

wandering bands of dispossessed peasants (often expressing their disaffection in religious terms), it becomes difficult to imagine precisely with whom Francis was identifying, or the circumstances that gave rise to his decisions. Equally, without any consideration of the possibility that he was trying to discover a different sort of community (e.g. by abandoning property as one of the props of the society he knew) it becomes almost inevitable that no basic difference should be seen between the views of Francis and those of his later followers who, unlike him, did take up property ownership.

In short, if Francis is not seen against his own background in the first place, there is no way of interpreting his relevance for the present. This rather vitiates the second half of the book, devoted to Francis and "questions of our time". What happens here is that his actions are transferred directly from his society to ours and examined for their utility in the age of industrial capitalism and Lord Longford. Not surprisingly, approached in this way, they are not found to be of much relevance. (So irrelevant in fact that at one point it is suggested that Francis would have entirely withdrawn from the scene by rushing off to Bangladesh.) In the process Francis' gestures are emasculated, for

their "dramatic" element is to be sloughed off.

To make Lord Longford's method work, it is more or less essential that Francis should have said something about pornography, prison reform and the rest. He didn't, so what Lord Longford has to say on these matters is substituted. It is all very laudable no doubt. Well balanced: we must "try to persuade the great organized forces of capital and labour to moderate their present exploitation of their bargaining positions." A little vague perhaps: as to seeking peace "one will reach one's purest and wisest conclusion within a community of discussion, a community where one finds oneself at home." Even contradictory: on the one hand national altruism in which rich nations give up their wealth is to be promoted, on the other we need armies because nations will always be quarrelsome (i.e. not altruistic).

Well, if Francis were around would he really be like this, so worthy, decent and civilised (and boring)? It seems more likely that he would rather have made some dramatic gesture running against our society, and in doing so would have taken sides.

ANTHONY ARCHER

AUTHORITY IN MORALS, AN ESSAY IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS by Gerard J. Hughes S.J. *Heythrop Monographs* London, 1979. pp. ix + 136.

In this discussion of the role of different types of authority in ethics, Fr Hughes adopts a cognitivist position: moral utterances can be true or false when related to rational needs, independently of any decisions made by individuals. This means that some reliable method is required for arriving at moral truths. It must be provided by philosophy, which judges the legitimacy of both scientific and theological conclusions. There is no specifically Christian ethic whose teachings are independent of ordinary reflective judgment. Christian revelation is not an ultimate authority which alone can justify moral beliefs. Moral laws are not the result of some act of God's will further to his creation of us. God's purposes are neither arbitrary nor ultimately impervious to our reasoning. Even if

original sin has severely weakened our powers of moral reasoning, it is now widely agreed by theologians that we cannot speak of natural reason on its own without grace, even in unbelievers. The view that there are some important moral truths that cannot be established apart from appeal to revelation and the tradition of the Church is "inconsistent with the basic rationalism which underpins the whole of Catholic tradition in theology." Now while this may be true in a notional sense I feel that it is rather like a student at the end of his course saying to his teacher, "thank you for your excellent teaching but really, there was nothing in it that I couldn't have found out for myself". True yet untrue. Fr Hughes, in maintaining – correctly, I think – that revelation is not

an ultimate source (although God is, of course), doesn't give enough recognition to the historical originality of its moral teachings. Respect for individual lives, integrity of marriage, necessity of forgiveness, care of the downtrodden: this adds up to a tradition which could scarcely have been arrived at without revelation. Apart from this, the case is well argued that in all our interpretation of the data of the Bible and tradition we have to bring our prior moral judgments into play. The relationship is a dialectical one.

Chapter 2 presents a renewed natural law theory, to be based on accurate scientific knowledge about rational human needs, and a set of criteria are offered for arriving at this. Good is to be defined as that which is capable of satisfying rational needs. The ultimate authority in ethics is the "vast body of ordinary, non-moral facts about human needs learned through our scientific and informal reflections". Moral principles of various kinds – he distinguishes three basic kinds on p. 104 – have to be assessed according to their correspondence with this truth, independently arrived at.

Chapter 4 offers a set of conditions for any legitimate appeal to Church authority. I feel there are some logical difficulties here which are not thoroughly discussed. The first condition is that the question must be one which we have not settled satisfactorily for ourselves. But what is the test for satisfactoriness? Is it agreement with the authority? Can there be a satisfactory moral conclusion that does not agree with it? I can't hold the position

that I ought always to trust in my own well-considered judgment except when it disagrees with authority, because that is saying that I ought always to trust in my own judgment except when it is untrustworthy. There are some cases when the "dialectical relationship" between traditional authority and my own moral conclusions turns into a simple contradiction. I might then appeal to some more basic principles of the tradition in order to justify my deviance from authoritative statements. But once again, that judgment is mine. But what if the authority claims infallibility p. 99 ff? If we can say with Fr Hughes that "anything we can independently discover to be false cannot possibly have been infallibly taught", what is there to stop us continually questioning anything that is said to be infallibly taught in order to find out if it really is? Surely we need some firm criteria set out – infallibly, of course – which allows us to be certain about what is infallibly taught and what isn't. These can't be the general tests for moral truth, otherwise there would be no need for any infallible teachings in morals – other than the most general Christian principles such as those listed above. Fr Hughes seems indeed to arrive at this conclusion on p. 109.

The book ends with a helpful discussion of ethical pluralism and relativism. If I hadn't been given this book for review, I would certainly have bought it for myself and recommended it to anyone who wants to start thinking seriously about the role of authority in Christian morals.

ROGER RUSTON O. P.

IN HABIT by Suzanne Campbell-Jones. Faber & Faber, 1979 pp. 229

This study compares two congregations of sisters, the Teachers and the Franciscans. Both originated at about the same time; both have missions. Both have met the challenges of recent change but approached them in terms of their own traditions. The first have changed in many ways; dress, style of house, enclosures; the second remain conservative in these things but have changed in a more subtle way.

The author writes as a social anthro-

pologist with a method. The method allows her to order a large amount of descriptive material, to make comparisons between the nuns and society in general and to ask interesting questions. That the method has a useful result is clear, but whether the method relates to the ordering in the way described, I wonder. The explanation that a method of constant and independent variables is being used (p.23) does not look very plausible with only two congregations at one point in time to