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Book Review. - Literatur

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Book Review

All books reviewed in this periodical may be procured from or through Concordia Publishing House, 3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis 18, Mo.

The Nature and Destiny of Man. A Christian Interpretation. II. Human Destiny. By Reinhold Niebuhr. Charles Scribner's Sons. XII, 329 pages, 5½×8¼. \$2.75.

While the first volume of the Gifford lectures, 1939, discusses chiefly human nature (cp. review in C. T. M., Vol. XIII, p. 156 ff.), the second volume deals primarily with human destiny. These two volumes present Niebuhr's philosophy of history. Liberal theology believes that the meaning of history is disclosed in the salvation of society and therefore operates on the Hegelian premise that the standard of ethics, the human-divine relation, the final purpose of man, must always be viewed as social. This is the false optimism of the social gospel. Dialectical theology — Niebuhr, Tillich, Lewis, are its outstanding representatives in America — holds that all divine-human relations are individual. While anthropocentric liberal theology views man only as being involved in history (this-worldliness), the dialecticians take the position that man is both involved in history and above history. This has led to the theory of supra-history, i. e., that all human-divine relations such as the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, occur not only at given points in history but also stand above historical dates in an eternity-involving aspect. This is Niebuhr's approach as announced in the opening sentence: "Man is, and yet is not, involved in the flux of nature and time. He is a creature, subject to nature's necessities and limitations; but he is also a free spirit who knows of the brevity of his years, and by this knowledge transcends the temporal by some capacity within himself" (p. 1). In other words: Because man is and yet is not in history, it is paradoxically true that the disclosure of life's meaning comes in history, but the source of life's meaning transcends history (36). "History has reached its culmination in the disclosure of the hidden sovereignty of God and the revelation of the meaning of life in history. But history is still waiting for its culmination in the second coming of the Messiah" (47). This is what Jesus meant when in combining the concepts of the "suffering Servant" and the "Son of Man," He referred to His first coming and to a second coming, either His own or another (48). Only a God who is both in history and above history, who is both transcendent and immanent, can solve man's problems. For this reason neither the Absolute of Greek thought nor the limited god of Liberal Theology can solve the meaning of history. Niebuhr's dialectical concept of God, man, history, has captivated the interest of American theologians and no doubt accounts for the fact that he is hailed with delight as the champion of neo-orthodoxy and the opponent of Liberal Theology. But the present second volume, even more than the first volume, shows that in finding the answer to the meaning of history Niebuhr's neo-orthodoxy is liberal theology still.

1. Following Kierkegaard's dialectical method, Niebuhr makes successful attacks upon classical culture and liberal theology, which attempt to disclose the true meaning of history by nature or reason (15); he speaks of God's revelation to man in Christ; he condemns the Schleiermacherian view that "Christ" is only the record of a high form of "God-consciousness," because such a "Christ" would be finite and not transcendent (53). Niebuhr holds that the Christian revelation must be an "incarnation," not man rising to God, but God coming down to man (60). "In the New Testament the atonement is the significant content of the incarnation. To say that Christ is the express image of His person is to assert that in the epic of this life and death the final mystery of divine power which bears history is clarified, and with that clarification life and history are given their true meaning" (55). (Cp. p. 67.) But Niebuhr's paradoxical method is philosophy and rationalism. All the "theological" findings in the two volumes are based upon this dialectical, paradoxical approach. It seems that Niebuhr believes that a thing is true because it is paradoxical, even as Barth attempts to prove divine truths paradoxically, *e. g.*, because man is a sinner, it must follow that there is also forgiveness. Accordingly Niebuhr does not find God revealed in the word of the Bible, but in history and at the same time above history (46). Niebuhr rejects the Reformation insistence upon the authority of Scripture as a new idolatry, biblicism, bibliolatry (152, 202), "the conviction that the Bible gave them (the faithful of the Reformation) the final truth contributed to the individual's spiritual arrogance" (229), "the Bible is another instrument of human pride" (231), the biblical symbols, *e. g.*, Christ's second coming, the resurrection of the body, immortality, must be taken seriously but not literally (50, 288, 294). The paradoxical or dialectical method as applied to the philosophy of history is made the source of truth and therefore also the standard by which the Bible must be judged. Man's capacity for rational self-transcendence opens up new points of vantage to judge our finite perspective in the light of a more inclusive truth. This is obtained from a twofold source, Christ and the *logos* within us (214 f.). The ultimate truth is to be found not by the intolerant attitude of Catholics, Calvinists, Lutherans, but by "tolerance" (220 ff.). The neo-orthodox Niebuhr, believing that truth is both beyond and within the reach of human reason, is still in the camp of liberal theology with its empirical and rationalistic approach to theology.

