

# Priests

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# The Cure of Souls

(Smoke Signals # 41, February 2004)

I have always been a sucker for a book with a beautiful dust jacket; the same holds true for CDs and I often tend to make my first judgment of women mainly on frontage. I often get trapped by such a reductionist criterion, but sometimes I hit gold. The book I want to tell you about is called "*Histoire des curés*" (Paris: Fayard, 2002) and the cover shows an endearing painting by Josseline Rivière entitled "*La maison du curé*" which depicts a white-haired priest in cassock, black cloak, biretta, silver-buckled shoes, and pince-nez strolling in his garden reading his breviary. The book was written under the leadership of Nicole Lemaître, a respected university professor of religious history in Paris (Panthéon-Sorbonne), and three colleagues from Rennes, Strasbourg and Rouen who each wrote 4-5 of the 18 chapters. I immediately realised that I could hardly live without it.

As the title implies, the book is meant to be a history of Western European Roman Catholic parish priests, more specifically rectors. It follows through the institution from its onset during the twilight of the Roman Empire to the present crisis. It is a goldmine of information, but it is too often written in an elliptic style in which facts and events are alluded to, but without enough detail for the avid reader and since the book has only about two dozen pages of endnotes, it is not always possible to follow up the information (the pox on French editors who do it every time to save money).

As you know, rectors are powerful figures in the history of the church and they are characterised by two essential features: the rector has a certain degree of **stability** and authority (particularly on the sacramental and liturgical life) and he cannot be removed easily from a parish entrusted to him; he is typically named for life; secondly, he is **personally responsible** for the care and salvation of the souls of his parish, the neglect of which entails his own personal damnation. A difficult and dangerous calling, in which responsibility and personal peril vastly outweigh any power or prestige. The Prayer Book Ordination Service (which is meant to ordain only rectors, it seems) gets it right when it warns the ordinands that they will be responsible for "*the sheep of Christ, which he bought with his death, and for whom he shed his blood*". Should any hurt or hindrance occur to them, because of negligence, the priest should be aware of "*the greatness of the fault and also the horrible punishment that will ensue*".

Bishops, who are terribly jealous of their God-given authority and assumed prerogatives (they have always been in the Roman Church and have sadly become so in the Anglican Church in a perverse consequence of the Oxford Movement), do not particularly like rectors as an institution and are trying quietly to do away with, and indeed succeeding in gradually eliminating, rectorships. Even our own bishop has been at work on the issue, and in his message in the May 2002 Montreal Anglican, his position is clear: "*We are moving gradually in the direction of incumbencies rather than rectories*". He continues by citing three arguments in favour of the move, none of which appears compelling except perhaps to fellow bishops, but none against it. Indeed, the abandonment of the rectory system for the RC model instituted by Vatican II continues

to centralise power into the hands of diocesan authorities and priests will be expected to dance even more to the tune played on Union St. The people will lose their power to hold "selection committees" against the vague promise of being consulted that depends on the good will of the Ordinary. I wonder if there would still be a S. John's today, had not Fr. Wood, in his days of persecution, been protected by his status of rector.

Rectors will therefore be replaced by incumbents, and all agree that it is not a happy change, if only for reasons of euphony. While we are keen to address Fr. Keith as "Rector", we would be embarrassed to call him "Incumbent". To me (and to Alice), words have meanings, and the rector is the person who guides his people (it is an active and positive title and it implies authority and responsibility); it emphasises the relation of the priest with his people which he is expected to lead (**regere**) in the right way (**via recta**); indeed, Psalm 23 "*The Lord is my shepherd*" is in S. Jerome's Latin "*Dominus regit me*", literally, "*The Lord is my rector*". "*The Lord is my incumbent*" makes no sense whatsoever and it would not do. Incumbent, indeed, is a passive and negative word; it refers to the charge that lies on someone as a weight and it emphasises the relation of the priest to his bishop and the hierarchy – in fact, an incumbent is someone who is lying down (the key root is "cubare" to lie down) on the ground squashed under a great burden handed down to him by authority.

Rector is the equivalent title to the French "curé" (in Brittany, the title "recteur" is also used). The implications are the same; the "curé" is he that has the charge or cure of the souls of his parish; it is also an active and positive title relating to the parishioners. Unfortunately, the word "curate" in English has lost its original meaning and has come to mean an assistant priest.

A simile comes spontaneously to mind from the Parable of the Good Shepherd. Cannot the Rector be assimilated to the shepherd who must give his life for his sheep (and worse, must put his eternal life on the line) and is not the incumbent more like the hireling for whom the care of the parish is more of a job than anything else? Surely, I hope that I am exaggerating; indeed, if I were a bishop, I would like to have as many rectors as possible to share with me the awful charge of the cure of souls and not take on my own back all the responsibilities it entails. But modern bishops do not seem to fear to put their eternal salvation on the line. I wonder if there are many bishops going to heaven these days, given the new rules of the game? A very sad business indeed, methinks. But what can I do about it except groan?

But back to my book. It paints the development over the centuries of the parish that soon became the hub-pin of the pastoral work of the Church, later to be in competition with the mendicant orders and the lay devotional confraternities. The role of the rector was periodically refined during Church history, particularly at critical times: the Gregorian Reform (1074-1075), the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), and the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The rector basically takes on a triple responsibility: sacraments, teaching and social control – not merely "*hatching, matching, and dispatching*", as some cynical modern priests would have it. He is expected to lead an ascetic life to edify his people and to refrain from ordinary labour, so that he can constantly be available to his flock; taken from the people, he must be different from the

people; he therefore wears a distinctive garb, the cassock. He must also reside in his parish and his parishioners must feed him and care for his material needs. The priest is expected to die at the altar. This ethos of the priesthood ("the good priest" who spends his life "doing good") became universal after Trent and it was fostered by the establishment of seminaries for the training of priests managed by specialized communities, such as the Sulpicians, the Oratorians, and the Lazarists... The golden age of this idealised priest culminated in the 19<sup>th</sup> c.; after the Great War, modern ideas started penetrating the rectories and the old ways were slowly eroded. The only seminaries today forming priests in this manner are those under the influence of the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, still making "*priests as God likes them*", as the archbishop liked to say.

The book deals as well with the various forms of anticlericalism that developed everywhere in Europe and it describes the repeated attempts by civil authorities to take control of the rector, such as Bonaparte's use of the Concordat in France and the development of Josephism in Austria.

I was particularly interested in a chapter on Irish Catholicism. The great problems of 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland were unknown to me: the lack of clergy and their scandalous lives (Irish priest were universally known for their drunkenness, their lechery and their avarice), the reduced lay practice, the absence of decent churches (taken away by the Anglicans) replaced by meetings for confession and communion in lay settings (the so-called "stations") often followed by drunken meals; after the Great Famine, the onset of the "**Devotional Revolution**" based on widespread parish missions instituted by Archbishop Cullen of Dublin, gave us the fervent Irish population and holy priests that we all know.

The final chapter tackles the great changes in operation since the Council: decline of religious practice and dearth of vocations. The rector has virtually disappeared and his role has been variously taken over by incumbents, detached members of religious orders of both sexes, lay pastoral committees, permanent deacons, and even lay women. In this new diversity of action lies the hope for the future, if any. One thing is sure and that is that only the local faithful can save their parishes, despite the hierarchy's concerted efforts, wittingly or not, to destroy them. The void left by the demise of the rector needs to be filled by the congregations themselves, for the old ways, efficient as they were, are no longer possible.

When all is said and done in the book, the image of the lowliest, yet the greatest, of all priests, emerges as a beacon. It is that of Saint Jean-Marie Vianney, the legendary Curé d'Ars. Remember that he predicted that, in a parish left without a rector, the people would soon be adoring beasts... as indeed they are!

