

all sorts of things without plan and order, as old friends do', finally putting her out on the stairs and letting her wander about the streets? (pp. 171f). She further speaks of experiencing the presence of Christ, yet she considers that 'Dionysius and Osiris are in a certain sense Christ himself' (p. 192). She also has a veritable hatred of Judaism, the religion of her own race, which she accused of making an idol of the Jewish destiny and being less in touch with divine truth than the religions of the neighbouring peoples. Christianity, on the other hand, in her view over-stresses the personal nature of God; to her the idea of God's personal love for his creatures was deeply suspect.

Enough will have been said to show how far Simone Weil was from Christianity; indeed, she had fashioned for herself a religion according to her own preferences. How then was it possible that Père Perrin, the French Dominican with whom she had long discussions, should have thought her so near the Catholic Church? Mr Cabaud gives the answer from her own correspondence: because Père Perrin was blind she did

not have the heart to tell him exactly what was in her mind, and as she constantly used Christian terms such as Christ, the Eucharist and grace, though with meanings of her own, it was only too easy for him to misunderstand her.

Simone Weil was certainly an extraordinarily gifted as well as an astonishingly opinionated and fanatical person; she asked Admiral Leahy, for example, to stop American food supplies being distributed in unoccupied France by the Vichy government; she considered this immoral, because most Frenchmen supported General de Gaulle and therefore ought not to benefit from material help received through a government which they condemned. In the same spirit she reproached an atheist for letting the Dominicans help him to escape from the Gestapo. This attitude shows that she did not understand the idea of all-embracing Christian charity; whether she herself was as important and as 'holy' as she is currently considered will no doubt be decided by posterity.

Hilda Graef

BERNANOS by Peter Hebbelthwaite, S.J. *Bowes and Bowes, 12s 6d.*

This is a very good book. Not only does it provide in a small compass a great deal of up to date and accurately documented information about a writer whose work, with a few notable exceptions, has proved difficult for English readers; its six carefully planned chapters progressively build up a coherent and convincing critical whole which stimulates us to reread Bernanos in the light of a fresh and balanced appraisal. In other words, it fulfills the function of creative criticism.

Fr Hebbelthwaite sets the scene by describing Georges Bernanos' general temper as a writer, his fierce rejection of mediocrity, his search, in an anti-heroic, post-Christian world, for the hero and the saint. As a novelist his spiritual home lies in the mystery of the agony in the garden, and of Calvary. In the light of this fact we are introduced to the main novels as well as to the isolated experiment in a film-script drama, *Dialogues des*

*Carmélites*. The critic analyses Bernanos' pre-occupation with the nature of 'angoisse' and 'misère', tracing the evolution of his portrayal of sanctity from the comparative crudity of abbé Donissan in *Sous le Soleil de Satan* to the child-like simplicity of Chantal in *La Joie* and of the unnamed hero of the *Journal d'un curé de campagne*. We are shown how the author is increasingly successful in giving his saints a real literary incarnation. Well selected quotations from this outstandingly great prose-poet of the French language show how the imagery and the literary form in general (dialogue, letter and diary form) brings out and supports Bernanos' main themes. The study is summed up in a discussion of the link between his political and creative writing.

To Mauriac, whose involvement in 'angoisse' was of a radically different nature, Bernanos'

characters seemed tame and provincial compared with those of Sartre; but one might say that though they are, of course, pre-war in conception, they have come into their own again in the nuclear

age because they show the personal triumph over despair by a renewal of hope, strength and fresh vision.

*Elisabeth Stopp*

BEARING WITNESS TO CHRIST by Jean Fletcher. *Geoffrey Chapman, 16s.*

Mother Fletcher provides us in this guide to the catechist with an up to date synthesis of what the experts are saying. She is at her best when she is writing freely and from her own experience, less good when she is giving us a catena of quotations from her sources. Her book may be expected to contribute to the raising of standards in the teaching of religion which is already taking place, but inevitably one finds points of disagreement. I cannot, for example, think it wise to put off the child who asks: 'where do babies come from?' on the grounds that the parents are the proper people to give this information. The section on the catechism, also, while reflecting contemporary positions, seems to contain a basic inconsistency. If, as Mother Fletcher says, catechism questions and answers (which should never be given to be memorized under the age of ten) should be the summary of the lesson, it is difficult to see how they can fit in with the programme she

outlines in the next paragraph (p. 55): 'In order to help the child to remember his faith it is necessary to repeat the basic truths of religion frequently, if possible every year, each time taking them from a different approach and at a deeper level'. If even a simplified catechism is used every year – and answers not used frequently will not be retained – it follows inevitably that in most classes the catechism question and answer to be learnt or relearnt will determine the approach of which it is summary, and the lessons will reproduce in the pupil the sense of boredom and staleness which is one of the basic failings of the teaching of religion in the secondary school. So long as the teaching of religion in this way is imposed, there would seem to be no way out of this dilemma, and the author cannot be blamed because she has not found one.

*C. H. Southwood*

THE CATHOLIC VIEWPOINT ON THE LIÈGE TRIAL edited and translated by Malachy G. Carroll. *Mercier Press, Cork, 5s.*

The excitement over the Liège Trial has long subsided but the issues which it raised are still very much alive. It will be surprising if during the life of the present Labour Government we do not see a major tussle over legalizing abortion on all sorts of grounds, and it is important that the Catholic view should be widely understood. The Mercier Press has now given us a curiously untidy paper-back, which oddly enough does not discuss the trial directly. It is composed of papers from the *Cahiers Laënnec* by eminent French doctors and Jesuits, but the quality is disappoint-

ing. An excellent opening paper, rather technical in phraseology, gives an account of the fantastic difficulties experienced by pharmacologists bent on combining safety and efficiency in modern drugs. Even after hundreds of experiments have been performed on various kinds of animals, the effects on the human organism, and more especially the embryo, are hard to foresee. Yet the value of these new medicaments is so great that no sane person would suggest that their production be halted. Father Michel Ray's paper on 'Moral Relexions' makes the good, but neglected,