

Dr. Weinrich is Sister Aquina, a valiant Dominican nun for years a well-known lecturer in Sociology in the University of Salisbury and a stout defender of the rights of black people. She is also a prodigious author who has written a number of immensely detailed studies about many sides of Rhodesian life. The subject of her latest book is the African population of one of the smaller towns of Rhodesia, Fort Victoria, and its social divisions. Its main value probably lies in the careful way in which she analyses some seven different social strata among urban Africans on the basis of place and type of residence, income and—especially—female behaviour. The author's recurrent, perhaps indeed over-repetitive, interest lies in the stratification of female society including the varying types of prostitution which help characterise its lower half. I liked the picture of the prostitutes in the women's hostel dancing before the good sister 'the dance of the merry widows' and I would not be surprised if she had joined in with her great sympathy to identify with the underling, but otherwise I found the book a rather heavy account, always reliable but rather too often concerned to underline the obvious.

One is struck by the poverty of so many of the less fortunate inhabitants of Muccheke—the labourers sharing one small room for years, their wretched wages and insecure employment. Yet such is the fate of many millions of the inhabitants of towns across the third world. What makes it a good deal more condemnable in Rhodesia is the relative wealth of the country as a whole and the considerable affluence of all the dominant immigrant community. Muccheke could be a far worse place than Dr. Weinrich describes it—much of the housing is new and fairly good, and it does not appear an unpleasant locality to live in nor one without communal facilities. The low level of crime is striking. Yet it could also be a far nicer place, and without in fact in the least affecting the overall economy of white-ruled Rhodesia. Indeed if Smith and his fellow crooks had had the sense to pour a good deal more money into townships like Muccheke and not only into their beer halls, the chances

of his regime surviving might be stronger today: he might conceivably have built up rather more of a black lower middle class to back him. So while those of us who have no time for Smith can be rather relieved that he has been so short-sighted, a book like this must read like a catalogue of missed opportunities to his many British backers.

No one could be much more opposed to the Rhodesian government than Sister Aquina but this is a very fair study and it certainly gives the impression of a community a good deal happier and better treated than the inhabitants of black townships in South Africa. This was, I believe, generally true of Rhodesia; nevertheless a small town like Fort Victoria is likely to have had a considerably more relaxed atmosphere than Salisbury or Bulawayo. Moreover, and this is very important, the research for this book was carried out between 1968 and 1970, years when Smith was riding high and black nationalist politics were at a low ebb. Hence the account of politics given here is weak and would be applicable neither to the early years of the 1960s nor to the present day when the atmosphere must be far more tense.

Would the picture be very different, I ask myself, if it was of a township in black ruled Africa? Of course, most of the affluent people in the low density area would then be black instead of white. Otherwise could not Sister Aquina make a very similar study today in Kenya, Nigeria or the Ivory Coast? I suspect that the answer is in the affirmative though there would be differences: employers more heartless than the dreary white women of Fort Victoria might be found, but also more redeeming threads expressive of a common humanity binding rich and poor. What frightens one most in the Rhodesian town described here is not any overt cruelty but simply almost total non-communication; yet out of the sustained, deliberate non-communication of 1970 has come the strident cruelty of 1977. After all we always paid them their wages, their quarters at the bottom of our garden were so much better than those huts we see in the countryside. Why were they not

satisfied? Are they not ungrateful pigs to envy the beautiful houses we have built in their country, and now that they are shouting at our gate should we not mow them down with a machine-gun? Yes, my

**Religion Without Explanation**, by D. Z. Phillips, *Basil Blackwell, Oxford*. 1976, xi + 200pp. £7.00

According to many distinguished writers religious belief is either explanatory or explicable and hence misguided. D. Z. Phillips is out to challenge both assumptions. He holds the first to be false because of the role played by language in the lives of religious believers. He dismisses the second by attempting, through a discussion of authors like Frazer, Tylor, Marett, Freud, Durkheim and Fuerbach, to demonstrate that supposed explanations of religion are not necessarily explanations of religion at all. The conclusion therefore is that religious belief is invulnerable to philosophical criticism, that 'religious and magical beliefs are misunderstood if they are thought of as mistakes or errors'. (p. 102) Instead of regarding religious beliefs as hypotheses verifiable or falsifiable, enlightened or confused, instead of regarding them as dubious statements of fact, one should attempt to understand them as data requiring an adequate philosophical analysis. 'in showing the kind of thing religious belief is, one is not advocating belief in it.' (p. 7) But one is not endorsing a general refutation of religion either. As far as religious belief or atheism is concerned, 'philosophy leaves everything where it is'. (p. 190)

In its addiction to a certain kind of jargon, much recent philosophy of religion ludicrously assumes that there is an easily identified something called 'religious language'. Apparently this can be broken down and rejected as improper without regard to the whole use of language within religion and with almost complete lack of attention to the reactions, behaviour and practices of religious people. Phillips is ostensibly concerned to avoid this mistake and that can only be a good thing. No useful discussion of religion can emerge from a failure to try and understand what religious believers are really saying. But is Phillips' own contribution the needed corrective? Here one begins to have reservations. What, for example, is the book about? The natural answer is 'religion and

dear, but first give me another cup of tea and put on that record of H.M.S. Pinafore to drown their screams.

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explanation', but what does this mean? Phillips does not provide a clear response. As far as 'religion' goes all he does is offer purported examples of religious beliefs. Yet what is the good of that and how can it furnish conclusions about religion? One might just as well suppose that 'Harold Wilson' answers the question 'What is an Englishman and what can be said about him?' On the issue of 'explanation', the nearest Phillips comes to defining his language is to say that 'the explanations I have in mind are those which I discuss in various chapters: explanations which seek to characterise religious belief as the false or confused result of ignorance, emotional stress, social pressure or metaphysical impulse, or explanations which seek foundations for faith in philosophical arguments or proofs'. (p.x) But this, of course, is no definition. Neither the characterizing nor the seeking of a foundation for something is an explanation. So what is this dreadful thing, this explanation, to which Phillips is clearly opposed? And what is this religion which cannot be explained and is not itself explanatory? As I asked above, what is *Religion Without Explanation* about?

Despite the noble intentions with which it is conceived, Phillips' overall concern is thus, to say the least, something which it is hard to greet with enthusiasm. The same goes for many of his questions and answers. Can there be a proof of God's existence? Can we infer the existence of God? Can there be evidence for religious belief? All these problems are raised by Phillips but both their purpose or significance in his account and his answers to them remain something of a mystery because more fundamental questions remain undiscussed. 'The whole notion of God and another world which we can infer from the world we know is', we read (p. 21), 'discredited.' But what is inference anyway and what, in particular, is this luminous world we know? "There is a God", says Phillips