

EDITORIAL

SITTING as a novice in an editor's chair is not one of the most comfortable situations. But the position is greatly eased for the new incumbent by his inheriting the tradition and the good will built up by his two predecessors. I would like to assure readers that I have no intention of deliberately departing from the one or of dissipating the other, and to ask for their indulgence if to begin with they find *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* falling short of what they have grown accustomed to expect. If they care to give any more active support than mere indulgence, in the shape of practical suggestions and criticisms, they will be most welcome.

Fr Henry St John, in his farewell editorial last month, commended me to the support of contributors as well as of readers. I would like to say that more than anything else I covet two kinds of contribution in particular; first, translations of passages, about 2,000 words in length, from the ancient Fathers; secondly, short 1,500-word sketches of saints, *beati*, and other outstanding Christian figures. I would like to have such a sketch as a regular monthly feature, and I am happy to have one in this issue by S.M.C., Dominican authoress of *Brother Petroc's Return*, to open the series.

I must also ask for the forbearance of contributors if articles are sometimes returned to them, or if they are provisionally accepted, and then fail to appear for a long time. But the chief function of an editor, I suppose, is to choose; he can perform it best if he has plenty to choose from; and selection must involve the stern necessity of rejection.



SECULAR INSTITUTES: II—FOR THE WORLD

TERESA MELIA

SENT into the world on my errand.' The word apostle signifies one who is sent.

Who sends, to whom, and why? Christ is the sender. To whom does Christ send his apostles? To the whole world. The Kingdom of God has no visible frontiers, it is within the

heart of each human being. 'Go out all over the world and preach the gospel to the whole of creation' (Mark xvi, 15). What is Christ's errand? To deliver the message 'which concerns the Word who is Life'.

'What he was from the first, what we have heard about him, what our own eyes have seen of him, what it was that met our gaze and the touch of our hands.' (I John i, 1.) Why is the message delivered? 'That you too may share in our fellowship . . . with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.'

There in a nutshell is the *raison d'être* for the apostle. In the name of Christ, in the name of the Church, he goes on his errand, which is no personal human affair, but divine, eternal. Yet it must be translated into human language and transmitted in a most personal way. Like St John the Baptist, his whole life should give utterance to the message, so that all his actions should be a voice delivering with truth and integrity the good news of Christ.

Before considering in detail the apostolate of Secular Institutes let us reflect a little on the profound significance of this word 'apostle', sometimes so glibly used. From our Lord's own words in the Gospel of St John we learn much. 'The learning which I impart is not my own: it comes from him who sent me' (John vii, 16).

'The man who delivers a message of his own, seeks to win credit for himself: when a man seeks to win credit for one who sent him, he tells the truth, there is no dishonesty in him.' (*ibid.*, 18.)

'The actions which my Father has enabled me to achieve, those very actions which I perform bear me witness that it is the Father who sent me.' (John v, 36.)

An apostle, then, must be utterly dependent on the sender, on Christ. He must be disinterested—wholly given over to delivering Christ's message, not his own. No room here for self-seeking, personal ambition or vainglory. Uncompromising and true—there must be no falsification of the Word of God. Moreover, his actions, his very life must witness to the truth that he is 'sent by God'. Cardinal Feltin once said: 'We must become what we are.' People today are less interested in dialectics than in the silent shining example of those around them. Heart is only touched by heart, by the genuine warmth of personal love and an integrity of life. Love is the dynamic source of the apostolate, its nourishment, its vivifying power.

Of this love, St John of the Cross says: 'A little of such love is more to God's glory and serviceable for the soul and the interests of the Church, than all works put together.' And Oscar Wilde remarks: 'Most people live *for* love and admiration. But it is *by* love and admiration that we should live.' If God himself is the Person we love and admire, how penetrating must be the influence, for we give people to eat not of our own fruits, but the fruit of the vine on which we are grafted. 'I am come to cast fire on earth and what will I but that it be enkindled?'

Light and warmth—these we must give to the souls of all we encounter, souls so many of them, groping in the darkness and benumbed by fear, uncertainty, and lack of love.

Fr Mateo, the great apostle of the Sacred Heart, describes an apostle as a 'chalice full to the brim of Jesus, and overflowing onto the world'. This agrees with the ancient maxim of philosophy, *Agere sequitur esse*, 'Activity follows being'. The more we are, the more we do—not maybe by specific actions, but by the influence of example, of our very presence.

The apostolate of Secular Institutes can be divided broadly into two kinds—*ex missione* or corporate organization, and *ex spiritu* or individual penetration. In both is found the basic element of totality that differentiates it from what is widely known as Catholic Action. There is a threefold totality of dedication: *to* God by the evangelical counsels; *of* self, by the use of our whole being, soul and body, mind and heart; *for* our neighbour in the practice of an all-enfolding love, interest and devotedness. These principles are translated into action in divers ways, for if we are to 'leaven the whole mass' of humanity, there must be an ease of adaptation to the ways and needs of the world and a great 'disposability' so as to ensure a close, living contact with people in every walk of life.

