

the drama expressed by an active verb : he submits, he lays down his life in expiation, he pours out his soul in death.

The hero of the Servant songs is no mere substitute for sinners, receiving from God the punishment due to them. The kernel and essence of his redemptive work is to be found rather in his super-human love and obedience, qualities which in the language of human experience are expressed and proved above all by suffering and death. Suffering and death came to him because it was God's will that he should drink to the dregs the consequences of his solidarity with sinful humanity. The further revelation of the New Testament makes it clear that it is only because the Servant is constituted head of the human race that his passion and sacrifice have any value for us. It is not so much *in our place* as *on our behalf* that he suffered and died and rose from the dead ; we, too, in our turn, and in our degree, are to follow his path of redemptive suffering, death and finally resurrection.

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*Pymble*  
*N.S.W.*

## PRIESTLY VIRTUES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

(Translated from the French by B. Dickinson)

Under the title of this article you would expect a whole book, if one were to give exhaustive treatment to the subject. However, we intend rather to extract from the inspired writings the key qualities demanded from priests, by Christ our Lord or the Holy Ghost. If we can mention only briefly each of these virtues, it will be the reader's task to meditate further on the texts quoted and plumb their meaning.

These priestly virtues are drawn from three passages of major theological importance : 1. The 'Conference after the Last Supper,' namely chapters 13 to 18 of the fourth Gospel, in which Jesus, after making his chosen disciples priests, gave them instructions on the spirit in which they should exercise their new powers ; 2. The Epistle to the Hebrews, which defines the virtues proper to the High Priest of the New Covenant, virtues which consequently all those who have received the sacrament of the priesthood should possess ; 3. The Epistles to Timothy and Titus, in which St Paul delineates for the shepherds of the Churches of Ephesus and Crete qualities that are indispensable for carrying out their duties.

We are talking of 'priests,' where the Gospels and St Paul speak mainly of disciples and apostles. But this last term certainly denotes the priesthood, such as we understand it today. Actually, the New Testament term 'apostle' by no means stands for messenger or missionary in the way its etymology suggests. It corresponds to the Hebrew *šelialh*, denoting the plenipotentiary, the *chargé d'affaires*, the legal representative of an elector (Matt. 10:40 ; Mark 9:37). Of course, the apostle is an 'envoy,' speaking and acting in the name of another person, but he takes the place of that person ; so much so that the acts of the *šelialh* are binding on the sender. The Talmud declares expressly : 'A man's *šelialh* is the same as the man himself.'

It is in this sense that Christ is the Apostle and High Priest of the Father (Heb. 3:1 ; cf. John 17:8 ; 1 John 4:9-10). He represents God and acts in His name : 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself' (2 Cor. 5:19) ; whoever sees Christ, sees the Father (John 14:9-10). Similarly the apostles represent Christ, they speak and act in his name, to such a point that their words and actions are 'Christ-done deeds' : 'As the Father has sent me, I also send you' (John 20:21). They can claim : 'God appeals to you through us' (2 Cor. 5:20) ; 'You welcomed me . . . as Christ Jesus in person' (Gal. 4:14).

In fact, by the almighty words that consecrated them (John 17:17-19), the Apostles are God's plenipotentiaries and mediators. Endowed with the same power as Jesus (Matt. 28:16-20 ; John 14:12), they continue to do what Christ did. Not only have they the supreme prerogative of priesthood—that of blessing the eucharistic cup of the New Covenant (Matt. 26:20 seq. ; 1 Cor. 11:24) ; but they carry on the sacred ministry of the Gospel : 'I have written to you . . . in virtue of the grace which God has given me to be a sacred minister of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles, with God's gospel for my priestly charge (*hierourgounta*), to make the Gentiles' offering worthy of His acceptance, consecrated by the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 15:15-16).

If then the word 'apostle' indicates that the ministers of the Church have the same 'mission' as our Saviour, the word 'priest' emphasises the fact that they control the same power. Very soon, the passing-on of this power of communication of the Holy Ghost will be performed by the imposition of hands (Acts 14:23). It is in virtue of this rite that priests will be ordained to be pastors of a specific community (Acts 20:28), as shepherds and teachers (Eph. 4:11), pilots (1 Cor. 12:28), rulers (1 Thess. 5:12 ; Rom. 12:8).

*Faith* The fundamental virtue required of these apostle-priests is faith. The priest as such is first and foremost a soul full of faith.

