

## Reviews

THE CRUCIBLE OF LOVE, A Study of the Mysticism of St Teresa of Jesus and St John of the Cross, by E. W. Truemann Dicken; Darton, Longman and Todd, 63s.

This thorough and well documented study of the two Carmelite mystics, whose teaching has been classical in the Church ever since, provides a reliable and illuminating statement of their mystical theology and establishes the substantial identity of their teachings. A particularly valuable chapter shows that the spiritual way taught by these two masters is in entire conformity with the teaching of the New Testament.

The problem presented by the fact that, whereas St Teresa requires devotion to the humanity of Jesus at all stages of contemplation, St John in his authentic text insists, for the contemplative, on a prayer devoid of any image or concept whatsoever is solved by the consideration that what St Teresa has in mind is not meditation on our Lord but simply an affectionate recollection of him, which passes over into the prayer of imageless contemplation.

The degrees of prayer as taught by St Teresa and St John are compared. Analysis of the accounts given by St Teresa of these stages shows an inconsistent terminology. In particular the prayer of quiet described as the Second Water of the *Life* cannot be identified with the prayer of the Fourth Mansions to which she gives the same name. The former is an acquired, an active prayer, though however at its climax passing over into an infused passive prayer—personally I should not equate 'acquired' and 'infused' with 'active' and 'passive'—the latter is a stage even higher than infused quiet, in fact the prayer of union. The author, that is to say, disproves the identification made first by Poulain in 1904 (not, as he says, by Zimmerman in 1906, who follows Poulain) between the Fourth Mansions and the Third Water, the Sixth Mansions and the Fourth Water.

Since the Illuminative Way is treated before the Unitive Mr Dicken's account of St Teresa's degrees of prayer is given in two separate chapters, 7 and 15. This disjunction may perhaps explain a certain obscurity in his relation of the *Life* and the *Mansions* accounts. I should have welcomed a clearer statement of the correspondence between them which in fact the reader must to a considerable extent puzzle out by scrutiny and comparison of scattered statements and incomplete, though correct diagrams.

For the first time to my knowledge an English critic compares St John's drawing of the Mount with the engraving by Diego de Astor published as the frontispiece of the *editio princeps*: he shows that in many respects the engraver has departed from the saint's meaning.

'All attentiveness to God is in essence mental prayer' (85). Mr Dicken makes the valuable point that, because contemplative prayer is still too commonly

relegated to the religious life and regarded as a mark of holiness, the widespread occurrence of its early stage involving incapacity to employ thought or imagination in prayer—or at least, I would add, considerable difficulty in doing so—is too frequently ignored (168). His contention is in fact reinforced by a questionnaire conducted by the American Carthusian Dom Verner Moore, who has found that occasional touches of the prayer of quiet are in fact experienced even by beginners in the way of prayer. (*The Life of Man with God*, p. 193.) As regards the ligature, however, this incapacity to meditate, I would raise the question whether an intellectual realisation of God's utter transcendence, that we cannot know what he is, may not of itself preclude or hinder the employment of imagination or thought in prayer.

The supreme unitive prayer known as mystical marriage or the transforming union, though, as the writer points out, the latter term is not employed by our saints, is a complete and habitual conformity of the subject's will to God, in virtue of which, analogously to the *communicatio idiomatum* between the two natures of Christ, there is 'a sharing of attributes and operations' between God and the soul so that the soul loves God with his own love, knows him with his own knowledge, though still in the obscurity of its transcendence. 'Conformity' however seems to me too ambiguous a term. For it could mean no more than two distinct wills willing the same object, whereas in fact the soul's natural self-assertive will is progressively replaced by the will of God, which is God himself, received by a created will purely receptive. There is, as indeed Mr Dicken says, 'an interpenetration' of substance between God and the soul which communicates God to the soul. It has been suggested in fact that, although God cannot be the metaphysical form of any creature, he may be, as it were, its extrinsic form, its superform, a suggestion encouraged surely by the Christmas prayer 'that we may be found in his form'.

