

*What follows is a section from *Priests and Workers: A Rejoinder* (DLT London, 1965) written by The Revd John Rowe on behalf of the Worker Church Group. It will sound dated to the contemporary ear. The reader will need to allow for that if wishing to be attentive to it's more important messages about the gospel, the church, the ordained person and the vast army of those of us who sell our labour – whether manual or intellectual.*

APPENDIX A  
STATEMENT OF  
A GROUP OF CHURCHMEN, PRIESTS  
AND LAY, WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO BE  
WAGE-WORKERS IN INDUSTRY AS AN  
EXPRESSION OF THEIR FAITH  
[February 1959]

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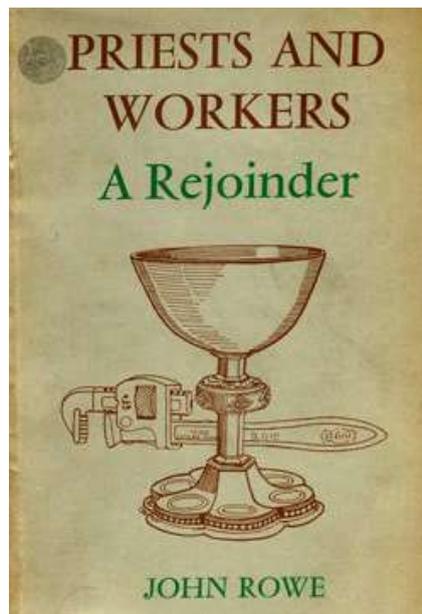
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## INTRODUCTION

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

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

We ourselves, however, feel called to answer this challenge at another level, by binding up our own salvation with that of the industrial workers. This, we feel, can only be done by working as they work and living upon the earnings of our labour as they do. Substantially, therefore, we speak as a group of men and women, with their families, all committed by this decision to a certain form of life, addressing the working people primarily by involvement rather than by propaganda. What we espouse is not primarily a 'technique of evangelism' but a form of obedience.

We may further clarify our position as follows:

### 1 The Way of the Incarnation

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

It seems to us that the answer to this situation is for the Church to enter with humility and sympathy into the life of the working people and build up the Church from within - that is, by Christians who are called to it becoming or remaining workers. Even on the human level this seems the obvious way to grow in understanding of the workers and to win their confidence. But beyond this, it is surely right for a faith founded on the Incarnation. The Christian minister or missionary must be, and must be felt and known to be, one with his people. *'It is not enough for the Church to speak out of its security. Following our incarnate and crucified Lord, we must live in such identification with man, with his sin, his hopes and fears, his misery and needs, that we become his brother and can witness from his place and condition to God's love for him. Those outside the Church make little distinction between faith and works'* (World Council of Churches, Evanston Report, Section II). Work is for us not an opportunity for propaganda, but the means whereby we become one with the working people.

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

### 2 The Meaning of Evangelism

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

response, and therefore of salvation. Thus the first step in evangelism is not one of controversy, but always one of love. We ourselves feel bound to express this spirit of love by becoming one with the workers. 'There are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of service but the same Lord' (1 Cor. 12: 4 RSV).

### 3 The Gospel Free of Charge

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

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

### 4 Vocation to Poverty

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

### 5 The Gospel in Material Terms

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

### 6 Rediscovering the Gospel

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

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

### 7 Dignity of Labour

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

## 8 No Classes in Christ

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

## 9 Secular Precedents

In the Lord's own words, the Gospel is the good news of the Kingdom of God. To preach the Gospel among the workers is therefore to stand for the Kingdom in industry, that is, for a re-ordering of industrial relations, and even of the economic structure of society. But we are by no means first in the field. We are preceded by various secular and partial expressions of the human desire for brotherhood and justice. Among such are the Trade Unions. We feel bound therefore to enter into the struggles for justice, brotherhood and industrial democracy which are already going on in secular terms, serving the Gospel no less in this way than in direct personal acts of love.

## 10 Church Finance

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

## 11 Relation to the Conventional Ministry

We would emphasise that we are in no sense in competition with the paid ministry, although we believe the clergy should not partake so much of the character of a profession in the secular world as they now do. We are anxious to work in co-operation with the parochial ministry in every way, and with any specialised ministries with which we may come in contact. Some of us prefer to exercise a primarily parochial ministry, being committed as priests on the staff of or in charge of parishes; while others of us desire to be clear of parochial responsibilities in order to have greater freedom to experiment in whatever way seems best. We think that there is a place for worker priests in both of these situations.

## 12 Worker Priests

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

### 13 The Wholeness of our Mission

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

### 14 Responsibility to our Children

*(Additional paragraph agreed at Whitsun 1961)*

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

Behind this question may be the assumption that the welfare of our children should be our first concern. But in fact the family as a unit must put God and *his* will first - '*and all these things shall be added unto you*'. Since we see our calling as an acting out of the Gospel which involves the whole of our lives, it follows naturally that our families (while they are still dependent on us) will share in it.

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

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

(Signed)

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

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

17 November 1964