

LE PROLOGUE DE SAINT JEAN. By M. E. Boismard, O.P. (*Lectio Divina* No. 11: Editions du Cerf; Blackfriars; n.p.)

There is always room for a good book on the first eighteen verses of St John's Gospel (In the beginning . . .), and this is one. The study is in two parts (of about eighty pages each), the first an 'Exegetical Commentary', in which the meaning of the words is examined closely, and the second a 'Theological Commentary' in which the ideas are discussed, traced to their origins and observed in their development.

In the first part a most valuable feature is the noting of parallel use of words in other parts of St John's Gospel, as for instance 'without him' in verse 3 paralleled in 15, 5, 'Without me you can do nothing'. The tracing of words is done of course in Greek, but in such a way that the argument is not lost if the reader knows little or no Greek. Some interesting points might be noted here. The punctuation in verse 4, ' . . . factum est . . . ' is followed, as in the Dominican Missal (*contra* the Roman), and as in the Bible de Jérusalem (*contra* most older translations) (pp. 24-5). This is also one of a number of points on which the author departs from Lagrange's opinion. Sometimes a most interesting history of the criticism of a passage is included, as with ' . . . did not comprehend it' (v. 5), here translated ' . . . ne l'ont pas vaincue' (p. 33). Perhaps the most surprising feature of the criticism is the author's adherence to the reading in verse 13 of the singular, where the usual text reads ' . . . to them that believe in his name, who [the believers] *are* born, not of blood . . .', and is here read ' . . . his name, who [Christ] *was* born . . .'. Admittedly the plural is in the past tense, but the singular form has no manuscript support and only the tenuous evidence of early patristic quotation. If the passage is taken as referring to Christ, the phrase 'nor of the will of man . . . etc.' is an interesting proclamation by St John of the Virgin Birth. The singular reading is simply accepted on page 62, and in the summary on page 64 'il faut lire . . . au singulier'. As it happens, the matter is very clearly discussed in Mgr Knox's *Commentary on the Gospels*. The exegetical work in the present volume is summarised on pages 93-95.

The theological section of the book opens with a discussion of indebtedness of St John to Old Testament phrase and image, a matter that is most usefully underlined (pp. 100 sqq.). An analysis of the structure of the Prologue, what a musician would call its 'cyclic form', follows, with an intriguing diagram on page 107. This leads on to the tracing of particular ideas of the Prologue back into the Old Testament, especially 'le rôle créateur de la Parole de Dieu' and the famous Joannine figures of Life and Light (pp. 143 sqq.) with many figures picked up in the Old Testament, as in Isaias 9, 2, 'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light'. Finally the Messianic mission of John the Baptist is seen foreshadowed in the Old Testament in Elias (cf. John 1, 21, 'Art thou

Elias?') and others, and the relation of Moses and his Testament to St John's Gospel, with the influence of Exodus 33-34 on St John, is illustrated.

In all this section the continuity of revelation from the Old Testament into St John's is stressed, which is a change from the too frequently urged Hellenistic philosophical influences, and is one more salutary sign of the understanding of the Bible as a whole ('une intelligence totale de la Bible'), which the series *Lectio Divina* sets out to promote.

There is an index of biblical quotations, but even in a short book such as this an index of the ideas, figures and phrases would have been an asset.

SEBASTIAN BULLOUGH, O.P.

LA PENSEE RELIGIEUSE DE LEON BLOY. By Marie-Joseph Lory.
(Desclée de Brouwer.)

Léon Bloy began to come into true perspective through the catastrophes of the last war. Much that appeared exaggerated in his utterances has assumed the proportions of life, and respect for him is deepening. Mystic, prophet, poet—he is a subject of almost chaotic variety, and presented with this book on him, divided and sub-divided, heavily footnoted and appended, one wondered whether Bloy could suffer such logic and live. But M. Lory handles his thesis with admirable flexibility and, mosaic-fashion, builds up this great paradoxical figure—this man with the violence of Elias and the poetical vision of Blake, who suffered the rigours of a Cistercian poverty without its dignity, and gave himself to the contemplative life without any of its securities. Surely few men have kept throughout their lives such rich contacts with suffering. But tears were his medium, his perspective-glasses of the Absolute, a chief furnishing in his world of symbols. M. Lory pays full tribute to the imaginative power of Bloy and to its symbolic quality. When he spoke as a poet criticism was silent. But, 'his imagination sometimes let itself be submerged by the symbols'—and consequently 'on the plane of the relative he was far from certain'.

The second part of the book deals with Bloy's 'interior universe' and the key points of his thought: the Scriptures, La Salette, his 'secret', the Jews, France; and here is acutely analysed that strange confusion of the relative and the Absolute—'his imagination bore him along and caused him to pass in spite of himself from Revelation to revelations'.

The third part attempts some estimate of what contemporary Catholicism owes to Bloy. With his cries of anguish, his unceasing thirst for eternal life, his loving tenderness for souls—he was indeed 'a burning and a shining light', and M. Lory pays him a great and thoughtful tribute in his verdict: 'Son originalité vraie est d'être un chrétien vivant'.

J. GUMMER