

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE DIOCESAN PRIEST

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IT IS becoming increasingly common for diocesan priests and seminarians to have recourse to religious priests, brothers and sisters for spiritual counselling. It is opportune, then, that we should ask some pertinent questions about the mode of spirituality which may predominate in such dialogue. The director must inevitably be influenced by his own spiritual background and religious formation, the approach to God and to the world for which his congregation is noted. Even though he is well aware that any spirituality, including that of his founder, is a kaleidoscopic composite of various gospel attitudes, he may be hesitant to impose his community's vision of the spiritual life on the one he is directing, for fear that it will somehow be extraneous to the concrete demands made on the diocesan priests.

On the other hand, it is often evident that the priest or seminarian is not conscious of possessing a distinctive spirituality. He has never made a novitiate. He feels that it has been his own responsibility to develop a spirituality appropriate both to his state of life and to that of the laypeople he was to serve. But he has also been exposed to confessors, to a variety of spiritual conferences and workshops, houses of prayer, monastic and apostolic, directed retreats, reading of spiritual classics accenting various traditions: and all this against a background of varying experiences at the local pastoral level.

The situation described above poses the question faced and answered at various times by figures of the stature of Charles Borromeo, Vincent de Paul or the Curé d'Ars. The apostolic lives of these canonized saints insist that there is surely a spirituality distinctive to the diocesan priest. Further, we are all acquainted with their modern counterpart: those who live according to a tangible spirit, known in practice, whose efficacy is sensed and deepened in a myriad lives. Most religious priests, particularly if they have shared pastoral activity with their diocesan brethren, cannot but be aware of this; and those who are engaged in counselling try to carry over this consciousness into their spiritual direction. The following pages are simply an attempt to articulate some of these factors, and to reflect on them.

First of all the religious priest will regard his own special ministry as part of the universal priesthood of Christ. Even though, in normal circumstances, he does not have to bear the full brunt of parochial responsibility, he frequently administers the sacraments and encourages those who receive them to act in society in accord with his experience of the triune God. Most especially he comes to appreciate that it is precisely in the celebration of the sacraments that the diocesan priest is most aware of the Spirit's action in him. As no other member of the Church, he is intensely present at the sacraments. He is actually what as a seminarian he was preparing to do: touching the lives of Catholics at those situations when the Father allows the risen Christ to meet them in the power of the Spirit, so that they are personally incorporated into the life and mission of the Trinity. The diocesan priest is the incessant mediator at this interaction of God and man, and his presence there is determinative of his entire spiritual life.

In his sacramental activity, the diocesan priest repeatedly leads the assembled community to discover the meaning of its corporate existence: to proclaim and to realize in the social and political spheres the values of the triune God. The parish priest's preaching and communal service aim to help his people to appreciate the sacraments as moral and eschatological incursions of God's power into time, until his reign becomes the culmination point of history. Thus, the priest is the chosen instrument for the transmission of sacramental grace into the warp and woof of society; he is the one called to be 'sacramental in society' *par excellence*. His spiritual life thus is both an interior conviction and a public announcement that the triune God is liberating his people, transforming their world through concrete signs in history. Our hope is that the following sketch of what we feel to be a sacramentally centred and socially relevant spirituality will help to articulate the spiritual aspirations of priests and seminarians and assist their own theological reflection.

A Spirituality centred on the sacraments

The claim that diocesan priests do in fact possess a distinct spirituality is rooted in the conviction that their mode of encountering the triune God, at work in the world, is different from that of religious and lay-folk. Spirituality essentially involves an inter-personal dialogue, occurring at a particular place and time, between the Spirit of the Father and the Son and the spirit of man. It is neither a simple corollary of the reflection in faith on the body of revealed truth theologically expressed, nor a private interpretation and application of that truth on the part of individuals. Rather, spirituality is situated at the heart of theological reflection; it brings together the 'I' who professes the Creed, and the triune 'Thou' who is professed as the Former, Reformer and Transformer of human history, of