Mr Dicken regards this conformity of will as the substance of mystical prayer, all else being accessory and unnecessary for the attainment of perfection. With his meaning I entirely agree. I would indeed maintain that the contemplative's experience of this union is mainly dependent on natural factors, in particular the subject's psycho-physical constitution, whether and to what degree he possesses the quality I would term transparency, namely the capacity for conscious awareness of what passes in the depths of his spirit. Consequently there is no fixed correspondence between a degree of mystical experience and a degree of union, and many opaque souls of advanced sanctity may never be aware of their union. Nevertheless, though the union is the foundation of mystical experience, it is not the experience, and the terms 'mystic', 'mystical', 'mysticism' should refer to the latter. Moreover strictly speaking the subject of the union with God experienced by the mystic is not the will but the centre or apex of the spirit, which is the root of the will and other operations, though expressed pre-eminently by the will.

Another particularly valuable feature of this book is the discussion of the problem presented by the two recensions of the *Spiritual Canticle*. Though not

claiming that all the difficulties have been solved, Mr Dicken in my opinion establishes that the longer recension B is the saint's revision of the shorter A, though even in the later text anomalies occur which, he believes, St John intended to remove.

'Interior peace co-exists with anxiety to serve God and with aridity in prayer, a paradox . . . which is experienced increasingly as the soul progresses to higher stages of the spiritual life.' A comprehensive and penetrating illumination of the life of contemplative prayer. I cannot, however, be convinced as Mr Dicken is convinced, by the doctrine of utter denial preached by St John in the opening chapters of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. 'Detachment requires . . . that we shall desire . . . no possessions.' (51). 'We are made for God *alone*.' (50). 'Affection,' he quotes, 'for God and affection for created things are contraries and so . . . cannot co-exist in a single will' (128). Such teaching surely ignores the fact that in this life our fullest knowledge of God is not essential but existential, an embrace in the darkness. So long as this is the case God *alone* cannot suffice. We also need his created reflections of which we do possess essential knowledge. Nor are affection for God and affection for his works contrary. What indeed would an artist think of a bride who on the ground that she loved him alone refused to interest herself in his art? Certainly detachment is indispensable, the readiness to accept God's will if he should deprive us of any created good. But this detachment would lose its spiritual value if we did not appreciate and desire what we are called upon to surrender. St John in fact in this passage, which I can bear witness was a stumbling block, a scandal, when first read, is repeating a traditional ascetic doctrine refuted even in his own practice. For he dearly loved his family and friends, and found in natural beauty an incentive to prayer. And he was even loathe to leave his native Castile for Andalusia though of course obeying without question his superior's order. To require from all souls drawn to contemplative prayer the deliberate choice of everything most repugnant and painful is to debar a multitude of souls from access to states of loving and peaceful prayer which, if not unitive, are truly mystical. If spiritual writers, even canonised ones, would not make impossible and unrealistic demands as being the inner way to God, the communion of prayer would attract many more souls.

St Teresa was 'a woman of a degree of sanctity unique in her epoch'. (18) How are we to measure degrees of holiness as between St Teresa and Sts Catharine Ricci and Magdalen de Pazzi? Intellectually she was surely far superior. But holier?

'True humility accepts the *fact* that *all* others are better than we are ourselves.' Truly a self-contradictory 'fact'. How can everybody be worse than everybody else? If A is worse than B, C, etc., B, etc., cannot be worse than A. Such obvious unreality destroys a virtue which must be founded on truth. The average decent man is not worse than Hitler, Stalin or Nero. Why should he pretend to be? And what source of pride can it be that he is better than a minority of villains? In fact, humility has no concern with a man's place in a holiness exam.

If St John, Mr Dicken observes, had objected to devotion to the sacred human-

ity, he would have been 'a Buddhist or a pantheist'. Not necessarily. There are non-Christian mystics who are theists, e.g. the post-Christian Jewish mystics.

The author raises a difficult problem where he contrasts St Teresa's praise of her directors individually with her strictures upon them taken collectively. Possibly she found the claims of truth and charity hard to reconcile. I cannot, however, agree that her 'directors pressed her urgently to give up her devotion to the sacred humanity in time of prayer' (285). There is no evidence for this and it is most unlikely. Surely what caused Teresa such suffering was her directors' distrust and dislike of her visionary and ecstatic experiences.

Baker does not, as Mr Dicken supposes (292), see his prayer of Forced Acts as the beginning of infused prayer but the prayer of Aspirations infused and moved by God—they are indeed a distinctive variation of the prayer of quiet.

