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How spiritual force is generated.
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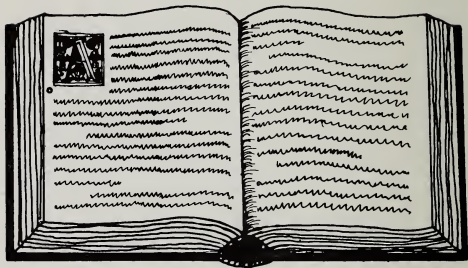
THE APOSTOLATE
OF THE
CONTEMPLATIVES

by

A Trappist Monk



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NIHIL OBSTAT

Fr. M. Mauricius Malloy, O.C.S.O.
Fr. M. Albericus Wulf, O.C.S.O.
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✠ Fredericus M. Dunne, O.C.S.O.
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FOREWORD

The present booklet, written by a Trappist, is composed with a double object in view. First and foremost, an effort is made to enlighten the Catholic laity on a phase of the Church's life that is either generally ignored or grotesquely caricatured. Ask an average Catholic layman: "What are contemplative orders?" and the chances are he will answer: "Religious institutes wherein good pious people live and pray, but do no good to outsiders." Whilst reading these pages he may conceive a greater esteem for prayer and thus be led to practice it more zealously and constantly.

In the next place, an attempt is made to enlighten and encourage contemplatives themselves, particularly Trappists, in regard to their sublime vocation. Barred as they are, by the very nature of the case, from being able to test their life by any visible results and eternally reproached with doing nothing for the Church, they need encouragement to go on and lead their hidden life wholeheartedly. God and the Church expect very much from them. The world, on the other hand, has more need of their prayers and penances today than it ever had before. In an effort to enlighten, an exhaustive treatise on the contemplative life was not so much as thought of; merely a few fundamental truths are brought to their notice.

In these pages will be found some general notions of contemplation; the work of contemplative orders, particularly that of the Trappists, will be sketched; the power of prayer and penance as means of spreading the kingdom of Christ will be pointed out; some reflections on the divine office are put forward; finally, the work ends with some conclusions that seem to us to be most obvious.

The Apostolate of the Contemplatives Why Contemplatives?

In this country there is a great ignorance of contemplative orders and of contemplatives themselves, coupled at times with a streak of prejudice against them. This is to be found not only among those who are not of the household of the faith, but likewise among Catholics. The average modern American, living as he does in a preeminently active and practical country, has little time for a manner of life that is unable to furnish tangible proofs of utility. An order or congregation that teaches, preaches, nurses the sick or cares for the aged and the orphan can be understood; its achievements can be numbered, compared, and evaluated. But contemplative orders — What do they do? Fossilized relics of a (perhaps) glorious past, they have seen their day and had better pass off the stage to make room for other religious bodies who do something.

And truly, why forgo a role of active usefulness in a world that has so much need of us? To flee from so many opportunities of doing good — from so many youngsters who need to be taught the very rudiments of the faith, from so many sick of body who need to be hospitalized, from so many sinners who need to be converted, from so many outsiders (and some of them with the very best of dispositions) to be brought into the Church; to turn one's back on all this and bury oneself in the egotistic care of one's personal salvation — why, the very idea of it is monstrous! Shame on such censurable apathy towards the needs of our age! What is the good of segregation from the world in a secluded monastery; what is the good of silence, of a hard couch, of rising in the middle of the night to chant psalms, of instruments of penance, strict fasts, perpetual abstinence from flesh meat, so much spiritual reading, meditation,

and manual labor? After all, if pagans are not housed within the Church because there are no apostolic souls to go out to search for them, instruct, and baptize them — what's the utility of all that?

Moreover, the fierce attacks that are made upon the Church all over the world — in Russia, Germany, and Mexico, to mention the most outstanding places — the atheism and the materialism that are strolling through the country, the anarchy that threatens society, the shameless corruption that is eating its way into the family — all these offer a challenge to every noble son and daughter of the Church to come forward and lend a hand in the war she is waging. If we are to hold what we have, to say nothing of making new conquests, everybody who can do something must be up and at work. Contemplative orders may have been good enough in the Middle Ages. In our times they are an extravagance, one had almost said, a delicate piece of nonsense. They are comfortable armchairs in which cowardly souls potter and dream, ignorant of, or at least indifferent to, what is going on outside in the world. As a matter of fact, it would be much better if they were suppressed; for the Church has no further need of them.

Contemplatives' Place in the Church

From the charge of selfishness and inutility it is hoped this pamphlet will acquit contemplatives beyond the shadow of a doubt. The reader will find that, as Msgr. Sheen says, these very contemplatives "love the world with its human souls so much that they want to do all they can for it; and they can do nothing better for it than to pray that souls may one day find their way to God." But even if we suppose for the sake of argument, that they did not concern themselves with the salvation of others, they would still have a right to a place in the Church. We

have only to read St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 12, to learn that she has a multiplicity of works to perform. Ample provision for all these works is realized by her different religious orders and congregations. Says St. Paul:

“Now there are diversities of graces, but the same Spirit, and there are diversities of ministries, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but the same God, who worketh all in all. . . . For as the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also in Christ. . . . If the foot should say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? The eye cannot say to the hand: ‘I need not thy help’; nor again the head to the feet: ‘I have no need of you.’ Yea, much more those that seem to be the more feeble members of the body, are more necessary. . . . And if one member of the body suffer anything, all the members suffer with it; or if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it.”

From a careful reading of this passage we perceive that the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, was planned by His infinitely wise mind to function as a perfectly organized body. Hence we expect to find therein a variety of organs and such compact dependence among these that any abnormal condition in one will be felt in all the others. It is unnecessary to say, of course, that the organs do not exist for themselves; being but parts of the whole, their function is to contribute to the well-being of the whole. On the other hand, the whole will not be 100 per cent itself if its organs are not in first-class condition. A boy, for example, who carries about with him a very weak heart, has no business

on a football field. Should he persist in lining up with his mates in a game, it will not be long before he will have to be carried off the field. Externally he may have the make-up of an All American back-field man. Nevertheless, because of his defective heart, he is disqualified for the terrific rough and tumble treatment of a real game. So it is with the Mystical Body. A defect in any of its organs (the hierarchical organization together with religious orders and congregations, though not in the same degree, may be considered its organs), is bound to affect the entire body to a greater or less extent. Hence we may safely say that contemplative orders, like active orders and congregations, have a specific work to do in the Church. If they do not do it, or do it only remissly, the Church will suffer.

Needed in Our Times

As a matter of fact, the contribution of contemplative orders to the work of the Church is most efficient and far-reaching. Of all those whose opinion is worth considering in this connection, there is one whose words deserve special attention — the late Pope Pius XI. Far from thinking that contemplative orders are out of date and are mere idlers in the present crisis, this great Pontiff, who did so much to promote Catholic Action and to develop the work of the missions, made bold to say:

“If ever it was needful that there should be anchorites (those who embrace the purely contemplative life) in the Church, it is most specially expedient nowadays, when we see so many Christians living without a thought for the things of the next world and utterly regardless of their eternal salvation, giving rein to their desires for earthly wealth and the pleasures of the flesh, and adopting and exhibiting publicly as well as privately pagan manners that are altogether opposed to the

Gospel." (Apostolic Constitution "Umbralem" July 8, 1924, A.A.S. vol. XVI.)

In the same constitution he went on to say:

"It is impossible that those religious, keeping the rule of their order not only accurately but also with fervor, should not become and remain powerful pleaders with our most merciful God for all Christendom."

Whilst reiterating these views in subsequent documents, he more strikingly returned to them in the Encyclical on Foreign Missions, "Rerum Ecclesiarum gestarum," of February 18, 1926. Having referred once more to his already expressed views on the utility for the Church of contemplatives and expressing the hope and the wish that monasteries given solely to penance and contemplation would be founded in the midst of the active mission field, the Holy Father continued:

"Since up till now we have been speaking of your fellow-laborers, either already enrolled or to be enrolled in the future, there remains one more thing under this heading to be suggested for your careful consideration; which if it could be brought to being would not a little help, we believe, towards the more rapid spread of the faith.

"And just as we earnestly beg superiors general of such orders, that by the foundation of monasteries, their stricter form of contemplative life may be introduced and widely spread in missionary territories, so likewise in season and out of season do we pray you, Venerable Brethren, and you, beloved sons, to interest yourselves therein; for it is marvelous what measure of heavenly graces such solitaries would call down upon your labors. Nor indeed need it be doubted that such monks would be at home in your surroundings."

Then, referring to the Trappist monastery in the Vicariate of Peiping with its one hundred monks, most of whom are Chinese by birth, the Holy Father went on to say:

“Whence it is perfectly clear that our anchorites, keeping unbroken the rule and the spirit of their founder, and taking no part in the life of action, can be daily of no small help towards the success of your apostolate. So that if the superiors of such orders give ear to your appeals and set up houses wherever you may agree together that they should, they will do a thing, in the first place, helpful to the salvation of a vast crowd of heathen, and one which, in addition, will be acceptable and agreeable to us beyond the bounds of belief.”

Needed in Pagan Countries

If ever there was a man in Europe or America who knew the evils of society and likewise the means and methods best calculated to remedy those evils, that man was undoubtedly Pope Pius XI. Hence we may be pardoned for calling the reader's attention to some points of this document. To begin with, the Holy Father addressed, not bishops of large well-organized dioceses, but vicars apostolic in pagan countries; bishops whose territories embrace, at times, millions of unbaptized souls, and who can muster for this gigantic task only a handful of priests. Looking over the fellow laborers whom these bishops actually have and those whom they may secure in the future, the Holy Father proposed for their special consideration a class of laborers whom, in the circumstances, one might be tempted to overlook or undervalue — contemplatives. These latter, according to the Pope, will contribute not a little to the rapid spread of the Gospel. But how are the contemplatives to do this? By forsaking their cloisters, opening schools, preaching, and doing missionary work? Not at all. They

are to take no part in the active ministry. They are to do their share by observing their rule and the spirit of their founder. Far from inviting them to take part in the active ministry, the Holy Father pointed out that this was in the past the cause why contemplative orders declined and lost their first fervor. Hence, whatever good they are to do for the world is to be accomplished in the solitude of their cloisters. They are, in fact, cloistered missionaries.

