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Book Review. - Literatur

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Book Review. — Literatur.

Gospel Light. Comments on the Teachings of Jesus from Aramaic and Unchanged Eastern Customs. By *George M. Lamsa, B. A.*, ethnologist, Aramaic language expert. The A. J. Holman Company, Bible publishers, Philadelphia, Pa. 401 pages, 5¼ × 7¾. Price, \$2.75.

George M. Lamsa is an Assyrian Christian, who was born in the mountains of Kurdistan, about forty miles south of the Lesser Mount Ararat, but is now a citizen of the United States. The present volume is his fifth work, its predecessors being *The Four Gospels from Aramaic; My Neighbor Jesus; The Key to the Origin of the Gospels; and The Secret of the East*. Lamsa claims that Jesus spoke Northern Aramaic which is his own mother tongue; that the four gospels were originally written in Aramaic for Aramaic-speaking peoples (which of course is not true); and that the Greek translators (he denies the doctrine of divine inspiration, at least *in praxi*) were woefully ignorant of the true meaning of the Aramaic idioms, which they took over in literal version into their Greek texts. The result is that Bible students to-day do not properly understand many passages in the gospels. In view of this fact Lamsa regards it as his proper task to set Western Bible scholars right by interpreting to them the true signification of the Aramaic idioms in obscure gospel-passages. His works fairly bristle with linguistic, historical, and theological errors, a fact which was abundantly proved by recognized scholars already in their reviews of his previous books. Nevertheless his manuscript has so impressed Dr. J. P. Harrington of the Smithsonian Institute at Washington, D. C. (ethnologist of acknowledged worth), that he wrote the Foreword to the present volume, and the A. J. Holman Company that it saw fit to publish this latest of his literary products. Manifestly quite a number of Bible students in our country have taken Lamsa seriously, so that also this new book of his may receive their approval. To the reviewer it seems as if Lamsa wrote the greater part of his new opus with his tongue in his cheek, depending on the gullibility of American readers to accept the preposterous interpretations (which have absolutely no trace of a chance to stand before the forum of scholarly research) which he sets forth in his new pot-boiler. Let us clearly and vigorously state that Lamsa's new book has but little value in clearing up Bible-passages and that his "comments" in many cases are self-evident, in numerous others, however, linguistically impossible, hermeneutically improbable, and doctrinally unsound and heretical. For illustration and proof we quote a few Lamsaisms. Thus Christ's beatitude "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Matt. 5, 3, Aramaically and Lamsaically interpreted, means: "Blessed are those who have no racial prejudice and are tolerant." Or: "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her," etc., Matt. 5, 28, means: "Who looks not at her face, but upon her naked form as she bathes in her garden, as did David when he espied Bathsheba." Or: "Deliver us from evil" means: "Part us from error." Or: "As Jonas was in the whale's belly," Matt. 12, 39 ff., means: "Jonas was in a hole, to use an American slang expression, *i. e.*, he was in great trouble, just as Christ was in great trouble when He was captured

and maltreated by His enemies." Or: "Joseph, the husband of Mary, had many wives, and that explains the 'brethren' and 'sisters' in Matt. 13, 55. 56. Or: "When thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money," Matt. 17, 27, means: "You will catch a fish that is worth one shekel. To the tax-collector Peter either gave the fish itself or the shekel which he got for it." Or: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Matt. 27, 46, means: "My God, My God, for this I was kept." Or: "Baptism by water is an outward expression of inward cleanliness, symbolical of the baptism by the Spirit" (Matt. 28, 19). Or: "He cast out many devils," Mark 1, 34, means: "He healed many crazy people." Or: "My name is legion, for we are many," Mark 5, 9, means: "My name is Legion, for I have many wrong ideas and am hopelessly insane." Or: "Jesus did not heed the prayer of the Syrophenician woman because He knew the prejudice of His followers and knew that they would be scandalized if He treated her with the same consideration as His own people" (Mark 7, 26). Or: "This is My body," Mark 14, 22 ff., means: "I shall be slain as this lamb." "This is My blood of the new testament" means: "Drink the wine in memory of My death and resurrection." Or: "Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias, had daughters, but no son, and she was barren merely because of her advanced age" (Luke 1, 7). Or: "Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils" (Luke 8, 2), means: "Out of whom went seven evil thoughts that dominated her." Or: "Jesus called Simon Peter for the reason that he could not quickly understand" (John 1, 42). Or: "At the wedding at Cana Jesus did not change water into wine, but served the guests *pure water*, the best of drinks. Afterwards He entertained them with spiritual wine. His words 'Mine hour is not yet come' mean: 'It is not My turn to provide the company with drinks'" (John 2, 1 ff.). In the Orient, according to Lamsa, the host provides the food, but not the drink; for this the guests must supply. Lamsa certainly denies the divine inspiration of the Bible, for he writes: "The writer of the gospel recorded this incident some fifteen or twenty years after Jesus' death. His statement is based solely on the remark made by the chief guest." Or: "Destroy this temple" (John 2, 19) means: "I will destroy these false beliefs and build a new temple not made with hands." Or: "When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus of the necessity of his being born again, Nicodemus did not understand Him because Jesus spoke Galilean Aramaic, while Nicodemus himself spoke Chaldean Aramaic." But enough of this sheer nonsense. The utterly preposterous misinterpretations in this book require no refutation.

