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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

RELIGION AMONG THE NOVELISTS

Religion in Life (spring 1955), under this heading, offers a general overview of religious fundamentals that are to be found in the modern novel. The article broadly touches the subjects of God, man, and Christ. God for most writers is the "great Absentee." Religious thought is introduced at times at strategic points in the story but only briefly. "This happens when the writer seems to have nowhere else to turn and so remembers the fact of deity, and allows God his brief moment upon the stage." — If the modern novelist is not very much at home with God, he is very much at home with man. Twentieth-century fiction presents man at his worst. We find here not contradiction but confirmation of the Christian position. Man without God does deteriorate and is finally destroyed. The absentee God produces the abject man. But man's dignity is not completely sacrificed. The picture of man is rather one of truncated dignity. Man, beaten down, still grimly clings to a certain basic dignity. — If God is Absentee for the modern American novelist, Christ is remote, a remote Redeemer. There is a dearth of references to Christ in the twentieth-century American fiction. The writers have not found the Person, but they are seeking after, and to a degree have found, some of the principles He embodies. For Faulkner apparently the Christ — not only as a principle, but also as a Person — is becoming less remote and more real. In closing the article the writer says: "These 'other [literary] sheep which are not of this fold' present a central challenge for the church. They and those who follow them give increasing evidence of asking the right questions. We believe that as a church we have the right answers. Our strategy must therefore be that of meeting the secular question by the religious answer. . . . 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' Herein lies a field white unto harvest." JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

INFORMATION ON THE ANCIENT NEGEB AND MESOPOTAMIA

By this time most of us are quite familiar with the term *Negeb* as used in discussions of the geography of Palestine because we have read about it a good deal in the newspapers during the last 8 or 9 years. The term (the Hebrew word for "south") describes the country of southern Palestine, extending from about Hebron southward. A fascinating informative article on this subject appears in the *Biblical Archaeologist* of February 1955, written by Nelson Glueck,

president of Hebrew Union College. The idea which most of us have of this region in Palestine is that it is barren, rocky, desertlike, unfit for habitation and cultivation, and merely traversed now and then by Bedouin tribes.

Dr. Glueck on the basis of researches made in the months of May, June, July, and August of 1954 has arrived at a startling view concerning conditions as they obtained in the Negeb during the age of Abraham and later. He stresses especially the significance of the pottery which his expedition was able to find in abundance. He says that the evidence is overwhelming that this country once upon a time was inhabited, that many cities and villages were located there, and that people apparently led a normal existence there in ancient times. It is impossible to give an adequate account of his article in a few words. It will have to be read in its entirety to be appreciated. At once the life of Abraham in these regions assumes an altogether different aspect. We begin to understand how the old patriarchs were able to support themselves and the large households they had, together with their herds of cattle, in these regions, which now appear so bleak and forbidding.

In the same issue of the *Biblical Archaeologist* appears an article by Bayard Dodge on "Elephants in the Bible Lands." Dr. Dodge is president emeritus of the American University of Beirut. He tells us that about 2,500 years ago elephants were numerous in the Euphrates country, which accounts, for instance, for their use in the armies which the Maccabaeen heroes had to oppose. The frequent mention of ivory in the sacred writings is thus easily explained. The question is whether gradually there came about such a change in climate that elephants no longer found food in these regions and simply disappeared. Dr. Dodge holds that this country, no doubt, became more arid even though experts, as he says, are not agreed that there really occurred a change in climate. It may be that the increase in population brought on changes which adversely affected conditions suitable for elephants. His article is provided with the necessary references to passages in ancient writings from which we have to obtain our information on this interesting topic.

