

mies are inappropriate; the reason that his poetry can be simultaneously so moving and so enigmatic is at least partly that his symbols were almost never without an existential base, his allegories almost never purely conceptual

fabrications. It is from a *sensory* reality of exceptional intensity (even if we cannot specify it with any certainty in biographical terms) that the symbols and allegories draw their power.

PETER DRONKE

THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY IN THE MIDDLE AGES, by Walter Ullmann. *Methuen*, 1967. 30s.

Professor Ullmann's latest book consists of three lectures, general in character, delivered at Johns Hopkins University, which may explain why in general the savagery of its author's comments on such English scholars as fall in his way is only equalled by the fulsome-ness of its praise for the Americans: unless he thinks they need it more than we do. At times this verges on the absurd. He has a learned footnote explaining that the drafters of *Magna Carta* 'plainly distinguished between the meanings of *vel* and *aut*'. The note adds nothing to Powicke's famous article which is not cited, although the collection in which it appeared is referred to in the same note. Again Dr Ullmann tells us: 'It is not altogether properly appreciated that the handling of legal business in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England was very largely in the hands of the unpaid amateur, of the non-professional'. I should have thought one of the books every history undergraduate might be expected to know was A. L. Poole's *Obligations of Society*. Moreover Dr Ullmann has equally overlooked *Self-government at the King's Command* by the American historian, White. In view of this it is both vulgar and distasteful when he tells us how ignorant of the influence of the Bible on the Middle Ages most medievalists are, and appends for our information a selection of his own articles with no reference to Dr Smalley's great book on the *Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. Perhaps he is not acquainted with it. In spite of the want of taste and the charm-less style the book is none the less decidedly a good one.

Dr Ullmann has devoted his first lecture to what he calls the descending thesis of medieval political thought. That is the notion expressed in 'official' sources, the protocol of state documents and so on, of government descending from God on to a King and downwards to his subjects. Then, deserting the level of high theory for a rare visit to the world of fact, the second lecture deals with the feudal realities in which Dr Ullmann brings out well the ways in which the nature of medieval society meant in practice a large measure of agreement, contract,

and co-operation to make life go on. The last essay is concerned with showing how this sort of theological political ideology and this sort of practical co-operative politics combined to create the liberal conception of citizenship, at least in *esse*. Although he must be summary in order to deal with such a theme in three essays of moderate length, Dr Ullman is not superficial. A great deal of very relevant knowledge is packed into a short compass. Very few could honestly say they had read this book without learning a very great deal about something important from it.

There are weaknesses. Dr Ullmann is not very often at home to the practical politics of the feudal world and he is not always clear at what level of society, the village or the honour, he is talking. But the points he makes tell well enough as far as I can see. Those acquainted with his other books will find much to ponder in the first chapter, that devoted to the 'descending thesis'. The point he wants to make is the absolutist character of official medieval ideology. The thesis is almost identical with that he identifies in his other books as medieval papalism. Once again its logical rigour is singled out as a leading characteristic. The new book, however, illustrates the logical weakness of Dr Ullmann's notion of papalism. Here only kings and a few great men are competent in matters of government because, the lower orders are *idiota* and therefore by definition incompetent. The authority for this is no more than Pauline and patristic texts to the effect that the world is divided into governors and governed, so that, as a consequence 'the *fidelis christianus* not only had no rights but also no autonomous standing within the Church itself or within society'. Everything depends on how the distinction between competent and incompetent is drawn and how justified. As Dr Ullmann has often pointed out the extreme canonists took up the position that in the end no-one was competent but the pope: a king is as much and as little of an idiot as the lowest of his subjects. Since few popes and fewer Catholics wanted a monopoly of governing power in the hands of the vicar of Christ,

and society would have collapsed into anarchy if they had ever tried this out, it is obvious that the canonist thesis is logically rigorous only so far as it proceeds like Euclid's geometry by logical deduction without taking in any concrete information whatsoever. In the end the ideal pope on this way of looking at authority would be a mitred computer: the *reductio ad absurdum* of a logically barbarous theory. When this kind of reasoning is applied to kingship it has not even the superficial plausibility of the extreme canonists. Inevitably there must be a conflict between kingship and papacy which in the realms of this kind of 'logic' the papalists must win. But this has nothing to do with the real world and it is not surprising that the more extreme forms of canonistic papalism were developed *pari passu* with the decline and degradation of papal

authority in practice by Catholic princes in the later middle ages.

Dr Ullmann would probably reply that this is not his fault: *this* is what was so. I do not think he is right. He places too much emphasis on the pious platitudes of composers of protocols both to secular and ecclesiastical documents. There is a profounder sense of the nature of society to be found in the Middle Ages, I believe, somewhere between the high theories of the professional speculators and the unreflecting practice of lordship and vassalage. I suspect Dr Ullman's ultimate thesis, then, to be over-simple, but I am sure it is a beginning of a line of thought very well worth development. If then this book is too much of a short cut, it is a courageous one and it is never trivial and never irrelevant.

ERIC JOHN

A SOCIOLOGY OF ENGLISH RELIGION, by David Martin. *SCM Press, London, 1967. 153 pp. 25s.*

Despite the importance of the subject, the sociological study of religion in this country is still very much in its infancy. For this reason, among others, Dr Martin's book is fulfilling a real need. It gives a survey of the religious situation from a number of varied and useful angles, probably the first book to attempt such a task, with an extremely useful bibliography at the end. The book can be recommended therefore not only to those whose academic interests overlap with the subject, but also to the general reader who will find much to stimulate him.

The range of topics is considerable. The central topic of the book is dealt with in chapter four; the relationship between the ecclesiastical structures and the general patterns of society and community in England and Wales with passing references also to Scotland. Utilizing three sociological models often adopted in religious classification, church, denomination and sect, the author attempts to trace the relations between religion and society in England by a broad comparison and contrast with France and the United States of America.

Closely allied to this central chapter is the historical background outlined in chapter one, which concludes with an appendix recalling Charles Booth's reflections on 'Religion in London in relation to Class'. The appendix is an appropriate conclusion to a chapter which emphasizes from many angles the strong correlation between religious practice and

socio-economic class which is illustrated from three periods in this historical background: prior to the Industrial Revolution, the 1850s, and the beginning of the 20th century. In the first period disaffection from organised religion was catered for by a dissenting body usually evangelizing a segment, but not the lowest social segment, and gradually lifting it to a higher social plane. This process often exhausted its capacity to repeat the effort and a new dissenting body would step in to repeat the process for another generation. The second and third periods are illustrated from the census of 1851 and the surveys of 1886 and 1903. In the Census of 1851, only 36% of the total population who could have attended church did so on the census day. But the proportions varied from 57% of rural Huntingdonshire to 21% of London. In the cities it was not so much the size as the distribution of the classes that was significant: the lower the social class the less the attendance. The two surveys of 1886 and 1903, which were focused on London, showed conclusively that it was the groups which attended to social structures, like the Baptists and the Methodist Forward Movement with their concentration on central missions with social concern, which held their own, while the Anglican Church sharply declined in all social classes. Failure to influence the masses was not due to lack of trying. It was due in part to a cultural gap, to lack of communication, to uprooting from the countryside and to the fact that in the new environ-