

in most previous volumes. This is not surprising in view of the many problems of criticism and interpretation which have been raised by the study of the psalter. Though inevitably some of these questions are specialised, there remain plenty which must concern every educated Catholic who wishes to pray the Church's liturgy with understanding and appreciation.

A few of these questions, in non-technical language, would be the following. How did the psalms come to be the official liturgical prayers of the Jews, and why were they so enthusiastically adopted by the Christian Church? Were they written in the first place for use in worship, or afterwards adapted for this purpose? Are they all one literary type, or does the word 'psalm' conceal a variety of literary forms?

To my mind, one of the most valuable features of the helps provided is the appendix list of psalms, classified according to type. Thus, *hymns* differ from *prayers*, *doctrinal poetry* and *prophetic eschatology*. *Hymns* again are of a number of different types; *prayers* may be *collective* or *individual*, or *prayers of supplication*, *confidence* or *thanksgiving*. The reader will realise the rich variety when he sees that there are nearly fifty subdivisions of this list.

Not less interesting to the modern Catholic are the questions of the messianic and theological meaning of the psalms. How many psalms are directly messianic? What is the justification for regarding others as indirectly messianic? Did the psalmist succeed in transcending the theological limitations of his time? How is it that the psalmists often betray an appreciation of the supreme value of spiritual union with God, if their view of divine rewards and punishments is confined to the usual Old Testament notion of purely this-worldly sanctions? How did they succeed in combining a pure and elevated view of God's almighty wisdom and holiness with a warm trust in his loving and faithful fatherliness towards man?

Such are the questions adequately and critically discussed in the seventy-page introduction, with exact references to chapter and verse of the psalter and other appropriate books of the Scriptures.

The French translation, together with the very brief select footnotes, will, I venture to think, be of great value even to English readers, in helping them to understand the true meaning of the Latin, especially the new, psalter. Like other volumes of the series, it is excellently produced on good paper.

H. FRANCIS DAVIS

A NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY FOR ENGLISH READERS. By R. A. KNOX. (Burns Oates; 18s.)

In the preface to this book, the author's aim is stated in the following terms: 'The object of this commentary is to examine briefly and candidly such difficulties as present themselves to the mind of the ordinary reader.'

After a short and very general introduction, one is plunged straight into notes on the actual texts of the gospels: 'the footnotes', as we are told on the dust-cover, 'which Monsignor Knox would like to have written' to his translation of the New Testament.

It is a serious disadvantage in so brief a book that so many distinct and technical questions should have been mingled indiscriminately with the exegesis. Such questions, while they prepare the way for the final elucidation, are not of primary importance to the ordinary reader. In his mind the one vital question is: 'What do the gospels really mean?' Yet in spite of his preface, the author is too often occupied with the synoptic problem, or with manuscript variations, or with historical reconstructions, or with the writer's personality, or with the sources of his information at any given point, to concentrate on that one vital question of the evangelist's meaning. Moreover, it is essential that the reader should perceive not merely the events recorded in each gospel but also the writer's own interpretation of those events. The evangelist's insight into the facts is part of the inspired truth. And since in this book Monsignor Knox never explains the formal structure of any gospel or indicates its characteristic themes, he tends to give the impression that he regards the evangelists as mere recorders of the material facts of our Lord's life. His estimate of John is frankly quite unacceptable. 'The reminiscences of a very old man, who has an old man's tricks of narration. He will recall, as if conjuring them up with difficulty, details . . . which have nothing much to do with the story. He will give us little footnotes, as if to make sure we are following; often unnecessary, often delayed instead of being put in their proper place.' Does the phrase 'detached reminiscence' really describe the literary character of the fourth gospel? In spite of the vigorous unity of theme underlying it, there is, it is true, some superficial lack of coherence, some strangeness, and some obscurity in this gospel. But surely that is to be ascribed, not to the tricks of an old man's memory, but to an insight into the Incarnate Word too deep and holy to be easily expressed in the words of this world.

However, where these notes are exegetical they do help the reader over many, though by no means all, of his difficulties. The promise of brevity and candour is certainly fulfilled. For these reasons the book, when used with the author's New Testament, will probably prove moderately helpful to those who cannot cope with a full-scale commentary.

J.B.

FAITH AND PRAYER. By Vincent McNabb, O.P. (Blackfriars Publications; 13s. 6d.)

Blackfriars Publications have done a considerable service in making available in a single volume these two works on Faith and Prayer as a