

The Priesthood in Crisis

Sociological factors have also contributed to the identity crisis of the priest. For example, widespread education has considerably



affected the leadership role of the priest. He is no longer the only educated man in his community. He may very well not be the best educated man in his community. In an age of specialization he increasingly faces the situation in which in many fields important to the life of the community — maybe even in the field of theology — he is surpassed in knowledge and expertise by other professional people.

Leadership in many areas where he was once unrivaled has passed to other hands. All of which forces him to ask the question: in what way can he continue to function as a leader of men?

Psychological Reasons:

There are psychological factors involved too. Increasingly priests have become uneasy standing on the pedestal where people have placed them. They have become uncomfortable with the mystique of the priesthood that conceived of them as somehow superhuman. A good example of this mystique is found in the reflections of Baroness Catherine de Hueck in her "Letters to a Seminarian:"

A priest is a miracle of God's love to us; a man who through his sacramental ordination becomes another Christ, with powers that beggar the human imagination.

Nothing can be greater in this world of ours than a priest.
Nothing but God himself.

- A priest is a holy man because he walks before the Face of the All-Holy.
- A priest understands all things.
- A priest forgives all things.
- A priest is a man who lives to serve.
- A priest is a man who has crucified himself, so that he too may be lifted up and draw all things to Christ.
- A priest is a symbol of the Word made Flesh.
- A priest is the naked sword of God's Justice.
- A priest is the hand of God's mercy.
- A priest is the reflection of God's love.
- He teaches God to us.
- He brings God to us.
- He represents God to us.

Few priests would recognize their own frailty and humanness in this extravagant encomium. More and more today a priest wants to be recognized for the human being that he is — like the rest of men. He does not want people to be surprised that he faces the same kinds of problems that they face. Oftentimes this false mystique of the priesthood removing the priest from the realm of ordinary human existence prevents the laity from feeling real concern for the priest and makes them hesitant to offer him the encouragement that at times he, like other human beings, actually needs. For to offer encouragement to the priest would imply that he needed en-

couragement; and this would mean taking him down from the pedestal. I recently heard about a priest so overcome by discouragement and the negative criticism of his work that he decided he had reached the limits of his frustration tolerance. Some Sisters saw him as he was driving away from the Rectory for the last time and pleaded with him — "Father, you cannot leave us. We desperately need you here." To this appeal he replied: "I wish someone had told me that a week ago."

This unreal understanding of the priest — conceiving him to be what he knows he is not and failing to see him as he recognizes himself to be — has helped to contribute to his confusion as to who he really is and what his mission should be.

The above represent a few of the factors involved in the "identity crisis" of today's priest. What is needed today is an understanding on the part of the laity — that will be faithful to the Gospel and at the same time will relate the priest realistically to the needs of our times. It will have to be an understanding — a theology of priestly ministry — that will evolve gradually, not out of abstract speculation, but out of the lived experience of the Church.

Nor will this understanding be achieved simply by attempting to give an expanded "job-description" of the priest. Rather, it will be necessary, first of all, to clarify what a priest is and, in the light of what he is, to understand his essential function as a priest. Only in this context — an understanding of what essentially a priest is and what fundamentally he is called to do — can the various expanding roles that priests have assumed be integrated into a total view that will give meaning and unity to his priesthood.

(to be continued)

Guest Columnist

By Father John A. Murphy

St. Lawrence Parish Reflects Aims of Its Pastor

The popular theme of our modern day is our sharing and giving to others. This was the idea among the early Christians. Those



who "had" contributed to those who "had not". Even the meal before the "Breaking of the Bread" — the Mass — was a shared meal. Furthermore a group of seven Deacons was chosen to provide for the needy and the widows. Most notable among these was St. Stephen. Very much like Stephen was St. Lawrence the first of the seven Deacons of the Church of Rome. To him was entrusted the distribution of the church funds among the 1,500 poor in that city. In fact, his last official act, before his martyrdom, was to sell even the sacred vessels to provide for the needy.

Lawrence had been ordered by the official to gather all the treasures of the Church to hand over to him. But instead of silver and gold, Lawrence had gathered hundreds of the poor whom he presented as the real treasures. The infuriated official, in retaliation, commanded that Lawrence be slowly roasted to death. His martyrdom is commemorated on Aug. 10.

Father John A. Murphy is pastor of St. Lawrence Church in Greece.

The new parish founded in Greece in 1959 was named in honor of St. Lawrence as a tribute to Bishop Lawrence B. Casey who had served as secretary to the Bishop and vice chancellor of the diocese and was then the auxiliary bishop and vicar general.

The early history of St. Lawrence parish paralleled the life of its patron. Like St. Lawrence, Father Edward Shamon gathered in treasures from other parishes in building a House of God. Parishioners gathered in the wood and the windows of Old St. Anne's Church. The lamps came from St. Michael's. From St. Ambrose came the pulpit, the sedilla and the present Altar of Sacrifice. From the burned out St. Boniface came the confessionals. From St. Thomas the Apostle came the beautiful oak pews. Doubtless, other parishes donated vestments and other equipment. These were the treasures Father Shamon gathered and his first put into place as, with sweat and toil and love, they built a beautiful church as God's Home in the western section of Greece.

But this sharing and giving by other parishes and this cooperation on the part of the pioneer parishioners was not limited to

the founding of the parish. For some years, Mother of Sorrows and St. John's, two of the mother churches from which St. Lawrence parish was formed, continued to educate many of the children in their parochial schools. St. John's and St. Lawrence combined religious education and youth activities until 1965. Then, when St. Lawrence School was opened, Mother of Sorrows, and St. John's in Spencerport opened the convent as a home for our Sisters.

Within the parish itself, new parishioners have followed the example of the pioneers in volunteer service connected with the parish in general, but especially in the parish school, in the religious instruction program and in youth activities.

And so, in the spirit of the early Christian Church and following the example of St. Stephen and St. Lawrence, neighboring parishes — and some from afar — and parishioners have shared and cared for this comparatively new parish of St. Lawrence.

In gratitude for the blessings of the past and present, St. Lawrence, in turn, through the mission collections and diocesan assessments, contributes in carrying on the work of Christ in our community, the diocese and throughout the world.