

**BERNARD  
WARD**

THE PRIESTLY  
VOCATION

Bernard Ward

**The Priestly Vocation**

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# **Bernard Ward**

## **The Priestly Vocation / A Series of Fourteen Conferences Addressed to the Secular Clergy**

### **PREFACE**

THE aim of the following pages is to present well-known ideals and principles of action, and to apply them to the state of things actually existing among the secular clergy of this country. They contain the substance of Conferences originally addressed to Seminarists, which are now amended so as to be applicable to a wider circle.

From the nature of the case it happens that the greater number of our spiritual books are written by the Regular Clergy. Yet in some of its phases the religious life differs essentially from that of a secular priest. For example, the virtue of Poverty, or that of Obedience, as practised by the latter differ not in degree but in kind from the manner in which they are practised by those in the religious state. Hence the seculars do not always find the exact application they want.

In the present book it is hoped that frequent quotations from the writings or sayings of well-known bishops and priests who have had personal experience of the English mission may at least give actuality to what is said, and at the same time add an authority for it to rest on.

**FEAST OF ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY,  
PATRON OF THE SECULAR CLERGY OF ENGLAND,  
*December 29, 1917.***

# THE PRIESTLY VOCATION

## CONFERENCE I

### THE PRIESTLY VOCATION

IT is well known that one of the great aims of Cardinal Manning during his long episcopate, and perhaps the one of his works which has left the most permanent impression behind it, was to raise the tone and status of his diocesan clergy. For many reasons connected with our Catholic history, the level at which the average secular priest in the days of the Vicariates aimed left something to be desired. When we read the story of penal times, and realise the kind of life that an ordinary priest had to live, it is not surprising that the tone and quality of mind which we somewhat vaguely designate under the name of the "Ecclesiastical spirit," should not have been largely developed.

We are not speaking now of the time of actual persecution. In the days when a priest had to go about his duties in the continual risk of being apprehended and cast into prison, and being condemned on trial to be hanged, drawn and quartered, the heroism of his life, and the manner in which he had to be almost continuously braving personal danger in his search after souls, would undoubtedly have taken the place of much training and prayer in sanctifying his soul. But with the relaxation of active persecution, came an imminent danger which showed itself throughout the dreary eighteenth century, and during the first half of the nineteenth. There was no longer any fear of violence, and even the depressing penal laws invented after the Revolution of 1688 gradually lost their vitality and ceased to be enforced. But the spirit engendered by these laws lasted longer than the laws themselves, and when the English clergy found themselves able to live the normal life of a secular priest, some stimulus was required to revive in them the spirit of their state, which had been so long obscured by the necessity of hiding their priesthood.

For consider what the ordinary life of a priest was even in the later days of the Vicariates. He dressed as a layman; he did not even venture to wear black, but wore the ordinary coloured coats common at that day. If he was not a chaplain to one of the old Catholic families, he would live in his own hired lodging, by himself, and in the utmost poverty. Only rarely would he have the opportunity of meeting a brother priest. Daily mass was at that time not usual. Even the Sunday services were of a very unpretending character, consisting for the most part of low mass, with some English prayers before or after. The "chapels" had little external signs of devotion beyond the altar itself. Statues of our Lady and the Saints were unknown, for it would have been considered highly imprudent to run counter to strong Protestant prejudice in matters which were not essential. The sacraments were administered with as much privacy as possible: the priest would hear Confessions in his own room; and having no font, would take Baptism water privately to the house of a child who was to be baptised. No vestments would be worn on such occasions, except perhaps a stole over a lay coat. It is not wonderful that such a life produced a kind of religion which was restrained and below the surface, and that there was little inclination to show outward signs of devotion. The lifelong habit of concealing their priesthood from the knowledge of others could not but tend to blunt the esteem for it in themselves; and it engendered a form of Catholicity which was dry and undemonstrative, to say the least, and wanting in the warmth of devotion which we now rightly look upon as among the most valuable aids to piety.

Nevertheless, it would be a great mistake to underestimate—as so many of the early Oxford converts did—the sterling qualities of the priesthood of the Vicariates. A more unworldly set of persons, with greater conscientiousness and devotion to duty, has hardly existed in any age of the

Church. Their life had a hardiness and simplicity about it which might well be a lesson to a modern priest. Their self-denial and the strictness of their personal lives, added to their remarkable humility and obliteration of self, often indicated great holiness, but it was of a stamp which an outsider would not easily grasp. They themselves in their daily conversations made light of their labours, and it was considered almost bad manners to talk of spiritual subjects. All that was taken as a matter of course, and anyone who spoke of it would be suspected of self-consciousness. The concealment of their devotional life had become to them a second nature, and it is no wonder that the converts who were brought up under such different surroundings failed to appreciate the real substantial virtues of a priest of the old school, or even failed to believe in their existence, while the roughness of their external behaviour was no small trial to those who were brought across it for the first time. Full allowance for this must be made in reading the strictures which Cardinal Manning made on the clergy with whom he was first brought into close contact.

Yet we must admit that this self-effacement had become a hindrance to their work. The time had come when the sacraments could be publicly administered, when many of the "chapels" had given place to churches which could reasonably be so called, with fonts, confessionals, tabernacles and ambries openly displayed, when a priest could go abroad not indeed in his cassock, but in a distinctively clerical dress, when he could live openly in a priest's house or presbytery, when the churches could be furnished in proper Catholic fashion with side altars, statues of our Lady and the Sacred Heart and the like, and there was no longer any reason to be shy of such practices as burning votive candles before pictures and shrines. Owing to their traditions they did not easily take to such practices, and often even discouraged them as being what they described as "Continental Catholicity," unsuited to the English character. And this spirit was intensified by the action of some of the converts who adopted the extreme opposite course, and carried their slavish imitation of everything Roman to a ridiculous degree. The practical result was that the old Catholics became still more restrained as a protest against the exaggerations of the new-comers, and it cannot be denied that the spirit of shyness of legitimate Catholic devotions thus engendered tended to stunt their development to an unfortunate degree.

It has, moreover, often been said, and still oftener assumed, that the priests of the old school were unfitted or unwilling to undertake new works, such as the building of churches and schools, or other developments requiring initiative and energy. It must be admitted that such was their tradition, for the simple reason that in the greater part of the eighteenth century, no such developments were called for. It was a time of gradual shrinkage of all Catholic work, as mission after mission was shut up. Those who read the account given in Joseph Berington's well-known *State and Behaviour of English Catholics from the Reformation to the year 1780*, will easily realise how the highest hope of the priest of that day was to keep what remained of Catholicity in the country, and to stem the wearying shrinkage which persistently went on in all Catholic work. It is probable that the English clergy obtained their first lessons of development of such work from their brethren, the *emigres* priests from France, men such as the Bishop of St. Pol de Leon, or Abbe Carron of Somers Town, or Abbe Maurel of Hampstead, or Abbe Voyaux de Franous of Chelsea, or Abbe Cheverus of Tottenham (afterwards Cardinal Archbishop of Bordeaux), or others who undertook such numerous works, primarily for the benefit of their exiled compatriots, but works which reacted powerfully on the English Catholics themselves. But as soon as the tide was really turned, and the Relief Act of 1791 had begun to bear fruit, we do not find such a marked want of priests ready to initiate new works. Such men as "Father Thomas," afterwards Provost, Doyle, who built St. George's Cathedral, or Rev. William Hunt, the founder of St. Mary's, Moorfields, or Rev. Peter Butler of Bermondsey, were typical priests of the old school, and yet had large ideas which bore fruit in the carrying out of important new works.

