

## VOCATION AND VOCATIONS

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**M**ONSIGNOR HUDSON of Coleshill worked out a neat equation which is still valid for religious engaged in social work: 'A religious vocation', he said, 'is good, efficiency is also good, but the two together equal perfection'. He was one of the pioneers of the training of religious in orthopaedics. It is interesting to reflect that religious communities devoted to nursing and education have no particular difficulty in submitting their subjects for training in accordance with State regulations, and the fruits of this policy are to be seen in our nursing homes and hospitals as well as in our schools and training colleges.

In other sections of social work, whether for example for the old or for children, the need to develop a particular technique and submit to training is only now coming into prominence. We have come to realise, rather late in the day maybe, that the mere housing of people, good as an emergency measure, is only the beginning of the problem of adequate care. It has been taken for granted that anyone, particularly any religious, was adequate to meet the needs of the case. But today we are being brought to realise that something more is needed if we are to achieve effective work and that there is no contradiction between training and religious vocation. A moment's reflection shows that religious teachers and religious nurses are none the less good religious, perhaps even better, because they are good teachers or good nurses, and similarly in all other sections of social work there need be no antagonism between professional proficiency and religious vocation.

It would be interesting to speculate on the attitude religious founders would adopt today if they were able to survey the present scene. Realists in their first beginnings, striving to grapple with particular social needs at a particular point in time, they would be realists today, and any useful developments to be found in modern technique would be seized upon for the furtherance of their particular aims,

even if these involved adaptations of their community rule.

What I think needs to be realised is that even a religious engaged in charitable works has to be convinced that efficiency as a religious does include efficiency as a social worker, and that both one's religious life and one's exterior work should be offered up to God as one whole rather than be departmentalised as having no essential connection; examination of conscience should be as rigid over the one as over the other.

The readiness with which some religious communities accepted the idea of training in child care was a revelation to the Central Training Council of the Children's Department of the Home Office. Such enthusiasm was shown as to indicate that some course of training was instinctively felt to be necessary. Practical problems have arisen from the dearth of religious who could be spared for the training and also who could benefit from training. This would seem to suggest that the selection of postulants to orders engaged in social work must be based not only on their suitability as religious but, too, on their ability to take advantage of training for their particular work. This need of selection has obviously been accepted in both nursing and teaching orders, whose subjects must be specialists.

At the present time the Church is facing a critical situation with regard to religious manpower. Until comparatively recently most Catholic girls wishing to engage in charitable work almost automatically became religious because only thus could they fulfil their vocation. Today social work has become a recognised and respected profession with high standards and, in many cases, with its own sense of vocation. The vocation, however, is to the work and not to a religious life as such, and it is salutary to be reminded that a vocation need not be a religious vocation. The consequences are that the call to enter religious life has slumped badly and communities are finding it difficult even to man and meet their existing responsibilities. Religious life has lost its attractiveness and the modern girl is satisfied that her basic Catholicity is adequate to meet the demands of her profession as a social worker. The book *Religious Sisters* (Blackfriars Publications), which will repay perusal, is an attempt to

understand why this situation has arisen and how it may possibly be remedied, It would seem that the trappings of religious life and other accidentals make the exercise of personal responsibility very difficult in the modern world.

This does not mean religious communities will disappear, because those which are facing up to modern conditions with active and foreseeing Superiors are the very ones which are least affected by the general decline. Some Mother Generals are assisting as many of their subjects as possible to undertake training of one kind or another. Others are trembling on the brink wondering whether their subjects may not thus endanger their vocations; this would suggest the need for more careful selection of subjects.

In the history of the Church many communities have been established for particular works and after perhaps hundreds of years have disappeared because either their work was completed or newer communities had arisen better equipped to carry it out. Modern trends would seem to suggest that other congregations will arise offering a very sound basic religious training together with technical training and demanding a character able to stand the stresses and strains of modern life without the protection of the strict community life which has so far been traditional.