

THE PRIEST IN EDUCATION: APOSTOLATE OR ANOMALY?

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A NOTEWORTHY fact about contemporary fiction is its interest in the priest.¹ This is due, no doubt, in some measure to literary faddism, but it cannot be dismissed as simply that. A more basic reason for the interest is that the priest has become an enigma in the technological society of the urbanized Western world. He is, for many, a fascinating survival from the past into an age that sees no utility in religious culture now that it has been stripped of the social, political, and intellectual functions that once made it a power in the world. But interest in the priest is not limited to the non-Christian. In fact, some of the most moving and influential novels about priests have been written by deeply committed Christians. Bernanos' *Country Priest* comes immediately to mind. For Bernanos, indeed, it is not the priest but the world that is ultimately called into question. For him the priest is, as it were, a beachhead of God thrust into enemy shores, into a world under the domination of Satan. The priest is doomed to failure, but in his failure God triumphs as He triumphed in the Cross of Christ. Other Christian novelists with priest-protagonists are less sure of what the priest is or ought to be; their novels are attempts to come to grips, in the manner proper to the novelist, precisely with the question: what is the priest? At times they focus their question on the priest as the possessor of authority and tempted to pride (cf. as far back as Canon Sheehan), more often on the priest as celibate man in a sensate culture and in a Christian culture that has, with relative suddenness, discovered and given reflective theological grounds for the dignity of Christian marriage and the dignity of the redeemed body.

¹ This essay was originally a paper read at an institute on "The Society of Jesus and Higher Education in North America," Woodstock College, Oct. 9-11, 1964. Only very minor alterations have been made in the text. The limitations of time explain why, after the lengthy development of the first part of the paper (this section is fundamental to any further discussion), only a first and sketchy answer could be given, in the third part of the paper, to the original question proposed to the writer.

Apart from the literary scene, not a few of those who are asking what a priest is are themselves priests, especially young priests and those approaching priesthood. In their minds the question has, no doubt, varying concrete meanings. Our concern here is with one particular aspect or form of the question. Many young priests—and the vast majority of them are to be found in the active religious orders rather than in the diocesan priesthood—are not able, as an older generation was, to go unquestioningly into a life of teaching or scholarly research. Why has the priest thus come to question many of the occupations he finds himself in? I shall suggest some of the reasons later on. But the important thing is that the questioning is there and must be faced.

I would like to be sure from the very beginning of this essay that the precise question I am speaking to is correctly understood. Some priests in educational work have no problem about the priest being an educator or a scholar. They do question whether Catholic colleges and universities have not seen their day, whether the priest-educator ought not rather go onto secular campuses and work there. This kind of question is often enough raised these days by priests and answered in one direction or the other. But there is a prior question: Should a priest be in education at all, at least apart from directly religious education (which might or might not include theology)? There is no doubt that education and scholarship are good, holy, Christian things, but should the priest be doing them? They are apostolic tasks, but is the priest justified in engaging himself in every kind of apostolic task?

In attempting to answer this prior question, I propose first to examine Scripture and the liturgy of episcopal consecration and presbyteral ordination for evidence of what a priest (= presbyter) is. There is need to do this in some detail, because in books on the priesthood there has long been prevalent, even if not always explicitly acknowledged, a somewhat narrow conception of priesthood which creates a false problem. A more just conception of priesthood is necessary in order to clear the air for further discussion. This more just conception will indeed itself raise a genuine problem for the priest-educator, the priest-scientist, any "hyphenated priest," a problem that cannot be dismissed on the grounds that it rises only from a too narrow conception of priesthood. But at the same time this more just conception will suggest a solution to our problem or at least supply norms to be applied

in facing it. After this first and longest part of the paper, I shall point out historical factors which make the problem of the priest-educator more acute today. Finally, I shall propose what I regard as a valid and viable solution to the problem.

NATURE OF CHRISTIAN MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD

The first and perhaps most significant fact about priesthood in the New Testament is that the title "priest" is applied only to Christ on the one hand and to the faithful on the other, but not to the apostles and the *episcopoi* or presbyters.

What does "priesthood" mean in the New Testament? Behind the New Testament idea of priest there lies, as we might expect, an Old Testament idea. The New Testament writers could speak of Christ, or the faithful, as priest only against the background of their experience, direct or vicarious (through the biblical writings), of what priesthood in the people of God was.²

No outward difference is discernible between the priests of Israel and those of pagan nations. The same name (*kôhên*) is applied to both in the Old Testament, and their functions were apparently the same. The difference between Israelite and pagan priesthood lay in a different understanding of God and of man's relationship to Him under the covenant. It lay in the meaning attached to the fulfilment of outwardly similar functions. What were these functions?

