

obviously sociology does not concern itself with the truth or otherwise of the supernatural, by looking at things in a relative sort of way (i.e. precisely as social phenomena) sociology does tend to reduce the special claims of all world views to equality. This applies not just to Christianity, but to any world view, whether religious, Marxist, or that of Western rationality. It is this threat of relativism which seems to lie behind Dr Newman's book. It's a real threat and there are real arguments going on (not least within sociology) about relativity and reductionism, about whether Durkheim (or Marx for that matter) adequately accounts for the way people experience things. But the way to discuss these matters is not to use sociology as a kind of background for expounding your privileged moral philosophy. Or at least the exposition should not be presented as an introduction to sociology.

Part of the trouble is the amount of ground covered by Dr Newman. Under neatly subdivided headings, the 24 pages of the opening chapter on the origin and development of sociology whip the reader through 65 characters (and this excludes those mentioned in the footnotes). Naturally there is hardly getting to the bottom of any of them. So one turns to the chapter on political sociology hoping that some of them will turn up again, or that there will be a discussion of how power is exercised or perceived or attributed, or maybe something about conflict or opposing interests. Instead what one finds is basically a collection of definitions of such things as forms of government with examples and the kindly advice that established government should not be disturbed in the interests of an unreasonable desire for self government on the part of a national minority.

All this gives a sense of superficiality. Take two examples from the same page. When considering the effect of migration on popula-

tion, Dr Newman informs us that 'until the advent of interplanetary migration it cannot be a factor from the global point of view'. Assuming he can't be saying migration is never international, is he telling us that population studies are at present confined to the earth? Or is he lightening the text with a space age joke? Two paragraphs along he tells us that the chief cause of declining population is moral decay—'practices such as homosexuality, artificial birth control, divorce and infidelity, and all sorts of selfish habits which cause avoidance of marriage or the birth of children'.

Some of this is just prejudice. In the chapter on the sociology of the family we learn that the American Womens Liberation movement is 'suspect of tendencies in the direction of lesbianism'. (No evidence given—so there's a bit of innuendo if you like.) The woman's position is basically in the home. Man is more fitted for leadership. She is 'more often than not unequal in powers of management. He is stronger, less emotional, more rational. Hence the wife, within reason, should be subject to the husband'.

There is no point in multiplying instances. Dr Newman is sometimes shrewd enough and it is not only conservatives who tell you what to think or rely mainly on assertion—and any analysis is from a particular point of view and generally contains some moralising. Occasionally here there's the interest of a specifically Irish problem being considered—bilingualism in Ireland for instance. And in what other sociology book could you read that 'the wife is Queen in the truly Christian home'.

Still in the end one can only hope that the students who listened to these lectures were as irritated as this particular sociology student who read them, and that they were driven by their irritation to read some of the sociology Dr Newman's schoolbook so inadequately refers to.

ANTHONY ARCHER, O.P.

THE THEORY OF MYTH, edited by Adrian Cunningham. *Sheed & Ward*. £4.75.

WHEN THE GOLDEN BOUGH BREAKS. by Peter Munz. *Routledge & Kegan Paul*. £2.25.

Christian theologians and exegetes, as Adrian Cunningham points out in the introduction to this set of six papers on the theory of myth, have been slow to make use of the resources and findings of the current debate on the subject. This collection is the first in a series from the semi-annual colloquia organised by the Department of Religious Studies, University of Lancaster. The two most immediately impressive papers are the devastating exposure of Mircea Eliade by Ivan Strenski and the equally penetrating attack upon Claude Lévi-Strauss by Caroline Hubbard. When the giants in the field

are so ruthlessly and plausibly cut down to size the outsider might well decide to put off getting involved until the smoke has cleared from the arena. Only the trouble is that the theologian is not really an outsider here. One of the main tributaries in the current debate is the study of stories (Vladimir Propp is the precursor), and if the Christian theologian is understandably wary of being categorised simply as a student of *myth* he cannot deny that his principal object of study is a *story*. That theologians are beginning to remember this, and perhaps to ask themselves questions

about the consequences of it, comes out in a recent issue of *Concilium* (May, 1973).

