

WANTED - A NEW TYPE OF PRIEST

You cannot see yourself as a clergyman? Good. Then you may well be the sort of person we are looking for. For tomorrow is going to require a new type of priest. This doesn't mean there is no room for the old kind. The Church will need both - indeed a greater variety of types, and the more cross-fertilization between them the better.

Traditionally - though in the beginning it was not so - to become a priest has meant being a full-time professional clergyman - whose main job is running a parish, taking services, being free for pastoral, preaching and teaching work. The Church would not have got established, and could not now continue, without such.

But in consequence, ordination has also meant "turning your collar round", joining a particular profession, and being cut off from the world as well as being free for it.

And increasingly it becomes clear that men and women cannot be ministered to where they are, if this is the only kind of ministry in the Church.

What is needed is not clergy as opposed to laymen, but men, and surely soon women - who will remain fully lay, living and working in the world, but who will also be commissioned and ordained to be priests to their bit of it.

What will they do? First what every layman should be doing - being truly human in the name of Christ, meeting and serving men at their points of strength and weakness, witnessing to a way and a truth and a life which is in the world but not of it. Hence the heart of their training will not be in some specialist expertise but in being better what every Christian should be: more clued-up and understanding, more sensitive spiritually and morally - or simply, in a word, more human.

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But they will be ordained to be resource men to others. The basic way in which a priest does this is as a breaker and sharer of bread, a focus of community and communion in the broadest sense. And in the future this ministry is likely more and more to be exercised outside any special building or special clothes.

But equally he is a breaker and communicator of the Word - not in the sense that he stands up and preaches sermons in Church, but in the sense that he enables the truth of God to break out of and into the life-situations and conversations of his world ('sermon' comes from the word meaning conversation, not monologue!).

Again, he is a man for others in the sense that he is specially trained and commissioned to be available to men personally in their joys and sorrows, to help them to become free and to discover their true selves (a 'parson' is not someone 'parsonical' but a real person).

It sounds demanding - and it is. But it is not overwhelming in the sense that every man has to have everything (the Church has suffered too long from "the one-type soldier army"). Many different gifts and ministries are going to be needed.

Does any of this make sense to you? If so, the Southwark Ordination Course exists precisely to train this new type of priest - with and alongside the old. If you would like to hear more, why not get in touch with the Registrar, St Stephen's Lodge, Hankey Place, S.E.1. (01-407 4584)?