

The Pastoral Office— A Comparative Study.

WE take it for granted that the Church ought to be concerned for the spiritual needs of individual men and women. It is worth reminding ourselves that this pastoral concern for individuals has a long and interesting history. The State religions of Greece and Rome did not conceive of the individual as a personality in need of spiritual guidance and help. Their devotees in turn did not think of the priest who conducted the temple rites as a person to whom one could go for spiritual direction or enlightenment. "In no case did they [the priests of Greece] regard themselves as having any teaching or pastoral mission."¹ The priest might indeed be a sceptic, or even a libertine, and yet not be considered unfit for his high office; since the business of religion, as Dill has pointed out, was "to avert the anger or win the favour of dim, unearthly powers, it was not primarily to purify or elevate the soul."

In course of time, however, the need for personal spiritual direction made itself felt, partly no doubt because of the larger place that suffering and uncertainty came to have in the pattern of Roman life as the difficulties of the Empire increased; and from the second century B.C. it became the custom, in wealthy Roman families, to include in the personnel of the household a philosopher who acted as spiritual director. His work was to give instruction on the art of living, to furnish guidance at times of crisis, to discuss religious questions, and, with the approach of death, to fortify the soul for its last journey. The Empress Livia sought comfort on the death of Drusus from Augustus's director, Areus. Better known are the ministries of distinguished philosophers like Seneca and Epictetus, who were much sought after as spiritual counsellors. Such men felt the need for the reformation of human nature, and to this end they encouraged the pursuit of virtue, and inculcated the necessity for self-discipline. They sought to help men to find God. It is to Seneca that we owe the saying so reminiscent of the teaching of Christ: "The mind, unless it is pure and holy, cannot apprehend God." Epictetus reveals the pastoral concern of these philosopher priests in a passage in which he unveils his own sense of a mission to

¹ Lecky, *Hist. of European Morals*, i. p. 24.

minister to wounded souls: "The school of a philosopher is a surgery. You ought not to go out of it with pleasure, but with pain, for you come there diseased." It must be remembered that these ministries were directed to a very small section of society. At this stage Stoicism was a religion for the educated classes first and last. Seneca's clientèle was drawn from men of wealth and social rank. Warde Fowler has pointed out that the average Roman statesman regarded the lower classes of the population with disdain, and though Cicero might, in an expansive mood, write: "Nature has inclined us to love men, for this is the foundation of all law," such noble sentiments could not endure close contact with the working-class elements of Roman life. It was Cicero who also wrote: "The work of all artisans is sordid; there can be nothing honourable in a workshop. All gains made by hired labourers are dishonourable and base . . . with them the very gain itself does but increase the slavishness of the work." The presence of slavery as a fundamental part of the structure of Roman society was an additional factor which led to the hardening of men's hearts in their social relationships. This earlier eclectic Stoicism was later succeeded by a popular Stoic movement, contemporary with the early Christian Church, which was inspired by a considerable pastoral concern, though its chief weapon was the preaching ministry exercised by its street preachers. It called the masses of men to a higher standard of life, and among its leaders and street preachers were not only men of distinction like Musonius, who taught the forgiveness of injuries, gentleness to wrongdoers, chastity in men and women, but "the rush of porters and smiths and carpenters to join the ranks of the Cynic friars," who were often "men of unkempt beard and ragged cloak." These fervent preachers of a higher life saw their ministry in a pastoral light: "The Cynic is the father of all men, the men are his sons, the women his daughters." Many of these precursors of the modern Salvation Army later joined the ranks of the early Christian monks and ascetics.

So far as the generality of people were concerned, it is not surprising that the State cults, lacking as they did any message for the individual as such, fell into an increasing decay, notwithstanding the zealous attempts of Augustus to revive them. There was, moreover, a new wine fermenting in the ancient world, and bursting the bottles of conventional habits of thought and practice. It was the new wine of individualism. It revealed itself in a new note in Roman poetry, in the prominence given to the joys, sorrows, tastes and pursuits of the individual, in the rise of Roman biography and autobiography, and it led to a greater measure of self-scrutiny. The inevitable result was that the serious-minded man increasingly felt the need of a religion

with a more personal note, with a message for the individual, into whose consciousness the fact of his individuality had broken.

