

merit must lie purely in the motive, since the mere refraining from killing cannot be meritorious because a man does that all the time without being aware of it. But in fact the distinction will not stand: I can equally meet the obligations arising from another's rights, violate those rights or merely respect those rights by refraining from doing something as by doing something. Furthermore there is an important difference between being inactive and refraining from doing something. If I refrain from doing something then there is something specific which I do not do. If I am simply inactive, then my not doing is not specified in this way. Thus the merit in not killing someone when I am tempted to do so is not to be explained in a different way from the merit that comes from positive doing, i.e. in the motive alone. My refraining from doing something is just as much a case of intentional behaviour as is my doing something and it is in both cases the intentional behaviour not the motive alone which is the object of a moral assessment.

Fr McGrath uses the concept of rights to provide an objective criterion for the application of moral terms. He considers the proposition that men have rights to be self-evident and argues that this entails the proposition that one is obliged to respect the rights of others. This may in fact be true but I think that the matter requires more investigation than Fr McGrath allows. What sort of self-evidence is in question here? Is it legitimate to employ the terms rights and moral rights as though the two were interchangeable? There is a danger if one does this of imagining that the connection between rights and moral obligation has been proved by the

use of expression 'moral rights'. In the last section of the book Fr McGrath connects the concept of rights to that of person and this part of his account is at once the most suggestive and the most unsatisfactory. The inviolability of certain rights a man has is said to depend on his status as a person, i.e. a being who possesses himself. The analogy seems to be drawn from the notion of a person possessing property but it is not at all clear how this is to be transferred to a man's relation to himself. What happens when a man loses his rights through his own fault or his rights are violated? Does this mean that he ceases to possess himself? Does a man have obligations with regard to himself, e.g. not to commit suicide and, if so, how are these to be related to his possession of himself? It is significant that Fr McGrath quotes Kant sympathetically, since it seems that a number of the logical problems attached to Kant's theory of the autonomy of the will are raised by Fr McGrath's theory of possession of self. The difficulty is that while one can see what the basis of a right is if it is conferred by an authority with the requisite power to confer such rights, it is not so clear what is the basis of fundamental human rights. Do we confer them on ourselves? This seems as nonsensical as the notion of giving oneself a present. Fr McGrath seems to suggest that we just have them because we are persons, i.e. individuals who possess ourselves. But isn't to possess something to have a right over it? So the argument seems circular, unless something different is meant by possession in this case. But what is this difference? It is very much to be hoped that Fr McGrath will develop this argument more fully elsewhere.

DAVID MORLAND, O.S.B.

LANGUAGE AND SILENCE, by George Steiner. *Faber and Faber*, 1967. 50s.

THE PRESENCE OF THE WORD, by Wather J. Ong. *Yale University Press*, 1967. 63s.

The focal argument of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is about what can be said and what cannot be said but only shown. It seems clear that the latter is the more important. This emphasis on the tacit is not unambiguous, but Max Black is surely right to insist, against the positivists, that the 'mysticism', far from being irrelevant or inconsistent or even non-existent, constitutes one of the central themes of the *Tractatus* as a whole. Miss Anscombe has pointed out that Wittgenstein took over the term mysticism from Russell, who used it of a perfectly ordinary experience: one which is well evoked in *Tractatus* 6, 52: 'we feel that even if all possible scientific questions have been answered, still

the problems of life have not been touched at all.' In the *Notebooks* version this is preceded by the remark: 'the urge towards the mystical comes of the non-satisfaction of our wishes by science.'