# The Worldly Priest

(Smoke Signals # 43, January 2011)

Our Lord, the Gospel tells us, kept company with sinners, prostitutes, and assorted other dubious characters. But woe on the present-day priest who tries to follow his example, he will be immediately condemned by his flock and reported to his bishop (unless of course he keeps company with rich dubious characters who may, it is hoped, leave money to the Church – but then the rich are so because they hoard money, not because they give it away – but that is another story). So ministering to the worldly is a dangerous calling for any priest particularly because of the presence of women.

As St. Symeon the New Theologian (+1022), that incomparable master of the spiritual life, puts it in his *Ethical Discourses*, the gift of dispassion is given only to the saint to the extent “*that he may converse and dine with a woman without yielding to some injury or suffering in secret of some kind of impulse or stain*”. Even Saint Alphonsus of Liguori (+1787) in old age still kept a table between himself and any female interlocutor lest he attack her out of lust. The tales of the desert fathers recount numerous stories of holy monks returning once a year to Alexandria to sell their basket ware and molesting the women they meet on their road - only to have these women hand back to them the children they had thus conceived when they returned the following years - a theory perhaps for the existence of child oblates in monasteries.

Obviously with our anaemic sperm counts, low testosterone level and estrogenic pollution, we men cannot imagine the wild temptations of the flesh that our male forebears in the faith must have had to deal with. And indeed, carnal failings have been the downfall of many potential saints and scholars. Old prints often show the “Temptation of the Theologian” as a naked woman lurking about a scholar at his desk seemingly absorbed in his learned books.

Take the sad tale in our times of **Jesuit Cardinal Jean Daniélou** (1905-1974). He was one of the greatest Patristic scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and his work is a delightful mixture of scholarship and insight. He died suddenly in the apartment of a prostitute (or was it at the door after climbing the stairs?) in the red light district of Paris. The Apostolic Nunciature, the Archdiocese and the Jesuits were called in. The Jesuits announced his death adding unwisely that “*he had now gone to meet the Living God in the epactasis of the apostle*”. They explained his presence in the dubious surroundings by his well-known ministry to the destitute and rejected of society. Others added that he had been called to the apartment to hear the girl's confession. And someone mentioned that he was not the kind of person to be sexually attracted to women anyway. Yet, many remained unconvinced by these arguments, and berated the Church for her hypocrisy and cover-up. The word “epactasis” was one often used by the cardinal in his writings and refers to the striving (progress) a Christian must show in his spiritual life, but in this particular case, it meant the never-ending striving of the blessed in heaven to experience the wholeness of the Living God, and was used as such by St. Gregory of Nyssa, following St. Paul's “*forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth* (ἐπεκτεινόμενος) *unto those things that are before*” (Phil. 3:13). The word raised questions

in the press and the irreverent magazine "*Le canard enchaîné*" explained to its readers that it meant "*dying during orgasm*". This uncharitable interpretation stuck on so much that the word "épectase" in the Petit Robert French dictionary is now given only this second meaning. We may never know the truth about the death of the good cardinal, though I suspect the Mondaine (Paris Morality Police) has the answer in its files.

Cardinal Daniélou was a member of the Académie française and Dominican Father Ambroise-Marie Carré (1908-2004) was elected to his seat. It is customary in that august body for the successor in his inaugural speech to praise his predecessor. And so all Paris was listening to find out how Fr. Carré would deal with the delicate situation - by using circumlocutions, he managed to evoke the ambiguous ending without delving unduly on it.

There is another well-known Daniélou, the brother of the cardinal - Alain Daniélou (1907-1994) who was a great student of Indian music and an apostle of Hinduism to the West. His interpretation of Hinduism has recently been strongly denounced as false and deformed. But that is another story.

Yet, it is possible to be a successful worldly priest, and my favourite example is the French **Abbé Arthur Mugnier** (1853-1944). He was born in modest circumstances and suffered from poor eyesight most of his life. He thought at some early point that he should marry and dreamt of an ideal woman, "*an exquisite mixture of enthusiasm and melancholy, capable of both joy and suffering; lettered but not pedantic, artistic but without profession...*" His mother persuaded him instead to join the priesthood and he then dreamt of becoming "un curé de campagne" to live among the fields and forests he so learned to love in his youth when his father was régisseur at the local château in Lubersac near Limoges. He soon developed a passion for literature and its great writers and all his life Chateaubriand was his favourite and he constantly delighted in the "*Mémoires d'outre-tombe*".

Ordained in Paris in 1877 by Archbishop Guibert, his first assignment was as substitute teacher and discipline master in a junior seminary - his two years there made him deeply miserable.

From 1879 to 1895, he was curate in three Parisian parishes in succession, St. Nicolas des Champs near the Halles, made up mostly of tradespeople, St. Thomas d'Aquin a more bourgeois and snobish community, and finally Notre Dame des Champs. This was a period of great tension between the Church and the secularizing French government. Abbé Mugnier did not appreciate the attitude of entrenchment of the hierarchy. He was a reformist and thought that the priests should go out into the world to spread the message, not retreat back in their churches. He was in favour of vernacular liturgies and a more welcoming confessional. This caused him endless troubles.

He was very active in parish life among his varied people, but he enjoyed mostly the company of the upper crust. One night he was called to the death bed of a man for the last rites. He was introduced into a rich patrician house that he figured was a fancy hotel. It is only as he carried the Sacrament down the hall, and saw all these women kneeling at the doors of their rooms and crossing themselves, while dressed only in

their chemises that he realised that he was in a high class brothel. This would be his introduction to the demi-monde which would also become his mission field. The story is in fact a fine metaphor on his ministry of introducing Christ into the sinful secular world.

One day in 1891, a lady brought the naturalistic and decadent novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans to meet him in the sacristy. A great friendship developed between the two men, and Abbé Mugnier was instrumental in the conversion of the author who went on to describe his spiritual journey in a great trilogy, *En route* (1895), *La cathédrale* (1898) and *L'oblat* (1903). Huysmans' conversion was based greatly on Christian aesthetics and he gathered a community of artists around him near the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Martin de Ligugé (founded ca. 360); this group broke apart when the French Army evicted the monks from the monastery in 1902. When I visited there for 3 days in 2006, I found Huysmans' house still standing (now the home of a local doctor) and the monks specialising in artistic enamels based on patterns provided by artists such as Rouault, Braque, Chagall... And thus the artistic connection of Ligugé has survived.

Abbé Mugnier constantly defended his new friend and convert and that friendship gave him an introduction to the world of letters. He gave popular conferences on literary topics, and on famous authors such as George Sand and visited their homes/graves and met their surviving relatives. This further connected him to the literary circles.

From 1896 to 1907, Abbé Mugnier was named first curate at Ste Clotilde, an aristocratic and generally royalist community. This gave him access to the old upper class society of France - which he thought illiterate ("*So much beauty, so much luxury, but not a book in sight*") and ultimately boring, but they were staunch supporters of the Church and her ministers. He would muse that though deprived of the joys of marriage, he enjoyed all his life the company of women and he was not insensitive to their charms, particularly to a generous décolletage. His rather homely looks, his worn eggplant-coloured cassock, square-toed peasant shoes and old hat and umbrella made him a strange spectacle among the refined company which he kept. He was appreciated for his conversation and wit as well as his liberal and non-judgmental views towards non-believers, anti-clericals and sinners in general.

In the late 1890s, he started spending his holidays (in those halcyon days, curates were given three months off a year) in Germany. He much enjoyed this time-out and got away from it all - his "*clauso ostio*" as he called it (from Mat 6:6 "*shut thy door*"). He developed there a passion for Wagner and especially for the opera Parsifal which he compared to Chateaubriand's *Génie du christianisme*. Each year thereafter he endeavoured to go to the newly established Wagner Festival in Bayreuth in August and maintained a regular correspondence with Cosima Wagner, the musician's widow and the daughter of Abbé Liszt. By September, it was time for him to return home to his confessional, "*I am being called back home by the autumn adulteries*".