One of the oldest texts on Israelite priesthood, the blessing on Levi in Dt 33:8-10 (which may date from as early as the end of the eleventh century), shows the priest with a triple function. He consulted God, that is, gave answers in God's name (with the help, in early times, of oracular devices) to pilgrims who came to pray and offer sacrifice at the shrine he served. He was, secondly, a teacher. *Tôrâh*, or instruction, belonged to the priest as judgment to the king and wisdom to the wise man (cf. Mi 3:11; Jer 18:18; Ez 7:26). *Tôrâh* was from God, but via the priest, who spoke not on the basis of prophetic inspiration but of inherited lore, of tradition. Originally, such instruction probably dealt with ritual casuistry; but later, at any rate, it became broader in scope,

² The next three paragraphs summarize what is said in Roland de Vaux, O.P., *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, Part 4, chap. 5.

included moral instruction, and got incorporated into the Bible itself. The priest's third function was sacrifice.

With the passage of time the priest's functions became more restricted. The oracular function may have continued until the ruin of the Temple, but most of the evidence for it is from an earlier time. The priest also gradually lost his teaching function. Teaching and worship became quite separated, and a new class of men, the scribes and doctors, came into existence, a class open to all and displacing the priests as teachers of the tradition, of the Israelite *depositum fidei* as recorded in the law and the prophets. Thus, by the end of the inter-testamental period, not only was priesthood conceived primarily in terms of sacrifice, but the priest had in fact no other functions.

It is against this background of the priest as sacrificer that the New Testament treats Christ's priesthood in the Letter to the Hebrews. Christ the priest is seen as accomplishing what the Old Testament priesthood had been unable to do. In the Old Testament, priesthood was a genuinely mediatorial office, that is, the Israelite depended on the priest for the offering of a saving sacrifice. But the priest could not, in fact, offer such a sacrifice, being himself a sinner. Consequently, the Old Testament ideal, established by election and covenant, of a priestly people purified of sin, fully sanctified, its whole existence an act of worship, was unattainable, and its realization was projected into the eschatological period, the "age to come."

Christ, however, came as one able to offer such a saving sacrifice and thereby to make the new and eternal covenant, and the age to come, present realities. The new covenant, like the old, has as its goal and ideal a priestly people; we see the phrases of Ex 19 being applied to the new Israel in 1 Peter and the Apocalypse: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy people, a people of God's very own. Under the new covenant, the ideal is already being realized, because the people shares in the holiness of Christ, priest and victim. The sacrifice which the new people of God is to offer is, according to the well-known passage, 1 Pt 2:1-10, a spiritual one, that is, a sacrifice made possible by the power of Christ's Spirit dwelling in the believer. The 1 Peter text does not tell us in what precisely the sacrifice consists, but what is meant is elsewhere made reasonably clear. The Old Testament already knows that the sacrificial gift which God really wants is man

himself, approaching God with prayer (Ps 140:2), with thanksgiving and praise (Ps 49:14; 106:21-22), and with a humble and contrite heart (Ps 50:9). This gift is more precious to Him than those prescribed by the law (cf. Hos 6:6; Mi 6:6-8), though the Temple sacrifices are not thereby rejected, since they are, ideally, to be the outward expression in ritual form of these more interior realities. In the New Testament, especially in Paul and Hebrews, a number of things are described as the Christian's sacrifice: faith (Phil 2:17), the service of love, i.e., almsgiving (Phil 4:18), the praise of God (Heb 13:15), and, in a word, the all-embracing sacrifice described in Rom 12:1, namely, the whole Christian life as a "living, holy victim pleasing to God, your spiritual [= Spirit-inspired and Spirit-directed] service of God."

But the passage from 1 Peter contains something more which is of great importance for our understanding of priesthood under the new covenant. Verse 9 reads: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, God's own people, so that you may proclaim the mighty deeds of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." The "royal priesthood" (a phrase in which we already have the intimate joining of two "offices") is linked with the proclamation of God's great deeds, that is, with what we can call (provided we do not press the word too much) the "prophetic" office. This proclamation, other parts of 1 Peter suggest, is a matter of words (we must be "ready always to satisfy anyone who asks you to account for the hope that is in you": 3:15) and of conduct as well ("your upright lives among the heathen": 2:12; cf. Mt 6:15, "luceat lux vestra . . ."). The basic great deed of God is His call to men, His redemptive mercy, as is suggested by the characteristic words of the 1 Pt 2 passage (*electum, acquisitionis, misericordia*) and by the description of the God whom we are to proclaim, namely, the God who called us from darkness into His light.

