

## THE UNCHANGING PRIESTHOOD

By H. FRANCIS DAVIS

IN 1950, two important works on the priesthood were published. The first was a posthumous work<sup>1</sup> of the late Rector of Wonersh, Mgr Hallett, a small work but invaluable, the result of many years of experience in the training of the clergy. The second was a new translation by Fr Henry Davis, s.J., of St Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*.<sup>2</sup> The latter has had a considerable influence on priestly spirituality in England ever since it was translated in the ninth century by Alfred the Great. It had been familiar in England in recent times, especially through Bishop Hedley's edition, *Lex Levitarum*.

The appearance about the same time of a sixth and a twentieth century work on the priesthood invites us to take a general view of Catholic works on the priesthood through the centuries, placing these two works in their setting. There is no better way to see their importance, and at the same time to appreciate the timeless urgency of an understanding of the true and deep understanding of our Christian priesthood. Mgr Hallett takes as his title and basic principle that the priest is Christ's friend. In so doing he takes us back to the second book of St John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, where he tells us that priestly zeal must spring only from love of Christ. We are also reminded of St Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, where he deplores those who from excessive humility decline the office of preaching, while Christ the 'Bridegroom... desires to hear her [the Church's] voice, for he yearns for her preaching through the souls of his elect'.<sup>3</sup>

We propose then to review the volumes before us in their place in priesthood spirituality, considering with them the other two masters of the ancient Church and our own Cardinal Manning.

<sup>1</sup> *The Priest-Friend of Christ*, by Mgr. Philip E. Hallett. (D. J. Murphy, London, 1950; 6s.)

<sup>2</sup> *Ancient Christian Writers. St Gregory the Great, Pastoral Care*, translated by Henry Davis, s.J. (Newman Press, Maryland, 1950; \$3). The translation is as well done as we should expect from Fr Davis and is combined with useful, compact introduction, notes and index.

<sup>3</sup> St Gregory the Great, op. cit., ed. cit., p. 179.

## I

St Gregory the Great had a predominant influence on the Western world both because his work was written in Latin and sent to various parts of the Christian world, and because his homilies which popularised some of the principal doctrines of his *Pastoral Care* have since early times been read almost daily in the Latin breviary. But his work would hardly have been written, at least in its present form, were it not for the much earlier work of his Cappadocian namesake, Gregory the Theologian, as the Easterns call him.

The third of the ancient classics, a greater work of art than that of either of the Gregories, was St John Chrysostom's *On The Priesthood*, written in the fourth century about ten years after that of St Gregory the Theologian, otherwise called Nazianzen. The occasion of all three works was the same. St Gregory Nazianzen wrote to apologise for his attempt to evade the priestly vocation by fleeing into the desert immediately after the ordination he had been so reluctant to accept. St John Chrysostom wrote to justify himself to his friend for his successful evasion of the priesthood and episcopate when plots were first made to thrust it upon him. St Gregory wrote to explain why he had tried to escape the office of Bishop of Rome, and to urge others to think carefully before undertaking any priestly office.

All three speak as though men of their time were unduly ambitious of rushing into the priesthood, as though it were like any worldly occupation, open to all who had influence and ability to procure it. All three regard it as their duty, not only to declare their own unworthiness for the office, but by their example and teaching to dissuade others from accepting it without firm conviction of their aptness and purity of motive.

Today we are perhaps surprised at such dissuasion, for we live in a world when many as well as good priests are sorely needed. Where the early fathers deplored the numbers of unworthy candidates, we deplore the dearth of worthy ones. However, we must not think that the Gregories and the Chrysostoms were unaware of the importance of vocations. 'For', writes Gregory Nazianzen, 'if all men were to shirk this office, whether it must be called a ministry or a leadership, the fair fulness of the Church would be halting in the highest degree, and in fact cease to be fair. And further, where, and by whom would God be worshipped

among us in those mysteries and elevating rites which are our greatest and most precious privilege, if there were neither king, nor governor, nor priesthood, nor sacrifice, nor all those highest offices to the loss of which, for their great sins, men were of old condemned in consequence of their disobedience?'<sup>4</sup>

