

*mystik* are there, but without the 'extreme and paradoxical formulae'.

As early as 1245, Dr Colledge notes in his introduction, Innocent IV had granted incorporation into the Dominican Order to many of the communities of German Béguines. One imagines that in the 1330's the great *Frauenbewegung* had settled down to the regular life, but with little diminution of the original zeal. These, after all, are the women whose national thoroughness still compels them to scrub, not only the doorstep, but the pavement in front of the street. Many of them were extremely intelligent, some genuinely ecstatic. Knowing his congregation, Tauler did not talk down to it, and one can imagine that the sisters at St Gertrude's at Cologne were duly grateful.

Reading these sermons, one can see what a valuable person Tauler really was. The great movement of piety in the Low Countries and the Rhineland began traditionally enough, with short works written for laymen by monastically trained authors. Behind the *Mirror for Simple Souls*, which now appears to be the very work for which Margaret Porette was burned in 1310, we find the influence of William of Saint Thierry's *Golden Epistle*. Eckhart and so many others suffered for trying to express things which are of their nature beyond expression, and they were misrepresented by the malicious as well as by the ignorant. With Tauler the exuberance of Béguine aspirations is harnessed to a safe, workable pattern. The sermons strike one as being perfectly harmonized between the way of Mary and the way of Martha. There is great debunking here of pious illusions and frauds, much repetition of how 'God scrubs the soul with his good stiff brush'. But together with the scrubbing there is a very sure touch in his guidance for those who want to be 'closer, much closer to God than prayers could ever bring them . . . in eternity, beyond creation, in the un-created, beyond multiplicity, in simplicity'. None of this is surprising, of course, in view of the fact that the sermons are so often a development of scripture texts in the traditional mode, developed in all the four meanings, and so applying to every level of the soul's life.

The translation conveys Tauler's tone to perfection. One can imagine that if he had given the sermons in English he would have used just these astringent phrases for making nuns face up to their foibles, while at the same time the gentleness and understanding of a real spiritual director are apparent. It is a manner that reminds one of other great directors—Saint Francis of Sales, Saint Vincent de Paul, and Bossuet.

GEOFFREY WEBB

CHRISTIAN CHARITY IN ACTION, by Michel Riquet, S.J.; Burns and Oates, Faith and Fact Books; 8s. 6d.

Stopping short as it does at St Vincent de Paul, this book is necessarily concerned only with describing how charity went into action in the days when, as

far as one can tell, Christians accepted the society in which they lived in much the same way as they did the weather. Authentic Christian behaviour could range from being a kindly slave-owner to selling all one's possessions, freeing and endowing all one's slaves, giving the rest to hospices, orphanages and all in need, and living from then on as a servant in a monastery, like Valeria Melania and her husband in the fifth century. But one wouldn't, apparently, question the institution of slavery. To put charity into action in the construction of society, questioning all institutions and trying to work out how best, precisely at the institutional level, to see that the brotherhood is well served, is in some ways our most important task today, and the notion of it seems to be new, not much illuminated by the actions of earlier generations of Christians. This makes it a little odd to classify this particular volume in the *Faith and Fact* series under 'The Church in the Modern World'. But what it achieves, within its historical limits, is valuable and fascinating. It is amazing how much of vivid, concrete detail P re Riquet has managed to pack into a few pages, making real the work of the deaconries, the xenodochia, the medieval hospitals. It is nice to know that even though very early Christian organized charity was necessarily concentrated chiefly on the household of the faith, the pagan victims of the epidemic in Cyprian's Carthage had Christians to nurse them when almost everyone else had fled; and to hear from the Emperor Julian that 'the impious Galileans feed our people along with their own'. Less pleasant to find the 'deserving poor' as early as the fourth century, when you had to have 'letters of peace' from your bishop to get into the Church's hostelry. Interesting that the tendency to leave everything to the institution did not wait for the Welfare State: Chrysostom complains that 'people rely on the resources of the Church' instead of practising hospitality to strangers themselves, and Jerome criticizes those 'who practise mercy through the services of others and show their goodness by their money, not by their hands'.

Throughout it is the concrete details that are worthwhile. P re Riquet's generalizations are less helpful. Why try to fit in the Crusades and the Inquisition on a 'not un-' basis? How can one justify a blanket reference to the 'schism of Photius and Michael Caerularius'? Do we really need to quote contemporary accusations (even though by Luther) that Lutheranism had halted the practice of charity? We have learnt to be suspicious of very simple and sweeping statements about the dissolution of the monasteries and poverty in England. Why bother with this kind of half-historical apologetics? It always needs so much qualification and counter-statement to get anywhere near the truth. Again, it is so excellent to start the book, before a fine scriptural chapter on 'The Charity of Christ', with a chapter to do justice to pagan as well as to Old Testament charity: then why bother to say that Buddhism (which does not admit caste) 'leaves intact all the injustices and inhumanities bound up with the caste system', considering that for eighteen centuries the Christian Church took slavery for granted. Without any such pushing, the impression still makes itself felt that here, in the kind of action so richly described in this book, there is for

once something discernible to mere observation which, taking its scale into account, remains characteristically Christian.

C. HASTINGS

THE GOLD RING, by T. W. Burke; Darton, Longman and Todd; 9s. 6d.

A high divorce and illegitimate birth rate, widespread sexual promiscuity and abortion, and almost a universal practice of artificial birth control are some of the visible scars inflicted by contemporary society on Christian marriage. The Christian answer, until very recently, has been an inward looking policy which met each new threat with a fresh condemnation and, whenever indicated, further disciplinary regulations for the faithful. Thus, for many Catholics, marrying in the Church has meant the fulfilment of certain requirements (marrying a Catholic, in a Catholic Church, procreating and sending the children to a Catholic School) and little more.

Recently there has been a decisive turning away from this outlook. Thought, within the Church, is being increasingly focussed in a re-examination of God's love in the marriage between Yaweh and his people in the Old Testament; and Christ and his Church since the Incarnation. In these prototypes we can find endless spiritual riches to inspire and guide Christian couples and provide a clear and shining example to those who look at Christianity from afar.

Fr Burke, using material from the French *L'Anneau d'Or* series (hence the title of the book) and adding original material, examines this theme. There are chapters on sacramental grace in marriage, the nature of the sexual act, procreation and the role of the family in society and the Church. The subject is so important and the plan so promising that it is particularly disappointing to report that the book is only partially successful. For too much has been tackled in 134 pages and the presentation is uneven.

Chapter nine, dealing with the problem of birth limitation and the use of the infertile period must be singled out for special criticism. Medical advice was sought before writing it, thus lending authority to the advice given on page 95 (3 days before menstruation and 2 days after it), which as it stands is highly dangerous and under certain circumstances will certainly lead to conception. It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that the use of the infertile period should be based on personal instruction given either by a specially trained physician or at a Catholic Marriage Advisory Council centre. If this is not possible information should be sought by post from the nearest centre, of which there are over 40 in the country now. There is also a repetition of the often quoted statement that the wife is deprived at a time when her sexual desire is maximum. In the light of modern research this is simply not true. In general there is far too much emphasis on the supposed difficulties and little attention is paid to the presence of sacrifice, in the mutual offering of love to God during the period of abstinence, providing a source of grace and an opportunity for love to grow.