

PRIESTS AND WORKERS

A Rejoinder



JOHN ROWE



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CONTENTS

Preface	9
I The Question of Class	15
II Clergy and Laity	27
III Some Sources of Inspiration	55
Appendix A—Statement	65
Appendix B—Biographical Notes	77

This is a product of thinking initiated, exchanged and developed among a group of people. I therefore thankfully acknowledge the participation and active help of the men and women of the Worker Church Group.

J. R.

PREFACE

THERE ARE AT present a small number of Anglican priests in Britain who earn their living as manual workers in factories.¹ This little book is an attempt to say what it is that these men are trying in this way to do and be. It is about priests in working-class jobs, not about priests in secular employment in general. The reader must not confuse the case that is advanced here with the case that is being made for the ordination of men in all kinds of professions and avocations. Nor with the case for calling upon the natural elders of a Christian community to become its clergy while they continue their ordinary occupations. Naturally, these questions are all related at points, but the book is primarily about the vocation to *share the working-class life*. And this vocation is not in the first instance for priests. It is for Christians; a calling of the church as a whole to mingle its life with the common people and to share whatever limitations society imposes upon them. Priests can discharge only *their own part* of this responsibility. They may not seize for themselves what is not theirs, nor inflate their own role out of a proper proportion. So it is that there has not been and there is not any 'worker priest movement' in Britain. There is, however, a little group of priests and laymen which meets once a year,

¹ There is also one in Canada. Appendix B has some biographical information about the priests of the Worker Church Group.

and it is within this circle that the ideas put forward here have been developed.

The Worker Church Group first met in 1957, for a week-end conference. It included priests and laymen as full participants, wives no less than husbands. No organisation or society was created, nor has one yet been formed, but a strong community of spirit grew from this time. The annual gatherings have been for mutual encouragement and the exchange of ideas on the experience and the meaning of this way of life. Not surprisingly, the group decided to try to crystallise their ideas on their common aims and bases in a formal way. This was done and a 'Statement'—reproduced as an Appendix here—was printed in February 1959. Later, in response to questions about the wisdom of involving children in this life, a section was added to the Statement dealing with this point.

It was not desirable to encourage much publicity, so the Statement was not published but privately circulated to interested people. This had the effect that had been hoped for. Criticism, approbation, questions and related observations began gradually to flow in to the members of the group. By this time, also, whether or not in response to the Statement, a few relevant articles in paper and journals had been published and one or two books. Perhaps inevitably, it was found that interest tended to centre around the role of the worker *priest* rather than that of the worker *layman*. There was much questioning whether a priest *ought* to take a job in a factory and whether he could achieve anything by it.

At a later conference, the group decided it was time

to collect the criticisms together and to publish a reply to them. This might have been done in the way in which the Statement had been prepared—by hammering out an agreed text at meetings of the group. But it would have been too expensive of time and perhaps too guarded in its expression of views to be interesting since it would have to be a distillation of many points of view.

Accordingly, it was agreed that the present writer should prepare the reply, which he should arrange as he saw fit. It follows that he alone is responsible for the whole text. A rough draft, prepared with the help of notes from the other members of the group, was circulated among them and corrections made in it as a result of their criticisms; there is certainly general agreement with what is said here. But it must be made clear that not every opinion expressed, or every emphasis or nuance of meaning, would be subscribed to by any other member of the Worker Church Group. This is the case particularly with regard to those opinions which seem to place the writer on one side of the great Anglican fence. He is not inclined to hide his Catholic convictions, but he is just as chary of seeming to involve all of his colleagues in them. He has too much respect for their independence and integrity of mind to want to do this. In addition, the very fact that the members of the group have arrived at a common mind about so many aspects of this vocation, despite wide differences of churchmanship, ought to be known by the Church. Let the reader therefore bear in mind that this contribution is the work of an individual with the help of a group, trying honestly to represent the whole group yet with-

out entirely suppressing the peculiarities of his own approach.

This said, this 'Rejoinder' is offered with the utmost humility on behalf of a small number among the many in the Church who are now deeply concerned about the alienation of the Church from the working people of this land. But they have a distinctive point of view and it is time for it to be entered decisively in the debate about the nature of the problem and its remedy. The worker priests may be pardoned for being just a little tired of doubtful compliments. So often they seem to be told how admirable they are in their willingness to commit themselves so wholeheartedly to their vocation, yet how really uncalled-for the commitment is in general. Perhaps here and there 'in special areas of need' and 'where the inward impulse is peculiarly strong' and 'with proper safeguards' and 'under conditions of controlled experiment' the thing is justifiable. But really, as an approach which is relevant to the English situation in the 1960s . . . ? Certainly not! It is a little less than satisfying to be told, in effect, that one is all heart and no head, all impulse and no reflection, all romanticist and no prophet.

But the contrary must be proved or, at least, commended reasonably to reasonable men. There is a challenge at the end of an article on this subject by W. G. Symons in *Frontier*, Spring 1961. He says, 'This is a time which calls for radical experiments in the ordering of Church life. Yet, in the long run, the experiments must be supported by something more than the individual convictions of those who are taking part in them;

they are part of the ordered life of the Church, and it is for the Church as a whole to scrutinise their implications.'

Here, then, is some material for scrutiny.

The fullest and most formidable criticism of the worker priest idea has been made by the Bishop of Middleton, the former Director of the Sheffield Industrial Mission. It was published, under the title 'Appraisal', as one of the essays in *Priests and Workers: an Anglo-French Discussion*, ed. David L. Edwards. The Bishop raises the two root questions which must be faced by people who are scrutinising the worker priest vocation. These two, therefore, provide the subject matter for the first two chapters following. Under their heads are grouped answers to all the more or less important questions which have been put at various times to members of the Worker Church Group.

The third chapter states some aspects of what might be called the spirituality of the Group. This may be read independently, but it is probably better to come to it after wrestling with the arguments of the preceding chapters.

THE QUESTION OF CLASS

The Criticism: Class not crucial

In *Priests and Workers: an Anglo-French Discussion*,¹ the Bishop of Middleton argues first that 'A basic difference is to be seen in the class relationships, for our British society, class-ridden though it may be, has not seen the deep fracture of the French scene.' 'The French working class . . . has been dominated by Communist organisation and leadership', and its outlook has been 'politically messianic'. In addition, the church in France is cut off from the working class not merely for reasons common to large industrial countries but from causes in both R.C. theology and proletarian ideology. On the other hand, in England especially since the war 'the working class' is far from being an isolated closed group. There are greater social mobility, more educational opportunities, the worker is not to be regarded as degraded, his 'alienation' is 'less in the Marxist sense than in a more imponderable sense, in that all modern men in our urban industrialised society are estranged from their true being'. Politically, the working class in England has been able to build social-democratic political instruments, partly with the aid of Nonconformity, a factor absent in France. Secularism in England has thus

¹ Ed. David L. Edwards, S.C.M. Press, 1961.

escaped both political messianism and the heritage of anti-clericalism and pronounced hostility to religion. The English worker is indifferent rather than hostile and he tends to justify his separation from the Church as due to faults of the Church rather than as a rejection of Christianity. 'And if a minister of the Church, as a minister and a man, penetrates into his setting, at ease, on his level, without patronage, forthright in his words, he is accepted and welcomed, and after the initial torrent of attack on the Churches he can count upon the assertion that at last the Church is doing her proper job "in coming to the people".' Moreover 'the stain of the Churches runs widely over British society if thinly, even into groups that have been historically estranged from them. The cultural cleavage is less pronounced here without doubt.'²

This view is strongly supported by the Rev. M. J. Jackson, the present Director of the Sheffield Industrial Mission, in a review in *Theology* (July 1962), and there can be no doubt that a considerable body of opinion in the Church would subscribe to a view of the English situation as rapidly changing in the direction of social equality and classlessness. 'Worker priests' therefore, are making much of crossing a barrier which is rapidly disappearing. This is the burthen of the argument.

On the contrary, class division very real

That the vocation in question implies a class analysis of British society is not to be denied. This in itself may

² *Priests and Workers*, pp. 136-9.

show the 'worker churchmen' to have a significance far beyond that of anything which they themselves can ever hope to build or accomplish. For in saying, by their action, that British society is radically and deeply class divided, they are swimming against the tide of ideological assumptions in Britain today. They demand that Christians should not delude themselves with the comfortable notion that prosperity and technology have done away with fundamental cleavages of interest in society.³ The control of the country's industrial wealth and productive capacity is not in more but in fewer hands than previously. Monopolisation, whether by 'take-over bids' or by 'mergers', is a pronounced feature of our times and there is no sign of the democratisation of industrial control, only faint gestures in the direction of economic planning by governments which plainly have no intention to interfere with private industry in any genuine sense.

