

The present work is addressed primarily 'to those who do not quite understand why they are obliged, by reason of their vocation, to make the psalms the substance of their prayer' (p. xii). The author's general views on liturgical interpretation are admirable, and quite in the Augustinian tradition. The pity is that throughout the book they remain general views; they are so rarely developed or applied. It is not enough to realize that in chanting the psalms we are participating in the praise of Christ, 'loving the sons of God in the Son of God', and becoming 'a new creature' in the Mystical Body. All this is true and important, but it is not enough. St Augustine shows us just how this master-idea of his applies to each individual psalm; but it is precisely this detailed application which Father Merton omits. It might be argued that he had not the space for it in so short a book, did one not realize how much of the existing material it could profitably have replaced. In the first section, for example, the author appears to be trying to persuade a hypothetical opponent that the Liturgy, so far from being an obstacle to contemplation, is in fact the chief and surest means of attaining to it. One would have supposed that the monks for whom Father Merton is primarily writing were the very last people to need convincing on such a point.

The third section consists of an account of the senses of Scripture which is so wide in scope, and at the same time so elementary in content, that it will be quite superfluous for those who have even a rudimentary acquaintance with the subject, and quite inadequate for those who have not. Again, it is difficult to perceive the relevance of the section entitled 'Visible Mysteries', in which there is virtually no reference to the psalms whatever. Such sections as these, and large portions of many others which are equally vague and general, might reasonably have been omitted, and sufficient space would thus have been saved for the concrete examples of specific psalms which seem so essential in a work of this kind. As it is, the author appears to have relied far too much on romantic generalizations to fill his pages. Such a treatment may serve as a general reminder that the Liturgy is the supreme means of attaining to contemplative union with God; but it is unlikely to be of much assistance to those who seriously wish to deepen their understanding of the psalms.

JOSEPH BOURKE, O.P.

SEX, SIN AND SANCTITY. By John Langdon-Davies. (Gollancz; 16s.)

This interesting book contains a number of valuable ideas and suggestions: it would have been more valuable as a whole had some of the research been more careful and some of the judgments less glib.

The author sets out to examine the probable nature of the 'sexual ideology' of the future by interrogating the past; more specifically, to show 'not only that Christianity did achieve what was demanded of it by humanity [in this respect], but that, if the new tasks are to be accomplished, it may again be by means of Christianity'. With certain reservations the first part of this aim may be said to have been successfully carried out; in the course of his argument the author shows very clearly both that Christianity is not life-hating (though there have been Christian life-haters) and that it was not Christianity which 'introduced the concept of sin into the world, and the concept that sexuality is sin'. But his success with the second part of his aim is more dubious. He makes a clear and useful distinction between the sexual (procreative), the I-Thou love-relationship, and the lustful (animality); but he seems to suggest that these three should be not merely distinct but separate and subject to the sanctions of different authorities—State, religion and 'good taste': it is surely very odd to suppose that Christianity could ever acquiesce in the separation of the first two as an ideal, or resign its responsibility with regard to the third. Quite apart from this, however, the book is marred by its frequent inaccuracies and occasional howlers. It is just untrue to say that according to Catholic moral theology 'foreplay' in marriage is 'inadvisable' (p. 83); the laws regarding 'spiritual relationship' as impediment to marriage are grossly misunderstood (*ibid*); Christian idealism does not see the love of woman as a 'misplaced' attempt to love God (p. 242), still less does it seek to 'denude sexuality of all connection with any myth of love whatsoever' (p. 138); the common Catholic teaching concerning masturbation has not been understood accurately (p. 312); to say, for the sake of a slick antithesis, that 'the Age of Faith offered us love without, or in place of, knowledge' (p. 338) is fantastic, and to say that no 'special mental state' is required in confession because the sacrament works *ex opere operato* is monstrous.

St Dominic, it may be added, is described (p. 193) as 'one of the less attractive of the great saints'.

GERALD VANN, O.P.

EARLY CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATIONS OF HISTORY. By R. L. P. Milburn.
(Adam and Charles Black; 18s.)

In this course of his Bampton Lectures Mr Milburn gives a survey of the first five Christian centuries' thought on the subject of history. It is a subject which has been the central pre-occupation of a great deal of the best theological work of our time, as well as one whose importance to early Christian thinking is becoming increasingly recognized in the