

is in the truth which is the supreme truth, and that there is no other truth in the proposition, except that we call it true, meaning that it does not fall short of that truth.

I will go no further. It is evident that as far as I have correctly described the doctrines of both philosophers, they involve many explorable problems. On the side of Thomas, we have his own extensive explorations. On the side of Anselm, it would be necessary to comb through his beautifully brief writings with an eye alert for answers to the questions that arise: there is no obvious place to look for them.

## Reviews

**HUMAN EXPERIENCE OF GOD**, by Denis Edwards. *Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1984*. pp. 154. Pb. £5.95.

**GRATEFULNESS, THE HEART OF PRAYER** by Br David Steindl-Rast. *Paulist Press, Ramsey, NJ, 1984*. pp. 224. Pb. \$6.95.

**SIMPLE PRAYER**, by John Dalrymple. *Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1984*. pp. 118. Pb. £2.95.

**CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM TODAY**, by William Johnston. *Collins, London 1984*. pp 203. Pb. £5.95.

Karl Rahner has divided the life of the Church into three somewhat uneven stages: the first for only a few decades, the Jewish Church; then the Hellenic Western Church till the mid twentieth century; and then, finally, the new age of the World Church into which we are just now entering. Perhaps a more useful variant might be: the contemplative apostolic age till the 14th century, then the rational and cerebral age till the mid 20th century, and now the ecumenical age. This division would include what has been called the scholastic parenthesis, beginning shortly after St Thomas and concluding in the present age. The point of these divisions is that while patristic theology began in faith assisted by prayer and labelled by the general practice of *lectio divina*, it gave place to the hard-headed philosophical theology of the scholastic period, now giving place to a sympathetic approach to all serious consideration of the divine.

These four books on prayer and the spiritual life make this division clear. Denis Edwards in his preface to *The Human Experience of God*: "In the early Church and in the writings of the medieval thinkers, theology and religious experience are intimately linked. In the work of Thomas Aquinas there is a profound integration of Christian experience and rational reflection. However, after Thomas we find the development of a dogmatic theology..." (p. vii). And John Dalrymple in his introduction: "In the 1950s my desire for simple personal prayer made me dissatisfied with the impersonal scholastic theology which was the prevailing diet of my seminary days" (p. 9) It was in the period of transition after St Thomas that the age of the mystics developed, so that "mystical theology" had to be tucked into a special pocket, with a feeling that experiences of prayer deserved their own special treatment. Thus William Johnston, despite many years of the comparative study of Buddhist and Christian teachings at Tokyo, decided to go beyond the tabulated Christian mystical theology: "I felt that the time had come to investigate the unique dimension of the Christian mystical experience... I wanted to go beyond St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila, beyond Meister Eckhart and the *Cloud of Unknowing*, beyond Augustine and

Gregory...” (p. 1) It is doubtful that he gets beyond these outstanding leaders on the way to unity, but he does start with the desire for experience. This he finds in the sense of presence, at first in the company of Jews and Moslems, but also uniquely in “involvement with Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord” (pp. 86–87).

All these authors, then, first set out on a search for the experience of God rather than on the clear perceptions of human reason. Steindl-Rast finds the experience in the heart: “The heart is where we meet God. But meeting God is prayer. And so we know one more thing about the heart: it is our meeting place with God in prayer” (p. 31). And from there he traces all the gratefulness that makes up the theme of his book. Theology of this sort therefore starts from faith and the experience of God in faith. Edwards goes to great length to show the reader how to detect God in every experience. It would seem to derive from the knowledge by faith of the universal creative power of God, but Edwards makes the exercise more difficult by deciding to make the word ‘Mystery’ stand for God. However the mystery becomes luminous in Jesus, whom we experience in faith.

Edwards and Steindl-Rast both make enjoyable and refreshing analyses of a wide variety of experiences, and the latter author sees them all as bearing with them a realisation of gratitude leading into prayer; certainly it is a joy to reflect on the way we are made ‘to eucharist’. For Dalrymple the experience of developing prayer issues into a state of increasing simplicity. “Simple prayer is *intuitive*. It is not a process of discursive reasoning, but the sort of simple knowledge, which people have of each other when they become intimate” (p. 33), and he continues: “There is a theological truth behind this experience. It is the truth explained by theologians that by grace man is *elevated* beyond his natural capacities and expectations to a kind of ‘equality’ with God” (p. 34). A dual activity is here described: the approach to simplicity as prayer deepens, and on the other hand elaboration into patterns and explanations as the theologians set out to unravel the hidden labyrinths of the divine mysteries. The foundation in both cases is the God-given gift of faith which is itself fed by the divine Word. John Dalrymple arrives at the last stages of his ‘simple prayer’ with the very difficult task of trying to describe the state of union with God. “The prayer of union need move no further...it has reached the utmost in simplicity” (p. 117). So words become useless. The theologian stays to sort out the implications of these experiences. Still within the framework of ‘mysticism’, William Johnston seeks the beginning of an explanation in the doctrine of the Eucharist and quotes Vatican II: “To accomplish so great a work (of redemption) Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations” (p. 94). So it may be that placing Mystical Theology in the centre, rather than in a sectional department, we could develop a schema of the ‘divine science’ with the experience of Christ, of his Church, of his way of worship...and so on.

