

BLACK POPES. Authority: Its Use and Abuse. By Archbishop Roberts, S.J. (Longmans; 8s. 6d.)

It is to be hoped that this book will be widely read by Catholics and non-Catholics alike, for it discusses, not only authoritatively but with complete frankness, matters which are widely misunderstood and often, within the Church, veiled by a policy of hush-hush. The Archbishop's thesis is that the sharpest criticism need not involve the least suspicion of disloyalty (p. 4); that on the contrary 'there is no divine guarantee that the Church will be healthy if deprived of the bracing public opinion recognized as the lifeblood of any intelligent democracy' (p. 8). True, a problem, and perhaps a contradiction, seem to lie at the back of the Archbishop's statement of *theory*: the difficulty about the 'obedience of judgment' as here propounded, i.e. that the will of the subject must as far as possible bend the understanding so that he comes to think as the superior thinks about the thing commanded (p. 15), is not so much that it is impossible as that it seems strictly unnatural and therefore immoral. To say, generally speaking, that 'the superior probably knows best' is no more than ordinary humility; but where there is real expertise, for instance, to try to do violence to the reason would be irrational and therefore immoral. The thesis seems moreover to involve a contradiction because if I am to do my utmost to think as the superior does, how can I at the same time be right in 'making representations', how justify St Ignatius in opposing the wishes of the Pope, how justify the very principle which is the book's main thesis, the principle of healthy criticism? To obey perfectly is to obey gladly, joyfully: and that is never more heroic than when the command cannot be intellectually approved.

This theoretical difficulty does not detract from the practical value of the book, or from the importance of the Archbishop's own criticisms, e.g. of the Church's matrimonial courts, or his vindication of the truth that 'if principles never change, their application does'.

GERALD VANN, O.P.

MEDIEVAL MYSTICAL TRADITION AND ST JOHN OF THE CROSS. By a Benedictine of Stanbrook. (Burns & Oates; 12s. 6d.)

This book is a most welcome contribution to the history of mysticism. It places St John of the Cross within the great mystical tradition of Christendom, and shows the influence of theologians such as the Victorines, St Bonaventure, Tauler and Ruysbroeck on his work, pointing out very striking similarities especially between Richard of St Victor and the Carmelite Saint. The anonymous author gives her wholehearted allegiance to this tradition, so often obscured by much

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.