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Religion and Modern Literature: Essays in Theory and Criticism (Book Review)

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Religion." One might argue that "civil religion" is institutionalized in some sense of the term but not in the sense that it has an organizational structure and office holders. Be that as it may, "civil religion" is the subject of intensive study at present by a variety of scholars. It is also of interest to many thoughtful citizens as they ponder the question as to what went wrong with the "American Faith" as the United States suffered defeat in Vietnam?

We face pertinent questions such as; What constitutes a civil religion? What factors bring about changes in that religion? What changes are needed now as we enter the post-Vietnam era? This is an era which is now a kind of extension of what Robert Bellah called the "Third Period of Trial" in American civil religion. Robert Bellah, Sidney Mead and Will Herberg, familiar names to those who have looked into the subject of civil religion, each have their own approach. Within the compass of this review it is impossible to assess their divergent views, but one will find all three stimulating and thought provoking.

Subsequent chapters in this work are devoted to "Religious Liberty and the Free Church", "Revivalism", "Indigenous American Religious Movements", "Liberalism and Conservatism", "Missions: Humanitarianism, and the Social Gospel", "Black and White in the American Religious Pattern", "Ecumenism and Interfaith Cooperation" and "American Religion in Ferment."

One of the commendable features of this book is the inclusion of pertinent documents at the end of each chapter's discussion. For example, the chapter on "Revival" is followed by excerpts from Moody, Finney and Billy Graham. The chapter on "Liberalism and Conservatism" includes in its documents A.A. Hodge on "The Inspiration of the Bible" followed by Harry Emerson Fosdick's "Shall Fundamentalism Win?"

The last chapter, "American Religion in Ferment" treats several of the changes which have characterized religious expression in America in the past fifteen years. There is a discussion of the Divine Light Mission of Satguru Maharaj Ji. As an illustration of American religion in ferment and process, it may be noted that the Maharaj Ji has been deposed as an unworthy wearer of the leadership mantle bestowed upon him by his father, the founder of the cult. The Maharaj Ji, it turned out, prefers the life of a big spender and high liver in preference to that of a model guru. This change took place since the printing of this book. Perhaps "fermentation" will have produced additional changes by the time this review is in print.

Martin Marty suggests that the changing pattern of ferment gives new options as to religious choice in America. It is no longer Protestant, Catholic or Jew. One can choose to be a Buddhist, Hindu or may associate with organized atheism. Not only that, but as a result of Black Studies, the Black American may have the choice of reverting to the African religion of his great grandfather in the African bush.

Because this book gives "religion" a broad meaning, one could possibly fault the authors for not including a chapter on "Secular Humanism." It is not organized but humanism surely plays a major role in culture formation in our country and should be present and accounted for.

The wide range of topics, the included documents, a comprehensive index, plus readable print and a quality binding make this book a worthwhile addition to a general or specialized library, private or public.

Religion and Modern Literature: Essays in Theory and Criticism, edited by G.B. Tennyson and Edward E. Ericson, Jr. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1975. 424 pages, \$5.95 (paper). Reviewed by Hugh Cook, Assistant Professor of English.

Pointing to the increase of interest in the study of religion in general and therefore the proliferation of courses which explore specifically the relation of religion to literature, the editors of this anthology have designed it to serve as course and reference material for students and teachers.

Since most questions involving the relationship of religion to literature resolve themselves into the theoretical and the practical, say the editors, they have divided the book into three sections to facilitate the movement from the general to the particular, a division which serves the book well.

The first section contains essays which deal with the theoretical relationship between religion and literature--how a writer's beliefs shape his art, and how the reader reacts to literature motivated by beliefs contrary to his own. Essays by T.S. Eliot, J. Hillis Miller, Flannery O'Connor and David Daiches are particularly incisive in exploring this topic.

The second section of the book presents essays on the religio-philosophic background of modern literature, focussing on those issues that have perennially come to the surface in modern writing.

The third section is intended to provide the practical part of the anthology: essays examining the work of specific authors such as Camus, Yeats, Eliot, Auden, Faulkner, Greene, O'Connor and others.

One of the cardinal issues in an anthology of this sort is the matter of one's definition of "religion." Is it to be given a narrow theological boundary, or a broad, world-view scope? The editors wisely choose the latter, yet do not always escape the crippling dilemma of the traditional sacred-secular dualism, "sacred" then being synonymous with "religious," and "secular" with something that is supposedly "non-religious." The anthology provides a fine opportunity for the editors to work towards the resolution of this problem facing the Christian academic community, yet they do not fully utilize this opportunity.

The anthology's main value lies in its impressive array of essays. Despite the variety of topics and contributors (and strength of the essays) the editors have compiled a unified anthology which may prove to be the standard textbook on the subject for many years.

Understanding the Old Testament—by Bernhard W. Anderson, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1975. 649 pages. Third Edition. \$11.95. Reviewed by Wayne Kobes, Instructor in Theology.

Bernhard W. Anderson, Professor of Old Testament Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, has offered this revised edition of Understanding the Old Testament "to help a new generation to understand and appreciate our scriptural heritage" (p. xix). The first edition appeared in 1957 and a second, revised edition in 1966.

Anderson's approach reflects his conviction "that the only way to understand the faith of ancient Israel is to portray the historical drama reflected in the pages of the Old Testament" (pp. xix-xx). He attempts to avoid the colorless recounting of one fact after another which too often has characterized Old Testament surveys. In this he has been fully successful. He presents a fresh approach which skillfully weaves together biblical theology, historical research, archeological discoveries and discussions in literary criticism.

In addition Anderson tries to probe beneath surface issues and to go beyond simplistic answers to more foundational matters. For example, he begins his book with a discussion of history as interpreted history. Maintaining that all history is interpreted history, he comments

on the unique characteristics of biblical history. The Reformed believer may not be fully satisfied with Anderson's perspective and his conclusions, but significant issues are brought to light.

The author attempts to present various points of view on biblical issues under debate. This makes his book more appealing to readers of differing perspectives. Yet his own stance of moderate higher criticism rings through clearly. For example, the documentary hypothesis is unquestioningly assumed as valid throughout the book, although Anderson concedes that there are minor differences between scholars on this point. The Old Testament is seen to be the product of Israel's religious history, although Anderson is quick to add that it is grounded in historical events. The following quotation gives an idea of Anderson's approach:

Every reader of the Bible has to make up his mind about the historical nucleus which lies at the heart of the tradition that has been elaborated and colored by Israel's faith over a period of generations. Some miracles are more central to the Exodus story, more native to the Mosaic period, than others. Other aspects of the story are an artistic and imaginative expression of the conviction that Yahweh was active in history, delivering his people from servitude and calling them to serve his purpose. Because the whole account is interpretive, it is very difficult to separate sharply the central elements of the tradition from later accretions. Nevertheless, Israel's ancient faith undoubtedly was based on the experience of actual events which facilitated the escape of slaves from Egypt, events in which they perceived in moments of faith the work of God (p. 66).

Although the Reformed believer will reject many of Anderson's approaches and conclusions, he will nevertheless find the book to be interesting and helpful. Understanding the Old Testament provides the beginning student of Old Testament studies with a good, elementary understanding of literary criticism and current issues in Old Testament scholarship. The book is especially helpful in relating recent archeological discoveries to the biblical text in lucid fashion. It is well illustrated with pictures of archeological findings, maps and chronological charts and constantly refers the reader to biblical passages under consideration.

The prospective reader who has a special interest in the Old Testament will find Understanding the Old Testament to be interesting and thoroughly worthwhile.