

# Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner

## Chapter III The Priesthood



This is the continuation of the [previous chapter of Roman Catholicism](#) by Lorraine Boettner.

### **1 The Office of the Priest**

The office or work of the priest is perhaps the most difficult to present and the least understood of any part of the Christian system. In the Old Testament the work of Christ was prefigured under the three offices of prophet, priest, and king. Each of these was given special prominence in the nation of Israel. Each was designed to set forth a particular phase of the work of the coming Redeemer, and each was filled, not by men who voluntarily took the work upon themselves, but only by those who were divinely called to the work.

The prophet was appointed to be God's spokesman to the people, revealing to them his will and purpose for their salvation. The priest was appointed to represent the people before God, to offer sacrifices for them and to intercede with God on their behalf. And the king was appointed to rule over the people, to defend them and to restrain and conquer all His and their enemies. In the present study we are concerned only with the priesthood.

The essential idea of a priest is that of a mediator between God and man. In his fallen estate man is a sinner, guilty before God, and alienated from Him. He has no right of approach to God, nor does he have the ability, or even the desire, to approach Him. Instead, he wants to flee from God, and to have nothing to do with Him. He is, therefore, helpless until someone undertakes to act as his representative before God.

In ancient Israel the priests performed three primary duties: they ministered at the sanctuary before God, offering sacrifices to Him in behalf of the people; they taught the people the law of God; and they inquired for the people concerning the divine will. Under the old covenant the men who held the offices of prophet, priest, or king were only shadows or types of the great Prophet, the great Priest, and the great King who was to come. With the coming of Christ each of these offices found its fulfillment in Him. And with the accomplishment of His work of redemption, each of these offices, as it functioned on the human level, reached its fulfillment and was abolished. As regards the priesthood Christ alone is now our Priest, our one and only High Priest. He fulfills that office in that He once offered up Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, thereby making unnecessary and putting

an end to all other sacrifices. He paid the debt for the sin of His people, and so opened the way for renewed fellowship between them and God. And as the risen and exalted Savior of His people, He intercedes effectually for them with God the Father.

All of this is clearly set forth by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews who in the ninth chapter says that "Christ having come a high priest of the good things to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption" (vv. 11- 12); that we are redeemed through "the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God" (v. 14); that "Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us" (v. 24); that "now once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (v. 26); and in 8:1-2, that "We have such a high priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man."

Thus under the figure of Israel's sacrificing priesthood, particularly through the figure of the high priest who entered into the holy of holies on the day of atonement with blood that had been offered, we are shown that Christ, who is our High Priest, has entered into the heavenly sanctuary with the merits of His atoning sacrifice, that its atoning and cleansing power may be constantly applied to all who put their trust in Him.

In accordance with this New Testament change in the priesthood, through which the old order of ritual and sacrifice which prefigured the atoning work of Christ has been fulfilled and Christ alone has become our true High Priest, the human priesthood as a distinct and separate order of men has fulfilled its function and has been abolished. Furthermore, all born-again believers, having now been given the right of access to God through Christ their Savior, and being able to go directly to God in prayer and so to intercede for themselves and others, themselves become priests of God. For these are the functions of a priest. This we term the universal priesthood of believers. And this is the distinctive feature of Protestantism as regards the doctrine of the priesthood.

"Ye also," says Peter, "as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ... Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:5,9). In making that statement Peter was not addressing a priestly caste, but all true believers, as is shown by the fact that his epistle was addressed to Jewish Christians who were scattered throughout the various nations, "sojourners of the Dispersion" (1:1), even to those who are as "newborn babes" in the faith (2:2). And in Revelation 1:5-6, John, writing to the seven churches in Asia Minor, says: "Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood: and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father."

The sacrifices offered by the Christian in the exercise of this priesthood are, of course, not for sin, as professedly are those of the Roman Catholic mass. Christ offered the true and only sacrifice for sin, once for all. His sacrifice was perfect. When He had completed His work of redemption upon the cross and was ready to give up His spirit He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). With His sacrifice God was fully satisfied. It therefore does not need to be repeated, nor supplemented, nor modified in any way.

The sacrifices offered by the Christian are termed "spiritual," and they relate to worship and service. First, there is the sacrifice of praise: "Through him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession in his name" (Hebrews 13:15). This offering of thanks and praise to God in worship, which expresses the gratitude of the heart, is an acceptable offering. Second, there is the sacrifice offered through our gifts, as our substance is given for the support of God's work. He has declared that it is His pleasure to receive such gifts when they are given willingly and with pure motives: "But to do good and to communicate forget not [i.e., sharing with others, helping those who are in need]; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:16). And third, there is the offering of ourselves, our bodies, our lives, in Christian service: "I beseech YOU therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service" (Romans 12:1). Furthermore, we are sons of God through faith in Christ (1 John 3:1-2). As no longer servants but sons in His family, we have direct access to Him as our Father and no longer need the mediation of any order of human priests. To depend upon priestly mediation is by that much to return to Judaism and to introduce an element (a person who is demented) of apostasy into Christianity.

Thus the New Testament sets forth a new and different kind of priesthood: first, Christ, the true High Priest, who is in heaven; and second, the universal priesthood of believers, through which they offer the "spiritual" sacrifices of praise, of gifts, and of themselves in Christian service. It thereby repudiates the pretentious claims of the Roman priesthood, which would perpetuate the Jewish priesthood and limit it to a few chosen men who are set apart from the laity, who profess to offer literal sacrifices in the mass, and who supposedly are nearer to God than are other men.

Every believer now has the inexpressibly high privilege of going directly to God in prayer, without the mediation of any earthly priest, and of interceding for himself and for others. We are told: "Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7); "If ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name" (John 16:23); "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21).

The believer, of course, approaches God not in his own merits but only through the merits of Christ who has made a perfect sacrifice for him. It is precisely at this point that the Roman Catholic fails to see God's true way of salvation, for he thinks that man still must approach God as in Old Testament times through a priest, or now perhaps through Mary or some saint whose merits can work for him. But Paul says, "By grace have ye been saved

through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the *gift of God*" (Ephesians 2:8). Christians have, by virtue of their union with Christ, free access to God at all times. This right is one of the finest things in the Christian faith, and it is a present possession. Yet Rome would rob us of this privilege and would interpose her priests and dead saints between the soul and God. Rome's teaching and practice is heresy, for in many places the Bible invites us to come to God through Christ, without any reference to priests or other intercessors.

The Bible teaches that "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 2:5). The Church of Rome teaches that there are many mediators—the priests, Mary, a host of saints, and the angels—and that it is right and proper to pray to them. But to any honest priest in the Church of Rome it must become more and more apparent that Christ is the only true Priest, the only true Mediator, and that in serving as a priest, in pretending to offer the sacrifice of the mass and to forgive sins, he is merely acting the part of an impostor.

## **2 No New Testament Authority for a Human Priesthood**

The really decisive answer to all theories concerning a human priesthood is found in the New Testament itself. There we are taught that the priesthood, along with the other elements of the old dispensation, including the sacrificial system, the ritual, the Levitical law, the temple, etc., has served its purpose and has passed away. With the coming of Christ and the accomplishment of redemption through His work, the entire Old Testament legalistic and ritualistic system which had prefigured it became obsolete and passed away as a unit. It is very inconsistent for the Roman Church to retain the priesthood while discarding the other elements of that system.

