

THE JESUS MYTH, by Andrew Greeley. *Search Press*. 215 pp. £2.00

'This is a book about the Founder of our firm, one Jesus of Nazareth'—could you hope for a more emetic opening to a book about Jesus? (particularly as the dust-cover provides the information that the author has another work entitled *Come Blow Your Mind With Me*). Should the opening sentence provoke emesis, the irritating, penultimate chapter 'Jesus and Political Action' is not likely to provide the sedative. But it would be a pity if for these reasons the book were not read, because there are refreshing and liberating reflections in between on the person of Jesus and the message he preached. These reflections, according to the author Andrew Greeley, are the fruit of what he describes as becoming 'hooked' on New Testament Studies some years ago, and studying in some depth the writings of such New Testament scholars as Dodd, Jeremias, Bultmann, Fuller, Kasemann, Perrin, Marxsen, Higgins, Manson, Bornkamm and Raymond Brown. Brooding on these authors has given Andrew Greeley a fresh and compelling understanding of the attractiveness of the person of Jesus and the novelty of his message concerning the Father and the kingdom. This aspect of his book is extremely good, and is energetically written with such conviction that it certainly convinces, and he is to be thanked for that.

But Andrew Greeley clearly has some sort of odd hang-ups about the connection between a christian's faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ and his commitment to his fellow men, especially if that connection spells itself out in revolutionary social and political commitment. This aspect of the book is unsatisfactory, a mixture of shallowness, muddle and confusion. 'Some of the more enthusiastic Catholic political revolutionaries would have us believe that the Gospel of Jesus legitimates their cause . . . They are quite wrong of course. Jesus did not advocate political revolution; neither did he condemn it' (p. 36). Well, it may be that Jesus was not a political

revolutionary (the Jewish nationalists of his day, the Zealots failed to get his allegiance) but as Greeley himself remarks some sentences later: 'the shocking message which Jesus came to bring was an attempt to redirect the course of human history, to change the style of human behaviour and transform the nature of human relationships'—if that isn't *the* political revolution, then what is it? There have been, of course, naive, shallow revolutionaries, some of them christians, whose naivety and shallowness have been exposed when they fail and move off disappointed, but it simply isn't good enough, (and it certainly isn't very loving), to point, as Greeley does, a sneering, 'I told you so' finger at frustrated, failed strugglers for human freedom. (see for example p. 107). Nor is it all that respectable to lump together all theologians who make the connection between christianity and political revolution, and never mention one of them by name or any of their writings. There are some theologians, for example, Moltmann, Pannenburg, Metz, Schillebeeckx, Alvez, Berrigan, who have written with some coherence on the subject and they can't be dismissed by vague phrases like 'some of the more enthusiastic Catholic political revolutionaries', 'much of the current "theology of revolution"', 'enthusiasts for revolution', 'contemporary fashionable activists'. For Greeley also confuses hatred with the requirement for christian witness to the sinfulness of injustice and racism. I cannot believe what Andrew Greeley suggests on p. 161, that Jesus would simply tell white ethnic racists or polluters of the environment that God loved them. Love is not to be confused with not telling people the truth about themselves, on the contrary, it is of its essence, and certainly Jesus himself did not shrink from *that*—see the whole of Matthew ch. 23: 'Woe to you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites!' etc.

ALBAN WESTON, O.P.

THE HUMAN FACE OF GOD, by John A. T. Robinson. *S.C.M. Press*, London 1973. 269 pp. £2.50

Bishop Robinson, to whom we already owe a great deal, has put us in his debt once again, this time with a stimulating, if at times annoying, study of Christology, which seeks to expose defects in accepted ways of talking about Christ and, using the best of modern scholarship, to present Christ in terms which will speak to our generation. Even partial success in such a venture is to be warmly applauded.

Robinson believes that we tend to think of Jesus either as the perfect man or as God in disguise, and that most of the supposedly

orthodox Christologies tend in the latter, docetic, direction. The doctrine of the Fathers and the Councils that Jesus had a human nature but not human personality (he is a divine person with two natures, human and divine), is, he suggests, but a refined version of docetism; it 'strikes us as threatening the very core of his manhood. What made him *him* was something alien to the human condition' (p. 39). He quotes with approval Donald Baillie's judgment, 'It is nonsense to say that He is "Man" unless we mean that He is a man'.