If 'eternal life is to know the one true God and to instruct souls in the doctrine of Christ' (Matt. 10:27, 28:19-20), then it goes without saying that the priest must declare himself—echoing the Incarnate Word himself—to be God's witness, and must speak with conviction of what he has seen and heard (John 15:27). The only Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, 'has unfolded God's story' (John 1:18). He was the authorised witness of the mysteries of the divine life (John 3:11-12, 31-2), and as such the light of the world. Now he confided his secrets to the Twelve (John 15:15), and thenceforward it is they who are to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:14). Trustees of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1), their mission is to disburse 'the unfathomable riches of Christ's knowledge' (Eph. 3:8). The conclusion is inevitable that a priestly soul possesses outstandingly that grasp of the unseen which is the spirit of faith (Heb. 11:1). The priest's soul has become so familiar with the heavenly world and realises so keenly its beauty, that it cannot stop itself from proclaiming aloud its faith and conviction: 'We believe, that is why we speak' (2 Cor. 14:13). In a word, when we see and hear a priest, we should have the impression that we are seeing and hearing Jesus Christ.

In fact, our Lord devoted himself first of all to the intellectual and religious formation of his chosen disciples. It is to them that he reveals the secrets of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:11). He disperses their doubts, clears away their misunderstandings, strives to initiate them into the relationship between the Father and the Son—and it is only on the final day of this patient course of instructions that Jesus is able to declare: 'At last, you have come to believe' (John 16:31). With what emotion the Master must have said this! He recognised the greatest success of his work: his own believe in him! He goes on to bless the Father for this enthusiastically: 'I have made Thee known to these men, whom Thou hast taken out of the world to give me. Now they have learned that all Thou hast given me comes from Thee. . . . they have recognised it for truth that I came from Thee and they have found faith to believe that Thou art the One who sent me' (John 17:6-8).

No doubt the new priests will have to undergo severe trials; persecutions and the apparent triumph of evil will be violent shocks that will bowl them over and stun them (John 16:32). But Peter—whose name means: a solid block that juts out and offers a shelter—will have the grace to uphold their convictions unwaveringly: 'Look now, Satan has claimed power over you all, so that he can sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith may not fail; when, after a while, thou hast come back to the right road, thy task is to hold up thy brethren' (Luke 22:31-2). A priest's faith

is not different in kind from that of the faithful ; but it has a special quality : the solidity of a rock. As a man chosen to bear witness and to preach, the priest's characteristics are steadfastness and stability. These words, in Biblical language, are the exact equivalent of the word generally translated as ' truth ' : *amen*, ' *emînali*.

*Hope* On the day of his ordination the priest hears our Lord say to him : ' Without me, you can do nothing ' (John 15:5). Hence he cannot count on his own strength for success in his mission of saving souls. He knows that he ' can do all things in him who strengthens ' him (Phil. 4:13 ; cf. 2 Cor. 12:9-10). So he is never put off or scandalised by trials that are inherent in the ministry (John 16:1). If he is surrounded by a world that is evil and often hostile (John 15:18-25), yet he is helped by an almighty Defender, the Paraclete (John 14:17, 25-6 ; 16:7-15), and ringing in his ears is the last word of our Lord, encouraging him to an invincible confidence : ' In the world, you will have tribulation ; but, take courage ! I myself am the conqueror of the world ' (John 16:33 ; cf. 14:1).

It follows that God's help far exceeds the difficulties to be met. St Paul speaks of a superabundance of power (2 Cor 4:7). The priest's hope is born of this triumph won by Christ crucified and risen from the dead. His death became the source of life. Now this same mystery unfolds in the day-to-day apostolate. Under the most unpromising circumstances, the priest not only benefits from this victory by our Lord over Satan and sin ; he repeats it and completes it (1 John 5:4-5). He too will raise the dead to life, because the power of the risen Jesus goes on working through his lips and through his hands. A priest who did not live by joyful hope would no longer have any reason for existence ; he would be like a soldier who had enlisted in an army, but who set out for battle certain of defeat and taking it for granted beforehand that he would be beaten, having no confidence either in the genius or the capability of his commander-in-chief. But ' believe me when I tell you this : The man who has confidence in me will himself be able to do the things that I do, and even greater things still, because I am going away to be with my Father ' (John 14:12).

