

# PRIESTLY SPIRITUALITY

*by*

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"... God does not love us... to spend our time loving and praising him, but so we will communicate his love and righteousness to his people, so that they in turn can reach out to others."(1)

". . . The sole end of priesthood is the contemplation of the Divine."(2)

There was a time when a discussion of "spiritualities of the ordained priesthood" would have occurred to no one, for spirituality, classically defined as "the despising of earthly things and the savoring only of those which are above," was part of the very essence of priesthood; so writes Claude Arvisenet, in *The Reminder of the Priestly Life*, 1794. George Herbert, in *A Priest to the Temple*, 1632, whose Anglican spirituality differs sharply from that of the world-despising Frenchman, would still find no means of separating out spirituality from priestly life. The modern dichotomies which permit the question of "priesthood and spirituality" lie at the center of our problem. The first part of this paper will address itself to some of those dichotomies and varieties of definition which so complicate our topic. We have to sort out, if not decide among, a world of competing spiritualities, as well as several alternative notions of the ordained priesthood, before the two can be considered together. We will then give some attention to those aspects of modernity which create difficulties for the reconstruction of a priestly spirituality. This first section will conclude with an Anglican vision of what a priest is and does. The second part of the paper will lay out four avenues of spiritual discipline which are implied by the understanding of priesthood here presented. Different conceptions of office elicit different spiritualities. I hope it will be helpful for our discussion to consider how one's definition of priestly being and function is, or ought to be, integrally related to one's spirituality of the ordained priesthood, how one lives out one's office towards God.

### Varieties of Spirituality

"Spirituality," a word coined in eighteenth century France, has come to have many more meanings than it had originally. Once allied to a "two-story" universe and a dualistic anthropology, in which the human being responded, reached towards God, and held the world in contempt as at best a place of testing and trial for salvation, spirituality now might be defined more generally as the desire for or

experience of God, and the disciplines, methods, predispositions which enable and make conscious that encounter with the Transcendent. Often today, human integration in this world displaces the goal of salvation, with its transcendent referent. Within such a generality there are, at least in the Anglo-American world, some sharply competing understandings of what that process/event looks like, and where and how it happens. One important challenge is raised by the rejection of the very notion of sacrality, the two-storied universe and the body/soul dichotomy of classical spirituality. Thus Eric James quotes Martin Buber,

... Since then I have given up the "religious" which is nothing but the exception, extraction, exaltation, ecstasy; or it has given me up. I possess nothing but the everyday out of which I am never taken. The mystery is no longer disclosed, it has escaped or has made its dwelling here where everything happens as it happens ... (3)

Here is a spirituality which finds God in life, in Event. These worldly spiritualities grounded in the "religionless Christianity" or secular theologies of the 1960's bid us, in obedience to the Word, to action and transformation of the world more than to unitive contemplation of God. Jack Smith, a chaplain at Boston University through the '60's well expresses this mode of spirituality as he refers to prayer, "... its main category the will of God acting through the cooperation of his people." (4) He expresses the anxiety of many priests, guilty about not saying their prayers, which traditionally meant at least the Daily Office, and declares those forms medieval in their contemplative bias. (5) His call is for a spirituality of involvement, struggle, criticizing the 'meditation racket' as an escape from saying the prophetic 'no' to the death-dealing enterprise of modern society. (6) "Become friends with time," he calls, and seek a religion of strength rather than consolation. (7)

What a different mood is struck by Tilden Edwards, proponent of another contemporary spirituality. Writing in the late 1970's, he sees many yearning for spiritual nurture in a crisis of soul to which mental health professionals cannot speak, and of which religious "professionals" all too often have no experience. Turning from prophetic activism and from the larger society to the individual, this spirituality looks to the mysticism of the "negative way." People are finding "... a theology of the Word inadequate for today. They want non-word, silence, touch, dance, music." (8) If control be an issue among spiritu-

alities, this apophatic tradition moves away from the virile, in-charge, this-worldly style, to the more open "letting-go" of the mystic's vocation: to receive and give birth to God in the depths of the soul. The balance has shifted away from the this-worldly activism of the 60's to a more inward dimension with a highly individual focus.

