

to me that saintliness is, if I dare say so, the minimum for a Christian'. Can she be blamed for asking too much of Christians? The brilliance and range of her mind in these letters is continuously amazing, it is like a finely cut diamond, sparkling sharp edged and with many equally polished facets. Here, however, is not only fine analysis but prophetic insight into the signs of our time. Many today speak of 'engagement', she practised it throughout her life with total generosity.

This is a challenging book which should shake us all in our complacency. A book for those who see the need for new life and not simply for reform within the framework of old categories and institutions. Radical action groups will find in her vision and life a stimulus to thought and significant action. We owe a great deal to Sir Richard Rees' skill in presenting these letters to us in such a readable translation.

SIMON BLAKE O.P.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION by Max Weber. *Methuen, London, 1965 30s.*

In reading this 'new' book by Max Weber one must bear constantly in mind that it was written almost fifty years ago: it is the first complete translation of the section entitled '*Religionssoziologie*' of his systematic work '*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*'. Research in the intervening years has yielded much new information and in so doing has called into question some of Weber's premisses, but in spite of the consequent weakening of his empirical generalisations his book remains a great work of analysis and is still amongst the most important in the field.

As Talcoot Parsons remarks in his useful introduction, Weber's focus, when he turned to the study of religion, 'was not upon religion "as such", as the theologian or church historian conceives it, but upon the relations between religious ideas and commitments and other aspects of human conduct, especially the economic characteristics of human conduct within a society'. His work is truly a sociologist's study of religion and as such is a necessary supplement to the approaches of other disciplines. No one man can be master of all the fields that must contribute to a complete study of religion. One marvels at how close Weber seems to have come to such mastery but his weakness, his very superficial understanding of theology, is a crucial one. On those occasions when he quotes a theological opinion or offers a theological comment one feels he is missing the point. For instance, it is not strictly true to say that 'the official doctrine of the medieval churches, as formulated by Thomas Aquinas, treated the peasant essentially as a Christian of lower rank'; but this is just the sort of misinterpretation that arises from unfamiliarity with theological thought.

This lack of theological understanding is of great importance in his discussion of some

topics; notably prophecy, the priesthood and the sacramental system. He begins his book by outlining the development of religion out of magic and wherever he treats of the sacramental one senses that he sees always the skeleton of magic giving form to the body of religion. This is made particularly clear in his remarks about the concept of '*ex opere operato*': though the fault may lie not only with Weber's questionable understanding of the concept but also with the questionable discussion of it by some theological writers. Such flaws in the passages dealing with Christian thought, inevitably make one wonder about the value of his remarks about non-Christian beliefs. It should, however, be remembered that Weber had published major studies of the religions of China, of India and of Ancient Judaism but died before he could undertake such an overall study of Christianity, so it may be that he was more soundly informed about non-Christian theologies.

Of course, Weber as a sociologist sees things that the theologian might well miss and be the poorer for missing. His studies of prophecy, of the evolution and relationship of mystical and ascetical tendencies, of the genesis of western and eastern thought about the nature of the divine and of the role of preaching and spiritual direction are especially valuable. By placing these phenomena in their socio-economic, and not merely in their historical, settings he throws new light upon them. His breadth of learning, which enables him to compare aspects of doctrine and practice in many faiths, deepens our understanding of some fundamental religious notions. Many of his insights may be familiar to us now but seen in their context they are more clearly understood.

The book is such an erudite and complex work that it is impossible, in a brief review, to

summarise even the main themes of its evolutionary argument; in this respect Parson's introductory summary deserves praise for its clarity and balance. In spite of the subtlety of Weber's thought and the 'Gothic castle' of his style the translation is readable and the text not nearly as clotted as many less substantial essays in sociology. There is an adequate index

but no references are given; a summary of at least the principal sources for each chapter would have been useful. The publication of this book in English can only reinforce Leo Strauss's judgment on Weber: 'Whatever may have been his errors, he is the greatest social scientist of our century'.

MANNES TIDMARSH O.P.

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH, MYSTERIUM MORTIS by Ladislaus Boros (translation by Gregory Bainbridge, O.S.B.). *Burns & Oates, 1965 30s.*

This is a book about death. The author explains that its three chapters were written in the order 2, 3 and 1, and a reader might find the whole slightly less puzzling if he takes them in this order. Chapters 2 and 3 are essays, one on the 'Philosophical basis for the hypothesis of a final decision', the other on the theological relevance of such a decision, written, we are told, '*currente calamo*'. One wonders whether, had the *calamus* been a little less *currrens*, these essays would have emerged in quite the same shape, and whether Chapter 1 would have been written at all.

This first chapter, 'Methodological postulates for an analysis of death', is fundamentally an attempt to establish the possibility of a 'temporal process within a non-temporal transition'. It is assumed that the moment of death must allow, within itself, room for an 'act of completely personal decision; preceding this decision in time, an absolutely personal act of perception; conditioning this perception, an awakening of the soul to its spirituality; and so forth'. Although the argument appeals to concrete human experience in general as its root, it does seem rather cavalierly to reject the human experience of death itself as unworthy of a hearing. Willy-nilly the old legends of a quick documentary film of the whole of life being reviewed in death are called to mind. It all seems rather like a *re-mythologizing* of death.

The reason for postulating a process within the instant of death becomes clear in the third chapter, where we find a puzzling emphasis of space and tone given to the unbaptized babies and limbo question. Knotty though the problem may still be, the author could have given a fairer picture of the recent theological and exegetical position. As it is, he is inclined to use

his running pen as a lance for tilting at windmills. Rosinante however is his real trouble. Any theory in this day and age that regards the soul, when free of this concrete biological organism that is its own body, as in a better position to be a person and make personal acts, is necessarily suspect.

The author promises to gather together the real achievements of previous authorities on his subject, to harmonize them and to carry our insight a step further into the mystery of death. A high aim, and difficult of attainment. In spite of protestations to the contrary, his argument suggests an underlying dualism of matter and spirit in the composite human person, although this dualism has long since been overcome. At one point he suggests that actual, personal sin can be realized only in the final decision of death, and this, even on the philosophical level, is a retrograde step. Again, in spite of recognition of the principle '*miracula non sunt multiplicanda*', he must appeal to a special intervention on the part of God (by means of a footnote appeal to St Thomas), in order to say how infants in death can awake to 'the use of their mental and spiritual faculties . . . full liberty and complete knowledge' (*per species divinitus infusas*).

Theology, at all levels, must surely be judged by its ability to render the mysteries of redemption more easily intelligible. Though there are, in this book, quite a few particular passages which do enlighten some particular points (one thinks above all of the discussion of the hereditary theory of original sin), its erudite and intricately constructed argument as a whole does not achieve what the author says he set out to do.

PAUL BARRETT O.P.