

I must admit that the first part startled me on first reading; but Dom Leclercq proves his point from tradition. He explains that traditionally the religious life is 'angelic' in the sense that it resembles the life of angels; he goes on to say that it is like that of the prophets of old. Then he explains how it is 'apostolic', using the term not in the sense of missionary, but because it is apostle-like; for the apostles left all to follow Jesus. It is at this point that the book has its richest vein. The author undoubtedly enlarges one's appreciation of the religious life, and from the principles he enunciates, many problems of the Holy Rule are clarified. Why for instance are monks most carefully warned by St Benedict not to murder or to steal? Read this book and you will probably find the answer.

COLUMBA CARY-ELWES, O.S.B.

ST BENEDICT AND HIS TIMES. By Ildephonse Cardinal Schuster, translated by Gregory J. Roettger, O.S.B. (B. Herder Book Co.; 45s.)

LE SENS DE LA VIE MONASTIQUE. By Louis Bouyer. (Editions Brepols; 85 Bel. francs.)

The two works under review, though their themes are related, differ greatly alike in subject-matter and in treatment. The first deals with the life and historical background of a single great monk, the greatest influence in western monastic history; the second deals not with the history of monasticism but with the spiritual doctrine which underlies it; and the doctrine given does not rest exclusively upon the Benedictine tradition. Indeed, for the greater part it is a statement of the theology of the Christian life as such; and where it deals with specifically monastic doctrine, it owes as much to the Fathers of the Desert and to more recent Eastern monasticism as to St Benedict.

After the tragic destruction of Monte Cassino in 1944, the greatly venerated Benedictine Cardinal Schuster published the work of which this is the American translation, in a splendidly produced and illustrated edition to be sold on behalf of the restoration of the ancient abbey. Cardinal Schuster's wide knowledge of the history of early canon and civil law, of the liturgy and of Italian ecclesiastical history between St Benedict and St Gregory, gives its principle interest to the book, in its interpretation both of the Rule and of the Second Book of St Gregory's Dialogues. Not all the parallels brought forward will be equally convincing to the critical historian; the great strength and charm of the book will be found in its monastic spirit, and in the profound *pietas* which it breathes towards St Benedict and towards Monte Cassino.

Père Louis Bouyer, priest of the Berullian Oratory, is already well known in England, both by personal contacts and by his profound

spiritual and liturgical commentary upon the Liturgy of Holy Week and Easter, *Le Mystère Pascal*. He has now given us a study of the theology and spirituality which underlie the monastic life, a work of depth and beauty, fresh and original in its approach, the work of a poet as well as of a theologian. The present reviewer must admit that he has often found the thought difficult to follow, and before attempting to give a summary of these dense pages he must recognise that sympathetic and repeated reading may not have entirely eliminated the danger of misrepresentation. The book is divided into two parts, each of seven chapters; the first and more important part dealing with the doctrinal basis of the monastic life, the second dealing with its practical realisation. Creation and re-creation in Christ are alike the reflection and the prolongation of that *diastole* and *systole* which are the inner life of the Holy Trinity, wherein the divine life flows out from the Father to the Son, to return in the Holy Spirit to its source. In the same rhythm, creation flows out from the Father, to return to him in a cosmic liturgy of *agape* and *eucharistia*. In the world of pure spirits the Father has realised ideas pre-existing in the *Logos*; in the purely material creation, he has given reality to the ideas of the pure spirits, upon whom material reality in a measure depends and through whom it is borne back into the cosmic liturgy of Return. The Fall of Lucifer and his angels involved the material creation dependent upon them, and thus intercepted as it were its return to its Source. God's reply was the creation of Man—a spiritual being who yet belongs to the material creation and so can be the priest of its return. It is thus man's essential vocation to replace the fallen angels, to be 'un ange de remplacement'. But man in his turn sinned; and God's final victory is achieved through the Mission of the *Logos*, who united mankind to himself and so re-integrates material creation into the cosmic Liturgy of Return, re-uniting through his mission the single lost sheep, man, to the choirs of the pure spirits, the other ninety-nine. But the Return is nevertheless irrevocably the return of a sinful race; hence, for its Head first of all, and then for his members, the Return can only be by the road of death and the cross, made present in the Mass, realised in a life of mortification and penance. Within this austere setting, the Christian takes his place in the great return, seeking God who seeks him individually, travelling towards that share in the life of the angels which is already his in principle through the Ascension of his Head—towards that ultimate safeguarding of all human values as God sees them, through their renunciation in this life, for which Père Bouyer uses the expression 'eschatological humanism'. It is in this setting that the monastic life must be seen; the monk is one who lives this Return with the maximum of intensity, his life being defined by the Seeking of God; and the

