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# Book Reviews

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*The Nature and Origin of the New Testament*, by J. Merle Rife, New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1975. 158 pp. \$8.75.

According to the author's own statement, this book is the result of over 30 years of teaching. It covers the material Rife thinks a college student taking a one-semester course should consider. In Chapter I, under the title "General Survey," Rife touches upon historical background, the canon, the text and translations of the New Testament. Chapter II deals with Paul's life and letters, which include Galatians, First and Second Thessalonians, First and Second Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Chapter III treats the Gospels. Chapter IV discusses Apocalyptic writings, which include the Revelation of John, the Shepherd of Hermas and the Revelation of Peter. Chapter V takes in Letters and Treatise which include the rest of the New Testament books as well as First Clement, Letters of Ignatius, and Papias.

For each canonical and non-canonical book under discussion, Rife usually takes up the questions of author and date. He also indicates the special features of that book.

This is a concise presentation of a typical contemporary skeptic view on the New Testament. According to Rife, Jesus was aroused by an appeal of John the Baptist and received baptism from him. Under the influence of John, Jesus had some mystic experience and became convinced that He was to have an essential role in the Messianic era. So He started His independent campaign. The Roman authorities, alarmed by this, arrested Him and crucified Him. A few days later, His intimate friends had visions of Jesus alive. This convinced them that Jesus was the promised Messiah. So the early Christians patterned the tradition about the life of Jesus after the Old Testament. Jesus was finally deified when the Christian message moved to the Gentile soil.

In the early Church there was comparatively little interest in the earthly life of Jesus. Yet there emerged an oral tradition which was shaped by the passion of Jesus, the words and deeds of Jesus, the spirit of Jesus, the Septuagint and the religious needs of the Christian community. This oral tradition became the source of the written Gospels. In the Gospels there is much *naivete* and anachronism reflecting the situations of the time of writing rather than those of Jesus' time.

According to Rife's dating, Pauline epistles (excluding Ephesians and Pastorals) were written in the fifties and early sixties. The Synoptic Gospels and Acts were written between A.D. 70 and 100. Revelation and Hebrews were written before 100. The rest of the books were written during the first half of the second century. All of the New Testament books are attributed to either an apostle or a close associate of an apostle. But for about half of the books these traditions are mistaken.

In presenting his position, Rife does not always offer evidences. Sometimes he offers some data which call for explanation by the traditionalist as evidences against traditional view. For example, he maintains that the strongest argument against Petrine authorship of First Peter is the unlikelihood of Peter being able to write such Greek. Yet Peter could have used Sylvanus as his amanuensis. Sometimes Rife makes a statement which cannot be squared with his own statement elsewhere in the book. For example, on page 95 he mentions that there is no convincing argument against the traditional dating of John's Gospel near the end of the first century. Yet on page 68 he states that the writer of the Fourth Gospel looked back from a second century standpoint. He does not mention the significance of P<sup>52</sup>, a papyrus manuscript, nor that of the Dead Sea Scrolls upon the dating and the background of John's Gospel. On page 116 and other places, he mentions that apostolic authority was required before a book could be considered Scripture. Yet on page 125 he says that the early Church was not deceived by the pseudonymity of the Pastorals. On page 115 he mentions Hebrews 9 as the "faith chapter." This probably is a typographical error for Hebrews 11.

Joseph S. Wang  
Associate Professor of New Testament

*Newness of Life: A Study in the Thought of Paul*, by Richard E. Howard, Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1975. 266 pp.

The author of this volume on the theology of St. Paul is Professor of New Testament in Greek in the Department of Religion at Bethany Nazarene College, Oklahoma. He has degrees from Eastern Nazarene College, Boston University, and Andover Newton Theological Seminary, plus doctoral studies at Harvard.

In five divisions of the book Paul's view of man is surveyed, followed by consideration of the doctrine of sin. The author then considers the "New Man in Christ." Particular attention is given on the basis of Greek exegesis to the cause-and-effect relationship between Paul's declarations and the commands which follow. "Life in the Spirit" is the concluding portion of the study. Included in the volume are a brief bibliography, a subject index, and an index of Scriptural texts together with the index of Greek words. President William Greathouse furnishes a perceptive "Forword."

