

world as because he is regarded as a kind of visitant from another world 'a living sign of the *future* life.' The authors are particularly worried about the exceptional cases of married priests already permitted to exercise their ministry. This is the thin edge of the wedge: 'this change in traditional discipline might be difficult to contain within the bounds of real and urgent necessity'.

The real problem, not the suitability of celibacy, but its imposition by law, is airily dismissed: 'Since no one is obliged to accept the ministry, the freedom of candidates is in no way offended.' In the last resort that is indeed the choice we made. However idealistic our outlook, however hard we prayed, is it right to speak of a charism when we simply submitted to a law which made marriage an impediment to the priestly vocation we were trying to fulfil? We were free indeed: to take it or leave it. Does this kind of restriction 'in no way' offend against freedom?

Of course it worked for the most part. We do not intrude into each others' lives, but it is obvious enough after forty years of their acquaintance that the vast majority of the secular clergy in this country do much more than observe the law, accepting the burden and often the blessed release of their way of chastity cheerfully and modestly. Utterly kind to their brethren who seem to weaken, they resent over-dramatization of 'departures', solemn criticism of the Church's laws from the pulpit on a Sunday followed by hasty arrangements at the registry office on Monday, worst of all the latter day Heloises and Abelards who insist on sharing with the general public dull little love letters which the most ardent teenagers would soon be glad to forget.

All that is no reason why we should not welcome to our ministry eager apostles already married or to be married, ready to preach the word, to lead the Eucharist, above all to *serve* in their leadership, and in and through their secular calling to bring home the meaning of the kingdom beyond the bounds of their parish or indeed of the visible Church. Still less reason for not welcoming young men who choose to give themselves whole-heartedly to the apostolate, without being distracted either by the sudden charm of a lovely girl or the constraint of laws that hamper the true freedom of the spirit.

## II. Priests or Clergy? by Owen Hardwicke

I recognize at once that any viewpoint I express on the Synodal Document on the priesthood is necessarily unrepresentative. There

are relatively few of us who are priests in 'secular' employments. Because I have no specific mandate, as I would if I were a full-time priest-teacher in a diocesan seminary or school, or if I were a religious pursuing the community's special 'work', it may be that I have put any opinion of mine out of court. I would hope, however, that there would be some who might accept that even two years' experience in extra-diocesan work could be the basis of a small contribution to the debate on the nature and contemporary forms of priestly ministry.

While the Synodal Document has many indisputable matters in it, and also poses some questions more radically than one might have expected, I cannot help feeling that the difficulties it faces in the current crisis are intractable on the basis of its theological view of the ministerial priesthood. Almost by its own definitions, which have been our standard fare for centuries, it can allow for little development. The document seems to have settled, as matters not open to question, that the specifically priestly functions are clearly defined ontologically; and further that the priestly character pervades the whole life of the ordained man. In doing so, some facts of the church's history are overlooked; or, if recognized, are touched on so lightly as to minimize their relevance to the contemporary situation.

I think it is important to stress that those of us who look back to the evidence of the New Testament and the earliest years of the Church, do so, not in the belief that we shall find there any sufficient pattern for our own times; far from it. We only wish to emphasize that the established patterns, evolved to meet the needs of the Dark and Middle Ages, and then the Counter-Reformation periods, though surely under the general guidance of the Holy Spirit, do not have an essential connection with the Gospel message and the mission of the Church. From the intentions of Christ as we can fathom them, it is not absolutely certain that the triple pattern in the hierarchy of bishop, priest and deacon, even though it has a distinguished history, is irreformable.

On the other hand we do not seek to destroy this pattern altogether, but only to dissociate from it some of its accidental historical accretions, which now prevent its new adaptation to the needs of the Church in the present time. This certainly *does* mean, in my view, an end to the notion of priest (bishop and deacon too, of course) as members of 'the clergy'. There may well be a deep need for presbyterate and diaconate as organized structures in the mission of the bishop; but to delineate this as 'the clerical state' which is then extended downwards to include 'orders' which are not conferred by a sacrament at all, and have virtually no ecclesial function (e.g. tonsured cleric) seems to be a matter of sociology, not theology, and singularly liable to give a false view of the distinct shares that all God's people have in the priesthood of Christ.