'Body and soul . . . are one single entity . . . a human is a single psychosomatic whole' (329). 'The saint (John of the Cross) is nothing if not an exponent of the doctrine that the human being, body and soul is one single and *indivisible* entity' (341). How then could he, like all other Christians, believe that body and soul are in fact divided by death? This contradiction however pinpoints my personal conviction that if St Thomas' Aristotelian psychology is true, and there are undoubtedly powerful arguments in its favour, survival of the individual soul is an intrinsic impossibility. Personal immortality is, I believe, consistent only with a Platonic psychology.

'God's will is done at all times by everyone and everything.' I cannot believe the hideous record of human cruelty and appalling natural catastrophes has been willed by God. His omnipotence should not be affirmed at the cost of his goodness. No good or wise man indeed could permit any suffering not indispensable to achieve a greater good. We must therefore postulate, not indeed like the Manichees a positive evil principle at war with God, but a negative one, the intrinsic defect of created being, comparatively unreal as it is, which, to speak anthropomorphically, confronts God with the alternative of permitting evil or refraining from a good which renders the inevitable evil worthwhile. Moreover one must believe that his providence can and will overrule evil to the spiritual benefit of all who obey and trust him.

'Rational thought and action, possible to humanity alone of all material creation' (333). Though this *obiter dictum* cannot be strictly disproved, in view of our knowledge of the extent of the material universe it is highly improbable, if not utterly incredible.

Finally the account of Quietism is unworthy of a book otherwise so excellent. It is impossible to discuss Mr Dicken's arraignment in detail. Suffice it to ask: If the Quietists were so obviously and flagrantly unorthodox as they are here depicted how came it that Molinos' *Guia Espiritual* bore for many years the *imprimatur* of the Master of the Apostolic Palace and he was condemned only when it became known that his direction had been in many respects mistaken and was twisted by a sexual morbidity? Did Madame Guyon receive honourable treatment at the hands of Bossuet? Did she not die in the communion of the

Church? Were not Malaval and Canfield's masterpiece victims of an anti-quietist scare? Generally speaking what real Quietism there was did but exaggerate and misapply sound principles enunciated by the Carmelite school.

E. I. WATKIN

MARY: A HISTORY OF DOCTRINE AND DEVOTION. Vol. I, by Hilda Graef; Sheed and Ward, 42s.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY: ESSAYS BY ANGLICANS, edited by E. L. Mascall and H. S. Box; Darton, Longman and Todd, 22s. 6d.

Of all the votes taken in the Vatican Council so far only one, that on the best place for the schema on our Lady, has divided the fathers evenly. This fact alone indicates the extent of the contemporary crisis in mariology. Certainly there is no question, in anyone's mind, of reducing our Lady's place in Catholic life; but there is a question of *locating* that place more accurately. The increasing tendency in theology to see the Christian mystery as a whole has highlighted the dangerous isolation of much of our mariology. Because few areas in theology arouse such strong emotional reactions, resolving the crisis becomes a difficult and delicate business. But the crisis *must* be resolved, by a genuine internal dialogue, before mariology can find its proper place in ecumenical discussions. As Canon Laurentin said recently—'What dialogue can there be with Protestant or Orthodox, if we do not, amongst ourselves, talk the same language: if we have not found our own unity in the matter?'

Miss Graef's book is important because a detailed knowledge of the history of marian doctrine is essential for this internal dialogue. This is a book of rich scholarship and calm, objective judgement; Miss Graef is not trying to prove anything, she is merely concerned with the facts. Throughout the book the fathers and theologians are left to speak for themselves as far as possible, but when the author does intervene to sum up or to synthesise, she does it clearly and incisively, although at times more evaluation might have been possible without compromising her objectivity.

The chapter on the twelfth century makes it clear (although Miss Graef does not draw out the implications) that the disastrous distinction between the justice of Christ and the mercy of Mary rests on the erroneous and unbiblical conception of God's justice that vitiates so much of the soteriology of the period, and a correction of emphasis here cannot fail to operate, eventually, in the field of marian piety as well.

Some people may find her frankness disturbing. She does not try to disguise the fact that decadence in devotional language about our Lady has a long history. Going hand-in-hand with authentic development, this decadence reaches its climax in the writings of Bernadine of Siena in the West and Isidore Glabas in the East. Bernadine can write 'only the blessed Virgin Mary has done more for God, or just as much, as God has done for all mankind' (p. 318), and