'Misspellings in legends' (which indicate pronunciation, and the knowledge of Latin in Greek areas), 'Nimbus', 'Officina', 'Propaganda', 'Quinquennalia', 'Scripulum', 'Serpent' (also omitted from types index), 'Symbols', 'Tricennalia', 'Vota'.

There is no glossary, no bibliography, no references to other discussions. So readers cannot judge if *prima facie* wrong statements arise from rejecting recent research (e.g. p.30, the first war between Constantine and Licinius in 314, not the correct 316-317), or from knowledge of it (e.g. p.88, the last western emperor in 480, not the traditional 476), or from sheer carelessness (e.g. p.84, Valentinian III’s vicennalia dated to 425, his first year).

Only British Museum coins are included (though this is nowhere explicitly stated) so there is no picture of the rare and important coins showing Constantine I with the Christogram on his helmet, nor any reference to them. The 516 coins included are all illustrated at life size, in black and white, in general very well, but several illustrations are too dark for details to be clear, and the coin descriptions contain too many mistakes to be taken on trust.

For ordinary readers and general libraries, *Roman Coins* by J.P.C. Kent, illustrated by M. and A. Hirmer, is much more useful, attractive and cheap; for specialist numismatists, Carson’s work is neither a substitute nor a useful supplement to the volumes of the *Roman Imperial Coinage*, despite their inadequacies; it will be of some use for the period 337-364 until volume VIII of *Roman Imperial Coinage* at last appears.

*C.T.H.R. Ehrhardt*


Growing out of a series of lectures delivered to the Faculty of Theology of the University of Oxford and progressively revised thereafter, Dr Louth presents us with a work of unusual quality. In a field in which there is much disagreement about even first principles, the author proceeds with modesty and careful scholarship. The whole is infused with a note of heart-felt commitment which lifts the work above academic pedantry on to a plane of high seriousness. If there is a fault it is that the author is more at home with the theologians than with the philosophers—but of this more hereafter.

Commencing with Plato (nothing on Aristotle) traversing Philo, Plotinus, the Greek Fathers, Denys and Augustine, with a glimpse forward
to St. John of the Cross, the book terminates with a welcome chapter on the mystical life and the Church. There is a useful bibliography. (Surprisingly, Kirk’s *Vision of God* is not mentioned).

Dr Louth has embarked on a brave venture. For what is mysticism? The term is perplexed with many meanings. Should mysticism be entertained in Christian theology? The question is much disputed. At first sight the answer is in the negative. Between the Christian endeavour of humbly doing God’s will and the presumption of the proud to mystical enlightenment there is a great gulf fixed. Does not St. Paul exalt charity and warn us against the knowledge which puffeth up?

Thus Nygren and Festugière both regard mysticism, if it means the quest for union of the mind with God, as an alien intrusion into the Christian order, something that detracts from the active life in the world inspired by *agape* wherein is true spirituality. How then are we to regard the Fathers who were much given to mystical discourses? Festugière is uncompromising: the admission of mysticism by the Alexandrian school and those influenced by them was a peril if not a disaster for Christian theology, a deplorable invasion of Christian doctrine by Hellenistic philosophy. Clement and Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Denys, Augustine and Gregory the Great all come under Festugière’s rebuke (*L’Enfant*, p.141). Daniélou on the other hand is more conciliatory. He endeavours to save the reputation of the Greek Fathers by maintaining that the similarity to the philosophers is merely linguistic; the Fathers use the mystical terms of Hellenistic philosophy but with radically different meanings.

Louth accepts the condemnation of pagan mysticism, and indeed adds to it in an informative chapter ‘The Monastic Contribution’ in which he draws attention to the anti-mystical character of the life of prayer: ‘An insistence that man is utterly remote from God, and in this world must live a life of repentance and ceaseless struggle against the powers of evil’ (p.98). In the final chapter he endorses and extends Daniélou’s solution: the Fathers never were mystics in the pagan sense. Festugière was misled by a mere verbal similarity. Louth writes: ‘The Fathers’ emphasis on grace in their mysticism is derived from their experience of the love of the *Incarnate* Christ. For the Platonist mysticism is about the soul’s withdrawal and ascent; for the Christian it is about the soul’s response to God’s descent and condescension in the Incarnation’ (pp.196-7).

