

beautiful undertones and gives a long-lasting bright finish. Although the effects of these three coats are quite different—the first is for orientation; the second fortification; the third, perfection—the need for covering the whole ground in each coating is the same and no single inch may be neglected. Of course the finishing touch is most difficult and calls for more time and skill. I wonder whether these three coats of paint may not be likened respectively to the purgative way, the illuminative way and the unitive way . . .'. Dr Wu's approving comments develop the thought and connect it with the cycle of the liturgical year, Advent to Epiphany, Septuagesima to Passiontide, Easter to Advent.

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THROUGH HIM AND WITH HIM AND IN HIM by Venantius Buessing, O.F.M.CAP. (J. F. Wagner, New York and B. Herder, London; 25s.)

'Father, we might have just as well stayed at home and read a book. If you ever will be appointed to give retreats, never read, but preach your retreat well-prepared, in plain and simple words, from the heart, and your words will reach the hearts of the hearers.'

The author of these retreat conferences—for such is this book—quotes this piece of advice given him by 'a very saintly and scholarly Capuchin' at the end of a retreat which had been read rather than preached to them. The old Capuchin had spoken wisely and to the point. There is more to a retreat than a series of well-prepared, coordinated lectures, delivered with perfect tone and emphasis, with just the correct word on every occasion to express the variants of meaning. There must be the personal contact with the man himself. He must, of course, speak the truth and offer solid food for thought; the appeal is to the mind and will, and not to the emotions only. Ultimately, it is his conviction of that truth, his evident love of it, and outward living of it, that will leave an impression and effect something worthwhile and lasting in his hearers.

These conferences are printed as they were preached; 'simple language on a subject most sublime'. Something of the author's intense love, and zeal, and sincerity comes through in these pages. And yet it is not true of Fr Venantius—unfortunately for this book of his conferences—that we would profit as much by reading him as by hearing him: the man himself is so evidently more effective and compelling than his words.

This book, then, will be of most value to those who have had the good fortune to have listened to a retreat by Fr Venantius. But it would be ungenerous to say that it will be of no profit to anyone else. The conferences make no claim to be a treatise on speculative theology.

All the way through the approach is practical. The author takes the spiritual realities which make up the daily life of the priest and the religious, and asks us to look at them. As we look with him—and that means trying to look with *Him*—a beauty, and a significance, and an inspiration are revealed, which, perhaps, we once knew, but have long since forgotten in the routine of life.

It is a bit misleading to describe the book—as does the cover—as ‘a full eight-day retreat on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.’ The author, too, speaks in the same way of a retreat on the Mass. For an actual retreat the programme proposed is heavy. Besides the opening and closing conferences, there are twenty-four others. The first two days are given over to the Mass, which is, undoubtedly, the dominant theme. Then follow three days on the usual retreat subjects—sin, death, and grace; faith, hope, and charity; poverty, chastity, and obedience. For the sixth day we return to the theme of the Mass with conferences on the altar, the tabernacle, and the communion rail. The last two days offer a mixed bag in which are talks on the divine office and the breviary, our Lady, the contemplative life, and on the need for being Christlike. The conferences on the Mass, hope, charity, the breviary, and on being Christlike are among the best.

But Fr Venantius cannot escape criticism. In many cases he almost spoils a good point by being too personal in his attitude. It is true that one should not rush on to the altar to say Mass without any preparation; nor, after Mass, should one go off immediately for breakfast. But no one can lay down hard and fast rules about time spent in preparation and thanksgiving—fifteen minutes formal preparation, and preferably before the Blessed Sacrament, with fifteen minutes (no, ‘make it sixteen’) thanksgiving. Even if one makes no *formal* preparation there is usually a space of twenty to twenty-five minutes between ‘the bed linens and the altar linens’ in which to collect one’s thoughts. A similar kind of personal law is evident in his remarks on the breviary. Is it really an advantage to anticipate matins and lauds? A more serious objection can be raised to the attitude of mind expressed by the following statement: ‘Fathers, how many converts do you make every year? One old priest in Wisconsin baptized his one thousandth convert the papers reported lately. A model priest and model parishioners have such results.’ One hopes that this is no more than a logical muddle.

The conference on poverty shows a lack of balance between absolute and relative values. A saint may have said: ‘Please give me *our* handkerchief.’ But we have not all the prudence and charity of the saints, and there would be utter chaos in a community if the phrase ‘*ad simplicem usum*’ were to be taken as giving to everyone the right to use anything. *Use*—as distinct from holding in trust for the community,

as does the bursar—implies that something has been given into the charge of a particular person for *his* use. And on the day of judgment might we not find that the religious who needed several trunks to move his goods was in fact poorer in spirit than the one who boasted that he never needed anything more than a large handkerchief?

In all these cases the important truths that are being brought to our notice—ultimately, a matter of right attitude of mind—are almost falsified by a wrong emphasis on details.

It is good to remind ourselves that we must die one day. But is *death* the last end God had in mind when he inspired the sacred author to write: 'In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin'? It seems a trivial point, but in fact it marks a fundamental difference in outlook. And now and again it would be enlightening if authors would explain in what sense they understand God to be a Prisoner in the Tabernacle. Serious objection could be taken to his referring to the moment of Communion as 'the climax of that hour (i.e. the Mass), the holiest moment of that holiest hour . . .'. In his teaching on prayer Fr Venantius does not see eye to eye with St Thomas. Again, this goes deeper than the mere fact of differing. The author is more than a little suspicious of the prayer of many people: 'it has become a pious exercise in selfish petitions for help in their needs'. Through the fault of the priests the people have been misled about the true notions of prayer—their attention has been fixed on the business of asking for things from God. We must right the wrong, and get them rather to give praise and thanks to God in their prayers. Anyone who has understood the teaching of St Thomas will see that this is not a sound position to adopt. In fact St Thomas uses the substance of this argument in two of his objections in the article: 'Whether prayer is an act of religion'.

On page 45 there is a misprint: 'Meditator' should read 'Mediator'.
M.J.S.

MARY AND MODERN MAN. Edited by Thomas J. M. Burke, S.J. (The America Press, New York; \$3.50.)

'Cultural relevance of Mary' is a slightly intimidating phrase and this book, consisting of ten essays on that theme, looks at first glance to be like just another of those learned Marian books—dry, not sweet. But the editor has chosen his team of contributors with care. They are writers who feel as well as think. Two of the ten are English, one Hungarian, seven American.

Fr Frederick A. Harkins, S.J., opens with 'Mary's Meaning for the Individual', a happy note to strike in a book about modern man. At first eloquent, Fr Harkins seems to tire before the end, as if he had shot his bolt before he had completed the required number of pages.