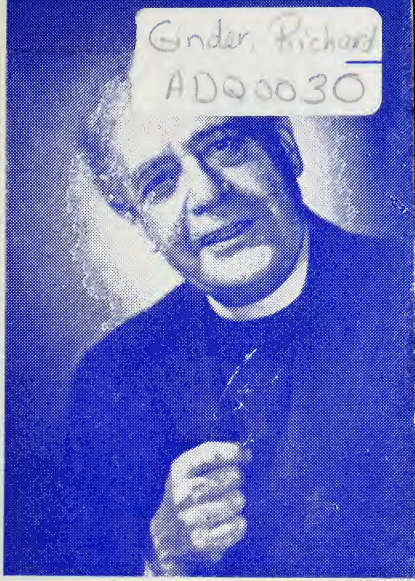


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# BACKWARD COLLAR

By *The Rev. Richard Ginder*

PRIEST TELLS WHO AND WHAT A PRIEST IS



That  
BACKWARD  
COLLAR

by  
THE REV. RICHARD GINDER

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A Priest Is

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Bishop of Fort Wayne

# That Backward Collar

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“You Catholics have to do everything your priests tell you—don’t you?”

“Why don’t priests marry?”

“They have it pretty soft. I wish I could get my living by passing a plate. . . .”

“And why on earth do they wear their collars backward? What would a priest do with a few neckties if I gave them to him?”

“Why don’t you call your priests ‘Reverend,’ like we do our preachers? Don’t you know the Bible forbids you to call them ‘Father’?”

“No third person is going to stand between me and my God. I always tell my sins directly to the Lord.”

## Does He Bite?

The priest is a strange person—to the non-Catholic. Outsiders do not know quite what to make of him. They know, in a vague way, that he is a fearfully well educated somebody—that he has spent twenty years of his life in school—they never saw him

bite anyone—openly, at least—but beyond that, they are all mixed up.

He wields such a powerful influence with his congregation, and he seems to run his church almost single-handed. Perhaps you have never seen the contented face of a salesman slamming his order-book shut over the signature of a pastor. It must be seen to be appreciated. And why the glee? No elders to be consulted; no superintendent; no treasurer: if Father wants the sanctuary lamp replated, he has it done. He is in charge. And the system seems to work!

## Power For Good

Why is that? Because, for one thing, a priest is given the best possible education by the Church. His training costs her thousands of dollars. In high school she gives him subjects just such as Erasmus and St. Thomas More—yes, and Benjamin Franklin—would have chosen. Then she sends him to college, giving him four years of drilling in English, and Latin, and history, with some Greek and, above all, philosophy. After that, she works with him four years, teaching him theology, Church history, Sacred Scripture, homiletics, and all the clerical sciences. And she does it gladly. *Sacerdotem oportet praeesse,*

she says in her rite of ordination. "A priest must lead"—and priests have always been leaders.

## "Joe" And "Father Joseph"

A Catholic may have known a priest ever since he was "this high." He may have had to thrash him when he was a boy. But, as the years went on and the lad matured, passing from grade to grade in school and college, rising higher in power of orders and reaching, finally, the sacred orders, that Catholic began to distinguish between "Joe" and "Father Joseph."

The Catholic, looking at his priest, sees not so much the man, short or tall, fat or thin, bespectacled or otherwise; the Catholic sees, first of all, the one who calls Christ down from Heaven every morning and offers Him up to the Eternal Father.

"Here," he thinks, "is the one who can help me when I'm in trouble. He can forgive my sins. This is the man I want to have by my bed when I'm dying. He'll know just what to do; if only he's around and I do my part, he'll see that I'm prepared for Heaven."

That is why Catholics do not slap their priest on the back. That is why

they do not take him to task over last week's sermon. That is why they raise their hats when they pass him on the street. Who knows? He may be carrying Our Lord to some sick person and, besides, even if he is not, has he not great powers from Christ? No angel ever immolated the Son of God. This man does. Even the Blessed Virgin gave Christ to the world only once. This man renews Christmas every morning. Of course they tip their hat—not to the man, but to the priest!

