

---

# Pro Rege

---

---

Volume 7 | Number 3

Article 7

---

March 1979

## Christian Missions to Muslims: The Record (Book Review)

James A. De Jong

*Dordt College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege)

---

### Recommended Citation

De Jong, James A. (1979) "Christian Missions to Muslims: The Record (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 7: No. 3, 25 - 27.

Available at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege/vol7/iss3/7](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol7/iss3/7)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact [ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu](mailto:ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu).

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-

tish and American Presbyterian missions are embraced by the writer's definition of "Reformed."

He selects 1938 as the *terminus ad quem* since in that year the International Missionary Conference at Madras, India, under the influence of Hendrik Kraemer, opted for the distinctiveness of the Christian religion as predicated on God's unique revelation in Jesus Christ. In reaction to the Laymen's Report, *Rethinking Missions*, which sought to relativize Christianity as simply one among the world's religions, Kraemer's approach laid the theological foundation for the continuation of the Protestant churches' missionary effort among non-Christian peoples. Vander Werff argues that the climate for accepting Kraemer's *The Christian Message in A Non-Christian World* in 1938 was created in large part by such missionary figures as William H.T. Gairdner and Samuel Zwemer. The lives and thought of these two representative men, then, become the focus of the present study.

Following a brief chapter on the rise of the Protestant idea of mission from 1500 to 1800, Vander Werff presents two thorough chapters on work in India and in the Near East after 1800. He treats India as a laboratory of methods: apologetic approach, educational approach, medicine as a means to evangelism, and church planting as a method of missions. Vander Werff finds that the Near East differed from India in that here Anglican and Reformed missionaries had to reckon with the extant Eastern churches, a Muslim majority in the population, and a more hostile political climate. The missions took different tactics, from working primarily with and through the Eastern churches (the American Board of Commissioners) to direct evangelism of Muslims (the Arabian Mission of the Dutch Reformed).

Chapters two and three, therefore, deal with both familiar and secondary figures and issues within a fresh framework.

The final chapter treats Gairdner and Zwemer. Gairdner was an Anglican with the Church Missionary Society and Zwemer established the Arabian Mission dominant in the Persian Gulf—an independent mission later taken over by the Reformed Church in America. Each man was shaped by his Anglican and Reformed predecessors, modified their thought and approaches, and rose to great stature as a Christian student of Islam and theoretician of mission. In his assessment of their lives and many publications, the author finds that both men ultimately adopted a somewhat irenic approach to the Muslim. This approach emphasized the importance of a personal union with and new life in Christ as the incarnate and risen Lord. For both, theoretical work on Islam served to understand

and reach the Muslim believer rather than as a foil for an intellectual apologetic. People, not systems, were the ultimate concern of both men. Their contributions, the author appears to be saying, constitute the Christian approach to Muslims for which he began his search.

This book merits careful study by mission thinkers and leaders in an era when relations between Christians and Muslims have taken on new political and economic contours. It will be intriguing reading for those who love mission history and to Dutch Reformed Christians for its material on the Arabian Mission.

From an academic point of view, the study leaves some unanswered questions. First, how viable is an attempt to arrive at a Christian approach to Muslims which does not take into account the point of view of the younger churches or of ethno-history? Vander Werff writes in the traditional vein of mission history, i.e., from a first world perspective. That approach is being called into question in the discipline today. Second, what differences emerge from a study of the material? These differences seem to be underdeveloped in the book, perhaps because of a pre-disposition to establish an ecumenical common denominator. Yet, chapter 3 in particular suggests differing Anglican and Reformed attitudes towards the Eastern churches which could have been explored more fully. For example, did the Anglicans' traditional Erastianism contribute to the formation of the Jerusalem Bishopric while the more free-church attitude of the Reformed pushed them in the direction of fostering independent evangelical churches or of directly evangelizing Muslims? Third, does the attempt to link Zwemer and Kraemer stand the test of documentation? The author proceeds on the basis of hunches and opinion (eg., a letter from J. Christy Wilson) rather than evidence on this score. These might prove to be solid hunches! But more research is needed on Kraemer's student days in Leiden (1911-21), on his visit to Cairo in the early twenties, and on his dependence on Zwemer's writings in order to forge the link which the author suspects. These avenues are not touched on, much less explored. Fourth, while there are undeniable affinities between the theology of Zwemer and Kraemer, how significantly did the theology of crisis influence an already mature Zwemer? In other words, would a closer look at the formative influences on both men also reveal significant differences, perhaps, for example, on the doctrine of Scripture?

