

The Reformed Community of Taizé-Les-Cluny

ON a little hill not far from the famous abbey of Cluny in the valley of the Grosne where the monks first placed the Benedictine mark before going to carry it to the whole of Europe, in one among the many other villages of this country, there stands a Roman steeple, flanked by a round white apse. A little group of monks, sent out from the abbey to work on the big estate, planned this building for worship. This is Taizé. It is a village where few people live, and has simple two-storied wine-dressers' houses built of yellow stone which blends with the sun. It is in the extreme north of the Midi. Here it is that there lives, in a simple life of farming, manual work and contemplation, a Protestant community—a community of men who belong to the French Reformed Church: twelve professed brothers of whom three are pastors, and three brother novices.

These men have as their aim—the essential goal and sole object of their life—to plant in the Church, and especially in their Protestant tradition, a sign. The sign is to be a community of brothers, a living and true community, such as the despairing world of to-day calls back, for which the early Church of Jerusalem has given the type (Acts 2 and 4): a community where the love of Christ reigns, a strong virile love, a love which gives itself in self-sacrifice, a love which shines and triumphs; a community where the praise of God and intercession for all men have the first place; where one chooses the better part and the one thing necessary, the part of Mary, which is an obedient contemplation of the Lord orientated towards an apostolate which is more effective because it is entirely penetrated with prayer and completely abandoned to Christ's orders.

These men are bound to Christ in the Holy Spirit by the vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. They have become, by these vows and their common fidelity, one of these families, these "patriai" of which S. Paul speaks (Eph. 3, 15) which derive their name from the Father and live on what He gives them from day to day; where the only true and deep intimacy in love is that which Christ gives them in liturgy, prayer, and sacrifice for others, where

obedience to God is achieved and intensified through definite submission to a rule, to a discipline, to a chapter of Brothers, to a Prior. In this poverty, celibacy, and obedience, the only thing they are looking for is a particular conformity to Christ and to be ever more fit and ready to serve Him. To own nothing of one's own is to realize better a total surrender to the Father who foresees all and gives all ; it is the response to the call of Jesus to the rich young man. The renunciation of marriage, of conjugal and family life, arises out of a desire to please the Saviour alone, and to give Him all one's time to serve Him. Casting off one's own will and personal independence is walking along the road to Calvary where one makes a total renunciation of self, where one loses one's life to find it again in the resurrection of the heart's intimate and profound joy, the resurrection of the whole being, for all eternity, at the last day.

It is all this which happens in the heart of the Brother novice when on the day of his profession (preferably at dawn on Easter Morning) he prostrates himself among the Community and in response to the question "What are you asking?" answers thus: "The mercy of God and the community of my brothers."

The first function of the community is to *be* the sign which we have spoken of, to *act* as perfectly as possible this parable of the fraternal community in its extreme form, so that it can be a call to consecration, to obedience, and to the love of Christ.

Its second function, through which all the others, whether of the community or of the individuals in it, are nurtured and strengthened, is praise and intercession, the "work of God" (*opus Dei*).

Every morning a Eucharist celebrated very simply according to the form of Christian tradition in the early centuries lets the Brothers meet the Lord, and so pass from the sin and sadness of the world to the joyous life of heaven. On Wednesday, Fridays and Festivals the Eucharist is more solemn. Then comes the Morning Office in which, through the liturgical recital of the Psalms, the reading of the Scriptures in course (Old Testament, Gospel and Capitulum) and prayers, the Eucharist is extended and continued. At mid-day and in the evening the Brothers are united again in a similar form of worship (The Epistles are read at the Evening Office). On Sundays, after a short morning office, there is a Sung Eucharist at which the Word of God is preached.

These are joyous offices performed early in the morning. The symbols,—lights, colours, actions—these all invite in a reverent harmony, for the same act of worship, the human spirit, mind and body which Jesus Christ willed to re-unite with His divinity in His Incarnation.

These are well-ordered offices where prayer is not always easy, spontaneous, and fervent, but where the regular obedience is pleasing to God, even if there is a certain aridity of heart.

Between offices, silent meals, prayers, and recreation the Brothers go to their own work. One, pastor of the neighbouring Protestant parish, gets down to his pastoral work ; another is engaged in theological studies ; another arranges the community's liturgical life ; another is in charge of spiritual direction ; there are also a Brother potter and a Brother painter who go to their studios. These men worship through their art which already points them towards giving themselves to the world. There are also the Brother farmers who cultivate the estate, and the Brother doctor who has the local country practice ; the Brother mechanic whose trade is also in the district ; the Brother bursar, and the Brother secretary.¹

Each one sees in his work an act of liturgical worship. Life is there, a unity—one office, one liturgy, a single prayer embracing all the various different activities. Intercessions and praises sung to God are but the privileged moments which set the tone and rhythm of the whole.

The rule of spiritual direction, which the Brothers recite each morning before breakfast, sums up well the whole of their spirituality : “ During the day let work and rest be quickened by the Word of God.” “ In everything keep inner silence, so as to dwell in Christ.” “ Steep yourself in the spirit of the Beatitudes : joy, simplicity, mercy.”

