

his first chapter (pp. 21–32) to the Euthyphro problem. This is not usually given as a barrier to Christian belief, and although beginners at philosophy sometimes say 'If what God commands is commanded because it is right and not right because it commanded, then there is something superior to God' this reasoning seems to me too weak to be taken seriously. Christians often think that though they may not know whether a particular act is right or wrong, God does, and accompany this reasonable belief with an ultimately unsatisfactory idea of what God's knowledge of such matters is like: they may unconsciously model it on a speaker's knowledge of what he has commanded. But it could equally be modelled on wise general's or doctor's knowledge of what ought to be commanded. The issue seems peripheral to the truth of Christianity, and the space saved by ignoring it could have been used later to say something about the miracles in the New Testament, which modern readers do sometimes find off-putting.

Secondly, I wish Meynell were less deferential to the feminists. His unremitting use of 'she' and 'her' where traditional English calls for 'he' and 'his' suggests that only women concern themselves with religion. And just as we are learning to discount this suggestion we discover he has reserved the masculine gender for examples of evil and vice. Apart from actual people with names, the only male human being in the book is 'an irascible and profligate father who makes the life of his wife and children a misery' (p. 15). Among all those females embraced by 'she' and 'her', is there none that nags or is unfaithful?

WILLIAM CHARLTON

**PASSION FOR THE TRUTH; CATHERINE OF SIENA: SELECTED SPIRITUAL WRITINGS** edited by Mary O'Driscoll OP. *New City Press*. Pp. 144. \$8.95

Mary O'Driscoll has issued a selection of Catherine's writings under the title, *Passion for the Truth, Compassion for Humanity*. Catherine's writings were always a mean to an end, the sanctification of the Church in Christ. The writings consist of letters, extended prayers and her only book, which she called simply "my book", but which is now better known as *The Dialogue*. The Dialogue should be read in its entirety as it is a carefully structured work, which has been shown by Giuliana Cavallini to be one continuous narrative, despite the fourfold division of the central section which had caused confusion since its introduction in an edition by Onorio Farri in 1579. The Cavallini edition uses a more basic structure, consisting of petition, answer and thanksgiving which runs through the entire work. There now exists an English Translation by Susan Noffke in *The Classics of Western Spirituality* series published by the Paulist Press. The selections in the O'Driscoll edition come from this translation but are no substitute for reading *The Dialogue* itself. They do show though some of the crucial themes of Catherine's thought. The section entitled *The circle of self knowledge*, gives readings which focus on the fundamental notion of humility in Catherine's thought, a humility which is

a self knowledge which includes within itself a knowledge of God because for Catherine, knowledge of self is a knowledge of what it is to be a creature. We know that we are a creature through knowing the creator, so that self-knowledge for Catherine is much more than a psychological examination. It is the discovery of oneself through God who is the mirror in which we see ourselves as we really are. The passages from *The Dialogue* are picked to make a sequence which leads us from the love of God, to the knowledge of our self through Christ, to the journey to God and its various stages, to the wider church to which we belong whose purity is the concern of all, and finally to the heavenly society to which we are all called. This helps us to follow Catherine's thought in a certain sequence which is useful but there is a danger that we might see this sequence as being from Catherine herself. To see how Catherine structured her thought we need to look at *The Dialogue* itself.

Few saints of the catholic church have been as ambitious as Catherine of Siena in their desire for the reform of the church. Few saints have taken upon themselves so much. For Catherine, it was the whole church that needed reform, a reform that had to spread both from top to bottom and from bottom to top. So we find among her correspondence, letters to popes, bishops, priests, religious both contemplative and apostolic, married women, merchants, dukes, mercenary soldiers, to strangers, close friends, to her own confessors and to her own family. To her all the church in all its aspects was her own special responsibility and all these people were part of the church to which she belonged, the one body, and the one bride of Christ. Catherine saw the church as fundamentally a unity and so any sin of the members of the church did not just pollute themselves, it polluted the whole church. There could be no individual sin in Catherine's mind, though there could be sin by individuals. The church as a whole was called to holiness and she could not rest until that holiness had been achieved. There are some of these letters in O'Driscoll's edition, though they are only a small selection of the many that exist, though once again, an English translation by Susan Noffke is being issued.

The writings of Catherine were only part of her struggle to achieve that reformation, they were a means to an end but she had other means. Personal persuasion, prayer, a willingness to endure suffering as an expiation of the sins of the church, and finally she died in a death which seemed to those who knew and loved her akin to a martyrdom as her identification with the church caused her to endure in her own body the breaking up of the ship of the church which she saw the great Schism of 1378 to be. The excerpts of her letters, *The Dialogue* and the great prayers which she dictated near the end of her life, which we are given in by O'Driscoll are not writings written in isolation. They are part of a struggle which came from her conviction that salvation was for the whole church and that God who was "mad with love" for his creation did not wish to abandon any one of his creatures. Catherine was embedded in

the history of her time but there is no need to detach her from that history. The unity of the church which she looked for still eludes us and her writings are of increasing relevance to us as we reflect on the meaning of the increasing divisions of Christianity and are inspired by her to work for the unification of the church. Another source of interest in Catherine is her literary skills. Writing in a Sieneese dialect which is not too far from the Florentine dialect in which Dante wrote the Divine Comedy, she is part of that literary tradition by which the vernacular was to replace Latin as the main embodiment of writing. The number of images which she could call to mind in her writings is breathtaking. In Vol. 1 of Susan Noffke's translation of the letters, the index extends over 2 and a half pages in listing the images in that volume. The images are taken from ordinary life and give us a vivid picture of the ordinary world. This was brought home to me while giving a talk on Catherine to some students in Edinburgh, in the Dominican priory there. I spoke of the central image of Christ as a bridge which she uses in *The Dialogue*, and said that this image would be misunderstood if we did not realise that the kind of bridge she was thinking of was a bridge with houses and shops on it, a bridge which people could live on. This was the sort of bridge which is found in the mediaeval world, especially the Ponte Vecchio in Florence. To my embarrassment, the students pointed out that they were well acquainted with such bridges since two of the main streets in Edinburgh town centre, North and South Bridge and George IV bridge are just such bridges. For Catherine, the whole of our lives are material for the images of the great things of God. A more recent book by Mary O'Driscoll, entitled CATHERINE OF SIENA, issued by EDITIONS DE SIGNE, makes use of the imagery of Catherine, with many pictures based on her images helping to give us a sense of the power of her imagery. This book, in the form of a brochure is a useful complement to this collection.

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**MIRABILIA DESCRIPTA — THE WONDERS OF THE EAST, by Jordan of Severac. Translated by Noel Molloy OP. Dominican Publications (India) 1994, xii + 80 pp. US \$5.95 + postage.**

Alas, this 'wonderful edition', as the Master of the Order calls it in his Foreword, falls far short of what might have been hoped for and what was in fact hoped for by the editor of the volume.

The introductory chapter on Jordan of Severac, by Simon Roche, is largely a tissue of pious fables concocted in cheerful ignorance of almost all the relevant scholarly work done during this century and of the solid evidence which such work obliges us to note. It would be tedious to go into too much detail; a few examples must suffice to illustrate the point.

In 1291 the Dominican Nicholas of Pistoia set off for China with the Franciscan John of Montecorvino; they spent some time in southern India on their way, and Nicholas died there. That is all that is known. Yet