Wittgenstein seems, here, to be haunted by the problem of the relationship between the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and the liberal arts (*Geisteswissenschaften*), which has perplexed German philosophers for more than a hundred years. Professor Gadamer, in his magisterial study, *Wahrheit und Methode*, has charted the course of the debate from its beginnings down to the effort to resolve it in the work of Heidegger. It is curious to reflect

that the word *Geisteswissenschaften* was coined to translate the term 'moral sciences', in the German version of John Stuart Mill's *Logic*. What the debate has amounted to, in fact, is an attempt to subvert Mill's thesis that the principles of intelligibility which operate in the natural sciences are appropriate also in the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Wittgenstein's desperate solution, in the *Tractatus*, is to say that nothing can be said at all except in science, and that the rest, ethics, aesthetics and no doubt theology and philosophy, must be consigned to silence.

George Steiner lectures in English at Cambridge. He has gathered together the essays and reviews he has written over the last eight years or so, and the collection certainly displays his inimitable range of passionate concern and polymath speculation. In one way this makes for a bad book, because there is far more reiterated assertion than detailed supporting argument. But the sporadic posturing in the style and the voguishness of some of the topics, while they no doubt betoken some infirmity of tact, cannot eclipse the serious challenge to our customary assumptions. There are half a dozen separate proposals which Dr Steiner makes to us, though none engages the theologian's attention more than his intimation that language may have gone as far as it can: 'the image of the world is receding from the communicative grasp of the word.' On the one hand, there has been so much brutality in the recent history of our culture that words to cope with it simply fail: the experience is unspeakable, and Dr Steiner seems sometimes to suggest that even to try to describe it would inevitably be to trivialize it. On the other hand, it is getting beyond the reach of language to encompass the whole of experience and reality now: 'it no longer articulates, or is relevant to, all major modes of action, thought, and sensibility.' We ought to be numerate as well as literate; print-culture has been surpassed by electronics; music concedes ultimate meaning more generously than speech; and so on.

That there are possibilities of experience which finally elude language, may be granted: 'cliffs of fall/Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed.' Theology, after all, is a language that is bound to end in silence: the aposiopetic moment is what all the talk is in aid of. It is important to insist on this, in face of 'poor little talkative Christianity'; but the repudiation of a merely propositional faith does not mean that we must surrender to the annihilating 'bom' of the Marabar cave. There is a way of being

apophatic in theology which is just a refusal to prophesy, a refusal to protest, a refusal to speak, a refusal to think. We cannot let silence too easily into Christianity because Christianity is nothing if it is not the gift of the word: listening and speaking, hearing and preaching. Father Ong lectures in English at Saint Louis, and his books disclose his indebtedness to his close friends Marshall McLuhan and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin as well as his immense learning in the fields of Renaissance literature and modern culture. *The Presence of the Word*, though not so good a book as *The Barbarian Within*, makes an interesting foil for *Language and Silence*. Following McLuhan, on whom Dr Steiner also writes persuasively, Father Ong holds that the word remains always sound, even through the traumatic shift into literacy and now into the culture of electronic communication. He insists, too, that the problem of language is the problem of being human: 'the predicament of the human word is the predicament of man himself.' But, in a study of the relationship between the spoken word and the sense of the sacred, particularly in the Hebraeo-Christian tradition, he is able to bring out how we can perceive God's self-gift in the word: the meaning of meaning is given only in dialogue, in the antiphonal liturgy of community.

The threat to language which Dr Steiner documents may thus be the moment for us to retrieve some real sense of the importance of the word in theology, and this is what Fr Ong begins to help us to do. But neither of them pays enough heed to the vast amount of reflection there has been on the nature of language, most usefully summarized for the theologian in Hermann Noack's book, *Sprache und Offenbarung*. Everybody knows that the understanding of language which Heidegger professes to find in some of the pre-Socratics is in fact much closer to that which is presupposed and created by the prophets of the Old Testament. It is perhaps in philosophical reflection on the 'event' of language that we may best be able to decide what the 'event' of being human is. What God it is whom we worship, and what it is that we ourselves are, are interwoven questions which may resolve themselves if we can allow language to bear a silence which is not annihilating.

The task of reconciling positivism with humanism is more urgent than any other in our culture. As these two books show, it is in reaching out beyond Eng. Lit. that the problem may best be set and chances of solution appear.

