

I will not attempt a similar summary of the second part of this chapter, which draws out the consequences of this illuminating approach (nature and grace, grace and freedom, grace and sin, grace and the sacraments, grace and the Spirit). I will merely suggest some of the difficulties that I encounter in Ernst's approach. It goes without saying that I agree with most of the views expressed which I do not mention. Of course we must get beyond the idea of the insertion of an extrinsic salvation into a pre-existent natural order. On the other hand, should we be so fearful of reducing the Cross to just one moment among others of the revelation of love, and thus maintain that its essential significance derives from sin (p. 77)? Doubtless the fact of evil, of human misery, would be justification enough for the crucifixion—and neither can I easily see how mankind could have produced a real discontinuity in the divine plan by sin (p. 88) unless one resorts to dreams of an original historical justice. It is most interesting to observe that the relationship between grace and freedom is formulated in terms of the new deeper possibilities of communion offered to the latter. Thus we escape any misleading synergism! It is necessary to maintain at all cost the thomist theory of merit as proportion, as 'the continuity of a human life lived in response to God's predestining purpose' (p. 84)? This doctrine is certainly beautiful, humanist and legitimate in itself—but has not history only too often shown the impossibility of maintaining this view

without falling into self-justification? Would it not be better to entrust oneself entirely to grace, while affirming the historical continuity between the present self and the resurrected self, recreated by the power of the Spirit? And even if one does designate sin as a failure of love, in all its forms and masks, is there not a trace of Augustinianism in the assertion that 'all that is not reborn, recreated, all that is not assumed into the glory of God, is sin' (p. 86)? Finally, it is most interesting to approach the question of sacramental realism, and especially that of the eucharist, from within the perspective of the very real new meaning which is given to the sacramental gestures or elements. But the approach, dear to H. Schillebeeckx, in which every sacrament is conceived of as the assumption of 'nature' into a creative purpose which makes it an action signifying the death and resurrection of Jesus, might suggest that we can speak of the several sacraments as though they were all 'sacraments' in the same sense (pp. 88-90). Can we avoid the fundamental duality of the Christian sacraments, even if other actions may be given this name analogically? In which case, which actions? Ought one to say so hastily that in the eucharist it is not the action (the meal) that is consecrated, but the species? Are the two separable, especially within the perspective of meaning?

Enough! The excessive length of this review shows the interest with which I have read this book by Ernst, and my desire to make it better known.

J. P. JOSSUA OP

CONCERNING RELIGIOUS LIFE, René Voillaume. Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975. 145 pp. £1.70.

I disliked this book. It is a collection of talks edited from a tape-recording of a two-week course on Religious Life, given by René Voillaume in 1971 in the desert chapel of Béni-Abbès, to the novices of the Little Brothers and Little Sisters of Charles de Foucauld prior to their religious profession.

René Voillaume has attempted to re-establish, simply by repeating, an ideology of Religious Life which many Christians perhaps happily imagine had been mercifully left behind subsequent to Vatican II's document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. Some of the book's theology is, to say the least, questionable, its dualisms unacceptable, and its spiritual élitism insufferable.

On page 8 we are reminded of the OT theme of the jealous God who brooks no rival, and then treated to the astonishing observation that 'Jealousy is only possible where there is love between people'. One also wants to observe, of course, that jealousy is *not* possible where there is love between people. On the contrary, it is destructive of love and implies a lack of faith or security. The OT theme of the jealous God who brooks no rival is one thing, but the menace contained in this threatening remark: 'Being loved by God is something very serious: advances like his demand a serious answer', implies a notion of God intent almost on rape, which is degrading. There is,

in the New Testament, a theology of the Fatherhood of God and of our filial relationship to Him. There is also a well authenticated tradition in the church of the Father whose love for us is a 'letting be'.

On pages 21 and 22 Voillaume paints a picture of two worlds: the visible, tangible world which we inhabit; and an invisible world inhabited by angels, spirits, saints and, seemingly, *God*. 'The only person born here who came from that other world is Jesus, the Word made Flesh'. Not only is it simply wrong to think of God existing in another world (what can it possibly mean anyway?), but the whole basis of Christianity is rooted in a God who is for us and *with us*; Emmanuel—"Behold the dwelling of God is with men" (Rev. 21:3).

The visible/invisible worlds dualism isn't the only one in this book's theology and anthropology; there is constant talk of inner and outer. There is an inner zone where the genuine 'me' resides and the true life of the spirit is located, and the outer zones (predictably the level on which the unspiritual man lives) which are comprised of the senses, the emotions, reason and feelings. There is an outward form of Religious Life and its fundamental unchanging realities. There is one curious dualism which I find a bit repugnant, conveyed in Voillaume's description of the Curé d'Ars as an example of the 'Radiance of a genuine spiritual life'—"The people who went to see the poor Curé d'Ars, who had nothing humanly attractive about him—merely a poor priest with rather limited ideas and a completely conventional theology—recognised him as a man dwelt in by God" (p. 65, my italics). Is it possible to be indwelt by God and *not* be humanly attractive?

