

sible for the performance of the liturgical offices and the music of the great basilicas.' (*Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, pp. 50, 52.)

Undoubtedly the picture which a general reader would form for himself of St Benedict would be that of a great educator. From the first words of the prologue to his *Rule* we find ourselves in a scholastic atmosphere. He tells us that it is his intention to found a school; and right through to the last page practically every word he writes testifies to his qualities as a teacher. His deep insight into human character and the motives for human behaviour: his love for those committed to his charge: his gentleness in bearing with their weaknesses and failings: even the so-called 'penitential' he drew up for dealing with the wayward: all bear eloquent witness to this important element in the personality of St Benedict. The modernity of his approach to delinquency (see for example chapter twenty-seven of the *Rule*) would interest the psychologist. 'Nothing is to be preferred to the love of Christ. The claims of charity are paramount, and Christ is to be found in the needs of all those who seek us in His name.' It is a pity, one is tempted to add, that every monk cannot be an abbot so that 'while correcting others by his admonitions, he will be himself cured of his own defects'.

On p. 52 Mr Lindsay says that St Athanasius had himself translated into Latin the *Vita S. Antonii*. Surely the translator was Evagrius of Antioch? It may be regretted too that this life of St Benedict is not illustrated. Some reproductions of paintings, such as the one on the wrapper by Meister von Messkirch, would have enhanced an otherwise well produced volume.

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SEEDS OF CONTEMPLATION. By Thomas Merton. (Hollis & Carter; 8s.6d.)

There is scarcely a Catholic review, German, French, English, Canadian, American, which has not in the past year offered its meed of praise to the young Cistercian monk, the author of this book. Anglican papers such as *The Church Times* have vied with their Catholic contemporaries in showing their appreciation of his work. The sales of his books prove that the reviewers are voicing the public thought. What then is the appeal of such a writer to the modern public? What is the secret of such sudden and phenomenal success in the publicising of contemplative prayer, which is the theme of this book and which as a rule appeals to so small an élite? It is not that he has a profound or closely reasoned theology of spiritual matters to offer to the perplexed world. He expressly condemns the man who attempts to share the knowledge of contemplation and promptly becomes involved in theological discussion and controversy (p. 186). Thomas Merton was scarcely ordained priest when he wrote this book—written shortly after his *Elected Silence*—he had just completed a course of philosophy and theology

necessary for ordination, but that was all. His experience of others' souls and their ways of prayer and sanctification must have been very limited. All this might have been a drawback in any other writer, but for Merton it seems to have contributed to his success. For he brings to his work of religious journalism (it is journalism in the best sense of the term) the double asset of the fresh enthusiasm about a newly found treasure and a complete mastery of a simple style with no pretensions or artificiality. So many people when they first study the infinite treasures of the Church's teaching are fired with desire to communicate what they have learnt to others, but are impeded by an insurmountable difficulty in expressing their new vision. In later life when they have perhaps acquired the art of expression too great an analysis has dissected their enthusiasm. Many others who have facility with the pen have not begun to discover the Truth.

Thomas Merton, then, writes with attractive simplicity of the most mysterious reality of human existence. That which is is God, so that the discovery of our true self is the discovery of God. The struggle towards this discovery is useless unless we leave the initiative mostly to God. This means the hard way of the desert and desolation; and in his own way the author is as severe as St John of the Cross on the bleakness of the ascent. 'The ordinary way of contemplation lies through a desert without trees and without beauty and without water. . . . The prospect of this wilderness is something that so appals most men that they refuse to enter upon its burning sands. . . .' (p. 153). He is, then, no dreamer; he warns us against becoming attached to the symbols used by such writers as St John of the Cross and losing sight of the realities behind the symbols. With such wise cautions the reader is led to consider the height of contemplation, which is 'no longer something poured out of God into a created subject, so much as God living in God. . . .'

It is inevitable that, carried along with such zeal, the author should occasionally fail to express himself with the exact precision which the Church desires in a text book of theology, and some theologians will find points on which they disagree. Some would even find traces of a sort of pantheism in the identification of the soul with God. But all this would be beside the point and the phrases extracted from their context would not say what the author so patently desires to say. The totality of his message is so clear and expressed with such vigorous simplicity—that contemplation is the freedom of love in perfect union with God—that to find fault with its parts would be to cavil. The only change the present reviewer would suggest is that in future editions the fancy type in which the book is printed, with every 's' upside down, the 'u' an inverted 'n', the comma an accent out of place and many other exasperating mannerisms, be supplanted by a well tried type-face.

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