Life of the Spirit

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MEDIATOR DEI

BY

THE EDITOR

THE present issue of LIFE OF THE SPIRIT has been suggested by Pius XII's second great doctrinal Encyclical, *Mediator Dei*, this time concerned directly with the liturgy and the liturgical movement. The articles had all been written before any version of the Encyclical had appeared in England, and some of them perhaps even before the Encyclical itself had been drawn up. But they display the same desire to draw men to the central prayer of the liturgy, the fundamental reality of Christians praying in Christ, which has evidently inspired the Holy Father to write.

For *Mediator Dei* is essentially a call to the greater appreciation and 'tasting' of the central prayer of the Church on the part of the faithful. It has variously been heralded as 'one of the major documents of Pius XII's pontificate' (*Nouvelle Revue Theologique*), as 'giving authoritative guidance' to the liturgical movement (*Irish Ecclesiastical Record*), as the culmination of a great development which had begun early in the last century (Fr Busch in *Orate Fratres*) and even as being characterised by 'a meticulous and extreme tendency to be just, firm and charitable' (H.A.R. in *Orate Fratres*). Indeed some have been heard to complain that the Encyclical is too cautious and too conservative, that while it gives with one hand it takes back with the other. But those who have been disappointed in *Mediator Dei* are mainly those who have looked for justification of their pet liturgical practices or reforms, vernacular prayers, plainsong, a cleaner art, altars in the midst of the church and so on. It would seem that the Encyclical comes precisely to purge this ardour of its superficiality and to redirect it to the fundamentals of communal worship, to encourage the enthusiasm but to ground it in the Body of Christ (this was the theme of the first great Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*) and in the Passion and Death of Christ given us daily for worship and for spiritual sustenance. The 'enthusiasts' will find no new weapon here for slaughtering their opponents; but those who since the time of Pius X have been learning, or desiring to learn, how to 'pray the Mass' will discover here a great source of inspiration.

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For readers of this review, therefore, the Encyclical will become a book of meditation and a help to live the life of Christ, first round the altar-table and then round their hearth at home or at their desk or bench at work. While the first part of it is concerned with the true relation between the external and internal in worship—a section which also sets out clearly the relation between the laity and the hierarchy and therefore gives the principles of liturgical life—the second and most important part, which is the core of the whole exposition, deals with Eucharistic worship in its double aspect of sacrifice and sacrament. Here we have the very matrix of prayer, the divine action which fashions us into worshippers and lovers. God works through his priest at the altar and this work is to draw all things to Calvary and so *per Christum et in Christo* into the full union of the embrace of love. The Pope devotes several pages to the share of the faithful in the sacrificial action and leads us thence to the consideration of holy Communion, which, though not of itself essential for the members of the mystical body in sharing in the Eucharistic action, is the culmination of that action. The Church desires that those who cannot easily communicate should approach the altar in spirit that their faith may be deepened and the union of love increased. The Holy Father renews the Church's invitation to all her children to come and receive sacramentally the bond of union, those children who are all so enhungered for Christ; children and young men and women, husbands and wives, workers and every grade of society, all these must feel the hunger for the bread of life and must be continually satisfying this hunger. And having accepted this urgent invitation all these people must relish the sweet and salutary colloquy with the Beloved. There beneath the public act of the whole community will spring the individual and most intimate converse of each member with his Christ, the life of his own soul. . . . The thanksgiving of each one, therefore, flows out into his daily life and makes him into a continual eucharist—*semper in gratiarum actione maneamus*. The Holy Father necessarily concludes this part with the doctrine of the worship and adoration of the blessed Sacrament which plays such a part in extending and intensifying this movement of continual prayer and gratitude.

Indeed this is not only the heart of the Liturgy about which he writes explicitly; it is the centre of the life of the Church, the centre of each individual Christian life. Prayer and penance, work and play, education and social life, none of the things which occupy man in his waking moments may be divorced from the continuation of the Word-made-flesh in his eucharistic body. Ascetical and mystical theology would be meaningless for the Christian but that it grow from an understanding of the Mass; religious vows and the life of perfection

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would be emptied of their significance. For these reasons, therefore, *Mediator Dei* should be a foundation stone for THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT. And for these reasons the articles concerned with prayer and the Liturgy which had been piling up on the Editorial table for some such occasion are here presented as an earnest of future studies of a like nature based on the Encyclical and to honour the appearance of what must become a classical text for all who read about and try to live the spiritual life.

ERRATA: We very much regret that, owing to unseemly haste in trying to publish the March issue of LIFE OF THE SPIRIT in time, some major misprints occurred in Fr Graham's article, 'Orthodoxy and Religious Experience'.

p. 401. *Line* 15 for *gates* read *states*.

p. 405. *Delete line* 30—'is thus the foundation', etc.

line 34-5. *The reference is to* I-II. 111. 5.

PRAYER, SILENCE, PEACE[1]

BY

BEDE JARRETT, O.P.



ONE of the curious things that you may sometimes hear nuns say is, 'I have no time for prayer', a curious thing for anyone to say. One would suppose that prayer were an exercise like eating, over and done with; as though prayer were an act that began and ended at a certain time. You hear too: 'I didn't say my prayers this morning'. 'No prayers?' 'Oh, yes, but not all'. Curious, isn't it? I look on prayer as a duty to be portioned off. How can I say I haven't time for prayer? Haven't time to raise my mind and heart to God? They mean they haven't time to sit and do nothing else but pray. We have *always* got time for prayer. Constant prayer is the idea of the New Testament, Christ's teaching. Anything is prayer, prayer is anything. It is not an individual thing, it can speak all languages, it is as varied as our life. Prayer is natural to the soul. That we have no time for that is incredible, impossible. We have a number of letters to write, children to teach—can't that be praying? To see the trees, to listen to the birds—*all* prayer. Don't say you have little time for prayer. Silly, isn't it? One often hears it said, too: 'I do not care to go to an active Order; I can't fit teaching with Religious Life'; blind, aren't

[1] From a retreat preached in Edinburgh, 1932.

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