The importance of the passage is its indication to us that the priesthood of the faithful, and consequently the priesthood of Christ which the faithful share, and the ministerial priesthood as well, are not fully intelligible if we consider priesthood as an isolated, purely cultic function, that is, if we define it solely in terms of sacrifice. We are equivalently, being told by 1 Peter not to concentrate on the intertestamental period when priesthood and sacrifice had become correlative terms, but

to look back to the early days of Levitical priesthood, when the priest was also a man of the word and a guide to the people, and still further back to the early days of Israel and to the period of the patriarchs and judges, when the natural heads of groups exercised priestly functions and in fact often combined in themselves the threefold office of ruling, prophesying, and offering sacrifice. I am thinking of such men as Abraham and Jacob, of Moses, of Gideon and the father of Samuel, of David.

I mentioned earlier that the New Testament never speaks of the apostles and the *episcopoi* or presbyters as priests. One may object that the reality of their priesthood is given and that we can very plausibly explain why the term "priest" is not applied to them. This is doubtless true. But the very fact that the term "priest" is not used, even if explicable, suggests that we ask: what words does the New Testament use to characterize the apostles and their office? There are two words: one is *ministry*, and the other, even more fundamental and contained in the very name "apostle," is *mission*.

We can, without doing violence either to the reality or to the New Testament text, sum up the whole redemptive action of Christ in the word "mission." Christ was *sent*, sent *with power*. He was sent, first of all, to speak God's saving word: the word which was His own person, His human reality and human life, His human actions and words. He was sent to rule or, perhaps better, to show in His miracles the dominion of God over the world which will be fully manifested only in the eschatological kingdom, and to found, by His teaching and redemptive death and resurrection, His rule over men which will be exercised, in this time of partial fulfilment, chiefly through the Church. He was sent finally, and above all, to reunite mankind to God by His own return to the Father which we call His sacrifice.

As Christ, so the apostles: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." "All power is given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore" The apostles are sent with power, but they are sent as ministers. The apostles, in any of their roles and particularly in that of priest (in the narrower, more technical sense of this word which connects priesthood with sacrifice as its central function), are not mediators in the sense in which Jewish and pagan priests attempted to be mediators and in which Christ was effectively a mediator. In the Christian

economy, there is only one mediator, Christ. No one succeeds to Him as prophet and ruler and priest; He abides eternally as these three. He does have representatives in the visible Church who sacramentalize or render visible His ever-present and ever-active mediation. These representatives succeed to their predecessors, but each has the same relationship to the living Christ and to the faithful.

I am not concerned here with the special role of the twelve apostles or of those others in the early Church whom the New Testament calls "apostles," nor with the passage from the apostles to the monarchic episcopate. Instead, let us ask: what were the functions of the apostles which would pass to their successors, the bishops?

The apostles conceived of themselves primarily as ministers of the word, that is, of the message of salvation, of God's redemptive love and His call to repentance and faith and to union with Christ in His Body, the Church. "Primarily" does not deny the centrality of the Eucharist. It states rather a permanent priority of the ministry of the word in the approach of God to men; for worship is man's response to the word of God, his answer to the call to repentance and faith. The Eucharist is the focusing both of God's greatest word to man, spoken in the atoning death of Christ, and of man's response to God in union with Christ. As with Eucharistic communion, so with the other sacraments: all of them are God's word of salvation spoken to the individual believer in the critical situations of his Christian life, and the individual's response of faith to God's offer of Himself in His Son.

The New Testament is clear enough on the apostles' office of government, in which they are called upon to interpret Christ's will for the faithful in the concrete circumstances of their lives. As for the apostles' priestly function of worship and of administering the grace of God to men in the sacraments, the reality of this mission is clear from the Gospel, where they are told to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice as a memorial of Christ's death, to baptize, and to forgive sins. In the Acts of the Apostles we see them communicating to others the Spirit given them on Pentecost, that they might bear fearless witness to Christ; we see them communicating to others their own apostolic powers or a share thereof.

In a word, the apostles, as ministers and as men sent, are to be defined, as Christ Himself is, by the triple office of prophet, priest, and

king, or, more concretely, by the ministry of the word, of the sacrament, and of authoritative guidance of the faithful.

This larger view of priesthood as an integral part of the apostolic ministry, as inseparably linked with the ministry of the word and of government, was unfortunately lost sight of. The loss was less a matter of practice, indeed, than of theory. But theory or theology, like any conscious reflection on one's action, can have unhappy repercussions if it be too narrow.

In the fourth-century West, in reaction to the power and pretensions of the Roman deacons and their putting themselves above presbyters, St. Jerome and Ambrosiaster tried to prove the superiority of presbyters over deacons by claiming that presbyters are really the equals of bishops. Apart from being selected out of the presbyteral body to govern, the bishop is, like the presbyter, a consecrator of the Eucharist; the presbyter has all the other sacramental powers of the bishop as well, even if in practice the exercise of some of these is reserved to the bishop. It would not be too long before the conclusion was drawn from this view that episcopal consecration brings with it no special grace, that is, is not a sacrament, and that in the last analysis the only thing to be considered in the sacrament of orders, as it is received by presbyters and bishops, is the communication of the power to consecrate the Eucharist and to prepare men for the Eucharist by the forgiveness of sins. The way was thus opened for the widespread medieval persuasion that regarded orders primarily in terms of the presbyter, that regarded the presbyter as one who can consecrate the Eucharist, and that regarded the episcopate, consequently, as not a new sacramental order. This theological tradition entered ascetical writing on the priesthood and led to a concentration there on the priest as offerer of sacrifice and to the development of a priestly spirituality centered too exclusively on the Mass.

