

as it is to speak of the divine essence: we can only suggest a little of what takes place. Not only is human intelligence confounded, but even angelic intelligence. Not only does not surpass natural comprehension, but also that which is given by grace.

Even so it is up to this point that the Holy Ghost visits, draws and exalts all those who offer him a well-prepared place that he alone can fill; all those who give him in their innermost being the office of Father of the family, by obeying him with all their hearts.

With what docility, willingness, with what love, should we therefore leave all things and ourselves to follow this very sweet and generous Spirit, who gave himself of old, as we have said, to the holy Apostles and to all the disciples, and who gives himself every day still and at every hour, to all those who are capable of receiving him!

May the all-powerful God, blessed for ever, grant us to be worthy to receive him as perfectly as possible. Amen.



## THE DAUGHTERS OF THE CHURCH

BY

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AMONG the new forms of religious life which now seem to be a characteristic of this present age is that lived by the Daughters of the Church in their monastery at Bruges. Their ideal is both contemplative and active. To a casual visitor to the Béguinage—for the 'Monastère de la Vigne' occupies the 700 years old Béguinage, which was dying out for want of subjects, with a new monastic cloister, refectory and cells built out at the back of one of the old Béguine's cottages—the life may seem almost wholly contemplative. What is most apparent as one crosses the quadrangle, whether by day or, if one is privileged to be a guest in the house, under a clear, bright winter's moon as one makes one's way to the church for Matins, is the almost palpable sense of the presence of God, of the nearness of the supernatural, of silence, of recollection, of a life lived on another plane or in another dimension caught up in God. This impression will be deepened if one assists at the morning Mass, dialogued, or, if it be a feast-day, sung, with its Offertory procession at which each nun gravely places her host upon the paten, and its *Benedicite* of thanksgiving, the verses

of which are recited alternately with the priest. Mass, the Divine Office, with its Vespers so carefully and beautifully sung, are at the very heart of this new form of religious life; how otherwise could the sisters be in very truth Daughters of the Church? But the contemplation fructifies into action, all the more valuable and enduring for being less apparent to the outward eye.

The founding of the Monastery of the Vineyard<sup>1</sup> was due to the vision and labours of M. le Chanoine Hoovnaert, still happily curé of the Béguinage parish and chaplain to the community, though more than twenty years have passed since the beginnings. The Benedictine Fathers of St André, Lophem-lez-Bruges, lent every possible help and support in this new foundation, which follows the rule of St Benedict. The life in itself is simple and admirably balanced. Its spirituality is that of the Church. It is centred round the Mass, mental prayer and the Divine Office, the latter recited according to the Roman, not the monastic rite. There are three half-hours of mental prayer daily, in the morning, at mid-day and again in the evening. The religious pray for (1) Catholic Action; (2) the Unity of the Church; (3) vocations to the priesthood and the sanctification of the clergy; (4) the development of parish life. Their formation is modern<sup>2</sup> and adapted to the needs of the moment. Before final vows are pronounced six months' postulancy followed by two years' novitiate and three years' temporary vows, are required. The formation aims at the development of a social sense, based on true charity, a sense of hierarchy shown by obedience to the Church and her ministers, and a liturgical sense which aims at the collective practice of a spirituality of praise, of worship, whose root is prayer and a deep sense of spiritual realities.

The apostolate of the Daughters of the Church takes several forms which may be subdivided into teaching, 'production', 'diffusion' and information. Under the first heading courses are given in liturgy, Church Latin, chant, vestment making and kindred subjects. Acolytes, catechists etc. are trained. There are eight chapters of the Society of the Magnificat in which lay people are taught how to say the Divine Office. Under 'production' may be grouped the Fra Angelico studio with its pictures and prayer-book cards, baptismal certificates, designs for stained-glass windows etc.; and the workroom wherein are made the vestments and altar linen for

<sup>1</sup> The title links it with the old Béguinage whose symbol was the vine and also recalls the words of our Lord to St Mechtilde (quoted on the descriptive leaflet): 'My vineyard is the Catholic Church in which I laboured for thirty-three years with many sufferings. Come and work with me!'