It is probable that as time went on, and such work was more and more needed, priests would have been found ready to undertake them; but it may be admitted that such ideas did not occupy a large part of the mind of the average priest of the day.

With respect to the Regular Clergy, many of the above limitations affected the character of their work in similar manner; but they had perhaps better means of combating them. They lived indeed outwardly the same lay life as a secular priest; but at fixed intervals they had to retire abroad to their monasteries and live the regular life for a time; and even when living in England as chaplains to the gentry, or in out-of-the-way country missions, they were able to keep some part at least of their rule. With the Jesuits this was especially the case, as their rule does not include reciting Office in choir, and is in fact specially adaptable to the conditions of a missionary priest. From the fact that they lived outwardly as the seculars, and were occupied over the same missionary work, while they had the advantage of a longer and more complete training, and continued it on the mission by the observance of their rule, which gave them greater opportunities of becoming spiritual men, they became more highly esteemed by the majority of the laity; and the feeling grew up that their vocation was the same as that of a secular priest, but that their rule caused them to live up to it better. They were looked upon as on a higher plane; a feeling which continued long after the circumstances which had led to it had been substantially modified. Even the secular priests themselves seemed to acquiesce in it, and though they were jealous of their own rights in matters ecclesiastical, they were often ready to hand over the more difficult work to the Regulars, and seemed to assume that the latter were the more experienced confessors or spiritual advisers, and that they were leading a higher life than themselves. It was the persistence of this idea which Cardinal Manning felt called upon to combat; and in order to combat the idea, the most direct method was to destroy the inequality of training which had given rise to it. We can quote his own words:—<sup>1</sup>

"My first thought was that no Provincial or Father General had any obligation to multiply and perfect his Order greater or more absolute than I had to multiply and to perfect the priesthood of the diocese of Westminster. . . . What was the esteem in which the laity held them? They, with exceptions, were held to be at a disadvantage as compared with the Regulars: as preachers, confessors, directors, judges of vocation, advisers in spiritual and even in worldly things they were held to be of less esteem. Many of them no doubt were so. But the whole as such was higher in parts. On the other hand, many of the Regulars, with longer training and greater advantages, were better qualified than the priests of the diocese; but many were not so. And yet the laity took for granted that the clergy were 'seculars' and spoke of them as such. 'He is only a secular priest' was often heard, and it revealed a whole world of prejudice, depreciation and mistrust. This was bad enough, but there was worse to come. The priesthood accepted the depreciation which depresses and paralyses the will. A conquered people lose the sense of power, and what is worse, take their state as a standard; so that priests have come to plead against invitations and exhortations to higher things. 'I am only a secular priest.' What can be greater than a priest? For itself does it not contain all perfection? What can black or white or brown cloth add to it? This seemed to me to be the first thing wanting. The world is governed by ideas, and the idea of our Lord's priesthood, truly and fully conceived, has a motive power to raise men to anything.

"The first thing needed, as it seemed to me, was to bring out into the clearest light what the priesthood is. It seemed to me to be obscured by the traditional prejudice that to be a Regular is to be everything, and to be a priest is to be functionary for sacraments and ceremonies. Even the priesthood of the Regular was lost sight of in his Order, habit and privileges.

"This conviction was the motive of all that I did and wrote at Bayswater. And more explicitly since 1869 in St. Thomas's Seminary and in two books, *The Pastoral Office* and *The Eternal Priesthood*."

It is no disrespect to the memory of so great a man as Cardinal Manning, to say that like most men who pursue one great idea, he went somewhat to extremes in working for his object. It is well known that he discouraged or at times even prohibited the Regulars from giving missions or retreats, in order to induce his clergy to do so instead. He endeavoured to abolish the very name of a secular

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<sup>1</sup> *Life of Cardinal Manning*, ii. p. 784.

priest, as being identified in the minds of many with low ideals and aspirations, and preferred the name "diocesan clergy." He insisted that they had a better right than the Regulars to the title "Father" which from his time began to be applied to them, after the manner in vogue in Ireland; and this change has become so permanent that the old title of "Mr." would to-day sound quite strange. Many of his clergy rose to the occasion, and undertook work which they had before looked upon as outside the scope of their vocation; and they soon achieved great success in it. Let Cardinal Manning himself bear witness to this:—<sup>2</sup>

"The next aim I had," he writes, "was to make the priests of the diocese conscious of their own power as priests. . . . It forced itself upon me that dormant powers diminish, faculties in activity are enlarged, energies exerted continually grow in strength. Why then, I asked, should our priests always ask others to preach for them, to give Missions and Retreats? Is it because they know themselves to be incapable? or because they have come to believe themselves to be incapable, because the laity so regard them? Is it true? If so, *in nomine Domini* let us wipe away this reproach as speedily as ever we can. Is it that our priests are discouraged and believe themselves to be what is said of them? At all events the way to cure this incapacity is to do the things of which they are told that they are incapable. Let them preach, give Missions and Retreats, 'Use legs, have legs.'

"I have therefore encouraged them to give parochial missions, which have greatly prospered; chiefly to the priests themselves. Many have told me that they had no knowledge they possessed such power over their people; that in giving the missions a new light and strength came to them, and a new piety came to their people. They had never before made a full trial of the priesthood, and of the powers dormant in it."

There can be no doubt that the work of Cardinal Manning was successful, in that he raised the tone and work of the secular clergy in a marked degree. And his work had a certain reflection outside his diocese, especially in the north, where the traditions of Dr. Newsham at Ushaw were still fresh. It is true that neither there nor after Cardinal Manning's time in London, has the full exclusiveness which he introduced been maintained. Missions and Retreats are fitly given by religious not only because they have more leisure to give to a proper preparation, but also because the holiness of their lives will often react upon the success of their work. The very fact of their being outside the ordinary parochial life is often an advantage for a mission. People confess to them more readily. But the idea that a secular priest is by his state unfit for such work may be said to be dead, and from time to time, as occasion offers, we find them bearing their share of it. The expression "only a secular priest" has passed from our vocabulary, and the old-fashioned depreciation of the secular clergy is almost a thing of the past.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 785

## CONFERENCE II

### THE PRIESTLY VOCATION—*continued*

IT was pointed out in the last Conference that the root of the evil of the depreciation of the secular clergy in the past, was the idea, in which they seemed to acquiesce, that their vocation was similar to that of the Regulars; but that not being religious, they were on a lower plane and could live with less high ideals and aspirations. The true fact, however, is that the two vocations are radically and essentially different. Each has its own special sphere of work in the Church, and if properly lived up to, they will not clash, but will supplement each other.

Consider this one point. The secular clergy are trained and ordained for the one special object of parochial or pastoral work; whereas in the case of the regulars, such work is only incidental and secondary. Many—in some countries the majority—never do it at all; and in the case of those who do, it is limited both in quality and amount by the demands of the rule and traditions of their particular Order or Congregation.

It is true indeed that in this country in the penal days and after, a large amount of missionary work was done by the regulars under conditions not very dissimilar to those under which the seculars were working. The English Benedictines became practically a missionary congregation, and remained such until almost within living memory: but this was due to the stress of the times. At an ordinary Benedictine monastery the monks give themselves to a life of prayer and study, and to singing the Divine Office in choir, only a few of them doing any parochial or missionary work, and that always in subservience to their monastic life.