It is truly astounding to see the rich variety of apostolic works undertaken by existing Secular Institutes; and with the flexibility of their form, it is to be conceived that no apostolic need should arise that could not be met.

The fields of activity open to us as lay people are almost endless. There are Institutes engaged in teaching, nursing, social welfare in all its many branches, missions, parochial work, youth work, editing and publishing, work for refugees, farming, retreat-houses and hostels. The needs of the world are almost infinite, and the

diversity to be found in Secular Institutes is a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work.

Parallel with this more organized apostolic movement, and indeed intermingling with it, runs what might be broadly called the humanistic movement. Institutes following this call emphasize the personal and unostentatious contact with the people of one's ordinary daily life, and exemplify the Spanish saying, 'Flower where God has planted you', or the symbol used by our Lord of the 'leaven in the lump'. By the spiritual energy of this dedication as well as by the radiation of a fully Christian life expressed in warm friendliness, simplicity, devotedness to work and unselfishness, they aim at 'divinizing' all that is human. There must be no water-tight compartments into which the fount of living water cannot flow. These persons dedicated in the world must be aware and make others aware that perfection can be woven into the very fabric of daily life.

Though very often hidden and intimate, how far-reaching can be the influence of one person's life and even of an isolated action or word. It may be a five-minutes contact, but if the whole of a Christian life is behind it, what power may be released! A famous painter, once asked by an admirer how long it had taken him to paint a certain picture replied: 'Five minutes, and my whole life'. So are our words and acts coloured by a life's experience. Oscar Wilde in *De Profundis* pays a shining tribute to a woman to whom he owed much. 'A woman who really assisted me to bear the burden of my troubles more than anyone else in the whole world has, and all through the mere fact of her existence, through her *being* what she is—partly an ideal, and partly an influence, a suggestion of what one might become, as well as a real help towards becoming it; a soul that renders the common air sweet and makes what is spiritual seem as simple and natural as sunlight or the sea.'

The importance of being must not be overweighted by the importance of doing. Both are necessary—but being is the very foundation of any apostolate. We cannot give what we *are* not. Activity in 'good works' can sometimes become so clamorous that the Word of God becomes inaudible. This is not to decry good works. Far from it. Faith without good works is dead. But these apostolic fruits may be produced in the souls of others sometimes without any outward show. Mary is as much needed in the

world today as Martha. So there are Institutes whose spirit is particularly contemplative—though *all* apostles must have a deep interior life. These Institutes stress the need for the personal influence in the professions, in society, in every single contact. A personal influence, but emanating from the presence of the Person within them. In this machine age, when the value of the individual is swallowed up by the State, by power, how effective is the apostolate of the *person*.

Whether devoted to organized works or to individual penetration, Secular Institutes must always be in the world and for the world, striving to win the world for Christ. It will readily be understood that such a programme of sanctity and apostleship requires a profound spiritual training so that these dedicated souls may be *not of the world*.

Every Institute must possess at least one house of formation. This Centre is used also for administrative purposes, and is a place to which members return for days of recollection, annual retreat and friendly re-unions. It could likewise provide a home for the sick or aged members of the Institute. Applicants for training may reside at the Centre for a certain period, or may frequent it for lectures, instructions, etc., while carrying on with their normal work in the world. Some Institutes insist on one year's residence, some on a few months, and others on none at all. But on one point they are all agreed, that the formation of members must be very thorough and spiritual. Academic studies are also carried out in many Institutes according to their varying needs in the apostolate. The purpose of the spiritual training, which can last for a number of years, but should cover a period of at least eighteen months, is to form zealous and prudent apostles who will live 'heart and mind fixed on the infinite abyss of love in Christ' (Bl. John of St Samson, Carmelite) while their exterior lives bear witness to the universal work of redemption. Since their vocation is more free exteriorly than that of religious, it must be more captive interiorly.

On account of the difficult and delicate work they undertake, on account of the dangerous circumstances in which they will often live, and of the unedifying surroundings in which they will work, far from being satisfied with a spiritual life less intense than that of enclosed Orders, they must have a high degree of spiritual life, a very personal one, strong and with deep

foundations. (H. Rothoff—*Les Droits des Sociétés sans Voeux.*)

The ideal of their vocation is set forth by Pope Pius XII in his *Motu Proprio Primo Feliciter*.

Their whole life ought to be turned towards the apostolate, which in the purity of their intention, in their inward union with God, in their deep and generous forgetfulness and abnegation of self, in their love of souls—is thus continually to be exercised in a holy manner, so that it not only shows forth the interior spirit by which it is informed, but may also continually nourish and renew it.

