

the size of the family, families helping each other, the affluent society as it affects the home.

Now is the time for Catholic women to take a long, hard look at the image they have of themselves as Christian wives and mothers. The writer points out that a woman's *difficulties* have too often been confused with her *virtues*. Poverty, drudgery and too many children too quickly are not good things in themselves, though many women in the past have been sanctified by them. 'The image of the meek, simple, devout mother who mutters Hail Marys over the washtub and is too absorbed in her prayers to bother about her appearance' is not appropriate for many women

nowadays, enjoying as they do a standard of living that has substituted washing machines for washtubs. Their vocation lies more in satisfying their children's questions, keeping up with current trends inside and outside the church, taking trouble to remain as physically attractive after marriage as before it.

Some of these chapters have already appeared as articles in *Life of the Spirit*, *The Aylesford Review* and *Search*. Many will be grateful that such abundant good sense has been published in a more permanent form.

Ann Hales-Tooke

THE SECULAR PROMISE by Martin Jarrett-Kerr. *S C M Press, 18s.*

This book is part of a series designed to relate the Christian religion to the various non-Christian cultures of our time – Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Humanism, etc. It springs from the conviction that, from the present crisis of Christianity – its Western and colonialist image, and the problems arising from the need to shed this – a new opportunity is emerging for a Christian witness which is not hostile to, but is sympathetic to, these other forces. Martin Jarrett-Kerr's book is concerned to discuss the secular world of modern western humanism and its value for a new Christian vision. M. A. C. Warren, editor of the series, emphasises in his introduction the 'inwardness of much contemporary humanism' and the *anima naturaliter Christiana* we often find in it: and this is Fr Jarrett-Kerr's basic assumption too.

The author discusses, in a broad not to say eclectic way, various aspects of the *literature* produced by modern humanism – psychology and sociology, morals, the arts, and the theology of certain avant-garde writers. He admits to the bookishness of this approach – which is certainly one important criticism of it. He also feels the force of the objection that he may be blessing many features of the world which ought not to be blessed. But I do not think that these disclaimers are enough to raise the volume above the level of a rough survey. For those already aware

in detail of the value of much modern humanism, the discussion is too hurried to bring to light any new insights on particular points. For those not so convinced, it will seem to be conceding a great deal of ground without giving adequate reasons. I have the feeling that the author is more concerned to persuade Christians that *they* must take modern humanism seriously, by presenting them with a lot of challenging quotations, than to take it seriously himself in the book, by subjecting it to the rigorous intellectual scrutiny which he claims it deserves.

One example may show the kind of thing I have in mind. In the discussion of the humanist attack on Christian ethics, much weight is given to the views of Professor Nowell-Smith in an article in the *Rationalist Annual*. I have not read the article, but the discussion and quotations given do not suggest that its attack on Christianity is very profound. Thus Nowell-Smith asserts that for a Christian, morality is 'an affair of being commanded to behave in certain ways by some person who has the right to issue such commands'. His objection to this view of ethics is that we have to be persuaded independently of the goodness of the author of the commands before we admit his right to issue them to us. Fr Jarrett-Kerr seems to think this is a serious challenge to the Christian (p. 102). But this is surely to concede the wrong point. Thus for St

Thomas, ethics is concerned with doing what the natural tendencies and needs of human nature demand (S.T. 1.2ae Q.94, 2). What God commands is right because it accords with man's nature, not the other way round, and a command which is inimical to that nature (say to commit suicide) would on that score reveal itself not to be from God. Ethics is the discussion of what, as a human being, I fundamentally need to do or not do; not of whether, or how, I ought to obey some known set of commands from outside. To say that I ought to obey God is not to put an end to ethical discussion, but merely to say that following-out his commands is part of what I need, as a human being, to do.

It still remains to discuss what these commands are and how they apply to me. The real difference between the humanist and the Christian here is likely to be that the humanist does not believe that human nature has any needs except the expressed wants of individuals. For him these are sovereign. The idea that mankind, as a species, can have needs which may be different from personal wants and which ought to take precedence, is rejected as authoritarian. Everything is a matter of mature personal conscious decision

and consent. What is at stake here is a profound *philosophical* difference about what it means to be a member of the human species.

But instead of arguing this out (which would have shown an interesting, and significant difference between humanism and Christianity) Fr Jarrett-Kerr lets the Professor get away with his 'challenge'. I suspect this is because he is so anxious to emphasize the dangers of intellectual imperialism by Christians, that he forgets that the way to avoid this is not to try to alter Christianity to suit the 'challenge' but to see that the 'challenge' arises only because of an inadequately 'humanistic' view of ethics. St Thomas is much more like a humanist in his ethical thinking than Fr Jarrett-Kerr is. This kind of situation is continually cropping up in confrontations between non-Catholic Christians and agnostics. Not being used to a philosophy which is itself highly agnostic about many things, the Christians panic when agnosticism rears its head. For the Thomist, at any rate, the problem of secular humanism is not how to grapple with a philosophy which seems so alien, but how to define one's differences with a philosophy which seems so familiar.

Brian Wicker

MYTH AND REALITY by Mircea Eliade. *George Allen and Unwin (World Perspectives), 16s.*

'Myth' is a word which has enjoyed a complete change of reputation during the last two generations. Professor Eliade begins this book by considering the older meaning of the word, according to which a 'myth' was a 'fable', 'invention' or 'fiction'. But in the primitive societies in which myths are born, a myth is regarded as a true story expressing ultimate realities, a story which is sacred, exemplary and significant. 'The function of myth is to reveal models, and in so doing to give a meaning to the world and to human life' (p. 145). It is this meaning of 'myth' which has been grasped afresh during the present century; and Professor Eliade has written a most valuable introduction to the subject, in which he shows the characteristics of myths and their development, and their relevance in contemporary society.

Myth is essentially practical, and also 'liturgical'. For it ritually re-presents the 'supernatural' power by which things were ordered in the beginning, so that they can now be restored according to the primitive model. Myth always has this reference to origins. It tells either of the origins of particular things or customs in order that power over them may be renewed and maintained; or of the origins of all things, of the primeval creation. If a myth tells of the end of time it is because the end is regularly seen as a restoration of the primeval creation, as a return to the primitive paradise and never as a simple annihilation. Myths have in common therefore this preoccupation with time – the desire to destroy time, the time which separates the present from the mythical past in which the gods or heroes laid down the patterns