I will mention a third 'brand' of spirituality in this reminder that spirituality today is legion. It is mine and I will work with it throughout this paper. This way to God is less readily discovered in the best-sellers on the religious book shelves today. It is the peculiarly Anglican "incarnational spirituality" of George Herbert, Jeremy Taylor, and more recently, Charles Williams, Martin Thornton or Monica Furlong. These writers are rooted in a long English medieval tradition of Jesus piety, from St. Anselm to Ailred of Rievaulx, Margery Kempe, Dame Julian of Norwich. God can still be found in event, but by reason of the paradigm Event of God's entrance into the world through the Sacred Humanity of Jesus, who gives shape and ethical content to every other epiphany. Margery meets and adores the Child Jesus as she changes a neighbor boy's diapers; Ailred found in human friendship a way to God, indeed, he was able to write, "God is Friendship." The key word in this third way is *sacramentality*, or participation, and the starting place of this movement into the world to find God is always the revelatory event within the Christian community, often sacramentally rather than wordily experienced. This homely Anglican piety begins in a meeting with God in prayer or sacrament, and moves inexorably into the rest of God's world. Thus Archbishop Ramsey's succinct charge to the priest: "To be with God, with the people on your heart."(9)

Prophetic/activist; mystical/apophatic; incarnational/sacramental; here are at least three spiritualities to consider.

### Varieties of Priesthood

Now let us consider priesthood, or, for Anglicans, priesthoods. At least since Elizabeth I gave us two Eucharistic theologies in a single sentence of administration, we have been living with our Catholic and Reformed souls in one often uneasy breast. The differing emphases here also reflect the varying weight given to the three sources of theological authority for Anglicans: Scripture, Tradition, and Right Reason.

At one end of the spectrum, a writer such as the English priest John Saward presents us with a tightly argued case for a sacrificial and

hierarchical priesthood focused on the Eucharist. The priest is an *alter Christus*, participating in the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ as set forth in scripture and the Church's liturgical tradition. This view stresses the objective, indelible character of priestly office and distinguishes clearly between priest and laity. As Raymond Brown writes, "... a priesthood that does not stand apart in some way is a priesthood that is not needed." (10) This understanding of priestly order and character may be contrasted, as Saward does, with a Protestant functionalism which he believes falls into a ministry of skill, a meritocracy, a bureaucratic professionalism that represents a ministry by works rather than by grace. (11) Hierarchy in this tradition is seen as the necessary ordering of the Church's organic life. Saward writes, "Without hierarchy, the Church is not the people of God but a rabble." (12) In this view, the priest facilitates community by being a priest, living an interior life of sacrifice, meditating the Presence of God not only in sacramental action, but in being himself "... a walking Sacrament of Christ the High Priest." (13)

In some contrast to this account at certain points would be the pictures of priesthood set forth in the Lambeth Reports of 1968 on ministry (14) or the recent book of Richard Hanson, *Christian Priesthood Examined*. (15) In both of these works, tradition tends to be subordinated to the biblical witness, to emphasize a ministry of service and mission to the world more than a ministry of the presence or experience of God. Hanson specifically criticizes the classical cultic model by which the priesthood is a caste apart from the laity, although he would still hold that the priest is a go-between person, an *alter Christus*. (16) This priesthood of proclamation stresses the role of teacher and the prophetic call to justice in a ministry of service "in the world, to the world and for the world." (17) The Lambeth Report includes but one brief paragraph grounding the priest's being and work in the life of personal and corporate prayer. (18)

Another Anglican vision of priesthood, the one I wish to recommend, fits neatly into neither of these two polarities—though remaining at one with the more traditional account in explicit rejection of the secular professional model. Representative of this third way is Urban Holmes who uses Right Reason in the form of cultural anthropology to set forth a priestliness which is before all a God-symbol. This priesthood is itself a sacramental, revealing in a powerful, non-cognitive way the Mystery of the Transcendent at the center of reality, of all human experience and meaning. The priest teaches by being that

which the priest offers.(19) So also Martin Thornton holds to this traditional sacramental model in which the center of priestliness is participation in the life of God for and with the people. At the same time he rejects Romanizing sacerdotalism, insisting that Anglican priesthood be homely and human in its sacramental involvement with world, and people, and the people's concerns, in play and work. The English parson digs his garden because that is part of his job, a sacramental relation with the world for which he pleads as intercessor.(20) Thornton calls the Anglican priesthood an untidy parcel, but the string which holds it together is Chalcedonian Christology, with a strong emphasis from medieval piety on the Sacred Humanity of the God made flesh. Again a definition of priesthood is grounded in a theology and carries a spirituality. It might be noted that it is gardens which the Parson digs, rather than picket lines of protest against nuclear power plants which he organizes. Thornton's examples are bucolic and very British, but can and must be translated for the American scene and a more diverse populace.

