

Book Reviews

Donald M. Nicol., *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979. pp. 162.

This is an interesting essay, originally given as four lectures, and essentially dealing with the last phase of the culture of the Byzantine empire. This is not to say that aspects of the earlier phase of this culture are not referred to, but they are brought in as illustrations and are, of course, not discussed fully. In a general way what one has in these lectures is a summary of the book on the same subject which the author published a few years ago.

In general, these lectures deal with the institutional and ecclesiastical structure of the empire, but more specifically they have as their subjects: the state and the nature, actual or theoretical, of imperial power; the nature and influence of the monastic establishments; the church, its position and power; and finally the life of the intellect as it evolved during this period. On the last point one may reflect that despite the remarkable recovery of antiquity which the Byzantines achieved in the course of this period, the so called Palaeologean Renaissance, they themselves produced no new ideas which might have served them as stimuli for the future. Even the ideas of Plethon were based largely on the old tradition. In any case they had no sequel.

The general social picture that may be drawn from these lectures on the society of the period is that it was in the process of disintegration. The picture is sad, of course, but it is not without interest. Especially to be noted are the internal upheavals of the fourteenth century, the phases of them in particular which began about 1341 and came to involve virtually every town of the empire, including Thessalonica, where the radical faction known as the "Zealots" seized control. The "Zealots" distinguished themselves by their violence, but also by their reforming zeal. Whether, however, they aimed at a thorough reform of society is still a matter of discussion. The discussion has been based on a discourse of Cabasilas, thought to have been composed when the "Zealots" seized Thessalonica and to have contained the arguments which they used to justify their seizure. According to some scholars, however, since Cabasilas nowhere in his discourse mentions the "Zealots", that discourse must have been composed later than their revolt and as a consequence, it could have no relation to it. Nicol seems to have taken no position on the question. This reviewer, on the other hand, is inclined to accept the old chronology of the discourse. But, however that may be, no reform was ever affected and society sank deeper and deeper into poverty.

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Sotiris Kadas, *Mount Athos: An Illustrated Guide to the Monasteries and their History*, Athens, Ekdotike Athenon, S. A., 1979, pp. 200.

Mount Athos, known locally as *Aghion Oros*, Holy Mountain, takes its name from the marble topped Mt. Athos approximately 6,670 feet, which crowns the Halkidiki peninsula.