There are a number of other theological positions that one wants to take issue with, two of which I raise here. Firstly, contrary to what René Voillaume seems to believe, it is not wrong for Christians to claim 'the right to decide for ourselves how we should behave' (p. 73). On the contrary, there is a very fine tradition of moral theology (St Thomas' notion of 'electio') which teaches that what is involved in the Christian moral life is choosing; not obeying a law (even Christ's Law), but having that law written on our hearts so that it is really *we* who *decide* how we should behave. Failure to understand this is presumably at the root of this kind of rubbishy remark—(after

Religious Profession) 'responsibility for our lives henceforth rests in the hands of Christ, of the Church, and of the superior of the Fraternity' (p. 10). Secondly, his definition of evangelical perfection must surely be challenged: 'Each of us therefore has a task of self-perfection to perform; and the Gospel tells us what is to be done. Hence the term "evangelical perfection"' (p. 25). What makes evangelical perfection evangelical (that is part of the Gospel, Good News) is that in a very important sense we don't have to *do* anything; what is offered is not a new set of rules but the *gift* (grace) of a new heart.

It is when René Voillaume talked specifically of the Religious Life that I found this book so depressing. 'From (the) teachings of Jesus forming an inseparable whole, tradition has however singled out three as essential, and as a suitable foundation for a way of life to be called evangelical. . . . These precepts are a true distillation of the Gospel' (p. 28). The three are, of course, poverty, chastity and obedience; the vows taken by religious. And the inference is clear to me that any Christian not taking these vows cannot live fully the life of the Gospel. It is not so much an inference for Voillaume, who is quite clear the Religious are a very superior breed in the Church. It is they who choose the way of restraint (p. 75, where is found the baffling notion that many disorders arise when we are asleep); they have the closest proximity to Christ, and Religious Life fulfils baptismal dedication more completely (p. 92)—though how fulfilment can be more or less complete is not clear; religious profession assures one's growth in Christ in a more constant and radical way (p. 93). There is a constant anxiety to puff out the superior importance and status of Religious Life ('we are the greatest'—Rene Voillaume is a kind of religious Mohamed Ali), by comparing it with the life of non-religious Christians. Not only is it manifestly untrue in one's experience that Religious are better, more dedicated, more self-sacrificing, closer to Christ than say married Christians, but the making of the comparison is pointless and idle. If God's love for each individual Christian is total, then the alleged (by definition) superiority of Religious Life is only possible if it is also posited that the non-Religious Christian's reciprocal love for God is (by definition) less than total. But as *Lumen Gentium* says: 'All the faithful

of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity' (para 40).

I found this a nasty book, often painfully depressing to read. I hope very few people take the risk of having a similar experience.

ALBAN WESTON OP

THE SENSE OF LANGUAGE, by Cyril Welch, *Martinus Nijhoff*, The Hague, 1973. 184 pp. Hfl. 31.50.

Those few authors who successfully make the journey to the centre of language where articulated meaning first emerges seldom bring back a coherent discursive account of their experiences. The rarified atmosphere seems to inflate their own language beyond recognition. Most authors, however, never manage to reach this centre. They get waylaid by any number of things: confused concepts, mirror reflections of the centre, mistaken avenues of approach, and so on.

Cyril Welch's *The Sense of Language* at first gives the impression that he has indeed made the journey and has returned to tell us about it. His own account, larded with epigrammatic observations and bloated concepts, points toward the experience of one who has witnessed to the origins of language and meaning. And the path he has chosen to reach the centre would seem to bear this out. Welch chose the notion of labour as his entry point, i.e., labour as the creative confrontation of man and world. Language and articulated meaning certainly do emerge in this confrontation and a careful account of this emergence is invaluable.

However, Welch's account grows hollow as his book proceeds, and the

hollowness cannot be explained by the mystifying powers that cloak the emergence of meaning. Rather, it becomes clear that, while Welch has found the entry into meaning, he has not followed it. He has lost hold of his notion of labour. While he is able to give a critique of Plato's elitist notion of the craftsman as the prototypical labourer, he fails to achieve any distance and critical perspective when speaking of our contemporary sense and problem of labour. He simply accepts the stock-in-trade sense of labour provided by his capitalist environment and its apologists. He attests to the alienation of industrialisation and the society it creates without pursuing the source of the alienation. As a result he never breaks out of the grasp of his culture and thus can only gaze down the path leading to the emergence of meaning through lenses his society has provided him. And it is this manner of gazing, not the immediate presence of emergent meaning, that accounts for his inflated language.

I can only say that, while Welch has more than his share of insights, his account falters. And this has happened not so much because he could not find the path, but because meaning mystified him too early in his journey.

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