

further strengthened by a new, ever deeper and more unshakeable unity'. There is a paradox here worth some thought. The unity of the Church is something built-in. It is given from the beginning by Christ her founder, not an ideal only to be achieved hereafter. And yet in practice this unity may be realized more perfectly by the formation of groups within it reflecting the Church's hierarchical nature. This is why, as St Bernard said, we have only one life by profession but we must embrace them all by charity.

Of course no book can ever be a substitute for practical experience. We learn more about the religious life by meeting religious than by reading it. Or is it only different things? Anyway, it is to be hoped that parish priests, chaplains to schools and others who need to know of these new developments in the life of evangelical perfection will find it possible to familiarize themselves with the movement at first hand. Meanwhile, Fr Reidy has provided them and others interested in the subject with an admirably reliable 'grammar'.

MARY EDWARDS.

THE LAYMAN AND HIS CONSCIENCE, by Ronald Knox; Sheed and Ward, 18s.

This book is a retreat at home for the laity and was described by Mgr Knox himself as a 'flick round with the duster', but in effect it fluctuates between the penetrating and the somewhat superficial. The author deals with various aspects of the relationship of God and man, from the meaning of detachment to the use of sacramentals, and he makes the reader take a critical look at his ideas and attitudes. The need for a positive approach is rightly emphasized. He points out that developing our spirituality, so that we grow closer to seeing things as God see them, is more effective than making negative resolutions to avoid particular sins.

Mgr Knox's colloquial style will irritate some and may well be helpful to others, but his discursiveness often weakens the force of his argument. His conclusions are sensible and often illuminating but the illustrations which he uses to prove his point are sometimes misleading. He sees the importance of basing our thinking on the scriptures which are the word of God but his interpretation of them is often based on personal speculation and takes no account of developments in biblical exegesis. He treats St John as if he were another synoptic evangelist; for instance he suggests that as the cleansing of the temple appears at a different time in the story in St John from that in the other evangelists, this event might well have taken place twice over. He uses this comment to illustrate man's constant need for cleansing, which is a valid point, but the argument is misleading for the arrangement of the events in the fourth gospel is in the main not chronological but based on the significance intended to be conveyed.

The author also underestimated the place of the love of God in the Old Testament. To show its lack of importance he cites the fact that the love of God is only mentioned thirty times in it. This seems a rather arithmetical approach

which ignores the underlying message of the prophets and the importance of the theme of the Bride of God which runs through the Old Testament writings.

In the light of the liturgical revival this book seems very dated. There is an entire chapter on the eucharist which only mentions the mass once in passing and which ignores the sharing by the faithful in the sacrifice culminating in the union with God through the people's communion. Indeed the bulk of the chapter deals with the Holy Hour. This reflects the trend, now reversed, which in the past few centuries came near to making benediction more important than the mass.

One of the strongest points of the book is the emphasis laid on the action of the Holy Spirit. The aim of this 'retreat' is to make the reader more flexible and responsive to the promptings of the Spirit, and Mgr Knox points out that the Spirit works in us not merely at times of vital decision but all the time. He is concerned that we should live by the law of the Spirit and abandon the attitude of mind that is anxious to discover what is the least one can do and still ensure salvation. Despite its deficiencies there is much in this book that is helpful and stimulating.

IANTHE PRATT.

THE WAY TO BLESSEDNESS, by Thomas Traherne; The Faith Press, 18s.

Traherne's *The Way to Blessedness* was originally printed in 1675 and was the only book which this elusive writer designed for the general public. His other, and better known, work—the *Centuries* and the *Poems*—was, despite its wonderful accessibility and zest, never intended for a wide audience. The reader, however, would never have guessed that Traherne's writings, and his prose in particular, were really a private matter, simply an overflow of his love and vision of God; Traherne always gives the impression of wishing to share and to communicate. Even when he is speaking of mystical experiences that can never be completely ensnared in words, he nevertheless seems always to be implying that the fullness and clarity of a wordless vision is somehow being held and passed on in the medium of language.

In her useful Introduction to *The Way to Blessedness*, Margaret Bottrall rightly points out that 'All Traherne's writings insist that it is only the man who possesses imaginative discernment who is able to reach full human stature'. She also indicates that for Traherne every human movement or response was an act of worship, a kind of prayer. As he himself said in one of the marvellous *Centuries*: 'You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars'. Yet Traherne is far from 'nature-mysticism'; he is remote from that kind of absorption in natural objects which Wordsworth made into a religion and which Aldous Huxley has, in recent years, attempted to make accessible through the medium of drugs. Traherne is wholly orthodox, fully aware of the hierarchy of things. His view of life is innocent, yes, in the sense that it is far removed