

Quarante-et-Un', qui s'appelle DANS LE THEOLOGY-PHILOSOPHY SEMINAR.

Professor: Ah! Nous avons ici un problème très tricky et très baffling. Un teaser pour les brain boxes. Does Dieu existe?

Etudiant: Quelle question daft! Comme disent les crack-intellects A. J. Ayer et Anthony Kenny, c'est un waste of time.

Professor: Pourquoi?

Etudiant: 'Dieu existe' est meaningless. Un load of gibberish.

Professor: Comment? Et Jésus Christ, et St Paul, et St Augustine, et St Anselm, et Malcolm Muggeridge et Prince Charles? Do they parlent le nonsense?

Etudiant: Oui. Of course.

Professor: Vous êtes trop quick, je pense. Remember les *Philosophical Investigations*: 'Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use'. Moi, je suis aussi au fait avec le slick Anglo-Saxon method de penser philosophically. Je ne suis pas un rural-idiot Hegelian. Et j'ai une use pour 'Dieu existe'.

Etudiant: Et j'ai une use pour 'Pixies

existent'. So what? Vous êtes un Wittgensteinian fideist, mais je dis 'Balls a Wittgenstein'.

Professor: Comme vous êtes sharp mais misguided! Je vois que vous n'êtes pas un mystic. What about *Les Lives of the Desert Peres*? What about le nouveau Classic of Western Spirituality *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality* (SPCK, 1980)? Mais, pour le coup de grâce, regardez le best-seller par Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?* (London, 1980), et le petit-seller par Herbert McCabe, 'God: Creation' (*New Blackfriars*, 1980). Ils disent (more or less) 'There might have been nothing at all'. Et maintenant, then, cocky. Mettez tout cela dans votre pipe de *St Bruno Flake*, et fumez. C'est une knock-down raison.

Etudiant: Hmm. Impossible d'arguer avec les died-in-the-wool Thomistes qui sont doubtless in the pay de *New Blackfriars* (c'est à dire, de *Nouveaux Frères-Noirs*). Ils ont toujours le last-word. Même en Franglais.

BRIAN DAVIES O P

LESSONS IN LIBERATION. THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA by Peadar Kirby. *Dominican Publications, Dublin, 1981. pp 128 £3.00 + VAT.*

Peadar Kirby is a journalist and this book is an extremely good example of religious journalism. The author went to Puebla in 1979 to cover the third general conference of Latin American Bishops, and then spent some months journeying around Latin America. He is aware that he is giving a series of first impressions: but as the book is a well-written account of its author's introduction to the church militant in Latin America, it serves as a good introduction for those who want to find out about the awakening of conscience which is taking place among many Catholics in that continent. It is clearly and simply presented, and might make a good text for parish discussion groups even in this country.

Chapter I is a rather brief account of the social, economic and political background to the struggles in which the radicalised church is engaged. There follow

chapters on Basic Christian Communities, on the notion of 'Conscientization' as outlined by Paulo Freire and used by some church pastors as a way of defining their task; on organisations set up by the bishops to defend human rights or respond to present needs; on the theology – and the theologians – of liberation; two chapters on missionaries and bishops consist of descriptions of various development projects set up by missionaries, and short biographies of four bishops whose experience has radicalised their outlook and practice. The two final chapters are on the Puebla conference, and how Christians in the West might apply to themselves some of the lessons Peadar Kirby learned on his journey.

The book does not purport to be an objective study of the whole church in Latin America. It is about those sectors of it which are critically aware of the awfulness of the social and economic situation,

and which believe that the preaching of the gospel would be meaningless without political engagement.

There are two maps, some suggestions for further reading, and a small index, mainly of names.

COLIN CARR O P

FROM HIROSHIMA TO HARRISBURG by Jim Garrison. *SCM* 1980. pp x + 275. £5.50 p.b.

This book undertakes a large task. It describes the U.S. decision to develop the atom bomb and to explode devices over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Leaning heavily on Robert J. Lifton's *Life in Death* it outlines some of the physical and psychological effects of the Hiroshima bomb on the survivors. It traces the post-war developments – the arms race, the increase in the number of countries which have nuclear weapons or the potential for them; it looks at our present situation – on the assumption that SALT II will be ratified – in terms of number of warheads, delivery systems, and the probable effects of 'limited' and 'all out' nuclear war; and attempts to delineate the social and political psychology which feeds on and gives a boost to the arms spiral.

The book then makes an uneasy transfer to the subject of nuclear power, which it sees as inextricably wound up with the question of nuclear weapons. The writer looks at the levels of radiation we are likely to incur from the presence of nuclear power stations in our midst, at the danger of meltdowns and other nuclear accidents; he gives a journalist's eye view of the Harrisburg (3 Mile Island) accident, and outlines the nuclear fuel cycle, from mining to waste-disposal.

A third chapter tells of the death of Karen Silkwood, an anti-nuclear activist who by Garrison's account, was the victim of some very nasty counter-subversion work by private and federal agents concerned with the protection of the nuclear industry's status.

Two final chapters, on a more meditative note, look at the problem of psychic numbing (a sense of helplessness in the face of powers beyond our control; the term is borrowed from Lifton); and make a plea that we opt for the path of 'soft energy' and non-violence.

In what way is Garrison qualified to cover this field? He is not a historian or a physicist: his research is nearly always based on publications which one would have to qualify as secondary sources; I share a number of the writer's prejudices, but few of my prejudices feel any firmer after reading this emotive essay in 'investigative journalism'.

For instance, it is far from proven that there is, technically, a link between a country possessing facilities for nuclear power and the same country achieving thereby nuclear weapons capability. The level of enrichment required for uranium in the present generation of reactors makes it useless for nuclear weaponry.

Like so many campaigners against nuclear power, Garrison ignores the radiation effect of other energy sources: we are not confronted with a simple choice between clean energy and nuclear energy; coal is also a killer, if I may adopt his idiom.

But the book is not all bad: if the technical link between nuclear power and nuclear weapons is not proven, it is correct to see a certain link between the two in terms of what their development does in practice to the civil liberties of a country. The arms programme is a sort of Frankenstein which has outgrown, it seems, its master's power to control it; the warning from Garrison, hysterical though he is, that the same process attends the energy programme should, not be dismissed.

The positive comments on humanity as the criterion for assessing the appropriateness of technological developments, although very general, remind one that it remains very important to ask of any artifact what exactly it's for.

Like most nuclear products, the book should be treated with great care.

COLIN CARR O P