But there is for us also a lesson in their diffidence. Theoretically at least we have learnt it. Today the faithful everywhere look up to the priestly office. Thanks be to God, few people consciously approach it without a real desire to dedicate their lives to God's service. But in practice the lesson has not always sunk deeply into our minds. We too easily approach the priesthood as something open to any of us, provided he is what people would call a good Catholic. We admit that a priest must be trained, and that he must know his theology, though in this latter respect we do not always set our standards as high as we might. Certainly it is as unusual to find ecclesiastical students with scruples as to whether they are learned enough for their work, as it is to find them worried as to whether they have a sufficiently sympathetic understanding of souls to be able to win their confidence and guide them. The world has perhaps changed little in this matter. At all times the majority of people think themselves tactful, think they know how to deal with others, when to be severe and when to be easy, when to praise and when to rebuke, and so forth. At all times they think that, if they sometimes make mistakes in such matters, it will not matter so much; that, in any case, such delicacy in dealing with people is a luxury rather than a duty; not everyone, perhaps they will say to themselves, is called to be a *Curé of Ars*.

The first thing one would note about these three early works on the priesthood is the emphatic way in which they reject such excuses. Gregory of Nazianzus tells us, and Gregory the Great repeats him, that the priestly life is the art of arts and science of sciences.<sup>5</sup> He compares the lightheartedness with which men of his day undertook to be physicians of the soul with the sense of responsibility marking those who undertook to be physicians of the body. No one even then would dream of setting up in the latter calling without feeling confident of both his knowledge

<sup>4</sup> St Gregory Naz., *Oratio II*, 4. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, translated by C. Brown and Swallow, p. 205.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory Naz., *Oratio II*, 16; Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care I*, i.

and his skill. I think we could safely say that among Catholics today we do not deserve this reproach so much, though the fact that diseases of the soul are less visible may still tempt us to take a less grave view of our deficiencies than the medical profession. One reason is that mentioned by St Gregory Nazianzen, i.e. that our patients are not so co-operative as medical patients. The medical patient does not wait for the doctor to find him. He comes of his own accord and faithfully tells his symptoms. Not only this, but he usually takes considerable care to obey his doctor, at any rate if he is told that his illness is grave. Patients suffering from the disease of sin and vice are less apt to come to their spiritual physician to tell him of their disorders. And when they do come, as often as not they begin to make excuses calculated to disguise the real symptoms, and therefore the real nature, of the disease. Finally, even after they have been told that they are suffering from some grave disease of the soul, they easily forget to carry out the priest's prescriptions.

Besides such difficulties, it is a notoriously delicate matter to correct people. Sometimes it is wise to rebuke them severely, at other times more good is done by encouragement. A short passage from St Gregory the Theologian shows how well he realised the different treatment called for when dealing with 'men and women, young and old, rich and poor, sanguine and despondent, the sick and whole, rulers and ruled, the wise and ignorant, the cowardly and courageous, the wrathful and meek, the successful and failing', and numerous other varieties and temperaments. 'Some are benefited by praise, others by blame, both being applied in season; while if out of season, or unreasonable, they are injurious; some are set right by encouragement, others by rebuke; some, when taken to task in public, others when privately corrected. For some are wont to despise private admonitions, but are recalled to their senses by the condemnation of a number of people, while others, who would grow reckless under reproof openly given, accept rebuke because it is in secret, and yield obedience in return for sympathy.'<sup>6</sup>

The application of such pastoral principles forms the bulk of the *Pastoral Care* of Gregory the Great. He took the idea from Gregory Nazianzen, but has his own way of adapting them. Poor people must be approached gently and kindly and must be led on

<sup>6</sup> Gregory Naz., op. cit., 31; trans. cit. p. 211.

to realise that only one kind of riches matters. Rich people must be warned severely against pride and the transitoriness of earthly goods; though, if their pride is excessive, gentleness may be the only method of approach. The priest should warn exuberant people that it is dangerous to become attached to earthly joys; while he should tell the melancholy to keep their eyes on eternity, and warn them of the dangers of depression. Subjects should be dealt with in one way, superiors in another. Learned people are to be warned to trust the foolishness of God before the wisdom of men; while dull people are to be encouraged to seek and love divine wisdom. Sensitive people would be unduly depressed by the forthright treatment that most benefits the insolent. Nor will the same methods serve to cure the patient and the impatient, the generous and the envious, the sincere and the hypocritical. The kind of treatment that will cure the sick man would not be suitable to the healthy. Taciturn people are to be induced to talk more and so be less tempted to brooding; while the talkative are to be told that 'the human mind behaves after the manner of water: when enclosed, it collects itself to the higher levels. . . . when released, it loses itself, in that it scatters itself to no purpose through the lowest levels. . . .'<sup>7</sup>

From this an idea can be gained of the valuable pastoral theology included in part III of the *Pastoral Care*. Clearly those who offer themselves for the priesthood must come with a full understanding of the responsibilities and difficulties of their calling. They need more than ordinary ability and experience.

