

In view of the upsurge of interest in Eastern Christian spirituality, and particularly in hesychasm, a complete English translation of the Philokalia has long been a fairly urgent desideratum. Volume 1 also contains extremely important texts for the understanding of the pre-Byzantine development of Greek monastic spirituality, almost all of which have not been previously available in English. The editors and the publisher of this new translation are to be congratulated on their courage in undertaking such a necessary and such a daunting task.

One of the first problems facing the modern translator is whether he should simply reproduce the whole text of Nicodemus as it stands. Plainly his introductions do not always measure up to modern standards of historical scholarship, and in many cases we are now in a position to provide a more reliable Greek text than was available to him. Also in some cases considerable doubt has arisen about the ascription of some of the works contained. On all these points it seems to me that the policy adopted by the present translators is the right one. No text contained in the Philokalia has been omitted, but the *De Oratione* has been restored to Evagrius, and the pseudo-Antonian *Texts* (which seem to be a rather half-hearted adaptation of a pagan work) have been relegated to an Appendix. Where a critical edition is available, it has been followed in preference to the Philokalia text, and, in some cases, unpublished work on MSS has been used, or published work which falls short of providing a fully critical edition. It would have delayed publication too much if the translators had waited until critical texts of all the works involved were available. If, accordingly, the reliability of the texts on which the translation is based is uneven, this is unavoidable in the circumstances. The historical introductions to each author are newly composed by the editors, and where, as often, their conclusions differ from those of Nicodemus, the reasons for this are given.

The work of translating was done by a whole team of people and, in spite of revision by the editors, a certain fluctuation in the quality of the translation remains. On the whole, a very high level of accuracy and readability is maintained, but the translation of Mark the Hermit is quite outstandingly good, while that of Diadochus (who is admittedly very difficult to translate) struck me repeatedly as slightly askew.

There are a few mildly annoying idiosyncrasies of translation. Thus *agathon* is often translated "blessing", which introduces an irrelevant idea (it is particularly unfortunate in Hesychius 62); *logikos*, rather pretentiously, becomes "deiform", while *alogos* becomes "uncontrolled". In fact, there is a marked tendency to "spiritualise" rational words. *Gnosis* becomes "spiritual knowledge", reading is turned into "spiritual reading", and *theologia* (especially in the note in the Glossary) is sharply differentiated from modern English "theology", in a way which makes nonsense of Diadochus' use of the word. There is also a discernible tendency to make some words more technical than they really are; thus *noema* is translated "intellection", and the note in the Glossary makes it sound very mystical, whereas often it means no more than "thought". *Energeia* and the related verb are similarly usually rendered "energy" and "energise" which are positively misleading. A suspicion sometimes creeps over the reader that he is meant to be impressed by the distinctiveness and profundity of the mystical East.

In a few places the text seems to have been misunderstood. In Diadochus 23, for instance, the double negative is plainly meant to indicate a negating of the negative (and this is how it is taken by des Places), but the translator takes it as pleonastic, which makes much less convincing sense. In Diadochus 53 the causal connexion between medicine and natural remedies has been reversed. In Evagrius, *De Oratione* 27, the relationship between desire

and anger has similarly been reversed. In *De Oratore* 10 "imaginary need for things" seems a wilful misrepresentation: Evagrius is talking about real needs; similarly in 24 he is talking about things, not "thoughts". In Hesychius 27 "Blessed by the Holy Spirit" suggests something quite different from the obvious meaning of the Greek ("Is declared blessed in scripture" is what it means). I noticed quite a few places where the English is more of a paraphrase than a translation, usually sacrificing some nuance or detail.

However, in spite of a few blemishes like this (and it would be superhuman to produce a first translation of such difficult texts without them), this first volume of the English Philokalia augurs very well indeed for the project. Learning and a flair for language have combined to give us a remarkably good English version of several spiritual classics in a form which will make them available to a much wider readership of students and of people who are concerned with their own christian practice.

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**CHRISTIAN HOPE AND THE LIBERATION OF MAN** by Juan Alfaro. *Dwyer*, 1978. pp 257 £3.25.

**THE SCOPE OF POLITICAL THEOLOGY** Alistair Kee (ed) *SCM* 1978. pp 184 £3.25.

"Modern man," you will be edified to know, "despite all his worries and distractions, carries within him the radical question about the ultimate meaning of his existence.... What is man? What am I? Am I just the fatal result of the impersonal dynamism of cosmic evolution, or does my existence, as a free and personal being, have a personal, transcendent foundation that is distinct from the immanent, evolutionary dynamism of matter?" (Alfaro, p 241).

Juan Alfaro's book attempts to speak to and about this anxious questioner, "to understand and express in the concepts and language of our time the content of the New Testament revelations on the Christian attitude of hope" (p 7).

His first chapter, on the "Anthropological infrastructure of Christian hope", depicts the earnest 20th Century Western European abstraction called Man whose fundamental choice is between "confining himself within the limits of his existence in the world" and "opening himself with courage and confidence to hope in a transcendent future" (p 21). One way lies absurdity and despair; the other way lies Christian hope, and it is to this that the rest of the book is devoted.

Chapters 2 - 6 constitute an essay in New Testament theology with an appen-

dix on how, with the help of St Paul, one might have a fruitful ecumenical dialogue about the question of Christian certainty or 'assurance of salvation' which has divided Catholic and Lutheran theologies of hope at least since Trent. Chapter 7, "The community dimension of hope", confirms what one had suspected, namely that 'man' and 'his hope' have been understood up to this point primarily in individualist terms, so that something about the communal dimension has to be dragged in; even the Church, as the sacrament of hope, gets a few pages of undivided attention at last.

Chapters 8 - 11 are to my mind the best part of the book; they are a discussion of the new creation which has been inaugurated by Christ through his life, death and resurrection, and thereby give at least some indication of the glory to which we are called now.

It is only in chapter 12, the last chapter, that we receive what seemed to be promised in the book's title, namely a discussion of the *relation* between Christian hope and the liberation of man. It contains some good rhetoric, especially where Christians are scolded for their too pietistic understanding of hope: e.g. "Hope in a common future is vain if it does not include a present solidarity of love, translated into action" (pp 216f). But it is written