

BUDDHISM—A NON-THEISTIC RELIGION, by Helmuth von Glasenapp. *George Allen and Unwin* London, 1970. 208 pp. £2.

Christianity is an atheistic religion. This was the view of ancient writers who pointed to Christian disbelief in the gods of the state. Clearly, then, the terms 'atheist' and 'theist' tell us only about a man's idea of a personal god, and nothing of his views in another areas usually considered 'religious'. But how can there be a religion without an omnipotent creator God? This is the question Professor von Glasenapp takes up, the religiosity of a non-theistic religion.

For many religions the origin of the world is an important problem. Some attempt to explain it by assuming an original creator of all that is, leaving themselves open to the dialectician's question, who then created God? The Buddha declined to speculate on the question of a first cause, but his destructive analysis of concepts of a divine creator led Indian thinkers to classify his teaching with that of the *Sāṃkhyas*, Jains, and Mimamsakas: religious systems which, whilst they teach a moral world order and a way to liberation, teach that the gods are impermanent.

The Buddha taught the Noble Eightfold Path to liberation from the only allowable standpoint, that of one who had achieved it. It begins with right understanding. To achieve this it is necessary to develop insight into the Three Marks of Existence; to see that all things are impermanent, frustrating, and without 'self-nature'. Professor von Glasenapp outlines the world-view which results from the application of this analysis. Buddhism knows neither a first cause of the world nor an all-embracing spiritual substance giving rise to all that is. Postulating dependent origination it affirms that it is always the case that something comes into being dependent upon, and conditioned by, other things. To assert a first beginning is as impossible as to assert a definite end. For the Buddhist neither the world nor the individual can be explained by reference to one or more 'eternal substances' such as God, soul, or original matter. The plea for parsimony in explanation rejects such notions as unnecessary explanatory constructs. All that exists is conditional and will pass away. Nothing

arises from a single cause; existence is the co-ordination of a multitude of conditions.

Indian Buddhism has never denied the existence of personal gods (*devas*). Professor von Glasenapp's studies show, however, that arguments for the existence of an eternal creator and ruler of the world have been consistently negated by the Buddha and his followers. Other Asian and Middle Eastern religions contain analogous views and these parallels are examined in the short sections which close the treatment of each of the five principal concepts relevant to theistic considerations in Buddhism. These are: The Impermanent Gods, No Creator or Ruler of Worlds, The Law of the World, The Bringers of Enlightenment, and The Absolute.

In a brief note which forms the second section of the book M. O'C. Walshe supports von Glasenapp's decision to work from Indian sources. Later developments may, he points out, be derived from the system given in the Pali canon. Selections from the Buddhist scriptures designed to support the arguments advanced by Professor von Glasenapp make up the third section. They have been chosen and edited by Heinz Bechert, and their inclusion makes this book a useful text for the serious student. The glossary of Pali and Sanskrit words is a selective one. The term *deva* (heavenly being, literally radiant one) is not included, perhaps because *devas* are dealt with at length in the first chapter.

This book is essentially a short work by Professor von Glasenapp designed as a contribution to the scientific study of religion. Buddhists may be a little surprised to see the *Jataka* or birth stories quoted as of equal standing with the discourses of the Buddha. General readers may be dismayed at the profusion of technical terms. Because its aim is so highly specific it is likely that the reader who lacks a fairly wide knowledge of Buddhism will find the work unattractive. It does, however, deal ably with a topic which may be foreign to the way of thinking of many, yet crucial for an understanding of this important religion.

ARTHUR WOOSTER

THE MIND OF CHESTERTON, by Christopher Hollis. *Hollis and Carter*, London, 1970. 303 pp. £2.10.

While Chesterton still lived his faults were recognized: the 'whimsically perverse aversion to accuracy', the almost wilful romantic

chivalry, the deadly monotony of his weekly column for *GK's*, his abiding vindictiveness after the Marconi trial and, even in that age of

debate and rhetoric, his excessive use of the paradox. But on the whole we were less aware of the faults which he shared with his age. It took a dictator and gas ovens to open our eyes to the evil of anti-semitism (and now that the horror is receding I sometimes wonder if our eyes are closing again) and missionary bishops are still straining to convince us that Europe and the faith are not synonymous.