St John Chrysostom has no lower an idea of priestly cares than the Gregories. He thinks of the priest more as shepherd and father than as physician. And, just as the Gregories find the priest's life harder and more important than that of the physician, so John Chrysostom finds it harder and more important than that of either shepherd or father, or even of ancient high priest or king. It is easier for the shepherd to discover the illnesses and troubles of sheep than for the priest to detect the weaknesses of human souls. And sheep can be compelled to take the proper remedies; while men with their free wills must be coaxed or threatened. And if one does succeed in forcing them, they are worse afterwards than before. The shepherd of men 'needs great wisdom and a thousand eyes, so as to examine the souls condition from every

<sup>7</sup> St Gregory, *Pastoral Care*, p. 132.

side. As there are many men who become arrogant, and then despair of their own salvation because they cannot endure severe remedies, so there are some who, because they do not receive a punishment of equal magnitude with their offences, are led to think lightly of them, and become far worse, and are led on to commit greater sin.<sup>8</sup> The superiority of priests over earthly fathers is clear when we consider that they give to their children spiritual and eternal life, while the latter can give only temporal life.

These fathers of the fourth and sixth century show us, in brief, how the priest's work is one of no small difficulty, calling for qualities that saints usually fear they do not possess.

Connected with this awareness of the great skill required in the priest is their appreciation of the evil of ignorance. The priesthood is the science of sciences as well as the art of arts. St John Chrysostom especially urges this. Though holiness and good works are demanded in him who will convince others of the truth of the doctrines he professes, he will never succeed without skill and training. In this John is a forerunner of St Teresa of Avila and St Francis of Sales. The former wrote about spiritual directors: 'It will help us very much to consult learned men, provided they are virtuous; even if they are not spiritual they will do us good and God will show them what they should teach and may even make them spiritual so that they may be of service to us.' (Complete Works, Trans. Allison Peers, vol. i, p. 81). We are told of St Francis of Sales: 'Those of you, he used to say, who find occupations which prevent them from studying, are like those who refuse solid food to their stomachs, giving it instead light meals, insufficient to support it. I tell you in truth that ignorance in priests is more to be feared than sin, because by it they not only lose themselves, but dishonour and cheapen the priesthood. I earnestly implore you, my very dear brethren, to give yourselves up seriously to study: knowledge in a priest is the eighth sacrament of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. . . . My dear brethren, since divine providence, without considering my unworthiness, has made me your bishop, I implore you to study all that is good, that being wise and of good life, you may be irreproachable and ready to give an answer to all those who question you on the things of the faith.' (Hamon, *Vie de S. François de Sales*, Bk. iv, ch. II.,

<sup>8</sup> St John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, Book 2, chapter 4, 113-114, translated by T. A. Moxon. S.P.C.K., pp. 46-48.

vol. i, p. 409.) St John Chrysostom, some thirteen centuries earlier, spoke with the same voice. After pointing out that, necessary as holiness is, learning is also required, he says: 'For though he himself stand rooted in safety, and be not injured by the gainsayers, yet, when the multitude of simpler folk, who are set beneath him, see their leader worsted and unable to answer the gainsayers, they do not blame his feebleness for the defeat, but the weakness of the doctrine; and, by reason of the inexperience of one man, the great multitude is brought into utter ruin. Though they may not utterly join the enemy, yet they are driven to doubt in matters wherein they might have been confident; and those whom they were wont to approach with unwavering faith, they hear no more with the same security; on the contrary, such a storm enters their souls by reason of their teacher's defeat that the evil ends in utter shipwreck.' (*On the Priesthood*, trans. p. 127.)

Who would dare to say that the dangers of ignorance have lessened since the fourth or sixteenth centuries? Pius XII certainly does not think so, since he is continually appealing to Catholics to help the Church in her war against religious ignorance. Those who proclaim that we want Curés of Ars rather than Aristotles usually forget that even the Curé had considerable ability in preaching, and that he would have been the last to admit that the priest can be holy and save the world, while disregarding the Church's insistence on learning. Such a priest falls short even in holiness.

Nor is it sufficient for the priest to be skilful in the art of directing souls and have sufficient knowledge, if he does not know how to preach in a manner that will bring glory to God. None could speak with more authority on this than the patron leader of ecclesiastical oratory. The priest must neither despise nor seek men's praise. If he despises it, he will develop into the bore, whom St John pictures as dragging on endlessly before a congregation whose one thought is, 'How much longer?'. If he seeks it, human respect will corrupt the pureness and sincerity of his preaching.