An enlightening article that appeared in the *Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary Record*, July, 1952, somewhat abbreviated has this to say about the priesthood:

"The writers of the New Testament had two separate words for *elder* and *priest*. They do not mean the same thing at all, and the New Testament never confuses them. It never says *presbuteros*, elder, when it means *priest*. The New Testament word for priest is *hiereus*. In Greek, from Homer down, this word had a singular meaning. It meant a man appointed, or consecrated, or otherwise endowed with power to perform certain technical functions of ritual worship, especially to offer acceptable sacrifices, and to make effectual prayers. Likewise in the Septuagint *hiereus* is the regular if not invariable translation of the Old Testament *kohen* and *kahen*, the only Hebrew word for priest. It occurs more than 400 times in the Old Testament in this sense. In the New Testament *hiereus* always means priest, never means elder. There is not anywhere in the New Testament the shadow of an allusion to a Christian priest in the ordinary sense of the word, that is, a man qualified as over against others not qualified for the special function of offering sacrifices, making priestly intercessions, or performing any other act which only a priest can perform. The Epistle to the Hebrews attributed both priesthood and high-priesthood to Christ and to Him alone. The argument of the Epistle not only indicates that a Christian priesthood was unknown to the writer, but

that such a priesthood is unallowable. It is to Jesus only that Christians look as to a priest. He has performed perfectly and permanently the function of a priest for all believers. His priesthood, being perfect and eternal, renders a continuous human priesthood both needless and anachronistic."

Paul enumerates the different kinds of ministers and agents in the Christian church, and the office of priest is not among them: "And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). And again, "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers. ..." (1 Corinthians 12:28). There is never any mention of priests. The only mediatorial priesthood recognized in the New Testament is that of Christ, the great High Priest, and to Him alone is the title "priest" (*hiereus*) given: "Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:17); "But he, because he abideth for ever, hath his priesthood unchangeable. Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such a high priest became us, holy, guiltless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people: for this he did *once for all*, when he offered up himself" (Hebrews 7:24-27), "For by one offering he hath perfected *for ever* them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14).

Since the priesthood occupied such an important place in the Old Testament dispensation and in the thinking of the Jewish people, it is inconceivable that, had it been continued in the New Testament dispensation, God would have made no mention of it at all—how priests were to be chosen, and ordained, and how they were to carry out their functions in this radically different dispensation. The fact of the matter is that the Old Testament priesthood was the human, Aaronistic priesthood, and that by its very nature it was, like the sacrificial system and the elaborate temple worship of which it was a part, a temporary affair, a mere shadow and prefigurement of the reality that was to come. And so, with the coming of Christ and the establishment of His priesthood, it fell away, as the stars fade before the rising sun, and as the petals fall away before the developing fruit. The priesthood as an order of clergy has been abolished.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews several chapters are devoted to showing that the Old Testament priesthood has been abolished and that there is no place in Christianity for a sacrificing priesthood, because Christ, "through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption," and that He has offered "*one sacrifice for sins for ever*" (9:12, 10:12). The many human priests with their innumerable animal sacrifices were effective in their work of reconciling the people to God only because they represented the true High Priest and the one true sacrifice that was to come. But after the reality appeared, there would be no more need for the shadows and types that had preceded it. Hence we read concerning the sacrifice of Christ: "But now *once* at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26); and again: "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ *once for all*"

(Hebrews 10:10).

The sacrifice of Christ was therefore a "once-for-all" sacrifice which only He could make, and which cannot be repeated. By its very nature it was final and complete. It was a work of Deity, and so cannot be repeated by man any more than can the work of creation. By that one sacrifice the utmost demands of God's justice were fully and forever satisfied. Final atonement has been accomplished! No further order of priests is needed to offer additional sacrifices or to perpetuate that one. His was the one sacrifice to end all sacrifices. Let all men now look to that one sacrifice on Calvary! Any continuing priesthood and any "unbloody repetition of the mass," which professes to offer the same sacrifice that Christ offered on Calvary, is in reality merely a sham and a recrudescence of Judaism within the Christian Church.

The abolition of the priestly caste which through the old dispensation stood between God and man was dramatically illustrated at the very moment that Christ died on the cross. When He cried, "It is finished," a strange sound filled the temple as the veil that separated the sanctuary from the holy of holies was torn from top to bottom. The ministering priests found themselves gazing at the torn veil with wondering eyes, for God's own hand had removed the curtain and had opened the way into the holy of holies, symbolizing by that act that no longer did man have to approach Him through the mediation of a priest, but that the way of access to Him is now open to all.

But the veil which had been torn by the hand of God was patched up again by priestly hands, and for forty years, until the fall of Jerusalem, sacrifices continued to be offered in a restored temple service, and in Judaism the veil continued to stand between God and men. In our day the Roman priesthood has again patched up the veil. Through the use of spurious sacraments, the sacrifice of the mass, the confessional, indulgences, and other such priestly instruments it insists on keeping in place the curtain that God Himself has removed. It continues to place fallible human priests, the Virgin Mary and dead saints as mediators between the sinner and God, although the Bible declares most clearly that "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Hence the continuing priesthood in the Church of Rome is absolutely unscriptural and unchristian. It owes its existence solely to a man-made development that can be traced in detail in the history of the church, for it was not until the third or fourth century that priests began to appear in the church. That system has been a source of untold evil. But papal dominance has been built upon that practice and is dependent on its continuance. Without a hierarchical priesthood the papal system would immediately disintegrate.

The Apostle Peter, far from making himself a priest or a pope, was content to call himself one of the many elders, a presbuteros. And he specifically warned the elders against that most glaring error of the Roman Catholic priests, lording it over the charge allotted to them. He urged rather that they serve as examples to the flock: "The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God

which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to the will of God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:1-3).

As regards priestly innovations that have been made by the Roman Church, Dr. R. Laird Harris, Professor of Old Testament in Covenant Theological Seminary, in St. Louis, writes:

"First century Christianity had no priests. The New Testament nowhere uses the word to describe a leader in Christian service. The Jewish priesthood was changed, we are told in Hebrews 7:12. Christ is now our 'priest forever after the order of Melchizedek' (Hebrews 7:17). It is true that the Douay but not the Confraternity version does use the word 'priest' (in a Christian connection), but the Greek never uses the word 'hierous' (priest), nor does the Latin so use 'sacerdos' (priest). It is good that this clear mistranslation of the Douay has been corrected in the newer Roman Catholic Confraternity edition. Christian priests are a Roman Catholic invention" (booklet, Fundamental Protestant Doctrines, II, p.3).

But the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers is not merely a negative teaching abolishing an order of clergy. For along with that freedom which makes the believer responsible only to God for his faith and life, there is an added responsibility. We are members of a Christian community, "an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:9). As Christians, then, we are not "laymen," not mere spectators of the Christian enterprise who may or may not engage in it as we choose, but "priests," and therefore responsible to God for the faith and lives of others. We are under obligation to make known this message of salvation. The word "layman" is not found in the New Testament, nor is there any "layman's movement" in the Bible. A priest is inevitably involved in the lives of others, and is responsible to God for others. He has the high privilege and duty of making God known to others. This priesthood, therefore, applies to all believers, and consists of two things: (1) Immediate access to God in prayer for one's self, and (2) the right and duty of intercession for others. Only as we grasp these ideas can we appreciate the full, rich meaning of the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers.

Furthermore, we are a royal priesthood. That means that we have been called, chosen, by the King of Kings to be His priests before our fellow men. We are not first of all clergy and laymen. We are first of all a royal priesthood, under obligation individually to make known the message of salvation. And the strength of Protestantism lies precisely here, in the willingness of its people to accept this strange office and all that it means, and to serve in the household of God as the royal priests that we really are.

### **3 Claims of the Roman Priesthood**

The Council of Trent, whose decrees must be accepted by all Roman Catholics under pain of mortal sin or excommunication, says:

"The priest is the man of God, the minister of God. ... He that despiseth the

priest despiseth God; he that hears him hears God. The priest remits sins as God, and that which he calls his body at the altar is adored as God by himself and by the congregation. ... It is clear that their function is such that none greater can be conceived. Wherefore they are justly called not only angels, but also God, holding as they do among us the power and authority of the immortal God."

In a similar vein a Roman Catholic book, carrying the imprimatur of the Archbishop of Ottawa, Canada, says:

"Without the priest the death and passion of our Lord would be of no avail to us. See the power of the priest! By one word from his lips he changes a piece of bread into a God! A greater fact than the creation of a world. If I were to meet a priest and an angel, I would salute the priest more saluting the angel. The priest holds the place of God."

