

FESTIVAL and STRUGGLE AND CONTEMPLATION, both by Brother Roger, Prior of Taizé. S.P.C.K., London, 1974. £1·20 and £1·25 respectively.

FAITH AND CONTEMPLATION, by René Voillaume. Darton, Longman & Todd, London. 1974. 80p.

Brother Roger of Taizé . . . it sounds like the title for a medieval saint! . . . is increasingly well known just as Taizé itself is increasingly well known. I have no doubt that this review should have been written by someone who knew Taizé, and therefore knew Brother Roger. The only reason I say this is not because it is impossible to review a book unless you know the author, but much more that in this case I have the sense that the spirit of Brother Roger and of Taizé is better captured in the spoken word and the atmosphere of presence than it is in the journal or the report of dialogue with young people.

I only know from my own experience the possibility of being often near a person like Padre Pio. The things written by him and of him and his reportedly spoken word are all more often than not fairly trite and of extreme simplicity. But I suppose that I am prejudiced when I come to read them, because I knew the man, I listened to the man; I heard the priest speak, I served the priest's Mass; I sat as a disciple at the feet of the guru . . . and so I believe I knew more deeply than is often reported the 'experience' of Padre Pio.

The same can be said when I read Brother Roger. It is not that it is not good stuff. It is simple, clear, often deeply moving, but in its very simplicity and intimacy it invites us to know the man and to share his friends and his hurts, his joy in the morning and struggle in the noonday.

Perhaps the most telling word which comes through, in and out of both these books, is that very word: *struggle*. The very first chapter of his book *Festival* is entitled *Festival in Struggle*. To my mind, as I read the passages and the dialogues (the books are a combination of the Journal of Brother Roger kept by himself, and the account of dialogues with young people) it is not unlike watching the scene in the Old Testament of Jacob wrestling with the angel. There is the youth and strength, the weariness unto exhaustion, the exhilaration and challenge of the contest, the sense that there must be no letting go until the blessing.

'By his poverty man loves, creates, *struggles*, marvels; but he pays a high price for his freedom'.

'It is a thirst for communion that I sense in young people here on the hill. For them, as for every generation, it is strong to the point of anguish:

—Communion with man in his *struggles* and aspirations, . . .'

So the very idea of festival, which might seem

so bright and gay, is shot through with struggle.

The two books run from 1969-1972, covering the inception of the vision of the Council of Youth and going on to the announcement of it. Through the writing the note of personal concern, especially for the youth of the world, comes out continually. It is, after all, the young people predominantly who have been caught by the spirit of Taizé and to me the most impressive message to come from the journal and the dialogues is the note of feeling forward in faith and hope, with an acceptance of unfinished work, foggy impressions of something demanded, unclear edges and ends, which do not get tied up . . . yet all going on in God.

It is difficult to say, then, what any individual person will get from the books, but if they are read in openness, an openness which can catch the light and shade of the author's life-thought, then the reader will surely emerge a deeper person, more joyful and better prepared to face real life, which combines so many facets—festival, struggle, pain, peace, weariness and brimming vitality.

The third book is by another founder, René Voillaume, who is also rapidly becoming well-known in England, as his books are translated. To me, the first that I read, *Seeds of the Desert*, was the best. I do not find this present one so numinous, so deep or heart searching. Much of it comprises fairly pedestrian talks having a simplicity which is attractive but also fairly elementary. Perhaps I am just 'over-read'! I somehow did not get very much further, and did not receive the same level of impression as I did from Brother Roger's books. It may be that is just what is intended in giving a down-to-earth statement of living the Gospel in today's world. Yet, somehow, the wonderful and attractive spirit of the Little Brothers and Sisters of Jesus by which the spirit of Charles de Foucauld has come alive does not come through as vividly as the spirit of Taizé. This is sad, because the attraction is great for the younger people today, and the spirit is very much the result of the quiet, reserved and deeply spiritual living of Père Voillaume himself. Perhaps I would have gained more from this book if I had not gained so much from him before. Anyone coming upon him for the first time in this book will gain a lot, and as with Brother Roger, the accent is frequently upon the youth of today. I wonder how each of these authors would respond to the thought of Karl Rahner expressed in *The Shape of the Church to Come*: 'To win one new man of tomorrow for the faith is more important for the Church than to keep in the faith two men of

yesterday; the latter will be saved by God's grace even if the present and future way of proclaiming the faith makes them insecure'.

