

REVIEWS

ST JOHN'S PROLOGUE. By M. E. Boismard, O.P. Translated by the Carisbrooke Dominicans. (Blackfriars Publications; 12s.)

There is no need to emphasize how wisely the Carisbrooke Dominicans have chosen in selecting P. Boismard's book for translation. A brief recapitulation of his argument may however be of service here.

In the Prologue to his gospel St John conceives of Christ's earthly mission under two aspects: first as a New Creation through the Divine Word, second as a New Covenant mediated to us, through a new Moses. The first conception has roots in Genesis and the Sapiential writings. It is a further projection of the idea of God creating the world through his Divine Wisdom. The second looks back to the institution of the Old Covenant at Sinai. There God had mediated his law through Moses to the chosen people, and had promised to 'walk with' them. Privately in a prophetic vision he had revealed himself to Moses as 'a God full of merciful love and fidelity' (Exod. xxxvi, 6). Now with the advent of the new Moses the old promise is fulfilled. God's 'merciful love and fidelity' which Moses had seen then is made present to us all now, 'walks with' us, in the person of his Incarnate Word. 'The law was given through Moses, grace and fidelity began to be by Jesus Christ.'

To demonstrate this thesis P. Boismard has divided his book into two parts. In the first he analyses the words used in the Prologue. In the second he traces the ideas underlying the words to their roots in the Old Testament, and shows how they are connected. The thought of St John in the Prologue develops in the form of a parabola. '. . . the thought leaves God so as to return to God after touching the earth. . . . Once he has come to earth he communicates to us that divine life which makes us children of God . . . then the Word reascends to the bosom of the Father drawing us in his wake to lead us to God.'

In general the translation has been carefully done and reads most attractively. It is only occasionally that important shades of meaning have been lost—as when 'renouer' is translated 'to tighten' instead of 'to tie again' (p. 80), and on the same page 'Alliance' should be rendered 'Covenant' (as it is correctly elsewhere in the book) and not 'Alliance'. Moreover, 'Semitic inclusiveness' (p. 76) instead of 'Semitic inclusion' seems distinctly amateurish. But it is impossible to approve of the expedient which has been adopted for the longer quotations from Scripture. Why, instead of translating these from the French, have the translators inserted corresponding passages from the Knox and Douay versions? The effect is always unsatisfactory and once or twice almost disastrous. For example, the Knox version renders verse 9 of the

Prologue: 'There is one who enlightens every soul born into the world'. But this is precisely the alternative reading which P. Boismard, after careful consideration, rejects! Repeatedly one feels that the quotation as provided in this translation is so different from P. Boismard's rendering that it largely fails to illustrate the point which it was originally introduced to support.

It must also be said that the *format* of this book is somewhat inferior to that of the original. The well-emphasized divisions and clearly differentiated print which made the original French easy and delightful to refer to, give way in this version to a relatively amorphous tract of undifferentiated print in which the landmarks fail to stand out, and in which it becomes a rather slow and painful process to find specific references. In the verse-by-verse analysis we no longer have each verse quoted in italics at the head of a fresh page. No attempt has been made to separate the concluding summary from the exegetical discussion of verse 18. The index of biblical references, so useful to a careful reader, has been omitted altogether, as has the table of contents for Part I.

However, readers perceptive enough to realize that these defects are eminently worth enduring may be assured that they have in this book a substantially accurate, clear, and readable translation of one of the most important Catholic books on St John's gospel which has appeared in recent times.

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RICHARD OF ST VICTOR—SELECTED WRITINGS ON CONTEMPLATION.
Translated with an introduction and notes by Clare Kirchberger.
(Faber and Faber; 21s.)

Perhaps only those who have themselves worked on Richard of St Victor can realize fully how much Miss Kirchberger has achieved. She has made a clear and very readable translation from a text in Migne that is often difficult and at times obviously corrupt. She has chosen an ideal selection from an author who is very hard to anthologize. Doing so, she has rendered very real service to all students of Christian spirituality and mysticism. For Richard, the 'Scotus' who died as Prior of St Victor at Paris in 1173, was to be a crucial influence on many later developments in mystical theory partly in his own right but perhaps most of all through what he transmitted.

So important a work deserves a detailed criticism. It might be carping to complain that Miss Kirchberger describes Richard as a Scot; by the twelfth century 'Scotus' could mean Scot as well as Irish. But I cannot myself agree with her interpretation of the modes of contemplation described by the Areopagite as straight, spiral and circular, and I doubt its relevance to the particular passage in Richard's writings