The most resplendent example of this classically Anglican incarnational priesthood, rooted in prayer and in the central act of the Eucharist, yet thoroughly free of spiritualizing or hierarchial aloofness from God's world and the people of God, is Archbishop Michael Ramsey's book, *The Christian Priest Today*, 1972. Ramsey knits scriptural biddings to mission, witness, and the reconciling and transforming work of forgiveness together with the contemplative and sacrificial notes of the tradition to forge a picture of the priest for the modern world which firmly avoids the archaic, the authoritarian, the socially irresponsible as well as the bureaucratic and professional model. "Being with God with the people on your heart" is the call, and the ground from which it is done is identification with Jesus' way of the Cross. Again a spirituality is implied at the heart of priesthood, one of redemptive suffering, which holds together the personal and the corporate dimensions of our life with God.

Kenneth Leech's chapter on the priest and the drug scene in his book, *Pastoral Care and the Drug Scene*, 1970, gives a practical description of this contemporary incarnational tradition. The identification of the priest with the High Priesthood of Christ entails a theology, spirituality, and life style which begins in the unitive experience of God in

sacrament and in a disciplined life of self-knowledge and prayer; is sustained by the Church; and bears fruit in a suffering love among the powerless and the broken that is not merely a ministry to individuals but also a confrontation with institutions in the light of God's will for a just society.(21)

Here we have again three variations in a definition of priesthood, roughly speaking: Tridentine, mission/proclamation/service, and a hybrid whose traditional sacramentalism begins with participation in the divine life and moves into the world in mission as the fruit of that Meeting. There is no two-story universe in Thornton or Ramsey, though to be sure the world is measured for what it is: a dangerous place in need of transformation, as well as the arena of salvation. It is this third way of Anglican Incarnationalism which this paper will commend as an ideal of the ordained priesthood for today.

### Contemporary Difficulties

Before we use these definitions of spirituality and priesthood to work towards a synthesis for our times, it is necessary to be aware of the difficulties which our late-twentieth-century American world places in the way of this task. I will do no more than list these roadblocks by title. It is significant that my English authors are of little use here; the theologians and spiritual writers across the Atlantic are short on sociological analysis. We do however have to ask how the Church's priesthood is to be received. What kind of formation is required if one is to communicate with God, yes, but also with the people, if one is to be nourished by God and nurtured by the people. Kenneth Leech remarked that the young in their drug experiences caught a glimpse of spiritual regions but needed a priest to guide them further, a priest whose spirituality had brought him or her through deadly pain to God, where one can stand, with nothing to lose, with those who seek they know not what (22); and, I might add, a priest who can *name* what they seek.

What prevents us in our culture from hearing such a voice? Holmes, in *Ministry and Imagination*, has traced the ways our world stifles the restless heart—and the formation of genuine priesthood. Our language, our epistemology, has reduced truth and communication to sense experience or boxed-in subjectivity, or to that which can be rendered in computer language. We talk *about* God. To talk *with* God is crazy. A priest is one who is crazy and playful enough to nudge us by example beyond talk about God to Encounter.(23)

Another commonplace observation about modernity which is particularly serious for priesthood and spirituality is the widening gap which opened between affect and intellect, faith and reason, piety and theology from the late middle ages into the post-Enlightenment present. For our purposes, the impact of this pervasive loss of integrity among experiences which belong together has been felt strongly in the formation and training of the clergy, who are often given professional skills and academic theological expertise disconnected from religious sensibilities. For too many of our seminarians, the most significant experiential component of their formation is the "C.P.E. Quarter," a context often undergirded by a psychological anthropology which, in its orientation toward control through insight, raises serious difficulties for a Christian view of grace and freedom. The gap between intellect and religious experience is corrosive; it spawns mindless and often narrowly subjective piety, and gutless talk about a distant God. The clinical mode of formation can tend to limit the experience of intimacy to the human plane. A priest is one who has known the "Narnia land" of God's touch, beyond human intimacy.

Ours is a society built on control, prediction, and resistance to death and to those liminal situations where the angels dance and God plays with us. Ours is a desacralized world which accepts church administrators, mental health therapists and group facilitators, but in which a priest, as here envisioned, has no role, status, or common-sense voice. A priest is marginal in this society and that is perhaps an opening for faithfulness, if we can but let go of our ambitions to be accepted in the world of professionals. A sacramental person makes no sense because our culture does not perceive the world in a sacramental way—a rose is a rose is a rose. The communities and the places where religious experience flourished, and the symbols which carried and handed on those experiences, have largely disappeared from the middle-class, white, American world—whether those be Novenas or the Great Litany on Wednesday nights during Lent. For the loss of symbols which carry experiences of the Holy, I would point to the spiritual crises occasioned by the extirpation of the Latin mass, and the more charitable and gradualist phasing-out of our own familiar liturgies. We live, as Holmes has said, in a disenchanted world.<sup>(24)</sup> Is there a way to recover "a place next to the divine opening" without falling into romantic anachronism which titillates but does not convert and transform in a genuine meeting with the Holy One? With some hope of addressing this dilemma, I will now move out of the descriptive mode



to take sides more explicitly and sketch a picture of the ordained priesthood in the Anglican tradition which could commend itself to the Church in our times. From this foundation, one might build a spirituality for priesthood.

