

the body and so getting a relaxation as superior to a usual rest as a Turkish bath is to an ordinary one. And the reason for this appears to be that muscles and fibres do not always go slack and easy merely because we cease to require their tension, but they seem to await a positive message of a rather special kind before they do so—quite like the boy on the burning deck. Those who have read *The Inside of the Cup* by Fr F. Valentine, O.P. will recall the use he makes of this method of relaxation in dealing with certain kinds of temptation.

The art of 'Letting Go' is thus connected with many things—and in one aspect it is another name for Trust.



THE SOLITARY RELIGIOUS LIFE

BY

RUSTICUS

RELIGIOUS life implies certain specific characteristics: the vowed and dedicated life; the three counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience; the ordered sequence of Mass, the daily Office and Mental Prayer; with some element of work and recreation at ordered times. We are so much used to the life's being lived in community that we are apt to think the Religious life implies, *per se*, Community life. But to be precise, this is not so.

It is however recognised and revered in its two most common (coenobitical) forms, and it is unlikely that any proposed adaptations would change these fundamental bases of the life—the 'family' life of Benedictine monachism, and the collegiate or communal life of the various orders of friars, where the members are not tied as monks are, to one House, but—moving about among the Houses of their own Province at the will of the Order's duly constituted authority—are bound by the Constitutions of the Order, and live within its framework a life full of change of habitat and movement.

But strangely enough, while in the world these two types of life, family and communal, in their secular aspect are accompanied by the third way of 'living alone' to an extent unknown in previous centuries, the solitary religious life is now almost non-existent. The attitude towards it, in England, also is curiously contradictory, and in the main seems a swing-away from the traditional one. Its opponents put forward its danger as a reason for its non-revival, as if

heroic sanctity were no longer to be the aim of the servant of Christ. It is good in this connection to remember Father Alban Butler (one sufficiently modern to be heeded today) on the life of St Giles. He says:

Complete and uninterrupted solitude is a state which few are able to bear with unabated fervour and without fatal relaxation. A man in solitude whom sloth warps or whose conversation is not always with God and his angels is his own most dangerous tempter and worst company. Aristotle having defined man as a social creature, or one born for society, added that he who lives alone must either be a god or a beast. But the Philosopher was unacquainted with the happiness of religious contemplation. The old Christian proverb is more exact: that he who lives always alone is either an angel or a devil. This state therefore is not without snares and dangers, nor does an hermitage necessarily make a saint. But when a person, by an extraordinary call, embraces it with fervour and strenuously applies himself to all the exercises of retirement and penance, such an one, being disengaged from all earthly ties, exchanges the society of a vain and sinful world for that of God and holy spirits, and has certainly attained the highest degree of happiness under heaven; this state is its novitiate, and in some degree an anticipation of its eternal sweet and noble employment. He who accompanies the exercise of contemplation and divine love with zealous and undaunted endeavours to conduct others to the same glorious end shall be truly 'great in the kingdom of heaven'.

Let us try therefore to see what warrant the history of Christianity, the teaching of Holy Scripture and the authority of the Church, the needs of the world today and of the spirit of man, give for such a way of life. And let us consider too whether 'adaptations' of the traditional eremitical life are needed for it to be of value for the glory of God and the salvation of souls in our own times.

From the time of Saint Paul, the first hermit, to the protestant secession, in England as elsewhere, wherever Catholic Christianity has come, the religious solitary, be he hermit or anker, has lighted his lonely candle in the wilder and darker solitudes up and down the land. As conventual religious life developed and increased, his small single light was seen burning steadily beside the great religious houses, whether self-contained Benedictine abbeys or the priories of Friars with their constant comings and goings, and also—the 'still point in a turning world'—he kept his stillness in the very heart of the kaleidoscopic movement of city life. He was in England up to the time of the Tudor devastation, a normal part of Catholic religious life, and, as far as Dominicans are concerned,

it seems almost as though an anker or ankress was welcomed as an adjunct to the great priories to take the place of the house of contemplative nuns, whose presence near a priory was one of its great sources of spiritual power. (As indeed it is today.) It will be remembered that only one such house, Dartford, existed in medieval England. Constantly one hears of this solitary—Richard Fearn at Lynn, Marjorie Clyde in the churchyard at the London Blackfriars. William Dingle at Oxford, Alice Oliver by the Blackfriars at Salisbury—just as in city and village alike one finds records of the unattached solitary, living under the eaves of a church, in a cave or forest hut, or an ordinary little dwelling house. The hermit went and came from his dwelling, had charge of bridges and roads, and had a certain amount of human intercourse. Saint Robert of Knaresborough built a guest-house near his cell since

Heghe and lawe unto hym hyed

In faith for to be edified.

