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**MONEY IN CATHOLIC PARISH LIFE
IN FRANCE**

by

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Overview

The Church may be seen as a very structured and very rich multinational. However, it would be a serious mistake to believe that this is so. Particularly with respect to finance, there are relatively few examples of organisations which allow such freedom at the lowest level of the hierarchy which legalises blatant inequalities between different groups. Governed universally by canon law, the Church is also subject to state law, which can have consequences at a local level. In France, dioceses are subdivided into parishes representing the Church. It was while studying the financial movements in parishes in particular that Nicolas de Bremond d'Ars wrote his thesis entitled *Monetary society and religion*. This enabled him to show the different ways of practising one's faith, and the variety of expectations regarding religion, which this entails. Conversely, analysis of the budgets managed by priests and parish groups sheds light on the way in which the ecclesiastical institution perceives its relationship with the outside world.

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TALK : Nicolas de BREMOND D'ARS

Following my training as a financial analyst, I worked at the Paris Stock Exchange before entering the seminary. Once I started my parish work, my time became very limited and I had to interrupt my theological studies, having just been granted the right to prepare my doctorate (the equivalent of a Master's degree) at the Catholic Institute in Paris. I still remembered a senior clerk in the Stock Exchange saying to me "The Church doesn't like financial people like us very much... Since you're entering the seminary, don't forget us !" This remark helped me think that the topic *Money and Religion* would be a good subject for a thesis. I tried to find somebody at the Catholic Institute to be my Thesis Supervisor but everyone whom I contacted tried to dissuade me from this topic. Then I met Danièle Hervieu-Léger, a sociologist in religion at the *École des Hautes études en sciences sociales* who agreed to supervise my thesis. This was how I came to write a religious sociology thesis entitled *Monetary society and religion* under her supervision.

Apart from the work of Georg Simmel¹, a German sociologist at the beginning of the twentieth century, there is very little literature in fundamental sociology which deals with money. Since, in addition, I had at my disposal the corpus of decisions concerning money and its circulation in catholic parishes, my thesis supervisor wanted me to make use of it. In the end, by combining theoretical aspects with observations gathered in the field I carried out my study. Michel Berry invited me to talk to you about my findings and conclusions concerning catholic parishes.

Money

It is difficult to say what money signifies. Even economists do not deal with this subject, limiting themselves to talking about finance. As far as sociologists are concerned, money is rarely studied. Occasionally pay may be mentioned : for example, studies at the end of the 1960s highlighted the fact that fee-paying professions - such as solicitors and lawyers - are all, in one way or another, linked with death. Apart from these exceptions, money in itself is not a subject which has been researched.

Yet, it seems to me that money can be very interesting, not least by the varied connotations of its vocabulary : money has a totally different meaning for a psychoanalyst and for a banker. How, therefore, can we define it ?

With reference to the works of Georg Simmel, and by extrapolating from them, it seems to me that what characterises money is first and foremost a *transaction*, whether it is between individuals, between individuals and groups, or between groups. Using this characteristic, I chose to study money in order to try to explain monetary society, and to verify in the field where catholic parishes have both a religious and a financial activity, whether this definition of money was viable and in what ways it enabled us to understand further the underlying reasoning behind both human and financial activity.

It is also necessary to fit this definition into a religious setting. Since I started studying sociology (a very profitable version of asceticism), the first thing I had to do was to stop myself from instantly classifying the observed reasoning as catholic, Christian or pagan,

¹ Georg Simmel, *Philosophie de l'argent*, PUF, 1987.

which would be a normal thing to do in theology. This is why in this talk I will not refer to specific beliefs in the catholic faith.

The extraordinary sovereignty of catholic parishes

The decentralisation and the fragmentation of spheres of autonomy and sovereignty in the Catholic Church are extraordinary. Two legal systems apply :

- canon law - the Church law - which is universal since it concerns the Roman Catholic Church ;
- ordinary French State law which applies to all French nationals.

Occasionally, these two laws come into conflict, but canon law applies the principle of subsidiarity very precisely : an independent fiscal entity has real autonomy. One might think that the bishop is the head of his diocese but the following examples show a different picture.

Legally, a priest cannot refuse the visit of the bishop to his parish, but it is the priest who fixes the date. However, a Parisian priest, about thirty years ago, had a few problems with his bishop. The cardinal archbishop at the time came by in person, and rang on the bell of the presbytery. The priest opened the door and said “Monsignor, today’s not the day !” and closed the door. He was perfectly within his rights.