But all this is insufficient if the priest does not possess the holiness required by his dignity. No writer has surpassed St John Chrysostom in showing the connection between priestly sanctity and the Eucharist. This is but fitting in one who has been regarded as the Eucharist Doctor. 'When you see the Lord sacrificed and lying before you, and the priest standing over the Sacrifice, and

praying, and all who partake reddened with the Precious Blood, can you think that you are still among men, and standing on earth? Are you not straightway transported to heaven, and, having cast forth from your soul every fleshly thought, do you not, with naked souls and pure mind, look around upon the thing of heaven. . . . ? He that sits above with the Father is, at the same time, held in our hands, and suffers himself to be clasped and embraced by those who wish; and all then do this by the eyes. . . .’ In the same passage he recalls the sacrifice of the Old Testament when Elias called down fire from heaven upon the sacrifice. How much more wonderful is the Eucharist. ‘The priest stands bringing down not fire, but the Holy Spirit. . . . (On the Priesthood, Bk. ii, c. 4, pp. 61-63.)

St Chrysostom also bases the priest’s dignity on his other functions, his power to forgive sins in baptism and penance, his fatherhood and pastoral care of his flock.

We shall not be surprised after this to find him supporting the doctrine that priestly sanctity should be greater than that of all others. ‘Let those be brought before us who far excel all others, and are as much above the rest in spiritual qualities as Saul surpassed the whole nation of the Hebrews in bodily stature, or indeed much more. We must not be content to seek one who is head and shoulders taller; on the contrary, the difference between shepherd and sheep should be as great as the distinction between rational and irrational creatures, not to say even more; for matters of much greater importance are at stake.’ (Op. cit., Bk. ii, ch. 2, p. 43.) These words and similar ones must not be misunderstood by laymen as showing any sort of underestimation of their glory as members of God’s people. Nor must they be understood to suggest that John denied that often there are lay saints and clerical sinners. He is merely insisting that, though laymen may be saints, the clergy are more to blame if they fall short of sanctity; and further that the likelihood of lay saints decreases where the clergy are sinners. For sanctity and perfection are in a very special sense part of the priest’s office.

Like so many after him, St John Chrysostom considers the priest’s duty of aiming at holiness and perfection as being far higher than that of the monk. ‘He needs a far greater purity than they; and he who has the greater need is subject to more temptations which can defile him, unless he use unceasing self-denial and



much vigilance to keep his soul unsullied by those forces.' (Op. cit., Bk. vi, ch. 2, p. 142.) He bases this duty both on his relation to the Eucharist and on his office of interceding with God for his people. He must excel all, if he is to plead for the living and the dead. Further, his life must be in the midst of distractions and temptations, unlike the monk, who is helped by his retirement. He must be capable of listening to criticism and acting upon it, where possible gently removing the cause of the suspicion.

It is interesting here to recall that St Chrysostom's view of the greater duty of perfection resting on priests and bishops than on monks who have not these orders is shared by St Augustine. In one of his letters he complains that there was a popular saying at his time that a bad monk would make a good cleric. 'It is truly deplorable that we should exalt monks to so disastrous a pride and deem the clergy to whom we belong deserving of such contempt. For even a good monk will scarcely make a good cleric, though he be well enough disciplined, if he lacks the needful instruction or personal integrity.' (Epist. lx, P.L. 33, 228.)

This quotation from St Augustine prepares us to pass from the Greek St John Chrysostom, with his angelic eloquence, to the practical Roman, St Gregory the Great. Those who seek the honour of the priesthood, he declares, must first seek the work. Otherwise they stand convicted of preferring worldly gain to God's kingdom. Many, he admits, will declare that they come to work; they promise themselves they will do much good for the Church; but in their hearts, unknown to themselves, they merely want power and honour. This temptation was perhaps greater in the time of these fathers, when priests and bishops possessed great worldly power and honour. Today it would take the form of basking in the sunshine of good people's flattery and submission. When the superficiality and insincerity of such candidates is discovered, it is already too late. They find they have what they want, and spiritual thoughts are forgotten.

If men really approach the priesthood with the love of spreading God's kingdom, their first thought will be to show people in themselves the good life, to give an example of humility, not pride. The priest is God's friend, and must know his Master. Any one unstable and of weak character, who cannot keep from sin, is unfit. This is most markedly so when his interests and cares concern earthly matters and his life is dulled by sensuality.

