

that exists between the forms of the Christian message and their content. No merely formal analysis of the gospel can convey an adequate sense of what the gospel is.

The book is filled with penetrating insights into the early Christian mind and its modes of expression. Professor Wilder can comment on such an apparently banal point as the length of the various New Testament books and transform it into a profound reflection on the relation between literary brevity and the brief span of Jesus' career or on the difference between rhetorical persuasion and revelation. Frequently his insights find felicitous expression: of the difficulty of attaining the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, he writes: 'Jesus' creative speech was so fresh and significant that it could, as it were, breed speech true to itself' (p. 90). In discussing the startling poetic fragment in Eph. 5. 14, he reminds us: 'Christian speech can have this kind of sublime non-sense because it arises from those depths where the world is still fluid and where all our usual categories are in question' (p. 117). I find particularly rewarding his analysis of myth as a New Testament form and his critique of some misconceptions of the problem of mythical language. 'Demythologizing', he rightly maintains, is no solution. He appropriately points out a weakness of many existentialist interpreters: they fail to realise that the New Testament sets out to provide not only a new self-understanding but also a new world-understanding with historical dimensions.

The author's treatment of myth is a reminder that this book is not meant to be an elementary introduction to the problems of New Testament criticism. It presupposes a certain familiarity with the categories of the discipline, and the discriminating reader may not accept all its judgements. For example he may not be as ready as the author is to admit extensive Gnostic influence upon the New Testament, especially on certain poetic passages of the Epistles or of the Fourth Gospel. Though our gradually increasing knowledge of Gnosticism may tend to push backwards the roots of the movement, there is still a sort of anachronism in arguing for Gnostic influence in the New Testament from demonstrably later Gnostic parallels.

But let us not imagine that such instances are frequent in this valuable book. They are rare and are far outweighed by the sensitive insight into the language of the early Church which the author so eloquently shares with us.

GEORGE MACRAE, S.J.

PAUL ON PREACHING, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P.; Sheed and Ward, 15s.

MASTER SERMONS THROUGH THE AGES, selected and edited by William Alan Sadler, Jr., S.C.M. Press, 25s.

One aspect of the complex thing that is happening in the Church at the moment is that she is discovering her role as the community in which the *Word* of God is mediated to men. The stress in the Council's liturgical constitution on *conscious*,

intelligent participation in worship, the biblical revival, the moral theology of Fr Häring, the coming decree on freedom of conscience, all these are part of a pattern. In and through the Church, the Word of God comes to men, inviting their free response.

Against this background, the need for a revival of the preaching ministry takes on a particular urgency. How many devout Catholics, as they come into church on a Sunday, say to themselves: 'Oh, good! There will be a *sermon* this morning'? How many priests, on a Saturday night, say to themselves: 'Oh, good! I can *preach* tomorrow'? The root reason for the present deplorable state of preaching is that everybody, priests and people, has forgotten what preaching is, and what it is for.

Dr Murphy-O'Connor's book is therefore particularly timely. He makes no attempt to outline a systematic theology of preaching. He is content to sift the Pauline letters to find out what was Paul's own understanding of the place of the proclaimed Word in his ministry. He has chapters on the place of preaching in the plan of salvation, on preaching as a prolongation of the ministry of Christ, on the 'quasi-sacramental' power of the preached Word, on preaching as a liturgical act. He is particularly helpful in showing that Paul saw his ministry as being in direct line of descent from that of the prophets of the Old Covenant; in a true and important sense the preacher can say, with the conviction of the prophet, 'Hear ye, Israel, thus says the Lord God'. The Church is the community of the New Covenant; and if it is true that faith is the response to the covenant-call of God, it is also true that the preacher is the mediator of that call. 'The place of preaching in the divine plan is as essential as the death and resurrection of Christ which it proclaims, and as baptism, the reproduction of that death and resurrection in the individual, towards which it tends. Preaching effects the initial contact of Christ with the Christian-to-be. This is possible only if it embodies a divine call addressed to that individual' (pp. 20-21. Here, as in much of the book, Murphy-O'Connor's preoccupation is with *kerygma* rather than *didache*).

The book is not particularly easy reading, bearing as it does the apparent stamp of work done for a doctoral thesis. The footnotes, grouped at the end of each chapter, are extremely full, but the overall impression is one of material collected, rather than fully digested and synthesised. The publisher's blurb attempts to ward off this criticism by saying that 'St Paul was too rich a thinker to be tidy, and he will not (fortunately) yield any simple recipes or neat formulae for success'. But it is one thing for St Paul's thought on a subject which he hardly ever attacks *ex professo* to be diffuse and fragmentary: for a book about his thought to show such apparent disregard for theological method is another. This problem of method is crucial nowadays, and to disregard it leads not to 'richness' but to woolliness. All theology should, of course, be biblical; but exegesis, 'biblical theology' and explanatory theology remain distinct theological 'language games'. This reviewer could not avoid the impression that Dr Murphy-O'Connor is not altogether clear which game he is playing, with the result that he sometimes tries to play them all at once. But, in spite of this, the book is

extremely useful, and should provide a starting-point for much useful work on the theology of preaching.

*Master Sermons Through the Ages* is an ambitious title, and suggests a balanced cross-section of sermons from all periods of Christian history. In fact, of the thirty sermons included, only two are patristic and one medieval, while twenty-one of them were preached during the last century and a half. And while it is true that a consistent emphasis on the importance of the preached Word is one of the glories of the Reformed Churches, it is surprising to find as many as sixteen Protestant (as opposed to Catholic or Anglican) preachers represented. The Eastern Churches are only represented by one sermon of Chrysostom's.

In spite of the imbalance of the selection, many of the sermons included are of great beauty and interest. But it hardly seems matter for regret that the preaching style of the nineteenth century is a thing of the past.

In the Catholic tradition, the sacramental Word has for too long been impoverished by the silence of the proclaimed Word. In the Protestant tradition, the proclaimed Word has been impoverished by abstraction from the sacramental. We are both learning again that the Word was made flesh.

NICHOLAS LASH

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE FATHERS, by Louis Bouyer; Burns and Oates, 63s.

LA PRIÈRE, VOL. II, LES TROIS PREMIERS SIÈCLES, par A. Hamman, O.F.M.; Desclée et Cie, n.p.

This history will be, in the final analysis, the search for and the bringing to light of the integral witness of tradition and of Christian experience to the whole concrete reality of "life in Christ Jesus". So writes Fr Louis Bouyer in the preface to this masterly account of the spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers. Inevitably one thinks of Pourrat, but Bouyer has written a very different kind of book and one, too, which shows on every page how much research has been going on in this field since Pourrat's pioneer work. Using the fruits of this research as well as his astonishing familiarity with the sources, Bouyer has written a history which the specialist will use with the utmost respect and the non-specialist will go to as an authoritative yet extremely readable account.

If he has set himself the task of bringing to light 'the integral witness . . . to the whole concrete reality of "life in Christ Jesus"', he has in fact concentrated more on the genesis and the development of the great seminal ideas of the Judaeo-Christian tradition of spirituality. For the reader to whom the New Testament is more familiar than the Fathers, the first section of the book will prove a continuous source of new insights. In fact the chief merit of the book is the thoroughness with which Bouyer has rooted his account in the New Testament.