

THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE: NOT NEEDED TODAY?

The hidden life of silence, solitude, work, and prayer of the contemplative monk or nun frequently compels many to ask: "Why do they want to bury themselves in a monastery or convent when there is so much good they could do in the world?" "Why such waste?" To a world which weighs worth in the only scale it knows, that of the senses, of practicality, of material and outward accomplishment, the contemplative religious life will naturally be seen as unnecessary, selfish, futile, or utterly folly. Even among Catholics one will often hear such things as: "How can they be so selfish when there is so much that desperately needs to be done for souls and the welfare of the Church in this age of terrible apostasy?" It is precisely the frequency of such questions and objections that proves that we are living in an age of great apostasy, for they betray, at best, a weak supernatural faith, or, at worst, the entire lack of faith. Even amongst those who have retained and "defend" the Faith, there are many who seem to have lost the *sensus supernaturalis* - the sense of the supernatural, the very heart of our religion. Few understand, therefore, the tremendous force and efficacy of the contemplative life for the Church and for a world gone mad with sin.

Widespread is the general lack of understanding of the ways of the spiritual life, the value of prayer and penance, and of the hidden workings of divine grace in the souls of men. So many minds, otherwise great and noble, have been infected with the wisdom of this world and are seemingly incapable of seeing past mere natural virtue, talent, and exterior activity for the solution of the Church's problems. This is what Pope Pius XII called the "heresy of action." If anything is going to remedy the current crises in the Church and the world, the answer resides in *supernatural* and *interior* activity. The answer lies in prayer and penance, for it is by these that grace and mercy are obtained from Our Lord. And if we truly believe in the efficacy of prayer and penance, then why not a whole life entirely dedicated to prayer and penance? If ever the contemplative life was needed, never has it been more necessary and essential than in this spiritual Dark Age.

The Pope of the Missions and of Catholic Action, Pope Pius XI, so anxious for the propagation of the Faith and the expansion of the active apostolate, has declared the mind of the Church on the value of the contemplative vocation. In his Apostolic Constitution, *Umbratilem* (1924), to the Carthusian monks, he writes:

"From the earliest times this mode of life (contemplation), most perfect and most useful and more fruitful for the whole of Christendom than anyone can conceive, took root in the Church and spread on all sides. Since the whole object of this institution lay in this - that the