Now, obviously, in this theological tradition a great truth is being respected and cherished. The Eucharist *is* the center of the Church's life. It is that "liturgy" or "work of the people of God" in which that people most fully expresses what it is: the gathering of men in Christ for the praise of God's redemptive mercy (cf. Eph 1:3-14). And it is the act in which that people most efficaciously renews itself, ever drawing men into, or more deeply into, the movement which is its life, the

movement of men in Christ towards union with the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But it is one thing to assert a great truth, another to isolate it. During all the centuries when this narrow view of the presbyterate and still narrower view of the episcopate and therefore of orders itself was developing and hardening, the Eastern Church possessed a broader and much more just theology of orders, and the West *lived* this same theology every time a bishop was consecrated or a presbyter ordained. Since the Council of Trent, indeed, voices have been heard in ever-growing numbers protesting against the downgrading of the episcopate by reducing its superiority over the presbyterate to a matter of administration. If one reads some of the recent literature on Vatican I, one will see the theology of the Schools being left behind in 1870 by the living magisterium, the bishops, in their debates on the episcopate. It is in the last two decades, however, that this reversal of outlook has reached the critical point, and Vatican II has brought the development to a climax.³

For our purpose it will be enough to look briefly at the rites of episcopal consecration and presbyteral ordination.

In the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, composed about 215 A.D., and containing the fundamental ideas of our later and more elaborate rite, the bishop is described as leader and priest. There is invoked upon him the power of the Spirit given to rulers; it had been given to Christ, who gave it to the apostles; these in their turn have communicated it to their successors, the bishops. The task of such a ruler is *poimainein*, "to be a shepherd," translated in the New Testament now by *pascere*, now by *regere*. The double Latin translation brings out the nature of "rulership" in the Church: it is a ministry, a *diakonia*, authority used for the well-being of those ruled. The bishop is also to have the "Spirit of high priesthood," which will find expression in constant service of God, in intercession for his people, in the Eucharistic sacrifice, in the forgiveness of sins, in the distribution of ecclesiastical offices for God's service, in all binding and loosing.

The present-day Roman rite of episcopal consecration is the product

³ Since this paper was written, Vatican II has promulgated its *Constitutio dogmatica de ecclesia*, which affirms that in episcopal consecration the fulness of the sacrament of orders is conferred (chap. 3, no. 21, par. 2).

of centuries of development but has now existed unchanged, in all important points, since the end of the thirteenth century. In the sacramental form of his consecration, the bishop's office is summed up as the *summa ministerii*, the "fulness of the ministry," and is spelled out, in the Preface of consecration, as including the ministry of the word (the bishop is *doctor fidei*), the ministry of reconciliation in word and deed, and the ministry of authority exercised for the building up of the Body of Christ.

If we turn now to the rite of presbyteral ordination in Hippolytus, we find the presbyter's office being defined in terms of the bishop's. The presbyter is to receive the "spirit of grace and counsel" proper to the presbyteral college, in order that "he may help the bishop in governing the people." He receives a share of the spirit given to the bishop, as the seventy elders (in the Book of Numbers) received a share in the spirit of Moses. The presbyter governs as a member of the *sacerdotium*, and thus is priest as well as leader, though in subordination to the bishop. His role as aide in priesthood and government includes the whole pastoral office and thus the ministry of the word, as the rest of the *Apostolic Tradition* and what we know of the Church's life at this period show us. In a word, the presbyter is ordained to help the bishop in all of the latter's offices.

The present-day Roman rite of ordination, which likewise dates from the end of the thirteenth century, spells out the presbyteral office in the Preface of ordination and in the various rites which dramatize the powers received by the presbyter. He is to govern, to offer sacrifice and administer sacraments, and to teach. What stands out most sharply in the Preface (which dates unchanged from about the time of St. Leo the Great) is the stress on the presbyter's relationship to the bishop. He is a man *sequentis ordinis et secundae dignitatis*, "of second rank and subordinate dignity." He is a *secundus praedicator*, a minister of the word, but a subordinate one. His whole office is a *munus secundi meriti*, a subordinate office or an office of lesser dignity. He is described in another prayer as *cooperator ordinis nostri*, "a helper of our [i.e., the episcopal] college." The bishop remains the constant center. It is he who, like the apostles of old, speaks to the world through the *secundi praedicatores*; it is he who, like Moses, governs the people through the *adiutores*.

