

Letter's eschatology. Among many fascinating subjects covered is a comparison of the Gnostic Redeemed—Redeemer myth as presented by Bultmann with a view of the Saviour in our Letter. Such a comparison yields important insights, and is done with the uttermost courtesy and the absence of anything suggesting polemic. However, all Section IV is preparatory to an investigation of the authorship of the Letter. This proceeds by a critique of the original editor's six arguments for holding that the *Letter to Rheginos* emanated from the Valentinian sphere of Gnosticism, and probably from Valentinus himself. Further to the same purpose is a brief comparison of the *Evangelium Veritatis* (which is usually held to be a genuine work of Valentinus, written in Rome c. A.D. 140-5) and our text *De Resurrectione*. The comparison all through takes the form of a sustained dialogue with the former editors of the text, and indeed the entire critical re-appraisal of

the Epistle to Rheginos is in terms of this dialogue. At the end comes the final parting of the ways. Five brief paragraphs lead up to the present editor's conclusion: 'In sum, on the basis of internal evidence from the letter, we would maintain that the *Letter to Rheginos* was written in the last quarter of the second century by an anonymous but revered Valentinian-Christian teacher'; and there has been a re-Christianization of his Valentinianism, 'beyond that our investigation will not permit us to go' (p. 180).

A bibliography and very full indexes of references in the *De Resurrectione* and in Scripture, Gnostic literature, Mandaeen and Manichean Writings, etc., all go to make the work a useful adjunct in a less well-known domain of study which, however, is relevant both to the New Testament and early Church history.

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF RELIGION, by Roland Robertson. *Blackwell*, Oxford, 1970. 256 pp. £1.8. (Paperback 90p.)

It is significant that this book is entitled the sociological interpretation, not explanation, of religion. Robertson's reasons for this (pp. 58-65) in part reflect a dissatisfaction with available explanations, which, while masquerading as sociological, turn out upon inspection to be psychological. Functional theories, for example, which focus upon 'anxiety' or 'uncertainty' in fact offer explanations of religious behaviour in terms of the properties of individuals rather than of social groups *per se*. And explanations at the level of sociology can prove to be unsatisfactory generalizations as, for example, when one postulates 'an ubiquitous and universal set of social processes which are products of religious phenomena' (p. 60). What is rather required is first that causal priorities are initially left open when investigating questions concerning the relationship between religion and society, and secondly, that one should offer an analytical framework against which explanations might be examined if only to spot their weaknesses and ambiguities.

In his own approach to analysis Robertson makes a basic distinction between 'culture' and 'social structure': the first refers to beliefs, values and symbols and the second to the social means by and through which they are mediated and expressed. The book then takes up the themes which arise from applying this distinction to the study of religion: organizations, beliefs and values in what is socially

designated as the religious sphere, the relationship between religious and secular culture, between religious culture and the social structure of the wider society, between the social structure of religious and secular culture and, finally, the relationship between social structure in the religious sphere and social structure in the wider society. Although Robertson does refer helpfully to anthropological work, he himself recognizes that most of the empirical data referred to relates to industrial societies, so that in practice by far the greatest emphasis is upon the Christian religion.

What the author does provide us with is a good over-view of a wide range of work. This includes, for example, a judicious critical survey not only of Weber's evergreen work on the Protestant ethic, but also of the issues and research continuities in that area. He takes the view that 'Weber was on the whole wrong about the Protestant Ethic, but right about the general contribution of Judaism and Christianity to the forms taken economically and politically by Western societies' (p. 181). He also offers an innovation in the approach to church-sect typologies, in an attempt to accommodate satisfactorily groups like the Salvation Army in Britain or the Mormons in the U.S.A. which, while they proclaim a message which is out of line with the dominant religious and secular culture, are also regarded as an acceptable part of the religious scene. It makes good sense to

think of such groups as institutionalized sects, which has quite new implications for understanding membership behaviour and responses of the wider society to such groups. It serves to remind us of course that simple models which treat groups as progressing from sect to church or denomination will not do.

But the most fascinating part of the book for me was the chapter dealing with attitudes towards the modern world—religion in relation to social science. Typically one thinks of sociology as a product of the enlightenment, reacting against dogmatic presuppositions and proclaiming its own scientific status over and against religion. Robertson here reminds us that various styles of sociology co-exist which have either implicitly or explicitly (in the case, say, of Marxist philosophical anthropology) an image of man. And here our attention is

drawn, albeit briefly, to the varying perspectives of Durkheim, Parsons, Berger, Luckmann and Dahrendorf.

At times, it is true, the themes and issues in the book are compressed so that we have allusions and illustrations rather than sustained argument. Robertson has nonetheless satisfied his own criterion that sociologists who work in this field should familiarize themselves with the work of theologians and philosophers of religion. And there is a certain kind of humility when he recognizes that since sociology is itself a cultural product, the sociologist should himself analyse, as an act of critical self-reflection, the sociological perspectives which have informed the approaches taken to the study of religion. In sum, this is a book which, for many reasons, one will be glad to recommend to students for whom it was primarily written.

J. E. T. ELDRIDGE

THE IDEA OF THE CITY IN ROMAN THOUGHT, by Lidia Storoni Mazzolani. *Hollis and Carter*, London, Sydney, Toronto, 1970. 289 pp. £2.25 (45s.).

Civilization takes its name, and in the so-called Western world, its substance, from the Greek city. The Greek invention was exported on a vast scale over the Hellenistic world; Rome, stepping into the Hellenistic inheritance through conquest, spread its urban institutions and culture—more or less thinly—over much of Europe. Christianity was an urban grouping from almost its earliest days, and soon espoused the urban values of the Graeco-Roman world. It allied itself with the urban culture of the Roman bourgeoisie, which had failed to assimilate the inarticulate, the barbarian, the *paganus*. After the collapse of imperial administration in the Western provinces of the Empire, it was the network of an urban Christian episcopate that kept Roman forms of life in being where these survived.

In multifarious ways the city could be said to be the central theme of European—though not only of European—history. Great historians from Fustel de Coulanges and Rostovtzeff to the late A. H. M. Jones have written about it and about its place in the ancient world and in its consciousness. Mrs Mazzolani has chosen a great theme for a first book (the book has been awarded an Italian prize for a first book); too great a theme, let it

be said at once, for even a skilled journalist, widely read, perceptive and intelligent. As far as can be judged from the very readable translation, Mrs Mazzolani is a gifted writer. Her book contains much of interest and can be stimulating. Her chapters on the extension of Roman citizenship and the problems raised by it, short as they are, contain much that is illuminating. But she escapes too readily into the ideal, spiritual city which she sees at the end of the development she is describing: the City which Saint Augustine (she argues) salvaged from the ruins of the classical world. The real problems, those which the work of Rostovtzeff has placed at the centre of both ancient and medieval history, concern the fundamental relationships of an urban culture to that of the underprivileged masses of the countryside. Although there is much 'straight' history in Mrs Mazzolani's book, there is a gulf between it and the speculations about the 'city' which her treatment does little to bridge. This is a stimulating book; if it succeeds in encouraging its readers to return to Fustel de Coulanges or Rostovtzeff and the more recent historians who have tried to come to grips with this central problem of the ancient world, it will have deserved its prize.

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