

Book Notes

Surely the Christian buyer of popular paperback editions, who is unlikely to have the knowledge needed to read an expert's book critically, has a right to be given at least a tiny hint on the cover if a book takes a controversial line on something as central as the identity of Jesus? There is no such hint, though, on the cover of the Fontana edition of Geza Vermes's *Jesus the Jew* (£1.75). 'Instead of treating Jewish literature as an ancillary to the New Testament, the present approach will attempt the contrary, namely to fit Jesus and his movement into the greater context of first-century AD Palestine' (p. 42). That was the aim of the author, a Jew himself who was once a Christian and is now Oxford's Reader in Jewish Studies and a world authority on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Unfortunately he handled the Christian literature not so sensitively as the *Jewish and had surely an inordinate confidence in the role of the historian, compared with the theologian. Even so, this is perhaps the most valuable contribution to the 'quest for the historical Jesus' produced in Britain since World War II. But read it with the author's standpoint firmly in the front of your mind. Incidentally, a concise survey of the tangled relationship between theology and history is to be found in Edgar Krentz's introductory account of the development of hermeneutical studies, *The Historical-Critical Method* (SPCK, £1.95).*

For something different, dip into Michael Paffard's stimulating collection of descriptions of experiences of the numinous, *The Unattended Moment* (SCM, 80p), drawn from a wide range of authors (including Bertrand Russell). And the Merton boom goes on. Burns & Oates have reissued his early meditations on the psalms, *Bread in the Wilderness* (£1.50) and his equally early meditation on the teaching of St John of the Cross, *The Ascent to Truth* (£1.95). *The Power and Meaning of Love* (Sheldon, £1.95) is an anthology of his preconciliar essays, mainly on eremitical and Carmelite spirituality. Perhaps most interesting is *Thomas Merton on Zen* (Sheldon, £2.50),

which is composed of hunks of two older anthologies of reviews, prefaces, etc., that give us hints of what Merton *might* have done if only he had lived longer and had had fuller direct experience of the East. Also from Sheldon comes Geoffrey Parrinder's new book, *Mysticism in the World's Religions* (£4.95), the object of which the author more accurately defines as 'to introduce the great religions in their mystical expressions' (p. 5). A remarkably comprehensive survey, all the key names seem to have been packed into its 200 pages, and descriptions are about as accurate as their brevity and the use of Western categories allow. But, if you do not move on to some of the texts themselves, reading this book will gain you nothing. Dent announce that the Prabhavananda/Isherwood translation of *Bhagavad-Gita: The Song of God* is now in the Everyman's Library (£3.20; £4 de-luxe.)

This is the right place to mention two new learned journals. The interfaith quarterly *Journal of Dharma* is published from Dharmaram College, Bangalore, India, in collaboration with four other university faculties (in India, USA and UK). For details Europeans should contact me c/o NB. (Yes, NB's present Reviews Editor is also UK/European Editor of the *Journal*.) The 1975 number of the annual *Islamochristiana* (Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi, Rome) includes the first part of a bibliography on Muslim-Christian dialogue through the centuries.

Bare Ruined Choirs: the dissolution of the English monasteries (Cambridge £6.50) is an abridgement of vol. 3 of David Knowles's superb *The Religious Orders in England* handsomely illustrated with photographs. And, moving from ruin to revival, note that Sheldon have reissued Charles Frederick Harrold's anthology *A Newman Treasury* (£6)—but it should be read alongside a biography like Meriel Trevor's *Newman's Journey*.

We may be omniscient but our space is limited ... so we suggest that if you are living in UK you will find it worthwhile investing 50p in SCM's *Religion and Theology: a Select Book Guide*. Unless you are nearly omniscient yourself. JOHN ORME MILLS OP