

NOTE.—The author of the above article is an ardent apostle in the *Missions de Paris* and writing from the French point of view has to some extent misunderstood the purpose of the previous writers on this subject, which was simply to investigate the possibilities of applying the *principles* of *Provida Ecclesia* to a solitary life which is often almost forced on the good Christian 'in the world'. But the writer's points are well worthy of consideration and put a challenge which no layman or cleric can lightly pass by.—EDITOR.

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## GOD'S COMMANDOS

BY

MARIE DESBOTTES

**L**IFE today is puzzling for many men and women. The problems and the answers to them are far from clear-cut; nor are they confined to those living entirely worldly lives; there are many seeking the things of the spirit who are having a time of difficulty and perplexity. The lay contemplative comes in for his or her fair share of these difficulties.

It seems to these men and women that they have been given a very clear mandate by God. They are to live in the world and yet give him whole time service; they are to follow as closely as they can the way of life that our Lord and his blessed Mother trod. They are increasingly aware of our Lord's words that some devils are only cast out by prayer and penance. It becomes more and more clear that most of our devils today are of this category and that God is leading these souls by a way of prayer and penance which is literally demanding whole-time service. Love, prayer, penance, silence; cells of love and contemplation living and working in an enemy territory to win souls for Love himself. . . . God's Commandos in fact.

All this seems clear; wherein lies their problem? First within themselves; they doubt that they have heard aright, it is so difficult to live in the world and not become one with it. The very generosity of their love makes them feel that they should join one of the great contemplative Orders, and frequently they are free to do so, except for one extraordinary barrier. . . . God does not give them the vocation for this life! Secondly, looking at the problem objectively there are so many dangers; to go 'free lancing' for souls is all very well, but when storms and stress arise there is a lack of dedication and of a Rule to keep them on their way, so the free lancing may well become a spare time hobby when their hearts and intentions are not engaged elsewhere. There is also the danger of dilettantism. We all know how easy that is; to sit back with our pieties and our

pious practices, our very homes arranged in imitation of the cloister, we even carefully stage our poverty . . . and we bitterly resent the intrusion of the outside world. It almost seems that we carve out our own cross—as we think it should be carved! All very nice, but we are cut off from the real discipline of living; far from the way of life lived by our Lord, and complete strangers to those God-given crosses and penances imposed on us by all who make claims on our time and our charity!

Thirdly the problem is increased by outside opposition, which comes frequently from those whom the lay contemplative has reason to regard as good and even holy people, very often including his own confessor. He is advised to give up his play-acting, to be 'Normal' (how every lover suffers from that advice!), to say his prayers and keep the commandments. When God leads these souls in his way of prayer their confessors often tell them that they are mistaken and that they should keep to their meditation books. Finally comes the most bewildering of all advice, and that is, if they really think God is calling them to a life of perfection they should enter one of the enclosed Orders; this is often what the poor soul wants to do, but God will not give the necessary vocation.

Here then is the problem of the lay contemplative. How are they to do this thing which to them is so surely God's Will? They know how they have tried to escape from this call, to be normal, to enter a religious Order, to forget the whole thing; they know how the devil, the world and the flesh have done all in their power to prevent them from following this way of life. They also know how God will not allow them to escape from their vocation, how after every set-back the old insistent call comes back with an even greater urgency.

This problem is being solved for some by the little-known Discalced Carmelite Third Secular Order on whose Rule Fr Kevin, O.D.C., has written a helpful book for all souls trying to live a life of prayer and love in the world.<sup>1</sup> Fr Kevin has written a good-sized book on the Third Secular Order of Carmel and it is not possible in a short article to do anything like justice to this subject! Yet, because it is so little known, perhaps it will be helpful to give some of the bigger and more important notes in it, so that those who are interested may have a brief survey which will send them to Fr Kevin's book for more!