All really apostolic men have ever been of the same opinion. Msgr. Lefebvre, Bishop in Cochin China, had been but a short time consecrated when he undertook to establish at Saigon a monastery of Carmelite nuns. The governor of the place told him in all sincerity that, instead of opening a Carmel — a piece of luxury according to his way of thinking — it would be more to the point to insure a Christian settlement. But Msgr. Lefebvre answered promptly: "What you call a luxury I consider a prime necessity of the Christian ministry. Ten nuns who pray will be of more help to me than twenty missionaries who preach."

We shall now look more closely into the nature of contemplative orders, in order to find out the secret of their power. We trust that this study will make at least one thing clear — that the contemplative is not so wrapt up with himself as to have no time to think of the world or of the work of the Church.

Contemplation

Natural Contemplation

Two men, one a Catholic priest, the other an atheist professor in a state university, were standing on the southern rim of the Grand Canyon looking into its dim and distant depths. Their gaze met fantastically shaped rocks — some like a Turkish mosque, with its domes and its minarets; others like

the battlemented castles that stud the banks of the scenic Rhine; rocks that were red, brown, purple, yellow, green, and gold. At the bottom was discernible a thin strip of soiled silver — the roaring Colorado River as it rushed madly to the sea. It was, in fact, a breath-taking sight. For Nature with her wind and her rain had chiseled strange shapes from rocks that were as colored as the rainbow. After gazing in silence for some time, the professor said: "Does not all this vastness make you feel small?"

"Small?" said the priest, taking in the whole scene with a sweep of his eye, "why, no. It makes me feel big, tremendously big. For I know that my God has been working for ages with His rain and His snow, His river and His wind, just that this day I might see His glory and His grandeur written in stone."

The reaction in these two men was widely different, due to each one's intellectual background. Be that as it may, they were giving themselves up — and it is this that concerns us — to a bit of contemplation. They were contemplating one of nature's marvels. The priest recognized God; the other was conscious only of his own littleness. As a matter of fact, who has not, from time to time, been ravished by the sight of one of God's wonders in the visible creation? Who can analyze his impressions whilst gazing, for instance, at a gorgeous sunset off the Golden Gate, or at the Niagara Falls? Our atheist professor may see only his own littleness; but any one who has not abdicated the use of reason will be able to decipher God's fingerprints stamped unmistakably on all the works of creation. That is just what God intended.

Supernatural Contemplation

Man can contemplate God, not only in the works of nature, but also in Himself and in His mysteries. We read in the Life of the Seraphic St. Francis of Assisi that on one

occasion he spent the entire night repeating the words: "My God and my all." During this period good St. Francis forgot everything but God. He perceived neither the presence of a companion nor the lapse of time. During those hours there was not on his part, we may be sure, any attachment to creatures nor to sin. Had the whole world with all its riches been offered to him, he would not have given them a glance. He would have spurned them all.

Were we able to analyze the soul of Francis in that nightly contemplation (we do not examine whether it was an active or a passive contemplation), we should find many amazing effects of grace. But for our purpose we shall concern ourselves only with the act of contemplation itself. This consisted of two processes. In the first place, his soul looked, gazed at God. This look enkindled in his heart the fire of divine love; looking and loving, in fact, are the two characteristics of contemplation. Doubtless reflections, considerations, and reasonings on God and His mysteries or attributes, or on the mysteries of our holy religion, had preceded; but in the actual contemplation that work was unnecessary. Our Saint visioned all that in one clear glance, a glance that made him realize the overwhelming lovableness of God. Love was the result. The more he gazed, the more did his love increase. As he loved and gazed, the leaden-footed hours of night sped on unperceived; whilst the glow of his loving heart found vent in the repeated cry, "My God and my all."

Precedents and parallels of this can be found in the lives of God's saints and servants. But let us hasten to say that favors of this sort are not the exclusive privilege of the perfect. Any soul in the state of sanctifying grace — and therefore possessing the gifts of the Holy Ghost — can, and many a one actually at times does, enjoy minor favors

of this kind. How often at Holy Communion, visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament, or at other times, have we not been favored with flashes of deep union with God; moments in which we looked and loved, and forgot everything else!

Thus we find that in natural contemplation there are two elements at work: (1) the sensible gazing at an object, and (2) a sentiment of awe, wonder, reverence, fear, joy, or similar emotion. So too, in supernatural contemplation there are two characteristic operations going on: (1) a mental gazing at a divine truth or object, and (2) an ardent love for God. It is to be noted that in both instances we are dealing with mere acts of contemplation. Sometimes they are long, sometimes they are short, it matters little; they are acts that come and go, leaving the soul, it is to be hoped, better off for the experience. We have now to consider contemplation from a new point of view.

Habitual Contemplation

Not only can man contemplate God by isolated acts, but he can also contemplate Him by keeping his mind habitually fixed on Him. The word "habitual" is used with such a variety of meanings that we must pause to state precisely the meaning we attach to it here. Were we to say that a man habitually votes the Democratic ticket, we'd mean that he votes for the Democratic party practically every time he votes; maybe once or twice he voted otherwise. But election day comes only once a year; therefore he does not vote in between elections. However, when we here speak of contemplation as a habit, or of "habitual contemplation," we do not mean that the only time the soul contemplates God is during the exercise of mental prayer. What we mean is that this gazing at God and loving Him is a permanent occupation of the soul; an occupation so ingrained in the soul

that it is, to a certain extent, ever-abiding, uninterrupted. This, of course, must not be taken too absolutely; for it is only in heaven that the soul can be always actually and continuously engaged in contemplating God. Owing to man's innate weakness and the demands of his environment, he must take his share in what is going on around him. Nevertheless, contemplation can with the grace of God and a wholehearted generosity become such a second nature that the occupations of daily life do not distract him from attending to God and loving Him more or less continuously. Let us illustrate this by one of the most beautiful, if not the most beautiful, thing, in God's beautiful world — a mother's love for her infant child.

A Mother's Contemplation

A mother spends days, and at times nights too, in contemplating her child. The little tot is, we will suppose, playing on the floor with a stuffed cat. Mother, on the other hand, though she is busily engaged with her household duties, follows his every move. When something has to be done upstairs, she takes baby with her. Really, he is never out of her sight. She is forever providing for his wants, ever divining — as only a mother can divine — his most feeble whimper. Should the little one fall sick, her mother love will nerve her on to work miracles of endurance. For weeks, for months even, she will hover over his bedside, ministering to his every need, always forgetful of herself. At times this love imparts an almost preternatural keenness to her senses. A double-headed freight drag may pass under the window where she sleeps without disturbing her in the least. But let baby moan or become fidgety, mother is at his side immediately, takes in at a glance what the trouble is and sets to work at once to remedy it. Soon baby is back in slumberland. Now, what is it that imparts such endurance, such understanding, such keenness,

such heroic self-sacrifice to a mother? It is love. Her whole life is one long service of love. She looks and loves. Her whole being is bound up with her child, and this, too, without any household duty being neglected. A similar life is led by the true contemplative.

The True Contemplative

When contemplation, understood in the sense in which we have been speaking — as a gazing at and a loving of God — so predominates in a man that it becomes his habitual, normal, constant occupation, we can say that that man is a true contemplative. God becomes the focal point of his entire being. For (1) his mind, (2) his heart, (3) his body are concentrated on God; not for one-half hour or one hour of meditation, but for the livelong day, plus the waking hours of the night. At the same time he disengages himself, as far as his earthly condition permits, from all other occupations and cares.

He occupies his mind with God — mind includes intellect, memory, and imagination. All these he endeavors to fill with God — His attributes, His mysteries, His word as found in Holy Scripture. His memory recalls all that God has done for man in general and for himself in particular; all that He has promised to his faithful servants. His imagination, instead of feeding on the — alas! too often trashy — things of the world, rather pictures to itself scenes taken from the life of our Lord, of our Blessed Mother, or of the saints, or of the happiness of heaven.

His heart, too, is centered upon God; by heart we mean the will as the seat of the affections and as the principle of determination. The contemplative reserves his affections and his will for God. Discovering good, infinite good, in Him, he seeks to unite himself more and more to the boundless Source of all good; he takes his pleasure in Him, gives Him the preference in all things, and tries to procure

His glory in every possible way. His greatest concern is to unite his will to the divine will in every manner that the latter manifests itself; in one word, he strives to perfect himself in the pure love of God.

Finally, his body with its senses and its organs is reserved for God, for His worship, and for His service. To sing God's praises, to celebrate the different feasts of the liturgical year, to consecrate one's whole being to Him, such is the life of the contemplative. His entire being, soul and body, is united to God and occupied with Him. To such an extent is this true that, for him, contemplation and union with God are synonymous terms. Most assuredly, from the very nature of his earthly existence, he sees and deals with other creatures, but he does not stop at them. He digs down and through them, whether they be persons, things or events, until he comes to God.

How To Arrive at This

Normally this state or habit of the contemplative soul is not speedily nor easily arrived at. The Holy Ghost, of course, is the master of His favors; occasionally He raises souls to this degree of the spiritual life in a relatively short time. Besides, some souls are more generous than others, more determined than others to conquer themselves; hence an iron-clad rule that admits of no exceptions cannot possibly be formulated. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that it is only after years of virile exercise that the soul arrives at this degree of union with God. Indeed, to bring order into one's life, to moderate the passions, and to tranquillize the irregular motions of the soul to such an extent that they no longer disturb habitual contemplation, a man must mortify himself completely. For to be occupied with God, one must first be dis-occupied with himself; to be united, he must be detached. It follows

from this that the contemplative must exercise himself day by day in greater separation from creatures in order to arrive at a fuller union with God. The practices of penance have for their objective to effect this detachment; prayer, on the other hand, recollection, and silence have for theirs, to unite the soul to God.

