

Spain's Worker-Priests on Increase

By MANUEL MIRA
(NC News Service)

Madrid, Spain—While avoiding much publicity, more than 50 priests have joined the ranks of labor, in Spain, taking up manual jobs and sharing the life of the workers.

They are taxi drivers, bricklayers, miners, factory workers. But they also say Mass every working day.

However unobtrusive they want to be in carrying out their real purpose — to bring Christ to the unbeliever and the indifferent — these priest-workers made nationwide news when at least 10 of them were arrested during student and labor demonstrations in October.

It is too early to talk in terms of a "movement" of priest-workers in this country, such as the one that flourished in France after World War II. But more and more priests in Madrid, Bilbao, Barcelona, and in industrial centers in Asturias, Galicia and Andalusia, are becoming full-time "obrerros" (workers).

Many seminary students join these priest-workers during vacations or week-ends.

The trend has attracted the watchful eye of the Spanish bishops. Some have established diocesan committees of worker-priests. In its November meeting the Spanish Bishops' Conference considered a draft of statutes under which priest-workers may continue and expand their ministry.

The priest themselves recently met in Madrid to exchange views and plan their future work.

Unlike the hundreds of priests who divide their time between church and office or classroom, this new wave of priests prefers to do manual labor in spite of the many hardships involved.

"Catholic Spain," says one, "is really a mission country in this respect: thousands of workers are entirely alienated from the Church. We know it."

He did not mean that meeting these workers is a hostile experience. "That's no trouble. There is no outright rejection of the priest; on the contrary, most workers welcome us as brothers."

Much of the shyness of the priest-workers — they refuse to give interviews or be photographed at their jobs — is due to the hesitancy of many bishops to support this new approach to pastoral work.

The priests, so to speak, are lying low.

But not in Oviedo, where Archbishop Vicente Enrique y Tarancón, has given official recognition to the group by setting up a diocesan center.

In many instances, outright opposition from management and business to workers' demands on wages and working conditions also included warnings against alleged "interference of priests."

In some areas, the priest-workers conduct their activities under a special understanding

with the bishop: they do not tell the bishop, and the bishop acts as if he "does not know" of their activities. Pressures and embarrassment are avoided on both sides, and the priest has more freedom to mingle with the people and undertake pastoral works.

The bishops' vacillation is understandable under the present tensions in the social and political life of Spain. Many bishops fear that their priests will become involved in the frequent disturbances in streets and factories throughout much of the nation.

Last October police launched a wave of arrests before and during the nationwide demonstrations. Over 400 people were put in jail, among them several priests, perhaps 10 or 12. It is hard to check the figure.

Even if released, or kept under house arrest, these priests will be brought to court and hence into the limelight of public attention. For some of the bishops, according to their view of Church-state relations, this situation is embarrassing. Others will say they knew nothing of the priest's labor involvement. To be sure, all will try to rescue their "strayed boys."

Even stronger opposition to the priest-workers comes from those lay Catholics in positions of power — economic, social or political. The Spanish upper class has too much at stake to allow social ferment — or any pious" encouragement of it. Most middle-class intellectuals also resent the action of the priest-workers.

Outdated Already?

There is another important sector opposing the venture, although for different reasons. Many of the more liberal Catholics feel that the priest-worker way of reaching the masses has been outdated by the renewed call for the lay apostolate.

"We can do that very well," a militant Catholic leader says. "We have a marvelous potential to go into the workers' world."

One opinion on this point comes from Msgr. Jose Maria Escrivá de Balaguer, founder of

Israeli Government Helps Fix Shrines

Jerusalem — (RNS) — The Israeli government has announced that it will contribute \$1 million for repairs to ancient shrines and other places of worship damaged during the Arab-Israeli war in June.

A major recipient of the contribution is the heavily damaged Church of the Dormition of Our Lady of Mount Zion, to which the Vatican has already contributed \$25,000. The Benedictine Abbey of the Dormition was severely shelled by Jordanian troops, according to reports of last June.

Other damaged shrines include the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Church of St. Anne near the Bethesda pool.

Opus Dei, an apostolic association of priests and laity:

"I feel that the priesthood, fully exercised, is sufficient to bring among workers the presence of the man-priest in unadorned, effective form. No more is needed for the task of communicating with the workers and sharing their lot and problems.