But the foundation must always be in faith—in prayer flowing from the Scriptures. *Fides querens intellectum*. Geoffrey Turner writes well in *New Blackfriars*: God’s activity in the Church through the function of Scripture should be seen as “Judging men and their values through the disparate and variegated language of the Bible and calling men to commitment through faith in Jesus Christ. It is in this way that Scripture becomes a word of God” (October 1984, p. 424). It is perhaps remarkable how little the four authors here seem to draw from the inexhaustible fount of the Scriptures. William Johnston’s approach to Christian mysticism is obviously compelled to consider the message of Christ, and he has the correct focus: “We hear His voice when we read the Scriptures or hear them read in community” (p. 7). But despite their charm the other three do not often relate their experiences to Scripture. In their work they are primarily concerned with the fruits of the Word rather than with the Word itself.

Comparing these four books in greater detail, Steindl-Rast makes gratitude for the graces of God a moderately simple approach to God’s presence, and if here and there it may seem rather obvious the cheerful phraseology makes for pleasant and easy reading. “How difficult it is to live in the creative tension of hope, the tension between

not-yet and already! When we allow that tension to snap, our quest peters out in aimless wandering, or gets stuck in a compulsive settling down" (p. 126). Denis Edwards, on the other hand, makes our experience of God hard to come by. It begins with a 'pre-conceptual' experience of the presence, and in order to make this into expressible theology we have to investigate our different modes of experiencing, of knowing by love, of recognising the beauty of nature, of feeling hurt, of being confronted by death, by failure, by loneliness...And so we continue to analyse our own contacts with reality, Jesus's contact with his Father, the process continues until a synthesis of vital experiences is elaborated. Behold, we have a theology of experience before, it seems, we have actual experience of God, when we may understand our social surroundings in the light of His presence and eventually open the door to contemplative prayer. More difficult to read, with less felicity of expression, but this may be a way to allow the reality of the Spirit to guide us on The Way.

The contemporaneity of *Christian Mysticism Today* appears in a surprising chapter on 'The Irish Conflict' in which one might be excused for thinking the author had some sympathy for the mysticism of blood. But, no, the exigencies of contemporary society press William Johnston into collaboration with Gandhi as well as with the Buddhist tradition. "As Christians we must join hands with people of other faiths. We must humbly learn from their theological insights and their age-old wisdom" and work for world peace (p. 154). The reader should not skip 'The Irish Conflict', but he should certainly continue to the end through the final chapter on our Lady, 'The Woman'.

On last analysis it must be said that the shortest and least 'scientific' of these four volumes is the most satisfactory. This is the simple work of Jock Dalrymple, *Simple Prayer*. 'Simple' should not be confused with 'easy' or taken as a 'short cut'. But following him 'Towards Unity', through the Dark Night and the Cloud of Unknowing, the Way is not complicated.

CONRAD PEPLER OP

**CHRISTIAN ENGLAND: FROM THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR, by David Edwards. Collins, London, 1984. Pp. 378. £12.95.**

This is the third and final volume of the Provost of Southwark's lively, well-written canter through English religious history. The terrain is for the most part familiar, but Dr Edwards relieves the onward march of institutional history by literary interludes, especially studies of religious poets such as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Browning, Tennyson and Hopkins. The work is up-to-date, and an excellent bibliography is provided in the footnotes. Dr Edwards says that his three volumes are 'the first ecumenical history of English Christianity': this is true in the sense that in the present volume he divides his space very fairly between different denominations, but he finds it difficult to avoid an Anglican perspective. English religious history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was far from being 'ecumenical' in its tone and content; one needs a conflict model, which church historians have been loath to use in recent years.

It is his professional anxiety to be 'ecumenical' which explains Dr Edward's reliance on a familiar framework of interpretation. Ecumenism by itself does not give him a radically fresh view of the changes in English religion since the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival. Dr Edwards is aware of the church historian's occupational hazard, the temptation to see triumphs of grace in all directions, and he closes his book on a sombre note, describing the England of the Great War as 'no longer Christian in any very substantial sense'. On the way to 1914, however, grace has certainly had its moments, and one is left wondering why so many remarkable Christians did not leave something more substantial behind them. Part of the answer lies in exaggeration: Elizabeth Fry, for example, is praised for bringing the gospel to people in prison, but we are not told that she *failed*, and knew that she had failed, to prevent the transformation of the old prisons into the inhuman penitentiary system which we have inherited, but