

Meaning and Truth in Religion, By William A. Christian. Princeton University Press, 1964, pp. 273. \$6.00.

Sooner or later, theologians will have to face up to the problem of method. Books like Professor Christian's should bring the day a bit nearer. While it will not appeal to those who claim exemption from the rules of argument, it provides solid help to those who accept the obligation to substantiate what they say.

The author first establishes that religious statements, if they are to be significant at all, must make some truth-claim. Those which purport to make none at all are either without significance, or, more commonly, they conceal a hidden truth-claim in metaphorical language. The primary truth-claim in religious statements is a proposal that something is "more important than anything else in the universe." At first sight, this definition might appear to suffer from the same ambiguity as "ultimate concern," since, for a given individual, anything at all might appear to be "most important." However, the main part of the book is devoted to establishing criteria of judgment between competing religious statements. Although the author is not concerned in the present book to make such judgments himself, he argues that they are both possible and necessary.

In establishing criteria of judgment, he makes a useful criticism of paradox, myth, and symbol, insofar as they purport to convey some allegedly trans-rational truth. Though such devices have their proper function, they become a source of obscurantism when used as substitutes for argument. Religious statements, like any other, must satisfy the requirements of logical consistency; they must be capable of some factual corroboration (or disproof) ; and they must be subject to principles of judgment.

Among his conclusions, the following seem especially relevant to current discussion. First, he denies, as against mystics and existentialists, that all men are inescapably religious, whether they know it or not. They are only religious if they happen to have an interest in "something which is more important than anything else." Second, the question whether there is such a "something" is not itself a religious question. Rather, it is presupposed by all religious inquiry, just as science presupposes the uniformity of nature. Third, demonstrative certainty is no more possible in religion than in science. It is therefore impossible to derive a religious concept which would be true *a priori*, and so eliminate all rival concepts. However, in religion, as in science, it is reasonable to assent when the evidence is strong, and more so when the issue is urgent.

Written in the style of current philosophical analysis, the book might strike the non-technical reader as overly subtle and detailed. However, it also has in high degree the corresponding virtues of thoroughness, precision, and the refusal to make inflated claims, or to resort to "metaphysical pathos." These are the qualities theology needs if it is not to alienate the world and deceive itself.