

It is the experience of some that much that in scripture makes good sense in the context in which it was originally said or enacted, makes even better sense in the context of modern life, provided one can tune-in to its symbolic undertones. In reading the parable of the pharisee and the publican, it is fairly easy to see the two figures as symbols of the two poles around which all human responses to divine mystery revolves. Apply the teaching of the parable to the contemporary situation and one is almost blinded by its light. Here within us and all around us is the pharisee trying to claim that he has solved the mystery of the kingdom, laying a stranglehold upon it in terms of human measurement, possessing the kingdom on his own terms, not those of God. At the other pole is the publican, the man in the world, not the upholder or prisoner of a legalistic ecclesiastical system, humbly not arrogantly admitting his creaturehood, under the hand of God and completely open to his advances.

There can be no doubt that the encircling wall of ecclesiasticism, the prison in which the Word of God languishes for want of fresh air and light, falls to the ground the moment an informed and competent laity break out of that cosy, comfortable womb. Perhaps the Church in this country has been guilty of drugging itself to have too easy births. It has certainly a large number of distorted and malformed laity in its congregation through no fault of their own. Once the Church stops being afraid of birth, it will produce a genuine laity. Dom Ralph gives the lines along which true birth takes place and the kind of diet her embryonic laity need if they are to be truly formed to break out into the world healthy and normal.

This book marks another important landmark in the history of the contemporary Church and will play an important part in forwarding the work of the Second Vatican Council, especially during these months of its recess. The Holy Spirit is indeed guiding those publishing-houses concerned with providing the proper emotional, intellectual and spiritual diet for the people of God.

JOHN FOSTER

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD, by Louis and André Rétif; Burns and Oates, Faith and Fact Books, 8s. 6d.

Making general observations about the world need not be a dubious metaphysical activity; an interest in ordinary everyday affairs and language does not preclude nor make less relevant a broader view of what we are doing and saying. On the contrary, the broader view has some sort of control over the everyday view. The local business depends in some sort of way upon big business trends, and the assessments of remote economists. Town Councils are related dependently to the political hierarchy and the complicated analyses of political experts. The brother priests, Louis and André Rétif, attempt in the first part of this book to make this kind of general observation about the world today. Their starting point is not society as it was, or ought to be, but society as it is; they

indicate this and that familiar trend — the fantastic spread of discoveries, the revolution in the kitchen, satellites and such like. Talking more generally they describe the attitudes which have formed this world; they discuss technology, socialization and more general articulate themes like Communism. Their conclusion is that this is a world that 'stands on its own feet'; and that seems to be a fair enough judgment: it characterizes this age in activities like philosophy, literature and political thinking. It underlines the fact that it is odd nowadays to talk of a 'created' world; the only creativity that makes sense is the human sort. Short of a bloody revolution, there doesn't seem much that the estranged and disaffected can do about this, for we are all involved in it in the things we do and the language we use. There is not, as some old-fashioned apologists seemed to suggest, some other world we could live in, some other language we could use for proving a higher dependency. Even if it were possible or desirable, we haven't got the equipment for creating the sort of society we would like to preach to.

Just to make this sort of general observation about present society is enough to show the very critical state that our missionary activities are in. The authors make no bones about our failures, and the situation, they show, is rapidly deteriorating. They recommend a completely new attitude to missions, working right through the old framework, from the enclosed Catholic parishes at home to the general policy in the foreign missions. They describe some new trends — experiments in Africa, the example of Charles de Foucauld, and there is a very moving and informative chapter on the Worker Priests. Surely that movement was the closest the Church has come to the starting point of this whole problem. It is the one attempt on a large scale to realize the crisis activity of preaching the gospel to a world that is standing on its own feet. It is significant that our greatest achievement so far has been a failure, and that this failure must be our starting point.

CHARLES BOXER, O.P.

THE MANUAL OF CATHOLIC PRAYER; Burns and Oates, 30s.

This manual contains the ordinary of the mass, the ritual of the sacraments and a comprehensive collection of prayers. There is some excellent material for prayer based on scriptures. Much use is made of the psalms; this is valuable for this fruitful source of private prayer has been neglected by the laity. The section on penance contains a selection of penitential prayers drawn from both Old and New Testaments, which are much more effective as prayer than some also to be found in this compilation which make the dry-eyed and probably only venial sinner say 'thy servant, who am overwhelmed by the storms of this world and in tears plead guilty to all manner of transgressions.' Considerable use has also been made in this manual of the early liturgies of both East and West. The liturgical and scriptural prayers included are much more suitable for prayer today than most of the vocal prayers made up by holy people, which tend to be flowery and emotional. The average Anglo-Saxon is not at home