To millions of Christians who are outside the Roman Church such words border on blasphemy, if indeed they are not blasphemy. Surely such declarations are a usurpation of the power that belongs only to God.

It is surprising how little Scripture authority even the Roman Church cites as a basis for her doctrine of the priesthood. Her main and almost only support is found in two verses, Matthew 16:18-19—which she has misinterpreted, and then, by adding one human tradition to another, has built up an elaborate system which not only has no real support in Scripture but which actually is contrary to Scripture. And by teaching her people this one interpretation and denying them the right to read or hear any other, she has misled millions so that they have come to believe that this is true Christianity. These verses read:

"And I say unto thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Confraternity Version).

There are various interpretations of these verses. Suffice it to say here that this passage contains symbolical language and that the interpretation of the "rock," the "keys," the "gates of hell," and the "binding" and "loosing" adopted by Rome is by no means the only one, nor even the most plausible one. We shall treat these verses more fully in connection with the discussion of Peter as the alleged head of the church on earth.

There is probably no other doctrine revealed in Scripture that the Roman Church has so obviously turned upside down as that of the priesthood. The function of no New Testament minister or official resembled that of a priest of the Roman Church. The titles of "archbishop," "cardinal" ("prince of the church," as they like to be called), and "pope" are not even in the Bible. The term "bishop" (overseer, or shepherd of the flock) designated an entirely different office than does that term in the present day Roman Church. In fact the terms "bishop" (*episcopos*) and "elder" (*presbyteros*) were used interchangeably. Elders could be of two kinds—what we term the teaching



elder, or pastor, and the ruling elder, who represented the congregation in the general affairs of the church.

Paul ordained elders in the newly established churches and gave his assistants, Timothy and Titus, instructions for choosing and ordaining elders in every city (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:5). During the Middle Ages the teaching elder became a priest at the altar, and the function of the ruling elder was usurped by bishops, cardinals, and the pope, until practically no authority was left in the hands of the congregation, which of course is the condition that continues in the Roman Catholic churches of today. Rome has robbed the laity of nearly all of its privileges.

Christ intended that His church, which consists of all true believers, should enjoy all of the rights and privileges that were conferred by Him. But Rome withdraws those rights and privileges from the people, and invests them in an order of priesthood. Christ bade His followers practice humility, acknowledge one another as equals, and serve one another (Matthew 20:25-28, 23:8; 1 Peter 5:3, 2 Corinthians 4:5). But Rome denies this equality and sets up the priest as a dictator belonging to a sacred order, altogether apart from and superior to the people of the parish. The loyal Roman Catholic must heed what the priest says, for priestly dignity is above all. The priest dictates to his people concerning their church, school, marriage, children, family affairs, political activities, what literature they should read, and so on, all of which he may inquire into intimately in the confessional. From before birth until after death that influence continues. As father confessor and "director of conscience," and as God's spokesman to the people, his word is not to be questioned.

The feeling of fear and dread of the priest, so characteristic of the people in Romanist lands, is comparable only to the fear and dread that pagan people have for the witch doctor. Says one from Southern Ireland who has had ample opportunity to observe from within the workings of that system: "You who have never been under this influence, who have from childhood been allowed freedom of speech, liberty of conscience, and who see no distinction between your clergy and laity, you cannot, you never will understand the influence that Roman Catholic priests have over the laity of their own nationality" (Margaret Shepherd, *My Life in the Convent*, p. 46).

Romanism puts the priest between the Christian believer and the knowledge of God as revealed in the Scriptures, and makes him the sole interpreter of truth. It puts the priest between the confession of sins and the forgiveness of sins. It carries this interposition through to the last hour, in which the priest, in the sacrament of extreme unction, stands between the soul and eternity, and even after death the release of the soul from purgatory and its entrance into heavenly joy is still dependent on the priest's prayers which must be paid for by relatives or friends. The Roman priests, in designating themselves, the Virgin Mary, and the saints as mediators, and in making membership in their church the indispensable requirement for salvation, place a screen between God and the people. And where does Christ come in, in this system? If you search you will find Him in the background, behind the priest, behind the Virgin, behind the church. The inevitable result is that the spiritual life of the Roman Catholic is weak and anemic, and that Roman

Catholic countries, such as Spain, Italy, Southern Ireland, Quebec, and Latin America, are immersed in spiritual darkness.

No matter what the moral character of a priest, his prayers and his ministrations are declared to be valid and efficacious because he is in holy orders. The Council of Trent has declared that "Even those priests who are living in mortal sin exercise the same function of forgiving sins as ministers of Christ"—such a declaration was necessary at that time, in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, if the Roman Church was to continue to function at all, because of the general and well-known immorality of the priests. Just as the medicine given by the doctor is supposed to cure the patient regardless of the moral character of the doctor, so the priest's official acts are supposed to be valid and efficacious regardless of his personal character. He is accounted a "good priest" so long as he remains loyal to the church and the rituals and ceremonies performed by him are correct. Says one writer, "When you see the way the system of the priesthood works out in daily life, be glad you are a Protestant."

Few Protestants realize the nature and significance of the vast chasm which separates the Roman Catholic priesthood from the people. No such gulf exists between the Protestant clergyman and his congregation. A fiction of sacerdotal wisdom and holiness, particularly as displayed in the sacrifice of the mass, sets the priest apart from the awed and reverent Catholic laity. Yet the Roman Church seeks to have the world believe that a close unity exists between the clergy and the laity. And an almost total ignorance on the part of the Catholic people concerning the political machinations of the hierarchy leaves them usually not only willing but even proud to be identified with whatever program is put forth in the name of the Roman Church.

In our method of choosing a minister, which we believe is in harmony with the teaching of Scripture and the practice of the early church, we choose a man not because he is of a superior order, but because of our belief that he is capable of ministering the things of the Spirit to his fellow men and because we believe he will live an honest, humble, sincere, and upright life. Ordinarily the minister marries and dwells in a family because this is the natural state of man, and hence he is closer to his people than is the celibate priest. He is chosen by the people, not, however, to govern according to the will of the people, but according to the will of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. He is among the flock as a spiritual leader, friend, and counsellor, not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

#### **4 The Christian Ministry Not a Sacrificing Ministry**

We have said that it is the work of a priest to represent man before God, to offer sacrifices, to intercede for men, and so to make God propitious, that is, favorably inclined toward them. In all pre-Christian religions, Judaism included, there were two common elements: (1) a human priesthood and (2) the teaching that the salvation provided was incomplete. In the very nature of the case their sacrifices were of limited value and therefore deficient. In the pagan religions this usually led to belief in a future round of existence after death wherein the still unsaved sinner would have to make further

expiation for his sins. In Judaism it was shown in the never-ending cycle of those sacrifices as day after day the same ritual was repeated.

Now, Roman Catholicism, although it professes to be Christian, possesses those same two elements. It claims a human priesthood, and it teaches that salvation in this life is not complete, but that after death the soul must suffer a longer or shorter time in purgatory and that repeated masses must be said to pay the debt for sin. But Protestantism teaches that with the coming of Christ and the completion of His work on Calvary a new element was added, one which completely eliminates the other two, namely, the evangel, or the "good news" that because Christ was both God and man His sacrifice was of infinite value, and that it was therefore *complete, efficacious, and final*.

This is the clear teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews, for there we read:

"By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*. And every priest indeed standeth day by day ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, the which can never take away sins: but he, when he had offered *one sacrifice for sins for ever*, sat down on the right hand of God; henceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet. For by *one offering he hath perfected for ever* them that are sanctified" (10:10-14).

And again:

"[Christ] who needeth *not daily*, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people: for this he did *once for all*, when he offered up himself" (7:27).