## Lay Slavery

But now to examine the miscellany of questions, charges, and misunderstandings with which we greeted you back on the first page.

First of all, Catholics certainly do not have to do everything their priests tell them to do. But they trust their priests, and they usually find them worthy of confidence. They grant their priest the right to direct them spiritually. In that case, their business is his, and he is minding his own business when he tells them, e. g., that they have not been at church lately; or that they are liable to marry that non-Catholic girl if they see her often enough,—and that would be against Church law; or that they ought not



send their daughter to the state university when there is a Catholic university just as near, and just as good.

For the rest, concerning politics, property, investments, and the like, Catholics do as they please. But let me tell you that if my pastor were to give me his opinion on something of business interest, I would listen carefully. He does more at our church with less money than any business man I know. His background in logic and philosophy must certainly have sharpened his sense of values. . .

### No "Rev. Mrs."

Another of those piquant mysteries is clerical celibacy. Usually, when you go to a Catholic rectory, you are admitted by a kindly female, definitely past the foolish age, no beauty as far as looks go and, quite obviously, not a "Rev. Mrs."

Why don't priests marry? Because a wise Church had found out that it just would not work out. Think of the nuisance a wife would be in the rectory—and children.

"Darling, will you put the children to bed yourself this evening? I want to look in on that scarlet fever case. . ."

"Oh, Ysobel, what are we ever going to do: The bishop has just trans-

ferred me to Cattle Creek. That rectory has only four rooms, and they haven't been able to give old Father Drabeau a penny's salary for the last three years."

Or, how would this sound? "Joe, honey, Eileen was in the confessional such a long time this afternoon—and usually she's in and out, just like that. Has anything happened between Cyril and her? Why don't you tell her to enter a convent? A face like hers could stand a veil."

## Cost

In our diocese, a pastor gets \$100 monthly, out of which he must keep the table. An assistant gets \$67. Do you really think two can live as cheaply as one? There are, roughly, 30,000 priests in this country. If they were married, the number of those in rectories would be 60,000; if each had three children, the total would climb to 150,000. Who would pay the bill?

The main reason, of course, is the fact that Our Lord praised celibacy as a state more perfect than marriage; and priests, aspiring to perfection, renounce their title to wife and family, in imitation of their Master. "And for them do I sanctify myself; that they also may be sanctified in truth" (Jn. xvii, 19.)

## Pretty Soft?

“They have it pretty soft. I wish I could get my living by passing a plate.”

Every Catholic knows that clerical salaries are closely limited by diocesan statutes. A priest, no matter how large or wealthy his congregation may be, or how exacting his work, may not claim one penny beyond that carefully fixed rate. Very often he collects less. There are many devoted men serving without salary, living without house-keeper or janitor, on donated food.

Anyone at all familiar with life in a rectory knows that Father does much more than offer Mass and read his breviary. Saturdays and Sundays are obviously busy. Saturdays—in our parish, at least—the Fathers are occupied with teaching children at the mission church, hearing confessions, preparing the announcements and putting the last touches to Sunday’s sermon.

The next day starts with Communion for the Sisters at 7:00 o’clock. There are confessions before the 8:30 Mass. The High Mass is at 10:30. One priest offers both Masses and takes care of both sermons. The other priest is saying Mass at the mission, five miles away. Baptisms come at

one o'clock; devotions at three. That makes a full day, and by four o'clock both priests are exhausted.

Week-days? The morning hours, from eight until noon, are given over to desk work, answering correspondence, catching up with the records, breviary, spiritual reading and pious exercises. (The priest is a man of prayer.) In the afternoon, there is always someone sick, a family to be visited, a parish project to be developed.

