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The Christian In Action–

Strangers TO FAME

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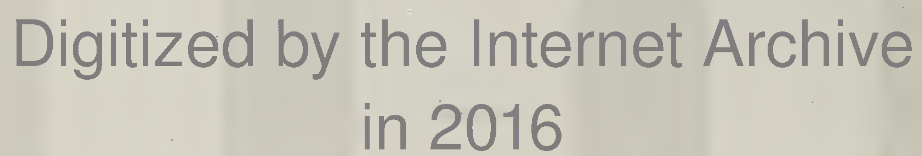
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THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD

Address Delivered on May 4, 1952

JEWS, Protestants, Catholics; Italians, Irish, Swedes—such, in the main, was the population of the neighborhood in which I passed my childhood and youth. My family moved into it when I was five years old; that was in 1914, as the first world war was breaking out in Europe and a radically different era was balefully dawning on the world. For a group so mixed, we got on extremely well. The harsh lines and the shadows in any picture tend to fade with time. But, allowing for this, it still seems to me that, living closely together, we of different strains were not under strain in dealing and bearing with one another.

In those days, there was no talk of fellowship and brotherhood, no harangues on tolerance, for the simple reason that there was no need of anything of the sort. You don't lecture the inhabitants of a tropical island on the evils of frostbite, or Eskimos on the danger of sharks. In the same way, no one had to try to persuade us to put up with one another, because we were doing much better than that already, and the thought that we should despise, or even dislike, one another because of our differences never ocurred to us.

There were differences, of course: differences of national origin, religion, diet, custom. A Swedish family at the corner had its Christmas tree some weeks before the rest of us (who were Christian). It is the Swedish way to make much of the feast of St. Lucy, which occurs early in December. We all trooped into the spotless, shining house to view the tree with its glinting ornaments and its glowing candles, and to have refreshments which were traditional for the occasion.

We did not scoff at this anticipation of our own Christmas celebration; we did not think these people freaks or fools for doing things differently. We knew there was a difference, of course, and we doubtless thought it rather peculiar when first we learned of it, but we did not therefore ridicule, much less hate, those who, in this, were unlike ourselves.

On the next street there lived an Italian barber and his large black-eyed family. This was but one of the many Italian households in the neighborhood. But we were perhaps more familiar with it than most others because we went there often, for two reasons—sometimes to get our hair cut, and sometimes to see a show produced, directed, stage-managed, and starred in by one of the daughters. The haircuts

we got for little or nothing; but we had to have the requisite number of pins ready if we were to be admitted to the show.

We saw this distinctively Italian home, then, from the inside, and here again, although there was a marked variation from our own way of doing things (the spaghetti and the wine, the loudly colored religious pictures and the Easter pastry) we did not feel that this was a world bizarre, suspect, to be feared or laughed at.

Facing our street was the big-verandaed porch of a family Irish in ancestry, Catholic in faith. They had a vigorous daughter, somewhat the senior of the rest of us, who had the distinction of already attending school while we were still looking forward to that marvelous adventure. She decided to give us a taste of it in advance.

For some weeks one summer she gathered us more or less regularly on that porch to—so she said—to teach us. We sat on the floor, a juvenile conglameration, while she, wearing one of her mother's skirts and using a wash stick as pointer, bell, and keeper of order, lectored and disciplined us, teaching us very little except obedience. The point is that nobody felt out of place, nobody resented anybody else's presence, on that porch or in that house.

My own parents' closest friends in the neighborhood were a Jewish couple who lived upstairs. There was constant visiting back and forth. When my mother went down town I was left with the woman upstairs, and I can remember having delicious noodle soup there. When the woman upstairs went down town, her little daughter was left with us. I was first taken to a vaudeville show by that good neighbor, and the headline act was a troupe of swimmers and divers performing in an enormous tank right on the stage.

I recall summer evenings of intense heat, with the daylight lingering late and thunder muttering around the horizon, when both sets of parents sat on the porch together, and we, restless in our beds, could hear the drone of their talk and an occasional burst of laughter.

In the influenza epidemic of 1918, the Jewish husband died, and the grief in our flat was only second to that in the darkened rooms above. The obsequies were of the strictly Orthodox sort, something with which we were wholly unacquainted. We went up to view the remains of our friend, and found him laid upon the floor, with feet exposed and bare. A heavily bearded rabbi came and went.

At odd hours there was chanting odd to our ears. And when he was taken away, in a starkly plain wooden box draped in a pall embroidered in un-

familiar symbols and Hebrew letters, we watched fascinated. For some time afterward there were daily memorial prayers which we could hear. All this was utterly new to us, completely different from what we observed. But we did not think it outlandish, outrageous. It impressed us. We could not but respect the more these friends of ours.

The friendship, incidentally, has continued. Now and again I meet that Jewish woman who took charge of me when my mother went shopping, and our reunion is always joyous. We are both much changed, but when we see each other, the old neighborhood springs to life once more and we retaste some of the happiness with which it was richly blessed. We speak of this one or that one who is gone out of life, or at least gone our of our lives, and we always agree that those were the days.

Down the street there lived an Episcopalian clergyman and his family. He wore a Roman collar, but his suits were grey and he had a moustache. We could, at a glance, tell that he was not a Catholic priest. Did this mean that we thought ill of him? Not in the least. We always spoke respectfully to him, and indeed we were always glad to see him, for he was a cheerful man and never too preoccupied to greet us as if we were important adults, and not small, noisy, and perhaps at times rather grubby children.