These are large political and economic questions and may be, as is the way among many Christians, written off as too political for there to be specifically Christian views upon them. But nobody can ignore the re-establishment of wealth, in this country since the war, as the

³ For a careful examination of the widespread assumption that economic class divisions in Britain, as they are expressed in income differences, are disappearing, see R. M. Titmuss, *Income Distribution and Social Change*, Allen and Unwin, 1962. Among his concluding remarks Prof. Titmuss has '... there is more than a hint from a number of studies that inequality has been increasing since 1949 whilst the ownership of wealth, which is far more highly concentrated in the United Kingdom than in the United States, has probably become still more unequal and, in terms of family ownership, possibly strikingly more unequal, in recent years' (p. 108).

most powerful criterion of social position. Nor is it simply commensurate with the general increase in prosperity. It is one expression of the general resurgence of the idea that every man has the right to use money to make money for himself and thus to separate himself from his fellows. In England, this is not mitigated by the other criteria which make for class-status. It is not as if while wealth goes up in the hierarchy of social values 'aristocracy' and its attendant grades of social gentility go down. Quite the contrary. The English upper classes have always been successful in making alliances with those who are rising in the economic scale. Pre-eminently, this is accomplished by means of a private educational system, which is controlled by those who represent the old order of socially superior classes and paid for by the rich, whoever they may be. The class system is thus not one whit undermined by the 'social mobility' of the few boys from working-class homes who by one device or another manage to get into 'public' schools. It is enhanced, for while it trains the boy for an upper-class status it tends to subvert his loyalty and attachment to his home.⁴ Anyone familiar with our newspapers, whether the ones for top people or the popular tabloids, if he will withdraw his mind

⁴ Vide chapters 4 and 5 of *Education and the Working Class* by Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962). This is primarily a study of eighty-eight working-class children of an industrial town in the north of England who go through grammar school and college and into middle-class life. It is not unreasonable to assume that the class-alienation accomplished in these people by a process beginning with a state grammar school can hardly be any more advanced than that experienced by working-class boys who go through private schools.

from the terrible grip of national assumptions, can see how wealth and a position in 'society', together with the ability to spend much time away from one's employment (if any) in order to enjoy the characteristic pleasures of the rich, are almost universally desired. At the same time they are based upon an economic system which requires a wage-earning class of severely limited ambition, *qua* class.

Certainly the English class situation is more complex and less obvious in its cleavages than the French, because the working-class organs have not developed ideologically in the direction of what the Bishop of Middleton calls 'political messianism'. But social democracy in the labour movement has not only humanised British society, it has helped to obscure the class situation it set itself to overcome. It is right to be proud of the role played by Nonconformists in the development of the labour movement, but it is not an unmitigated good that Christians helped to restrain the movement from drawing revolutionary conclusions. Christians are not always to be on the side of the moderates. The moderates are sometimes the betrayers. In recognising the relative social peace and order and, indeed, humanity of British society today in comparison with other industrial countries, it is important not to think that we have thus proved the perennial value of moderation, of not judging in blacks and whites, of not accepting revolutionary theories. We are still in history, and prices we have paid in the past and are paying now may gravely affect our bank balance in the future and, indeed, in heaven.

Church's part in class division

What of the church and the clergy? Are they as accessible to the working man as the Bishop implies? Is the cultural cleavage so much less pronounced here than in France? First as regards the Church in general, let us grant that the cultural gap is not so wide as in Roman Catholic France; a majority of working-class babies are still baptised in church and couples married there, with all that this implies of real, if vague, attachment. Yet, who will deny that the 'culture' of the Church of England is predominantly 'middle-class'; that in the growing areas of cities it is people who are mounting the social ladder, getting out of manual labour into technical, supervisory and administrative jobs, who are also found in our faithful congregations? The people who are at the bottom and can expect to stay there, see nothing for themselves in the Church of England. It is not their Church. This is a very large class of people and it is the most neglected in our ministrations. It consists of people who, if their position in life is to be bettered, can only do it by trade union action, that is, action which betters the many together rather than individuals by themselves. This is the class of people which is characteristically collective in mentality, yet whose characteristic collective is not the Body of Christ but the Trade Union. It is the class of people whose separation from the Church is not in any degree accidental or amenable to any kind of *educational* approach. It is the class on the other side of that ancient and great gulf, a gulf as real as ever today though not

now to be symbolised simply in terms of rags and scraps and sores, a groaning table and purple and fine linen. This gulf may only be bridged—in the long run closed—by *sharing*. For sharing is one of the simplest and yet most characteristic expressions of Christian *caring*. And it is very often harder in the deciding to do than in the doing itself.

The part of the clergy

The parson is himself a kind of crux of the problem. His education identifies him culturally with an upper class, yet, as the Bishop says, a sensible and forthright minister can before long talk man to man with a worker and break down the immediate prickly barriers. This has been the experience in England for many years. It is no new thing, although it has not of course been the *rule*. But *talking* is not the point! Two men may talk across class barriers and they may even go together to the altar and experience a oneness in Christ while there. Yet what has by this token been done to break down the objective barrier symbolised by the wage status on the one hand and the stipendiary status on the other? Is it surprising that some conclude that the Gospel points an obvious way? When you have worked a while in a factory and seen the unconscious arrogance of authority, even in good men; when you have experienced the situation of being under command day after day, knowing that it always will be so; when you have clocked your card late and taken a quarter-of-an-hour's pay less, next pay day; when you have seen

what that pay means in terms of housing and necessities and comforts, and learned the lessons of overtime; and when you have looked out from the circle of your work-mates and seen with their eyes the manner of life of the socially superior, including the clergy, a realisation is surely borne in upon you with unmistakable force. You realise something which you might have known before but have been afraid to admit, that on the side you have relinquished lies privilege and on the side you have accepted resentment.

Here is a class of men and women marked out by the nature of their work, the wage status and their style of life as belonging at the bottom level of an economic and social complex which accords the more privileges the higher you go. At the same time the minister of the Gospel finds himself, broadly speaking, well above the bottom level. Is it not an absolutely genuine gospel reaction to desire to share the conditions which straiten and limit life at that level? Not just to *sympathise* with them, and try to correct the characteristic misconceptions and psychological reactions of that status, but to *share the conditions* because sharing is so basically Christian a motive. And can it be correct to write off a response of this kind as emotionalism, romanticism or mere individual psychological need?

The means of healing

The class separation, both between the Church in general and the workers, and between the clergy in particular and the workers, is more real than many are

willing to admit, and it is not to be talked or discussed or sympathised out of existence. Nor is it fundamentally changed by the increased material wealth of the working class in general. Two things together will change it, in the long run. One is a social reorganisation which either abolishes the wage status or includes the whole population within it. The other is a spirit which is *equal to* the step of renouncing privilege and crossing the class barriers in person. Not everyone will be required to cross in person, but all must be able to see and feel the Gospel meaning of the step and express that meaning in his own life according to his own opportunity. We are here at the heart of religion. We are not here discussing evangelistic method. Before we get busy taking the Gospel to the workers there is a prior demand that we share with them the conditions in the midst of which they are to receive it. The demand is upon the Church as a whole and it is to be met not by some utopian—and sociologically absurd—programme for all the clergy and all the laity to become manual labourers. It can be met by a representative body of clergy and laity doing this *on the Church's behalf*, with her sympathy and with the realisation that this action is necessary if the Gospel is to be fully proclaimed in our age, just as many another type of Christian action is necessary also. If this action by some reacts back upon the Church to undermine entrenched ideas, this is a good thing. The whole meaning of the Gospel will be a little clearer. The Gospel is, usually, for everyone in that station to which it has pleased God to call him. If some leave their station for the Gospel's sake, it is not to

proclaim that this is the only way of serving it. It is to demonstrate meaning which each observer must interpret for himself within the possibilities of his own life.

This may be the place to deal with the aura of nobility and self-sacrifice with which both friends and enemies of the worker priests tend to envelope the individuals most concerned. To friends, this is what proves the propriety of the vocation; for adversaries, it provides a way of escape from wholesale condemnation. It is persuasive to be able to praise the impulse but yet attack the accompanying wrong-headedness and romanticism.

Self-denial is a wonderful thing, and the men and women in whom it becomes really noticeable as a dominant characteristic are rare indeed. These testify gloriously to an indispensable part of the Christian life. But most of us express our salvation through Christ not by marked extremes of self-denial, but in a wholesome combination of looking after ourselves and our families and having a care for others besides. Thus it is that the Worker Church Group are embarrassed by the claim of self-denial made on their behalf. Not, of course, that there are no elements of the sort. Notably, there is a security factor in the conventional clerical life which is not lightly given up. But there is so much which also fulfils and affirms one's own life and that of one's family. The family itself, first. This is not abandoned for Christ's sake! In present conditions in England, wages can provide all that is necessary for food, clothing and shelter—though there are difficult times. Public educa-

tion ensures the children do not suffer; indeed, for children the working-class environment is in some ways more wholesome than the middle-class. The delights of the mind need not be entirely denied. The anxieties of parochial administration, on the other hand, can be. The separateness of existence in vicarages and clergy houses is only too thankfully given up. The same applies to the special treatment afforded the man wearing a clerical collar and the subtle mental conditioning which afflicts him as a result. The biggest personal gain of all, of course, is the rich experience of being a mate among men working with the material fabric of things; the sense of belonging among men again, *qua* man, and re-interpreting one's heavenly commission in this context. For the rest, there is undoubtedly a straitening of circumstances, but of the sort which, paradoxically, tends only to enhance one's sense of well-being, particularly in relation to the conditions of life endured by the working people of most of Asia, Africa and South America.

All this may not be everyone's cup of tea. It is not claimed it should be. But for those who are called, it makes the 'sacrificial' motif seem overdone. It is only now, in this new situation, that the demand for self-denial properly asserts itself. A man may indulge himself even here. Let his praiseworthiness be proved here—not assumed because he has come here.