It is to be borne in mind that union with God must be effected by union with Jesus Christ. For, as He Himself says: "No man cometh to the Father but by Me" (John, 14:6). It is for this reason that St. Paul is so emphatic in assuring us that all the arrangements of God's providence have only one end in view — to make us conformable to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). Likewise the operations of the Holy Ghost in souls are to impart to them Christ's ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. When this is assured, then Christ really lives in them. They can say with the great Apostle: "I live now, not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Contemplative Orders

Since this state of contemplation, or union with God, is the joint product of the Holy Ghost working in the soul and of the latter's cooperation, it is to be expected that souls of good will are to be found in every walk of life. Blessed Anna Maria Taigi, to say nothing of other saints in ancient and modern times, was a married woman and a mother. To her own children were added some grandchildren, whom she took care of also. Evidently, in itself this was not an ideal environment for the making of a contemplative. Notwithstanding, she was thoroughly contemplative; always looking at God, always loving Him. But her contemplation was not because of her state, was not the normal flowering of her state; rather it was in spite of her state; of its own nature her state tended to shatter the calm and tranquillity necessary for contemplation.

We have now to consider religious orders that furnish the milieu proper for such souls as wish to live to God in complete union.

There is the private, interior, personal state of a soul established in union with God; and there is the exterior, public, official state of an order that is destined to favor contemplative vocations. Interior, private, personal contemplation is realized when, as just stated above, all the faculties of the soul are concentrated on God; when penance has separated it from created things, especially from itself. Whereas exterior, public, official contemplation is realized in an order that is established to furnish souls which are called the environment and the means proper to conduct these souls to the afore-mentioned interior, personal contemplation. Contemplative orders of this kind are organized with the express end in view of leading souls to this separation and union. The manifold means of penance such as enclosure, fasting, manual labor, austerities and other penances, isolate the religious, separate and detach him from all things and from himself. On the other hand, the divers exercises of prayer, the divine office, Mass, meditation, examination of conscience, spiritual reading, exhortations, lead the soul to union with God. Everything is combined with one end in view, union with God.

Trappists Are Contemplatives

A cursory glance through the daily life of the Trappist will show that it is arranged primarily with a view to prayer. There is no mention of the outer world nor of external duties. The holy Mass, divine office, prayer, and pious reading, which form the exercises of the contemplative life, occupy the major part of the day. Furthermore, the Rule exhorts the religious to devote himself frequently to prayer and to have ever before him the thought of God's presence. Manual labor itself tranquillizes and disposes the soul to

resume its converse with God; or rather, the nature of our duties and the monastic silence, which is never broken, allow the religious to lead a life of continual prayer. Fasting, watching, humiliations, and obedience detach the soul from lower things, disengage it from the sway of the senses and enable it to wing its flight to God without impediment. In short, the vows cut off the principal sources of worldly cares, the enclosure protects him from contact with the world, and the rules, both collectively and severally, tend to dispel trouble, whether arising from the world or the passions; they foster solitude of the mind, of the heart, and of the will. In this way our monasteries become shrines of holy silence, filled with God and perfumed with prayer; shrines wherein is heard only the voice of the soul praising God, and the voice of God conversing with the soul.

Active and Contemplative Orders

Though active orders also make use of spiritual exercises, meditation, a distinctive habit, a certain degree of separation from the world, and many exercises that are found in the contemplative orders, and in this way seek direct union with God, nevertheless, by the activities that bring them into contact with their fellow men they go to Him indirectly. By preaching, teaching, writing, and exercising the various corporal and spiritual works of mercy they aim at going to Him through their neighbor. And what would become of the world if they did not devote themselves to these works as zealously as they do? Their work is indispensable and deserving of all praise.

On the other hand, contemplative orders have no such works. They have no ministry that brings them into direct contact with the outside world. Though they do contribute to the welfare of their neighbor by their life of prayer and penance, as we will see later,

their immediate concern is God. They go to Him directly. Primarily they are for God alone.

God's Rights

"For God alone" may to some sound strange, exaggerated, out of place. If the phrase sounds thus it is because in these days God's rights are ignored. Strange to say, some of the most obvious duties of a creature towards its Creator are the very ones that men are frequently the most careless in acknowledging and acquitting themselves of. Indeed we are so self-centered, to such an extent do we refer everything to ourselves and evaluate persons, things, and events according as they minister to our pleasure, happiness or advantage, that it is the most natural thing in the world to overlook an important side of contemplative orders. St. Bernard says that the reason for loving God is that He is God. We may say that at least one reason why there should be contemplative orders in the Church is that there is a God and that He is what He is.

He is an abyss of infinite perfections. In Himself He possesses infinite grandeur and dignity; He is the Creator of heaven and earth and of everything that is contained therein; He, furthermore, preserves all creatures in being each moment of their existence. By this fact alone He acquires an absolute, supreme, and inalienable right and dominion over His creatures' entire being: over their bodies and senses, over their souls and faculties, and over every moment of their existence. He is our universal Benefactor, from whom we receive all that we have in time and all that we hope for in eternity. Besides, He is our Father, lavishing upon us an infinite love, communicating to us sanctifying grace, which, being a participation of the divine nature, makes us children of God and gives us a right to eternal life. Recognizing all these rights of God to His creatures' love

and service, is it really so strange that some souls are to be found who consecrate their entire being to Him alone? Is it too much to give Him? More than He deserves? And if we can never do too much for Him because He is our Creator, our Benefactor, and our Father, what do we owe Him above all as our Redeemer? What do we owe Him for the Crib, the Cross, the Holy Eucharist, the Sacred Heart?

Lest some one may say that God is willing to waive His unquestioned rights in this matter in favor of our neighbor, we may recall what happened in the house of Simon the Leper when Mary poured her precious ointment on the head of our Lord. "The disciples," says the gospel, "had indignation, saying: 'To what purpose is this waste? For this might have been sold for much and given to the poor.'" Christ was very emphatic and outspoken in her defense. "The poor you have always with you, but Me you have not always." In behalf of contemplatives we might paraphrase His words: "Everybody thinks of his neighbor's welfare. Few, very few indeed, think of Me and of My rights to the full and undivided love and service of My creatures." As the angels and saints in heaven pour themselves out in love and adoration before the throne of God, it is becoming that at least some souls should do the same on earth. Thus they make their apprenticeship for heaven.

Mystery of Christ's Hidden Life

Perhaps we have here the reason for Christ's hidden life of thirty years. Thirty long years of manual labor, silence, and obscurity; a life hidden away in the small town of Nazareth, the most despised town of Galilee. He, the Incarnate Son of God, possessing in Himself all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and sanctity, passing ten-elevenths of His earthly life away from a world that

needed Him as it needed no one else; a world that was overrun by errors of all kinds; that was steeped in idolatry and corruption; a world in which souls were dying every minute and which He alone could convert and save. What was He doing during those thirty years? Was He indifferent to its fate? Did He care nothing for the salvation of those souls? Most assuredly He did care, and care very much. But He cared for it in His own way, a way quite different from ours. He advanced its interests by a life of silence, labor, and prayer. He wished, moreover, to teach men that God has the first right to our love, to our service, and to our life. Contemplatives, therefore, merely follow in the footsteps of the Master in separating themselves from the world in order to give themselves up entirely to God and His service.

Though the immediate object of the contemplative's life is God alone, nevertheless benefits not a few, nor insignificant, flow from it to the Church and the world.

Helping the Church

To some it may seem strange that men, far removed from the world and ignorant of what is happening therein, should for all that exercise a beneficial influence on it. True it is, contemplatives enter their solitude to give themselves entirely to God and His service, and apparently to work at the exclusive sanctification of their own souls. All that notwithstanding, they are mighty forces for the salvation of souls and the welfare of Holy Mother Church. This is one of the principal aims of their life; aims of this kind are implicitly involved in true love for God. For one cannot love God without at the same time loving his neighbor for the love of God. The contemplative, as well as the religious of an active order, has and must have love for his neighbor; the only difference lies in the manner of exercising this love. Without love for

one's neighbor it is impossible to be a one hundred percent contemplative; it is doubtful if he would be a contemplative at all. This aspect of contemplative orders we shall now briefly study.

Ways of Bringing Souls to God

There are two ways of bringing souls to God: the ordinary, usual way and the exceptional way; of both the gospel will furnish instances. Our Lord, knowing that His death was not far off and wishing to make sure some reliable followers would continue His work, chose from among His most zealous and capable adherents a select body of seventy-two disciples. These He sent before Him as His forerunners, with the mission to heal the sick and to preach the kingdom of God; He would follow later on. Having labored earnestly for some time at the work assigned them, they returned to their Divine Master and reported success. "Lord," they exclaimed, "even the devils are subject to us in your name." Here we recognize the ministry that ordinarily devolves upon priests and missionaries: to preach, exercise the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, and to lead souls back to God. This, as distinct from the contemplative, is called the active life. Again, our Lord told His apostles before His Ascension: "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations. . . . Preach the kingdom to every creature." St. Paul on his part says: "Faith cometh by hearing, hearing by the word of God." Hence there must be preaching and teaching. This is the ordinary, and, in the present order of things, really necessary, way of bringing souls to God.

Exceptional Way

However, there is another, an exceptional, way of doing the same work. It consists in God's using an unintentional agent, at times even a positively perverse agent, to bring

about a conversion. Of a perverse agent we have an instance in the conversion of the Venerable Father Libermann. The first push he got towards the Catholic Church came from reading one of the works of the infidel Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Whenever Samuel Haldeman was asked what brought him into the Church, he would answer laconically: "Bugs." With John Moody's conversion the only thing a priest had to do was, practically, to baptize and receive him into the Church. He had, guided by the Holy Ghost, read and studied himself into the truth. There are other conversions on record that began with something very insignificant. God makes use every day of most unexpected incidents to bring souls from a state of sin to a state of grace. He is indeed wonderful in all His works, but in nothing is He more wonderful than in the conversion of sinners.

