

## LIBRORUM AESTIMATIONES

### Vita Spiritualis

FRANS MAAS, *Spirituality as Insight: Mystical Texts and Theological Reflections*, (Leuven & Paris: Peeters, 2004), pbk, pp. 176.

The *Fiery Arrow Collection*, produced under the auspices of the Titus Brandsma Institute at the Catholic Institute of Nijmegen and the Carmelite Order, aims to make the 'treasures of the spiritual tradition' accessible to the contemporary reader, especially to those who 'in a great variety of ways are in search of interior life and the fire of love'. In this respect, the latest addition to the series by Frans Maas, a Professor at Nijmegen, does not disappoint. Maas has taken the 'spiritual treasures' from five writers in the tradition and relates them to contemporary academic debate on the nature of mysticism, as well as the wider 'thirst for spirituality' within contemporary society. I say, 'the spiritual tradition' for Maas is clear that he will not confine himself solely to Christian perspectives. However, in doing this he does not dilute his analysis of the implications these spiritual writings have for our understanding of Christian spirituality regarded as a distinct discipline. The five writers chosen: Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross, Dag Hammarskjöld, Thérèse of Lisieux and Etty Hillesum, may at first sight seem somewhat eclectic, yet within the brief Maas has set himself the selection begins to make sense. Indeed, the book has a certain 'circular' or 'spiral' feel to it, once I had completed it I wanted to return to the beginning and start again. Insofar as Maas presents an overriding 'thesis' I would suggest that he is advocating a way of understanding 'spirituality', or more contentiously, 'mysticism', through a theological interpretation of 'spiritual diaries'. The diaries of Hillesum, Thérèse and Hammarskjöld are viewed through an interpretation of mystical theology drawn from the writings of John of the Cross and Eckhart. In doing this Maas is very much aware of what has recently been termed the 'hermeneutic of mysticism' and in so doing makes us aware of what Jorge Ferrer calls 'the participatory turn':

'This new experience of existence which comes to us through the text can take on many contours: a consciousness of overwhelming abundance, of being transformed, being fully alive with hardly anything to sustain us, an intense desire, an unprecedented courage to withstand suffering and adversity, thriving in a limitless love'. (p. 6)

Or, as he says elsewhere, 'letting the strangeness of the text to its work'.

Bot John and Eckart are very good at providing this hermeneutical space where the strangeness of the text can do its work and in a somewhat intense chapter we are presented with as good as an account of the mystical teaching of the two writers as can be found anywhere in recent scholarship. The choice of the two, one a saint of the Roman Catholic church, the other a scholar whose writings often present more questions than they do answers, is interesting in itself and the dialogue that is set up between the two opens the debate nicely. One small point, I would have liked to have seen more mention of some of the recent excellent commentaries that have appeared on John in recent years, not least Colin Thompson's *John of the Cross: Songs in the Night*. Also, some mention of the (albeit limited) scholarship that has attempted to link the two writers might have been interesting. But as in a lot of the text Maas is more concerned with developing his own theses rather than presenting an academic digest of other scholars.

As mentioned above, the theme of 'spiritual diaries' links the following exposition of Dag Hammarskjöld, Thérèse of Lisieux and Etty Hillesum and again the choice of the three: A Lutheran career diplomat, a nineteenth century Roman Catholic enclosed contemplative and a Dutch Jewess killed at Auschwitz, presents some interesting conversations and a chance for Maas to develop his theses through their writings. I think the diversity of the material covered will be sufficient to introduce new insights to most readers: very few readers will be as familiar with all three of these writers as Maas. A counter-theme to the text may be the relationship between Christianity and Christian spirituality to a contemporary seemingly 'godless' world where Christianity has no place. Through the minds, experiences and writings of the three we are presented with strategies for making sense of such a godless universe and, in three quite different ways, presented with possible paths and answers to the dilemma of how to be a Christian in a postmodern world.

