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Missionary Nature of the Church (Book Review)

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From Holmes' catalog of philosophers one would be led to conclude that rationalism and Christian theism are mutually compatible or that Christian theists can leave areas of thought uncovered by their Christian perspective. In either case, Holmes here does lapse into a kind of "Fundamentalism" which has at its root a basic Arminianism, as it seems to leave room for areas of autonomy in human thought. Autonomy is here to be construed as meaning that man can approach creation as if it is not completely pre-interpreted and controlled by the Creator. Holmes does not presume to exercise that autonomy himself, but extends the privilege to his philosophic predecessors.

Space keeps me from pointing to further agreements and disagreements. Needless to say, the latter are not included to discourage the prospective reader, but rather to stimulate interest. Holmes has many valuable insights to share. If you participate one way or another in Christian education, Holmes gives you one more way to extend your participation.

The Missionary Nature of the Church—by

Johannes Blauw, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974, 182 pages, \$3.45 (paperback). Reviewed by James De Jong, Assistant Professor of Theology.

With the printing of this review, fourteen years will have passed since the appearance of the first, the German edition of Blauw's book. The German title, *Gottes Werk in dieser Welt*, more accurately reflects the substance of the study, commissioned by the Working Committee of the Department of Missionary Studies, at the time a joint agency of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches. It was designed as an evaluative survey of the missionary implications found in the writings of modern Biblical theologians. Thirty-five pages of footnotes in small case letters testify to Blauw's careful survey of the field. However, the then-Secretary of the Netherlands Missionary Council has produced more than a survey. This project is an original, complete, and stimulating Biblical theology of missions which has become a standard source in the field. A measure of the esteem in which it is held is the number of English and American publishers who have marketed printings of it between 1962 and 1974.

Blauw observes in his introduction that mission itself has become a problem: "The problematic character of the missionary movement which began about two and a half centuries ago has led to an ever more insistent question as to the why of missions" (page 9). Believing that the only defensible solution of the problem should be a Biblical one, Blauw defends the thesis that the entire Scripture regards mission as belonging to the essence of the church. Mission is never an option, but always an imperative for God's people. Even her thinking on mission is effected: "The consequence for theology, I think, is that a theological reflection of missionary service is possible and extremely necessary, but not a 'theology of missions' " (page 121). There is a missionary aspect to every function of the church.

The author's approach is one which traces the mission motif through the history of salvation. He argues that Genesis 1-11 establishes the "perspective of universalism" found in the rest of the Old Testament. The entire Old Testament, not just Jonah and sections of the Psalms and Isaiah, "has the whole world in view" (page 17). God's work of salvation proceeds via the election of Abraham and Israel. But as Genesis 12:3 shows, this is always an election for service. Although God's covenant with Israel is particularistic in manifestation, its design is universalistic; in its Old Testament manifestation, God's mission to the world is centripetal, that is, it functions by attracting the nations to Israel and to her God. Blauw interprets the book of Jonah, the Old Testament Messianic figures and titles, references to the nations, and the eschatology of the prophets in terms of the universalistic presupposition of early Genesis. In the proselytism of the diaspora and the appearance of the Septuagint, he finds the harbinger of transition from a centripetal to a centrifugal form of the divine mission of salvation. However, only with the work of salvation completed in Christ's death and resurrection do we find the church commissioned to go out and to proclaim salvation to the nations.

Blauw might be challenged for making Jonah a parable to Israel, for treating election in only one of its Biblical facets, for simplifying Old Testament particularism (Was not Israel more than an instrument for the salvation of the nations, namely, a special object of God's salvation?). But remembering the thrust of Blauw's study, we can only applaud the forceful manner in which the author confronts the church with her missionary nature.