Here we are taught, first of all, that the pre-Christian element of an incomplete salvation was superseded by the complete salvation obtained through the one efficacious sacrifice offered by Christ, and, secondly, that the human priesthood offering daily sacrifices for the sins of men was eliminated, having been done away through the once for all sacrifice for sins when Christ offered up Himself. This means further that sin cannot persist as something to be expiated for after death; that we are saved completely, not half-saved; and that therefore there can be no such place as purgatory.

In the Jewish priesthood, (1) there were many priests, (2) they were men of infirmity, and (3) it was necessary that they repeat their sacrifices many times, for their own sins and for those of the people. These same reasons apply with equal force against the Roman priesthood: (1) they too are many, (2) they too are men of infirmity, and (3) they too repeat their sacrifices many times for themselves and for the people. In the nature of the case there could be nothing permanent about the work of the Jewish priesthood, for it was merely a foreshadowing or a prefiguring of the work that was to be accomplished by Christ. But the "one sacrifice," offered "once for all," by Christ paid the penalty for the sin of His people and so fulfilled the ritual and made all further sacrifices unnecessary. There is, therefore, no place for a sacrificing priesthood in the Christian dispensation.

This same truth is taught when we are told that after Christ had completed

His work, He "sat down" on the right hand of God, thus symbolizing that His work was finished, that nothing more needed to be added. In Hebrews 1:3 we read: "Who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification for sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high"; and in Hebrews 10:12-13: "But he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God, thenceforth expecting till his enemies be made the footstool of his feet."

The greatness and completeness and finality of Christ's sacrificial work is seen in His royal rest. The fact that He has sat down is of special interest since in the tabernacle and the temple there were no seats or benches on which the priests could ever sit down or rest. Their work was never done. Their sacrifices had to be repeated daily because there was no saving power in them. Therefore their task was endless. But the work of Christ was entirely different. His sacrifice of Himself was "once for all." By that one sacrifice He made perfect provision both for the sinner and for the sin. Therefore, as our High Priest, He sat down in the place of authority, and is now waiting until His enemies are brought into subjection and His kingdom is brought to fruition.

It is interesting to notice that when Christ sent out His apostles He commanded them to preach and teach, but that He said not one word about sacrifice. In the Great Commission He said: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them... teaching them..." (Matthew 28:19-20). Yet the most prominent feature of the Roman priesthood is its sacerdotal or sacrificial character. The mass is the very heart of the service. In the first part of the ordination service for a priest he is addressed as follows: "Receive thou the power to offer sacrifices to God, and to celebrate masses, both for the living and for the dead. In the name of the Lord. Amen."

In the Book of Acts there are many references to the founding of churches, preaching the Word, the assembling of Christians, the governing of the churches, and the matter of controversies with those who advocate error. But there are no references whatever to a sacrificing priesthood. Paul likewise through his epistles gave many directions concerning the duties of the ministry. But nowhere is there even a hint that the ministers were to offer sacrifices, nowhere even an allusion to the mass! The Greek word for priest, *hiereus*, as we have noted, is never applied to New Testament ministers. Strange indeed, if this was the work of the early ministers, that in Scripture we find no references whatever to it!

But in contrast with this, in later ages, after the Roman Catholic Church had developed, we find the writings of the spokesmen for the church filled with references to the mass—how, when, how often, and under what circumstances it is to be administered. It became, during the Middle Ages, as it is today, the most distinctive feature of the Roman worship, the primary thing that they profess to do. Surely it is clear that the sacrifice of the mass is a later development, a radical perversion, and that the Roman Catholic priesthood is following a system quite foreign to that of the early church.

Some Roman Catholics who have turned to Protestantism have said that before they left the Roman Church the charges which hurt them most were those which declared that the Bible does not reveal a teaching authority with the pope and the priesthood as its divinely authorized agents, and that the blessed sacrament of the altar does not exist in the New Testament. But with further investigation they were forced to conclude that such was the case and that in truth the sole support of the priesthood was nothing other than the traditions of men.

Our conclusion concerning the priesthood must be that Christ alone is our true High Priest, the only Mediator between God and men, the reality toward which the entire Old Testament ritual and sacrifice and priesthood looked forward, and that when He completed His work that entire system fell away. Consequently, we reject all merely human and earthly priests, whether in the Roman Catholic Church or in heathen religions, and look upon their continued practice as simply an attempt to usurp divine authority.

## **5 Training for the Priesthood**

There are approximately 56,540 Roman Catholic priests in the United States. And there are 237 bishops, archbishops, and cardinals who make up the American hierarchy, according to *The Official Catholic Directory* (May, 1963). The large proportion of the priests, some 34,465, are what are termed diocesan priests, whose work is in the local churches, while the remainder, some 22,075, are in the various religious orders, such as the Franciscan, Dominican, Benedictine, and Jesuit. Those in the various orders tend to specialize in some specific work, e.g., the Franciscans dedicating themselves to the relief of suffering and want, the Dominicans to theological and ministerial studies, the Benedictines to service in the schools and churches, and the Jesuits to the field of education, although the various fields overlap considerably. There are about 35,000 Jesuits in the world, some 8,000 of whom are in the United States. There are also about 177,000 nuns in the United States who work primarily in the schools and hospitals, although some are cloistered.

Many people find it difficult to understand why so many young people choose to dedicate themselves for life to the rigorous system of the Roman Catholic Church as priests and nuns. The answer is that most of them do not enter as a result of free personal choice, but are recruited while quite young, usually between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, with greater or lesser degrees of leading or persuasion by the priests who are instructed to keep their eyes open for promising boys and girls. The confessional, which affords the priests an opportunity to know intimately the personalities, ambitions, and problems of the young people, affords an excellent opportunity for such leading. The church seeks candidates for its personnel and tries to gain their commitment at that period in the lives of boys and girls when spiritual ideals are strongest but illusive and superficial. That is the age when the ambitions of youth soar highest and when they feel the urge for self-sacrifice in building a better world. The ones the church wants are, for the most part, selected by the priests, cultivated over a period of time, sometimes even for years, and so led into the various fields of service,

although the priests are by no means successful in getting all they want. The result is that many a boy and girl who had never felt any natural inclination toward the priesthood or convent life has found himself or herself following that road and more or less committed to it before realizing the consequences.

Most of those who eventually enter the priesthood are recruited from the middle or lower class families, boys who for the most part would not have much chance for higher education or for advancement in life, and to whom ordination means promotion to a position of prestige which their family status would not likely attain for them. Training is for the most part provided without cost. In their new positions, with their handsome rectories, luxurious vestments and beautiful automobiles they can feel superior to their parishioners. Those become most beholden to the hierarchy for the advantages that they have received, and are the most easily controlled. Having been drilled and disciplined into the system, they feel powerless to change. This is especially true of those who come from orphanages, whether priests or nuns. They are the real victims of the system. That is an unhealthy situation and deeply unjust, but one that is difficult to control or remedy.

A former English priest, Joseph McCabe, in his book, *The Popes and Their Church*, says that the Jesuits and Benedictines, who control large schools, appeal more to the middle class, but that as a rule they fail to secure the more intelligent of their pupils, that the intellectual and moral level of priests is not nearly as high as, for instance, that of teachers and doctors, and that only a minority have any exceptional ability or deep religious feeling. Other writers have said substantially the same thing. Furthermore, the idea has been promoted among Roman Catholics that it is a special honor to have in one's family a priest or nun, and unusual privileges and favors, sometimes quite substantial, are directed by the church toward the families of those so chosen. Getting into the service of the Roman Church is not so difficult; getting out after one has committed himself or herself is the real problem.