When he has once reached his position of authority, his conduct should as far surpass that of his people as his position does. His first interest must be the inner life. He must be pure and single of heart. This, in the language of Gregory, meant single-mindedness, a desire only to live a noble life, innocent, even in thought, of all avarice, pride or sensuality. His life must be one of charity and mortification. He should not be afraid to speak, yet should use this weapon with caution. He must be all things to all men, understanding their especial difficulties. Though himself given to contemplation of spiritual things, he must have a fellow-feeling for those whose lives must be spent in more earthly matters. He must discourage excessive veneration for himself, and must be ready to lose popularity when rebuking sinners. He must be able to remember, when he is rebuking people, that he is in his human nature no more than their equal. Further, he will not be able to retain the necessary inner life, unless he is careful to avoid too much preoccupation with externals.

All three Fathers whom we are discussing agree that nothing is more important for the shepherd of souls than the art of letting his light shine before men without getting corrupted by vain-glory. None has written more on this subject than St Gregory the Great. We priests read homilies of his on the subject almost day by day in our breviaries. If we let our light shine before men, they may praise us or they may persecute us. As far as we ourselves are concerned, we must learn to take praise and blame indifferently, provided it is our Christlikeness that is the subject of their comments. If they enjoy our sermons when we preach Christ, or if they approve of our true virtue, then God is glorified, and we have no other duty than to pray that the praise may not be turned to ourselves. It is St John Chrysostom who reminds us of the great privilege that is ours when we are persecuted and reviled for Christ's sake.

But, says St Gregory, men should not be careless in letting people misjudge them, and wrongly attribute evil. Such people 'do not, indeed, commit evil personally, yet in the persons of those who imitate them they do commit a multiple sin'. All who say the divine office will remember St Gregory's homilies. In the lesson for a Confessor not a Bishop, he says that the lamps to be carried by disciples represent the light of good example, without which even internal purity will not suffice. 'For we hold burning lanterns

in our hands when, through good works, we show to our neighbours examples of light. About which words the Lord says: Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven.' Similarly he writes in the homily we read for the office of Virgins: '...but by today's reading of the holy gospel I am compelled to say that even the good you do should be protected with great care; lest the desire of praise should creep in and what is outwardly displayed should inwardly be deprived of its reward'. He later says of the good people who live for the interior life, chastise the flesh, and have only eternity before them: 'These do not put their glory in the mouths of men, but hide it within their conscience. And there are so many who afflict their body by abstinence, but seek from that abstinence the favour of men.'

In the office for 'Non Virgins', he tackles more directly the apparent contradiction between giving good example and keeping our good works secret. His advice is that in intention we should do them before our heavenly Father, though for his sake we let them shine before men. 'In this matter it should be noted, that the treasure when found is hidden that it may be kept safe. For it is not enough to safeguard the zeal of our heavenly desires from evil spirits, if it is not also hidden from human praises. For in the present life we are as it were on the way to our heavenly country. Evil spirits waylay our path like robbers. He who carries his treasure openly on the highway is asking to be robbed. But I say this, not to prevent our neighbour seeing our good works, since it is written: *let them see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven*; but I mean that we should not look for outside praise for them. Let the work be in public, but in such a way that its intention is secret. Thus, we may both give example to our neighbours by our good work, and at the same time wish the work were hidden, by our intention only to please God.'

The same theme often recurs in the *Pastoral Care*. Those who do evil when not seen, but good in public in order to win men's praise, both glory in what is wrong and despise what is right. They despise what is right in that they do not mind throwing it away for a trifling price, giving that which deserves an eternal price for the price of human approval. They glory in what is wrong by doing it unashamedly in secret. On the other hand, we must not allow people to think evil of us falsely. And we must be ready

frequently to risk men's displeasure rather than shirk our duty. St John Chrysostom recalls in this connection the words of our Lord: 'Blessed are you, when men revile you, and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you falsely, because of me. Be glad and lighthearted, for a rich reward awaits you in heaven.'<sup>9</sup>

## II

It would not be fitting to pass from the sixth century to the nineteenth without a word from St Thomas. In comparing the priesthood with the religious state, he declares that from one point of view it is a greater thing to dedicate oneself to the acquiring of holiness in the religious state than merely to dedicate oneself to the office of parish priest or vicar general. But he immediately states that this is on the assumption that the charity of one is not greater than that of the other.