2. Niebuhr's anthropology is both in the Catholic and in the Liberal tradition. In Volume I he condemned in no uncertain terms the easy conscience of modern man, human pride, and liberal theology's untenable principle of the inherent perfectibility of human nature. The dialectical theologians have successfully challenged the false optimism of liberal theology, but have substituted a gloomy pessimism. The anthropology of the dialecticians, however, is not the Scriptural realism, but a paradoxical combination of human finiteness and self-transcendence. On the one hand, Niebuhr speaks of the inherent wickedness of man (cp. Vol. 1) and, on the other hand, of man's inherent capacities for good. Niebuhr rejects the doctrine of man's total depravity and defines the Fall as a symbol. The Scriptural account of the state of

innocence before Adam's fall is a symbol of the fact that human nature has unlimited possibilities (77). Man, however, cannot effect his salvation alone, and thus God must enter with His judgment and with His grace. In this Niebuhr differs from liberal theology. Grace, however, is defined as the mercy of God which overcomes the sinful element in man's achievements as well as the power of God within man. "In Christ both wisdom and power are available to man, that is, not only has the true meaning of life (wisdom) been disclosed, but also resources have been made available to fulfill that meaning (power). In Him the faithful find not only truth, but grace" (98). This amounts to the Roman *gratia infusa*. Niebuhr inclines to the Roman Catholic view of free will (117) and rejects Luther's doctrine that pagan goodness has no value before God (186). And thus, in the final analysis, the neo-orthodox Niebuhr's quarrel concerning the doctrine of man is therefore not so much with liberal theology as it is with orthodox Christianity.

3. Niebuhr's neo-orthodoxy becomes apparent as modern Liberalism, especially in his view concerning Christ's Person and work. He believes that Jesus erred as to the true nature and the fulfillment of history (50 f.). According to Niebuhr, Jesus taught that the Messiah as God's representative — not, as Humanism holds, some force in history — would reveal the final meaning of history by vicarious suffering (45). "The synthesis of Jesus as the suffering Servant and the divine representative makes it possible for God to suffer for man's iniquity, that is, He resolves the contradictions of history, not only by judgment upon the wrongs, but primarily by revealing His mercy in history so that man in history sees both his guilt and his redemption, and thus the Messiah will give His life as a ransom" (46). This means that Christ as the norm of human nature defines the final perfection of man in history (68). Man in history is capable only of *eros*, that is, mutual, reciprocal, egoistic love. Man above history is capable of *agape*, that is, sacrificial love. "This paradoxical relation of sacrificial and mutual love clarifies the Christian doctrine of the sinlessness of Christ and makes the doctrine that Jesus was both human and divine meaningful" (70). Niebuhr rejects the doctrine of the Virgin Birth (73) and holds that God is revealed in Christ, more particularly in the cross, inasmuch as we see God as being above history with its *eros* or self-interested love, and as being free to have *agape*, which does the very opposite of human love (71, 72). Thus the cross reveals the divine, history-transcending *agape*, and Christ becomes the "second Adam," the normative, the essential man, the perfect human character, who re-establishes the original virtue of Adam and sets forth the ideal possibilities of human life (76 ff.). Niebuhr at times seems to approach the Christian concept of the Vicarious Atonement ("divine mercy triumphs over divine wrath without annulling it," p. 104), but according to Niebuhr the cross is not the accomplished redemption of the world, but rather the disclosure of that attribute of God which can overcome human corruptions. "The Cross symbolizes the perfection of *agape*, which transcends all particular norms of justice and mutuality in history" (74). Niebuhr's theory of the Atonement does not differ essentially from Bushnell's Moral Influence theory. "The atonement is the beginning of wisdom in the

sense that it contains symbolically all that the Christian faith maintains about what man ought to do and what he cannot do, about his obligations and final incapacity to fulfill them, about the importance of decisions and achievements in history and about their final significance" (212).

