
Book Reviews

A Guide to Understanding Romans, by Harold J. Brokke. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1964.

Here is a popularly written, highly edifying exposition of the book of Romans. In Mr. Brokke's opinion, the chief contribution of the study is its identification of the theme of the risen Christ as the cornerstone of the epistle's five major sections. Jesus Christ raised (1) "to judge the world," 1:18-3:20; (2) "to justify sinners," 3:21-5:21; (3) "to sanctify believers," 6:1-8:31; (4) "to finish his purposes," 9:1-11:36; and (5) "to transform saints," 12:1-16:27. While the exposition does not really demonstrate the critical place of this theme as the actual logical foundation of the entire book of Romans, its importance as one of the unifying threads of this great letter is well presented.

Mr. Brokke's understanding of Romans and of biblical faith itself transcends the parochial boundaries of any single theological tradition. This is clear at numerous points. Wesleyan readers will be delighted with his exposition of the Law of Faith as the means by which "practical holiness and righteousness" emerge "in all manner of living" (p. 70), and of chapters 12-15 as a life of dynamic love growing out of "absolute abandonment" of the believer of God. It is also clear from the treatment of Romans 6-8 and 12-15 that the author is in sympathy with those various deeper-life movements which understand the life of holy love as the correlate of total surrender in the growing Christian, though he does not use terminology confined to any one of them.

As with many reprints, there is a distressing lack of adequate publication data in the work, so that one does not know precisely how this freshly-done volume in hand relates to the 1964 copyright the title bears. One would guess it is a recent re-edition, perhaps with a new cover.

Be that as it may, its simple language, numerous instructive charts, clear outlining and extensive printing of the biblical text make the work easy to read and use. Written to believers or sympathetic seekers of faith, the clear style and spiritually edifying content of this work

commend it for use in personal devotion, lay Bible study classes and discipling groups.

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The Third Reich and the Christian Church, by Peter Matheson. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1981. 103 pp., paper.

The usually reputable publisher of this little book makes some extravagant claims for it. The back cover says that it will tell us the impact of the Third Reich upon the Christian church, the response of the church, and failures and successes in dealing with the tyranny of Hitler. Peter Matheson, lecturer in ecclesiastical history at the University of Edinburgh, does not assist with any of these concerns.

The volume is intrinsically interesting. Anything about the Nazi regime sells well at present. Matheson has collected 68 documents from 1933 to 1943. They include statements by Hitler, Hess and Himmler; Pope Pius XI and Cardinal Bertram; Ludwig Muller, Hitler's appointed advisor on church affairs, and opposition leaders such as Karl Barth and Martin Niemoller. Other documents are descriptive relating to church administration, Hitler youth and church youth, persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses and Jews, euthanasia and other points of conflict.

The introduction contains 93 words. It does not tell us who translated the documents. The source citations are so brief that tracing originals is difficult in some cases. There is no hint of the selection criteria, thus making biases difficult to establish. The introductions to each document average about 100 words. They do not give sufficient information about authors or participants to give a connected picture. For example, the removal of 700 pastors at one time is mentioned. Were they imprisoned? Were they replaced? Were the churches closed?

The reader can form some inductive idea of impact and response from the documents, but the lack of adequate commentary or a conclusion gives no aid toward assessing the failures and successes of the church in Germany. There appears to be a trend toward increasing opposition from the documents, but that may be a dubious impression in the face of increasing repression by the government. There is little reason to read this unless you also read a

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companion volume such as the recent work of Ernest C. Helmreich, *The German Churches Under Hitler* (Detroit, 1979).

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Genesis One and the Origin of the Earth, by Robert C. Newman and Herman J. Eckelmann, Jr. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977, reprinted 1981. 154 pp. (including bibliography and indices). Paper, \$4.95.

This is a reprint of a successful, brief book that attempts to push aside some of the Bible-science rubbish by narrowing the subject to manageable size and then dealing with it comprehensively. The authors present what is usually called the “progressive creationist” viewpoint. They accept the great age of the Earth and the findings of astronomy and geology, while remaining skeptical of the developmental tenets of evolutionary theory. The astronomical portion is sound and well done, the biblical exegesis debatable at points, and the reprints of older articles interesting. This is a generally worth while and readable effort.

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The Pentateuch, Lloyd R. Bailey. Nashville: Abingdon, 1981. From the series *Interpreting Biblical Texts*, edited by Lloyd R. Bailey and Victor Paul Furnish. 160 pp., \$6.95, paperback.

Is it possible to consider the Pentateuch and not mention sacrifices, including that of Christ? Or the Tabernacle? Or miracles? The answer is a definite yes in this short study guide by an Old Testament professor from Duke University.

Bailey indicates that he wishes to assist the lay reader over the interpretive difficulties involved in Old Testament studies. He intends to take the Bible seriously and relate it to today's needs. Taking the bible seriously does not involve the question of truthfulness, which Bailey regards as an inappropriate question. Meaning is more important than truth.

The unifying themes for Bailey are “story” and “community.” The Pentateuch is neither law nor history, but story. He avoids the word myth and says that torah equals story. The stories are traditions

preserved orally, and eventually, put in writing because they served some explanatory purposes in that society. Individuality is alien to the ancient world, therefore, the interpretive keys are the communities that preserved the stories, and the reasons they preserved them.

After an extended discussion of the various communities (e.g., the Yahwehist, Elohist, Priestly and Deuteronomic), the times they existed, and the motives of these nameless editors in preserving the stories, we are then ready to put the Pentateuch together in terms of when it was written, which redactors wrote which parts, why there are contradictions, repetitions, and chronologically misplaced events in the narratives.

The third chapter is a critical assessment of the various interpretive traditions within the believing community — Bailey’s replacement for the Church. While excessive allegory appropriately takes its lumps, one need not so quickly abandon all the contributions of other great historical figures and their followers, in favor of the results of the last 100 years of higher criticism.

The last quarter of the book is the application of the developed interpretive method to six specific passages. The results oppose “progressive revelation” although Bailey uses “communal development” for explanatory purposes. Bailey is sensitive to the community, and opposed to individual or personal interpretations of the Pentateuch. I believe Bailey has misunderstood a familial pattern for communalism.

While this effort is somewhat more spiritually stimulating than Martin Noth’s or Gerhard von Rad’s works upon which it depends, it still leaves the taste of dry bones in the mouth. The evangelical will be frustrated by the array of unsupported accusations of “hundreds” of inaccuracies and errors, and the style that seems to assume that multiple repetitions, firmly held, make it so. While there are correctives to the excesses of some evangelical scholars, this presentation will not serve to promote the taking of the Pentateuch seriously, as the author said he intended.

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