

can be indefinitely repeated: Christ's physical death was initiative, the culminating point, the decisive moment of his life of sacrifice, the unique event which assures the inner efficacy of the mass, saving it from being magic or mere wish. The action of the sacrifice of the mass can properly be termed ritual: it is the sacramental sign of Christ's physical sacrifice, imaging it so fully that it is literally re-presented; which men will put into play till the Lord returns with power and glory and fulfils all signs. Fr Coventry goes on to distinguish sacrifice from sacrament in the mass; this is an unhappy disjunction: if the mass is a sacrifice it can only be so sacramentally. One further point: in the course of the commentary Fr Coventry follows his guides in finding considerable fault with some features of the mass, and yet in his introduction he states, 'no great changes are to be expected, nor are they desirable'. Given the torpor of English Catholics would not plain speaking have been better, to prepare them for the considerable revisions that may well lie ahead?

THEODORE TAYLOR, O.P.

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS. By J. H. Ropes. (O.U.P.; 7s. 6d.)

ETHICS AND THE GOSPEL. By T. W. Manson. (S.C.M. Press; 12s. 6d.)

THE FOUR GOSPELS. By Lucien Cerfaux. (Darton, Longman and Todd; The Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland; 9s. 6d.)

Here are three slender books from the pens of distinguished scholars, only one of whom is alive today. Mgr Cerfaux stands for what is scholarly and good in the Louvain tradition; J. H. Ropes brilliantly represented the Harvard of twenty-six years ago; and Professor T. W. Manson, in his lifetime, embodied much of what was best in the new testament work done in England.

Let us hope that it is not a barrenness or a vacuum in new testament writing which brought about the reprinting of a work which first appeared in 1934. Admittedly it deserved to be better known, and if some of Professor Ropes' suggestions had been followed up, some of our contemporaries would be less heavily entrenched in the positions which they occupy. It is indeed a pleasure to read these admirable and clear chapters, so full of a certain freshness of manner in looking at our age-old gospels. Professor Ropes wins our sympathy at the outset by stating, 'I shall rather look at each Gospel for itself, as an individual book, the work, not merely of a compiler but of an author in the proper sense who tried to serve his generation with some kind of literary aim' (p. 3). At least we are fully in agreement with this, even if we do not accept all his findings or his way of looking at gospel origins. Yet his foresight and acumen showed him that source criticism was not enough; that possibly Q could be dispensed with, and that

certainly Q's existence is not so well established as many are taught to think (p. 37). All this was to the good—thirty years ago. But should we now look back and not rather look ahead to newer problems and attitudes? Surely what needs to be written, and taught, is the reading of the gospels in the light of newer findings. Progressive new testament work today is post-Bultmanian, preoccupied with the *apport* of Qumrân and Nag Hâmadi, with the true assessment of gnostic thought and pre-gnostic ideas, with the specifically judaeo-christian theology, and the like.

No one would deny that there is a shortage of books on 'the biblical basis of ethics', and this no doubt is the reason for publication of lectures only one of which was revised by Professor Manson. Though Ronald Preston, lecturer in Christian ethics at Manchester University, has written up and made the best of some lecture notes, and there is much to be learned from many good pages, particularly on the old testament background, and the ethical ideals of judaism and how our Lord most perfectly fulfilled and transcended those ideals; how the imitation of Christ is the royal road of a Christian's perfection; how too, as the Hebrew of old was a member of God's kingdom, and close-knit to his brother Hebrew, so too the Christian after him is one of a community (as we would say, one of the mystical body of Christ . . .), and 'the ethic we are dealing with is the ethic of a kingdom: the ethic of a society with a leader and a ruler . . . in the last resort Christian ethic inevitably comes back to Christ himself' (p. 102).

When we turn to Mgr Cerfaux's work, the first thing to strike us is that the English title is misleading. 'The Four Gospels' is not *La Voix vivante de l'Évangile au début de l'Église* (correctly rendered in the German and Dutch translations). We can be misled about the nature of a book by the title of the book. In this case the true nature of the book is further shown in that it appears in a popular series *Bible et Vie Chrétienne*, which is addressed to all, clergy and layfolk alike, who wish to deepen their faith, to fortify it with substantial spiritual nourishment. It is important to assess correctly the nature of a writing before us, whether we are to read or translate or review it.

Fortunately Mgr Cerfaux is a great scholar actively pursuing new testament research at Louvain, and this little work is the best kind of popular work because it is penned by such an authority who can write an up-to-date, convincing, and absorbing popular work. He starts with a study of the good news and apostolic tradition. Then come chapters on each gospel, with their individual characteristics and even why St Matthew comes first. A sixth chapter tells of the transition from oral tradition to written gospels, and of the four-fold gospel which obtained in the Church. 'On the fringes of the four'

explains the relative value of apocryphal writings, and how they are indirect evidences and help us to prize our gospels even more. Finally comes 'Christian Life under the sign of the gospel', or how of all the gospels it could be said 'These things were written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name' (Jn 20, 31).

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.

LES PAROLES D'ADIEUX DU SEIGNEUR. By G.-M. Behler, O.P. (Editions du Cerf; 12 NF.)

The study of themes running in and through the Old and New Testaments has been much favoured in recent years, and it is always profitable. Nothing however can replace a word-for-word contact with the texts themselves as they are in their contexts. And this is the belief of Fr Behler, a German Dominican who has written this commentary of a meditative type on five famous chapters (John 13-17) which have always been looked upon as a source book for the spiritual life. That he should write in French, and Frenchman-like cite Loisy, is intriguing. Fr F.-M. Braun, O.P., in the preface explains that our author has the gift of tongues and is moved by a truly Pentecostal fire. Be that as it may, the author tells us what he meant to do: 'these pages are specially intended for contemplative souls. Oft-repeated experience has convinced us that, for such souls, nothing is more nourishing than the Word of God explained by the self-same Word. The preacher who effaces himself, as it were hiding himself behind the divine word, leads others to prayer and furnishes them with truly spiritual nourishment.'

We can say that Fr Behler has succeeded in this intention. Sentence by sentence, he comments on the whole content of five chapters, pausing to introduce the sequence and quiet flow of ideas, and all the while bringing out the content of the text by frequent references to other passages of scripture, as also to some more helpful comments of Fathers and Doctors. And the writer effaces himself behind the divine word in that he makes little or no show of technicalities or erudite apparatus: yet we know, and sense, that he is a master of these, who simply wants us to hear the voice of St John and our Lord in the gospel.

This is a book which will appeal to prayerful and contemplative folk, and is to be recommended as such.

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.