In order to understand why Roman Catholic priests act as they do, and why the priesthood is able to hold them so firmly, it is necessary to know something about the training they receive. That has been set forth clearly by Mr. McLoughlin, and we present in considerable detail the account of his training in St. Anthony's Seminary, at Santa Barbara, California, which he informs us was during the years 1922-27. He says:

"When a boy enters a seminary, he begins twelve years of the most thorough and effective intellectual indoctrination the world has ever known. It begins gently, with a blending of the legitimate pleasures of boyhood, the stimulus of competition in studies, and the pageantry of the forms of an ancient religion unseen in an ordinary parish church. It ends twelve years later, with a mental rigidity and acceptance of medieval superstitions and religious concepts as archaic as those of the Buddhist monks upon the isolated, frozen mountains of Tibet. It may surprise non-Catholic Americans to learn that the story of Tibet in Lowell Thomas' *On Top of the World* has its counterpart in the hundreds of Roman Catholic seminaries flourishing in the cities and countrysides of America.

"The course of training for the priesthood is roughly divided into two

periods. The first six years are spent in the junior seminary—four years of high school and two years of what would be considered college work. The senior seminary provides the last college years, devoted mainly to Catholic philosophy, plus four years of training in all the intricacies of Catholic theology. Between the junior and senior seminaries in religious orders (Franciscans, Dominicans, Vincentians), there comes a year devoted entirely to religious indoctrination. This is the novitiate. ...

"All our textbooks, even in high school courses, were written by Catholic authors. No daily newspapers were permitted, and no non-Catholic magazines. All incoming mail was opened by the Prefect of discipline, a priest; if he deemed advisable, the letters were confiscated. All outgoing mail had to be placed in the Prefect's office in unsealed envelopes. Along with newspapers and movies, radios were forbidden for the use of junior seminarians. The priests in their supervised recreation hall were permitted a radio—but we were not admitted to that hall. Not only were we gradually withdrawn from the world but we grew to feel that the non-Catholic public disliked us and, if given opportunity, would persecute us. ...

"During these junior years, the boy has no official ties binding him to the Church. He may leave the seminary at any time, without penalty. Many boys do so; and others are dismissed as being too worldly or intellectually unqualified for the intense indoctrination ahead. ...

"With one magnificent gesture, the ceremony of entering the novitiate sweeps aside the centuries. The aspirant for the priesthood in the Franciscan Order finds himself, in spirit, walking the ancient streets of Assisi, eating in its hallowed monastic halls, and chanting the sixth-century hymns of Gregory the Great. ... To symbolize more effectively the repudiation of the 'old' man and the start of a 'new' spiritual life, even our names were changed. I had been christened John Patrick. I was now named Emmett—or, in Latin, Emmatus—in memory of an obscure saint in early Irish and French history. ...

"During this year our seclusion from American life and our indoctrination in the 'spirit' of the Catholic Church became so intensive that I came to feel that I alone was a true Christian, privileged to commune with God. I believed that the American way of life was pagan and sinful, a rebirth of the Roman Empire and destined to the same disgraceful doom in the ashes of history. I came to believe that the American government was to be tolerated though wrong—tolerated because it gives unlimited freedom to the Roman Catholic Church, wrong because it gives freedom to other churches. I believed the ideal form of government was the one in which I was living in the seclusion of my spirit—the era when the papacy made kings because the power to govern came from God to the king through his 'representative,' the pope. My boyhood concept of civics—of the right of man to the processes of law and government through the consent of the governed—faded away under the constant repetition of the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and the moral theologians. The Constitution of my country and the laws of its states dimmed into trivialities in comparison with the all-powerful Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church. I became in all truth a citizen of the Church, living—by accident—in the United States.

"Such intensive indoctrination was unknown to the Western world outside the Roman Catholic Church until it was copied by Fascism, Nazism, and Communism. The training for the priesthood goes on, after the novitiate year, for six more years. We were no longer permitted to visit our homes, even for

vacations, unless a death occurred in our families. ...

"The process of indoctrination in all seminaries is intensified by the use of the Latin language. All textbooks of Catholic philosophy and theology are in Latin. The lectures by professors (at least in my day) were in Latin.

Examinations were conducted in Latin. We reached the point where we were thinking in Latin, the language of the early centuries of Christianity.

Subconsciously we were living not in the age of presidents and politicians, or labor unions and capitalists, but in the age of masters and slaves, of kings and serfs, of popes, representing God, and the faithful, who meekly acquiesced in their decisions as coming from the throne of God Himself.

"The chains with which the religious orders of the Roman Catholic Church bind their priestly aspirants to a lifetime of service are the three vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity.

"The vow of obedience is the most important of the three. It identifies all ecclesiastical superiors with the Church, and it identifies the Roman Catholic Church with God. Every command by the superior of a religious community or by a church pastor, no matter how petulant, how ill-advised, or how unjust, must be considered as a command from God Himself and must be obeyed as such under penalty of sin. ...

"The robe of every Franciscan monk is girded with a rope. One strand hangs from his side. It has three knots on it symbolizing the three vows—poverty, chastity, and (the bottom knot) obedience. The young Franciscan is trained that when the Provincial Superior greets him he must kneel on one knee and kiss the lowest knot on the Superior's cord, and then his hand. It is the token of complete, abject, unreasoning obedience. ...

"The student priest must learn to crush the desire of the flesh by fasting, self-denial, and even physical pain. Many Americans have read of the ascetics and hermits of the early middle ages of Christianity who mortified the flesh by wearing hair shirts, fastening chains about their waists, and sleeping on boards or in bare coffins. But it might surprise these Americans to know that in the senior seminaries for Franciscan priests in the United States there hangs, inside the door of every cell or bedroom, a scourge or whip. It is made of several strands of heavy cord, each knotted at the end. Each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evening at 5:45 o'clock we closed the doors of our cells; to the chant of the 'miserere' we disrobed and 'scourged our flesh to bring it into submission.' The Superior patrolled the corridors to listen to the sound of beating—the assurance of compliance. ...

"The distinction between the licit and the illicit was so elusive in our minds that we could not discern it. We were warned constantly about the danger of any association with women. The saints had characterized them as tools of the devil, devils themselves in beautiful forms, instruments permitted by God to exist and test man's virtue of chastity" (*People's Padre*, pp. 7-18).

At the conclusion of the book Mr. McLoughlin says:

"To non-Catholic America, I have attempted to portray life within the priesthood as it actually is. I have emphasized the long, narrow, effective mental indoctrination of the seminary, taking young boys from their families, walling them off from society, from world events, from modern education through the formative years of adolescence, and then turning them out into



the 'vineyard' after ordination as thoroughly dedicated as a Russian envoy to the United Nations. I have pictured the tyranny of fear that chains these men to their religious posts long after they have become disillusioned and yearn for the freedom and normal life of America. I have tried to show, through my own experience and through correspondence, the miasmic fog which the Church has intentionally spread to conceal the truth from the Roman Catholics who blindly follow it—stifling their freedom of thought, of worship, of action, and of life itself. I contend that this foreign thing is far more subtle, far less forthright, but just as inimical to the American concept of life as Communism itself. It is often the indirect cause of Communism by keeping whole nations in ignorance and poverty and by developing techniques of fear, indoctrination, and mental tyranny that the Kremlin exploits. The Inquisition led by the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century finds its parallel in the political persecution by the Communists in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Russia" (p. 279).

We urge everyone who possibly can to read this very informative and interesting book by Mr. McLoughlin. It is written in a truly Christian spirit by one who knows intimately the Roman Catholic Church, written not in spite, or hatred, or vindictiveness, but to acquaint Roman Catholics themselves with the truth concerning the secret inner workings of their hierarchy, and to inform those outside the Roman Church concerning the nature of this growth that has spread so luxuriously in our free and hospitable land while at the same time choking freedom of thought and action in those lands which it controls.

We should add that the priestly course of preparation reaches its climax in a colorful and solemn ordination ceremony, in which the bishop pronounces the awesome words: "Thou art a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." To himself and to the Roman Catholic world the young priest becomes an *alter Christus*, "another Christ," offering in the mass the same sacrifice that Christ offered on the cross. People bow before him and kiss his hands as a token of respect and submission. Ordinarily a priest is not ordained before the age of 24, although ordination can be performed earlier by special permission. According to Canon Law, a priest once ordained can never lose his ordination. Even if he leaves the Roman Catholic Church, renounces it, and becomes a Protestant minister, he still remains a priest, although unable to function as a priest until he returns and repents.

