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Philosophy of Religion: Contemporary Perspectives (Book Review)

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noted, I have objections to some of the material in this volume. What I object to most of all is the fact that, while he calls his book a "theology," Richards very often deals with and settles issues in a rather non-theological, pragmatic way; e.g. the manner in which he considers the various offices in the church. At the same time, I appreciated many things in Richard's work. Not only is it well-written, but it contains ideas which can be used to make our programs of "church education" more effective.

Philosophy of Religion: Contemporary Perspectives—by Robert O. Schedler. Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1974. 564 pages. Reviewed by John C. Vander Stelt, Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy.

When man rejects the Light of the world, he can no longer remove the fears and anxieties of daily living. The contents of Schedler's excellent anthology of theological and philosophical reflections on the existence, meaning, and horizon of religion clearly demonstrate this precarious impasse of contemporary man.

The thirty-five articles, written by twenty-nine prominent present-day thinkers, are arranged into seven chapters, each of which Schedler begins with an introduction and ends with a well-prepared list of suggested readings for further explorations. Some of the more outstanding contributors are Michael Novak, Harvey Cox, Will Herberg, Mircea Eliade, Rudolf Bultmann, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Paul Tillich, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Erich Fromm, and Carl Braaten.

The central question that is discussed in this collection of post-Christian writings is whether the world we live in is chaotic, filled with outmoded myths, and surrounded by good-luck charms, or whether our reality is, after all, coherent and in the design of some unknown, beneficent force. The way of either Sartre or Tillich is a "cruel and long-range affair.... No man has seen God. We are

all struggling in the darkness to live well" (p. 124). We live in an age in which "to be an atheist is not to be a deviate," writes Schedler, "for it is not the religious who are looked upon as being less than that what one ought to be.... It is on moral and rational grounds that contemporary atheists make their stand; belief in God is immoral and irrational" (p. 330).

The irrationalism in Schedler's own linguistic analytical approach is apparent when he claims that "change is the essence of things" and that everything is "disposable" (p. xiii). Although Schedler is fascinated by the new, open, even faddish, especially in theology, he does sense that there is some form of continuity of the "old questions and options" in his own philosophy of religion.

Schedler is basically not that novel in his views. As a matter of fact, he is in a sense still very old-fashioned. He remains entangled in the classic misunderstanding of the nature of philosophy and theology. "The philosopher is less superstitious," he writes, "because he does not rely on faith and revelation; the theologian is more broad-minded because his concept of experience includes depths denied by the philosopher" (p. xi). The question of defining "philosophy of religion" Schedler has "sidestepped" (p. xiii). Rather than talk directly about God, humankind and the world, Schedler believes, we should concentrate on "talk about the talk" of these three (p. 220).

All who desire to improve their "exegesis" of our modern world since the late fifties would do well to make a careful study of this well-arranged anthology of popular articles by reputable scholars. The forces of irrationalism and the subtle powers of new paganism loom larger and larger the more one reflects on the contents of this book, especially the statement by Schedler: "In this volume the student is confronted by the careful exact thinker who attempts to keep us from fanaticism, irrationalism, superstition, and the new paganism" (p. xiii).

But even modern man is religiously restless. The search of the ages continues relentlessly. To answer the questions of contemporary secularists, we must question their answers. This presupposes a sympathetic understanding, on our part, of their peculiar questions and inevitable answers.