which every human creature is a part. In this sense, a person's spirituality is always unique, but never capricious. It is any and every Christian's way of entering into the continuous impact of the triune God on the time and space of his intelligible creation. Each one of us has a unique role in the forming, reforming and transforming of our world. Each human person is responsible for the history of the material creation and of the family of man, in that his life takes its origin from and is destined to exercise stewardship over this environment of matter and of culture. More than this, it is given to the Christian to understand that his role in society is bound up with the Source of all reality, who at once transcends his creation and is immanent in it. He is the free God who loves man in three distinct ways, and opens up a totally new future for him. Each Christian is uniquely challenged to reflect this threefold love by adhering to it and by being caught up in its interaction, according to each one's endowments and specific life-choice. Here, then, is the essence of christian spirituality, the person dialogue of knowledge and love between each unique believer and the universal triune God.

So it is for the diocesan priest. His spirituality is the means by which his unique spirit both communicates with the Spirit of the Father and the Son and freely engages out of love in the fashioning, refashioning and 'trans-fashioning' of matter and culture. Yet, for all the individual variations which are bound to distinguish each one's approach in this prayerful dialogue with the triune God, and participation in apostolic mission on his behalf, there must emerge a common and predominant pattern from the individual's sacerdotal existence. We might say that this existence has two objective poles: the liturgy of the Church which reaches its highest pitch in the celebration of the sacraments; and the manifold priestly service of his parishioners who are directed toward the reception of the sacraments, and are entrusted with the sacramental impact upon the environment in which they live out their daily lives. In his sacramental ministrations, and in his creation of an atmosphere in which this ministry, through the efforts of his people, can permeate society, the diocesan priest contributes to the formation, reformation and transformation of the world. Thus his own history and the history of those to whom he ministers constantly finds a point of contact with the creative, reforming and transforming power of the Trinity.

The reason for this trinitarian approach is that, while it does not neglect the christological nature of the sacraments, it more easily removes the worship of the Church from the category of personal devotion, and translates it into that of corporate action. To situate the sacraments into the cosmic history of salvation, which the triune God is at present bringing to completion through the Church, permits us to glimpse them in the context of a threefold divine love which calls for a similar response. The sacraments are seen as perpetuating the Father's creative plan, the Son's recreative

task of directing all things once more towards his Father's glory, and the Spirit's trans-creative power which never ceases to make present the Son's resurrection, and to renew the face of the earth. Against this divine and cosmic backdrop, the seven sacraments of the Church are lent a coherent perspective which makes it all but impossible to regard them in isolation from the one God, who not only graciously chooses to work through them, but also freely grants them a true share in his own active mission of love in history.

Furthermore, this divine action of love, if it is not to remain all too abstract, must be delineated in terms of God's justice. The Father, who embodies justice itself, fashions the world in his own image; the Son is the righteous One sent to refashion unjust relationships according to the pattern of the Father's inner being; and the Spirit is active everywhere to 'trans-fashion' matter and culture by foreshadowing in the present the justice of the end-time. Viewed in the light of the threefold justice of God himself, the sacraments inevitably assume the function of social instruments of divine righteousness, signs to an unjust society which point beyond themselves to the transcendent source and goal of natural and human history. Those who receive the sacraments are challenged to be and to act like their God: to fashion, refashion and trans-fashion their surroundings into the image of the divine being with whom they interact at the liturgy, and with whom they become united in a universal mission of justice. The trinitarian approach to the sacraments thus guarantees that they be conceived neither as simply interior nor as exclusively private events. As the Christian's repeated access into the triune God's loving and just way of being, the sacraments inherently possess characteristics which are redemptive in terms of the individual and transformative of the human community.

Since the spirituality of the diocesan priest is centred on the sacraments of the Church, and since the latter are best understood within a trinitarian framework which entails a saving mission of love and justice, the main lines of such a spirituality can now be drawn more clearly. The diocesan priest continually encounters the triune God through his sacramental ministry in the sanctuary. Yet even here his meeting with God is both direct and indirect, since it always takes place with and through his fellow Christians. In fact, in the liturgy of the sacraments, the priest begins the prayerful and prophetic mission which he executes in the course of every other duty he is called upon to fulfil in society. Instead of being an endless series of diverse and disjointed appointments and obligations, all his activity is drawn into one single effort to live out the sacramental spirituality which was first learned and practised at the liturgy. His activity in society willingly redirects him time and again to the sacraments, once he has discerned anew the presence of the Trinity in the secular world and rekindled the desire to deep his relationship with his God and to intensify the service of mankind in his name.

