
The author, ‘a lifelong Methodist of Quaker ancestry’, is concerned to show that ‘authentic Christian mysticism has a very vital meaning and message for our time’ (180), and need not make us self-centred, pious or quietist. She therefore retells, in brief, the lives and teachings of some twenty masters of Christian devotion, from Augustine through Francis and Eckhart to Loyola, Wesley and Hammarskjöld; most of whom did lead very active and effective lives.

These thumbnail sketches occupy nearly half the book. They are economic, readable and informative. Those sketched are all Christians, of the Western traditions.

The opening chapter takes up some more general and systematic points. Can mysticism be defined? Is it all subjective? Does a mystic claim union, or communion with God? Many said ‘union’; but Dr Harkness takes them to mean ‘communion’, as ‘it runs counter to all the basic structures of Christian theology’ to suppose that the human soul is ever actually merged with God (23). So it does; but will that settle the matter? The language of ‘union’ is unorthodox, as those who used it were reminded frequently. But they went on using it. Could it be that they meant precisely what they said?

Another introductory chapter notes ‘mystical’ passages in Paul and John; and a third presents some of the philosophical background of ideas, from Plato and Plotinus. In a concluding chapter the neo-mysticism of today is surveyed, and tested ‘by its fruits’: the drug-route is rejected as dangerous, and Zen and Krishna-consciousness are found not quite compatible with Christianity.

This book is not, as its title might suggest, a general study of mysticism. It is an introduction to some Christian mystics of the West, to show that they still have something to offer to active western Christians. It achieves this aim. For those who want to go further, due reference is given, in the Notes, to the standard works of scholarship.

Humphrey Palmer


This symposium, originally intended as a Festschrift in honour of Professor Brandon’s sixty-fifth birthday, sadly had to take the form of a memorial volume. The bibliography of Brandon’s works prepared by John Parry indicates an