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THE CHURCH AND THE PEOPLE.

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IT is not intended that this closing paper should continue the discussion on the subjects that have been presented to us to-day, or that it should try to sum up the conclusions reached.

We are bidden now to consider the relationship between Church and people, for it is her success in winning the people which will ultimately determine the validity of the Church's claim to be called the National Church.

The Times Leader, which greeted the publication of the Church and State Report, closed with a commendation of the following remark made in evidence before the Commission by Sir Thomas Inskip :

"The present relations of Church and State are not such as to prevent the Church from doing the work which is at present being left undone."

The aim of this closing paper may well be to discover how far we are using the liberty which we do possess. If the Church is failing to accomplish the purpose for which she exists, is that failure due to hindrances over which we have no control or is the cause to be found within ourselves? Let us try to face the situation frankly, and if in doing so we seem to be too critical, let it not be thought that our criticism is directed against others, but rather that we seek to know the worst in ourselves so that we may discover the cause of our weaknesses and find the appropriate remedy.

In regard to freedom of thought and action, and the absence of open hostility, the Church has surely never enjoyed more freedom than she does to-day. And this freedom, combined with the immensely powerful and far-reaching opportunities afforded by the modern miracle of broadcasting, should enable her to reach the zenith of her influence upon the nation.

Yet we are assured that the Church has but little influence and that if she had more she would not know what to do with it. The Chaplain of All Souls, in one of a series of broadcast talks on the Established Church, said: "The first broad distinction between this generation and most that have gone before it is that the social and political importance of the Church (in its widest sense) has declined." The Principal of Mansfield College, using the term "Church" with a wider application, wrote in the *Spectator*: "Over most of what was once Christendom the Christian Church no longer enjoys even formal or conventional recognition of its ancient claims from society as a whole. Much of contemporary society is frankly pagan. . . . For the Church the distinction between Home and Foreign Missions is to-day little more than geographical," and Prebendary Cash in *The Responsibility of Success* writes: "In England paganism is making rapid strides, secular

and material standards of life invade the Church, the nation no longer looks to the Church for moral leadership."

If all this be true, the Church's influence upon the nation is not commensurate with her immense opportunities. Is this due to the interference of the State or is it because the Church, both in her relationship to the State and to the people, has lost that pastoral genius which is the bed-rock upon which her strength and influence depend, and for the exercise of which she has surpassing privileges and opportunities?

It cannot be said that recent incursions into the realm of politics have improved the relationship between the Church and the people, or increased the influence of the Church upon the nation.

Dr. Inge says: "The laity do not like the priest in politics, and the Churches against their will are being thrown back upon their real message and their own business."

If the Church's influence upon the nation as a whole is measured by her success in winning the people we can hardly have cause for unmixed satisfaction as we contemplate the result of our efforts. There is a great body of earnest, devoted clergy who are spending themselves without stint for their people, in quiet, unobtrusive service under appalling difficulties, and with many discouragements; and their influence is seen in the transformed lives of men and women whose names, though unknown to history, will be written in heaven. But we cannot be complacent when we are told that in London probably not much more than 10 per cent. of the population is regular in its attendance at public worship. In the provinces the percentage is higher, but 25 per cent. would be a generous estimate. In Sittingbourne, it is said, only 3 per cent. of the population goes to Church. "No one," says the Bishop-designate of Portsmouth, "can go about these new areas of population . . . without becoming more and more convinced that England is beginning to become a pagan country." The Bishop of Durham is convinced that "the great mass of English folk have no longer any effective contact with the Church of England, and that the parish churches are no longer used by the masses of parishioners. In 1634 there were probably more communicants than there were in 1934, though the population of England in the interval has multiplied ninefold."

Ignorance and superstition abound, and those who minister in the poorer parishes could supply many parallels to the story of the woman who had her child baptised to "ward off God."

Many of our young people, though better educated than their forefathers, are scarcely conversant with the main facts of the New Testament, and there is little hope that their children will know even as much. Seventy-five per cent. of the children in a Sunday School here in Oxford were stated to be without a Bible in their homes.

It would, however, be a mistake to regard the millions, who give no outward indication of religious convictions, as either hostile to religion, or impervious to its influence; but it has virtually no

place in their lives. The Archbishop of Canterbury speaking at the C.P.A.S. Centenary Meeting said: "There is a phrase often used which I think is most misleading—'the lapsed masses'—meaning that they have lapsed from religion. I do not think that is true. . . . Generally speaking, the bulk of our people have not lapsed from religion, they have never yet been won. When we try to win them we have good grounds for encouragement."