The author's treatment is carefully stated and abundantly documented. The discussion follows closely the text of the Scriptures with few references to contemporary literature and current issues. Repeatedly, the author appeals to Paul's words to correct many distortions in contemporary doctrinal statements from those who share his own convictions. Commendable is this author's use of the Scriptures, his thoroughness and honesty in dealing with the Biblical data. Although he constantly is reacting to the Greek text, he does so in a manner which makes the volume useful to the reader who is unacquainted with Greek. Effective use of footnote documentation permits this. Happily, the publishers have put the footnotes at the bottom of the pages to which they are relevant, saving the reader much time and frustration.

Like Bultmann, Professor Howard lays special stress on the relationship between the indicative and the imperative in Pauline epistles. His treatment of Romans chapter six is especially significant in this respect. Further practical help is given in Howard's analysis of human nature and the change upon it which God's grace affects. Because of the thoroughness and objectivity in dealing with Pauline letters and because of the importance of the subject matter, it is to be hoped that this volume will receive the wide circulation that it deserves.

Dr. George A. Turner  
Professor of Biblical Literature

*The Right to Remarry*, by Dwight Hervey Small, Revell, 1975. 190 pp. \$5.95.

The emphatic title of Dwight Small's latest book is not the basis for a legal treatise. It is an alternative to a legalistic reading of the Biblical teachings on divorce and remarriage, based on a "nonlegal ethical ideal." Written for the contemporary evangelical pastor and the

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Christian layman who want Biblical guidelines, this book presents a case for “Redemptive Realism.” Instead of the misconception that divorce is the unpardonable sin which disqualifies a person from Christian service,

this book sees divorce and remarriage as neither a personal nor an absolute individual right. It is permissible at times, not because the Kingdom Law of Christ provides for it, but because the redemptive grace of Christ does not preclude it. (p. 14)

The author first treats the Old Testament background with emphasis on the importance of marriage in God’s creation order. He then examines the Scriptural references from the Gospels, Acts and the Pauline epistles. He attempts to be complete in this study, but concentrates his attention on the Matthew passages, including the “exception clause” found at 5:32 and 19:9. He develops the argument that these teachings of Christ are not to be read like Mosaic law but rather as the new law of the Kingdom of God. However, since Israel rejected Christ as king, the establishment of the Kingdom of God as a physical power was delayed. In the interim we live in the Age of the Church which cannot be equated with the Kingdom, but neither is it governed by Mosaic law.

The Church Age is not under law, but under grace. It is not subject to absolute commands with legally determined consequences. The ultimate consideration is realized forgiveness, renewing grace, restoration to life’s highest possibilities. This is no less true of marriage failure than of any other failure. (p. 163)

The author shows that divorce destroys God’s unconditional will for man, but divorce also exemplifies the broken conditions that Christ explicitly came to restore. From this principled perspective the possibility for healing through Christian remarriage can be seen. We are called to minister to those whose intimate lives have been shattered, not to make them into scapegoats incapable of knowing forgiveness.

Although *The Right To Remarry* tends to be pedagogic in the intricate construction of the author’s argument, the topic is painfully relevant, the Biblical application is worthy of examination, and the conclusions are exciting. Most of all, Mr. Small presents a balanced study, relating the needs of contemporary society to the Bible as a whole.

D. Ivan Timm  
Instructor in Bibliography

*Five Sermons and a Tract*, by Luther Lee, edited with introduction by Donald W. Dayton. Chicago: Holrad House, 1975. 135 pp. \$3.00.

As Professor Dayton notes in his preface to these sermons by Luther Lee, one of the founders of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, "The profound ethical witness of Luther Lee . . . is now largely forgotten – even among his own spiritual descendants."

Hopefully, in publishing this collection the editor will challenge the current Wesleyan holiness movement to review the strong relationship which once existed between American holiness revivalism and concern for the moral and ethical renewal of society. He could have chosen no better exemplar than Luther Lee. The subjects of the sermons themselves immediately introduce us to a dimension of preaching which is often lacking in evangelical proclamation. "On the Death of Elijah P. Lovejoy" was Lee's response to the martyrdom of the Presbyterian minister and anti-slavery publisher in Alton, Illinois in 1837. His "Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel," constituted the first ordination sermon for a woman fully ordained by a regularly constituted American denomination – Antoinette Brown by the Congregationalist Church (1853). Although a Wesleyan, Lee was asked to preach the ordination sermon because of his strong support of women in the temperance movement of the time.

