

Catholic missions is obliged to concentrate on a peasant Church whose essential conservatism calls in question, or at least balances, the élitist slant of the Protestant mission histories' (p. x). My only serious criticism of this fascinating book is that Linden makes too much of the possible link between a missionary's own social and cultural background and the church which emerges under his guidance. The 'formula' suggested for Nyasaland is that Catholic peasant missionaries produced a church of Catholic peasants and Protestant élitist missionaries produced a church of élite Protestants. So, for example, we are told that 'the ahistorical Christianity which African Catholics learnt was a natural product of missionaries who were in a sense themselves escaping from history in Europe. The priests in Nyasaland were largely the children of Europe's *émigrés de l'intérieur*' (p. 88). Speaking of Auneau's 'peasant aggressiveness', Linden reminds us that there was 'a tradition of Catholic armed resistance to the Republic among the 'chouans' in the Vendée where Auneau had grown up, and many of the Montforts came from anti-republican Brittany' (p. 89). And it is said, of the early Catholic missionaries, that 'the Church they produced in Nyasaland was a

remarkable replica of the one they left behind in Limburg, Quebec, or Brittany; it was profoundly conservative and made up largely of peasants' (p. 208). But will this do? If a 'functionalist' explanation really is required for the character of Catholicism in Nyasaland, it seems more important to stress that the Catholic missionaries were outsiders, foreigners in an area of British influence, that most of them spoke little English and could therefore not teach it, and that they arrived late to find that the Protestants had already won the allegiance of the 'progressive' chiefs. In Rwanda and Burundi, areas of Belgian influence, the reverse happened. The British and American missionaries arrived late, received little support from the Catholic authorities, could not speak French, and found that Catholic missionaries had established a monopoly of 'élitist' education. Many of these 'élitist' Catholic missionaries came from the same conservative background as the 'peasant' missionaries of Nyasaland.

Finally, two complaints. It would have helped to have a clear, comprehensive map of South-East Africa at the front of the book. Secondly, £6 seems a lot to charge for 180 pages—which is all that is left after deducting the prefaces, footnotes and index. JEREMY GREENLAND

THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE, by Anders Jeffner. *SCM Press Ltd.*, London, 1972. 135 pp. £2.25.

MYTHS, MODELS AND PARADIGMS, The Nature of Scientific and Religious Language, by Ian G. Barbour. *SCM Press Ltd.*, London, 1974. 198 pp. £2.95.

THE MEANING OF GOD, by Robert H. King. *S.C.M. Press Ltd.*, London, 1974. 166 pp. £2.50.

A THEOLOGY OF SPEECH. An Essay in Philosophical Theology, by Ian Davie. *Sheed and Ward*, London, 1973. 114 pp. £2.50.

These four books form only a small selection of an evergrowing flood of studies in philosophical theology, all covering more or less the same ground, grinding at the same argument that has now dominated the discussion for some time. In our secularised society the issue is no longer to demonstrate God's reality from given data in this world, but to show that, while we are involved with the things in this world, there is still room for religious convictions. Can mankind go on expressing hopes and expectations that concern a dimension beyond this world: does religious language make sense?

Modern insights into the multiform structure of language extending itself to various domains of life have freed us from positivist and empiricist dogmatism that makes verification the only criterion of meaningfulness. The meaning of religion does not depend on metaphysics and its fruitless dispute with the positivist sceptics, but is to be found within the domain of religious language itself, we are

assured. But having said this, many questions remain, especially with respect to the objective value of religious statements that cannot be reduced to mere expressions of sentiments or primitive forms of a scientific understanding of the world. Jeffner argues that the criterion of religious speech is not to be sought in its relation to the world as such, but in its connection with a religious situation. Indeed, in these days many religious statements have become problematic: the statement 'God created the world' is no longer evident in view of modern science. Many philosophers have therefore tried to reconstruct their function so that they can be incorporated in a modern view of the world. But such a reconstruction falls victim to the very challenge which it tries to meet. The meaningfulness of religious language depends on its right to make statements about what is the case, and it is only on that condition that the other, more emotive functions of religious language make sense. The author then interprets 'problema-

tic' in a positive sense. Religious problematic statements can be appreciated as non-scientific explanatory hypotheses which prove to be just as reasonable as explaining the world merely in terms of science and common sense. But in order to be real statements they have to be more than arbitrary hypotheses and must involve a firm option. Just as ethics allows us to accept or reject basic norms for which we cannot give any further reason, so we adopt in religion the optimist's non-scientific explanatory hypothesis without reason or argument.

