

that we live now our life of worship as we should if England were completely Catholic. And within that effort, study and teaching take the first place, so that we ourselves may worship with understanding and that separated English Christians may see their way to finding reconciliation in the faith.

Mummy, Here's God

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I am writing this article about the duty, as it is considered, of the priest to visit in his parish. I take the title from what an excitable little girl exclaimed once at my entry. Her pert young mother's laughter, when she ran out to see who 'on earth' it was, and sat collapsed on the stairs, still jars in memory in my ear. I know I am not God, I mean. I don't know that it is quite so funny.

The subject of visiting does interest us all. It is part of ideal Catholic life: Father at home in the Catholic family, intimate with everyone, not only available in need as a close friend, but influencing all the time by his contact, towards good relations, better life, finer manners, more careful choice of career, deeper judgement in marriage; his very presence reminding of faith, restoring hope, inspiring love; counteracting the whole battery of trivial and stultifying fantasies current as so much of today's politics, literature and entertainment. One can hardly imagine full Catholic life without it.

But this is an ideal. It doesn't happen, that is, quite like this. In writing generally we can't particularize, but there is an impression around that 'priests aren't visiting as they used to'. This may be untrue, actually—the past has a way of adding up in perspective to make once-a-year then appear all-the-time now. However, the impression is there, and may be true to some extent.

If true, I want to put the cards on the table for you and discuss visiting from a priest's point of view. I will suggest that there are increasing difficulties about it that priests may feel, consciously or not,

and that it will be good for all to know. Readers may not like the next few pages; but if one wants to deal with people there is an element to be encountered, an unexpected not-quite-in-the-book-ishness that is, to me, the mark of genuine contact with genuine people.

The difficulties of visiting are of two clear kinds: some merely 'technical' and others more fundamental. Merely technical difficulties are things like the scattered housing estates more and more people live in; the shifting of population and dispersal of families; the diversity of class found in most parishes; the habit in men and, increasingly, in women of being out; curiously, the priest's possessing a car; last, by no means least, the hold of television.

Scattered housing estates are particularly difficult to visit. The priest walks half-a-mile, a mile, two or three, to knock embarrassedly at doors in view of a hundred windows and find four or five homes empty. The compensations are that he is seen and the visit is appreciated by the whole neighbourhood; in the unsocial emptiness, more needed too. One soon realizes the break-up, brothers and sisters scattered from aged parents over the whole country, or several countries; for any slight freshening advantages and for all the economics that have made that necessary, untold harm has been done to culture and ways, peace of mind and religion.

Then if he visits, determinedly, the whole parish, its bewildering variety is another difficulty, from poor and shabby through magazine-style hire-purchase to rich, beautifully appointed homes; hoping that he doesn't mingle prejudices and habits as he goes. Even their smells can be a difficulty: sour, unmistakable (no bathroom) for all the Social Welfare can do, of pensioners and the very poor; of cooking, children, or those spicy obviously unused 'sitting-rooms'; more embarrassing still the odour of lawns and old gardens, perfume and dogs, cigars and whisky. He divides mornings to the very poor, afternoon to workers, evening to well-to-do. He doesn't let it be known where he is off to next (in fact, everyone likes to pretend that you only visit there, you are not on rounds). If he crashes a meal, the poor man has to learn where to sit it out with a cup of tea in a corner and where he can sit with the family if invited — and risk the inevitable embarrassments ('Mummy, why did we say prayers *at table*?').

The most frequent and most discouraging experience is to find everyone out; perhaps calling for a change of visiting habits, going to people at their occupations as well as at their homes. We visit the children at school and do a lot with them there. We might visit men

and women at work, in factories and mines and docks: easy to arrange for a first occasion—when mere curiosity is presumed—but harder to keep up (with a regular appearance at the canteen at lunchtime, or an office arranged in a corner somewhere, or an agent collecting enquiries and making appointments?) especially if crypto-political influence, or even just taking up time, were suspected. There is another solution to finding people not at home, but I will scarcely mention it, so far is it from our present habits; and that is the priest being more 'at home' himself, and entertaining special people—newly-weds, group leaders, and so on. I wonder just how much is lost to us by those grim, mysterious, uninviting presbyteries.

