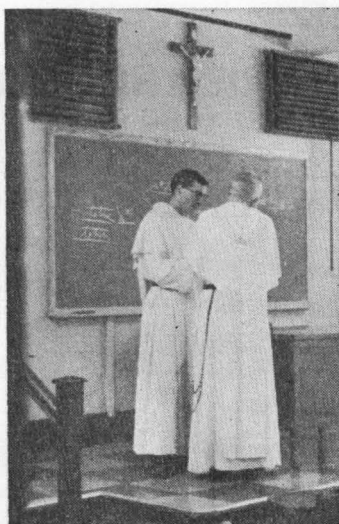


DIMENSIONS OF THE PRIESTHOOD



IN THE VAST STRUCTURE which makes up the Church, it is important to understand the balanced functions of the members to see the life of the whole. The Church is not just an association for the mutual welfare of individuals. It is a corporate life: it is the Mystical Body of Christ. The members of the Church really have their life in Christ for they are just that: members of His Mystical Body—the *Whole Christ*.



Preaching and teaching Sacred Doctrine of their very nature flow from the life of loving God. . . .

The purpose of the Church is the salvation of souls. But just what does this mean? Salvation will be, as St. John tells us, "To see God just as He is." This is heaven; to see and love God after the fashion in which He knows and loves Himself. The mystery of the Church hides in the tremendous truth that this life of knowing and loving God, through a supernatural elevation of our nature, has already begun on earth for the members of the *Whole Christ*, the Church.

To feed His members in the life to which He has raised them, Christ left on earth His physical Body. The significance of this gift derives from the victory Jesus Christ accomplished through the death of this Body which was united to the personality of the Son of God. He Who is both God and Man reached into the abyss of human misery, charged Himself with every crime the world can know, and died in punishment for our sins. Our Redeemer gave a new beginning to the whole human race by reconciling it with God.

But Christ wasn't to allow His priesthood, which accomplished our redemption, to end with His death. At the Last Supper Christ left Himself—a visible sacrifice—in the hands of His first priests, the Apostles. The mandate He gave them and their successors provides a pledge of heaven and life for all time: *Do this for a commemoration of me.*

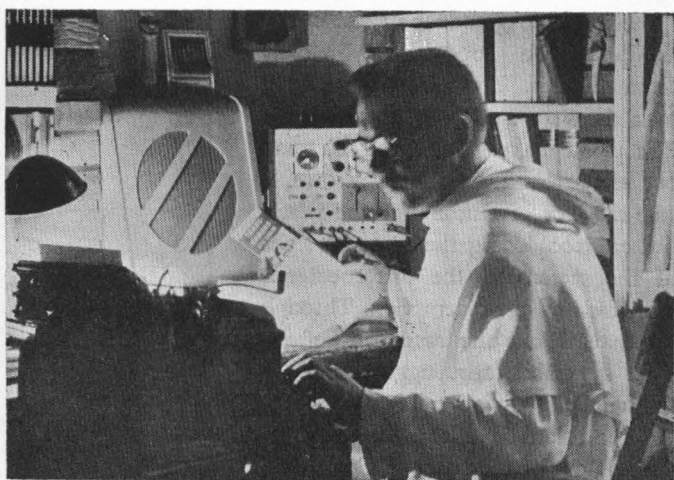
To use the words of Pope Pius XI,

"The ineffable grandeur of the catholic priesthood appears very clearly from all this. The priest has power over the very Body of Jesus Christ." The priest makes Christ present upon our altars to offer a divine Victim, a true sacrifice in ransom for the whole human race. Using the material signs of the sacrament, the priest extends the effects of our redemption. Through a ritual action, the sacrament effects what it symbolically suggests. This is the height of divine mercy; as long as the conditions required are fulfilled, the gift out of the heart of God's own personal life is completely given. The priest is the only man on earth who can give away with the reckless abandon of divine liberality the graces and the life of God.

This mystery is the core of the Church's life. Pius XI wrote: "In addition to his power over Christ's real Body, the priest is also given a wonderful and extensive power over His Mystical Body, which is the Church." The priest takes the place of Christ in the world; he acts as "head" for the members of Christ under his care. The priest prays the prayer of Christ, offers the life of Christ, for the welfare and health of His members. His prayer at Mass is *Oremus* and *Quaesumus*: Let us pray; We beseech You. Should he even wish to do so, the priest could not disconnect himself from the needs and prayers of all the faithful. For just as Christ took upon Himself the sins of all men, the priest



The priest is Christ loving His members. It is his "to teach, to pardon, to console and to bless."



