Books


The Significance of Religion in Human Experience

By J. CLAYTON FEATHER

Discourses on Religion is made up ostensibly of five monologues, but it soon becomes apparent that it is basically five dialogues, each speaker in dialogue with the one before him or with the reader. In its monologue form, the speaker voices his response to and understanding—sometimes misunderstanding—of religion. In its dialogue form, each succeeding speaker examines and makes reply to the questions, doubts, and objectives of the preceding speaker. Also each speaker seems to be conversing with the reader. As I read these discourses, I found myself engaged in conversation with the speaker. Sometimes the conversation took the form of a sharp debate: I disagreed with the speaker or pleaded for clarification. At other times I agreed with his point of view, or was amused with his illustration, or was thrilled with his insight. Whatever the turn of my response, however, I was stimulated to carry on a conversation, as it were, with each of the five participants.

Probably the chief design of the Discourses is to stimulate interest and thought in the field of religion. The book is not primarily a source reference, though it be-speaks wide study and knowledge of religion. It is not a history of religion or an analysis or defense of religious practices and ideas. Rather I believe it might best be described as a poet's effort to make articulate deep insight into the meaning and significance of religion in human experience. To be sure, Dr. Mueller has injected a bit of constructive criticism into his Discourses; but his main accomplishment, achieved with enthusiasm and good humor, lies in his ability to prompt in the reader both a feeling for religious truth and a decision to investigate its importance to human life and achievement. I should judge that the book will appeal both to those with extensive training in religion and to laymen. Those with special training will find a certain fascination in the wide variety of religious experience which the Discourses suggest, and the layman will be stimulated to re-think his own religious presuppositions and to open his mind to wider interpretations.

The Poet's Birthday . . .

in 1592. Sonnet LX was likely written c. 1592-1593. If he were forty years old then, Spenser was born in 1552 or 1553.

Chaucer had been dead for a hundred and fifty years, and the state of English poetry was so deplorable that some questioned whether great poetry could be written in the English language. The Shepherd's Calendar, in 1579, helped to put an end to such conjecture. In an epistle prefixed to the twelve pastoral which make up The Calendar, Spenser is called “the new poet,” a title which has followed him down the centuries because of its appropriateness; for, Spenser, from his first verses to his last, was an experimental poet. He never ceased to innovate. His experiments in language, rhythmic patterns, and subject matter not only re-innovated English poetry but changed its trend completely. Is it so surprising, then, that he should have believed that he could move the hearts of his countrymen to greatness in living through the beauty of poetry?

Of Chaucer, Spenser said, well of English endued.
On Fames eternall beadroll worthie to be sylde.
What better could we say of Spenser on his four-hundredth anniversary?

About the Author

Dr. Feaver joined the faculty in 1951 as Kingshier College Associate Professor of the Philosophy of Ethics and Religion, the first endowed professorship in the University. He had previously held the pastorate of the Bridgeport Memorial Church, Bridgeport, Connecticut, and had taught at Berea College. Dr. Mueller is a poet and philosopher with many publications to his credit both in the United States and Europe.

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