It is true that Chesterton's false notes are often an echo of Belloc. But we thought him a prophet and prophets should not be led by the nose. He was a prophet, and when he spoke in his own voice he spoke of things that endure. This is borne out when we ask which of his books first spring to mind after thirty-odd years. They are *Orthodoxy*, *The Everlasting Man*, *The Ballad of the White Horse*. Here he echoes no one; he speaks in his own voice and his eyes are set on the horizon. He writes about ultimates, good and evil, truth and falsehood, creator and creature, the dignity of man. In an odd way—at least it seems odd now—he did not need a crisis to remind him of the great truths. He lived intimately with them. When we discover a man to be this sort of contemplative we cannot believe that he is touched by evil, the trivial squalor of everyday. But more than once Chesterton declared that he became a Catholic because he needed to have his sins forgiven. The average sensual man finds this hard to credit. And the only hint of an explanation that Chesterton gives is that during his time at the Slade he indulged himself in a period of sceptical solipsist speculation which contaminated him. That seemed to me a very rarefied kind of wrong-doing until Mr Hollis offered an explanation which he illustrates through the Father Brown stories. Some of the crimes, e.g. in *The Secret Garden* where the murderer substitutes the head of a guillotined criminal for the head of the man he has murdered, 'are so horrible and obscene that . . . we shudder a little at the mind that could

have composed such a picture'. Chesterton had so metaphysical a mind that he could almost render evil incarnate. Sin for him meant something beyond our sordid imaginings; it meant the ultimate monstrous disruption of reality and goodness that comes when man denies his natural roots. Chesterton recognized that this, terrifyingly, is within the reach of us all. Mr Hollis implies the timeliness of a Chesterton revival when he makes this clear without labouring the point or dragging in comparisons with world-poverty or Vietnam. When Chesterton wrote in *The Man Who Was Thursday* that he had no doubt there was a 'final adversary' and that 'you might find a man resolutely turned away from goodness' it might be Archbishop Helder Camara speaking.

This was all of a piece with the optimist who lived aware of the pervading presence of the good God. A man can only live with such a clear comprehension of evil if he is aware of the power and presence of God. This was the source of Chesterton's sense and wit and optimism and all the good things we remember of him. This sense of the ultimate sanity of things (if only man didn't confuse the issue) appears in surprising ways: the solutions to many of the Father Brown stories, the least didactic of books, depend on the marvel of everyday things and the inability of man to see the obvious.

Mr Hollis writes discursively and easily out of his own experience. He sometimes wanders from the point. He never canonizes his subject and speaks at length of his faults, his childish obsession with swords, blood and battles and the limitations of his mythology. Chesterton has something to say for the seventies; we need his voice, for some of the obscene horrors that he apprehended too clearly to describe are now actualities; a Chestertonian sanity stripped of its eccentricities and mannerisms might do much to purge such evils.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

LETTERS TO HIS FAMILY, 1901-1962, by Pope John XXIII. *Geoffrey Chapman*, London, 1970. 18+833 pp. £4.75.

Pope John was welcoming Governor General Vanier of Canada and his family to Mass in his chapel. It was the first time they had met since they were friends in Paris. 'Mon cher ami', said the Pope. 'Je suis toujours Roncalli; mais maintenant je suis le Vicaire du Christ.'

These letters, 727 of them, are the letters of the Roncalli he was proud to be, 'the son of

humble but respected parents' whose family had since 1429 farmed the few acres at Sotto il Monte, often in real poverty (28th May, 1945). They show, for those not so sophisticated to be blind, how, under the Providence of God, there arrived in the chair of Peter, just as the mass media was able to show him to the ends of the world, this archetypal Christian, who was