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TÉMOINS DE LA SPIRITUALITÉ OCCIDENTALE by Dom Jean Leclercq. *Les Editions du Cerf, 1965.*

Dom Leclercq tells us in the introduction that the people and the things we are going to read about have been chosen only because they represent the various factors that he dealt with in an earlier book, 'Aux Sources de la Spiritualité Occidentale', and so he anticipates that these monastic studies may have something *disparate* about them. They are indeed a *recueil de travaux disparates*, as he repeats in his epilogue, a cloud of Benedictine witnesses who testify to the remarkable flexibility of the monastic ideal, itself owing so much to the church's own flexibility. Not since vandenbroucke's 'Le moine dans l'Eglise' have I come across a book that so completely and satisfactorily identifies monasticism with the church. But something unfortunate happens to the witnesses under the impact of the thesis. They seem to get flattened out in some strange way, perhaps because they are called upon to edify, when in fact one would willingly take them as they come, Boniface, Liutger, Sturm and Sol, Smaragdus and his 'Diadema', Odo of Cluny, Peter the Venerable, the libraries of Moissac and Pomposa. Dom Leclercq has deliberately chosen ordinary Benedictines for the most part, unremarkable, average, typical abbots and monks – not the most exciting people, and the one he finishes up with, a seventeenth century novice master, must have been an overpowering bore.

If the book had been offered as a set of scholarly Benedictine studies, which it really is, it would have been quite impressive, if only for the historical treatment of the eremetical and apostolic strands that weave in and out of the background of the common life, creating such interesting tensions. But even then one has a nagging feeling that instead of concluding on the note of *le mystère monastique*, he might have said something vital and valuable about Benedictine relevance for today. The matter is so much under discussion, as readers of this journal are well aware, and here is magnificent background material for interesting reflections from a writer of the stature and respectability of Dom Leclercq. But the author seems to shun any such discussion, and you feel an opportunity has been lost. Monasticism, as we think of it today, is not so much a mystery as a way of life.

GEOFFREY WEBB