Besides, his wife and my mother were on very friendly terms, and whenever one went up the street, or the other down the street, there was sure to be a conversation between porch and sidewalk, having to do with everything from war news to remedies for children's colds.

But where is all this reminiscence leading? There really is a point to it. My parents were what would be called devout Catholics. Some people use that phrase in praise, some in derision. There are those who seem to believe that to say "devout Catholic" is to say "bigot" and to suggest narrowness, selfishness, un-neighborliness, hostility to those of other creeds, contempt and animosity towards Jews and Protestants. Doubtless there are Catholics with some or all of these characteristics. But they are not devout Catholics, properly so called, and they certainly are not typical Catholics.

My parents loved the Church dearly, second only to God. They went to Mass without fail, and not only on Sundays. They went to Confession, to Communion. They supported the Church liberally out of their very limited means. They reverenced priests, all priests. No greater honor could be done them than that a priest should come to the house or salute them on the street.

One of my first recollections is of being taught my prayers. I was taken to Mass very frequently from the age of three. Holy pictures were part of the scenery of the home. I began Sunday school at an early age indeed, and had to trudge many a block to church and back for those and other instructions. Their religion, then, was not something secondary or superficial with my parents. It was the prize of prizes. Their lives were dyed to the roots in it, and they did all in their power to make this the case with their children as well.

I have already suggested, I think that our neighbors were religious folk, too. Their religions differed, but each of them could be said to be deeply devoted to the church to which he belonged. Many of the Protestants went to the white-spired church, surrounded by trees, down the avenue, and the children told us of what went on in the Sunday school there. The Jews were members of one or another synagogue, and, by going in to light the gas or switch on the electricity for them on their holy days, we helped them in their careful observance of these.

The differences in religion, then, were clear and striking. And in the whole of that small and populous neighborhood there was hardly anyone who was indifferent to religion, who didn't belong to some church. And yet the friendliness, the mutual concern and mutual help of these people, sharply set off from one another in belief and practice, could hardly have been improved upon.

Did sickness come to one house? Then everyone pitched in to help, at cooking, tending the furnace, running errands to the drug store. Did someone die? Then sorrow came, in some measure, to every home, and you were told not to play the piano, since it would be inconsiderate to do so when grief had taken possession of the house across the way. Did someone win a scholarship? It was an achievement, a distinction in which we all shared.

I always think of the old neighborhood when I hear people saying, as they so frequently do today, that the presence and the recognition of religious differences is divisive, that it sets a community at odds and at war, that it cuts a society to bits and prevents it from being a well functioning organism, that it destroys or inhibits democracy. It is significant, surely, that such sentiments are generally voiced by people who know little about religion, and care less. It is significant, too, that these people have no concrete evidence to prove their assertion, but are (and have to be) content with their generalization. Did they generalize in this slipshod way about any-

thing else, they would be quickly called to time.

Did they say, for example, that differences in height and weight and beauty make people incompatible, they would be told to produce their proof (which they couldn't do), and in the absence of proof, their allegation would be dismissed. But it seems that no such challenge is effectively made when it is loosely and irresponsibly charged that ardent espousal of one religion makes a man incapable of living peacefully with those otherwise committed.

Upon examination, it will be found that much of the friction attributed to religion is actually social in origin. I could not in honesty contend that there is no such thing as that ludicrous and heart-breaking phenomenon of people hating one another for the love of God. It does exist, God help us. But those in whom it is found are not representative of religion at its best and purest. Elements other than the truly and distinctively religious have invaded and contaminated their hearts, and it is these which account for bias and contention which are given the name "religious," although this is, in exact truth, not the case at all.

The old neighborhood, to which my mind fondly returns, comprised simple people, humble people, God-fearing and God-seeking people, people in whom there were not at work those germs of economic struggle, social struggle, class struggle nor the virus of secularism which subsequently have played so conspicuous a part in American life, sometimes under their native colors, and sometimes under the semblance of religious dissension.

The people in the old neighborhood honored one another's sincerity and freedom of conscience. And this I know to have been particularly true of my own parents. They were without racial bigotry or religious bigotry. For them, the Catholic Church was the Church, the one Church founded by Christ, universal in scope and meant to be the single household of the faith for all mankind. Yet they sought to use compulsion on no man that he join it or that he be enjoined from practicing the religion in which he was born or to which inquiry and conviction had led him. They knew that the mind cannot be forced, the conscience cannot be forced, the will cannot be forced. As Catholics, they understood that the only two legitimate compulsions are those of truth and of love.

By the compulsion of truth is meant simply this: that the truth, if plainly seen, lays hold of the mind and demands acceptance. By the compulsion of love is meant this: that the good, if unmistakably presented so appeals to the will as to

require that it be embraced. The Christian who would win others to his religion must strive so to live the truth, so to embody the good as to attract the minds and wills of his associates.

To try to win others in any other way is to do them violence which God Himself scrupulously refrains from doing. The Christian in action must be Christian in action. That is, he must avoid the use of means which are not Christian in character, no matter how indubitably and laudably Christian the end he has in view may be.