Thus, when the priest treats each parishioner justly and also advocates equity within the local, national and international spheres which affect every human life, he realizes the power of his own christian initiation, recalls the baptisms he has already performed, and creates the social and political atmosphere in which those whom he will baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit may live with dignity. His spirituality thus reflects the Father who, through the power of his Spirit, justifies those alien to grace and accepts strangers as his children along with Jesus Christ. When the priest teaches, guides and encourages the youth of his parish, he is fostering the hope of those who will determine the future of society, as they span out to live and work in diverse places. Thus he rediscovers the grace of his own Confirmation, is reminded of the young people he has prepared for this sacrament, and attempts to improve the situation within which the next generation of Christians are to be confirmed, in order to witness to the moral and social significance of being filled with God's Spirit. When he visits the sick and the ageing, consoles the dying and stands by the broken-hearted in the daily rounds of his ministry, the priest unearths the wisdom of the Anointing of the Sick, is joined more closely to the compassionate God whom he has so often recognized in those he previously anointed. He is stirred to instigate in society at large a similar compassion with the power to alleviate the isolation and meaninglessness which the sick and the aged often experience, surrounded as they seem to be by unfeeling and indifferent neighbours.

These reflections, based on the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and anointing of the sick, are sufficient to indicate the general rhythm of the diocesan priest's spirituality. Having recognized the presence of the Trinity in the pain and joy of human life and culture, the priest presides at its culmination in the liturgical signs of the Church. He has intensified his awareness of God's activity on behalf of concrete individuals at particular moments of grace, and is thereby energized to continue his mediating work among all men and women, where what has been celebrated is not forgotten, and what is yet to be celebrated is prefigured. So much of his activity appears to be 'secular' and 'unpriestly'; yet it is in fact permeated by the sacramental grace flowing from the heart of the trinitarian operation of power, wisdom and goodness, which in this very activity prepares him for an intensified exercise of his directly ministerial functions.

It follows, then, that since the triune God is at work both in the world and the sacrament, the diocesan priest is never a dispensable functionary. He is a freely chosen partner in the divine mission of saving love and justice. The priest fashions the world with the Father, who will never be content until his creation reaches its apex. He refashions his environment with the Son, who will come in glory only when the redemptive power of his first advent, and the hidden mystery of his presence now, has been extended to and permeated all of creation's dimensions. The diocesan

priest is also transforming the world with the Holy Spirit, who will not hand over creation to the Son and the Father until man's free co-operation has been fully achieved and has truly contributed to the new heaven and the new earth. By centring his spirituality on the sacraments, the diocesan priest not only finds the unifying thread of his complex temporal ministry, which is at once sacramental and para-sacramental; he also discovers the trans-temporal dimension of the Church and the world: the immanent self-mediation of divine love and justice in which he is a graced partner.

Finding the triune God in liberation signs

Christian spirituality involves not only a way of acting but also a way of being. It is a means of encountering and enjoying God, as well as of interacting with him in history. Thus, the spirituality of the diocesan priest must contain at its core a finding of God. Though God is the mystery which is implicitly known by every human being as the ground of his comprehension and affection, man also possesses the ability to become explicitly aware of the personal character of this mystery: to discover that this comprehension and affection is reciprocal. Finding God is an intense human act which automatically imparts an unawaited joy. It is the discovery that man reflects God's very being, and can therefore project his mind and heart towards the embodiment of love and justice.