### The Priest's Model: Christ as Priest and Victim

One begins with Scripture\*, with the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ recalled by the Church in John 17 to be the model and source of Christian ministry. Is this not where George Herbert began as he wrote, in *A Priest to the Temple*, of "... the dignity of the office, that a priest may do that which Christ did, and by his authority and as his viceregent," and of "... the duty that a priest is to do that which Christ did and after his manner both for doctrine and life."(25) Thus the priest, as participant in the priesthood of Christ, is above all called to an interiority of the cross, "... always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body" (II Cor. 4:10).(26) The priest "... stands already beyond extermination" in the words of Ulrich Simon, *A Theology of Auschwitz*, and so can ignore the world's accusations of lunacy, go with the lost sheep and stand there in the darkness.(27) The priest lives life as one prepared always to lose it, in an openness to the Cross with which God can work.

The Ordinal, as well as the New Testament picture of Jesus Christ, bids the priest to be the one who binds and looses, the mediator of the mercy of a righteous God, or, as St. Anselm wrote in his prayer to St. Paul, "Fathers by your authority, Mothers by your kindness."(28) Above all the priest is mediator of the compassion of God, for that is the teaching of the Cross, a compassion which recognizes but overwhelms sin. "Love that cannot, will not be broken by sin, is rocklike, and quite astonishing," wrote Dame Julian of the compassion of God.(29) Accordingly, the merciful Motherhood of the priest is rocklike, tough if you will, or, as St. Gregory the Great wrote of the pastor's motherhood and fatherhood, a "... love that does not enervate, vigour that does not exasperate."(30) The priest as minister of divine forgiveness recognizes in humility her solidarity with the sinner, for she has herself confessed to have tasted the chaos of evil and been brought back by the Good Shepherd. The priest is called also to be such a Shepherd, a governor of the community and a nurturer, a director of

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\*I am using scripture devotionally, not as an historical norm—I hope not unintelligently.

the Christian Proficients, but also a seeker after the cliff-hangers on the edges beyond the community. The priest is, before all things, a Christian soul given to prayer, that is, the disciplined practice of the presence of God, centered in the Eucharist and grounded in a daily rule of Office and silence. "To pray, and to teach souls to pray, it is all, for given this everything else will follow."(31) Out of this Interior Castle come the fruits or works of priesthood. After the fashion of one's model, the Lord, the priest is intercessor for the people before God; also one who mediates the power of God into the world in sacraments and blessing. George Herbert encouraged the use of priestly blessing, which warms the heart with the assurance, confidence and power of God at the priest's hands.(32) Like the Lord and the first order of Deacons, the priest is ever a servant, enabled in this humble ministry by one's own capacity to be waited on by Jesus through the admission of one's own finitude and sin.

The priest is revealer as was the Son of God, opening the Scripture with learning and fervor, enabling the laity to take hold of their own priestliness by which we, the whole People of God, offer our selves and our work to God in thanksgiving. Still more fundamentally, the priest reveals the Godward side of all of creation, naming the Name, pointing to the Mystery who is with us to save at the heart of every human joy and pain. Yet the priest reveals only by being what she offers, and so the call to Holiness sums up this vision of priesthood. To be that symbolic person, an *alter Christus*, one must join sacramental being with the ever-adventurous journey towards God. To be God's ambassador, one who welcomes, entices into the Presence, one must have oneself tasted, or known with St. Bernard that the very desire to taste affords the gift. This union with God in the sacraments, in personal prayer, and in self-giving service amongst the People is inevitably bound to the pursuit of holiness. The Ordinal makes this clear where the priest promises to be a "wholesome example to (the) people" at the personal and political level. Holiness—a gift, not a work.