Wandering the streets on his many affairs, he can meet, greet and chat with a surprising number of people; hence the menace of the car, not only as iron curtain between priests and people, but enlarging unduly the scale of vision and activity, making his parish shrink to a locality, and his people 'those pedestrians' in the windscreen.

Priests complain of the difficulty of walking in on the family rapt before their favourite programme. I've usually had to watch good-humouredly with them and then go, hoping that mere quiet presence was enough. I did walk into a large family where the children were excitedly waiting to see the newly-installed set at work for the first time. Mother firmly switched it off; but the faces showed such strained, saintly resignation that I could stand it no longer and adjusted the thing with my bare hands.

Visiting, however, presents much more fundamental difficulties than these. I will hazard a guess and say that I think many young priests today feel unqualified to meet the laity at any depth; and feel that the superficial chat, tending to gossip, of much visiting is, to be honest, a waste of time, a 'disenchantment', and best avoided by *not* visiting, leaving contacts to the professional safety of the consulting office and the confessional.

It is true that if we go round, and have shown ourselves in sermons and conversation—more revealing than we realize—as open-minded and amenable to discussion, we get sharply confronted with problems (a claim to the Pauline privilege in my first fortnight's visiting). They vary, but most involve what we can take as samples, the subjects 'never discussed among gentlemen' and thrust up therefore to the priest—sex, politics and religion.

To take the first matter first. The young priest has a lot to learn. Ridiculous and old-fashioned as usual, I did worry at the beginning

(and this may be holding back other priests) about visiting all these attractive young wives alone at their homes, as I had to, having only afternoons free at the time. I spoke frankly to the men I knew well about it, asking their opinion. It took quite some time for my message to get across. They were obviously long past being able to consider their wives a possible danger to anyone and, I'd better ruefully admit, couldn't consider me any danger on the other side. We are trusted on this matter to an incredible extent. There are dangers of scandal, and one must take normal precautions. One needn't worry, all the same, if seeing a man and woman together is enough for one conclusion to poisoned minds.

I will say, however, that talking about sex problems is not usually a good idea. There is natural reticence, which is a very good thing (though not to be deceived, men: women do talk outrageously among themselves sometimes).¹ One is personally rather ignorant as a priest. (One woman to another after the glowing sermon: 'I wish I knew as little about marriage as Father seemed to do'). One has a different kind of spirit about these things from everyone else. There is terrible danger of misunderstanding and misquotation; and subtle peril in 'liking to talk about it'. It is, however, a sore anxiety for nearly everyone, and they need to talk. The priest is often the only one they will turn to; I've long given up being astonished at what men and women will confide, as they never would to partner or parent; the priest has only to give signs of experience and understanding, be tolerant of talk and naughty jokes (which are often just to test this; though I suppose he should never initiate such talk himself). Tête-à-tête discussion, with all safeguards, and until healthy knowledge is universal (if ever: there are signs of a reaction to fashionable neo-Victorianism already which I hope Catholic schools will not be implicated in) is still invaluable and necessary. I remember—this will not be believed—a young wife, frightened to ask her husband, beating about the bush, finally to ask me anxiously about something they gave her to wear after her first child, at the clinic—one of their devices—for grave health or hygienic reasons, as she thought. I made things clear; and can share modest pride with the parents in the small family that is ensuing.