But perhaps an even more serious feature is what the Bishop of Leicester calls the sub-Christian life of many Church members. A very striking article in *Evangelical Christendom* described the impressions of the Bishop of Uganda after taking charge for three months of a parish in Westminster. He said: "One thing that has impressed me more than anything else, I think, is . . . the almost unspeakably profound ignorance of the elementary truths of the Christian faith among the boys and girls and the men and women of our own country and our own capital. I have been taking a Confirmation Class and quite literally I do not think one single member of that class would have a chance of coming forward for Confirmation in Uganda. The standard is different, and altogether different."

A serious consequence of this ignorance is that so many sincere and earnest Ordination Candidates are unable to give any reason for the faith that is in them. One often hears the excuse, "What can you expect of a boy of eighteen?" Having failed to teach him anything we accuse him of being too ignorant to learn. We expect boys at the age of eighteen to be sufficiently developed mentally to win scholarships at Oxford and Cambridge and to be sufficiently developed physically to achieve a measure of fame in athletics, yet we consider them hopelessly incapable of spiritual growth or doctrinal understanding, although they have probably passed the most impressionable age in their lives. If this were true it would surely be a strange blunder on the part of their Creator! The excuse is, like the schoolboy's definition of a lie, "a very present help in trouble." It is an indication of our own failure. Why, then, is the Church's influence so feeble and why are the results of her labour so disappointing?

Why have the sincere efforts of our parochial clergy left such a large number of our people untouched and an even larger number unimpressed? It is certainly *not* due to any hindrance imposed by the State.

We may comfort ourselves that it is due in part to the serious understaffing of many parishes throughout the country. This is particularly the case in those parishes which are unable to afford an adequate staff, and they are the parishes where the populations are large and the need most urgent. Our inability to keep pace with the rapid development of new housing areas, and the rivalry of the motor-car and the wireless, are creating a grave problem, and large areas of the country are lapsing into semi-heathendom. Hard-pressed incumbents are breaking down under the double burden; of a task beyond their powers, and of the despair which failure

breeds. But when we have made due allowance for the serious lack of workers, ordained and lay, we have not accounted for the *real causes* of our failure as Messengers, Watchmen and Stewards of the Lord.

Among several causes, three are of great importance: the neglect of pastoral visitation; the lowering of spiritual standards; and the lack of Gospel teaching and preaching.

How easily and quickly we have forgotten the solemn exhortation in the Service for the Ordering of Priests. "Wherefore consider with yourselves the end of your ministry . . . and see that you never cease your labour, your care and diligence, until you have done all that lieth in you, according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to your charge, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you, either for error in religion, or for viciousness in life."

Has there not been a growing tendency to concentrate upon the few who may be reached through Church Services and to neglect the masses who are outside—to abandon the pastoral for the priestly functions? Men are not interested in priestly functions until they are first interested in religion, and to-day religion is to many quite irrelevant. Thus our appeal is seriously limited in its scope.

Canon Peter Green, speaking to Ordination Candidates at Durham, said: "Of all the titles which may be yours . . . the title I covet most for you is that of pastor." And again: "I am sure that pastoral work is the thing most needed and I sometimes fear it is the thing most neglected in the Church to-day."

Men to-day are often noted more for what they have done outside their parishes than for what they are doing within them. How many names will this generation add to the list of those whose title to fame is Pastoral? We cannot fail to be deeply impressed by the extraordinary piety and amazing zeal of the great men of the Evangelical Revival: Grimshaw of Haworth, whose people feared him more than a Justice of the Peace, and in whose Church Wesley found 1,000 communicants; Fletcher of Madeley, who never met his parishioners in the street or in their homes without talking to them about their souls; Berridge of Everton, who sometimes rode 100 miles in a day to preach and visit; Newton of Olney, who had a prayer meeting every Sunday at 6 a.m. and every Tuesday at 5 a.m. with a good average attendance. The diligence and zeal of these men for spiritual work make our present-day parochial activities appear very mundane and superficial.

We thankfully acknowledge that through the medium of the wireless a vast body of those who would normally be entirely cut off from all spiritual contacts have developed an affectionate familiarity for clergymen whom they have never seen. We have Scriptural authority for believing that the shepherd should know his own sheep by name, but to-day we have reversed the situation and the sheep know the shepherd by name, often by his Christian

name! Valuable as this may be it is far from the pastoral ideal of our Church. No one can take the place of the true pastor *in the parish* who lives among his people, sharing their joys and sorrows for his Master's sake.