"Has the parish-hall been straightened out for the high school club meeting this evening? Did the janitor remember to fire the furnace over there? I wonder if Margaret and Greg will be around for their instructions this evening . . . devotions, too. Where can I fit that couple in? If they're late, it'll hold up everything."

It would not be very soft, even if Father could keep everything in the plate. And if you knew the amount of persuasion, worry, and nervous tension involved in getting enough onto the plate even to meet current expenses. . . !

## That Collar

The next question is a little silly. Priests do not wear their collar backward. They are made that way—the

collars; and if they are different from others, it is because it is a convention which has become proper to the clergy. His distinctive dress sets off a priest and marks him apart from other men. It is an outward sign of the character on his soul—of that God-given authority which must compel the respect of all who recognize it.

The presence of a priest always has a wholesome effect. You yourself know the change which comes over, say, a gathering of men when Father enters the room. His very appearance brings grace. It is as though the incense of the altar perfumed even his street clothes.

Now, suppose Father were indistinguishable from other men; suppose he wore a tweed suit with a deep blue shirt and polka-dotted four-in-hand; we might as well put fawn-colored oxfords on his feet, too. Wouldn't that be a sight? It would be unthinkable! It would imply that he wants to be as "smart" as the next one—when he does not. He wants to look neat; to be conventional—unobtrusive. All he is interested in is your soul. He has no time for fashions.

The Roman collar, as it is called, is a uniform. It marks a man as being in the legion of Christ. It is to the priest what khaki is to the soldier.

## Why Call Him "Father"?

We do call our priests "Reverend." The correct form of address in, for example, presenting a priest to a person or group would be: "I am introducing to you the Reverend Father Titus." Nor does one correctly refer to a non-Catholic minister as, say, "Reverend Forbes." It should be inevitably "The Reverend Mr. Forbes."

It is true that Christ said, "Call no man your father upon earth." But He surely did not mean that we must strike the word from our language. He told us once before to honor our father and our mother, so we must have a right to call one of our fleshly parents "father."

The correct interpretation is that, while we have a father on earth, his paternity dwindles and becomes almost insignificant by comparison with our relation to the Eternal Father. Our earthly father cooperated with God in forming our body, but it was our heavenly Father alone who created our soul—who has kept us thus far in existence—to whom we owe everything we have and are. Him we address as "Our Father."

Is it not beautiful, then, that Cath-

olics should address their priests as "Father"? St. Paul called the Corinthian converts his children: "For in Christ Jesus, by the Gospel, I have begotten you" (I Cor. iv, 14). The priest stands in relation to the soul just as the parent to the body. He gives it spiritual life, instructs it, nourishes it with the sacraments, re-proves, advises, corrects, warns, commends—always in a spirit of charity and devotion. Priests love their title and do their best to justify the tribute. Don't you yourself like "Father" better than "Reverend"?

## Interference

Every Catholic senses at once the fallacy behind the charge that priests stand between God and themselves. Perhaps priests do, just as the telephone operator stands between ourselves and the party on the other end—or our attorney between ourselves and the jury. If the priest does stand between God and you, it is only because, in virtue of his Christ-given powers, he can do for you just what you want to do but in a way much better than you can do it. Do you want to adore God? This man—this mediator—will offer sacrifice for you. Are you conscious of sin? Tell it to this priest. He will judge your mo-



tives and, again, in virtue of that God-given power, he will remove the guilt from your soul, neatly, and with the certainty of a good surgeon snipping off an infected appendix.

Christ told His Apostles: "He who hears you, hears Me." And, when Saul was knocked off his horse, the voice said, not—"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou the Church," but "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME." Catholics, then, do not hesitate to call their priests "Other Christs." Did not the Lord say that they speak with His voice? Did He not say that a blow at them was a blow at Himself? Of course, Christ is the only mediator by Redemption; but any one who prays for you is a mediator by intercession.

