

many of the admirable works they have published. The benefit is the greater, of course, when the subject of the assembled articles is the unique one here chosen. As Christians and Catholics we all know that we should try to grow in the knowledge of Christ—whether we do try is another matter. But here at least is a new chance, an opportunity of seeing him, and matters pertaining to him, through the eyes of many—more than forty authors, in fact—who in one way or another may be able to enlighten us. The wide variety of standpoints and styles of treatment should please those especially who can seldom find a spiritual book that suits them. The two main ways by which we can seek to enlarge our knowledge of Christ—the study of his earthly life and of his life in his Mystical Body, the Church—are each well provided for. The first three of four sections into which the anthology is divided are concerned with our Lord's human life until Pentecost, while the last one continues the story 'To the end of Time'.

The book is a companion to *The Mary Book* published two years ago, and is very like it. It has however the further advantage of some theological appendices, taken from Mr Sheed's *Theology and Sanity*, which supply a useful framework. M.H.

LA PAUVRETE. Collection 'Problèmes de la Religions d'aujourd'hui'. (Cerf; Blackfriars; n.p.)

The conference convened by the Editor of *La Vie Spirituelle* to consider the very real problems of Religious Sisters in France has recently discussed the question of Chastity and the substance of their discussion will appear in book form next year. The present volume contains the papers of last year's discussion on the vow of Poverty. It would have been easy to be carried away with enthusiasm for such a Christian subject. But Père Ple, the Editor, saw the danger of such general treatment, in view of the fact that it is in the practice of poverty that the religious is most directly implicated in the economic and social changes in the world around. This is particularly true today with the advent of Marxism and the difficulties regarding capitalism. So the volume treats not only of the evangelical and monastic call to 'sell all and follow Christ', but also of canonical and economic matters concerned with the vow. Procurators may benefit in particular, as well as superiors, by these pages; and those who realise the importance of the constitution *Sponsa Christi* will find here useful applications of it to the present situation of religious sisters. The volume will appear in an English translation in 1953. C.P.

THE ASCENT TO TRUTH. By Thomas Merton. (Hollis and Carter; 18s.)

In these days, when even Catholics are in danger of being infected with indifference and materialism, any book that will help us to get back to our own spiritual past, that will introduce us again to the great doctors of

prayer, must be welcome. Thomas Merton's new book promises to do its share in this great work. *The Ascent to Truth* cannot be called an easy book to read, but the subject-matter would not be easy for any writer.

The author's purpose in writing is expressed in his own words at the beginning of chapter XVIII: 'Our only task has been to give a clear and concrete idea of the prelude to mysticism and to lay down a few fundamental principles without which infused contemplation cannot be thoroughly understood'. In a short review only a few points can be emphasised. His pages on the difference and relations between the theology of light and the theology of darkness will help many to understand the classical writers when they seem to contradict one another in their approach to the physical world, to creatures. Again, there are some who fear the teaching of St John of the Cross because of his drastic asceticism. This book should go a long way to remove such fears by showing what St John really does teach and how he leads us to love creatures in the right way. 'He will find greater joy and recreation in creatures through his detachment from them, for he cannot rejoice in them if he look upon them with attachment to them as his own.' In the same way he helps us to realise the true balance between 'knowing and unknowing', a point that can be wrongly understood with dangerous results. St John of the Cross, in his doctrine of 'unknowing', in no way condemns intellectual activity, but emphasises that there comes a time in the life of prayer when reason and knowledge can hinder us on our way to God. St John himself was a theologian. He had the deepest respect for all that reason can do to help the soul to God, but he knew its limitations. In Thomas Merton's words, 'Knowledge that is acquired by the intelligence, working in its own human mode, whether on the level of reason alone, or in the order of grace, where reason deals with the revealed truths of faith, has, for St John of the Cross, all the validity it has for St Thomas Aquinas.'

The author will have done a great work if he convinces at least some of those who hold St John of the Cross under a cloud of suspicion, that the great Carmelite is always reasonable and logical, using his teaching not only upon Theology and Holy Scripture, but also upon a profound knowledge of human nature, its strength and weakness.

BRUNO WALKER, O.C.R.

WHAT ST PAUL SAID: or 'The Teaching of St Paul. By J. W. C. Wand, Bishop of London. (Oxford University Press: Geoffrey Cumberlege; 7s. 6d.)

Anyone who has tried to expound St Paul in the classroom, in the lecture-room, or in church, and has used the technique of partly summarising the argument, partly reading or paraphrasing the actual words of St Paul, and partly explaining in asides the circumstances, while welding these