

It will have been noticed that the translation does not always read well; it must be borne in mind that St Bonaventure's Latin, which can be magnificent (as in his prayer for use after Mass, once upon a time well-known), is very often impossible to render in any really satisfying way. Cousins breaks up long sentences and lyrical passages into 'sense-lines'. Sometimes this comes off, but sometimes one has the sense of being spoon-fed in a quite absurd way. *The Life of St Francis* begins thus:

1 *There was a man*
in the town of Assisi
Francis by name,¹
whose memory is held in benediction²
because God in his generosity
foreordained goodly blessings for him³
— phrases which can be found in the Bible are italicized throughout with references in footnotes. In this translation of the *Legenda Maior* the miracles attributed to the Saint after his death are omitted, but there are still many stories of marvels; people who read books on spirituality nowadays (if one may judge from the large sales of *The Cloud of Unknowing*

in recent years) are not looking, usually, for that kind of thing. Father Ignatius Brady, O.F.M. in his authoritative Preface, describes Bonaventure as 'devoted from childhood onward to his Seraphic Father in very deed and truth'. It might have been pointed out that, although Bonaventure was thoroughly imbued with the 'Franciscan spirit' he did not feel called upon to imitate him in everything. Let us grant that the clericalization of the Order was a necessary and therefore a legitimate development of the Franciscan idea: it remains that Bonaventure recognized in himself a sub-vocation to the academic life which differentiated him sharply from Francis. To adapt some remarks of Gilson's in this connection, you may be able to pray well when you are frozen and starving, but you will not be able to write good lectures. Since I have confined myself largely to criticisms of the book, I must emphasize, in case it should not be obvious, that there are many fine things to be found in it.

ILLTYD TRETOWAN O.S.B.

THE LADDER OF MONKS AND TWELVE MEDITATIONS by Guigo II. Translated by Edmund Colledge OSA and James Walsh SJ. *Mowbrays*, 1978. pp. 157 £3.95

In 1970 Colledge and Walsh published a critical edition of Guigo II, with a French translation by a Carthusian, in *Sources Chrétiennes*. The present volume in English gives English readers access to this work. The Introduction is basically the same; the Latin text is not given, but the editors give us their own translation into English.

There can be no doubt about the importance and interest of Guigo II. His *Scala Claustralium* is one of the most attractive short works of medieval monastic spirituality, and in its day it enjoyed a considerable vogue, as the manuscript tradition shows. The Meditations were not so popular, but they retain their value as first class specimens of a kind of reflection on scripture at which medieval monks (and some modern evangelicals) excel, in which texts galore are woven into a richly suggestive, if quite unsystematic, whole.

The editors' introduction in the English volume differs from that in the earlier

French volume in two ways. First of all, the detailed and useful account of the textual tradition is omitted, and this is sensible, since there is to be no presentation of the Latin text. And the report of the fourteenth century English translation is expanded, containing much longer quotations (modernised) than the French version did. This too is an obvious improvement for the English edition. Apart from this, there are only minor alterations in the new introduction, mostly due to reviewers' comments on the French.

Since the introduction is not, then, a new work, it calls for little comment now. I would only mention one point: it seems to me that the editors exaggerate the anti-intellectualism both of Guigo himself and of the so-called Western mystical tradition.

The English translation is curiously uneven. It is a much looser rendering than the one given in the French edition, and at times the translators seem rather to have lost their way. But on the whole it is

an imaginative and expressive representation of Guigo's Latin, and it makes these works available to English readers in a form which is not too distorting, and for this we can be sincerely grateful.

Unfortunately, though, the translators do not seem entirely to have escaped from that inattentiveness to detail which appears to have reached epidemic proportions among present day translators. For instance, they several times get connexions wrong, either by mistranslating connecting particles or by supplying wrong ones. *Etiam* at least twice becomes "for", which inevitably disrupts the meaning (pp. 91, 126); *enim*, on the other hand, at least once becomes "yet" (p. 89). Funny things also happen to tenses. For instance, the hope *et fiet lux* at the end of Meditation V becomes "and there was light", which ruins a powerful conclusion.

On p. 83 Guigo's image of a text of scripture being like a grape which one chews to extract the sweetness goes sadly awry, because the translation suggests that a person examines the grape *after* having put it into his mouth; there is nothing in the original to justify this.

There are, I am afraid, quite a few passages which suffer from this kind of carelessness.

At least twice the translators are evidently too coy to reproduce Guigo's robust medieval imagery. All the references to drunkenness in Meditation XI (which makes a lot of use of *bibite et inebriabimini* from the Canticle) are expurgated, considerably reducing the force of the Meditation. And in Meditation IX Guigo is quite clearly taking *eructavit* in Ps 44 at its face value, when he says that David had eaten previously to doing it. He ate and then he belched. This is too much for the translators, who make out that "He had eaten and drunk. and now his heart burst forth in song".

Meditation XI, in fact, is a disaster throughout – the only part of the book which merits such a complaint. The Lord is apparently holding a children's party, the "good cheer" being "lovely and sweet". The whole thing is then riddled with petty misunderstandings and mistranslations.