### **The Priest's Model: Apostle sent to the World**

One might stop here. However, there is a further list of priestly characteristics which are equally biblical and follow from attention to the work of the Apostles as depicted by the first-century Church. As we look at contemporary nuances in one's vision of ordained priesthood and priestly spirituality, it appears that attention to the High Priesthood of Christ produces one set of priorities, and focus on the

earthly ministry of Jesus and his disciples can result in a slightly different set of emphases. In accordance with our commitment to a spirituality of Incarnation and a truly sacramental (not simply cultic) priesthood, these two sets of values must be held together—though in today's church and world I believe the first needs special emphasis. However, the priest as mediator of divine Presence and Holiness is also one sent, on apostolate, on mission, to proclaim the Gospel and to enable the people on mission in the world and to the world. The priest is the teacher, who tells the paradigm Story of God's Mighty Acts and who "traditions," who hands on and remembers (anamnesis), in a world without memory, that which binds us back (religio) to our Creator. Like the Apostle Paul, the priest is a prophet who enables community, bringing the order of God's truth and justice to a rudderless and unjust world. He is a prophet who breaks up the golden calves of civil religion, political injustice, and violence, in the name of a Gospel which makes all things new in the Spirit. The priest today profits more in reading the Acts of the Martyrs than any other Christian word since the New Testament canon, because they contain a charismatic word of challenge to the world. The Apostles were warned that the world would hate them because they are not of the world, and the Church's leadership can look for no less than this as the priest is called to confront the principalities and powers—confront perhaps more than change.

Finally, to look to the apostles as model for priesthood is to see the priest as symbol also: symbol of the unity, continuity and universality of the Church, the whole people of God; and representing Catholicity, not schism or party or sect. Christ died for all; the Apostles were sent to convert all nations. Priesthood symbolizes the universality of this call.

Each of these lists of priestly ideals/characters is brought together and summed up in the Eucharistic being and action of priesthood. Michael Ramsey wrote, "The Eucharist is the most important thing a priest ever does, and it must be certain that what is done is seen to be done rightly."<sup>(33)</sup> In an Anglican vision of priesthood, this sacramentality carries the priest from the altar into the streets, the kitchens, the country clubs and sweatshops, leading and enabling Christian witness to political and social righteousness as well as to personal wholeness. Where the people—all the people—work and play and struggle and sin, there is the matter of Eucharistic sacrifice and intercession. "With God, with the people on your heart." A vision of priesthood faithful to the Incarnation must, as Thornton insists, be

thoroughly human. "The English priest plays cricket on the green not in spite of his priesthood, but because of it." I would add, playing cricket seems very safe. The priest must not be safe.

To sum up. This is a priesthood of Presence. The priest seeks to become what he or she offers, a walking sacrament by which God touches and heals, feeds, reconciles and challenges. Priesthood is an office: Spirit-filled, but an Order of the Church more than simply a freely given charism. It is therefore public, symbolic, objective, a form of obedience and authority in the community, enabling the community, called out of the community. As symbol, the priest is representative person, God to the people and the People represented before God. To be alive, this symbolic being must be rooted in a desire for God and God's righteous holiness, in a life of prayer and charity. Finally, the priest is liminal, a bearer of Tradition but ever counter-cultural (34), as one who, like Christ, is a failure in the world's terms. She or he is not a professional, but a clown for God, expecting the world's derision, a resident Alien, a citizen of another City. There is something of the monastic tradition within the Anglican inheritance of priestliness, especially seen in the married priesthood in the role of the Rectory household as an example of Godly community. Burdensome, but there nevertheless, and more often a blessing than a curse.

### **Practical Spirituality for Priests**

What does this all mean for the disciplines of the spiritual life? There is of course a spirituality implied in the description of priesthood here set forth. Let me now make it more explicit. I will consider the spirituality which follows from this definition of priestly ministry in four points. First, the priest and liturgical piety; second, the priestly disciplines of personal prayer; third, the priest as friend of the soul, spiritual director and confessor; fourth, the priest and "prayer without ceasing," or the sacramentalizing of life in the world. These four areas can ground a spirituality for Anglican priesthood in America during the last quarter of this century.

It is perhaps a sign of our times that one must very nearly apologize for writing a paper on spirituality for the ordained priesthood. No derogation of our "common prayer" as members of the one Body is meant. We share by our one Baptism, yes, by one Book of Common Prayer, a single spirituality, lay and ordained minister alike. But those called out to be God's Clowns—the Priest at the Altar, servant in the Inn of the Church—have a special responsibility to be, and reflect

on, what that common spirituality demands of our life within this office. A priestly spirituality for the ordained priesthood is distinct, though not disconnected, from the spirituality of the whole people of God. It is so because it is public; because it is nurtured in the awesome privilege and responsibility of Presidency in the Eucharistic community; because it focuses, enables and gives a model for whatever else goes on in the community; and because it confronts the specific experiences and temptations of the ordained priesthood.