The confessional was his workshop, though he had no illusions about it - "*one rarely confesses one's true sins*". Yet it gave him an insight - thus he distinguished "*les péchés de gare*" i.e. visits to a prostitute when one misses one's train from other more

serious failings. And he remarked that penitents came more readily to tell him about their waning love affairs than of their budding ones. He thought true love possible in marriage, though more frequent outside it. He never refused absolution - on the basis that few women were faithful... even to their sins.

When asked how to resist temptations of the flesh, he advised his male penitents to consider the consequences: "*I desire her; I possess her; she phones constantly; she wastes my time; she is jealous; my friend stay away because of her; she gesticulates; she always repeats the same things; she writes too much; she doesn't write well; she bores me...*"

He was also much present in the strange world of the well-known newly converted, the so-called Neo-Christians. He said of them that they loved the great sinners and tried to rescue them from the pit, but that they showed little interest for ordinary mediocre sinners. He was referring among others to the famous Maritain couple - Abbé Mugnier kept away because he did not like Raïssa Maritain and the food they served was unremarkable.

He met Father Hyacinthe Loyson, a preacher very popular with the ladies who had extreme reformist ideas about the Church, that the hierarchy did not appreciate at all. Loyson was a rable-rouser who had been suspended *a divinis* by his bishop, had married an American widow (he described their relationship as that of Christ and his disciples) and founded his own Gallican Catholic Church that eventually drifted to the Old Catholics of Utrecht. Abbé Mugnier befriended him and naively thought that he could bring him back to the fold. This put him in hot water when a scandal arose in the press concerning this friendship and their exchange of correspondence. The bishop decided to send Mugnier away for some time - he thus spent a year or so in Greece, Egypt and the Holy Land visiting the sights. On his return in 1910, he was named chaplain of a poor congregation of missionary nuns, les Sœurs de Saint-Joseph de Cluny, a post he kept till his death in 1944.

Abbé Mugnier then divided his time between his ministry to the nuns, the numerous baptisms, marriages and funerals for le Tout-Paris, his visits to the old and sick, and his evenings out among the literati. Indeed, every day after the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament he went out to supper with his artistic friends and got to know everyone worth knowing in Paris. "*Jamais prêtre ne mangea en ville plus que moi. Je dissipe mon âme à pleine assiette.*"

When the Great War broke out, he set up his confessional at the Gare du Nord or Gare de l'Est to shrive the soldiers leaving for the front. Other soldiers preferred to line up at the door of the neighbouring "maisons d'abattage" for a few fleeting moments of sensual delight before being sent to the great slaughter; perhaps they then visited Mugnier afterwards on the way to the troop trains.

He was especially close to two women writers whom he called his nieces, Anna de Noailles née Bibesco-Bassarava (1876 - 1933) and Marta Lahovary Princesse Bibesco (1886 - 1973); they were both femmes du monde and had their entry into all literary and political circles. Princesse Bibesco said of Abbé Mugnier that he was the only man that never made her suffer. Anna is buried in the Bibesco mausoleum at Père-Lachaise; the first time I saw it many years ago, it contained a photograph of her with a hand-written

verse inscription, "*Hélas, je n'étais pas faite pour être morte*" which can be read as a act of faith in the resurrection - which it probably isn't; but the last time I passed by, it had gone, no doubt stolen.

In later years, he was cared for by the Comtesse de Castries, another "niece", while the Princesse Bibesco provided the entertainment. He died at a ripe old age of 91 completely blind and had people read to him over and over again his favourite authors, Chateaubriand, George Sand and Victor Hugo. All the gratin of Paris, both aristocratic and artistic, attended his funeral. The Archdiocese celebrated his unusual ministry to the Tout-Paris, but dubbed him, "*mirandum, non imitandum - to be admired, but not imitated*".

# Why Real Priests Don't Go Hunting

(Smoke Signals # 25, May-June 1997)

Well, kind of. I remember that, when I was training to become a missionary priest (!), we were told repeatedly that we should never consider hunting either for sport or for food. Hunting was most emphatically to be left to the lay brothers. And we were repeated the examples of many good fathers who had been gored by wounded water buffaloes during hunting expeditions. How the buffalo could distinguish between a priest and a lay brother was, however, never satisfactorily explained.

In fact, the old Codex of Canon Law (Can. 138-141) did prohibit priests from indulging in hunting, as it did from carrying arms, becoming surgeons, serving as executioners-hangmen, joining the army, participating in murder trials... What did all these prohibitions have in common? They were about shedding blood! Priests should never shed blood...

**The Trades of Blood.** In many callings, the contact with blood is a daily occurrence; just think of surgeons. In England, surgeons are a race apart from physicians and indeed would never use the title of doctor. They have traditionally been associated with barbers - the men with the sharp knives and razors - and their profession actually took off only during the Napoleonic Wars, when the megalomania of the Little Corsican Corporal provided them with unlimited material to practice on, in the guise of legs and arms to chop off. But human blood has become a very dangerous substance indeed, and all those dealing with it must now take elaborate precautions. Even dental hygienists use latex gloves and surgical masks and ruin what was essentially the only legitimate way older men like myself could be fussed about by a young woman. But the latex barrier has eliminated that. Happily, some of the hygienists have real beautiful eyes.

Butchers too have refined their art. They are seldom the persons who kill the animals, and even in slaughterhouses, the killing is spread over a number of persons (as in a firing squad) so that the actual killer cannot be strictly pinned down. The role of the slaughterhouse is to transform flesh into meat, calf into veal, pig into pork... and this is best done by draining the animal of its blood. Though blood can in some instances become food, as in blood-pudding, or even medicine (in olden days anaemics would go and drink it directly from the dying animal!), it is on the bloodless flesh, a.k.a. meat, that the butcher's art is exercised. Notice also that we eat only herbivorous animals, rarely predators (wolves, minks, lions...) and never pets (except at the proverbial Chinese restaurant; actually no one would dream of serving Rover or Felix to the family; this would be somehow incestuous). It is as if by becoming meat, flesh had lost its soul (become de-animated) and its connection with the animal world and become somehow associated with the world of plants - think of this next time you order corn-fed chicken.

**The Black Blood of the Hunt.** Hunting is a different business altogether, and there is no civilised way of doing it, despite all the rituals, because hunting brings out the "savage" in man. Notice, I write man, because women seldom take pleasure in it. And men rarely want them around... at least not the women who happen to be their wives. Which reminds me of a story: there was a hunting club near our summer place in the Laurentians belonging to twelve Montreal physicians. They met there and had great sport, until early one Sunday morning their wives came up upon them unexpectedly and found them sporting in bed with some of the local lasses... and a number of partnerships in the club came up for sale.

You will object: what about Diana the huntress queen? Do notice that she is an eternal virgin and remember how harshly she treated Actaeon for having seen her beauty, and how dearly Orion paid for the common double sin of hunters, excessive killing of animals and raping of maidens. The hunting and/or soldiering maidens of fable often tend to be somewhat androgynous, and take on these male attributes at the price of losing their femininity, as did the legendary Amazons. Even St. Joan of Arc is always represented dressed in male attire and she was said to eat like a man, pouring wine into her soup ("faire chabrol").

Hunting generates a real fever (Jagdfieber) or fury in its aficionados as the fall season sets in. And the illness can only be cured by the kill and the shedding of the black blood of a rutting stag or moose. The Church has attempted to recuperate some of these barbarous undertakings, and the elaborate rituals associated with the feast of St. Hubert on November 3<sup>rd</sup> are a witness to this: the so-called Hounds' Mass accompanied by the peals of hunting-horns and the howls of the beasts, the holy bread (pain bénit) fed to the dogs, the first stag deposited on the church steps... There even used to be a solemn St. Hubert's Mass in Montreal, with hunters, horns and hounds, celebrated each year by Bishop Chimichella at the RC cathedral, but I am not sure it still is.