monastic life is the angelic life, the life which is man's true vocation, the life to which death alone can give the entry. Hence the structure of monastic observance, analysed in the second half of the book: the emptying of creatures through the three fundamental renunciations, through solitude and silence, through the mortifications of which work is the most fundamental; the filling of the void thus achieved with prayer, in its twofold rhythm of *lectio divina* and *opus Dei*; the sacramental realisation of the whole through the mass.

It will be clear from this imperfect summary that Père Bouyer envisages the monastic life in the setting of a profound statement of the whole theology of creation and re-creation. It is not possible in a review to give an idea of the doctrinal richness of these pages, saturated as they are in biblical and patristic theology. If the book is written primarily for monks, it is also addressed to all Christians, both because its fundamental theme is our life in Christ, and because Père Bouyer sees in the monastic life an austere reminder for all of the essential other-worldliness of Christianity, a warning to a complacent 'humanisme devot' that there is, as he says, 'no "christianity without tears"': 'eschatological humanism', he tells us in the dedication, is the 'idée-mère' of the book. It would be unjust to say that the emphasis is upon death and the cross rather than upon life and the resurrection; but certainly Père Bouyer writes with the purpose of shaking our complacency, and will not allow us to forget that it is as sinners that we have to seek God, and that the only road to life is through death—through the death of Christ and through our configuration with it. And just as the theme of the book is a challenge to all Christians, so is it an exacting examination of conscience for monks. There are searching pages on the ways in which we instinctively strive to compensate the renunciations of the three fundamental counsels, and upon the exigencies of mortification in sleep, in food, in comfort. He warns us against the tendency to over-spiritualise, and so to volatilise, the indispensable material basis of monastic asceticism. One would need to be complacent indeed not to be grateful to Père Bouyer for these pages. And yet it has seemed to more than one reviewer—and surely rightly—not that he has exaggerated the exigencies of the Gospel here, for that is impossible; but that he has given too univocal a picture of them, and that some of these pages could lead to tension and to discouragement. *Le Sens de la Vie Monastique* has nearly been a great book; it fails to be one through a certain lack of wisdom which leads us to lay it down with as much misgiving as enthusiasm. Nor is this flaw wholly accidental to the thought of the book.

It will be seen that *Le Sens de la Vie Monastique* is essentially a piece of speculative theology; and the framework of its speculations is given

above all by the neo-platonism of the Greek Fathers. The thought of the book raises many problems of method. Some of its key-chapters are built round classical images of biblical, patristic or early monastic tradition, the implications of these images being drawn out with sometimes ruthless realism. It cannot be questioned that the mind of the ancients was more realist than ours, and our tendency to dilute and rationalise the image weakens our understanding of their thought. And yet the part played by such images in the structure of the book has brought with it a very real element of obscurity, and is in some measure responsible for its deeper flaws. There is a close connection, for instance, between its teaching upon mortification, and the analysis of the idea of death. The book would have gained, not lost, in clarity and force as well as in measure, from the classical theology of the theological virtues, of the virtue of religion, of perfection and of the counsels. Again, there is continuous tradition in monastic spirituality, and we are still disciples of the Fathers of the Desert. But this does not mean that they remain the norm in all things; there has been growth also, in wisdom and insight. For instance, Père Bouyer tells us that the monks went out into the desert not primarily to seek solitude, but to challenge the evil spirits to combat in what was their own territory *par excellence*. Is the change of emphasis that has taken place here necessarily an impoverishment? To limit oneself to the phenomenology of monastic spirituality has its dangers; methodical theology may be misused to dilute and to evaporate, but rightly used it is the indispensable safeguard and vindication of the data of tradition.

