

*Plebs sancta*: we are a holy people and therefore must physically share in the celebration. This does not necessarily demand an altar facing the people: Fr Jungmann is only in favour of this for small congregations, because the traditional orientation of the altar has its own significance. *Socia exultatione*: as the blessed in heaven share the joy of the Mass, so at the other end of the scale we must see that our liturgical embellishments do not exclude the rank and file of the congregation.

This is a stimulating commentary because the author is enthusiastic without being a fanatic. He would like to see the congregation filing to the altar to offer their hosts for consecration but appreciates the difficulties: he would like sufficient vernacular in the Mass of the Catechumens to remind the faithful how God has accepted Christ's sacrifice. To the discussion he brings a wealthy array of learning, theology, history, art; but we are never overawed because all is subordinated to the purpose of making the Mass more real in our lives. This is helped not a little by his gift for dramatic presentation: 'Nous voyons l'Eglise gravir la montagne sainte, si l'on peut dire. Sur le sommet de la montagne, elle reçoit l'offrande des mains du Seigneur et présente le sacrifice avec lui.' Only once or twice do the suggestions for liturgical 'reform' sound like special pleading. This is a thoroughly stimulating book, as practical as it is learned.

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GESCHIEDENIS VAN DE VROOMHEID IN DE NEDERLANDEN. Vol. II: *De Eeuw van Ruusbroec*. By Stephanus Axters, O.P. (De Sikkel, Antwerp; 380 fr. belg.)

This second volume, *The Age of Ruysbroek*, of Fr Stephanus Axters' *History of Piety in the Netherlands*, must be read as a sequel, if its methods and conclusions are to be duly esteemed. In the first volume, dealing with the 'Frankish period' (the fifth to tenth centuries) the author discusses in some detail several groups of highly significant texts. One of the earliest is 'The Book of Visions' in the *Vita Aldegundis* (St Aldegunde of Mauberge, ob. 684: Acta SS Jan. iii), perhaps originally composed in the Frankish vernacular, in which a man appears to the saint to announce that Christ is to be her Bridegroom, and she replies in our Lady's words to the angelic messenger; and later Axters describes the *Pigmenta* of St Anscharius (ob. 865), a 'garland' of 150 devout orisons which he used to recite as adjuncts to his psalter, 'ut ei psalmi hac de causa dulcescerent'. Without doubt in the 'Book of Visions' we have an exceptionally early manifestation of the *Brautmystik* which has characterized Netherlands piety throughout its history; and in the concept of the *Pigmenta*, the admixture of the wine of the liturgy, the *opus Dei*, with the honey of private devotions, we have one of the seeds from

which the 'Hours of the Passion' and all the other great devotional exercises, including the Rosary itself, were to grow.

Little is as yet known of the early history of such devotions; and it is to be regretted that Fr Axters has adhered to the plan which he followed in his first volume, that he has chosen to trace the history of piety as it is organized and recorded for us in the chronicles of the religious Orders, and that he has postponed his partial and cursory account of the development of lay piety until the very end of his work. His view that until the early fourteenth century secular devotions were a mere reflection of organized conventual life, and that it is only then that we find a 'spiritual emancipation of the laity', is open to objection. It is true that from c. 1300 onwards we do find a great profusion of evidence of such an 'emancipated piety', but it can hardly have been such a sudden growth as is here suggested. Had Fr Axters given due consideration to the medieval Dutch religious lyrics and mystery plays, and had he compared them with the two great Old Saxon biblical vernacular epics, he might have been less ready to assume that the laity of the centuries for which evidence is scarce were unemancipated. One may not unjustly compare the Frankish Netherlands in this respect with Anglo-Saxon England, and recall that the recently-discovered Old English *Poem on Fasting* has provided evidence of a well-developed satirical, anti-clerical trend of thought which hitherto has been associated only with a much later period.

We may also ask how far Fr Axters reconciles his dating of the emergence of lay devotion and piety with his very proper statement that one of the marks of such spiritual emancipation is a growing acquaintance, by one means or another, with the subject-matter of the Bible. So far as biblical iconography is concerned, the author seems to regard as specifically fourteenth-century and specifically Netherlands a number of developments (such as the accretion in Crucifixion scenes of supernumerary figures, Adam and Eve, it may be, the Old and New Churches, or the sun and moon in eclipse) which are certainly earlier and which are probably directly or indirectly Byzantine in origin. On medieval Dutch biblical texts Professor Margaret Deanesly's *Lollard Bible* is still superior to the present work as a guide; and in his treatment of this subject, as elsewhere, one can observe a certain reluctance in Fr Axters to accept the conclusion that no history such as his can be written without account being taken of the formative piety and devotion of men and women whom medieval churchmen condemned as heretics. His descriptions, fascinating as they are, of such sects as the Flagellants and such enthusiasts as the Dancers, are not really integral; had Fr Axters been better acquainted with medieval English piety and with some of the standard critical works on it, notably those of Miss

Hope Allen, he might perhaps have seen his way more clearly towards an unified treatment of such material.

