

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION, By Fulton J. Sheen. Longmans; 25s.)

In spite of its title, this book is not concerned with abstract theories about the nature of religion but with the historical pattern of modern thought as viewed from the standpoint of the *philosophia perennis*. A review of the various *Zeitgeists* that have succeeded one another since the abandonment of the Great Tradition in the sixteenth century—Rationalism, Romanticism, Scientism, Temporalism—reveals the gradual rejection of spiritual realities ('the sixteenth century . . . demanded a new Church, the eighteenth a new Christ, the nineteenth a new God, and the twentieth a new religion') and of objective truth ('what one generation believes to be true, the next generation believes to be false'). Accompanying each *Zeitgeist* there is what the author calls 'lyricism'. This is 'the interpretation of philosophy, politics, religion, literature, art and God, in terms of the particular Spirit of the Age enjoying popularity at the moment'. This constant changing of the tune to which it has been made to dance has induced in human reason a kind of self-paralysis and accounts for the general mood of irrationalism which pervades so much of contemporary thought.

In order to regain its bearings and its native power of action, reason must be re-orientated towards metaphysical first principles, the principles of *being*. Only a return to the 'natural science of the human mind' will correct the prevailing irrationalism and enable reason to exercise its proper function in the quest for the purpose of life, and therefore in the assessment of the value of man. Monsignor Sheen shows that it is only by a restatement of metaphysical principles that it is possible to prove the true transcendence and immanence of God, as opposed to the false theodicies propounded by the scientist-philosophers. In discussing the impact of the empirical sciences on religion he shows that it is here especially that the 'lyricisers' have been at work, applying the method and outlook of the particular science which happens to be fashionable to the whole range of knowledge, including philosophy and religion. Thus sociology, biology, psychology have in turn had their day and each has been hailed as the key to the universe of knowledge. Today the fashionable science is physics, with its accompanying 'lyricism' in the attempt to interpret not only the physical universe but everything else in terms of physics. According to Monsignor Sheen, Professor Whitehead, 'although the deepest thinker among the physicists themselves, is also their greatest offender and their greatest lyricist'. Certainly when we contrast *Science and the Modern World* with *Religion in the Making* there cannot be much doubt that however great a scientist a man may be, he can make a very poor theologian. It is this tendency to take one science as the norm, guide, and interpreter of every other science

that constitutes the 'academic sin' of today, the 'Fallacy of the Uniform Method of Science'.

Passing from the physical sciences, the author goes on to consider two other branches of science, comparative religion and the historical. Both have an obvious bearing on the question of the transcendence of Christianity, and it is to this section that the general title of the book is most applicable.

The last, and most interesting, part of the book deals with the typically modern problem of man ('the Middle Ages studied the problems of man, but the modern world studies man as a problem'). The various humanist theories of man as a creature capable of indefinite progress and perfection by his own efforts have been abandoned, largely as a result of the experience of two wars. The modern version is that of 'frustrated man', who has within him 'some radical tension or dialectic—who is groaning for some kind of sublimation or deliverance'. It is here that Monsignor Sheen sees the possibility of a new argument for the necessity of religion, a new opportunity for the application of the principles of *philosophia perennis* to the most pressing of all modern problems. He points out that in the *Prima Secundae* of St Thomas we have the true philosophy of the 'frustrated man'. There St Thomas describes these tensions, but also assigns their cause: 'the separation of man from God and the consequent separation of man from himself. The cure therefore of man's frustration lies in his restoration to a knowledge of, and friendship with, God.'

Philosophy of Religion is a competent piece of work. The various currents of modern thought are described and criticised with sympathy and understanding: their inadequacies are exposed in terms of that insight into the nature of the relation between faith and reason which marks the achievement of St Thomas's philosophy.

EGBERT COLE, O.P.

THE PHYSICAL PHENOMENA OF MYSTICISM. By Herbert Thurston, S.J. Edited by J. H. Crehan, S.J. (Burns Oates; 35s.)

This book consists of a series of papers originally published in *The Month* and other periodicals, together with one hitherto unpublished lecture. It will be well to make clear the nature of these studies from the start. Father Thurston himself described his work as that of a *bureau de contestation*. He gives a series of case histories from the lives of saints and others, and those who remember Father Thurston's articles when they appeared will recognise with pleasure the admirable lucidity with which he sets out the evidence for the cases that he considers. It is obviously impossible to discuss the various phenomena in detail here, but it may be useful to distinguish between those, the majority, which are connected with living persons, and those