Furthermore, this discovery ushers man into a dialogue with God which is unique, surprising and renewing. We submit that the diocesan priest has access to such a distinctive way of finding God; that he can reach an explicit consciousness of God as his own embodiment of love and justice, capable of overwhelming him with unexpected consolation and of leading him to a continual transformation. The distinct locus where this enhanced awareness occurs for him must be his sacramental ministry — in its primary and secondary senses, for there he enjoys a privileged contact with the active mystery of love and justice, reaching into the often loveless and unjust determinations of human life at a particular time and place. As he witnesses God thus over-reaching himself, he finds himself permeated, surprised and renewed in his encounter with the triune God.

This personal meeting of the priest with God, which is decidedly sacramental, is far from being a vague fancy. The God who is encountered liberates his people, shows himself to be just, encouraging, forgiving, compassionate, selfless, attentive and loving. The diocesan priest uniquely senses this saving character of God, precisely because at Baptism he witnesses divine justice in the midst of man's self-regard; at Confirmation, God's encouragement in the recesses of human despair; at Reconciliation, divine mercy at work in man's vulnerability and self-hate; at the Anointing of the Sick, the divine caring over against man's ultimate frailty and mortality; at the Eucharist God's readiness to give himself away when man

insists on hoarding and protection his talents and his goods; at Ordination, God's humility and unpretentiousness in serving man when man's pride and desire for recognition keeps him from generosity; at Matrimony, God's love for his family which overcomes within himself the tensions which men and women are so prone to make divisive. Since the diocesan priest is continually present at these signs of God's liberating acts in current human history, he can develop an intensely personal relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit. He comes to understand that the triune God offers man the sought-after alternative to his own personal, cultural and social restrictions. New possibilities are glimpsed, which promise to free man from his blinkers and initiate a totally different way of being human.

Because of his sacramental ministry, the diocesan priest is afforded an intuition into the being-in-action of the God of the sacraments, one which affords an explanation of the unique character of his finding, relating to and enjoying the presence of the transcendent in the world. Through signs linked to human lives in a way which touches and transforms them at critical points of growth, the priest gains an acquaintance with God which proves to be the formative influence on his life-style, his prayer, his preaching and his counselling. The God whom he meets in signs of liberation can indeed be known by others as well; but the almost incessant liturgical function of the priest — whether he is preparing others for the sacraments, officiating at them or following them through in various forms of pastoral and social service — causes him to be intensely exposed to the generosity of the saving God. Thus, his personal knowledge of transcendent love and justice is coloured by the very means through which it is attained.

He is thus offered a continual opportunity for dialogue with God precisely at those moments when he encounters him in the signs. At the liturgy, his mind and heart repeatedly thank and praise the divine mystery, which is never for him a totally concealed presence. It constantly discloses itself as bent on communication with mankind by means of created things for the sake of creation's renewal. This insight is invariably surprising even for the experienced priest because, though the world he comes to know is a broken one in so many respects, in sacramental activity the triune God is recognized as dwelling in the midst of this brokenness. In fact, the Trinity is diffracted in these bitter waters, healing the world in three different ways, freely allowing his own being to share its pain and to rejoice in its alleviation. This realization not only causes the priest to wonder at the ways of God, but also to notice that his own existence is transformed by this ever unique and surprising encounter with the transcendent love and justice present in human persons through visible signs.

The seeking and finding God in sacramental activity is integral to the minister's interior growth. Since the Trinity is divine being-in-action for the salvation of man, the priest is interiorly moved at the liturgy to be like

the God with whom he engages in the task of human liberation. He is challenged to become one whose interior existence is directed to the salvation of the world. Thus, finding God is not a purely passive experience; it entails allowing oneself to be re-interpreted and re-oriented in accord with the self-interpretation and self-orientation of the God who reveals himself as love and justice in person. Hence the priest is integrating into his own being the activity of God revealed to him in sacramental liturgy. He is to become just, encouraging, forgiving, compassionate, selfless, attentive and loving. In this sense, finding God through the sacraments is for the priest a constant call to conversion, a detachment from all else, so as to adopt the creative, recreative and transcreative intention of the triune God. For, just as the Trinity's external work corresponds to its immanent being, so the visible actions which the priest performs should spring from a spirituality attuned to the very love and justice of God made transparent in the sacraments. This spiritual attitude of the priest not only brings a cohesive unity to his explicitly sacerdotal activity, it also imparts to his parasacramental actions their proper perspective, as a means of aiding others, first to ready themselves for and then to live according to their intense encounter with grace at the sacraments. The priest's sacramental spirituality effects an essential change within him, so that he can serve as a living reminder to others that the hidden grace of God in a human life first becomes incandescent in the liturgy, and then radiates outwards into the whole of one's existence with others in the world.