### Liturgical Piety

There is a great deal written about liturgy, less on priestly liturgical piety, and of that, much is Roman Catholic and now divides itself rather neatly into pre- and post-Vatican II viewpoints. The single article on liturgical spirituality in the new *Festschrift* for Massey Shepherd, *Worship Points the Way*, is disappointing, for I am not persuaded that the author's post-Vatican II critique of Tridentine sacerdotalism speaks to *our* issues, as American Episcopalians with Rite II and the Book of Common Prayer 1979.(35) Anglican spirituality is not bookish; as a people we are not formed by handbooks for seminarians and *Layfolk's Mass Books*, but rather we are formed, priest and people, by worship with the one Book of Common Prayer, which includes in varying amounts Holy Scripture, the liturgical traditions of the Catholic centuries, reformed over the last four hundred years, some ceremonial, and personal devotions set firmly within a public liturgical context. The ordained priest's spirituality focuses and is centered in this liturgical character of the piety of the whole People of God. The week is lived in the light of thanksgiving and preparation for the Lord's Day celebration of the community Eucharist, including a serious study of the lections to be read and preached, a discipline common to Priest and People. The week should be so lived that one is enabled to pray the liturgy which one says or sings. That is an injunction of self-examination and perhaps a call to confession, as essential as sermon preparation. It is also a reminder that the careful observation of one's daily prayers is the best assurance of a prayerful spirit at the altar. Further it is a warning about busyness. Nothing gets in the way of prayerful liturgical action and its pastoral fruits more than a sense of hassle or rush. I know a priest who always removes his watch before he celebrates the Eucharist. This is a powerful piece of priestly spirituality, which might set the tone for all of one's ministry.

The ability to receive the gift of prayer during liturgical leadership also rests on knowing what you are doing. Rehearsal frees the mind and hands to be taken up by the Spirit. I mention such a truism because some of the students in my seminary too often presume "spontaneity" (in practice, a certain casual sloppiness) to be the precondition of the presence of the Spirit. I know some Episcopal priests who share that error enthusiastically. As a very new priest, I yearn for the day when I will have mastered the ceremonial of liturgical Presidency so that I will be once again, as I was as a Deacon, able to pray my way through the liturgy. It makes all the difference for people and priest, and God is honored.

There is a priestly liturgical spirituality implied in the new Prayer Book. I have yet to see it discussed with any depth. It differs less radically from the 1928 BCP than the Vatican II liturgies do from the Tridentine Mass. Yet there is change. The four orders are explicitly represented in public worship, in cooperation and organic relationship rather than the old rigid hierarchy. Celebration is by the whole people, for the Eucharist does not belong to the priest, nor is priesthood reduced to saying a mass of priestly leadership and lay passivity. We have gone less far than Rome in turning our liturgies into Godly instructions or exhortations in the banal language of the market place. Mystery, symbol, beauty, the sacrality and otherness of worship are central values; and that sacred space and time nurtures our priests in their sense of the oddity of being a "God person," set apart "... in the world, for the world, against the world."<sup>(36)</sup> The Book of Common Prayer is the matrix of lay and priestly spirituality which binds the priest to her or his special calling as sacramental person, and integrates that focus into the *Opus Dei* of the whole gathered community. It is the mark and fruit of our Catholic and Reformed heritage; it defines our priesthood.

Finally, the Eucharist is the most powerful force in a priest's life for connectedness between the joy and pain of the world and the pain and victory of God on the Cross. To the altar it all comes, more than any one pastor or ministerial team can bear or cope with, to be offered and transformed, healed, redeemed, given thanks for.

As a new priest, I am awesomely aware of my hands. What do I do with my hands, all week long—is this or that gesture, or failure to put my hand to the plow, worthy of what I will be doing with those hands on Sunday? No wonder my hands still tremble when I hold the Host. Will that ever cease? And my people's hands. There is such a startling

personality in hands, all the same, each different. Here it all comes together, as I pray over those hands and feed the people. I am so deeply grateful that my hands were anointed at my priesting, something physical and with a sweet savor done to help prepare this priest to be God's hands in His world.

Liturgical spirituality. If the practice of priesthood is inseparable from the theology of sacrifice, then the weekly remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection in Eucharist is surely the foundation of priestly being and sending into the world.