None of these foregoing remarks must be taken as suggesting that Fr Axters is unaware of such possibilities in his material. He takes full account, for example, of the recent work of Professor Grundmann and Dr Guarnieri (and he has himself been able to suggest, on what seem to be valid grounds, a narrower dating of *The Mirror of Simple Souls* to within the years 1300-1306): and one of the most interesting and valuable preliminaries to his discussion of Ruysbroek's doctrine is his examination of Fr van Mierlo's contention that some of the highly characteristic terms which Ruysbroek uses, such as 'bare' and 'empty', are Dutch in origin. Re-examining the material used as evidence by Professor Grundmann, Axters finds against van Mierlo, and for the probability, already suggested by Dom Combes on different grounds, that Eckhart and Ruysbroek derived many of their ideas and the language in which they clothed them from common sources of which our chief evidence consists in thirteenth-century anonymous German texts.

Fr Axters compares, as he was bound to do, the use of such terms in religious texts with their occurrence in the works of the poets of courtly love, Hartmann von Aue, Walter von der Vogelweide and others; but elsewhere in this work he shows that one of Ruysbroek's outstanding qualities is his freedom from courtly influences. Much as Ruysbroek honoured and learned from Hadewijch, he utterly eschewed her use, for divine ends, of the symbols and metaphors of earthly love poetry: his celebrations of the love of God are indeed more truly representative of the Beguine movement, homely, unsophisticated, unadorned. The Beguines, however, are only one of the formative influences which Axters discerns in the canon of Ruysbroek's works: in the *Limburg Sermons* he finds the beginnings of Dutch exemplarism, in the *Gaesdonck Tracts*, some of which in their present form may be Dutch versions of originals composed by Eckhart, a 'Logos-mystique' at all times close to Eckhart's teaching.

It is difficult to perceive exactly how the opening of this second volume, an account, interesting in itself and full of pregnant suggestions, of the institution of an educational syllabus in the University of Paris and in the various religious orders, notably the Dominican, which supplied it with teachers and pupils, serves as a prologue to this history of Ruysbroek and his age. One may indeed think that in general too much attention has been paid to the minutiae of Dominican history at the expense of others, notably the Carthusians, whose influence upon and debt to Ruysbroek was greater. So, too, in considering Ruysbroek's sources, this work, though it goes deeper than any other recent author-

ity, still fails to give us what perhaps only Denifle could have achieved had he lived long enough, an exhaustive and serious estimation of the debt of Tauler and Ruysbroek to Eckhart and to Eckhart's sources. But if such a study ever comes to be written, its author, even though he will be obliged to cover territory not explored in this work, will find none the less that Fr Axters has immensely eased his way there.

ERIC COLLEDGE

SHORT MEDITATIONS FOR PRIESTS. From the French of Rev. A. M. Meley, C.S.S.R. Translated and adapted by Rev. John J. Doyle, C.S.S.R., (M. H. Gill and Son Ltd., Dublin; 15s.)

A little book of this sort is needed and could be a ready help to many priests who have good desires and good will in the matter of mental prayer. It could especially help those unfortunate priests who might be tempted to think that there is little or no time for meditation in their busy, breathless days. For the meditations presented, besides being adapted to the clergy generally, are short, and could form the matter of 5-10 minute meditations. At the same time, because of the many Scriptural citations which give so much more 'content', they could serve as outlines for the customary half-hour or longer meditations.

Less happy is the adaptation from the French which has resulted in much standard phrasing and conventional religious language, all of which detract from the effectiveness of such meditation-plans (for such they are), making them much weaker instruments of spiritual result. For many, however, the most serious deficiency would be a seeming lack of more properly theological order. It is true that the various meditations are grouped under headings (thus:—I. The Priest—His Virtues—His Duties—His Failings. II. The Great Truths. III. Jesus Christ—The Great High Priest. IV. Mary—The Mother of the Priest. V. The Priest's Models). But there is a much more essential ordering of all, including meditation subjects, under God, and more precisely in their proper place in the total return of all creatures to God. And then this very ordering in itself, in its profundities and complexities (for God writes straight even with crooked lines) serves to mirror the mind of God, and becomes a wonderful theme for meditation, not least when we think on Christ our Lord who is *Via nobis tendendi in Deum*.

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LES INSTITUTS SÉCULIERS. By Jean Beyer, S.J. (Desclée de Brouwer; 150 frs. b.)

The rise of those pious associations now known by the proper name