The day following the Transfiguration, a father, whose son was an epileptic and possessed by a devil, came and threw himself at our Lord's feet, begging Him to have pity on the lad. "I asked your disciples to cure him," said the distraught father, "but they were unable to do so." Our Lord, taking the boy, healed and freed him from the devil, and then gave him to his father. After the crowd had dispersed, the disciples, not a little perplexed at their ill success, inquired why they had been unable to expel that devil and heal the boy: "Why could not we cast him out?" "Because of your unbelief," came the answer. He went on to add: "But this kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:14-20). Our Lord assigns two reasons for their ill success: (1) weakness of faith; had their faith been more robust, they would have been able to cast a mountain into the sea or even to cast out that devil; (2) a particularly powerful class of demons, which, to be dislodged, required a more intimate union with God and a more rigorous practice of penance

than the apostles could boast of at that moment.

Pope Pius XI on This Incident

The above incident reminds us of some words of the late Holy Father, which fit in here very nicely. In his Encyclical "Caritate Christi compulsi" (Urged by the Charity of Christ), under date of May 3, 1932, he said:

"Profiting by so much economic distress and so much moral disorder, the enemies of all social order, be they called Communists or any other name, boldly set about breaking through every restraint. This is the most dreadful evil of our times; for they destroy every bond of law, human and divine; they engage openly and in secret in a relentless struggle against religion and against God Himself; they carry out their diabolical program of wresting from the hearts of all, even of children, all religious sentiment; for they well know that when once belief in God has been taken from the heart of mankind they will be entirely free to work out their will. Thus we see today, what never before was seen in history, the satanical banners of war against God and against religion brazenly unfurled to the winds in the midst of all peoples and in all parts of the earth....

"However, in the face of this satanic hatred of religion, which reminds us of the 'mystery of iniquity' referred to by St. Paul, mere human means and expedients are not enough, and we should consider ourselves wanting in our Apostolic ministry if we did not point out to mankind those wonderful mysteries of light that alone contain the hidden strength to subjugate the unchained powers of darkness.

"When our Lord, coming down from the splendors of Tabor, had healed the boy tormented by the devil, whom the apostles had been unable to cure, to their humble

question: 'Why could not we cast him out?' He made reply: 'This kind is not cast out but by prayer and penance.' It appears to Us, Venerable Brethren, that these divine words find a peculiar application in the evils of our times, that can be averted only by means of prayer and penance."

Prayer and penance are, in the mind of the Holy Father, the most efficacious means to subjugate those fierce demons that have been unchained in our own days. Be it noted, prayer and penance sum up the whole life of the contemplative. But more of this later.

Christ's Recommendation

On the point of beginning His third year of preaching, our Lord, accompanied by His apostles, went into the villages, towns, and cities of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and infirmity. The work was arduous, fatiguing, superhuman. What most filled His Sacred Heart with distress was the moral condition of the people. "Seeing the multitude," says St. Matthew (9:36-38), "He had compassion on them; because they were distressed, and lying like sheep that have no shepherd." What program does He, the Good Shepherd, outline? Strange to say, He does not order His apostles to throw themselves with all possible energy into the work of converting these people. "The harvest is indeed great, but the laborers are few. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest." This recommendation, in the light of the circumstances in which it was uttered, seems passing strange. "Pray, intercede, that the Holy Ghost will raise up zealous workmen, zealous shepherds to do this work." We have indicated for us here the union of the active and of the contemplative life in the work of the Church. Some going out, work in the fields of the Lord and shepherd the straying sheep; others,

whilst remaining in solitude, bring down by prayer God's grace on the formers' labors. Of course, they do not work in opposition to one another; rather, they are working together for one and the same end — the spread of the kingdom of Christ.

True it is, every soul of good will that prays and suffers for the welfare of Holy Mother Church does his or her share towards the upbuilding of this grand work; but for contemplative orders it is their public, official task. Never before, perhaps, have contemplatives been more forcefully reminded of this and of all that the Church expects from them, than by His Holiness Pope Pius XI.

“It is no wonder that ecclesiastical writers of former ages, wishing to explain and extol the power and efficacy of the prayer of these same religious men, should have gone so far as to liken their prayers to those of Moses, quoting a well-known fact, namely, what took place when Josue was engaged in battle with the Amalekites on the plain, and Moses on the top of the hill near by prayed and besought God for the victory of his people. It happened that as long as Moses held his hands raised heavenwards, the Israelites conquered; but if from weariness he lowered them a little, then the Amalekites overcame the Israelites; wherefore Aaron and Hur on either side held up his arms until Josue left the field victorious. This most aptly symbolizes the effect of the prayers of the religious we have spoken of, since these prayers are borne up by the august Sacrifice of the Altar on the one hand, and on the other by works of penance, as by two props typified respectively, in a certain way, by Aaron and Hur; it being the usual, indeed the principal, duty of these recluses, as we have remarked above, to offer themselves as victims and propitiatory sacrifices for their own salvation and that of the world

— a function which they fulfil, as it were, in an official way” (Apostolic Constitution “Umbratilem,” July 8, 1924; A.A.S. vol. XVI).

In the same document the Sovereign Pontiff did not hesitate to say that those who devote themselves with fervor to the contemplative life and “who fulfil the duty of prayer and penance contribute MUCH MORE to the increase of the Church and the welfare of mankind, than those who labor in tilling the Master’s field. Without the formers’ prayers and penances, which bring down showers of divine grace, the latter would reap but scant fruit from their labors.” St. Paul assigns the reason for this. In his First Epistle to the Corinthians he says: “I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase. Therefore, neither he that planteth, nor he that watereth is anything, but God that giveth the increase.” As a matter of fact, the real though hidden agent in every conversion is the grace of God. And that grace is given in answer to earnest prayer.

In the light of this statement of the Sovereign Pontiff, the words of Msgr. Guebriant, Superior of the Foreign Missions of Paris, uttered at the Missionary Congress of Lisieux, September, 1929, will not startle us: “Had I to choose between the entrance of ten thousand new Christians into the Church and the foundation of one Cistercian [Trappist] monastery, I would not hesitate an instant. It is to the monastery that I would give the preference; because the hopes it holds out for the future are exceptionally more fruitful.” Being at the head of a great missionary society, we must believe that he knew what he was talking about and had weighed well his words before uttering them.

In the preceding pages it has been said more than once that the contemplative furthers the work of the Church by a life of prayer and of penance. It is time that we

say a few words on these, and show how they come to be such powerful weapons.

Power of Prayer

The Trappist's prayer is of two kinds: (1) personal, or private, and (2) liturgical, or public. In the order of importance and of efficacy, undoubtedly the first place belongs to the liturgical prayer, or the divine office.

The Divine Office

To judge correctly of the absolute value of anything or of any work, we must do so from God's point of view. Things are worth only what they are in God's estimation; nothing more, nothing less. This is the sole infallible criterion of judgment; aside from this we expose ourselves to error. To see things, then, as God sees them is to see them with the eyes of faith. Faith reveals to us God's thoughts and allows us to penetrate into His designs. Of the many things faith has revealed to us, there stands out one great truth that we must never lose sight of, namely, that God has made all things for His own glory. "The Lord hath made all things for Himself." This being so, it follows as a rigorous consequence that things are of value only in the measure in which they procure the glory of God.

Now, the divine office procures the glory of God directly. By its very nature and the elements of which it is composed, it relates directly to God. The divine office, together with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which is indeed the center of the sacred liturgy, forms a complete expression of religion. Of course, the divine office contains prayers to obtain God's blessing on ourselves, but the sentiment that overtops every other sentiment is that of praise. Therefore, the direct object of the divine office is to praise and exalt God's perfections, to delight in them and to thank Him for them.

To get anything like a worthy idea of what the praise of God really means, we must by faith lift ourselves up to the very heights of the Adorable Trinity; there we shall find the fountainhead of all praise. The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity is, according to St. Paul, "the brightness of His [the Father's] glory and the figure of His substance." The Word, the Son, is essentially the glory of the Father. From all eternity He is the Word by which the Father says to Himself all that He is; the Word is the living expression of all the Father's perfections. In contemplating Him the Father sees the perfect, substantial, and living image of Himself. This is the essential glory of the Father. Had there been no creation, the Father would nevertheless have His essential and infinite glory. By the very fact of being what He is, the Eternal Word is like a divine canticle, a living canticle, singing the praise of the Father, expressing the fulness of His perfections. The Father has no need of any other glory.

But "the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us," never ceasing to be what He was, the eternal Word; consequently He remains ever and always the infinite glorification of the Father. However, having united a human to a divine nature in the unity of His Person, this Sacred Humanity through the Word participates in the work of glorification. "I seek not my own glory," said our Lord, "but the glory of Him who sent me." All His activity tended to procure the Father's glory. When Christ prayed, recited the psalms, or spent the night in the prayer of God, these were the human accents of a God. Thus the same canticle of praise which the Word chanted from all eternity in the sanctuary of the Godhead, was prolonged on earth when the Word became man. Henceforth the humanity of Christ will forever sing to the glory of the Father a canticle of human expression, indeed, but of illimitable value,

and consequently alone worthy of God. This glorification of the Father, which He also furthered by His every act and suffering, was Christ's essential work on this earth. For Him, nothing came before the glorification of the Father. When at the Last Supper He said: "I have glorified Thee on earth," He summed up His lifework.

The Church Continues the Work of Christ

In ascending to heaven, Christ bequeathed His riches and His mission to His Church. By uniting Himself to her, He gave her His power of adoring and praising the Father. This is the liturgy. It is the praise of the Church united to Jesus, supported by Jesus; or rather, it is the praise of Jesus passing through the lips of the Church. The priest, when he sings the Preface at Mass, asks that as the nine choirs of angels offer their praise to God through Christ, the Head of Creation, so our suppliant confession may also ascend to the throne of God THROUGH HIM. On the other hand, the Church, in offering her praise to the Triune God, associates all her children with herself; for she offers it in the name of all. Being a society — and the most perfect of societies because she is modeled on the Church Triumphant — she owes to God a public homage, a public tribute of praise and supplication. But it is impossible for all the members of the Church to take an equal share in the accomplishment of this duty; as a matter of fact, the greater number are incapable of acquitting themselves of it. Hence she is constrained to put this obligation on certain chosen and devoted members, whom she makes her representatives before God, whom she commissions to praise Him in her name, and to beg His help in all her needs. The Church deposes these to act before the throne of God as her ambassadors.