At the synod of Limoges, the first assembly of a French diocese, that of the *départements* of Creuse and of Haute Vienne, the aim was to divide up the parishes again because the situation had become unmanageable. All the priests agreed to this new restructuring apart from one, a seventy-five-year-old priest who was opposed to it as was his right. He even went all the way to Rome where he won his case. Mgr Soulier, who had organised this synod, had to be very diplomatic in order to convince this priest to resign and thereby let the project go through.

This autonomy is particularly visible in financial matters. There is nothing to stop one parish from being extremely wealthy and the neighbouring parish from being very poor without there being any sort of automatic compensation between the two. In reality, there is only a voluntary financial balance between the various independent fiscal entities. This is legal according to canon law. Of course, the bishops do their best to create the smallest amount of disparity in the distribution of money but in order to persuade their priests to agree (which is essential), they are forced to listen to them and hear their views. In reality, priests have the power to cut off their allowances.

It is in this environment that the parish exists and functions. Canon law however has to adapt itself to French state law. After the separation of Church and State, the Catholic Church finally agreed to adopt an association status with respect to the recognition of the Church in its smallest, most complete form, ie. the diocese, which had been defined by the boundaries of the *département* since Napoleonic times. A bishop runs the diocese which is an administrative and theological division of the Church (different to the parish which is not a theological division). The diocese alone is organised in an associative manner with religious associations which have very particular characteristics. For example, on the civil law level, the parish is legally a subdivision of the religious association, but on the canon law level, it is an independent fiscal entity in its own right and this has certain consequences.

Despite this, we still do not really know what a parish is ! The Church, on a local level, is divided geographically into parishes but there are certain parishes, according to canon law,

which are not a geographical entity. Furthermore, people living in these areas do not have to attend a specific parish and they can make a donation to whichever parish they desire. This introduces a bias of the very perception of what constitutes a parish area which in the end is made up of all the inhabitants who attend the parish church of their own will. A parish which extends over a small area and whose population is small may be very rich if it drains a population largely beyond its normal boundaries for special reasons. This is not a problem in itself, but it introduces a bias in the interpretation of financial flows.

Added to this, are the laws on the separation of Church and State in France which have made a large number of Catholics wary of formal networks of ownership of ecclesiastical goods. This explains the relatively recent creation in Paris of innumerable associations whose aim is to provide safekeeping for finances, in particular property, and which sometimes voluntarily and deliberately blur the balance sheet in the parish.

In addition, financial agreements between dioceses and parishes vary from diocese to diocese. Take the following examples :

- in Paris, priests are paid directly by the parish, whereas in Bordeaux they are paid by the diocese. This makes the constitution and the comparative analysis of budgets a complex operation ;
- in the name of financial balance, the diocese of Paris asks its parishioners for a voluntary contribution, whereas the diocese of Bordeaux levies a percentage on all the takings/proceeds/collections in its parishes.

I should add that the accounting process and tax covenants change on a regular basis. For example, the Inland Revenue is in the process of considering whether, even in decentralised dioceses like Paris, the clergy is in fact comparable to a business (the religious association), and that as a result tax covenants should be reviewed. Imagine the confusion if the priests had to elect a representative to the appointed work committee....

The collections

Collections are essentially donations which take any one of six forms. In order from the most anonymous to the most personal, they are the following :

Collection boxes and candles

In all the churches in Paris, there are candles and collection boxes. As far as worshippers are concerned, the collection boxes are there in order to pay for the candles but for the priests, who do not want to worry about VAT, they are there in order to collect voluntary donations. It is a fact that surreptitiously there are several collection boxes located in each church, and they are not necessarily intended to pay for candles. The fact remains that the price of candles is shown as a rough guide and there is generally a collection box nearby. It seems to be the case that people give the suggested amount. The Inland Revenue could therefore quite rightly ask for a VAT payment but the Church is completely unable to control this donation unless it employs specific means to do so, because people who come into the Church do whatever they want. Another question is whether or not these people are parishioners, or even Christians. If one watches them a while, it becomes clear that people who visit these religious areas are not necessarily Christians.

