

which man may truly be said to possess his soul.

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CONTEMPLATION AND COMMUNITY

The importance of human life is seen from the end towards which it tends. That which gives a human being his unique value and place in the symphony of creation is his possession of an immortal soul made by God, for God, and whose duty it is to become "worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called," which is the "lot of the saints in light." This is the dominant theme interwoven throughout the fiery melody of God's love for the human soul, and the integrating principle for all human activity. The fecundity of the divine self-contemplation is made manifest in His creative love which has ordained all things so that they form a far away reflection, a passing shadow of those riches of beauty and order whose plenitude is in Him. "For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; His eternal power also and divinity." The social structure, therefore, composed of a community of persons mystically united through charity, one in grace yet diverse in operation, whispers of the Trinity of Persons in God. The very fact that we all partake of the same divine life obliges each, through charity, to serve and participate in the necessary Mass of his brothers sanctification, in order that we may become "a chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation." And the fundamental unit of this greater unity is the family, natural and supernatural, both motivated by the same principle of love, though differently directed as to the immediate end, and each affording to its members an ideal and natural context for the plenary development of those powers within the person whose need of fulfilment occasions their unity.

In the natural family whose members are normally ordained to the service of the community, the means chosen are in proportion to the end in view, and are as manifold as the needs of the community itself. In the supernatural family, whose vocation is to God, there is also diversity, but diversity in method and not in kind. And although the one seeks God indirectly through the service of his fellow men, and the other immediately, the same divine command, to seek God, is incumbent upon all. The life of prayer and contemplation, being an abiding in the Lord, constitutes a state with its own validity, and the proper means for deepening and apprehending our baptismal union with God.

Contemplation which is a *donum Dei*, but normally given to those who faithfully seek to realize the riches of the divine in-

dwelling, is an affective intuition of the Divinity resulting from the practice of the moral and theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, especially wisdom and understanding, and is the first supernatural bud of the grace pregnant soul whose full blossom will flower in eternity under the sun of the Beatific Vision. It is in this bending of the whole will-energy towards God through the practice of the "threefold rhythm of the virtues," through prayer which feeds the nascent sanctity in the soul, that the religious family achieves its own special justification. There is a third vocation within the religious sphere which, although it may be complimentary to the second, is by no means necessarily identical with it. There has been, is, and can be, a fully valid and plenary religious life without the addition of the priestly state, which forms a necessary part in the hierarchical functions of human society, and is the completion of that priesthood we received in baptism, and the divinely ordained channel through which God is pleased to confer His graces upon mankind. But although the priest is obliged to the life of perfection as a priest and a person, he is not, nevertheless, obliged to the state of perfection, nor should the layman seeking the state of perfection be constrained to the priestly state, a third vocation which may, or may not, be conjoined to the second.

The more one considers the tragic muddle in which modern life has involved itself, the more it becomes apparent that there is a desperate need to return to the basic things, to appreciate the fundamental sanity of the Christian life and values which acknowledges the whole man, the person, theological man the image of God rather than man conceived in a purely humanistic, rationalistic, biological, sociological, or economic capacity. Ever since the second great act of disobedience and pride, which has resulted in the crucifixion of the whole of mankind, when man broke away from his proper setting within the unity of the church, the sempiternal rainbow of God's love, the visible promise that nevermore need man be plunged in the mortal deluge of unredeemed sin, he has, mostly unconsciously, constantly resought that little path, straight and narrow (though how broad compared with the Totalitarian road!), leading to the garden where God was wont to walk with Adam in the cool of the evening. This echo of St Augustine's great search can only be regarded as the fundamental and inevitable expression of the need of the part for its whole, the incomplete for completion. The desire for integration, even though it be only of the momentary, sensory kind, as experienced in sensual acts, and the failing to find it, has rendered most modern efforts sterile, if not actually dangerous, because applied without *reference* to the needs of man as a person and the child of God.

Man is restless and ill at ease because *capax Dei*; and determined to achieve at least a material beatitude. And the fact of the Church nailed to the cross with her Spouse, is an ever present reminder, which he intuitively recognizes, that it profits a man little, though he gain the whole world, if he suffer the loss of his own soul. It is a conflict of values, the finite and infinite, a continuation of the struggle between heaven and hell, God and Lucifer. It is a continuous re-enactment of that drama which took place between Christ and the Devil in the desert, and the Church answers with Christ, "Man cannot live by bread alone."

