

# Bringing up Father

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I want, for my own satisfaction and perhaps others', to set down as clearly as I can some thoughts about the place of the priest in today's world. It wants some thinking about, I feel.

First of all there is very little written on the subject that comes my way. I remember a deliberately superficial and snap picture in the *Observer* recently of various clergymen, very sympathetic with the Catholic priest, though one wondered on the evidence just why; a strange novel, *The Edge of Sadness*, by Edwin O'Connor, which I found evasive and lacking in the decisiveness there must be in a priest, somewhere one hopes even in the vague, tired, washed-out priest that one does see often; and another book I have just got hold of, *Priests and People*, by Conor Ward: this an excellent sociological study so far as I can judge of a 'typical' Liverpool parish, though it leaves out deliberately the personal life of the priest.<sup>1</sup> I have it on my shelves, with *The Parish From Theology To Practice*, edited by Hugo Rahner, S.J., and *Handing On The Faith*, by Josef Jungmann, S.J., as basic text-books for a real pastoral theology. Many, many more need to be written, and others forgotten. It is as a small, provocative contribution to the whole matter that I write this article.

The feeling I want to meet and to answer was expressed for me once and for all by an amusing incident involving the gardener in one of our priories, not a Catholic but devoted and accordingly forthright nevertheless. We had to help him on certain days, while he treated us to friendly sallies and comment all the time; but one I remember especially, to me alone. 'Eh, you're on to a good thing', he said in his Midlands manner, his eyes twinkling respectfully. 'You stick to it. And the best of it all is', he added fiercely, '*no women involved*'. He was very happily married, himself; for all to see. Which gave his words all the more point.

I felt and feel, frankly, that what he said was true. He put a finger on the simplicity of religious life, and the life shared in obedience and celibacy by the diocesan priest also. And yet . . . what do I actually do? What is my life? What have I been doing these last two days?

<sup>1</sup>It gives a special kind of delight to have things like 'The Parish Fete' gravely pondered as a sociological phenomenon; and some useful ideas, too.

Mass in the morning; confessions afterwards; breakfast; a morning in the office, to solve or not to solve an unbelievable assortment of problems from visitors, medical, matrimonial, legal, educational, civil, financial, and occasionally religious; half an hour in one of the schools, teaching or trying to; lunch; reading the *Listener*; divine office from beginning to end; tea; in the office again; Legion meeting; visit to the hospital—going round beds chatting here, cheering up there, stopping to answer a question, checking from nurses no-one in danger; visit homes, if time; back to dinner; sitting in the parish choir in the evening—well out of the way, during practice: to let the members see the importance of their attendance, and be ready to check incipient quarrels so likely among *artistes*, furtively reading interesting scores over the girl organist's shoulder, hopefully coaxing her into venturing on better, modern music (very difficult, this), helpfully turning pages ('I'd rather learn to turn them quickly myself, please, Father'). Weary, to bed. Same programme the next day; substituting for the *Listener*, three chapters of *The Worldly Philosophers* (about economists, by the way); for the Legion, a Men's (in-) Action meeting—attendance 25 per cent; and for the choir in the evening, a Patricians' Discussion group—when I had to listen humbly to smart young men telling us what it suddenly strikes them priests ought to be doing about what, I had to remind them after all, are simply the faults of lay people (and that the only, only answer to bad priests, ever-to-be-insisted-on, from them, is to be yourself a good priest. Any takers? As I thought).

Why am I doing all this? Why must I do all this? My mind at one level accepts the need for the priest: the guide, leader, spokesman, interpreter and artist<sup>2</sup> that is needed for any sort of meeting, going anywhere, doing anything; never mind for a people believing itself face to face with God in faith and needing atonement in sacrifice. My mind at other levels slips its grasp of why I—or anyone like me—should be that priest, why there should be priests by profession, a cliquish clergy quite foreign to the ordinary run of men. Why not the most senior worthy active married man in the town? Why not the highest civil authority? Why a horrible young man like me? Trained and educated almost not to understand the ordinary man?