To this unshakable confidence belong the repeated encouragements of the prayer in the Discourse after the Last Supper. After promising his apostle-priests that their ministry will be magnificently fruitful, Jesus immediately adds : ' Everything you ask in my name I will grant, that through the Son the Father may be glorified. If you ask anything from me in my own name I will do it ' (John 14:13-14). Actually, our Lord has just granted his disciples the highest power

and authority, the immeasurable task of converting the world, of speaking and acting in his name. How will they be able to 'bear fruit in abundance and so prove themselves his disciples'? By prayer. A man of flesh and blood can do divine work only with this effective means, by harnessing God's own power to the task. Now it is intercession that will guarantee heavenly co-operation and unfailing fruitfulness. Hence: 'As long as you live in me and my words live in you, you can ask what you like and you will obtain it' (John 15:7); 'I have appointed you to go forth and bear fruit, fruit which will endure, so the Father will give you anything you ask for in my name' (15:16); 'In very truth, I tell you: Whatever you ask the Father for, he will give it you in my name. So far you have not asked for anything in my name; ask and you will receive, so that you may be filled with joy' (16:23-4); 'When that day comes, you will make your requests in my name, and I do not say that I will ask them from the Father for you. For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved me and have come to believe that I came forth from God' (16:26-7).

The duty of making intercession is therefore an integral part of the priest-apostle's vocation. In fact, when our Lord chose the Twelve, it was so that '*they should be with him* and go out preaching at his command' (Mark 3:14). The Apostles are more essentially disciples than all the others, they follow the Master more closely (Mark 1:17). There is no apostolate worthy of the name unless it stems from a permanent union with our Lord. It is prayer that keeps this contact alive and active.

*Charity* The fundamental lesson of the parable of the vine (John 15:1-10) bears on the union of charity between Christ and his priests. For a vine-branch, the sole law of life is to remain attached to the vinestock; for a priest, the whole of his spiritual life is to love Christ exclusively, or rather to cleave fervently to the love of predilection with which Christ envelops him. Priestly spirituality is summed up in this word of command: Abide in my love. To be sure, to love God is the sole law imposed on all the faithful in the old and new Covenants alike. But from priests, who are chosen out of the world and set apart for the work of bearing the fruits of grace to other souls (John 15:16), our Lord requires a total surrender of the heart (John 16:27; cf. Matt. 6:24). From each of them he expects priority of attachment: Lovest thou me more than these (John 21:15-17). In fact, authority to feed the sheep belonging to the supreme Shepherd is given only on condition that the recipient be dedicated body and soul to his Chief, in the same way as our Saviour consecrated himself to

the will of his Father to the point of total immolation (John 17:16-19). Priestly charity, according to St John, is on the one hand a union of real love towards the person of Christ, an attachment of the whole being, a vital allegiance; on the other hand, it means what today we call the virtue of religion, worship and total reverence towards God, flowering into 'devotion,' that is to say into unqualified obedience and devotedness: 'The man who has my commandments and keeps them, he is the one who loves me' (John 14:21).

It is into this union of wills and hearts that a priest's love and zeal for souls is grafted: 'This is how we can be sure that we love God's children: it is when we love God and keep his commandments; since loving God means keeping his commandments' (1 John 5:2-3). Love achieves a harmony of wills: *idem velle, idem nolle*. The heart of a priest, locked in the embrace of Christ's love (2 Cor. 5:14), will therefore love souls as Christ loves them and because he loves them (John 15:12). It is not a case of human sympathy or of some kind of sublimation of the paternal instinct. Just as Jesus received those converted to him as a gift from his Father (John 6:37-40; 15:9), so the priest carries over and extends to men that divine love of which he is the official channel. Following our Saviour's example, his mission is to enkindle men's hearts with this heavenly fire (Luke 12:49); he spreads its flame. This refers to the inexhaustible funds of zeal and energy in priestly charity, 'which great waters cannot extinguish, nor can the waves submerge it' (Cant. 8:7). Christians in the world may be allowed to have a divided heart, attached simultaneously to their Saviour and their husband or wife (1 Cor. 7:25-35); but this division is impossible for the priest. His charity is so intense that it must be exclusive; it leaves no room for any other object than this one: 'It is by this that we have known God's love of charity for us: he gave his life for us. We too must give our life for our brethren' (1 John 3:16). The only thing for the priest is to possess, by vocation, a charity strictly parallel to that of the incarnate Son of God. It is a religious love, springing from the gift of self and from a consecration which, through union with God, devotes itself in life and death to the work of saving souls.

