lecture-room, have been separated: a readiness to listen to what a text may have to teach, not only about man and his world, but about 'transcendence', and a recognition that the Christian exegete stands in a tradition of interpretation which is part of the total data to be considered. These are the principal components of what he calls a 'hermeneutics of consent', an expression destined, I fear, to pass into the jargon of this debate (as 'transcendence' has already passed into the vocabulary of academics shy of introducing God into their discussions even in inverted commas). But whatever its terminological shortcomings, it nevertheless suggests that between a Lutheranism thus attentive to tradition and a Catholicism renewed by its own more recent *retour aux sources* there need be no very deep gulf fixed.

All the more reason to examine very carefully his unstated assumptions. When in his final paragraph Stuhlmacher protests against 'the hypothetic unravelling of the New Testament tradition into a multiplicity of single strands, solitary communities, and isolated theologies which can no longer be correlated', is this in the name of what is or of what must be – of the facts or of the construction that his theology requires him to make upon those facts? And when he proposes that we should instead 'attempt the outline of a synthetic biblical theology of the New Testament which is consonant with development in the history of Israel's language and religion, and which extends to the formation of the Christian canon', is he maintaining, as a matter of demonstrable fact, that this can be done, or, as a matter of theological principle, that it must be done, if his system is not to collapse beneath him? If the latter, he is surely open to the charge of allowing his theology to determine what the facts are. But if the former, then the basic premiss from which he starts is contingent and falsifiable; what will he do if it cannot be sustained? To put the matter another way, why should his synthesis of biblical theology extend no further than the formation of the canon? Can one ever be arrived at in terms of the New Testament alone, rather than of the tradition's ongoing reflection on the diverse New Testament data, a process which is never complete? Stuhlmacher has already appealed for Protestant exegesis 'to strive for contact and connection with a dogmatics able to correct and guide it'; perhaps what is called for is a more explicit recognition that dogmatics is not only 'charged with a contemporary account of the faith', but, like the tradition of exegesis, has a history.

Professor James Barr has provided an introduction to the English edition which the non-specialist reader will do well to read first. The translator's contribution is, regrettably, less helpful. Too often he has been content to translate the words, but reproduce the German idioms intact. The result is not only distressing for the reader with a feel for the English language, but at times seriously distorts the sense of the original. There is a particularly glaring example at the top of p 77.

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HOUSEHOLDS OF GOD by David Parry O.S.B. *Darton, Longman & Todd,* **1980. pp xvii + 199. £4.50.**

THE ENGLISH BENEDICTINES 1540-1688 by David Lunn. *Burns & Oates* **(London) and** *Barnes & Noble* **(New York), 1980. pp xii + 282. £13.50.**

THE ENGLISH BENEDICTINE CONGREGATION by Dom Bernard Green. *Catholic Truth Society,* **1980. pp 100. £2.50.**

BENEDICT'S DISCIPLES, edited by David Hugh Farmer. *Fowler Wright Books Ltd.* **1980. pp xii + 354. £12.50.**

COMMUNITY AND ABBOT IN THE RULE OF SAINT BENEDICT by Adalbert de Vogüé. *Cistercian Publications,* **1979. pp 256. £15.50.**

1980 marks the fifteenth centenary of the birth of St Benedict, a suitable occasion for a spate of literature on matters Benedictine. Four of these books represent a good crop of the English offerings to date, and all of them have something to recommend them.

Households of God is a translation of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028428900055827 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Rule of St Benedict accompanied by 'explanations for monks and lay people today'. The translation reads well, and it can certainly be referred to as an alternative to that of Dom Justin McCann, whose edition of the Rule is the only serious competitor to it currently on general offer. But the rest of the book is less satisfactory. It dodges the major questions about the Rule's contemporary usefulness and valididy, and its assertions are often simplistic, condescending and questionable. A lot of the trouble comes from Abbot Parry's determination to present the Rule largely (though not, admittedly, exclusively) in isolation from its historical and literary tradition and as a guide for twentieth-century man. But there is also the theology of Abbot Parry to reckon with, and that, to put it mildly, is less than discriminating.

David Lunn's book belongs to an altogether different genre. It is a scholarly accumulation of historical detail which began as a doctoral thesis supervised by David Knowles. Its origins are somewhat obvious, but it reads well and is the first major modern history of the English Benedictine Congregation from 1540 to 1688. Clearly it must be taken as a standard work. Bernard Green's little book covers the period dealt with by Lunn, but, though it carries the English Benedictine story up to present times, and though it succeeds in giving the reader a compact view of English Benedictine Congregation history, it cannot compete with Lunn's book in terms of information. Its narrative also lacks sparkle, and, as the reader of Lunn will quickly realize, it is in danger of verging on the hagiographical. English Benedictine skeletons, which Lunn is not afraid to unearth, are decently left undisturbed, and the illustrations offered are also misleading. There is, for example, a photograph of the newly altered church at Belmont Abbey, but a photograph of the chapel at St Benet's Hall in Oxford must have been taken years ago and is likely to create the erroneous impression that the place is now bursting with Benedictines.

More worthy of comparison with Lunn's book is the one edited by David Hugh Farmer, a thoroughly delightful volume which covers a wide range of topics. There are essays on better known figures like Gregory, Anselm and Aelred, but there is also material on lesser known but fascinating people such as Godric of Finchale and Dame Gertrude More. Contributors to the collection include Aelred Sillem, Frederick Hockey, Bernard Green and Daniel Rees. The essays vary in quality and style, there are no footnotes, there is no index, and the spotlight is, unfortunately, turned mainly on the British scene. But the book as a whole is an excellent introduction to the sort of characters who must be considered in any serious assessment of the Benedictine Order.

It remains to be said that such an assessment cannot now plausibly be made without also referring to the magisterial work of Dom Adalbert de Vogüé, who has done more than most in providing modern scholars with erudite writings on St Benedict and his sources. The material contained in *Community and Abbot in the Rule of Saint Benedict* is already well known to specialists on Benedictine history and tradition, and little needs to be said about it here except that an English translation of it is welcome. The work was written before Vatican II, and some of its emphases will not now endear themselves to all parties. But it is still an indispensable text for those engaged in detailed study of the Rule. Together with *The Rule of the Master* (Cistercian Publications, 1977) it illustrates the desirability of an English translation of the critical edition of the Rule of St Benedict (ed. A. de Vogüé and others, *Sources Chrétiennes*, Paris, 1972-7).

BRIAN DAVIES O P

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI, OMNIBUS OF SOURCES ed. Marion A. Habig, London 1964. 3rd edition 1979.

'Among all the saints of post-apostolic time,' says the Foreword to this volume, 'it is generally conceded none seems to have exercised a more profound influence upon the Church and the world . . . than the poor man of Assisi' (p v). 'St Francis