The point I wish to make here is twofold. First, the presbyter and the whole body of men who form the presbyterate are helpers of the episcopal college, whether they are assigned to help a particular bishop or work for a group of bishops or work directly for the head of the episcopal college, the pope. Thus, even if the bishop were to communicate every power he has to a presbyter, the presbyter would have these powers only from the bishop and as an aide to the bishop, who alone has in himself the fulness of the ministry, which is the fulness of the triple office of teacher, priest, and ruler, or more simply, the fulness of the apostolic office.

Second—and this is more directly of concern to us—the priest is not simply a minister of cult, not simply a man of the ritual sacrifice and the sacraments. He is also a minister of the word of God and an authoritative guide for the people of God.

From this long explanation of the nature of Christian priesthood a question immediately arises: If the role of the priest is to be minister of the word of God, to sanctify the people of God by offering sacrifice and administering sacraments, and to help govern the people of God, what business has he to get involved in all the occupations which, as a matter of fact, take up the bulk of many priests' time? The question can be asked of many diocesan priests no less than of religious priests. For the parish priest may be involved in numerous parish activities, anything from being business manager of the drum-and-bugle corps, to measuring out his life in coffee spoons while the ladies of one or other parish society engage in small talk. The priest in education may teach the passive voice to passive boys, or range along the ladder of instruction from literature and science to philosophy and theology. Perhaps he is a research scholar, scorning delights and spending laborious days, or even nights, with microscope or telescope, or trying to resurrect the past from shards or shells or books. How can he afford to engage in all of this? Not that *it* is not of value, but why is *he* doing it?

The impression that he is gone astray, or rather is stopping gaps that someone else ought to be stopping, is strengthened if we look for a moment at the history of the priest's engagement in such tasks and at the contemporary scene. "History" is too pretentious a word. I wish simply to convey an impression of an evolution whose direction is

towards the priest's progressive disengagement from all such seemingly alien tasks.

CHALLENGE OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The first and paradigmatic example of such disengagement in the interest of more suitable and essential tasks occurred shortly after Pentecost. In Acts 6 we read that the apostles appointed men of good repute in the community to see to the support of the widows of Greek-speaking Jews, who, it was felt, were being neglected in favor of native Jews. The apostles had been expected to handle this task directly, but they objected that it was not right for them to neglect the ministry of the word in order to serve at table, no matter how laudable this charitable act might be.

At a later point, the breakup of the Roman Empire led to the progressive involvement of bishops in the tasks and offices of civil society. It led to the medieval prince-bishops and to the pope as temporal ruler. A great many political revolutions with their spiritual consequences were needed to change this situation and to effect that separation of spiritual and temporal rule which has proved so beneficial to the Church. Today the tide of sentiment (not least in Vatican II) is running strongly in favor of bishops' ceasing to be primarily great builders or business managers or fund raisers and becoming, like the apostles, men devoted to the ministry of the word and fathers of their people.

As for the presbyter, we need only look at very recent times in our own country. A vast number of American Catholics who grew up in the Eastern United States before the Second World War came, I would venture to say, from large Catholic parishes, from Catholic schools, and from large Catholic clans, whether Irish or Italian or Polish or German or whatever, whose older members were from overseas. They came, in other words, from Catholic ghettos, though I do not use the word in any pejorative sense. The Catholic ghettos I speak of were a historical necessity, and what today would be a flight from reality was at that time a facing of reality. At any rate, it was within such enclaves that the priests we knew moved all their lives. Those outside were either lapsed Catholics (usually due to invalid marriages), for whom the priest and others prayed, hoping by this strong cord of love to draw

them back to the fold before death, or else they were born non-Catholics, for whom, again, one prayed but with whom one had, on the religious level, no more contact than if they lived on a distant star—and this even though one might have grown up with them, played with them, lived next door to them for a lifetime. If they “came into” the Church, it was just that: they were drawn by something or other to where the priest was. Part of his job was to instruct them, and he did so. But the religious world from which they came was still on another star.

In this milieu the priest, who would define himself most likely by his power of consecrating the Eucharist and forgiving sins, was by no means limited to these two occupations. In addition to other spiritual ministries, he had to be, and was, all things to his people: builder of churches, parish halls, schools; social worker who found food and jobs for his parishoners, and politicked for them and their rights against the Protestant establishment; teacher of religion; teacher of everything, if need be, in the schools he had built as the bulwark necessary for safeguarding and strengthening the faith of his people.