But if, he says, one bears in mind the greater difficulties of the priest in the parish, and the external dangers he has to struggle against, then the parish priest needs greater charity; though, on the other hand, he allows that the very rule itself of the religious is a difficulty avoided by the former.

But finally he aligns himself with the Fathers of the first centuries by stating without reserve that the priest excels in dignity and consequently in his duty of perfection the unordained religious. 'For through holy orders a person is deputed to the most worthy ministry of serving Christ himself in the Sacrament of the Altar. For this, greater interior sanctity is required than for the religious state. . . . Hence, other things being equal, the cleric in sacred orders sins more gravely if he sins against holiness, than a religious who is not in sacred orders. . . .'<sup>10</sup>

Many treatises on the priesthood were of course written during the long gap between St Gregory the Great and the twentieth century. The fundamental principles have remained the same. In each period and country or diocese the attempt has been made to apply them in a practical way to special circumstances. Such a book is that, mentioned at the beginning of this article, by Mgr Hallett, which may be said to be a practical adaptation of them to the England of today. But, before passing on to consider that volume, a modern work on the lines of the early classics should

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 5, 11-12 (Knox). St John Chrysostom, *op. cit.* book III, chapter II.

<sup>10</sup> St Thomas, II-II; 184, 8.

first be noted. I refer to *The Eternal Priesthood*, by Cardinal Manning. It derives its wide and lasting popularity undoubtedly from the fact that it keeps so closely to its sources, Scripture, the Fathers and St Thomas. Its authority in many countries and languages is an indication that, like the earlier classics, it deals more with the principles than their application to special local conditions.

Manning began, as was his custom, with theology, explaining how the priestly character gives the priest a share in Christ's consecration and self-oblation. Above all, it gives him a power and duties with regard to Christ's Body in the Blessed Sacrament. Christ entrusts that Body to his minister, who acts as his steward. The words pronounced by the minister in the supreme moment of sacrifice are Christ's words, and have divine power. This all unites the priest in an intimate way with Christ. 'He is servant, friend, companion.'<sup>11</sup> 'What more can be bestowed upon the priest? What obligation to perfection can exceed the obligation of such a power, of such an office, and of such a living contact with the Word made flesh?' (Op. cit. p. 18.)

These reasons alone, he says, would make the priesthood the highest perfection on earth. But there is, added to this, the priest's jurisdiction over the mystical body. This means that he must be an example and a guide. 'The priest is set *exercere perfectionem*—that is, to manifest perfection in himself, and to form the souls of men to the same law and likeness. He must needs then be perfect first himself.' (Op. cit., p. 20.) To exercise perfection on others he must be himself in the state of perfection; though no generous priest could be satisfied merely to be, as it were, within the border.

In this way, Manning joins himself to the Fathers and to all who have written spiritual works on the priestly office. The priest is called both to a holier and to a more difficult life than even the religious without priesthood. Manning knew, as all have recognised, that unfortunately the priest is frequently less holy than others; but, true though this may be, he is the more guilty if he fails, since he is called to the highest. Manning deduces this from the priest's unity with the great High Priest, from his special discipleship of his Master, and, thirdly, from his commission to tend God's children, Christ's brethren.

He has been vigorously supported in this matter, as being one

<sup>11</sup> Manning, *Eternal Priesthood*, p. 16.

with all true Catholic tradition, by Canon E. J. Mahoney, in his masterly work on *The Secular Priesthood*. The latter draws the conclusion that students for the Church should be clearly taught that they have a duty to reach a certain degree of perfection before ordination; a perfection involving complete freedom from grave sin and a real determination to take all the means to advance continually in the pursuit of holiness.

This high thesis is in the greater part of Manning's book applied to practical life. The book is too well known for it to be necessary to give any analysis, for it will obviously be more convincingly mastered in Manning's own words.

### III

And now, to pass on to the year 1950. Among the many valuable books on priestly work published during the present century, circumstances lead to our picking on the most recent and therefore least well-known. It is characteristic of recent works to spend much time on encouragement and practical helps towards our prayer. Perhaps this is because we are living in a world from which it is harder to escape; and which, owing to the ever-increasing variety and attractiveness of its distractions, is becoming less conducive to the prayer-atmosphere. By way of reaction against this, never before were the clergy so united in mind as to the importance of prayer and interior life, if we are to be priests in the modern world after Christ's heart. Bishops, professors, retreat-fathers and missionaries unite in appealing to us to recognise this. The Church's system of seminary and novitiate training has as one of its principal aims to teach it, and so deeply to implant it that nothing in the future life of the priest will seriously shake his conviction. That this conviction dies hard even in the slack priest speaks well for his early training. Ask any of the busy parish clergy to give a conference to priests or to write on the priestly life and he will teach this doctrine, though most of us feel guilty when it is preached to ourselves. But with all the practical helps we get, it often fails to take as practical a hold on our lives as we might well hope. We are skilful at procrastination, we are tempted to grow complacent about our fulfilment of external duties. Though successful there, are we successful in our interior life?