It was in such a situation that the Mystery cults rose to power. They frequently found their way to the centres of Roman life by way of the soldier who had been engaged in the Empire's eastern campaigns, and so had learned of the Egyptian Isis and Serapis, and of the Persian Mithra. The soldier was attracted to the new faiths not least because they had a message for the common man. "We see for the first time in history bodies of men and women banded together, irrespective of nationality and social rank, for the purpose of religious observance, and religion becoming recognised as an affair of the individual rather than of the State."² The priests of the Mysteries, who in the case of the Magna Mater might be women, undertook to give spiritual guidance, and promised to the individual, in the name of their cult, a deeper, richer life in this present world, and in the future a blessed immortality. Attempts might be made to suppress the new faiths in the interests of the old, as they were, but the inherent superiority of the new, in its concern with the needs of the individual, gave it a vigour which could not long be denied. The fine seriousness which was one element of these cults, compounded as they were of depth and superficiality, is seen in that of Mithra, a favourite cult of the soldier, with its god who is the type of the suffering and struggling life of man. The cult's pastoral aspect is indicated in its custom of sometimes referring to its adherents as "brothers," and in its use of the title "pater" for one of its officials. The cult of Aesculapius, though much concerned with bodily healing, had its pastoral ministry also. "In his sanatoria men acquired health of body and restoration of mind." "He raises up souls that are sinful." Spiritual direction took a considerable place in the "half philosophical, half religious sect of the Pythagoreans." The adherents of this cult met in underground basilicas, in which their sacred rites and purifications were carried out. Cumont has described how from a chair within the apse the Pythagorean philosopher-teacher gave instruction to the faithful, which included rules for daily living. "At dawn, after he had offered a sacrifice to the rising sun, the pious man must decide on the way in which his day was to be employed. Every evening he must make a threefold examination of conscience, and, if he had been guilty of any sin, must make an act of contrition." Numerous abstinences, repeated prayers, lonely meditations, were also prescribed. "This austere and circumstantial system of morals would ensure happiness and wisdom on earth, and salvation in the beyond." The deeper self-

² Legge, *Forerunners and Rivals*, i, p. 21.

scrutiny which has been referred to led to a new consciousness of sin. "There is a brooding consciousness of failure, of the load of human sin, and the need of reconciliation and purification. Self-sufficiency had given way to a mood of pessimism."³ Relief for the troubled conscience was provided in the Mysteries, the priests of which anticipated the confessional of Catholicism. Ritual on an elaborate scale was a feature of the Mysteries, but it is interesting to note that the age produced also the Hermetic movement, thought by some scholars to be an offshoot of the Mysteries. This cult, which has been compared to the Society of Friends of our day, and for which salvation was the knowledge of God, dispensed with sacraments, but had its priests, known as "fathers," who were spiritual teachers concerned to guide the perplexed. Here, for example, is guidance as to the relation between the body and the soul: "Unless you first hate the body, my son, you cannot love your true self, and if you love your true self you shall have Nous, and possessing Nous you shall partake also of knowledge."

The pastoral conceptions and practice of Judaism also call for mention. The Pharisees, who were the most influential religious leaders of Judaism in New Testament times, gave great attention to the Law as the divine rule of life. The primary object of the synagogue service, for example, was "to hear the Law and learn it accurately." In private life, it was as individuals conformed to the pattern of conduct given in the Law, God's practical guide for the conduct of life, that they were judged to be rightly related to the God who had inspired the Law. In some schools of Pharisaism ignorance of the Law was judged to render impossible a life acceptable to God.⁴ The religious leaders of the people were therefore regarded primarily as teachers, whose main work was to expound the Law. There were, of course, Rabbis whose pastoral work was an outstanding feature of their ministry. Dr. I. Abrahams, in his *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, has written of one Rabbi who showed intimate friendship to robbers and highwaymen in his neighbourhood, so that they might be brought to penitence; and of another who would go out on the roads at night, intercepting those who were about to sin, and with kindly words would divert them from their intentions. But though the Pharisaic brotherhoods could produce such outstanding examples of the pastoral spirit, and their ministry included such works of mercy as visiting the sick and burying the dead, their principal responsibility was to care for the text of Scripture, to understand the Law themselves, to teach it to others, and to administer at the

³ S. Angus, *Mystery Religions*, p. 207.

