

REVIEWS

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

One has the impression that this short book of reflections has perhaps grown out of conferences delivered to the novices or students of Fr Merton's own monastery. It is, as it says, a book about the psalms, though rather round about them. The last part of the book especially, and the part which is much the best, is mainly concerned with the dispositions of mind and heart necessary for reciting the Divine Office fruitfully. This is the section which incorporates in general terms the approach of St Augustine to the psalter, and it is a pity that it was not made the starting-point of the volume and developed with some quite particular examples. For the first part of *Bread in the Wilderness* is disturbed by arguments with imaginary opponents of a kind one could never meet outside the covers of a textbook. There is indeed one passage (p. 39) in this section which gets so bewitched with those beguiling words 'immanence' and 'transcendence' that it makes very little sense. Perhaps less harmless is the attempt (pp. 13-14) to distinguish between contemplation and what is called 'mere faith' by putting faith outside the field of experience altogether. If ever one is to be able to maintain that contemplation is a deepened and heightened awareness of what is initially given in faith this kind of distinction must be avoided. Doubtless it is suggested by a wish to safeguard an orthodox position on the objective character of faith. But it fails to note that the faith which is presupposed whether to the most humdrum meditation or to the loftiest of the infused gifts, is faith *as a virtue*, and hence something legitimately spoken of as within the field of experience, albeit there may be nothing very exciting about it. It may again be questioned whether the distinction between symbol and myth made on page 55 is really very satisfactory.

None of these criticisms, however, should blind us to the book's many virtues, not the least of which is Fr Merton's communicative concern for spiritual things. It is no small matter to have made many people want to pray or try to pray better.

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AGAINST THE STREAM. By Karl Barth. (S.C.M. Press; 16s.)

DU PROTESTANTISME A L'EGLISE. By Louis Bouyer. (Les Editions du Cerf. Paris; n.p.)

Both these books are important. The former is a collection of papers written by Barth between 1916 and 1952. Once again Barth

is concerned to state Christian Doctrine in the face of the world, but his particular view of what that doctrine is leads to strange conclusions. His rejection of natural law, the transcendental character of his thought, leads him to distrust 'Christian' political parties, and indeed any association with the non-Reformed. This is not to say that he denies that the Christian must act in the civil sphere—he is very clear that he must, but since he so fundamentally distrusts nature, it is clear that he cannot allow of a Christian theory of the state; one is only permitted to speak of a 'direction'. Barth sees so clearly the necessity of the Church preserving her freedom so that she may speak of the things of God, that one regrets profoundly that his view of *gratia sola*, as destructive of the good of the whole created order, should blind him to the divine 'condescension' whereby the imperfect, but perfectible, human is incorporated in Christ, and thus becomes, in all its aspects, the medium of grace.

In the second book the Abbé Bouyer has excelled himself, and it is to be hoped that we shall see this work translated in English very soon. Few living writers have M. Bouyer's extensive acquaintance with both classic and contemporary Protestant theology, intimate understanding of Newman, and grasp of Patristic thought. In his latest work he shows how the negative factors in the Reformation movement, which stem from a nominalist theology, not only find issue in theories of forensic justice and rejection of all 'good works', but give rise to theories and even demands for 'inner light' and set in motion that constant series of reactions between formalism and revivalism, transcendence and humanism, which characterizes the history of Protestantism. This, found in the latter part of the book, is treated as an apologetic theme leading towards the Church. The first part of the book is, perhaps, even more valuable for the teacher and student of '*De Ecclesia*' for there we find an illuminating analysis of the great positive convictions which gave, and still give, strength to the movement—each of these is treated at length and it is shown the 'value' represented is found in the Catholic Church. These convictions are Luther's '*gratia sola*', the idea of the all-sufficiency of God, which burst forth in John Wesley's hymns; Calvin's sovereignty of God, with which nothing can be compared, and the Calvinist's love of the psalm, for only God can speak well of God—the list could be continued from M. Bouyer's pages, but perhaps enough has been said to indicate that his book is an indispensable introduction for those who want to know what motivates Protestantism and why, on the long view, those motives, though vital, are inadequate.

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