WILLIAM F. ARNDT

"PROPITIATION" IN BIBLICAL GREEK

In the latest issue of the *Westminster Theological Journal* XVII, 2 (May 1955), pp. 117—157, Roger R. Nicole of Gordon Divinity School presents a thorough study of the usage of ἱλάσkesthai and cognate words in the Greek Bible, under the title: "C. H. Dodd and

the Doctrine of Propitiation." While the study takes issue with the conclusions presented by Dodd in several published works, Nicole's article has independent value because of his thoroughgoing presentation of all the Biblical data. We would advise the reader to place a reference to this article under ἱλάσσεσθαι in his Biblical lexicon or in the margin of his dogmatic handbook where the significance of the Work of Christ is discussed. Dodd holds that "the New Testament conforms in every way to the practice of the LXX," and "the LXX," so Dodd avers, "does not regard the cultus as a means of pacifying the displeasure of the Deity but as a means of delivering man from sin, and it looks in the last resort to God Himself to perform that deliverance" (p. 125). Nicole follows the arguments of Dodd step by step and finds weighty objections both against his method and conclusions. Nicole concludes, in opposition to Dodd, that the idea of propitiation "has not evaporated out of the term" (p. 150). "The Biblical usage of words of the class ἱλάσσεσθαι appears to be in line with Greek usage in general, Classical, Hellenistic, and Patristic. It must be carefully noted, however, that the Biblical view of propitiation is not characterized by the crude features which attach to most heathen conceptions. Rather it should be viewed as the gracious provision made by God himself whereby the effects of his righteous anger against sin may be averted and the sinner may receive the blessings of his parental love without infringement of his holiness and moral government" (p. 152).

V. BARTLING

ARE WE IN A REVIVAL OF RELIGION?

Theology Today (April 1955) presents this question to its readers for serious consideration. There are indeed evidences that seem to "prove" that we are in a rising tide of interest in religion. There is much interest in religious books. The sale of Bibles is at an all-time high. Church membership, attendance, and giving have reached a record. The appeal of Billy Graham has not abated. The number of students studying for the ministry has increased. Popular radio and TV programs on religion have high ratings. Yet caution must be exercised in any judgment in this matter. It is not a matter of what men think about it (religion) but rather of what it really is. Success may blind people to real issues and deceive them about real values. Again, this interest in religion may be generated by low motivation, and it may be satisfied with an "easy" gospel. It may be an attempt to use religion or God for personal or national security. Lastly, the term "religion" is vague. It may mean almost anything from a Trinitarian

Christianity to a humanism centering in high human values. Nevertheless, it is the task of the church to evaluate properly this interest in religion, to interpret it, to correct it, to guide it. People today are anxious, fearful, lonely, insecure, frustrated. It is the duty of the church to recognize the fact of religious concern in our time and to meet this return to religion with a return to Christianity. Only the Gospel can save it from an inevitable disillusionment.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

ON THE MYSTERY RELIGIONS

While the Mystery religions are not mentioned so frequently today as was the case 30 or 40 years ago, the advocates of Modernism by no means have agreed to discontinue using them as a weapon against the conservative Christian positions. If anybody doubts that the view holding that there is a vital connection between early Christian teaching and the Mystery religions is still potent, let him glance at Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 133ff. (English translation). For this reason it is with joy that we greet a brilliant article by Prof. Bruce M. Metzger of Princeton Theological Seminary having the title "Considerations of Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Early Christianity." The author says that "the substance of this article was read as a paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Philological Association in New York, December 1953." The article is packed with useful and interesting information and will serve students well through the wealth of bibliographical notes which are included. Among the important ideas expressed is, for instance, the thought "that the early Palestinian church was composed of Christians from a Jewish background, whose strict monotheism and traditional intolerance of syncretism must have militated against wholesale borrowing from pagan cults." Dr. Metzger does not wish to deny that there are parallels between the Mysteries and Christianity, but he properly insists that these parallels must be carefully evaluated and not be puffed up to yield results which are imaginary. If this brief note will lead one or the other of our readers to peruse the article of the Princeton professor, it will have accomplished its purpose. It appeared in the *Harvard Review*, Jan. 1955. WILLIAM F. ARNDT

BRIEF ITEMS FROM RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

New York.—The Lutheran Women's Missionary League, an affiliate of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has canceled its 1955 convention scheduled for July 12 and 13 in New Orleans because of the

city's segregation customs. The cancellation was announced after the convention committee of the League's New Orleans Zone withdrew its invitation to the women to hold this year's sessions in the Southern city.

