

The Priesthood in Crisis

PART I

On all sides one hears the remark: "The Catholic priest today is experiencing an identity crisis." Of course he is. So are today's parents and college administrators, today's teachers and students, today's politicians and statesmen. The reason for the widespread bewilderment in contemporary society about roles and functions in that society is that so many of us were trained and educated for a Church and a world that no longer exist.

In such a situation a crisis is not a bad thing. Crisis is a Greek word and it means 'judgment'. When culture and society and the Church are experiencing rapid and unprecedented change, it is not a bad thing for people to make a judgment as to who they are and what they are supposed to be.

There are a number of specific reasons for the identity crisis in today's priest: some are theological, some sociological, some psychological.

Theological Reasons

The Council of Trent which gave the Church the theology that she has lived by for centuries defined the priest largely in terms of

Guest Columnist

In Chemung County, during the past year, much effective study has been expended on the subject of our Catholic schools. This intensive and ambitious project was undertaken by the very active Chemung County School Board, composed of a layman as president and the priests and principals of the schools in the county, and other enthusiastic laymen and women.

Knowing the evident financial pressure on our schools, special attention was given to mergers or combines, consistent with the usual high type of education which our schools have always provided.

This, indeed, was an ambitious thesis and has borne fruit. It is to be hoped that the now-working project may be continued. Two schools in the county have been closed. Of

his cultic role. The priest was described as a sacramental man, whose task was to mediate the sacred reality of grace to a people who saw their principal duty in life as the salvation of their souls. In an age of faith, in a sacralized society that saw everything in its relationship to eternal life, this mediating role of the priest was all-important and gave the priest a status in society that was unrivaled by any other professional. The priest was the man who ushered people into the life of grace through baptism, restored them to grace in penance when they had sinned, presided at critical events in their lives, attended them in sickness and prepared them to face their creator in their last moments. In such a world, where the priest's ministry touched a person's life in all its crucial stages, the priest's status was secure and his role irreplaceable. The exercise of his sacramental ministry brought him a sense of dignity and respect that gave him, to use a very modern expression, maximum "job satisfaction."

In our day, society has undergone radical changes. We live in an age that many have characterized as "post-Christian." Certainly it is a time no longer describable as an age of faith. We live in a world that has become secularized. It is a world in which concern for 'this-world' realities tends to obscure the importance of man's final destiny. Or, even if ultimate values are not forgotten, 'this-world' concerns have tended to broaden the scope of the Christian's mission in the world. It is no longer sufficient for the Christian to work

out the salvation of his soul and let the rest of the world go by. His Christian mission calls him to face the problems of his world and to become involved in their solution. There is a deeper realization that man works for salvation not simply by sacramental means, but by developing his manhood, by perfecting his society, by facing its manifold problems and working with others to solve them.

In such a society the priest conceived in his cultic role has relevance only for those who freely accept in faith his priestly powers. It is quite understandable in such a situation that priests have become increasingly unwilling to regard their priesthood as an almost exclusively cultic role in society. This is why there is much discussion of new roles and new ministries for priests that will match the newly recognized imperative for Christian involvement in the building of a better world. This is why the "hyphenated priest" — the priest-teacher, the priest-social worker, the priest-psychologist — has had a wider and wider appeal.

All this has helped to widen the scope of the priest's ministry; at the same time it has tended to blur the uniqueness of his identity as a priest. How does the priest-teacher differ from the teacher who is not a priest? How does the priest involved in the solution of the social problems of the day differentiate his role in society from that of the professional social-worker?

(to be continued)

By Msgr. Philip E. McGhan

Support of Catholic Schools

Msgr. Philip E. McGhan is pastor of SS. Peter and Paul Church, Elmira.

the four remaining, three now have grades one to six; a Junior Catholic High School, grades 7, 8 for the whole county has been started at St. Patrick's. Students from the closed schools have been welcomed into the others. Each parish contributes a fair share of its revenue to the maintenance of the new system. The standards of education are kept high and there is an over-all projected savings of about \$75,000.

Will we be able to continue financially? If the true dedication of our lay representatives, as well as religious, continues as arduous as it has been, hopefully we can. Suppose our state aid, in the form of payment for mandated services, etc., is declared unconstitutional and, therefore, cut off.

There are two courses we can follow: close down our schools or really sacrifice to

keep them. And I use the word sacrifice. I believe it can be done. I used to think it naive to consider continuance without state aid. Now, thanks to opinions of some educators, I believe we can continue. It's going to involve a re-thinking and a re-dedication on the part of our lay people, parents as well as non-parents.

Father James Hertel, of the diocese of Paterson, N.J., and a convert to Catholicism writes: "It has always been a pleasurable experience for me to meet a young man or woman who has been educated from grammar school right through to post-graduate university studies in Catholic schools. Why don't we search for a solution to the financial crises that our schools are currently experiencing in (a) an authentic and genuine renaissance of Christian ideals in our American sisterhoods and priesthood and (b) an honest and generous support of Catholic institutions by the laity, in true proportion to the material goods they have received from the divine bounty."

Editorial

Taiwan Expulsion Reflects Poorly on U.S., U.N.

At a time when the world in general is awakening to the necessity of supporting, at least emotionally and spiritually, the smaller nations of the world, it seems unfortunate that one such nation should be summarily booted out of the United Nations.

Admitting the logic of allowing a nation of 700 million into membership, it still confounds the intellect that Taiwan should be stripped of its international credentials despite being a charter member and maintaining its good standing in the international organization.

It is a sobering defeat for United States maneuvering within the international body and its repercussions will be felt on the national scene, particularly with a presidential election in the offing.

What makes it particularly embarrassing is that it happened while, and maybe because, the United States is experimenting with a new open door policy with Peking. Dr. Yi Chu Wang, a professor of history at Queens College recently warned a gathering at Nazareth College, that in dealing with Communist China we should be aware that it will operate only on its own terms.

He forecast then that they would join the United Nations only if Taiwan was expelled and that they would get their way. He also said that they would demand other concessions, such as U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. His point is that they give only what they have pre-decided upon anyway.

So while the upcoming visit of President Nixon to Peking and the approaching era of better communications with this

Asian colossus may hint of a more peaceful world, we must be wary.

Regardless of Chiang Kai-shek's dictatorial habits, Taiwan has been an old friend from World War II days, has maintained a good record in the United Nations, is a nation of 14 million people, bigger than most U.N. members, and has looked to the U.S. for protection. We were caught standing by when this nation was slapped in the face by the United Nations.

Such action neither compliments the United States nor the United Nations, which itself is operating on shaky grounds.

So despite our overtures to Peking, Washington had better double its efforts to help and protect little Taiwan, now estranged from the body of international rules.