## Not Meddlers

How can a priest be called a meddler in one's relationship with God? The non-Catholic, it is true, does great talking about his face to face relations with God, but he is really more dependent on the services of a third party than he imagines. If he lives in the city, he will not infrequently cross town faithfully every Sunday to settle contentedly in his pew before the one man in millions who can arouse in him that pleasant internal feeling, which he calls "spiritual satis-



faction," and which he identifies with religion. If he lives in a small town, he throws all his influence toward the engaging of a minister with whom he is "in emotional agreement."

A Catholic makes sure he is in a Catholic church. He does not particularly care which priest offers the Mass.

As for telling your sins directly to God—He knows them already, and besides, He may have had some ideas of His own on how He intended to dispense His mercies, and on His Resurrection Day Christ made it clear which way of seeking forgiveness would be God's way.

## What Makes A Priest?

Our concept of the priesthood is so far different from non-Catholic notions on religious leadership—we can call it that for the time being—that it is an actual effort and a matter of study to arrive at their state of mind.

Our priest offers Mass. That is, to our way of thinking, what makes a priest: a priest is one who consecrates bread and wine and presents them to the Eternal Father; and, once ordained, a man is a priest—whether his trousers are pressed or baggy, whether he is clean-shaven or has a long, black beard; whether we like his

looks or not, and even if he seems as young as a college freshman—if he has been ordained, he has the power to offer sacrifice and to forgive sins. He has been “taken from among men” and set apart “in the things that appertain to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins.” He is one “who can have compassion on them that are ignorant and that err: because he himself also is compassed with infirmity; and therefore he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.” “For every high-priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices” (Heb. V, 1-3).

## Sacrifice

You must have noticed in that last paragraph how St. Paul kept dwelling on the association of sacrifice with the priesthood. We Catholics have never lost that notion. It was carried on down from the Garden of Eden, under the old dispensation, to Golgotha, where the Church took it up and brought it along with her to the Twentieth Century. We are the heirs of that tradition. We think in terms of sacrifice. So much so that, even apart from the Mass, when we ask some favor of Almighty God, we often seal the petition with self-renunciation in some form or other: “I’ll do without

cigarettes for a month"—or, "I'll give five dollars toward the Propagation of the Faith."

But when it comes to corporate worship, to adoration offered God by the community, then we feel the need of a priest: one set apart and consecrated for that work. We feel this need, I say, even beyond the fact that, by the positive ordination of Jesus Christ, His Church is governed by a body of men to whom He committed His powers and whom He charged with the duty of offering sacrifice. "This do for a commemoration of me."

## No Sacraments— No Priesthood

Those outside the faith have pretty well lost their grip on the sacramental system.

Understand, before we go on, that the priesthood—itsself effected by a sacrament—gives a man power over other sacraments. The priesthood stands or falls with the sacraments.

Of the modern heretics, Luther led the way, dropping all of the sacraments overboard (even the priesthood) excepting Baptism and "The Lord's Supper," about which his ideas differed in some ways with Christ's. The

other heresiarchs followed Luther in their line of thought.

It was a case of "Away with the priesthood." They would have, not priests, but preachers—"Ministers of the Word." A sermon surrounded by hymns became their central act of worship. The altar was replaced by a communion-table. No "popish mumery" here: a table, a Bible, white-washed walls, and benches. That was their idea of pure, primitive religion. The preacher was to be called and ordained in one way or another; sometimes by the congregation, sometimes by a board of elders. A few denominations, after killing the sacramental life, kept the skeleton of the old Church in the land, with its offices of bishop and pastor, now meaningless.

The preacher received his commission, not now from God, but from the congregation—and if he displeased them, he could be forced to resign. The organist and janitor had more stability than he! And that is how things stand today, speaking generally.