Two concluding essays on *Beauty and Religion* and *Venturing and Working* are appended to the end, but feel a little superfluous to what has preceded them. Perhaps a concluding statement on the discussion of the five may have been better. These two essays feel like the beginning of another book and (hopefully) will be elaborated upon at a later stage.

Two little gripes. It would have been helpful to have had an index and a good bibliography: with the amount of source material covered, in German, Spanish, Latin, Swedish, French, Dutch and Danish, a bibliography which points to the main source material would seem pretty crucial.

Secondly, and this is perhaps a more serious flaw, the English translation of the work is a little infelicitous. Some passages are awkward, to say the least, and I feel this could be a serious barrier for some readers. Passages such as the following (writing on Hillesum) occur throughout the book:

'It was the war that was the context of her spiritual growth although there was of course a mutual interaction between them. The persecution of the Jews constituted the extreme situation of her religious maturation, but was not its prerequisite. The mysticism of suffering is seen

as problematic because it suggests a conditional relationship and implies a type of mysticism that only thrives in a context of suffering'. (p. 113)

Time and again I had to make a conscious effort to overcome this somewhat awkward style. In the end it was worth it, but I believe Maas's thesis deserves a little more polishing, in English translation at least.

Overall then, a good contribution to the ongoing debate as to the nature of mystical interpretation of the text and one that will present much new material to its readers.

PETER TYLER

MARIE-MADELEINE DE' PAZZI, *Les quarante jours*, édition établie et annotée par Giancranco Tuveri, éd. Jérôme Millon, Grenoble, 2002, 224 p.

MARIE-MADELEINE DE' PAZZI, *Les trois extases de la passion de Jésus*, traduction, introduction et notes de Frère Gianfranco Maria Tuveri, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, coll. *Flèche de feu* n° 5, 2003, 160 p.

En France où ses oeuvres furent largement imprimées au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, mais d'accès difficile aujourd'hui, sainte Marie-Madeleine de' Pazzi demeure peu connue malgré les trois éditions de la biographie de M. Vauusard de 1921 à 1925. Les lecteurs francophones seront reconnaissants au carme Gianfranco Tuveri qui leur rend accessible le message de la carmélite de Florence par ces deux livres ainsi que par un article paru dans *Mélanges carmélitains* I (2003), Téqui, Paris, pp. 248-279: *La prière au Carmel. L'expérience de Marie-Madeleine de' Pazzi* (1566-1607). Dans la préface, le traducteur explique comment il en est venu à «boire plus abondamment à cette source cachée» qu'est sainte Marie-Madeleine, à savoir par l'intermédiaire de sainte Thérèse de Lisieux qui écrit: «à Florence, je fus heureuse de contempler sainte Marie-Madeleine de' Pazzi». Une riche introduction présente la spiritualité de Marie-Madeleine. L'opposition entre la mystique de Thérèse d'Avila et celle de Marie-Madeleine, Thérèse de Lisieux et Élisabeth de Dijon présentée par une citation de la thèse de doctorat du P. Secondin peut prêter à discussion. Si la mission de Thérèse de Jésus s'exprime différemment de celle des trois jeunes carmélites qui n'ont pas eu sa charge de prieure et de fondatrice, ne relève-t-elle pas d'un même amour et d'un même zèle en présence du Dieu vivant? Après des notes bibliographiques (corriger la table des matières où il est écrit «bibliographiques») sont présentées douze méditations de la jeune novice, les quarante jours d'extases quotidiennes qui ont suivi sa profession le 27 mai 1584 et d'autres extases de l'été de cette même année.

Le récit des extases constitue une source spirituelle et théologique où se perçoit l'esprit du Carmel, nourri de la Bible, de l'héritage patristique et des grands spirituels. Dès la première méditation on notera la mystique trinitaire de Marie-Madeleine qui fit profession le dimanche de la Trinité. Dans la neuvième méditation, le Père est honoré à travers le voeu d'obéissance, le Fils par