And finally there is a demand for help from writers and publishers to assist those living 'in the world' with suitable literature:

'Together with this sense of vocation, there exists the urgent need for more literature and text-books to help the laity in their strivings. Could there not be more books written for the encouragement of would-be contemplatives —books that combine spiritual advice with a simple down-to-earth knowledge of the everyday rubs of life? More books like Dom Van Zeller's, also Miss H. C. Graef's *Spiritual Life For All* and F. Pohl's *The House of the Spirit*. So much is written today to help religious, but not enough dealing with the needs *and* the hunger of the laity.'

HOLY WORK

AELRED SQUIRE, O.P.

To say that Dom Rembert Sorg's *Holy Work*[1] disappoints the hopes it arouses, is not to deny that it was an essay well worth writing. It attempts to show the relevance of the monastic tradition concerning manual labour, not only for the rejuvenation of the monastic life itself but also for the solution of the problems of Christian labour in a pagan society. Let it be said at once that its claim to present a *theological* rather than an historical justification of its approach is somewhat exaggerated. It assembles a number of reflections which have a theological bearing, but they are not built into a cumulative and cogent argument, a weakness which reveals itself clearly in the important final chapter on the laity. To those not already favourably disposed to the author's thesis, its presentation will seem uncomfortably divided between two methods, neither of which is adequately used; for it dispenses with a detailed historical treatment without compensating for it by a sufficiently judicious theoretical one. This is a pity, for we are convinced that, on both counts, a better case could certainly be made.

The early part of the book discusses chapter 48 of the Rule of St Benedict and the tradition of monastic practice which lies behind it. The author's conclusion on a debated question about the meaning of the Holy Rule is that 'putting everything together, it is indicated that agriculture was a normal *necessary* pursuit of the Benedictine community, even though individual monks were not obliged as such to do it'. Even

[1] *Holy Work*. By Dom Rembert Sorg. (Pio Decimo Press, St Louis, Missouri; $1.50.)

those who would readily agree with this will doubtless find themselves puzzled at the fanciful suggestion that St Benedict's *necessitas loci* implies that, on the Egyptian precedent, his monks hired themselves out to neighbouring farmers in harvest time. A tendency to mild extravagances of this kind only invites hostile criticism.

On more general principles Dom Sorg has some valuable things to say. Speaking, for instance, of America—the same would be true of any industrial country—he says, the Christianization of manual labour would be a glorious apostolate, urgently indicated for our country, and one cannot help but think that Benedictine monks who overlook it are missing the day and place of their visitation. The apostolate, that is, has to recognize that the fundamental Christianization of manual labour means doing it in the Christian way. . .' Or again, 'The spirit communicated in the consecration of monks is the very spirit of the Apostles, that is, the spirit that determined the Apostles' manner of life as distinguished from the tasks of their apostolate. But it is apostolic to live by the labour of one's hands; and if a man be more than a vegetable or a cow, that life includes the worship of his God. . . . The latter becomes an exercise of his whole life and being.' In this part of the book the forthright defence of the reciprocal relation between hard work and heartfelt liturgy has probably much to be said for it. There is, it would seem, something about contact with the tools of a trade for which no amount of 'solid' spiritual reading can be an adequate substitute.

These considerations, as they relate in general to monks, are in the last chapter referred specifically to laymen 'after due allowance for the diversity of their states'. But is this difference of state properly recognized? We read, for instance: 'The positive Christianization of manual labour postulates the setting up of economically independent communities, which renounce the system that is run by the spirit of the world, whose prince is the devil'. It is therefore not surprising to find that 'the material set-up of the community . . . *ideally becomes a replica of the monastic enclosure* in which all the trades of manual labour, necessary for subsistence and wholesome living, find their place'. This is surely the point that most needs rethinking. Even supposing it were possible, would it really be desirable to make the world into a replica of a monastery? Is not the idea of family holiness something with its own quite different standards, involving the administration of private property with all the cares it brings with it? By all means let those who can, follow Dom Sorg's austere counsels. But how far can such solutions ever recommend themselves to any except those who already feel something of the ardour of a religious vocation and, be it added, are sufficiently free of family responsibilities to be able to take the risks involved? Is it not possible to devise a Christian theory of work and prayer which does not start from the

maxim that the situation as it exists is unredeemable? It is vitally important to retain the conviction that something is possible, lest we leave the great mass of Christian workers like men without hope. We need, indeed, something of that robust spirit of St Benedict which led him to build the house of God on the very site where the pagan temples had formerly stood.

REVIEWS

THE FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. By H. F. D. Sparks. (S.C.M. Press; 13s. 6d.)

The idea of this very well-arranged book is to show, with the fullest documentation from the text of the New Testament itself, how in the first place each of the books came to be written, and then how they came to be placed in the series which became the 'Church's Book', the New Testament.

The first instances of the way in which the Christian message was given to the world after the Resurrection are to be found in the earliest sermons of Peter, as recorded in Acts, from Pentecost onwards. The first chapter analyses this message and sees it firmly anchored to the Messianic hope of the Old Testament. It was in this light that Christianity was first presented.

It is most frequently assumed that the first time the message was committed to writing was after the field had widened to include the Gentile world, and St Paul was writing to the Thessalonians. The next two chapters therefore deal with St Paul, and take his Epistles in chronological order, providing full arguments for their dating. The conclusions are orthodox (the Pastorals are genuine) and arguments against the Epistles are often discussed. The tradition, however, that Hebrews is by St Paul is 'certainly wrong' (p. 81).

With regard to the Gospels, which are taken next, the situation is less satisfactory. Since 1951 it is not easy to write about the composition of the Gospels, unless one has read Abbot Christopher Butler's book *The Originality of St Matthew*, for whether one accepts the proofs or not, the arguments of that book cannot now be ignored, and all one's readers who have read it will inevitably subject one's conclusions to its penetrating criticism. And since February 1953 the same thesis is presented more simply in the *Catholic Commentary*, where the arguments of Dom Bernard Orchard about the dependence of Thessalonians on St Matthew, hitherto only available in *Biblica* of 1938, are also made public. Professor Sparks, after discoursing aptly on the oral tradition at the beginning, is unfortunately still committed to the priority of St Mark, and the supposition that St Matthew was an expansion of St Mark made between A.D. 70