

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.

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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'.