

BOOK REVIEWS

Bainton, Roland H., *Erasmus of Christendom*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969. 308 pp. \$ 6.95.

The latest work from the pen of Roland H. Bainton, the Titus Street Professor Emeritus of Ecclesiastical History at Yale University, is a biography of Desiderius Erasmus. Within eleven chapters the author portrays not only the most significant periods and events in the life of the Dutch humanist, but he also highlights the essentials of Erasmus' literary productions and makes known the intent of the author's thoughts and interpretations by assembling choice excerpts from his works and letters. The learned but at the same time charming and not seldom humorous pen of Bainton makes the book both highly informative and most pleasant reading.

It is significant that the book bears the title, *Erasmus of Christendom*. Disowned in his own lifetime by both the Catholics and the Protestants, Erasmus has only recently obtained a rightful place among the Christian theologians in the formative and formulative decades of the early 16th century. Bainton has taken Erasmus out of the hands of the rationalists, who in the past have made the main contributions to Erasmian studies, but left a somewhat one-sided impression of the thoughts and intentions of the man. In the source material presented, Erasmus reveals himself as a Christian theologian who seeks to solve theological and ethical problems within church and society by finding solutions based on Scripture and centered in Christ. No ecclesiastical institution should stand between the needy and the Good Samaritan. Erasmus appears not as an academic theorist or a cynical satirist, which often has been the case in the past, but he is seen as a Christian pragmatist who is devoted to his Master in service for his fellow men and is untiring in his quest for the *restitutio christianismi*.

High among the surviving amenities of academic life is the unselfishness with which scholars still give their hard-won knowledge to improve or to make possible the works of others. The bibliography in Bainton's book corroborates this fact. In the preface Bainton mentions that lately a flood of monographs has corrected that portrait of Erasmus which the rationalists had drawn, but "the results have not been gathered into a single volume." Now, Bainton has rendered this great service. As in his distinguished biography of Luther, *Here I Stand*, he shows his extraordinary qualities in mastering the prodigious amount of literature written about his hero. Compared with the two best-known earlier Erasmus biographies, Bainton's is superior to that of Preserved Smith, but supplementary to that of Johan Huizinga. Albert Hyma's study of the young Erasmus is still useful, and the same should be said of P. S. Allen's *The Age of Erasmus*.

Erasmus never laid out his *philosophia Christi* in a great systematic work as did Calvin in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* or Melancthon in *Loci communes*, but in *Erasmus of Christendom* the Christocentrism of the Dutch humanist has found its proper place. However, when it comes to a scholarly systematizing of Erasmus' *philosophia Christi*, the honor must go to Ernst-Wilhelm Kohls. Under the auspices of *Theologische Zeitschrift* (sponsored by the theological Faculty of the University of Basel), edited by Bo Reicke, Kohls' very pertinent two-volume work, *Die Theologie des Erasmus*, was printed in 1966. With great profit Bainton could have utilized the findings of this German scholar.

In the future Bainton's name will be closely linked to that of Erasmus not merely because of his biography but on account of the kinship between the two men. Something of what he writes about Erasmus may also be written about Bainton himself and about his response to the transformation of the world in which he and we live.

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Brandon, S. G. F., *Religion in Ancient History*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969. xiv + 412 pp. \$ 12.50.

The author's significance as a thinker is the greater because he has not isolated himself from intellectual discussions with other human beings who may not be academic scholars but whose minds are no less acute than his. Not only has he courageously served as chaplain (1939-1942) and chief chaplain (1942-1951) to the British armed forces, but he has lectured in Natural and Comparative Religion at Oxford University (1954-1957), in Philosophy and History of Religion at Liverpool University (1964), and is currently (since 1951) Professor of Comparative Religion at the University of Manchester. Since World War II, he has familiarized a cultivated public with the vast literary treasures in the history and religion of the ancient world; he has also helped educate a conservative English clergy and laity to the merits of archaeological research and Biblical criticism which seek to confirm, correct, and supplement the history and narrative of early church history.

The present volume under review has grown out of a series of essays on the subject of comparative religion in ancient history which the author has published in the past decade for the popular journals *History Today* and *Horizon*, and for the scholarly *Bulletin of The John Rylands Library*. At the level of description and exposition, this book is a true model of research. He has located and defined the basic problems of the religions of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Israel, Greece, Iran, and early Christianity, and his profound knowledge of the entailed issues, coupled with a searching power of analysis, has enabled him to establish original analogies and distinctions. The result is