In a statement explaining its action the committee said: "Local customs of segregation make it impossible for the New Orleans Zone fully to entertain the Lutheran Women's Missionary League in a manner characteristic of this organization."

Mrs. Arthur Preisinger of Lake Forest, Ill., national president of the League, said the decision to cancel the convention was made after consultation with officials of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. She said that a meeting of the League's executive board would be held in St. Louis, Mo., at the time the convention was originally scheduled.

Chicago.—Judge Otto Kerner granted the plea of a young unwed mother in County Court here that her six-month-old daughter be returned to her because the child had been adopted by parents of another faith. The mother is a Roman Catholic, while the Detroit couple to whom custody of the infant had been given are Jewish. She told the court that, in signing consent for the adoption, she had asked that the child be placed with Roman Catholics. The foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Osnos, indicated they would appeal the judge's decision. It was testified that they had secured the infant by paying \$1,500 to intermediaries.

Judge Kerner cited a provision of the Illinois law that adopting parents "where possible" shall be of the same religious faith as the child. He added that a "consideration" in his ruling was the fact that the Osnos couple already have two other adopted children, while the mother, because of complications following the birth of the infant, will be unable to bear any more children.

Detroit.—An open-door policy in changing neighborhoods was recommended to the American Lutheran Church at a meeting of area pastors here sponsored by the denomination's Board of American Missions. "We believe it is the responsibility of American Lutheran congregations to minister to the communities in which they are located," the pastors declared in a resolution.

"In the event that minority or nonwhite groups make up the members of the community, it shall be the responsibility of the congregation to work among them in the same way as they would among usual white communities." They asked the mission board and the denomination to declare that principle as a statement of policy for all congregations and missions.

Los Angeles.—A statement criticizing the Roman Catholic Church's "trend to exalt the figure of the Virgin Mother" was adopted unanimously and without debate by the 167th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. It asserted that an increasing emphasis by the Catholic Church on the role of the Virgin Mary has "widened the breach" between that faith and "all other Christian communions." The statement said the devotion of Roman Catholicism to Mary "now equals and even exceeds the devotion to Christ Himself."

Minneapolis, Minn.—The Evangelical Lutheran Church is not likely to accept an invitation to consider a merger of all Lutheran bodies, according to Dr. Fredrik A. Schiotz, ELC president. Writing in the *Lutheran Herald*, ELC organ, Dr. Schiotz commented on a recent invitation by the United Lutheran Church in America to the Augustana Lutheran Church to join in extending a merger proposal to all Lutheran Churches in America.

Iowa City, Iowa.—Five nuns of the Order of Sisters of the Holy Humility of Mary will be replaced by lay teachers at the beginning of the next school year in Cosgrove Elementary School, 11 miles west of here.

The Cosgrove consolidated district school board made the decision after the State Department of Public Instruction threatened to halt state aid payments to the school, Board President James J. Meade said. The State Department said the school was operating illegally by employing nuns in a public school, Mr. Meade said.

The Cosgrove district in 1954 received \$6,000 in school aid. The district's budget was about \$63,000. The area is predominantly Roman Catholic. Nuns have taught in the Cosgrove school since it was opened as a parochial school 50 years ago. After it became part of the Cosgrove consolidated district in 1920, nuns continued to teach in the elementary grades.

There are 165 children enrolled in the elementary school. The Neighbors Club of Cosgrove opposes the nuns' removal. A member said: "Cosgrove without the Sisters of Humility? Why, that's like spring without flowers!" Club members gave financial support to the teaching nuns.

The nuns wear religious garb while teaching but remove their crucifixes before entering the building. They turn over their salaries to the order. Two elementary teachers have been hired for next year. The nuns' right to teach in the school was challenged in District Court here in 1937, but the case was dropped in 1939. L. W. SPRIZ