Let it be admitted if so desired that, in itself, this vocation is higher than that of the secular clergy; for it makes the sanctification of him who receives it the first and chief concern, to which any work which he may undertake must be subordinate. In that way it becomes the highest possible state of life, for it fulfils our Lord's test, <sup>3</sup> "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have a treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me." The traditional interpretation given by the Church to the well-known text, "Mary hath chosen the best part," <sup>4</sup> indicates the greater dignity of the contemplative over the active life.

Many religious orders, however, especially the modern congregations, were not founded for the contemplative life in this strict sense, but rather for carrying out some active work of a specific nature, which could be combined with the religious life. The Society of Jesus was founded for special educational and other work; the Redemptorists were intended for giving missions to the uninstructed poor of the country districts; and similarly with others. Such Congregations will adapt themselves, so far as they can, to altered conditions, and will often undertake work such as was not exactly contemplated by their founders; but they will always regulate the amount which they undertake by the consideration of the limitations of their rule and the number of their subjects available, their general principle being that no member must be given work which either in degree or in kind would interfere with his own religious life, for that is the primary object of his vocation. For every one of them is bound to aim at perfection, which is of the essence of his state.

This consideration is so important as to be an excuse for quoting at some length a portion of a well-known letter of Cardinal Wiseman in which he urges it. When he first came to London as Bishop in 1847, and saw the amount of work among the poor that was calling out to be done, and the utter inadequacy of the secular clergy in point of numbers to cope with it, he conceived the idea

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<sup>3</sup> St. Matt. xix. 21.

<sup>4</sup> St. Luke x. 42.

of putting much of it as special work into the hands of the religious Congregations, who were then settling in London: but he found in every case that their missionary activities were strictly limited both as to quantity and quality. We can quote his own words:—<sup>5</sup>

"1. The Jesuits have a splendid church, a large house, several priests, besides Westminster. <sup>6</sup> Scarcely was I settled in London, than I applied to their Superior to establish here a *community* in due form, of some ten or twelve fathers. I also asked for missionaries to give retreats to congregations, etc. I was answered on both heads, that dearth of subjects made it impossible. Hence we have under them, only a church which, by its splendour, attracts and absorbs the wealth of two parishes, but maintains no schools and contributes nothing towards the education of the poor at its very door. . . .

"2. The Redemptorists came to London as a missionary Order, and I cheerfully approved of and encouraged their coming. When they were settled down, I spoke to them of my cherished plan of missions to and among the poor. I was told that this was not the purpose of their institute *in towns*, and that 'another Order would be required for what I wanted.' The plea of 'rule' is one which I have all along determined to respect; and I had no more to say. They have become, so far as London is concerned, a parochial body, taking excellent care of Clapham, having five or six priests and abundant means for it. . . .

"3. The Passionists I brought first to England, in consequence of having read what their founder felt for it, and of a promise I made to Father Dominic years before I got them placed at Aston Hall, and thence they have spread. In consequence it was decreed that the principal house should be in London when I came to it. . . . They have never done me a stroke of work among the poor. . . .

"4. The Marists I brought over for a local purpose, and they are answering well. I hope for much good from them in Spitalfields, but, at least at present, I dare not ask them about general work.

"5. And now, last, I come to the institute of which I almost considered myself a member, San Filippo's Oratory. I have never omitted an opportunity of expressing my thankfulness to God for its establishment here, and for the many graces it has brought with it, in the piety it has diffused, and the many it has converted. But as a matter of fact, you know that external work, the work I have been sighing for, is beyond its scope.

"You know" (he continues) "how rigidly I have respected 'rule,' how I never thought of forcing a parish on you, how I have refrained from asking cooperation, even a sermon, because I would ask for nothing which I understood to be incompatible with the Institute's purpose. . . . Two things I have always respected in the case of all Orders, *vocation* and *rule*."

And he sums up as follows:—

"Look at the position in which I am . . . I have introduced, or greatly encouraged, the establishment of *five* religious congregations in my diocese; and I am just (for the great work) where I first began! Not one of them can (for it cannot be want of will) undertake it. It comes within the purpose of none of them to try. Souls are perishing around them, but they are prevented by the rules, given by Saints, from helping to save them—at least in anything but a particular and definite way."

In the case of secular priests, no such reasons for limiting their work can ever enter in. It is sufficient that the work is there, waiting to be done, and they must put their hands to it, even though their number be hopelessly inadequate to perform it with anything like completeness or efficiency. They are, as it were, the residuary legatees of the needs of the Church, and often have to do the roughest work for the simple reason that no one else has undertaken it. Many a priest is in charge of a mission, either alone or in company with others, in which the amount to be done is hopelessly out of proportion to the supply of men to do it. Yet he cannot refuse. He must do what he can, as well as he can, and leave the rest in the hands of Divine Providence. This is surely nothing to be ashamed of:

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<sup>5</sup> *Life of Wiseman*, ii. p. 116.

<sup>6</sup> i.e. The old Jesuit mission in Romney Terrace, afterwards Horseferry Road, now absorbed in the Cathedral parish. The letter was written on October 27, 1852.

it is rather the chief glory of the secular clergy that the roughest work of the Church falls to our lot, and we are continually called upon to do that which the religious, for good and lawful reasons, cannot undertake. One sometimes hears of dissatisfaction at their having missions which are flourishing so far as this world's resources are concerned. It may be that it is their hard work and self-denial which has caused their missions to become so; but whether this is the full explanation or not, there is no reason why we should envy them: rather they should envy us, in the difficult and uphill work which has been laid upon us by the providence of God.

Nor can we refuse to do it on the plea that our spiritual life will suffer. Such will indeed seem at first sight to be the case. Consider the example of a busy mission in London or one of our large towns, especially if it be a single-handed one. On an ordinary Sunday there a priest cannot possibly devote much time to his own religious exercises. He will perhaps have to say two masses, to preach possibly more than once, to catechise children, and give Benediction, and to administer the sacraments of Confession, Holy Communion, and Baptism at different times of the day. Manifestly his own meditation, spiritual reading and the like have to be omitted. Even his Office is said with difficulty, a great part of it perhaps at the end of a long day's work when he is hardly physically fit to say it, and might with advantage profit by our English privilege of substituting the Rosary. Often on the Monday he will not have sufficiently recovered and has as far as possible to take a day's rest. Thus his regular spiritual exercises are at best limited to five days in the week, on the last of which—the Saturday—the pressure of the coming Sunday work is already making itself felt, with the duties of preparing sermons, and perhaps sitting long hours in the Confessional. This weekly break is an effective hindrance to any strict adherence to a rule of life, and prevents the personal self-sanctification of a secular priest from being so systematic as that of a religious. Indeed, even on an average week-day, it is impossible to adhere at all rigidly to any self-made rule. If a priest has to go out to say mass at a Convent, it is hard to avoid his daily meditation being performed in a perfunctory fashion, or sometimes even omitted altogether. If he has to say mass twice or three times a week at ten o'clock and on other mornings at eight—as is often the case in town missions—regularity of life disappears. Then much of his pastoral work—such as visitations, sick calls, or unexpected calls to the Confessional—is entirely uncertain and variable as to time, and cannot be foreseen. Moreover, the anxieties of a priest are very distracting to the even tenor of our spiritual life. Add to this that much of his recreation has to be taken late in the evening, as being the only time that his friends in the parish are at home, and it is difficult to refuse *all* invitations to dine out, or his position among his parishioners would suffer: yet the evening is the time of day when naturally a spiritual man wishes to be recollected.