J. T. MUELLER.

The Epistle Selections of the Ancient Church. An exegetical-homiletical treatment by *R. C. H. Lenski*. A series of Epistle-texts for the entire church-year. Lutheran Book Concern, Columbus, O. 932 pages, 6×9. Price, \$4.50. Order from Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo.

Again the untiring pen of Dr. Lenski has given us a work which may be called a *magnum opus*, not only on account of its size, but because of its rich content. As the title indicates, one here finds exegetical discussions of the old Epistle-lessons of the Church, written from the point of view of

the preacher, and at the conclusion of the remarks pertaining to a lesson there are submitted suggestive, helpful outlines, some long, others very brief. What Nebe did in German Dr. Lenski here does in English, with this difference, that his comments strike me as more practical, though not so abounding in exegetical lore as those of the German theologian. The reader will see that our Missouri Synod homiletical literature has been drawn on a number of times, with due acknowledgment. Sixty-four texts are treated, the number exceeding that of the number of weeks in a year because of the inclusion of texts for those major festivals of the church-year which, as a rule, do not fall on a Sunday and of a text for a mission-festival. It has been impossible for me to read all of the 932 pages of this book. What I have perused has impressed me as being sound in doctrine and excellent material to be employed by a minister in preparing for his chief function, that of preaching the Word of God to his congregation. The exposition of the text is based on the Greek original and is thorough and satisfying, touching the points on which there is controversy or which require elucidation.

Concluding his introduction, the venerable author says, speaking of outlines: "When I see another man's outline for a sermon, I am stimulated to try to produce a better one. The present-day fault of the preaching in our Lutheran circles is what Lowell condemned, namely, 'not failure, but low aim.' Let us do our part to raise our pulpit ideals." It is a sentiment which we gladly pass on to our readers. Dr. Lenski does not agree with those who think that preaching on the Epistle-lessons is more difficult than preaching on the Gospel-lessons. It must be admitted, of course, that the latter are far more in favor than the former. Moreover, one feels instinctively that the lack of the story element in the Epistle-texts makes it more difficult to write an interesting sermon on them than on the Gospel-texts. But the mere fact that certain texts present greater difficulties than others should not bar them from the Lutheran pulpit, whose occupant is bound to declare to his flock the whole counsel of God.

Dr. Lenski is entitled to the gratitude of the Lutheran clergy for this work.

NOTE. — The above review was written a few hours before the news of the death of Dr. Lenski was received. Since the author's significance to the Lutheran Church was discussed in the last issue of this journal, the above review was left unaltered.

W. ARNDT.

Present Theological Tendencies. By *Edwin Ewart Aubrey*. Harper and Brothers, New York. 245 pages, $5\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{3}{4}$, including an index of persons and of subjects. Price, \$2.00.

This interesting and informative volume, written by Dr. Aubrey, formerly instructor in religion at Vassar College, at present professor of theology in the divinity school of the University of Chicago, has been selected by the *Religious Book Club* as one of the preeminent theological books of the season "because of its clear-cut and highly informing picture of the dominating tendencies in current theological thinking, including the influences arising out of European thought, too little understood in this country." This characterization of the book is excellent; for in it Dr. Aubrey keenly and, in the main, correctly analyzes the chief present-