The Third Order Secular of Carmel may be joined by individuals who are unable to attend any meetings of the Tertiary Congregation,

<sup>1</sup> *The Way of Perfection for the Laity*. By Fr Kevin, O.D.C. (Brown & Nolan; 8s. 6d.)

in fact owing to the fewness of the tertiaries there may be no congregation to join. They should have a Director who is a Carmelite, or at least in sympathy with the Carmelite way of life. There are other qualifications of age, etc., which can be found in the *Manual* or in Fr Kevin's book.

After a year's novitiate the tertiary is professed, and at his profession he takes two vows which are binding as long as he is a tertiary; these vows are obedience and chastity. That of obedience is only exercised in matters of grave importance and only binding if given in writing by the Superior. That of chastity does not forbid the married state but the vow makes any and all infringements of the virtue more serious.

The Rule is long, covering all the main points of daily life. We would here mention in particular:

1. Daily Mass and Holy Communion, if possible, otherwise weekly Holy Communion as a minimum.
2. Little Office of our Lady daily, and as a minimum, though nothing more must be undertaken without the director's consent; a half-hour's mental prayer, spiritual reading, silence and recollection must be the keynote of the day, unless work or charity demand otherwise.
3. All idle gossip, uncharitable talk and back-biting is forbidden. A tertiary must be exact in fulfilling the duties of his state, especially in the home, where it is his duty to make piety and religion attractive by his own good temper and charitable example. A tertiary must avoid idleness and be well employed; if this is not necessary for his livelihood, then the work should be voluntary in character and of the nature of almsgiving, working for the poor, and for poor churches. This is to live in perfect harmony with the Carmelite Rule which is inspired by the two-fold love of God and of the neighbour.
4. A tertiary is expected to perform definite penance, if not by the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence, then at the direction of his director. Advice is also given regarding retreats and days of recollection.

This very brief outline will at least show that here is the dedication and the rule of which many have felt the need. The book referred to shows much more than that. In this way of life these souls, called to give our Lord whole time service, find that they are no longer lonely; for it is lonely to feel you are in enemy territory by yourself. No longer need they feel 'odd' and not 'normal'. On the contrary they find that they have entered a great family, they are surrounded by some of the most gloriously normal people who ever lived. The

whole Carmelite family is now theirs and if either of the Saints Theresa were 'odd' then oddness is to be commended! What is more, the vast store-house of prayer and penance which the First and Second Orders of Carmel have built up, and to which the Third Orders Regular and Secular have added their contributions, is there for them to plunder at their hearts' content for the good of souls.

Within this framework it is possible for the lay contemplative to go forward with a greater sense of purpose, of security and peace. No longer do they need to fear that they are free lancing in their spare time, or that they are becoming spiritual dilettantes, play-acting at being hermits. They have a vocation, a dedication, and a rule; they need waste no more time puzzling over their way of life but can go forward to their great vocation as one of God's Commandos.

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## THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE & FRIENDSHIP<sup>1</sup>

BY

PAUL PHILIPPE, O.P.



WHILE the active life is the life of the soul acting as the form of the body (that is, the life of the individual as a member of the human race), the contemplative life is the life of the soul in its purely spiritual reality, the life of the person, the complete being, the 'whole'. For by definition the 'whole' suffices to itself. It has all.

It lacks nothing.<sup>2</sup> The contemplative life is the perfect life: in itself it has need of no assistance. It can be entirely solitary.

But, it being granted that the human person is a person created, a part of the divine 'whole'; it being granted also that it has been multiplied by the Creator, are we not going to discover that the nature of the person implies an 'order' or organisation, a 'spiritual society'?

It is certainly true that there exists an 'order' of persons, and even an order of creatures purely spiritual—the angelic hierarchies. But it is only a question there of a 'communicatio in forma', an analogical similitude, in the fact that all these creatures possess an intelligence which has for its final perfection the contemplation of God. There exists then, by that very fact, among men and among angels, a 'communion' in the object, a 'communion' in the final end. But that in itself only means that all contemplate the same

<sup>1</sup> Being section 1 of Chapter 4 of *Le Rôle de l'Amitié dans la Vie Chrétienne selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin*. (Angelicum). Translated by R. M. Wildy.

<sup>2</sup> 'Totum et perfectum sunt penitus idem'. III *Physic.* xi.