Such questions do not jeopardize the validity of Vander Werff's fine study. They do suggest areas where it could have been carried further and deeper. With its copious notes, extended

bibliography, and thought-provoking indexes, the book has significant reference value and is an important contribution to mission history.

---

**Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy**, by C. Vanderwaal (translated by Theodore Plantinga), St. Catherines, Ontario, Paideia Press, 1978, 139 pages, \$3.95;

and **Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle. . . An Evaluation of Hal Lindsey's Writings**, by T. Boersma (translated by Elizabeth Vanderkooy Roberts), St. Catherines, Ontario, Paideia Press, 1978, 251 pages, \$4.95. Reviewed by John C. Vander Stelt, Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy.

---

In his *The Late Great Planet Earth* and *There's a New World Coming*, Hal Lindsey has concocted a pop-apocalypse which capitalizes on the spiritual uncertainties of our age and tries to interpret the Arab-Israeli and East-West conflicts by means of a divine time-table supposedly given in Biblical prophecy.

Vanderwaal describes how Lindsey, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, presents a simplistic and misleading interpretation of both Scripture and history. Assuming the validity of Darbyist dispensationalism and of an exegetical (infallible) literalism, Lindsey thinks of all prophecy as prewritten history.

As a dispensationalist, Lindsey regards the church as only an interlude or intermezzo, Zionizes Christian hope (p. 32), and eschatologizes Judaism (p. 68). Vanderwaal shows how this erroneous theological stance has forced Lindsey to resort to acrobatic stunts in his exegesis of such crucial passages as Ezekiel 38 and 39, Daniel 9, Matthew 24, II Thessalonians 4, and the entire book of Revelation. Worst of all, with his peculiar way of reading Scripture and history, Lindsey has done grave injustice to the meaning of both, robbed Scripture of its covenantal normativity, and deprived God's people of genuine comfort for the present.

With a measure of vehemence and justifiable anger, Vanderwaal rejects this distorted interpretation of the Bible and history. Scripture, Vanderwaal counters, should be read covenantally. It does not provide us with a political almanac or a detailed time-table of events and exact description of wars. Rather, the Bible should be read and understood as the book of God's words of promise, command, and threat (p. 27).

Vanderwaal briefly discusses the nature and implications of understanding Scriptural

revelation covenantally in the last three chapters of his book (pp. 87-139). He suggests the novel and exciting idea that "Babylon" as used in the book of Revelation does not refer to the world but typifies "Jewish unfaithfulness to the covenant" (p. 84). This way of hearing God's Word in Scripture avoids the danger of reading the Bible as a quick recipe-book in the manner of "an old woman in a shawl who gazes into a crystal ball or who reads tea leaves" (p. 55), and it does not exploit the unhealthy spirit of enjoying "the apocalyptic land of terror and the unknown" (p. 13).

Whereas Vanderwaal's book is primarily an attack on Lindsey's views and only secondarily an exposition of an alternative way of listening to Biblical revelation and viewing history, Boersma's *Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle. . .* is first of all a positive explanation of how to read certain passages of Scripture that deal with prophetic and eschatological matters, and only incidentally a critique of the exegetical acrobatics of Lindsey.

According to Boersma, Lindsey "lifts pieces from all parts of the Bible—a prophecy of Daniel, a prediction of Jesus, a section of Revelation—and forces them together" (p. 21). For Lindsey a prophet is not "a herald of God's Word" to strengthen God's people at the time and in the places they live; rather, he provides insight into the future and makes predictions on the basis of which the contemporary Christian can know God's time-table and, as a result, calculate the timing and sequence of future events.

Challenging this unbiblical view of prophecy and the resultant speculative theories of dispensationalism, Boersma discusses in detail the meaning of such things as "the seventy weeks" of Daniel 9, the millennium and beasts of Revelation, the role of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, the phrase "in the latter days," and the centrality of Christ and the Church rather than the Old Testament Israel.

The approach of Vanderwaal and Boersma to the Biblical meaning of covenant is basically the same. Both men have opened up new vistas which make it possible to read and be comforted by Scripture, to avoid a gnostic spiritualizing of created reality, and to shun the perils of speculating about the future after trying to pry into God's time-chart.

Both books are indispensable for preachers, elders, Bible discussion group leaders, and teachers of Bible and theology. We commend the Paideia Press for having made these two publications available for the sole purpose of strengthening the faith and power of God's people who live in an age and culture which is made more complex and confusing by the sensational yet unbiblical views of such propagandists as Hal Lindsey.