

independent of it, then they would have refereeing ability over and above even solemn statements of the magisterium, a state of affairs which would leave us and all succeeding generations at the mercy of the theologians, a situation not too far removed from *chaqu'un son Pape*, and as distasteful to Fr Coventry as to the rest of us. If, on the other hand, these "methods" function within the magisterium process itself, then they are not truly 'independent' of it; and thus the two questions are not alternatives with the conjunction 'or' between them, but are 'both/and' alternatives, with a possibly affirmative answer to both of them.

There is much which I found enjoyable reading in *Christian Truth*, and I liked in particular the section on the relationship between mysticism and faith, a connection not dealt with sufficiently, if at all, in many works of revelation theology. But one was left with the final wish that Fr Coventry will one day present us with a much longer book, in which he handles, with much more room to manoeuvre, the problems raised in *Christian Truth*, and, with the abilities which he has demonstrated so often before, fills some of the yawning gaps left by this little book.

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PERCEIVING WOMEN, edited by Shirley Ardener. *Malaby Press*, London, 1975. 167 pp. £6-95.

FLESH OF MY FLESH, by Una Kroll. *Darton, Longman and Todd*, London, 1975. 112 pp. £1-50.

As stated in the introduction (p. vii), the essays in *Perceiving Women* are principally concerned with the question of how women in the groups or societies studied see themselves, how this relates to the way in which their society defines them, and how outside observers see them. Theories of the structures of thought are therefore very prominent in all the essays, but given this very specialised approach to the subject matter, this is a book well worth reading both for the information presented and for the sake of the questions it raises. The most important of these is why, in virtually every society, women are not 'articulate', and are more or less invisible in ethnographical or historical accounts despite constituting at least half of the population.

Answers are sought in the analysis of structures of thought and symbolic expression in each case, not least because in these areas women play a part as prominent as their numbers would warrant. It is argued that the dominant conceptual models of a group or society, which are by definition those accepted as most intelligible by ethnographers, are generated by the socially dominant (normally male) class or group, and only superficially appropriated by subordinate groups. The latter, including women, will have their own self-image, but it will not be one which is articulated in the same terms as the dominant model

because of the contradictions between them. Instead it will be expressed symbolically, and it is therefore by means of a study of symbolic behaviour and thought that subordinate self-images can be made explicit.

This approach has yielded some very encouraging results, but it has weaknesses which are at times exemplified in the articles in this book. None of the authors pretend that West African societies, gypsies in Britain, diplomats' wives and Carmelite nuns are groups of the same type and therefore precisely comparable. Nevertheless, in more or less veiled ways the authors succumb to the temptation to suppress some of the crucial differences (see for example S. Ardener, p. 49).

It is the central focus on the structures of thought, and the virtual autonomy they are granted from social relations and relations of production that underlie an almost platonic conception of human societies in some of the articles (e.g. p. 37 where reference is made to symbolic 'templates' which serve to generate events from time to time in unexpected ways; or p. xii-xix where the theory of the structures of thought are outlined). This rules out an approach such as that of C. Meillassoux ('Essai d'interprétation du phénomène économique dans les sociétés traditionnelles d'auto-subsistance', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* (4) 1960, 38-67). Also

using West African material, he has provided a persuasive explanation for the origin and perpetuation of the domination of women by men, starting from the exigencies of basic agricultural production. Instead, the relationship between ideology and production is here reversed (p. xvi): women's agriculture serves only to provide conceptual 'analogies' with what women seem independently to perceive to be their position in society.

Again and again it is stressed that mental phenomena, minds and ideas are the concern of these studies (e.g. p. xi, xviii), and any similarities across societies in these areas are compared directly without serious reference to the vast social and economic differences between them. The stress on the apparent similarities between some of the militant activities of women in West Africa and Western Europe (p. 49) does not take account of the fact that from the evidence presented it is clear that the African women wanted a restoration of a status quo which was felt to be under threat, and in which they would be as before, in a subordinate position, whereas in the women's movement in Western Europe and America the militant demands are for a radical change in society and the traditional position of women in it. One is left at the end of the book uneasily wondering where, on their account, conceptual models of society come from, and what their true relationship is with the relations of production.

Una Kroll's book is of a very different type, almost selfconsciously non-theoretical. It would make a safe introduction to the arguments and aims of the women's movement for one's mother. It never raises its voice, or its intellectual demands, and seems to be a deliberate refusal of the shrill tone or theoretical argument of many works of women's literature (p. 10). The book is very obviously the fruits

of U. Kroll's considerable personal experience as a doctor and politician, and is best and most to be recommended where it deals with concrete case histories and the brute facts of legislation and official discrimination.

In later chapters, however, the weaknesses of the book are more evident. The sections on psychology are too obviously 'written down' and facile, and very little defence is offered for statements with which many would not agree. To take one example, in the section 'Human Beings are Aware of Mystery' the author states (p. 57): 'The sense of mystery goes beyond reason and evokes a response which is called faith. Faith, a belief in powers or personalities which influence human lives, requires that people should be in a right relationship with these objects of worship, in order to obtain their assistance, and to control them. This seems to be the basis for human morality'. This statement would not only be repudiated by most of the women's movement, but also by theologians. Similarly, there are a disturbing number of sweeping generalisations of the type (p. 85): 'women all over the world have been particularly quick to learn this lesson . . .' which foster a cosy illusion of global progress which does little to instil confidence in the depth of Dr Kroll's analysis, for all its sincerity.

There are, however, now a large number of heavy theoretical books on the subject of women, and if this book serves to kindle an interest in women who have hitherto held a bad image of the women's movement, it will have served a useful purpose. It can be recommended as a first introduction for the hostile or indifferent, but it will not greatly further the understanding of those who are already familiar with the wider literature.

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