## The Golden Chain

In their bolt from orthodoxy, the Protestants forgot, or ignored, succession of orders. That is, just as a freight-car, if it is to move, must be coupled with the engine in some way,

so a minister of religion, if he is to have divine authority, must be linked with Christ. The Church has always guarded this golden chain most jealously. We see it as early as the time of St. Paul. He charged the young bishop, St. Timothy to "Impose hands not lightly on any man."

So an imposition of hands was needed! Well, if I had wanted to be a priest and St. Timothy had refused to impose hands on me, couldn't I have gone to some kindly old gentleman in the Church and had him impose his hands? Of course not! No one can give what he does not have.

St. Timothy, a Bishop appointed by the Apostle Paul, conferred some power by laying his hands on other men, and St. Paul was warning him to be careful about whom he selected for that imposition. St. Timothy had received his power from St. Paul (II Tim. i, 6), and St. Paul had been ordained, with St. Barnabas, at Antioch (Acts xiii, 3). It was a matter worthy of mention.

Throughout the centuries, the Church has seen to it that three bishops assist at the consecration of every other bishop, as though to provide a threefold insurance against a lapse in that precious succession. Power over the sacraments must come

from Christ. It was because the heresiarchs had lost faith in the sacraments—except Baptism, which anyone can administer, and “The Lord’s Supper,” as they called it—because of this denial, they saw no need for the power of orders. All one needed for preaching was a ready wit, some background in the Scriptures, and a kind of delegation from the community. They completely missed the point in that apostolic laying on of hands.

## Anglican Orders

There is a *cause celebre* which may throw some light on the matter. A certain group of Anglicans came, in the last century, to see the necessity of this apostolic succession.

“But,” they said, “the succession has never been lost in our church. Our bishops went on ordaining men and consecrating bishops, after the break with Rome, just as they had always done.”

The question became so urgent that Pope Leo XIII finally appointed a commission to investigate the matter. These scholars found that the ordinal or ritual previously used in ordination, and the intention of the ordaining bishops, had so changed, that their ordinations no longer created priests. Nor did the bishops want to create

priests. They meant to ordain preachers. They deliberately excluded the intention of enduing their ordinands with the power of offering Mass.

As Pope Leo says—"Under a pretext of returning to the primitive form, they corrupted the liturgical order in many ways to suit the errors of the Reformers. For this reason, in the whole ordinal [ritual-book] not only is there no clear mention of the Sacrifice, but every trace of these things which had been in such prayers of the Catholic rite as they had not entirely rejected, was deliberately removed and struck out . . . Once a new rite has been initiated, in which the Sacrament of Orders is adulterated and denied, and from which all idea of Consecration and Sacrifice has been rejected, the formula 'Receive the Holy Ghost' no longer holds good, and so the words 'For the office and work of a bishop', and the like, no longer hold good, but remain as words without the reality which Christ instituted."

Later, Queen Mary restored the Catholic order, but under Elizabeth, the Protestant ordinal was reinstated and kept in use over several generations. During that time, all the properly consecrated bishops died out and with them the power of orders. The succession had been broken forever. so



that now, when an Anglican clergyman is converted to Catholicism and wants to become a priest, he is simply ordained by a Catholic bishop, just as any other layman.

It is curious, in this regard, to notice that when John Wesley "consecrated" his first bishops for Methodist brother, Charles, a devout Anglican missionary work in this country, his minister, was horrified.

"John lays his hands on others," he is reported to have said. "Who laid his hands on him?"

## None Self-Appointed

Common sense dictates that any organization, but especially a religious society, have its officers, properly constituted. It was so with the Jews from the time of Moses. The family of Aaron had the priesthood, and the levites—descendants of Levi—were the ministers of the altar. Toward the end of the old dispensation, the prophets looked forward to a new day when the Lord would select a priesthood from among the Gentiles (Is. lxvi, 21). Malachi saw a "clean oblation" being offered by the gentiles from the rising of the sun to its going down (Mal. i, 11).