Thus, there is to be no comparison of *virtue* between worker priests, as such, and parish priests. Love must be lived wherever a man is, and love may glorify *any* setting. The argument is not at this level. The argument

is whether or not a deep meaning of the Gospel is being ill served by a Church which is unwilling to share, through the lives of a representative body of her clergy and laity, the conditions of life of the manual workers of our society.

II

CLERGY AND LAITY

The Criticism: Disservice to rediscovery of role of laity

The second major criticism of Bishop Wickham is that a 'worker priest movement' would tend to obscure the 'first priority of mission appropriate to the British scene and a reformed Church, namely the engagement of the Church with the world through the laity'. We are 'continuously tempted to repose our hopes in new forms of the ordained ministry' and thus to perpetuate a long-standing weakness in our doctrine of the rôle of the laity. It is of prime importance that the laity should see themselves, to use the words of Prof. Kraemar in his *Theology of the Laity*, 'as truly and fully subject in the Church as the ministry and clergy are'. The task before us is to produce 'a truly active laity' and a worker priest movement, giving as it would the impression that only the clergy are capable of mission, would make this task a great deal harder.¹ 'To turn the idea of the worker priest into a matter of theological or missionary necessity is to hold a wrong view of the Church and ministry and to bring confusion into the industrial scene.'² 'There is a risk here . . . of assuming that priests are "real Christians" in a sense that ordinary lay folk are not.'³

¹ *Priests and Workers*, pp. 144-7.

² M. J. Jackson, in *Theology*, July 1962, p. 290.

³ W. G. Symons, in *Frontier*, Spring 1961, p. 43.

The whole Church, not only laity, needs reactivation

Some critics are fearful that the English worker priests are dominated by an Anglo-Catholic or 'sacerdotalist' view of the ministry.⁴ This is seen as an obstacle to the reactivation of the laity. The fact is, however, that the Anglican spectrum of churchmanship is pretty well represented among these clergy, though not at either of its extreme ends. There are Catholics, such as the present writer, who stand by definitions of the priesthood in terms of mystical 'character' conferred at ordination and in terms of a doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice. There are Evangelicals who see no need for this, or who find it misleading, yet yield nothing to the former in their view of the importance of the ordained ministry.

Against the charge of 'sacerdotalism' the Catholics must point out that to hold a priestly concept of the ministry does not imply a non-priestly concept of the laity. In fact, the liturgical movement should by now have shown the opposite to be the case. Modern 'sacerdotalists', including Roman Catholic ones, are not behindhand in exalting the role of the laity. Otherwise, how can we understand the extraordinary outburst of lay apostolicity in the Roman Church in France, and elsewhere, at the same time the worker priests were under licence? The English priests-in-industry, 'Catholics' as well as 'Evangelicals', are as aware as anyone, and have been from before the time of their commencing this vocation, of the chronic clericalism of the

⁴ R. S. O. Stevens, in *Frontier*, Spring 1962, p. 377.

Church, and they have indeed conceived of their venture as an attack upon it.

It is a matter, of course, of how you see the problem. If you see the relative lassitude and theological ignorance of the laity as a problem by itself, you may distort the issue. Is it possible that some of those who are very concerned about reactivation and re-education of the laity have not yet shaken off a major part of the old clericalism? This is an easy pitfall for the reformer today. Desiring with all his heart the renewal of the life of the laity, and also impatient with the conservatism of the parochial clergy, he nevertheless perpetuates the old relationship of Clergyman (outside the world)=guide and inspirer—'producer'—of laymen: Laymen (in the world)=workers. 'Be ordained', said the Director of the Sheffield Industrial Mission to theological students who had worked for a time in factories, 'and produce the kind of laymen you have now discovered it possible to be'.⁵ Apart from the shallowness of the experience at the basis of this 'discovery', was this not to exaggerate both the actual and the proper powers of the clergy?

The problem must be seen differently. The Laos, if this means the People of God, is not the 'laity'. It is the whole Church, priests and people together. Our failure to be 'engaged with the world' is not merely a lack in the laity. It is a failure of the whole Laos. One aspect of this has been clericalism. As our religion became less and less concerned with bringing the world to the altar, the principal servants of the altar became the 'givers' of the benefits of religion and the laity became the 're-

⁵ *Priests and Workers*, p. 148.

ceivers'. And as we today recover the truth that the Christian religion is about God being involved in the affairs of man with a view to the 'universal restoration',⁶ we must not perpetuate this relegation of the clergy to a role at the side-lines of life (for that is what it has become), nor try to restore its power as a manipulator from outside. In other words, we need as much a new theology of the priesthood as we do of the laity. And it is too simple to suppose that the position which society has given to the clergy is always adequate for the performance of their function as the second Order of the People of God.

Industrial Missioners and Chaplains

It is for this sort of reason that the priests of the Worker Church Group have rejected, for themselves, the role of Industrial Chaplains or Industrial Missioners of the Sheffield pattern. They do not underrate the good which can be done by industrial chaplains and missioners. In fact, in terms of 'achievement', amount of pastoral care undertaken, numbers of people drawn into discussion groups, and number of misconceptions corrected in one way or another, there can be hardly any doubt that the industrial chaplain, if he is any good, ought to achieve a great deal more than the lay priest. It is all, however, achieved on the basis of the traditional status of the clergyman. He is essentially an outsider who is *permitted* to come into the factory to do his stuff. Even apart from the place where this puts him in relation to management and labour, as class entities, it

⁶ Acts 3:21 NEB.

does nothing to undermine the professionalism of the clergy nor to give the developing laity a living, 'horizontal' relationship with their clergy. It continues to foster the impression that the clergy must always have the security of employment from *outside* the factory in order to do good to those *inside*.

None of this must be taken as a denial of the need expressed in Prof. Kraemer's excellent words. It is vital that laymen should come to know that they also are 'ordained', they also have a ministry and that they must be the gossellers of the Kingdom. But it must be denied that the presence of 'lay priests' in industry militates against the meeting of this need. In fact, there is some evidence that far from *discouraging* lay initiative they may play a small part in *encouraging* it among the professed believers and churchgoers whom they find at the workplace.

The disadvantages of the priest as evangelist

The priests of the Worker Church Group all began, and have continued, with a very modest notion of what they could achieve in the setting of industrial life. They have sometimes been criticised for disclaiming any intention to convert fellow-workers. It is not, of course, that they have no desire to convert. Quite the contrary. You cannot be a sincere believer and worshipper, committed with all your heart to the Church of God, without wanting to win men to faith and worship. But when you have come to the point of recognising the depth of the alienation of the working people from organised religion, you cannot long imagine that you have an

answer in yourself to this alienation, and that by your daily example and witness the lost sheep will begin to flock back to the banner of the faith. You have the sense to see, either before you begin or soon after, that unless God has given you some grace he has denied others, you are not going to begin the conversion of the working class of Britain. If before you began you knew that theologically there is no reason why a priest should be a more effective evangelist than a layman, in virtue of his Order, you soon find out that there is no practical reason either. When you get over the initial inward thrill of observing and dealing with the reaction of working men to your presence, it is not long before you realise that there are considerable evangelistic disadvantages in being a priest in this situation. For men may then, by talking with you *about the Church* and their experience of it, hide from themselves the demands of the Gospel. A priest carries with him invisibly all the secondary lumber with which the Church is burdened in the public eye—the buildings, the money, the clerical voice, the local rules about baptism, the music ‘as it used to be sung in our church at home’, etc. He may find it quite impossible to fight his way through the thousand curtaining associations of ‘the Church’ to the question, or the grief, or the emptiness, or the hope in a heart which needs the pure word of the Gospel. A layman in the same situation will not be so initially burdened. He may reach the real issue more quickly and may be able to brush aside irrelevancies which a priest cannot.

The ‘Movement’ required is of priests and laymen both

In fact, what the worker priests are claiming is merely their proper part in the mission to the working class. They are demanding of the Church not a ‘worker priest movement’, as if to claim that once again salvation lies with the ministry. They are demanding a movement of worker churchmen, predominantly lay in composition but containing its due proportion of clergy. That is why from the beginning the Worker Church Group has contained lay members as full participants. The Group appeals for more men and women in the Church either to stay in labouring jobs, for Christ’s sake, or to move from other jobs into them, and to recognise this as a valid and godly vocation. The separation between Church and people is equally real, if not as obvious, at the level of the laity as at the level of the ministry. There is a vital task of mutual interpretation to be done, which can only be accomplished through men and women who in their daily lives bridge the gap between the two worlds. For laymen, this step may be a great deal less spectacular, less ‘interesting’ to the world; less easy to justify in worldly terms. But it may well be that their rewards in effectiveness will far outweigh that of priests, for the reasons suggested above.