Dual Personality

Though he who recites the office may be alone and isolated, it is as a public person, as a minister of the Church, as the representative of the faith, that he offers this office to God. True, his lips pronounce the words, it is his soul that conceives the thoughts and affections that are expressed by those words; nevertheless his prayers, thoughts, affections, and words have been dictated and prescribed for him by the Church in such wise that, if he pray, give thanks or beg for grace, it is in the name of the Church that he does all this. Therefore we must say that it is the Church who asks, gives thanks, and prays by her accredited organ. Thus the divine office when recited by the sacred ministers of the Church is not a purely personal, individual act. Rather it is a common prayer, the principal author of which is the Church; a prayer in the fruits of which all her children share. As a consequence of this, he who recites the office in the name of the Church, by that very fact puts himself in relation to all the members of the Church and to God Himself. Like an ambassador at a foreign court, he enjoys a dual personality. In his private life the ambassador is an ordinary individual. But when clad in his robes of state he speaks and acts in the name of his sovereign, he at once becomes the representative and, in a certain sense, the very person of his master. So it is with the ministers of the Church. In their ordinary avocations, they are private individuals. But when they recite the divine office, offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, or administer a sacrament, they at once put on an official character; they are the organs and ministers of Holy Mother Church. For this reason, the divine office is always pleasing to God.

If the divine office, looked at from this angle, takes on such a character of grandeur and sublimity, how great and sublime does it

become when we consider the multitude, the sanctity, the fervor of all those who are engaged in reciting or chanting it! What a magnificent concert it is as discharged by the Church! Hundreds of thousands of holy priests and religious, bishops and archbishops, cardinals, and the Pope himself, are all united, are all using the same psalms and canticles. There is not a minute of the day or night in which, from one point of the globe to the other, the incense of prayer and praise does not rise to the throne of the Most High. The world is one vast temple in which voices without number never tire of repeating the same accents of adoration, thanksgiving, and supplication.

Now, it is a general law, a fundamental principle of revelation, that everyone is bound to ask God for His help, and to ask Him in proportion to his individual needs. God is willing, most willing indeed, to grant us everything that is necessary for our salvation; He has even bound Himself by a solemn promise to do so. But as a general rule, He waits for us to ask for those graces; ordinarily He measures His gifts according to the duration and fervor of our petitions. St. James (4:2) says: "You have not, because you ask not. You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss." All our trouble is due to the fact that we do not know how to pray.

The Church herself is bound by this law of prayer just as well as her children; hence she obliges her ministers to pray without ceasing. Not that she undervalues the prayers of the simple faithful; on the contrary, she prizes them and begs for them. They are often, as she is well aware, very fervent — like everything that is personal and spontaneous; but she also realizes that they are rare and altogether out of proportion to her needs. Above all she knows that, depending on variable inspirations and uncertain cooperation, they do not unite the special conditions that characterize the prayer of her ministers and

impart to their intercession a sovereign efficacy.

Divine Office and the Contemplatives

For the contemplative the divine office is one of his principal duties. And in order that nothing may distract him from the solemn choir service, the Church frees him from every exterior occupation. He has no parish activity to engross his attention, no missionary project to take him away from worshipping God with voice and body; consequently he can give himself without reserve to this great work, this great apostolate — the apostolate of prayer.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the power of prayer, especially of fervent prayer said in choir. Our Lord said very emphatically: "If two of you shall consent upon earth, concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by my Father who is in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:19). From these words we see that to have Christ join Himself to our prayers and to add His infallible efficacy to them, it is sufficient that two or three be gathered together in His name. If this is so — and no one can doubt it for a moment — is it possible that He will fail to listen to a full choir of ardent souls who pour out the sentiments of their hearts in unison of voice and soul in the grand Gregorian Chant, and beg His mercies for a sin-laden world? St. James, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, assures us that "the continual prayer of a just man availeth much" (5:16). If earnestness and perseverance can give to the prayer of a single soul such power that it offers a certain violence to God Himself, what irresistible power, then, is possessed by the united prayer of a company of souls who have consecrated themselves to Him!

Trappist's Life a Liturgical Life

The Trappist rises on ordinary days at 2:00 A.M. (on Sundays and minor feast days at 1:30, on major feast days at 1:00 A.M.) to begin his day of liturgical prayer, or the divine office. From then until he retires (in summer at 8:00, in winter at 7:00 P.M.) the disposition of his day is regulated by the canonical hours, each of which is sung at the traditional time. For him the divine office is his first and principal work, to which everything must be subordinated, not only in principle but also in fact. Each office is announced by a "first bell," which reminds the religious to prepare his heart for the work of God, to which he is about to return. Thus the whole day is one of continuous prayer. The periods between the different canonical hours are, as it were, intervals of preparation for the work of God: either direct preparation — holy reading, private reading — or indirect preparation — manual labor, which maintains the equilibrium of life and tranquillizes the mind, thus rendering it more capable of applying itself afresh to divine things. All is organized in view of the liturgy.

Most assuredly, the liturgical year is not peculiar to monastic orders, still less to Trappists; all Christians are called upon to participate in it according to their opportunities. But to do so to the full requires, as those who attempt it seriously soon learn, an application of mind that is difficult in the world. In a Trappist monastery there is nothing to hinder this application. Not only the order of the day, but the days of the weeks and the seasons of the year are regulated by the liturgy; in fact, the entire life takes its color from the liturgy.

The Liturgical Year

The liturgy, as a matter of fact, is the re-enactment of the life of Christ; it is the representation (making present again) of the

work of redemption. By means of the liturgical cycle Christ re-lives His different mysteries. It is to be borne in mind that the annual celebration of these mysteries is not a mere memorial of the past. Christ lives in His Church forever, and as Head of the Church possesses the power of renewing, continuing, and extending His mysteries throughout the whole of His Mystical Body. Every truth of Christ, every miracle, every event of His life that is celebrated in the liturgy, is a manifestation of the living Christ. The Church lives over again the mysteries of her Spouse in the course of the liturgical year, and we as members of the Church have our share in them. For, as the Roman Catechism says, these mysteries of the life of Jesus have not only the purpose of presenting to us an example for imitation, or a truth to be believed, but have also the power of producing in our hearts effects analogous to those mysteries themselves; in other words, they have the power of producing in us the living image of Jesus. What happened in the past is ever recurring.

Thus the mysteries of Christ's life are unfolded before us in orderly succession. Advent is ever impregnated with a sweet and mysterious expectancy. Christmas charms with the incomparable joy of the birth of the Divine Infant. The Epiphany awakens in us the spirit of reverent homage to our King and the spirit of zeal to spread His kingdom. So with each succeeding season; it has its own spirit and for those who prepare themselves properly its own peculiar grace.

Then come the feasts of our Blessed Mother and the saints. Like the feasts of our Lord, they, too, have a lesson and a grace proper to themselves. They portray Mary and the saints with each recurring feast as more imitable, more fraternal, more inclined to help us. Thus it is that the liturgical cycle

never grows stale; it possesses a wonderful power of renewal.

When, therefore, we speak of a monk coming to the help of Holy Mother Church by a life of prayer and penance, we mean that he renders this assistance first and foremost by his liturgical prayer. It is by this, the prayer of the Church, which he offers in the name of the Church and as the ambassador of the Church, that he exercises his apostolate. He stands between God and his fellowmen to pour into the ear of God, on the one hand, all the interests of the human race; on the other hand, he returns to his fellowmen with graces from their Maker. Unknown to them, he pleads their cause day after day at the throne of God's mercy; for he is well aware that, though the miseries of the human race are as vast as the ocean, the mercies of God are far vaster. It is his vocation to be the canal that carries the graces of the Creator to His fallen creatures.

Private Prayer

Besides the liturgical prayer, which is the Trappist's principal means of aiding Holy Mother Church, he also has his own private, individual, personal prayer. However, with regard to this, an outsider's calculations must meet with sad disappointment. The Trappist, according to his horarium, devotes a surprisingly short time to the exercise of formal mental prayer; one half-hour in the morning and one quarter of an hour in the afternoon, three quarters of an hour the entire day! Whereas one hour or two hours are often prescribed in orders and congregations that are not contemplative by any means. This seems strange for a contemplative order.

Be this as it may, the Rule of St. Benedict, the one that the Trappists follow, mentions two kinds of prayer: the divine office, "Opus Dei," and private prayer. To the divine office St. Benedict devotes, roughly speaking, twelve

chapters of his Rule; twelve chapters in which he foresees and provides for every detail connected therewith. In sharp contrast with this are the meager references he makes to private prayer. In addition to Chapter XX, he has some allusions to it in the Prologue and in the Instruments of Good Works. But there is no precise time allotted to it; there is no suggestion of anything like a method of mental prayer. Does all this argue a lack of esteem for mental prayer on the part of St. Benedict? By no means. According to him, mental prayer is not a separate exercise of the day, but the habitual element in which the monk should live; it is the spiritual atmosphere that he should breathe; it should permeate his entire life; it is as indispensable to his spiritual life as air is to his physical life. Without it the "Opus Dei" cannot be discharged as it should, for our minds must be in accord with our voices. The basic disposition of such a life of prayer is what our Saint frequently speaks of as the holy fear of God, a description of which he gives in the First Degree of Humility. Fear of God, in the mind of St. Benedict, means walking habitually in the presence of God, never losing sight of Him, always conversing with Him.

The short periods which the rule prescribes for mental prayer in common, therefore, indicate only a minimum, which the average Trappist greatly exceeds in actual practice. One has to meet the monks only casually to verify this. The very fact that he wears his choir dress (the cowl is a surplice) at all times, apart from work periods, is a reminder to the Trappist that he should "pray without ceasing."