Though I submit that the facts of history are more complicated,

theology's traditional presentation has been of a priesthood conferred by episcopal ordination beyond the common priesthood of all the faithful. This has meant an 'empowering' to certain ecclesial functions—the offering of Mass, and the forgiving of sins especially; but has been most of all the entry into a special bond of duty to the administration of a bishop, or religious superior, and therefore to a way of life, the clerical status. Nowadays there is a renewed emphasis on the ministry of the Word; but for long this has been shared with the deacon in theory, and in practice I'm not sure we would not accord it to the trained CEG speaker, or any member of the Church who is faithfully presenting her teaching. The only clear exercise of this ministry by the priest is in the liturgical assembly, when almost he alone (though there could be exceptions here) is the recognized and authorized exponent of the scriptural texts, or the medium for the bishop's pronouncements.

Yet it is the possible exceptions that provide the difficulty. The functions which need to be carried out in the Church are certainly more extensive than the priest alone exercises; his special functions may not even be called administering the sacraments, for baptism is certainly not limited to his 'power', and he is normally prohibited from administering matrimony—that is the office of husband and wife. What does seem to be the case in the developed office of *parish* priest (which is primarily a jurisdictional concept for organization under the diocesan bishop), is that he is responsible for ensuring that the sacraments are made available and are in fact being received in his area; and he himself is the sole authorized person (or his duly delegated substitute or assistant) for the presidential celebration of Mass, including the preached Word, and the official reconciler in the sacrament of penance, and dispenser of the holy anointing of the sick.

No-one would surely wish to say that such a figure is obsolete. In a well-ordered society, the Church rightly retains an easily recognized pattern of 'who does what', to be seen by all, and where the lines of responsibility are clear. Yet this does not clash with the need of much modification; there will be spiritual needs of people better served by criss-cross chaplaincies of some kind, not confined to geographical districts; and it may also be strictly necessary for the shedding of the load that many more people be ordained to authorized ministry on a limited scale. It is not outrageous to envisage the greatly increased conferring of ordination on many people to lead the local celebration of Mass in sub-districts, or even streets. The parish church would be then more like the early cathedrals; places for the special assembly of a much larger community on less frequent occasions. So far from lessening the need for priests, this envisages a much greater spread of ordination. Such people would not necessarily exercise other functions formerly performed by parish priests; they would not need to leave their 'secular' employ, and would need only a minimal period of training; for they would surely be chosen from those who had a

basic suitability for the work, and would accept 'in-service' training because of their well-known commitment. This really would be a vocation, a calling out by the bishop from the ranks of common priesthood for special service.

This can only come about satisfactorily if it does not mean re-classifying them as 'clergy' and forcing them to follow a manner of life that is essentially monastic. Celibacy, poverty of goods, a community life and a total commitment to the service of the ecclesial community are signs which are still badly needed in the world today. It is *not* clear that these full-time 'sign-men' were ever meant to be identified in any way with those who are called to the ministerial priesthood as co-ordinators under the bishop (i.e. parish priests) or even with the sole function of cultic leader. A special way of life of men set apart is still essential to a sacramental Church; there are still special 'times', 'places', 'things' and 'people' who signify in a special way the Holy, the supernatural values. The 'sign-men' are usually to be found in the monastic life; we have attempted to place this role on the parish priests. Many monks may indeed have the gifts that are called for in parish pastoral work, but to expect all pastoral priests to be monks is absurd, and to confuse the vocations. I suggest we have done it in such a way that we have produced the half-breed, 'the clergyman', the man who wants to work full-time and directly with the people of the Church, but tied to monastic customs and practices, and an ethos that separates him sociologically from the people. Whenever a man breaks through this—as he often does—people make the comment: 'You can speak so easily to him; he doesn't seem like a priest at all'. And there are many others who do not wish to have that sort of easy relationship with the priest, because they need him as the sign-man, the man apart, and expect an other-worldliness which it is very difficult to convey when one is primarily expected to be a leader of a local mission of the Church.

Apart from the monk (who may well not be a priest at all), and the more wide-spread de-clericalized priest orientated primarily to the eucharist, we still need the man who goes round (to quote someone else's phrase) to 'provoke community', to inspire and establish local groups, to co-ordinate and facilitate the growth of the life of faith. It calls for many different gifts and techniques, and if this man is the one who is to preside at the greater parish worship, then here we have the nearest thing to our present parish priest. If we learn anything from those denominations which have dispensed with the necessity of an ordained minister of some kind, there is usually a lack of cohesion, and certainly a loss of numbers where there is no central full-time man, recognized as authoritative in the way the parish priest is, the focus of the life of the local Church.

