieben zu haben: „Dann verfaßte er [Luther] das Plakat und ließ es bei Johann Grünenberg drüben an der Straße drucken“, dies vor dem Thesenanschlag. (S. 174.) Auf Grund der Forschungen Johannes Luthers scheint es vielmehr festzustellen, daß der Druck der Thesen durch Melchior Lotther in Leipzig besorgt wurde (S. 11—23), und zwar vor dem Thesenanschlag, da dies sowohl aus der Einleitung zu den Thesen selber hervorgeht wie aus der Anzahl von Exemplaren, die Luther in den ersten Tagen des November verfannte. — Ferner geht aus Luthers Brief an Scheurl hervor, daß seine Thesen ins Deutsche übersetzt worden waren. Dieser Dienst war von Kaspar Nühel besorgt worden, und es mag sein, daß sich die glühenden Berichte des Myconius von der schnellen Verbreitung der Thesen auf die deutsche Form der Thesen allein beziehen. Damit war Luthers Bedenken wegen der Sprache beseitigt.

Aber auch damit war Luther noch nicht zufrieden gewesen, wie er das in seinem Briefe an Scheurl andeutet. Er ließ darum zwei Schriften ausgehen, damit jedermann eine klare Einsicht in die ganze Streitfrage haben könne. Im Februar oder spätestens im März erschien „Ein Sermon von Ablass und Gnade“, der noch in demselben Jahre in mindestens dreizehn verschiedenen Einzelausgaben auf den Markt kam. Hier faßt Luther die 95 Thesen in zwanzig Artikel zusammen, aber so, daß der Text weit mehr als die nackten Sätze bietet. (XVIII, 270 ff.) Die zweite Schrift, „Erläuterungen seiner Disputation von der Kraft des Ablasses“ (*Resolutiones Disputationum de Indulgentiarum Virtute*) war am 30. Mai handschriftlich vollendet. Sie war schon am 4. Juni unter der Presse; am 10. Juli waren sechs Bogen gedruckt, und am 21. August war der Versand der Schrift im Gange. (XVIII, 100 bis 269.) Es ließe sich hier noch viel des Interessanten anreihen, besonders über Tegels Erwiderungen auf Luthers Thesen und über die Flut von Schriften, die der Ablassstreit hervorrief, aber das ist ein Kapitel für sich.

P. C. K r e h m a n n.

Proselytizing, a New Problem.

Handbooks for Bible classes that throughout discredit the Bible have not been a rare offering of the publishers' tables of recent years. But here is a text-book for religious study classes which not only casts doubt upon the veracity of Bible accounts, but which in detail is designed to eliminate the doctrine of Christianity from the consciousness of the new generation. And it is "approved by the Committee on Curriculum of the Board of Education of the Methodist Episcopal Church." The title is *Great Christian Teachings: A Book*

for *Study Classes*, and its author is Edwin Lewis, professor in the theological seminary of Drew University.* Let us review its attitude and position in detail and then reflect on the meaning of the word "proselytizing" as it is being modified by this and by similar texts.

From the pedagogical standpoint we have here a well-constructed book. The chapters with their problems and explanatory notes are well suited for individual and class instruction. But our troubles begin with the opening paragraph. Concerning the Bible the author says that it is "the great source-book of Christian teaching,"—but he immediately amplifies this statement with: "This does not mean that its teachings may not be supplemented in various ways. These supplementary sources may be described as, respectively, the Church, the inner light, and experience" (p. 9). To Professor Lewis it is simply "a record of life and experience" (p. 11). True, the authors of the Bible "not only describe experience, but they also attempt to interpret or explain it." But as is evident from the references to demons and to the six-day work of Creation, "experience was simply being interpreted in the light of such knowledge as was then possessed" (p. 13).

