

description of meditating on scripture is taken to signify that "we *must* see in Philo's pondering on Scripture something that passes beyond discursive meditation to contemplation" (italics mine). Surely a dangerous argument!

These criticisms, though I have dwelt on them at some length, should not be overemphasised. "Mystical theology" is such a hopeless mess that any proposal to sort it out is bound to be unsatisfactory and will almost inevitably operate with over-simplified dichotomies and inadequately clarified terms. The most useful contribution that anyone can make is probably to shed light on particular areas, for example by suggesting ways of reading particular authors (and this is admirably done in this book) and then, moving into more speculative issues, to provoke a quarrel. And a great many more quarrels

will be needed before we can hope to get any great consensus even as to what the quarrel is all about. Louth effectively rebuts the, surely rather absurd, belief that patristic mysticism is nothing but Platonism, and he usefully indicates various items on the agenda for scholarly debate, and makes a few moves to provoke such debate. I hope that weightier bulls than I will respond to his red rag. But what makes the book valuable to the general reader and to the student is the unassuming and competent way in which the author introduces his patristic friends to us. Because of this, it is a book of considerable charm, and is a useful addition to the equipment of those who wish to engage in "asking the Fathers".

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**SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN – THE DISCOURSES, translated by C. J. de Catanzaro. (*The Classics of Western Spirituality, SPCK.*) pp xvii + 396. £8.50.**

After finding it necessary to blow somewhat on the volume in this series containing translations from the writings of St Bonaventure, I thought that I could rely on being able to write a favourable review of the present one. And indeed there can be no question of its being unwelcome: for the first time a work of Symeon's has appeared in an English translation published in America and in England, and this is a notable event. But it must be confessed that the Discourses are of uneven interest. If the volume had contained a selection of Symeon's writings, omitting a good many of the Discourses and including instead, among other things, a good many of the Hymns, it would have had a greater appeal for the public. Presumably this would not have suited the publishers because a translation of the Hymns by George A. Maloney, S.J., appeared in America a few years ago. That admirable, prolific, but sometimes hasty writer on mysticism, whose *The Mystic of Fire and Love* (Dimension Books, Denerville, New Jersey) is at the moment the only book devoted to Symeon in English, has written a substantial introduction to the Discourses which

adds enormously to the value of the book under review; it is a sort of summary of his own splendid but occasionally careless book (from which he repeats a *gaffe* especially strange in a Greek-speaker: 'for Symeon, this phrase, to do the the commandments of Jesus Christ, is almost a hendiadys for fulfilling the teachings of the holy Fathers'). 'Grace', he here writes, 'or the indwelling of the Trinity, for Symeon, was meant, in the teachings of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament, to be directly and immediately experienced by all Christians'. Symeon was abbot at the monastery of St Mamas in Constantinople from 980 to 998; the Discourses were addressed to his monks. Maloney's general description of them cannot be bettered. He detects 'two main characteristics': 'The first is the accent on the same traditional themes that the hesychastic Fathers or the mystical theologians of the Christian East wrote about . . . the other main characteristic . . . is the new and insistent accent on the operations of the Holy Spirit, who effects the end of the spiritual life and all Christian asceticism and contemplation, namely greater mystical

union with the indwelling Trinity. Symeon is one of the great charismatic figures in Christian spirituality'.

It is time to consider the Discourses in some detail. The first of them, on charity, delivered when Symeon was not much over thirty, begins with conventional protestations of his own unworthiness but goes on almost at once to a well-known eulogy of love, which concludes: 'Reason cannot comprehend it; its glory is inaccessible, its counsels unsearchable. It is eternal because it is beyond time, invisible because thought cannot comprehend it, though it may perceive it. Many are the beauties of this heavenly Sion not made with hands! He who has begun to see it no longer delights in sensible objects; he ceases to be attached to the glory of this world'. But a little later we come across something distinctly odd: 'O love divine, where are you holding Christ? Where are you hiding Him? . . . Dwell in us, that for your sake the Master may visit even us lowly ones, as you go before to meet Him . . .' One is left wondering who is supposed to be going where. In fact there is a good deal of incoherence in Symeon, but one must not expect this sort of writer to be strictly logical. He is best at his simplest, as in the second Discourse: 'let us strive to feed and increase the divine fire within us by practising [sic] the commandments, that fire which makes the light shine more brightly and brilliantly'. The earlier Discourses tend to concentrate on the need for rigorous ascetical practices. The third and fourth are little more than commonplace fervorinos; the fifth, which is much the longest, is little more than a hell-fire rant. The reader has to be patient, bearing in mind that Symeon had to cope with the worldliness of Constantinople in general and his monastery in particular. He may seem worldly-denying, but he is following the traditional spirituality according to which before you can 'see the world in God' you must be detached from it. He is not unaware of social problems: his denunciations of luxury insist that it is robbery of the poor. He does sometimes exaggerate. But I question whether he is unorthodox in asserting that