day theological trends, current both in Europe and in our own country. The author, himself a pronounced liberal and in complete agreement with the latitudinarian theological tendencies of our age, has instituted his investigations primarily from the viewpoint of the modern-culture problem in its two most important phases: "Why is it that our present Western culture has failed?" and: "What contribution can the Christian religion, viewed as a philosophy of civilization, offer our tottering culture?" The book contains no replies to these weighty queries, but in its final chapter, entitled "Conclusion," the results of the various investigations are placed before the reader with the implied suggestion that he himself, on the basis of the material proffered, find an adequate solution for the problems confronting the Church to-day. While the Biblical theologian, who views all matters in the light of the illuminating Gospel and there finds the true solutions for all problems, religious and otherwise, must reject all the antichristian trends discussed in this volume, the book nevertheless is of value also to him just because of the highly important information on the modern theological tendencies which it so liberally supplies. Modernism, in its various phases, Dialecticalism, or Barthianism (we still like that name), Social Gospelism, Neoscholasticism or Neo-Thomism, Theistic Naturalism, Rationalistic Supernaturalism, Scientific Mysticism, etc., all these theological trends are carefully and thoroughly scrutinized and criticized by the writer in his able analyses. Nor can the orthodox theologian ignore contributions of this sort. No matter how much he may dislike the theologies of Barth or Kierkegaard or the social-gospel doctrine of Reinhold Niebuhr or the misplaced optimism of the anthropocentric theology of modern humanism, he must know at least the basic principles of these destructive movements, which all alike repudiate the God and Gospel of the Bible. Dr. Aubrey's judgments may not always be correct, but on the whole his analyses of the present-day theological trends outside the realm of orthodox, Biblical theology are very practical and valuable. To all pastors who wish to be informed on this vital subject we recommend this very reasonably priced volume for careful study. J. T. MUELLER.

Oriental Philosophy. *The Story of the Teachers of the East.* By *Francis Grant*, Vice-President of the Roerich Museum, New York. The Dial Press, New York. 303 pages, 6¼ × 9½. Price, \$2.75.

Die Christus-Botschaft und die Religionen. Von *D. Dr. Johannes Witte*, ord. Professor fuer Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte und Missionswissenschaft an der Universitaet Berlin. Goettingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 280 Seiten, 6½ × 9½. Preis: Geheftet 10 RM., Leinwand 12 RM.

Although these two books are written in different languages, they belong together, namely under the category of comparative religion. The first is a sympathetic, frequently really delightful discussion of the chief teachers of false religions, those of India, China, Japan, Iran, and Islam. It really contains much information in a very appealing form and will probably be read with appreciation from this angle. But unfortunately the thesis of the author is fundamentally unsound, for he states, p. VIII: "And finally, reader and friend, must we not all express our appreciation

to the Ineffable One, by whatever name He has manifested Himself through all time?" And again, p. XI: "The prayer behind them is one, that men may yet reach that brotherhood, for which all teachers of East and West have willingly consecrated their lives." And again: "As with Mohammed, so with all flaming seekers of East and West, heroes who came and those who are to be. Each in turn kindles a light by which man may read the pages of an eternal book; a light by which man may find his way in the night-crossing, as he journeys out towards the morning star." All of which is hardly in accordance with one immutable fact, namely, that Christianity is the one absolute religion.—For that reason the second book presents a real antidote, for Dr. Witte, of the Chair of History of Religions and of Missions of the University of Berlin, in an altogether objective and scientific way analyzes the various religions, after some introductory chapters presenting the problem and the solution as given by the Church Fathers, by Luther, and others, including Confucianism, Mohammedanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*, and then very definitely presents his conclusions, which may be summarized in his words: "*Nach der Pruefung der Weltreligionen koennen wir also unser am Anfang unserer Untersuchung aufgestelltes Urteil ganz und gar aufrecht erhalten: Alle Religionen der Menschen sind Irrtum und Irrueg, darum Verderben. Nur in Christus ist Gott und darum nur in der Christus-Botschaft die Rettung der Welt. Hier aber ist auch wirklich die volle Rettung der Welt fuer Zeit und Ewigkeit*" (p. 246). The book abounds in splendid statements, such as the following: "*Nun kam Gott selbst und starb in Christus am Kreuz den Verbrechertod als Suchne fuer die Schuld der Menschen der ganzen Welt. Erst auf Grund dieses Suchnetodes Gottes selbst am Kreuz ist die Vergebung moeglich. Es gibt keine Vergebung am Kreuze Christi vorbei. Das ist das zentrale Heil nach dem Neuen Testament, vorbereitet im Alten Testament, geschaffen durch Christi Tod*" (p. 149). It is a pity that the book is marred by the author's strange rejection of the doctrine of inspiration and his total misunderstanding of Luther's attitude toward the Bible. (P. 63.) In his discussion of the description of heaven as given in the Bible the author has the sentence: "*Alles andere, was die Bibel sonst noch ueber das Jenseits sagt, ist menschliche Phantasie und mit Irrtum untermischt.*" Fortunately such passages are few and far between. The book itself will be hailed with rejoicing by students in the field of comparative religion who desire objective arguments against the syncretists of our day.