Beginning with this opening chapter, the book in the most subtle manner discredits the truthfulness of the Biblical record. The author insists that we should say that the Bible "brings us" the Word of God, rather than that the Bible "is" the Word of God (p. 12), and then takes great pains to point out the discrepancies and the obsolete thought patterns of the Scriptures. To him the Book of Jonah is simply "imaginative allegory" (p. 13). Very low were the moral standards of the Old Testament, as exemplified by "Samuel's command that Saul should destroy all the Amalekites, Nahum's doctrine of bitter hatred against Nineveh, Nehemiah's banishing of the foreign wives, the assertion in Ecclesiastes (4, 2, 3) that it is better to be dead than to be alive, the psalmist's supposition that God is the God of only the righteous few (Ps. 35) — any such teaching we reject as not being Christian" (p. 15). "Samuel believed that God was the kind of Being who could order helpless people to be destroyed" (p. 31). Doubt is cast upon the miraculous birth of Jesus, and a contradiction is established between the accounts in Matthew and in Luke (p. 57). Belief in the Virgin Birth therefore "can hardly be called indispensable to Christian discipleship" (p. 58). Notice how the entire authority of the New Testament is shaken by statements as suggestive of doubt as this: "There are still [!] many scholars who believe that 'the last commission' (Matt. 28, 19, 20), with its injunction to baptize, represents His [Christ's] actual intention" (p. 82). And in the helps for the teacher the author again stresses the distinction

* Methodist Book Concern, 1933. 121 pages, 4×6¾. Price, 50 cts.

between a Bible that "brings us" and one that "is" the Word of God. He asks: "Is the earth really square, with 'four corners' (Is. 11, 12), because 'the Bible says so'? Were there really 'witches' with power to converse with the dead (1 Sam. 20, 3—25) because 'the Bible says so'? Must we believe that epilepsy is demonic possession because, for example, of Luke 9, 37—42 (compare Matt. 17, 14—18)? (p. 109).

With the Bible discarded as an infallible source book of Christian teachings, the author departs on his voyage of speculation upon the various points of religious belief and does not permit one doctrine of Christianity to stand. In other words, we have here a completely modernistic presentation of religious belief.

God was conceived by Abraham and Moses as "narrowly national" (p. 19). Through legislation and institution of the priesthood, placed by Lewis in the fifth century B. C., "God was put farther away" (p. 21). As for believing in God's fatherhood, "trust is the proof of our sonship and service the proof of our brotherhood" (p. 23) — a position not one whit above that of the Masonic Order.

As for sin, the story of the Fall and the doctrine of original sin are "impossible conclusions" (p. 27). When are actions to be regarded as sin? "They may be called sin when they are thought of by the person concerned [!] as violations of the will of God" (p. 30). Hence also in morality no real foundations, no definite standards. "What used to be called in the child 'natural depravity' was nothing at all but the unorganized condition of the necessary equipment of life" (p. 33).

Salvation is throughout grounded upon human merit and performance. "To love, and to live, and to think, and to serve as Christ loved, and lived, and thought, and served — this is to attain the Christian salvation" (p. 39). But what about the cross? The first Christians, says Lewis, had some "extravagant metaphors" involving the idea of Christ being our "Ransom," or "Propitiation," or "Sacrifice." But what, then, becomes of God's character? "Suppose there were a father who had one son who loved and obeyed him perfectly and many other sons who were continually grieving him by their disobedience. What should we think of such a father who said that he would not forgive the disobedient sons until he had first of all inflicted the most dreadful punishment upon the one son who was obedient?" (p. 49.) ("To the Greeks foolishness," says Paul!) But what, then, is the meaning of the crucifixion? Lewis proposes the moral-influence theory in its modernistic form. "Jesus was convinced that He must suffer and die because in no other way could He be true to the whole demand of love as involved in His sonship to God and His brotherhood to men. Was He not saying that in love to God and man was summed up the Law and the Prophets? Did not

that mean that what God wanted was the spirit of love in all hearts? Was it not love that made men sons of God and brothers of their kind? Then must He not Himself pay the full price of that love? He would do whatever was needed to show the supremacy and the power of love" (p. 50). Of course, this is sheer nonsense. Here are sentences that sound as though they had meaning, but which are utterly devoid of sense since it is certainly true that, when we begin to *rationalize*, we have only one reason for the crucifixion — Jewish hatred. We note also that the denial of Christian truth becomes particularly outspoken at this point. The Father permitted Jesus to die as a criminal "not because there had to be a satisfaction of His justice before He could forgive men; not because He demanded a sacrifice as a condition to His being gracious" (p. 51). In conclusion, "the cross saves us only as we share it. . . . Jesus Christ made our salvation possible, but we have to convert the possibility into actuality" (p. 53).