I think this is true and important questioning, to be distinguished before I go on from merely personal feelings which every priest must have from time to time, and which I mention now just to dispose of:

<sup>2</sup>I can't find or fabricate another word for someone who sets, or makes sense of, the world to be lived in. This side of the subject is beyond my depth.

feelings of anxiety, or emptiness, mistakenness in one's life and work. Anxiety can come from lack of a clear view of responsibilities, one's own, and others', and their limits—one's own, and others': this from lack of a knowledge of men and affairs, usually, for which all in charge of the training of priests must take a fearful blame. How many young priests worry and worry, have to be led out of social scrapes by the laity they should lead? Shrink from further dreaded collisions to become nonentities. *Emptiness*, from bachelordom, loneliness, lack of property interests, other small things even down to coming low on the diocesan pecking list; or finding priestly work not what was imagined; simply changing as one grows up to find certainties not so certain, sanctities not so sanct. *Mistakenness* in one's life, from personal sins, suppressed impatience and indignation at conditions; from the draw of work parallel to one's own that one may have to do also—and which one can come to feel was what was always wanted, was mistaken for the priesthood: social welfare, psychiatry, youth work, writing, teaching, management, personnel handling, administration, community leadership. How many priests give themselves to one or other of these? Not to mention those who mistake social climbing for promoting the Church, sanctuary drill for liturgy, decor faddism and dandyism for the proper worship of God. Is it any wonder all that falls?

These, I repeat, are feelings individual priests can have. However difficult they can make life for him, they are not questions or answers to the main issue to be faced. What is a priest for? What is he doing all day, that he couldn't raise a family or do a good day's work like anyone else?

There is an answer to this that would be given, angrily or good-humouredly by nearly every layman. What does a priest do? Why, nothing. Why should he? He might visit a bit among the women in the afternoon, or read his books if he wants to, but he doesn't work.

I don't know how to define work, actually. For most people it would be 'doing what you don't want to do—and have to be paid for'. On reflection, however, even they might agree that this was wrong-headed and harmful. They might then say, 'making something really of use'. But then a coal miner or a stevedore doesn't; a lorry-driver doesn't, he even doesn't have to stand to do it, either. They just handle things. They would all claim to work; most indignantly. You might then say, nearer the mark, 'providing some service that is needed'; though even this can't be pressed too far, or it would mean only the farmer, the bricklayer and perhaps the clothmaker. If we don't end up

with something really silly ('getting your hands dirty') as work, then we must agree on some notion like 'doing something, with effort or skill involved, and of use to others', even if we beg a lot of questions indeed. We begged a lot starting this discussion that would be incomprehensible to an Egyptian Pharaoh, or a Roman Senator. We assumed that we form a community within which we have rights and duties that however 'different' should be equal.

But before we come to this, even, there is a real misunderstanding on the part of honest laypeople that must be cleared up, a serious misunderstanding that is also, as Salinger's Esmé wrote (about *war*, actually) 'ridiculous to say the least'. The serious and ridiculous misunderstanding is that the priest does nothing. An example vivid in my memory will show what I mean.

I had made one of my appointments in a previous parish in England to be shown round one of the factories where many Catholics worked (shown round, incidentally, by one of the foremen, *not* owners or managers.) I had my usual morning, up around half past five, taking prime, pretiosa, terce in choir with the novices, stayed for meditation mass, caught a poor novice to serve my own mass, snatched breakfast and attended community mass at eight, stayed for sext, saw to correspondence, opened the Procurator's office for an hour or so to attend to the needs of the brethren, slipped into town, to shops, bank and post office in all of which I was delayed, and only then at last scooted along to the factory where I was, at eleven, nearly two hours late for my appointment. As, slightly weary even at twenty-five, after such a morning, I removed gloves and goggles, I was met by my friend the foreman with grudging admiration in his eyes for the gentlemanly life.

'What!' he said. 'You get up only *now*?'