The principle of seminary training is twofold. First, the student is given a rule of life which includes all the essentials of the

spiritual life in a form best adapted to his particular vocation. This will help to form the right habits. But habits of virtue cannot be formed by acts of the body without the full co-operation of reason and will. This is why the second principle is far more important than the first, the instruction of the reason and the appeal to the will. This formation is done in a general way by means of theology, both dogmatic, which gives the doctrinal basis of all the spiritual life, and spiritual theology which studies the application of this doctrine to everyday life. The latter in practice studies the spiritual lives of saints and mystics in order to see how the Christian life has been applied by those who have been eminently Christlike in the past, as well as suggesting, by way of reasoning, ways and means of adapting Christianity to the life of the modern man. But lest even all this theology should remain a purely speculative possession, it has always been understood that few things are more important during this early period than spiritual conferences and private spiritual direction, which make a direct appeal to the individual's will and conviction. All these, especially the latter, are meant to give the priest at an early stage a personal interest and sense of obligation in the growth of his spiritual life. It is more important that he should be made to want to continue with his meditation, his spiritual reading and his rosary than merely that he should do these at the moment. It is more important to give him the right attitude to Mass and office than merely to insist on his taking part in them now. For he is being trained—especially if he is preparing for the secular priesthood—to be independent of the seminary. This is the reason why it is not easy to judge of the real success of a seminary's training by the external appearances of order and discipline. The latter are naturally good, and, if accepted in the true spirit, must have great value for all concerned. But the real test is whether the students are acquiring a deep conviction of the importance of continuing to grow in the spiritual life after they have left the seminary.

Mgr Hallett, as is evident from his delightful posthumous book on *The Priest—Friend of Christ*, had spent many years instilling these truths into the minds of his students in as uncompromising a way as possible. A priest is not an officer called upon to perform certain services, and free once he has performed them. He is never free from his duty, since the service to which he is called is one of

unreserved surrender, in close friendship with his Master. It is peculiar to friendship that the interests of the parties are mutual and common. This involves knowing one another intimately and at all times being at the personal and loving service of each other. It is this principle of friendship which is the root of the many duties of the priest which come under the heading of his spiritual life, which form the subject-matter of this book. The priest must continually meditate on his divine friend if he is to acquire and maintain real friendship. He must read about him, fill his mind with thoughts of his friend and that friend's interest. This means of course the constant practice of mental prayer. Mgr Hallett, like all who have written on the priesthood, insists that there is no short-cut to this intimacy with Christ. One must proceed by way of meditation. On the other hand, he has many practical suggestions as to the methods of meditation. He shows that much fear of meditation comes from a wrong idea of what it means and of what it is attempting.

We said at the beginning that it is more important what a priest is than what he does. He can only become another Christ by continual association with Christ. If he will be the friend of Christ, he must be filled with Christ, he must do everything in a spirit of recollection and union with him. This will enable Christ to use him, and the extent to which Christ will be able to act through him will be identical with the extent to which he already possesses his heart.

The busy priest who has long been struggling with problems in his parish, whose whole day seems filled with activities that he cannot avoid, is the one most tempted gradually to acquiesce in a feeling of complacency that he is doing all he can be expected to do, and that if God wants him to pray then God must either find him another position or lighten his burden of work. Mgr Hallett sympathises with such a priest's problem, but advises first that he must never allow this temptation to distort his view of the supreme importance for everyone, above all for every priest, of the interior life, no matter how many calls there may appear to be to neglect it for the sake of works. Some of the works, good as they undoubtedly are, must be sacrificed for something better, the priest's personal duty to his divine friend. The loss is only apparent and temporary, for the value of all activities will increase immeasurably by the closer union of the priest with his Master



that results from the extra time he is able to spend in prayer. Some activities doubtless, such as sick-calls, must take precedence over everything, but frequently these can themselves be done in such a spirit of recollection that they become a continuation and application of the priest's interior life instead of a distraction. They thus become prayer, rather than works.

