

Only a minority in academic circles would have agreed in the two centuries that followed his death. We must look elsewhere for the acknowledgment of his special magistral greatness, to the mystics of the Rhineland. 'Though it is still a matter of dispute whether Eckhart was a Neoplatonist with a smattering of Thomism or a Thomist with a penchant for Neoplatonism, there is no doubt that so far as Eckhart dealt with technical theology he used the Thomist idiom. It probably says much for his radical orthodoxy that his disciples are unimpeachably orthodox (and Thomist)—John Tauler above all. The result of this was that the great mystical school of the Rhineland wrote and thought in the Thomist language and built up an entirely Thomist mystical theology. This was exported wherever German spirituality went. It is seen very clearly in the English *Cloud of Unknowing* and in Walter Hilton, who follows *The Cloud*, and it is seen still more clearly in the Spanish Carmelites, above all in St John of the Cross. Although by his time the Thomist revival in Spain was well under way, it was probably not so much from Salamanca as from Tauler, directly or indirectly, that St John derived the Thomist framework of his mystical theology—by no means the least important part of the Thomist legacy to modern times.'

THOMAS GILBY, O.P.

A GUIDE TO THE CITY OF GOD. By M. Versfeld. (Sheed and Ward; 10s. 6d.)

Mr Versfeld is a lecturer in moral philosophy. Neither he nor his publishers tell us what university he teaches in, but wherever it is, the students of philosophy at that university are warmly to be envied. He has been lecturing to them for some years on the *De Civitate Dei*, and this excellent little book of a mere 138 pages now gives a wider public the benefit of his reflections on this subject.

St Augustine had a great and energetic mind, which he expressed with an inexhaustible eloquence in enormous volumes. The *City of God* must be at least twenty times the size of this modest guide to it. But the guide is wholly adequate to the vast rambling edifice, and succeeds in putting the reader in living contact with the mind of the architect. A man must be both very bold and very self-effacing to write or lecture successfully on the thought of St Augustine; if we try and tidy up his thought for him, classify his ideas into topics, his political theory, his philosophy of history, his doctrine of grace and predestination, his Platonism, his this, that and the other, then his thought immediately goes limp and lifeless in our hands, like water-lilies out of the pond. The vital element in which all his thought expands and lives is his quest for God, his faith seeking understanding. It is this context that Mr Versfeld is careful to preserve for us.

He has tried to catch, he says—and he has certainly succeeded—‘something of the mind of Augustine, and it was the mind of a bishop and a theologian’. How often this obvious truism is overlooked! The philosophic apparatus of Augustine’s mind was wholly at the service of his faith. There was no such thing for him as a philosophic discipline independent of theology—or of theology independent of philosophy. Christianity is the one true philosophy, Platonism, the Academy, Stoicism and all the other schools are false theologies, against which the *City of God* is a work of sustained polemic.

With a most disarming candour Mr Versfeld admits that he cannot appropriate that side of Augustine’s mind which interprets history by allegorizing Scripture, and he leaves the matter ‘without prejudice to some more sympathetic or more intelligent commentator’. Here he is being just neither to himself nor to Augustine. Not to himself, because his failure is due to want of information, not to a lack of either sympathy or intelligence, of which his whole book is redolent. Unfair to Augustine, because his exegesis in the *City of God* must be taken in conjunction with all his exegesis in his other works; above all it must be taken in the context of the whole exegetical tradition of his time. He did not learn to allegorize from Platonism, but from the Church, from the Fathers who went before him, right back to Irenaeus and Justin, and we may safely say from the Bible itself. Perhaps Mr Versfeld would appreciate Augustine’s very traditional allegorizing more sympathetically if he were to read some of the anti-allegorical exegesis of, say, Augustine’s contemporary Theodore of Mopsuestia. There is nothing like a diet of ship’s biscuit and salt pork to make one appreciate good food.

EDMUND HILL, O.P.

THE SPIRIT OF THE SPANISH MYSTICS. Edited and translated by K. Pond. Burns, Oates and Washbourne; 16s.)

This book of extracts from the Spanish spiritual writers of the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries serves a useful purpose in introducing the general reader to the background from which the genius of St Teresa and St John of the Cross arose. It will certainly come as a surprise to many to find how numerous and how varied were the writers on spirituality during these three centuries. Their teaching follows the main line of Patristic and mediaeval tradition in the interpretation of the Scriptures psychologically, and in ascetical theology. As is well known, Laredo and Osuna derived some of their mystical teaching on prayer from Richard of St Victor, and St Teresa was deeply indebted to them for her doctrine on the prayer of Quiet. Among the other writers quoted we find some passages of fine prose