Hunting remained a dangerous sport. The contact with the black blood (rich in black bile) of wild animals would affect the hunter and render him melancholic (literally "black biled" or as Victor Hugo put it "enjoying the pleasure of being sad"). Melancholia could lead to genius and it increased the sexual powers immensely, particularly when the hunter ritually drank some of the blood of the stag or boar, ate some of his organs raw, such as the liver, the heart or the testicles, and cut out the penis bone (Priapus bone). But an excess of black bile generated Heracles' madness and turned the hunter into a savage, a wildman, eventually a werewolf, and in the end gave him rabies. The werewolves or lycanthropes longed for human blood and sex, and attacked lone women who ventured into the forest. They were addicted to raw meat (flesh) and barked like dogs ("maladie de l'aboi"). Such mad persons used to be excluded from society and were often killed by strangulation as late as in the 19th c. (Balzac). Even dead they were a menace and were thought to roam from their graves, unless a stake was driven through their hearts! Remember Dracula!

**Men's Blood - Women's Blood.** Men and women entertain quite different relationships

with blood. In men, blood becomes visible only in traumatic instances, such as accidents, crimes, duelling, sacrifices, murders... It somehow nearly always foretells death. In women, however, blood flows regularly and naturally in the menses, following a lunar cycle. Its absence or presence mark the different ages of life. It is a sign of life and fecundity, rather than of death. Still, women's blood is rarely seen as positive, but rather as impure. The woman is fecund but impure, and somehow fecund because impure...

Why this should be has been the focus of much speculation. There is a close relationship between the notions of sacredness and impurity; and indeed the Latin word "sacer" means both sacred and horrible, as does our English word "aw(e)ful". Blood partakes of these notions because it sits at the limit of two realms or worlds. When blood flows, it leaves one realm to enter another, and this is always interpreted as a magical moment, considered with awe, fear, and disgust. The fact that women bleed without trauma makes them unusual, magical, and dangerous... and hence impure and to be avoided. It was therefore thought that menstruating women had magical powers (because while they menstruate, the laws of nature are superseded - blood which should naturally stay inside flows out!). That is why menstruating women tarnish brass, ruin mayonnaises, sour wine, ruin honey-hives, flop whipped cream...

Menstrual blood was said to be black for it had an excess of black bile. If it was not evacuated in the menses, it would cause severe problems of melancholia in women and eventually make them mad. In men, the black blood was thought to accumulate in the hemorrhoids, hence the use of a lancet and/or leeches to remove the blood. A common prescription for the treatment of melancholia was frequent sexual intercourse, for it was well known that men who have no or little sex rapidly became melancholic and dogs rabid. The combination of black bile and warm weather during the dog days often increased the sexual appetite of women to the extent that they often became "devourers of men". The magical element was particularly evident in witches who while no longer menstruating because of their usually advanced ages nevertheless had red eyes and redheads who were thought to menstruate constantly, while being endowed with unusual sexual powers.

Leviticus 15 forbids sexual relationships during menstruation, "*if any man lie with her at all, and her flowers be upon him, he shall be unclean seven days.*" A dog eating a menstruating woman's "flowers" would become rabid. It was widely held that redhead and/or freckled children had been conceived during menstruation, and since Christians did not follow the Biblical prescriptions they had a greater number of such children than did Jews. Others traced the origin of leprosy (also rare in Jews) ultimately to conception by a menstruating mother, hence to contact with soiled blood; a cure was sought by the opposite treatment, i.e. contact with pure blood - that is why the leprous Emperor Constantine was said to have killed 3000 children to secure their innocent blood to bathe his blemished skin.

But menstrual blood could also have beneficial powers: in Scotland, it was said to protect cattle from the Evil Eye. Pliny writes in his Natural History that menstruating women running with bare buttocks through fields infested with beetles

effectively chased the pests away.

Another dangerous moment for men was that of the first intercourse with a new bride, when the breaking of the maidenhead often drew blood. So fearful were men of this situation that the deflowering of the new bride was sometimes left to the local lord or squire in what was called the "right of the first night" (*droit de cuissage, jus primae noctis*). Noblemen, typically mighty hunters, were said to have "blue blood" (as seen through their whiter skin) or "red blood", that is a blood of better quality than ordinary people. Both characteristics allowed them to feed with impunity on venison and other dark meats and only they typically wore fur with the hairs pointing outward. They were therefore immune to black blood and could face the first night's blood better than their subjects... or so did they have them believe. An alternative practice was to postpone the first intercourse for a few nights after the wedding, in the so-called Tobias nights: in the Book of Tobit, the son Tobias did not know his wife Sara until the fourth night, because the evil spirit Asmodeus had killed her 7 previous would-be husbands and the devil had therefore first to be exorcised by ritual ("*the ashes of the perfumes*" and "*the heart and the liver of the fish*") and prayer.

Man is born in blood and must die in blood. In the not so distant past, birthing was the business of women, and only they saw the baby come forth in blood. But now reluctant husbands are conveyed to the great arrival... and often the whole family as well as the event is minutely recorded in photographs and on video. In the Middle Ages, the interruption of the menses, which heralded the birth of a child, was thought to indicate that the blood, instead of flowing, was being concentrated to form the foetus. The remaining blood at birth was interpreted as soiled. The new mother therefore was considered impure for 40 days (the lent of impurity), but twice as long if the child was female (double impurity). The traditional place for birthing was in the stable or the barn, not only in remembrance of that of Our Lord, but because it was a place out of the way of the rest of the family and because it was often the place where the child had been conceived; there was little intimacy in Medieval households and lovers often repaired to the barn for their love-making.

**The Smell of Blood.** There is a strange tradition which holds that the Blood of Christ is sweet-smelling. That is in sharp contrast with ordinary human blood, which has an acrid smell, as do most other body humours (urine, bile, sweat, tears, phlegm, pus...). In fact, most of us are disgusted by our own body fluids and all the more by those of others. When we speak of body odour (BO) it is rarely in a positive way.

Scientists now tell us that we are wrong, and that we should be paying more attention to body odours. Just take, for instance, the renewed interest in "armpit research". In recent years, there has been a lot of studies on the vomeronasal organ, a set of small bodies on the floor of the nasal cavity and set close to the vomer bone. The organ is apparently sensitive to pheromones or semiochemicals (actually steroid compounds such as estratetraenol produced in females and androstadienole in males) secreted by the skin of persons of the opposite sex, and therefore forms an hitherto unrecognised "sixth sense". These chemicals are generally odourless, at least until the

bacteria get at them and transform them into the musky stench of perspiration. They are produced in great quantity in some body areas, such as the groin, the armpits, the breasts, the navel, generally where growths of body hairs serve as wicks to disperse them into the surrounding atmosphere. The chemicals produce a sense of well-being in persons of the opposite sex... and explain (in part) why most men feel great when reclining on an aroused woman's breast... and vice-versa. So think of all you are losing when you shave your armpits and douse them with anti-perspirant aluminium salts (which probably also further your Alzheimer!) to make yourself odourless. You can actually buy perfumes called Realm and Lydia (Erox Corp., USA) which incorporate these semiochemicals, but beware, some scents, such as Musk-2 and Athena contain pheromones from pigs, such as androstenol and androstenone, which are apparently inactive in humans, and which you may not really want to wear for your next visit to the farm!