One final word must be said about the distinct way in which the diocesan priest finds God through the liberating signs of sacraments. It is not just a matter of encountering the divine as one does another human being; nor does it involve merely a personal attempt on the part of the priest to imitate the God he meets, as he might emulate the qualities of another human person. Christian spirituality has always been understood as more than a means of locating God and of reflecting his image to others. Central to genuine spirituality is the belief that one becomes united with God, shares in the being of God and lives in God.

Thus, the spirituality of the diocesan priest is an active engagement in the being of the triune God. The ultimate truth about this spiritual orientation is that it is a unique participation in the fashioning, refashioning and transforming being of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. When the priest heals the sinner, feeds the hungry and blesses the sick, he not only meets the triune God and copies his way of being, he also co-operates with the Spirit in presenting his world to the Son and the Father. In other words, he partakes in the liberating mission of the Trinity in history. The priest acts with the Spirit to complete what has been formed and reformed, but which awaits final transformation when the Spirit and the Son cede all things to the Father. Thus, what appear to be transitory visible signs in human lives, the priest increasingly comprehends as creative events, in

which the triune God is at work in and across the Church and the world. In discovering this deepest christian truth again and again, the priest does more than recognize God and emulate him; he joins him at the core of his being as the loving and just God. This is the interior aspect of the diocesan priest's spirituality — his way of personally meeting, imitating and dwelling in God, so as to find himself circumscribed by transcendent love and justice, and able to enjoy this state of being. By existing as such, the priest is inwardly transformed and welcomed into the life of God as it is graciously extended to the world.

Engaging in the Trinity's transforming mission

In the sacramental moment, the priest's interior being is transformed by meeting with and dwelling in the Trinity, the transcendent Source of love and justice present in human lives. At the same time, since God's being is his creative, redemptive and transforming activity, so it is with the action of the priest. 'We are God's fellow-workers', says St Paul, describing his work in the Spirit as a 'dispenser of the mysteries of God' (cf 1 Cor 2-4). Thus sacramental activity is not merely religious ritual but in a true sense moral events. At the signs of divine liberation, the priest and the entire christian community are not merely God's witnesses. They actually share his work of gracing the ungraced, encouraging the youth, forgiving the sinner, anointing the sick, breaking and offering himself in bread and wine, serving the needs of human society and overcoming through love the divisions between the sexes and between conflicting ideologies. To be truly present at the sacraments is to be engaged in the divine liberating action. At the liturgy the Church co-operates with divine love and justice, since believers are not simply related to God but exist 'in Christ' and 'in the Spirit'; that is, sharing the divine Fatherhood through his personal self-giving to the world in his Son and Spirit. Sacramental grace is not to be conceived as some sort of 'charging of spiritual batteries' which enables the Christian to reflect at a distance, in his personal choices, the moral gestures of God, 'Be like that which you handle', the newly-ordained are reminded in the rite of Ordination. Since the diocesan priest's inner being and outer ministry are so intimately linked to the divine morality, he is called to be a powerful witness to the world-transforming actions of God which alone constitute christian ritual as the manifestation of social morality.