### Personal Prayer

"To pray and to teach souls to pray, it is all, for given this everything else will follow." The peculiar discipline and rule of priestly personal prayer is the Daily Office. Happily, as Anglicans, that discipline is shared by many lay people, but it has been a traditional expectation of the ordained; how can one encourage the laity to dailyness unless one is so engaged oneself? Why the Office? For all the old reasons. It is the Church's prayer; it ensures that every form of prayer will be part of one's daily life—thanksgiving when there is apparently nothing to be thankful for, adoration and praise when the circumstances of life at the natural level invite only tears. How very important it is also for the priest to know herself or himself *not alone* at prayer, but surrounded by the communion of the saints and that handful of parishioners one knows to be saying the Office somewhere out there in the world. Finally, the Office keeps us inside the calendar, so that we live by sacred time and not simply the world's patterns.

I realize that the use of the Daily Office is felt by some to be oppressive and monastic. For such persons I would cite Dom John Chapman: "Pray as you can and don't pray as you can't." (37) It remains, however, the norm.

The priest's rule needs also to include an orderly method of intercession. One way to do this is to include the daily appointment book in one's early morning devotions. Intercession should also include petition for one's own needs and fears and hopes, too often neglected by those called to care for others. The priest, like Peter, is called to allow Jesus to wash her feet.

### Silence

Recently in the United States, there has been a strong movement towards mystical religion of the "negative way." Hence the enthusiasm

for Asian religions, and the *via negativa* of Western spirituality, as for example in the writings of Meister Eckhart or the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*. There is a suspicion of words. Certainly a silent attending on God, adoring, listening for God's special word to us, needs to be part of any rule of life. Yet I have some uneasiness with the popularity of contemplative prayer, which, after all, is most usually a gift more than the result of a "method." It is possible that the interest in interior silence represents a reaction to our noisy culture, and, less appropriately, an escape from the hard work of confronting the positive Revelation of God in the midst of a faithless, desacralized world. Perhaps priestly spirituality in particular requires that we bite the bullet of the affirmative way, and if new words, new pictures, and new names need to be forged to match the community's experience of God and the Holy, let us then be about that difficult task. Could it not be that our often cold, personally isolating, myth-poor existence requires the recovery of an affective, sacramental, story-filled piety, that we might *remythologize* rather than *demythologize*. Especially in the face of our new prayer book, we need a renewed folk piety for the 1980's. Our personal prayer and interior life with God is a place to begin that creative, spirit-filled way into affirmation. The priest, by virtue of public office as teacher, mediator and representative of the People of God, is called especially to this awesome task of naming and renaming—God. Let us not be afraid; the saints have always done this. As a new priest in a parish where all priests have been heretofore addressed as Father, I confront this challenge of the affirmative way, existentially!

### The Priest as Abba or Amma

The priest is one on the journey to God, who goads, accompanies, steps out of the way, goes down into the ditches, falls with the people on the journey, and relates how God picks us up to move on. As a seminary professor, I confess to a desire to enhance and extend our contemporary focus on clinical training and pastoral counseling with the ancient form of the cure of souls, that of confessor and spiritual director. What does being an Abba or Amma involve? The vocation of spiritual guidance is not necessarily a priestly calling; it was the lay hermits of the desert, then monastics, who pioneered this Fatherly/Motherly way of furthering and nurturing one's progress towards intimacy with God and faithfulness to God's will. Is it too much to ask that every priest consider the spiritual formation of the serious



Christians in the parish a *priority of pastoral care*, as Thornton has so persuasively argued for in his early books? Such a commitment suggests that the priest sees himself or herself also as one on pilgrimage, involved in the daily process of conversion as a penitent. One cannot direct, or hear confessions properly, unless one has oneself a soul friend and a confessor. Here is the place to underline the importance of that sacrament of reconciliation in the spiritual growth of a priest and of a parish. It is to be hoped that its inclusion in the BCP 1979 will remove its use from questions of churchmanship, and allow a strong recovery of the priest's office as mediator of the transforming power of forgiveness, as well as representative of the reality of God's judgment and the community's stake in sin and virtue. A confessor may be distinct from one's spiritual director, but Anglican practice has, in a very healthy way, often combined confession with direction. The priest who makes a regular confession ministers out of an awareness of one's humanity and weakness, and dependence on grace alone. Such a priest can be used by God as a healer, because she herself has known healing.

