

to foolish rivalry. In the house of God there are many mansions and each has its own ground plan, different in design from all the others.

In conclusion an extract from another letter about the August Editorial will help to clarify the nature of this contemplative life in the world: 'The story of St Jane Frances de Chantal seems rather relevant—"When Madame had M. de X as her director she prayed for two hours a day and upset the whole house. Since she has had M. de Genève she prays all day and upsets no one." . . . Contemplation is a matter of the kind of prayer not the amount of time one gives to it; and if the right thing is achieved the time question will solve itself. Would it not help if we concentrated on that interior discipline of mind and will which must be there before the Holy Ghost can take over?'

PAROCHIAL SPIRITUALITY

BY

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.



THE parish church is the place of God's meeting with his children. God's house is the Christian's home, and home is the place to which you return.

The life of grace is for the members of Christ a common life, whose redemptive source is one, whose end is one.

Its unity is symbolised by, indeed is effected on, that altar-stone of sacrifice which gives to the church its meaning and reveals to the people of God their destiny.

Within the single circle of Christian life there are infinite varieties of Christian living. Each soul unique: but for all alike the need and fact of redemption, of incorporation in Christ the Lord of all. The irony is that the life of the Spirit, which is primarily the common life of unity, of being made one with and through Christ our Lord, should so largely be considered in terms of individual perfection. Degrees of sanctity there most certainly are, and the heights are more exhilarating than the plains. But unity precedes diversity; the source from which St Teresa and Mrs Flaherty alike draw their strength is available to all.

But the economy of grace is achieved amongst men; thus are their wants supplied, their desires fulfilled. And the Incarnation reaches down to all that is human save sin. A man's natural need for meet-

ing, for finding a place and time in which to realise his incorporation in Christ, is given its supernatural answer. For the Church, the Mystical Body, is itself made incarnate in the world that is ours. The house of God is the Christian's home.

And here the significance of Baptism must be seen. The Sacrament of initiation is, properly, administered in the parish church in the presence of the people of God. A new member is engrafted into the Christian family, and it happens in the *ecclesia*, in the assembly gathered about the altar on which the sacrifice of Calvary is perpetuated. Whatever destiny may await the baptised one—whether it be marriage or a Carmelite call, martyrdom at the ends of the earth or an unnoticed lifetime within sight of the church—for everyone the source is here. A new name is recorded; a new life begins.

The spiritual life is inaugurated at that moment, and for the laity it is simply a parochial life. The overtones of special vocation, of particular graces, are grounded in the essential fact of this solemn incorporation in the Body of Christ, which looks indeed to its consummation in Heaven, but is achieved, here and now, in a local assembly, whether the church is that of Corinth or St Patrick's down the street.

'Spirituality for layfolk' is perhaps too often presented as something strange, certainly as something uneasily accommodated to the rhythm of parochial life. The reason is to be sought, one suspects, in the seminaries where 'Mystical and Ascetical Theology' is a special and secondary discipline—and the categories set out in Tanqueray's manual are certainly formidable. In other words, the spiritual life, in the technical sense, is supposed to be beyond the attainment of ordinary folk. For the members of sodalities there may be an occasional retreat—usually elsewhere; during a mission there will be a deeper understanding of the obligations of Catholic life. But one can scarcely wonder, granted the context of contemporary life, that a priest's preoccupations are with what is juridically essential. The 'spiritual life' of seminary recollection can bear little resemblance to the crowded life of Sunday masses, Saturday confessions, reclaiming the lapsed, catechising the children and keeping a precarious hold on finances. It is in any case no part of pastoral care to introduce people to obligations which they cannot be expected to fulfil.

What is needed, then, is a deeper understanding of the ordinary life of the parish as a means of sanctification, as well as a less academic approach to spirituality. The conditions for a deep spirituality are in fact given in the parochial cycle. The pity is that they are too rarely realised as such. Laymen (or, more often, laywomen) who are seeking to advance in prayer and the spiritual life are

tempted to contract out of the community to which they belong. It is a natural tendency, but a disastrous one when it impoverishes the common life into which all were incorporated at baptism.

No part of the Encyclical *Mediator Dei* is so impressive as that in which the Pope appeals for the proper integration of the objective and individual elements in Catholic life and worship. In the fully constituted parish they are both present because they are both necessary. Individual prayer finds a constant renewal in the corporate prayer of the community. And, conversely, the community at prayer looks to the extension of that life of divine union in all its members as individual persons, with gifts and graces separately given.

The spiritual life must be presented to the people of God as the normal fulfilment of Baptism and not as a minority occupation for the leisured and discerning. And the means for doing so are at hand in the Mass and the Sacraments. It is through a deeper realisation of the life of grace there made available that a true spirituality can be nourished. Methods of mental prayer, special mortifications, the recitation of the Divine Office, these for the laity are, as it were, ornaments in the margin of an essential text, and that text is the common life of all the baptised as realised in the parish.