I hardly expect that this summary does justice to Jeffner's thought, which is hidden behind an awkward use of the English language and a jungle of sometimes arbitrary technical terminology.

Barbour, too, refuses to believe that religious statements are inevitably mere fictions fulfilling some function in man's life in the world. Religious claims can be true as well as useful, specifying as they do a perspective on the world and an interpretation of history and experience. We must therefore not be put off by the apparent objectivism of the myth, describing as it does the realm of God, and we must not oppose it with a total internalisation of its truth. For myths embody models which they present in dramatised form, and these models do indeed have objective value. The point is made by comparing religious models with the ones used in science. Scientific models are used not as literal pictures of reality nor as useful fictions but as partial and provisional ways of imagining what is not observable. Religious statements can best be seen as models subjecting themselves to the same rules as scientific ones, that is to say, they demonstrate their objective value in the real possibility of being falsified by the cumulative weight of evidence against them. When embodied in myth they also account for the non-cognitive function of religious language, expressing attitudes, emotions, commitment, etc. In this way we can avoid the hazards of the metaphysical assumptions on which the scholastic doctrine of analogy depends. What is lost in certainty is gained in tolerance and ability to understand other religions that work with different models. Once again the question of arbitrariness arises. Surely religious models are not merely tentative but require option and commitment. But here too religion is not all that different from science, as can be seen in the use of paradigms. Scientists do have a commitment to a tradition and legitimately stick to it with considerable tenacity, exploring its potentialities rather than abandoning it too readily. This commitment arises from the scientific community's unconscious assumptions, which influence all its ways of thinking.

King is familiar with Barbour's work and seems to accept its conclusions: in fact his book can be seen as a chapter in it. He sets out to explore the Christian commitment to the model 'I' as it functions in the understanding of God. It enables us to speak of God in a way that is personal and not excessively mythological and objectivistic. But there is the danger, to which many have succumbed, that religion becomes subjectivistic and exclusively an individual's private relationship to God. It is then without any objective value, ruling out any sort of corroborative judgment. But this danger can be avoided by emphasising in the model the aspect of the person as agent. A person is truly in his action, he is what he does, for action implies intention and vice versa. Is it not true, however, that a person is met in his action because it is observable on account of his bodily presence in it? But God has no body. How then can we observe him in his action? In this, our secular world, we no longer perceive an ultimate order in the skies. On the other hand, the bodily representation in the action has to do precisely with the limitations of the individual as distinguished from other agents, while ultimately, at a deeper level, the intentions of a free agent are not read off directly but involve a context of interpretation and the agent's testimony, the revelation of his intention by which the givenness of a particular situation is transcended and a meaning is projected beyond that situation. Through limited freedom we have some notion of complete freedom, and thus some notion of the complete freedom in God who is the Ultimate Agent, revealing himself in his word that concerns his action in the world.

Davie's little book comes as a pot-pourri of citations, but if we look behind the quotation marks we can detect an argument related to the one discussed above, although his approach is quite different. Unbelief is the ultimate form of solipsism, the doctrine that I alone exist, for believing affirms the creaturely condition of man which implies his membership of the human community. Now, language is essentially not a private affair, and since man is a speaking animal, solipsism is contradicted by this fact. For this reason human language is open to transcendence and God can make use of human language to reveal himself, which warrants the title of the book, *A Theology of Speech*.