On these lines our Lord defined the spirit of the ministry which he was about to entrust to his first priests, in the scene of washing their feet. At this moment, as it happened, a dispute had arisen between the disciples: 'Which of them would be the greatest? He said to them: Kings, among their peoples, give them orders as masters, and it is those who use their authority over them who are praised as benefactors. For you, it will not be like that; but the oldest among you will act as if he were the littlest, and the one who is in command

as if he were the servant. Who, in fact, is the greater : the one who sits at table or the one who serves at table ? Is it not the one who sits at the table ? Now I, among you, am like the one who serves' (Luke 22:24-7). Adding example to his teaching, the Master takes off his outer garment, ties a napkin to his girdle, sets down the basin of water before the apostles and, like a slave, washes and dries the feet of each in turn.

It seems as if Jesus feared nothing so much for his Church as a place-hunting hierarchy. The disciples knew that their Master was establishing a kingdom, and this one word awakened ideas of domination in the earthly sense. So Jesus corrects this pagan notion and demonstrates for them the paradox that, in the spiritual kingdom, the way to climb high is to come down, and that to attain the first place you must choose the last : 'When you speak to me, you give me the title of Master and Lord. That is the simple truth, I am—Jesus is fully conscious of his position ; authority and humility are by no means mutually exclusive. If then I, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, how much more are you bound to wash one another's feet ?' (John 13:13-14). My example teaches you the dignity and duty of serving one another (cf. 12:26). This has the force of a command (cf. Matt. 11:29-30) : 'What I have done, you likewise ought to do.'

What is the point of this example ? It does not seem to lie simply in bodily purification, which has the force of a symbolic act. Symbolic of what ? First of humility ; but this is only an accidental and secondary aspect of the psychology which Jesus wants to drive home. There is certainly a lesson in mutual love (John 13:1) and even something more complex. Humility is in it, together with fraternal charity, but then something much deeper : the gift of oneself. The washing of feet is the sacrament of apostolic authority ; it signifies the humble service of love which the disciples owe to one another. For Saint John, this act is a synthesis of all the lowly service of love in which the whole life of the Word incarnate was spent for men : this is the religious psychology which the Master wants to instil into the leaders of his Church. He chooses an example that is homely and menial, precisely because it best conveys love's humble service of souls which a priest's life is meant to be, after the pattern of his own. Just as Christ, out of love, lowered himself in the service of his own so as to save them, so the Apostles in their turn, in spite of their position—nowadays we should call it their eminence in the hierarchy—will devote themselves in the ministry to the humble service of souls, out of love.

This is suggested by verses 16 and 17, which emphasise the real dignity of service, and therefore the whole idea of the apostolate :

'In very truth I tell you : There is no servant who is greater than his master, and no apostle greater than him who sent him. Knowing this, blessed are you if you act in this way.' That is a priest's blessedness ! It is easy to see the beauty of serving the brethren ; it is more difficult to put it into practice. Jesus knows this, and that is why he adds a blessing to the injunction of duty and even to his own example. But the man who can humiliate himself in practice like a slave, will be blessed from then on in the present life, and in the future dispensation he will have a real superiority. One is never so great in the eyes of Jesus and never more closely united to him than when one agrees to lower oneself further, like him (Phil. 2:3), to serve one's neighbour.

*(To be continued)*

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### THE BIBLE : NEWS OF GOD

If it has pleased God to hide his truth in a dunghill, that is where we shall go and find it.—JACQUES MARITAIN

How can we speak of 'news' of God ? 'What is the latest news of God ?' sounds like a joke. And so it might be for one who thinks in terms of essences and not biblically. The Israelite did not pry into the nature of God. Indeed, when Moses dared to ask the question : 'Who are you ?' he was told : 'I am what I am,' which sounds suspiciously like : 'Mind your own business.' The concern of the Bible is not with what God is but with what God does. Consequently the Bible is always on the lookout for news : it is a commented diary of God's activity among men. The polytheist and the pantheist are bound up with the cycle of nature ; their hope is born yearly in the Spring, and it is a hope of earth ; when this hope fails, nothing is left. But the Israelite accepted no god immanent in nature ; his was a personal God, the free and independent maker and controller of nature, a craggy unreasonable God who will not conform with nature's cycle. For the Hebrew hope might bloom in the winter and when earth's hope failed he looked instinctively to heaven because the God of the Hebrew is the God who interferes. It is the same with history. This God does not merely use history, He makes it. That is why He is the God of the two great historical religions, the one based on the historical exodus from Egypt, the other on a historical exodus from the grave. History is God in action, and the particular history the Bible relates is regarded (rightly regarded we would say,