4. Neo-orthodoxy is a this-worldly religion, in spite of the fact that Niebuhr speaks much of transcendence. His kingdom of God is defined in accord with his concept of grace as man's constant struggle for sanctification in the social relations. The section on the Kingdom (pp. 244—286) is not theology, but a blueprint for organizing the world along lines of truth and justice. He condemns the Lutheran otherworldly view and charges the Reformer with social antinomianism, a curiously perverse social morality, extreme pessimism, and utter lack of interest in the brotherhood of man (191 ff.; 277 f.). Did Niebuhr really study Luther's treatise on the *Liberty of the Christian Man*? Is he acquainted with Luther's social writings, notably the *Address to the Nobility* and the *Large Catechism on the Ten Commandments*? Niebuhr's interests are not in the spiritual kingdom, where the believer daily receives the forgiveness of sin for Christ's sake, but in "the new world which must be built by resolute men who when hope is dead will hope by faith" (285). Believing that "history moves toward the realization of the Kingdom, but yet the judgment of God is upon every new realization" (286), Niebuhr has not deviated essentially from his former social gospel position, as set forth, for example, in *Religion and Power Politics*.

5. Neo-orthodoxy is very unorthodox in defining the end of the world. It employs the paradoxical method. Inasmuch as man is finite, the end of the world is *finis*, i. e., that which exists ceases to be; but inasmuch as man is free and above history, the end is *telos*, i. e., the purpose of history has been accomplished. Thus all things move both toward fulfillment and dissolution (287). History is actually only an interim between the disclosure and the fulfillment of its meaning (213). What does Niebuhr mean by the culmination of history, *finis* or *telos* or both? We are not sure, for he uses the eschatological Bible concepts symbolically. The triumphant return of Christ is an "expression of faith in the sufficiency of God's sovereignty over the world and history and in the final supremacy of love over all forces of self-love which defy for the moment the inclusive harmony of all things under the will of God" (290). The final judgment by Christ according to the human nature is the Scriptural symbol denoting that man will not be judged by contrasting the eternal with the finite, but according to a human ideal possibility. Nevertheless the judgment also conveys the idea that man cannot free himself from his sin without God's "grace" (292 f.). The New Testament concepts of the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul indicate that only those things have abiding value which transcend finite conditions (296). The end of history must then be viewed as *telos*, for if we view history only from our involvement in history, we shall fail to see history in all its richness and variety; and if we take our position above history, then we fail to see its "self-surpassing growth" (301).

Niebuhr's book is hard to read. Nevertheless the two volumes de-

serve close scrutiny, not because of any positive contribution to the orthodox theology of Lutheranism, but because they show so clearly the bankruptcy of every theology which is not grounded in the Word of God. Niebuhr labors—and the reader must also labor through the paradoxical statements—with all the tools of modern scholarship to show the inadequacy of optimistic Liberalism. While he lands some telling blows against liberal theology, he fails to give the real meaning of Scripture, and his philosophy of history is as inadequate as that of the classical culture, of Roman asceticism, and the false optimism of Liberalism. Not the philosophy of dialectical theology will give the meaning of history, but the “more sure word of prophecy.”

F. E. MAYER

80 Eventful Years. Reminiscences of Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo. 1944. 267 pages, 5½×8. \$2.00.