It is only now, only in retrospect, that I perceive how authentic and powerful a Christian spirit was at work in the old neighborhood. My parents, now gone to God, made no bones about their religion. No one could be under any misapprehension as to what it was. They were Catholic, wholly Catholic, enthusiastically Catholic. They suffered no penalty because of that fact. And they, in turn, imposed no penalty on those of different religious affiliation. They tried to show forth in their lives the meaning, the beauty, and the spiritual force of Catholicism, to shed its light in their homely circle. And their efforts, I have reason to know, were not in vain.

MEN OF CHARITY

Address Delivered on May 11, 1952

HE was a small man, short and thin, but his heart must have outrivalled a giant's. I am speaking of the proprietor of the biggest grocery store in the old neighborhood. There are hundreds, living and dead, who could testify to his openness of heart and hand. While he was with us, it would have embarrassed him that there should be public witness to a charity as unobtrusive as it was inexhaustible. But he is gone now, and his story can be told.

There was room for charity, need for charity, in that section of the town where the number of people was matched by the number of troubles. There were lay-offs at the factories (nothing was more dreaded than the rumor, usually accompanying the hot weather's peak, that the typewriter shop would "let 400 go next Saturday"); there were injuries and illnesses which deprived a family of its breadwinner; there were unexpected crises which overtaxed the means and the courage of a household. In these and other difficulties, the grocer was the man to see.

He wasn't a sentimentalist. He wasn't demonstrative, given to easy tears or soft words. He watched you quietly, brown eyes alert behind his silver-rimmed spectacles, as you told your story, and you knew that what you said was being critically weighed in a scales even more precise than that into which sugar dribbled from the tin scoop, you knew that what you said was being x-rayed for sincerity. He had a faculty for recognizing the truth, for distinguishing the grain of fact from the chaff of fiction. The faker, however plausible of tongue or histrionically gifted, simply subsided under this silent scrutiny, then went away.

But the person in genuine need was wordlessly encouraged to complete his recital, and at its close, something was always done: something concrete, something immediate, something decisive. This man always gave the hungry bread, not a disquisition on growing one's own wheat. Sometimes his help was no more than supplying food for a single meal. Sometimes it was the gift or the loan of money for the rent. Sometimes it was paying the winter's coal bill or a hospital bill which hung like a millstone about one's neck.

A widow, left with half-a-dozen children, sought to support them by running a boarding house; her provisions she got without cost for as many years as her struggle continued. A man whose desperate efforts to care for his family were always being defeated by his

variable health, was handed the deed to a house and told of a job which would be less taxing than the one he had. A group of small brothers and sisters trudging hand-in-hand up the snow-filmed street were told to go to the nearby shoe store and get fitted for sorely needed new shoes. And so it went, year in and year out until, in his eighties, the grocer was no longer capable of coming to his place of business.

The news of what would surely be his fatal illness went quickly and witheringly through the old neighborhood. A great change was imminent, for there was drawing to a close a life that had begun in Ireland and in poverty. The philanthropist-to-be was one of a numerous family ill-supplied with comforts and utter strangers to luxury. He had worked from his earliest years. His passion was for reading. The cottage in the fields boasted few books, and so, this man would tell you three-quarters of a century later, "As I went down a lane or a country road, my eye would be searching the wayside for a bit of newspaper caught in a bush. If I saw one, I seized it and thrust it in my pocket, saving it for the delight it would give me in the evening when the work was done and the rosary said and the fire cast its own daylight on the hearth."

He came to America in boyhood, and had to work very hard at a number of jobs. He remembered running down to the railroad station in his noon hour to get a batch of New York papers giving the latest news of the Civil War, and rushing back to sell these to his fellow employes. He had a genius for making money for investment. A banker said of him after his death, "He could have been a millionaire, and more than a millionaire, but he always said that he would avoid that, and he did."

A determination *not* to be a millionaire—how infrequently is that encountered. He made good on it, in part by refusing opportunities which would take him into that generally envied class, but mostly by giving money away constantly and in sizable sums. There were princely gifts to hospitals and other institutions serving the public, but by far the greatest portion went, without anyone else's knowing it, to persons who stated their needs at the worn wooden counter where stood the big-wheeled coffee grinder. In his last days, as he was sinking down to death, his talk was of giving money away to those in want. In that hour when inhibitions go and the self shows itself unmasked, this could be seen as his chief preoccupation.

This man's name has always been the easiest way to spell charity, for anyone from the old neighborhood. But the charity which played like precious, life-giving sunlight over that area that knew only too well the scowling weather or worry and

fear, was by no means all of his doing.

I think, for example, of another man who was, in the common and misleading phrase, self-made, and who, by tireless charity, was always making himself over in the likeness of the God who is love. When depression came, its effect on the old neighborhood was especially devastating. Everybody everywhere had to "cut down." For people in some places this meant no more than foregoing the yearly new fur coat or a Caribbean cruise or fresh cushions for the terrace furniture. For other people it meant a more drastic reduction of the standard of living. But for the old neighborhood, it meant cutting down to the bone: skimpy meals, patched pants, no cheering glow in the parlor stove on a winter's night.

It was then that this second man, retired from business, shone like a flower in a flinty landscape. He gave all his time to seeking out the distressed and helping them. Upstairs and downstairs he travelled; his knock at the back door was the only herald of cheer in a gloomy time. You thought of Christ's words about the good shepherd going into the bleak and hostile desert to find the miserably perishing sheep, as you saw this man on his incessant rounds.

