

POINT OF VIEW

'THE IMITATION' DRAWS A CONVERT

It is perhaps presumptuous to feel urged to defend *The Imitation of Christ*, the most widely read devotional book, next to the Bible, in Christian history; and one which has continued to meet people's needs through the last five hundred years. However, there has been a tendency lately to criticize *The Imitation* for what it does not contain; it is not liturgically orientated, or theologically reasoned; it does not stress the social message of the Gospel. But it does have so much truth to offer about the individual Christian's relationship to Christ that it should not be overlooked by today's enthusiasts for liturgical worship and the lay apostolate. The present writer's contention is that *The Imitation draws* a person towards the fullness of the Church.

For several years before coming to the Church *The Imitation* was part of my daily reading—all of it except Book IV on the Sacrament of the Altar. With a Presbyterian background I was too prejudiced about sacraments to look into that. Eventually I did read it and this book became the one which I cared for most. It drew me toward the Sacrament of Communion until a great longing grew up in me—a longing for a living experience quite other than any known by me before. Reverence for Communion in a Protestant Church I had had, and inspiration from it, but I thought of it as a link with a historical Christ of the past rather than an immediate union with the risen Christ, the Eternal Son, and a sharing in his life. Unconsciously I yearned for this. *The Imitation* nourished my mind in preparation.

It was the sixteenth-century Whitford translation, edited by E. J. Klein (Harper and Bros.) that claimed my attention. In England in Whitford's time receiving Communion was called 'being houselled', that is taking the Lord into our house. *Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum*—'Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof'—these are the words of the Mass which immediately precede Communion.

Jesus said: 'For whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, he shall dwell in me and I in him.'

The author of *The Imitation* writes, as if addressing Christ, 'Thou wilt give me this heavenly meat and this angel's food which is plainly none other but thyself, that art the living bread that descendest from heaven and givest life to the world. It is a marvellous thing, worthy to be believed and far above the understanding of man, that thou, Lord, who art God and very man, art wholly contained under a little likeness of bread and wine. O my soul, be thou merry and glad for so noble a gift and so singular a comfort—for as oft as thou takest the body of Christ, so oft thou workest the work of thy redemption and art made part-taker of all the merits of Christ'.

With its innumerable quotations from the Bible, *The Imitation* can form a link between the Bible and the Mass for the seeking Protestant.

MARGARET GARDNER

Norwich,
Vermont, U.S.A.



EXTRACTS

AMONG the reviews of the first months of this year dedicated to the centenary at Lourdes, *La Vie Spirituelle* (February), as we might expect, takes the lead in profundity as well as attractiveness. The major part of the number is devoted to Lourdes, its apparitions and miracles, but the most instructive section is 'Prayer to Mary'. Père M.-F. Moos, O.P., writes of the Psalms of the Lady Office and how and why the Church applies them to our Lady. By what he calls a *mystical literal sense* as distinguished from an historical literal sense, the Church has taken the Gradual Psalms and dedicated them to the Blessed Virgin with whom our prayer ascends to Jahwe. This 'sense', 'thanks to the analogy of faith, bursts forth from the very words by a kind of fullness of meaning intended by God who is the principal author of Scripture'. With regard to these psalms sung by the pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem,

we must remember that Jerusalem is primarily the figure of the Church militant. We have to join ourselves to her more every day by the assent of our faith and our love. In the praises which are offered to her, Jerusalem in a particular way represents Mary, 'the