What is tackled by philosophers on the Continent is left to literary critics in the English-speaking world. This is not without grave disadvantages. For instance: Dr Steiner's decision to prefer the philosophy of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* to that of *Investigations* is never argued for; he contents himself with saying that 'it is an open question whether the *Tractatus* is not the more powerful and consistent statement. It is certainly deeply felt.' That does not seem a secure enough basis to hold up a whole interpretation of 'the retreat from the

word' in our culture: Wittgenstein, Jackson Pollock, John Cage, the 'new illiteracy', and so on. But there are some important things, if they are to be said at all, which have to be said badly; and one of the most important of these is how we are to state what is happening in our culture, particularly in terms of the opposition, if it really is one, between *Geist* and *Natur*. In the absence of more coherent attempts, for those who have ears to hear Dr Steiner and Fr Ong are among our most telling and provoking prophets.

FERGUS KERR, O.P.

**CREATIVE EVANGELISM**, by Harry Sawyerr. Lutterworth, London, 1968. 183 pp. 37s. 6d.

**MISSIONS AND RELIGIONS**, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. Sceptre Books, Dublin, 1968. 163 pp. 21s.

Canon Sawyerr is Professor of Theology of Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone. His exciting new book is sub-titled 'Towards a new Christian encounter with Africa'.

*Missions and Religions* prints the Vatican documents on Missionary Activity and the non-Christian Religions. Penetrating essays tracing the history of their discussion in the Council draw out their implications for the Church today. The volume ends with the Pope's Letter to Africa in October, 1967.

That Letter had spelled out again the areas in which the animistic background of the African should provide bridges towards the faith. It said (p. 137) 'the African who becomes a Christian does not disown himself, but takes up the age-old values of tradition in spirit and in truth', and (p. 145) 'today more than ever, the motive force of new Africa comes from its own sons, and in particular from (those) . . . in schools and universities'.

*Creative Evangelism* shows the truth of both these statements. It underlines how vital it is going to be that Christians engage together on the task of our generation 'to interpret the meaning of the non-Christian religions in the light of the universal history of salvation' (*Missions*, p. 43).

Canon Sawyerr surveys critically the interpretations of existence, evil and the universe with which he is best acquainted in West African societies. He points to the areas where sympathetic presentation of the Gospel as fulfilment will stand most chance of acceptance by the

non-Christian. He shows how at the points where the effort to do this has been least, the impact of the Gospel has been shallow. Above all (and here again our divisions as Christians stand condemned), he believes that Christianity is the expression of God's will for man's unity. Where it already transcends colour, tribe and clan divisions, it earns the right to be heard in these days when the secret of unity eludes so many newly-independent states.

Perhaps the most striking chapter in *Creative Evangelism* outlines 'a fresh liturgical approach'. Building on his understanding of priesthood as an Anglican, and on his traditions as an African, Sawyerr avers, 'only a sacerdotal ministry can meet the emotional and spiritual demands of the African if he is to feel at home in the Christian family. . . . Only a Christian priest can provide for the African convert to Christianity the complete release from anxiety, worry and depression which he formerly sought at the cultic shrines.' Bound up with all this is a frank study of ancestor beliefs, so that 'the communion of Saints' can come alive in African society.

Only as African theologians delve like this into the details of their two selves, and allow the Spirit to state quite simply where truth lies, can a new period of *deeply* creative evangelism happen in Africa. We have lived through the end of the 'missionary era', however long expatriates may or may not still be welcome to serve God's people there.

JOHN POULTON

**THOSE DUTCH CATHOLICS**, ed. by Michel van der Plas and Henk Suër. Chapman, London, 1967. 164 pp. 21s.

This book is concerned with dialogue. Desmond Fisher says in his Preface: 'I became convinced of the necessity of having it written when I

heard criticisms of the Dutch Church from some leading English prelates. I had just come from Holland where the atmosphere of genuine