

Balthasar's understanding of the Mystery of Being which I know. Although this volume on glory in the modern age of metaphysics is difficult reading, it demonstrates the plausibility of de Lubac's judgment that Balthasar is the most cultured Catholic mind of our century.

JOHN O'DONNELL SJ

**BENEDICTINE TAPESTRY** by Felicitas Corrigan *Darton, Longman & Todd, London, Pp. 223, £ 9.95.*

A number of books in recent years have dealt with the subject of monasticism, examining its origins, development and relevance to contemporary Christianity. *Benedictine Tapestry* represents a further contribution to this genre. The author, Dame Felicitas Corrigan, offers us a look at some of the basic elements characteristic of the monastic life as interpreted within the Benedictine Order, drawing upon information from historical and biographical sources as well as her own experience as a nun of Stanbrook Abbey.

In the introduction, Corrigan states that she senses a need to explain some of the fundamental principles of the monastic life in order to dispel a part of the mystique that often shrouds the lifestyle of the monk or nun. Although some people may at different times have questioned the value of the monastic life, how far Corrigan's present work will go to set matters aright remains unclear. Taken as a whole, the book offers a wealth of illuminating details concerning Benedictine spirituality, as well as a first-hand look at the lifestyle and customs of the Stanbrook community; however, the writing style reflects a certain disconnectedness in the development of ideas. Consequently, several times while reading the book I felt at a loss to discover how the paragraphs within a given chapter relate to each other. The author's tendency to express her thoughts disconnectedly strikes one especially in the first several chapters.

The book is divided into two parts. Part One discusses the historical development of the Benedictine Order, with particular attention given to how the Order took hold in England. The opening chapter focuses on the remote origins of Christian monasticism, tracing in some detail the etymology of the word 'monk' to its Syriac root while contrasting non-Christian ascetic practice to that adopted by the Egyptian Fathers and Mothers of the desert. The succeeding chapters discuss the role of women in the evolution of the monastic life, examine the contributions made to the upbuilding of the Benedictine Order in England by Saints Gregory the Great and Wulfstan, and reacquaint us with the personal histories of Hildegard of Bingen and Heloise.

Throughout Part One, Corrigan exhibits skill as a researcher and interpreter of historical data, as well as a remarkable grasp of the foundational principles of monasticism. Unfortunately, these elements combined do not overcome the effect created by the pervasive juxtaposition of disparate ideas. In almost every chapter in this first

section, the subjects under consideration tend to shift abruptly, at times even within the same paragraph. For example, in the opening chapter, "What is a Monk?" Corrigan states that Egypt was the first home of Christian monastic groups. She immediately refocuses in the next sentence and begins to list the various non-Christian ascetics Clement of Alexandria encountered in his native city. Then, still within the same paragraph, she alludes to the qualities distinguishing a thoroughly Christian man, only to conclude with another list of the non-Christian ascetics dwelling in Egypt.

The author's tendency to introduce unrelated ideas in close succession within the text appears less pronounced in Part Two. Here she offers two essays of an autobiographical nature, recollections concerning members of the Stanbrook community, extracts from her personal correspondence, several poems, and a collection of Lenten spiritual conferences.

In my opinion, the selections from Corrigan's letters written to friends over a span of several decades proves the most rewarding part of the book. The author's correspondence reveals a depth of cultural and intellectual refinement and radiates immense warmth and vitality. Here, if anywhere in the text, Corrigan realizes her objective to dispel illusions and clarify uncertainties regarding monasticism. Her lively exchange with correspondents hailing from widely differing backgrounds invites the reader to probe beyond the author's words to find what manner of life, what inner dynamism produces such an engagement of human and spiritual resources with a God-centered *joie de vivre*.

Together with the excerpts from the author's correspondence, the four spiritual conferences that comprise the final chapter also deserve a word of praise. Originally given in 1937 by the then Abbess Laurentia McLachlan, the four talks center on the single-hearted pursuit of Christ that forms the basis of monastic spirituality. With simplicity and directness Abbess McLachlan addresses such traditional themes as obedience and self-denial, the love of God and neighbor, and surrender to Divine Providence. Here we find no trace of the lack of organized development of ideas that plagues most of the book; in fact, the conferences effectively summarize the entire work, reflecting as they do the central Benedictine principle, "Let us prefer nothing whatsoever to Christ."

Overall, I think the value of this book would have been greatly enhanced if more attention had been paid to the systematic development of ideas, resulting in a smoother flow of the text. Although its good points do not outbalance its flaws, I would say that *Benedictine Tapestry* provides an accessible overview of Benedictine monastic spirituality, particularly for those who may come to the subject for the first time.

SISTER MARY OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD, OP