In a world where speech is powerless and perverted and has lost its efficacy, or else serves to divide rather than to unite, we must look again for a full life, lived in obedience and silence ; a life in which the Word of God spoken with one's whole being and lived, without haste, at the appropriate moment, will bear its fruits of resurrection and life.

Inner silence allows a true and continuous spiritual communion with Jesus Christ, and establishes a contact of true charity with men.

¹ The Community has founded a House for abandoned children. It is responsible for 25 boys it considers as sons, and for whom it has created a family life in the Manor House of the village.

Joy : The joy of living as a child of the Father and friend of Christ gives us brothers and friends to love in Him, through Him and for Him. It is a joy which does not always manifest itself openly, because sometimes there are difficulties in life which make it inadvisable to show it ; but it is always there in the depths of the heart, in the Holy Spirit's secret dwelling-place in us. It is renewed every morning when, before approaching the Lord's Table, we say again with the Psalmist " I will go unto the altar of God, even unto the God of my joy and gladness."

Simplicity : Simplicity of lodging, of clothes, of food, but above all simplicity of spirit through which the Brothers can exchange simple words, thoughts, and tastes—that openness of personal life which, without the dangers of public confession of sin, unclothes personal life of all mystery to make room for a greater brotherly communion.

Mercy : The pardon of God continually sought after and renewed in the words of sacramental absolution received in private confession ; the pardon of the community at the morning " chapter of faults," given for falling short of the rule or of charity ; the pardon of a Brother in private exhortation and humiliation. Pardon without limit, which finds its strength in the mercy of God Himself. Private confession is strongly recommended to combat the devil effectively ; it can, as S. Benedict says, " break against Christ the first assaults of devilish thoughts."

The means of communicating the whole of this life, which is lived not at all for its own sake but for God and other people, is hospitality. Wide open to receive everyone who seeks God, the community offers first of all a small house for spiritual retreat, adjoining the old church. There, in the solitude and silence of a retreat which lasts several days, men come to live and talk with God, under the spiritual direction of a Brother. But people do not come only for retreats : there are many contacts made with Taizé from varied angles, ranging from social and industrial problems to problems of Christian unity.

Ecumenism, preoccupation with and prayer for unity, hold a prominent place in the community. Priests, religious, and Christians of all denominations go there to live for a short time in definite study of, and intensive prayer for, unity. In the country itself there are very cordial relations with the Roman Catholic clergy. The community must not, in any way whatever, indulge in a Protestant proselytism. Its sole wish is to give a living witness to

Christ in the world around it. True, it can do this only according to Reformed dogmatics, but by taking away from them all polemical aspects in order to open them as much as possible to the ecumenical perspective of the great tradition of the first centuries of the undivided Church.

Our age is no longer for polemics, nor for the wretched nibblings of proselytism, and the passing of individual persons from one tradition to another. If one cannot but respect certain "passages" made in humility, loyalty and truth, the true results of an organic evolution, one should, however, not desire individual victories, gained sometimes in an unhealthy and morbid psychological complex. These "conversions" often do more harm to a number of people than good to a single person. They stiffen up, they build new barriers and arouse reactions of suspicion, defence, and war. They retard true unity. We must pray for the unity of groups of separated Christians in the visible unity of the mystical Body of Christ. We must want a Roman Catholic to find Christ again in what is best in his Church, and a Reformed to do the same in his. This spirit of loyalty and peace is a much better way of preparing the visible and organic unity of the Christian bodies in the *Una Sancta* than a certain "evangelisation" (now happily out-of-date) which takes the number of "converts," gained often over a rival Church, as the yardstick of fidelity.

A living witness to Christ, spiritual emulation among separated Christians, fervent prayer for unity . . . and God will accomplish it when He wills, as He wills and in the way He wills.

The nature of a regular community belongs to the order of signs. The essential thing for it is not preaching or the doing of good works; it ought first of all to exist as a sign in the Church and in the world.

First it signifies the absolute and transcendent character of the Gospel and the Christian life. With a special emphasis it shows that the Christian must, in some measure, break with this world because he already belongs to another world, to the Kingdom which is within him.

The parish community, too, has a meaning which completes the other without being opposed to it. It shows that it is possible for the Gospel to take flesh in common, conjugal, family life. True, these functions are not completely differentiated: the parish bears within it the mark of a break with the world, and the regular community lives in the world while not being of it. It is a question

of emphasis, intensity, and nuances. And by the presence of this double tradition, each recalling its truth to the other, a balance is created.

The regular community is also the sign that the people of God is passing into the Kingdom of God. By its institutions (Rule, customs, liturgy, and its earthly (?) and patriarchal character) it recalls that certain elements of the life of Israel and of the period of Law which Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil, are still valid for the Church, the people of God. But, at the same time it is a sign of the coming of the Kingdom—by its having all things in common, which proclaims the universal community—and by the demands of celibacy which proclaims the fact that the Kingdom will be the fulness of the love of God. The Church also is this sign of the passing of the people of God into the Kingdom of God. The regular community is nothing that the Church is not or cannot be. The only difference is that it expresses certain characteristics more intensively, not in words but in reality.

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