But, Mgr Hallett goes on to point out, no matter how active is the priest's life, there are certain spiritual duties which he can never normally escape, if he does his priestly duty. The first of these is his mass and the second his office. It is characteristic of Mgr Hallett's sound common sense and moderation that he strives to persuade the priest who is otherwise finding himself so taken up by his busy life to use to the utmost as means of his spiritual growth these two offices of the Church's liturgy, which so surpass the rest of a Christian's spiritual life. He shows here his knowledge of human psychology and his severely practical turn of mind. He advises, for instance, to use the utmost reverence and care to express our faith in the actions of the mass. Such care will not only be a result and an expression of our faith, but will actually help it. For man is always affected by what he does, and still more by the way he does it. The man who genuflects reverently actually grows in his faith and love and sense of adoration. Similarly, preparation for mass and thanksgiving after mass can be such as not only to express our devotion, but also to increase it, for the same psychological reasons. Mgr Hallett makes a still greater effort to induce us to say our office profitably and prayerfully. Once again he gives a deal of sound practical advice. He suggests that we should choose our time and place, taking care not to begin office until duly settled down. Likewise he considers the habit of saying office in trams and buses as normally unwise. Rather we should have what Cardinal Manning called five-minute books, which we can read on such occasions. He has much to suggest concerning the principal part of the office, the psalms. He has himself worked out a scheme to make the recital of psalm 118, which so often recurs, a prayer of real value and an expression of our spiritual life. He also offers useful suggestions towards a more spiritual recital, such as that we should decide each time whether they will best be recited in the person of Christ, in the person of the Church or in our own person.

The life of friendship with Christ is not only a life of prayer, it

must also be a life of virtue. Here Mgr Hallett has much that is both inspiring and practical to offer. Humility should be a distinguishing virtue. We should prove in our lives the falseness of the popular non-Catholic view that a priest is proud and tyrannical. Humility will lead to most of the other virtues we need, obedience to the bishop, love for the people, patience, courtesy. We should take as our motto that glorious title of the Pope, that we are the servants of the servants of God. Among these other virtues, obedience, brotherly love and zeal for God's house are picked out. Above all it is important to retain idealism, even though at times it leads to mistakes. 'It has been often said, a man who never makes mistakes, never makes anything.' Mgr Hallett is well aware how easy it is to lose one's idealism through discouragement. This is a far greater danger for the priest than inactivity. 'Like our Lord, we are set for the fall as well as for the resurrection of many. We must bear our witness. Some will reject it; some will accept it. Not even our Lord himself was able to convert all; even he met with disbelief.' (p. 97.) Nothing can be gained by looking at the black side of things. We shall find it easier to keep up our ideals if we are optimists.

Mgr Hallett's book is indeed packed with common sense, and will be eagerly read, not only by his former students, who had the privilege of listening to these talks when first given, but by all of us. Perhaps those who are concerned with the training of the clergy will feel a special interest. It is encouraging to find that Mgr Hallett takes very strongly the attitude of St Thomas towards the secular priesthood which was defended by Cardinal Manning and supported by Canon Mahoney, that the priest as such, even the secular priest, is called to a higher degree of perfection than religious who are not ordained. The fact that he may not be called to the particular means of perfection to which the religious is called in no sense excuses him from the full pursuit of holiness. If he happens to be a secular priest, he has an especially difficult task, to reach a holiness greater than that of the laity and even the non-ordained religious, while still being forced to live in the world without the particular help of community life. This obligation was sometimes lost sight of, through a misunderstanding of the term, 'state of perfection', and also through forgetting that the priest today is practically always committed to the cure of souls or some other work for the Church which he may not desert,

and is therefore as fully dedicated for life to all that the pastoral priesthood means as any religious is dedicated to his life. The popes have done all they can to impress this truth upon us in recent times. Pius X, in a passage Mgr Hallett quotes, uses the striking words: '...between the priest and the average good man there ought to be as much difference as between heaven and earth: wherefore the holiness of the priest should be immune not only from graver sins, but even from the very slightest'.<sup>12</sup> The growing understanding of this has led to a continual approximation of the spiritual training and life of the secular priest to that of priests in religious communities. It is in harmony with this spirit that the Archbishop of Birmingham has introduced a house of preparation, where students go for a year before entering the seminary, where they are given the beginnings of a spiritual formation analogous to that given to religious in their novitiate.

It is impossible to have too many books of this type, written from a long life's experience, so helpful in enabling other priests to profit by the thoughts, prayers and struggles of their colleagues.

<sup>12</sup> Pius XI, *Haerent Animo*, Mgr Hallett, op. cit., p. 12.