**Plant vs Animal Odour.** In the Incarnation, Christ the true God became true man, but also true sacrificial animal (Lamb of God). His Blood was thought to be perfect, just as Adam's had been before the fall: in Medieval humoral medicine, this meant 4 parts blood, 3 parts phlegm, 2 parts yellow bile, and 1 part black bile. In other people, the balance was wrong and much of the work of the physician was to try to restore the equilibrium by blood-letting, enema, leeches... Blood-letting was generally followed by a good drink of red wine, the perfect food for restoring the blood. Still, the balance could never be perfectly achieved, for humans were sinners and this was reflected in their humours. Indeed, blood-letting was often accompanied by confession, to try to cure jointly the body and the soul.

Christ's Blood is given the characteristics of plant sap and it takes on its sweet smell. The "vegetable" proprieties of the Blood of Christ are closely mirrored by the use of wine in the Sacrament. From this transmutation of the animal into the plant world arises the image of the winepress as a figure of the Passion: as the plant (the grapes) are crushed, they exude their sweet-smelling juice, so Christ sheds on the Cross His sweet-smelling Blood. Thus the New Testament vegetable sacrifice of an agricultural society replaces the Old Testament animal sacrifice of a pastoral society; but remember that God rejected Cain's offering of the fruits of the earth only to accept Abel's animal sacrifice. (...)

**Blood and Priesthood.** The mysterious relationship with blood and priesthood has other intriguing dimensions.

**First**, priests were forbidden from shedding blood in ordinary life, because of their role as the shedders of the Blood of Christ in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is as if a person can only suffer so much contact with blood in what the French call "le cumul du sang" (the surfeit of blood).

**Secondly**, the prohibitions against priests shedding blood as hunters, surgeons, soldiers... also applied in traditional societies to women, on the basis that women already had a mysterious connection with blood through their menstruation and should

not indulge in more, again on the same principle.

**Thirdly**, because of these shared prohibitions, priests got somehow assimilated to women. Add to this the priest's celibacy, and you can understand better the suspicion with which he was and is often treated by other men.

**Finally**, the priestly role has many feminine dimensions: the long dress, the frills, the lace... the nurturing and suckling imagery of the Eucharist... the birthing dimension of Baptism... These are all roles traditionally vested in women. And many feminists (e.g. Rosemary Radford Ruether. **Why males fear women priests**. Witness 63:19-21, 1980) have argued that male priests are afraid that female priests would challenge the feminine dimension of their traditional role. If this is so, it may explain why the opposition to women priests is greater in churches which see the Mass as a sacrifice and the priest as the sacrificer and quite absent from churches in which preaching is the main office of the minister. That menstruating women should be excluded from the sanctuary and the priesthood is thus not inconceivable in such a frame of mind.

Consider finally the relationship between Christian virgins and blood, not only in their martyrdom which is generally a very bloody affair, but also in their emaciated ways of life of fasting and deprivation, which eventually provoked amenorrhea, hence the loss of the menses. A contrived reference can be made to Christ's curing of the woman suffering from an issue of blood: somehow He liberated her from her impurity, while letting himself being touched by her and becoming impure by association. It is as if being a virgin martyr cured the natural blood-impurity of women by substituting to it the blood-relationship of men, in which blood flows through wounds. Somehow, it is as if women cannot really achieve sainthood without in a way becoming like men...

The heyday of Blood worship in Christianity was the 13th c. when the Lateran Council defined transubstantiation, King St. Louis of France built the Sainte-Chapelle to house the holy Crown of Thorns, St. Francis of Assisi received the stigmata or marks of the Passion in his own flesh, and everyone read eagerly the story of Parsifal and his search for the Holy Grail... The devotion reappeared in the 18-19th c. as the cult of the Sacred Heart, culminating in the construction of that other Parisian monument, le Sacré-Coeur. But, I suppose, that is a topic for another day.

# Splitting Hairs

(Smoke signals # 7, June 1995)

Did you ever ponder on the liturgical significance of hair? Well, there is more to it than it would seem at first glance. Humans are mammals, and so glory in their "fleece" as birds do in their plumage. One only needs to consider the care, time and expense both sexes invest in their hair; and the trouble they go to in order to rid themselves of hair where God so often ungraciously makes it grow and to get it to flourish again where God has sadly removed it. And all would agree that a luxuriant mane of hair, particularly in women, does indeed pass on a definite sexual message, but so curiously does its absence: a bald pate in men is the undoubted attestation of a high testosterone level.

In Holy Writ, it is certainly of significance that Esau was "*a hairy man*" and Jacob "*a smooth man*", though I cannot say why. And did not Samson get his great strength from his unshaven locks (Judges 16:17)? The colour of hair is also important, and again Esau is described as having come out "*red*". There is a lot of talk of black, grey and white hair in the Bible. I have of late developed a certain fondness for psalm 71 from Mattins on the 14th of the month, "*Forsake me not, O God, in mine old age, when I am gray-headed*" and I get some consolation from Proverbs 20:29, "*The beauty of old men is the gray head*". I do realize, however, that pretty soon I will be searching for comfort elsewhere, such as in Isaiah 47: 4 "*Even to hoar hairs will I carry you*" and Prov. 16:31, "*The hoary head is a crown of glory (if it be found in the way of righteousness)*".

Although the earliest pictures of Christ in the Catacombs represent Him beardless (like the god Hermes), nearly all later representations show Him with long hair and a beard. Except in the Orient, where priests wear both long hair and beard, priests, who stand in His stead and thrive to imitate Him in every way, are typically shaved and shorn.

Indeed, priests are traditionally required to wear their hair short and equal, particularly on the forehead and around the ears. There should be no parting nor forelock, and the hair should never be curled, craped or padded ("*cucuffatos, crispatos, calamistratos*", as the rule has it). Wearing one's hair long on the back of the head is the sure sign of Gallicanism and of open rebellion against authority! And the great Medieval liturgist Durandus remarked that long hair was the symbol of a multitude of sins.

There is good evidence that in the Early Church, clerics wore the simple haircut we usually associate with ancient Romans. And indeed St. Paul reminds the Corinthians "*that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him*" (1 Cor. 11:14). In 147, Pope St. Anicet reminded clerics in Gaul not to "*let their hair grow, and to follow the prescription of the Apostle.*" And St. Augustine has harsh words against the "*criniti fratres* (the hirsute brothers)". So much so that a cleric guilty of a crime was required to let his hair grow as a layman. This was in contrast with pagan priests who generally wore special haircuts. In the great cult of the goddess Isis, the priest who carried the

jackal-headed god Anubis, the leader of the dead souls, had to shave his head; and when Emperor Commodus (180-192) performed the ceremony, he first shaved his head. In other cults, the hair was cut in various arrangements, some not unlike those worn by present-day teenagers, such as the head shaved except for a long forelock.

By the 4-6th c., however, monks began clipping their hair to form a **crown** (recalling the shearing of St. Peter's hair in Antioch by the Jews, but also the Crown of Thorns, the Royal Crown of Christians, and the circle of the perfect life). There developed other ways of clipping one's hair, the better known being that of St. Peter (a large shaved circle on the pate) and that of St. Paul (fully shaved head). Other haircuts were seen as heretical, and in particular that said of Simon the Magician, which was later assimilated to the Celtic tonsure worn by the monks of the Celtic Church which both St. Augustine of Canterbury and St. Patrick so strongly opposed. This tonsure was said to go "from ear to ear" and is usually interpreted as indicating that all the hair on the front part of the head was shaved away. St. Patrick apparently traced it back to the swineherd of the Irish king Leogair. When in the 16th c. the Capuchin started wearing a horizontal crown instead of an oblique one as do other friars and monks, they were accused of having revived the tonsure of Simon the Magician.

The practice of clipping one's hair then passed on to the secular clergy, and the **tonsure** (the cutting of five locks of hair by the bishop) and the vesting of the cassock became the rites of entrance into the clergy. Until recently, this clipping was recalled by a small shaved spot on the top of the head; this was the size of a small wafer bread (2.5 cm) for a simple clerk, a large host (7.5 cm) for a priest. For a bishop, it reached 9.5 cm, for a cardinal 11.5 cm, and a pope 13.5 cm.

