

the individuals involved may be; the attempt at equality necessary to truly loving relationships will be constantly undermined by the prevailing ethos. So perhaps "achieved indissolubility" is in fact unachievable separate from the conversion of society as a whole. Thus concepts such as "a truly Christian home" and "an exemplary family" which should be characterised by the values of the Gospel are distorted by our cultural norms. How often does a Christian marriage appear to threaten the establishment – as all true Signs of the Kingdom surely do?

This being said, what comes over most strongly in this book is Kevin Kelly's under-

standing of the pain involved in marriage breakdown, and his deep compassion for those whose entry into a second relationship means exclusion from the Body of Christ, together with his determination to ground his ideas firmly in the Jesus of the Gospels. (I'm not entirely sure that his attempt to reconcile them with the traditional teaching of the Church is either possible or necessary – it is their embodiment of the spirit of the Gospels that matters.) It will bring liberation from guilt, and hope, to many. As a married non-theologian, addressing a non-married theologian, I would just like to say "Thank you".

CLARE PRANGLEY

**IN SEARCH OF HUMANITY, by John Macquarrie.**  
*SCM Press, 1982. pp 280. £8.50.*

In this book the author draws extensively on both Christian and non-Christian views of man in order to reach an overall estimate of human, as against non-human, forms of finite being (which in this case also includes finite becoming in so far as we are constantly discovering and actualizing the potentialities inherent in human nature). Although Macquarrie maintains that "the emergence of personal life from the merely animal life which preceded it must be accounted just as great a leap in the evolutionary process as the much earlier emergence of the living from the non-living" (p 8), he is reluctant to name one distinguishing characteristic of humanity "since there is a whole range of characteristics that mark off the human from the non-human" (p 6). Nevertheless he follows Kierkegaard in also holding that man's primary characteristic is freedom. And so he begins by examining the latter. He then devotes a chapter to each of the following topics: transcendence, egoity, embodiedness, cognition, having, sociality, language, alienation, conscience, commitment, belief, love, art, religion, suffering, death, hope. Most of these chapters are intelligible if taken separately; but together they constitute a coherent whole.

The extent and variety of the ground that the book covers means that I can

choose only a few examples for comment. The three I have chosen go to the heart of the matter. Also I agree with what is said about them. First, there is the question of human freedom. Here Macquarrie maintains, on the one hand, that it is impossible to prove the existence of freedom without turning it into an object "and this is precisely what it is impossible to do" (p 16), but, on the other hand, that we must postulate freedom in order to justify rational investigation and moral responsibility (p 17). Secondly on the nature of the self Macquarrie, while, emphasizing each person's psycho-somatic unity, holds that mind and body are ontologically distinct. Thus on p 49, although he rejects (perhaps too readily?) "the view that the soul is an independently existing substantial entity that somehow "inhabits" the body and interacts with it", he nevertheless claims that "in the complex being that we call a human being, we can get rid neither of the materiality of the body nor of the transcendent characteristics of the soul, and we cannot absorb either into the other". Furthermore, he claims (against Hume) that there is in each person a subject or ego that, like freedom, eludes objective description (pp 38-42). Thirdly Macquarrie affirms the importance of language as a distinguishing mark of human

nature. "Rationality needs language, but language is broader than rationality and corresponds to the whole range of personal being" (p 96). Having next admitted that animals too have language he adds that "these animal analogues to language are so restricted as compared with the seemingly endless possibilities of human

language that there we have a difference of degree so vast that it has become a difference in kind" (ibid.).

This is a wise and balanced book that distils a large amount of learning and reflection lucidly. It deserves to be widely and carefully read,

H. P. OWEN

**SELFLESS PERSONS: IMAGERY AND THOUGHT IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM**  
by Steven Collins. Cambridge University Press 1982. pp ix + 323.

There is no universal and unchanging conception of what it is to be a human being. Notions of personal identity, human nature, selfhood and individuality vary widely over space and time in response to changes in social and economic conditions and as part of wider shifts in patterns of thinking. Alasdair MacIntyre, in his book *After Virtue* (Duckworth 1981), has recently sketched a view of the way the notion of the person has developed in the last few hundred years in the west. He offers us a contrast between western ideas of man in different ages, between the classical and medieval view and that of post-enlightenment thinkers. One of the purposes of Steven Collins in *Selfless Persons* is to present us with a geographical contrast. He explores the Buddhist conception of the person, with its philosophical and social origins, inviting us to reflect on the meaning and origins of our own. But it would be misleading to suggest that such a comparative interest is at all explicit in the bulk of the book. Most of it is concerned straightforwardly with a discussion of the central distinguishing tenet of Theravada Buddhism: the doctrine of *anatta*, that human beings have no 'soul' or 'self', that we are selfless persons. Collins's aim is expository rather than critical. He gives a detailed and thorough analysis of those texts of the Pali canon dealing with the *anatta* doctrine, and of many others besides.

The doctrine of *anatta* raises serious problems with regard to other religious and philosophical doctrines that Buddhism took over from the Brahminist milieu in which it arose. Buddhism shares with Brahminism a belief in *karma* and rebirth as well as the goal of escape from the conditioned existence of *samsara*. In Brahmin-

ism, the person is essentially his *atman* or 'self', altogether non-material and spiritual, yet somehow entrapped in matter. It is, crudely, this self that is reborn, suffers the consequences of action, and so on. If, as Buddhism maintains in opposition to Brahminism, there is no self, if people are simply composed of aggregates of impersonal elements, there appears to be nothing left to be born and reborn, to be subject to the laws of *karma* or finally to escape to *nirvana*. Buddhism appears to have taken over most of the doctrinal system of Brahminism while rejecting precisely the element required to give some kind of sense to the whole. The Theravadins felt these difficulties, and others connected with personal identity and continuity, very strongly, and Collins goes into great detail in his explanation of the ways they attempted to meet them. For those not already expert in Buddhist philosophy much of the detail is, despite the author's clear presentation, inevitably difficult to follow, and this dominant aspect of the work will probably only be of interest to those concerned seriously with Buddhism, or with Indian religion in general. Much of the material would have been more digestible and of more general interest if the author had not confined himself so rigidly to the task of exposition but had devoted some space to philosophical criticism of the *anatta* doctrine.

There are, though, themes of wider interest running through the book. The relation of religious doctrine to the social structures of believing societies is an important element in the understanding of any religion, and Collins's treatment of the relation in the particular case of Theravada Buddhism is most illuminating. The opposition between *samsara* and *nirvana* is