But if the method underlying the book involves weaknesses, it is also the source of its great freshness and power of inspiration. For inspiring much of it certainly is. Père Bouyer defines monastic life by its essential task of seeking God, and he has brought out wonderfully the personal character of the quest—personal alike in the God who is sought and in the manner of the seeking. The book is penetrated by a profound sense of God, of reverence, of awe, which owe much to Otto as well as to the traditions of the Bérullian Oratory. From the sense of reverence for God comes also the emphasis upon the realisation of sin and upon the duty of penance. There is throughout an 'interiority' sometimes lacking in recent writings upon the liturgy—see for instance the admirable study of the scriptural basis of Denys and of the *theologia negativa* and also the vindication of the purely eremitical life from the charge of being neo-platonist rather than Christian in its inspiration. (But we cannot accept the statement made on page 209 that for St Benedict 'le coenobium est et n'est que l'école de la solitude'.) The great strength of the book lies in the use made of biblical theology, and the chapters on *lectio divina* and on *opus Dei* are particularly rich—the

latter consists principally of a quite masterly summary of the theology and spirituality of the psalms, which would be well worth translating and printing apart, even if the rest of the book does not find a translator.

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EACH HOUR REMAINS. By a Carmelite Nun. (Sands; 10s. 6d.)

In a review of a former book by the author of the above, *The Catholic Times* says: 'This book has that well-rounded, all-of-a-piece quality that comes from the pen of one who is a master of a subject—in this case, the capacity to hand on the ideals of perfection not as cold text-book principles, but as a life to be lived'. These words apply fully also to the book we are considering here. Really, the title explains the book, for it expresses in three words the substance upon which the whole depends. 'Each hour remains'—that is, nothing is lost, no time is wasted, no apparent loss or failure is really so—provided that God alone and his will are the aim towards which all action tends. As 'Sister Imelda'—the delightful old Nun who is the chief exponent of the wise sayings with which this book abounds—declares: it is not the *results* of work done for God's sake that are so important, but the *efforts* to carry it out, the will and intentions. 'Each hour of life', she says, 'stands by itself; there it remains—accomplished, lived; it affects the next, but in itself it stands for ever—complete, unalterable. Those hours were not packed with result; they were packed with effort.' (p. 225.) This attitude of soul—that nothing matters in itself, but only as regards God—does not mean that there is any lack of interest in what goes on in the world, in human life in general. The object of the writer is certainly, on the one hand, to declare the need of not only the contemplative spirit and attitude, but of the actual cloistered life of contemplative religious. On the other hand, her object is also and equally to point out that the active spirit and the life of action is no less necessary—that both contemplation and action, in short, must be united against the enemy of God and mankind. Both the contemplative and the active spirits must co-operate in the service of God and of man.

Chapter IX, entitled *The Contemplative in the World*, is refreshing to read as the attitude of an enclosed Carmelite towards this important question. The writer of *Each Hour Remains* declares quite frankly that 'the world has need of contemplatives *in* the world and the gift of contemplation has nothing whatever to do with the grace of enclosure: it is possible to have either without the other. So let those who have no enclosure take courage and cultivate their gift.' (pp. 94 and 95.) Nothing could be plainer than this; nor more encouraging. The author goes on: 'This vocation [to contemplation]—for vocation it is—is not meant to be used selfishly . . . contemplatives, as much as anyone else, are included in the Holy Father's call to action and to energy and to