<sup>2</sup> Their material surroundings, too, are modern as far as possible—each cell has running water.

which the monastery is so justly famous. The 'diffusion' section has a lending library of reviews for the clergy and numerous publications. The information department consists of a Liturgical Secretariat which answers all kinds of problems and questions relating to the liturgy, whether from priests or layfolk.

But the activities of the Daughters of the Church extend outside their monastery—in order to serve the liturgical movement in the parishes. The training of acolytes is one instance of this. Originally begun in the monastery, this work has been so successful that many parish priests have asked the nuns to undertake the formation of their altar servers. Courses of one, two or three days' lessons have thus been organised in different towns and at the Abbey of St André near Bruges. In 1949 an 'Acolytes' Day' was held in Roeselare, with an attendance of 500 boys who, singing the *Veni Creator*, went in procession through the streets of the little town to the church where Mass was dialogued.

A still further extension of the monastery's apostolate was made in January 1947, when four sisters were sent to work in a parish at Liège where the population (almost wholly working-class) numbers only 700 practising Catholics. The nuns visit the parishioners, even those who profess to be non-believers, teach catechism, take care of the church and sacristy and, in short, do all they can to bring religion into the lives of the pagan population, while fostering in the faithful love of God and souls. The work is difficult and it is too soon to judge whether results will be lasting, but it is encouraging that now the little temporary church is filled to overflowing at the four Sunday Masses, Compline is sung by a good congregation every Sunday evening and the people love their little church, improved and beautified by the efforts of the zealous curé and the sisters, so much that they want no other. The nuns there recite part of their Office in the church with the parish clergy and the remainder in their oratory.

Recently two new activities have been added to the already long list of the nuns' occupations they take the younger children of the parish to school every day (in order to prevent their being sent to a non-Catholic school) and the work of the Liturgical Committee for the diocese set up in accordance with the directives of the Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, has been entrusted to the Daughters of the Church.

No account of this Congregation would be complete without some mention of the 'Addictæ', who are members of the monastic family not bound by vows but dedicated to the work of the Daughters of the Church, either in the monastery itself or in the world.

They are allowed to participate in choir in all the hours of the Office and they share as far as possible in the life of the religious<sup>3</sup>.

A stay in the 'Solitude Ste Thérèse' or guest house of the monastery is a truly delightful experience, not only from the spiritual but even from the temporal point of view. The charity of the nuns finds expression in the friendliness with which they welcome their guests and in their solicitude for their spiritual well-being, happiness and comfort. People are not received as holiday visitors, but those wishing to study the life, to follow some one or other of the courses given, to make a retreat or merely to spend a quiet time alone with God, are always welcome.

Liturgical enthusiasts are often accused of being mere formalists or else of putting aesthetic considerations first. The life of the Daughters of the Church at the Monastère de la Vigne constitutes an emphatic refutation of such charges. It demonstrates far better than argument can do where liturgical life and liturgical practices lead, if properly understood and carried out. It is the rhythm of a double movement, its first phase the flight of the human spirit to God where it remains poised in worship and adoration, the second its gentle descent to earth, its song made so lovely in contact with the divine that by the very force of attraction earth is caught up to heaven; first the liturgy of prayer, of praise, the worship of the mystical body, but a liturgy which, founded and rooted in charity, does not end in prayer but for the glory of God seeks every means of persuading souls to reach out and attain the plenitude of their membership of that body whose Head is Christ. May the Monastery of the Vineyard, planted as it is by the hand of God, grow and prosper, and may the branches of its vines extend far and wide, attracting many souls to devote themselves to the work of tending the Vineyard of Holy Church.

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<sup>3</sup> They do not wear the religious habit but those who live in the monastery have a distinguishing dress, pleasing in its simplicity of style and dark blue colour relieved by white.