

Were these accounts based on historical fact? There is no reason, in most cases, to suppose that there is not a central person and situation behind these stories. The literary genre of hagiography has of course taken over the texts, and they are presented in order to show how these people were conformed to Christ, how they became 'hagios', 'holy' in a Christian sense, not to reveal the details of their lives among their contemporaries. Much detail can be culled from these accounts about the life of the antique village or city, however, and as documents of social history they have great importance, provided they are not seen as written to convey such information.

The fact that all these stories have women as their central figures may appeal to the present-day interest in 'women's history' but it is not with this primarily in mind that the texts have been translated. In the excellent introduction, and in the shorter sections which present each text, the authors deal with the stories in their whole historical and theological context. One of the texts may have been written by a woman, the rest by men, but this lack of the desire to write down and analyse experience on the part of women, evident at other times and places, need not be evidence of their inferiority at all. What these stories show is people, in this case women, living out what they understood with all their being of the reality of the Cross of Christ and His Resurrection. Perhaps one could apply a phrase of Fr Jean Leclercq in describing the literary products of the thirteenth century, and use it of the articulate men of the fourth century who wrote of what had been lived: '(In the thirteenth century) minds were less cultivated than in earlier centuries, centuries so happy that no need to produce was felt; it was enough to be alive'. (*The Love of Learning and the Desire for God; a Study in Monastic Culture* (New York 1960, re-issued London 1978, p. 312)

This is a book full of excellent things, translated with accuracy and in a vivid style which matches the material. The book is beautifully produced, and well worth the rather high price at which it is at present offered.

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**A PASTORAL ART – SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE IN THE ENGLISH MYSTICS** by Julia Gatta, Darton, Longman and Todd. Pp. x + 117. £3.95

Julia Gatta is spiritual director at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, where she lectures on ascetical theology. The mystics whose teaching she discusses are Walter Hilton, Julian of Norwich and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. 'All their searching', she succinctly explains, 'all their pastoral advice, moves towards a single goal: union with God', and she maintains: 'A slow and painstaking process, growth in the spirit depends in part upon our gradual appropriation of our common spiritual heritage'. Hilton's advice is given that 'it is the response that we make to our emotional situation that matters, and that remains our fundamental orientation for or against God'. It is well said that, for Julian, 'it is "ignorance of love" that keeps us in despair'. The account of *The Cloud of Unknowing* is admirably designed to win it new readers. These remarks will suffice, I hope, to suggest that the book contains many good things and is to be recommended. But it should be added that 'our common spiritual heritage' does not include, for this writer, belief in God's impassibility (which means that, although God's love for us—his 'concern', if anyone likes—is infinite, he does not experience human *feelings*), that there is talk here of God's 'self-emptying' in creation, the Incarnation and the sufferings of Jesus Christ, and that purgatory is referred to as what 'was thought' to prepare souls for heaven in 'mediaeval theology'.

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