

THE EMPTY MIRROR, by Janwillem van de Wetering. *Routledge and Kegan Paul*, London, 1971. 145 pp. £2.

THE WAY OF ALL THE EARTH, by John S. Dunne. *Sheldon Press*, London, 1973. 240 pp. £2.50.

One immediate disadvantage of trying to say the unsayable is that the result is likely to be pretty unreadable. So far as I understand them, the message of these two books is similar: that, even if you succeed in 'climbing the mountain', all you end up with is insight into failure, an insight which, peculiarly enough, humanises one; but one of the books is content to point, while the other tries also to state.

Janwillem van de Wetering describes his experience of going to a Zen monastery in Japan, equipped with little more than a vague but dogged determination. After a longer stay than he originally reckoned on, one day he suddenly left, and came home. He shows, rather than tells, us how he learned (without perhaps even being aware that he had learned) that there is, anyway, nothing really to learn. The monks, most of them, were not 'good monks', and he himself settled down frankly to the task of surviving, giving up any attempt to learn how to 'meditate'. Nowhere is the Gita referred to, but the story of the book could well be summed up in the phrase 'action with complete detachment from the fruits of action'. The author did not, perhaps, learn anything very obviously 'spiritual', and he has enough humour to let us share the joke about his attempts to 'become a Buddhist'; but yet, he has learned something about being himself. In Professor Dunne's language, having 'passed over into a strange religion, culture and language, and several very diverse lives (from the rather wild novice to the grave and alarming Master), he discovers that it all leads him

back, not even to his own culture, but simply to his own life. In a thoroughly elusive way it is a beautiful book.

Dunne tries to theologise, or at least generalise, where van de Wetering just tells a story, and the result is inevitably much heavier. Some people, no doubt, have a taste for this kind of thing, and it is a bold attempt at a kind of theologising that we have not really learned how to do yet. The fact that one can 'pass over' to somebody else's religion and thereby enriched and strengthened in one's own faith is undoubtedly of profound theological significance, and it is to Dunne's credit that he has attempted to unpack this at all. And he has certainly managed to steer well clear of the usual sell-out to syncretism. But nevertheless there is something odd about writing a book about 'turning poetry into life' such a book could only be a book written to men's hearts. Maybe the best way to demonstrate that we can learn from each other's religions how to talk our own religious in the theological language better is by actually talking it better.

One of the hardest tasks for us is to learn how to abstain from asking (let alone trying to get answers to) the questions that cannot be asked. And this is an existential, not an academic, problem; one needs ladders to climb up, before one can throw them away, and Dunne's book may provide such a ladder for some people. But I suspect that van de Wetering remains much more approachable for most people.

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THE OCCULT REVOLUTION. A Christian Meditation by Richard Woods. *Herder and Herder*, New York, 1971. 240 pp. \$6.50.

THE DEVIL, by Richard Woods. *The Thomas More Press*, Chicago, 1973. 172 pp. \$5.95.

Now that William Friedkin's film version of *The Exorcist* has come to Britain and is drawing many to the cinema to this this orgy of Satanic horror, it is perhaps the moment to mention briefly some books by the young American Dominican, Richard Woods.

Most British critics, much too sophisticated to be impressed by Satanism, have greeted the film with total rejection as a disgusting and calculated attempt to make millions out of millions of impressionable people. But the 'success' of the film remains an ineradicable fact that in some way or another has to be accommodated in the contemporary confused religious scene in the West, where, in the wake of Christianity's decline, all sorts of obscure

cults have mushroomed. Woods deals with this question and takes his cue from *The Exorcist*—more exactly, *The Exorcist* in book form—comparatively harmless between its black corners. We are then taken on a journey through a flood of literature to show that the Occult Revolution has really caught on in America. Woods himself is, of course, an orthodox Christian who has not fallen victim to the craze, but he has met enough of the phenomenon to insist on the reality of the devil. The reality of evil is not, however, so mighty and incontestable that even God is unable to stand in its way. That was certainly the conviction of the medieval church, and inasmuch as this is not recognised by the writers (