P. E. KREZMANN.

Christ for the Nation. *Dr. Walter A. Maier.* Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo. 272 pages, 5¼ × 7¼. Price, \$1.50.

In this volume our Concordia Publishing House presents the third series of Dr. Maier's radio sermons, delivered over a chain hook-up and heard and appreciated by many thousands of listeners, as has been evidenced by the heavy radio mail, including voluntary contributions of many thousands of dollars. Dr. Maier dedicated this volume to the memory of his father.

In the first radio address of the series Dr. Maier struck the key-note of his broadcasts by taking as his text 1 Cor. 2, 2: "I determined not to

know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." Dr. Maier said: "As we inaugurate to-day the third season of this radio mission over a special network from Minnesota to the Atlantic seaboard, you may ask in challenge, 'What is the message of this broadcast?' With many and conflicting voices on the air, some that appeal to reason and intellect, some that would inflame passions and prejudices, we promise that these weekly broadcasts have no political aims. This microphone will not be employed to fan the fires of class hatred, bigotry, and intolerance. The facilities of our Gospel network have not been drafted to flood the American nation and our Canadian neighbors with economic theories, financial strategies, and social speculations. Rather do we acknowledge as our own the apostle's determination '*not to know anything . . . save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.*' Addressing you from the campus of a divinity school that for almost a century has dedicated its resources to the Christ of the Scriptures, I offer you in the name of the Triune God not the Christ of present-day compromise and concession, not the Christ of twentieth-century indifference and indecision, not the Christ of modern doubt and denial, who has been exalted in His humanity only to be robbed of His deity, but (above all the evasion and distortion, the rank unbelief of our day) the Christ of the Cross. With my hand on the Bible, I dedicate this radio mission to the preaching of that Cross,—not as a memorial to martyrdom, a glorified symbol of an unselfish ideal, but as 'the accursed tree,' the cruel, heart-breaking gibbet on which the Savior died the blackest death of all history. That crucified Christ, Son of God, yet Son of Man, offering the eternal mercies of forgiven sins as the free gift of His boundless grace; strengthening our faltering souls with His never-failing Spirit; guiding those who trust in Him from the sorrows of this life to the glories of the next; the Savior for every sin and for every sinner, the unfailing Friend for every moment and for every path; the Christ for our hearts, our homes, our churches, our nation,—this all-sufficient Savior, and Him alone, we offer with the pledge '*Nothing . . . save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified*' in every message, every prayer, every hymn, broadcast over this Gospel network." In his second address Dr. Maier spoke of the Bible and among other things said: "I challenge any one within the range of my voice to show that the Bible, as originally inspired by God, contains even a minute mistake. I ask any opponent of the Scriptures who may have tuned in accidentally or out of curiosity to submit proof that the Bible as given by God makes a single faulty or incorrect statement in any one of its 31,000 plus verses from Genesis to Revelation." The themes of the other addresses were such as "What can the Church Offer in the Present Crisis?" "Build the Home with God"; "God Answers Prayer"; "Unashamed of the Testimony of Christ"; "Back to Bible Truth!" "Strengthen the Foundation"; "Glorying in the Cross"; "The Pleading Love of Christ"; "With Christ at Calvary"; "With Christ at the Open Grave."

We know that both pastors and laymen will derive much spiritual benefit by a careful reading of Dr. Maier's *Christ for the Nation*. May the book have a wide sale not only among the members of our churches, but also among many who do not hear the Gospel from their pulpits and among the many unchurched!

J. H. C. FRITZ.

Glaubensfragen und Bußfragen mit Gebeten. Von Hermann Bezzel. D. Gubert-Verlag, Stuttgart. 96 Seiten $4\frac{1}{4} \times 6$. Preis: kartoniert, RM. 1; in Leinen, RM. 1.40.