The publication of this small collection is especially appropriate at a time when evangelicals are becoming increasingly aware of their social responsibility, intensified as it is by the vacuum created by the collapse of many of the more liberal and humanistically oriented reform efforts of the last few decades. It is interesting and challenging to find some of the best examples of the synthesis of individual and corporate Biblical witness within the Wesleyan holiness tradition. Holrad House is a new publishing house. Requests may be addressed to 5104 N. Christiana Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60625.

Melvin E. Dieter  
Associate Professor of Church History

*Questions and Answers on Death and Dying*, by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974. 177 pp. \$4.95.

The pioneer researcher in death and dying as we currently think of it is Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Swiss-American doctor and psychiatrist. Well-known for her earlier work, *On Death and Dying*, she now provides a

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question-and-answer book on the subject. Material comes right out of her seminars and conferences in many places, and the down-to-earth reality of both questions and answers makes itself immediately clear upon opening the book.

Part of the genius of her work is that she really gives us lessons for living. Her thesis at this point is well-known — accepting one's own death is prerequisite to liberated living.

Pastors should be aware of her work and research findings if they are to function at increasingly efficient levels. But there is one major caution: her materials must be screened through the eyes of a Biblical perspective. The reason? Her work is colored with humanism. Though she seems to be moving more and more toward a Biblical understanding of life and death, one needs to view her opinions and convictions over against the Christian faith. In this regard, see the March 18, 1975 issue of *Light and Life* magazine in which O. S. Walters, Christian doctor and psychiatrist, tells of his own impending death (he died before the article was published) and bears testimony to the role of the grace of God in helping one to face this condition realistically.

Donald E. Demaray  
Professor of Preaching

*The Logic of God*, by Malcolm L. Diamond and Thomas V. Litzburg, Jr., editors. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975. 552 pp. \$12.50.

The subtitle, "Theology and Verification," affords a general clue to the content and purpose of this rather weighty volume. Overall, it serves to answer the question, "What has become of the approach to knowledge known as Logical Positivism?" The answer implied by the several contributors is that it has gone into gradual eclipse since around 1955.

In relation to this theme the contributors seem agreed that Ludwig Wittgenstein has, whether intentionally or not, set in motion trends in logical theory which hastened its demise. The several writers concern themselves largely with the thinkers of our time whose orientation is that of formal logic, and whose methodology utilizes a positivistic or post-positivistic perspective. This latter form represents a return to the appreciation of "ordinary language," and is reflected in the more popular theological currents in the later Paul van Buren.

Two terms are treated with almost exhausting thoroughness in this

volume: verification and falsification. Underlying much of the discussion is Antony Flew's paper of two decades ago, "Theology and Falsification." Flew seems delighted at the gradual withering-away of the all-destroying (as its advocates thought) method of logical positivism, with its presumption of atheism.

Much attention is given to the differences between scientific and religious assertions. What is lacking in this later work is a dogmatic insistence that scientific assertions are totally neutral, as against the self-involving character of assertions in theology. Alvin Plantinga speaks to this point in quoting J. C. Smart's statement, "The main danger to theism today comes from people who want to say that 'God exists' and 'God does not exist' are equally absurd." (446) He defends the thesis that while many theologians have made grave mistakes in their affirmations (or better, their modes of affirmation), yet religious utterances are not necessarily semantically absurd.

This volume is technical, and in points, repetitious. It is not of such a character that the layman will read it. But as a survey of linguistic philosophy, it deserves a place in the library of the critical thinker.

Harold B. Kuhn

Professor of Philosophy of Religion

*The Celebration of Life*, by Norman Cousins, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974. 83 pp.

I excite to *Saturday Review* because Norman Cousins, as editor, shapes it. He turns me on for several reasons: he thinks, he believes in mankind, inevitably he challenges you to make of yourself a better philosopher.

*The Celebration of Life* is a philosophical discussion of immortality. Lectures given at the Pacific School of Religion in 1954 were published two decades later in order to give his ideas rugged experience in testing. (Commendable!)

One profits by following his line of argument. But humanism lacks the sharp, radical thrust of New Testament revelation.

Incidentally, the clever dialogical technique used throughout constitutes a splendid learning pattern.

Donald E. Demaray  
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