adopted a state of life which is organised for contemplation, because he has entered a contemplative religious Order. As we come down the scale in this way we notice that the first is not according to his choice at all, but comes as the Holy Spirit 'listeth', the second depends considerably on the cooperation of the human will as a man can exercise his will in love and constantly practise the virtues of faith and hope. He can keep from serious sins and deal always severely with any deliberate, venial sin and thus live the contemplative life partly by choice though of course virtues are infused. Finally the life he leads in a religious order may be almost entirely his own choice. Indeed it is possible for a man without a contemplative vocation to be living in a contemplative order through his own choice—even against the manifested will of God.

In this way there may be lay contemplatives in the world according to the first and second types but not according to the third, and perhaps this fact will help to disentangle some of the confusions which have arisen on the subject.



CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,—Your correspondent in your November issue seems to overlook that there are people who are irresistibly drawn to contemplation, yet have no vocation to live an enclosed religious life, and it is for such people that lay institutes are designed.

The Christian contemplative, religious or lay, offers his life in total self-giving to the purposes of God, and if we look at the life of our Lord, it seems likely that lives wholly orientated to God in the world will be extremely exacting, but if they are to be fruitful must be trained and disciplined.

A time of complete withdrawal from the world, if it is practicable, must be of the greatest value. It will be the dispositions learned during that time of withdrawal that will later stand in good stead in the world. During this time the standard will be set, the ability to work out the same ideal in a different context developed. Of course the change from one way of life to another will be difficult, but that does not seem to be a good reason for foregoing so valuable an opportunity of training. Neither does the desire for peace and retirement necessarily make it right that the desire should be satisfied.

It seems to me that it would be of inestimable value for any isolated person trying to practise a life of prayer in the world to be 'attached' in some measure (perhaps as a tertiary in a lay institute),

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or at least to know that there is somewhere where he or she may go when the opportunity offers to join in praise and thanksgiving, have the chance of rest and quiet and the benefit of expert advice in this particular aspect of the spiritual life.—Yours etc.,

ELIZABETH PAUL.

Sir,—Your correspondent Miss G. M. Stanford raises in THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT for November two points regarding the Carmelite Lay Institute at Venasque. May I be permitted to reply according to my information. Firstly, it is certainly not suggested that the Institute should *teach* contemplation, though a certain degree of 'acquired' contemplation *can* be learnt. But the contemplation envisaged is a special grace from God, which the soul accepts rather than chooses. It would seem that the Institute exists for those in whom contemplation is already confirmed but who do not feel any call to a strictly cloistered life. It is their wish to be taught how to use the fruits of their contemplation for the benefit of their fellows. The prolonged stay in a religious house is bound to deepen their union with God, and they will go forth to their apostolate enlightened and stabilised. This is in no sense a regimentation of their spiritual state. Secondly, it is asked: 'Is it wise to transfer into the atmosphere of the world a contemplation developed within the cloister?' This *does* seem to be the traditional progress. The first great contemplative, our Lady, lived during her early years in the seclusion of the Temple. Then she and her Son passed thirty years in the obscurity of Nazareth. After that there followed three years of arduous public life, ending in the Passion and Death of her Son. Did our Lady then retire into a corner once more? No, she lived in the midst of the apostles, and shared the privileges of Pentecost with them as well as the dangers and difficulties attendant on the establishment of the infant Church. St Ignatius, St Francis, St Catherine of Siena and St Teresa, all contemplatives of the highest order, left their seclusion to scatter abroad the fruits of their secret contemplation. I cannot agree that the longing to pass a certain space of time in retirement, during which, freed from worldly duties, the soul can refresh herself with God, necessarily 'indicates an incipient vocation to the cloistered religious life'. The Holy Father is calling for consecrated souls, the more contemplative the better, to share in the apostolate of the Church, and the Institute at Venasque is a humble attempt to respond in some little way to this sacred call.—Yours etc.,

K. L. BROCK.

Sir,—As a recent visitor to the Carmelite Lay Institute of Notre Dame de Vie at Venasque, I read with much interest the letter referring to it which appeared in your November issue. My visit was made in particularly happy circumstances in that I had for companion the Discalced Carmelite Father who has directed the

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undertaking from the beginning. I may be permitted therefore to offer a few observations in reply to your correspondent's queries.

i. It is certainly true that contemplation is a free gift from God which, to quote St Teresa, he gives when, how and to whom he wills. But it is also true that ordinarily he bestows it only on those who have prepared themselves for it. Indeed St Teresa would seem to say that normally he does in fact grant it to those who are thus prepared. Now the classical preparation includes solitude, prolonged prayer, recollection, the practice under an experienced guide of virtue and asceticism, the assimilating of a sound spiritual doctrine. Moreover, the standard definition of contemplation is that of contemplation in its highest forms. But contemplation admits of several degrees through which the soul must as a rule pass to reach the summit. Notre Dame de Vie has been guided by these principles. Only those are admitted who long for interior union with God and who are resolved to persevere in the straight path of mortification and detachment that leads to it. Then only those are retained who, during the two-year period of training, give proof of an authentic contemplative spirit.

ii. In regard to the second query, I should like to point out that the aim of the Institute is to form contemplatives who will not merely live in the world but who, while living in the world, will be active apostles as well. The ideal is such a union of contemplation and action will form a perfect balance, contemplation vivifying action—'Was not our heart burning within us whilst he spoke?'—and action in turn fulfilling and enriching contemplation. The problem, it is true, admits of no easy solution. Hence the fifteen years of patient and prayerful groping of Notre Dame de Vie before formulating its solution. The formula is this. First, there are two years of regular training in solitude. Then comes the introduction under careful supervision to the active apostolate in the world, the primacy of contemplation being assured by two hours' mental prayer each day and a return to solitude every year for 45 days. Results have proved the excellence of this solution. It already has upon it the seal of the Holy See's approval and has been affiliated to the Order of Discalced Carmelites. No doubt other formulae will be found. The superiors at Venasque, I gathered, hope to organise something for Catholic homes according to the same principles but of course in a necessarily different form. In conclusion I would refer your readers to a recent work by the Carmelite priest I have mentioned entitled *Je veux voir Dieu* (Editions du Carmel) in which he develops, in the form of a commentary on St Teresa's *Interior Castle*, the great principles of the interior life which inspired the Institute.—Yours etc.,

O.D.C.

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