

acknowledged as being of great importance for living. David Hempton describes some of them and shows the methodological difficulties in studying them. But what is not raised is the functional difference between folk and traditional religion, as if they are simple alternatives.

Nor is that question asked in the most controversial contribution. This comes at the end, when Kenneth Thompson attempts to deal with the general question: How religious are the British? He rejects a rational, but inevitably pessimistic, approach which focuses on the secularized state of religious institutions. Instead, adopting an uncritical and simplistic interpretation of Durkheim, he holds that the British are surprisingly religious. But then so is every society if one uses such criteria. For him people are transposing their potential interest in the churches into a variety of individual beliefs and practices which are religious in form or function. He relies on attitude surveys, which purport to show that the vast majority of people believe in God and hold to a form of liberal Christian morality. He is hard put to it to demonstrate a corresponding ritual or action component. He waters down Durkheim's concept of community and believes that it exists through religious beliefs associated with watching the T.V., no matter how faint and diverse they are. Indeed, the essay should have demanded on the cover not a picture of jolly Anglicans outside their churches but of a family at home in front of the jolly telly. And of course Thompson's position is strengthened by the recent survey *Godwatching*. But why get embroiled with Durkheim? According to this phenomenological picture, the future of religion depends on the box.

Obviously a book of this kind cannot deal with everything but it is remarkable that no space was given to the upsurge of twice-born Christians, to the charismatic movement, to negro churches, and sects not influenced by eastern religions.

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SHARING THE DARKNESS: THE SPIRITUALITY OF CARING by Sheila Cassidy, *Darton, Longman & Todd. 1988. Pp. xviii + 164. £.5.95.*

The strength of this work lies in its conversational, anecdotal approach, which makes for readability and gives the author's intrepid personality ample scope. Unfortunately the over-ambitious and misleading sub-title implies something much more portentous. Sheila Cassidy has profound and sometimes provocative things to say about caring for others, about prayer and about community. Much of the book is reflection on hospice work.

The author is aware of the powerful witness given by some dying people, whom she portrays as 'glowing like candles in the dark', and as sometimes voicing the most devastating truths. She is wisely impatient of the phrase 'dying with dignity' which has become commonplace in this field. She is refreshingly relaxed on the question of an interventionist God, declaring herself 'quite content to remain in a state of unknowing'. She speaks of the task of being constantly sensitive to those in need as 'always listening to the music', and recalls a moment in solitary confinement in Chile when she became aware that 'in my powerlessness and captivity there remained to me one freedom: I could abandon myself into the hands of God.' So much for what is simply admirable here.

Other aspects of the book are less convincing. While acknowledging that 'the wounded healer is more sensitive and compassionate than those who are strong and whole', Sheila Cassidy expresses the greatest admiration for those dying patients who remain in control to the last. There is an unresolved and unacknowledged tension, if not contradiction, between her sense of the positive significance of vulnerability and surrender on the one hand, and her praise for remaining in control on the other.

Again, the extreme ambiguity of the role implied by phrases like 'professional loving' and 'professional Samaritan', defined as 'dedicated professional people whose only conscious agenda is to relieve suffering', does not seem to strike the author. A bracing contrast here is provided by the work of Alistair Campbell, *Paid to Care*, and still more by the incisive astringency of the clinical psychologist David Smail, who likens his own profession of psychotherapist to prostitution, in that it consists of dispensing love in return for money.

Another and perhaps connected weakness is that the book is by no means free of the hospice movement's tendency to praise itself. In speaking of herself and her colleagues in the Plymouth hospice Dr. Cassidy writes, 'We are, I believe, by any standards a devoted group of carers'. This embarrassing tendency may be connected with a need to claim that hospice work is on the frontiers or, as the blurb has it, 'in the front line of caring', with the implication that this work is uniquely taxing. The implicit comparison with other contexts in which people devotedly look after other people day in day out without counting the cost seems both unnecessary and incapable of being substantiated.

My discomfort here is not with what hospices actually do, which is its own witness, but with the typical claims made from within on their behalf. There is a prevalent mystique of the hospice which is in danger of raising false expectations. Now that it is becoming fashionable, the hospice movement may be in danger of becoming the prisoner of its own propaganda. When it is criticised at meetings of Christians there is an intake of breath, rather as if someone has sworn in church! The movement in general, and this book in particular, despite the best of intentions, shows signs of being doctrinaire about what constitutes a good death. There is potential for oppression here.

There are grounds for a similar uneasiness in face of what the author suddenly says about AIDS: 'It seems to me that the AIDS epidemic is offering the single largest and most clear-cut challenge to the Christian community of this decade, if not this century.' The dramatising note here is unmistakable and distasteful, not least in that it diminishes a whole range of other urgent concerns and implicitly denies the rich diversity of human vocations and gifts. Somewhere behind pre-occupations of this kind lurks a cult of heroic caring which risks idolatry and is potentially destructive both of the carers and of those cared for. This book gives some consideration to the phenomenon of burn-out among those who work in hospices, but does not seem to take seriously enough the possibility that it has to do with a certain way of relating to the task rather than with anything intrinsic to the task itself.

To end in a minor key, the section on the deficiencies of convents, though not without interest, seems out of place here, and does not add anything of substance to current discussion, from which Dr. Cassidy quotes copiously. There is an error of fact on p. 151, where what is translated here as 'a change in manners' is said to be the only Benedictine vow. Something has happened to stability and obedience!

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