What then? Are the secular clergy to surrender their own sanctification for the sake of their work? The question has only to be asked to be answered in the negative. The dignity of the priesthood and the pastoral office is enough to put such an idea out of our thoughts. Some of the greatest saints of the Church—including the Apostles themselves—belonged to the secular clergy: and it would be manifest blasphemy to look on their state as anything but a school of holiness. Certainly we must look for an answer in a different direction from this.

Three different answers may be suggested, each of which can lead us to important considerations.

In the first place we have the three great Evangelical Virtues, Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, as practised by the priest, which inform their whole lives and give a character and greatness which overshadows everything that they do. These are so important that separate Conferences will be given to the consideration of each. Let it suffice here, then, to enumerate them as the first answer to the difficulty we are considering, of how the secular priesthood is to be made a school of holiness.

The second answer is the spirit which prompts us to do our work. It is a spirit of complete self-sacrifice and trust in God, who will in his own way watch over His priests and ministers, so that if they have sacrificed themselves for the sake of preaching the Gospel of His kingdom, He will in

return take them under his protection and accomplish their sanctification in His own manner and in His own time.

Let us take comfort when we examine our lives. We may find that our daily exercises have been very irregular; that our meditation has been cut short, or elbowed out; our spiritual reading has often been postponed till late at night, or performed in perfunctory or distracted manner, or not infrequently omitted; our Office has been said at odd times whenever we could fit it in; perhaps we have not always been regular even at our daily mass. The cause of much of this has no doubt been culpable; we might have been less irregular than we have been. But if we can truly say that it was in great measure due to the unequal pressure of our work, and that the primary cause is traceable to the necessary sacrifice of our ministry we can feel confidence in the result; for whatever our shortcomings in detail, we have in the main been practising the highest kind of self-sacrifice, and the kind which is specially characteristic of our vocation as secular priests. This is the advice insisted on in the *Imitation of Christ*:<sup>7</sup> "Evil ought not to be done either for anything in the world, or for the love of any man; but for the profit of one that stands in need, a good work is sometimes freely to be omitted, or rather to be changed for a better. For by doing thus, a good work is not lost, but is changed into a better. Without charity the outward work profiteth nothing; but whatever is done out of charity, be it never so little and contemptible, all becomes fruitful. For God regards more with how much affection and love a person performs a work than how much he does."

But if we have often to set aside our rule of life, and postpone or give up our religious exercises at the call of charity, we should be careful to maintain strictness in not giving them up for other reasons, as, for example, for the sake of some recreation, or through pure laziness. Here also we may quote the *Imitation*:<sup>8</sup> "If for piety's sake, or with a design to the profit of our neighbour we sometimes omit our accustomed exercises, it may afterwards be easily recovered. But if through a loathing of mind or negligence it be lightly let alone, it is no small fault and will prove harmful." So long as we act strictly on this principle, we shall find that hard work, however distracting, is not a bar to holiness. "Let no one think," says Cardinal Manning,<sup>9</sup> "that a busy life cannot be a holy life. The busiest life may be full of piety. Holiness consists not in doing uncommon things, but in doing all common things with an uncommon fervour. No life was ever more full of work and of its interruptions than the life of our Lord and His Apostles. They were surrounded by the multitude, and 'there were many coming and going, and they had not so much as time to eat' (St. Mark vi. 31). Nevertheless, a busy life" (he adds) "needs a punctual and sustained habit of prayer. It is neither piety nor charity for a priest to shorten his preparation before mass or his thanksgiving after it because people are waiting for him. He must first wait upon God, and then he may serve his neighbour."

A third answer to our question on the means of our sanctification may be given, of a different kind from the other two. It is that the very works of our ministry may be a direct source of sanctification far greater than the various exercises, which from time to time we give up. Some of these we may enumerate.

First and foremost comes our daily mass. This can never be omitted through pressure of external work, whether there is a congregation or not. Time was, when in the days of our youth, we looked forward to the privilege of saying mass as almost too great and too sacred to be spoken of. It seemed to us that with this daily privilege, all life would be sanctified and sin would become impossible to us. What has been our experience after many years of this daily privilege? Has it fulfilled our expectation? Alas, our first experience has been that with frequent repetition the act has become perfunctory, and has often been performed with inadequate preparation, too short a thanksgiving, and little real devotion. Perhaps we have been free in too often omitting it. But it is not too much

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<sup>7</sup> Book I, xix. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, xv. i.

<sup>9</sup> *Eternal Priesthood*, p. 81.

to assert that when it has been said properly, with suitable preparation and recollection, it has more than realised our most sanguine expectations, and that no instrument of sanctification could exceed in strength the daily mass of the priest, well prepared, well celebrated, and with a suitable thanksgiving.

After this we may look at the various exercises of the pastoral ministry. Take the Confessional; who can rise up from a long session in the box without the consciousness that he is a better man? Why is it that the time spent in the exercise of hearing the Confessions of others never seems long, except that during the whole time we are conscious that it is reacting upon ourselves? Cardinal Manning enumerates five different truths upon which the Confessor assimilates:—<sup>10</sup>

"First, self-knowledge, by bringing things to his own remembrance and by showing him his own face in a glass by the lives of sinners.

"Secondly, contrition, in the sorrow of penitents who will not be consoled.

"Thirdly, delicacy of conscience in the innocent whose eye being single and their body full of light, accuse themselves of omissions and deviations from the will of God which we, perhaps, daily commit without discernment.

"Fourthly, aspiration by the fervent, whose one desire and effort, in the midst of burdened and restless homes, is to rise higher and higher in union with God.

"Fifthly, self-accusation at our own unprofitableness, from the generosity and fidelity of those who are hindered on every side, and yet in humility, self-denial, charity and union with God surpass us, who have every gift of time and grace needed for perfection."

A similar effect is produced in us by the ordinary visitation of our people, even in the most difficult surroundings. How many do we not come across whose daily uphill struggle for virtue puts our own lives to shame! Others whose trust in God in apparently hopeless circumstances, and the answers which we see to their prayers, bring the closeness of God's providence over His elect sensibly nearer to us. Then our prayer with our people and for our people, our instructions and sermons, our indirect influence over them, all alike continually keep us in the presence of God. There is a tendency among some priests to look upon the devotions in which they lead their people as one thing, and their own spiritual exercises—their Office, Meditation, Spiritual Reading—as another. There is no need for any such distinction. The devotions which a priest goes through with his people—the Rosary, confraternity prayers, Benediction and the like—react on his spiritual life quite as strongly as his Meditation or Spiritual Reading which he may have omitted in their favour. The Cure of Ars for many years practically gave up his private spiritual exercises, except his mass, in order to devote the whole of his time to his pastoral work, either in the Confessional, or in the midst of his people, preaching to them, or saying night prayers or other devotions with them. In his later years he was dispensed by Rome even from saying his Office. His was indeed an extreme case; but the same principles hold good, in their measure, in the case of every priest who devotes himself to his pastoral work. Even the sin and misery which we see around us, bring vividly before us the dignity of our own office in trying to rescue our people from the results of their own folly. Still more when we minister at the death either of one who has led a good Christian life, or one who has become a true penitent, are we brought almost into touch with the other world. There is a sacredness about a Catholic death-bed which is all its own. One moment the patient is going through the last of his sufferings in this world, dependent upon our poor help and our prayers, and receiving the consolations of religion at our hands: a moment later he is in the other world, looking down on us, with knowledge and experience which we so long to have, his salvation we hope assured, and this the result of our ministry. Can any priest come back from a Catholic death-bed without a feeling of awe, and his faith strengthened as though he were in actual contact with the next world?