The Fathers erred in good faith, fully believing that it was important to safeguard Jesus' humanity, 'but their expression of what is meant for Jesus to be human, even at its best, is hopelessly unsatisfactory for us' (ibid.); *inter alia*, they 'ignore what for us is a *sine qua non* of personal existence, namely, the nexus of biological, historical and social relationships with our fellow-men and with the universe as a whole. If that is not there, then Jesus may have entered completely into the place where we are—but only as a visitor . . . No one can just *become* a man out of the blue: a genuine man, as opposed to a replica, can only come out of the process, not into it' (pp. 41; 43). Many will be glad to follow the bishop at least for quite a way along this path, readily agreeing that even Aquinas presents a Jesus who is 'extraordinarily unreal', and that Christology today should start with the humanity of Jesus and proceed from the known to the unknown. In one of the half-dozen striking passages quoted from his works in this book, Luther says: 'the philosophers and doctors have insisted on beginning from above, and so have become fools. We must begin from below, and after that come upwards'.

In affirming the substantial historicity of the Gospel accounts, even John's, Dr Robinson shows that he is not devoid of the independence of mind which dares to snap its fingers at the *Zeitgeist*. Would that he did so more frequently! Too often, alas, from the elevation of a fashionable bandwagon he pours ridicule, unmingled with reasoned refutations, upon allegedly outworn notions. Myself, I resent his attempts thus to hustle me into agreeing that ontological or absolute modes of thought are untenable (e.g. 'Christ may be a centre, or even *the* centre for me, but to say that he is *the* centre absolutely seems as naive today as thinking of Delphi as the centre of the world', p. 24); or that the only reality is the mundane (e.g. 'mythical or metaphysical "events" are ways of speaking, and to us fairly strange ways of speaking, about the profoundest realities of *this* historical order. The real world—"where we are down here"—is the starting point: the rest is interpretation, in terms of the imagination or the intellect', p. 32); or that the belief that God can be

directly present to the religious consciousness is 'naive'. To characterise views as naive, a disturbingly common ploy in this book, is a poor substitute for rational disproof.

It is not clear to me that in order to commend the approaches he favours Dr Robinson needs to dispose, by whatever means, of older approaches. May we not, for instance, emphasise the importance of the this-worldly without assuming that other-worldly talk is chimerical? May we not stress the social and political dimensions of the Gospel without denying the value of millenia of 'vertical' religious experiences? 'These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone'.

The bare bones of Robinson's Christology are as follows. Jesus was not the incarnation of a pre-existent divine person. The Logos which was from eternity was, as he quotes the Catholic Schoonenberg as saying, *anhypostatic*. Jesus was a fully human being conceived and born in the usual way (not by virgin birth; but of Mary and an unknown man: 'we shall never know humanly speaking who was Jesus' father'). 'Jesus' and 'the Christ' are not co-terminous: rather, as the Kingdom 'subsists' in the Church, so the Christ 'subsisted' in Jesus. That Jesus was perfect, sinless, ever-loving, we have not the evidence to say positively, but we can say that pure, unbounded love *is* revealed in the Christ. Jesus 'is but the clue, the parable, the sign by whom it is possible to recognise the Christ in others' (p. 239). Jesus 'lived God', he so responded to God that we can use God-language of him as well as man-language. But to say of him that he is God, or 'God for us' at least, is not to *add* anything to his humanity.

This is an uneven but important book, which must be taken seriously. In my view, Dr Robinson has, particularly in his discussion of pre-existence and virgin-birth, where his argumentation is detailed and based upon the careful exegesis of the NT at which he is adept, given us much to chew upon. On the other hand, an important part of his thesis, namely the distinction between Jesus and the Christ, which is never adequately explained even, appears to have no Biblical basis and to be gratuitous and thoroughly unsatisfactory.

BERNARD ROBINSON

HEGEL, by Raymond Plant. *George Allen and Unwin Ltd.* London 1973. 214 pp. £3.75

The aim of this book is 'to show that Hegel's mature philosophical position can be greatly illuminated by considering his own acknowledged failure to solve the problems in both personal and social experience which he diagnosed in his early writings' (p. 16). This aim, with its consequent chronological approach to Hegel's mature philosophical systems, is pur-

sued in conscious opposition to Professor Findlay's assertion (quoted by Dr. Plant) that 'the great interest in [Hegel's] *Juvenilia* stems in part from an unwillingness to scale the main crags of his system: men linger in the foothills because they resemble the lower-lying territories in which they feel best able to work and think'. It should be said at once