He gave money in immeasurable plenty. But he also gave himself; his time, his energy, his attention, his sympathy, his wisdom. Moreover, he enlisted others in the work, and through them reached still others, so that he afforded many the priceless consolation of forgetting their own anxieties in concern for, and assistance to, those much worse circumstanced than themselves.

He showed that there was use for worn clothes, discarded shoes, furniture which was scratched and sagging; that these could come as priceless gifts to the destitute. He showed that solicitude for others could be the healing of one's own heart-wounds. Here was a case of charity multiplying itself like seed cast into the earth and bringing forth a hundredfold crop to feed the spirits of people in and out of the old neighborhood.

And then there were the doctors. Two in particular stand out in my memory, although the honor roll is long and illustrious. Plainly, these were men to whom their life's work was a sacred vocation, not a means of aggrandizement. They couldn't have used us better if each visit meant a fat fee. What gifts they had, what skill, what experience, were ours to command as if we were the city's leading citizens. They could be called on at any hour, in any season. They came through the sleet, through the brazen heat, through the night wild with rain, at our summons.

They did not show temper, although they could be stern in command if they felt that important orders might be ig-

nored. Their manner was mild, their presence reassuring. They did not seek to overawe with the false dignity of bluff or the lofty manner of the olympian professional disdaining the rude layman. No more did they stir unwarranted cheer. You knew that they were capable and responsible, that they would tell you the truth as they saw it, with a gentle rather than a grim, candor, and would prescribe as well as they could. If they made light of the illness, you could put away your apprehension. But if they were grave, you had cause for concern. Their kindness was past computing, past repaying. No one ever spent a sleepless night because of their bills, and not a few found that the medicines asked for at the drug store had already been paid for by the doctor.

Now these were not misfits or failures, men whose doubtful excellence as physician or surgeon the more prosperous refused as they did certain cuts of meat or grades of vegetables. Quite the reverse, they were first rate, unsurpassed in the city, capable of quickly running up a fortune if they so chose. But what they chose was the Gospel ideal of ministering to the common people, of bringing mercy to those whose wallets were flat, if they had wallets at all.

They treated not symptoms, not ailments, not cases, but human beings, human persons. They had reverence for life and reverence for death. They discerned feelings, moods, dispositions of spirit. They were aware of the soul, as well as of the body, and the most unpossessing human specimen, on the most crumpled bed, in the dingiest room, had their respect and their utmost in concentration and care. There was, indeed, something authentically priestly about them and even, I dare to say it, something Christlike.

They shared in our joys and sorrows. The baby they delivered and that was welcome not as another mouth to feed but another heir of heaven to be loved and cherished, got its first and probably its finest gift from them. They saw to it that the sickly child who needed fresh air and sunlight, a nourishing diet and real rest, went to a camp in the country or at the shore. They kept vigil with us in the hours of dreadful waiting. They prayed with us as the candle of consciousness began to gutter and the tide of breath began to thin down to a trickle. They spoke words of truly telling condolence when bereavement was upon us. Yes, they were woven into the fabric of the old neighborhood.

And what did they get out of it? They got part of a living and the enduring substance of a life. They won the gratitude and the love of those they helped; to us they were truly great men. But their chief reward, this side of heaven, was, I am sure, the unique satisfaction, the lasting satisfaction, which comes only

from helping others, especially those without resource or recourse.

All these men of whom I speak walked among us as the personification of charity. They showed us the possibility and the practicability of carrying out literally the precepts and counsels of the Man from Galilee. Some of their beneficiaries have never, in subsequent years, been known to imitate the charity which had made all the difference in their early lives. But then, a portion of every sowing falls upon stony ground. Others have, in the intervening decades, never forgotten the liberality of these men and have sought, insofar as they could, to pass along the light and the warmth of that charity which, in its every instance, is a kind of new incarnation of the divine love.

As I look back on it I can see that it had two distinguishing characteristics. The first is that it was motivated by religion, not mere humanitarianism; and the second is that it was intrinsically personal.

These men were well informed and deeply devout Christians. Studying Christ in the Gospels, they perceived the first place given charity in His life and in His teaching. The love of others is placed by Him second only to the love of God, and the latter is inoperable in the absence or defeat of the former. There is the vivid, unforgettable parable of the Good Samaritan, the despised stranger who, seeing a fellow human being under affliction, instantly and efficaciously helps him, something which those surpassing him in learning and position and prestige failed to do. There is the dramatic assurance that "whatsoever you do for one of these, my least brethren, you have done it unto Me," and the solemn pledge that even a cup of cold water given in His name will not go unremarked and unrewarded.

In view of the clarity and the force of Christ's words concerning charity, the wonder is that the men of charity are so relatively few. For to know the Gospels, to know Christ, is to know the indispensability of charity, to know charity as the mark of election. I am sure that each of the men of whom I have told you, would be poor at preaching a sermon. But what they did, had, and still has, incomparably greater impact than the most eloquent sermon. They graphically affirmed that Christ's instruction and inspiration came home to them, struck fire in them, ruled and shaped their lives, and could be put to practical use. And anyone considering their lives, would not stop short in admiration of the men themselves, but would be drawn on to perceive and to hail Him who prompted and nurtured these careers of charity.

