

## *A Miscellany of Recent Books*

*Believing and Knowing: The Meaning of Truth in Biblical Religion and in Science.* By EMERSON W. SHIDELER. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1966. 196 pages. \$4.95.

*The New Christianity: An Anthology of the Rise of Modern Religious Thought.* Edited by WILLIAM ROBERT MILLER. New York: Delacorte Press, 1967. 393 pages. \$6.95.

*The Challenge of Science.* By GEORGE BOAS. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965. 92 pages. \$2.95.

Although these three books are not really similar, either in subject matter or in approach, a comparison of them does pinpoint, at least for me, one of the reasons why "religionists" are speaking to an ever-narrowing circle. For whereas George Boas, the philosopher, communicates very well and is willing at all times to spell out what he means by the expressions he uses, the same cannot be said for the theologians. This, I suspect, is partly because the theologians are too conscious of trying to protect something and are not, therefore, at ease.

Emerson Shideler's central thesis is that the various attempts to harmonize science and religion have been futile and undoubtedly will continue to be so. (Here it should be pointed out that, throughout, Shideler uses the word "religion" in a very limited sense. What he means by it is biblical, particularly neo-orthodox, theology.) In science men are asking different questions and employing different means than in religion. Thus, thinking scientifically, we ask, "What is this world?" and "How can we explain what is happening?" whereas, thinking religiously, we ask, "Who am I?" And in answering the basic religious question we proclaim at the same time the persons we choose to be. Although it is granted that the scientist as a person is deeply involved in the scientific quest and that, conversely, the religious quest does have a social- and world-understanding aspect, nevertheless the author contends that the religious orientation is essentially toward the self, whereas the scientific orientation is essentially toward the world.

A harmony, then, is not to be expected, not so much, however, because the two contradict, but because they deal with different concerns. Man must expect ever to live in tension. What man can hope to gain by his participation in both pursuits, however, is a better understanding both of this world and of himself. It is for this second understanding that religion can be of special significance. For man discovers himself as a person who is "met and supported by a Person who confirms and authenticates" his own selfhood as a person. Thereby, it would seem, he is enabled to discover his own transcendence of that limited world which science discovers and explains.

The thesis is well argued, but I did not find it very helpful. For one thing the author uses too many of the vague cliché words of the neo-orthodox, such as "revelation." I want to know concretely what is meant by this word; otherwise I find it meaningless. For another thing, the distinction drawn between the scientific and the religious quest is too sharp. Somehow, if religion is to speak powerfully and effectually in this modern age, it must, I am sure, speak within the scientific context and to the questions science raises. I would think, too, that save for professional Christian theologians the big problem has long since ceased to be one of merely relating science and the Bible, and is far more the dilemma of how within this scientific culture values may be discovered and transmitted in such a way as to motivate man and enable him to live constructively and hopefully. The basic question, then, is not "How can the message of the Bible be authenticated?" but "What is it that creates and sustains life and enables it to move toward higher levels?" It may very well be, of course, that, as men devote themselves to the more basic question, the Bible will also take on new and deeper meaning for them.

William Miller's anthology, purporting to trace the rise of modern religious thought, also limits the word "religion" to Christianity. But what we have here is not even a collection of representative Christian writings (no contemporary Catholic is included, for instance, not even Teilhard de Chardin) but, rather, a book on "the death of God" movement.

Anthologies inevitably suffer from the necessity to select and edit. A particular piece may easily appear out of context and thereby give an erroneous impression of what the writer really intends to say. Fortunately, however, Miller is a skilful editor. He has chosen his selections well and has written excellent introductions (although the exclusion of Van Buren in a "death of God" anthology is peculiar).

There is little here that relates to the stated purposes of *Zygon*. However, one who does not want to wade through all of Altizer, Hamilton, etc., but wants some idea of what this "fad" is about will find an excellent introduction here. But I am sure it is a fad. Like Shideler, these men are preoccupied with the biblical message; unlike him, they have passed through neo-orthodoxy. They are addressing themselves more to what the collapse of neo-orthodoxy means to them as theologians than to the more direct questions that modern man asks almost desperately. The language, too, especially in Altizer, strikes me as unnecessarily difficult, even esoteric, and the message of these men remains, after considerable reading, unclear. It is no wonder, I would think, that fewer and fewer people are listening to the theologians. Were it not for the sensational slogan "death of God," the writings of these men would have little general appeal.

The third book, incorporating the John Danz lectures delivered by Boas at the University of Washington after a long and distinguished career as philosopher, teacher, and writer, can be heartily recommended. There is not, perhaps, much that is new here, but there is the wisdom of one who has struggled seriously with modern questions and who shares with us his own insights with real warmth and humor.

Without in any way minimizing the accomplishments of science, Boas points out that science is simply the record of someone's experience. It is, of course, a

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record that has been purged, as far as possible, of everything personal. Nevertheless, experience is never totally impersonal. Science is not, then, as totally unlike the arts, philosophy, and religion as is commonly supposed. Science must be viewed as commanding a tremendous, but still a limited, area in contemporary life. Its challenge to the arts, philosophy, and religion does not come so much from its conclusions as from its methods. In other words, empirical investigations have taken the place of authority so that inferences can no longer be deduced from a priori principles.

The way in which the author spells out the implications of this challenge is helpful. The last sentence well summarizes his basic theme. "If ever we reach a point in civilization in which there will be peace on earth, it will come about by the inspiration of our religious tradition, elaborated into philosophic principles, and tested by the methods of science." Although Boas would, I am sure, agree with Shideler that the scientific and religious questions are not identical, he somehow succeeds in keeping them in a close enough relationship so that the human venture remains of one piece. One feels, too, that his insights are those of a man who has engaged in a very personal and human, rather than a professional, quest. Unlike so many theologians, he has no "vested interests" to protect.

There is also a sentence in his chapter on the religious challenge which warrants quotation here: "May I express at this point my wonder that human beings can have so much confidence in time? Why do we think that our natures will change simply because a new generation has come into being? That generation will also be human. If individuals as they grow older do not become any better than they were as children, in spite of experience, why should their offspring be any better?" This small book is rich in such wisdom, like a naturalist's testament of devotion.

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