"While legitimate attempts should not be discouraged a priori, I believe that the layman — at the desk or the shop — when exercising a 'priesthood of the apostolate,' responds much better to the doctrine and directives of the Second Vatican Council."

Meanwhile the work goes on. Some priests act alone. Others

join in small "communities" that include workers. One such community is in a Madrid suburb of low-income families. The pastor works as a mason at a nearby building project. His church is plain. It has a crucifix, but no statues; on the walls are two large murals depicting the privation and the hopes of his parishioners.

One poster on a wall says: "Housing is our problem now. Homes for the workers are scarce, while thousands of luxury apartments go unoccupied, many built with government help."

Father X, the 29-year-old pastor, explains: "For us, the Mass is truly an assembly of the people of God, a Christian com-

munity in which problems are discussed as they bear on the community's internal life, or on its influence on the world."

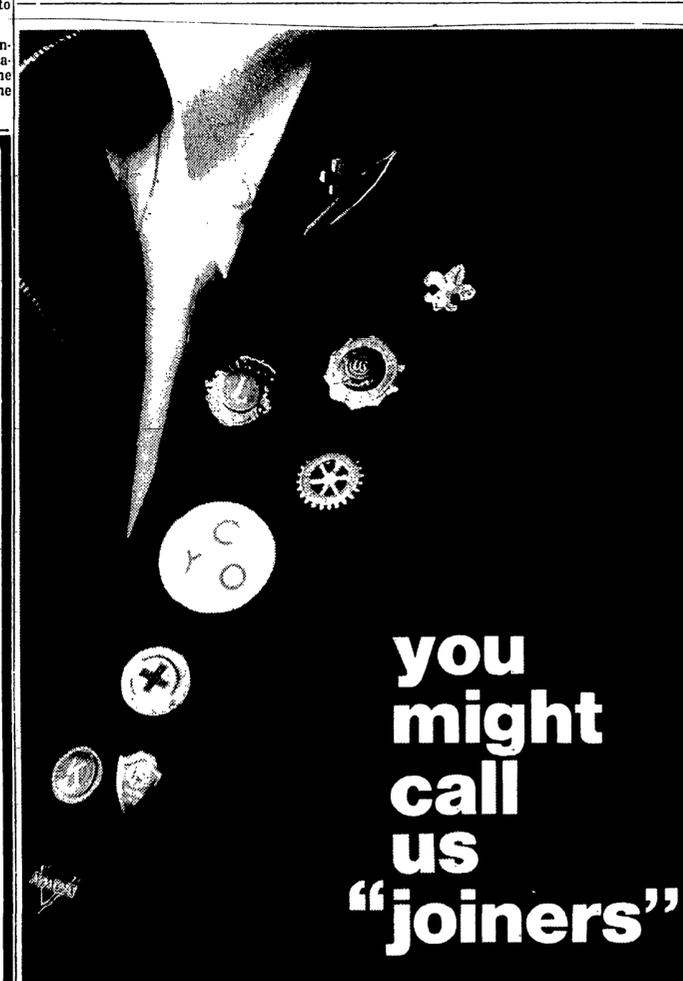
"In fact," he goes on, "we have inserted in the liturgy of the word the human reality of daily living. The priest acts as moderator while the men and women present discuss in an orderly manner their problems and the main issues of the time."

"I earn my bread with my hands, a perfectly normal way. I have no right to ask for sustenance from my people, who are already exploited by others. Perhaps the day my workers receive enough income for their basic needs, they might decide that I should quit working and devote all my time to their service. . . . Then I will lay down the trowel."



New 'Diamond Jim' Visits Marymount

Tarrytown, N.Y.—(RNS)—Petrus Ramoboa, the African who found the seventh largest diamond ever known, is the "kibitzer" as a nun tries her hand at shooting baskets. The exchange took place at Marymount College, Tarrytown, N.Y., when Sister Ann of the science department, escorted Mr. Ramoboa, his wife and daughter on a tour of the Catholic school. The Ramoboas, who are Catholics, visited the U.S. as guest of Harry Winston, a New York jeweler, who purchased the diamond for a reported \$649,600. Mr. Ramoboa discovered the stone in his 20-square-foot claim in the new African nation of Lesotho.



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