But this world has, I would hazard, vanished in large measure. The clan cohesion has broken down among many ethnic groups as they have become Americanized, and the individual family is much more directly and inescapably confronted with the pluralistic, i.e., non-Catholic and non-Christian, society of which it is a part. A great many of the young Catholics who have come to maturity since the Second World War face this pluralistic society not only as a threat but also as a positive challenge; the ecumenical spirit has been growing for years in the Catholic Church, even if it experienced a tremendous new injection of life with the advent of John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council. There has inevitably come to the young priest of the post-modern age the same apostolic challenge, both with regard to his fellow Catholics, to inspire in them a greater love for the full Christian life and a greater apostolic zeal, and with regard to the non-Catholic and the non-Christian.

At the same time as this change of outlook has been taking place, other changes have occurred: the priest, if not the Church, can be relieved (if he wants to be!) of many of the tasks he formerly had to do. Governmental agencies, private secular organizations, and, within

the Church, zealous laymen and laywomen and new religious societies have made it possible for the priest to be no longer a social worker, a counselor in temporalities, a builder, a financier, a Jack-of-all-trades in education. There are many laymen willing and eager to share in the apostolate of the Church according to their capacity, whether by relieving bishops and priests of temporal tasks, or by engaging in education on all levels and in all disciplines. Not too long ago the idea of a layman (to say nothing of a laywoman) teaching philosophy (much less theology) in a Jesuit college would have been scorned. But we have them today.

It is no wonder, then, that many young priests are irked at having to spend their energies in tasks which laymen could do just as readily, perhaps more competently. This applies to parish life; it applies also to education and to the use of priests in many positions of administration and teaching.

All this is, in a sense, the negative side of the picture. On the positive side, there is a renewed sense of what a priest is, namely, a minister of the word no less than of sacraments, combined with an awareness of the dechristianization of society and of new vital impulses within the Church, springing from the liturgical, biblical, and ecumenical movements. Many priests, therefore, feel that their consecration as apostles calls for them to spend their time not in classroom or office, doing jobs that others can do, but in the work of directly fostering these new vital impulses in the Church and of directly engaging in the struggle between Christianity and the pervasive practical atheism and paganism of modern society.

TOWARDS A SOLUTION

Is there anything to be said, then, for a priest's commitment to higher education and to scholarship? Have groups of priests engaged in education simply become prisoners of the work they started, unable to escape its inner logic of expansion, its ever-growing demands for further commitments as the realms of important human knowledge grow broader and more detailed? Are they left to make the best of a situation they would be better out of? If the answer is "yes," then they are indeed in an intolerable situation, and the major forces operative in the renewal of Church life today will wreck the priest-educator.

For the more deeply conscious he is of his priesthood and its ideals, the more schizophrenic he must become as the rift between ideal and accomplishment remains or is even widened. The only hope would be that the consciousness of his priesthood should recede into the background and cease to disturb him—which is hardly a desirable solution.

Similarly, I do not think he can find peace by saying that he is first of all a Christian, who has his talents and inclinations which he must sanctify and make part of his spiritual sacrifice to God, and that he is also a priest, ordained for the accomplishment of certain functions necessary in the Church: Mass and sacraments; government if need be; the preaching of sermons and the giving of spiritual direction. To stop here is to partition his priesthood off from the rest of his life by reducing it to a narrowly conceived function. The impossibility of doing this is perhaps best indicated by the fact that, however narrowly he may conceive his functions, men regard him always as a priest. It is, in their eyes, always a priest who is a scientist or philosopher or litterateur or teacher. Thus he has to integrate his life in the eyes of men; to do this, he must integrate it for himself.

A solution—or, at least, the promise of one—to our problem of whether the priest belongs in higher education and scholarship or indeed in any task that takes him, as it were, outside the sanctuary, lies, I think, in the idea that the priest is a minister of the word. And to be minister of the word of God means to be an official witness to the redemptive will of God for man and his world. Let me spell this out by some remarks, first on the words “official witness” and then on the words “redemptive will of God for man and his world.”

Priest As Official Witness

Every Christian is called—as was mentioned earlier in connection with 1 Peter—to bear witness to God’s marvelous deeds, to His saving the world in and through Christ. This is the indispensable witness of personal holiness; without it the Church would founder, would not be the *signum levatum in nationes* (Is 11:12, cf. Vatican I, *DB* 1794), the sacrament of God’s redemptive mercy victorious over sin and death. Such witness is based upon personal insight into the gospel message. Such witness by any individual does not commit the Church as a whole, though the power of the gospel message will undoubtedly be judged by

its results in Christians as a body. The distinction I am making between two types of witnessing may be clarified if we look at the priest, where the situation is reversed. When we speak of the priest as official witness or as minister of the word, we do not mean that, unlike the layman, he preaches sermons or teaches catechism (these are only two forms such ministry can take); we mean that when he speaks, he speaks in one or other degree with the authority of the Church and not simply with the authority of personal insight into the gospel. By "authority of the Church" here I do not mean necessarily some canonical authorization; I mean that in the eyes of men he is a priest and that he can rarely escape entirely this *persona publica*, this new personality given him at ordination. Where he goes, the Church goes, in a way special to the priest as distinguished from the layman. Thus, when recently priests and ministers became involved in the civil-rights movement, men said: "Now the Churches are involved."⁴

