

Theology and Prayer: Essays on Monastic Themes

presented at the Orthodox-Cistercian Conference, Oxford, 1973
(Studies Supplementary to *Sobornost* No 3), edited by A. M. Allchin,
Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1975, 107 pp., 50p.

St. Seraphim of Sarov

by Valentine Zander, SPCK, London, 1975, 150 pp., £2.50.

The Christian West has for long regarded the spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church with diffident reverence, an attitude for which these two books provide further justification. Both publications are marked by subtle unities, within and between themselves. It is astonishing how often in *Theology and Prayer* the same themes – Merton's approach to "dread", the influence of Gregory of Nyssa on St. Bernard, the themes of *excessus* and *kenosis* – occur in papers dealing outwardly with widely disparate subjects. Thomas Merton is the explicit subject of two of the six papers, and most of the others find it difficult not to mention him somewhere. And Merton is the link between these two books, for as John Eudes Bamberger says in his paper on Thomas Merton and the Christian East, Merton was greatly dependent on that spiritual tradition at the centre of which stood St. Seraphim of Sarov. Of the other papers, Kallistos Ware points out in his succinctly definitive account of *Hesychia* how often it is the men of activity, and not only the contemplatives, who have practised this form of spirituality. John Saward in a masterly paper on "The Fool for Christ's Sake in Monasticism East and West" makes brief but excellent use of that unjustly neglected master of 17th century spirituality, Jean Surin, whose Catechism still disgracefully awaits translation into English. Gueric of Igny turns out to be the main subject of Aelred Squire's paper and A. M. Allchin discusses monastic life and unity in Christ. Rowan Williams, who deals with Merton and Yevdokimov, has interesting paragraphs on the monks' flight into the desert, the purpose of which was mainly "to face the demons", "to confront the diabolical" – a highly dubious motive, surely, if it was their primary one.

Valentine Zander's biography of St. Seraphim of Sarov is in the best tradition of rigorously disciplined hagiography. Her treatment of the miracles with which St. Seraphim is credited shows this clearly. They are simply stated as facts but the evidence, or the places where the evidence can be found, is scrupulously given. The description of Motovilov's conversation with St. Seraphim on the Holy Spirit equals anything to be found in any of the writings of Christian mystics.

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