The priest of the church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés said to me twenty years ago that his collection boxes brought in 10,000 Francs a week for the parish. However, the money raised depends on the location and organisation of the collection boxes : if these are not well placed, then there will be no money raised. At the church of Notre-Dame de Lorette, situated near a big Parisian *lycée*, on one day during the *Baccaulauréat* (final year school examination) we collected what we would normally collect in a whole week. I was told three years ago that in the Sacré-Cœur Basilica, all the collection boxes (for charities, for the poor, for the maintenance of the church, and so on) together brought in seven million Francs for a candle investment of 700 000 Francs !

Collections

One should distinguish between collections made in the interior of the church during services from collections made at the entrance to the church. Most of the former enter into the parish budget, whereas the latter generally go directly to other organisations which make collections. Here I am only interested with the first category.

Dedications during Mass

Dedications during Mass come from a very ancient practice of Indian and European origin which one finds in Vedic sacrifices where it is customary to pay the sacrificer. If someone wishes to dedicate a specific prayer to a close relative or friend during Mass (in general the person is deceased), it is customary to give a sum of money to the priest who celebrates the Mass. This was the principal form of payment to the clergy for centuries. It even brought about underhand dealings : priests, who were often called upon to say these prayers, not only accepted more dedications than the number of services which they celebrated, but also asked other less popular priests to say Mass in their place despite keeping a part of the payment for themselves. Canon law forbids a priest to accept more than one such payment per day... Even though these dedications during Mass are less and less common, they nevertheless help supplement the parish budget.

Offerings for special occasions

This is money given by those who ask for a ceremony outside of ordinary Mass. In general, parishes suggest an amount of money, leaving people free to give whatever they wish. This applies to the three key moments in life, namely christenings, weddings and funerals. People who asked for these ceremonies used to be called “Christians on wheels” because they arrived for the christening in a pram, for the wedding in a carriage and for the funeral in a hearse. A large majority of the public only come to church on these occasions.

Events and fêtes

Church fêtes and associated events bring in a great deal of money, often the equivalent of the property costs of the parish. They can go on for two to three days. For example, at Saint-Éloi, a parish in Paris with about 650 practising Catholics, the last church fête raised 115 000 Francs. At Saint-Lambert, also in Paris, the proceeds were greater than 200 000 Francs between 1985 and 1990.

Subscriptions

Subscriptions generally concern catechism for children. This amount is not very large but it is important since it is payable every year for a number of years.

Annual pledges

This is the most important flow of money for a parish. In a way, it is a kind of tithe or voluntary tax which people give to the parish which they have chosen. The sums involved are quite important as currently, in the diocese of Paris, the average donation per person per year is about 1 200 Francs. The total of the amount donated for these annual pledges accounts for between 30 % and 70 % of the parish budget.

Other revenues

There are other revenues, notably :

- bequests, which fiscally are received by the diocesan association, in the knowledge that canon law requires the diocese to give over the full sum to the parish. As a matter of interest, these “hand-over” procedures can go on for such a long time that there can be a succession of priests in the parish and the last one, unaware that the parish is due a large bequest, may never receive the money, as the diocese has forgotten to pay it ! It is merely human error.... ;
- pseudo-commercial activities, such as the loan of parish rooms for a fee related to the costs. This is not a genuine room hire but since the prices are shown, this makes the Inland Revenue particularly nervous ;
- rented property, but this is very unusual ; the parish of Saint-Antoine-des-Quinze-Vingts, in the 12th *arrondissement* of Paris, is the richest in this respect in the diocese, with seven buildings in a block of houses.

Expenses

Earnings

Priests are paid either by the parish or by the diocese. In the latter case, the parish sometimes gives an extra payment. There are, therefore, disparities in clergy fees even if officially these disparities have been reduced. Currently, the clergy earnings in the dioceses of the apostolic region of Paris are of the order of 90 % of the minimum wage, but I know of dioceses where they are 150 % of the minimum wage. This disparity is not always very easy to live with.

Lay people such as the administrative staff are paid according to their particular collective labour agreement. For the so-called ‘pastoral’ staff, such as the people who teach the catechism, payment varies from diocese to diocese but can be greater than the minimum wage. This flow of fixed expenses related to a constant number of personnel is very important.

Maintenance of the premises

The maintenance of parish premises is another big item of expenditure. Some presbyteries belong to the town or village, and the parishes therefore only pay the maintenance costs. Other parishes own a parish building and have to meet all the costs themselves.