⁴ The Church (in the person, e.g., of the local bishop) can disown the action of one of its priests where he has gone astray in doctrine or discipline. This can happen even where the priest had a strict canonical mandate to act or was carrying out his "office" in the strict sense of this word (cf. *CIC*, can. 145). Men recognize the possibility of a priest, no less than a layman, ceasing to be, in fact, the kind of witness that truly represents the Church, and the validity of the Church's withdrawal from solidarity with such a priest. On the other hand, the very fact that a priest is legitimately (in the eyes of the Church at a given time and place) engaged in an activity is an official approval and commitment by the Church (even though there be no question of an "office" even in the wide sense this word can have in the *CIC*; cf., again, can. 145). There are kinds and degrees of "officiality."—Since neither the strict nor the broad sense of the word "office" (as understood by the *CIC*) provides an adequate concept for describing the involvement of the Church through its priests or, in other words, for describing the character of the priest's witnessing as distinguished from that of the layman, I have used "official witness" in this paper to mean "the priest as men see him": they see him as in one or other degree (according to the place of what he is doing in the hierarchy of values) invested with a *persona publica*; this is a datum which cannot be avoided by refusing to extend the concept of "official" beyond its use in the *CIC*.—I have said nothing in the text about the priestly "character" received in ordination. The reason for this reticence is that, on the one hand, we really know almost nothing directly about the character, while, on the other, it is not, in any event, a priori evident that the character must be at work, so to speak, in all that a priest does "officially" (as I have used this word or, for that matter, even in the senses in which the Code uses it). And even if the claim can be justified, as it may well be, that the character is operative at every point in a priest's official action, our knowledge of the nature of the character can nonetheless ultimately be only an induction from what we can establish about the priest's proper activity. The fundamental question thus is: how is the ministry or apostolate of the ordained priest to be conceived?

I said above that the priest speaks "not simply with the authority of personal insight into the gospel." If the priest's life is discordant with the message he brings, the power of the message is, humanly speaking, undermined and diminished. The more he personally lives by the gospel, the more effectively the Church will preach the gospel through him. However, it remains true: in the case of the layman, his holiness or lack of it reflects indeed upon the Church, yet it is primarily he and not the Church that is made resplendent or tarnished; in the case of the priest, his holiness or lack of it not only reflects upon the Church, but it is primarily the Church and not he as an individual that is strengthened or weakened in the eyes of men.

The Redemptive Will of God for Man and His World

So much on the priest as official witness. What is it that he witnesses to? He witnesses to the *verbum salutis* (Acts 13:26), the word of salvation, to God's will to redeem mankind and all that is human, and to the fact that this redemption is already accomplished. This effective word of salvation was spoken in the person of the Incarnate Son and in His cross and resurrection. It is spoken anew in every Mass and in every sacrament. It is spoken anew (the distinctions to be made need not concern us here) whenever the Church preaches the gospel message, whenever it interprets the will of God for Christian man or even for man as such.

The redemptive word of God, then, must not be conceived in too narrow a fashion. Such narrowness can be avoided without at the same time confusing preaching with sacrament, kerygma with law, or spoken word with word incarnated in action. The Christian whose life is under the domination of charity is in all his actions speaking the redemptive word of God into his own individual world; he is effecting the sanctification of his world—a world of matter, a world of the human spirit, a world of human relationships—because he is integrating it into his own movement of charity towards God.

It can likewise be said of the priest that he—but now as the official witness of the Church—speaks the redemptive word of God in all the actions of his life. The difficulty with such a statement is that, however true, it offers no proximate criterion for determining in what

spheres of human action a priest may or ought to engage himself. Perhaps we will do better to start, not with the individual priest, but with the Church.

The Church has a word to communicate, the word of salvation. It expresses it in sacrifice and sacrament, in teaching and governing. Now in these latter two areas one cannot draw a line and state: "Thus far and no further does the Church have a say." The Church's field of operation is as broad as human life itself, because it is man in his totality as a person, moving in history towards God, that is the object of God's redemptive will and redemptive word. There is, after the Incarnation, no longer any radically profane area in human existence. For what is this "word of redemption"? Is it not that all things have been restored in Christ, that all reality has its being in Him as center? This word finds expression indeed in the word of preaching and in the word of doctrinal teaching. But the redemptive will and word of God are preached and taught in order that they may lay hold upon, find themselves incarnated in, the living flesh of redeemed man, in the *life* of preacher and teacher, hearer and learner, in the action of man in his world as he brings all human values to God in himself. Man's world—his talents, the energies, personal and impersonal, that affect him and work good or evil in and through him—all these become "word" in him as they are submitted in him to the law of the gospel. And the gospel becomes flesh in him and his world. The Church, therefore, must be present to all that is human, at least through its unofficial witnesses, the faithful. Otherwise we are Manicheans or, at best, deists who think that God is interested only in some realm of pure spirit.