Moreover the formation of a Catholic parish, conscious of its vocation as such, is the prerequisite for any missionary apostolate beyond its limits. The code of believing Christians, solid in faith, strong in hope and rooted in charity, a praying parish, shows the life of the spirit as already realised in the members of Christ.

What may this mean in practice? First of all the parish itself must be rediscovered as the Christian community, the people of God gathered together as a family with Christ our Lord for its head. Its unity is a reality which must be expressed, above all, in its prayer. The primacy in a parish belongs to the parish as such. Confraternities and guilds and legions are groupings which presuppose the society of the baptised. And it is in the administration of the sacrament of Baptism that a parish should find an eloquent expression of its unity. The sacrament publicly administered after the principal Mass, with its ceremonies explained and with all invited to participate, can be the most instructive reminder of what membership of the Church really means. It is, besides, an invitation to prayer, and one that rarely fails of its effect.

The Mass has its own pre-eminence, both as a sacrifice in which the parish fulfils its corporate mission, and as the model and inspiration of the individual prayer of Christians. Here, as in Baptism, an essential element in the Church's life must be seen as much more than a legal obligation. A 'parochial spirituality' will spring from a

deepened understanding of the Mass and the Sacraments as the means for achieving the divine union for which man was created. But they must be seen as mysteries in which the members of Christ are incorporated; in which, therefore, mind and voice and gesture are engaged.

The introduction of the Catholic laity to the spiritual life does not demand extraordinary innovations. Apart from the Mass and the Sacraments, the familiar forms of Catholic devotion have their share in this work of parochial sanctification. Too often liturgical services are presented with a grim finality which perturbs those unaccustomed to the Church's official types of worship. There is room for a sane adaptation here. The psalms of Compline, for instance, can become a real introduction to mental prayer if they are patiently explained, so that if need be the theme of a psalm can be summarised in English before it is actually sung. Popular forms of devotion, and especially the Rosary, have their own importance, and their familiarity make them especially valuable instruments to foster growth in holiness. Hence the importance of relating isolated acts of devotion—morning and evening prayers, the daily decade of the Rosary, the Angelus—to the corporate worship of the parish, centred in the church itself. Thus it is that the influence of the Sunday Mass can extend to odd moments of the week and the unity of the Mystical Body be resumed afresh.

There is no novelty in any of this, and it would be a work of supererogation to want to 'improve' on what the Church so abundantly provides. The point, perhaps, is to rediscover the ordinary life of the Church as an opportunity for growth in sanctity. And that means a fresh understanding of what a parish may become.

In our world and age it is easy to assume that traditional communities have ceased to have any validity. The anonymous life of large towns is not friendly to local loyalties, and even a rural environment has ceased to mean the stability of a society at one with itself. But the Christian community is not to be identified with any particular circumstances of time or place; in the last resort, what is true of Ballymena is true of Assisi and Seattle besides. And the only secure basis for the building up of the parish as an assembly of the people of God is simply its spirituality. No amount of organisation or activity can be a substitute for the divinely-bestowed unity of grace.

Where this sense of a responsible sharing in a divine work is active in a parish; where, that is, the people have been taught to pray, to use their hearts and voices, its effect does not end in the porch. Goodness asks to be communicated, and the unity realised at the altar must flow into the social life of the Christian family, whose

oneness in Christ so far transcends the divisions imposed by the business of daily living. Thus spirituality becomes not an optional extra, but the very spring and source of life itself.

This sense of a deepened responsibility of our adult awareness of the *unum necessarium* is achieved within the Church's ordinary framework. But it can be immensely stimulated by parochial retreats, themselves based on the traditional pattern of the Mass and the Sacraments. Such retreats, revealing the place of the sacramental principle at all levels of mortal life, from birth to death, in sickness and in health, are the best of all initiations to that total spiritual life to which Christians are committed in virtue of their baptism. As always, the Church provides the end—and the means for attaining it.

DEVOTION FOR EVERY MAN

BY

C. J. WOOLLEN



CHRIST'S message, being for every man, is for the large body of unthinking as well as the more intellectual. In these days it must be admitted that the average man is not disposed to reason much; he prefers to accept mental fare that is given him without examining too closely its quality.

He does not necessarily accept the conclusions of others, but that is because he has not troubled to make judgments about them. His mental attitude is more that of one who is willing to be entertained as an observer at an intellectual feast, and with a pronounced respect for the dictum of the expert. There is a general mental laziness making for mass-passivity, which provides the grand opportunity for the demagogue and dictator.

The unresponsiveness of the man in the street to a message that demands mental exercise on his part has led us, in our campaign for the conversion of others to the Faith, to appeal more particularly to the intellectual. Our whole approach has been carried too far on to the intellectual plane. We tend to overlook that our real aim is to draw our fellow-countrymen into the life of the spirit, and we are inclined to waste energy in engaging in a battle of wits with the few disposed to argue. True, we always have at the back of our minds the intention to bring to those with whom we engage the solid gift of faith, but we seem not to have formed a technique for doing the work of conversion on a grand scale. If we have, in this country, forty million or more souls to convert,