**Wigs and toupees** were not allowed, particularly the powdered kind. The pope could nonetheless allow a wig, if it was simple and prescribed by a doctor, but it had to be removed during Mass. There is the case of an English seminarian at Rome by the name of Edmund Pumer who in 1846 was tonsured by having five locks clipped off... his wig. The validity of the procedure was much debated, but he was not required to be tonsured anew.

Short **mustaches** were tolerated but **beards** were generally forbidden. There is the story of a Guillaume Duprat, son of the chancellor of Francis I of France, who was named bishop of Clermont. He had a remarkable beard. When he came to his cathedral, the chapter was waiting with scissors and the book of statutes (which required "*barbis rasis*"). The bishop-elect would not part with his beard, so he left the cathedral and retired in his castle of Bellegarde, without ever claiming his see. Yet, there was a series of bearded popes, from Clement VII (1543) to Clement VIII (1605) and a series of mustachioed ones: Paul V (1605) to Innocent XII (1700). Since then, popes have been clean shaven. In the 19th c. Anglican Church, priests and bishops generally wore the whiskers fashionable at the time. Ritualist priests, however, did not; and this was the case of the clergy in our church. When in 1871, there was the first great problem with Bishop Oxenden, our curate, the Rev. Mr. Prime, was described by a fellow priest in the newspapers "as all shaven and shorn" a condition he thought was motivated by vanity and desire of notoriety.

Some strict orders (Capuchins and Camaldule Hermits) wear beards and there is a well-known folk-song on the "*Venerabilis barba capucinatorum!*" Still, these bearded priests were expected to shave the lower part of the mustache so as not to touch the Sacrament during Communion. Missionaries also generally wore beards. I remember in my seminary days that when young priests received their first posting, all other seminarians were curious to find out where each was being sent. These postings were generally handed out in the evening during private interviews with the major superior. As this was during the great evening silence, the good or bad news could not be spread around. Yet, the next day, at morning prayer, we would all check to see who had not shaved, the budding beards identifying those who were to go to the foreign missions.

Thus limited in the wearing of their own hair, clerics have taken quite early on to wearing the hair of others.., well, of other animals. **Fur** was for a long time a favourite with the clergy, particularly with canons, who had to spend long hours every day singing the office in cold and drafty cathedrals. Indeed, the word surplice comes from "super-pellicem" which means over-the-fur. The last time we saw liturgical fur in our church was a few years back when Fr. Slattery caused a sensation by wearing a white-fur almuce for the Carols and Lessons service. Various kinds of canons, beneficiaries, and prebendaries wore different furs, such as squirrel (vair), Siberian cat, and various types of rabbit. Cardinals generally wore hermine (white), but Capuchin cardinals traditionally used marten (brown), Franciscan cardinals vicuna (grey), Benedictine cardinals black cat or squirrel, Sylvestrine cardinals blue fox... thus retaining the colour of the habit of their order.

# Clerical Haberdashery

(Smoke Signals #12, February 1996)

I am sure that you noticed the fine outfit our Archdeacon wore when he last visited us. I learned from the Synod Report that our diocesan dignitaries got new costumes for the visit of The Archbishop of Canterbury in 1994. We have thus been privileged to admire that appointed for an archdeacon. A noble raiment indeed, though a little strange to my Roman eyes. What I found more interesting, however, was the cape and particularly the Roman hat that he wore over it all - and that Father Vincent sported at the Vestry Meeting. I had not seen such a hat in decades, except in old reruns of Don Camillo films featuring Fernandel. This type of headwear was traditionally worn by clerics in Rome, and became at one time widely used by bishops and other dignitaries.

In fact, however, the appointed head-gear for a priest is a **three-cornered hat** (tricorn) and for the Pope a bicorn. The last person I saw wearing a tricorn (outside the house of Commons) was an ancient Christian Brother on New Year's Day 1963 when, as a seminarian, I was invited with others to see the Hitchcock film *Vertigo* at the Académie de Québec in Sainte-Foy. The place was like an ant-hill, teeming with intermingled generations of Christian Brothers and was ironically known as "The Manufacture" (... of Brothers)! times have changed, haven't they? Such institutions no longer exist.

The earlier prescribed head-dress was **the square cap** or **biretta**, which survived in the Anglican tradition as the Canterbury cap of Canon 74. Its use was revived for the coronation of King Edward VII. It is in black velvet for bishops and doctors and in cloth for others. In Roman use, it has taken on a peculiar shape and is reinforced with cardboard (a contrivance which is destroyed the first time the priest sits on it, which is generally early in the life of any biretta). There were originally four corners or "horns" and it was thus used by clerical university doctors for teaching until a generation ago; for liturgical use, the horn on the left side is always clipped. The middle usually bears a small cord-loop (cardinals) or a tassel (others); Jesuits still use an earlier form without any middle appendage. The red biretta has long been one of the insignia of a cardinal; bishops have worn purple only since 1888, when the privilege was given to them by Pope Leo XIII on his golden anniversary of ordination.

You knew clerical attire was complicated, but I am sure that you never thought it was that complex. I have come across a 19th c. treatise in the Université de Montréal Library entitled, "**Le costume et les usages ecclésiastiques selon la tradition romaine**" by the otherwise unknown Mgr Xavier Barbier de Montault, a prelate of the Pontifical Family. But would you believe he could fill two volumes and 1016 pages? and he deals only with the secular clergy.

The priestly habit is, as you know, the **cassock** ("vestis talaris" = the vestment

that goes down to the heels), which should reach to four fingers from the ground. It was worn by all clerics from sunrise to half an hour after sunset. The Roman cassock is wide, but not fitted at the waist and has an opening at the collar. The Gallican cassock is fitted at the waist with folds, and traditionally it is held with a sash; the collar is straight. Both are closed by a row of buttons (which are purple, violet or red for various dignitaries). It sometimes had a "tail" or train ("en cul-de-poule"), a long triangular extension which was carried by a caudatory or train-bearer. Large buttons, big pockets, insignia of fraternities, societies, family crests... are specifically forbidden. The collar is a white band of cloth (Roman, dog or jampot-collar) in Roman use, and bands in Gallican use. The collar has a black flap or bib to keep it in place and to close the gap in the cassock - in the Congregation of the Holy Ghost (to which I once belonged), the flap is blue, because it replaces a scapulary.

You might think that there is no significant difference between a Roman and a Gallican cassock; let me tell you an experience of mine to prove you wrong. I was a young and innocent scholastic in Quebec City studying philosophy. I wore the habit of the congregation, a loose cassock (of the Roman type), tied at the waist with a woollen cord. One day I inherited a cassock from a colleague "who had returned into the world". It was not the regulation garb; it had been made by a well-known clerical tailor, and was closely fitted at the waist (in Gallican style). When I wore it for the first time, I got compliments from a colleague whom I had hitherto imagined to be very saintly and unwordly on "*the rotundity (sic!) of my backside...*" (I had a waist in those days). So if you are "on the prowl", by all means, get yourself a Gallican cassock!