In the Lancaster collection Tim Moore provides a brief introductory survey of the state of play in the analysis of narrative and outlines how the 'science of stories' might develop as a relatively independent discipline. He mentions 'the stimulating and magisterial work now being done in the infancy of this new discipline' and refers to the *Mythologiques* of Lévi-Strauss, but it is obvious that we have a set of stories much nearer home than these remote and exotic American Indian myths—indeed we have more than one set of stories—and the time is surely coming when we must begin to practise some analysis upon our own familiar myths. As far as Christian literature is concerned, perhaps the way will be led by *Le récit évangélique* by Claude Chabrol and Louis Marin, in the press at the time of writing. It promises to give rise to questions of theory in the field of biblical exegesis as well as in that of semiotics (which, drawing more upon de Saussure than upon Propp, and inspired by the researches of Roland Barthes, A. J. Greimas and Tzvetan Todorov, has already produced a fair crop of theological work in France).

One of the toughest theoretical problems is, of course, the relevance of questions of truth and falsehood to myth and story, as John Creed points out at the end of his study of the uses of ancient Greek mythology in the emerging 'science of stories'. Another complication is the relationship between myth and ideology, as Adrian Cunningham brings out in the essay which concludes the Lancaster collection. What account is to be given, for instance, of the social effects in nineteenth-century England of the doctrine of sin and labour contained in the Genesis story of the Garden of Eden? (There is a persistent attempt in this essay to confuse the reader about the gender of the word *esprit*.)

The heart of the collection, however, is the slaughter of the two giants and the cautious admission of Mary Douglas as a feasible alternative. Eliade's field is, of course, the history of religions rather than the study of myths as such, but Ivan Strenski is surely correct in saying that Eliade's concept of myth pervades his work and has also gained much wider currency through the popularity of some of his books. A great deal of his material is admitted to be valuable ('in practice his work is often useful and interesting'); it is his methodological prescriptions for the study of religion which Strenski regards as so disastrous. In a nutshell the problem is that for Eliade every myth turns out to be only one more transcription of a non-historical and trans-cultural universal 'ontophany' in the existence of which we have

no reason to believe. The notion that the narration of myth transposes people to the non-temporal time of the Origin has really very little to commend it as a general theory, and a great deal to be said against it in detail—starting with the crude dualistic ontology which it assumes. Again, as far as Lévi-Strauss is concerned, there is no denying that his formal technique for the study and classification of stories has transformed the field and inaugurated the new discipline. As Edmund Leach has observed, Lévi-Strauss on Myth is like Freud on Dreams; nothing can ever be the same again. But there is something askew with the Lévi-Straussian conceptual framework, as Caroline Hubbard convincingly demonstrates. The logical categories of the human mind—*la pensée sauvage*—turn out to be really derived from the categories of nature and we are led back to another anti-historical and universalistic theory of myth comparable in this respect to Eliade's, though in this case a 'sentimentalised materialism' (Adrian Cunningham's phrase) rather than a post-Jungian ontologism.

Finally, and more hopefully Eric Pyle contributes a study of Mary Douglas's book *Natural Symbols* (1970). Many symbols are natural in that they arise from the human body, itself taken as the symbol of the body politic and of the cosmos. Every human group exhibits a drive to harmonise the symbolism with the social system. It appears that for Mary Douglas the relationship is dialectical. Eric Pyle applies her approach tentatively to Christian symbolism and suggests how the original symbolism might be related to the Jewish situation at the time. As he says, there is no need to assume either that the social conditions 'cause' the symbolism or that the 'truth' could only be appreciated in those particular conditions. Tentative and questioning as the approach remains, it surely indicates how study of myth could be freshly related to study of the social situation, thus providing a proper historical dimension, while also being connected to the human body, the one undoubted trans-cultural datum which we have. But as Adrian Cunningham says in his introduction, we should be back again at the basic questions of meaning and interpretation and raising again the problem of the possible trans-historical significance of myths.

