

devotion to the cause of Christ.' (p. 95.) This seeming paradox (which always arises in the question of contemplation and action) is due, as is here shown, to the fact that each needs the help of the other, in order that God's work be complete.

In answer to 'the vexed question as to what precisely constitutes a contemplative', the Carmelite says that to be a contemplative means: 'an awareness of God, an underlying but constant pre-occupation with God himself which lies at the root of all activity . . . if they [contemplatives] are obliged by a very right sense of duty to join in the activities of other people, they do it for the sake of God and for God alone and not for the sake of activity'. (p. 95.) To this she adds: 'the usefulness of the two types—contemplative and active—is precisely the same both in religion and outside it'. But this truth and also the ever-increasing foundation of new, active religious orders and, especially in these days, of societies of lay-folk living a real religious life in the world, but without habit, or external observances, in no way implies that the old monastic and enclosed orders are out of date and should gracefully come to an end. 'The Church', says the Carmelite Nun, 'is very wide and she has need of all', and she goes on to speak of 'the modern extension' of the contemplative life, the 'actual apostolate of contemplatives in, for instance, missionary countries, as so strongly advocated by Pope Pius XI, where contemplation *itself* is to be exercised for the sake of souls'. (p. 119.)

The book ends with a most poetically expressed 'prophecy': although the world may *seem* to have succeeded in overcoming the power of God, in destroying his Church and overthrowing his contemplatives, 'always the last word of any battle lies with God . . . one morning in the growing light of dawn, with the love of God in his heart—the first hermit of our new world will turn his face towards the everlasting desert and the gold of the rising sun'. (Chapter XX. *The First Hermit of the New World.*) And so, in spite of Communism and all the errors of man striving to make mankind alone the object of life and service, the immediate homage offered to God in and for himself (which is the very meaning of the contemplative life, and which absorbs in itself but does not therefore *reject* all other ends or objects) will survive and be renewed until the end of time.

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L'ASCÈSE CHRÉTIENNE ET L'HOMME CONTEMPORAIN. By various theologians and doctors. (Cahier de la Vie Spirituelle; Cerf—Blackfriars; n.p.)

A tentative survey is here given by different writers, in collaboration, on the principles underlying Christian asceticism and the application

of them to contemporary conditions of life. Especially in the foreword and the final chapter there is an awareness that the ground is somewhat treacherous and that there is danger of over-stepping the mark of orthodoxy. It is established that, whatever else may be said, asceticism is integral to Christian living, that for self-conquest it is an essential form of preventative therapy and is inspired by a love for souls which seeks to be identified with Christ crucified and to share by expiation in his redemptive work.

Lives of the saints bear witness that asceticism is the normal way of attaining holiness of life, and that there are different kinds. The first part of this work studies the matter in the light of Holy Scripture and of the apostolic and patristic writings. History of the middle ages and onwards indicates the types of asceticism which have taken shape at different times. In three chapters (one by P. Chenu, O.P.) an effort is made to place asceticism in its proper theological setting. Whilst being essentially a personal work, it may be also corporate and institutional, as in religious orders, having a common and sociological value in the Mystical Body of Christ.

In six chapters of the second part, doctors, psychologists, historians, and theologians, including P. Dubarle, and P. Mailloux, combine to explore the ground for adaptations which appear to be called for in the present age. Asceticism at every level implies renunciation with the positive intent of setting the soul at liberty for the things of God. But it is legitimate to enquire how far traditional forms of penance serve their original purpose, or are even detrimental to it, in the present situation. Grace builds on nature, and man is in a measure conditioned psychologically and physiologically by his environment. Loss of sleep or shortage of food may be less fruitful of spiritual results than in former times, and certain kinds of bodily penance may feed perverted tendencies. Such considerations awaken a sense of responsibility, and suggest the need of advances and adaptations in accepted practices both within and without the cloister, and especially in novitiates, if harm is not to be done. Some of the older observances are unattractive to the modern mind and for the best of reasons. Traditional asceticism is not an end in itself but a means to a wider Christian humanism. It is not intended to be a dehumanising process, but it may become so by inattention to individual susceptibilities. Undoubtedly there are certain factors in a healthy asceticism which must remain constant. But it is right to enquire how adjustments can be made to safeguard an asceticism which will be both human and Christian. This book is an attempt to serve this purpose. Those who have the guidance and training of others in the Christian way will find in it much food for thought, and will be left to draw their own conclusions.

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