Again, there is the personal note. You will observe that when Christ in the Gospel calls us to charity, it is always to a

service not to an abstraction like society, but to another and a specific human being. And you will note, too, that He directs us to perform homely services and to perform them ourselves—*not* to delegate them to others, *not* to give others the wherewithal to perform them.

Organized charity is, in our day, absolutely necessary, and I would speak only words of praise in referring to it. But we must realize that our support of it does not wholly discharge our obligation of charity. There remains the necessity of personal contact, personal assistance, the giving of something of ourselves, as well as of something of our money. It would be tragic were we to learn only at the great judgment at the world's end that Christ meant it when He said that our standing with God will depend on our feeding of the hungry, our clothing of the naked, our visiting of those in misery—that is, on personal charity, that what we can expect from Him is decided by what we have ourselves done for those who stood in need of our personal succor.

THE TEACHER'S TOUCH

Address Delivered on May 18, 1952

To us who had not yet crossed its threshold, the school was a red brick mystery, a long, none-too-lovely, many-windowed buuilding over which a flag rippled and snapped on windy days, and which, morning and afternoon, swallowed and disgorged straight lines of children. We would, when old enough to have a place in one of those lines, be initiated into wonders — of this we felt certain. And yet there were those who had explored the scholastic bourne and who assured us, with all the patronizing airs of the expert, that perils and even terrors awaited us there: unremitting labor, unpleaseable tyrants, unpleasant associates, and strange and fearful punishments. Finally there came the fateful hour for discovering at first hand what went on within those weathered walls.

This was a public school, the only school in our part of the city. With but a few exceptions, the teachers were Protestant ladies, some of them wrinkled and white-haired veterans, others with less lengthy records of service written on their faces, still others beginners more nervous than their charges. In those more sober days the teacher's uniform was shirtwaist and skirt, the former usually white and starched and with a monogrammed watch pinned to it, the latter dark and heavy and reaching below the tops of the high laced shoes.

It was a little frightening to be handed over to a stranger, as you were on your introduction to school. You came out of the sheltered harbor of home, clutched your mother's hand as you marched along the sidewalk and avoided stepping on the cracks lest disaster strike you, lagged behind as she sought out your first classroom, and looked imploringly after her as she went off down the enormous corridor and you were left in the midst of equally desolate contemporaries whose tears and tantrums the teacher was trying to stem.

She seemed formidable to you, as you studied this unknown person. She was to be no casual acquaintance, like the saleswomen in a store — that you realized. You would not merely be seeing her day after day; you would be under her authority. And as yet you had been under no authority that was not tempered and irradiated by love. Was this rule now to suffer repeal? Naturally, at that tender age, you wouldn't have put the question so, but you felt it.

In time you had your answer. A happy answer it was. School

was such that you would never mistake it for home, of course, nor teachers for members of the family. Yet teachers, most of them, brought love to their work and to their pupils.

It is part of the universal folklore of childhood that the teacher is the enemy, to be suspected and distrusted and, if possible, thwarted or at least laughed at. But there is abundant nonsense in that folklore of children which, for example, connects toads and warts, nonsense which, as the years pass, is seen for what it is. Looking back, one realizes how intimately and substantially these teachers contributed to one's being; realizes, too, that they could never have done so had they been mere functionaries.

Have you ever recognized your debt to the teacher who showed you how to read? Probably not. Probably you have forgotten her name or what she looked like; her face may have blended irrecoverably into that composite of the faces of all the teachers you ever had. It is all but certain that at Christmas, for example, it never occurs to you to send her a gift in token of gratitude. Someone who, a year or two back, put you onto a good thing in business, in stocks, at the races, you remember and thank materially. But where is the remembrance, where the thanks, for her initially responsible for opening to you the fabulous realm of knowledge with its many treasuries — of literature, of history, of philosophy, and all the rest?

How she worked to help you master letters, words, phrases, sentences, to give you the key which could unlock to you the secret of those clumps of black symbols deployed all down a white page. It was no easy task, no quick accomplishment, getting you to read, but she stayed at it until you were, at last and for the rest of your life, a reader.

Such a task is not merely one of skill and perseverance. Such a task is not merely one of mechanics and psychology. Such a task is not successfully performed without love, and your teacher gave you the kind of love which the task required, gave it realizing full well that there would be small requital, or none, or only in the heart and in the dim future when, if you were exceptional, you might in reflection search the past and, with astonishment, discover for the first time the debt, not only of knowledge but also of love, which you owed to a person of whom you hadn't thought of in decades.

And remembering, you might perceive that the teacher's touch is farther-reaching, more creative and decisive than is commonly appreciated. When I go back in thought to that brick school with its brownstone trim and its oak wood-

work and its huge dressing rooms, I thank God for the teachers who there molded me and breathed something of themselves into me.

They were Christians in action. From them you got nothing which could make shipwreck of your life in time or in eternity. They had integrity, and its touch, though less palpable than that of the ruler they sometimes wielded in just punishment, left a more enduring impress.

We had prayer at the beginning of school, and reading from the Bible, generally from the Psalms. As the brilliance of the young day flooded through the eastern windows, and the plump-faced clock, with its sound as of someone cracking his finger joints, showed nine, we commended ourselves and our efforts to God, sang a song which as often as not alluded to Him, and then plunged into arithmetic—somehow it always came first.