To read either of these authors opens one to

the need to go forward in faith with insecurity as part of the struggle.

MICHAEL HOLLINGS

BERNARD: BRINGING UP OUR MONGOL SON, by John and Eileen Wilks. *Routledge & Kegan Paul*, London, 1974. 160 pp. £3.

All living matter is composed of cells, and the nucleus of cells under microscopic examination reveals the presence of small thread-like substances called chromosomes. The human cell contains 46 chromosomes in 23 pairs, except for the sex cell which, at the moment of conception, contains 23 single chromosomes and unites with another 23-chromosome cell to produce a new 46-chromosome cell: a kind of genetic template from which eventually a new human being grows by a process of reduplication and division. Sometimes, for reasons as yet unknown, the new cell formed at the moment of conception has an extra chromosome, and in these cases (about one in six hundred live births) the human being that results will have certain physical and mental abnormalities known clinically as Down's Syndrome, and more generally as mongolism.

Dr Down was the late-Nineteenth-Century doctor who first identified the characteristics of the condition (without of course understanding its chromosomal origins, something discovered a mere decade ago). A clever and in many ways humane man, he nevertheless showed an unfortunate racial and eugenic prejudice characteristic of his age in dubbing the condition (on account of the slant eyes usually associated with it) mongolism: a slightly sinister, foreign word that has not helped either individuals or communities to adapt themselves to the existence of these people. Such adaptation is an especially urgent task today because the mongol population is steeply rising. Whereas in the recent past something like 80 per cent of mongols died before reaching full adulthood, with the development of antibiotics they now have a life expectancy little less than average. And since in 96 per cent of cases mongolism seems to be a random occurrence unrelated to the chromosomal make-up of the parents, there is usually no way of predicting or preventing it. Most parents of mongol babies therefore find themselves quite unprepared for the eventuality, as were Mr and Mrs Wilks.

One of the virtues of their book is its calm, down-to-earth, matter-of-fact tone. Both scientists by training and profession, they have no time for sentimental or rhetorical self-indulgence. But there is one sentence that stands out from the text by its apparent redundancy, and reverberates with unstated emotion: 'Meanwhile the quinces, picked from the garden, ripened in the kitchen, and their sweet smell began to pervade

the house'. A little earlier John Wilks (who for convenience acts as narrator of this joint composition) has described how Eileen's second confinement was brought to term by the exertion of picking a heavy harvest of quinces from a tree in their garden. Though the new baby was not as handsome as his elder brother, they never suspected anything was wrong and the doctors and nurses did not disillusion them. 'Eileen had to spend a long time feeding him; he was inept at sucking and dribbled inordinately. This was an ominous sign, but one which we did not appreciate at the time. Meanwhile the quinces, picked from the garden, ripened in the kitchen. . . .' One suspects that for the Wilkses the smell of quince is a Proustian memory-trigger which recalls in a flash the fools' paradise of Bernard's first weeks and the painful awakening that inevitably followed. And although I imagine that I have been invited to review this book as the parent of a mongol son rather than as a literary critic, I can't resist pointing out the appropriateness, in this context, of the quince—that odd, bitter little fruit that, rightly used and appreciated, is yet capable of yielding its own special savour.

At first, however, it is mainly a bitter business. Only a saint could rejoice in the birth of a mongol child. Most parents are stunned, depressed, resentful. They feel trapped—perhaps even (irrationally) ashamed and guilty. In many ways the event hits especially hard at professional, middle-class couples such as the Wilkses reveal themselves to be: hard-working, intelligent, highly organised, self-denying (no TV), placing a high value on achievement, on discipline and good manners, emotionally restrained, totally rational: all things a mongol is not, and never can be. It might seem therefore that a mongol child is likely to fit more happily into a more casual, sprawling, unreflective life style. Perhaps this is so, in the short term. But all mongols must eventually cope in some way with life beyond the horizon of the family, and the better equipped they are to do so, the happier they will be. Then the very same virtues and values which can never be realised *in* the mongol come into play in educating him to fulfil his maximum potential, for the effort required can be enormous, as this book shows. Fortunately, the benefits are not all on one side: the mongol child has his own kind of sweetness and light to contribute to a culture which, from the factory