THE ORPHIC VOICE, by Elizabeth Sewell; Routledge and Kegan Paul; 56s.

That poetry could be the most authoritative and exacting mode of exploring and evaluating our condition is not a view that cuts much ice in these days. Not to speak of those for whom poetry can at best be only a mental holiday, because language itself has come to seem too crude to serve as an adequate medium of thought, there are also those who, while caring deeply for the poetry of the past, believe that the creative initiative in literature has now passed for good to the novel. Fiction seems so much ampler and more flexible an instrument for registering and encompassing the complex particularity of raw behaviour. This book, however, is an impressive vindication of poetry as primarily an intellectual activity, more far-reaching, more inclusive, more telling, in its research into the morphology of human existence than any other discipline whatever. Poetry is the mind unfolding and shaping itself, articulately and critically. It is the language in which we lay hold of, and qualify, our natural history. Miss Sewell clinches her argument with responsible and illuminating analyses of *The Prelude* and Rilke's *Sonette an Orpheus*, works which certainly bear out high claims for the service of poetry in our unending search to understand ourselves.

F.K.

THE RUINED TOWER, by Raymond Chapman; Geoffrey Bles; 13s. 6d.

Mr Chapman is worried by the isolation of the imaginative writer in modern society, an isolation which can lead to a withdrawal into a private world ('The Ivory Tower may soon become the Ruined Tower'). For the Christian writer such a withdrawal is a denial of the responsibility to his neighbour which his faith implies; yet for the Christian the difficulties of communication are aggravated by the weakening of the traditional symbolism of the Church, through ignorance of Christian dogma and through the transformation of a rural into an industrial society. This not very controversial thesis is set out clearly enough in the first hundred pages. Occasionally there is room for disagreement: 'The accepted (religious) symbol does not depend for its power on the quality of its individual reproduction'. Bad art, then, is as powerful as good art? Whatever we mean by 'power', it seems odd to put a Madonna by Duccio or Henry Moore, a Crufixion by El Greco or Rouault, on a footing with the most grossly sentimental treatment of the same theme.

In the main, however, Mr Chapman's account of the position of the Christian writer in a secular world is unexceptionable, if familiar. In the remaining forty or fifty pages he considers certain themes in the work of Eliot, Christopher Fry and Charles Williams. As criticism these pages are disturbingly superficial; the assumption that a play like *The Dark is Light Enough* can be taken seriously as literature is itself surprising. The desultory analysis of Eliot's poetry and plays, which could have been studied closely in this context, suggests that these latter

chapters are intended at the most as illustrations of the thesis advanced earlier in the book. But does this justify a criticism that elucidates themes without reference to the quality of their expression in the work of literature?

R. W. GASKELL

AN INTRODUCTION TO RELIGIOUS SOCIOLOGY, by F. Boulard, translated by M. J. Jackson; Darton, Longman and Todd; 21s.

The recent translation of Canon Boulard's '*Premiers Itinéraires en Sociologie Religieuse*' by the Revd M. J. Jackson coupled with the trial parochial surveys up and down this country in February by a method devised by the Newman Demographic Survey are not unrelated events in the development of religious sociology.

Canon Boulard's work was first published in Paris in 1955, and the present translation of this book represents the first detailed summary in English of the work which has been accomplished in France since the Second World War. The detailed references to contemporary work at the end of each chapter will make this book a valuable aid to those who need to have a specialized knowledge of this subject, but the abundance of good maps, and the copious supply of detailed charts and diagrams enable the general reader also to follow the methods described with absorbing interest.

From surveys carried out in the main by diocesan authority, but under the direction of specialists in religious sociology, the whole of rural France can be divided into three kinds of areas as to the religious practice of its baptized Catholics, who are estimated to form 94 per cent of the total population. There are areas of majority practice where 45 per cent and over of adults (over 21) attend Sunday Mass and their Easter duties. Other parts are areas of minority practice, where 45 per cent of the adults practice their religion by only seasonal conformity. Lastly, there are areas where a minimum of 20 per cent of the children are not baptized, the mission areas. It becomes quite clear from a map of these areas that not only individuals but whole regions are characterized by their religious practice. The north-west is a large region of majority practice as are also most of the areas down the eastern border. The heartland of France is a vast area of minority practice stretching in some cases along the principal rivers to the coast. The mission areas are also concentrated in particular localities, one very large one is centred upon Sens, two more are around Limoges, and another is to the south of la Rochelle.

Cannon Boulard has shown that the explanation of these clear-cut patterns is not exclusively to be found in industrial development. From diocesan records going back to pre-Revolutionary times, and still more from the records of missions in certain areas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is clear that certain of the areas of minority practice to-day were in the same position three hundred years ago. And even the regions of high religious practice to-day