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Faith and Victory in Dachau (Book Review)

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Book Reviews



by John M. Zinkand

Faith and Victory in Dachau, by Rev. Jack Overduin, Translated by Harry der Nederlanden, Padeia Press (P.O. Box 1450, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2R 7J8), 1978, 252 pages. Reviewed by Jack Vanden Berg, Associate Professor of English.

Suppose you are an unmilitant but successful minister in Nazi-occupied Netherlands in 1942. Suppose your congregation is fearful and uncertain after having resisted an attempted Nazi takeover of their Christian school. And suppose that on a Sunday you face your congregation intending to encourage them to continue to resist but see in the congregation two Gestapo agents whose report on your sermon will insure imprisonment in a concentration camp.

Would you have the courage to remain true to your faith and your basic convictions? Rev. Over-

duin's decision in that situation began his journey to the concentration camps at Amersfoort and Dachau, with short stays in prisons in Arnhem, Essen, and Nuremburg.

But the story of his arrest, interrogation and sentencing constitutes only two chapters. The bulk of the book deals with the victory of faith (and humor) over the incredible conditions of Dachau, where the unheroic Rev. Overduin, overworked and starved, was given an extension of life and eventual release in answer to his prayers and those of his colleagues and his congregation.

Throughout the narration of his experiences, Rev. Overduin insists that he was not a hero; instead, he wishes to give all honor to the grace of Christ. In the last chapter of the book, he discusses the spiritual dangers he sees in writing about his experiences: "Namely that on some level . . . we start to present ourselves as heroes and martyrs." "The true martyr testifies not about himself . . . but always and only about Christ,

about his power and faithfulness." In addition to testifying to the faithfulness of God, the author has a second reason for writing this book: he wishes to warn his readers about the destructive influence of the "degenerate principles" of National Socialism.

The author is apparently a cultured and intelligent Christian. His brief but perceptive analysis of the nature of National Socialism and communism, his discussion of the "subjective individualism" caused by imprisonment, and his denouncement of the calous degradation and destruction of human worth by the Nazis, present thought-provoking interludes in the flow of the narrative.

Because this narrative avoids both the sensationalism and shallow pietistic evangellism often found in other works of this nature, I recommend it as suitable reading for all readers. Moreover, the writer is reticent in discussing the most horrible forms of torture and experimentation in Dachau, so no reader will be offended. The reader will also see a somewhat different picture of Dachau and the amazing difference in prisoner treatment caused by changes in staff. Above all, the reader will feel his faith strengthened by Overduin's testimony of God's faithfulness.

Christianity and Democracy, by Norman De Jong. The Craig Press, 1978. \$4.95 pb. Reviewed by Dr. James W. Skillen, Associate Professor of Political Science.

This book is something of a mystery. The mystery begins with a title which is broad enough to raise many interesting questions, but it turns out that there are actually two titles; the cover presents the title given above, but the inside title page reads "Christianity vs. Democracy." That discrepancy (surely unintentional) is something of a clue to the book as a whole.

The mystery deepens after one has read the Introduction and the two following chapters on Plato and Thomas Jefferson. De Jong suggests that his book is going to address several important historical problems in the relationship of Christian faith and democratic politics—especially the problem of law and the nature of the Kingdom of God. And he is correct that Plato and Jefferson are important figures in western political thought. But throughout his introduction he says very little about the nature of

politics or law or the Kingdom of God. What the author does do is to introduce Boyd H. Bode, a relatively well-known American professor of education during the first half of the twentieth century. Though Bode was neither a statesman nor an orthodox Christian, neither a political scientist nor an interpreter of Christian faith, De Jong believes that Bode is of fundamental importance for a discussion of "Christianity and (vs.) Democracy." Most of the book is devoted to Bode. One of De Jong's central theses is that Bode's "gospel of democracy, which he proclaimed with unabated fervor from approximately 1920 to 1953, and which he claimed to be unalterably opposed to traditional Christianity, is simply a secularized version of the kingdom of God" (p. 7).

Anyone interested in the life and educational influence of Boyd H. Bode will find this book interesting and worthwhile. If, however, one wants to pursue the debate about Christianity and democracy or wants to study the influence of Plato, Jefferson, and others on contemporary American political life, then one will be disappointed with this small volume. Whether or not it is the author's intention to do so, he leaves the impression that Bode was not a particularly deep or consistent thinker. Moreover, practically nothing of significance with regard to politics comes out of Bode. Thus, the two very weak chapters on Plato and Jefferson, coupled with a concluding chapter that is almost unrelated to the book as a whole, are not of any real help to the political scientist, theologian, or philosopher interested in anything besides Bode.

Finally, even if one is interested in Bode himself, it strikes this reader that the influence of John Dewey on Bode is not sufficiently explored by De Jong.

Christian Missions to Muslims: the Record, by Lyle L. Vander Werff. William Carey Library, South Pasadena, California, 1977. 366 pages, \$8.95. Reviewed by James A. De Jong, Associate Professor of Theology.

In the author's words, "this study (examines) the historical development of various Anglican and Reformed missions to Muslims as an answer to the vital question: What constitutes a Christian approach or approaches to Muslims?" (page 3). As indicated in the subtitle, the investigation is limited to Anglican and Reformed work in India and the Near East from 1800 to 1938. Congregational, Dutch Reformed, and both Scot-