This seems to be the point at which we recognize the Synodal Document's reference to the representative role of bishop and

priest. There is a sense in which their acknowledged leadership is a necessary function. To me at least this representative function, both within the community of believers and to those outside the fold, is distinct from the sign function I have ascribed to the monk. At this point also however, I think we have to acknowledge the extreme value of some merging of the roles of 'man of God' and 'representative figure', and accept the effectiveness of having the bishop, our full-time diocesan leader, as monastic—celibate, with special time for contemplation and intercession, poverty of goods and total availability. The Eastern tradition would seem to point to this for the bishop at least, though we cannot claim it is originally required by the Gospel, unless we are to deny the authenticity of the scriptural injunction to the episkopos to be faithful to one wife.

If these notions are valid, and if many of these figures are also to be the parish priests in our present allocation of work, then there is a huge need, and a great practical advantage usually, in some elements of the common life, of team work, of planned prayer, study, mission, even if this means amalgamating many of our present parish districts. My impression is that this is what is still distinctly missing in most areas, in spite of new deanery modifications; and even in the most advanced dioceses, it is no more than a pious wish in the relations between bishop and priest. There may be something to be said in favour of individual priests going it alone. I speak as one who was allowed to get on with it for nearly 15 years in a very individualistic way, though also very much according to the spirit of Church renewal as I understand it. It is but the purest accident if one gets away with it, and it is fundamentally unsatisfactory that one parish should be eccentric in relation to its neighbours. And when it comes to the crunch, all our friendly clergy talk in agreeable recreation did not result in active re-consideration of our methods, but in toeing the line of 'traditional methods'; and though I was extremely happy in my work, I think we observed the life of the Church making less and less impact on the faithful, let alone the outsiders. The better the liturgy became, the less those not wholly committed could take part in it (yet surely the Church needs to minister to the worshipping needs of the less committed?); the more genuinely we fulfilled the ecumenical spirit, the quicker we came up against the seemingly absolute prohibitions concerning shared communion and the like; the more we saw the need to re-think and re-word the application of the faith to life as it really is, the sooner we found ourselves asking questions which sounded heterodox to others.

If such rugged individuality is unhealthy, so also is the determination to preserve the ways and approaches of earlier days, and no more. No-one recognizes the dangers of our present attempts at renewal more than I; it is simply that I see the alternative danger of stagnation as more sinister yet. So there must be great confidence in

one another; within and between teams of priests: and most of all with the bishop as supreme diocesan leader, co-ordinator, provoker.

Renewal does not however begin and end with old-style or new-style priests and bishops. The Spirit of God is as much at work in the many charismata of the people of God as a whole. Priests should be the first to really listen to the suggestions of the Spirit in others. Beneath the apparently accepting and unquestioning conformity of the most 'traditional' of parishioners, there will always be found one or more points on which there is a radicalism, a questioning which has been too easily inhibited, and will remain so unless we shout it from the mountain tops that the Holy Spirit is at work in *all* of us. He is not confined to this new moral entity we have so often to cope with, called 'the magisterium', the teaching authority which has been hypostatized in a way that only allows its identification with its special organs in the Pope and Council.

Does all this envisage only the increased ordination of married and other people in 'secular' employment to develop the work of ministerial priesthood in the contemporary Church? What rather is the relationship of the ministerial priest to the work he actually does? Reflecting on the long centuries of the Church's experience, we see that she has always accepted as 'full-time' priests not only diocesan bishops and parish priests, but a whole army of curial officials, Rescue Society administrators, cathedral fund-raisers, schoolmasters, etc., whose daily horarium does not contain many moments devoted particularly to spiritual matters or the 'cure of souls'. We vacillate here. One moment we find ourselves saying that nevertheless the whole of their life is priestly—and this has some quaint logical end-products; e.g. priestly accountancy (is this why the finances of the Church have been so secret?) and priestly recreation (is this why the *Universe* has a special cup for golfing priests?). The next moment we are bewailing the drain on priestly resources and suggest that layfolk should take over all these tasks. The presumption of the latter suggestion is that it would leave all the priests available for parochial ministry. It certainly would improve the distribution; but for which specifically priestly work would it free them? For Mass? hearing confessions? anointing the sick?; the near certainty is that there was time for much of this even amid other specialized tasks. No; for instructing converts, preparing children for the sacraments, and couples for marriage, visiting the sick, aged and lonely, gathering prayer and discussion groups, etc. And for not one of these tasks does anyone's theology pretend that priestly ordination was ever necessary! No doubt it is suitable that the representative role should be played in connection with some or all of these from time to time—the housebound sick person rightly regards the priest's visit as relating him more officially with the local Church; yet the spiritual and corporal works of mercy are the tasks of the whole priestly people of God, *not* exclusively of the



ministerial priesthood. The quality of Christian life has surely been spoiled by the way in which we have tended to leave this work to priests, or in recognizing our mistake have gathered clerically controlled groups together who have been largely regarded as the 'arms' of the parish priests, and in their turn tend to absolve the wider Christian community from noticing and meeting the needs in its midst.