What of the Church's official witnesses, its priests? Two broad general norms must, I think, be applied to the question of the activities in which priests are to be engaged. First of all, there is a hierarchy within the forms that the ministry of the word may take. Primacy belongs to the direct preaching of the gospel with its call for faith and conversion. As long as this is not done, all else must wait; otherwise the Church betrays its primary purpose. Here, then, is a first norm for the choice of works by the Christian priesthood, and doubtless it is precisely from this consideration that the malaise of many priests arises. Can we af-

ford to spend our time in other works, however good, as long as this primary work is still to be done?

It is beyond question that the dechristianization of many formerly Christian areas and the growing Diaspora situation of the Church in all parts of the world as Christians are more and more swallowed up in the masses of pre-Christian or anti-Christian society give special point and urgency to the ever-necessary re-evaluation of the works to which a society of priests commits itself. But many considerations must enter in here. For example, there are considerations of talent and temperament: not all priests are equally able to work on the frontiers of Christian society. More fundamentally, the existence of a hierarchy of works (a hierarchy in terms of need) does not change the fact that there are other ways in which a priest may bear witness to the redemptive love of God; and some of these ways, I would venture to say, must always be traveled if the Church is not to absent itself from key areas in the life of the man whom it summons to conversion and salvation.

· The second norm that has to be applied is the degree to which a work threatens to swallow up the priest who is engaged in it. This can happen in either of two ways. (1) The work makes impossible the kind of life a priest normally needs—a life with time for prayer, meditation on Scripture, and study—if he is to protect and develop his religious life and to have the wherewithal to be of priestly help to others. The failure of the priest-worker movement has been attributed (rightly or wrongly) to precisely this difficulty: the worker too often swallowed up the priest. (2) A second way in which the work may swallow up the priest is that the work itself does not embody the kind of human value which specifically needs to have put upon it the mark of Christ, needs to have the word of redemption spoken to it. To take an extreme case: there is no need of priest garbage-collectors, because there is no crisis here. There *is* a need of priest-scientists (I include the psychological and social as well as the natural sciences), of priest-litterateurs, priest-philosophers, priest-theologians; there is need of priest-poets and priest-artists. The Church must have an official presence in these areas, because the great and fundamental human value, knowledge, is *always* threatened by the innate tendencies of fallen man. It needs to have

the word of its redemption spoken to it, not in abstract statement, but in the concrete form of its exercise by the Church in the latter's official as well as unofficial witnesses.

I would like, finally, to make two brief points. The first is that the justification here proposed of the priest as educator and scholar can be obscured by clichés that only darken knowledge where they pretend to cast light. I am thinking, in particular, of the statement that "to the layman belongs the consecration of the world." There is undoubtedly a truth here, as there is in most clichés. But the contrast which is implicit in the statement is a contrast primarily between the monk and the layman in the world. It really leaves untouched the place of the priest as such, and even the place of the active religious. The Jesuit priest, for example, is not a layman, but, though a religious, neither is he a monk, and unfortunately much of the writing on the spirituality of religious assumes at bottom that what goes for the monk goes for the clerk regular as well.

The second point is that we should not immediately attach to the role of the priest-educator or priest-scholar, such as I have described it, the tag "apologetic." We have become afraid of this word, but our fear fails to take into account that there are various kinds of apologetics. To speak of a priest becoming a scientist for apologetic reasons can mean that he enters into science with a utilitarian religious outlook on scientific work which will probably, sooner or later, lead to a lack of intellectual probity, and will certainly prevent him from becoming a genuine scientist; yet it is only as a genuine scientist (genuine at least in his intention and attitudes) that the priest can speak the needed word of redemption into this area of human experience. But "apologetic" can have another, quite different meaning. The priest can have the talent for scientific work and a genuine commitment to the scientific enterprise. As a Christian, he makes his work glorify God; as a priest, he makes it a powerful apologia for Christianity and Catholicism as truly catholic, as truly the place where all human things are redeemed. Witness or apologia here, however, is not something superimposed, something plastered on as an afterthought; it is inherent in the work itself and need not even find explicit voice.

CONCLUSION

This paper has been, for the most part, concerned with the theological basis needed for a solid approach to the question of the priest's concrete apostolates, and with the difficulties many priests feel at the present historical juncture in entering the apostolate of education or scholarship. The principle and norms offered as an aid to solution need to be tested by application to other areas in which priests have been or might conceivably be engaged (politics is one that may be suggested; work in planning and building the physical city of man, or work in technology, are others). Only such further testing and reflection will show whether the principle offers a universal solution or finds application only in restricted areas, leaving some doubt about others.