

# Editorial

The popes of recent times have stressed the need for a laity who can take an active and intelligent part in the life of the Church, and gradually we can see their words taking effect. Laymen no longer think of themselves merely as passive recipients of sacrament and instruction, and fortunately are less often told from the pulpit or in the headmistress's study that their only function is to listen and obey. The lay movement is in fact both a sign and a cause of renewal in the Church today. But its success will have to be judged by the degree to which it has brought priests and lay people into a relationship of friendly collaboration. It would be tragic if the new awareness of the rights and duties laid on us all by incorporation into Christ's mystical body were to lead only to opposition between cleric and lay.

Today there exists an eagerness to understand theology in scripture and tradition, probably more widespread than ever before since the first ages of the Church; yet because theology demands long study, only a minority of lay people will ever be able to give it that priority of attention which a priest always must. Hence there will always be a division between teacher and taught in this matter, even apart from any question of grace of office, and though all together draw upon the faith of the whole Church sustained by the Holy Spirit. Yet on the other hand a priest knows that he has much to learn from his people, especially over the proper care for the material things of God's creation which are the laymen's professional concern. Humane standards in such matters as the regard for truth and justice, maintained in the old idea of liberal education, lie at the roots of religion; now that the world is trying so fast to abandon them, the collaboration of all men of sensitive intelligence is needed if they are not to be lost for the Church.

Here, as in many other matters, Newman's voice is still alive. We can all take heart from his championship of the lay movement, as described by Fr Dessain in the first article below. In the world's eyes Newman failed. And if we lacked his faith, we might have doubts whether the situation had changed in any of its essentials since his day. Yet looking deeper we can see an altogether new spirit at work, and at least in part can refer it to his foresight, his example, and today, we may believe, his prayers. As an instance of the change we may point to the

different journals which now exist for the expression of theological truth in a way that is relevant to our common need, and may hope that readers of LIFE OF THE SPIRIT in particular, find it of some use to this end.

## Cardinal Newman on the Laity

CHARLES STEPHEN DESSAIN of the Oratory.

Newman complains of Catholic preachers that they think it their duty to give a bird's-eye view of Christianity in every sermon, and never to expound one truth without bringing in every counterbalancing consideration and saving clause. To apply such a method to the subject of Newman's influence in the second half of the twentieth century would be fatal! He lived so long, he touched life at so many points, he anticipated so many of the best movements in the Church today, that there would be no ending. The biblical and patristic movement, the ecumenical movement, the Catholic intellectual and university movement, the concrete and real approach in philosophy, the lay movement—all these, and much else owe a debt to Newman. This article will limit itself to Newman's connection with the lay movement, and will outline his views as to the place of the laity in the Church. In this matter, which always interested him, he was a precursor, and it caused him some of his bitterest trials.

In the days before the Oxford Movement, Newman's study of the Fathers taught him the important part played by the laity in the early Church, and he called attention to it in his *Arians of the Fourth Century* (p. 358). He noted how bishops, under pressure from the imperial government would subscribe to unorthodox formularies, and then find themselves abandoned by their flocks. 'Indeed', he adds, 'to many of the Arianizing bishops may be applied the remarks which Hilary makes upon the laity subjected to Arian teaching; that their own piety enabled them to interpret expressions religiously, which were originally invented as evasions of orthodox doctrine. "Sanctiores sunt aures plebis quam corda sacerdotum".' This view of the part played by the laity in