Other expenses

Among other expenses, there are notably :

- the financial balance between parishes in the diocese. The principle is to tax certain (richer) parishes in a diocese in order to help others which are unable to meet their running costs. This is always subject to negotiation between the two, since the balance cannot be imposed ;
- financial aid from parishes, in other words, donations to the poor or to organisations not linked to a parish.

An analytical grid

I devised an analytical grid of the transactions. It is valid in our monetary society and is made up of six types of transaction which allow us to understand what is at stake in the social arena in general and in a religious setting in particular. I suggest the following general interpretation of each type of transaction :

- *purchase of goods* ; the aim is to amass a collection of symbols. By buying goods, the individual creates a personal symbolic place which allows him to construct his own distinctive identity ;
- *purchase of services* ; these represent admission into a social network. For example, whenever one rents a telephone line, pays one's lawyer or one's doctor, or if one signs a contract with a computer service company, one enters a social network ;
- *the subscription* ; whether it is associative or mutualist, it is a way of joining a circle of fellow producers of goods or services for end-users ;
- *taxes* ; by paying one's taxes, one recognises the sovereignty on one's life as a social individual. This joins up with the concept of paying back the debt owed for one's life, a good subject for an anthropologist ;
- *savings* ; this is a way to take part in monetary sovereignty. The problem of our monetary society is that it creates a conflict of sovereignty at a global level, notably with the authorities which provide a social identity, in particular the State, which helps explain a certain number of other conflicts ;
- *the donation* ; this has a very important significance, because if taxes consist of recognising the life given by a pre-existing social institution to an individual, then the donation represents on the contrary a power of procreation. For example, by giving money to a homeless person who does not have a penny, whatever use he will make of this money, you will succeed in reintegrating him with an identity, since he will then be able to go into a shop and be a consumer, in other words, he will be recognised in economic terms. The donation is the highly symbolic act of procreation of economic and social subjects, or quite simply, of people.

Equivalents

All revenues from parishes resemble donations, but they nevertheless come under of the categories which I have noted above apart from savings.

- the offering for special occasions is comparable to a purchase of services ;
- dedications during Mass are a tax, or a purchase of services ;
- subscriptions concerning catechism are obviously subscriptions ;
- annual pledges for the Church are comparable to a tax, but at the same time are a donation ;
- collections are comparable to a tax, or more precisely to taxation, or even to cash donations.

The fundamental problem comes from determining the most relevant equivalent in order to understand transactions in the Catholic Church. By intersecting these two grids, one can finally make some sense of the individual's act in the religious arena.

Results and interpretation

Generally speaking, the annual pledges for the Church alone account for 50 % of the parish budget if the parish has a large population of practising Catholics. If we add to this the amount raised in collections, 75 % of the budget can be accounted for. The percentage of the offerings for special occasions is less than 20 %.

Different populations

There is no overlap between the population which subscribes to catechism, that which makes annual pledges, and that which puts money in the collection boxes for candles. Similarly, those who ask for dedications during Mass are not from the same population as those which make offerings on special occasions, and so on. This situation totally belies the vision of a Catholic church which is constructed in concentric circles. In reality, donations come from contiguous entities which are most often impermeable to other sorts of donations. This pattern of behaviour is the same regardless of the parish or region of France. Additionally, people give proportionally exactly the same sum for the collection, whatever the town. The same is true of the offering for special occasions.

Annual pledges

The Church invites its parishioners to calculate the amount of their annual pledge by the number of days worked in the year. If this method was really applied, this annual contribution could be likened to a tax. However, it is nothing of the sort, since I have observed that the amount of this donation is truly voluntary, highly symbolic, and has nothing whatsoever to do with a calculation.

I examined using population groups in tenths the distribution of donations (from 0 to 10,000 Francs) for annual pledges to the church in several parishes. I noticed that the greatest number of donors are concentrated in three groups which were almost identical, regardless of parish :

- one peak around 2 000 Francs ;
- another peak around 1 000 Francs, and very often at exactly 1 000 Francs, or 1 200 Francs, (which represents 100 Francs per month) ;
- and a third peak around 250 and 500 Francs depending on the parish. It can be noted that whether the peak is at the top end or the lower end of this range helps us to determine the wealth of a parish.

It is clear that we are in a symbolic sphere which has nothing whatsoever to do with tax. It is surprising that this distribution is identical to other sorts of donations. For example, I asked the organisation in charge of the funds for the former *Centre français du patronat chrétien* (Christian employers' fund) to give me the lists of the donations received during one year. I applied the same analytical grid and I found exactly the same results : the distribution is the same, and yet this fund is not a parish at all but a non-profitmaking organisation. In fact, it gives a view of the categories which increase donor's probability of giving money in a religious context. I think that the annual pledges are a measure of the symbolic distance

between the donor and the governing body of the parish or the movement, and in particular between the donor and the parish priest.

