

smack simultaneously of anti-colonialism and, at the same time, a kind of divine Marshall-Aid. Not quite what one had expected, perhaps, but very exciting all the same, and well worth seeing in spite of its truly epic length. I had quite meant to leave at half-time and yet found myself eagerly going back after the interval to find out what really did happen in the end. Let me urge you not to falter, for the second part contains not only the Orgy (round the Golden Calf), which is in the best old-fashioned tradition of such things; but also the delivery of the Commandments to Moses which is both imaginative and impressive. The Almighty, who has appeared to Moses earlier on in the Burning Bush as a not very convincing incandescence, here is a tall, swirling Pillar of Fire, and as the echoing, noble Abraham Lincoln-type voice intones each commandment in turn, a jet of fire leaps out and cuts the Hebrew characters on the granite like some celestial rock-drill, and finally, the Decalogue completed, leaps out once more, even more violently, to cut the very tablets themselves out of the living stone: if you are going to attempt the impossible, that is a very good way to do it.

It would be a mistake to miss this film through any false feelings of aesthetic superiority; it has some wonderful things in it as well as being often moving and sometimes very jolly.

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## THE RELEVANCE OF PRIMITIVE RELIGION

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IT IS NOT EASY for someone who is not a professional anthropologist to read a work of social anthropology. The difficulty is of a quite special kind: it is not merely the difficulty someone who is not a botanist may find in reading a study of plant morphology, or someone who is not a theologian in reading a discussion of the instrumental causality of the sacraments. The difficulty is the problem of human relevance. These people about whom the anthropologist is writing are human beings: the detail of their activities should be humanly intelligible; and yet, on the one hand these activities in their detail are often meaningless and sometimes disgusting, and on the other, without a sympathetic grasp of the detail the whole work of interpretation and synthesis offered by the anthropologist would become meaningless in its turn. And the anthropologist has nothing to refer to but the information

he himself gives us in his book: he has usually no imaginative literature, for instance, no common body of experience to which to appeal.

If this is a difficulty for the common reader, it is also a difficulty for the anthropologist himself, one which he frequently fails to solve. Sometimes he may seek experiential resemblances in the form of archetypal patterns, and some of these archetypes are undoubtedly genuine; for instance, Professor Evans-Pritchard refers<sup>1</sup> to the social (the human) significance, manifested in Nuer ritual, of the fact of the bilateral symmetry of the human body; and we are all of us familiar enough with the difference between left and right not to be particularly disconcerted by examples of this in societies with which we are not familiar. Or again, we can sympathize readily with the polar opposition in Nuer thought between the above and the below. But the anthropologist may be tempted to suppose that this minimal similarity is sufficient, and either ignore the differences or find resemblances even when they are not to be found, or both—all in order to make humanly intelligible the alien humanity with which he is concerned.

But the anthropologist may abandon the whole attempt to render his material humanly intelligible; he may apply a modified version of the procedures of the physical sciences to what is now regarded as an object dissociated from himself the observer, and describe it in a language which in the last resort denies the humanity of the people he is studying. Dr Ernest Jones's biography of Freud shows us the stages of this process in a related field. At its worst (because most deceptive) such a procedure in anthropology produces a sort of pseudo-metaphysics, patterns of hypostatized human relationships which, as such, cease to be human.

The difficulty, then, for both anthropologist and common reader, is quite baldly, 'What is man?'; and the benefit of field anthropological studies is that they force us to put ourselves the question in a new way, new with each new people and also radically new. The question becomes radically new because it demands an attitude for its solution which is neither metaphysical nor moral (in the opposed senses of these two words): the attitude involves a metaphysical awareness of moral meaning as this meaning emerges in the really human community of the investigator with the people he is investigating, so that the sense of moral meaning and the moral determination not to let it escape one illuminate and control the metaphysical search for generality and categorization, for the ultimate simplicity. The anthropologist's 'material' is his communication and community with the people which he is studying: not merely the people but himself with the people. And unlike the various sorts of existentialist philosophy which

1 *Nuer Religion*, By E. E. Evans-Pritchard (Clarendon Press, 42s.)

practise similar investigations on the Continent today, the anthropologist has the discipline of the condensed and formalized human significance of a given, unfamiliar society to control him, and is not left to objectify the shifting aspects of his own consciousness in its current historicized form, re-living the past and the present, and even the future, in an unending succession of historical diagnoses and prognoses. He can bring to bear on a relatively simple, restricted and unreflective human world all the seriousness appropriate to the absolutely general question 'What is man?'

This is one way of suggesting Professor Evans-Pritchard's achievement in his remarkable book. The absolutely general question is hardly ever alluded to for its own sake; we are never offered a sort of theosophy, i.e. a deliberate employment of alien traditions to maintain a private and European view. But the general question is always manifest as a controlling attitude, a refusal to dissociate himself as investigator from the people he is studying. This is of particular importance in a study of primitive religion. It seems clear that Professor Evans-Pritchard does not assume from the start that Nuer thought about *kwoth*, Spirit or spirit, can contribute nothing to our own understanding of God; and any sympathetic reading of his book requires the same openness in the reader. 'And this is what all men call God.' But the fact that men call God by quite different names, *kwoth* or *Deus* or *Theos*, is not unimportant: for each name is the expression of a whole human community's experience of God, a tradition of the ways of God.

