

CONTEMPLATION AND COMPASSION: THE VICTORINE TRADITION by Steven Chase, *Darton Longman & Todd, London, 2003, Pp. 173, £8.95 pbk.*

This is another volume in the admirable series *Traditions of Christian Spirituality*, edited by Philip Sheldrake. Like its predecessors, it makes no claim to academic status, and therefore contains no index, and the references and bibliography refer only to translated sources. The aim is to introduce general readers to one of the lesser-known traditions of Christian spirituality, and this is done clearly and thoughtfully.

The first section outlines the background in the 12th Century, when the abbey of St Victor in Paris became a centre for dynamic Christian theology: the name of Hugh of St Victor is of course well known as one of the foremost theologians of his time, and Richard of St Victor is sometimes read for his connection with the English mystical text, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The lesser lights in this galaxy, however, Thomas Gallus, Achard, Andrew, Adam, Godfrey and Walter, need the brief introductions given here.

In the following chapters, the main themes of Victorine teaching are arranged thematically, beginning with a section which deals with devices for understanding and remembering stages of the spiritual journey, a typically Victorine concept. Then a chapter addresses the use of Scripture by the Victorines, as an aid to meditation. The next section deals with knowledge and love, two themes whose relationship was much discussed by Augustine of Hippo, a foundational writer for the Victorines. The links between mystical prayer, charity and action are then explored, according to a theme made popular later by the Dominicans: 'to contemplate and to pass on contemplation to others'.

The writings of the Victorines are the works of great teachers and organisers of ideas, and since so many of them are now available in English the book is a timely introduction to the riches to be found in what at first sight seem particularly boring texts. In recommending this book, I want to enter two caveats of a minor nature. First, the excellent translation of the collect for purity by Cranmer from *The Book of Common Prayer* makes a great introduction to the book but this could have been strengthened by referring to the use of this collect much earlier by Dionysius the Areopagite in his *Mystical Theology*, which is mentioned later and forms a central part of Victorine tradition. Also, I would have expected some reference to the seminal work of Anselm of Canterbury, whose 11th-Century prayers and meditations formed the key to all later Western spirituality, especially with his phrase 'faith seeking understanding', which seems to sum up the whole of the Victorine quest for holiness.

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