Sometimes they were supported by a monastic house though not living near it: so the contemplative nuns at Dartford supported the hermit of the Bridge by the River Darent. The monks of Garendon had a cell for two solitaries in Cripplegate (St James's), and one anker of London Wall was Simon Appulby, Canon of St Augustine's (possibly the same as that most holy and attractive 'Sir Symon the Anker', self-styled 'wrecched Symon' who was anker in the tourelle by All Hallows, London Wall). So too Cristina of the Wood was under obedience to the abbot of St Albans. But many, especially hermits like Richard Rolle and St Robert of Knaresborough, were, so to speak, solitaries in their own right, and subject to episcopal but not to monastic authority. How native it is to the English temperament is shewn not only by the number of these hermits and ankers in the middle ages whom we recall in the prayer of the English saints (. . . 'all those holy monks and hermits who made this once an isle of saints'), but also by the fact that among the English mystics whose writings were the most notable English contribution to medieval spirituality, practically all were either recluses or were writing for recluses. At the time of the suppression, we know of well over a hundred, either hermits or ankers, up and down England, and at least seven Dominican priories had each its own recluse. In earlier days, numbers seem to have been much greater. When hermits and ankers were turned abroad and the parish churches of England became protestant, naturally the ankerhold by the church, like the hermitage in the dale, fell into decay. Even now the scarcity of Mass in country places would, no doubt, make any revival of the hermit life slow and

uncertain. Yet from the historical aspect, it is a thing that merits attention.

Moreover—and this is a most serious consideration—in especially evil and irreligious times of the world's history there has always been a movement among the few to a life of intense and contemplative prayer: a life that demands a great element of solitude and apartness. This explains the amazing movement to the desert in the time of St Anthony. It is as if the Holy Spirit moved generous souls to a greater ardour in the life of perfection to make up for the coldness of the many and the active antagonism of whole sections of society. The alabaster box is broken and the ointment is poured out on the feet of Christ, not sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor.

In the teaching of Holy Scripture our Lord's words to Martha about Mary are the supreme authority for the contemplative as distinct from the active life, and have been taken as such all through the history of the Church. Mystically, too, the story of Jacob's service for Leah and Rachel has stood for the soul's training in action before it attains to contemplation and gives the clue perhaps to how the contemplative life should be approached. The withdrawal to solitude and prayer in our Lord's own life and those of the Apostles is enough witness to the need for these in every apostolic life, and the Carmelites point to Elijah, the Carthusians to St John the Baptist as their guides to solitude, and to *contemplari et contemplata aliis tradere*. None of these, the critic will say, envisage a whole life of solitude, and if the history of the solitary is studied, it will be clear that (as in all descriptive epithets in the spiritual life) the term is relative. Very few were given to absolute solitude. Disciples attached themselves to desert solitaries. Visitors came to the ankerhold window with their questions on spiritual matters, and their requests for prayer. These things made the life an apostolate, not of prayer only but of human contacts. Even the walled-up anker (whose return today I suppose no one would desire or expect) had a window on the world. Many retired to such places after life in the world or in a religious community.

As regards the authority of the Church, Père Philippe points out that there was never a 'religion' of solitude; but this means there was no vow of solitude as a characteristic of the religious life. But the life was legislated for (*vide* the translation of Canon 41—Council in Trullo—A.D. 692, in the January 1949 LIFE OF THE SPIRIT) and the order for enclosing ankers with episcopal blessing still survives and has been reprinted from the York Manual by the Surtees Society. The Church neither enjoins nor forbids the life. But she

most clearly permits it, and it would be interesting to know how many solitaries have been raised to the Altars of the Church.¹

As for the needs of the world today, this is an age of desperate diseases—desperate except for the hope of heroic sanctity and abandonment to the power of God. Our Lady at Fatima, as at Lourdes, asks for prayer rather than action. To enlarge on its apostolic value is unnecessary, and in any case is outside the scope of this article, yet prayer and the witness of the dedicated life (not the good, devout lay life, but the openly dedicated life) seem a supreme need, as in the days of Moses, to strengthen the hands of those more actively engaged in the work of battle against the forces of evil. In the middle ages, when vocations were more numerous, an abbey or a priory—like Witham in Somerset—would be founded as a lantern of prayer and contemplation to show forth religion in a wild and irreligious spot, where the very presence of the monks would be apostolic. Now vocations are few, and the single candle up and down England is the more necessary to give light and to point even though feebly to the true faith.

So we come to the needs of the human spirit.

