

EXTRACTS

CATHOLIC ACTION as a modern version of the apostolic life is being progressively deepened and harmonised with the life of the Church in general. At the same time it brings forth new and vigorous organisations within the Church, such as the way of life labelled 'Secular Institute'. Fr Hans Urs von Balthasar, S.J., has written a book which emphasises this very markedly, a book translated into French as *Laïcat et plein apostolat* (Pensée Catholique, Liège; n.p.) and, we hope, shortly to be published in English, a neat book, short and to the point. He shows that the transference of much responsibility for the apostolate from the clergy to the laity cannot be happily effected without reducing both ways of life, clerical and lay, to the common background or foundation—the '*vie evangelique*'. It is here that Secular Institutes have a special part to play. 'Priest-workmen' and 'religious in the world' are all very well in certain countries and for certain needs. But the confusion of function in such activities does not really assist in the conversion of the multitude. A writer in the January *Orate Fratres* gives a vivid description of conditions in an American city where the priest must visit:

Recently I visited the worst slum in the city. The area is called 'The Rock'. What was formerly a coal bin of a foundry was converted by thin partitions into a long row of blockhouses. Each hovel has one room, one door, one window, and no plumbing. . . . In these 10 × 12 rooms live families with children. . . . The owner of the property expressed surprise at seeing a priest in the area. 'Isn't this a little rough for you here?'

The author insists that Liturgy and Missals are not of the first necessity in such places, and certainly the priest does not go to such slums in his 'neatest thing in cassocks'. But the priest should go as a priest, and *with* the laity there or in the neighbourhood he can begin to bring men to the Lord. In general, he must preach the Gospel as a priest, and the laity must take their part in that preaching, not as crypto-religious or semi-sacerdotes, but as lay men and women. The Secular Institutes is one way of bringing this about, for they are decidedly not religious, nor should they try to pretend to be.

DOCTORS and priests are concerned, in a recent number of *Cahiers Laenec*, to study psychasthemia, particularly in relation to the religious life, because it is a malady to which religious are specially prone. After giving typical symptoms the writers of the first article show how frequently psychasthemia takes the form of scruples—'one does not come across scruples on matters of pride or lack of charity; they are always about some ritual act or some material fault'.

People suffering from it are very easily influenced, and therefore one should be very careful in testing the vocation of anyone who is strongly influenced by his mother. Sometimes such influences are not detected until the person has irrevocably committed himself, and the question is bound to arise of whether he committed himself by a free act.

If he is badly directed the psychasthemic may have his pathological uneasiness treated as a supernatural case, in which case the religious life will only worsen his condition, whereas the demands of life in the world will face him up to fight his weaknesses.

In dealing with novices who have psychasthemic tendencies 'one primary error must be avoided: that of releasing him too readily from the external regulations and requirements of the rule'. The fact is that often the master of novices or the seminary director, faced with a novice who complains of being tired whilst at the same time displaying good will and generosity in his spiritual life, will often be inclined to dispense him from certain material obligations and leave him scope to organise his life as best he can. The results in the case of a psychasthemic are usually disastrous. They have been robbed of the very external support which they need and have been imprudently relieved of those very definite obligations which give them a sense of security. Left to themselves, they are incapable of the necessary effort and gradually slip into an undisciplined condition.

Those who are too easily inclined to say that the emotions do not matter in the religious life may be interested in the statistics produced by Dr Barbier to show that people of an emotive temperament tend to choose vocations in which they can sacrifice themselves—in the medical profession, for instance, and especially in religion. From which he rightly concludes, not to a theory of determinism, but that 'it offers the best example one could imagine of the noble rôle of emotion'.

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