Personal Love of Jesus Christ

Another characteristic of the Rule — if indeed it be another and not rather an application and development of the habitual thought of God — is a deep love for the di-

vine Person of Jesus Christ. Even a cursory glance through the Rule of St. Benedict will show the outstanding place Christ holds in the teaching of our Saint. It has been said, and said correctly, that the Rule "Christifies" the soul that allows itself to be moulded by it; this is the same as saying that the Rule is Christo-centric. Whether it recommends the practice of virtue or outlines conduct in relation to various persons, it ever keeps before the monk's mind the Person of Jesus Christ. Obedience prompt and without hesitation will be practiced only by those who prefer nothing to Christ; it is He whom we obey in our superiors. As regards persons — abbot, brethren, guests, poor, even enemies — the monk is to see Christ in them all. Before concluding the Rule St. Benedict gives one last recommendation, which expresses his spirit — to prefer nothing to Christ.

Evidently, to live up to this program the monk must have a lively, vigorous faith. For many within the Church, to say nothing of those outside her pale, Christ is indeed the Son of God and the Savior of the world. But this faith is a seedless fruit, a sleeping, lifeless soul; it contains no vitalizing energy in it. On the contrary, to the monk who possesses the faith that St. Benedict wishes him to have, Jesus Christ is the one big reality of life; a reality in which his heart rests; a reality in which his energies, powers, talents, and whatever else he may have in his make-up find their focal point. For him Christ must inevitably become a living Person; a Person who still saves, and sanctifies, and vivifies him. Thus is effected in him the progressive assimilation of Christ's principles and virtues. Gradually he comes to see, think, act, and suffer as Christ. A life separated from the noise of the world, a life of perpetual silence filled with holy reading and daily exhortation — all this little by little moulds a soul into a man of prayer; into a man for whom Christ is all.

Reciprocally, if Christ is everything to him, he in turn becomes everything to Christ; for God cannot be outdone in generosity. St. Paul assures us that those whom He foreknew He predestined to be made conformable to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). Resemblance to Christ is the result of the contemplative life as outlined by St. Benedict; it enables the monk to realize to a greater or less extent St. Paul's "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Precisely because of this — this indwelling of Christ in him — the contemplative's prayer has such power over the heart of God and contributes so mightily to the welfare of the Church.

Love for the Blessed Virgin

Wherever there is real, personal love for Jesus Christ, there normally, one might almost say, necessarily, will be found also deep love for His Virgin Mother; love for Christ and love for Mary go hand in hand. Hence one is prepared to find devotion to Mary in high honor among the Trappists. Besides the divine office which they, like other monks, discharge every day in choir, the Trappists in addition recite every day in choir the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, whose special servants they proclaim themselves to be. This Little Office is recited to implore her intercession for the conversion of sinners, the salvation of souls throughout the world, and the expansion of the Church Militant. All Trappist monasteries are dedicated to the Mother of God. The first office that they say in the morning is the Blessed Virgin's, and their last prayer in the evening is the solemn chanting of the "Salve Regina." Indeed, they tender her, with due proportion of course, almost as many marks of honor as they do to her Divine Son. She is their principal patron, the patronal feast being the Feast of the Assumption, August 15.

Penance

The second means the contemplative uses to help the Church and his neighbor is penance. Penance is a supernatural virtue, allied to justice, which inclines the sinner to detest his sin as an offense against God, induces him to avoid it for the future, and also to offer satisfaction for it. Evidently, penance strictly considered concerns the one who sins. He hates sin as an offense against God and tries to undo it to the best of his ability. Furthermore, he makes satisfaction for it, thus endeavoring to return God the glory of which he robbed Him by his sin. Every mortal sin is a grievous offense against God and brings upon the sinner untold spiritual consequences. By the commission of mortal sin the sinner turns away from God — that God who made him, redeemed him, and gave him everything he has in time or — were he faithful — might hope for in eternity; by sin he turns to a creature, and thereby brings upon himself the wrath of his Maker, whom he expels from his soul. In addition, he forfeits sanctifying grace, all the infused virtues that go along with it — except faith and hope; loses, until penitent, his merits, and becomes amenable to hell. If he die in that state, he will be buried therein for all eternity. Unless God come to the rescue of the soul, it is lost. That He may look down with eyes of mercy upon it, the contemplative leads his life of penance. When penance is performed for others, it is commonly called reparation.

Reparation Incumbent on All

According to the teaching of Pope Pius XI, in his Encyclical "Our most Merciful Redeemer," of May 8, 1928, all of us are obliged to offer God this tribute of reparation; we are obliged by the double duty of justice and of love. Since the Holy Father explicitly states that this duty is incumbent on the entire hu-

man race, it follows that penance, or reparation, is not reserved only for contemplatives.

Incidentally, we may be permitted to remark — and the remark is not altogether out of place — that most people have a very erroneous idea of Trappists. People commonly imagine that the Trappist is one who, while in the world, broke all the Commandments of God and was an out-and-out sinner. This is not the truth. Of course, not all Trappists were so innocent as St. Aloysius or St. Therese of Lisieux (alas, how few such there are in these days!), nevertheless the rank and file are recruited from the average good Catholics of the world. Not infrequently, exceptionally innocent souls are to be found among them, who left the world precisely to get away from its corruption. They did this in order to be able to live for God alone. Now to come back to our subject:

In making satisfaction for sin the contemplative does not forget that he himself has offended God, nor does he overlook the rigid obligation of offering satisfaction for his sins; certainly not. But his penance is not exclusively, not even mainly, personal; rather it is social, vicarious. He does penance for a world that flouts all restraint and makes a fetish of self-expression — a new name for a rather ancient article, self-gratification.

The spirit of reparation is very prominent in the Church today, and it is to be hoped that it will become more widespread as time goes on. Individuals in goodly numbers make it a point of their life to offer reparation to God for the countless sins that are committed against Him. On the other hand, many religious congregations have reparation as the very soul of their institute. The misery and distress, moreover, that grip the world today are, if viewed in the right light, evidences that God Himself is at work to bring men to a sense of their wrong-doing and to do penance for their sins. Hence, no one will be

surprised to learn that reparation holds an outstanding place in the life of the contemplative. His very name, "monachus," one who mourns in solitude, implies that much. Reparation seems to many to be the principal end of contemplative orders. Msgr. Sheen, for example, speaking of reparation, says:

"Such is the reason for the communities in the Church, such as the Carmelites and Poor Clares, the Trappists and the Carthusians, and many others whose supreme business in life is to repair the harm done by others, and to bring succor to those who cannot help themselves. The world is full of those who sin and atone not; who offend God and never repent; who have their sins forgiven, but who never do penance. These poor, burnt, anemic, wounded members of the Mystical Body of Christ may yet be saved by those who, out of their superfluities, expend spiritual wealth for the salvation of souls. . . .

"In these days when the world regards sin as a lesser evil than a headache, the value of reparation in the Mystical Body is apt to be overlooked. It needs to be repeated that reparation exists because there is sin. In every sin there is a double element: the joy of a forbidden fruit and the act of disobedience against God. . . . It is not enough to be sorry for our sins. Sin involves a debt, and the debt must be paid. It is not sufficient for a man who has run into great debt to say to his creditors: 'I am very sorry I have contracted such debts. I will not run up any more in the future.' He must pay the debts in addition to being contrite. So likewise with sin. It is not enough to tell God we are sorry for our sins; we must pay the debts we have contracted by them."

The contemplative's life work is to make good the debts which others have contracted, to offer God the atonement that He fails to re-

ceive from so many sinners. In doing so he shows at one and the same time true love for God and genuine love for his neighbor.

But one may ask: "How can I pay the debt of another man, debts that I have not contracted?" To this we may answer that, owing to His infinite mercy and to the Communion of Saints, God willingly accepts vicarious atonement for the sins of others. Just as our Lord by His passion and death atoned for the sins of the whole world — He did not suffer for Himself, He had no sins to suffer for — so we may pay the debts others owe to God's justice. It is of faith that we may aid the souls in purgatory by offering satisfaction for their sins. Under certain conditions we may do the same for the living. Among men payment of a debt by a friend of the debtor is sometimes accepted.

Teaching of Pius XI on Reparation

In order to steady ourselves and not run into exaggeration in the matter before us, we shall recall the teaching of Pope Pius XI in the afore-mentioned encyclical on reparation. Stating the fundamental truth that any and all reparatory value which our good works may have depends entirely on the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, and that He wills that His Sacrifice should be renewed without intermission on our altars, the Holy Father goes on to say that to this Eucharistic Sacrifice must be joined the immolation of both the ministers and the faithful, so that they may offer themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing unto God. To such an extent is this true that St. Cyprian did not hesitate to affirm that the Sacrifice of the Lord could not be celebrated in a legitimate manner unless the oblation and sacrifice of ourselves correspond to the Passion. Hence St. Paul tells us that we must always carry about with us the mortification of Christ; that we ought to crucify our flesh with its vices and concupiscences

(Gal. 5:24), fleeing the corruption which is in the world; that we should see to it that the life of Christ is made manifest in our bodies (2 Cor. 4:10), and thus, having become participants in His eternal priesthood, we should offer gifts and sacrifices for sin (Hebr. 5:1).

Affirming the too often forgotten truth that all of us, not only the duly ordained but the layfolk also, share in this mystical priesthood, the Sovereign Pontiff continues to say that we should offer sacrifice for ourselves and for the entire human race. He then proceeds to furnish a criterion whereby we can appraise our acts of reparation. "The more perfectly our self-oblation and our self-sacrifice resemble the Sacrifice of Christ — that is to say, the more we immolate our self-love and our desires, and crucify our flesh with that mystical crucifixion of which the Apostle speaks — the more abundant fruits of propitiation and of expiation for ourselves and for others shall we reap." From all this we can readily understand both the nature and the necessity of reparation.

