

merely human effort can bring it about. But in plain reason we shall maintain that if God so wills, and man would receive, then by divine power this can be done; with no incongruous or artificial separation of spheres; but rather with added power and honour to man who receives, and a more perfect manifestation of the mercy of God given; who out of nothing created the world, out of evil draws good, out of error draws the truth, and out of our human weaknesses and failings can raise saints to his own celestial company.



A NOTE ON THE FAMILY SPIRIT

IN the recent discussions in these pages on the nature of perfection and its bearing on religious life, one aspect of this life has not, perhaps, been sufficiently stressed. We are experiencing in our times a remarkable renaissance of the contemplative spirit. Many souls in all walks of life are thirsting for God. Some, interpreting this thirst in the terms of religious vocation, offer themselves to one or other of the religious orders, only to find after a period of probation that they are not suited to religious life.

The Catholic girl of today, while keenly interested in the doctrine of the Mystical Body, capable of grasping its implications and discussing it from all points of view, nevertheless, on entering religion, often finds it difficult to adjust herself and to live in harmony with the other members of the family. Perhaps one of the reasons for this may be that her previous background and training have not prepared her for living in a family. In the old days—and not so very old either—a girl growing up in a large family learned to give and take as a matter of course. She acquired many of the moral virtues by rubbing up against the other members of the family. Consideration for others, tact, a certain good-humoured acceptance of home-truths formed part of her everyday life. She learned to be loyal to the family code of honour. At the cost of personal inconvenience, social engagements had to be fulfilled through courtesy to the hostess, who would not be let down at the last moment and so on. Now, all these conditions of family life find their exact counterpart in religion. The difficult character in the family is also a difficult character in the community; personal eccentricities are just as tiresome in religious life as in home life—for religious life is essentially family life, lived on a supernatural level and for a supernatural motive, but still family life *par excellence*.

It is a truism to say that the school cannot do what home-training has failed to do; neither can the noviciate compensate for the lack

of background. Grace does not work, so to speak, in the air: it pre-supposes pre-existing material, material capable of being given a higher perfection. Without this 'obediential' quality of the material, perfection, normally speaking, will not be attained.

It must be added that the professional background of the girl of today *can* be an excellent opportunity for learning to live happily with others, if it is used as such. And specialised talents and gifts of all kinds are of the utmost value if they are used to enrich the corporate life of religion, coupled with the saving grace of adaptability and docility. The richer the personality, the richer will be the life of the group to which she belongs; on the contrary, the movement of the 'robot', intent merely on toeing the line and conforming mechanically to custom, impoverishes the spirit of the family, destroying that spontaneity which is of the essence of life. Again, it is not the 'only child' but the 'only child mentality' which introduces the jarring note of false individualism into the family circle.

St Paul laid flat on the road to Damascus by an overwhelming mystical experience of the unity of Christ and his members, St Paul who could not find language rich enough to express this transcendent experience, nevertheless translated it, down to the last detail, in the homely language of everyday life—wearing himself out in anxious love that, at all costs, the family spirit might flourish and grow strong among the members of his various little groups of Christians.

To sum up: Religious life is composed of those who have bound themselves by vow to tend towards the same end—the perfection of charity. This pursuit of the same end constitutes a very closely knit relationship one with another. Each community of religious is a Mystical Body of Christ in miniature. In religion, then, we tend towards God, not as solitary individuals, but as members of a group and, by means of the group, striving, as St John of the Cross has it, 'to put love where there is no love', and to present an impregnable force of love to the opposing forces of selfishness and hate. And, as in a human family it is the mother who makes the home, so in the Mystical Body Mary performs a similar function, for she is not so much *my* Mother and *your* Mother as *the* Mother of the Mystical Body—Mother of the Whole Christ. She is a unitive force and influence, drawing the members of the Body together in closer and closer harmony, 'Until we all meet in the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ'. (Eph. 4, 15.)

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