

YHWH's messenger said to her
Here, you have conceived and shall breed a son
You shall call his name God Hears (Ishmael)
for YHWH has heard your affliction

There are one or two infelicities of language — notably the decision to translate “hinneh” throughout as “Here!” rather than “Behold”, which leads to Abraham’s complaint to YHWH in v. 15:3 being rendered as “Here, to me you have given no seed!”, as though he had only just noticed. But largely, the translator is extremely successful in finding words to reflect the connotations of the original. “Adam” is rendered “groundling”, to bring out its connection with “ground” (“adamah”) in the second chapter (she presumably thought of, and rejected, “earthling”); “yalad” is rendered “breed”, because the same word can apply to men, women and animals, as in the Hebrew. (A postscript points all of this out, in unexpressed indictment of previous, gender-biased and anthropocentric, translations.)

A. D. Moody in the introduction calls this translation “radical, scholarly and brilliantly effective.” It is in truth all three: going back to the original text (in the Stuttgart critical edition), rendering it with knowledge and care, and setting it out with taste and some flair. If it is also “exotic”, “earthy” and on target to appeal to feminists and environmentalists, so much the better. Above all, it is probably about as near to the Hebrew as the reader or hearer is likely to get without actually learning the language.

SARA DUDLEY EDWARDS O.P.

SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION IN THE FATHERS, Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (eds). *Four Courts Press*, 1995, Pp.xi + 370, £35.00. **AILERANI: INTERPRETATIO MYSTICA ET MORALES PROGENITORUM DOMINI IESU CHRISTI**, Aidan Breen (ed.), *Four Courts Press*, 1995, Pp.215, £37.50.

Four Courts Press deserve the gratitude of scholars in many fields. The volume of the Proceedings of the Second Patristic Conference at Maynooth, *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers*, offers a wide-ranging collection of papers under this heading, examining the approaches of, among others, Clement of Alexandria, Pseudo-Dionysius, Origen, Athanasius, Ephrem Syrus, Augustine and Eucherius of Lyons. These are the names that one would expect to appear in a patristic conference anywhere, but the Maynooth collection also attends to a more locally rooted patristic tradition. The final three chapters, *Patristic Background to Medieval Irish Ecclesiastical Sources*, *The Irish Augustine's Knowledge and Understanding of Scripture*, and *Exegesis and the Book of Kells*, all draw us into the early medieval Irish world of biblical scholarship and imagination.

Such explorations of medieval Irish scholarship are to be warmly welcomed for the sake of the interest of the texts themselves, but also for the light they shed on the links between continental and insular churches.

Aidan Breen's new edition of Ailerán's *Interpretatio Mystica et Moralis Progenitorum Domini Iesu Christi* serves this end too. This seventh century monk and scholar, wrote a commentary on Matthew's genealogy of Christ. Written in two parts, it treats first of the mystical meaning of the names of his ancestors, showing how the meanings of the Hebrew names point towards Christ and his saving work, and secondly how these same names also embody moral demands on the followers of Christ.

In addition to the text and translation (the latter of which is sometimes a little weak: surely *dii fieri ... possimus* could have been translated "we may become gods", rather than "as gods" (p.56), which would have been a perfectly acceptable idea to anyone familiar with Augustine on the Psalms or with his *De Civitate Dei*), Breen lists and discusses some of the sources used by Ailerán.

Both these volumes, then, take the reader into the literary world of the early medieval Irish theologian. Among the many good ends that they will serve is the hammering of another nail or two into the coffin of a popular and highly romanticised "Celtic Christianity", conceived of as a distinct Christian order and culture which self-consciously distanced itself from the faith and literary creativity of continental Christians.

GILBERT MÁRKUS O.P.

STRANGERS AND FRIENDS: A NEW EXPLORATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE BIBLE by Michael Vasey. *Hodder and Stoughton*. Pp xli + 276. £9.99.

Late one night I was in hospital, and the very ill young man across the ward was visited by his friend, who drew the curtains around his bed, and for a while I could hear them kissing. Were those embraces sexual? I do not know if you have ever been very ill and possibly close to death, but at such times sexuality does not figure very largely in one's thoughts. Those embraces certainly represented comfort and reassurance in the face of the young man's coming death. But does a moral stance require a judgement also on whether those embraces were sexual?

Questions such as this are posed by Michael Vasey's book. Michael Vasey is tutor in liturgy at St John's College, Durham and is a leading figure on the evangelical wing of the Church of England. The considerable importance of his book lies in the breadth and sureness with which he has drawn on the extensive research of the last twenty years on the social expression of homosexuality in disciplines as diverse as philosophy, history, anthropology, and cultural studies. Some of this has found its way into the columns of *New Blackfriars* (volume 67 pages 538–544 and volume 75 pages 52–64 and 476–488). As my own work is part of this research, perhaps I may say without sounding too grand that to my mind Michael Vasey has grasped aright the implications for theology of this often difficult body of work.

His argument falls into three steps. The first is that bodily actions, sexual acts included, derive their meaning from the symbolic systems in