One has to admit that what I had been doing all morning, assisting in the public, sung and acted acknowledgment of God, and seeing that a community of men could exist in reasonable condition to do so, might not compare in obvious indispensable advantage to society with the manufacturing I was to inspect so knowledgeably in the next few minutes. I mean, for there to be petrol in my machine at all to bring me to see the complicated manufacture of valve fixtures, there simply had to be this whole industrial complex for the manufacture of valve fixtures . . . Well, at any rate, you may see perhaps what I mean.

Finding and holding balance in this whole question makes a community. Lack of it is rocking our society to bits. Isn't it? My own life and work should be a contribution towards finding that balance. What

I do, the things I say, how I live, even down to what I wear, should make it clear that there is something else to life for us all than the steamy, gritty, daily manufacture of valve fixtures, and dreamy evening relaxation from it all. You may well wonder if it did, or what it did, this apparition of a young clergyman with sleek black suit, very clean white hands, general gloss. We shall dump whole bundles of questions overboard here, about whether it does any good at all, dressing and talking and acting as we do. From reports, actually, it did, and the young gentleman from the priory with his level interest in their various accomplishments let in on everyone a welcome whiff of church and history and death and marriage. At the time I was told proudly of the well-remembered visit of one of the Fathers previously—many years ago; of how the talks once given by the Prior at lunchtime in the street were liked very much indeed. All the girls, just all the girls, promised to come to see me about fixing the day, shrieking boys' names at each other above the clatter. I moved on, steadily. The men did complain—that the trees and grass around the war memorial needed tending, badly, and offered to see to it with me, too—which was later done.

I know, I know, there is still far to go in a factory fit for Christians, with not only regular services or classes for a few at lunch time, outings, retreats, psalm hymns and spiritual canticles *sometimes* over the loud-speakers, readings from the Bible, but with attempts to bring real confidence between management and workers, having ready crisis-plans for the relinquishing of jobs by married women and unmarried men in the event of an accepted lay-off perhaps—perhaps, too, joint reduction of profits and wages to make the product more available where it is needed. You will be surprised what people will do if shown the need for it—a film of living conditions in some foreign place like Liverpool due to the shortage of valve fixtures somewhere—if others will do it too, and they are sure it isn't just another of the bosses' tricks.) All this might be done, very slowly and gingerly and over the years. All this may be what we priests are here to do.

Without going so far at once, however, what, still, is the priest doing exactly?

He is going round, I suggest. All this work, other than study or writing articles, that keeps him in is worse than a waste of his time and could be handed over to lay-men and women—accounts, secretarial work, marriage advice: it might save some businessman's soul to handle parish and house accounts for the priest, and keep some woman

off the streets or away from magazines to do his letters. And you simply must have a good married woman to advise on problems. Unless it were all on such a small scale that it is more work and worry to have another do it, and as long as it is clear even to lay-folk that the bishop has the final decision. It would certainly open the eyes of the laity to the priest's problems. I'll never forget the look of horror, sheer, horrified sympathy, on the faces of the girls I asked here to help count the collection, every copper of it.

What should a priest do, going round?

He should meet evils, stand fast against them and learn to defeat them, and turn them into good, when he can. He has the mass, the office, and the sacraments to help him.

A priest has to meet evils. I had better not mince matters, and report one of the worst I know, that will be printed, anyway. In a parish not too far from here there's a young lady, very nice, I hear, living cheek by jowl and in the most amicable relations next door to the priest. She is well known to all, children and adults, and by the name 'Three Dollars'—her fee for the whole night; exorbitant, here, actually. But all day, as the priest, let's say, is repainting the statue of the Little Flower (the only sort of thing to do, safely, in that parish) he must be reminded of one of the sins of his parish every time he hears the cry, *T'ree Dallahs, T'ree Dallahs!* It would become quite haunting, I should imagine, even more so than the famous *Pieces of Eight*.

