

**BUDDHISM—A NON-THEISTIC RELIGION**, by Helmuth von Glasenapp. *George Allen and Unwin* London, 1970. 208 pp. £2.

Christianity is an atheistic religion. This was the view of ancient writers who pointed to Christian disbelief in the gods of the state. Clearly, then, the terms 'atheist' and 'theist' tell us only about a man's idea of a personal god, and nothing of his views in another areas usually considered 'religious'. But how can there be a religion without an omnipotent creator God? This is the question Professor von Glasenapp takes up, the religiosity of a non-theistic religion.

For many religions the origin of the world is an important problem. Some attempt to explain it by assuming an original creator of all that is, leaving themselves open to the dialectician's question, who then created God? The Buddha declined to speculate on the question of a first cause, but his destructive analysis of concepts of a divine creator led Indian thinkers to classify his teaching with that of the *Sāṃkhyas*, Jains, and Mimamsakas: religious systems which, whilst they teach a moral world order and a way to liberation, teach that the gods are impermanent.

The Buddha taught the Noble Eightfold Path to liberation from the only allowable standpoint, that of one who had achieved it. It begins with right understanding. To achieve this it is necessary to develop insight into the Three Marks of Existence; to see that all things are impermanent, frustrating, and without 'self-nature'. Professor von Glasenapp outlines the world-view which results from the application of this analysis. Buddhism knows neither a first cause of the world nor an all-embracing spiritual substance giving rise to all that is. Postulating dependent origination it affirms that it is always the case that something comes into being dependent upon, and conditioned by, other things. To assert a first beginning is as impossible as to assert a definite end. For the Buddhist neither the world nor the individual can be explained by reference to one or more 'eternal substances' such as God, soul, or original matter. The plea for parsimony in explanation rejects such notions as unnecessary explanatory constructs. All that exists is conditional and will pass away. Nothing

arises from a single cause; existence is the co-ordination of a multitude of conditions.

Indian Buddhism has never denied the existence of personal gods (*devas*). Professor von Glasenapp's studies show, however, that arguments for the existence of an eternal creator and ruler of the world have been consistently negated by the Buddha and his followers. Other Asian and Middle Eastern religions contain analogous views and these parallels are examined in the short sections which close the treatment of each of the five principal concepts relevant to theistic considerations in Buddhism. These are: The Impermanent Gods, No Creator or Ruler of Worlds, The Law of the World, The Bringers of Enlightenment, and The Absolute.

In a brief note which forms the second section of the book M. O'C. Walshe supports von Glasenapp's decision to work from Indian sources. Later developments may, he points out, be derived from the system given in the Pali canon. Selections from the Buddhist scriptures designed to support the arguments advanced by Professor von Glasenapp make up the third section. They have been chosen and edited by Heinz Bechert, and their inclusion makes this book a useful text for the serious student. The glossary of Pali and Sanskrit words is a selective one. The term *deva* (heavenly being, literally radiant one) is not included, perhaps because *devas* are dealt with at length in the first chapter.

This book is essentially a short work by Professor von Glasenapp designed as a contribution to the scientific study of religion. Buddhists may be a little surprised to see the *Jataka* or birth stories quoted as of equal standing with the discourses of the Buddha. General readers may be dismayed at the profusion of technical terms. Because its aim is so highly specific it is likely that the reader who lacks a fairly wide knowledge of Buddhism will find the work unattractive. It does, however, deal ably with a topic which may be foreign to the way of thinking of many, yet crucial for an understanding of this important religion.

ARTHUR WOOSTER

**THE MIND OF CHESTERTON**, by Christopher Hollis. *Hollis and Carter*, London, 1970. 303 pp. £2.10.

While Chesterton still lived his faults were recognized: the 'whimsically perverse aversion to accuracy', the almost wilful romantic

chivalry, the deadly monotony of his weekly column for *GK's*, his abiding vindictiveness after the Marconi trial and, even in that age of