The examples of empirical sociology of religion which Martin provides in his third part are valuable so far as they go, but they do not go very far. In his discussion of secularisation in England, Dr Martin does not come up with any very new sociological observations. Whereas anti-religious sociologists have been able to claim that institutional religion is on its last legs in England, Dr Martin is able very skilfully to use their own data to show the surprising vitality of religious belief and allegiance still surviving in Britain. His observations on Bulgaria, that is, on secularisation in a Communist state, are new and interesting but their sociological value is clearly limited by Martin's extremely brief stay with his Communist hosts.

Dr. Martin is one of the few sociologists who can write attractively free of the jargon one inevitably associates with sociology. Rarer still, he is a religiously committed sociologist, interested in the field of the sociology of religion. He is right to insist that the sociology of religion is a much more important topic than sociologists have, generally, been willing to admit, and he has important and interesting ideas about the importance of the concept of secularisation to the wider field of the sociology of religion. A comprehensive and systematic discussion of these topics is required, and this book suggests that Dr. Martin is admirably equipped to tackle such a task.

I noted a misprint of 'possibility' on p. 97.

T. A. Roberts


Any sensible person who glanced at the dust cover of this book and saw on it the title of one of its chapters, 'Towards an Erotics of History' might be justifiably excused the natural temptation to dismiss the work unread as yet another piece of pretentious theologising, augmenting the vast accumulation of literature on the theme of history and Christian theology. Despite the absurdity of that particular chapter heading (modelled, unwisely, on Susan Sontag's 'the erotics of art') it would be unjust to dismiss this not very long essay out of hand.

The area of discussion covers the by-now familiar range of questions about whether we can talk of historical fact divorced from interpretation, whether we can distinguish between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, whether 'history' is distinct from 'salvation history', whether 'the eschatological dimension of history' expresses the ultimate meaning of all history or is just one of a number of possible options in the philosophy of history. It is not difficult to say what the author is against. He is against Cartesian anti-historical thought, and poor Descartes with his emphasis on clear and
distinct ideas gets very short shrift; he is against scientific, 'positivistic' history, the Liberal theologian's nineteenth century view of the historical Jesus, and with some reservations and qualifications, he is against Bultmann's divorce of faith from history and his interpretation of myth. Positively, the author favours the views of Vico on history and he gives a brief summary of some of the salient points of the *New Science*. He is also favourably disposed to the 'new hermeneutics' of Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling, and of its philosophical support in the writings of Martin Heidegger and Heinrich Ott. The 'new hermeneutics' is said to present us with the possibility of a revolutionary new mode of understanding the New Testament; the work of bringing this about has barely begun, and the other's main thesis that 'history is a form of myth' expresses a standpoint broadly in harmony with the insights of the 'new hermeneutics'.

I confess that I am far from clear what exactly is the force of the author's claim that 'history is a form of myth'. Certainly in presenting his case, he makes many important and valuable judgements. But in the final analysis, the author's failure to give us a close and detailed analysis of that very slippery eel, the concept of 'myth'—he does offer a definition but this is quite inadequate to support the weight of the thesis he wishes to place on it—accounts for his inability to convince at least one reader of the validity of the argument. And yet the book gives the impression that the author is in fact struggling to say something genuinely worth saying and my own view is that had he chosen not to express his insight in terms of the notion of myth he might indeed have been very much more successful.

As the book stands, two things in it, in my judgement, are valuable. The author directs attention to the importance of Vico's views on history, a topic perhaps largely neglected of late by theologians, although account has been taken in various quarters of the idealist view of history as we find it in the work of Croce and R. G. Collingwood. He also draws attention to the notable shift of emphasis which has occurred in the contemporary theological debate on history and the Gospels through the work of Fuchs and Ebeling. The concern in this new emphasis with the importance of language echoes a similar interest in the conceptual structure of language to be found in contemporary philosophy. The 'new hermeneutics' which, unlike contemporary philosophy, is Continental and not Anglo Saxon in its inspiration, is undoubtedly expressing valuable insights but if its views are to be more widely shared, its proponents must learn to exercise a more rigorous discipline in their use of terms and definitions. Is it being old-fashioned and Cartesian to suggest that clarity and distinctness in thought are admirable and much-needed virtues?

T. A. Roberts