And when Jesus arrived on the scene with His vast program for



bringing eternal truth to every man, woman, and child in the universe, He did just what one would have expected. He set up a definite organization, with one director over a group of lieutenants and aides. How else could the Gospel have spread?

He singled out twelve men and spent two or three years imbuing them with the spirit of His Gospel.

## The Apostolic College

These Apostles were granted the power to give or refuse the pardon of sins (Jn. xx, 23). They were told to baptize (Mt. xxviii, 19). They were given the power to consecrate the Holy Eucharist and offer it to the Everlasting Father (I Cor. xi, 25).

St. Peter was given authority over the others (Lk. xxii, 31-2; Mt. xvi, 19). Then, before ascending to His Father, Our Lord sent the twelve out into the wide world with His Gospel (Mt. xxviii, 19; Mk. xvi, 15-6), promising that He would be with them "all days, even to the consummation of the world" (Mt. xxviii, 20)—with *them*, mind you—St. Peter, the Apostles, and their successors; not with those who might venture to contradict them, or bicker with them—not with Nestorius, Arius, Luther, Calvin, or any of the rest.

## Ruling The Church Of God

After Christ returned to His Father, the Apostles seriously set about the business of ruling the Church of God. St. Paul, before leaving the Christians at Ephesus, told his clergy—“Take heed to yourselves, and to the whole flock, wherein the Holy Ghost hath placed you bishops, to rule the Church of God . . . I know that after my departure ravening wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock. And of your own selves shall arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts xx, 28-30). He asks Timothy—“If a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God (I Tim. iii, 5)?”

We know that the Apostles taught with authority, and that they did not hesitate to use the “big stick” which Christ had given them (Mt. xviii, 15-8) for the safeguarding of the faithful. St. Paul formally excommunicated one of the Corinthians who had married his father’s wife (I Cor. v, 1-5).

They conferred the sacraments: confirmation (Acts viii, 12-18; xix, 1-6; Heb. vi, 2); extreme unction (Jas. v, 14-15); and, above all, the Blessed

Eucharist (Acts ii, 42, 46; xx, 7; I Cor. x, 16; xi, 24-32).

And they were careful to perpetuate their powers. You remember how quickly they elected an Apostle to succeed Judas (Acts i, 26). We mentioned the ordination of St. Paul, St. Barnabas, and St. Timothy—always by laying on of hands. Paul and Barnabas, after preaching at Derbe, returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.

“And when they had ordained to them priests in every church, and had prayed, with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, in whom they believed” (Acts xv, 22).

St. Paul left St. Titus at Crete, “For this cause,” as he tells him, “that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and shouldst ordain priests in every city, as I also appointed thee” (Tit. i, 5).

### “Not Now Servants, But Friends”

Certainly there is enough of the New Testament packed into those last few paragraphs to show conclusively that the priesthood—the sacrament of Holy Orders—its nature, dignity, and authority, was essentially the same in the days of Ss. Peter and Paul as it is today.

And when we think for a moment on the powers of the priesthood! One of the saints said that if he had to choose between saluting an angel or a priest, he would raise his hat to the priest. Is it any wonder?

Listen to the bishop at ordination: "Receive the power to offer sacrifice to God and to celebrate Mass for the living and for the dead, in the name of the Lord."

"Receive the Holy Ghost: whose sins thou shalt forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins thou shalt retain, they are retained."

"I will not now call you servants, but friends, because you have known all the things which I have wrought in the midst of you . . ."

These are men who have been chosen by Our Lord for the closest possible companionship with Himself—not now servants, but friends. He has given them power, not only over His mystical body, which is the Church, but over His own body—over that sacred flesh and blood which, so long ago, He drew from the body of His Virgin Mother.

Priests of God—other Christs: pray for them! "That they may gain the great gift of perseverance," to quote Cardinal Newman—"that they may continue to stand in the grace in which

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they trust they stand now, even till the hour of death, lest, perchance, after they have preached to others, they themselves become reprobate."

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