Participating, on behalf of the Church

Not that conversions are to be considered the main objective. The chief aim is to share, on behalf of the whole Church, the life of a section of the people which

has been grievously neglected and has suffered injustice for generations. This sharing involves a view of the men and women concerned not simply as individuals in a mass, but as constituting a collective. It would be the greatest mistake if churchmen came to the workers with the idea of fishing them one by one out of the mire into the safety of the Ark of Salvation. The last thing that is wanted is the creation of separated groups of 'Christians' in factories (in this the Group agrees with Bishop Wickham) who write off the rest as lost and who act as if the workers' characteristic collective, the trade union, is at worst an invention of the devil and at best irrelevant to God's plan of salvation. Churchmen are needed who see that it does not follow from the Church's absence from the factory that God also has been absent; who see that things have been accomplished by men apart from the Church which reflect the glory of God, and have much to teach us about aspects of our own Gospel which we have forgotten. Churchmen are wanted who, in the midst of this environment, can carry on what Bishop Wickham calls the 'secular dialogue', striving both to do justice to it in its own terms and also to reveal, little by little, what is God's 'hidden purpose . . . to be put into effect when the time was ripe: namely, that the universe, all in heaven and on earth, might be brought into unity in Christ'.⁷

Leadership of mission not the point

It is within such a context, that of a mission of churchmen to share the life of the working people, that the 'lay

⁷ Ephesians 1:9-10 NEB.

priests' justify their action. They simply claim their place amidst the laity in this sphere—among those who are already there by natural right, as it were, and those who choose to go there on behalf of the Church. They insist that if the Church is to 'be there' in its sacramental wholeness, the ordained ministry must be there among the laity. They do not in this way arrogate to themselves the 'leadership' of the Church's mission. The Church is in any case too obsessed with the problem of 'leadership' and especially of how the clergy should exercise it. Priesthood is not leadership. Leadership is a matter of personal gifts and abilities for causing corporate tasks to be performed. Priesthood is firstly concerned not with corporate tasks but with corporate being. It unifies, mediates and represents, among the body of the faithful, and it *guards* the truth though it is not especially its task to *advance* it. Why, then, do priests push themselves forward into a 'mission field' where there are few or no self-conscious laity, thus apparently exercising leadership? They can only reply that they are Christians too, as well as priests, and they must answer the call to the Church for missionaries when they hear it, not waiting artificially, until there is a proportional body of laity involved before taking the plunge themselves. But this does not make them leaders. It merely places them in the sphere where their priesthood is to be exercised. If they arrive first it may be that they will be of use to laity who come after. Meanwhile, in an important sense, they wait upon the Holy Spirit, whose wind blows where he sees fit and not where we prescribe.

Practical difference from laymen

The priests who earn their living as factory workers are not, therefore, primarily undertaking a piece of 'work' for the Church, except in so far as their daily labour, as 'done unto the Lord', is work for the Church. It is not relevant to ask them 'How is the work going?' unless you mean their production figures, on the assembly line. They are, rather, simply *being* in embryo a slight shift of the Church's attention, a slight adjustment in her centre of gravity. Please God, there will come a time when they will be caught up in a great work of gospelling undertaken by the Church as a whole toward society as a whole, and not in the job of 'evangelising the workers'. Meanwhile, if anyone asks 'How does he (a worker priest) differ from a lay reader . . . in the *practical* part he plays in the economy of the Church and in the Christian impact on society?'⁸ the reply is: very little, if by practical is meant some form of outward action not open to a layman. It is precisely in order to strip himself of the outward, and the worldly, additions to the status of the ministry that a priest becomes a wage worker. He cannot now organise and administer a congregation in the midst of the secular sphere he moves in. He cannot make of religion a thing in itself, with its visible building and its separate activities of worship. He cannot hold a 'living'. But he does not for an instant divest himself of the character conferred upon him at ordination. His word on matters of doctrine and morality are no less the word of a priest.

⁸ Symons, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-5.

If nothing is to be said about the sacraments, in which he of course continues to play his part among the faithful though not overtly among his unchurched workmates, his part in the 'economy of the Church and in the Christian impact on society' is in terms of his undoubted continuance as a focus of authority. Any who come forward, or are brought forward by the laity, may have confidence in his answer to questions and in his teaching, for he does not lack any grace which any other priest enjoys by virtue of his Order. Is this not a 'practical' role to play? Anyone who knows anything about the distortions and ignorances of unchurched people concerning the faith must appreciate the value of there being knowledgeable and authoritative officers of the Church wherever people are, available for questioning at the moment when questions come up, or very soon after. Their usefulness would undoubtedly increase if there were more and more active laymen in their workplaces. Meanwhile, they remain as prophets of a future in which the Church genuinely has come alive within the industrial environment and by its presence is posing questions and inciting men to a dialogue. The present 'practical' lack of 'usefulness' (in quantitative terms) of priests at the work bench is not necessarily evidence that the Church does not need them there. It may as easily stand as witness to the degeneration toward irrelevance which has for so long afflicted the ministry and which is not overcome in a day.

What of the shortage of clergy?

Some critics of the factory priests base their objections

upon the supposed shortage of clergy. How can these men in good conscience deprive the Church of so many hours of service, when so many parishes are desperate for clergy?

It may well be asked, in reply, would this not apply to every exploratory and extra-parochial ministry—that of teachers, theologians, monks and friars, archdeacons in offices, canons in residence, missionary secretaries, and even industrial chaplains! But even if all these were to fall into line and enter the parochial ministry, should they go to parishes in the south of England where the shortage is great, or to the north where it is twice as great, or to the foreign mission field where it is astronomically greater? How will the priorities be decided?

Surely the popular idea of a shortage of clergy is based itself upon the false notion that the Church's ministry is wholly the work of the Church's Ministry. 'We need more clergy so that the work of the Church may be done.' It may well be true that we need more clergy, but this need must be firmly and resolutely keyed to the much greater need for all Christians to recognise their corporate ministry. The existence of a professional clergy does not *necessarily* assist the body of laity, or indeed the body of the clergy themselves, to recognise this, for the efforts of the clergy can hide the failure of the Church as a whole to minister. The worker priests may well ask the professional clergy to explain why they spend so much of their time doing things which laymen could do just as well *qua* laymen. Praying, visiting the sick, running clubs and societies,

attending to the fabric of buildings—these should not be the sole responsibility of the clergy. If it is said that there are not the lay people who are capable and willing to undertake all these tasks, the answer is that that is another problem which the Church is not entitled to solve by making more clergy to do things which could just as well be done by laymen.

Evidently there is a reformation to be undergone by the Church as a whole as regards its objectives and its means of pursuing them. An increase in the number of priests will not be a step towards these objectives unless there is a questioning of traditional assumptions about the boundaries of responsibility of both priests and laity. The priests-in-industry are trying to play a part in this questioning and in the breaking down of set and out-dated notions. This may be as important a contribution to the Church as the objective 'work' of a parish priest.

Let these words, from a personal letter of one of the worker priests, make the matter incisively clear :

. . . I feel it is a matter of vocation. It is no good trying to do something you are not called to do, however great the shortage of clergy may be. We are doing this precisely because we believe it *is* the best way we can serve the Church. Does the Church need more man-hours of 'service'—or new inspiration? Clearly the latter, and once it has the inspiration and the vision all else will follow. The Church needs above all to be made relevant to life, and more clergy just operating within the traditional set-up may even be doing more harm than good.

In any case this idea that we are 'depriving the Church of so many hours of service' assumes that if we were not

workers we would be professional clergy. I for one would not be a priest at all if I could not be a worker priest, so I am certainly not depriving the Church of my services . . .

The last sentiment would not be shared by all the priests of the Group, but the main point is certainly held in common.⁹

'Achievement' a false issue

People are always asking the worker priests questions which amount, put baldly, to this: 'How much have you achieved so far by this unusual ministry?' This is partly because of a hidden presupposition about a clerical monopoly of evangelism, indeed a clerical preoccupation with *verbal* evangelism. It is partly also because they do not realise how unready the Church is for 'evangelism', and that readiness is not merely a matter of making up one's mind to it. Putting aside the work of specially gifted individuals, evangelism is much more a product of corporate life, corporate understanding, corporate verve and corporate intention, than many are yet able to realise. The winning of people for the Kingdom of God depends a great deal upon the unexpressed knowledge, in the mind of both missionary and missionee, of the character of the Church which has sent the missionary. If both know, and secretly regret, the sorry state of division, worldliness and self-regardiness in which the Church has floundered for so long, then how can 'results' be expected? How can results be

⁹ See below: 'A comparison with the religious vocation,' p. 59.

expected from a few men who come representing a Church which has been careless so long, self-concerned so long, disunited so long? Of course this is to speak only of human powers to overcome obstacles. It is testimony to the wonders of God's grace that nevertheless people are converted from time to time. God appeals direct to the heart and mind, through the simple word of the gospeller. A man who is ready for the Gospel can intuitively realise that the eternal truth, the way of salvation, the perfection of the Kingdom of God into which he is called to enter are not in themselves one whit compromised by the sins of the Church. Christ if he pleases will come directly into any soul which is willingly offered to him. But it does not follow that human powers and human obstacles, individual and institutional, are irrelevant. For most men there is a mountain chain of obstacles to the Gospel in the various public signs of sinful worldliness in the Church. Clerical scandals are the least of these but are readily seized upon by people who cannot articulate their contempt for a body which, professing to follow the carpenter of Nazareth, yet secures itself so firmly in the world of finance, whose clergy effectively cherish their separateness from the people, whose congregations seem to care only for themselves and their 'services'.

Mountains are for moving, for Christ's sake. There must be proofs, by deed, that the Church loves, that the Church repents, that the clergy do not really care about their social position, that the Church Commissioners are not just a group of financial manipulators caring only about maximising returns on capital so that sti-

pends may be raised. And proofs must touch men's experience, not merely be published in the newspapers. Proofs must be given by the example of men who can be named by name and found among the people, men who are accessible not only spatially but culturally. The worker priests do not imagine even for a moment that their way is the only way of doing this or the only way in which it is being done today. They claim that it is *a* way and an indispensable one for the Church.

