

POINTS OF VIEW

In the October (1953) issue of *THE LIFE* 'T.P.F.' brought up the subject of contemplation 'in the world' which has become a chorus in this review, repeating itself at regular intervals like the question of Rosary during Mass in the correspondence columns of the October Catholic papers. His 'Point' was taken up by far too many readers to allow us to publish them here. But at the risk of turning the subject into a hackneyed one, we may summarize or quote from some of the letters.

On one side there are those who remain convinced that 'contemplation' remains the property of the enclosed religious until after death when every Christian in grace is given the highest contemplation in Vision.

"The answer to the Martha-Mary question is in the word "balance". . . . The secular priest is called to that "state" and if he tries to be a "contemplative" he doesn't really do his secular job properly. His "balance" is, after all, almost more on the side of Martha. The parish affairs, finances, upkeep of presbytery and church: all very "Martha"!

"As to the "timetable life" of the contemplative, I feel we should, and can, adapt it to our conditions in the world; though we have got to be honest, almost brutal, with ourselves in order to do it. We know, of course, that the contemplative does not live his or her life in "sweet contemplation". There's a lot of manual work: chores, mending, etc. They reverse our life, as it were; sandwiching in the manual work between the contemplation. You will realize how we have to do the opposite. The only way they can do it—and we for that matter—is to follow the "timetable life" to my mind. And if we really want to be contemplatives it is distressing no doubt to realize that our contemplation should be carried out in the early morning and at night. Leave the day for our activity, punctuating it with the Office much as the secular priest has to do. I think I would rather quibble with "automatic efficiency" of daily duties. We have got to do just everything as well as possible if we are doing it for God; got to do it as a craft, not a machine. We would not

“throw a bed together” for the Christ Child, we would make it lovingly and carefully.

‘I certainly have never heard that medieval monks did not set time aside for meditation. I do not see how they could have recited their Office *‘digne, attente ac devote’* if they were contemplating—as a distinct activity—at the same time. Surely they gave a little time to meditation after their private night prayers in their cells?’

These dislocations between action and contemplation and between meditation or prayer and Office remain at the back of our minds as an inheritance from the post-Reformation world. It is the reunion of these various aspects of the Christian life that THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT has been attempting to foster. It should be said, perhaps, that the writer of the above is not a regular reader of the review. Many of the ‘regulars’ on the contrary show a keen desire for simplicity—the simplicity which combines varying and seemingly opposed activities or qualities in a single whole.

‘Why worry whether a man is active or contemplative? A person’s personal prayer (which includes contemplation) is his affair and I think the only sane teaching is that of de Caussade in his *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. His teaching on the sacrament of the present moment, i.e. doing the will of God at the present moment, which includes our duties in the world, is the best, because it brings our religion into our everyday life. Too many of us have separate times for worship (in our hearts) and our work. It is all one, but I do say that a man *does* require to go into an empty church, for instance, every day and give a minimum of half-an-hour daily to being with God alone; let us remember the old labourer in the Curé of Ars’s parish who just sat gazing at the Tabernacle and when asked what he was doing there, replied: “I looks at him and he looks at me”. It is no good joining societies for contemplative prayer, where one can meet others at their homes or in a hall; there would be no contemplation about that. Contemplation, surely, is a *personal* inward state, and from a natural point of view, very uncomfortable, with the terrible aridity one experiences in groping through a darkness, but we *keep on*, longing for God, and although it is a darkness to us, yet he is enlighten-

ing the soul, without us knowing. *Let us love God, or strive to, and then nothing else matters.* Every soul must find out his way to do it, *alone*, if he cannot find a good director.'

Another writer turns to the Holy Spirit as the power for unity in life:

'It seems to this writer that to lead a contemplative life in this world must not be regarded, necessarily, as a special vocation. Are we not all called to it? At any rate in some degree? It is this idea that there is no time for contemplation because we are too busy, that needs refuting. Of course our minds cannot be consciously on God if the baby is crying, the milk boiling over, and someone knocking on the door, all at the same time. But there is always an opportunity, even in the busiest domestic round, when one can consciously turn to the indwelling Holy Spirit and ask for help and grace, and offer our harassed selves to his keeping. Washing up, bed making, ironing, dusting—routine jobs such as these—provide the necessary opportunities, from the domestic scene at any rate.'

Yet another writer looks to our Lady for this simplicity:

'The truth is that the Church has the answer all the time—has had, from its beginning—and it is so obvious we do not see its significance, perhaps. For the answer to this direct consent to our Lord's invitation (which is to all) is direct contact with him—through the ordinary channels, but in such a spirit of Faith that they are, in fact, "direct"—and real. Just as the first apostles, we firmly believe, gained this help from our Lady his Mother—so can we. To anyone who, quite truly and sincerely, is set upon this course, there is a contact to be established which is quite other than that of the ordinary way of "devotion". The holy Mother (as many have discovered) will behave as "novice-mistress" to any who sincerely apply to her. This is meant "actually", not, as it were, symbolically. She can, and does, lead the soul through all the stages of its life by means of Faith, Hope and Charity. No other than quite ordinary direction is needed when this is understood, accepted, and acted upon. The devotion taught by Saint Louie-Marie gives much light on this, but unfortunately the accounts of this devotion are not always properly understood.'

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.)