

OASI EUCARISTICA
SERVI DEI S. PARACLITO
MONTOPOLI A SABINA (RIETT) ITALIA

These notes will be a humble attempt to fulfill the request of the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office for information and suggestions regarding the tremendous problem presented by the priest who through lack of priestly self-discipline has become a problem to Mother Church.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

I have said “tremendous problem” because it represents a contradiction: the man of God whose vocation involves leading souls to God and yet has de facto, at least for the time being, taken even his soul away from God by departing from the clearly defined discipline of Mother Church for priests.

Let me say in the beginning that the policies which we would like to see enforced represent a via media between the extremes of “pereat” and what to our mind seems, at least at times, to represent a mercy that is not mindful of the import of the habitual sinner on the care of souls.

AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

We believe a clear distinction should be made between the priest whose sin is like the sin of David or Peter, a reversal of his whole way of life, and the priest whose life is found upon investigation to be one of continual weakness and habitual failures. We feel that the first class should be given the widest opportunities, not only to restore their own souls, but in quality and be permitted to exercise the cura animarum, including the hearing of confessions. We would recommend this especially on an ad experimentum basis for the priest who has escaped the entanglements of a civil marriage and spent three years in penance. At least in the United States, a priest who is activated but does not hear confessions is almost immediately suspect and a source of wonderment and concern to Catholics.

On the other hand, where a priest for many years has fallen into repeated sins which are considered, generally speaking, as abnormal (abuse of nature) such as homosexuality and most especially the abuse of children, we feel strongly that such unfortunate priests should be given the alternative of a retired life within the protection of monastery walls or complete laicization. We have the former in most cases, for laicization is at best the less of two evils. If a priest is willing to accept protection in his weakness,

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this aid to salvation in the mercy of Christ should be made available to him.

In other words, we feel that many priests who would be of great service to Mother Church are now lost to the apostolate of the cura animarum by reasons of the traditional reluctance to grant such priests the full exercise of priestly life, including the hearing of confessions. In America there is a great war, thank God, and resort to the Sacrament of Penance upon the part of the people and clergy and a priest who cannot hear confessions is about as useful as a soldier without arms. To restore completely a priest whose failure is a one-time failure would represent not only a mercy to the individual, but a mercy to the thousands of souls who would fall under his care. Surely St. Peter was a better confessor by reason of his fall and St. Augustine by reason of his former life.

Balancing this mercy is the man whose failure does not fall into a behavior problem, we would recommend greater severity, at least in the external forum, with men who fall habitually in those classes of sin which are so abhorrent to the accepted holiness of the priesthood as to be the species of very deep, deep scandal to the souls of the faithful. We would recommend that it be taught with the same severity as in the case of solicitation that repeated fall of this character would deprive a man permanently of the exercise of priestly faculties, other than his Mass *intra sesca*.

THE INTERIOR LIFE

Moreover, without wishing to be an alarmist, after more than forty year in the priesthood I am personally convinced that we are not turning out today, either in religious orders or in the diocesan priesthood, men as deeply dedicated to their priesthood as we did in former days. The reason for this, if it be so, and many experienced priests agree with me that it is so, the reason in my mind is that this emphasis placed on intellectual qualifications has brought about a de-emphasis on the necessity of the priest of God being a man of prayer, before leaving the seminary, diocesan or regular, the young priest should have at least a beginning of the foundation of an interior life. Besides this need of interior life, we have reached the conclusion from our experience with hundreds of casualties that in fully 30% of the cases of priests who have failed Our Lord their entrance into the priesthood followed upon the (exposure) of question marks against their qualifications that were overruled.

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in one way or another by someone in authority. Red lights of warning were flashing and these warnings were not observed. A more careful screening of candidates would seem to be desirable. The man of intellect, unless that intellect is balanced by moral qualities and humility, is potentially a liability rather than an asset in the priesthood.

Increasingly we find "immaturity" in the priests coming to us, which is indicative of a lack of both motivation and of capacity for the sacrifice inherent in the priestly vocation. Apparently some professors do not realize that immaturity and intellectual brilliance are not contradictory terms.

METHODS AND POLICY

As to our practices in dealing with priests, it is based upon the attempted translation of treating every priest, even the priest under suspicion, with reverence for his priesthood, even when he may himself be lacking in reverence toward that priesthood. The fallen priest is yet capable of resurrection and in so far as possible is treated in the Paraclete program as the sorrowful Mother treated the lifeless Body of her Son. We aim to respect in the individual the priesthood which at the moment at least he may not respect.

In our therapeutic policy, while trying to utilize the finest medical and psychiatric assistance available (we have both a surgeon-physician and Catholic psychiatrist on our staff), we emphasize the spiritual because, aside from outright insanity, the salvation of the individual (and the consequent rehabilitation of a priest) must of necessity result from the correspondence of the individual will and intellect of the man with the grace of God and the sacramental life of the Church. The will must capitulate to God. Hence the intellect must be captivated by the thought of Him.

House, our treatment is aimed deliberately to expose a priest to a Eucharistic contact, both in the Sacrifice of the Mass and in Eucharistic adoration. There alone with God, exposed as it were to God, the Sacred Heart of Jesus can work directly on the soul of the priest the unique attraction of a Divine law.

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We, the Paracletes, are accustomed to speak of a threefold therapy; the therapy of a healthy, inspiring physical environment; the therapy of fraternal charity; and, the therapy of sacramental grace, especially as flowing from the Eucharist.

The problems involved in dealing with priestly rehabilitation will vary considerably from country to country but the basic approach, or so it seems to us, must always be based on the interpretation of the Mercy of God, which is the *raison d'être* of the Church, and from which mercy surely the priest of God should not be concluded. The prodigal of the Gospel received the fatted calf and presumably responded in his after-life to the paternal mercy exercised on his behalf. The man who fell among thieves found a Good Samaritan and the Good Samaritan provided an inn for the care of this wounded neighbor. We thank God that today through the zeal of such men as the late Father Venturini, F. C. J., and other zealous priests there are now in many parts of the world inns of the Good Samaritan where Christ's wounded priests may be cared for. And we have been deeply edified by the obvious desire of both the Holy Father and the members of the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, as well as of prelates and of priests everywhere, to help their fallen brethren.

A RECOMMENDATION

If I may be permitted to add one last word, it would be a plea for a swift or rehabilitation of men whose failure has been a single incident, even though this incident led them into a situation from which it has taken those years to escape. And a more distinct teaching in the last years of the seminary of the heavy penalty involved in tampering with the innocence (or even non-innocence) of little ones.

SUMMATION

In summation; to the weak but willing; shelter; to the stranger, complete rehabilitation, at least: *ad experimentum*; to those like the thousands of ex-priests reportedly living in sin in Italy and other parts of the world, a release from celibacy, that scandal may be removed, but at the price of a fixed lay status - mercy be with a permanent pricetag. This would come as a special act of his Holiness on the even(t) of the Ecumenical Council.

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Whatever be the decisions of Mother Church, it is the writer's first and supreme purpose and policy to remain always an obedient child of a Church, divine in origin, although obviously human (at times too human) in some of its members - including the undersigned.

(Fr. Gerald of the Holy Spirit) signature

Father Gerald M.C. Fitzgerald, s.P.
Superior General

Via Coeli
James Springs, New Mexico
April 11, 1962