To sum up then, the pastoral work of the priest is in itself a means of sanctification as direct and as efficacious as any personal religious exercises can be; and while we should always be jealous of

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

omitting any of our accustomed devotions through carelessness or laziness, we need have no misgiving when they are omitted in consequence of the pressure of our pastoral work. We may fitly conclude with one more quotation from Cardinal Manning on the sanctifying power of the self-sacrifice which a true pastor practises:—<sup>11</sup>

"The pastoral office is in itself a discipline of perfection. For first of all it is a life of abnegation of self. A pastor has so many obediences to fulfil, as he has souls to serve. The good and the evil, the sick and the whole, the young and the old, the wise and the foolish, the worldly and the unworldly—who are not always wise—the penitent and the impenitent, the converted and the unconverted, the lapsed and the relapsed, the obdurate and the defiant, all must be watched over—none may be neglected, still less cast off—always, at all times and in all ways possible. St. Philip used to say that a priest should have no time of his own, and that many of his most consoling conversations came to him out of hours at unseasonable moments. If he had sent them away because they came out of time, or at supper-time and the like, they might have been lost. Then again, the trials of temper, patience, self-control in bearing with the strange and inconsiderate minds that come to him, and the demands made upon his strength and endurance day and night in the calls of the sick and dying, coming often one after another when for a moment he has gone to rest; the weary and continual importunities of people and of letters, till the sound of the bell or the knock at the door is a constant foreboding, too surely fulfilled; all these things make a pastor's life as wearisome, and, strange to say, as isolated as if he were in the desert. No sackcloth so mortifies the body as this life of perpetual self-abnegation mortifies the will. But when the will is mortified, the servant is like his Master, and his Master is the exemplar of all perfection."

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

## CONFERENCE III

### POVERTY

THERE is nothing new in the remark that Christ at His coming sanctified the state of poverty in a manner totally new to the world. In this relation we look upon the circumstances which surrounded His birth as a very special Providence. The life of the Holy Family at Nazareth was indeed one of ordinary but apparently not extreme poverty. The question "Is not this the son of the carpenter whom we know?" "Is not this the carpenter?" show us that our Lord and St. Joseph practised a trade in the ordinary way, like any other Jews would have done, working no doubt day by day for their living, but not in a state of destitution, or in want for the necessaries of life. By a combination of circumstances however, which we believe to have been brought about by God for this express purpose, His birth took place away from His home and from the friends of His mother and St. Joseph, in surroundings which were without what may fairly be considered as the necessaries of life. It was under these circumstances that He preached His first sermon on the dignity of Poverty.

It was a new idea to the people and one of which the world had never before heard. The poor have ever formed the vast majority of mankind; yet the instinct has always been to look down upon them. The ancient Romans looked upon the needy and the afflicted as the object of the malediction of the gods. A story is told of one of the Emperors sending a whole shipload of them to sea, and having the vessel sunk, so as to rid the city of their presence. The Jews had indeed learnt something less opposed to the truth; but even they looked upon Poverty as a misfortune. A promise of an earthly reward was necessary as a stimulus to lead them on to do their duty. "I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thou mayest be long lived upon the land which the Lord thy God will give thee." A modest competency was to them the minimum that was put before them to deliver them from care and anxiety. "Give me neither beggary nor riches: give me only the necessaries of life." <sup>12</sup> Yet they knew that if the poor were faithful to God, He would protect them; and indeed that one of the attributes of the God of the Jews was His providential care of the poor. "He shall judge the poor of the people, and he shall save the children of the poor, and he shall humble the oppressors. . . . He shall deliver the poor from the mighty, and the needy that had no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy; and he shall save the souls of the poor." <sup>13</sup>

Our Lord in His teaching, however, went far beyond anything which even the Jews had before their minds, when He proclaimed that Poverty was the true state of blessedness. His first recorded words as official teacher of mankind are "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In another passage we read still more explicitly, <sup>14</sup> "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God; Blessed are ye that hunger now, for you shall be filled; Blessed are ye that weep now, for you shall laugh; . . . but woe to you that are rich, for you have your consolation. Woe to you that are filled, for you shall hunger; woe to you that now laugh, for you shall mourn and weep." He is here putting the state of poverty forward as the state of blessing, more to be desired than the state of riches.

The same idea we find enforced by our Lord in His teaching in numerous instances. He speaks of as "the Mammon of Iniquity," so intimately connected does He consider them with vice. More than that. He speaks as though the salvation of a rich man was so difficult as to be almost a test of

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<sup>12</sup> Prov. xxx. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Ps. lxxxix. 4, 12.

<sup>14</sup> St. Luke vi. 20.

God's omnipotence. "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God. . . . With man it is impossible; but with God all things are possible." <sup>15</sup>

Consider also some of our Lord's parables in this regard. The well-known one of Dives and Lazarus at once occurs to mind. The rich man is not accused of any particular evil; but simply he lived trusting in his riches, the selfish life of which they are so often the foundation. He "was clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day"; while Lazarus "lay at his gate full of sores, desiring to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table"; and it is added almost as a matter of course that after death their lots are reversed. Abraham is depicted as saying to the rich man, "Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." <sup>16</sup> In another parable we have placed before us one who trusted so much in his accumulated wealth that he said to himself, "Thou hast much good laid up for many years, take thy rest, eat, drink, make good cheer"; and the merited rejoinder is "Thou fool; this night do they require thy soul of thee, and where shall those things be which thou hast provided?" <sup>17</sup> These examples might be multiplied indefinitely.

There is no danger of the virtue of poverty being lost sight of by the Church. The whole attitude of the clergy and devout laity affords opportunities of charity to the poor. Not only do they practise almsgiving to a degree far beyond any question of strict duty, but many of them give themselves to personal work among the poor, which is more valuable than silver and gold, while the modern active congregations of nuns are fully appreciated especially for the work that they do among the poor. One of the most sanctifying phases of a priest's life is his close contact with the poor. The man of the world at best looks upon them as persons to be pitied, to be relieved, to be helped; in modern times, they teach them to combine together to insist on the betterment of their state—a movement with which, if carried on with proper responsibility and care, the Church is in full sympathy. But so long as the world goes on, so long there will be poor people in it, and to the Christian, still more to the priest, the natural attitude is something bordering on reverence for the poor; for to them Christian virtues such as humility, work, self-denial, obedience, come almost naturally as the accompaniment of their state. Their very necessities almost compel them to seek comfort from God in prayer. Many of the poor indeed neglect these advantages and make their poverty a source of discontent and even murmuring against Divine Providence in this regard. Equally a rich man may practise poverty of spirit; but it does not come easily. "How *hardly* shall they who have riches enter into the kingdom of God." <sup>18</sup>

While however a priest easily understands the sanctifying effects of poverty in others, there is a real danger that he may fail to appreciate it in himself. The anxious and worrying effect on the mind, the continuous trouble as much as the self-denial necessitated by the conditions of his life seem to interfere with his power of prayer and with the proper sanctification of his duties. Yet in truth the facing of such conditions may react in a far more sanctifying way than the prayers and devotions which they impede: the prayer of a poor man in anxiety and distress, even though a distracted prayer, may be more efficacious than the ordinary prayer of the man in comfortable circumstances.

