

EDITORIAL

THE members of the LIFE OF THE SPIRIT Conference who gathered at Spode House in September last, came together to consider the question of 'Prayer in Modern Times'. The theme was suggested by the changes in modern Catholic life, the return to the Bible and the Liturgy, the emphasis on Catholic Action, the renewal of interest in the contemplative life. Although the essential elements of prayer never change, it is inevitable that the ways into prayer and the modes of continuing a life of prayer will change in different ages and races. There seemed, therefore, to be a need to review the present situation to discover whether new approaches and new techniques existed and if so whether they were sufficiently genuine and well grounded as to be encouraged and developed.

A cursory glance at the following pages, which contain the majority of the papers delivered at the Conference, may leave the impression that no change in the prayer of Catholics is as yet discernible in the middle of the twentieth century. The stress in all the papers is mainly on the tradition of the doctrine of prayer which has been largely developed since the later middle ages. But in fact some leaders were given by the speakers which were developed in the ensuing discussions. Thus the second part of Father Peter Lawler's paper opened a fruitful discussion on a return to a direct and simple doctrine of grace as a share in the life of our Lord as the essential of prayer that connects most readily with the modern insistence on the doctrine of the Mystical Body as the heart of the Christian life. Again, Father Michael Hollings's suggestion that the modern method, so universally accepted by Catholic Action, of the Gospel Enquiry forms the basis of a new technique of communal meditation was a pointer to a possible development in prayer in tune with present changes. The psychological approach of Baroness von der Heydt was also topical since everyone today is acquiring smatterings of psychological knowledge.

But the fact remains that the pattern of prayer will never vary in itself. The Christian must needs pass through the purgation of the Cross to reach the unity of the Resurrection. The only thing that is required for modern man is that this pattern be revealed in a simple and acceptable manner. Expositions naturally tend to

become more complicated as the years go by and various minds analyse the facts and experience of what they are studying. It is perhaps time to produce simpler expositions of the life of prayer that will link up easily with the other aspects of the Christian life which are now playing such important parts in the Church—the Mystical Body, the Scriptures, the Liturgy. This issue of *THE LIFE* may perhaps serve as an introduction to such a simplification.



THE ESSENTIALS OF PRAYER

PETER LAWLER

I SPENT this morning preparing some lectures on John Locke. He is, I think, a dull writer but I found a passage in his Introduction to the Essay which expresses very nearly my own feelings in reading this opening paper. 'Everyone', he says, 'must not hope to be a Boyle or a Sydenham, and in an age which produces such masters as the great Huygenius and the incomparable Mr Newton, with some other of that strain, 'tis ambition enough to be employed as an underlabourer in clearing the ground a little.' At this conference then which has brought together so many Boyles and Sydenhams of the spiritual life I shall try only to clear the ground a little.

Let us begin—in the fashionable manner—with our present situation. Many of us have not met before. Suppose we engage upon our first conversation. There is an imperative need to find topics of conversation no matter how inconsequential. As acquaintance grows into friendship, however, small talk becomes unnecessary. Pauses in the conversation cease to be embarrassing. And if, over a period of time, friendship should grow into intimacy then often there will be no need for words at all. Simply there is a shared happiness in being together. Now this constant human experience of a growing intimacy is basic to that classic progress in man's communion with God which has emerged from Christian experience and the writings of the saints.

It may be convenient to picture the progress as a ladder. The first rung on the ladder is discursive mental prayer. To attain this it is usually recommended (at any rate since the fifteenth