One grins nervously, reading this, I suppose. Is that enough? Please don't think I imagine there is any quick remedy or trick for this sort of case. There certainly isn't. I want you to imagine its effect, on any young priest with the standard cotton-wool upbringing, and how he would cope. I would complain about it were it not that divine providence seems to arrange that enough, well, experiences come the way of even the best brought up, most carefully guarded young clerical student. I'll still complain that the atmosphere is not there among us, not encouraged or allowed, in which one can grow to have the fine, finely-balanced sanity, the views one can and should take, able to laugh, comfort or damn when one should and as one should, knowing anything at all of life's complexities and values. One could be sent home from school sometimes to learn even from younger brothers and sisters some of the facts of life, before it is too late and one is irretrievably gauche.

What a priest has to do then, standing fast and turning to good, is something deep, complex, and unspeakably valuable; with effort and

skill involved and of use to others. It isn't simply seeing to mass attendance and the sacraments. It is helping as he can in the life of all the people he is in contact with. I can think of only one example. I wonder if you know the study and campaign outlined by Mr Ian Nairn in his books—a training in perceptiveness to the spreading squalor and mess of town and country, in *Outrage*, and the steps that can be taken, in *Counterattack*—canvassing for support and organising enlightened local resistance to the proposed concrete lamp posts here, the hoardings there, cutting down those trees in one part of town, unnecessary widening of the road in another. The aim is all the time for trimness everywhere, without any superimposed plan, but full respect for urban, town, village or rural scale and style; a proper setting for everything, ancient or modern, tenement or cottage, M 1 or mountain; a desire that every turn of the road should reveal wherever one is a neat, satisfying surrounding for nature and man. I must say, it all fascinates me—it is probably my 'draw'. If I ever desert the priesthood (which God forbid) you might track me down intent over a drawing board in some county architect's office, hands slightly over-hasty, eyes just a shade too eager, replanning the whole neighbourhood to heart's content. And you had better not disturb me, either.

But while I am still with you, as a priest, I see my life as something like that in a more difficult sphere—facing outrage on souls, and planning counterattack. The means are the same. One has no machine-gun, statutory powers, or very recognised position at times, to impress. One has to campaign, organise, explore, make contacts, as Mr Nairn and his friends do, against fearful odds. Don't let us complain of lack of interest and support; if you want to know what apathy looks like, call a meeting for the Preservation of our Rural Heritage. But if one learns how to campaign, the lack of machine-gun, statutory laws, and position can be turned into very great advantage indeed.

I wish to leave off here: not descend into mere suggestions, small proposals. A priest will be in touch, as much as he can, that's all, with anyone doing anything, councillors, cinema managers, editors, policemen, social and voluntary agencies, doctors, A.A., Old People's Help, and the dozen others working quietly away in his area, unnoticed. He will then learn what to do, what to encourage, what to oppose.

In spite of my good intentions I have not been clear about the real work of the priest. It is unclear itself, perhaps; unofficial, at times unwelcome; unobtrusive, often at best unrecognised; unrelated, not to say opposed to the majority's main, vivid concerns. He will be satis-

fied, nevertheless, if those in touch with him, by example or word or pen, even if only partly, but in some way because of him are living, and living more abundantly.

## The Liturgy as Prayer<sup>1</sup>—I

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

I want to begin by quoting a passage from St Paul which provides a good introduction to what I have to say. He is talking to the Colossians about rising with Christ and living in Christ's life. He goes on to say:

Put ye on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another if any have a complaint against another; even as the Lord hath forgiven you so do you also. But above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection; and let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts, wherein also you are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you abundantly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual canticles, singing in grace in your hearts to God. All whatsoever you do in word or in work, all things do ye in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father in him.

This concludes with the form of the liturgy, saying all *per Christum Dominum nostrum*, and begins with the social and moral virtues, leading up to the virtue of charity which is the bond of perfection. Now all this is really a sort of background to what is going on in the Church today, returning if you like to a more liturgical frame of mind—this enormous, unimaginable revolution in the liturgy that we have had in these last twelve years. Twelve years ago hardly one of us could have thought that so soon there would be changes in the mass, which has become so sacrosanct in every individual word and prayer that the idea of changing anything in it was hardly thinkable. A little further back

<sup>1</sup>Though based on a paper given at a conference for Religious at Spode House, this article should interest all who are trying to live a life of prayer. It will be concluded in the next issue.