

interiore e spirituale, sempre indispensabile per poter aprirsi all'intervento della Madonna e per vivere con una devota meditazione dei misteri di Maria.

Il lavoro di Vincenzo Noja è quindi una bellissima esposizione sulla spiritualità certosina. Riportando gli studi e scritti di p. Pollien, che sono anche un riprendere delle Lettere di san Bruno e di altri autori certosini, si incontra la testimonianza di valori autentici di una concreta esperienza spirituale dei Certosini, squisitamente culturali e documentari. Per questo, il libro apre orizzonti nuovi della spiritualità certosina. La lettura del libro è per questo di grande valore anche per tutti i cristiani di oggi, non semplicemente perché si incontrano gli studi medioevali e quelli del secolo scorso dei Certosini, ma anche attraverso le interpretazioni e gli approfondimenti spirituali di p. Pollien. Così la lettura di questo nuovo libro ha un particolare significato per conoscere le origini della spiritualità certosina e per poter arrivare ad una vita spirituale di oggi che si appoggia sui loro valori tradizionali, messi in luce per costruire nel lettore un dolce cammino, in cui non si dischiudono gli orizzonti di una nuova conoscenza della Devozione mariana e della vita spirituale del Medioevo, come è nell'Ordine certosino.

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MCCORMACK, MARY, O.C.D., *Upon This Mountain: Prayer in the Carmelite Tradition*. 2009, pp. 76. Teresian Press, Carmelite Priory, Boars Hill, Oxford, OX1 5HB, United Kingdom (www.carmelite.org.uk). ISBN 978-0-947916-09-1. £ 4.00.

This book, whilst not an academic study, is nevertheless worthy of notice in *Carmelus* since it expands upon a study course on 'Prayer in the Carmelite Tradition' written by the author and her prioress at Notting Hill Carmel in London, offered as part of the Carmelite Institute of Britain & Ireland's Adult Education Diploma in Carmelite Studies (www.cibi.ie). The scholarly apparatus of the book is minimal, but quotations are given appropriate citation within the text or as footnotes. The book is also noteworthy in terms of Carmelite publishing, as one of the first offerings of the recently revived Teresian Press, based at the Discalced Carmelite Priory at Boars Hill near Oxford, and the appended list of forthcoming titles is enticing.

This succinct book (just 76 pages) offers an excellent overview of prayer in the Carmelite tradition. The boast on the back cover's blurb that 'In a few short chapters, this profound book says everything' is not far from the truth, given the limited scope of a popular-level publication.

Even in a broad introduction to the subject of prayer in the Carmelite tradition there are some disappointing omissions (at least from the perspective of a lay Carmelite of the 'Ancient Observance'). The 'Carmelite tradition' is here interpreted almost exclusively as Teresian, and whilst no one could doubt the pre-eminence of Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross as experts in the life of prayer, the three hundred years of Carmelite life preceding them, including the injunctions on prayer in the *Rule of Saint Albert*, receive only

brief reference. Nevertheless, such omissions do not detract from the immense value of this small book, the early pages of which give good consideration to the importance of praying with Scripture in the Carmelite tradition, both in *Lectio Divina* and the Divine Office. Liturgical prayer is also upheld as a great source of spiritual nourishment during periods of dryness in private prayer. References after Teresa and John are again exclusively Discalced (Thérèse of Lisieux, Elizabeth of the Trinity, and Edith Stein) where points might well have been illustrated by the likes of Mary Magdalene de'Pazzi or Titus Brandsma, but this book goes well beyond partisan distinctions and has something truly valuable to contribute to the spiritual growth of all branches of the Carmelite Family.

Given the emphasis upon Teresa and John, a reader coming to this subject anew might have appreciated a little more biographical information on the reformers, but again this is not a serious omission and too much detail in a survey of this sort is to be avoided. A particular strength of the book is the way that the author weaves the insights of the great figures of Carmel with practical experience from her own life as a Carmelite nun for over forty years.