⁴ cf. *St. John* vii. 49.

pronouncement of legal decisions. The priests remained in Judaism, sometimes as teachers of the Law, for which formerly they had been completely responsible; but since they were largely concerned with the maintenance of the Temple services, the offering of the sacrifices and the accompanying ceremonial, the care of the sacred utensils employed in the services, the disposal of the offerings in kind, there could of necessity be little of a distinctively pastoral character in their work. In any case, the spiritual oversight of the people became, from the period of the Maccabean wars, in increasing measure the work of the Pharisees, and the religious ideal held and expounded by them was that of conformity to the Law in its amplified form. "He who haunts the synagogue and the schoolhouse, he who busies himself with the Torah"—it is such men to whom the vision of God will come.⁵ Dr. T. W. Manson has made the interesting suggestion that the Aramaic word possibly used by Jesus to describe His disciples, and giving the meaning "apprentice," may have been deliberately chosen in opposition to the scribal system precisely because the pupil of the Rabbinical schools was primarily a student, whose chief business was to master the contents of the written Law and the oral tradition.⁶

When we begin to examine the pastoral conceptions of Christianity as illustrated in the ministry of Christ, in the records preserved of Him in the Gospels, we are met by a notable pastoral concern. Its source is traced back to God Himself, in His loving concern for the salvation of the individual, so unforgettably illustrated in the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. There is thus in the Christian faith an adequate theological basis to inspire and sustain pastoral concern. In this respect Christianity stands over in contrast, for the most part, with the Mystery religions. As Angus has shown, the Mysteries were never, with the exception of Orphism and the Hermetic sect, conspicuously doctrinal or dogmatic, and were weak intellectually and theologically. The Stoic philosopher guides and preachers, too, found their inspiration to pastoral care not so much in their doctrine of God as in their conviction of the inherent superiority of the life of virtue. "Stoicism, again, was in essence a purely pantheistic system, knowing no destiny for the individual soul except absorption in the soul of the universe."⁷ There is at times a warmer note in the religious philosophy of Epictetus, so that Kirk concludes that "with him, theism is all but a firm conviction"; but it is significant of the distance of Epictetus from Christianity, not only ethically but

⁵ Kirk, *The Vision of God*, p. 21.

⁶ *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 239.

⁷ Kirk, p. 34.

theologically, that the words *ἀγάπη* and *ἀγαπάω* are not used by him. Dill has called attention to the underlying pessimism of Stoicism: "Life is but a moment in the tract of infinite age, and so darkened by manifold sins and sorrows that it seems, as it did to Sophocles, a sinister gift." The dynamic of the Christian faith, on the other hand, has been and will always be, the realisation of God's love for the individual. "We love Him because He first loved us." This pastoral concern of God the Father is shared by His Incarnate Son, whose filial consciousness is so striking an element in His life as revealed to us in the Gospels. The pastoral conception of His ministry as directed to the needy meets us at its outset in the words quoted from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth: *The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised . . .*

In another passage the Son speaks of Himself as having come "to seek and to save that which was lost." These great words bring to light a unique characteristic of the pastoral ministry of our Lord. It is that He went out in search of the sinner, to reclaim him for God. Two distinguished Jewish commentators have generously borne witness to this new note in the Gospels. Thus Dr. C. G. Montefiore: "The virtues of repentance are gloriously praised in the Rabbinical literature, but this direct search for, and appeal to, the sinner, are new and moving notes of high import and significance. The good shepherd who searches for the lost sheep, and reclaims and rejoices over it, is a new figure, which has never ceased to play its great part in the moral and religious development of the world."⁸ Dr. I. Abrahams has commented: "One might put it by asserting that the Rabbis attacked vice from the preventive side, they aimed at keeping men and women honest and chaste. Jesus approached it from the curative side; He aimed at saving the dishonest and the unchaste."⁹ The concern of Jesus for the individual, shown in His personal dealings with such representative figures as Zacchaeus and the woman of Samaria, is all of a piece with the pastoral character of His ministry, as is the testimony to His compassion for the multitude, that they were as sheep without a shepherd. It has always been a matter for pride among Christians that their Master was described by His critics in the days of His flesh as "a friend of publicans and sinners," because the title indicates that the Saviour felt a special concern for the spiritual well-being of the neediest section of the community.