This emphasis on the social dimension is of crucial importance. As the Council has declared: 'It has pleased God to sanctify and to save humankind not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by moulding them into a single people' (*Lumen Gentium*, 9): humankind which 'today is joined together more closely by social, technical and cultural bonds' (*ibid.*, 1). No longer then may we regard the sacraments simply as private encounters with the Father through Christ in the Spirit. The accent

rather must be on the ethical and social aspects of sacramental celebration. In fact, liturgy itself stresses that God chooses to meet his creatures in space and time, in a communal setting, through the goods of creation and in the midst of man's glorious yet flawed cultural achievements. The purpose of liturgy in setting forth true communitarian values is highlighted by what Paul has to say about unregenerate attitudes in Eucharistic celebrations at Corinth (1 Cor 11, 17-33). Precisely because the sacraments possess a social and, in the proper sense of the word, a political character, they must not simply reflect the world in which they take place; they must serve as countersigns, hopeful prescriptions of what the world could be like if all were to adopt the values of the triune God discernible in his way of acting at the liturgy. When the diocesan priest presides at the sacraments, he does so as a member of a community which is undergoing an encounter with God in the form of a religious, moral, social and political event. God is acting within the spirit of each person, within his moral conscience, within his social situation and political system. In the sacraments, the love and the justice of the Trinity enter into all aspects of human life, so as to transform them. Thus, the priest not only encounters and enjoys, recognizes and dwells in the Father, Son and Spirit at the sacraments, but he is actually taken up, with the entire community, in the creative, redemptive and transforming mission of divine love and justice in human society.

Because the liturgy involves diverse yet convergent perspectives, a sacramental spirituality is, by its very nature, both personal and political. The personality of the priest, who is increasingly aware of the dynamics of this spirituality as well as of his public function in the Catholic community and beyond it, is stamped with an apostolic zeal. He is one whose participation in the sacraments incorporates him into the life of God, and sends him out into society on the divine mission of love and justice. Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick are chiefly incorporating sacraments, since they continually join human lives to the death and resurrection of the Son, and to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit into the world until the coming of the Kingdom. Eucharist, Ordination and Matrimony are more properly missioning sacraments, since they empower and delineate the ways in which Catholics serve the community in the name of Christ and his Spirit for the glory of the Father. It remains true, however, that the incorporating sacraments intensify the priest's mission in society, just as the missioning sacraments imply his deepening commitment to Christ in his Spirit. The justified persons are called to be the missionaries of Christ's brotherhood, confirmed in hope, reconciled by the divine forgiveness and anointed for peace and trust. Eucharistic, ordained and married Christians, who engage through the innate power of these sacraments in a universal salvific mission with the triune God, are further incorporated into his immanent love and justice. The spirituality of the diocesan priest is thus indicative of the

compenetration of the personal and social aspects of sacramental existence, which reflects the very being and mission of the triune God.

Through his repeated presence at the incorporating and missioning sacraments, the priest realizes that what happens there not only supplies the pattern of his activities elsewhere, but also initiates these very activities. When he later encounters the struggling members of his parish, who are attempting to live their faith within a given social structure, they and their pain are not strangers to him. He has already recognized their anguish in the longing love of the Father who, at the liturgy, comes near to mankind through his Son and in his Spirit. By being sacramental in society, the parish priest bridges the gap between the sacred and the secular. He finds the triune God equally present, though in different ways, both in the sanctuary and in the social and political system which structures the world in which and to which he ministers, in spite of the opposition and indifference. The priest will acquire an intimate knowledge of the poor of the world in God's presence both at the liturgy and in the poor of the world. The need for a just, hopeful reconciled, healed, sharing, ministering and loving social order does not contradict the Catholic celebration of the sacraments. Rather it finds ultimate vindication in the message and activity of the triune God, whose being is worshipped, and whose mission is shared by the ecclesial community. Nor should the latter consider itself separate from or irrelevant to the pressing needs of mankind. Rather, these very needs are essential to sacramental celebration, since God, Father, Son and Spirit, deliberately meets the human community at the disheartening centre of its vulnerability and with an aim to its salvation. The priest who is sacramental in society includes the world in the liturgy and directs the liturgy to the world.

