

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Understanding God: The Key Issue in Present-Day Protestant Thought.* By Frederick Herzog. New York: Scribner's Trinity, 1966. 191 pp. \$4.50. Reviewed by John W. Montgomery, Trinity Evangelical Divinity school, Deerfield, Illinois.

Even the most theologically unsophisticated layman is aware of the radical revolution going on in current Protestant thought. Death-of-God theologians Altizer and Hamilton, situation ethicists Fletcher and Rhymes, and popular advocates of a secular Christianity such as Robinson and Pike have made the national news media with increasing frequency. Clearly, in spite of all the hoopla, these new emphases reflect vitally important underlying shifts in Protestant theological orientation. Professor Herzog of the Duke Divinity School has written his first book in an endeavor to understand, interpret, and constructively criticize the theological roots of the current radical theology. His approach has four foci: the problem of God (as raised by the theocritologists); the post-Bultmannian "New Quest" (James M. Robinson, *et al.*); the related problem of acquiring a "historico-ontological hermeneutic" (Fuchs, Ebeling), illustrated especially by the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel; and the ethical issue as displayed in nonviolence and the new morality. In a concluding chapter, Herzog seeks to pull the four strands together, thereby expressing "the present-day task of systematic theology": "In the diakonic word and the diakonic deed Jesus' words take on new meaning today. . . . Perhaps we are seeking for a new articulation of the Name we have known all along."

Bewildered we are, but this book is not going to reduce the confusion; if anything, it is going to increase it. The reason is not primarily its technical and scholarly flaws (its discussion of the post-Bultmannian New Quest with no mention at all of Conzelmann or Kasemann, mere *en passant* reference to Bornkamm, and woefully inadequate treatment of Pannenberg); the difficulty chiefly lies in the fact that the author has become so mesmerized by the jargon of contemporary theology that he allows verbal formulations to substitute for clear thinking.

Had Herzog confronted in depth (instead of relegating to footnotes) theologians such as Hick and Ian Ramsey, who have been applying the insights of analytical philosophy to contemporary theological problems, he might have been able to find his way out of the semantic thicket of unrecognized metaphysical *a priori* that vitiates most mainline theological investigation today. Similar benefits would have accrued if the author had entered into meaningful dialogue with orthodox theologians, whether Anglo-Catholic or evangelical. Both the analytical and the orthodox theologians would have reminded Herzog that until modern

theology faces the epistemological issue—the basic question as to how one validates theological assertions—it will forever wander in a speculative labyrinth.

Particularly irritating to a Lincoln lover and a *docteur* of the University of Strasburg is the author's prefatory statement that Jean-Frederic Oberlin "looked over the author's shoulder" and Lincoln's "abiding influence" presided over him as he wrote. I doubt if the vague Christology and the vaguer bibliology of *Understanding God* would have appealed to either.

"*The World of Mission*," by Bengt Sundkler. Eerdmans, 318 pp., \$6.95, 1965, reviewed by Francis Rue Steele, Th.D.

Here is a book that is both intriguing and puzzling. Many aspects of Sundkler's approach are refreshingly practical and stimulating. His compact survey of church history is lively. But basic definitions are often unclear; or so it seemed to me. There is frequent reference to "Gospel" and "reconciliation" but no adequate statement concerning either the necessity for salvation or the biblical doctrine of regeneration.

The book is in three parts: I, "King and People"; a brief statement of the theology of mission, II "Church and Empire"; a history of missions against a background of changing political influences, III, "Church and Milieu"; a study of the younger churches and their problems with tribal cultures and "the great religions."

An understandably denominational bias is evident throughout. The author, being Lutheran, strongly supports the inclusion of the liturgy as a defense against the incursions of syncretism. And this in spite of the fact that he recognizes the necessity for the young church to develop its own music. He also gives disproportionate emphasis to smaller European denominational missions at the expense of much larger international "faith" missions.

The weakest point, however, is the recurring description of biblical mission as universalistic. One cannot be positive that Sundkler's use of the term conforms to the general neo-orthodox definition of universalism. But that is certainly the impression given; especially since having rejected what he describes as the Catholic, Lutheran and Liberal approaches he commends the interpretation of Barth and Kraemer.

Further evidence of WCC orientation is found in the author's passion for church union and his sensitiveness to proselytism especially between groups commonly known as "Christian." He grants that "distortion or obscuring of central truths of the Gospel" might justify the decision to "intervene" but even here seems to prefer a course of "free discussion and cooperation."

In short, here is a book, stimulating if not profound, which essentially fails to speak clearly to most of the important issues facing the Church in its world mission. This is an unfortunate characteristic of much theological writing which attempts to pass as "evangelical."