The problem of appearing to patronise

Here it is appropriate to deal with a question which is often raised with the priests-in-industry. Will not the workers resent your coming among them and suspect that it is an act of condescension?

The question is not to be treated with contempt. Bishop Wickham says: 'Whether worker priests or students, they should be wary of claiming an "identification with the workers"'. Clergy and theological students cannot be other than they are, with their background and education, and the English workman, whatever criticisms he may have of what he understands as the clergyman's life, strongly resents the suggestion that he himself is a poor benighted wretch, in need of compassion, the object of the missionary enterprise. We must not allow theory or zeal to blind us to the baffling realities of English industrial life. The tolerance, indifference, humour and easy "carry-on" there would allow a Buddhist monk to take a prayer-wheel into the works, and the chaps would do no more than rag him—and go

on playing cards!'¹⁰ All this is perfectly true except the implication that a worker priest would, in effect, flourish his religion before his workmates in anything like the style of the putative Buddhist monk! Note, too, that the objection on the grounds of educational background applies as much to laymen of education undertaking this way of life as to priests. Now, is it not a tragedy that this can be said at all? And does this not open out the whole problem of the relation of the 'cultured' with the 'uncultured' sections of our society? Here is a subject which deserves a whole book to itself. What is the meaning of this cultural cleavage, from the Christian point of view, and what can be done about it? All we can say here is that the man or woman who makes a bridge across this barrier by working in a factory must prove by his behaviour that his motives exclude patronage. No part of this involves trying to forget his education, as if it has no place in this environment. This would be to perpetuate, not move to heal, the cleavage. What is required is a great and continuous effort of imagination in order to understand the minds of people who have had a different kind of education. This in turn calls for a great deal of listening, though even this also can be done in a patronising way. It calls for participation in the organisations of the working people without succumbing to the temptation to 'put them right'. It calls even for participation in their leisure-time activities, though this is much harder, especially for a family man. Everything depends on a proper humility and a proper charity, without excess. In the missioner there must be a con-

¹⁰ *Priests and Workers*, p. 148.

stant struggle to make a true marriage between these two backgrounds; to assimilate, to sort, to evaluate, the elements of both backgrounds in the light of one another. And then, when speaking, to speak with sincerity and without airs.

If these things are done, experience shows that there is no danger of serious resentment or rejection. Above all, the factory is a place where people earn their livings. If a man is there to do that, nobody will mind his other motives and may even be interested in them from time to time, which is all that is to be expected (not, surely, that he will interrupt their game of cards!). If he accepts office in his trade union, or in some factory committee, he will be judged by the way he carries out the office, not by some preconceived notion of his motives. If he argues, his arguments will be judged by the merits which are recognised in them, not on the basis of contempt for his upper-class background. In the course of the years it may be that the advantages of his education will be made use of, consciously or unconsciously, by his workmates. This is something to be waited for, not thrust upon them. And by the time it happens he will himself have found a deal of cultural riches in the environment which he has entered.

Will he be suspected of 'meddling'?

Both Bishop Wickham¹¹ and W. G. Symons¹² fear that workpeople will conclude that a worker priest is merely *using* his work as a *means* for 'ecclesiastical

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹² *Frontier*, Spring 1961, p. 46.

ends', 'interfering', 'meddling' from outside. One suspects that this is what they secretly think a priest *would* do in this context. What a poor judgment of the English clergy this implies! Meddling, interfering, and using things for extraneous ends are the sort of crimes of which people outside often rightly accuse the Church. They are outsiders' methods. They cannot be the methods of priests whose first desire is to accept the conditions of those inside—in other words, to become insiders. This is a first principle of the method of the Incarnation. You don't go in in order to fish people out, or to manipulate to an extraneous end. You go in because the Church must be there. You then pursue the logic of the life in its most wholesome aspects, shunning the unwholesome as far as you can. One day, it may be, you will be permitted to show how the glory of God is waiting to crown that wholesome logic, bring the life to its true end. If this is meddling it is godly meddling, and is an occupational hazard for *all* Christians in *any* sphere, not just for priests in factories.

Loyalty to the job

Symons also says that the layman has a double loyalty—to his job and to the Church: that they are 'parallel and interdependent in the sense that the loyalty to work is in no way to be subordinated to the loyalty to the Church . . . both responsibilities are equally placed on him by God'. Can a priest have the same sort of double commitment? 'Or do they see their various jobs as convenient and neutral opportunities, enabling them

“to proclaim the Gospel free of charge” and to meet other folk, but of only secondary importance compared with their primary loyalty to their priestly Orders? . . .¹³

Would Symons say that for the Christian the loyalty to work is in no way to be subordinated to the loyalty to the *Kingdom*? This would surely be absurd. Can there be any part of life which we ought to keep independent of the reign of God? But the word ‘Church’ brings in a difficulty because it may be understood in the sense of a temporal organisation to which the clergy owe a more closely-binding loyalty than the laity. This understanding of it, however, is to be rejected out of hand. That the Church is temporal in one aspect, yes, but that one Order is more bound to it than another, no. This is just the sort of clerical-lay division which ought not to be made. It effectively reduces the layman to second-class membership in the Church, leaving his secular work outside the sphere of redemption. If, on the other hand, the loyalty of the layman to the Church is no less binding than that of the priest, then priesthood and laity are states which have nothing whatever, in essence, to do with how a man contributes to the work of the world. Just as a priest’s vocation may include either his being married or his being single, so it may include either his being a plumber or his being the full-time officer of a parish.

It may be that the present few priests-in-industry reveal in their writing and in their talking some relics of the very clericalism which they are attacking. It may be that men who have only for a few years earned their

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 46-7.

living as manual labourers after many years of middle-class status manifest in their attitude to their jobs a certain lack of naturalness. And if you are asked to talk ‘about being a worker priest’ to a group of churchpeople, it is not surprising if they gain the impression that your job is a means to an ‘extraneous’ end. But none of these human failings should be built up into a sort of theological objection to priests working in industry. They are the consequences of the Church’s present unreal pattern of integration with the world. They are, please God, not permanent.

Sectional priesthoods?

The worker priests have been asked whether the logic of their going into the factories as workers is not that every section of society should have its ‘identifying’ priests—not only the manual workers, but technical staff, management, the healing professions, artists, professional sportsmen, lawyers, police, professional politicians, and so on. The answer is that sectional identification is not an issue with the Worker Church Group. If the Church Commissioners’ financial structure were undermined, as it might be under a socialist government, the Bishops would soon find themselves ordaining men in all sorts of walks of life. This would not be particularly because they happened to be in certain professions but just because they were called to the ministry. In the Diocese of Southwark this kind of thing has already begun to happen and the priests-in-industry have been joined by deacons in other professions who

can expect to become priests in due course. But it must be made plain that the members of the Worker Church Group, whether priests or laymen, are in *wage-earning manual work* precisely as an expression of their faith. It is not because priests must be found in every section of society that they are there, but because this sphere is more than 'a section of society'. It is the class at the bottom of the accepted structure of society and, as such, makes a peculiar demand upon the Church in the name of Christ. Thus while it is true to say that the Worker Church Group as a whole would favour the extension of the priesthood into any walk of life on the basis of the general principles put forward by Roland Allen,¹⁴ they would have it understood that this view of the ministry is not their essential concern. Even the question of *priests* in industry is not primary for them, but is important only as an essential part of the question of the *Church's* approach to the wage workers through the sharing of their conditions of life.

Danger of 'heteronomy'

This said, however, it is necessary to answer an objection to worker priests upon which Bishop Wickham lays great store. Patrick McLaughlin, also in *Priests and Workers*,¹⁵ had urged an abandonment of the medieval identification of 'priest' and 'clerk'. He saw the need of priests becoming workers in the wake of a lay apostolate because in order for the Church to be 'made' in any

¹⁴ In *The Ministry of the Spirit*, World Dominion Press, 1960.

¹⁵ Chapter titled 'Priest or Clergyman', p. 104.

place or culture the sacramental ministry must be present among the laity. To the Bishop this conjured up a frightful vision of priests moving not only into every professional occupation but into every department and sub-department of, say, a steel works! He puts a rather ludicrous construction on McLaughlin's theory, but at the same time he raises a real question. 'Would there, in theory, be a priest for every factory department and every social level in the works, for every little garage and every professional group? And where would he express the Church visibly in his milieu, with the marks of Word and Sacrament? To do so outside the place of natural assembly, outside the works context, presents formidable problems in the highly mobile urban conglomerates and presents a fantastic picture of "going to church". But to express the Church visibly in the work context would be to tear up the secular community into the sacred and profane, and to bring division amongst men who have got to live and work together, and sin against the cardinal principle of mission which is "engagement" in the secular scene. . . . One trembles at the potential "heteronomy" of the Church over against the secular world implicit in such a concept of the Church and ministry. It is precisely such "heteronomy" that engenders the worst forms of secular autonomy in the life of the world. People who cannot go all the way with the Church feel compelled to justify themselves by opposition.'¹⁶

In other words, either the lay priests create unreal congregations of people out of their section or profes-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-3.

sions, meeting outside the place of work, or they create 'holy huddles' at work, dividing the people whose redemption ought to be corporately wrought.