Finally it has come—the book which we eagerly waited for and expected, a volume of reminiscences by the genial, highly esteemed president emeritus of Concordia Seminary, who March 29 observed his eightieth birthday. Through his travelogs published in the *Lutheraner* he has achieved an enviable reputation as a raconteur, and his gift of presenting pleasing narrative accompanied by wise and helpful reflections and admonitions is here splendidly exemplified. Dr. Fuerbringer tells the story of his own life and, as all somewhat acquainted with his family connections and official work know, he was placed in a position which enabled him to be a close observer and in many a way made him an actor in the drama of the Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod. The narrative is simple, straightforward, and artless, enlivened, however, now and then by quotations from the Scriptures or from ecclesiastical and even profane authors like Goethe. The person interested in historical minutiae will here find a very valuable mine for study and research, for the author tries to be precise and to verify the statements he makes. The number of footnotes added at the conclusion of the volume is not inconsiderable. The work is richly illustrated, some of the photographs submitted being rather rare. Special attention is given to the prominent leaders of the Church: Walther, Pieper, Stoeckhardt, Graebner, and others. The volume is not intended to be a theological contribution for the understanding of the doctrinal positions held by our Church and hence, though there are many helpful allusions to controversies in which our Synod was involved, no strictly theological chapters have been included. Dr. Fuerbringer has taught thousands of men who are now engaged in the glorious work of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That fact alone entitles this volume of reminiscences to a respectful reception. If in addition to the other engaging features of the book we bear in mind that in the author we have a link between the heroic past of our church body and the present, that he was not only a relative but also a student of Dr. Walther, our great theological leader, the value of the book for all who love our Church or wish to become acquainted with its history is immensely enhanced. We hardly have to urge that the book be bought; an announcement of its appearance is sufficient to insure a wide sale.

W. ARNDT

Concordia Bible Teacher. Edited by Rev. A. C. Mueller under the Auspices of the Board of Christian Education, Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. Vol. V, No. 2, April, 1944. Prepared by the Rev. J. M. Weidenschilling, S. T. D. Topic of the Quarter: "Parables of Jesus."

Concordia Bible Student. Edited by Rev. A. C. Mueller under the Auspices of the Board of Christian Education, Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. Vol. XXXI, No. 2, April, 1944. Topic of the Quarter: "Parables of Jesus." Prepared by Rev. J. M. Weidenschilling, S. T. D. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo.

Here are two worth-while quarterly publications with which our clergy should be acquainted. The *Concordia Bible Teacher* costs 75 cents per annum, the *Concordia Bible Student*, 50 cents per annum. In the quarter beginning with April the subject treated is: "The Parables of Jesus." The pamphlet intended for the teachers naturally presents material of a more advanced nature than does the issue prepared for the students. In all, twenty-seven parables are treated. The style is popular and simple. No one can read these pamphlets without being richly benefited. The pamphlet for the students includes at the end of each chapter teaching devices, namely, a section entitled "For Study and Discussion," and another one having the caption "Searching Daily for Spiritual Treasures." Needless to say, these pamphlets go forth with our sincere benedictions.

W. ARNDT

Our Bible. A Guide to the Study of the Holy Scriptures. By J. M. Weidenschilling, M. A., S. T. D. Second printing. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo. 95 pages, 5×8. 35 cents.

This neat paper-bound book, we are sure, will delight all lovers of the Holy Scriptures who would like to become better acquainted with the Sacred Volume. In 12 chapters the chief facts pertaining to the Bible are submitted. One of these chapters has the heading "The Bible, a Library of Sacred Literature." The title of another chapter reads "Ancient Historical Records." Chapter 7 presents "The Story of the Christian Church." Chapter 10 tells "How the Sacred Books Became Our Bible." The presentation throughout is pleasing and simple, and the information submitted is important and vital. Every chapter is followed by a section entitled "For Study and Discussion," in which as a rule questions are submitted. Another appendix added to every chapter has the title "My Daily Companion," in which interesting, stimulating questions for every day from Monday to Saturday are placed before the reader. The volume is concluded by a number of minor sections containing prayers for Bible study, interesting facts about the Bible, etc. In the Preface the Rev. A. C. Mueller, editor of the Sunday school literature of the Missouri Synod, correctly says, "People as a rule know very little about the history of the Bible, the ancient versions, the Greek and the Hebrew manuscripts, and the origin of modern versions. They are astonished when someone introduces them to the

history of the Bible or when they hear the story of its remarkable preservation down through the ages." May this little volume be an aid in making our people read and love the Holy Scriptures more and more.

