

COPIA

August 27, 1963

Most Holy Father:

Let me begin by thanking Your Holiness from the bottom of my heart on behalf of myself, Father Edward Woeber our assistant general and the Servants of the Holy Paraclete for the gracious audience of August 26. In accordance with Your Holiness' desire I am summarizing some convictions on the problem of the problem priest that our forty years in the priesthood and some twenty years of working exclusively in the Paraclete apostolate to help priests have crystalized in our soul.

1) I believe that natural qualities and virtues of aspirants to the priesthood should be more carefully observed before they are segregated and channeled towards the priesthood. To be a good priest, and only the good priest is the successful priest, the aspirant must be naturally of a generous and cheerful character. I am speaking now of the priest whose vocation is the so-called active vocation. Too many even good men but self-centered reach the priesthood.

2) On this natural, generous and cheerful temperament the years of formation should build and develop, side by side, the head and the heart into a unique partnership for God and with God. The brilliant priest is a liability rather than an asset to the Church unless, as in the case of Augustine and Aquinas, there is

the warmth of a personal love for God and a natural humility that recognizes that the most brilliant intellect is shining only with light reflected from the infinity of Divine Truth. Unfortunately there is an understandable temptation to consider the brilliant student as adequate for the priesthood without a deep scrutiny of his interior spirit.

3) There has been an alarming increase in the present era of priestly casualties. A neo-paganism has arisen. Christian modesty is at a low ebb (note Our Lord's comment to the children of F . . .) and the priest who is walking and working in the midst of neo-paganism cannot but be affected by his environment. A century ago a parish priest in his rectory and a religious in his monastery had comparatively much less exposure to the world, the flesh and the devil. His only means of survival today is a very real and personal interior life which is equivalently and effectively the life of constant union with Christ motivated by personal love and sustained by abiding prayer and mortification. When these elements fail to be present, or to be maintained, the casualties are bound to be multiplied. The present conditions could have been easily predicted and are not in themselves surprising.

4) Having analysed *raison d'etre* for the increased casualties let us now consider how they should be treated. This calls for

classification and along two lines:

a) the length of time the priest in trouble has been in trouble.

b) classification according to the character of his problem and his own individual character. This last element is the most vital factor in the prediction of his recovery.

Under the first class, obviously the priest who comes on penitential retreat after long years of habitual sin will need a different treatment, if only in duration, than the priest whose fall is a first fall and who has had the good fortune to be brought up swiftly with the seriousness of his situation. Here we recommend to the Hierarchy the value of an ordered retreat which may well save a priest from becoming hopelessly enmeshed. We have had priests say to us: "Father if I had only come here on retreat a year ago, or two years ago, I would not now be under the grave censure of the Church."

5) The corrective remedies to be applied and their effectiveness will obviously depend upon the good will and character of the individual. Problems that arise from abnormal, homosexual tendencies are going to call for, not only spiritual, but understanding psychiatric counselling. Personally I am not sanguine of the return of priests to active duty who have been addicted to

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abnormal practices, especially sins with the young. However, the needs of the Church must be taken into consideration and an activation of priests who have seemingly recovered in this field may be considered but is only recommended where careful guidance and supervision is possible. Where there is indication of incorrigibility, because of the tremendous scandal given, I would most earnestly recommend total laicization. I say "total" designedly because when these men are taken before civil authority the non-Catholic world definitely blames the discipline of celibacy for the perversion of these men. They argue - rightly or wrongly - that these men turn to boys because they are denied the right of marriage.

6) As for the priest who has entered civil marriage, or who has for years lived in concubinage, for the lifting of scandal and the elimination of the sacrilege arising from living in habitual sin as, above all, for the salvation of souls which is the Church's reason for being I believe where there is no other invalidating impediment these unions should be quietly validated with the final punitive sanction eliminating any hope of priestly rehabilitation.

7) The fear that this would encourage others doubtlessly has some weight but is it not true that the Church for centuries has granted dispensation from the solemn vows of religion - both men and women - if they insist and yet this had not made a notable change in the determination of the vast majority of religious to live

die within the voluntary renunciation of their vows. Moreover, there must be a realistic recognition of the fact that the average priest who sins with a woman has no intention of abandoning his priestly life on a permanent basis and hence is not seeking an out from the priesthood. Moreover, the knowledge that priests were abiding in priestly self-discipline by an abiding personal choice rather than the onus of vindictive law would bring a deeper respect for the priesthood in the long range esteem of the Roman Catholic priesthood before the world.

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