But it wasn't merely the fact of their leading us in prayer which makes me speak of these teachers as Christians in action. It is more the fact that they inculcated reverence, gave example as well as instruction in virtue, avoided whatever might disedify, upheld, quite without canting, the validity and the relevance of religion—in short, impressed on us that life was a preparation for something beyond, that the good life was not a matter of accumulating things and was linked with God (whose name was mentioned as naturally as anyone else's), that the realities and values which were supreme were spiritual. This was not a matter of indoctrination; it was something conveyed by the kind of people those teachers were.

It appears that no longer is it of major concern what kind of people teachers are. The prevalent test is the amount of factual knowledge at one's command. Unquestionably it is important that a teacher have knowledge, but were that the sole or sovereign requirement, then the devil would be the best of teachers, for of sheer knowledge, of mere knowledge he has more than the person out-stripping all others in academic degrees.

The teacher is not just a sort of intellectual stoker, shovelling facts and dates into the child. No more is the teacher a sort of psychological mechanic, adjusting wheels and levers and gauges in the child. Nor, again, is the teacher a laboratory technician, experimenting with the child. The teacher-child relationship, in the last analysis, is one of impact of person on person, of one image of God on another, with a view to helping the child grow in the wisdom and grace which are life's principal prizes, which are, indeed, the essence of life itself.

I do not say that my teachers

of yesterday could have, or would have, thus defined their role in so many words. But instinctively they grasped that such were its dimensions and its aim, and with all their gifts they sought to fulfill it.

It is curious, surely, that the teacher is so misprized in our present culture. We carry regard for education almost to the point of superstition, and we carry disregard for the teacher almost to the point of contempt. It is enough to brand some proposal as fantastic, beyond the pale of sanity, to say that it originated with a professor.

In late August, when the resumption of school is just over the horizon, you will see advertisements on billboards and in the press which blare the merits of certain clothes or shoes or school supplies for children. If the text is illustrated, the picture sometimes includes what can only be called a caricature of a teacher — a gaunt, horse-faced female wearing old-fashioned pince-nez and frumpish clothes, and doing her hair in the bird's nest style. Pointer in hand, she is evidently holding forth on the mystery of two plus two equalling four, while wise-eyed youngsters smirk at her or engage in horseplay. There may have been such frights in the schools at one time, although I never met one of them, and there may be some still, although they must get to and from school on broomsticks, for I never encounter them in the buses.

Now such caricatures reflect not simply the strange minds of the artists who perpetrate them; they reflect as well a common misconception on the part of a great many people. In novels, for example, school teachers are often depicted as sadly frustrated human beings. It is said that they do not "know life," that "life has passed them by," that they are denied "the rich, full life" which everyone else is presumably enjoying. They exist in a vacuum, evidently, and are bloodless, desiccate creatures who are to be pitied, not without a tinge of scorn, for the dull, sapless, and somehow less-than-human being which is theirs.

This is the more puzzling in view of our uncritical veneration for the mere attendance at college and university, the mere piling up of credits. The teacher has herself gone to school longer than most others in the community, and yet, while anyone else's having been exposed to many courses is taken as a mark of distinction and a badge of worth, in her case it is interpreted as a flight from life's mainstream.

The puzzle may not be so hard to solve as it seems. The crux is the matter of money. The teacher is not making much money, and will never pile up even the most modest of fortunes. She ranks far, far down in the hierarchy of the

dollar sign, and this is taken to signify incompetence or queerness or something of the sort. What a revelation this is of our incomprehension of the very idea of vocation.

The teacher is a teacher because of a vocation to teach, or she is no teacher. Anyone who has made an attempt to teach soon comes to grasp this fact. The faculty to teach is a divine gift, and the career of teaching has rewards in a human way, in a spiritual way, which far surpass monetary return. This is not to say that the community can salve its conscience, when it fails properly to pay teachers, by saying that they are otherwise compensated. There is an obligation in justice on the community, and it is not removed or reduced because the teacher is fulfilled in teaching.

There are some teachers who get no monetary reward at all, and they are the nuns. I did not go to school to them in my early years, but I have since come to know them very well and to esteem them very highly. In them, teaching as a vocation can be seen in its plainest terms. Since they work without salary, since their only gain from their work is in personal growth and in divine merit, the inherent worth and the spiritual benefit of teaching well done are made manifest in their lives.

There are many thousands of them teaching in this country. Many of them belong to religious communities which came here in pioneer days, braving the wilderness and its perils and inconveniences to set up schools in log cabins and sometimes even abandoned shanties. No trouble, no danger could turn them aside from their purpose of bringing truth and goodness and discipline to the youngsters on the frontier. Their contribution to the making of this republic and its development is incalculable. To know what they did is to hold them in reverence and lively gratitude.

The tradition established by the first-comers has been kept in force by those who have succeeded them. In innumerable schools across this land, they teach all the standard subjects, and they do so with love of the children entrusted to them, and love of the truth in all its facets. They exemplify and inculcate love of God and love of country. It is significant, surely, that no graduate of their schools has been accused or found guilty of treason to the nation and subornation by the enemies of all that American principle and American institutions represent.

If a country to endure and to prosper needs selflessness, dedication to the noblest ideals, and ceaseless hard work on the part of the shapers of the upcoming generation, America has been well served by its

teaching nuns, and they deserve well of America.