W. ARNDT

What a Man Can Believe. By James D. Smart, Minister of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, Peterborough, Ontario. The Westminster Press. 252 pages, 5½×8. \$2.00.

While our book utters the complaint: "The Protestant Church of our time is very much like a house standing in the midst of the floodwaters of a great river. The swirling waters break against it, and the storms shake it. As we watch, we see walls crumbling here and there and disappearing under the flood. We ask: 'Can it stand against every storm? Will its foundations be strong enough to hold?'" (p.168), it is itself engaged in the work of undermining the foundations of the Church. It denies, in the first place, that the Bible is the Word of God. It repudiates the "doctrine of the literal inerrancy of the Scriptures," "of the absolute authority of the letter of the Scriptures," will not have men "believe, literally, that the whale swallowed Jonah and that the entire Creation was completed in six days of twenty-four hours each," and declares: "The Word of God cannot by any stretch of imagination be identified literally with the words of a book. . . . Martin Luther said that the Bible is the cradle in which the Word of God is laid." (Pp.18, 36, 70, 82.) And, in the second place, it has no use for the central teaching of the Bible, the Vicarious Atonement. What it teaches on the Atonement is summarized in the following statements: "What, then, is the special meaning of the cross? Is it not this, that on the cross was enacted the consummation of all holiness and love? In the light of what Jesus is we first become aware of the depths of darkness that dwell in us. . . . It is perfect love, a love and mercy which would not turn aside even from a cross when the work it sought to make perfect was the deliverance of man from self and the opening of a way once and for all for him to be reconciled with God." "The cross draws us out of ourselves and up to God because it judges us and sets us where we belong in life. Because it breaks the power of evil over us by humbling our pride, the cross and the cross alone has the power to deliver us from the imprisonment and darkness of our self-will and to bring us into our true heritage as the sons of God." "It was God's holiness in Jesus which made men hate their sin in His presence, while in the same moment God's love in Him gave them absolute confidence that they could leave their sin behind and begin a new life." (Pp. 143, 214, 216.) The meaning of these and similar statements is that it is not the death of Christ itself that reconciled God with the world, but that the sinner's reconciliation with God depends on the effect produced in him when he beholds the holiness and love of God which was displayed on the cross. In line with such a theory of the Atonement is this statement: "In relation to the God and Father who rules over all our days, forgiveness is the overcoming of our rebelliousness and the reconciling of our wills to his will for us." (P.193.) And we are not surprised when we read in the section dealing with "The Fate of the Unevan-

gelized": "What about the earnest, thoughtful God-fearing man of a non-Christian religion, a man who perhaps puts many Christians to shame with his virtues? Are we to say that such men lose their chance of heaven because they do not happen to have had their life stream directed into Christian channels? . . . The man who asserts that God cannot say to a Buddhist or a Confucianist, or even for that matter to a professing atheist, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant,' denies to God the freedom which is His. . . ." (P. 243 f.)

Some sections of our book offer the Scriptural remedy for certain ills of the Church. For instance: "The problems of *doctrinal* training are not given very serious consideration by the Church. The Church's emphasis is upon activity and conduct rather than upon ideas. . . . Here, then, is where we stand. We are certain that right beliefs are essential to the Christian life. . . . Morality, when its foundations in Christian knowledge are gone, has not much to hold it up. . . . When once we know that upon the nature of our faith all else depends, we shall cease as ministers and as people to treat doctrine as a matter of secondary, or even lesser, importance." (Pp. 17, 32, 40, 252.) — "With Martin Luther the Reformers had to say: 'Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. So help me God.' The truth for them was not a formal creed which they held in their minds and could change at will. The truth held them and possessed them so that they were no longer free." (P. 64 f.) — There is "a passion for the unification of the visible Church, arising from the conviction that the Christian Church will have strength in the face of the unbelieving world only when it is able to present a completely united front. . . . Those impelled by this impulse tend to minimize all differences in regard to faith and doctrine, and refuse to admit their implications or even to take them with real seriousness, because their great eagerness is for a unity which will impress the world outside the Church." (P. 185 f.)