## **6 Groups within the Priesthood and within the Laity**

After the new recruits have finished their long course of preparation and are ordained as priests, what is their reaction to the environment in which they find themselves? Dee Smith, a former Roman Catholic layman who writes with an intimate knowledge of conditions within the Roman Church, finds that when they emerge from the seminary they gradually evolve into three fairly distinct groups which may be classified as: (1) the naive, (2) the disillusioned, and (3) the aggressive. He says:

1. "The naive are worthy souls so honest themselves that they never question the honesty of others. Even repeated experiences of hypocrisy and corruption among their priestly brothers are insufficient to shake their faith or

extinguish their inexhaustible charity. Such priests never advance to high rank among the clergy. They are found in poor city parishes, lonely country stations, or out in the mission field, sharing the meager life of their parishioners.

2. "What of the disillusioned? Emmett McLoughlin estimates that about 17 percent of the priests would like to leave not only the priesthood but also the church. ... Not all who leave have the stamina to stay with it. The memory of indolent, well-padded living is too beguiling. Expecting the same thing, plus adulation, in the Protestant camp and not finding it, these feeble characters inevitably return to Rome.

"In their eagerness not to jeopardize their cushy sinecure a second time they cravenly accept the hypocritical 'penances' handed out to them and become the most ardent of Rome's propagandists. Nevertheless it would be unfair to judge harshly all disillusioned priests who fail to break with Rome. When one considers the scurrilous attacks which will be made upon them in the Roman Catholic press, the boycott pressures which will starve them out of a means of livelihood, the malignant persecution which will seek them out and hound them wherever they go, one can readily understand that the decision to leave is a more heroic one than most of us are ever called upon to make. It cannot be denied that some of these priests are good men who, to atone for their lack of courage, do what they can to comfort, encourage, and assuage the lot of the duped and betrayed Catholic people.

3. "Nothing, however, can be said in extenuation of the aggressive cohort of the priesthood, the class which comprises the hierarchy and upper clergy as well as many of the lower. No man can rise very high in the ranks of the Roman Catholic priesthood unless he is of this class. In fact, the savagery of their intolerance against all who stand in the way of ruthless ambition extends far beyond their hatred of their tacit opponent, the non-Catholic world, and intimately permeates their own relationships. The viciousness of their tactics against one another in the competition for promotion is precisely the same quality as that of medieval cardinals who hired prisoners and assassins to dispose of their rivals in the Consistory.

"Their objective is not merely a life of privilege, luxury, and carnal self-indulgence. In fact, there are among them men of rigid ascetic character. But each and every man of them is driven by an insatiable lust for power. Each sees himself as a factor to be reckoned with in a globe-dominating force. Having lost the capacity for love, they seek the fear of their fellow men—the more abject the headier. Is it any wonder that the hierarchy's own security demands an impassable gulf between the decent, well-meaning Catholic people and these men with the hearts and spiritual nature of wolves, these men with no God but Greed, no religion but Power?" (*Christian Heritage*, May, 1959).

The chief victims of the Roman Catholic system are the people themselves, who are schooled to accept the teachings of their church implicitly and who are almost totally ignorant of the political machinations of their clergy. Again we are indebted to Dee Smith for an analysis which, with some degree of overlapping, groups the Roman Catholic laity as follows:

1. First there is that comparatively small group of people whom we may designate as "converts" to Romanism, or "joiners," those who when they see the Roman Church growing in influence "jump on the band wagon." Such as these would join most any movement, even the Communist if it appeared to offer them advancement. They have only a nominal Christianity, and usually have suffered frustration in some form. In Romanism they become the center of attention and gain a position of influence that would not otherwise be attainable to them.
2. A second group, much the largest group in the Roman Church, consists of those whom we may designate as spiritual suicides. They shrink from any serious thought concerning religious truths which they do not want to face, truths which if followed through might involve them in arduous spiritual effort. In the Roman Catholic Church they gain a promise of heaven through the payment of money and the recitation of sterile formulas. They are content simply to float along and to leave the spiritual and intellectual problems to others.
3. A third group consists of those who are genuinely naive. For them, as Dee Smith says, "the beautiful music, gorgeous trappings, fragrant incense, majestic temples, and eye-filling spectacles perform the office for which Rome designed them, namely, to lull the senses into a state of euphoria which the victim mistakes for heavenly transport. Like wide-eyed children at a circus, the victims of this form of mass hypnosis see nothing of the shoddy meanness behind the glitter."
4. There are those whom we may term the "practical Catholics," those who for personal reasons make a career of their church connections. They are the typical members who are always ready to do the bidding of the clergy, serving as a front against the non-Catholic world, bullying bookstores into refusing to handle anti-Catholic literature, organizing boycotts, coercing businessmen to support Catholic charities, posing the threat of the "Catholic vote," etc.
5. Another group is that of the "nominal Catholics," those who are members of the church simply because they were born such. They follow the rules of the church only so far as it suits their convenience. They are not critical of the church, but neither do they have any particular devotion for it. They generally attend mass, and they vote for Roman Catholic candidates. They are, however, unsteady and a source of concern to the clergy.
6. There is a comparatively small group of real liberals, men of integrity who try to reconcile the teachings of their church with their consciences as long as possible, but who in a showdown between church and conscience follow their conscience and walk out of the church.
7. Lastly, there is the group, consisting of perhaps one third of the membership, who by any standard are good, honest, self-respecting people. They are, to be sure, somewhat naive, but they are good neighbors to their Protestant fellow citizens and are the kind of people for whose sake Protestants sometimes resent any insinuations against the Roman Catholic Church. They are people who, if they knew the true purpose, motives, and character of their church's leadership, would leave in disgust at the betrayal of their faith. They are good not because they are Roman Catholics

but in spite of that fact. They are the kind of people who, not going to the trouble to investigate the doctrinal tenets of the faith they profess, would be good in any faith in which they might have membership. Innocently and unknowingly they serve as a perfect smokescreen for the hierarchy. By using the good character and sincere faith of these followers, and by surrounding themselves with a stage-setting of exalted faith, the priests are able to create the illusion of true religion for their entire system. But that system in its basic reality remains like the magnificent Hollywood temples, so impressive and awesome to the untrained eye, but in reality nothing more than plywood and canvas (cf., *Christian Heritage*, May, 1959).

Protestants who have made any effort to talk with Roman Catholics about spiritual things know that they have received but very little Bible instruction from their priests. But that lack of Bible knowledge is but a natural consequence of the fact that the priests themselves have only a minimum of Bible study in their seminary training. L. H. Lehmann, a former priest who founded *The Converted Catholic Magazine* (now *Christian Heritage*), says that only in the last years of their training in seminary did they have any Bible study, and that even then it was in Latin. "The Scripture course itself," he says, "was merely an apologetic for papal interpretation of certain texts of Scripture to suit the past historical development and aims of the papal power. Nothing was taught or indicated to us about the spiritual, individual message of Christ in the Gospel itself. Hence, what was sought in teaching the Bible was a glib use of tag-ends of texts in defense of papal power. The letter of texts, apart from their content, supplied the pretext for Roman Catholic use of Scripture. The spirit of the word was overlooked" (*The Soul of a Priest*, p. 54).

A further word about the different orders of priests: As we have indicated earlier, there are two classes: (1) Secular or Diocesan priests, who are responsible only to the local bishop, and who usually are assigned to churches; and (2) Religious priests, who belong to an order, and who in most cases are responsible to an abbot who rules the monastery. Secular priests take the vows of chastity and obedience, but not of poverty, and so may own property. Members of religious orders take the three vows, poverty, chastity, and obedience, and are of two classes—monks, who withdraw from the world for religious motives, usually live in a monastery, and engage in meditation, study, writing, etc.; and the plain religious priests, who engage in various public activities for the order to which they belong. Those belonging to an order, taking the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but not being ordained as priests, are called Brothers. These may teach in church schools, or engage in other kinds of church work. The Jesuits belong to an order but are not monastic, and usually are engaged in educational work in the colleges and seminaries.