It would, of course, be a mistake to conclude that the formulation 'sacramental in society' is either a panacea by which the parish priest can obliterate all the tension which his ministry creates, or a facile means of harmonizing the mission of the Church and the goals of diverse human societies. Only his insight that he shares in the creative, recreative and transforming activity of the triune God can lend his spirituality the necessary realism and courage: realism, because God takes man's freedom seriously and effects the salvation of all things not by by-passing human sinfulness but by accepting and transforming it; courage, because being sacramental in society will bring the priest into conflict with those who, for a variety of reasons, desire to keep the world from the sanctuary and the sanctuary from the world. Only the triune God, the one creative, redeeming and transforming Force of both the Church and the universe, can provide the priest with courage when he is confronted by those whose desire for clarity or autonomy can destroy, unwittingly perhaps, the very unity of man's spiritual and social nature. The priest who develops a spirituality which is both sacramental and social must be realistic and

courageous at the same time. He must learn the humility of God who prefers to suffer with the world as it gains its promised freedom; and he must practise the non-violent indignation of the same God, who gives himself away in response to a world which refuses to open itself to his salvific will. As he attempts in society to be just, encouraging, forgiving, compassionate, generous, ministering and loving — since he acquires these divine attitudes at the liturgy — the priest must always cede to the mysterious and unflinching intention of God, who neither overlooks man's freedom nor holds back from freeing it anew.

Conclusion

What has been offered here is patently only one formulation of the spirituality of the diocesan priest; at most these reflections provide a sketch which must be filled out in much greater detail. The key elements of the formulation, however, do seem to be rooted in the actual experience of the diocesan priest. The trinitarian dimension reflects the distinctly christian monotheism of the liturgical texts which he constantly pronounces; the social/political dimension mirrors his life at the centre of his people and their culture; the eschatological dimension is consonant with his tireless effort to introduce the Catholic from birth to death into the mystery of Christ's resurrection and the Spirit's ultimate renewal of the face of the earth; and finally, the ritual dimension corresponds to his particular task of building up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church through the communion shared with the saints, and through the one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

Equally, the diocesan priest's spirituality is an intense and unmistakable way of living out the third article of the Christian Creed. As one filled with the Spirit of the Father and the Son, he serves the Church by unifying it, sanctifying it, underscoring its universal nature and fostering its missionary vocation. He does this chiefly by celebrating the central sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, so as to plant the seeds and then to witness the harvest which result from union with the triune God. Yet, since the Church exists for the world and its salvation, the priest extends into the public arena — the realm of flesh and blood, life and death, social and political systems — the values of God which can transform creation until the resurrection of the flesh and the life everlasting.

It might be argued that the spirituality outlined here, based as it is on the liturgy and on the Creed, is the heritage of every Catholic and not just of the diocesan priest. This has been intentional: the spirituality of the diocesan priest ought to be and is that of the entire Catholic community, since it is from the local pastor that the living spirit of the liturgy and the Creed are first learnt. However, we have insisted that the priest is an 'intense' and 'unmistakable' sign of the being and mission of every

Catholic. He provides a model of sacramental existence in society, of sharing the divine task of transforming the world into that kingdom which is typified in the rites of the Church. The diocesan priest, due to his undeniable sacramental function, reminds the entire christian community that these incandescent signs of grace are not to be forgotten. Religious and married vows, for example, are essentially delineations of sacramental existence, and find nourishment and renewal in the liturgy of the Church. It is also true that the priest offers an unmistakable sign-value to the Church and the world, since his sacerdotal ministry proclaims to all the compenetration of liturgy and 'politics'. Christian life, as a miniature of life in general, is mission to others in society.

By combining service of the word and the 'mysteries' or sacraments of divine salvation with a loyal and prophetic involvement in human affairs, the diocesan priest clearly re-presents the transcendent and the immanent nature of the Trinity. As a dedicated and an unambiguous servant of God and mankind, he indeed possesses a spirituality which, though it might be aided by the insights of other paths to sanctity, is one to be treasured and followed for and in itself. It springs from and leads back to the nucleus of christian faith — the triune God meeting man through the material of creation and transforming personal and social history through the heightened human freedom which the sacraments engender. The spirituality of the diocesan priest also points forward and anticipates the goal of Christian faith — the glory of the triune God, as those once touched by signs of his love and justice experience with him that completion for which all human and social history yearns.

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