

## EXTRACTS

MORALISM from time to time needs to be attacked rigorously; for no matter how strongly and theologically its errors are exposed, there will always be that tendency among the devout to reduce Christian life to a matter of good behaviour. Père G. Dirks, S.J., has taken up the perennial struggle in an article on Religious Moralism in the *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* (July-September), and after wisely warning us against the danger of exaggeration in these matters sets out to show deficiencies of this attitude. The true Christian should live the life of charity; the moralist is always considering the question of obligation.

The continual desire to satisfy exactly the duties of a christian often develops into legalistic preoccupations, 'juridical' restlessness which ends sometimes in scruple. . . . Confronted with any action the first question becomes Can I, or Ought I? Is there a duty or a prohibition? A real obligation or no? From this we can understand how such christians come to find the essence of christian life in the observance of law. And certainly we find among such men remarkable specimens of the faithful servant even to the pitch of heroism and men who mould themselves into outstanding examples of justice, honesty, and energy. But alas not rarely such admirable men are persuaded that to be thus honest and strong to the end despite the seductions of self-interest and passion is due to themselves alone. They admit that the grace of God is a useful help, but they do not regard it as indispensable.

Père Dirks suggests that though such men often achieve great results, these remain within the natural order. They need the Holy Spirit with his gifts and an outpouring of generosity and love to lead them out of themselves, to reach to God himself without thought of reward in St Bernard's phrase quoted here: *Non sine praemio diligitur, sed absque intuitu praemii*.

SILENCE and the solitude of the Carthusian occupied the major part of the October *Vie Spirituelle*. The article on Carthusian asceticism by a member of that Order will appear later in LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, but there are other good things recalled in the solitude and silence of a Carthusian cell:

In short it is verily a new universe that opens before the eyes of the solitary in the depths of his contemplative repose. And yet this solitude is full too of a very vital spirit of fraternal charity. And this is surely the point of the Carthusian as a model to the world. His silence and his solitude are not anti-social, nor mere escapism. They are, as another writer in the same issue points out, the garden in which all the virtues grow and flourish, especially the virtue of charity. Fr Egan in the autumn number of *Cross and Crown* discusses

this from St Teresa's point of view. The Carmelite would be expected to seek the same seclusion for her contemplation, but at the request of obedience the contemplative, having given herself to God, will give herself to God's creatures.

'The soul (in solitude) seems to live in greater purity because there are fewer opportunities of offending God.' Now that seems like a very valid reason for preferring solitude and prayer. St Teresa admits its validity, but only in part. She surprises us by pointing out another side of the picture: 'It is here (in the active life) that love must be made known: not in secret places, but in the midst of temptations . . .' Nevertheless she adds an important warning: 'Remember in all I say I am taking for granted that you run the risks under obedience and out of charity. If it is not so my conclusion is always that it is better to be alone: moreover *we ought to desire to be alone* even when employed in the way I am speaking of.'

It is the great difficulty over again of preserving the spirit of silence under the demands of active charity and the apostolate that makes the Carthusian vocation so indispensable. Dominican contemplation, for example, which has to be ready to overcome the racket of the world with the voice of the Word, rests necessarily on silence. *La 'Belle Ceremonie' du Silence* is the subject of an article in *France Dominicaine* (September-October) recalling that tertiaries too must seek to observe this beautiful rule—charity must be the rule as to when to speak and when to keep silent.

MODERN PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE is the general title given to a most outstanding double number of *Vita Christiana* (July-October), in which the energetic and cheerful Editor, Padre Colosio, o.p., has shown that Italy is not far behind France in appreciation of urgent actualities. Indeed, *La Vie Spirituelle*, which inspired this number and from which some of the articles are translated, could hardly have done better. These two hundred pages may almost be regarded as a *Status Questionis* for the Roman gathering called by the Sacred Congregation for Religious for the end of November to study the problems of religious life. There are articles here on Religious Life with references to its decadences, to the priesthood, to the monastic state, to the modern mentality, to its immediate problems, and to special forms such as secular institutes and lay brothers. Amid this wealth of interest we can select here only the question of Secular Institutes. After pointing out the special needs of the present age which have called forth the secular institutes, the author of this article outlines their characteristics—the full profession of Christian perfection according to the evangelical councils, the 'secularity' which establishes them in the world, and the special nature of a

community. The spirituality of these Institutes depends on the complete consecration of the members to God, which preserves them from the 'heresy of activism', and this consecration is fulfilled in the apostolate in the world which gives each member a tremendous responsibility for personal sanctity among their own kith and kin, building up the sanctification of others upon the human ties which bind them to the world. Finally the author remarks that members may be either priests or layfolk:

Naturally what has been said will apply to priests and to the laity in an analogical way. The layman is a secular in so far as he is dedicated to professional, political action, etc., the priest in so far as he is diocesan. In the one as in the other the consecration realised in the Secular Institute finds its concrete objective in the respective activity of the apostolate in the world.

This underlining of the possibility of members of the secular priesthood consecrating themselves in such an Institute is surely new to the literature of Secular Institutes and one that is full of promise.

ALSO OF NOTE: The Assumption in tradition and in its practical 'actuality' is treated in *America* (October 28th) and *Vie Spirituelle* (November).

## LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

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