

work is too highly technical and conceived in a spirit very remote from any that can be called religious.

If the two books under review can be confidently recommended as suitable auxiliaries to *lectio divina*, it is because they avoid at least one of these strictures. The French volume (consisting of four promising studies on the prophets by two young Holy Ghost Fathers, ably chaperoned by an already accomplished exegete in this field, the Abbé Steinmann, who also contributes a study) may be described as a critical *haute vulgarisation* of the important but highly technical work of the Scandinavian scholars, Engnell, Haldar, and Kapelrud.

Dr Farrer's book is certainly not lacking in high technicality. Its reading demands a sustained application if the brain is not to be seized up in an arithmetical whirl. Yet quite apart from his attractive style which is expert to spur on more slow-moving minds to face the seemingly endless series of hurdles erected by his swift intelligence, it is the general spirit which inspires his work which makes his book more than an intellectual exercise. For in Dr Farrer the typological exegesis of the Fathers has had a brilliant resurgence in our days. This may not be a book that can be read quietly at the prie-dieu (nor for that matter in the fireside armchair). But if it drives the reader to his desk to jot down remarks together with frequent consultation of his gospel text, the result is not necessarily less of a spiritual enrichment.

It would be wrong, however, to stress the ingenuity of this book without also mentioning the humility of the author. This is a sequel to his *A Study in St Mark*, and in it he freely confesses to mistakes made in the earlier book. Due no doubt to this sobering fact the present book has less of the finish of the earlier as well as of *A Rebirth of Images*. As a consequence we are given rather a closer glimpse of the writer's workshop, with some still undeveloped work still on the bench. No doubt this readiness with a *retractio* will have raised a few cynical eyebrows in certain academic circles where a strange premium is put on intellectual impotence. But for many other readers this further link with St Augustine will be a winsome feature of Dr Farrer's book.

RONALD TORBET, O.P.

THE ASCETIC LIFE. THE FOUR CENTURIES ON CHARITY. By St Maximus the Confessor. Ancient Christian Writers, Vol. XXI. Translated by Polycarp Sherwood, O.S.B., S.T.D. (Longmans; 25s.)

Growth in the ascetic life and growth in charity are for St Maximus two aspects of a single process, and therefore *The Ascetic Life* begins with the love of God for men revealed in the Incarnation, and proceeds to an analysis of the way our love for God is shown by obedience to his commandments, summed up in Christ's commandment of love,

while *The Four Centuries on Charity* are largely concerned with the purification of our passions brought about by charity. St Maximus is well aware that it is the same vital force of desire and love that is expended in gross passions or sublimated and turned to God: 'For him whose mind is continually with God, even his concupiscence is increased above measure into a divinely burning love . . .' He is perhaps too negative in his attitude towards natural human things, but we have to remember that both these works were written for monks, and human love is renounced only for the sake of a more inclusive love: 'He that loves nothing human loves all men'. 'The friends of Christ love all sincerely, but are not loved by all; the friends of the world neither love all nor are loved by all.'

The translations are clear and well bring out the serene wisdom of St Maximus. The introduction does not make easy reading and produces a rather confused impression, particularly in the sketch of the life of St Maximus; the summary of his teaching repays a careful reading with a deepened understanding of the works here translated by placing them in their context in St Maximus's theology.

JEROME SMITH, O.P.

PATRISTIC HOMILIES ON THE GOSPEL. Translated and edited by M. F. Toal. (Mercier Press; 30s.)

FUNDAMENTALS OF CATHOLIC DOGMA. By Ludwig Ott. Translated by Patrick Lynch. (Mercier Press; 30s.)

Fr Toal's preface does not contain much actual information, but it can be gathered that he is adapting and translating a seventeenth-century compilation of patristic homilies on the Sunday gospels—to each gospel some four or five homilies, preceded by the relevant portion of St Thomas's *Catena Aurea*. The translations are made from 'the best texts now available'; unfortunately they are made in the heavy nineteenth-century conventions of 'translator's English', so that actual comparison was necessary to convince me that the old *Library of the Fathers* translation was not being used. So this volume and the three to follow will lie gathering dust on presbytery shelves, where fresh modern prose might have done so much for Sunday preaching, might even have given, to use the translator's words, 'models and sermons to which the people will listen eagerly, as they listened to them long ago'.

If Fr Toal's translation is uninspired, Dr Lynch's is catastrophic. He seems to have made no attempt to get away from the Latin and German idioms of his original, and often enough his meaning can only be got at by translating back. The value of such a book, with its 'proof-texts' from Scripture, potted patristics, cut-and-dried assurance, is in any case not easy to assess. Perhaps it may, as the present Editor suggests, be