

EXTRACTS

TWO 'LIFE OF THE SPIRIT' MEETINGS

IN JULY of this year the Editors of Dominican reviews of spirituality (a better name has not yet been invented) met for the third time to discuss their common interests and problems. The meeting took place on this occasion at the Dominican Priory of Woodchester, near Gloucester, but the inspirer still remained the Editor of the senior review, *La Vie Spirituelle*, who first convened the editors in Paris. The representative of the Spanish *Vida Sobrenatural* did not reach England at all, the Dominican from the Irish *Doctrine and Life* arrived a week late, while the German Province was too hard pressed through business and illness to send anyone. But five reviews were represented and three or four other Dominicans took part to address the members or to join in the discussion.

The subject of discussion was 'the Christian Mystery' in the sense of 'the total Christ', 'Christ living in his members', which forms the background to modern theology and Christian life. Fr Ian Hislop, o.p., Prior of the Dominican house of Philosophy at Hawkesyard, began with a talk on 'the Christian Myth', the substance of which appears elsewhere in this issue. It was agreed that the lack of a real *myth* among Christians had led to the deadness in Christian language, partly due to the nominalism of a decadent scholasticism. The problem today is how to restore a Christian *mentality* which can appreciate mystery and is not content with the 'surface morality' now so common. A subsequent discussion dealt with the review itself as a means towards this changing of mentality. 'What is a "spiritual review"?' the editors asked themselves; and it became clear that it was the elaboration of theology as it affects the Christian person, assisted by real experience of union with God and observation of progress in holiness. In this practical elaboration psychology is used with profit, and to that must be joined a real contact with sources—tradition and scripture. Fr Sebastian Bullough, O.P., gave a detailed history of the attitude to the 'spiritual sense' of the Scriptures, so relevant to 'spiritual theology'. The great biblical themes provide the pattern for Christian living and Christian prayer.

Finally, after a very encouraging view of developments towards a more real and complete spirituality in America, the meeting reached its climax in a talk by Père Plé of *La Vie Spirituelle* on *Mystère et Mystique* the substance of which will appear in the November issue of *Supplement de la Vie Spirituelle*. Some of the ideas discussed at this session are touched on by Fr Corson in the review of Arintero's two important volumes printed above.

Mystère, in the biblical and liturgical sense, signifies the descent of God into the world in Christ Jesus, a descent that continues throughout the ages in the Church. In this sense 'mystical theology' is essentially 'ecclesial' and Catholic, because it is concerned with God-in-us, with the experience of the 'total Christ', the common life of grace in the mystical life as well as the ascetic. Such a discussion disclosed to the editors new horizons, which they hope in the course of time to reveal to their readers.

IN SEPTEMBER the LIFE OF THE SPIRIT organised a Conference, the second of its kind, at Spode House, next door to Hawkesyard Priory in Staffordshire. This conference seemed to continue and apply in many ways the theme of the editors' meeting. Last year in October a gathering of about thirty Catholics had discussed 'The Spiritual Needs of Today', and no matter from what angle they approached the subject the question of 'The Common Life' came to the fore. This year 'The Common Life' was taken as the central theme and a mixed group, which included Benedictines, Jesuits, Franciscans, Redemptorists, Anglican religious as well as Dominican nuns and friars and several lay men and women, joined in a fruitful two-day discussion with a diocesan bishop from Scotland as the guest of honour. The papers that were read at this meeting will be published together in the January (1953) issue of LIFE OF THE SPIRIT. In view of their publication it will be premature to discuss them here; some general impression may however be of interest.

The greatest importance of such a gathering lies in the fact that the members live a very fruitful common life together, praying together and assisting in the daily dialogue Mass, talking constantly in groups outside the actual conference hours, washing up together and in general getting to know new people and their ideas. On this occasion the need for hospitality in the modern *koinōnia*, the community life of the Church in charity, came into prominence, and with it the need for personal relationship between the bishop and his flock and the priests and their flocks. In the early Church there was a much deeper obedience within the Church because the individual 'churches' were gathered in smaller groups round their pastors. Today the obedience demanded of the faithful has become more impersonal and with the emphasis upon the juridical aspect. The modern attempts to recapture something of the wholeness of life in the 'total Christ' tend to fail because of this wider impersonal grouping and because the social aspects are not taken sufficiently into account. Work goes hand-in-hand with worship; the eucharist is a real meal however served, and therefore relates directly to the ordinary family's 'bread-winning' struggles. The family meal, said one member, is the fitting preparation for the sacred meal. It was

felt, too, that much could be learnt from the Quakers in their ceaseless appeal to true charity, which lies of course at the heart of the whole common life of Christians at home, at work and in church; and for this true prayer is a necessity—prayer, charity, hospitality, these three must go together. Parish life often fails in all these ways because it has no natural basis; the liturgy can be re-established round the Mass where people have some principle of cohesion other than the mere walls of the church. In fine, it was felt that the two most pressing needs were the reintegration of the family as a proper unit within the parish and within the social structure of modern life, and the grounding of this family life, both matrimonial and monastic, upon Sacred Scripture.

All this might at first seem rather remote from the pages of *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*, but reflection will show how relevant it is that the review should be kept in touch with the realities of the Christian life today. Without the generous assistance of the members of both these meetings it would be easy indeed for the review to beat the air with unreal discussions and pious nothings.

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Space for further 'extracts' here ceases, but we must refer readers to two outstanding current reviews: *Supplement de la Vie Spirituelle* (15 September) contains articles on determinism in psychology by Père Mailhous, fear in religious psychology by M. Oraison, the origin of the lay brethren by Père Mulhern, the image of God in the soul according to the Greek Fathers by H. C. Graef, and Contemplation in the thirteenth century by Père Paul Phillipe—a memorable number. Equally important is the August number of *Lumière et Vie* on the Sense of Sin in the world today, which is based as usual on a sound scriptural treatment of the subject in both Testaments.

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Contributors are encouraged to submit original MSS. or translations from the Fathers. *Literary Communications* should be addressed to The Editor, Life of the Spirit, Blackfriars, Oxford (Tel. 3607). The Editor cannot be responsible for the loss of MSS. submitted, and no MS. will be returned unless accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope. *Subscriptions, Orders and Communications regarding Advertisements* should be addressed to The Manager, Blackfriars Publications, 34 Bloomsbury Street, London, W.C.1 (Museum 5728). Annual Subscription 17s. 6d. post free (U.S.A. \$2.50). *Binding: Orders and Enquiries for binding volumes of the review may be sent to the Kemp Hall Bindery, 33 St Aldates', Oxford.*