

Giulia Di Nicola & Attilio Danese, *Abissi e Vette. Percorsi spirituali e mistici in Simone Weil*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002, pp.5-302, ISBN 88-209-7257-3.

This is an interesting and intriguing volume written by the couple Di Nicola/Danese for the series 'Collana di Mistica' of the Libreria Editrice Vaticana. The writers are responsible, alone or as a couple, for numerous other works of philosophical research, especially on the subject matter of Personalism. In this volume they return to their study of Simone Weil ten years after they had published in 1991 *Simone Weil. Abitare la contraddizione*, their first volume on this independent minded and original mystic who lived the first half of the twentieth century in France. In their 1991 volume, the authors concentrated on Simone Weil's philosophical and theological thought while in the present work they seek to "approfondire la dimensione mistica e religiosa del suo pensiero"(p.13). They acknowledge that in Weil's human, cultural, and religious experience one may easily trace the "tratti di una vera esperienza mistica"(Ibid). These vestiges of mysticism are recognised as such also by the Discalced Father Luigi Borriello who writes a short preface to the book (pp.5-7). But the reader who happens to be new to Simone Weil should wait until he/she has read her most famous book *Attente de Dieu* posthumously published in 1954, or this volume by Di Nicola and Danese before he/she forms any idea of what type of mystic Weil was. For she was't the type of religious person one normally expect to meet as he/she hears the adjective 'mystic' applied to her.

Simone Weil was a French lady of Jewish origin, who had been brought up within an a-religious though ethically sound and idealistic background. This meant that her religious experience had to start from zero: the issue of God's existence and man's relationship to him were not relevant to Weil in her youth. Rather she embarked on research into positive and historical materialism. Until she bumped into a most profound religious experience that transformed her life and her thought. Di Nicola and Danese outline this personal evolvment and attempt to account for it in the first three chapters of their monograph and in chapter 8 where they tell of her mystical encounter with God and seek to situate it within theology.

In their appraisal of Simone Weil's thought and spiritual life Di Nicola and Danese speak with empathy; however they are never slack in their evaluation and critique of her contribution to philosophy and theology, making it clear to the reader where her strengths and weaknesses lay. This is one reason that makes this book valuable.

*Abissi e Vette* offers a good guide into the mysticism of Simone Weil. Di Nicola/Danese's work is not a biography. It is a research into the mystical elements detected in Weil's essays and private letters. These writings are listed on pp. 9-11. Fortunately for the first time reader of Simone Weil, this volume contains generous abstracts from the mystic's written contributions so that as he/she moves with the writers of *Abissi e Vette* through an analysis and consideration of her thought and behaviour they come face to face with her and her life. The present volume consists of eight chapters. Readers who are more inclined to search biographical details should first go through chapters 1-3 and 8 where Di Nicola and Danese trace the spiritual development of Simone Weil; in the remaining chapters the authors focus on various aspects of Weil's philosophical and religious thought. In Weil's case, her philosophical thinking is never absolutely abstracted from her daily living so that this volume share traits of the genres of both biography and philosophical/theological essay. This makes Di Nicola and Danese's volume very attractive to read. Towards the end of their work the authors reflect on their contribution: "Non vorremmo fare né i censori né i difensori della santità della persona e dell'opera di Simone. Vorremmo piuttosto raccogliere dal suo pensiero alcuni brevi tratti costruttivi a cavallo tra filosofia, teologia e fenomenologia del vissuto. Da una parte essi scaturiscono dall'approfondimento relativo alla sua opera e dall'altra dal significato che assume il suo vissuto per la sensibilità contemporanea. Del resto la teologia è sempre 'biografia', nel senso che è la riflessione di un soggetto che vive in un determinato contesto" (p.292; on pp. 292-296 one may find a brief sketch of Simone Weil's thought). Readers who are in search of material for their daily spiritual meditation will find in this volume an entire treasure hold.

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