

[1958. Review of *Words and Images*, by E.L. Mascall. *Christianity Today* 18 Aug.]

COMPELLING SUBJECT

Words and Images, by E. L. Mascall, Ronald, 1957. 132 pp., \$3.50.

This is both an interesting and disappointing book. It is interesting, first, because the author's style is attractive. Second, and more important, the subject is compelling: the logical positivist theory of language versus a Roman Catholic view of words and images which, though based on sensory experience, convey non-conceptual and unverifiable truth.

Yet the book is disappointing, for the theory defended is not comprehensively explained. A reader new to the subject might indeed have his interest stimulated, but he would be many times perplexed. The author excuses his omissions on the ground that he or his friends have given the arguments in other volumes.

The excuse, however, is not altogether sufficient. In the space of a few lines the author dismisses the view that perception is inferential: Brand Blanshard in *The Nature of Thought* spent 100 pages of careful argument to show that it is. Then the author proceeds to assert that the intellect grasps the *real thing* in a direct but mediate activity (pp. 33 and 34). How apprehension can be direct without being immediate, he does not explain.

There is a more serious omission. If the author wishes to reject logical positivism – and most of his reasons here are quite sound (perhaps there is one doubtful accusation of ambiguity on page 13) – he should show more clearly that it is possible to defend the meaningfulness of theological propositions while retaining the sensory origin of language. “All the language that we have in which to talk about him [God] has been devised in order to describe and discuss the finite objects of our sense-experience” (p. 101). Does this not concede too much to the logical positivists right at the start? Can this position be rescued by a puzzling hint of a primitive language that antedates the distinction between the material and the spiritual? And is mystic imagery of any help?

It would be unreasonable to require a man to write a 700-page volume when he wants only to talk for 150 pages. But is it unreasonable in this case to wish that the number of assertions were few enough to allow for moderate explanation and for some genuine argument?

GORDON H. CLARK