Not the least sad aspect of this policy has been that people terribly unqualified for, and often temperamentally unsuited to, so many vital tasks have been imposed on the faithful for long years. *Some* priests really are gifted in a hundred different ways, but I for one am unable to split my mental and physical energies in so many fragments. I'm sure that's not what Paul meant by being 'all things to all men'. We would do better to undertake only those elements of the pastoral task that are suited to us, and for which we have been properly trained. It is surely idle to deny that, while the motivation and purpose of parochial pastoral work may be distinct from that of social and educational workers (and I'm not always sure of this), it still involves the arts and science of counselling, case-work relationship, therapeutic support, group work and teaching—to use some of the current jargon. The Church would do better to foster by proper training the gifts (*charismata*) we may have, and not to assume that priestly ordination will fill in the cracks of our deficiencies. Of course a priest is not simply a social worker; but he does many of a social worker's tasks. Of course he is not simply a teacher, but he often needs to know the best teaching methods. Of course a really holy man will emanate faith and goodness to the people in contact with him without special techniques; but holiness is no substitute for competence, and, without intending undue offence—our ranks are filled with men who are called upon to do tasks for which they are frankly incompetent. The theology of 'once a priest, always a priest' prevents us doing much about it. Even to restrict misfits in pastoral jobs to the central ordained functions relies too much on 'ex opere operato' for comfort. The Mass in its normal community form simply does not do its work remotely when the presiding priest is indistinct in speech, ungracious in manner, not really aware, as a proper 'president' would be, of his people's share in the celebration.

Somewhere here is the sad fact of sociology. We have trained men to be first and foremost members of the clergy—why else the parade of tonsure and minor orders?—subject to the jurisdiction of a bishop, a loyal army of unquestioning officials. This has been our strength and weakness in the Church. We have supported it with a theology of sacramental character that I for one believe has terrible weaknesses (I do not say it is false). We deny it in practice by the process we still call 'laicisation' for those who cannot stand the pace for whatever reason; but in theory we claim that a man after ordination is

ontologically a priest for ever. Many of us have begun to wonder if we should not start again with the Gospel itself, with the mission of the Church, and work out to the ministerial needs of the whole priestly people, as we find them, and with less dogmatism about the precise forms in which they should be met.

I for one am a secular priest in the fullest sense. I happen to have had for 20 years a deep concern for delinquents, and a certain gift of dealing with their problems. I go further and claim that such people can be classed among those whose needs should arouse compassion and understanding, and scientific help from Christians who are called upon to minister especially to the oppressed, the misunderstood and the despised. My ministry in the delinquency field was reasonably extensive even when I was a parish priest; indeed help with many difficult people was quite part of the local apostolate in the parish. After 17 months in residential work with young offenders, I am currently increasing my competence (I hope) as a Probation Officer with a view to non-statutory work with delinquents elsewhere later. This work does not prevent me being available for parish or convent Mass on most days, for weekend preaching and occasional retreat-giving. But I have come out of the clergy ethos, probably for good. I am a priest, and have at least the consent of my bishop (though he must not be blamed for any of my outlandish notions or precise whereabouts). I am no longer a clergyman; for I earn my living outside the diocesan structures. I am responsible to a committee for employment, and subject to the scrutiny of experts for my competence (and we've just had a Home Office inspection!). I have put aside some of the obvious representative functions (even though colleagues and clients know who I am) *within* the local church. Naturally I have set aside the clerical dress, which is only a recent fashion anyway, and does not exclusively mark out a priest, for it is worn by deacons, lay-brothers, not to mention ministers of other denominations. I am fortunately happy as a celibate, and have not given up on prayer, even though I may dance somewhat lightly to the rubrics of the breviary (and which of us did not, during the 'supplement' days). I have learned the need for community more clearly, and look forward to days when priests and others will gather to share with me the special concerns of this apostolate; in the old days we would have tried to form a new religious community, I suppose. I have already had enormous help from the religious and lay people who have worked with me, or who have provided me with a home. I do not advocate this approach for others particularly. But had I started life as a social worker with delinquents, I think by now I should be offering my services additionally to the bishop in the ministerial priesthood, for I still would want to be a recognized leader, yet without feeling I had to become a member of the clergy.