

M. Gilson goes on to suggest that a return to the Greek tradition of the *Via Negativa* has 'on a crucial point made possible and prepared the ecumenism of tomorrow'.⁴⁵

I ended my last article on the theme of God's will. Traditionally two aspects are distinguished—God's permissive will as expressed for example in the precepts and the counsels, and the will of his good pleasure. I suggested that there was a parallel between this distinction and the distinction between necessity and contingency. It is necessary that a Christian should obey God's precepts, but God also exercises seemingly direct influence on the soul much less easy to formulate. Dom John suggests that as time passes conformity to the will of God's good pleasure becomes more important—subjectively speaking. For 'in reality the one act of giving oneself entirely to God includes both'.⁴⁶ In a third and final article I hope to show how these notions of necessity and contingency, of obedience and conformity, and of 'irrational and unmeaning craving for God'⁴⁷ were synthesised for Dom John in de Caussade's doctrine of abandonment to divine providence.

⁴⁵M. Gilson's 'discours' is printed in *La Croix* for 15-16 December, 1963. The reader is also recommended Fr Victor White's essay 'The unknown God' in his book *God the Unknown*, London 1955.

⁴⁶*Spiritual Letters*, p. 95. ⁴⁷p. 291.

Resuscitating the Parish

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In apostolic times unity among the faithful was understood as a direct consequence of assuming the new life in Christ. St Paul sees the reconciliation of man with man and particularly of Jew and Gentile as effected through the crucified Christ. 'But now in Christ you who were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace who has made us both one—(that he) might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross' (Eph. 2. 14-16). Through baptism we become members of this body 'For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free' (1 Cor. 12. 13) whose head

is Christ while we 'are one body in Christ and individually members one of another' (Rom. 12. 5).

This is one of the themes running through the epistles and the writers considered it sufficiently important to exhort the Romans to 'love one another with brotherly affection' (Rom. 12. 10), and to 'welcome one another' (Rom. 15. 7), the Thessalonians to 'admonish the idle, help the weak, be patient with them all' (1 Thes. 5. 14), and the Ephesians to 'be kind to one another, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you' (Eph. 4. 32) and to 'be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart' (Eph. 5. 18-20).

This is a far cry from all too many parishes today where individual private devotion has replaced the communal sacrificial meal, where the preaching of the 'good news' is frequently reduced to a condemnation of communism or contraception, where the *ite missa est* is belied by the sermon advocating withdrawal from the world, where bingo is the sole communal activity and football pool promoting the limit of responsibility allowed to the layman. Once the obligatory Sunday mass is over the parish is forgotten for the rest of the week and with it the silent demands of the aged, the sick and the lonely.

If the helpless and needy members of the community of the faithful are ignored is it surprising that in the local voluntary social services there is a complete lack of co-operation by Catholics as a body? Unlike others we have no tradition of responsibility for the unfortunate (apart from the work done by the religious orders and the S.V.P.) nor is this being remedied by training in our schools. Children are encouraged to bring pennies for black babies but not to provide them with food by helping in the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, let alone offer their services in Voluntary Service Overseas when they are older. In the political plane we willingly lobby M.P.'s on the school question but never on the inadequacies of aid to underdeveloped countries nor do we even question local councillors about overcrowded houses and homeless families.

If we lived the liturgy so that the eucharistic meal was the core of our lives and strove to understand the meaning of the scriptures, in fact if we were truly committed Christians these 'good works' would be the inevitable consequence of our beliefs. And they are essential—not for our salvation as this lies only in Christ—but in our calling as apostles. This is the sole means whereby most of us can bear witness to Christ in the world.

Renewal, recognised as necessary by the Church, and set in operation by the Council, does not appear to have permeated as far as the microcosm which is the parish. How then is it to be effected? How, in the first place, can the faithful 'be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy' (*Constitution on the sacred liturgy*, para 14)? And further how can the Church 'invite them to all the works of charity, piety and the apostolate. For all these works make it clear that Christ's faithful, though not of this world, are to be the light of the world and to glorify the Father before men' (*idem* para 9)? How can these ideas reach and revivify the moribund community of the parish?

The family group movement may be one of the most effective means of bringing about this renewal. It exists already in some parishes in the form of five or six couples meeting regularly in each other's houses for discussion. The size of the group means that the individual becomes personally involved, the organisation is minimal, the cost non-existent, and already by its very existence some sense of neighbourliness has been revived. Until now the topics discussed have been mainly those of particular concern to the family, such as religious training in the home, but some groups perhaps finding that they have reached the limit of useful discussion of these subjects have started to consider wider problems such as the local housing shortage.

If each family group could extend its discussions to consider the new role of the laity in the liturgy, in the ecumenical movement, and its responsibility in social and political matters this would provide the nucleus in the parish of trained laymen able to share fully in the liturgical life and ready to undertake their responsibility both to the parish and to the wider community. The neighbourliness engendered in the group could be extended to embrace the whole parish: acts of kindness and friendship surely proliferate. Then, when we are some way to regaining our feeling of community, it is a short step to extending this from the Catholic community to our separated brethren, one with us in baptism, and finally to all our fellowmen. Perhaps then we will see the reconciliation of man with man through him who 'did not come to judge the world but to save the world' (Jn. 12. 47).