

modern addiction to doubtful phenomena and 'little devotions'. 'Long before St John of the Cross', she writes, 'the Seraphic Doctor warns his readers not to desire visions and revelations, which should rather be feared.' And again: 'Devotion to the Sacred Heart was coming in, but never in Bonaventure or his brethren do we find any suggestion that the Sacred Heart is mourning over Its failures! They were too theological to let their emotions get the better of them. . . . Christ crowned with thorns, the Man of Sorrows, was ever *Christus Rex*.' This traditional teaching can hardly be emphasized too much.

Much of the present work is devoted to the intermediate state between meditation and infused contemplation now generally called 'acquired contemplation'. 'To make a thorough study of the earlier contemplation . . . the missing link, its features and causes was to be the supreme original contribution to spiritual theology of St John of the Cross.' Perhaps this is a little one-sided. It seems to us that the Saint's studies of the later stages, the dark night of the spirit and the transforming union, are no less original contributions, though it is probably true that St John's careful analysis of this intermediate state which he called 'the night of the senses' has attracted the attention of later—especially recent—theologians more than other parts of his teaching.

Though evidently intended especially for students of mystical theology, this book will also be of profit to a wider public. The many well-chosen citations from the comparatively little-known medieval spiritual writers as well as the sound comments of the author provide most fruitful matter for prayerful reflection.

HILDA C. GRAEF

BREAD IN THE WILDERNESS. By Thomas Merton. (Hollis and Carter; 15s.)

Anyone who undertakes to write a short book on the psalms must be prepared to face serious problems of method. On the one hand, when dealing with so heterogeneous a collection of poems, it is important to avoid facile generalizations; on the other, to consider each psalm of the hundred and fifty individually, is obviously impracticable. One solution would be to concentrate on representative examples of the psalm 'types': the Lamentations, the Royal psalms, the Thanksgiving psalms, Liturgies, etc. But whatever method is chosen, it must allow for the fact that a psalm, like any other poem, deserves to be treated as an organic unity. It is not enough to talk vaguely in terms of general themes (the 'cosmic' theme, the historic themes), or of such isolated images and symbols as may have attracted the commentator.

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.