Without fear of being contradicted, we may safely assert that the life of the contemplative is a literal living of the program outlined in the above words of the Holy Father. The contemplative's life may be truly summed up as a life of reparation; a life of penance that is at one and the same time privative and afflictive. To be sure every religious by his vows and rules must deprive himself of much, indeed of very much. But the stripping of earthly things that the contemplative is called upon to make is more complete. To him are denied most of the comforts, satisfactions or compensations that are permissible, yes, under certain circumstances even necessary, to religious engaged in active work. Down deep at the bottom of this denudation lies the spirit of reparation. The sinner despising and separating himself

by mortal sin from the supreme Good, and not wishing to have any more to do with God's friendship or His grace, turns to creatures for happiness. For this insult to God he deserves to be punished by the privation of all good in time and in eternity. In order to repair the offense that is thus offered to God and at the same time to save the guilty sinner, the contemplative strips himself of superfluous things, and reduces permissible things to the merest minimum possible. In this way he offers God a homage which, by its being united to the Sacrifice of Christ, is a compensation for the sinner's act of disobedience.

The Ax to the Root

If we examine sin more closely, we shall find that it has two principal sources: the mind, productive of pride; the other, what Holy Scripture calls "the flesh," productive of sensuality. As a matter of fact, tracing sin back to its origin, the sin of our first parents, we find there these two characters. "For God doth know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened; and you shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil" (pride). "And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat and fair to the eyes, and delightful (sensuality) to behold; and she took the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband who did eat" (Gen. 3:5 and 6).

Long examination is not necessary to come to the conclusion that the privations and the penances of the contemplative aim at waging a relentless war against these two vices. From morning till night, and from night till morning too, there is always some prescription or other pressing upon him. At one time a prescription will exercise him in humility, then another will pinch the flesh in some way. As a result they, one and all, make a holocaust of him; sooner or later, provided he

puts into his observance the soul that he should, he becomes a whole-burnt offering.

And Why?

The big motive behind it all is love of God and love of one's neighbor. Without this love the contemplative's life would be meaningless. The world today is running madly after pleasure; in its frenzy it rides roughshod over God's law and makes no fuss about the matter either; it never thinks about atoning for its sins. If God is to be placated, somebody else must be world-proxy. This is the contemplative's work. Hidden away from the world, unknown to the world or, perhaps, even despised by it, he tries to give God what He is deprived of by sin. Hence the complete stripping of all those creature-comforts which the modern world has brought itself to believe necessary for its existence; hence the varied afflictive and privative exercises and penances that he takes upon himself. His is a veritable thirst to pay the unredeemed debts of his fellowmen.

Sons of the Soil

Of these penitential prescriptions we shall here single out but two or three for special mention. They are manual labor, the common life, and silence. The reader will bear in mind what was said in the foreword when reference was made to Trappists; for the above exercises will be considered as they are by them practiced. According to the Constitutions of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance (popularly called Trappists), the monks gain their livelihood by the labor of their hands, principally by agriculture or by stock raising. They are to be self-supporting. Being vegetarians, they have to raise the crops needed for their sustenance. Hence they are to be found doing outdoor work in the heat of summer as well as in the cold of winter. As might be surmised, the labor that is involved

in the two above-mentioned pursuits is ordinarily of a humiliating character; in addition, it is at times of a painful nature. And precisely for these reasons it is one of the most important phases of the penitential life led by the Trappist. So important is manual labor in the monk's life that the early Fathers of Citeaux laid it down as one of the foundation stones of their reform. In reality it is the penance that God imposed on man after his fall. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread" (Gen. 3:19). It retains today its penitential sting and enables the contemplative — at the same time that he gives the world a much-needed lesson in industry — to offer God reparation and atonement for the indifference of a sinning world.

Never Alone

The common life, or better the life-in-community, is another exercise of penance. For the Trappist, life-in-community is carried to such a point that it may truly be affirmed no other order in the Church calls for it to the same extent. As it is lived by him, it means to be always in the company of his brethren, to be always together. He has no private room to which he may retire for study or leisure. He works in common, takes his meals in the general dining-hall, chants his office in public choir, passes his intervals (periods when he is free to pray, study, read, or write) in a common "scriptorium," and sleeps — though in partitioned-off, still contiguous, cells — in a common dormitory; he is never alone. Perhaps there is no other order or congregation in the Church in which life-in-community is so complete, so absolute.

Most assuredly this life has advantages of the highest order. For some characters it is ideal. In it they find a support for their weakness, a spur urging them on to lofty aspirations and noble deeds. But, taking human nature as it is, it is next to impossible

to live it without a continuous exercise of penance. For in every community there are differences — and the larger the community the greater the differences — of character, temperaments, talents, propensities, and education; from all these there results a continuous jarring of sensibilities. Moreover, this goes on, not for one or two years, but for a lifetime, with the same brethren, in the same monastery. As a consequence, an unceasing demand is made on one's patience, humility, mortification, charity, and on a score of other virtues, which, taken together, make life-in-community a very sizable item of penance.

The Silent Brotherhood

Trappists are known the world over for their silence; as a matter of fact, they are called the Silent Brotherhood. Not that they never use their tongues, for they use that useful organ in singing the praises of God at the divine office and the High Mass; nor because they are never allowed to speak, for at certain times and places they may speak to the first two superiors. But they are never allowed to indulge in conversation with one another and never have recreation. They have a very limited number of non-alphabetic signs for indispensable communications with one another. The rule of silence, however, is never suspended, not even on the great holidays.

Undoubtedly, silence is one of the most efficacious means of developing a life of union with God; this is the same as saying that silence is a powerful means of sanctification. St. Luke tells us: "The kingdom of God is within you" (17:21). As a matter of fact the soul of the just man is a temple wherein the Holy Trinity resides. Silence befits such a sanctuary. Our tongues, bedewed each morning with the Blood of Christ in Holy Communion, abstain from converse with men in order to converse more intimately with God.

An interior life without some kind of silence is impossible.

St. James truthfully says that the tongue: "...is a world of iniquity...an unquiet evil, which no man can tame" (3: 6, 7, 8). Yet the man who wishes to advance in virtue must at all costs try to tame it; hence the penitential aspect of silence.

If we wish to regulate our words, we must regulate our thoughts; to regulate thoughts, we must regulate and pacify our passions. From this it is clear that silence entails an unremitting vigilance in watching over ourselves and curbing our impulses. For it is most natural to excuse oneself when one is guilty of a fault; it is most natural to air one's ideas about things around us; to murmur when things fall out contrary to our wishes; to indulge from time to time in silly boasting about self and self's doings.

Silence, moreover, decidedly aggravates the burdens of the life-in-community. Frictions are bound to arise, even if all the members of the community be saints; a word could at times ease off the unpleasant situation. Many a misunderstanding might never exist if a word of explanation were forthcoming at the proper time; a word of counsel or remonstrance given with genuine sympathy could go far to soften and allay a troubled mind. Occurrences of this nature happen every day. So when all is said, though silence is indispensable for the contemplative life, it must, nevertheless, be numbered among its salient penances.

Up-to-dateness of Prayer and Penance

Prayer and penance, then, are the weapons that the contemplatives use to further the cause of the Church of God. They are the weapons that were used by them from the very beginning of the Christian Era, and they are just as potent today as they ever

were. Pope Pius XI, pointing out the dangers of Atheistic Communism and indicating the means whereby Christian civilization can be saved from the satanic scourge — and not merely saved but better developed — for the well-being of human society, utters words which show that prayer and penance are still powerful and efficient in overcoming the greatest evil that has thus far beset the human race.

“But ‘unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it.’ And so, as a final and MOST EFFICACIOUS REMEDY, We recommend, Venerable Brethren, that in your dioceses you use the most practical means to foster and intensify the spirit of prayer, joined with Christian penance. When the apostles asked the Savior why they had been unable to drive the evil spirit from a demoniac, our Lord answered: ‘This kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting.’ So, too, the evil which today torments humanity can be conquered only by a worldwide crusade of prayer and penance. We ask especially contemplative orders, men and women, to redouble their prayers and sacrifices to obtain from heaven efficacious aid for the Church in the present struggle. Let them implore also the powerful intercession of the Immaculate Virgin who, having crushed the head of the serpent of old, remains the sure protectress and invincible Help of Christians” (March 19, 1937; Vatican Press translation, N.C.W.C. publications).

The Contemplative Is a Victim

Every contemplative is a victim for the salvation of the world. It was in this spirit that the Little Flower entered Carmel, and it was the spirit that animated her during her short life. It is the spirit, too, that animates every true contemplative. For the one time

that he prays explicitly and exclusively for his own salvation, he prays at least twenty times for the salvation of the world. This, however, not because he is so sure of his own salvation that he need have no concern about it; still less because he believes himself confirmed in grace; but simply because he knows full well what kind of Master he serves. St. Teresa of Avila told her daughters that the reason why she founded the convent of St. Joseph was that they should pray and offer themselves for the salvation of the world.

If asked what it is that gives the contemplative such intercessory power over the heart of God, we should reply that the answer is to be found in the very nature of his vocation. In imitation of Jesus Christ, whose different states he reproduces, the contemplative offers his freedom, his talents, his entire life and person before the majesty of God's claims. Relinquishing all earthly comforts, he abandons himself without reserve to God's good pleasure; God is the goal and the rule of all that he does; he espouses God's interests as his own. Now you cannot outdo God in generosity. He repays this total surrender of self with wonderful graces. With Dom Innocent La Masson, General of the Carthusians in the seventeenth century, we may say that the contemplative is, in the strict sense of the word, a courtier and intimate friend of God. Seated at His feet, like Mary of Bethany, his adoration, worship, and attendance are never interrupted; and his prayer assumes the character of holy intimacy. God on His part, who loves that we should do violence to His mercy, throws open to the contemplative the treasury of His favors.