The task before the individual Christian is the concrete manifestation of the positivity of Christian ethics, the shewing forth of Christ until He come. "Let your light so shine before all men," here is the principle for a dynamic Christianity. We are called upon to exercise the priestly function of communicating God to the world, and this can only be effectively carried out by a fresh affirmation of our need for prayer and contemplation as the proper motivating agents of the spiritual life, and, in order that our efforts may receive the maximum cogency, assure to them the proper context within which they may attain, normally, their finest expression.

This brings us again to a consideration of the family, the first unit of the social structure, the spiritual poverty or richness of which can make or mar a nation. The natural family reproducing itself, the Martha busied about many things, the supernatural family, reproducing God, the Mary from whom her necessary part must not be taken, the two sisters whose separate functions are complimentary, and essential to the well being of the mystical whole: The soul and body symphonically uniting the complexus of an organic entity. At the moment much effort is being made to ensure that Martha shall continue to be busy, in her own home if possible, and that her children shall be assured of a just wage. But what about Mary? In these days when only pragmatism, with its doctrine of visible results, is considered to be of worth, and the whole balance of life is tipped end-ways in the mad rush towards undisciplined, unco-ordinated, and only too often unthinking effort, we need more than ever to emphasize the utter necessity for a contemplation, aesthetic, sociological, scientific, rooted in a religious contemplation which is their basis and unifying principle. For contemplation is the safeguard of ordered action. From the fecundity of the *Ecclesia orans atque contemplanans*, emerges the voice of the *Ecclesia docens*, from contemplation proceeds action, from the mutual contemplation of the Father and Son, bursts forth the ineffable glory of the Holy Spirit, a love pulsating stream of purest activity, the principle of God's im-

measurably rich grace-life, the *Dominum vivificantem*.

In this weary age of universal disillusionment and shoddy values, the cry of the ancient Prophet may be repeated of us, "For lack of vision the people perish." We do not suggest that all may, or can, become contemplatives, but all are called to put on the new man, the Christ, the holy and elect of God, and all need, therefore, in addition to the Sacraments, the strength and vision which comes from prayer, and prayer, again, is nourished by reading and study, and direct contact with the things of the Faith.

The Catholic, at least in this country, tends to represent a small Christian isle surrounded by an ocean of paganism or indifference, so that he is largely driven back on his own resources, apart from the weekly half-hour at Mass, and the pious sodality, from which to draw what he needs to sustain his spiritual life. The formation of medium sized centres of contemplation and liturgical piety, situated in and near towns, and easily accessible to all, could provide the empirically observed need of the short retreat, and might well become the focal points for local Catholic action. The possibilities of such centres are enormous.

When St Benedict, who was a layman, and who founded his order for laymen, wrote his Rule, it was with the sole intention of creating schools of the Lord's service, workshops where the instruments of perfection could be used to the best advantage, but, above all, he intended the formation of the religious family. In the absolute sense of the word he was not the creator of a new form of religious life. He was essentially a man of tradition, and he based his ideas on the teachings of the ancient Fathers and traditional Christianity. What distinguishes his Rule from all others and gives him his title of Patriarch of Western Monasticism was his genius for selecting the essentials, and forming them into a way of life which is the very norm of Christianity, which breathes order, lucidity, and moderation, and allows to the individual soul its own characteristically personal approach to God. It is, as he says, "but a little Rule for beginners," and he ordains nothing harsh or contrary to human nature therein. The Spirituality which springs from this Rule has moulded generations of saints and men of prayer, souls of great diversity of talent and temperament, imparting a fundamental family likeness, not through any system of minute regularization and regimentation, but through the intrinsic theocentricity of the Rule itself. The spirit of the Rule is in the "positive flowering of love rather than the negative uprooting of vice," in adoration rather than penitence.

