

under the somewhat infelicitous title of *The Spirituality of the Old Low Countries*; although the infelicity was not altogether to be avoided, since Axters rejects, for reasons which may be thought pedantic, 'Netherlands' along with the quite reprehensible 'Flemish' as a genetic term. This French work was designed as a preliminary sketch of the massive Dutch critical history of the subject which has since appeared and which the present writer hopes shortly to review for THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT. But this English translation can meanwhile be warmly recommended, both for its own merits, which are such as one looks for in any work by Attwater, and for the admirably concise account which its original gives of the chief problems which are to be considered in assessing the history of mystical devotion in the Low Countries. Even in this short sketch Fr Axters's great learning and his awareness of the sometimes bitterly controversial nature of some of his themes are not disguised: but he presents his material lucidly, and in a form so attractive that it should encourage many readers to seek for themselves in the vast treasury of medieval Dutch devotional literature. It is sad that as yet so little has been done in Britain and America to make these riches available to English readers: some of Blessed John Ruysbroek's greatest works are still not translated, and, so far as the reviewer knows, not one single letter or poem has appeared in our language by the great Hadewijch, the mystery, fascination and power of whose writings must strike any reader even of Axters's somewhat dry and terse account of her. Naturally, she has her place in his balanced and ordered account of speculative mysticism as Ruysbroek's forerunner, just as John van Leeuwen, the Groenendael cook, and Denis the Carthusian appear as his heirs in that great tradition. The question whether too much is sacrificed to balance and order, whether the author's admirable method does not compel him to take a somewhat blinkered view of spiritual history, must be postponed to the review of his major work. Meanwhile it only remains to say how grateful we must be for this modest, pleasing, scholarly little work.

ERIC COLLEDGE

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF MAN IN SOCIETY. By G. Ernest Wright.
S.C.M. Press; 7s.)

This book is the outcome of a series of conferences given in Chicago by a number of Protestant biblical scholars, and organized by the Study Department of the World Council of Churches in pursuance of its policy to deepen its broad enquiry on 'The Social and Political Message of the Bible today' (v. *Biblical Authority for Today*, published 1951), by fostering a series of monographs on particular themes.

The convenor of the Chicago group here presents the fruits of the work of his group as it was elaborated by papers and discussions at intervals over a two-year period, and cross-fertilized by contact with a German group working on the same subject. The result is a book of great richness and scholarship, which, since Dr Wright is alone responsible for its present redaction, redounds greatly to his ingenuity and courage. It is to be doubted, however, whether this herculean effort to produce a monograph from a symposium was entirely wise. No matter how great the measure of agreement attained by those participating, one feels that the book suffers in freshness of language and presentation by not having its matter given in the original accents and style. In short, it would have been preferable if the convenor had let us hear more of the give and take of contribution and discussion and contented himself with giving us an editorial introduction or epilogue of his own.

The subject of this book determines that it is a work of biblical theology. In a carefully-written introduction Dr Wright lays down his terms of reference and the limits of his enquiry. In this, however, he is too disarming. Fearing that 'to some readers the monograph may still appear deficient in Christological emphasis' he writes that 'the relation of the Old Testament to the New is not clarified by Christomonism but by "the full Trinitarian faith of the Church"'. That is very true. Nevertheless no really satisfactory biblical theology can be written which contents itself, as this book too often does, with emphasizing the continuity of the two testaments and not at the same time giving due value to what is new in the fulness of revelation in Christ. It is perhaps, symptomatic that while strongly underlining the charismatic element in the N.T., the book should be so singularly poor and unsatisfactory in delineating the full dimensions of Christian charity. In particular the peculiar light cast by the Johannine writings on the mystery of charity is not given its full value. The author tends to regard St John's insistence on love of the brotherhood as a withdrawal under stress of persecution from the more 'open' position of earlier N.T. writers which may be summed up in St Luke's parable of the good Samaritan. But it is profoundly to mistake the aim of the writer of the 'spiritual' Fourth Gospel to see a contradiction here. St John is not correcting; he is giving the essentials from which all else in Christianity flows. For the key to the new creation in Christ lies in that charity of God which 'is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us' (Rom. 5, 5). And, paradoxically it is the interplay of love within the Christian community, between men who have had this new heart created within them, far more than the flow of love from within that community outwards (although of course this secondary movement

is a necessary consequence of the first) which bears the most effective witness to Christ. 'Behold how these Christians love one another' was first an expression of genuine *admiratio* before it became a sneer.

Despite these reservations, there is much in this book to nourish the spiritual life of a Catholic. Indeed such a reader with his background of a living and unbroken tradition dating from N.T. times is in a privileged position to supply the deficiencies of this present essay, even in the precise sphere of *biblical* theology. The Christ whom we encounter in the sacred pages commands all history, and in a special way the divinely appointed communities, the two Israels, which radiate from him: the one, the old Israel backwards to the election of Abraham; the other, the new Israel, forwards from Pentecost to the Parousia. To understand even the biblical Christ, we must be in vital contact with both these communities. Such contact with the former is possible from reading the O.T. But the latter, full contact implies being *in* that community itself which now exists in unbroken succession from the Apostles.

RONALD TORBET, O.P.

THE MEDITATIONS OF WILLIAM OF ST THIERRY. Translated from the Latin by a Religious of C.S.M.V. (Mowbrays; 7s. 6d.)

No theoretical studies of our inheritance in medieval spiritual writing can be any real substitute for open access to the works themselves. The humble task of the translator is still for us in England a very necessary one, though of course it demands something more than mere conscientiousness. It is indeed strange that William of St Thierry, a Cistercian writer of a genius which, although distinctive, makes him comparable to St Bernard himself, should hitherto have attracted so little attention. His *Golden Epistle* has been available in English for some years, but nothing more. Those who have already found pleasure and profit in the translations of this Anglican Sister will need no special encouragement to acquire a new one. It makes no pretensions to scholarship, but it does its job efficiently and sympathetically. Anyone who has yet to make the acquaintance of this great monk with the penetration of a true theologian could not do better than begin here.

A.S.

THE NEW TESTAMENT BASIS OF PACIFISM. By G. H. C. MacGregor, D.D., D.LITT. (The Fellowship of Reconciliation. New and revised edition; 5s.)

This is an important book as it is perhaps the best exposition of the Christian pacifist case from a non-Catholic standpoint. On the whole Dr MacGregor presents his material in a careful and objective manner