Occasionally the reader is likely to be misled by apparent technical terms, which

are introduced gratuitously by the translators. For instance, the reference to the "active life" on p. 97 disguises a simple *honesta actio*, and the "spiritual senses" on p. 133 hide a perfectly straightforward appeal to intellectual understanding. Conversely, the reference to "union with Christ" in *Scala IX* ought to have been retained, as this is a valuable piece of evidence that this phrase, which later plays an important part in the jargon of psychological mystical theology, means something quite different in medieval spirituality: for Guigo "union" is something which cannot be identified with any special state of awareness. It is as much there when the experience of "contemplation" is over as it is when it is consciously felt.

One of the difficulties of translating medieval texts is that they play in the most complex ways with minute verbal links between different texts. Guigo does this, for instance, in Meditation IV, juggling with *confige timore tuo carnes meas, quicumque sunt Christi carnem suam crucifixerunt, and Christo confixus sum*. The translators make no attempt to reproduce this, but at least they ought to have alerted the reader to it with a footnote, as the coherence of the Meditation is considerably weakened without it.

The notes to the translation are all references to scriptural texts which the editors consider Guigo to be quoting or echoing. They have spotted several more since their Sources Chretiennes edition. In a text so riddled with scriptural allusions, this is inevitably a rather hazardous game to play. I am not convinced by all the references cited. But there are one or two allusions which seem to me to be clearly present and which the editors have not mentioned. I am sure that there is a reference to Romans 9:16 in *Scala V* 110f, and I think that this affects the translation. Also a reference to the Canticle in *Scala V* 90, which is noted in the French and which is surely correct and interesting, is omitted in the English.

Having said all this, however, it must be recognised that, by and large, this is a readable and tolerably fair version that we have been given here of a text which deserves to be much more widely known. It is

a text not only for scholars and historians, but for anyone who is concerned with

christian spirituality in theory or in practice.

SIMON TUGWELL O. P.

WHAT IS A GOSPEL? *The genre of the canonical Gospels* by Charles H. Talbert *SPCK London 1978. Fortress Press 1977 pp 147 paperback £3.50*

This is an important subject but not a good book. The approach is polemical rather than heuristic. Basic issues, like what 'genre' is and how it can be defined, and whether the four canonical gospels are examples of the same genre, receive little attention. Important evidence is ignored. Goulder's midrashic hypothesis is refuted, but otherwise nothing is said about possible connexions with Old Testament writings.

Professor Talbert is concerned to support the thesis that the four Gospels belong to the biographical genre of antiquity i.e. not that they are biographies in the sense that we would use the word today, but that they conform to the genre of Graeco-Roman biography. He divides his study into three main sections: mythic structure, cultic function, and attitude, headings he has borrowed from Bultmann.

In Chapter two he focuses attention on the myth of the Immortals, legendary figures like Hercules, who, because of their beneficence, are rewarded with a share in the world to come. He tells us that 'the average Mediterranean man in the street' would recognise Hellenistic-Jewish Christology and the synoptic Gospels as examples of the myth of the Immortal. There are three obvious weaknesses in the argument. Firstly, most of the Graeco-Roman evidence cited comes from the second or third centuries A.D. Secondly some of the evidence is less than convincing (e.g. that Moses was considered to be an Immortal), and thirdly and most significantly, the structure of the Graeco-Roman biographies is strikingly different from the structures of Hellenistic-Jewish Christology and of the synoptic Gospels. Professor Talbert admits that he has found no parallel in the Graeco-Roman biographies to the idea of pre-existence or to the belief in the Parousia, or to the exclusiveness to the claim to Lordship made for Jesus. In addition, he has not discussed the meaning of 'resurrection'.

In chapter three, he argues that the fourth Gospel shares the structure of a Hellenistic-Jewish redeemer myth, but he fails to provide convincing evidence that such a myth existed. His reference to wisdom personified and to the occasional visits of angelic figures does little to explain the Johannine structure: pre-existence, incarnation, signs and discourses, death and resurrection.

Chapter four is about cultic function. Professor Talbert divides Graeco-Roman biographies with a moral function into five types, of which the second, which is concerned to dispel a false impression of the subject and set a true account in its place as a pattern for the reader to copy, is identified as the type corresponding to that of the four canonical Gospels. However, the Gospels are concerned not only with moral questions but also with metaphysical questions. Very little evidence is cited to connect any of the Graeco-Roman biographies with a cult.

The final chapter discusses attitude or mood. Professor Talbert is correct in questioning whether the eschatological outlook of the canonical Gospels should be called 'world-denying' but he fails to raise the important question: What relevance does the eschatological outlook have in determining the genre? It seems to me to be a central element in the mythic structure and should have been discussed in chapters two and three where it is ignored.

Under this same heading: attitude, Professor Talbert goes on to discuss what he calls the method of 'inclusive reinterpretation' used by the Gospel writers. This describes the way in which each writer drew together older sets of materials, like sayings or miracles, into a coherent whole to present a new and fuller picture. 'Inclusive reinterpretation' is a method used commonly in works of philosophy, history, biography and fiction and it is left unclear how such a general description of method