Thank God, in England there is no chance of a priest being anything else than a poor man. But there are degrees of poverty amongst us according to the missions at which we are stationed and other circumstances; and from the fact of the general state being inevitable, we are apt to lose sight of its value and long for positions where we have to practise it less rather than more.

It is well for us then to think over and apply to ourselves the fact that Poverty as such should be looked upon as a true blessing, to be desired as the ordinary means by which our lives may be raised up and made like to that of our Divine Master. True, indeed, our wish should be for whatever

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<sup>15</sup> St. Matt. xix. 24, 26.

<sup>16</sup> St. Luke xvi. 19, 25.

<sup>17</sup> St. Luke xii. 20.

<sup>18</sup> St. Mark x. 23.

surroundings will best enable us to carry out the work which God has destined for us individually; and whatever He sends us, we joyfully accept. But so far as we have any wish or longing, the blessing we should prefer should not be riches, but poverty, for that make us more like to Him.

It is just here, when we come to reduce theory to practice, that our state contrasts with that of a religious. In one sense—and a true sense—they practise the virtue in its fulness, and we should never underestimate the spirit of self-sacrifice necessary in order to have nothing that they can call their own. But in another sense, religious poverty may be easier to practise than that with which a secular priest is faced. For their wants are always provided for, and they are free from the anxieties of poverty with which we are familiar. St. Ignatius gives it as one of the fruits of whole-hearted sacrifice in the Society, that it relieves its members of all care. They live indeed in what may be called in the words of Pope Leo XIII "frugal comfort," such as befits men who are poor; but they are free from anxiety. For St. Alphonsus it was not enough that his subjects should use things that are cheap; but he wished that they should be rough and common things, so that the spirit of poverty might not be wanting. And many inconveniences distinctive of poverty are common to all religious. But so long as their order or congregation exists and flourishes they need have no care or anxiety for themselves or their future.

Our poverty, however, is of a totally different type, and our dangers of a different nature. The life of a secular priest may be full of care and anxiety on the question of money—difficulty of making ends meet, support of church and school, perhaps the weight of a capital debt, good works languishing for want of means—the poor dependent on him—and so forth. He will wear a threadbare coat, and deny himself any food or comfort that are not absolutely necessary for the sake of his people and his work. This is a poverty more wearing and apparently less sanctifying. Poor jaded human nature longs to be free from care and anxiety, and we easily lose sight of the supernatural power of poverty. We look on it as the unfortunate accompaniment of the existing state of Catholic England; we fail to remember that it is one of the great sources of blessing on it. Hence the anxiety of some priests to be placed on better missions, with more pay and less work, a hope for better days in recognition of past services and so forth.

What is to be our remedy? How are we to learn to love our poverty, to realise its power for good, to make it, as it can be made, the greatest source of our sanctification?

The answer to all these questions is one and the same. Our life must have about it the notes and characteristics of the poor men that we are. It must be a life of humility and self-effacement, hardiness, and of work; there must be no self-indulgence; and, above all, we must surrender our liberty to the call of duty. Let us consider these points in detail.

1. A poor man does not think of himself individually; he knows that he is only one of a multitude of human beings similarly circumstanced. He has to work for his living, and is willing to put up with whatever his lot may be, provided he can earn what is necessary for the support of himself and those who depend on him. He does not resent being slighted: he looks upon it as his natural lot. Nor does he put forward his own wishes or opinions. He only desires to be able to go his way and do his daily work. Our Lord was in this, as in other things, our model. He had lived nearly thirty years at Nazareth, and all that his fellow townspeople had to say of Him was, "Is not this the carpenter?"—as though to say, "Is he not like any other carpenter?"—"How came this man by all these things?" (St. Mark vi. 2, 3.) In like manner a priest with the spirit of poverty will seek no notoriety, will not wish to be known from his fellow clergy, but will only seek to be allowed to live the daily life on the mission, and to share its blessings. He will look on the ordinary rough usage of life merely as incidents to be expected, while he pursues the end of his calling, the acquisition not of temporal, but of spiritual riches: the "unum necessarium," so far as he is concerned.

2. A poor man does not seek after self-indulgence. If money is spent on himself, he has to do additional work to earn it: this thought is a perpetual stimulus to self-denial. In similar manner, to a priest on the mission there is plenty of such stimulus. Such small sums of money as may pass through his hands are wanted over and over again for the relief of the poor around him. Their needs

are ever present, and appeal loudly and forcibly to him. If he is a rector, the expenses of the mission have to be met, and they are often increased by having to find interest on mortgages or capital debt, sometimes leaving little or nothing for personal expenses or salary. Here necessity to some extent asserts itself; but not altogether. A priest in a so-called comfortable mission has the physical power to make himself very comfortable. He can furnish his rooms well, so that they appeal both to his artistic sense and to his self-indulgence: he can spend money enough to give himself the best of food, without sinning against justice or defrauding anybody; he can save money enough for a first-rate holiday once a year. His work may languish, though he does all he is bound to do, and no one can make a complaint against him.

Yet he is living a life unworthy of his state, and one which will not bring any blessing on him such as the sanctification of his flock. Where is his spirit of poverty? Has a poor man always plenty of good food? Does not his work sometimes suffer from his forced abstemiousness? Can he give himself a holiday of the nature indicated? Truly many a man of the world would envy the comfortable life of a priest who has lost the spirit of poverty. A zealous priest on the other hand will strive to live economically. His measure of food is just that which will support him and enable him to do his work efficiently: his measure of comfort <sup>19</sup> will be that which he needs for his work. If he be in a well-to-do mission, he will willingly save what he can for the relief of the poor at his doors. If he is on a poorer mission, or if he is a junior priest, he will willingly accept any necessary self-denial, both as a schooling for himself and because he knows that what is saved will find a worthy destination in the hands of the poor and needy, or in the support of the Church.

3. A poor man is a hard-working man. "Exibit homo ad opus suum, et ad operationem suam usque ad vesperam." "Man shall go forth to his work, and to his labour until evening." <sup>20</sup> Such is the ordinary lot of mortals. By far the majority have to work for their daily bread. They only think themselves fortunate to have work ready to their hands which will enable them to earn what they require. Now a priest may be a hardworking man or not as he himself decides. The amount of work absolutely necessary and binding *ex justitia* is usually not large. His Sunday duty may be heavy; but during the greater part of the week he is free. But if he has the spirit of his state, the work ready to his hand is inexhaustible; and the salvation of numberless souls depends upon his doing it. "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" is Christ's reproach to those who have time on their hands and do not use it. St. Alphonsus made a vow that he would never pass a minute of time unoccupied. Such a vow if kept to would mean a heroic life. Far short of that we can well learn to use our time with the sense of responsibility. To throw away time in inordinate reading of the newspapers, accompanied with the smoking of cigarettes, may not be definitely sinful; but it is throwing away opportunities which will never recur. A hard-working business man once explained to the writer that he never wasted a moment of time: so much so that if he had to wait in a waiting-room before seeing some one, he would exercise himself by valuing in his mind all the objects of furniture, which he considered a good business training of the faculties. Truly the children of this world are in their way wiser than the children of light. He said Time is money: we can say, Time is eternal life. Which of the two maxims makes time more valuable, or should make us harder workers?