"They that are learned shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that instruct many to justice, as stars for all eternity." So says the prophet Daniel. Is this the destiny of those strangers to fame in the neighborhood schools? On the basis of my knowledge of them, I would say yes.

THE PEOPLE'S PRIEST

Address Delivered on May 25, 1952

There are people who find Church strange — indeed, very strange. For them, one of the strangest things of all is the fact that Catholic priests do not marry. Doesn't this mean, they will ask, that in the Catholic view marriage is somehow wrong or at least wanting in worth? Doesn't it reflect on the excellence of marriage? The answer it "not at all." Far from slighting marriage, Catholicism holds matrimony to be a Sacrament, not merely something good, but also something sanctifying, something in which husband and wife administer God's grace one to the other, and help each other on to a greater nearness, a greater likeness to God.

The priest does not marry because, in a real sense, all men are his family once he begins his priestly work. He belongs to the people, in the way that a husband and father belongs to his wife and children. He is the people's priest, to be called on by them, to be used by them, to be used up in their service. You would have to be a priest to know how literally true that is.

Consider, for example, a train journey taken by a priest. This is no imaginary journey. It is a factual report of a real journey recently made. The priest was going from one city to another, with a change of trains in a third city about midway between the points of departure and destination. He went into the railroad station, bought a ticket, sat down on a bench in the waiting room to read the paper.

He had scarcely opened the paper when a man came and sat beside him and asked if he might speak to him. The priest said, "Of course," and the man began. He had a son who had always been a cheerful, agreeable, and reliable child but now, in adolescence, was giving his parents endless trouble, serious trouble. This common but difficult subject was talked over until the train was announced.

On the train, the priest settled in a seat and began to read a book. He was quickly joined by an old man obviously anxious to talk. The priest closed his book and turned to the newcomer. "I have just buried my wife," the old man said. "I brought her back to the place where she spent her girlhood, although she'd been away from it for forty years, but I wanted her to rest near her parents. And now I have to go back home, where I'll be alone and lonely, and I just don't know how I am going to get along." The priest spoke some words of sympathy and advice, but he

could see that what the old man wanted most was companionship and someone to listen to him as he let his mind and tongue wander over the years patterned of joy and of sorrow.

At the junction where the priest had to change trains, he went into the station, found a place to sit down, and again opened his book. Hardly had he done so, when a young man who was passing, suitcase in hand, suddenly stopped, took the place next to the priest, and said, "Seeing you reading that book reminded me of something which I read in a book lately and which has puzzled and worried me. Would you mind letting me ask you about it?" "Go right ahead," said the priest, and the young man did. Their conversation continued until train time.

The priest then boarded the train for the second leg of his journey. The coaches were pretty well filled, and he had to ask a young sailor whether he might share the seat which the sailor had previously had all to himself. The sailor said "Sure," and, when the priest was squared away, began to talk, at first diffidently and then in a rush, about his wife. Their married life had been spent almost entirely apart, because of his being in the Navy, and some estrangement had developed. He was miserable about the way things were going, and at a loss to know who was to blame and what could be done. The priest heard him out, then tried to analyze the difficulties and to make some suggestions. He was still hard at it when his station was called.

During that entire journey, which was not a short one, he had no time at all to himself. He was not resentful because of this. On the contrary, he was glad that people found him approachable and that he could be of some help to them. Whether or not his wisdom was equal to their needs—and he had done his very best to make it so—at least he had been an attentive and receptive hearer to whom the griefs and anxieties and perplexities harrowing their hearts could be poured out.

Now, I do not say that this happens every time that a priest takes a railway journey. No, it is not the rule that every minute of such a trip is taken up with listening and talking to people he has never seen before and perhaps will never see again. But some portion of almost every such expedition is so occupied. People, seeing a priest in a public place, somehow feel that he is theirs to consult.

This is particularly true, for example, on a boat trip. As he sits in a deckchair or walks the deck or goes through a corridor or enters a social room, a priest will find someone dropping into the next chair, or stopping him in his progress, for a chat. The chat will open with conventional greetings, remarks about the weather, exchange of names and

places of residence, perhaps the discovery of mutual acquaintances, but it will soon get down to confidences and problems. And let me repeat that this is not said by way of complaint. Why should it be, when it amounts to one of the highest of compliments possible for a priest? It is said, rather, to illustrate what was earlier noted: namely, that the priest belongs to the people, and is at their disposal always.

Perhaps you could better understand this, if you worked in a priest's routine. Not knowing it, you might suppose that he had little else to do save conduct services in the church, prepare sermons, and occasionally go to see ill or invalid parishioners.

Not a busy life, surely, not a crowded life. A closer view of it would surprise you. For one thing, there is an almost constant stream of callers. The rectory doorbell gets more use than that in any other house. And the priest must be ever ready for its summons. Some of the calls involve routine business, some have to do with marriage certificates and the like, but most of them are about the predicaments in which people find themselves and in which they desperately need counsel.

A husband has unaccountably turned on his family, a mother has deserted her children, illness has wiped out a household's small savings, a man in his fifties finds that he cannot get a job and is on the brink of despair, an old woman has the doors of her sons' and daughters' homes against her, a girl is being harshly used by her parents, a childless couple want to adopt a youngster and do not know how to go about it, a person is distressed over a family or a neighborhood quarrel—and so it goes, the variety of predicaments is limitless.