Such a personal perspective is, of course, reminiscent of the dynamic of Carmelite prayer, which is essentially an interactive relationship with a God 'whom we know loves us' rather than a strict 'method' of prayer, and Sr. Mary captures this wonderfully in the opening chapter:

Those who turn to the Carmelite saints for guidance in prayer have often become confused by the multiplicity of books and methods and may be wondering if there is a Carmelite approach that would make the exercise easier and more fruitful. Or they may be troubled because prayer, formerly a source of peace and comfort, has become difficult and unrewarding, and they fear they have gone astray. It can come as a surprise that neither of the two recognised authorities on prayer, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, advocates a particular method. In all their writings, Teresa says very little, and John even less, about how to spend the time of prayer. Rather, they go to the heart of what prayer is all about: exposure to the reality of a self-surrendering God. They indicate some basic requirements in our way of living, if the encounter is to be authentic, and they chart the path of growing intimacy, leading to full union with God.

Such a simple and direct summary of the dynamic of prayer in the Carmelite tradition will be invaluable to those who have heard of Carmel's wisdom, or a caricature of it, but know little of its reality. It is not the only occasion on which Sr. Mary is able to debunk popular misconceptions about Carmel's spirituality, and as such this book would serve as a particularly valuable resource in initial (and indeed ongoing) formation.

The second chapter on 'Prayer as Relationship' begins (I believe accurately) that 'The most attractive aspect of Carmelite spirituality for people of today is probably the special emphasis on prayer experienced as intimate relationship with God' (p. 31). This leads the author to consider the masks and roles individuals adopt to conceal their sense of 'darkness, pain and insecurity', and how such 'poses' can be projected to make false human

constructions about the nature of God. The explanation of the disturbing yet vital place of silence in breaking down the barriers between 'the *real* person that I am and the *real* God that he is' (p. 32) will encourage many to embark on this difficult journey (even if it fails to challenge the construction of God as male). In a non-threatening way Sr. Mary transposes the insights of psychology to explain the dynamics and experiences typical of a soul committed to prayer. The metaphors of the spiritual journey – including John of the Cross's image of the praying person as a burning log and Christ as the apparently hidden lover – are presented in language that can the reader can clearly grasp, without loss of poetic effect.

The third chapter, 'Into Stillness', encourages the person of faith to pray just as they find themselves before God, in a moment of self-awareness, an awareness that accepts a certainly inability to express oneself and a gradual surrender that lets God take control. The chapter's final section on 'Praying through distractions' will undoubtedly resonate with many readers and the author's wise words will encourage them: 'very many people undervalue their prayer, disparaging it at the very point where it no longer offers any obstacle to direct encounter with God. If all we can do at the time of prayer is just to *be* there, then we must be content to sit there and just *be*. In that place, at that moment, God shares with us the divine name, 'I AM'.' (p. 50).

The fourth chapter, on 'The Apostolate of Contemplation', opens with the essential point that 'All prayer is apostolic'. Citing images from Carmel's three Doctors of the Church, the author demonstrates how 'The fruit of contemplative prayer is a heart that widens to a universal embrace' (p. 62). 'Contemplation' and 'meditation' are perhaps not always clearly distinguished in the book, but the salutary point is made very strongly that 'As our union with God deepens, we know ourselves to be one with all that is God's. We are brought to identify more and more fully with the needs and sufferings, hopes and strivings of the Church and the whole world.' (p. 55). This echo of Vatican II needs to be repeated to God's people today. The sense of prayer as being in itself an act of service to a needy Church and World is one which no doubt stems from the author's own experience and perspective as an enclosed religious; Carmelite friars (other than John of the Cross) and laity are not referred to as such in the book, but will no doubt find many of its insights pertinent to their vocations as well.

The epilogue, entitled 'Carmel as Garden-Land', is a reprint of an article that appeared some time ago in *Mount Carmel* magazine; whilst it does not flow inevitably from the previous chapters in terms of subject, aesthetically it makes a beautiful conclusion to a book that ought easily to find a place on the bookshelves of every Carmelite individual and community in the English-speaking world, and which will hopefully be translated into many other tongues.

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