

Dragoș MÎRȘANU

*Despre contemplarea lui Dumnezeu*

(Guillaume de Saint-Thierry, *Despre contemplarea lui Dumnezeu – De contemplando Deo*, bilingual edition, translation, introduction and notes by Florin Crișmăreanu; Bucharest: Ars Docendi, 2014)

The present translation of William of Saint-Thierry's *De contemplando Deo* is a welcome surprise for the Romanian reader, who, while regularly expecting to receive news of translations made from the patristic literature, is less accustomed to be treated to a text from the Medieval Christian West.

The author of this first translation of one of William's works into Romanian, Dr. Florin Crișmăreanu, offers a comprehensive 'Introduction,' from which we are able to gain considerable insight. As it is often done in the studies dedicated to William's personality and works, he starts by making his author stand next to the giant Bernard of Clairvaux, to whom he was a friend and a follower. Rather than continuing to present William as overshadowed by the latter, as he was for centuries, the translator proceeds to demonstrate why he is to be considered nowadays, in light of the recent scholarly advance, one of the truly original minds of the twelfth century.

In the first part of the 'Introduction,' we are offered a sketch of William's life, in which, notably, the author sides with J.-M. Déchanet and J. Hourlier in arguing that William received his education at the school of Laon (instead of that of Reims), where he was most likely to have been introduced to Eriugena's works, which were to influence him a great deal. After a list of William's works, the 'Introduction' moves on to present the work *On Contemplating God*. In writing this text (half meditation, half treatise) on how to know God through love, William was surely influenced, beside the Scriptures, by Augustine and by works of the Greek Fathers available to him via the translations made mostly by Eriugena.

The next section of the 'Introduction' is probably of the highest interest to the reader, as it is dedicated to the concept of contemplation (*ref., contemplatio*, from the Greek term *theoria*). After a presentation of the manifold, but on the whole material meanings of *theoria* in Aristotle, we are introduced to the rather different concept in the theology of the Greek Fathers (*e.g.*, Maximus the Confessor), where it signifies the vision of God and eventually *théosis*. Out of these, William's understanding would have to fall in the line of "Origen, Dionysius, Maximus and Eriugena", as for him *contemplatio* is the vision achieved by means of the eyes within, rather than the external eyes (p. 52); last but not least, William is heir to the Augustinian

understanding and use of contemplation (influenced on its turn by stoics and by Plotinus). In brief, William considers *contemplatio* a gift from God – still, mankind is called to work towards it as well – and discusses it in terms of the necessary, if limited, process of analogy. Mankind will have to contemplate God in the created order and especially in the human nature of Christ, the Incarnate Son. Thus, for William, contemplating God does not mean acquiring the knowledge of God, *i.e.*, by means of an intellectual vision, but a true and beatific participation in the life of God.

The reader is provided next with an examination of William's understanding of what it means to know God through love, rather than intellect; this seems to be for him a better, if more obscure way to achieve the knowledge of God (*'amor ipse intellectus est'*). The translator proceeds to show the similarities between William's understanding of love and that found in the Greek Fathers, such as Dionysius and especially Maximus.

The following section is an exploration of William's Greek sources, wherein the translator analyses whether our author was indeed indebted to theologians such as Origen (via Rufin's translations or perhaps only via Ambrose), Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor (via Eriugena's translations, which he probably became acquainted to at Laon), and not only to the Latin authors, especially to Augustine (as argued by some). The 'Introduction' ends with a portrayal of William as an anti-dialectician (alongside Bernard), offering a useful discussion of his literary reaction against the "philosophers", such as William of Conches and Peter Abelard.

As for the translation proper, one cannot stress enough the often unfathomable character of William's Latin style; the translator has to be commended for undertaking the difficult job of interpreting the text for us in order to produce a translation as close as possible to the original (*i.e.*, quite literal). As the book offers a bilingual text, the reader can clarify for himself or herself any remaining uncertainties in the Romanian version. An appropriate number of endnotes were added as well in order to offer crucial references or further elaborate on important matters. The volume ends with a bibliography but unfortunately offers no indices. All in all, both the translator and the Ars Docendi Publishing House are to be congratulated for introducing William de Saint-Thierry to the Romanian reader.

