

that what his better opponents seek is something simpler, something not mentioned in this book, but on which the human psyche *lives*? I refer to truth. Admittedly, the man who eulogizes truth and has not yet thrilled with the recognition of one particular truth (and among these the existence of God is at the top of a very long, arduous and joyful path, as natural theology rightly tells us), is like the man who eulogizes women and has not yet loved one particular woman. But you will not have the second stage till you have committed yourself wholly (if tacitly) to the first (vague and even frigid as it may sound); and most Christians have at least this in common with most 'materialist atheists', that they have not recognized this 'mystery of simplicity' that only truth matters, that every writer in the Bible took this as his starting-point (though a great many stated it explicitly), and that there is no *possibility* of faith (least of all, thank heaven, in 'the modern intellectual climate'), until the step into that (only apparently) wintry world where only truth is considered, has been taken.

Really, of course, no-one wants an 'answer' to dialectical materialism. The situation is much simpler. Having read every page of Marx, Trotsky, *et al.*, having (let us suppose) established a classless society, one would find that the most elementary books (to start with) of the Old Testament (e.g. Proverbs), had something that was new, gay, vital, beautiful, and, on inspection, true. Then the virile, often ironic, frankness of the Old Testament will not miss its mark. To take a low-tension sample, 'a merry heart is the true life of man'—reach for your George Lukacs, Eisenstein, Brecht, and report when you find a comparable sentence. You would find it in at least two modern non-Christian writers, Nietzsche and D. H. Lawrence; and it is probably from these men of joyous insight that the reconstruction of true religion *will* start. From 'Proverbs' to the New Testament is a journey with which History (if not its eulogizers) is rather familiar. But 'love' and 'faith' offered us on a plate of parchment? That tune was played out a very, very long time ago; and every Christian knows that in his heart as well as every atheist.

Incidentally, if I were confronted with a dialectical materialist (they are rare and interesting specimens over here; it's more fashionable, and more questionable, to have lapsed than to be one), I would refer him to Ecclesiasticus 5. 12: 'Be true to your own thought and to the knowledge you have'.

ANTHONY BLACK

A CATHOLIC'S GUIDE TO SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTION, by C. C. Clump, S.J.; Catholic Social Guild; 6s.

It's as well to be reminded from time to time of the inadequacies of orthodox Catholic social thinking, and Fr Clump's handbook of quotations from the social teaching of six Popes, contrary to its conscious intention, serves this purpose admirably. The book, significantly, is in question-and-answer form: social thinking, according to this kind of outlook, is a matter of dogmatic answers to care-

fully formulated questions, and the whole thing could really be worked out on paper, one feels, with a few abstract principles and little reference to the way men actually live in community. The mechanical, un-lived quality of the thought comes through on every page: defensive, legalistic assertion serves in place of any true exploration of the complex nature of a Christian society, and the blueprint of moral imperatives blurs whatever humane feeling may have motivated the enquiry. Questions like 'Can a Catholic be a member of a political party?' or, even more basically, 'Is the existence of different political parties legitimate?' are evidently still thought relevant by Fr Clump in the 1960's; in this kind of book it is the questions as much as the answers which highlight the unreality of the approach.

What is most evident is the lack of adequate sociological concepts, the use of outmoded ways of looking at society. Society and State are still, at points, interchangeable terms; society is seen as 'subsequent to man' in a way which calls for careful definition; socialist equality means 'making a dead level'; 'masses' is still found to be a meaningful concept, after the mangling it has justly received from modern social thinkers; the familiar 'organic' society gets some affectionate attention and little critical analysis. The emphasis is on law, authority, rights and duties, at the expense of human community as a positive value in itself. A passage from Pius XII on the role of Catholic women in society captures the general tone exactly: woman's role is 'to be the guide and teacher of her sisters; to correct ideas, dispel prejudices, clear up confusions; to expound and spread the teaching of the Church . . .'. What emerges here, in this picture of brisk spiritual activity, is the ironic lack of a Christian quality of feeling; the precise, dogmatic activity dispels, not prejudice, but the qualities of tolerance, co-operation and active sympathy which should be part of it. The presumption is not that Catholics will share in the common process of creating a good society, but that by mugging up their C.S.G. handbooks they will be able to put the pagans right on all the main points.

But of course, the main points of Catholic social thinking are as shaky as ever. For one thing, we have still not stopped apologising for bothering with society and politics at all: careful distinctions are made in Fr Clump's papal quotations between what concerns a Christian as a Christian and what is 'purely political', and it is disturbing to see that the 'purely political' includes 'the type and form of political power or government'. The Church must remain aloof from the 'fleeting exigencies of politics', but this may be either a useful warning against committing the whole Church to a particular party, or, as is evident here, a downgrading of the 'merely' political. The Catholic, although not essentially concerned with politics, must become entangled with them from time to time when his religion is under attack; usually, however, these matters will be concerned with the ordinary quality of human life rather than with religion, which deals with higher things.

Fr Clump's book has a good deal to say about the origins of civil authority, and little to say about the nature of class-society and industrial capitalism. If this kind of handbook is continuing to provide the basis for social teaching in our schools,

the need for a truly radical Catholic approach to society, one which tackles our fundamental assumptions about human community, is more obvious than ever.

TERRY EAGLETON

MYTH AND RELIGION OF THE NORTH, by E. O. G. Turville-Petre; Weidenfeld & Nicolson; 50s.

Students of Old Norse and related subjects should be delighted with this book which sets out in a clear manner the extent of present knowledge of the Northern pagan religions without in any way glossing over the difficulties inherent in the sources. It could be praised indeed as an exposition of scholarly deduction and imagination which never over-steps the border into fantasy.

The confusion in many of the literary sources, poetry, history and saga, stems chiefly from their dates at the beginning of, or well into the Christian era of the north. Accounts of heathen religion found in thirteenth-century Saxo or eleventh-century Adam of Bremen, are likely to be prejudiced or at least to contain misunderstandings. Apart from such descriptions of rites and customs, we have fortunately preserved for us a detailed mythology of the gods and giants and an account of the cosmos in the Edda of Snorri Sturluson, an Icelander of the twelfth-century, and some of his own sources remain as a test of his reliability. The cults and rituals taking place in the north are indicated also in the archaeological material, the Oseberg ship of the ninth-century for example, amulets of the god *Thór* and traces of provisions found in other burial mounds, or the remains of a temple at Hofstadir in Iceland. Sacral elements in place-names can indicate the extent of particular cults, and the evidence stretches down to modern times in other ways since recently-recorded Finnish and Lappish customs are believed to preserve ancient religious practices influenced by their neighbours. The picture which emerges is one of very varying cults and allegiances often adopted individually by men attracted by one or other of the gods. A link between circumstance and cult can, however, be seen, for example in the strength of the cult of *Ódinn*, god of dissension and death, among the Vikings and landless men under Harald Finehair, while the Icelanders who had fled before him and valued stability of home and lands, seem often to have had names compounded with the name of *Thór*, the defender of the world of the gods against the anarchy of the giants. In the settled lands of Sweden a religion of fertility gods and goddesses grew up, and place names compounded with *Freyr* and *Freyja* are particularly common here. To such cults should be added those of kings upon whom the success of the tribe and especially the fertility of the soil was thought to depend: the body of one such king had to be divided into four so that each of his provinces could bury a portion on their land and so ensure prosperity of crops. Figures who also, like the kings, acquired a divine ancestry in legend were the great heroes such as *Sigurd* and *Starkad*. Finally, the picture would be false if it omitted those men who scorned all sacrifice and relied only upon their own might and main.