dulges himself with a hold-all statement: 'we must reckon with the possibility that Jesus himself in his historical lifetime was known—and perhaps knew himself, at least in equivalencies—to be Son of God in all the ways then imaginable', p. 123. Since the discussion has covered both an 'adoptive' meaning and 'an utterly literal affirmation of deity', it is difficult to see how Jesus could have held both these contradictory views about himself, let alone the whole gamut of ways then imaginable of being Son of God.

But if this book is likely to cause serious difficulties for readers, it must nevertheless be said that, with the exception of L. Sabourin's *The Names and Titles of Jesus*, we do not have an up-to-date Catholic NT christology of comparable depth and seriousness available in English. Readers should prepare themselves for a stimulating set of adventures of ideas. Jesus is said to have sharply refused the title of Messiah: when Peter said to him 'You are the Christ' Jesus replied 'Get behind me Satan'. (Mysteriously there is no reference to E. Dinkler, who put forward a similar view in 1964.) Vawter discusses the death of Jesus under the headings 'The Metaphors of Salvation' and 'The Metaphors of Sacrifice', and the priesthood of Jesus is said to be 'fairly marginal' in the NT, mostly confined to Hebrews and there a matter of typology and midrash (and therefore, I take it, also metaphorical).

Finally, Vawter places special emphasis upon the wisdom tradition as a source for NT christology. He argues that the redaction of wisdom materials implied a basic approval of them; hence we can go back behind the redactor of Coloss. 1:15-20 and acknowledge Christ as the head of the body, *the universe*. This will enable us to account more realistically for the historical, geographical and religious parochialism of Christianity while reaffirming faith in Christ as cosmic Lord. Despite the methodological weakness about the argument from redaction, this suggestion that Christ should be seen as the hidden and trans-historic Lord of Buddhism, Judaism and Islam on the basis of the hymn behind Colossians 1 is well worth meditation.

JEROME SMITH OP

SYMBOLS OF CHURCH AND KINGDOM, by Robert Murray. *Cambridge University Press*, 1975. xv + 394 pp. £8.75.

The subject of this book, *A Study in early Syriac Tradition*, as the subtitle says, may sound abstruse enough, but in fact this is a book for all serious students of Christian antiquity, as well as being likely to interest a more general theological public. Taking as his basic area of investigation the various symbols used of the Church and of the kingdom in 4th Century Syriac writers, especially Ephrem and Aphrahat, the author in fact provides a masterly introduction into a whole world of Christian tradition that had previously been largely inaccessible except to the experts. He begins by giving us a concise account of the literature in question and its background; he then analyses his sources in detail, drawing out parallels with Jewish traditions and other patristic traditions, as well as occasionally referring us back to pre-Christian Mesopotamian sources. He concludes with some more general probings—which he presents tentatively, in view of the current state of investigation—to try to situate the Syriac church vis à vis Judaism, Judaeo-Christianity, and Graeco-Latin patristics.

No student of Christian beginnings can afford to ignore the very tricky area of Judaeo-Christianity, and the essentially Semitic character of the Syriac church makes it an important witness. It is also coming to be recognised that the Syriac tradition may well contain an important clue to the origins of Christian asceticism, as well as supply the background for the Macarian corpus. Fr Murray's book provides an excellent introduction for the beginner in addition to making an important contribution to our understanding in these fields. His scholarship is most impressive, but is presented in a way which does not make impossible demands of the reader; and a very delicate theological sense is also evident throughout.

There has also been a marked increase in recent years in interest in the use of symbols as vehicles of theological expression; particularly, we have been obliged to recognise that Christian theology in its earliest form worked as much with symbols as with logic, appealing to a style of scriptural exegesis current in Judaism, and rich in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028428900038026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

imaginative suggestiveness, though often rather bewildering for poor moderns. Even while one must often feel that precision was dangerously lacking, there is a certain human warmth, an appeal to the imagination and to the artist in us, which surely has much to offer to us.

Apart from anything else, Fr Murray's book introduces us to some very fine literature, helping us to grasp its meaning, without presuming to interpret it all away. Ancient poets are left to speak for themselves, with comments which elucidate, but do not exhaust. The author hopes that his book, like the well-known writings of Hugo Rahner and Jean Daniélou, will help the modern church to rediscover the value of symbols, of poetry, in the expression of our faith.

It is altogether a very fine book, only very slightly marred by a few trivial misprints. And it is well equipped with bibliographical information, indices and tables, so that it should serve as a valuable reference work for students and scholars.

SIMON TUGWELL OP

STRUCTURALIST POETICS, by Jonathan Culler. *Routledge & Kegan Paul*, London 1975. 301 pp. £5.50.

This book should extend the study of literary meaning in some important ways. It does not alter our habits of reading so decisively as (say) *The Country and the City* or *La révolution du langage poétique*, to mention two major landmarks in contemporary literary analysis, in which Raymond Williams and Julia Kristeva respectively oust previously dominant interpretations of whole swathes of literature, in his case English literature since 1600 and in hers French poetry since 1870. But Jonathan Culler unlocks for us the often formidable-looking world of current French literary theory, and in the process he provides a better guide to the field than any so far published in French or in any other language. The only comparable books are Fredric Jameson's *The Prison-house of Language*, an altogether weightier account, written from a Marxist standpoint, and covering Russian formalism as well as French structuralism, and Stephen Heath's much more specialised study, *The Nouveau Roman* (in the same series as Dr Culler's book on Flaubert). Precisely because of his much less definable intellectual moorings, Dr Culler's book is more likely to help to disseminate French theories over here. He is blessedly free of the patronising and insular posturing which so often marks, and mars, English discussion of foreigners' notions about philosophy and the arts, though he is never slavish in his exposition or modish in his judgments. The sympathy with which he presents his material makes his strictures, when they come, all the more serious.

It is language that speaks', Dr Culler quotes Heidegger as saying: 'we speak only in so far as we learn the knack of complying with language'. What we say is made possible only by our observing a set of conventions over which we have no control. The creation of new sentences depends upon rules which normally escape the speaker. The characteristic of structural analysis of literary texts is that it refuses to make the thinking subject—the author —the only begetter of the meaning. The meaning of a text lies less in the consciousness of the writer than in the system of codes that enables the text to be woven.

After a preliminary canter through exemplificatory works by Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss, Dr Culler goes in some detail into the theories of Roman Jakobson and A. J. Greimas. The first part of the book then closes with a highly selective sketch of the kind of analysis practised by Barthes, Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov, among others.

In the rest of the book Dr Culler sets about assembling some of the elements for a future theory of how a literary text functions. Formulating any such theory is, of course, something different from practising literary criticism, and it is this which Dr Culler labels 'poetics' (as Northrop Frye has already done). The task is to understand how we make sense of a text; it is a theory of the practice of reading. To read is to participate in the interplay of codes which creates the text. The desire to isolate and identify codes is perhaps the strongest impulse in structuralism. It is only when we are faced with texts that we are tempted to dismiss as 'unreadable' that we begin to understand how much the accessibility of a text depends

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028428900038026 Published online by Cambridge University Press