A second aspect of direction, mentioned with some hesitation in Tilden Edwards' new book, *Spiritual Friend*, is obedience, a not-very-popular notion in our society.(38) I mention this virtue because it is of particular importance to the being and exercise of priesthood. Again my friend St. Gregory the Great noted that training for the "government of souls" requires the capacity to be oneself obedient. The right exercise of authority is a serious issue for the priesthood today, and its resolution is inseparable from a sane practice of holy obedience. There is a component of obedience in spiritual direction which, when the soul friend is wise, experienced and trusted, does indeed enable growth in one's obedience and trust towards God. This is not the only virtue in the Christian life, but the humility fostered by obedience is an especially important aspect of character for those given responsibilities of governance in the Lord's vineyard.

The people have a right to ask of their priest not problem-solving, or therapy, but hints of the Experience of God. The priest therefore is a *Theotokos*, a God bearer; the priest is midwife, one who waits for grace to bear fruit in the community; the priest is also a nourisher: Catherine of Siena wrote that the priest holds the people to the breasts of Mother Church (39), to be fed the milk and meat of the Gospel. The priest as friend of the soul, as Abba/Amma, stands as Mary, or John the Beloved Disciple, together with another Christian soul at the foot of the cross;

and is one who has the spiritual discernment and experience to know the way to Calvary, and to name it, and to speak the hope and life and forgiveness which lie within the darkness. That is why priestly spirituality should involve the disciplines of spiritual direction.

### **“Pray Without Ceasing”**

We close these reflections on a spirituality of priesthood with Paul's injunction to pray without ceasing. I mean by this more than merely to recommend what the Desert Fathers did with this scriptural verse: that is, for example, the use of the Jesus prayer to hallow and point all our times in a Godward direction. This use of “arrow prayers,” to pray, as St. Benedict recommended, “often but short,” is a way of allowing God to weld our spirituality to our physicality; it sacramentalizes our world. It is a way of being open to that kind of incarnational spirituality which (in my aspiration to be an American Martin Thornton) I call the “yellow school bus piety.” If the British priest is on the cricket field because of his priesthood, and his being there is in part a kind of prayer without ceasing, I would bear witness to a similar situation in that hour between seven and eight o'clock on school mornings. If all has gone well, I have said morning prayer and fed the dog and made the coffee before 7:15. Then there is the matter of breakfast and newspapers and getting two children dressed and out so as not to miss the yellow school bus. In what spirit does that all get done? That morning breakfast table is a kind of altar; it is my preparation for the altar, and for the people whose lives and schedules and frustrations I share, not simply as next door neighbor, but as a priest. Indeed, there waiting for the yellow school bus, I wait for God.

This one story has to do with the redemption of a little society, the family. Sacramental spirituality is that, a link between the personal meeting with God and the political, social structures of our lives. It has to do with the construction of the Kingdom. The priest's spirituality models that link between personal and social, sacred and secular, ordinary and ecstatic.

Prayer without ceasing. The priest is that symbolic person through whom the ordinary and the profane are met by the transforming power of the Spirit as one reaches one's hands over simple gifts. That which takes place on Sunday is the paradigm for all of life—work, play, personal journey, political order—as this Bread and this life are offered up to the God who broke into this ordinary world. Priestly spirituality needs to make public these connections between parish

altar and breakfast table, between the personal and the political, and to make these connections in our own *vives as priests*, not simply in sermons. I call this experience a prayer without ceasing, for indeed these worldly experiences are generally redeemed only in the presence of intentional, conscious and habitual prayerfulness—"O God make speed to save us, O Lord make haste to help us," muttered in the midst of it all. Other times of quiet can be assigned by rule to such arrow prayers: every stop light, while driving between parish calls, for example. This builds the habit of recollection, which enables a sacramental way of living, a practice of the presence of God. For it is just that, a profound sacramentality, by which daily living, hedged about and penetrated by prayer, becomes a way of participating in God's own life. The priest who experiences the world in this way will know and be shaped by the inner reality and order of Incarnation, despite all the road blocks of modernity: filled calendars, frustrating busyness, false dichotomies of action and contemplation, resistance to enchanters and the Enchanted. A great confidence and joy abounds as one meets and loves God in the streets or at home as well as at the altar, a joy which gives substance to one's capacity to be a priestly person, a walking sign of Emmanuel—God with us. This is the priest's prayer without ceasing, being that sign.

The cardinal image of priestly spirituality is the servant Lord dying on a Cross, with the people on his heart. At the foot of the Cross is another image, that of the Blessed Mother, not displacing her Son, but, by long tradition, a symbol for the contemplation of other aspects of the Mystery of the Incarnation. Mary also is a paradigm for priestly spirituality, especially for this grace to say yes to God in the world without knowing the outcome, to receive what is come into the world and bear it, and pray without ceasing over it.

*Come abide within me  
Let my soul like Mary  
Be thine earthly sanctuary.*

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