

for Christian-Jewish relations. With admirable forbearance the author gives the historical background of the anti-attitudes on both sides, and clears the ground for a dispassionate appraisal of the attempts of both Christian and Jewish scholars to isolate the 'man' Jesus. He is aware of the fact that the separation of the human Jesus from the Christ 'goes against the grain of historic Christianity'. And after a brilliant exposition of the efforts of scholars on the one hand to separate Jesus from Christianity by claiming him for Judaism (Graetz and Geiger) and on the other hand of de-judaizing him completely (Renan and the later Strauss) he reaches the conclusion: 'We can know what the Gospels say, but we cannot know Jesus' (p. 124). As a Jew the author has more sympathy with the liberal and 'Social Gospel' schools of Protestant biblical scholarship, than with the neo-orthodox school (R. Niebuhr) which is more concerned with Jesus the Christ. The last two chapters: 'The Jewish reader and the Gospels' and 'Toward a Jewish attitude to Christianity' are valuable personal documents. By probing into what the Gospels are basically saying the Jewish scholar finds three basic themes about which both Christianity and Judaism revolve: There is a will of God. Man can and does know the will of God, because God has revealed it to him. Man can abide by this will – the shameful Christian actions of the past are put into proper perspective by one in

whose native land pogroms were ushered in by the ringing of Church bells, and who was baited by fellow pupils as a Christ-killer. 'The persecutions of Jews by Christians ought to be seen as one of the many horrors with which the history of mankind has been unduly filled' (p. 146). But the ugly question remains whether the outrages of the past are 'of the essence of Christianity or only a reflection of particular historical occasions?' (p. 142) – the difference between the Jewish and the Christian approach to religion is seen to lie in the Christian emphasis on faith from which actions result, while 'the Jewish way has been to ask, what shall a man do, holding that what man does illuminates the antecedent, and even tacit, faith' (p. 74). There are pertinent remarks in this book which are illuminating to the Christian reader: the emphasis that Christianity is, of course, a monotheism; the warning not to entrust the dialogue with Jews to converts from Judaism; the remark that in the controversy about the Hochhuth play the Christian obligation to save Jews was acknowledged on both sides. The Catholic reader may regret that Professor Sandmel mainly encountered Christianity in its Protestant form. But he can learn a great deal from this fascinating study which certainly removes obstacles to mutual understanding and is written in a conciliatory spirit.

IRENE MARINOFF

SIMONE WEIL: SEVENTY LETTERS. Translated and arranged by Richard Rees. *Oxford University Press* 30s.

There is something awesome about Simone Weil; a spine-chilling quality about many of her actions. She did whatever she wanted with utter dedication and regardless of difficulty or danger to herself. Heroism on this scale is frightening to ordinary flesh and blood. A blue-stocking in ill-fitting dungarees, she forced herself to work in frustrating jobs in spite of her clumsiness and poor physique. Her letters on the conditions of work and the mentality of the industrial workers are full of interesting and challenging ideas. It is not entirely surprising to learn that she had leanings towards Catharism; she drove herself to death with a dedicated rashness that one cannot help admiring. Her letters however reveal a humanity, a compassion as well as a capacity for enjoying simple things that one would hardly suspect from her

other writings. There is a Franciscan quality about her love of poverty. One of the reasons why she felt she couldn't identify herself completely with the Catholic Church was because it was not manifestly on the side of the poor.

Her deepest admiration was for the classics and more especially for the Greek tragedies; she gives the impression of being closer to Antigone than to Abraham or Christ. She could only embrace Christianity as an ideal: 'I think it is a sacrament simply to look at the host and the chalice during the elevation . . .' Just as she neglected her body and thought it of secondary importance she underestimated the value of the sacraments as physical realities for the healing of the whole man.

Only the heroic attracted her and she couldn't tolerate weakness: 'In reality it seems

to me that saintliness is, if I dare say so, the minimum for a Christian'. Can she be blamed for asking too much of Christians? The brilliance and range of her mind in these letters is continuously amazing, it is like a finely cut diamond, sparkling sharp edged and with many equally polished facets. Here, however, is not only fine analysis but prophetic insight into the signs of our time. Many today speak of 'engagement', she practised it throughout her life with total generosity.

This is a challenging book which should shake us all in our complacency. A book for those who see the need for new life and not simply for reform within the framework of old categories and institutions. Radical action groups will find in her vision and life a stimulus to thought and significant action. We owe a great deal to Sir Richard Rees' skill in presenting these letters to us in such a readable translation.

SIMON BLAKE O.P.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION by Max Weber. *Methuen, London, 1965 30s.*

In reading this 'new' book by Max Weber one must bear constantly in mind that it was written almost fifty years ago: it is the first complete translation of the section entitled '*Religionssoziologie*' of his systematic work '*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*'. Research in the intervening years has yielded much new information and in so doing has called into question some of Weber's premisses, but in spite of the consequent weakening of his empirical generalisations his book remains a great work of analysis and is still amongst the most important in the field.

As Talcoot Parsons remarks in his useful introduction, Weber's focus, when he turned to the study of religion, 'was not upon religion "as such", as the theologian or church historian conceives it, but upon the relations between religious ideas and commitments and other aspects of human conduct, especially the economic characteristics of human conduct within a society'. His work is truly a sociologist's study of religion and as such is a necessary supplement to the approaches of other disciplines. No one man can be master of all the fields that must contribute to a complete study of religion. One marvels at how close Weber seems to have come to such mastery but his weakness, his very superficial understanding of theology, is a crucial one. On those occasions when he quotes a theological opinion or offers a theological comment one feels he is missing the point. For instance, it is not strictly true to say that 'the official doctrine of the medieval churches, as formulated by Thomas Aquinas, treated the peasant essentially as a Christian of lower rank'; but this is just the sort of misinterpretation that arises from unfamiliarity with theological thought.

This lack of theological understanding is of great importance in his discussion of some

topics; notably prophecy, the priesthood and the sacramental system. He begins his book by outlining the development of religion out of magic and wherever he treats of the sacramental one senses that he sees always the skeleton of magic giving form to the body of religion. This is made particularly clear in his remarks about the concept of '*ex opere operato*': though the fault may lie not only with Weber's questionable understanding of the concept but also with the questionable discussion of it by some theological writers. Such flaws in the passages dealing with Christian thought, inevitably make one wonder about the value of his remarks about non-Christian beliefs. It should, however, be remembered that Weber had published major studies of the religions of China, of India and of Ancient Judaism but died before he could undertake such an overall study of Christianity, so it may be that he was more soundly informed about non-Christian theologies.

Of course, Weber as a sociologist sees things that the theologian might well miss and be the poorer for missing. His studies of prophecy, of the evolution and relationship of mystical and ascetical tendencies, of the genesis of western and eastern thought about the nature of the divine and of the role of preaching and spiritual direction are especially valuable. By placing these phenomena in their socio-economic, and not merely in their historical, settings he throws new light upon them. His breadth of learning, which enables him to compare aspects of doctrine and practice in many faiths, deepens our understanding of some fundamental religious notions. Many of his insights may be familiar to us now but seen in their context they are more clearly understood.

The book is such an erudite and complex work that it is impossible, in a brief review, to