Conditions of Efficacious Prayer

As a matter of fact, three things make for efficacious prayer and penance: (1) sanctity of life, (2) fervor, and (3) union with our

Lord Jesus Christ. The value of an act depends upon the dignity of the person who performs it and the degree of esteem in which he is held by the one who rewards the act. What constitutes the dignity of the Christian and makes him dear to the heart of God is the degree of sanctifying grace, of divine life, that he possesses. This is why the saints enjoy such great power of intercession. Hence, if we possess a higher degree of sanctifying grace, we are worth more in the eyes of God than one who possesses less; we please Him more and give Him more glory. For this reason our actions are more noble, more agreeable to Him, and are more meritorious.

In the holiest of actions it is possible for us to be careless and remiss, or we may act with vigor and energy, making use of all the actual grace put at our disposal. Evidently there will be a vast difference in the value of our prayers and penances according as we act in one or other of these ways.

Jesus Christ is the source of our merit and the author of our sanctification, the chief meritorious cause of all supernatural good, the Head of the Mystical Body, of which we are members. It is clear that the closer we keep to Him, the more abundant graces we receive, the more pleasing we are to the Father, and the greater will be our influence in behalf of others. Our Lord tells us this Himself: "In that day you shall ask in my name; and I say not to you, that I shall ask the Father for you; for the Father Himself loveth you because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God" (St. John, 16:26 and 27). What makes us pleasing to the eternal Father is the fact that we are members of Christ's Mystical Body; of ourselves we amount to nothing, but united to Jesus, we are irresistible.

By reason of his solitude, his silence, and the habitual occupation of his soul — contemplating God and the eternal truths — the

contemplative is in an ideal environment for realizing the three afore-mentioned conditions of efficacious prayer and penance. Knowledge, for him as for anybody else, begets love. Psychologically, it is impossible to love some one whom we do not know or do not know something about. But the contemplative is always studying God, contemplating Him, conversing with Him, worshiping Him, occupied with Him in one way or another. It stands to reason, then, that he should grow in love of God in proportion as his knowledge of God increases. All this the more so, as Christ came precisely to cast fire, the fire of divine love, on the earth.

Blind Fighting

The contemplative, following the example of St. Paul, "fills up those things which are wanting of the sufferings of Christ in his flesh for His body, which is the Church" (Col. 1:24). His entire life is as much devoted to the welfare of his fellowmen as it is to his own spiritual interests. But he labors under one great difficulty, a difficulty that at times is a source of discouragement to him, occasionally even becoming a real temptation: he seldom, if ever, sees the results of his prayers and penances. A priest in the active ministry may be able to state very accurately the number of his baptisms, First Holy Communions, confirmations, converts, marriages; he can point to the school or the rectory that he has built; he has a list of young men whom he sent to the seminary or to the different brotherhoods, and also of the girls he sent to the convent. All these furnish him real joy and afford him genuine consolation; they are a worthwhile compensation for the sacrifices he has made in the service of God and his fellowman. But the contemplative has not, and from the very nature of the case cannot have, any such consolation. His is a hidden life in itself and in its fruits. God alone knows what he is accomplishing. He has to

live by faith. In the beginning of World War I an English artilleryman, writing of his experiences, stated that for a whole day he had been fighting furiously, yet never once saw a single German soldier; the enemy were two or three miles away. However, the range finders had located the enemy for him; his commanding officer specified the proper elevation and direction to be given the gun; then he was told to "Fire away!" All he had to do was to fire. The results were no concern of his. Yet he was sure all along that he was doing efficient work. So it is with the contemplative. He fights on without being able to see the results of his life of prayer and penances. But he falls back on his faith. He trusts God. He willingly waits until he reaches the other side of the grave. Then there will be no possibility of vanity or pride.

Conclusion

The preceding pages have not been written, needless to say, in an endeavor to belittle those engaged in the active ministry, nor is it intended to disparage the many works of zeal that are being carried on in this country. It is quite evident that these works are necessary for the salvation of those in the Church as well as for the conversion of those outside her pale. By all means let priests, religious, and laymen join hands in extending the kingdom of Christ. There is place for everybody and work for every talent. Good can be done and is being done in shop, office, club, school, college, and university. Nor can anybody deny that this work is brilliant or that the lives of those engaged in it are generally an example of self-sacrifice, at times, even of heroism. The first to applaud this is the contemplative himself. The sight of it is an incentive to him to redouble his prayers and penances in order to bring down God's blessing on the work and the workers.

At the same time, however, we are confronted with two hard-as-brass facts, which it would be futile to deny. On the one hand, an immense amount of effort has been expended in every imaginable way to bring our separated brethren into the Church and to lead erring members of the Church to better sentiments. To be sure, many conversions have been made, and this is something very great. But — to say nothing of a leakage that is ever on the increase and threatens to exceed the number of conversions — has any real solid impression been made on the nation at large? Men of ability and zeal, like David Goldstein and his fellow crusaders, bring the teaching of the Church to the man in the street; learned and eloquent lecturers, like Msgr. Sheen, convey the message of salvation over the air to millions; an ably-edited Catholic press spreads the truth over the United States, yet our country has not been converted; and this notwithstanding the fact that there are thousands, hundreds of thousands, of men and women who are hungry for the truth and would give their heart's blood for it if they only knew where it is to be found. This is the second fact — meager visible returns for all the labor expended. What is the cause?

Of course, no one may pretend to know all the ways of God's providence in regard to His Church. Without doubt this sterility is due to a coalition of various causes. Yet for all that, judging from the history of the Church, it seems certain that the volume and quality of prayer and penance demanded for such a gigantic result is not forthcoming. During World War I it was computed that for every soldier in the trenches two helpers were needed behind the lines to keep him going. These helpers had to prepare ammunition, foodstuffs, and the thousand and one other things that were necessary for the men in the trenches and had to bring these things up to them; there was, in addition, a large

army of doctors, nurses, Red Cross aids, etc., etc. Without all these the fighting men might have stayed at home; they could not have won the war. Something like this takes place in the battles the Church wages with the powers of evil. She has her active soldiers, who go right into the thick of the fight and engage the enemy in a hand-to-hand encounter. But behind this battle front another army of helpers is indispensable.

Though the Church in the United States suffers in some places from a lack of active workers, the real trouble is not in that quarter; her great handicap is insufficiency of those who pray and do penance for others. Contemplatives, sharing as they do more closely than others in the expiatory sacrifice of the Son of God, because they perpetuate in themselves the sufferings and Passion of Christ, have the duty and privilege of assisting the Church in this all-important need. For it was by the Cross that Christ saved the world; and it is by the same means that the fruits of the Cross are to be applied to the souls of men. Hence He willed that the Sacrifice of the Mass, the unbloody Sacrifice of Calvary, should be offered daily on our altars. He also wills that His Mystical Body should likewise perpetuate His sufferings in themselves day by day. Contemplative orders, devoted as they are to prayer and penance, are official victims, filling up in their flesh those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ. Of course, nothing was wanting to the sufferings of Christ; one drop of His Precious Blood was sufficient to redeem a thousand worlds worse than our own. What is wanting, or to put it in another way, the condition on which He willed that the application of the fruits of His Passion should hinge, has to be realized. That condition is that His ministers and the faithful labor and suffer, in union with Him, for the sake of their fellowmen. When these labors and sufferings are in sufficient volume and intensity, the fruits

of salvation and of sanctity will be abundant and far-flung; when they are meager or insufficient, the fruits will register a corresponding falling off.

We may therefore conclude that the more contemplatives we have, and the more fervent these contemplatives are in living their lives of prayer and penance, the greater hope we may entertain of winning our way into the souls of our fellow countrymen and thus spreading the kingdom of Christ. Furthermore, we must conclude that generous souls who think of giving themselves to God in contemplative orders should not be dissuaded from putting their project into effect, on the ground that they are entombing themselves in a useless egotistic life far removed from one's fellows and incapable of doing them any good. The reader has been able to judge for himself that this accusation is unjustifiable; as a matter of fact, the contrary, is the case. Contemplatives are not indifferent or unconcerned in regard to souls in the world; rather they are much concerned about them. Contemplatives of ancient and of modern times have always been concerned for the Church and souls. Witness the Little Flower. She entered Carmel at the age of fifteen in order, as she said, to save souls and above all to pray for priests. In her zeal she wished to be a missionary, to go over the whole world in order to win souls for her Divine Master; to be a missionary not only for a few years, but she would have liked to be one from the creation of the world, and to continue the role till the end of time. St. Bernard is an instance of an ancient contemplative who burned with zeal for the welfare of the Church and the salvation of souls. He left the world and its riches in order to live alone with God in the contemplative life. Obedience, however, drew him out of his solitude. A role of the most varied activity was forced upon him. He traveled up and down Europe healing the schism, preaching the Second

Crusade, pointing out and refuting heresy, counseling popes and kings; yet retaining his interior solitude in everything that he did. Whenever the interests of the Church would allow him, he was back at his monastery to commune with his Lord. Contemplatives of today live up to the same ideal. Their concern is not a mere wish or empty desire; they take means to give effect to their desires; means that have been pronounced by the Watchman of the Vatican the most efficacious for repelling the greatest danger that has thus far threatened both Church and state alike — Atheistic Communism; means that will bring down God's blessing in abundance on those working in the active ministry and on the ministry itself.

God Alone

However, let no mistake be made. The apostolic and social side of contemplative orders is not their supreme justification. Great as it undoubtedly is, we must be on our guard against pushing it too far. It is not their exclusive nor their principal end. Countless religious institutes are at work in the Church for apostolic work in all its aspects and for the alleviation of every form of human misery. But the contemplative orders' primary and essential end is God Himself. Necessarily and normally connected with this is zeal for souls. Still this claims only the second place. For Cistercians, their first work, to which nothing is to be preferred, is the "Work of God," the liturgy. But the liturgy, as Guardini tells us, does not exist for the sake of humanity, but for the sake of God. God-ward, then, does the contemplative's activity ever tend; his neighbor comes only in the second place. Keeping this in mind, no one will find fault with the words of a great Benedictine monk, the late Bishop Hedley: "Perhaps the less a monk thinks about converting the world, and the more he thinks about converting himself, the more likely will it be that the world will be converted."

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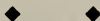
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