It would be strange indeed if this third manner of life for religious should have been accepted (if guardedly) and have flourished and produced so many saints and holy ones—(it is not denied that there were also solitaries who were not altogether admirable, and hermitages which were not held in high repute)—in every age of the Church, and now should be unsuited to the human spirit whose essential needs are unchanging and whose vocation may be recognised as always falling into specific categories. A couple of years ago one would have said that the idea of the revival of the solitary life was stirring in men's minds, and in the pages of the LIFE OF THE SPIRIT there have been many articles on those English medieval writings for and by solitaries which are mentioned above. In one of the articles discussing the true basis of the religious life which was published some time ago now, 'Medicus' made reference to some of these articles, and also indicated clearly the existence, and the

¹ There is a striking passage, well worth pondering, in an article by Fr Pierre Doyère in his article on Saint Benoît Labre, (also in the December 1948 number of *La Vie Spirituelle*). It runs:

La vocation d'ermite est bien à la source même de toute vie monastique, car tout moine est un solitaire. Même lorsque le discrétion cénobitique s'avère nécessaire pour écarter les dangers du caprice, de la fantaisie, de l'illusion et de toutes sortes d'excès, le monastère demeure un groupement de solitaires; l'éremitisme ne cesse jamais d'être la réponse idéale de l'âme en quête de Dieu seul, la forme par excellence où réaliser dans leur plénitude les conseils de perfection évangélique; l'histoire confirme d'ailleurs que, dans tout effort de réforme d'une discipline monastique, il y a, sous un aspect ou sous un autre, un retour vers un accent plus érémitique.

difficulties, of this type of contemplative in the world today, where there seems no place for them:

Their whole bent is towards prayer but temperament or their psycho-physical state makes them unfitted for community life; they seem to need more freedom and it is possible that their real vocation is to a life of comparative solitude.

He spoke of Charles de Foucauld as the outstanding example, and adds:

But Father Conrad Pepler, O.P., points out that in the fourteenth century, a period of turbulence and decline, a great host of mystics poured out a flood of mystical writings all over Europe, and he draws a close parallel between that century and our own age. Moreover not a few of these mystics, for example Mother Julian and Richard Rolle, were anchoresses or solitaries. It does not then seem impossible that the vocation to solitude may revive even in these times, however unfavourable they may appear.

Nor are these isolated references. The need for solitude, although solitude within the framework of a remote communal life, was the keynote of articles in the 1946 *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*—'Pabbay or the Island Fathers' and 'The Opportunity of the Islands' by Peregrinus; and it was the theme of Charles de Foucauld in the December issue. Father Oswin McGrath's article on the subject of the possible revival of the solitary life in South Africa apparently called forth more than a few interested letters. Strongest sign of all perhaps of this re-awakening interest is the foundation in France in 1947 at Roquebrune-sur-Argens (Var) of a Desert Carmel with the traditional separate dwellings for solitary hermit-Carmelites, about which there was an article—'Sur le Chemin du Désert'—in the December 1948 number of *La Vie Spirituelle*.

But it is not necessary to go to South Africa or a French Carmel, or even to the islands of Scotland, to follow the hermit life. Here in England the villages and even the cities are waiting for such solitaries. More than that, it would seem that in other parts of Europe God himself is showing that in this way of solitary prayer his will to combat present evils may be accomplished, by permitting the removal from active works in his service to solitary confinement in prison of so many of his servants, who may well be reaping such holy fruit from their imprisonment as St John of the Cross reaped. What is needed now is the recognition not only of the life as a legitimate way of religion, but also as the complement of the coenobitical forms of religious life, both active and contemplative, whose revival will give balance and strength to the fabric of the Church and will act as a missionary force, especially in a countryside at present of necessity almost outside the scope of the Church's ministry.

The manner of its revival in a legitimate and ordered form (for it must have strict ordering and the outward signs of religion: the poor cell, the habit, mortification, the regularity of Office and prayer) remains to be considered. Perhaps it will go hand in hand with the foundation of village mission priories to evangelise the entirely non-Catholic areas of our land. It is doubtful if even a modified form of the life of an anker will revive outside the purlieus of religious houses, but a form of hermit life—confined perhaps to those who have passed their first youth and have received the necessary preliminary training in religious life—suited to the age we live in, but moulded on traditional lines, may well come into being. Perhaps it will grow from, or itself mould, some of those adaptations of conventual life which are taking the attention in France and England of religious directors. It may be that there will arise a Mother House for the training of solitaries to which—reversing the Carmelite way—solitaries will return for periods of communal life from time to time, and from which visitations of hermitages would be made (though the ‘Obedience’ of a solitary, be it man or woman, would no doubt be to a Priest-Director). These and similar points would need ‘religious’ consideration. One thing would have to be clear: the training, even if in a community house, would have to be a training of solitaries, not of coenobitical religious. This is the thing that would need most care.

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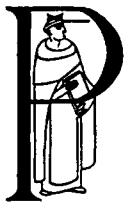


THE ROAD TO CARMEL

HOW I ENTERED THE CARMEL IN COLOGNE

BY
EDITH STEIN¹

Fourth Sunday of Advent,
18th December 1938.



PERHAPS I shall leave this house soon after Christmas. The circumstances which have compelled us to arrange my transfer to Echt are strongly reminiscent of the conditions at the time I entered. There is, no doubt, an inner link between them.

When the Third Reich was set up at the beginning of 1933 I had been for about a year a lecturer at the ‘German Institute for Educational Studies’ in Münster. I lived in the *Collegium Marianum* with a large number of nuns of various

¹ Translated by C. Hastings.