In the reading of the gospel records we now have the advantage of "more freedom in handling them" (p. 59), since we now know how they were put together. This relieves us of all difficulty in judging of the possibility of miracles. The resurrection of Christ is highly problematical. Lewis distinguishes between the view of the disciples who thought they had seen Jesus in the flesh and Paul's way, who had an inward experience (p. 60). The discussion here contradicts the consonant testimony of the Pauline letters to the bodily resurrection of our Lord. What, then, does the resurrection story mean to us? As long as Jesus is a living experience with us, we may well regard the resurrection narratives "not as literal statements of fact, but as a more or less pictorial effort on the part of the early Christian community to account for their experience of Christ" (p. 61). After this we are not surprised to hear that the entire doctrine of the Incarnation and also that of the Trinity is brushed aside by the author as "rather elaborate speculation" (p. 62).

The discussion of conversion is along definitely Pelagian lines. Faith is a surrender to God, "meaning that you will highly resolve to act at all times as one should who sees in Jesus Christ the final truth about life" (p. 69.) Baptism for infants is no more a sign that they belong to God; "an infant, as such, is not 'lost'; therefore it is not 'saved' merely [?] by being baptized" (p. 82).

All the teachings regarding death, the future life, heaven, and hell are termed "apocalyptic," and Lewis maintains that this expression means "figurative." For instance, there is much in the Bible about the second coming of Christ. But this simply means "the progressive realization of His spirit in human lives and affairs" (p. 90). The rising of the dead from their graves is justifiable as "picture-thinking"; it belongs to "the realm of imagination" (p. 92).

The conventional views of heaven and hell as states of bliss and of torment are "utterly repellent" (p. 93).

I have carefully reread Lewis's *Great Christian Teachings* and have failed to find in its pages one sentence or a line that maintains any element of supernatural religion except the existence of a God (who is not a Trinity, however) and of the possibility of the persistence of the soul after death. It is a faith that will be readily subscribed to by the Ethical Society, by the *Monistenbund*, and by the rationalism of the streets. The fundamental doctrines of Christianity are denied implicitly and explicitly. The book is antichristian, destructive of faith in the Bible and in its teachings.

Methodist and Baptist publishers, not to mention Scribner's and the Macmillans, have for the past twenty years placed their facilities at the command of Modernists. As a result we have to-day a grown-up generation in the Protestant churches which from the days of its youth has no acquaintance with the doctrines of Christianity. This unbelieving generation is now in control of the Sunday-schools and other teaching agencies of the sectarian bodies. More and more it becomes a problem how to deal with this situation in our mission-work. When is a "prospect" to be regarded as a Christian who holds membership in another communion and, as such, not to be looked upon as missionary material? Until fifteen or twenty years ago we would say that adult persons who professed membership in the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches were members of a Christian body and could be presumed to have received and accepted Christian instruction. But the unquieting thought forces itself upon us — if proselytizing means to steal the sheep of some other shepherd, how about our attitude toward sheep whose shepherd we know to be a wolf?

THEO. GRAEBNER.

Reflections on the Status of Our Preaching.

A Symposium of Eighty Opinions.

Christian preaching never continues very long on the same plane. On the contrary, it is subject to a continual alternation of revival and decline, and that not merely with reference to its literary and homiletical qualities, but above all in the substance, the power, and the effectiveness of its message. There is nothing extraordinary about this; for "human progress of every kind is usually not steady and continuous, but rather goes by waves, like the rising tide. Declension and revival, forward and backward, up and down, these are the common Christian phenomena, individual, local, general. Even the most superficial study reveals the connection, at once causal and