This dilemma is only inescapable if it is assumed that the priest has come to the factory in search of a congregation. If it can be seen that he has come only to work, as any Christian worker comes, the dilemma disappears. Why should the priest be any less aware than the layman of the dangers of 'heteronomy'; of the danger in the Christian group 'gaining power' in a place, in a trade union, and trying to 'save' men despite themselves? The priest is there not to gather around him a group of Christians who will set out to take the place by spiritual storm. The priests-in-industry, no less than Bishop Wickham, look for the common working out of salvation at the workplace and the use of the workers' own traditional means to this end. Nobody can rule out of court the getting together of believers who happen to work in one place, whether or not there is a priest among them. Anyone among them who realises the danger of the 'holy huddle', the group which in effect ignores the work which God has already done through secular institutions and makes 'religion' a thing in itself, will do his best to warn the others. And no one need fear the worker priest's role in this matter any more than the layman's.

Representative character of priest

Speaking for himself—for not everything that is said under this heading is agreeable to all the priests of the

Group—the present writer is not unconcerned about his sacramental inactivity at the workplace. He does not forget that he is a priest and he longs for the day when his workmates will know it in a fuller sense than is possible at present and will not find it strange if he should exercise his Eucharistic functions in their midst, accompanied by those among them who believe. Yet he knows this may not come in his lifetime, for it will be a fruit of great changes which God must first bring about in the Church. Meanwhile, though poor evangelist he may be, inhibited as to pastoral care, altarless among those whom he would love most to represent at the altar, yet he is, as a priest, in a special sense representative of the wonderful and sacred Mystery, which is the Church of God, and he stands as a promise to all with eyes to see that the Church, as an organic whole, cares.

Limitation of pastoral scope

The question is asked whether, in the England of the 60s, where so many workers travel great distances from home to work, the worker priest will not find 'his social contacts confined to the bench'.¹⁷

In the first place, it must be pointed out that this is true also for the layman. His social contacts with anybody will be only where he can find them. It is only if it is assumed that the priest ought to have, and should be capable of sustaining, a wider circle of 'social contacts' among the unchurched that this objection has any point. But this assumption is false. It is true only where

¹⁷ Valerie Pitt, *Church of England Newspaper*, April 29th, 1960.

the priest is *employed for the purpose* and thus the assumption begs the question. The worker priest's social contacts are not of paramount importance. What is most important for this witness is simply the submission, on behalf of the whole Church, to the conditions of the wage-earner's life.

Inevitably there are social contacts both within the factory with workmates, and outside the factory with the people in the neighbourhood of the priest's own home. The quality of these is more important than their number. They generally give rise, not to 'pastoral work' or any overtly religious attention, but simply to exchange between persons. As often as not the priest is changed and matured by these relationships rather than the other. There is no unreal desire to 'follow up' contacts from the factory to the home. For most working-class folk there is a rather definite separation of the working circle from the home circle, which has to be respected until there is a clear indication to the contrary.

These terms and conditions of 'social contact' the worker priest accepts, knowing that his prime purpose is not to search out and help individuals but to participate with men in their working life, and with his wife and family to live the life of the neighbourhood.

Meanwhile, he is not prevented from praying for his mates and using the wider knowledge and understanding which he has received through his education and his experience in prayer, to make his prayers larger in scope—in other words, in a sense to pray *on behalf* of the factory community.

The priest's own needs

What of the priest's own needs as a priest; the nurturing of his capacities as a pastor of Christ's flock, as a preacher and as a minister of the sacraments?

The priests of the Worker Church Group have in practice adopted various methods of exercising priestly functions outside the factory. One has always believed in uniting his vocation to industry with the pastoral care of a small parish, or at any rate a daughter congregation of the parish church. The rest all have links, more or less close, with a parish church. One has had a small 'gathered' congregation meeting in his house, both for discussion and for the celebration of the sacraments. Another operates from a community house which is the London centre of a small, rather close-knit liturgical society within the Anglican Communion, for which he has responsibility in that area. In every case, however, the worker priest has at least one and sometimes two 'congregations' behind him, however small, within which his preaching, teaching, counselling and sacramental functions are exercised. There is no tendency to separate from the body of the Church or to withdraw from the authority of the Bishop.

It is much too early in the history of this form of outreach among the industrial working class to discern the dominant patterns which will be followed by the priests concerned, in maintaining their integration with the Church as it is. Problems will undoubtedly arise for Bishops, but this is no more than can be expected of so unconventional a plan of action. A great deal will

depend on the willingness of all concerned—congregations and their parish priests, the worker priests themselves, and the Bishops, to be frank with one another in all charity, and to discuss the meanings and implications of the various aspects and phases of these developments before making decisions that are hurtful to any party.

III

SOME SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

St. Paul's own words

One of the marvels of Holy Scripture is the way in which, perhaps when a man least expects it, a truth will suddenly spring forth from it for the exaltation of the spirit and a spur to action. In every generation, in every place, in every peculiarity of circumstance, the Bible has been known to do this for men, making them discover truth which they had read a hundred times, even meditated upon, but yet had not *seen*. It is this way for some of us with the ninth chapter of St. Paul's first letter to the Church in Corinth. Here, Paul is reacting with some exasperation to accounts he has received that he is being belittled in relation to Peter and the other apostles, apparently on the ground that he does not travel about as the others do at the expense of his flock. A man who has to put aside time to work at his trade in the midst of the community to which he is bearing the Gospel does not have so imposing or authoritative an air about him as one who comes and lives at the expense of the community. Paul freely acknowledges the right of the apostle to material support. He establishes it from commonsense examples and from scripture, but he is nettled,

for he wishes his correspondents could see that it honours a man as much to *reject* this support as it does to accept it, provided his motives are good. Paul's humanity, his pride, more than peep out of this chapter. He knows it, but he knows too that it is not only a matter of human pride in his desire 'to make the Gospel of Christ without charge'. He knows that there is at the heart of him a 'necessity'—he groans with intensity at the thought of it—to declare the gospel to every sort of person he encounters; and to win over as many as possible he must make himself everyone's servant. His 'power in the gospel' (his right to support) must not, at all costs, stand between him and those to whom he preaches. What is more, in order to win Jews he must be Jewish and Law-abiding, to win Gentiles he must be free of the Law, to win the weak he must be weak. He must be all things to all men that he might by all means save some.

There are two strands to this argument. The first is that his right to material support from the Christians, if exercised, might cut him off from some, make him seem less of the 'servant unto all' that he would like to be.

The second is that he must submit himself to the limiting conditions, notably the psychological and ideological framework, and even the level of spiritual strength, of a man in order to win him over. This is the argument for identification *par excellence*.

We of the Worker Church Group cannot hope to be all things to all men. We do not have Paul's genius, his personality, nor his unique opportunity. But we do feel

within ourselves the force of both strands of his argument in relation to the common people. Not only must we be quit of a privilege (the clerical stipend) which appears to belie the spiritual constraint which lies upon us to serve the Kingdom; but also we must share the conditions which encompass those to whom we go, in order to make the Gospel seem more compelling. 'To the weak, became I as weak, that I might gain the weak.'

We are only too aware that there is a terrible danger of spiritual pride in all this, a danger of being content with this one motion of identification when what is required is a profound and consistent love. What can we say? We know it. We are sinners. But will you not have us at least try to express love this way, and will you be so bold as to say this way is only for a few? Will you put limits upon the grace of God?

Our Lord's own example

We know from *Seeds of the Desert*, by the Prior General of the Little Brothers of Jesus, that Charles de Foucauld, the inspirer of that remarkable little Order, was passionately devoted to the 'Mystery of Nazareth'. This was the period of the 'hidden years' spent by our Lord in his own town as a man in the midst of his family and engrossed day after day with the work by which he earned his bread. De Foucauld, when he came to prescribe his ideal for the community he proposed, wrote,

. . . take the life of Nazareth in its simplicity and broad-

ness as your objective in every way and in every connection . . . no special costume or habit—like Jesus at Nazareth . . . no enclosure—like Jesus at Nazareth . . . no isolated place of abode, but close by some village—like Jesus of Nazareth . . . not less than eight hours of work (manual or otherwise, but the former as far as possible) per day—like Jesus at Nazareth . . . neither large properties nor large buildings, nor large expenditures, nor even large sums in alms, but real poverty in every respect—like Jesus at Nazareth. . . . Pray as Jesus prayed, pray as much as Jesus prayed; always make plenty of room for prayer. . . . And, as He did, do plenty of manual work, for manual work does not mean time taken from prayer, but time given to prayer. . . . The life of Nazareth can be led anywhere at all; you must lead it wherever it will be most helpful to your neighbour.¹

It must not be thought that the spirituality of the Worker Church Group is in any way a copy of that of the Little Brothers. For one thing, few of us had heard much of the Order before commencing our work in factories, and for another, none of us would aspire to the Gallican extravagance in spiritual things which de Foucauld appears to have expected of his children in Christ!