The Anglican cassock is wide, not fitted at the waist, and closed by buttons at the neck and chest; the collar opening is wide; the collar is Roman, sometimes augmented by narrow bands. Many Anglicans wear Roman cassocks, and the long row of buttons is referred to as "the 39 Articles", but it is only a pun, because those wearing such a habit are those least likely to uphold the articles. By contrast to Roman or French cassocks, the Anglican model tends to be rather short, and sometimes surprisingly so, probably to accommodate the traditional vicar's bicycle. Actually, RC priests generally wear it so long, that the legs and feet are barely visible. But why, pray, should a priest hide his feet? Any good Protestant can tell you why; it is because priests, particularly if they are Jesuits, have the hairy legs and hooved feet of a ram. And why should they have such legs? It is because they are like the devil. And why does the devil, you ask, have hairy legs and cloven feet? Well, that is a long story. Christians have transferred to Satan the appearance and attributes of the god Pan of Antiquity. Pan was the god of fertility, of woods, and of pastoral life, and he was represented with horns, a beard, the feet of a ram, and a massive sex organ. He was both revered and feared, and from his name comes our word "panic". Pan eventually came to represent paganism as a whole (Pan = All). And when the shepherds bowed down in adoration before the Christ Child at Bethlehem (or when Christ died on the Cross in other versions), a cry spread through the Ancient World "Great Pan is Dead", heralding the end of the old religion and the coming of the new (see Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem on the topic). So identifying Satan with Pan is in fact a rejection of paganism as a whole. And by implication,

Protestants were accusing priests of paganism and superstition.

Cassocks come in various colours, witness the multicolored ones of the seminarians of the various nations studying in Rome. Since the Council of Milan in 1565, black has been prescribed for the secular clergy (except for various dignitaries), though white, grey and buff have often been worn particularly in tropical climes. The Pope traditionally wore crimson velvet (though white is customary since Pope Saint Pius V, who was a Dominican, or ironically a Black Friar, kept the costume of his order, a white robe with a black cape) and cardinals red watered silk (moire). Bishops wore silk or wool according to the solemnity of the season. Priests wore cloth in winter and merino cloth in summer.

Under a cassock, the proper attire is a pair of breeches or knickerbockers. Indeed, priests were expected to wear the "**Sainte Culotte**" or "**Holy Breeches**"; pants were associated with the revolutionaries who shunned breeches, hence their name of "Sans-Culottes". Suspenders, another invention of the French Revolution, were another no-no. In Rome after the 1870 Revolution, priests wearing pants were dubbed "i pantaloni" and rejected by the faithful. The name apparently comes from Pantalone, a lean and foolish old man in 16th c. Venetian comedy who was dressed in loose trousers and slippers. They may also come from the trews or tartan "pants" of some Scottish Regiments. Pants became popular with military men but rejected by good society, and in 1814 the Duke of Wellington was refused entrance to his club because he was wearing pantaloons. Breeches are also associated with the Bible, at least with a particular version of it; the Geneva edition of 1560 became known as the "Breeches Bible", because Gen. 3:7 read "*and they sowed figge-tree leaves together, and made themselves breeches*".

Monks wear woollen bloomers under their habit, though, as in the case of the legendary Scotsman's kilt, one is never quite sure. These drawers are sometimes referred to as "antiphons" because they are the first article of clothes that one puts on. They are much like the large bloomers which our mothers and grandmothers used to wear under their dresses to ward off the cold as well as indiscreet glances; they used to be called in Québec "*culottes à grand' manches*" or "*culottes catholiques*" (long-sleeved or catholic drawers).

It is rumoured that some strict orders wear no underclothes at all, a fact which is discussed at length in a strange book entitled "*Essai sur l'histoire naturelle de quelques espèces de moines, décrits à la manière de Linné. Ouvrage traduit du latin et orné de figures par M. Jean d'Antimoine, naturaliste du Grand Lama etc. à Monachopolis 1784 in octavo. (A. Boussonet, Éditeur)*". This scandalous publication (**Essay on the Natural History of Some Monks, Described in the Manner of Linnaeus. Translated from the Latin and Provided with illustrations by John of Antimony, Naturalist at the Court of the Grand Lama etc., Published in 1784 at Monkville in octavo by A. Boussonet, editor**) caused much furor, but its publication was encouraged by Austrian Emperor Joseph II (+1790) who hated monks, "*who being useless in the world cannot be pleasing to God*" and had ordered the closing of more than 750 monasteries in his realm. The book was said to contain "*des planches très curieuses*" - very strange illustrations.

## "The Priest" and Other Nonsense

(Smoke Signals #6, May 1995)

Have you seen the movie? Well, I have. I felt that if it had been condemned by both the American and French bishops, it must have some redeeming value. And besides, the publicity promised nothing less than **"a world of ritual"**. How could I resist?

It was great fun and helped me get through a vast volume of popcorn, but in last analysis it was a pretty stupid movie. I cannot really see why the bishops got so excited. Under the disguises, I could not find a single priest. None of these guys even comes close to knowing what the priesthood is about, so gross is the caricature. Though I suppose there are "priests" like that around. And what to say about the crafty bishop, what an ass... and he can't even wear his pectoral cross properly on his zimarra! - What is a zimarra (or simar), you ask? well it's a kind of housecoat for clerics. It looks like a cassock, but it has a pair of short silly sleeves over the regular sleeves and a short silly cape on the shoulders (just like the Pope wears). The cross should be worn over the cape, not under... which immediately identifies the so-called "bishop" in the movie as a fraud.

But then when was a real priest last pictured in the movies? That is hard to tell, but probably never better than when Georges Bernanos' *"Journal d'un curé de campagne"* (The diary of a country priest) was set to the screen by Robert Bresson. This was the portrayal of the battle of the soul against the forces of the devil, a battle which informs all our daily lives, but which rages with particular intensity in the soul of a holy and faithful priest. Having *"the divine ignorance of the saints"*, the priest painfully discovers the pervasiveness of evil in his parish, and through his own excruciating spiritual agony strives to liberate the possessed... None of this in Priest, I am afraid... except a bit of howling at a crucifix!

Well, others have written more knowledgeably about the movie, and I am being too harsh, so I should restrict my comments to the liturgy. What liturgy? the few bits that were shown were all right, I guess, and conformed to the current rubric "Anything goes!" Actually, they were rather conservative, compared to what one can find around here in RC churches.

Did you pick up the old theological puzzler in the movie? It goes like this: **you are a priest about to say Mass; a man comes to confession and accuses himself of having poisoned the wine you are to use. What do you do?** You discard the wine and open a fresh bottle? Right? - Wrong! You go and say Mass as planned, drink the poisoned wine, and become an unacknowledged martyr of the secret of the confessional. You see, a priest may not use for any purpose whatsoever, including saving his own life, the information he hears in confession. I wonder if the puzzle is still around and whether present day seminarians still worry about it. Father Simons should know, and the Anglican version must be even more "fun"... because then, not

only do you poison yourself, but you also kill off your whole congregation...

While we are on the subject of poisoned chalices... There is a lot of casuistry built around the topic. Do remember that such information could at one time come in handy when there were Borgia popes about. And it still could; a lot of people still believe that Pope John Paul I was helped to his grave by his evening tisane (despite his notoriously blocked arteries).

Here are some of the rules:

- If you learn of the poisoned wine before the Consecration, you throw it away, get a fresh cup and go on with the Mass.
- If the poisoned wine has been consecrated, you put it aside and consecrate a new cup. After Mass the poisoned wine is soaked up in linen or in cotton wool, and left to evaporate and become vinegar. The cloth is then burned, and the ashes poured into the piscina (a drain that goes into the ground).
- If you have drunk the poisoned wine, immediately begin the prayers for the dying... Well, not exactly, you are allowed to use an emetic or a stomach pump. You must then collect the rejection, burn it and throw the ashes in the piscina.