4. Uncertainty as to the future. We often hear a demand among the clergy for "fixity of tenure." This means that a Rector, without Canonical fault, should not be removable from his mission, which should be bound to give him support in sickness and old age. There is nothing unreasonable in this

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<sup>19</sup> The question of how to furnish one's rooms must be always a personal one for each priest to settle. To some, the advantage of an attractive room, artistically decorated, both as to furniture and pictures, may be a help towards their work, and induce them to spend time among their books which might otherwise be frittered away. But the effeminate or even luxurious method of furnishing that one has occasionally seen is hard to defend in a priest's room. Cardinal Vaughan ends his book on *The Young Priest* by this advice:—"We have but one caution to offer, and that is, not to furnish your room as though it were a lady's boudoir. Indulgence in this kind of taste tells unfavourably upon a Priest's own character and stamps the man in the judgment of others" (*The Young Priest*, p. 34).

<sup>20</sup> Ps. ciii. 23.

aspiration, at least for those who have a certain number of years of work behind them: the ordinary law of the Church is designed to produce such security. Nevertheless, we in England, when we were truly missionaries, and had no such claim to fall back upon, were undoubtedly practising the virtue of poverty in a higher degree than those who had complete and permanent parochial livings. A poor man's future is always precarious, depending on his services being still wanted, his employers being themselves prosperous, his own health remaining strong, and a thousand other contingencies of life. A missionary in accepting a like state of precariousness is putting himself on a higher plane than that of the ordinary parochial clergy, and many priests, with the true spirit of their vocation, have rejoiced in their condition in this respect, the hardship of which has been much mitigated by the existence of clergy funds which secure to the aged and infirm an amount of help quite out of proportion with the entrance fees or subscriptions they have to pay, and thus far better than any mutual help association of the working man.

In recent years, however, this question has been settled permanently. Whatever the effect here in England of the legislation of Pius X— about which there has been some difference of opinion—in the revised Canon Law it is laid down that in all countries in which there is a Hierarchy, the rectors of the churches are to be "Parochi"; but whether or not they have security of tenure is left to the Bishop to decide in each case. It is possible that our custom in England may continue without much change, and only those who have what were formerly known as Missionary Rectories will have true security of tenure: that, however, will depend on the individual Bishop. But at least, we can say that those who are called to work long years without such security, will be called to practise the virtue of poverty in a higher degree than the others. A priest with the true missionary vocation will do good while he can, and leave the future in the hands of God. The practice of a priest saving up money for his old age is not indeed to be condemned, but it is the less high course. How many have done this for years and then the last summons came to them while still in middle life, so that they had to leave their savings for others to spend.

5. Surrender of Liberty. The consideration of this can be postponed until the [Conference on Obedience](#).

## CONFERENCE IV

### CHASTITY

WE are often asked by non-Catholics why it is that priests are not allowed to marry. It is a difficult question to answer in a few words, and becomes the more difficult from the obvious inability of even a well-disposed person who is not a Catholic to understand our view of the matter. We should probably answer by appealing to the conveniences of the rule. A man who is unmarried is free from encumbrances; he can go where he is sent at short notice; in his daily life all the time and thought which he would otherwise spend on the affairs of his home and the bringing up of his children can be devoted to the direct work of his ministry. We might perhaps quote the words of St. Paul: "He that is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God; but he that is with a wife is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife; and he is divided."<sup>21</sup> Or we might point to financial considerations to show that it is a useful rule, for an unmarried priest can be supported on a far lower income than a married one. A somewhat similar rule applies to the army, and for similar reasons, with this important limitation, that soldiers cannot be expected to deprive themselves permanently of matrimony, so that the limit of the rule is to restrict it to a certain percentage, and to those of a certain age; whereas priests being called to a more self-denying life, are expected to do without it permanently.

All this is true as far as it goes; but we ourselves know that this is only one aspect of the subject, and that not the most important one. The fact that the Church faces scandals among the clergy in every age of her history, without showing any inclination to relax the rule, would surely point to the fact that there are greater issues involved than mere questions of finance or convenience. These scandals are indeed happily few—very few—in proportion to the total number of the clergy; but they are sufficiently numerous and sufficiently grave to make us certain that the Church would not insist on the rule which makes their recurrence possible, but for a good of surpassing and all-pervading importance.

In fact the Church has ever spoken with no uncertain voice on the excellence of the celibate over the married state. Not that she underrates the latter; on the contrary, by raising matrimony to the dignity of a sacrament and insisting on its indissolubility, she has done much to raise the standard of domestic virtue and domestic happiness, and to emphasise the greatness of the Christian home and family. But St. Paul says, "He that giveth his virgin in marriage does well"; but "he that giveth her not does better";<sup>22</sup> and the celibate state has ever been regarded by the Church as higher than that of matrimony.

In fact it would seem that the married state, great as it is, is hardly compatible with the highest sanctity: scarcely an instance occurs to mind of a canonised saint who died in the married state, except martyrs whose sanctification was accomplished by the very act of death.

Nor is there any difficulty in discerning our Lord's special love for celibacy or virginity. An esteem for virginity was indeed the creation of Christianity. Even to the Jews, for a woman to have no children was considered a reproach,<sup>23</sup> if for no other reason, because it destroyed any possibility of the Messiah being descended from her. It was our Blessed Lady herself who first broke through this prejudice. For her answer to the Archangel Gabriel can only mean that she esteemed the privilege of being ever a virgin more than the prospect of having the Messiah descended from her, or even that

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<sup>21</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 32, 33.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 38.

<sup>23</sup> St. Luke i. 25.

He should be her own son. It was only when it was explained to her that by a special dispensation of Providence her motherhood was to be compatible with her continued virginity that she gave the requisite consent, and the Word was made Flesh within her womb. It is perhaps a thought that we might make more prominent in our spiritual life that Mary, whom we love to regard as the guardian of a priest's celibacy, was in truth the first in this world to discover the excellence of that state, and the first to practise it as a virtue.

And there are other instances where our Lord showed His special predilection for this virtue. The "disciple whom Jesus loved," whose head was on His breast at the Last Supper, who stood beneath the Cross, and received the commission to be the guardian of our Lady during the remainder of her sojourn on this earth, according to tradition practised this virtue throughout his life in all its fulness, so that the Church on his feast day calls out, "Valde honorandus est beatus Joannes, quis supra pectus Domini in coena recubuit; cui Christus in cruce matrem virginem virgini commendavit"; and again, "Diligebat eum Jesus quoniam specialis praerogativa castitatis ampliori dilectione fecerat dignum: quia virgo electus ab ipso, virgo in aevum permansit. In cruce denique moriturus huic matrem suam virginem Virgini commendavit, quia virgo electus ab ipso, virgo in aevum permansit."

These thoughts might easily be developed; but it is unnecessary, as— theoretically at least— we are all familiar with the idea. Nevertheless, there is often a danger that we may lose sight of its essence—that we may look upon celibacy as a mere disciplinary law of the Church, made for prudential reasons, and our duty as merely to abstain from every thought or act which may endanger its observance—to look on celibacy, in short, as a negative rather than a positive precept, forbidding us to do this or that, but not adding anything very special to our daily spiritual life, beyond absence of sin. Yet this gives one a very inadequate idea of what should be to us a most positive virtue, affecting our whole lives, giving to the priesthood our greatest glory, and to our lives the note of heroism.