The first third or so of Peter Munz's book is given over to an exposition of Lévi-Strauss on myth and the main point made is the familiar enough one that the structuralist approach is vitiated by neglect of the historicity of myths. The corrective is to be found in 'typological interpretation', by which Munz means that since every symbol is the conclusion of a whole series of increasingly less specific sym-

bols it can be stripped down until the most ancient stratum is reached. This 'phenomenon of historical seriality' seems to have no more substance than Eliade's non-temporal time, and a certain amount of talk about the spire-tree-phallus series really does not achieve very much. ('If one looks at the phallus in cold blood, the substitution of the cathedral spire is an attempt to disguise something', page 90.) As the author says in the preface the book 'stems from the concern to keep our lines of communication with the centre clear and un tarnished', it is a desire to 'defend ancient springs'. By comparison with the studies in the Lancaster collection it becomes obvious that we are still in the Eliade era here (not that

Eliade is ever mentioned). It is difficult for a theologian to take the book very seriously when he finds the author asserting, on page 2, that Bultmann believes that 'the whole of Christian mythology was an ancient, groping attempt to express the truths put forward by Martin Heidegger'—of whom it is said, by way of explanation presumably, that he is 'a German philosopher who, to boot, eventually joined the Nazi movement'. To boot or not to boot, it little boots but surely that is not the archaic meaning of the word (*OE bót*; of German *buss*e, making good, expiation). It is by such trivia that one's confidence in Professor Munz is sapped.

FERGUS KERR, O.P.

S. T. COLERIDGE: LAY SERMONS, edited by R. J. White (Vol. 6 of the *Collected Works of S. T. Coleridge*). *Routledge & Kegan Paul*, £4.75.

Well! If the poet's prose-style offered notorious difficulties for his contemporaries, there is no reason to expect that time has diminished them. 'Dislocated and perplexed by the parenthetic tangle' commented Carlyle, and Sarah Wedgewood is quoted in the introduction to this edition as saying that the Sermons were 'Full of an affectation of the most sublime and important meaning—and so much unmeaning in reality'. We are told that a James Lowell had the Lay Sermons read to his hens on rainy days, when they were backward with their eggs. 'The effect on them was magical. Whether their consciences were touched, or they wished to escape the preaching, I know not'.

But the complexity of style is only the first of the hurdles for us to surmount if we are to get to the heart of this work. It might just have been possible for someone in the early 19th. century to read the title page without being immediately put off, but it does seem to be specifically designed to repel any 20th. century reader: 'The Statesman's Manual, or: The Bible the Best Guide to Political Skill and Foresight; a Lay Sermon addressed to the Higher Classes of Society'—which had already evoked the response 'humbug' before the death of Coleridge. Even supposing that our interest in him, or even the subject matter, should carry us far enough to continue reading, there is yet another obstacle on the way—and that is the presentation of this superficially attractive edition. For the text is so overloaded with asterisks, letters and numbers, referring to Coleridge's own footnotes, emendations to the text of the original edition, and footnotes to the text and to Coleridge's footnotes respectively, that the actual sermon is often reduced to a thin dribble at the top of the page, in constant danger of being dried up altogether, and which requires heroic determination to be read at all.

Assuming that the effort has been made, is

it all worth-while? I think so, apart from the light which these little-known works shed on Coleridge's political and religious thought, it is amazing how much the picture he paints, and the future he fears, resemble the England we all know and hate. For example, on page 189, this is to be found: 'We are a busy, enterprising and commercial nation. The habits attached to this character must, if there exist no adequate counterpoise, inevitably lead us, under the specious names of utility, practical knowledge and so forth, to look at all things through the medium of the market, and to estimate the worth of all pursuits and attainments by their marketable value'. And it is at once apparent how, even though his idiosyncrasy often slips into mere eccentricity, his thought can cut through the usual categories the ideology; a trait which alienated him from his contemporaries, but which we, in our detachment from his age, can be grateful for. He shared with the radicals of his day their critique of society, with regard generally to the spiritual effects of capitalism, and in particular to the issues of slavery and child labour. But he abhorred their solutions as a threat to individual liberty. Instead, he offers three things which are surely closer to the hearts of the Monday Club than to those with whom his name has been linked in John Cornwell's recent book, 'Coleridge, Poet and Revolutionary'; for his 'counterpoises' to the spiritual decay of his time are these: (1) A feeling for ancient birth, and respect paid to it by the community at large. (2) A genuine intellectual philosophy with an accredited learned and philosophical class. (3) Religion. It is in this ultra-reactionary programme that we can see the shadow of the man who is the real hero of the work, who indeed makes a more frequent appearance. It is not Jesus Christ, but Plato.

PAUL POTTS, O.P.