But a poisoned chalice is a rare occurrence, **The Cunning Man**, (Robertson Davies' novel) notwithstanding. There are a lot of other situations which the casuists have pre-solved for the unwary priest. Here are a few examples:

- A fly or a spider falls into the consecrated wine. Option 1: you gulp it down with the wine. Option 2: you take the beast out, rinse it with fresh wine over the chalice, and wrap it in a purificator. After Mass, you burn it and throw its ashes in the piscina. I have once seen one of our priests use option 1, when a ciborium was found to be infested with flour beetles.
- You have just taken the consecrated bread, and you vomit. If the bread is still recognisable in the rejection, you must eat it again. If you cannot without vomiting again, you collect the rejection and dispose as above.
- You are passing communion, and drop a little consecrated wine on the floor. You must kneel, and collect it with your tongue.
- The chalice freezes during Mass. The server must bring in a large bowl of hot water and the chalice is put in to thaw or else is wrapped in warm wet cloths.
- A bird or a squirrel swipes the consecrated host from the altar. You get a new host, and reconsecrate. Some books suggest the same solution if the holy bread ever should disappear by "miracle".
- If the wine is found to be vinegar at Communion time, new wine must be procured and consecrated, because the Sacrament cannot be celebrated with vinegar.
- If there are drops of wine on the outside wall of the chalice after Consecration; no worry, they are not consecrated. Same thing for wafers put on the altar but outside of the corporal.
- If the church catches fire, or if terrorists burst into the church, or if a notorious heretic (!) walks in during Mass, the priest should immediately consume the Sacrament and leave the altar.

- A priest is allowed to interrupt Mass even during Consecration to give the last sacraments to a dying person (but it must be resumed within an hour, and someone must keep guard of the Consecrated elements).
- If a priest dies or becomes ill during Mass, another priest must complete the service if one or both elements are consecrated.

# They are Taking Over the Earth!

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I am sure that you are as troubled as I am to hear the reports that the UN are to call an international conference on "Male Infertility". Well, it seems that we males are not the men our fathers were, that our sperm counts are way down by 50%, and that our testicles are shrinking. We intuitively knew that somehow we were not up to par, but we thought that it was all psychological or psychosomatic and due to the castrating effects of the shrieks of radical feminists, and we believed that a little closer male bonding would make it all better. But to make it all even worse, it appears that there are fewer males being born. God in his wisdom always allowed a small surplus of boys, probably to compensate the reckless streak he put in adolescent males that prods them to acquire motorcycles or to join the army. Well, how wrong we were! It's the tainted food we eat and the water we drink that is doing us in: our intake of organo-chlorides has increased through eating fruits and vegetables laced with insecticides and drinking water from PVC pipes - so much for the "*better living through chemistry*". The problem is that organo-chlorides mimic the female hormone oestrogen, so that we males are all slowly but surely becoming feminised. Just think, we are to be the last generation of the "big-balled" men... We are hit where we are the most vulnerable. It's all downhill from here. The women will have to find a way to make kids without us (and that entails parthenogenesis!)... so the feminist dream will come true after all.. a world without sexism, machism, patriarchy, paternalism... **and without men.** Human society would be, God forbid, like a nunnery!

So the Church in her wisdom should start ordaining women as fast as it can. Follow the Anglican lead; the Spirit bloweth where she listeth and sometimes a little breeze comes our way. But, what about the Pope, you say? Here, I have a problem for the Pope.

As a biologist and otherwise... I am, as are most people, intrigued by the whole business of sex and gender. Despite what you may think, this question of why most animal and plant species waste half of their resources making males who actually are of little use except for reproduction remains largely unanswered. The current theory is that the presence of males and sexual reproduction increase genetic variability, which protects us from pathogens and disease...

Getting back to gender, the Pope refuses ordination to women on the basis of their gender. That seems straightforward, but it is not as simple as it may seem at first. But, you say, each of us has a gender, male or female, which makes some of us potentially ordainable and others not. But, think about it a minute: where did you get your gender from? it is based on your parents' opinion when they first cursorily glanced at you on the delivery table. That is OK, I guess, because most parents know enough about the topic to place correctly most of the children they make, but obviously not all of them.

There are various definitions of gender:

- 1) **Chromosomal gender:** males have a smaller Y chromosome as companion to the X chromosome on the 23<sup>rd</sup> pair, while females have two X chromosomes. That is why in past Olympic games, the stockier USSR or East German female athletes were asked to submit cells from the skin of their mouth for the tell-tale heterochromatin test and then sent to play with the other boys.
- 2) **Gonadic gender:** males have testicles and females ovaries, right? Well, in principle, that is a good criterion, but it does not always work.
- 3) **External gender:** males have a penis, while women have a vagina and breasts, again criteria which are usually pretty good, but not fail-safe.
- 4) **Psychological gender:** and what about the gender of the brain? What about those people who see themselves imprisoned in a body of the wrong gender?

So when Holy Church decrees that no member of the female gender can be ordained, to what gender criterion is she referring to? In most cases, there is no problem since all four criteria for gender determination coincide in a given person. But, what if they don't; let me use an example.

The fictitious Marilyn is a devout 20-year old Catholic girl; she is stunningly beautiful, with a great mane of hair and has all the right curves in the right places. She has, however, little or no body hair and has never menstruated. One day she complains of a lump in the groin... which proves upon examination to be a descending testicle! (She) is eventually shown to be a male suffering of the **Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome**, a recessive disorder on (her) sole X chromosome. Genetically, she is a male with the typical XY karyotype (criterion 1), which is the cause of her descending testes (criterion 2), but although the testes produce the male hormone testosterone which normally brings about criteria 3 (external male sexual characters) and 4 (male brain), her receptors cannot accept the male hormones (androgens), so the process is interrupted, and she develops as a female, and exteriorly quite an acceptable one too ("*voluptuously feminine phenotype*" as the medical textbooks put it). And I am told, many such "males" enter the modelling business, where their generous bosom allied to their narrow hips and long legs give them a definite edge over competing and real females. And just think of the otherwise homophobic males who drool and lust in their hearts after such pseudo-females and even bring them into their beds; they would die if they knew what they were actually doing ("*Forgive them for they know not what they are doing*"). But I am digressing... again.

So what we need is for the imaginary Marilyn to ask to be admitted to the priesthood on the basis of his (her) vocation and his (her) genetic and hormonal analyses. It would be fun to see the Curia deal with this one; they use such reductionist criteria for everything relating to sex, that they would be caught unless they ditched their usual narrow view. I bet they would refuse on the basis of the absence of a penis - but who can tell where a clitoris ends and where a penis begins, the two organs being completely homologous. Methinks (s)he should be ordained on the basis of his(her) testicles.

Nature being so bountiful, the converse situation also exists: some genetic females with an XX chromosome possess a masculinising gene, and hence develop as

apparent males. And I am sure some of them must have been ordained in good faith in the past even in the Roman Church, and there must be some of these unknowing priestesses around somewhere celebrating Mass, quite unaware of their condition. Perhaps search committees should require a genetic test from applicants, lest they unwittingly hire a priestess. (Don't fret, the fathering of three children will do as a genetic test!)

So it is perhaps time that the Church and the Pope do away with all this nonsense and remember that in Christ there is "*neither male nor female*" and that this is sometimes true in nature as well. To reduce the world to black and white, male and female, is essentially Manichaeian and dualistic and ultimately contrary to the "catholic" world view which is to be in theory all encompassing. Actually, I personally have rather little difficulty with male or female priests per se; what I really have problems with are liberal priests who degrade their priestly character and Protestant priests (quite an oxymoron!) who have never realised they had a priestly character at all.

Another interesting point about this gender business is that it is obvious that the female is the basic gender in humans; it is also the default gender. Any person not having a complete "male kit" will therefore develop into a female. This only reinforces the old prejudice that females are incomplete and imperfect males, as Aristotle and St. Thomas so clearly thought. Perhaps, that is really why only "real" men can become priests, because only they are perfect. That is probably also the reason why the Church traditionally would not ordain eunuchs. That, to me, is a classic example of sexism, the consequences of which we sometimes pray to be delivered from at the Great Intercession during Mass. The bees have a more realistic attitude. Male bees (drones) come from unfertilised eggs, so the queen bee can produce them at will. Males are therefore kept and fed as long as food is plentiful, although they do not do any real work around the hive and just hang around until needed to fertilise a new queen. But as summer ends and food becomes scarce, they are killed and thrown out. By comparison, our females don't actually treat us so badly after all.