But this basis in the mystery of Nazareth could well be our own. Was the working life of Jesus, before his public ministry, a mere accident of the circumstances of his birth? Or was there something spiritually constitutive about those years of manual labour and of 'ordinary life' which we lack to our impoverishment? Of course,

¹ *Seeds of the Desert* by R. Voillaume, Burns and Oates, 1955, p. 22.

it can only be *strictly* argued from our Lord's example that those who are to conduct a public ministry should have a preparation comparable to his. But it may not seem absurd, to those who want to see, that some of us could wish to take up that 'life of Nazareth' in emulation of Jesus, not as an act of preparation but as a way of commitment to him, and to do it in the terms of modern society. Not even, indeed, as de Foucauld suggests, 'close by some village', but in the midst of the city, at the heart of the masses.² And, again, not even as an Order of celibates but simply as Christian men and women, secularised yet desiring sanctity.

A comparison with the religious vocation

We have now reached a time in the Church of England when hardly anyone seriously questions the validity of what is known as the 'Religious Vocation', that is the self-giving of men and women to the Kingdom of God under vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. There still cling to the Anglican Religious Orders strong signs of affinity with Roman Catholic traditions, but both because this in itself is less suspect than it used to be, and also because we are plainly and painfully struggling toward a common Christian mind which transcends past divisions, the 'Religious Life' is being accepted as a treasury of blessings for the Church, albeit with its own kind of faults and distortions too! Even the Reformed and Lutheran Churches on the Continent are bringing forth these new 'offspring', as the Roman Missal quaintly calls their papist counterparts.

² The French title of *Seeds of the Desert* is 'Au Cœur des Masses'.

Now without for a moment going into the question whether or not the Religious Life should always today be formalised in the way it generally is, it is good to recall that in their beginnings the earliest Religious Orders had a much more 'secular' look than they have now. They were simply groups of people in ordinary dress going apart to make their lives flower in certain ways by pruning them in others. They earned their livings like everyone else, chiefly by working on the land. And they included both laymen and priests.

We are not here making a claim to be Religious with a capital R. This is a matter of terms, which is not of prime importance. But we do claim there are certain similarities between our vocation and that of friars, monks and nuns. These purposely uproot themselves from their 'normal' circle of life, and find a new life in a new circle for the Kingdom's sake. So do we. These accept certain limitations and conditions which their usual circle does not accept, in order to be able to channel their energy in unusual ways. We do not demand celibacy of ourselves, nor the sort of obedience, nor the sort of poverty of the Religious. But we embrace a sort of poverty, as real though more 'secular', and we feel thereby equally channelled into a sphere otherwise closed to us. In this respect indeed it may be that our vocation is a little nearer to the Franciscan spirit than modern Franciscanism.

But most important of all, there is a similarity with the Religious Life, and not only with the Religious Life but with other phenomena in the Church, in that this pattern of response to the contemporary situation is not

something which the Church *decides* to call forth or *organises* into existence. It is something which *happens* to the Church or within the Church. It is a way of life, not a scheme thought up by someone. This is not to say that it is not to be responsive to authority. But it is not primarily a technique used by authority, wielded by authority for purposes thought up externally to its own spirit and logic.

This is why we would have people understand that there is a difference between what the Worker Church Group stand for and any organised scheme for priests in secular jobs such as has been set up in the Diocese of Southwark. For this sort of scheme in general we have every respect. It strives to face realities about the supply of ordinands for the ministry, it strikes a blow against excessive professionalism among the clergy, and also it can promote a more wholesome interpenetration of the Church and the world. But it should be noticed that this sort of scheme, as such, has nothing in particular to say, and in fact must not say 'anything in particular' about the Church's separation from the working class. This is because it must look out upon all levels of society with an equal eye. But our prime concern is not at all that of providing priests-in-secular-jobs for the Church. It is not even that of providing priests for the working class. It is, rather, simply to be Christians in a certain fashion. The early monasteries, looking for their special 'fashion' of being Christians, found it in the desert, away from the established centres of social life. Their choice of environment, which, if made today, would seem to us a matter of pure escapism, was in the circumstances of

their age something more than flight from the world. It arose from a profound realism about human nature and society in their times and it resulted in very far-reaching effects upon European civilisation. We have today an opportunity to make a comparable choice. Looking for the environment in which the life of holiness may be nurtured with the least interference of worldliness, we do not turn to the deserts of Australia or the prairies of Canada. We turn rather to a *social milieu*, one which is as huge and omnipresent as the desert and the wild in the dark ages. And the one we choose—or which chooses us—is the one in which people have the smallest stake in, and the least responsibility for, the world as it is; the one where people have the least power and whose temptations are mostly severely limited because their opportunities are small. This is the desert of the common people. The Church must be truly planted and rooted there, as it was planted and rooted in the wild places of Europe through the monastic orders of the earlier centuries.

Thus we are engaged not simply in a missionary approach to a large neglected group in society. We are trying to represent a fashion of life demanded by the Gospel. This is the fashion which rejects worldly wealth and worldly power for as long as need be, until *all* are able to hold wealth and power and *all* have become free citizens of the Kingdom of God.

We are, therefore, setting out to declare something about the Gospel, not only to the working class but, perhaps even more, to the Church. It is imperative that Christian people should face the uncomfortable fact

that their relationship with unchurched society is not *simply* that of bearers of the message of salvation to the heathen. There are some truths of the Gospel which can deliver as much of a shock to churchmen as to others—perhaps even more so. And those shocks must be given, even though they may appear to some to place the Church in an unfavourable comparison with those outside. They must be given, because in all ages the Gospel must be declared anew and rediscovered the hard way, demanding repentance and a readjustment of values not alone of the unbeliever but also of the believer.

Let churchmen now judge what it means *for themselves* that some few have chosen to express their faith in the way defended here. Let them ask themselves not simply whether these individuals are right to do what they are doing, whether the movement has any future, whether they are merely fulfilling their own inner spiritual needs. Instead, let it be asked, 'What is being said about the Gospel by this venture, and does it mean anything to me?'

APPENDIX A
STATEMENT

OF
A GROUP OF CHURCHMEN, PRIESTS
AND LAY, WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO BE
WAGE-WORKERS IN INDUSTRY AS AN
EXPRESSION OF THEIR FAITH

[February 1959]

INTRODUCTION

It is now widely recognised that there is a serious and deep-rooted estrangement between the Church and the industrial wage-earners of this country (henceforward referred to as 'workers' or 'working people', the terms by which they describe themselves). Committees, missions and projects of all sorts are springing up to tackle the problem.

Most of these efforts are addressed to the workers from conventional footholds in the Church—chaplaincies, parishes, and formal missions. The Church may be expected to gain much from these, providing they are inspired with humility and patience and willingness to re-examine traditional assumptions.

We ourselves, however, feel called to answer this challenge at another level, by binding up our own salvation with that of the industrial workers. This, we feel, can only be done by working as they work and living

upon the earnings of our labour as they do. Substantially, therefore, we speak as a group of men and women, with their families, all committed by this decision to a certain form of life, addressing the working people primarily by involvement rather than by propaganda. What we espouse is not primarily a 'technique of evangelism' but a form of obedience.

We may further clarify our position as follows:

1. *The Way of the Incarnation*

The Church is out of contact with the lives of most working-class people. It is not a natural growth within their kind of life but stands without. Speaking generally, it does not understand them and their problems and they have little confidence in it or its representatives. This separation is primarily regarded in the Church as a technical rather than a spiritual problem. We think it should be clearly recognised that for the Church to be out of contact with the people is *sin*. Technique is no answer to sin.

It seems to us that the answer to this situation is for the Church to enter with humility and sympathy into the life of the working people and build up the Church from within—that is, by Christians who are called to it becoming or remaining workers. Even on the human level this seems the obvious way to grow in understanding of the workers and to win their confidence. But beyond this, it is surely right for a faith founded on the Incarnation. The Christian minister or missionary must

be, and must be felt and known to be, one with his people. 'It is not enough for the Church to speak out of its security. Following our incarnate and crucified Lord, we must live in such identification with man, with his sin, his hopes and fears, his misery and needs, that we become his brother and can witness from his place and condition to God's love for him. Those outside the Church make little distinction between faith and works' (World Council of Churches, Evanston Report, Section II). Work is for us not an opportunity for propaganda, but the means whereby we become one with the working people.

This is not a wasteful use of the Church's manpower. It is a proper exercise in faith. In the midst of a world which believes in salvation through money, technique and force, Christians believe in the power of the 'foolishness' of the Cross.

2. *The Meaning of Evangelism*

All evangelism is the work of the Holy Spirit. Successful evangelism is not primarily the result of organisations and plans, but it follows from lives inspired by the Holy Spirit. Evangelism is not just getting people to church. Nor is it merely altering people's opinions. To evangelise is to convey the love of God to people in any way possible—by word and by life. It is to make men know and feel that they are loved—that behind our feeble love lies the absolute Love of God seen in the Cross of Christ. In that experience lies the possibility of response, and therefore of salvation. Thus the first step in evangelism is not one of controversy, but always one

of love. We ourselves feel bound to express this spirit of love by becoming one with the workers. 'There are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of service but the same Lord' (1 Cor. 12:4 RSV).

3. *The Gospel Free of Charge*

Our feeling is similar to that of St. Paul as expressed in 1 Cor. chap. 9. He recognises clearly that the preacher of the Gospel has a right to get his living by the Gospel: but he goes on to say that he has not made use of this right, but prefers to earn his living by work, in order to make the Gospel 'free of charge' (v. 18), i.e. in order the more fully to express the love of Christ, by seeking no material gain in return for his preaching. Further, the completeness of this self-giving love makes him want to become 'the slave of all' (v. 19) and 'all things to all men that I might by all means save some' (v. 22).

