

but it is so. There is no vantage point from which to survey all religions, except that of complete scepticism, which is the very anti-thesis of religion. We can only meet each other's religions by going more deeply into our own. And Christianity, in the last analysis, is surely a prophetic, eschatological, narrow-minded, evangelizing religion. To be too *déjà* is to miss the point.

It is in a way nice to see someone standing out (or perhaps, rather, sitting down) against the prevailing winds of historicity, eschatology, biblicism, and all that. There is a danger that we turn all these things into idols and forget the living God they were meant to lead us to. The God of the historians and the scripture scholars (or Bible-bashers) may be no more real than the God of the philosophers. I doubt if Abraham or Moses would have had much more use for Heilsgeschichte than Dom Aelred has. And I am quite prepared to allow that part of the antidote is Dom Aelred's kind of benign and cultured humanism.

But, after all, we are manifestly living in a

time of crisis. It is the gospel of the 'last days' that makes sense. There is an urgency in the air which we cannot afford to overlook. The issue, finally, is not whether we need new ways of meditation or a less authoritarian Church (though both are eminently desirable), but whether Jesus Christ has really 'overcome the world' and freed us from our sins (taken, if you like, all bad karma upon himself). If he has, it is worth knowing, because it is the most important fact in the whole universe. How one shares it with India or Thailand or, for that matter, with modern man in the West, is a serious problem. But no kind of relativizing or subjectivizing can be a real solution. Living out its implications in joy and peace, in faith and hope and love, is rather more promising; but then one could hardly write 'explorations' about that, let alone autobiography. Dom Aelred is, after all, a humble man. And, in this book, he has, I think, at last, come straight with us.

SIMON TUGWELL, O.P.

MAN WITHOUT GOD. An Introduction to Unbelief, by John Reid. *Hutchinson & Co. Ltd*, London, 1971. 306 pp. £4.00. Theological Resources.

The author of this theological study of modern unbelief feels that there is too much journalism in this field, and he hopes that his book will rise above that level (xvi). Alas, he failed sadly in achieving this goal—*Man Without God* is a very good (or bad) example of such theological journalism.

From cover to cover the book is filled with 'vagrant musings' (the author's own judgment, p. 236) and, perhaps slightly more entertainingly, some detailed information about the workings of Vatican II, the Roman Secretariat for Non-Believers (to which the author is a consultant), the Christian-Marxist dialogue, and such matters—all rather superficial and very Roman Catholic. Exceptions are, perhaps, the useful bibliography and the forty eight pages of notes at the end of the book with some interesting references. The notes should certainly have been incorporated into the text, and the vacated pages could then have been used for the numerous and lengthy digressions in which the author spells out his own incompetence. The text must speak for itself, and it does so with embarrassing honesty. I single out the paragraph on Paganism (one of the Counterparts of Unbelief) as particularly revealing. Reid seems to regard Paganism with its

multitude of deities as something rather daft, beyond belief, and quite outside the perspective of both Christians and Modern Man. Of course, there are angels, etc., but the Christian 'never regards them as literally divine' (19). Unfortunately for Reid, that is precisely what the Bible seems to do on several occasions, e.g. Psalm 8 and Job 1. This may create a problem for a certain type of metaphysical monotheism, but it also shows that the Scriptures are quite unfamiliar with the hollowed-out concept of the totally transcendent God which Reid propagates. God's transcendence is stretched to its absolute limits—and even beyond—when we read that: 'The mysteries of faith are inexpressible' (176)—one wonders how we are to know about them.

This concept of God is eminently suited for a dialogue with the sort of unbeliever the book is mainly concerned with: modern sophisticated man who is conscious of his autonomy and his dominance over the world through science. This God is so completely transcendent that he cannot be a rival to man's autonomy, he will not hamper man's development, but truly bring it to fulfilment. Listening to the criticisms of the unbeliever, the Christian will be inspired to purify his own concept of God.

How is a dialogue possible if unbelief has to be regarded as sin, a rejection of God's graceful offer of himself? The answer given is that sinfulness must not be located just in the unbeliever, but in the believer as well. Doubt is to be inherent in faith, for God's revelation comes through man, and we all must have our doubts as regards the human representation of the divine revelation. For the professed unbeliever this doubt has turned into a rejection on account of the misbehaviour of the Christians, who have violated God's revelation in their theology and their institutions, and who, in addition, give very little evidence of God's presence in their lives.

So, if Christians would once again demonstrate the redeeming presence of God, and so proclaim how good faith in God is for the human condition, all will be well.

This may be so, but at the moment it looks as if secular man is finding the religious dimension

to existence quite independently of the Christian inspiration. This, of course, should not stop Christians finding the relevance of God in their own lives. But they may be a bit at a loss when they are backed up by a theology à la Reid. The split between God's revelation (from nowhere) and its appropriation in the human condition is incomprehensible. And so is Reid's concept of God. Had the author given more serious attention to the unbeliever's own analysis of the challenge of religious belief, he would have found that it was precisely *his* notion of God that was rejected because it renders religion meaningless. Reid's concept of the transcendent God creates a vacuum in which all religious aspirations will eventually evaporate. And so this lofty idea of God may hide a secularism which most of the unbelievers have left behind long ago.

ROB VAN DER HART

A DREAM OF ORDER, The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-century Literature, by Alice Chandler, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1971. 278 pp. £2.50.

Faced with the mechanist view of the world and with its capitalist application to social and industrial life, those who opposed it in the nineteenth century could still seek for the antidote in the past. They sought it in the medieval world and in feudalism in particular. Such is the argument of this book; and what has to be said at once is that the term 'medieval' is used rather too generally. *Tract XC* is referred to, for example, as 'medieval'; while the revival of the religious orders receives only a footnote.

The absence of a proper consideration of the religious element in what has equally loosely been called the Gothic revival is a serious weakness, since it could also be argued that all religions, and the Christian religion in particular, commit their believers to some kind of 'organic' conception of society. Christians are bidden to realize their beliefs in terms of their membership one of another; and since that membership is talked of in metaphors of the Body of Christ, then an expectation arises that the forms and structures of society are themselves alive—or can be made so. If this is so, then the post-medieval development of a society based upon new principles of financial and technological mechanism is bound to constitute a continuing challenge to such religious beliefs and their associated metaphysical pre-suppositions. These changes are still interpreted as 'putting an end to all

feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations', or as bringing in a new age of 'sophisters, economists, and calculators'. Of the preceding quotations, the first is from Marx, the second from Burke; but when 'the hardships of life' come by chance and with injustice, all seem to agree that 'it kills a man's love for his country', or, in other words, that a past moral order has been violated. What Marx, Burke, and Coleridge also have in common is their vision of the alternative society as one in which, when sawing down a tree, 'we shall discuss metaphysics, criticize poetry when hunting a buffalo, and write sonnets while following the plough'. This could be Marx in the *German Ideology*: it is, in fact, Southey; but the vision of Pantisocracy is confined neither to the Left nor to the Right bank of the Susquehanna.

Where what Miss Chandler calls the 'medievalists' (Scott, Disraeli, Carlyle, etc.) differed from Marx is the extent to which they failed to give sufficient weight to the uniqueness of the process which had occasioned the changes they lamented. Instead, they sought for a simple 'home-coming' to the past. Yet without this framework of medievalism or Gothic revivalism—call it what we will—it is difficult to see how old values could have been preserved—how without the Gothic chrysalis the socialist gadfly could have been born. The age of chivalry may be dead, but its conception of 'largesse' (or public wealth) has never been