The Benedictine life, set within the rigid structure of the liturgy, the *opus Dei*, takes on a classical formalism which is a natural safeguard against the individualistic devotions of modern piety,

good as they may be in themselves, but which, nevertheless, tend to prevent a proper comprehension of the unity of the mystical body focalised through active participation in the liturgy and which should make of the Mass, for example, a concelebration with the priest. Such a rule would be ideally suited as the basis of a group of lay contemplatives. The first thing such a group would have to gain would be experience of community life, and the gradual acquisition of a tradition peculiar to the community itself, so that those coming after would receive a definite formation in accordance with the agreed aims. The amount of observance, too, should be dictated by the necessities of the moment.

It is almost certain that a group of this nature would be dependent for a long time upon the pooled income gained from the normal occupations of its members, and this rather suggests the manner of its starting. It would, at first, be composed of people who, during the day, carried on their ordinary work, returning at night to the community house for the common meal, the recitation of as much of the Office as could be reasonably fitted in, prayer, spiritual reading, and recreation. Those who wished to live in community but were prevented from doing so, by reason of work or studies, could nevertheless remain spiritually united, observing the same rules and regulations, and participating fully during holidays or whenever possible.

The dedicatory aspect of monasticism might be emphasized by a promise of the three great religious vows, providing they were conceived as binding much less vigorously. Poverty, understood as the frugal use of the things of this world, the pooling in the common fund of the greater part of one's income, the possession of nothing of oneself but of everything in Christ. Chastity, understood of mind and body, and the pure intention to do all things that God may be glorified. Obedience, understood as the consecration of one's will to God's service, and in the Benedictine tradition, the recognition of the Superior, whatever his failings of mind or body, as the Christ. St Benedict is most insistent upon this last, and it should be an empirically observed fact that form and order are vital to the existence of anything as a definite thing. Where there is no such preservative structure there is at once chaos and indeterminism. But it is no corpse-like obedience that St Benedict asks of his sons, but a willing and joyful assent to what may be required of them, so that the virtue of obedience flows directly through the Superior into the heart of God Himself.

Thus, we have in essence the whole of the monastic life. For a long time such a body would be primarily concerned with becoming rather than doing, but who can fortell the manifold uses it might ultimately serve? In these times no stone should be left

unturnd which, by the turning, though it cost a little hardship, might contribute something to heal the mortal malady from which we suffer for, adrift from God, who is as necessary to our life as oxygen itself, the individual and national soul is as the dead leaf blown before the wind of the prevailing doctrine of the moment.

"Hear O Israel, the Commandments of life; give ear that thou mayest hear wisdom. How happeneth it, O Israel, that thou art in thy enemies land? Thou art grown old in a strange country, thou art defiled with the dead; thou art counted with them that go down into hell. For if thou hadst walked in the way of God, thou hadst surely dwelt in peace forever. Learn where is wisdom, where is strength, where is understanding, that thou may know also where is length of days and life, where is the light of the eyes and peace." Where else, indeed, can be strength, wisdom, understanding, most vibrant life, truth, beauty, and love, but in God who made all things, sustains all things, and who spoke to men by His Chosen One, saying "Come unto me all ye who travail and are heavy laden, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

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REVIEWS

THE MASS: FROM SHADOWS TO THE TRUTH. By Arthur J. Clarke, C. SS. R. (Burns Oates, 7s. 6d.)

The first burst of enthusiasm for the Liturgical Movement has happily subsided. Happily, because bursts of enthusiasm lead to excesses, and the simple Catholics of the last twenty years have often had to sustain a great deal of nonsense in matters of external religion under the title of the liturgy. Now there is greater hope of balance, as Catholics begin to relate more easily the external trappings of vestments, chants, offices and ceremonies to the basic principles of worship. They have begun to see the importance of these things in relation to the Mass. Here Fr Clarke's book has appeared most opportunely. In a brief space he covers all the essential features of the Mass without allowing himself to be drawn aside into modern theological discussions. He explains the daily Mystery in simple and vivid language God himself has explained the Mystery in images that the most uneducated can understand in the *vestigia* of the Old Testament, and Fr Clarke makes very effective use of that explanation. He also introduces history how the modern Mass has developed for the sake of the Liturgical gnostic, but to enable the laity to assist at the Mystery with greater understanding. The chapter on the share of the people in the Mass (chapter 9) is particularly