Die hier gebotenen Andachten, aus dem Nachlaß Bezzels, enthalten I. Betrachtungen über den 1. Johannisbrief, II. Betrachtungen über die Bedeutung der Sakramente. Sie stammen aus den Jahren seiner Wirksamkeit als Rektor der Diakonissenanstalt in Neuenbetschau und wurden dort vor den Diakonissen gehalten. Es sind schlichte, lehrhafte Darlegungen, die ein Pastor sehr gut bewerten kann, wenn auch hin und wieder gewisse Redewendungen etwas fremd anmuten. Eine ähnliche Anwendung des Wortes Gottes bei Beichtanmeldungen und sonstiger pastoraler Arbeit, etwa an Krankenbetten, dürfte sich als sehr segensreich erweisen. Die Gebete tragen das Gepräge rechter Innigkeit und tiefer Gebantenführung.

P. E. K r e t z m a n n.

Topics for the Young People's Society, No. 3. Compiled by Helen Percy. The Warner Press, Anderson, Ind. 128 pages, $4\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{1}{4}$. Price, paper, 50 cts.

This little volume might prove very stimulating and interesting in showing what other people are doing for their young people's associations, for the compiler offers 31 topics, or outlines, for topical discussions on various subjects, such as "Do I Want to Be a Christian?" "The Principles of Jesus"; "Have You Fulfilled God's Purpose in You?" In the doctrinal subjects there is much of admiration and imitation of Jesus, but not enough appreciation and appropriation. The entire book might be much improved if the topics were offered in some sort of orderly progression, for it is doubtful whether such sporadic discussions will have lasting value. Many outlines and presentations are hazy, not well organized, and therefore not adequate for the most successful work. There are too many yes — no questions. Mistakes of this kind may be rectified in a new edition of the booklet. Meanwhile topic leaders might examine the compilation for the sake of receiving some idea of what others are doing.

P. E. KRETZMANN.

Faces toward God. By N. M. Ylvisaker. Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, Minn. 240 pages, $5\frac{1}{4} \times 8$. Price, \$1.00. Order from Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo.

The author of this book is Executive Secretary of the Young People's Luther League of the Norwegian Lutheran Church. He here offers sixteen chapters or meditations, with an Epilog, on some of the fundamental facts which ought to engage the attention of young — and old Christians. In this stimulating, challenging volume practically every chapter contains rich food for thought, although the chapters on "The Cross," "Facing Christ," and "The Praying Heart" seem particularly gripping, since they breathe a burning zeal for a Christ-centered faith and a sanctified life. The book is in a way a companion volume to *The Road Back to God* issued by the executive secretary of the Walther League. It would be most desirable if literature of this type should replace the shallow and poisonous books which are circulating so widely in our days.

P. E. KRETZMANN.

One-Way Streets. Talks to the Teen Age — and Other Ages. By *Arthur Osborne*. The Judson Press, Philadelphia. 213 pages, 5x8. Price, \$1.00.

The author is a layman, a practising civil engineer in Charleston, W. Va., prominent in Sunday-school work in his denomination. The talks which he here offers were delivered before Sunday-school classes and are of the kind frequently given in institutions of this type. Many of the topics and little stories are interesting and valuable, but the application frequently leaves much to be desired, especially in the field of doctrine. The author has no conception of the grace of God in Christ Jesus (p. 29), his statement being: "The grace of Jesus Christ is obtained by simply giving our hearts to Him and resolving to study and follow His teachings." The author considers the hymn "There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood" as "now somewhat out of date," and he has many other misleading ideas. But a careful choice of some of the topics may enable a pastor to inject new life into his own short addresses to children and young people.

P. E. KRETMANN.

Martin Luther. A Brief Review of His Life and Work. A Children's Reformation Service. By *Peter C. Krey*. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo. Price: Single copy, 5 cts.; dozen, 50 cts., and postage; 100, \$3.50, and postage.

This is a short and simple, but altogether satisfactory service for the children's celebration on Reformation Day, with a full catechization, interspersed with hymns, all of which are taken from the compositions of the great Reformer himself.

P. E. KRETMANN.

Literatur.

Das soeben erschienene Doppelheft des „Luthertum“ (August-September 1936) — es ist dem Erlanger Kunsthistoriker Hans Preuß zu seinem sechzigsten Geburtstag gewidmet — enthält eine Reihe von Beiträgen, die in enger Beziehung zu dem Arbeitsgebiet des Jubilars stehen. Paul Althaus spricht über den „Sinn der Liturgie“; Otto Prosch bringt eine Untersuchung, „Das Todesjahr Pauli“. Auch Werner Eiert, Hermann Sasse und Johannes Bergoldt sind vertreten. — Die „Theologie der Gegenwart“ bringt in der laufenden Nummer besonders Besprechungen von Büchern auf dem Gebiet des Alten Testaments.

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