⁸ *The Synoptic Gospels*, Vol. 2, p. 520.

⁹ *Studies in Pharisaism*, etc., p. 59.

This fact evidently greatly impressed the early Church also, for one of the sources of the Gospels, the special source used by Luke, and designated L, is marked by its emphasis on the concern of Jesus for those who needed Him most. "And so L is the gospel of the underdog, the poor, the despised, the outcaste and the sinner . . . the greater part of it might be regarded as a commentary on the text, 'They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick. I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners'."¹⁰

Enough has been said to indicate the essentially pastoral character of the ministry of our Lord, and of the religion which He brought to the world. There are special reasons for urging the importance of pastoral work at this time. The resurgence of totalitarianism, the influence of which English life has already begun to feel, makes imperative a fresh realisation of and insistence upon the value of the individual, as does the machine age in which we live. The devotion of the Church to the conversion of individual men and women to God, and their building up in Christian faith and character, though not exhaustive of the Church's work, will be its most effective contribution to the preservation of a Christian estimate of individual personality. Canon Peter Green, in his inspiring lectures on pastoral theology published under the title, *The Man of God*, has urged the need of "a new ideal of the character of the parish priest, and of the worth and dignity of parish work," in the interests of a revival of religion. His own devoted and powerful ministry in Salford gives weight to his contention that "nothing would do more for the conversion of England than for young men to regard the office of the parish priest as the highest and noblest to which they could aspire." The lectures make it clear that it is an evangelistic and pastoral caring for souls which Canon Green desiderates.

The first necessity of such a ministry to sick and needy souls is a sound theological background. Admitted that, as a recent American writer¹¹ on pastoral theology has pointed out, the psychological and social sciences have given us a new picture of human nature, and recognising that nothing but good can come from the deeper insight into the lives of men and women which such modern knowledge can furnish, we may well demur when it is argued by the same writer that "the trouble, then, with folk who are in need of the pastor's ministry for the cure of souls is not that they have inherited a corrupt nature, but that they have failed to make that adequate and efficient social adjustment which will eventuate in a satisfying life." The judgment smacks of that naïve optimism and superficial reading of human nature

¹⁰ T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 42.

¹¹ Holman, *The Cure of Souls*.

which have invaded theological thinking in recent years, both in America and in this country, and which makes it difficult to understand why God should have thought it necessary to send His Son to save men. The reality and power of sin, the necessity for a life rooted and grounded in repentance and faith, the forgiving grace of God in Christ, the power of the indwelling Spirit; it is upon these solid and enduring foundations that Christian pastoral practice must be built.

In the second place, an adequate equipment is demanded. It is cause for gratitude that the importance of training for the exercise of a pastoral ministry such as is within the competence of the working minister is finding increasing recognition. For Anglicans of the Anglo-Catholic school, guidance is offered in the recent symposium *Introduction to Pastoral Theology*. The point of view of the book is alien to Free Churchmen, who have never welcomed an ecclesiastical regimentation of the soul, but its contents are a reminder that the strength of the Anglo-Catholic movement is due in part to its deep concern for souls. Special courses of lectures on pastoral work by ministers who are recognised to have been successful pastors are now included in the curricula of some of our Baptist theological colleges. But much more is needed. In view of the impressive testimony of psychiatrists to the close relation between religion and mental health, it is to be hoped that the time is not far distant when the Church will have among its ministers a body of competent psychiatrists to whom the ordinary working minister can refer those whom he discerns to be in need of their specialised ministry. At present many a minister feels woefully helpless in face of a need he cannot himself meet. It is a reproach to the Church that it can be said with some truth that "the area of competence of the Christian Church has steadily contracted during these years, until to-day few people suppose that the pastor or the priest has either the knowledge or the skill to help them when they are spiritually sick; they turn instinctively to the doctor and the psychiatrist."¹² The removal of this reproach through the work both of those who have received a highly specialised training for their delicate ministry to sick souls, and of a multitude of working ministers whose sense of call to the pastoral office has been quickened, would do something towards furnishing contemporary evidence that the Gospel is still "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

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¹² Eric Fenn, *The Crisis and Democracy*, p. 33.