

can be discerned woven into the fabric of the Acts, and that these are authentic records.

The following chapter examines the place of martyrdom in the life of the city and its dependence on such features of urban life as judicial procedures, intellectual culture, the role of the mob, the great festivals, the brothels, the imperial cult and other urban rituals. The characteristically Christian pattern of martyrdom, then, emerges in a way which is dependent on the distinctly non-Christian life of the cities where it appears.

The fourth chapter deals with the phenomenon of "voluntary martyrdom", which occasionally becomes actual suicide, and the efforts of the church to put a stop to it. Later sources played down this feature of the history of martyrdom, but we are presented with what appeared to contemporaries as a kind of collective insanity. It appears in much the same way to the modern reader, and one can only wish for a longer work from Bowersock in which the psychological, cultural and theological aspects of this movement might be explored, especially the subjective elements in the stories of people who queued up to die or threw themselves into fires. Something more of an explanation than "pathological desire" (p.7) would surely be illuminating. The four-lecture format of the present work allows only a brief glimpse of the Stoic background, the horror which the movement aroused, and the opposition of the views of Tertullian and those of Cyprian, Augustine and Clement. Augustine's "ringing denunciation of suicide" may also be related to his use of the "fear of death" motif in his dispute with Pelagius. Robert Dodaro has shown how he attributes a "lingering mortal fear" to the dying apostles and martyrs, a sign of the incompleteness of the healing process, the continuing failure of humanity even after baptism, and the need for grace at the moment of death - even among the saints.

Four short appendices expand usefully on some of the themes in the corpus of the book. The whole is a pleasure to read - one of those rich seams that can be mined more than once. Shedding its light on "the dark space between the Gospels and hagiography", it shows the historical emergence of a concept which proved one of the most powerful in the Christian imagination - and not only for the understanding of violent death - from Athanasius' description of Anthony's life as a "daily martyrdom", echoed by Martin's hagiographer Sulpicius Severus and by the "white martyrdom" of Irish monastic asceticism, right up to the modern day. A pleasure to read, but a disturbing one.

GILBERT MÁRKUS OP

**DOM COLUMBA MARMION: A BIOGRAPHY** by Mark Tierney OSB.  
*Columba Press. 1994. £11.99*

Anyone who like me is a constant trawler of secondhand bookshops knows that the works of Abbot Marmion are to be found there in abundance, all with the bookplates of convents and seminaries up and

down the country. He was clearly zealously read before the Council and equally zealously thrown out afterwards. Marmion's trilogy *Christ The Life of The Soul*, *Christ The Life of The Monk*, and *Christ in His Mysteries* were hailed as spiritual classics in his lifetime and many an elderly priest today recalls them fondly. They are, however, quite hard going until one realises that they were never written as books at all, but are rather Marmion's very densely packed lecture notes-crammed with patristic and scriptural references and needing to be read slowly and pondered over; they are in fact excellent reference books but almost impossible to digest if you set out to read them from page one to the end. Because of this, it is hard to come away from them with any firm grasp of Marmion's particular spirituality, and harder still to recapture any sense of what made him such a spellbinding retreat-giver. Unlike Knox, whose humour is still on the page, all Marmion's wit and blarney must have been *ad libs* not preserved for us in these worthy tomes, in which his personality has somehow been edited out. All the more reason then to seize on a new book about Marmion hoping for the key to the man and his writings. I opened Mark Tierney's biography eagerly.

My first disappointment was that, in spite of the blurb on the back calling him "one of the most influential spiritual writers of the early twentieth century" and naming the famous trilogy, there was almost nothing about the writings in the book at all. The trilogy is named like a mantra on p. 238 and again on p. 273 but the contents of the books are never analysed anywhere, although we are tantalisingly told on p. 250 that "his name was on the lips of many Catholics in England who had read *Christ The Life of The Soul*" and on p. 238, without any explanation, that "he had become almost overnight a best selling author" and that "his books were spiritual classics". This cannot be, I cried, and turned feverishly for the index. There is no index. But I did run to earth a section headed "The Intellectual Life of Maredsous under Marmion" on p. 272. I expected a beefy chapter; alas, the book ends on p. 273, half a page later. How could you write a book about Marmion and do this?

So there is nothing on the writings. Is there anything on the man? Here I was not disappointed; Mark Tierney has done a lot of research and produced a well documented account of Marmion's career from seminary professor to venerable abbot. The early years of monastic life are particularly well drawn, perhaps because here Tierney allows the human side of his subject to break through- later he is too relentlessly laudatory, too much the Vice-Postulator of the Cause to risk anything. But the miseries Marmion endured as a novice are vividly told: the slights and humiliations that only a religious community knows how to inflict, particularly on an older man, one already used to a certain respect in the world; the anguish at seeing contact with friends and family diminishing; the jealousies in the house; the superior who envied him his popularity with penitents and who said "I had to make him suffer"—how true it all rings.

The later career is given a certain hagiographical gloss which I think

is a pity. We could admit surely that Marmion was wrong to have lionised Aelred Carlyle and rushed him to ordination - what harm would there be in admitting that Marmion too fell for that extraordinary charlatan, when so many others did the same? And as for Marmion's quixotic idea at the end of the First War to grab the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem while its German monks were in exile and turn it into a bit of the Holy Land that was for ever Belgium—can't we smile and agree it was nonsense? To know that this holy man made a few errors of judgement would not detract from his charm but only make the reader believe in him as a real person. As the book climbs through Marmion's years of greatness one believes this less and less.

And so an uneven work. There is real scholarship, but the book disappoints. And there are jarring notes: the diocese of Menevia is only spelt correctly twice in all the many times it occurs in the text; Lord Curzon is bizarrely referred to as "Earl Curzon" throughout ( I know it is a *point d'honneur* for the Irish to know nothing of English titles, but even so); and Paray le Monial we are told is a Shrine of Our Lady. But it was the patronising footnotes, in which, for instance, we are gravely informed that the Huns mean the Germans, and so do the Boches. Who, for heaven's sake, does he think will be buying this book who won't know what a biretta is ("special clerical hat") and that *Regina Coeli* means Queen of Heaven?

JAMES-FRANCIS FRIEDENTHAL

**THE CIVILIZATION OF LOVE, Proceedings of a Symposium for the International Year of the Family, edited by Denis Riches, *Family Publications*, 1995. Pp 107, £5-95**

Occasionally, book reviews appear to be welcome excuses for reviewers to simply propose their own theses on the subject of the book under consideration. And indeed that temptation is often a great one. In the case of this present work, however, the temptation is of an opposite kind: I am inclined simply to present a string of quotations from the book, without further comment at all. The contributions in this slim volume speak in a far more stimulating, humorous, and convincing way about the 'civilization of love' (i.e. the kingdom of God) than I am able to do. However, I shall try to preserve something of a Golden Mean between laziness and self-indulgence.

The theme of all the contributions is the family. The contributors are all Catholics, and so in a way the theme is 'the Catholic family'. But 'Catholic', here, must not be taken in a denominational sense. The word has two meanings (as the Catechism reminds us: CCC 830-831). First, fullness, completeness; and secondly, universal. In the first place, then, the contributors plumb something of the human and God-given depth of the family and of its purposes; and in the second place, the family is presented as the key building block in society for the construction of the 'civilization of love'.