those who have no 'experience' of God are not true Christians, let alone priests or bishops (this was what sent him into exile). Later on there are plenty of fine passages to linger over. Scripture, Symeon says, 'urges us to speak the truth, that the resurrection of Christ takes place in each of us who believes, and that not once, but every hour, so to speak, when Christ the Master arises in us . . . flashing with the lightnings of incorruption and Deity'. 'Every soul is set free from all vainglory, since it is clothed with the royal garment, the most radiant vesture of the Spirit, and is filled with God's superabundant glory'. Then there is the famous account of his experience when he was a disciple of Symeon the Studite; at the climax, 'I fell prostrate on the ground, and at once I saw, and behold, a great light was immaterially shining on me and seized hold of my whole mind and soul. . . .' There is the wonderful image of death seen as 'wine that has been strained and is held up against the sun [light] shining brilliantly and showing its colour more clearly and flashing joyfully on the face of him who drinks as he faces the sun'. Symeon can be very effective as an apophatic theologian: Christ is 'simple, not compound, good, all goodness, and above all goodness'. So one could go on. The two great 'Thanksgivings' are added here, according to custom, to the thirty-four Discourses.

Something has to be said about the presentation of the book. The President of the Paulist Press in New York, the original publisher, has, we are told, on his Editorial Board as well as an Editor-in-Chief and an Editorial Consultant twenty-nine distinguished persons, several of them Europeans. But it seems that someone is needed to make these volumes more presentable. On the second page of text, in an editorial note on Father Maloney, we read: 'Some of his books include . . .' It is not always easy to decide whether other little blemishes are muddles of this kind or misprints, of which there are in any case too many. As I read the translation, I was surprised by the number of incoherent

passages but assumed, since the translator's qualifications were so high, that they must be scrupulously literal versions of Symeon at his vaguest. As time went on, my curiosity grew, and on three occasions I turned to the Greek. In each case there was mistranslation. One passage (at the top of p 306) read: 'Thus he who lacks perception in one matter lacks it in all, just as he who has it in one matter is capable of perceiving all things and is beyond their sensation. He is capable of perceiving all, and is not overcome by their sensation'. This proves to be about the contemplation of the world 'in God': he who sees the One sees the world too but is not subject to the things of the world. The

standard of English in this translation is often low. To take a passage (from p 78) almost at random: 'After he has had a drink his appetite is aroused. Imperceptibly he is as it were led astray by the tasty food; without realizing it he eats it greedily and fattens his stomach and makes it intractable [sic] so that it does not respond to the impulse of the soul'. There are two elaborate Indices, one of them listing, for instance, the several hundred occasions on which the name 'Christ' occurs in the text. The energy thus spent could have been put to better uses. But I conclude that, at least in present circumstances, the book is definitely worth buying.

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**DICTIONARY OF MEDICAL ETHICS, Revised and Enlarged Edition, edited by A. S. Duncan, G. R. Dunstan and R. B. Welbourn. DLT. 1981. pp 459. £12.50.**

The original edition of this work, which appeared in 1977, seems to have established itself with practitioners and academics alike as a valuable work of reference. Workers in the medical professions must have little chance to develop comprehensive ethical positions which will enable them to cope with the day to day dilemmas, which are often of alarming urgency and difficulty. This Dictionary would be a helpful guide so long as it is not treated as a book of rules, which it does not pretend to be. Medical ethics is everyone's business and the Dictionary acknowledges this by casting its nets very widely. The social and political dimensions of the subject are vast: from alcoholism, through genetic engineering to the right to strike. As a consequence, there is bound to be some ideological position-taking which needs to be questioned. For instance, the *Pharmaceutical Industry* is over-zealously defended by the late Sir Derrick Dunlop, who will not listen to talk of excessive profits and manipulation of the market with brand names. The very short article on *Tranquillising Agents* by Peter Tyrer – which could well have been longer – is more critical in this respect.

The entry on *Marital Pathology and Counselling* by Jack Dominionian (who mentions only his own works in reference) sees marital breakdown as primarily a medical problem. Presumably this view has arisen because it is doctors who are now most often confronted with it. It has drawbacks for our understanding however. For all its welcome compassion, Dr Dominionian's position tends to swallow whole the religious/commercial ideal of the unit family and to look no farther than faults in personal development to explain why many marriages become intolerable to the partners.

The entries on *Mental Handicap* and associated subjects between them rightly stress that it is up to society to decide how best to use the available resources – and indeed how great those resources should be – for the benefit of the mentally handicapped. The role of the professional is to present the facts so that responsible decisions can be made. The same applies when an individual or a couple is faced with the choice of terminating a pregnancy where the foetus is probably handicapped. However, the writers play down their own in-