We think this applies to both laymen and clergy. It is merely accidental that most of the Church's paid agents are clergy.

4. *Vocation to Poverty*

Throughout the ages Christians have been called to show forth Christ's love by sharing the lot of the poor. We also feel this impulse. And though in England today the wage earners are not uniformly poor in material things, yet, as a class, they are the lowest stratum of society: suffering a 'poverty' which is a complex of conditions—the very wage-status itself, the impersonal

nature of much of the work, the deprivation of responsibility, job insecurity, educational under-privilege, and low social status.

5. *The Gospel in Material Terms*

If we seriously intend to get over the Gospel to the people of our time, we must live it in the materialistic terms of money and work which they most easily understand. For our part, this means that we must express our faith by sharing fully the life of the wage-earning class. In our opinion only on the basis of such a life is the preaching of the Word likely to carry much conviction in modern industrial society.

6. *Rediscovering the Gospel*

We wish to learn, even while we live it ourselves, what the Gospel should mean for industrial workers and their families, and how to express it so that it may be understood. We must not only humbly learn the outlook and conditions of life of those so long estranged from the life of the Church, but also, with them, allow our grasp of the faith to be deepened. Our purpose is not to 'translate the Gospel into terms which simple people can understand', but to discover again what the Gospel of Love means for today, in life as well as in word.

It follows that we must learn the practice of prayer, worship, and the priestly vocation (in its particular and general sense) in the life and work of those with whom we have to do.

7. Dignity of Labour

We believe that manual labour, the necessary support of the material fabric of society, partakes, like other forms of work, of an intrinsic nobility conferred by the Creator. The status of worker has therefore a godly dignity in itself. We seek to make it manifest. It is only by seeing it in this way and recovering the sense of a divine vocation in such a life that the fatigue, boredom, and apparent triviality of labour in industry may be freely borne and given its true significance.

8. No Classes in Christ

We believe that most social benevolence as commonly taught and practised gives all aid short of equality of essential status and that this is repugnant to the will of God and falls short of Christian love. The Incarnation of God is with man as simply man, and whatever in the structure and practice of society demeans one class of men in relation to another is a virtual denial of the Incarnation.

9. Secular Precedents

In the Lord's own words, the Gospel is the good news of the Kingdom of God. To preach the Gospel among the workers is therefore to stand for the Kingdom in industry, that is, for a re-ordering of industrial relations, and even of the economic structure of society. But we are by no means first in the field. We are preceded by various secular and partial expressions of the human

desire for brotherhood and justice. Among such are the Trade Unions. We feel bound therefore to enter into the struggles for justice, brotherhood and industrial democracy which are already going on in secular terms, serving the Gospel no less in this way than in direct personal acts of love.

10. Church Finance

We are uneasy about the present financial policy of the Church of England. We believe that the Church, more than any other body, should be self-supporting, and that the clergy, if they do not earn their own living by secular work, should be dependent on the giving of Church members. Although this is gradually being realised in the Church and efforts are being made to implement it, the official financial structure of the Church does not accept its implications. The charge often made by working men that the clergy are state-paid is far too near the mark. Although they are not actually state-paid, the fact remains that in practice most of them are living very largely on 'unearned income' (i.e. the interest from past investments). This, to the working man, is as bad as being state-paid. With some justice he may regard the clergy as living on the fruits of his labour, and without his consent.

11. Relation to the Conventional Ministry

We would emphasise that we are in no sense in competition with the paid ministry, although we believe the clergy should not partake so much of the character of a

profession in the secular world as they now do. We are anxious to work in co-operation with the parochial ministry in every way, and with any specialised ministries with which we may come in contact. Some of us prefer to exercise a primarily parochial ministry, being committed as priests on the staff of or in charge of parishes; while others of us desire to be clear of parochial responsibility in order to have greater freedom to experiment in whatever way seems best. We think that there is a place for worker priests in both of these situations.

12. *Worker Priests*

The Lambeth Conference (1958) has said plainly that there is no theological principle which forbids a man being ordained priest while continuing in his lay occupation (Resolution 89). We wish to take this further: the expression of religion in daily life in the world is not an extra, but is of the essence of Christianity. It therefore seems right that *some* clergy—the accredited leaders of the Church—should be fully in the strains and stresses of daily life to the extent of earning their living at secular work. The laity are frequently told to exercise Christian leadership in their place of work and to work out a pattern of Christian discipleship there, and so they should. But it seems both unreasonable and unkind to expect them to do this effectively in a sphere of life in which their appointed spiritual leaders are not engaged, particularly when the problem of witness in that sphere (the sphere of industrial work) is acknowledged to be one of the most intractable problems facing the Church today.

13. *The Wholeness of our Mission*

Our mission is not confined, even at present, to worker priests, nor is it conceived as a 'Worker-Priest Movement'. It is rather, we believe, a fundamental expression of the Christian response to modern industrial society, and as such the whole Church needs to be adequately represented in it. That means clergy and a predominance of laity, men and women, married and unmarried, all alike responding to the call to glorify God in the lives of the workers. Some who have grown up in this life will feel called to surrender the chance to escape from it. Others, who enter from without, will surrender claims to privileged status and security.

14. *Responsibility to our Children*

(Additional paragraph agreed at Whitsun 1961)

To most of us family life is an important part of our calling; in any case, the normal worker's outlook on life is conditioned by the fact that he has a family to support. We have frequently been asked whether we are being fair to our children in depriving them of many material and educational advantages which we might otherwise have been able to give them.

Behind this question may be the assumption that the welfare of our children should be our first concern. But in fact the family as a unit must put God and *his* will first—'and all these things shall be added unto you'.

Since we see our calling as an acting out of the Gospel which involves the whole of our lives, it follows natur-

ally that our families (while they are still dependent on us) will share in it.

We are concerned to redeem the situation in which we find ourselves, not to contract out of it. Our children are no more important in the sight of God than other children, and we can show our care for all the children in the area, including our own, by working for a common improvement of standards in health, education, etc., though we recognise that as parents there is a particular kind of love and consideration which we can and must give to our own children. To exclude our children from the life we have chosen to live would be to renounce our whole faith in it.

Finally, it is our impression, as we grow in years in this calling, that, far from denying anything really necessary to our children's welfare, our life provides for them a fulness and richness of experience such as might not have been available to them in a more conventional setting.

(Signed)

SHERRY WALDON
 TOM WALDON
 VERONICA STRONG
 JOHN STRONG (The Rev.)
 ANNE GRUBB
 MARTYN GRUBB (The Rev.)
 ISABEL ROWE
 JOHN ROWE (The Rev.)
 BARBARA WILLIAMSON
 TONY WILLIAMSON

The following, who are also of this vocation, are in general agreement with the above statement, though for reasons of distance they have not been able to take part in the conferences which have produced it.

ALICE HEAP
 DON HEAP (The Rev.)
 TOM QUIGLEY (The Rev.)

17/11/64

APPENDIX B

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

ON THE PRIESTS OF THE WORKER CHURCH GROUP

JACK STRONG. Ordained 1938. Southwark curacies twelve years. From 1951 became one of two worker priests having jobs in Kent coalmine and charge of local parish. Both withdrew 1954. Joined staff of Bedfordshire parish 1955, with shop-floor job in factory. From 1956, while continuing in same factory, priest-in-charge village parish six years. Shop steward. Short period in North. In 1964 became colleague to priest-in-charge council estate and got motor factory job nearby. Oxford Diocese. Age 49. Married. Three children.

MARTYN GRUBB. After university, five years in shop-floor jobs. Withdrew eighteen months for theological course, ordination (1957) and curacy. Returned to industry 1958. Now a radial driller in large engineering firm. Shop steward. Associated with parish church without regular duties. London Diocese. Age 37. Married. Four children.

JOHN ROWE. Ordained 1951. Curacies five years. Brewery worker from 1956. Now electrician's mate, same firm. Regularly assists parish priest with services on Sundays and Holy Days. London Diocese. Age 41. Married. Five children.

TONY WILLIAMSON. After theological college, two years in shop-floor jobs. Ordained 1960 without giving up job. Now drives fork-lift truck in large motor works. City Councillor since 1961. Assists parish clergy with services. Oxford Diocese. Age 31. Married. Three children.

TOM QUIGLEY. Ordained 1942. Curacy three years. Army chaplain twelve years. First factory job 1957. Now labourer in electrical manufacturing works. Regularly assists with Sunday services in parish church and with parish activities where possible. Blackburn Diocese. Age 45. Single.

KENNETH RAMSEY. Ordained 1952. Curacy five years. Temporary factory job during curacy. Chaplain at Lee Abbey and Scargill four years. First permanent factory job 1961. Now radio assembler in factory. Some assistance to parish priest. Southwark Diocese. Age 46. Married. One child.

DON HEAP. (Canadian, associated by correspondence with Worker Church Group.) Ordained 1951. Rural parish three years. Job in corrugated paper factory 1957, and since. Some assistance to parish priest. Toronto Diocese. Age 39. Married. Six children.

PRIESTS AND WORKERS

A Rejoinder



JOHN ROWE



DARTON, LONGMAN & TODD
LONDON