It may be objected that a Catholic Christian can have nothing to learn about God from non-Catholic, non-Christian religion: surely he must already possess the fullness of divine Truth in faith. But it is precisely *in faith* that he possesses it, not in vision. The articles of faith and the definitions of the Church do not exhaust the mystery of God. The Catholic's possession of the fullness of truth in faith does not exclude the possibility of his entering more fully into an understanding of that truth. It is not that the *content* of non-Christian religion is likely to add anything to his understanding of God. But 'God' is not a piece of shorthand for a list of attributes. It is in the *act* of recreating a lived and shared experience of God in a non-Christian religion that a Catholic can enlarge his personal understanding of God, and primarily by practising that sort of criticism of his own symbols for God and divine things which prevents them from becoming a system of idols. The prophetic and Christian denunciation of idols is the basis of the mystical rejection of 'images'; in neither case is it denied that representations can help us on our way to God: what is rejected is the spiritual attitude, compounded of fear, sloth and greed, which refuses to transcend the representation, to seek God in, through and beyond the

representation. In our own time, this tendency to idolatry within Christendom shows itself most clearly perhaps in our attitude to what Professor Evans-Pritchard calls 'social refractions' of God: our tendency to grasp at the manifestations of God in the social order as absolute, and so to hinder the free growth of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Papacy, the hierarchy of sacramental Order, are ways to God and will be until the Second Coming; but not all forms of social manifestation of God necessarily have the same divinely ordained function in the history of salvation.

Perhaps the most rewarding chapter in Professor Evans-Pritchard's book is the chapter on 'The Problem of Symbols'. The basis of the 'logical grammar' of Nuer thought about God (and if we use Wittgenstein's phrase here it is because the situation is characteristically Wittgensteinian, except that the 'tribe' is a real one and not merely hypothetical) seems to be that while *kwoth* is predicated of all sorts of things and events, it is rarely that anything is predicated of *kwoth*. 'Though one can say of rain or pestilence that it is God one cannot say of God that he is rain or pestilence. . . . The situation could scarcely arise, God not being an observable object, in which Nuer would require or desire to say about him that he is anything' (p. 125.) It is perhaps inevitable that we to whom Revelation is communicated by catechesis should find this disconcerting. Our *religious* thought is normally *theological*: that is, it starts from God and not from things; and we find no difficulty in making all sorts of statements about the God of Revelation. But this mode of thought has become so exclusive that we find it difficult to appreciate the significance of St Thomas's Five Ways and their place in the *Summa Theologica*; we do not easily recognize the basic human need to find God in things; our religion has tended to become exclusively supernatural at the expense of the natural (and hence inevitably of the supernatural too). But God is the one source of all that is in heaven and earth; and we cannot even appreciate the significance of the revealed truth of the elevation of Christ's humanity, about which St Paul tells us in the Epistles of the Captivity, except in terms of this ultimate unity at the source of all created things, whether natural or supernatural.

Professor Evans-Pritchard goes on to analyse the predication of *kwoth* in terms of a general formula: 'the problem of something being something else'. His account is of the greatest interest for any student of the logic of analogical predications. Why, for instance, can Nuer speak of twins as birds? Because twins by their manner of birth and birds by their manner of being can both be called 'children of God': they are both *kwoth* by manifesting *kwoth*. The basis of this relationship of four terms is the triadic relationship of subject (individual or lineage),

natural object (bird or twin) and *kwoth*: the predication of *kwoth* always involves a third term not mentioned but understood (cf. p. 142). Professor Evans-Pritchard nowhere mentions any adjectival derivative of *kwoth*, to mean something like 'spiritual' or 'divine'. Some of the difficulty in understanding how a crocodile, for instance, can be called *kwoth* would be removed if '*kwoth*' included an adjectival sense. We too can call things 'divine' without meaning that they share the divine nature: we mean that they serve as sign of the divine, as occasion in and through which we may ascend to contact with 'the divine'—God *actively* transcendent (not merely a third term of more or less the same kind as subject and natural object, and 'behind' them) and thus only to be apprehended by an active transcendence of the occasion in which subject and object concur.

Enough has perhaps been said to show that the study of primitive religion, when it is carried out with the seriousness and restraint which characterize Professor Evans-Pritchard's writings, has the closest relevance to our own deepest religious needs and to our thought about them. Studies of this kind will have to play their part in any theological revival which we may be fortunate enough to see.

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## REVIEWS

**METAPHYSICAL BELIEFS.** By S. E. Toulmin, R. W. Hepburn and A. C. MacIntyre. (S.C.M. Press; 25s.)

In his preface to these three essays, Mr MacIntyre says that they are concerned with issues traditionally coming under the heading of 'natural theology'. Since the writers succeed in making this rather vague term more precise, one can assess the measure of agreement between their understanding of it and that given it in the tradition claiming descent from St Thomas.

Professor Toulmin examines two unwarranted extensions of valid scientific theory. The second law of thermodynamics cannot be used to justify statements about the beginning or end of the universe, and the theory of evolution cannot be used as a foundation for ethics. Ethics is founded on reason, though not on the reasoning proper to natural science, whereas the beginning and end of the universe is beyond the power of natural reason to discuss. In the one case a wrong method has been eliminated from natural theology, in the other a whole area delimited as beyond its competence. A Thomist will be in full agreement with this.

The other two essays are less easy to place. They are concerned with