The second cause of our failure is to be found in the invasion of worldliness and the use of unworthy expedients to win men and women to the Church. "It is a law that a religion which gains power by non-religious methods invariably uses it for non-religious purposes." The Puritans said of the Church, "She casteth forth her ice like morsels; Who is able to abide her frosts?", but this description is hardly justified to-day. The Church of this generation may be likened unto children sitting in the market place and saying, "we have piped unto you and ye have not danced." It is not the wolf, to-day, but the shepherd who is in sheep's clothing and the sheep are not impressed. Canon Joynt in his excellent book, *The Church's Real Work*, writes: "His shepherds are not called to amuse the flock by doubtful, if not positively sinful, expedients, on the plea of keeping them together. There are great fields of untainted recreation which they can recommend and encourage without turning the sheep of Christ into pastures where poisonous weeds predominate. Should these phrases offend . . . forgiveness is pleaded for them on the ground that among the Church's greatest perils to-day, the greatest is the eating out of her life by the world and its spirit, like the slow, silent destruction wrought by the death-watch beetle in some venerable temple of prayer."

The third cause of failure, and a serious one, is the lack of what used to be called Gospel-preaching to win men to Christ, and of doctrinal teaching for the edification and strengthening of the faithful. It is significant that the words "teaching" and "preaching" are rarely separated in the New Testament.

A leading article in *The Times* expressed the opinion that "The average citizen, if he goes to Church on Sunday . . . comes with some real spiritual hunger, but the hungry sheep look up and are not fed when from the pulpit their pastor offers them his not very well-informed reflections about India, disarmament and housing."

The Church's message to-day is so often a curious mixture of heroic futility and mawkish sentimentality. There is no message for the plain man who knows he is not a hero but knows he is a sinner. There is no assurance, no authority, no attempt to state what Scripture teaches, or what the Church believes—just the preacher's opinion! Arnold Lunn, before he left the English for the Roman Communion, asked, "Why should men go to Church to hear 'honesty is the best policy' set to music?"

We feel an obligation upon us to-day to prophesy smooth things; but Christ never taught us to believe that His message would meet with general acceptance, and He certainly gave us no authority to adjust His message in order to make it acceptable. He taught His disciples to expect persecution, hatred, and even death, and the reward of His own preaching was the Cross. The

Cross is the centre of everything outward and material in the Church's furniture, decoration, and ritual; but it has been effectively excluded from the pulpit. We have transferred the Sacrifice from the Cross to the Communion Service: but even so we cannot be logical. It is a strange inconsistency which in the Most Comfortable Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ can administer those precious symbols of the Passion of our Lord with the words "The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which was shed for thee"; and then deny the efficacy of that Blood and, to the great pain and distress of many devout souls, do despite to that Holy Thing by pouring scorn upon "the Blood" as the means of our Redemption. To preach "beauty, truth, and goodness," without any reference to the Redemption that is in Christ Jesus, apart from which there can be no eternal values, is not Christianity: it may not be more than ethical paganism; as a means of Salvation it is only more pleasant and useful than lying on a bed of spikes or going on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Can we be surprised at the purely superficial adherence of so many Church members?

What then do we need to-day? Not deliverance from the shackles of state control, but a quickening of spiritual life; with Christ: not movements, or methods, or men, but Christ as the Centre! There are unmistakable signs of an awakened spiritual interest; the rising tide of evangelism, the emphasis on the need for the New Birth, campaigns of witness, and so on. But there is sometimes a fear lest these things are a phase which will pass without accomplishing any permanent results. If they merely become fashionable they will leave the Church empty, swept and garnished. The motive power of all these efforts must be not simply to stir the Church into renewed activity; but to bring every individual into a personal relationship to Jesus Christ as the only hope; to Christ, Who exemplifies in His Death the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God against sin and all its abominations, and the exceeding great love of God for the sinner while he was yet a sinner: to Christ, Who alone can give deliverance from the bondage of sin and from its eternal consequences; to Christ, Who only is able to transform frail men and women and make them more than conquerors; to Christ, Who can fill them with constraining love that they cannot but speak the things which they have seen and heard and experienced. When we determine to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and Him Crucified the quickening will come; but it must begin in us. John Wesley said the clergy of his day had no more knowledge of saving souls than they had of catching whales. A High Dignitary of the Church says to-day, "You will never do anything with evangelism until the clergy themselves are converted," but, we may ask "Who is responsible for ordaining unconverted men?"

There are many earnest men to-day of whom it may be said as of the Parson in the *Canterbury Tales* :

"Christ's lore and His apostles twelve
He taught, but first he followed it himself."

