

explanation of human suffering is concerned, comes the recognition that nothing is ours by right, and a love of human beings which they do not have to earn or qualify for. Simone Weil calls this love 'supernatural', since it cuts across our natural expectations. This love is a source of energy 'outside the world'.

Peter Winch is correct to distinguish between these reflections and the metaphysical arguments which dominate philosophy of religion. He emphasises, however, that it is equally important to recognise that her reflections are meant to clarify what concept-formation comes to where the notion of God is concerned. This matter needs to be stated with some care. While it is true that sense can only be made of the supernatural in terms of the relation in which it stands to natural responses, it does not follow that religious responses are extensions of natural responses. On the contrary, they transform them.

Peter Winch has certainly written the book which philosophers in the Anglo-American world need. Whether they will heed it is another matter. In this respect, Winch's comparisons between Weil and Wittgenstein may prove to be a disadvantage since, at the moment, there is a widespread neglect of Wittgenstein's philosophical insights. There is an industry in books *about* Wittgenstein, but little appropriation of his way of discussing philosophical issues. Peter Winch shows that Simone Weil's importance too lies in the originality and integrity of her investigations. Philosophers will be poorer if the neglect of her continues.

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**SHARING THE VISION: CREATIVE ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN RELIGIOUS AND LAY LIFE**, by Lavinia Byrne, *S.P.C.K.* 1989, Pp. 101. £4.95.

The underlying conviction of this book is that 'both lay life and religious life have a vision and both are for sharing'. (p. 99). The continuing value of the religious life is taken for granted, and much is made of what the different strands of that life have to say to lay people today.

Considerably less is made of the complementary contribution the laity might make to the religious, though there is an intriguing comparison of religious to married people. Of marriage Lavinia Byrne writes: 'To come this close to another person is to make oneself vulnerable and open and to reveal the depths of one's desire. My married friends take a far greater risk than I do; they risk letting another human being this close, while I back off in the name of God.' 'Professed religious', she continues, 'are too easily able to hide from the demands of intimacy. We ask married people to carry the burden of that part of the Christian story for us and we berate them when they fail.' (p. 76). This is a grave indictment, but does not lead to any radical questioning of the religious life despite much criticism of how it has often been misunderstood.

Given that Vatican II says a degree of chastity, poverty and obedience is incumbent on every Christian, this book asks what is the difference between lay people and religious. The answer given is that religious 'commit themselves to following Jesus in this way; they make this commitment the matter of a formal promise and ask the Church to identify them in terms of

their promise.' (p. 69). This is a very puzzling difference: religious are people who make a formal promise, recognised by the Church, to commit themselves to three virtues which are incumbent upon Christians as such! An ingenious development occurs when the vow of poverty is considered! '... in a Church which enables some people to witness to the value of poverty by vowed commitment it is easier for all of us to continue to acknowledge our own.' (p. 83).

This last quotation is an example of the author's thesis that religious and laity need each other 'for the right questions to be addressed.' Why some encounter with professed religious should be considered indispensable if lay people are to ask the right questions escapes me. I suspect wishful thinking here, or at least the translation of what sometimes happens into what ought to or needs to happen.

The writer's enthusiasm occasionally runs away with her, so that she reads much more into the religious life than can be found there. Thus she speaks of Benedictine-type communities as 'specialised environments in which all the dramas of the human family are lived out in microcosm.' (p. 24). This is a very large claim for a one-sex and celibate community, and smacks of fantasy. The author also claims that Benedict's intention was 'to say something about the value of manual labour by having people work with their hands.' (p. 29). But Benedict is remarkably negative about work; the ground of his insistence upon it is that 'idleness is the enemy of the soul.' On the other hand Lavinia Byrne has a splendid observation about obedience: 'If I am vowed to religious obedience, I am committed to speaking my truth and listening to the truth.' (p. 93).

Much that is best in this book is incidental to the main thesis, and is usually found in a striking sentence here or there, e.g. 'It is so hard to reclaim the feminine within God when all that it might be appropriate to name in God is transferred for safety's sake to Mary the mother of Jesus.' (p. 40). Writing of the uncritical cult of wholeness now so fashionable among the comfortably-off, Lavinia Byrne writes astringently: '... our vain attempts at wholeness are doomed to make us ignore what really needs attention.' (p. 85). Or again, '... we set ourselves up as the healers and the carers, the ones who can crack the problem, unconsciously adopting a superior tone and position in our dealings with the weak.' (p. 86).

Some of the most pointed passages are tantalisingly telegraphic, as for instance when the question is put of the Church, 'Where has compassion gone?' The author answers: 'When the place of sin is denied within our Christian rhetoric, we soon lose the ability to name our personal hurt and pain and ambiguity; we begin to grow cold.' This hint of something important very sharply observed cries out for extended exposition.

The author has at times allowed a valid psychological insight to blunt the cutting edge of the Gospel. Thus she speaks of the home in very absolute terms: 'Each of us needs that centre we call our home, where a named space is ours by right and we do not have to earn it.' (p. 60). Yet Jesus said: 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' I John says we are to lead the kind of life which he led! I shall be told that this is not a matter of slavish imitation. Indeed not. But what is it a matter of?

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