The virtuous circle of giving

There is a group of loyal and permanent donors who make annual pledges and give to collections. Not only do they give to the collection destined for the parish but they also give the same amount in collections for humanitarian causes. This explains why, in the *Foundation de France* (a charitable organisation) study, we can define the profile of a typical donor who is also very strongly involved in the church.

I suggest the following reasons for their donations : if giving to the poor can be regarded as a procreation, then practising Catholics have learnt to procreate by giving. When they give to their parish, the parish encourages them to give to the poor. In order to thank the parish for having given this donation, they give again, which explains why the more a parish asks for donations to the poor, the greater the amount of donations given. Practising parishioners are not people who are particularly generous in the sense of a 'generous person' ; they are simply happy to give, happy in their deep sense of humanity.

Calculated donations

There are several other groups which revolve around these loyal donors. These groups represent donors who give occasionally and have a very particular role in catholic parish activity. I shall mention two such groups.

The first is made up of those who give money for catechism, in other words for their children. In fact, they have an educational relationship with God. From the moment they transmit their values, they consider that they are doing their work properly but they carefully consider the amount of their donation.

The second group are the "Christians on wheels". These are the careful people. In fact, they are wary of anything religious and they certainly do not want the church poking its nose into their affairs. They want to pay for the ceremony straightaway so that they are free of any further obligation and they give only what they are asked. They can be summed up in the phrase 'I give you something, you give me something and so we're quits !'. The majority never go to Mass on Sundays but they are nevertheless part of the parish environment.

Dedications during Mass

Since dedications during Mass are most commonly donations for deceased relatives, they are a very clever way of paying back one's parents for having given one life. 'Since my parents put me into his world, they gave me a big present and I am going to give them back my life by having Mass said in their name.' This resembles a tax.

Candles

Candles can be seen as a way of cutting out all intermediaries in one's faith, especially ecclesiastical ones. Each individual can make up his own sort of religion by simply putting a coin into a collection box and burning a candle. If no price is shown, people feel the need to know it. Once I suggested to someone who was at a loss because he did not have any change

for a candle to take the candle all the same and pay later. “ Oh, no ! ” he said, “ the Lord might hold it against me ! ” It is really a short-cut to heaven, fair’s fair, the immediacy of the relationship shared with the divine.

The request for candles is fundamental. The parish of Saint-Vincent de Mérignac near Bordeaux, which had taken away the candles as it considered this practice pagan, had to quickly backtrack due to urgent requests. In this way, the Catholic Church in its parishes gives a social setting to people who have a fair number of religious aspirations which are a bit unorthodox.

Management

According to the statutes and canon law, each parish is administered by a pastoral council which, as its name suggests, looks after pastoral activities, and an economic council which deals with the financial management. However, when one reads the minutes from the different councils, one is tempted to conclude that the pastoral council is the costly one and does not bring in any money, and that the economic council only deals with income ! Having said that, these two councils tend to function separately and it is the parish priest who presides over both of them. It is perfectly possible for there to be no contact at all between the work of the pastoral council and that of the economic council, and if one wanted the religious and financial activities to be more closely related, the institution itself might develop some sort of schizophrenia. It is true that the pastoral council avoids talking in general about money, and the economic council refuses to talk about pastoral affairs. If, for example, a question is raised about the price of candles, it is the economic council’s concern ; the pastoral council would not stoop so low as to deal with that...and yet, a certain number of pastoral projects depend on such revenues !

Despite this, I must emphasise that those in charge of managing parish life do a wonderful job. They are the guardians of the visible stability of the parish and of its brand image. What they invest in property is proof to that. However, when one looks at their choices over several years, one notices that, despite what they say they do, aid to the poor still has a very low-priority in the parish budget. Additionally, there is no question of giving an official budget to organisations which the parish does not control since the money has to stay within the parish. This may seem exaggerated and it is a bit, but the figures do not lie.