I shall not attempt to evaluate these theories, which are rather overpowering in their 'newness', born as they are in the supposedly new and precarious position of religion in a secularised society. They all seem to be in search of God and get as near to a 'proof' as they possibly dare. They shine as lights in a heaven which was first darkened by the crude metaphysics of our rationalist predecessors that

tried to construct God from our knowledge of the world. But as I cannot feel so negative about the wider metaphysical tradition of Western thinking I am not so susceptible to the brightness of these new lights. The actual spelling-out of the argument certainly lacks

sparkle. In fact, the dullness of the presentation of the argument obscures the communicative force of language—the communicative force which, paradoxically, is the very foundation of that argument.

ROB VAN DER HART

SUMMONS TO LIFE. *The Search for Identity through the Spiritual*, by Martin Israel, M.B. Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1974. 158 pp. £2.10.

This is an interesting and unusual book. Its author was born in South Africa and came to England in 1951. At present he lectures in Pathology at the University of London. It is clear from the book itself that he is a deeply religious man with some sort of mystical experience. His aim is to convince his readers of the primacy of the spiritual and to show them how they may grow in the knowledge of God by entering into what he discerns to be the realities of life and especially by entering into their own inner reality.

On the whole it is a convincing message he conveys, although at times his language and his highly personal philosophy and terminology somewhat obscure his argument. His use of the words 'personal' and 'personality' is particularly unclear. Two quotations will illustrate this. On p. 26, speaking of the presence of God, he says 'As we move beyond the limitations of our own personality to the vast reaches of the soul that underlie it, so the being of God ceases to be merely personal, but expands to embrace the whole universe, and transcend it at the same time'. On p. 81, 'Faith is the movement of the personality towards that integration which is accomplished by the spirit of the soul'. If I understand him correctly, by 'personality' Dr Israel means an existential and superficial self that is identified in normal living with 'the fleeting ego that represents the present focus of my awareness' (p. 12). This existential self has to be transcended so that we can arrive at the true or spiritual self. Thus 'the course of constructive living is to foster the light of the true self in such dedication that it may pervade the personality and raise up the ego to a consciousness of true being' (p. 13).

What this must involve he attempts to clarify in subsequent chapters. 'The realisation of your true identity', he says, 'consists primarily in detaching yourself from those attributes that are superficial but which you, in your blind ignorance, consider essential to your being. In other words, the movement towards the real is first and foremost a progressive stripping from yourself of illusion'. This stripping comes about through the circumstances of life and, in particular, through relationships with other

people, the course of our chosen work and through suffering. Each of these is given one or more chapters. Chapters 5 and 6, dealing with the mystery of love and with love and relationships, are specially to be recommended. Dr Israel is at his best when he shows us the need to become mature within the real human framework and not within some 'spiritual' enclave. From thence he moves on to speak about the inner life of prayer and faith, but he puts these squarely in the context of our social life. In passing he touches on a host of interesting and relating topics—meditation techniques, the charismatic movement, extrasensory perception, the occult, loneliness, euthanasia, re-incarnation (to be distinguished from rebirth, in which the author believes), psychedelic drug experiences—and in each case he shows great practical sense and wisdom, although he also makes many statements which are challengeable.

Perhaps one of his most surprising shortcomings is a failure to grasp the true role of dogma and credal formulae. He sees in them an attempt to constrict God to man-made terms or even a form of escape from intimacy with God. Although he himself is not a Christian he frequently quotes the gospels and Pauline epistles and always refers to Christ with respect. In fact, his view of religion is highly syncretistic and correspondingly vague. One of his favourite ideas is some sort of 'world-soul'. He mentions it many times. A typical and rather puzzling example occurs on p. 69: 'Meditation is a relationship in the depth of silence with the object of meditation. And when the relationship is complete, subject and object merge into a unity in which the one becomes the other inasmuch as both lose their separate identity and instead are members of the body of creation, which is the universal body of Christ. This is the I-Thou relationship of Martin Buber, in which there is neither subject nor object, but all is one in that ultimate reality which is God'. But is this 'the I-Thou relationship of Martin Buber'? Another area where one may criticise Dr Israel is that concerned with prayer itself. Here God appears more as man's fulfilment than in His own right.