

CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,—In reply to X's article on 'The Family Spirit' I am taking it for granted that having mentioned 'a remarkable renaissance of the contemplative spirit' she is writing from the point of view of contemplative orders.

If this is the case there is probably a larger proportion of converts than one normally expects to find in teaching orders. These converts not only have no Catholic background or training, but they are generally considerably older than the postulant who is born a Catholic. All their education will have tended to emphasise their individuality and they have not that realisation of themselves as members of the Mystical Body which in the born Catholic produces an entirely different conception of her relationship with others.

Furthermore, they suffer under a disadvantage which is inevitable but not always sufficiently recognised. I refer to the fact that during the process of conversion the subject has passed through a period of intense introspection and concentration upon her own problem. When she realises her vocation to the religious life, her immediate reaction is the thought that in the convent she will be able to continue her personal quest for God free from distraction and hindrance. She does not come to the convent with the idea of pursuing her ideal in common with others, and is disconcerted to find that she is expected to subordinate her personality to community life. Perhaps if it were impressed upon her even before her entry into religion that in the convent she has less importance as an isolated individual than as part of the community, she would develop in time 'the family spirit'. I speak, I admit, in ignorance. For all I know that may be the first thing she is taught; but I find it difficult to believe that any soul of good will, whatever her upbringing, can be so wrapped up in her own personality as to be quite unable to fit in with the general scheme once it is explained to her by someone who sees her problem clearly.

Do superiors realise sufficiently the cause of her self-absorption? It is not necessarily sheer self-centredness in the ordinary sense, but may only be the result of an intense preoccupation with her often quite recent conversion and a great desire to 'get to God quickly'. She is apt to look upon the community as ministering to her own special advancement. So it is, but not in the way she thinks.

I believe 'the family spirit' is very much alive today, which is probably why so many people are anxious to join Third Orders and other Aggregations. They want to belong to a family and this feeling is quite different from the gregarious instinct that makes people want to do things in droves.—Yours etc.,

Y.