The priest cannot be perfunctory about any of them. He has to get the whole story, insofar as that is possible, and has to try to see it objectively and in perspective, has to probe for undisclosed factors, underlying causes, motives, complications. And his advice cannot be of the sort handed out by weighing machines—glib, superficial, impersonal, irrelevant. It has to apply to, come to grips with, help to solve a concrete and pressing set of circumstances. All this takes immeasurable time, patience, good will, effort. But that is what he is there for—he is the people's priest.

He is the people's priest in the hospital. Have you ever noticed him on his rounds in one of those vast institutions which the modern city hospital is? He goes through it systematically, spending hours and hours in seeing person after person, those in private rooms, those in small wards, those in large wards. He is there to perform a corporal work of mercy, visiting the sick; but he is also there to perform spiritual works of mercy.

In illness, in the days and nights of suffering and apprehension and perhaps unaccustomed reflection, people survey their lives, sum them up, are dissatisfied, maybe disturbed, at what they find. They want light, direction. They want someone to help with the burdens. The priest is there to serve them. Any of them, all of them. For he is, to say it yet again, the people's priest.

But the callers and the hospital work are by no means the whole story. I think, for example, of what one young priest did for the children of what has been called a blighted neighborhood. It was one of those sections thickly planted with tenement houses which had been none too good when new and had since sadly deteriorated—dingy, dilapidated warrens in which human beings were crowded together. Adequate yards just didn't exist, and anything like playing fields was unknown.

The children took their recreation on the sidewalks or in the streets — the small children crawling about on the dirty flagstones, those somewhat older pushing rickety carriages containing their battered little dolls or chalking the walk for hopscotch games, the boys improvising out on the paved road a game that owed something to baseball. At night, under the glare of the street lights, the young men and women strolled up and down or clustered at the corner. It was not inevitable, of course, but no more was it surprising when trouble developed—gang battles, precocious affairs, delinquency in many guises.

One of the priests in the neighborhood parish decided to form clubs for the youngsters. To begin with, all he had was an idea and a determination to carry it through. His financial resources for such a project were precisely nothing. And until he had demonstrated that something of the sort could be done, that it would work, he could not expect to gather contributions. So, in the spare moments of a crowded schedule and heavy borrowings from his already inadequate hours of sleep, he made his plans, specific, practical, detailed. These he submitted for criticism to people who had experience in such work, and to other people who knew the locality intimately. Thus was his original scheme modified, amplified.

His first attempt, a club for older boys, had small and chancy beginnings. It was meant to include all boys in the neighborhood who wished to join, be they black or white, Catholic, or Protestant. Anyone else would have been discouraged by the first response and the small ups and big downs of the first year or so. But the young priest kept at it, pouring himself unstintingly into the endeavor.

Little by little the thing

steadied, then started to swell. Against a unanimous opinion to the effect that the notion was simply preposterous, the priest secured a clubhouse—the assembling of its parts and equipment is a story in itself, a story as full of laughs as of heartbreak. Then came city-wide recognition, and days of prosperity for the club, and the institution and flourishing of clubs for girls and for boys of other ages. It would be impossible to calculate the influence for good which this work exerted on countless lives. And yet the priest did not think of himself as exceptional, a pioneer, a hero. He was doing what his office required of him. He was being the people's priest.

You have never heard his name; very likely you never will hear it, any more than the names of thousands like him who, in different parts of the country and in different situations, are similarly expending themselves for the people in whose midst they live. Occasionally a priest wins the national spotlight for his work.

A case in point is that of the late Father Flanagan, founder of Boys Town. His labors for youth were familiar to every American, and they deserved to be, for here was a great man possessed of a great idea and driven by a great charity, who from far and near gathered in boys gravely in need of help. The portals of Boys Town stood open to every boy, whatever his background, who required its special assistance, and youngsters of all sorts headed for those portals and for Father Flanagan's welcome and for his aid in becoming sterling men. Given the originality and the scope of Father Flanagan's accomplishments, they were bound to win widespread notice and respect.

Yet Father Flanagan would be the first to say that, in almost every American neighborhood there is at least one priest who is devoting himself unstintingly to a work in some ways comparable to his own—to helping people to live like human beings and children of God, at peace with God, at peace with themselves, at peace with one another, developing and utilizing their capacity for good, making their contribution to the brotherhood of man and the kingdom of God.

The priest offers the ineffable Sacrifice of the Mass, he administers the life-giving Sacraments, he preaches the Gospel—these are his chief occupations, the principal reasons for his being a priest. But closely connected with these, flowing out of these, are those other aspects of his ministry which take him into the troubled areas of the life of a community or the life of a neighborhood or the life of a family or the life of an individual, bringing light and love and a tireless, many-sided service. He is God's priest, yes; he is also the people's priest.

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	Montgomery	WAPX	1600 kc
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California	Eureka	KHUM	1240 kc
	Los Angeles	KECA	790 kc
	Sacramento	KFBK	1530 kc
	San Diego	KFMB	550 kc
	San Francisco	KGO	810 kc
	Stockton	KWG	1230 kc
	Visalia	KTKC	940 kc
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	Cleveland	WJW	850 kc
Oklahoma	Ardmore	KVSO	1240 kc
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