

THE PRIEST IN ACTION

There are two ideals in life. The one is called "some ideal," the other, "one ideal." The distinction between the two lies in this that the former is vague, erratic, vacillating; the latter is clearly defined and tends to an ultimate goal. In other words, "some ideal" is a pacifist. It does no serious fighting to attain a particular end, but prefers to sit quietly in the shade and dream that the "open sesame" will play an important part in its uneventful life. "One ideal" is a warrior. It adjusts itself to life and demands that the exigencies thereof be made subordinate to the psychic expressions of its constitution.

The priest, the alter-Christus, because of his sublime mission must perforce be in the category of those who follow a determined plan of action. These are the men whose escutcheon is emblazoned with the impress of one ideal. It is not difficult to see why the priest should subscribe his name to the tenets of this party. For if we consider mere natural motives we can argue that the great thing about the men of one ideal is that of them can be said what Lincoln said of Grant: "He is not easily excited, and he has got the grip of a bulldog. When once he gets his teeth in, nothing can shake him off." Such men are not visionaries. They have some principles that are worth fighting for, and they fight for them. This was exemplified in the life of the "child of destiny," who by perseverance and persistent endeavor bent the backs of the greatest military powers of Europe. This genius, physically insignificant, but a giant in courage and decision, had a definite purpose in life. He achieved his goal, not along the lines of least resistance, but according to specific determinations.

On the other hand, mere natural motives cannot be the only impelling forces of a priest's action. It is true that:

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,"

yet his ideal is more than human; It is divine, transcendent. Again, the priest must consider carefully the definition of greatness. For the world is only too prone to attribute greatness to men who, disregarding ethical principles do and write things that touch it only materially. These are they who "have greatness

thrust upon them." The ideal of the alter-Christus is preeminently Jesus Christ, who while He walked the ways of this life was ever conscious of a single ideal, determined, specific—the salvation of men and the glory of His Father. He had a principle to fight for. He fought for it, He died for it, and He triumphed with it. The priest who keeps before him this consideration must of necessity arrive at the conclusion that he cannot be of the number of those whose desires comprehend the entire field of human action. Such men fight for no definite principles. Their goals are many, nebular, abstract. And in the end they receive few, if any, of the compensations that life holds out to those who know that "genius is perspiration." What they have is theirs by mere accident, for they are the beneficiaries of blundering luck, the henchmen of some ideal that is ever and anon deiating from the beaten track that leads to success. Instead of trying to ascend the mountain by one path, they attempt a simultaneous ascent by all paths. The consequence is that they seldom if ever reach the top. To them, one ideal is an unknown quantity. If it is known, they sidestep it, because it is a martinet to whose discipline they are unwilling to yield obedience.

What, then, must the priest do to be a man of principle and concentrated action? He must follow his Master in all things. On ordination day Christ hands him the chalice filled, not with the nectar of the gods, but with trials, difficulties, and even failures. The Master's chalice must be the chalice of His priest. To overcome these obstacles he needs must be something more than a creature of momentary impulse, a puppet swayed by caprice. He must be a master of his own will—a will that scorns the word "impossible." He must be a master of "invincible determination—and then, Death or Victory!"

His priestly life must be built upon this foundation, "This one thing I do." To be faithful to his ideal he must be a master of men, a huge dynamo charged with energy and magnetism, so that his every action will be productive of the highest good. For if society needs the whole man, and needs him at his best, it is only logical that the priest should endeavor to make the most of himself in all things that pertain to his sacred calling. Nor is this an easy matter. It means labor—persistent labor and sacrifice. As a certain bishop said: "Of all work that produces results, nine-tenths must be drudgery." This is not an idle utterance. It has been verified. Haydn's persistent application made

him the remarkable musician that he was. The great speeches and addresses of Edmund Burke were the outcome of his unceasing toil. The almost insurmountable obstacles that Cyrus W. Field overcame to lay the Atlantic Cable are too well-known to require comment.

If, then, men labor to make concrete their ideals, labor to reach their goal, the priest, the alter-Christus, perforce cannot forget that "genius is patience." There have been, and there are now, great men who are models of persistent endeavor. But the priest's ideal is over and above these. He is Jesus Christ, whose couch was Mother Earth, whose coverlet was the "azure robe of night,"—Jesus Christ, the Man-God, who had a definite purpose in life.

—Angelus McKeon, O. P.