TH. ENGLER

The Chemistry of the Blood and Other Stirring Messages. By M. R. De Haan. M. D. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Mich. 183 pages, 5½×8. \$1.50.

The author of these addresses, a medical doctor, is recommended by the publishers as an outstanding Bible teacher, broadcasting over three hundred radio stations. Many things in the book are to his credit. A thoroughgoing Fundamentalist, he confesses without any qualification such fundamentals as the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, the deity and vicarious atonement of Christ, salvation by grace through faith, and so forth. But he errs throughout his talks in an attempt at apologetics, going beyond and, in places, against God's Word and so (not to say more) only weakens his witness to the truth. By way of illustration, let us state the following. He builds up and bases the value and efficacy of Christ's shed blood on the nature and consistency of human blood. Misusing the Biblical teaching that "the life of the flesh is in the blood," he asserts that when God "breathed into his [Adam's] nostrils the breath of life," He "imparted blood to that lump of clay," by which "man became a living soul." When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree, this caused "blood-poisoning." "Sin affected

the blood of man, not the body, except indirectly, because it is supplied by the blood" (p.14). "Since God 'made of blood all nations,' sin is transmitted to all of Adam's progeny" (*ibid.*). Christ's conception and birth were sinless, because sin is transmitted through the blood, and the blood is supplied to the fetus only through the male, not through the female. (Cf. pp. 14, 35, etc.) This grotesque and, at times, almost ludicrous exegesis spoils the whole book, for what the author offers his readers are not Scripture teachings, but just so many vagaries of a well-meaning, but misled and misleading mind. We regret this, since evidently the writer believes in the salvation truths of the Gospel. Where he errs (and this is most serious), is in his false motivation and interpretation.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

The Six Creative Days. An Interpretation of the Biblical Account of Creation in the Light of the Existing Universe as We Know It. By the late L. Franklin Gruber. Lutheran Literary Board, Burlington, Iowa. 105 pages, 5x7½. \$1.00.

Someone has said, somewhat facetiously, that the Bible has suffered more at the hands of its friends than at those of its enemies. But the saying is frequently borne out, as a number of recent publications abundantly show. And the book before us, sad to say, is one of just this type. It is an attempt, briefly stated, to explain away the plain statement of the Bible that God made the earth and all that is therein in six days, days as we now know and designate them. The arguments of the book are very much like those of Bettex in a similar monograph, to which the writer refers. All the outworn, specious arguments are again presented, with a show of learning that might confuse the reader who is not a simple believer in Holy Writ. The book really presents the claims of theistic evolutionism. It abounds with speculation and rationalization. And its chief thesis is effectively and permanently refuted by the unmistakable word of the Lord in Ex. 20:11: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is." Cp. Ex. 31:17. If men like the unbeliever H. H. Lane frankly state that the word *yom* in the account of the six-day creation cannot mean anything but a period of twenty-four hours, it seems a pity that an alleged believer in the Bible should make such damaging concessions to unbelief. See *Lehre und Wehre*, "Das Wort Tag, Gen. 1," 65:465; *Theological Monthly*, "The Length of a Creation Day," IV:37; *Lutheran School Journal*, "The First Week of the Earth's History," 79:247.

P. E. KRETZMANN

BOOKS RECEIVED

From Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Rubies from Ruth. By W. G. Heslop, D. D. 112 pages, 5½x8. \$1.25

Christian Dialogs and Recitations. By C. Kuipers. 83 pages. 5½x7¾. 60 cents.

Great Illustrations. By Fred T. Fuge. 117 pages, 5½x8. \$1.25.

Golden Nuggets, Volume IV, The Gospels. Compiled, condensed, and edited by Theo. W. Engstrom. 277 pages. 5½x8. \$2.00.