
Reviewed by WILLIAM J. SAMARIN

With the thesis of this book we are in entire agreement: "As God in Christ entered concretely into a specific culture at a given time and place, so the message of his revelatory-redemptive act must become incarnate in and for each generation by entering the culture of that generation and redeeming it" (p. 194). We know that here the author is not talking about world cultures (in the anthropological sense) but about different eras of Western civilization, yet the relevance of the thesis to world-wide, cross-cultural evangelism is inescapable. Nor does it escape Moreau: "It is unnecessary to make Platonists, Aristotelians or children of the Enlightenment out of non-Western peoples before they can hear the Christian message and understand it as well as we do" (p. 191).

How does the author propose to accomplish this communication? To him, the whole experience is conceived as a thorough-going process of translation. By translation, he does not simply mean the encoding of the Biblical message into other languages. This aspect is only part of the process, the importance of which he by no means minimizes. He calls for intensive study of both the Biblical "source" languages and the "receptor" languages—descriptively, historically, semantically (using his terms, p. 150).

A linguistic translation as commonly conceived, however, is looked upon by Moreau as a translation in "stark nakedness" (p. 149). The next step is to "translate" the hearer of the message into the context of the "peculiar idiom of the mythico-historical language of the Bible" so that he might participate in it. This is the kerygmatic aspect of the Christian witness. At this point, we are in philosophy and theology—even history and psychology.

Language and Religious Language is really a theological book, but one with a strong historical perspective. The author writes from an impressive knowledge of many related fields. (He is now Librarian and Assistant Professor of New Testament at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary of the Protestant Episcopal Church.) He attempts a mighty task: to trace the restatement ("translation") of the Christian message in various semantic structures, first Hebraic and currently existentialist. The church is said to have failed at any time in its history in the degree that it did not develop a theological language in the philosophical vocabulary in that era. The ante-Nicene period was one of its most successful in this regard.

Basic to Moreau's whole orientation is his assumption of the so-called mythic aspect of the Christian message. In his milieu one apparently does not ask "Who made the world?" but "What is the relation to ultimate reality of the One who has met us in certain historical encounters?" (p. 166).

Missionaries who are declaring the gospel to non-Western peoples might well

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wonder how one can make the “translation” suggested by Moreau in their situation. Is it possible where a sophisticated philosophy of life (with a concomitant meta-language) has never been developed? Further questions follow: Is it not possible that some have not so much “translated” the Christian message into modern (shall one say existentialist?) terms as transformed the message into a somewhat different one? What other form would it take if an equal number of men spent an equal amount of time on the “translation” into other cultures? What unity would remain in the resultant Christian gospel?

This volume is a stimulating one. As a syllabus for a serious seminar on the subject of the communication of the gospel it would be of considerable value. The discussants would, however, make little progress until some agreement was reached concerning Moreau’s theological suppositions.