

# THE PRIEST WHO CAME TEN YEARS AGO

Andrew Neaum - 10 May 2013

The priest who came ten years ago  
Must have seemed a so and so  
To gentlefolk, disturbed or riled  
By clergy who're not meek and mild,  
Refusing an approving nod  
To wild, irreverent priests of God.

Though full of vigour, sound of limb,  
Straight of back and figure trim,  
He dressed disturbingly off beat,  
In baggy shorts with sandalled feet,  
A tatty beard to compensate  
His mildly scabrous, balding pate.

An African-Australian-Brit  
Much given to jokes and risqué wit,  
Sesquipedalian, adjectival,  
A joy in words that few could rival;  
Provocative, a tad pugnacious  
In bishop-baiting, bold, audacious.

Though in his wives supremely blessed,  
His four bright kids had flown the nest,  
Depriving him of access to  
A sympathetic point of view  
To cultures popular or yob.  
No social, just a culture snob.

He came in all his rude vulgarity  
In part to test your Christian charity,  
Inviting love of down and outs,  
Beggars, ne'er do wells and louts,  
Those scorned by prissy folk and prim  
(As too are liberal priests like him).

Difficult to hedge or box,  
A friend of doubt and paradox,  
Embracing incongruity  
And preaching ambiguity.  
Thick skinned but also sensitive  
Impulsive and yet tentative.

A walking paradox indeed,  
Passionate for Church and creed,  
But also, too, a classic skeptic.  
Even tempered, yet dyspeptic,  
Distinctly trad liturgically,  
But liberal theologically.

A melancholic optimist,  
A happy, joyful pessimist,  
Hating happy clappy loons,  
Facile choruses and tunes,  
But prone at times to compromise,  
To his and everyone's surprise.

In grief and sorrow self-contained,  
Emotionally well restrained,  
Yet sharing of himself as well  
And telling all there is to tell  
Of what he thinks and reads and eats,  
In sermons, verse and strong pewsheets.

As time rolled on and years increased  
He knows you've grown to love this priest.  
You egg him on, affirm, support,  
Accept him, back him, rarely thwart  
Even his most crazy schemes,  
Wild fancies, hopeless dreams.

You've helped him through great tribulation,  
Have joined him too in celebration,  
He, among and one of you,  
Identifying through and through  
With all, save that judgmental lot  
Who say "I'm saved, but you are not!"

But as retirement looms at last  
He ruminates upon the past  
To find that faith and life and years  
Have lavished far more joys than tears,  
Upon this sixty seven year old.  
So drunk on blessings manifold.

What's more, of all those blessing lavish,  
Among the best has been this parish,  
Where priestly life and Christian creed  
Have granted much to him indeed.  
Not least tonight, just being here  
Among good folk who hold him dear.

And though this chapter now is told  
Don't think he's done for, finished, old.  
Bollocks! He'll have none of that!  
To prove it, here and learned off pat,  
A last brief sermon..... "*Life's no Bitch,  
Shot through with God, how rich, how rich!*"

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