Most priests are, I find, humane, balanced and knowledgeable on

¹There is a marvellous sample of it in the first page of Braithewaite's *To Sir, With Love*, among London chars thinking that, as a black man, he won't understand their English. The whole book is humbling, a civilized West Indian's picture of what we have let East End London become.

this. The one or two exceptions do the incalculable harm. An excellent book I looked at recently, *Moral Problems Now*, by Frs Hagmaier and Gleason breathes a wonderfully sane and sensible spirit especially on confessional technique in these matters. I'd like to suggest, myself, a change of vocabulary, which I think would help a great deal, in catechetics and confession. Couldn't we stop everyone saying 'sins against purity', sins, they must think, of 'sex' against 'purity' (which is sexlessness, then?) and make them say instead 'sins against sex', 'by oneself' or 'with another' as the case may be? They will be surprised, but that is what they are doing. Sex is the happy, successful relation possible in marriage, deviations from which, in fantasy, or acquiring contrary habit, or forming disrespect for its unique possibilities and meaning, are then so deplorable. Good Catholic people know something of this—and just wonder why it doesn't come like that from the pulpit more often—but not our perplexed, ashamed youngsters adrift in the high, careless tide of sensationalism, of whom we lose (not surprisingly) about three-quarters every generation. Of course in approach like this we must be ready then to provide further help, or see that it is provided. Women's and men's organizations can come into their own here, providing small libraries, expert talks, and free discussion. Real physical satisfaction in the marriage relationship is a skill rarely learned. Helena Wright's books on *The Sex Factor in Marriage*, and *More About*, give the best help. In personal problems, a constant campaign has to be fought for much more general enlightenment and sensitivity. Advice can be given and passed on in the pulpit about plays and films to look out for, small literary groups do wonders in making it possible for men and women, parents and children, young and old to understand and help each other. Women should know about the almost painless childbirth possible; *Natural Childbirth*, by the late Dr Grantly Dick Read, explains and exhorts at great length. One imagines antenatal classes in one of those large, unused presbytery rooms. I hope most priests can imagine the help and relief from worry for couples to know about Conception Days Indicators. They are permissible and necessary; every couple has to space the children and can do it in this way without danger of sourness, quarrelling, infidelity, drink or neurosis. It is quite accurate, I have reason to believe on the very best of authority—those who use it. For the delicate business of instructing the young, Audrey Kelly's *Life and Our Children* is admirable; though Father Jungmann, S.J., points out (in *Handing on the Faith*, chapter 8) the incest barrier, among other things, that makes it impossible to expect this except

from the most confident and capable parents.

I find it difficult to handle the second problem facing the priest who allows the laity close contact, query and discussion: the problem of politics. I feel that it is—interestingly—becoming in this century the ‘unmentionable subject’, like sex for Victorians (living and dead). I mention it as there is an impression around that the Church is ‘going into politics’ or even ‘going Communist’. As an individual the priest will have his own views, which will make it difficult for him to speak impersonally. Those he speaks to will also have theirs, and very heart-felt convictions, one way or the other. Politics for most people are very close to morals—they do not keep them in separate compartments as is often complained. There are those who wonder how any honest and experienced person can oppose the establishment of planned society with equality and security for all; and those who wonder how any honest and experienced person can oppose the management of affairs by those whose birth or business talents mark them out obviously for such leadership. Lastly, the difficulty that the priest tends not to think very much about these issues any more than say, a dentist, does; and like the dentist can be embarrassed at a call to stand and declare his own, or his profession’s politics.

There is a difference, however; the comparison is not a good one and was thrown in merely to hit the point. The collection and distribution of money, the responsibility for providing employment and security, the waging of war and all the other business of government, does involve morality. The priest is concerned with morality and must guide his people, especially if they ask, as conscientiously and capably as he can. It might help to read a book like D. H. Lawrence’s *Kangaroo*, with its confrontation and rejection of British jingoism and Australian labour politics; especially the furious and passionate statement of labour feeling in the speech of chapter 16; or a book like Bernard Shaw’s *Intelligent Woman’s Guide*, which will at least disturb, exasperate, and make you think. Then you can turn to the calm, slow-moving and realist wisdom of the Popes in the social encyclicals, feeling by contrast the urgency and the hope behind them; and your task is easy to begin. There is the Church’s mind on politics; to be put before union leaders and business men at all levels as such, too, and not merely mentioned reluctantly to often ineffectual enquirers like students and teachers. But if they got local union, or Communist leaders a subscription to the *Catholic Herald* (and even paid for it themselves), we might have more Douglas Hyde stories. We need them.