Asserting that for the Platonist moral virtues are essentially purificatory, but for Christian theology they are the fruits of the spirit and evidences of the indwelling of Christ in the soul of the Christian (p.198), Louth resumes the matter in a succinct phrase: ‘It is participation, not moral imitation, which stands at the centre of the New Testament’ (p.199). (So the 18th Century Scots Populare were right after all in their protest against the
Moderates' 'cold clatter of morality')

From participation Louth draws the conclusion that genuine mystical theology is essentially ecclesiastical; what counts is not the isolated individual but the mystical body which is the Church, and with the Church the sacraments. The critics had made a false dichotomy between contemplation and the active life of *agape*. When contemplation is participatory it flows out into the active life. There is no dualism. (Another way of putting this—not Louth's—is that extrinsic imitation is egocentric, intrinsic participation is filial. It is egocentricity that creates all the difficulties about mystical theology.) The last chapter of Louth's book in which these matters are set in order is of outstanding merit.

Having paid tribute to the work, perhaps some interrogatories on particular matters will not be unseemly.

There is the question of *creatio ex nihilo*. On p.xiv, reiterated pp.75, 197 et al., it is argued that Christian and Platonic mysticism are separated decisively by the affirmation in Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. This principle, Louth avers, rules out Platonic notions of the soul's essential kinship with the divine and puts the stress on divine condescension. The point which Louth makes is often encountered. But is it valid? Could it not be argued on the contrary that the presence of uncreated matter rules out essential kinship, while *creatio ex nihilo* permits kinship?—as indeed is expressed in the *imago dei*, and by the Psalmist (100) 'Know that the Lord is God! It is he that made us and we are his.' Perhaps this question would be resolved if we were given a more precise definition of the term 'kinship'.

On p.197 it is asserted that the theme of the Divine Darkness is without parallel in Platonism. What then of the 'darkness at noonday' of *Laws* x 897? (cf. Aristotle's owls in the midday sun).

We wonder if Ch.1, on Plato, strikes an entirely happy note. (Likewise the summary p.193 sq.) The treatment follows the conventional lines: Plato as a dichotomous and other-worldly sage, a kind of gnostic seeking to escape from the world to some fantastic Sick Heart River. This rendering of Plato's *theoria* satisfied the generality of 19th century commentators, and still lingers with Festugière. Yet surely it is a one-sided and perverse rendering, with the ill consequence to boot of creating opposition between Greek wisdom and the Christian Evangel. If we read Plato in a common sense way, making proper allowance for his dramatic hyperboles (specially extravagant in the *Phaedo* on which Louth draws heavily), we get quite a different picture: that of one appalled at the sordid level of the average of human lives and human affairs, who saw that steady communion with the great realities is needed, not to remove us out of this world, but to redeem the world (the Cave is our proper home), to make us more truly human in the world—*andreikelon*, not *theoeikelon* (Rep. 501b). Plato so understood
is indeed a precursor of Christianity, but not in a mystical sense, rather as one waiting for the Gospel.

As to Louth's assertion that to the Platonist moral virtues are only for purification, to facilitate the separation of the soul from the body: this is clean contrary to Plato's earnest assertions. Holiness is holy, the Just is just, et al. The virtues are with us to the end; they grow in eminence as we progress; indeed they are handed down to us from the Ultimate.

As regards participation versus moral imitation: Plato is no stranger to the matter, nor to the conviction that the only *mimesis* worth having is that which proceeds from *methexis*. Mere extrinsic imitation such as practised by Gyges before his fall is a sham. And indeed what is the whole sophistic doctrine of morality but systematised imitation without participation? Conversely, the pretence to participation without imitation is the way to fanaticism (The modern politicising of religion is a case in point). Plato was wise in joining imitation and participation. Accordingly while Louth is right in putting participation first he would seem to be unwise in setting participation at odds with imitation. Leading a Christ-like life is inseparable from the participatory liturgy and sacraments.

Throughout Louth confuses the issues by talking of 'Platonism' without sufficiently distinguishing Plato from the neo-Platonists. When he castigates 'Platonism' what he says may be true of Plotinus but it is wide of the mark as regards Plato's *theoria*.

Lastly in this catalogue of queries is Louth's total neglect of Aristotle. In the Stagirite the fires of missionary fervour were well banked back. He prunes away Plato's extravagant imagery, sometimes with an unnecessarily heavy hand. The result is Greek wisdom in Puritan dress. A chapter on Aristotle's *theoria* might have led Louth to a more judicious appraisal of the philosophy/evangel situation.

These points of dissent amount to saying that the author has not drawn from philosophy the fullness of support and discipline which philosophical reflection is capable of rendering to theology, and in neglect of which theology itself cannot rise to its full height. The handmaiden has been willing, but her humble offerings have not found favour.

However, let not this tendency to underrate the gifts of nature obscure the real worth of these lectures. What the author has given us is a major contribution to the field.

*Gavin Ardley*