

THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION. Theory and Practice, by M. J. Jackson, *Batsford*, London and Sydney, 1974. 253 pp. £6.50.

The title is deceptive. From it one is tempted to think that Michael Jackson has produced a conventional text-book which might be recommended to students in polytechnics and universities studying the sociology of religion. Such is not the case. Instead, although claiming to write for such a readership, he offers us in the first section a general criticism of the discipline, particularly of the way it has developed or implied an anti-ecclesiastical or anti-religious ideology. His positive plea (not positivistic) is that the sociology of religion can offer help to the Church, and here he means in particular the Church of England, in its task of maintenance and mission.

The reviewer recently drew attention to some of the problems which the sociologist encounters in working for the Church in the kind of way Canon Jackson suggests ('Sociology: Friend or Foe', *New Blackfriars*, September 1974). Insofar as he raises such problems as defining of religion, the reduction of religion to its social dimension, relativism, the bias of the observer, the relation of sociology to theology, and so on, his book is to be welcomed. These problems are extremely important in the sociology of religion and are crucial for the Church in coming to terms with sociology (see M. Hornsby-Smith and G. Dann, 'The Contribution of Sociology to the Catholic Church', *New Blackfriars*, August 1975). What is alarming, however, is the facile way in which Jackson writes off these and other issues (for example, natural theology) in a mere 50 pages! Without saying a great deal about the achievements of the sociology of religion, especially at the hands of its founding fathers, such as Weber and Durkheim, Jackson is negative and simplistic. Nor is it clear in the last analysis what he plumbs for—a religious sociology which the Church directs and uses for its own purposes, with the parameters defined

by the 'officers of the Church', or on the other hand, a 'neutral' sociology of religion, seen as an autonomous discipline whose findings may only incidentally be of direct value to the Church, and in which theory and explanation are the dominant interests.

In the second half of the book, 'The Sociology of Religion in Practice', he offers very little that is new and his selection of material is ecclesiastically slanted. He does not seem to have heard of the Roman Catholic Church in England, or even the Free Churches! And on the subject of leadership he offers, in the main, criticisms of reports on the Anglican clergy (papers written for journals perhaps, but with no references) and which demand a prior detailed knowledge of the reports themselves. However, much material comes from surveys on French Catholicism, where, for example, church attendance is related to geographical and demographic factors—surveys connected with such well-known names as Le Bras, Boulard, Pin, etc. This information is interesting enough but its limitations, by way of repetitive description, and (above all) the precise manner in which it is actually used by the Church is not spelled out. Nor, at a very practical level, does the author show how the clergy might undertake simple surveys themselves, which could be a starting-point for a parish in the task of self-analysis, for he admits he is also writing for those in the churches who need 'some assessment of the help the sociology of religion can bring to the life and work of the churches' (p. 2).

Altogether the book is an extraordinary hotchpotch, with a strong, nineteenth-century establishment ideology. 'Our Victorian forefathers were probably right in thinking Gothic to be the Christian architecture' (p. 161). And if Victorian Gothic is for all times, so is this book!

W. S. F. PICKERING

WISDOM: Twelve Essays, edited by Renford Bambrough. *Basil Blackwell*, Oxford, 1974. x and 300 pp. £4.50.

'Without Contraries is no progression'. 'The Holiness of Minute Particulars'. Blake's slogans stand as mottoes to this collection of essays in honour of John Wisdom, and are expanded in the editor's own contribution to the volume: 'Philosophy is the conflict of

the obvious with the obvious. . . . The process of resolving such a conflict is the process of examining more minutely and particularly the minute particulars concerning which the opposed generalities are in conflict. Such a method of reasoning is usually informal, and its