The last of our three subjects—religion—is curiously difficult for us too, in that there is also unusual shyness in 'talking about it'. This may sound surprising. You will probably know what a popular subject religion is (ask newspaper editors and broadcasters); and that everyone in clerical clothes is at the mercy of people in trains, pubs, and so on—wanting to discuss it. Because of the shyness in ordinary conversation, all is dammed up until an approachable clergyman comes along and it gushes out. It means that people aren't airing healthily their difficulties and their feelings about religion; which should be a matter of concern to us, even if only professionally.

It is different among our people; actually, I take it as an index of a good Catholic family, religiously well-instructed and happy, that the question of religion simply never comes up at your visit. For the talk to take a religious turn is an ominous sign: an argument has taken place; or a problem like an imminent mixed marriage is to be broached; or a question about whatever you meant in that last sermon. There are, of course, special cases—families in some difficulty, particular individuals whether mystics or honest-to-God sinners, converts anxious to be correct and informed, and above all, mixed marriages. The details of faith and morals must be at fingertips for the purposes of argument or exhortation.

The mixed marriage problem is particularly poignant. Our people are woefully unable to state the case—or mercifully conscious of the difficulties—and any arguments with the partner are best avoided, as indeed by the priest also; though if the partner starts—always a good sign of insecurity—they must be taken up. One has to know something of the various Protestant positions and the increasingly prevalent, non-Christian position adopted by more and more people: perhaps everyone today at times—who hasn't had his bouts of infidelity? At the risk of being banal, I sketch at least three types. (Nearly all consider religion to grip and fascinate precisely by its remote absurdity and impossible promise. The Procession of the Co-Wardens of the Badgeries in Mr Nigel Dennis' mischievous *Cards of Identity* catches the wacky appeal religion and ritual have to some minds, and are suspected of having to us all. His *Boys and Girls Come Out to Play* makes a savage thrust, if I remember, at what we 'papishes' are generally held to hold about the joys of marriage.) The atheist believes we are made by the weather, and the million flukes of evolution for this blink of time; we must make the most of that. The pagan thinks he sees God or gods in every direction, but giving us only now to live; everything then is to live now.

The agnostic leaves these speculations, gladly or sadly, as unanswerable, believing only, perhaps, that we can do good to all men; a sort of 'justification by works' that I find impressive if simple-minded. In serious, deep discussion the priest has to know what he is dealing with. The most convincing thing is frank, good-humoured devotion to the faith and to the Church that gives it.

And so your priest will visit, frank, good-humoured, devoted, facing embarrassment, argument, opposition as well as sometimes satisfaction and delight. If he wonders at times just why and just what he is doing, I hope it may help him to remember my little girl. She spoke a truth—did she know?—but a truth that is sadly remote, painfully dim, that strikes us as uncertain and eerie, disturbing, fantastic. It may have been before her, until her mother laughed, as she looked with clear, round eyes at the abashed young priest with his love and his hope he might help, and she saw—and where else, and why not—that, right enough, here's God.

An Ambiguous Saint

G. S. WINDASS

The tenth century was a time of change in the common attitude of Christians towards war; a change in fact so great as to be best understood as a swing from one extreme to another, and we should therefore have in mind from the outset two diametrically opposed points of view.

On the one hand, there is the uncompromising rejection of war and of military service by the early Christians. In the first two centuries after Christ, there was virtually no possibility of Christian participation in worldly conflicts between states. The *militia Christi*, the soldiers of Christ, were always contrasted with the *militia saecularis*, the soldiers of the world. The soldiers of Christ were to fight a spiritual battle with spiritual weapons, and the final victory was the victory of the martyr; the soldiers of the world fought with carnal weapons for base material