DISCUSSION

Parish councils

Question : *Simply to moderate your remarks on the separation of the councils, I can testify that I joined the economic council for the parish of Saint-Lambert for pastoral reasons. In this parish, a representative of the pastoral council is present at all the plenary sessions of the economic council and I personally represent the economic council at all the sessions of the pastoral council. I am regularly called upon to discuss whether a project is feasible or not. At Saint-Lambert, there is a real sense of working together.*

Q. : *Do priests receive financial training ?*

Nicolas de Bremond d'Ars : Not at all, and in view of the results in a certain number of parishes, it is most certainly a pity. The sociology of the clergy is in a phase of profound change. We have currently about 3 600 priests in France under sixty years of age, and 5 400 less than sixty-five years of age, compared with the 30 000 we had about ten years ago. The priests who remain will be parish priests but who have sometimes lacked the ability to guide the financial management of their parish. The current challenge before us is to make sure that the economic council knows how to preserve the essential choices of the pastoral council.

Q. : *Were you not exaggerating a little in your description of the economic council as being a bit penny-pinching ? Is it not up to the pastoral council to propose and justify the money it wants to spend, expenses which are all undoubtedly well justified ?*

N. de B. d'A. : Take this example. I studied the outcomes of three grant requests which were submitted at the same time to the parish of Saint-Lambert in 1991 :

- a Parisian parish had very obvious and justifiable needs. Since the archdiocese did not answer its request, the parish asked other parishes for help ;
- the local secondary school's chaplaincy (which was legally and financially independent from the parish) asked for 10 000 Francs in order to restore a dilapidated room which 250 young people used each week ;
- a ruling had to be made on a project for building work, which was of interest to the parish, to the sum of 250 000 Francs.

Aid for the parish in difficulty was turned down. This was a perfectly legal and legitimate decision in terms of canon law. The reason given was that it was up to the archdiocese to deal with this problem since the parish had already paid taxes for it. The chaplaincy had to submit detailed documentary evidence so that its subvention would be granted, which it was reluctantly. This procedure was relatively burdensome for this type of project. The local investment plan was approved in the course of just one session. These decisions were taken with the best intentions.

I shall not enter into the first level of the decision - what was decided was perhaps justified. I am only interested in the second level, and not in judging it but in shedding light on what really happens. The decision-makers work according to the first level and do not always think about what they are implementing. Among the decision-makers, in this particular matter there were the members of both councils, the parish priest himself who presided over them, and the vicars who, in this parish at least, were consulted before decisions were taken.

Conflicts

Q. : *My father is member of a pastoral council. The "Christians on wheels" who exert pressure for giving priority to taking photos rather than to the liturgical ritual of christenings or weddings, appal him. Frankly, he would really like to get rid of these infrequent "invaders". What can the parish priest possibly say to such a comment ?*

N. de B. d'A. : It is indeed a fact that different groups which are culturally mixed and which go to their local church can come into conflict with each other. As far as I am concerned, I am delighted that the Catholic Church is interested not only in permanent donors. The problem is knowing how to manage the relationships between these two groups.

Surprising facts

Q. : *Can your analysis be applied to countries other than France ?*

N. de B. d'A. : This financial analysis cannot be applied to places where the priests are paid by the State, as is the case in Alsace-Lorraine or in Germany. The Germans pay a tax, the *kirchensteuer*, which allows them to practise a religion. This tax is not compulsory but if it is not paid, it is impossible to my knowledge to christen one's child. This has two important consequences : the desertion away from catholic and lutheran churches because of this expensive tax (of the order of 7% of one's earnings) ; and Germany taking a huge liberty with regards to the Pope, since the Vatican is essentially financed by the German and the American Church.

Donations

Q. : *You said that the dedications during Mass are given to the parish budget. Is it not really given to the priests ?*

N. de B. d'A. : Since the reform of the Vatican II council, the payment of the clergy was standardised. Priests do not receive earnings but a fee which corresponds in reality to 20 such dedications during Mass. As a result, they come under a more profitable, fiscal regime², which allows parishes to pay them less since they pay fewer taxes. All dedications during Mass are therefore paid to the parishes and are no longer used to pay earnings directly. This is not to say that a priest will not receive cash and can do with it what he wants : there is absolutely no control.

Q. : *Is the collection not part of the ritual ?*

N. de B. d'A. : Indeed, and some people give the same amount throughout their lives. In reality, the collection is essentially linked to the statistical frequency of the presence of coins in one's purse. The abolition in certain cases of the ritual of manual collections, in other words of this anthropological education in the act of giving, will entail a significant loss in the long term of manual donations, and might even give rise to the idea that giving is something which is necessary.

