

EDITORIAL

IN the October number of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* the general connecting theme of the articles it contained was the necessity of objectivity in our spiritual life. It is so easy, in our fallen state, to remain blind to the real condition of things, to deceive ourselves into going far towards setting up as our God, to worship in the innermost shrine of our souls, an idol, which is little more than a projection of our own uncontrolled emotions and sentiments. The sacramental system of the Church, initiated by baptism, the sacrament of Faith, by which the redeeming power of Christ's cross is communicated to us in the inner life of his Mystical Body, is one of the safeguards God has provided us with against this innate subjective tendency of our fallen nature.

In the present number this same theme is continued and extended. Sacraments are outward signs conveying and guaranteeing in the very act of conveyance the grace they signify; faith, the supernatural virtue given us primarily in baptism, enlightens us as to what we are, what God himself is and what is our proper relationship to him. Liturgical prayer and in particular the liturgy of the sacraments plays, for this reason, a decisive part in the growth of our spiritual life, leading us to the highest contemplation. In God's way and often in God's words, or at least in the words of his Church, it gives us an ever-deepening comprehension of the power of Christ's redemptive work and a growing sense of our own need of it.

In the offering of the sacrifice of the Mass, if we use and make our own the Church's language in that basic act of worship, if we pray the Mass, our minds are penetrated, formed and shaped by the inspired Scriptures and the liturgical prayers which faithfully reflect the Church's mind. The more therefore we absorb this mind the more we have the very mind of Christ, and the less danger is there of the idolatry of setting up in God's place a projection of our own creation made in our own image. The more idolatry of this kind there is in us, even though its presence may not be due to explicit sin, the greater is the impediment to a fuller acceptance of the life of sanctifying grace received in baptism.

What a pity it is that our baptism is such a far-off event in our lives; it took place (in all probability) long before we can remember, and its very remoteness in time tends to obscure in our minds the consciousness of the ever-present and continuous gift of supernatural life which it conveyed to us, and the urgent necessity we are under of deepening and strengthening that gift by every means in our power. What a pity it is, too, that this great sacrament, the only gateway to life eternal, is often, liturgically, such a hole-and-corner affair. Half-past two on a Sunday afternoon; just the priest; the rather hurried repetition of the marvellous drama of liturgical words and acts; a church empty save for the godparents and perhaps one or two other relations; the surroundings a little drab, grubby maybe and commonplace. Yet it is the occasion of our receiving Faith and of our setting out upon the voyage to life eternal.

Once a year at Easter we now have the opportunity of an impressive renewal of our baptismal vows within the solemn ceremonies of the Paschal Vigil. Could not the parish congregation be given the opportunity of witnessing, from time to time, as a congregation, as the assembly of the People of God, the actual conferring of this mighty sacrament? In some churches, of course, the position and size of the baptistry is an obstacle; but in others it is often well within view of the whole congregation. How much all would learn from a solemn celebration of the liturgy of baptism at the evening service. Even where the position of the font puts this out of the question, would it not be feasible at times to obtain permission to use a temporary font, in the place where on Easter eve the baptismal water is blessed?

In a small country parish in Monmouthshire there is *no* font, and baptisms are done in a silver bowl kept specially for that purpose. From time to time the sacrament is conferred after the parochial Mass on Sunday morning in face of the whole congregation. The acolytes take part in it, a cope can be worn; the priest and his assistant go in procession after the last gospel to meet the catechumen at the church door and put the questions to the godparents. The exorcism is made. Then up the church the child is carried, the whole congregation reciting the *Pater* and *Credo* together: the Church's proclamation of its Faith. The renunciation of the devil and profession of Faith by question and answer are made in loud tones so that all can hear. The two-fold anointing is

carried out and the cleansing waters poured. The white robe and lighted candle vividly symbolize the new life now given.

What better sermon could be preached than this drama of regeneration, the passage from the darkness of sin into the marvellous light of Christ? What better reminder of our own baptism, and the solemn obligations of our baptismal vows?



TOWARDS AN OBJECTIVE SPIRITUAL LIFE¹

II

THOMAS DEMAN, O.P.

The Theological Virtues

WITH the theological virtues, we move away from ourselves to attain the highest object set before human action. Wonderful as it seems, God becomes our object. No one calls in question the fact that the theological virtues are pre-eminent and people certainly do not dream of denying that they have a part to play in the spiritual life. It is doubtful, however, whether they are cultivated with the care they deserve and whether they are actually directed towards their object. Let us consider this direction which it is important they should take in practice.

Among the different virtues, *faith* bears a strongly marked objective character. Its purpose is to attach the mind to the truths God has revealed. These truths in no sense derive from us and are certainly not the fruit of our meditations. God has revealed them and they have entered into us through the medium of hearing. The initial attitude of faith is that of the ready ear. We listen to the word of *another*. We register everything about it that is new and hitherto unknown. We forget our own thoughts, to open the mind to those of God. *Faith is not a discovery but a welcome of acceptance.* The truths of the faith do not spring from the soul as a poem might do; they are introduced into the soul in conformity with the dictates of God. For this reason what is asked of any one

¹ Second part of a translation by Kathleen Pond from *La Vie Spirituelle*, Sept.-Oct., 1944. Part I appeared in *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*, October 1956.