As a rule the monks have a reputation for being lazy, the Jesuits for being industrious. The Jesuits are tightly organized under a military type of discipline, and their number is relatively fewer than those of the other orders. Their influence, however, has been out of proportion to their numbers. For centuries they have been the real power behind the papacy, often determining the election of popes, but apparently not trusted by their fellow

priests and not being able to elect any of their own number. They have been the object of much criticism because of their advocacy of questionable moral principles, the word "Jesuitical" having entered the dictionary as a synonym for that which is crafty, deceptive, cunning. On various occasions the Jesuits have been banned from practically all of the European and South American countries, from Catholic as well as from Protestant countries. On one occasion the order was condemned and dissolved by a pope, but was restored by a later pope. Often there is bitter rivalry between them and the other orders, which they tend to look upon as inferior, or at least as less efficient.

A custom of the Roman priesthood offensive to Protestants is that of having people address them as "father," and particularly that of calling the pope the "Holy Father" (capitalized)—which we term simply blasphemy. In this connection Christ Himself commanded in the clearest language that the term "father" in a spiritual sense should not be used when addressing our fellow men. "Call no man your father on the earth," said He, "for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9). Yet the priests continually and openly violate that command.

## **7 Leaving the Priesthood**

The priesthood is the real crux of the Roman system. Most of those men, even during their seminary course, as we have indicated, have but very little Bible study; and much of what they do have relates to disconnected portions of Scripture and is given primarily with the purpose of preparing them to answer the arguments that Protestants make against the Roman system. Such has been the testimony of various ones who have left the priesthood. There is in this regard a great contrast between the Protestant and Roman Catholic training for the ministry or the priesthood. Rome simply does not like Bible study either for her priests or for her people, for they find too many things there that are not in accord with their church. We believe that if these men could be persuaded to make an unprejudiced study of the Bible, many would be convinced of the error of their system and would turn from it. An encouraging feature in this regard is that a considerable number, after years of useless priestly ministry, have on their own accord made a serious study of the Bible and have found that it not only does not teach the distinctive doctrines of their church but that it contradicts those doctrines. When an honest priest studies Protestantism without prejudice, in the light of the Word of God and not of Roman tradition, he cannot but recognize that it is Christianity in its purity and in its originality. Much to his surprise and contrary to all that he has been taught, he finds that Protestantism is very simple, very clear, and profoundly attractive. He finds that its doctrines are based solidly on the Bible, which is the true manual and code of Christianity. Says Lucien Vinet, a former Canadian priest:

"In the Church of Rome faith is based on the authority of a man, the Pope, and the traditions of men, namely the opinions of former theologians such as the Fathers of the Church.

"In Roman Catholicism, Christianity is the doctrines and practices of men; in Protestantism, Christianity is the doctrines of Christ as revealed to us, not

by fallible men, but by the infallible Bible" (*I Was a Priest*, p. 126).

Many a priest, struggling against moral degradation and frustration of mind (and one who spends much time in the confessional has an abundance of both), has had an intense battle within himself as to whether or not he should remain in the Church of Rome. He possesses a Bible, but in accordance with the rules of his church he usually does not dare to read it apart from the assigned notes and commentaries, and so remains ignorant of its saving message. How difficult it is for him to realize that all that anyone has to do to receive forgiveness from sins and to experience the joy of salvation is to confess his sins to Christ and to put his trust in Him alone! When he does read the Bible he finds that most of the doctrines that he has held and taught either were perversions of the Scripture or that they were the inventions of men. Would that thousands of those men could be persuaded to turn from that false and subversive system to the clear teachings of Scripture! The key to the whole problem is the priest. And the task before us is to persuade him to read the Bible with an open mind.

It may seem surprising that it takes so long for a priest to discover the truth. But the fact is that a candidate for the priesthood enters the twelve-year course of training from parochial school as just a boy—the preferable age is 16—that during his training he is quite effectively cut off from the surrounding world, and that he is an adult before he completes his training. He has not known any other kind of life. During that long and intensive course practically all of those who show signs of independent thinking, those whose dispositions indicate that they might not be obedient to their superior, and those in whose make-up there are any traits which might indicate lack of perseverance or failure for any reason, are weeded out. Not all who finish the course are chosen by the bishop for ordination. But those who are chosen are pretty much of a type that can be reasonably depended upon to continue loyal and submissive to the church. Those who become priests are not so much those who have volunteered for that service but rather those who have been chosen by the hierarchy and carefully screened and trained for that occupation. They are what we may term "hard core Romanists."

Becoming a Roman Catholic priest is a far different thing from becoming a Protestant minister. Everything possible has been done to impress upon the Roman priest the idea that if he breaks with the Roman Catholic Church he will not be trusted by anyone, either within or outside of the Roman Church, and that he cannot make his way in the commercial world for which he now is so entirely unfitted. His intensive training in Latin, doctrine, liturgies, and church history, is of comparatively little value in the outside world, and in fact has been in part designed to unfit him for anything except the priesthood. He has been disciplined for that particular work, and his soul is in a real sense held captive within the walls of Roman Catholic dogma and within the bonds of the priesthood. It is an exceedingly difficult thing for one who has been so trained, and who has committed himself to that system, to break those bonds and to come out into a new kind of life—even into the freedom of the Gospel, for he does not know what that means. This is particularly true if he does not reach that decision until middle age or later. Furthermore, the Roman Catholic people are forbidden to have anything

to do with one who has left the priesthood. Getting into, or getting out of, the priesthood is no easy task.

Certainly there are many priests who do not believe what they are teaching, at least not all that they are teaching. Many are ill at ease, and a considerable number are struggling against a real sense of frustration. But they usually remain in the priesthood because they feel more or less helpless and do not have the courage to break away.

Emmett McLoughlin, in an address in Constitution Hall, in Washington, D.C., in 1954, said:

"It is not unusual for people to change their religious affiliation, but it is considered very unusual for Roman Catholic priests to leave the priesthood. Yet one third of the class of which I was ordained have deserted the hierarchy. I know ten priests who have quit St. Mary's Church in Phoenix where I lived for fourteen years. The number of priests quitting the priesthood is kept as secret as possible. ... According to the best estimate I have been able to find, at least 30 percent of all Roman Catholic priests leave Rome."

In his *People's Padre* he says:

"The hold of the Roman Catholic hierarchy over most of the clergy, as I have observed it, is not the bond of love, or of loyalty, or of religion. It is the almost unbreakable chain of fear—fear of hell, fear of family, fear of the public, fear of destitution and insecurity. I firmly believe that, in place of the 30 percent of the clergy who probably leave the priesthood today, fully 75 percent would do so if it were not for fear. ...

"Most priests, torn between the intellectual realization that they have been misled by the hierarchy and the fear of family reaction, hesitate and live on through barren years in the priesthood. ... Every priest is taught through the years that anyone who leaves the priesthood will be not only cursed by God but rejected by the public. The priest believes that people will sneer at him as one who has violated his solemn promises and therefore cannot be trusted with responsibility. In Catholic circles mention is never made of ex-priests who are successful—only of those who have strayed, who have starved, and who have groveled back to the hierarchy, sick, drunken, broken in spirit, begging to do penance for the sake of clothes on their backs and food in their bellies" (pp. 98-100). "Hundreds of priests quit the church every year. Hundreds more would if they had the means of earning a living" (p. 203).