Q. : *Do you think that donors try to reduce the amount of taxes they pay ?*

N. de B. d'A. : Very often, donors refuse to fill in a tax receipt. Furthermore, people never work out what they give for the collection. On the other hand, as far as the annual pledges are concerned, the parishioners fix their amount according to how they perceive the parish priest, or more precisely, the way in which their donation was and will be valued.

Q. : *I have noticed that people are much more consistent in their behaviour when they are aware that they are seen. Is there any publicity for those who give annual pledges to the Church ?*

N. de B. d'A. : On the contrary, they are very concerned to be ignored, apart from being ignored by the priest himself, and this does not prevent them remaining loyal. There would be an obvious shock if the list of donors and their donations were published.

² The NCP (non-commercial profit).

Poverty

Q. : *Why did you not mentioned the positive value of poverty in the Church ?*

N. de B. d'A. : This question comes under another analysis, which would be more related to ideology : how the Catholic Church in the course of 2 000 years has talked about poverty and has always valued it. This aspect did not come into my thesis and this is why I did not mention it.

Q. : *Seen from the outside, the Church resembles a big multinational which appears to be very rich and which pays its employees very badly. Furthermore, articles have appeared in the press that the parish priest, to make ends meet, is often forced to put his hand into the collection box, and that he might feel a bit guilty. What inner motivation is necessary to accept this poverty ? Does the Church still choose to believe that priests come from rich families who come to their aid ?*

N. de B. d'A. : I hope that having listened to my talk, you will no longer describe the Church as a multinational, because it is totally impossible to consolidate its accounts. As for the current method of payment of the clergy, this was decided upon less than thirty years ago.

It was because the French government paid the parish priests and not the vicars that so many churches were set up in the nineteenth century, as had been built during the previous centuries throughout the country. By installing a parish priest in each town or village, this resulted in many church staff who were paid by the State ! I think that it was also a way of using surplus labour in the countryside.

There were also some very big disparities. In the 1960's, it was hoped to put an end to them in France, with the commendable concern to be closer to the poverty ideal. Without going into the very complex reasons for this, it is true that only those who have sufficient resources can currently get involved in this movement without having financial worries.

Historians say that if the social indicator given by the income of a profession can be compared favourably to other professions, then there is space for other candidates. On the other hand, if this social indicator is utopian and counter-productive as far as the ideology of progress is concerned, then there is a 'quality effect' which means that one enters a profession for reasons other than that of a career move. However, in turn this may have a negative effect, namely the risk of fewer and fewer good candidates.

The balance in terms of recruitment is fragile and is constantly in the process of being readjusted in cycles of 15 to 20 years. At present, we have reached the point of maximum negative effect on earnings because we are not capable of offering potential recruits an image of social identification which is realised by financial reward. We should not reach a point where there is financial dependence on our fellow workers to a greater or lesser extent. However, there are a number of conflicting views on this subject...

Q. : *...and there are important local variations. With 90% of the minimum wage and a certain number of advantages thrown in, I can testify that I, as a priest, have a disposable income equivalent to that of a middle-class family with children. Of course, there are some priests who are poor but there are some young ones who manage to balance their budget without the support of their families. Furthermore, the fact that the clergy's fees have become practically independent from the wealth of the parishes, greatly encourages ecclesiastical mobility within the diocese³.*

³ There is no ecclesiastical mobility between dioceses.

The suspicion

Q. : *In your talk, your sixth type of transaction, the donation, appears more important than the others, and you say that when one helps people to give, they give more, and in particular to the Church which itself makes sure that the money stays within the parish. Does one teach the act of giving to others without really giving enough oneself in the end ? I have the impression that this is an underlying theme in your analysis.*

N. de B. d'A. : There is a terrifying phrase in the Gospel according to St Matthew “ *No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon⁴”*. The main problem with management, (if it is interpreted with regards the implications and consequences behind it and not its practical implementation), is to know how one will transform this money into a good servant, and not a master in society. Therefore, in Christianity, there is necessarily something about this which appears suspicious.

The real problem is that a rival to God may exist, and it is identified with this aspect of material riches. The other idols are never potential rivals to God. This explains why it is so important that people who receive money become more human.

The speaker :

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⁴ Chapter 6, verse 24 (the exact text is the following : *Ye cannot serve God and mammon*, mammon means “ money ” in Hebrew).