Now the positive side of the virtue of celibacy is in theory plain enough, at least in its main outline. Woman was created to be man's helpmate, and she fulfils her calling in the first place by her power of sympathy. There is no human sympathy like that of a woman, and granted that it is used within proper limits and restrictions, it is one of the greatest helps which man can have in meeting the troubles and storms of life. The care and sympathy of his mother in youth, of his wife in the heyday of life, of his daughters in old age, are the most valuable helps to many a man of the world, to enable him to face with success the difficulties of his state. In like manner when he wants counsel and advice he turns to that sex who have specially the gift of entering into another's difficulties and helping him through them.

The essence of celibacy is that when we seek sympathy and counsel in our troubles and trials, or our work, and in all the affairs of life, we turn not to human sympathisers, but to those whom we know by faith—to our Lord in the Tabernacle, to His mother, to our patron saints, to our guardian angel, etc. The sympathy we get differs from that which is to be obtained in the world in the first place in the absence of the feeling of sense, which is the first and easiest remedy and that which we should look for as the natural accompaniment of sympathy in the world. This does not mean that it is less real: on the contrary, it is far more real and more powerful. If a priest is sent any great trouble or anxiety, and instead of seeking human consolation and guidance, goes straight into his Church, to pour out his soul in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, or before the altars or statues of our Lady or the Saints, he will come forth strengthened in spirit, and having received the gift of counsel in a far higher degree than would ever have been the case had he had recourse to the solace and company of a wife or family or relations. And this counsel and strength will increase in degree in proportion as he has banished from his life the ordinary sensible consolations to be obtained from human sympathy.

He does not on this account love his family and his friends less; on the contrary, he loves them more, though in a different and more mortified manner. The relations between a priest and his family must be essentially different from what they were when he was a layman. His pleasure in being in their company, the joy of their society, has to be restricted and curtailed; often for long years—as

in the case of foreign missionaries—he may be cut off from them altogether; but his true charity towards them, his wish for their highest good, his readiness to sacrifice himself for them are not less but far greater than before, and both he and they have the consolation of knowing the power of his prayers to help them.

The great exemplar of this virtue, St. Aloysius, may be quoted as a special example. Of him it is written that he even denied himself the sensible consolation of his mother's countenance, and his detachment from all the consolations of sense were such that we can hardly realise. Yet he speaks confidently of his affection for his family and friends. He declared that he offered daily to Almighty God in one hand his relations and worldly friends, in the other his fellow members of the Society of Jesus, and that both were continually in his mind.

In such a matter as this it is not suggested that we should aim at the height of chastity practised by St. Aloysius. The particular degree of reserve alluded to above, however admirable in him—and the fact that the Church records it with approval in the official lessons on his feast is sufficient proof of this—would be in us not only affectation, but wholly unsuited to the conditions in which we live. Nevertheless, we have to imitate the same spirit in our measure and our social intercourse with our family must be limited both in degree and in character. The very fact of the sensible sympathy being so strong between mother and son, or between brother and sister, is one of the reasons—and not the least of them—why the Synods of Westminster prohibit a priest's female relatives from living in his house, without special circumstances to justify it, lest such close intercourse might draw the heart away from that higher kind of sympathy which we seek from Almighty God in prayer.

We should in fact be exceedingly foolish if we were to limit our aspirations to the avoidance of those things in which there might be a danger of leading us into sin. That is indeed the minimum to which we are all bound; but there are degrees in this virtue, and we can all of us aim at a higher detachment from sensible consolations than that to which we are bound under sin, and the higher we can put the practice of this virtue, the nearer we shall get to Almighty God, and the greater will be the power of our prayers.

From consideration of our relations with our own family, we proceed to the question of our attitude to members of the other sex generally and the need of strict limitation and mortification in this matter. In discussing this question, we shall appeal to the authority of a small brochure, privately printed some forty years ago, by one who can speak with as great authority as any man living or dead, on the practice of the virtue in circumstances of the present day in this country.<sup>24</sup> It will be worth our while to study what he says in considerable detail.

He begins by quoting in favour of the rules he lays down some widely different authorities, such as St. Augustine, Thomas á Kempis, St. Ignatius and St. Francis de Sales. These great men lived at different epochs, amidst different surroundings, and in different circumstances. Their types of piety differed widely from one another. If, then, we find that they are all agreed in recommending a particular line of conduct, a very strong presumption is created in favour of their recommendation.

He continues:—

"[Our duty] is indeed all summed up in the one word of the *Imitation*, 'Be not familiar with any woman.' This familiarity is the one thing which according to all is to be avoided. And if we ask what precisely is meant by the word, we may say that at least it means, as regards the external conduct of a priest, the avoidance of long or frequent intercourse with women, even by letters; as regards his heart, a firm purpose never to seek consolation or recreation in female society; and, finally, it means

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<sup>24</sup> After this lapse of time, there seems no reason to conceal the name of the writer, who was the Rev. Robert Whitty, S.J. He was in many respects a remarkable man. Educated chiefly in Ireland, he finished his course at St. Edmund's College, where he remained some years as a Professor; then at a comparatively early age he became Cardinal Wiseman's Vicar-General, which post he held during the exciting times of the so-called Papal Aggression in 1850. A few years later he joined the Society of Jesus, in which he afterwards became Provincial, and then English Consulter to the General. Certainly no man has a better right than he to speak on the subject before us.

that the counsel *nunquam solus cum sola* should be as far as possible the rule of daily life. Of course this rule is observed so long as he is in the sight of others or is easily visible. Priests are bound by vow to celibacy, and as a consequence the saints quoted above regard them as bound in prudence to treat with women on business only, and never to look on them as companions or intimate friends."

A little further on he anticipates possible objections based on the condition of modern society, especially in this country. He writes:—

"We are compelled to look at the world as it is, and it cannot be denied that in an English-speaking society a priest is expected to do much more than administer the sacraments and preach or catechise. There is always a great deal of mental as well as bodily misery to be met with. This misery is much increased in the English-speaking world by differences in religion, by the circumstances connected with conversions to the faith and the persecutions to which these give occasion. On the other hand, centuries of persecution have created in our Catholic laity generally a larger and deeper confidence than is perhaps to be found in other countries. By their very nature women are inclined to lean on others. What more natural than that many should look to the priest—their 'director' as they love to call him—as their one and only guide in all their doubts and troubles? Again, a priest has frequently to call in the aid of women in his efforts to reclaim souls from sin. It will often happen that he can reach the ignorant and sinful only through the co-operation of nuns or good women living in the world, or of both. Hence innumerable occasions of treating with women will arise to which he is compelled by his very duty as a priest.

"All this is true. Still there is nothing in these modern circumstances to justify a departure from the reserve inculcated by the saints. Nay, these circumstances only the more strongly confirm the saying of the *Imitation*, 'we should have charity towards all, but familiarity is not expedient.' Charity is universal. Intimacy or familiarity is necessarily confined to a few. If a priest acts from charity, he will be ready to receive all and at all seasons. But if he follows natural inclination, he will necessarily waste on a few the time and heart that might have been given to many. . . .

"Still on the plea of the difference of their times from ours, it may be said that the reserve which they recommended and practised has become impossible for a priest at the present day. It may be alleged that he is indeed bound to avoid sin, and therefore all proximate occasions of sin, whether the danger be to himself or to others. But he must be natural in his behaviour towards women no less than towards men; otherwise his ministry will be to a great extent sterile and his confessional will be shunned. And after all, every Christian, it may be said, is bound to avoid sin. Why should a priest be more on his guard than an ordinary layman?

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