If our faith is worth preserving it is worth teaching. And "seeing that we cannot by any other means compass the doing of so weighty a work, pertaining to the salvation of man, but with doctrine and exhortation taken out of the Holy Scriptures, and with a life agreeable to the same, let us draw all our cares and studies this way that we may wax riper and stronger in our ministry, and that we may be wholesome and godly examples and patterns for the people to follow." It may mean scrapping some of our too numerous organisations. The still small Voice is drowned by the noise of the machinery. The Bishop of Bristol says: "So much of our time is taken up with just keeping things going, raising the necessary funds, supervising parochial organisations and the rest, that the main purpose for which the Church exists is terribly apt to be crowded out, if it is not lost sight of altogether."

Evangelistic Campaigns must not be regarded as an end in themselves. Many campaigns reach the outsider only indirectly. There is a tendency to be intra-congregational. This work should not be confined to special occasions but should be the normal work of the parish. There is no work so lasting and so effective as the everyday work of the clergy and their staffs, year in and year out, among the people of their own parishes. There is a danger lest the eyes of missionary-hearted people, looking at the need afar off, should overlook the heathen at their own doors.

I would like to suggest that what we need to-day is a campaign of house-to-house evangelism aided by organised groups of people in every parish who will give up their time each week to go from door to door throughout their parishes bearing their witness and inviting the outsider to join their fellowship. This may not be so easy or so exciting as the conventional campaign of witness, but it would meet a long-felt need and might be spiritually healthier for those who adopted it. Such visiting could not be a substitute for the regular visitation of the incumbent, but if our people were set to work in this way to help others they would not expect so much nursing themselves and thus would set free the staff for more intensive pastoral work outside the congregation.

At the C.P.A.S. Youth Rally one of the speakers called for volunteers who would be willing to give one day, or part of a day, each week in a poor parish for any work that might be needed. The response has indicated a real opportunity along this line. Agencies such as the C.P.A.S. would gladly receive the names of leisured people who would be willing to go wherever the need is greatest.

In closing, may I venture to add one more cause of our weakness? May I say a lack of faith? Are we not told that "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief?" But I am not so anxious to emphasise the lack of faith in the hearer which prevents the appreciation of the message, as the lack of faith in the instrument which may hinder the working out of the divine purposes through him. The apostles asked of the Lord the cause of their impotence. The Lord replied, "If ye have

faith as a grain of mustard seed . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you."

It is not a coincidence that we meet in Easter week. How glorious is our position having at our disposal all the power of a victorious Saviour Who by His death hath destroyed death, and by His rising to life again hath restored to us everlasting life. The world is sick and sad with its own muddlings and the hearts of men and women are hungry for a better way. We live in a day of wonderful opportunity. With the failure of human effort and the readiness to try God's way how unspeakably pitiful if the Church at this moment should be too weak herself to seize the chance of an eternity. The disciples after Calvary were not stronger or more assured than we are to-day, but after Easter and Pentecost they were transformed; defeat was turned into triumphant victory; men took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus; and it was all due, according to Peter, to the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Easter Day is behind us; we draw near to the Day of the Ascension. When Jesus is glorified the Gift of Pentecost can be poured out upon the Church, and a Church filled with the Holy Ghost could turn the world upside down to-day.

A Cambridge Bede Book, by Eric Milner-White, D.S.O., M.A., priest of the Oratory of the Good Shepherd, Fellow and Dean of King's College, Cambridge (Longmans, Green & Co., 5s. net), contains a series of seventy collects for moments of prayer and meditation. While the prayers are all new, the author says that "they tend to echo the writings of great English Christians from Richard Rolle and Mother Julian to Bishop Westcott and Robert Bridges. Above all, their inspiration derives from Andrewes, Donne, Traherne and Taylor." The writer says that he has found private use for them as "special intentions" at the daily eucharist, but that need not deter any from the use of some of the well-phrased petitions placed at the head of each page of this little book.

The Dean of Wells delivered a course of lectures in his cathedral on *The Inspiration of the Bible* (Oxford University Press, 3s. 6d. net). The object of the volume is "to dispel such notions as those of the Church-goers who still take the unintelligent, unimaginative, unhistorical view of the Bible which its American adherents have labelled *fundamentalist*. It is certain that a large section of the public, especially that portion of it which does not go to Church believes that fundamentalism is synonymous with orthodox Christianity and that if the clergy at least are not all fundamentalists they ought to be; and would be if they were more honest."

NOTE.—Owing to the space taken up by the papers read at the Oxford Conference, which we are sure our readers will appreciate, we are compelled to hold over a large number of reviews and Notes on Recent Books.