Working in the world, they will have no external framework and routine of community life to help them; their discipline must be interior, based on the demands of the Gospel and the dedication of their vows. Stripped of all helps to devotion, often face to face with distracting worldliness and materialism, members of Secular Institutes need an inner cell and solitude, and a keen appreciation of the essentials of a Christian life. Their spirituality must be focussed on the central truth of religion—the grace of Baptism and all that flows from our incorporation in Christ. From this will spring their love and appreciation of the Church, the mystical body of Christ, of the Mass and the liturgy, but through all and under all and above all there must be the realization of dedication not to a movement, but to a Person. He is the only one who can give meaning to their vocation, who can uphold them in their difficulties, who can solve all their problems. How can they hope to live up to this ideal? By being vitally Christian, by developing an inner life of prayer, and by fidelity to their vows.

Prayer

That their prayer may be an untarnished source of their activity, those dedicated in the world need to know the Word of God through the Word of God. Secular Institutes, in their training, stress the importance of the study of the Bible, especially the New Testament, and many encourage union with the liturgical life of the Church by the use of an abbreviated form of Divine Office in the vernacular. The Psalms become, as Thomas Merton says, their 'bread in the wilderness' because man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. The immense theological impact of the Psalms prevents their souls from sinking into a subjective sentimental piety. From these Psalms, Christ himself developed his prayer while on earth. For centuries the

prayer of Christians was rooted deep in the psalter. This simplicity, this depth of prayer appeals strongly to these modern Institutes whose members will often have less time for prayer than they would wish, and whose way of life in a frenzied world demands a unifying spirit, a stillness of heart which is acquired most surely by penetration of—meditation on the word of God.

'Pray without ceasing.' 'Without me you can do nothing.' These words apply to every Christian. People in the world are often inclined to regard prayer as the special 'business' of religious. It is true that religious have more time set apart for prayer, but the words 'Pray without ceasing' are meant for everyone, and it is of fundamental importance that members of Secular Institutes fulfil this injunction and so lead others to realize that prayer is the gateway to grace, to God, without whom 'we can do nothing'. It is not enough to know *about* prayer. We must pray. It is not enough to know *about* God. We must know God. Prayer is learnt by prayer. Père Voillaume says in *Seeds of the Desert*:

'Do not wait to pray till the desire of it comes—or until you feel like it. If you do this, you will find yourselves slipping just when you need most to pray. Desire for prayer can only come from faith; it is an effect of prayer, and not the other way round. The less you pray, the less well you will pray, and the less often will you desire it.'

These words were addressed to the Little Brothers of Jesus, men who spend their lives working amongst the poor, living their lives in factories, mines, shipyards. Yet they are to pray, not merely to 'say prayers'—they are to be contemplatives. For dedicated souls living an ordinary secular life, can it be easy to pray thus? To make prayer the very breath of their daily life? No—it is not easy. For this reason it must be made simple.

The most simple way of praying is to live in the presence of God so that everything in this daily life is referred to him, as one dwelling within us. As the great English contemplative, Dame Julian of Norwich says, 'Our Lord God who has in us his homeliest home and his endless dwelling'. Working in the world it is not easy to find the solitude and peace of a convent chapel; it is not easy to find much time to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. But wherever one may be, it is possible to turn to God in 'his homeliest home' within us. An inward look of love, of trust, of supplication, of thanksgiving. Short ejaculations can

help us to remember God's presence within us. Those who use the breviary will find after some time that the words of the Psalms become ejaculations, springing from the mind and heart without conscious effort. These short affective prayers can sanctify the whole day.

There will of course be also a time set aside for prayer apart from work. This time will vary according to the demands of one's daily work, but for those striving after perfection it should never be less than fifteen minutes, apart from the time for Mass, office, and rosary. Fatigue, dryness, discouragement will normally be felt when we are seriously trying to live a life of prayer. Feelings and ourselves must be disregarded. Union with God lies beyond feeling and even beyond words and ideas. Perseverance is the secret of prayer. Our Lord repeats that over and over again. We tend to look for some 'secret', some short cut, some clue to the life of prayer. It will be found in the Gospels—perseverance. Pray in spite of difficulties, in spite of feelings, in spite of yourself. For only prayer can make a real apostle. So members of Secular Institutes must learn to walk with God, abide in his Presence and fulfil the obligations of their vows not in any mechanical or negative attitude but by a positive personal adherence to the Person of Christ. It is only love for him that will make their vows bear lasting fruit in their own souls and in the souls of those around them. 'Follow me.' Simple, absolute, personal, such is the call of the evangelical counsels, and the response to this vocation, a *daily* response, must be one of generosity and self donation, in a simple attitude of 'Here I am'. Such an interior captivity blossoms into apostolic freedom. When the heart is God's captive, the hands are free to serve our neighbour. So the vows set one free, because they bind one to Christ.