

mental system to clear up the messes. His eye must be open to the sight of God even in a wicked world, and, like God, he will allow the evil to work itself out. There is no conflict between poetic and moral truth; on the contrary, if we have our eyes open to every scrap of it, the poetic truth will only be artistically convincing if we have our eye on the pattern behind it: the moral truth. Proust and Virginia Woolf are the products of a world which has been driven in on itself and condemned to self-conscious art because it has lost the pattern of God's planning. The loss of this sense means a loss of faith, and it has produced the excessive concern with techniques and experiment that is so common today and has made the modern novel 'etiolated and narrow', as Storm Jameson calls it. If Catholic novelists fall short in technical skill it may be partly because they cannot believe that technique is everything. Their greatest temptation may be to over-emphasise the pattern, but undoubtedly their infallible method will be to keep out of God's light and allow him to appear through their mirrorings, and the last thing they will worry about will be 'edification'. No writer was ever less interested in edification than Geoffrey Chaucer, and he gave us the finest sketch there ever was of the communion of saints in that pilgrimage which began in a tavern and ended in a church.

OBITER

NOMADELFIA—AN ITALIAN EXPERIMENT

Nomadelfia (and the name means 'a city where brotherhood is law') started as an attempt to solve the problem (a very serious one in Italy) of the abandoned child; it has become an attempt to solve the fundamental human problem of the relationship between man, his neighbour, his needs, and the fruits of the earth.

Don Zeno Saltini, its founder, has always been interested in abandoned children. He was first a lawyer, which gave him the opportunity to learn much about juvenile crime. The day he was ordained a priest, he adopted an abandoned child, and from then on his 'family' grew rapidly; the children came home with new brothers, some turned up on their own, and they came to be called 'Little Apostles'. Apart from the material problems, which were very great, Don Zeno found himself incapable of giving his children the love and care which they would have had from a mother, and at the same time he became convinced that children who did not have this form of love in their youth could

only under very exceptional circumstances grow up to be good, balanced, reliable men. To learn about love, devotion and service, they needed themselves to know these things directly. In 1941, a girl of nineteen offered to come and help, and she joined the family in the house in which they now lived. The children immediately called her 'mother', and more 'mothers' soon arrived. Towards the end of the war, when even boys of fourteen and fifteen took up arms, many were dispersed; but in 1947 they all returned, except the dead, and many more children, whose families had been killed, or who had been lost on the roads, joined them. The house which they had been given was by now terribly overcrowded, and they decided to move into the abandoned concentration camp at Fossoli, where, not long before, six hundred Jews had been murdered. The walls were thrown down, and the huts were rebuilt and turned into homes. Fortunately, 'mothers' and 'fathers' arrived as well as the children. And somehow, day by day, enough food was found for them all. Since then, through gifts and credit, three thousand acres of shrub-land have been bought by the sea in Tuscany, to be turned into farm-land by the growing children. The community is constantly in debt; its first crop of wheat was requisitioned by creditors. But *Nomadelfia* still grows.

Nomadelfia is run by a General Assembly, composed of all the adults, and all the 'Little Apostles' over fourteen years of age. They have evolved a fairly elaborate constitution, the main points of which are that all property is common property (even personal effects); that at least seventy per cent of the population must be under fifteen years of age, 'until there are no more children deprived of a mother's love on the face of the earth'; that all the citizens must work; that there is to be a Patriarch at the head of the community, elected for life (at the moment Don Zeno), who is the final judge in any controversy; that there is to be complete obedience to His Holiness the Pope.

With the growth of *Nomadelfia*, its citizens have developed a social and economic ideal. This ideal they try to put into effect within their town. Its basic principle is simply a very realistic practice of the precepts of the Gospels, the dominant note being love. Each man is as Adam, made of clay, born from a corrupt society, but he is animated with the breath of life. He is the builder, he is the worker, he must keep the family supplied with what they need. He must love his work, and those he works for, and all must be to the glory of God. Through this he achieves his redemption. Woman, the most important unit in *Nomadelfia*, is the impersonation of motherhood; each woman must then be a new Mary, full of love, and full of sacrifice for her children. 'Woman, behold thy son; son, behold thy mother' is said by Don Zeno each time a new child is given to a 'mother' at the altar. This motherhood is

each time a gift of Providence, and can be just as valid as blood-motherhood. Many 'mothers' take a vow of chastity; the Patriarch or his delegate is the responsible 'father' of the children, and all mothers give an assurance that they will not be married except to men wholly prepared to continue their mission with them. All the adults are at the service of the children, and the 'Little Apostles' are brothers among themselves, and at each other's service.

Apart from its humanitarian aspect, Nomadelfia is of great interest not only as a radical development of, but rather as a real revolution in, Catholic sociology. Three factors seem to have directed its development, and the limits within which it has grown: much poverty, leading to immorality, personified in the abandoned child; a great need for social reform, reflected in the violent communism which is the political opinion of the inhabitants of the area where Nomadelfia was founded and has grown; and an ardent Catholicism, which claims that the only way to eliminate the first two evils is to follow Christ by giving up everything, and loving one's neighbour entirely.

Nomadelfia is full of defects, particularly economically; seeds are bought for flowers while a baker's bill remains unpaid; roads are built without expert advice, and so they are flooded in winter. Logically, the whole system is full of contradictions, but every time I see Nomadelfia or its citizens, I feel them to be a living example of Faith, Hope, and Charity, and most of all, of Charity.

P.R.

NOTE: *Molte Strade, Una Casa* by Maria Pirelli (Comitato Milanese per gli aiuti a Nomadelfia, Piazza S. Carlo I, Milano) is the latest account of Nomadelfia. This, admirably illustrated and fascinatingly written, is more than a chronicle of what has already been achieved. It reveals the range of one of the boldest developments in the Catholic sociology of our time, which is only to say that it is a return to an evangelical simplicity and poverty which the world has forgotten.

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The first number of the *Revue Internationale de Télévision et de Radio* (Paris: 31 Boulevard de la Tour—Maubourg) is particularly devoted to the beginning of religious television programmes. Printed in French and English, this review deserves generous support for its work of information and criticism.