*There is no end to study, for there is no end to the truth of God;
and there are always souls who have not heard the good news of
Christ.*



*The priest works to restore all things in Christ. He becomes all
things to all men that he might save all.*



*This is the chalice of
my Blood which shall
be shed for you and
for many unto the re-
mission of sins.*

at Mass must take upon himself the wants and needs of all the members of Christ.

To this great spiritual unity there is added the physical union with Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. It is in the hands of the priest that we see the Word of God come into our presence; it is from the hands of the priest that we receive the Son of God hiding behind the appearances of bread. The priest gives us "the Bread of Life."

This "Bread" which is Christ is a feast. It is, as St. Thomas Aquinas

called it, "the Holy Banquet . . . come from heaven with every delight within it." Since this is true, the priest who consecrates for us this sacrament is a minister of joy. With the Body of Christ he administers charity, peace, and joy which are the fruits of the sacrament. Between time and eternity, the priest reaches into the measureless goodness and holiness of God and brings all-powerful help to earth for our needs and struggles.

Through the centuries, the words of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians have been taken as an expression of the dimensions of the priest's vocation: "I became all things to all men, that I might save all. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I might be made partaker thereof." To countless young Christians, these words have been the inspiration and stimulus to sacrifice all they possess to the thirst for souls which seizes the soul of a priest. Yet the graphic beauty of these words written in the flames of charity also taunts men of lesser talents than Paul. Somewhere within the paradox lies the secret to the role of the priest.

First, the words of St. Paul certainly seem to mean that the priest is literally sent to all, to love all men. It is certain that no one man will ever minister in person to the whole world; but this is not demanded. What is demanded, what belongs moreover to the very idea of the Christian priesthood is that priestly charity embrace all men.

The individual priest is sent to a parish, to a college, to a mission post, to a monastery. The souls he finds there are his immediate concern; but they cannot be his only concern. The universality of his priestly character embraces in every Mass, every recitation of the Breviary, whether performed at the high altar of a cathedral or in a mission shelter, the heart of each member of the *Whole Christ*. The priest is a priest "to all men."

But it is well to ask also to what lengths this love of all men might lead. One answer to this question was given by St. Paul's own method of making himself all things to all men: it ended in martyrdom. This is the ultimate gift, Christ's own way, to lay down your life for your friends. But even though this is not demanded of this priest or that, the offering of self is. The life of the priest becomes the life of Christ, and that life is given to His members.

While no one priest will actually preach and minister to all the men in the world, there is yet another way the priest's mission is "to all men." The priest is sent to all those entrusted to his care, those in his parish or classroom or mission compound—to *all* of them without respect of personalities. No man is too far removed from Christ for the priest to be unable to welcome him. Priestly love, equipped with the power of Christ

to forgive, heal, and strengthen, is prepared to embrace the forlorn and sinful within the same blessing it pours upon the chosen children of grace.

In the characteristically sober language of the Code of Canon Law, the Church shows solicitude that her priests be trained for the frontiers to which St. Paul's charter beckons: "In seminaries there should be lectures on the theology of pastoral duties, practical seminars on catechising both youth and adults, conferences on hearing confessions, visiting the sick and assisting the dying" (Canon 1365, ¶3). Here the law of the Church reminds the priest that wherever his work may take him, he is always to be the dispenser of the riches of Christ. To hungry, thirsty, dying souls he must always be prepared to give Christ to eat, to drink—to love. For blind, tired and indifferent souls he has to be ready to break the bread of Christ's truth for them to taste the savor of faith and begin to hunger for the Bread of the Divine Master Himself.

What are the dimensions of the priesthood? They soar beyond the limits of the world into the infinite space which so fascinates us today. They soar beyond the problems which cover earth to find a conclusion in God. The dimensions of the priesthood are the dimensions of Christ: infinite.

—Paul Philibert, O.P.

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

*So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.*

(From *Richard Cory*, a poem by Edwin Arlington Robinson)

IN A RECENT ISSUE of a prominent national weekly magazine an article appeared dealing with the troubled emotional state of modern man. Aptly entitled "The Anatomy of *Angst*," it proceeded to analyze the guilt/anxiety feelings prevalent today. More an historical conspectus of the problem than a true analysis, the article concluded with a few remarks