And again:

"My experience has proved that an ex-priest can overcome his own fears and survive the most concentrated attacks of Roman Catholicism. That experience proves also that the American non-Catholic public still believes strongly in freedom of thought, freedom of religion, and freedom of the right to change one's means of livelihood—and that it will support a man who exercises that right. There is no need for any disillusioned priest or nun to seek the protective anonymity of Los Angeles, New York, or Detroit. He needs only the courage of his convictions, a willingness to work, a deep confidence in

America, and a solid faith in God" (p. 261).

Lucien Vinet gives the following analysis as to why priests remain in the priesthood:

"There is no doubt that the great majority of the Roman priests in the ministry of their church have come to realize, just as many ex-priests have done, the hypocrisy, intrigue, and falsehood of Romanism. There are various reasons why so many intellectual men still cling to a false religious system and even spend much time and energy in defending this un-Christian religious organization.

Priests who remain in the priesthood can be classed in four categories:

1. "There are some priests who really are convinced that Christ founded the Roman Church and that 'Out of the Church of Rome there is no salvation.' They explain the contradiction between the doctrines of Christ and those of Rome as apparent only and believe that the traditions of the Roman Church have equal doctrinal value as the words of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. They excuse the many scandals of Romanism as a necessary human factor in the organization of the Church of God on earth. They believe in the infallible teaching authority of the pope and therefore placate their conscience in relying on the Pontiff of Rome for their spiritual and doctrinal convictions. We met very few priests during the nine years of our life in the priesthood, who could be sincerely classed in this category. Most priests know just as well as we do that Christ is the only Teacher of Christianity and that Romanism is anti-Christian in its doctrines and practices.

2. "There are priests who are fully convinced of the falsehood and hypocrisy of the Roman priesthood, but find it impossible to leave the priesthood. ... Many of them hope that some day an opportunity will be given them to quit Romanism. They realize that their training in the Seminaries provides no preparation whatever for a proper position in life that will enable them to earn a decent living. Their knowledge of Latin, Greek, History of the Church, and Roman Theology is to them of very little use to obtain a decent position in our modern world. By the time they fully realize that their priesthood is a usurpation of the only priesthood of Christ and that of the priesthood of believers, they are usually too old to start a new training for a proper career in life. Their health not be as good as it used to be and they fear that if they leave the comfortable existence they now enjoy, they might land in the poor house.

"The greatest incentive that keeps priests in the priesthood is fear. They fear the curse and persecution of Rome, the rebukes of some of their Roman Catholic friends, and the loss of esteem and association of their families. Some of them, of course, fear hard work.

3. "There are now the priests who stay in the priesthood because they like the comfort and pleasure that the Roman ministry affords them. It is the very life of a priest that they like. They command the respect and obedience of many credulous Roman Catholics and they enjoy to the utmost dictating to them. ... Their life is assured and they have no troubles. Even if they cannot



accept all the doctrines of the Church, they do not have to admit it publicly. They can travel extensively in distant lands where their identity is not known and where they can enjoy life as any other human being would do.

...

4. "Finally there is a group of priests who remain in the priesthood, not on account of their Roman religious convictions and not because they find material comfort in the Roman ministry, but because they experience indescribable mental and sexual pleasure in the very exercise of their Roman ministry. These priests appear to the world as deeply religious and ascetic. They seldom indulge in material comforts and no one can accuse them of any actual sins of any visible form whatsoever, but they are spiritual perverts. The greatest satisfaction or pleasure of their lives is not 'wine, women, and song,' but the torturing of human souls in confession and in spiritual direction. They love to explore secrets of souls and hearts. They experience sordid pleasure in embarrassing female penitents by impertinent questions and prescriptions. Only the Roman system of confession can provide them with the means of indulging in these criminal and sordid pleasures" (*I Was a Priest*, pp. 75-80).

Mr. Vinet also recalls the suggestion of an old priest that if the priests in Canada were given ten thousand dollars each there would not be enough priests left to man the churches. We don't suppose anyone is going to offer that kind of an inducement for them to leave the priesthood, either in Canada or in the United States. But undoubtedly the fear of not being able to make a livelihood has kept many in their positions.

## **8 Renouncing Priestly Vows**

We do not hesitate to say that a priest who becomes disillusioned and finds that the Church of Rome has deceived him with false pretensions should repudiate his vows, declare his independence, and make a new start. In such a case the church has misrepresented herself to him, the ideal that she held before him has proved deceptive and fruitless, and he therefore is not bound to continue in such a relationship. He has not failed the priesthood; the priesthood has failed him, and has been revealed as something other than that which it was represented as being at the time of his ordination. He was led to believe that the Roman Church was the only true church, God's chosen and exclusive instrument for the salvation of souls. She has failed to substantiate her claim to be the only true church, and has been found rather to be a mixture of truth and error, with error in many cases overshadowing the truth.

Insofar as the Roman Church has extracted vows that are unscriptural and unreasonable, it is right that those vows should be repudiated. This principle applies not only to priests and nuns, but also to parents who, in signing a marriage contract that was forced upon them, have pledged away the religious freedom of their children even before they were born. No man has the right to swear away his own religious or civil liberty or that of others and so to place himself or those who are given into his care in a state of subjection to a fellow mortal. Human slavery, whether physical or spiritual, is wrong and cannot be tolerated. Enforced spiritual servitude of one's self

or of one's children to another person or institution can be as degrading and galling as physical servitude. "Ye were bought with a price; become not bondservants of men," says the Scripture (1 Corinthians 7:23). "Ye were redeemed... with precious blood... even the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). "No man can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). Christ is our true Master; He has set us free, and no other person or organization has the right to usurp that freedom.

It is universally acknowledged that when one party to a contract breaks that contract and makes impossible its normal functioning, the other party is not under obligation to continue fulfilling its terms. Yet that is the condition in which many a priest and nun has found himself or herself. Even in human contracts only those obligations continue to be binding which the person to whom the promise was made wishes us to observe them; and certainly in this field of promises to God it is only reasonable to suppose that we are not bound to do what God does not want us to do, merely because we were led through false pretenses or false motives to promise that we would do it. In this instance the priest has made an unscriptural vow of complete obedience to another man, the bishop, and has pledged himself to a service that in reality does not exist. We have already seen that with the coming of Christ and the completion of His work on Calvary the human priesthood was abolished forever. Hence the Roman priesthood is in reality nothing but a sham and a delusion.

On these grounds all priestly vows are to be considered null and void. This was the position taken by the Reformers, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and others, as they renounced the authority of Rome, and the Gospel became the proclamation of liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who were bound.

Those who leave Romanism for this reason are not traitors to the church of Christ, as the Roman Church attempts to make them believe. On the contrary they are enlightened and intelligent men, courageously following the path of duty. "The real traitor," says Lucien Vinet, "is the Roman priest who knows the wickedness of Romanism and yet clings to it for material gain" (*I Was a Priest*, p. 10).

"It must come as a shock to non-Catholics," says McLoughlin, "to realize the possessiveness of even the lay Catholics toward their clergy. It is accepted practice among Protestant, Mormon, and Jewish groups to recognize a clergyman's right to change his vocation. Rabbis become merchants, Mormon bishops enter politics, and ministers in unknown numbers exchange the pulpit for farming, law, mining, teaching, trade, or just plain loafing. But not so a former Roman Catholic priest" (*People's Padre*, p. 176).

McLoughlin expresses as follows his justification for leaving the priesthood:

"Many letters from Roman Catholics had lamented that I had broken my solemn vows, my word to God. But I felt no guilt. I had entered sincerely into a contract, a bilateral contract, when I solemnly vowed poverty, chastity, and obedience. I was one party to the agreement. The Provincial Superior claimed to represent God. My indoctrination trained me to believe that he did. I know

now that he did not. The contract was null and void” (p. 183).

And again:

“I was an unsuspecting pawn or tool in the greatest swindle of all history. ... I have not defied God—I have rejected an organization that has usurped the prerogative of God and claims an exclusive right of speaking in His name. My only regret is that it took me so many years to come to my senses” (pp. 203, 204).

(Continued in [Chapter IV Tradition.](#))

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