

Life of the Spirit

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THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF TODAY

UNDER this title a representative group of clergy and laity gathered for a two-day conference at Hawkesyard Priory, in Staffordshire, from 3rd to the 5th October. It was the first LIFE OF THE SPIRIT Conference, and because it was the first the subject was rather wide and the final result perhaps lacked the concrete conclusiveness that might be desired of such a meeting. But it showed that in future more specific meetings would be valuable because of the problems raised and the opportunities realised for discussions and for 'contacts'.

The purpose of the conference was twofold. Firstly in the minds of the conveners has long been fear of beating the air with the words thrown out from LIFE OF THE SPIRIT without reaching real men and women of today. It is necessary for a review of this nature to keep very closely in touch with the lives of real people in order to help to supply some of their spiritual needs. An editor or two cannot easily achieve this aim unless he has the experience of many different people to assist in bridging the gulf between the editorial chair and the minds and hearts of those infinite hosts of people who should be devoting themselves to God. Here, at the conference, were professors from each of the large English seminaries, parish priests and curates, regular clergy (both superiors and subjects), and laymen of experience. All these men were in touch with the 'other man' of today and knew something of the barriers that now exist between them and God. For this reason the discussions, particularly during the first half of the conference, took the practical turn of enquiring how to get the spiritual life of Christ 'across' to these people. Very often the individual contributions were concerned with the 'apostolate', revealing that this is the problem uppermost in the minds of most Christians today when they really take their Christianity seriously.

But had this been the exclusive aim or the exclusive topic of the conference there would have been a danger of falling into those unprofitable though interesting conversations about other people's problems which seldom lead to any kind of external result. Such conversations are in fact on a level with gossip without the spice of uncharity! Constantly, therefore, during the conference the participants were brought back to the second purpose of the gathering, namely, to a consideration of their own personal spiritual needs and how they could be supplied. So the discussions were meant to serve the members not only in showing them how they could bridge the gap between the Spirit of Christ and modern life, but in pointing also to the challenge which that Spirit gave themselves. For example, religious life today which professes poverty holds in its hand one of the most powerful weapons of the gospel for fulfilling the modern needs of the spiritual life, yet the absence of the spirit and even of actual poverty itself is quite frequently remarked among modern religious.

In this way the conference kept the balance between the thought of others and the thought of self in the question of spiritual needs; and the papers which were read dealt with the fundamentals of spiritual life—the natural roots of religion in the need for myth and ritual, the scriptural and patristic basis of spirituality, liturgical formation in the spiritual life, the modern dislocation of religious life and the secular spirituality today. It is hoped to publish these papers in the course of the next few months in *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*. Certainly the results of the discussion will provide material for planning useful and representative issues of the review over the coming year. Perhaps successive conferences will help to clear up some of the profound problems now facing those who quite simply wish to lead the Christian life with zeal.