

forms of charity within the community is the normal and natural means by which charity grows to perfection. This family life is the exchange, a hundredfold better, which is received for the family life renounced, and the Church does not normally allow her consecrated members to live outside community life. Only the person already perfect is able to lead a perfect life of charity with God alone as a hermit. Normally the wise safeguards of enclosure, prayer, penance and community life are necessary to preclude reversal to a lower ideal. Only in the case of religious sent to the Missions does the Church make an easy and habitual exception, and this is because the benefit of community life, which consist primarily in the compulsion there is to practise charity, is supplied in a still higher degree in missionary life, and replaces the normal safeguards and means of perfection.

The centre of the life of vowed chastity is, therefore, charity, love of God and the neighbour for God, and love of the neighbour as a means to love of God, so that its outwardly negative characteristics are submerged in its positive value of love, donation and consecration.



A LAY CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

A REPORT GIVEN AT THE SEPTEMBER CONFERENCE

THE aim of this community is described in the provisional Rule as 'A school of the Lord's service composed of men, women and children, engaged in farm and craft work, having all things in common and holding to the counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, that in all things God may be glorified'. The membership at the present time is twelve adults and eleven children, made up of four families and four single men and women.

The community was started in 1940 as a political experiment by a small group of young people holding pacifist and socialist convictions. They felt that society was disintegrating from within and that the way back to a more creative life was through a different economic structure and the discovery of a new pattern of human relatedness. Possessions were

pooled and income shared; anyone who wished could join; there was no form of authority or discipline beyond the natural one of earning sufficient to live on by working on the small community farm.

After a few years, with considerable changes in membership and the usual difficulties of human relationships, it became obvious that the primary assumption of the political materialist doctrine that man was entirely conditioned by circumstance had been proved false. The tendency to disintegration seemed to lie within each person whatever the external context might be. This realisation left a vacuum in which nothing from the past had any life and belief of any kind was impossible. The response to this was to throw out whatever remnants of a hollow culture remained and to attempt the return to a primitive instinctual basis—and to let the unknown happen.

Eventually, the necessity for a radical process of change in the natural person before community living was possible led to contact with Jungian psychology—which opened the way to the writings of the Hindu and Chinese mystics and in time to the Christian mystics. Some members visited a Catholic monastery, periods of meditation were started in the community life, and one by one, over a period of three years, the members were all received into the Church. The Divine Office grew up out of the set periods for meditation and a provisional Rule, based on the Rule of St Benedict, was drawn up and accepted by all the full members.

The community has in this way grown to a position of comparative stability—but the form is still in the process of emerging and the following description is of a life which is likely to change in details during the next few years. The daily work consists of farming (mainly dairying), a small pottery, painting, woodcarving (just beginning), building and housework. There is a large farmhouse containing three flats, rooms for single people, a communal kitchen and dining room, a cottage, the farm buildings and workshops, and the community chapel and uncompleted library. The families live and eat in their flats except for the midday meal which is in common—this is prepared by one of the women on weekly rota, the other women doing the house-

work and washing.

The Divine Office is said in English: Lauds and Prime at 6 a.m.; Terce, 9 a.m.; Sext just before dinner at 12.30 p.m.; None, 4 p.m.; Vespers, 6.30 p.m.; and Compline, 9.30 p.m. The rhythm of the Office and the work throughout the day has been one of the most important ways in which the life has begun to grow together into one piece.

There are four categories of membership—associate, postulant, novice and full; full members undertake: (i) to become oblates of St Benedict, (ii) to obey the Rule and decisions of the community, (iii) to make a gift of all their possessions to the community, and (iv) to promise stability in the community life. The senior oblate's responsibility is to see that the Rule is kept and to bring to the notice of the community any problems which should be discussed and solved. The planning of the life is carried out by a council of three members who meet every week, but no decision of this body (or of the senior oblate) is operative until it has been discussed and passed by the weekly general meeting of all the full members. Each section of the work has its manager, and the aim is to decentralise responsibility as much as possible.

At the present time, Mass is celebrated in the community chapel on Sundays and Thursdays, but it is hoped that daily Mass will become possible in the future.

All this, of course, is only a very sketchy outline of outward appearances; the more important problems remain untouched. Some discussion of these problems would help the community to find its bearings in the Church into which it has just been born.

THE FAMILY

Concern is sometimes felt by Catholic visitors that the community impinges too much on the integrity of family life. The experience of the community so far has been that families have grown together rather than the opposite—but the starting point has been outside the Church, and as no Catholic family has yet joined fully this evidence is not conclusive. What does seem clear is that the Christian family should be closely knit to other Christian families in the Church—that the parish should be a community in which

the members are interdependent in every aspect of their life.

PRIVATE PROPERTY

The community is in the peculiar position of having come into the Church without private property and with the conviction that common ownership (voluntarily and in a small group only) has a very great spiritual value in removing barriers between people and forcing a man to stand naked to his fellow man. On the other hand, the Church has stressed on many occasions the necessity for private property. The two may not contradict each other as much as this suggests, however, because the teaching of the Church is directed against forcible large-scale collectivisation and large-scale capitalism, both of which deprive the worker of independence and any sense of stewardship over material goods. The community life is directed towards developing this stewardship and responsibility for material goods, but a member is not, of course, free to do what he likes with these goods. Is this latter a necessary part of the teaching of the Church in this matter?

PRAYER

It seems possible that by means of the Office and the community life generally that growth in prayer could be a natural one, rather than an isolated, self-conscious struggling up a ladder of stages and categories. It is much more difficult to retain illusions about oneself living and working with others than when alone. There is no escape from the persons, the situations, or the moods which are difficult, and these are the means sent by God for transforming our self-will; whereas an individual living today in a large city finds it only too easy to avoid the difficult person, to change the unpleasant situation and by-pass the mood.

UNITY

The tremendous importance of unity grows more apparent with each problem the community has to face. Even if a theoretically wrong decision is made, this is of no importance providing the members remain united in charity. God will set it right in his own time—whereas an opinion (even if right and leading to greater efficiency) insisted upon to the point of division, removes us from his

guidance and inspiration. This in no way lessens the responsibility of each member to express any opinion he may have on a subject under discussion, but the freely given acceptance of the community decision should follow as the necessary complement.

APOSTOLIC WORK

The apostolic work of the community lies in prayer and hospitality and hardly at all in discussion or exposition. The young person of today is usually pagan, whether nominally Christian or not, and words mean little to him because the symbols have been drained of life by continual lip-service. He is separated from the Church by an abyss not of his own making and only love and the grace of God can lead him over. It is not a neglecting or falling away from something once known (in this case words are often necessary), but a total ignorance of what life is about and an inability to understand what the Church is saying—a traveller lost in a strange country with no maps and little knowledge of the language. Often the only way is to chatter in a pub and make some sort of contact, at the same time praying that the Holy Spirit will lead him blindfold by the hand.

The reason why a community like this has happened seems to lie in the strange situation in which Western man is placed. He leads an atomised, split life with no roots in Nature, no roots in any localised human community, no supernatural roots. This inevitably seeps into the life of the Church and religion becomes yet another department instead of the source which binds everything together.

‘And all they that believed were together and had all things common. Their possessions and goods they sold and divided them to all, according as every one had need.’



POINT OF VIEW

ON THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD

At this time, in the Church, there seems to be a divine urge leading men and women to study more deeply the truth concerning both God and themselves.

In a recent conference, given at a retreat by Archbishop