

## O B I T E R

TWELVE THOUSAND PARISHES OF FRANCE are without priests. Each year the Church in France—and especially in the countryside—loses more than four hundred priests, and the priests that remain are often old. In many country parishes, if indeed one can still call them parishes, only a handful of believers remain, lost against a background that is indifferent if not hostile. Such is the situation which justified the title of the Abbé Godin's famous book, *La France, Pays de Mission?* The question-mark was scarcely necessary. And with loss of Catholic faith a creeping paralysis has attacked the very roots of rural life. From the train, as you pass from Paris to the south, all seems the same: the village curling round the church, the tethered goats and the maize drying from the eaves. But look closer. The forms remain, but the heart is dying.

For a desperate disease the remedies are most often desperate too. In the history of the Church each generation has seen fresh threats to the Christian life, but most providentially there arises first the awareness of the calamity and then the will to mend it. It was so with St Francis, St Dominic, St Ignatius, the curé of Ars, and with countless hosts besides. The problems of industrial society are tragic enough. They are spectacular, on a scale that staggers the mind that turns to face them. The countryside remains; its memory is long. Anonymous and ancient, its life defies the shock tactics that may touch a factory, a street in a town.

On Rosary Sunday 1943 there was established at La Houssaye-en-Brie (Seine-et-Marne) the priory of St Martin, the first foundation of the *Frères Missionnaires des Campagnes*. This new congregation of Brothers was founded by Père M.-D. Epagneul, a Dominican, to meet the de-Christianisation of rural France. In his *Missionnaire en France* Père Epagneul estimates that three-fifths of the country folk of France are lost to the Church. Here is a missionary territory, the most difficult of all but the one that has the first claim on France. The new congregation (which has already over forty members) has two aims: first, and indispensably, the sanctification of its members through the religious life; second, the reconciliation of rural France to the Church. To achieve these aims the Congregation vows itself to a life that is missionary and communal, wholly at the service of the countryside. All forms of the apostolate are open to it: missions, teaching, pastoral work, the organisation of lay Catholic action. But the context is quite simply a rural one, and the Brothers are counselled to work 'without hurry, silently, with a constant awareness of

the deep roots of country life, and using wisely, as did Christ our Lord, the things of the earth to raise men, believers and unbelievers alike, to God'. The priories are to be part of the parochial community, designed to revivify the Christian life where it is most lacking through a close and sympathetic sharing of a way of life that springs from the land. The Congregation includes priests, and auxiliary Brothers who are not ordained, but who share intimately in its apostolic work.

The *Frères Missionnaires des Campagnes* are not a substitute for the traditional parochial organisation. They are primarily religious, vowed to perfection, subject to the stability of community life. Their work is complementary to the normal pastoral ministry, and their secondary patron, St Martin, sufficiently declares their special vocation.

FOR WOMEN, the *Dominicaines Missionnaires des Campagnes* offer a similar vocation. Founded in 1932, this Congregation (which, unlike that of the Brothers, remains part of the Dominican Order) too places itself at the service of the countryfolk of France. Small priories in remote villages have become centres of a renewed Catholic life. The Sisters are ready to nurse the sick, play the church organ, catechise the children, help with the washing: in fact, *praeparatae ad omnia* might well be the device of these missionaries whose work is no less heroic because it is accomplished in the familiar village streets and out in the fields of their own country. At their mother-house at Flavigny-sur-Ozerain (Côte d'Or) the Sisters hope one day to welcome women and girls from other countries who may want to be trained in this special vocation and who may then return to help restore the countrysides of their own lands to Christ. The example of St Hyacinth, going back to Poland, suggests a parallel in the time of St Dominic himself.

GRAHAM GREENE is the subject of an intelligent study by Paul Rostenne in *La Revue Nouvelle* (Brussels) for September. Avoiding the 'creator-like' emphasis of Bernanos, who, M. Rostenne justly observes, 'penetrates directly to the most secret places of a man's personality, the territory where God—and Satan—alone can work', Graham Greene

while depicting a nature that seems to be confidently sure of itself, succeeds, without juggling with appearances, in making us hear faintly that gentle but all-powerful rumour of the supernatural which is ever at work in the shadowy depths of a man. He achieves an almost miraculous union between the metaphysician and the novelist, who come to each other's aid instead of destroying each

other. From this union springs the powerful impression of *reality* which Graham Greene's novels leave. And what higher praise than that could any artist deserve?

SOCIAL SERVICE (September-November) prints an appeal by Charles W. Ferguson, editor of the *Readers Digest*, to the great voluntary agencies engaged in social work to use their international resources to foster free communication among the peoples of the world. The appeal has its force for Catholics who, by virtue of their membership of the mystical body of Christ, should be foremost in prayer and work for the removal of the senseless barriers that separate the nations. Are Catholic organisations, one wonders, conspicuous for their sense of *catholic*, i.e. universal, responsibility? Such bodies as the Society of St Vincent de Paul have a world-wide membership, and a world-wide opportunity.

FATHER LA FARGE surveys two thousand numbers of *America* (September 13) and concludes that the problems the Catholic journalist must deal with are as perennial as original sin.

ORDEN CRISTIANO (August) continues its sturdy battle for the principles of Christian democracy in the unfriendly setting of Peron's Argentine.

THE CHURCHMAN (September) has a useful series of articles on the Ecumenical Movement among Protestants.

ETUDES (September) includes Père Daniélou's view of Christianity and History: 'Christianity is the building up in time of the mystery hidden in God from all eternity'.

LA FRANCE CATHOLIQUE (September 19) publishes a vigorous defence of Christian education by Père Sertillanges: 'the citizen is not merely an elector; he has a soul'.

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#### ANANDA COOMARASWAMY

News has reached us of the death, shortly after his 70th birthday, of Dr Ananda Coomaraswamy. Dr Coomaraswamy was for many years an occasional contributor to *BLACKFRIARS*, and it will be remembered that Eric Gill wrote of him in the *Autobiography*: 'I believe that no other living writer has written the truth in matters of art and life and religion and piety with such wisdom and understanding'. During all his curatorship at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts—where he was wont to describe himself simply 'as a research fellow at this museum'—the degree of distinction in his connoisseurship and the