

the need for a truly radical Catholic approach to society, one which tackles our fundamental assumptions about human community, is more obvious than ever.

TERRY EAGLETON

MYTH AND RELIGION OF THE NORTH, by E. O. G. Turville-Petre; Weidenfeld & Nicolson; 50s.

Students of Old Norse and related subjects should be delighted with this book which sets out in a clear manner the extent of present knowledge of the Northern pagan religions without in any way glossing over the difficulties inherent in the sources. It could be praised indeed as an exposition of scholarly deduction and imagination which never over-steps the border into fantasy.

The confusion in many of the literary sources, poetry, history and saga, stems chiefly from their dates at the beginning of, or well into the Christian era of the north. Accounts of heathen religion found in thirteenth-century Saxo or eleventh-century Adam of Bremen, are likely to be prejudiced or at least to contain misunderstandings. Apart from such descriptions of rites and customs, we have fortunately preserved for us a detailed mythology of the gods and giants and an account of the cosmos in the Edda of Snorri Sturluson, an Icelander of the twelfth-century, and some of his own sources remain as a test of his reliability. The cults and rituals taking place in the north are indicated also in the archaeological material, the Oseberg ship of the ninth-century for example, amulets of the god *Thór* and traces of provisions found in other burial mounds, or the remains of a temple at Hofstadir in Iceland. Sacral elements in place-names can indicate the extent of particular cults, and the evidence stretches down to modern times in other ways since recently-recorded Finnish and Lappish customs are believed to preserve ancient religious practices influenced by their neighbours. The picture which emerges is one of very varying cults and allegiances often adopted individually by men attracted by one or other of the gods. A link between circumstance and cult can, however, be seen, for example in the strength of the cult of *Ódinn*, god of dissension and death, among the Vikings and landless men under Harald Finehair, while the Icelanders who had fled before him and valued stability of home and lands, seem often to have had names compounded with the name of *Thór*, the defender of the world of the gods against the anarchy of the giants. In the settled lands of Sweden a religion of fertility gods and goddesses grew up, and place names compounded with *Freyr* and *Freyja* are particularly common here. To such cults should be added those of kings upon whom the success of the tribe and especially the fertility of the soil was thought to depend: the body of one such king had to be divided into four so that each of his provinces could bury a portion on their land and so ensure prosperity of crops. Figures who also, like the kings, acquired a divine ancestry in legend were the great heroes such as *Sigurd* and *Starkad*. Finally, the picture would be false if it omitted those men who scorned all sacrifice and relied only upon their own might and main.

## REVIEWS

Among the gods themselves Ódinn and Thór stand out and a separate chapter is devoted to each of these very complex figures. They are joined by Baldr whose story illustrates the contradictory nature of the sources. In the West Norse tradition he is the shining god, innocent and indeed full of fine qualities, whereas in Saxo's version he is a bullying, lustful figure devoid of any moral virtue. Apart from these two differing developments of his character, the myth has further interest as it seems to have been susceptible to Christian influence which found in the tragic death of Baldr a figure for Christ. The chief gods, or Aesir and Vanir, have their counterpart in the giants of frost and rock although the two camps appear to have intermingled over the begetting of the main figures of the gods such as Ódinn. Besides these is a host of lesser deities, inhabitants of rocks, waterfalls or trees, and also the tribe of guardian spirits of men or families, the *dísir*. Animals often accompanied the gods or indicated their presence; two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, perch on Ódinn's shoulders (and are thought to represent his intellectual qualities of thought and memory), while Freyja appears in a chariot drawn by cats, and Thór in one pulled by goats. In practice horses were often dedicated to a god or regarded as seats of special potency. Finally Snorri gives a magnificently coherent account of the creation myth and the final doom of the gods, or Ragnarök, when the wolf Fenrir will break loose to fight with Ódinn, and Thór strive with the world serpent, until all ends in a consuming fire and the return of certain of the gods, including the virtuous Baldr.

Such material finds parallels in the myths and practices of other areas and Professor Turville-Petre discusses the possibility of the influences of one on another or of a common Indo-European source in particular instances. First and foremost, however, this book presents a Northern distillation. We are constantly being reminded that we cannot divorce the present from its roots in the past, and here is a book which enables us to find out what these roots are. All this appears in beautiful guise in the series 'History of Religion', well supplied with photographs, notes and a useful bibliography, the only thing lacking being a clear map of the whole region.

CHRISTINE THIRLWAY

**BISHOPS AT LARGE**, Some Autocephalous Churches of the past Hundred Years and their Founders, by Peter F. Anson, with an Introduction by Henry St John, O.P.; Faber and Faber; 70s.

It could perhaps be argued that this lamentable story is redeemed by Fr St John's introduction, for expense of spirit—if not a waste of shame—must be the verdict on those six hundred pages of misplaced erudition. One can say 'redeemed', for the first of the fantastic flock of nineteenth-century bishops who multiplied schisms and scandals was in fact an apostate French Dominican priest, Jules Ferrette, 'Bishop of Iona and Patriarchal Legate of the Syrian Jacobite Church for Western Europe'. At once the recurring note is struck: apostasy, the obtaining—