

But of course this is only one of many themes in the book, which, by the way, contains only ninety-six pages all told. Physically, the book is uniform with the same publishers' Studies in Biblical Theology series, bound with thick paper. Catholic readers will note that the author's Protestant theology appears in places, particularly in his rejection of the possibility of reasoning to any knowledge about God from our experience of creation. W. H. Auden has an amusing reference to this viewpoint of our author's in his recently published poem *Friday's Child* (in memory of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, martyred at Flossenburg, April 9, 1945):

Since the analogies are rot
Our senses based belief upon,
We have no means of learning what
Is really going on,

And must put up with having learned
All proofs or disproofs that we tender
Of His existence are returned
Unopened to the sender.

R.S.

ST ODO OF CLUNY. Edited by Dom Gerard Sitwell. (Sheed and Ward; 16s.)

Students of the history of spirituality will be grateful to Dom Sitwell for his pains in giving us an agreeable volume of translations of John of Salerno's life of St Odo, the great tenth-century abbot of Cluny, and of Odo's own life of a holy layman, St Gerald of Aurillac. This is the kind of reading it is so easy to put off indefinitely unless one is given so convenient and enjoyable a way of doing it. The phrase in which John of Salerno speaks of the youthful Odo crossing 'the great sea of Priscian' will perhaps already have been familiar in quotation, but the whole of this opening section on Odo's early formation, with its emphasis on the importance of the connection with Tours, and its account of the virtues and difficulties of the young student, is particularly rewarding. Although neither author answers many of the questions about the inner life of his subject we should so like to ask, each conveys something of the temper of mind of a holiness that was profoundly humanizing in the barbarous society in which it flourished.

A.S.

THE HOLY RULE. By Dom Hubert van Zeller. (Sheed and Ward; 35s.)

The Rule of St Benedict was one of the great formative influences in the civilization of medieval Europe. In Toynbee's *Study of History*, it is 'one of the main foundations of the new social structure which was

eventually raised in western Christendom on the ruins of the ancient Hellenic order'. Viollet-le-Duc called it 'le plus grand fait historique du moyen âge', and even Coulton admitted that 'its institution marks an epoch in history'. No wonder, then, that books are always being written about it. And this new one of Dom Hubert van Zeller, though modestly called 'Notes on St Benedict's Legislation for Monks', is well worth keeping on the same shelf as our Calmets, our Martènes, and our Hildemars.

The Rule of St Benedict is a sixth-century document, and cannot therefore be literally implemented in modern times. In fact, once the ancient way of life had passed, it became increasingly difficult to live by the letter of this ancient rule, and Benedictines all down the centuries have found themselves forced to make interpretations of it to the age in which they lived. Some of these interpretations have been narrow and others broad, and saintly men in the past, trying to regulate their lives by this written code, have found themselves poles apart in outlook, like St Bernard and Peter the Venerable, Mabillon and de Rancé. That is why visitors to monastic houses have so often found a variety of observances even among abbeys of the same congregation. A wise monk today will recognize the right of others to hold different opinions, and look for the spirit of St Benedict in them—and he will rarely be disappointed. An impartial reader of this new commentary will find how extraordinarily well balanced Fr Hubert's interpretation is. He sees the whole Benedictine way of life as an equally balanced triangle of prayer, work, and reading (p. 305), and reflects that if any one of these is unduly weighted, the smooth running of the monastic life will be thereby affected. How could one criticize such a sane approach? And it is not only a wise handling of a difficult subject, but good literature into the bargain. All the sparkling van Zellerisms are there: 'Concord and not regimentation is intended as the final result', 'Reading, properly handled, is the overture to prayer', and a hundred others. There is much to admire in these pages, and very little to disagree with. He probably has his reasons for saying that St Benedict's scapular was originally a hooded overall or apron, though Abbot McCann thought it was some kind of leather braces to keep the loose robe tucked in for work. Is he going just a little too far when he seems to approve of newspaper lining under the habit in lieu of warmer clothing (p. 226)? And, looking in the other direction, he thinks the Benedictine monk is normally secure in his expectation of three square meals a day. The two do not quite fit together. But if these are little blemishes in the book, they are almost completely eclipsed by the sound common sense and brilliance of the whole.