

COMMENT: II

THE HAWKESYARD LIBRARY

EVERY priest of the English Dominican Province begins his studies at Hawkesyard Priory. There he spends three years studying various aspects of philosophy before going to Blackfriars, Oxford, where he begins the study of theology. These first three years at Hawkesyard are important for more than an acquaintance with the formal discipline of philosophy, though this of course is the central theme of his intellectual life there. He must enlarge his understanding of Scripture, familiarize himself with the Fathers of the Church, her history and liturgy; and he must continually enrich his experience of human possibility and achievement even where this is not explicitly ordered to the redemptive mysteries of the Church.

These are all aims with which readers of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* will sympathize; and it is for this reason that they are asked to help in the achievement of these aims by contributing to the chief means which makes that achievement possible: the appropriate current literature. The remoteness of Hawkesyard from any large library makes it necessary for the students and teachers there to rely almost entirely upon the resources of the Priory library, and these have become more and more inadequate in the last twenty years. We appeal to readers of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* to help make good the serious deficiencies of the Hawkesyard library, and we shall be most grateful for the gift of money or of books. Those readers who wish to make a gift of books are asked to send a list beforehand, to avoid duplication. All contributions should be sent to the Librarian, Hawkesyard Priory, Rugeley, Staffs, and will be acknowledged by him personally.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

DEAR FATHER.—May I trouble you in order to make a few observations on the review of Dr Fuller's book *What is Liturgical Preaching*, which appeared in the January-February issue of your review? It is not my intention to make any adverse comment on what Father Crichton says, still less to challenge any of his statements, but because of the importance of the subject and the

great need there is of emphasizing the cardinal principle of this excellent book, namely that the sermon at Mass is essentially part of the liturgy, I would like to take this opportunity of commenting on some of Father Crichton's reservations about what Dr Fuller says.

My main concern is with the objection that 'to bring the sermon always back to the "magnalia Dei" (or the Redemption) would lead to a certain monotony'. I think that this calls for comment and discussion because it is the objection most frequently made against liturgical preaching, i.e. preaching on the texts of the day's liturgy, and I feel that while superficially it appears to be true it is in reality altogether groundless and to admit it at all would be fatal to the very ministry of preaching itself. Let me explain what I mean.

There is in reality only one valid subject for preaching and that is the gospel—the good tidings of the Redemption. The very word 'preaching' means in its Christian sense the proclaiming of this good news. It always has this meaning in the New Testament. This is the great dominant theme of the Scriptures and of Christianity itself: salvation has come to us in Christ and it continues to be operative in the midst of his Church. From one end of the year to the other the Church has nothing else to say to us than this—it is one idea but it is an extremely rich, even inexhaustible, idea and it is presented in an infinite variety of ways not only on the great feasts of the Church year but throughout the seasons of that year, every Sunday and indeed every day. Yet neither the idea or its presentation is ever monotonous. Nor will preaching that is inspired by the liturgy, and that follows the lead of the liturgy, ever be monotonous. All that the preacher has to do is to present the doctrine as the Church presents it on that day, unfolding the meaning of the texts. Within the limits of the proper texts of each Sunday or feast day he has the widest choice: he may relate them to one another or he may choose to expound one of them alone, like the epistle, or the gospel or the various chants. No two Sundays are the same—each one presents different aspects of the mystery of salvation: on one Sunday the Redemption is presented as a raising from the dead, or a new creation, on another as a cleansing process, on a third as a healing process. Certainly then there need be no monotony within the year. When the next year comes he can begin all over again—if he

does he will only be doing what the Church does year after year. But if he prefers he can build his sermons one year from the psalm texts, another from the epistles, another from the Gospels. This process will provide the congregation with all the variety that anyone could desire. And always he should relate the texts to the Eucharist proper that follows immediately upon what he preaches. It would not even be necessary for the preacher to confine himself to the proper texts of the Sunday or feast that is being celebrated; he could talk on the themes of the Canon of the season's office. As long as he preaches the Gospel and brings the minds of his hearers to the great central event of Christianity being re-enacted in the Mass he is preaching a liturgical sermon and he has all the freedom and latitude that he could wish. At the same time he will over a long period touch upon all the doctrines that the people must be instructed in. Father Crichton speaks of the need of instruction in doctrines that do not readily fall within the liturgical scheme. It is rather hard to see what doctrines these would be—everything proclaimed in the creed is celebrated one way or another in the liturgy.

