

Editorial

What has teaching religion—the subject of our first article—to do with spiritual life? At first sight it will seem odd to answer the question by reference to a philosophical theory of what knowledge is. Yet seemingly remote and academic subjects play their part in conditioning the world of thought into which we are born. A reviewer in this number draws attention to the effect produced by a false theory of knowledge which has influenced all of us for a very long time. According to this theory to know something means to look inside ourselves at something: a purely passive gaze at the contents of our head. Ask many people, for example, whether philosophers or not, if two men can agree over a concept such as ‘red’, and the answer is no, because no two men experience the same sensation of redness. But the truth is that knowledge comes from a shared public world of concepts. Getting to know something is entering this world of discourse, and an active business (implies an active power of the mind, as St Thomas put it). We learn the meaning of ideas from those who teach us, not from an inner world. It is not just incidental to knowledge that it must be taught.

Now this same change of emphasis has to be made in relating teaching to the life of the spirit: even to put the question of their relationship implies that they have been wrongly dissociated. Spiritual life is not the private individual experience it is often said to be: prerogative, perhaps, of an élite. By baptism each member of the Church enters into an inheritance of faith, but it is by the ordinary process of learning to express it that he makes it his own to use in the common life he shares with every other member. ‘How are men to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?’ The Church’s present emphasis on catechetics is simply a recognition of this truth. It is not primarily an apologetic concern, based on the need to form men capable of repelling enemy attacks. More profoundly it depends on seeing that we cannot divide the learning of the Faith from the process of making Christ’s life our own or of living it out with our neighbour in the work of liturgy and daily life, ‘until we all attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.’ Learning religion is a life-long process, and the way in which it is done, no less than the content of what is learned, indivisibly bound up with our spiritual life.