

EXTRACTS

THE DIVORCE BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND MYSTICISM, which has been often lamented in our own day by such outstanding writers as Dom Stolz, is traced to its origins in a most important article by Dom Fr Vandenbroucke (*Nouvelle Revue Theologique*: April). The article reveals an historian of spirituality hitherto unknown in this country who has a powerful grasp of his subject and a flair for synthesis. He begins by sketching the modern problem of holiness, pious, devout and irrational, which has little connection with the massive tomes of theology which are content to treat of a 'normal' christianity into which sanctity scarcely enters. He then returns to the Fathers to show briefly how theology burst forth from their holiness. Then came the flowering of theology followed rapidly by the German mystical school headed by Eckhart, who was keen to restore the balance, naturally rather disturbed by such advances among the schoolmen. But eventually, despite the deep learning of Thomas à Kempis and others, the two great sources of the life of the Church—theology and mysticism—had become suspicious of one another and their quarrels grew almost permanent.

Where should we locate the origin of this separation? I believe it to have been at the end of the fourteenth century with its speculative mysticism on the one hand and the *Devotio moderna* on the other—that seems to have been the time.

It is to be hoped that this illuminating article will be translated into English.

THOMAS MERTON continues to write vigorously for the people on the things of the spirit. In *Commonweal* for 31st March his theme is the power and joy of true christian asceticism. A few quotations may be of value here:

When the great Carmelite (St John of the Cross) says: 'In order to arrive at having pleasure in everything, desire to have pleasure in nothing', he is teaching us the quickest way to happiness. The second half of his sentence is so bluntly stated that it may perhaps shock us into forgetting the first. But it is nevertheless true that the passions and desires of fallen human nature, because of their tendency to blind and weaken and exhaust the soul, constantly prevent us from fulfilling our highest capacities and therefore frustrate the need for happiness which is implanted in us all. . . . (The Cross) is the trellis upon which grows the Mystical Vine whose life is infinite joy and whose branches we are. If we want to share the life of that Vine we must grow on the same trellis. . . . In a world in which there is so much involuntary suffering it is not strange that there should be many men and women who begin to discover in themselves a totally un-

familiar desire to take upon themselves unfamiliar penances and mortifications. . . . But the more the Holy Spirit draws these souls to God the more they realise that sanctity is not just a matter of 'ascetic practices'. The end is the total gift of ourselves to God in an interior abnegation that penetrates to the very depth and substance of the soul, a holocaust that leaves nothing that our pride can still contemplate with satisfaction.

THE MIXED LIFE is a convenient title but it enshrines a very confused idea, which can only be clarified by dropping the term. A writer in *Sponsa Regis* (April), after quoting at length St Thomas and Fr Walter Farrell's comments on St Thomas, still believes that Most religious live what we have called the 'mixed' life which is a mixture of contemplation and external activity. Generally there is a nice balance between the two, though the one or the other may predominate somewhat. Among such are the Premonstratensians, Carmelites, Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits. . . . Perhaps some of these Orders would reject the compliment, but they are tempted to approve when the writer goes on:

The mixed life is more perfect than the other two, because (a) it is more in conformity with the life of the Apostles, (b) and with the life of Jesus Christ himself, and (c) because it is better to contemplate and give the fruits of one's contemplation to others than to devote oneself solely to contemplation.

All this shows how confusing the term 'mixed life' can be—the final sentence implies that the mixed life is an extended contemplation, a special form of the contemplative life, whereas the first quotation evidently regards contemplation as time spent in choir or at least in cloister doing something directly for God, and action as time spent in service of one's neighbour outside the cloister. No wonder the author concludes: 'my head is spinning too'! Until people have a clear idea of contemplation and the contemplative life they should not use the term 'mixed life', nor should they write about it.

MY DAILY OFFICE is a six-page folder containing brief reflections on the psalms of the Little Office of Our Lady. (Assisi Office, St Francis, Broad Lane, Cork; 1s.6d. a dozen). The meditations fulfil the function originally supplied by the antiphon at the end of each psalm; the chief point of the theme is isolated and emphasised in order to draw all the verses together into a unity.

THE CLERGY HELPS, the young men who are trained and professed for the self-less task of assisting the parochial clergy of France, seem to be finding their feet. Their numbers are very few, but they are now confident that theirs is a special vocation and that God's providence will thus fill the gap which is felt by so many hard-

pressed parish priests (*Les Auxiliaires du Clergé*, of Picquigny, Somme).

REVUE DES COMMUNAUTÉS RELIGIEUSES for March-April is entirely occupied by the text of the Questionnaire for religious of diocesan congregations or societies; since 1947 the answering of this questionnaire has been obligatory every five years; the answers have to be sent to the Holy See.



BOOKS RECEIVED

- Burns, Oates and Washbourne.* Ann M. C. Forster: the Good Duchess, 8s.6d.
Clonmore and Reynolds. Earl of Wicklow (Trans.): More About Dom Marmion, 7s.6d.
Desclee de Brouwer. Eugene Masure: Le Sacrifice du Corps Mystique, 65 frs.
Herder (Freiburg). Novum Testamentum (Græce et Latine) (edited by H. J. Vogels), 7 DM.; Peter Lippert, S.J.,: Credo, 12.80 DM.; F. M. Moschner: Unsere Liebe Frau, 7.80 DM.
Michael Joseph. Gerald Bullett: The English Mystics, 12s.6d.
S.P.C.K. T. Thompson (Trans.): St Ambrose on the Sacraments and on the Mysteries, 10s.6d.
Editions Universelle. J. Creusen, S.J.: Religieux et Religieuses, n.p.

LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

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