In any case there should be a clear distinction in the preacher's mind between a sermon or a homily (to give it its proper title) preached at Mass, and an instruction, which does not belong at Mass, though it may and should be given at other times (for example, during novenas, evening devotions, Lenten sermons and so on). Failure to make this distinction is responsible for the truly baneful practice that is becoming too common over here of the diocesan syllabus of instructions that must be given at Sunday Masses—a list of topics that often have no relation whatever to the Sunday or the liturgical year—topics altogether divorced from the Mass or the mysterium: 'The Different Kinds of Conscience', 'Man's Need of Religion', 'The Duty of Voting', 'The Sixth Commandment'. People may need instruction on these things but you cannot preach on them. They are subjects for classroom instruction or for lectures or radio and television talks, but they are not the gospel and should not be allowed to usurp the place of the preaching of the gospel. The people must be instructed on these things, of course, but the answer to that difficulty is not to substitute *ex professo* treatment of these subjects for the preaching of the Word. They can be brought in or alluded to in the exhortation that should accompany and round off the

sermon given at Mass, but to devote an entire sermon to these and like subjects at Mass is to wander quite far from the base of operations. It is to make the sermon an interruption in the action of the Mass rather than a part of it. For the primary purpose of giving a sermon at Mass is not to instruct in the narrow sense of the word: it is to awaken the faith and devotion of the people, to make them more conscious of what they are doing and thus to condition them for the sacrifice which they are engaged in here and now.

And in fact Fr Crichton gives the answer to the difficulty he raises, when he says: 'Dr Fuller would I think agree with much of this (that there is need to instruct people—that there is need to expound the scriptures to them) and would argue that if the essential liturgical preaching is being done these things fall into their right perspective.' I for one do not see how Dr Fuller could argue otherwise. If the preacher is really preaching the gospel and relating his preaching both to the Mass and the lives of the people, then he is bound to take care of all the instruction, moral exhortation and scriptural exposition that is pertinent to their lives. And that is all that the preacher of the Word is expected to do, or indeed as much as he has the time to do. If he feels called upon to give instructions in theology or ethics, or Church history or Bible lore, he has many other media open to him and ample opportunity to engage in this apostolate. (Indeed the wide diffusion of the Catholic Press for one thing makes it largely unnecessary for the priest to give *ex professo* talks about many of these matters. A newspaper or a periodical can do this work far more completely and satisfactorily than a priest can do in the short time allowed for speaking at Mass.) But let us keep the sermon at Sunday Mass for what it is intended to do—to proclaim in season and out the goods news of the Kingdom, and to do it in the context of the here and now.

Once again let me disclaim any intention of taking Fr Crichton to task; I am sure that he is as devoted to liturgical preaching as I am. But what he said in his review gave an opportunity to add a little—even if only by correspondence—to what has been written on the subject; far too little has been written in English, by the way. I only hope that what has been said will help to keep interest stirred up and will stimulate discussion, that will ultimately contribute to a badly-needed revival of authentic preaching

in our English-speaking world.—Sincerely yours in Christ,
St Mary's Seminary, Roland Park, WILLIAM O'SHEA
Baltimore 10, Maryland.
 Jan. 31, 1958.



REVIEWS

EVOLUTIONARY THEORY AND CHRISTIAN BELIEF: THE UNRESOLVED CONFLICT. By David Lack, F.R.S. (Methuen and Co. Ltd; 10s. 6d.)

'As impartial a book as has ever been written on a highly controversial subject': this is how one reviewer has described it. Certainly the author (who is best known for his excellent work on bird behaviour) has no axe to grind. The kernel of his book is a scholarly, lucid and very readable exposition of the present state of knowledge about evolution, all within fifty pages or so. It must be clear to anyone from his account how compelling is the evidence, and how strikingly modern genetics has confirmed Darwin's surmises by actual demonstration of ways in which natural selection can bring about the effects he ascribed to it. In view of all this it is perhaps misleading to describe evolution as a theory; this term has, for the general public, associations of uncertainty and lack of proof which are quite inappropriate.

'Evolutionary ethics'—publicized a few years ago on the *Home Service* by Julian Huxley—attempts to account also for man's moral sense in terms of natural selection. This attempt is as utterly unconvincing as the evidence for the evolution of his body is convincing; as Darwin had realized and Dr Lack emphasizes, there is no 'survival value' in the virtues.

Various Christian and agnostic views bearing on evolution are discussed very objectively and with sympathy, but it is a pity that no distinction is made between the views of some naive Christians and the orthodox teaching of the Church. The author insists that there is, still, a conflict between 'Darwinism' and Christianity. But his definition of Darwinism includes the belief that 'man has evolved wholly by natural means', and this, as he says, 'is a philosophical and not a scientific claim', which obviously does conflict with Christian belief. On the author's own showing, there is nothing incompatible between the scientific claims of evolutionary theory and orthodox Christian belief: the title of the book is bound to give the wrong impression (but no matter if it thereby attracts more readers). This is