

THE TEACHING OFFICE OF THE CHURCH.¹

BY THE REV. THOS. J. PULVERTAFT, M.A.

THE Committee that sat and reported upon "The Teaching Office of the Church" had been instructed "to consider and report upon the methods by which the Teaching Office of the Church can be more effectively exercised." It was asked specially to bear in mind the duty of preventing thought and discussion becoming desultory and the obligation of forming a strong public opinion in the Church as to the things which ought to be and can be done. On one point the Committee has made itself clear. The Church has failed in the exercise of its Teaching Office, and this failure is re-iterated in the pages of the Report. There has been a great deal too much talk of failure. A knowledge of our shortcomings is the best preparation for remedying them, but when we are told that shortcomings exist on every side, that they are universal and it is the duty of every one to confess them, we are in danger of using the word "failure" without any of that poignancy of meaning which leads to repentance. There arrives a stage in the collective and individual religious consciousness when confession becomes meaningless as a moral experience—it is simply the echoing of the conventional, the repetition of the expected that is followed by an acquiescence in failure as normal and in contentment with things as they are. We do not find that the clever epigrams that have adorned the well written Reports have made any deep impression

¹ We have arranged to publish in the *CHURCHMAN* a series of articles reviewing the Reports of the five Committees of Inquiry which were appointed by the Archbishops as an outcome of the National Mission. These will appear month by month not in the order in which the Reports were issued, but in the order in which the Committees were appointed. That on "The Teaching Office of the Church" was the Archbishops' *First* Committee of Inquiry. The Report is published by the S.P.C.K. (2s. net). The Members of the Committee were: The Bishop of Ely (Chairman); Sister Annie Louisa; Dr. Barnes (Master of the Temple); Miss G. M. Bevan, S.Th.; Archdeacon Bodington; the Rev. A. C. Bouquet, S.C.F.; Prebendary Caldecott; Miss Zoe Fairfield; Canon C. F. Garbett; Canon H. L. Goudge; Canon A. C. Headlam; the late H. Scott Holland; Dr. Edward Lyttelton; Canon A. W. Maplesden; Mother Agnes Mason, S.Th.; Miss Winifred Mercier; Professor A. H. McNeile; the late A. S. Orlebar; the Bishop of Oxford; the Bishop of Ripon (who could not attend any of the meetings); the Rev. T. Guy Rogers, M.C.; Mrs. Romanes; Principal A. J. Tait; the Rev. W. Temple; and Canon J. Vaughan.

on the Clergy or Communicant classes. We are not surprised. Failure has been used too freely, and in the repetition of the word we find a sort of absolution that gives us an excuse to go on failing.

The Christian method of instruction is to hold up an ideal and to point men to it. When they see the ideal they strive to follow it. Dr. Gore rails against the use of the Commandments in the Communion Office as being the law code of an imperfect revelation. He has something on his side, but it is one thing to put before men in their self-complacency a statement of "Thou shalt not" to lead them to action and quite another thing in a Report to dwell upon failure to such an extent that the sense of failure is the main impression left on the mind of a reader who somehow feels that when all have failed he cannot be expected to succeed. If the report had been less intent on the exposition of the presumed causes of failure and the impressing on the Church the individual opinions of its members it would have served a much more useful purpose. An ideal set before the Church as to its real place as a Teacher would have made men think and have caused them to bring from the study of the thoughts of the Committee an earnest desire to reach that ideal. As it is most readers will say, "failure is so universal, it is due to so many causes beyond my power to remedy that I can only continue to muddle along in my own way and do the best I can. My penitence for failure can at best be only vicarious, and this means I am not really penitent at all."

We regret that this should be the case, and are of opinion that the Report misses its mark by its effort to crowd into its pages the favourite opinions of its most prominent members, and thereby it loses that measured weight and well-defined perspective which make documents influential. The study of the hundred pages of appendices—attached to the sixty-one paged Report—shows the part the leading members took in the composition of the joint document. There is much that is good in Report and appendices—but it is obscured by talking about the subject instead of placing before the reader a clear conception of what the Church is supposed to teach and the best manner of accomplishing its mission.

We are told that the Church has to teach "a message of Divine origin and transcendent importance for the well-being of the human race," and has "the duty of interpreting the gospel to each genera-

tion." This is on p. 2, and after fourteen pages of exposition of the causes of failure we are told that the "message or Word of God which the Church is commissioned to deliver takes shape from the first in a doctrine about God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit ; about man, his nature, destiny, his sin and his redemption ; about the incarnation and the Atonement ; about the earthly life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, His Resurrection and Ascension, and the Mission of the Spirit ; about the Church, and the sacraments and the Ministry. This body of truth, which is declared in New Testament and summarised in the Creeds, though it expresses itself in a series of propositions or 'articles' is one coherent whole." We may remark in passing that the Creeds do not contain any reference to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and are silent concerning the Ministry. The Report proceeds : " This is the Catholic Faith or Word of God which it is the primary business of the Church to study and proclaim. We ask of the Church, and especially of the Clergy, a fresh effort to study it, and to recognize their need of the Holy Spirit to enlighten their minds to receive and to understand it."

We pass over the use of " the Word of God " as synonymous with the coherent whole as set forth in the statement made by the Committee. We welcome the emphasis placed on the continuous movement of the Spirit of God in the world that has compelled the Church to reform itself when its teaching had become corrupted, on the use of free inquiry and the duty of " the disciple of Christ to welcome truth of all kinds." " It is of the greatest importance to know, and to be able rightly to declare what the Church teaches. But it is not enough, especially when the Church by its divisions is disqualified for teaching with authority. The more thoroughly we have thought things out for ourselves, the more simply and humanly we shall be able to teach so that all may understand." May we add that all through this Report we find a certain paralysis of teaching, through an evident disagreement among the members of the Committee as to what the message really is. There is nothing more misleading than to give in general terms a statement of the message when that message is obscured by the interpretation placed on different parts of it by those who deliver it. We all know the contrast between the Institutional and the Evangelical conception of Christianity, and we have a suspicion that the members

when once they got to grips with the fundamental question of the meaning of salvation and the means by which it can be obtained would fail to secure anything like unanimity. This is really the main source of the "failure of the Church." It speaks with many voices and an absence of authority follows from the confusion of utterance. We have anodynes administered to prevent the really fundamental differences becoming evident, and in consequence the Church of England has no definite message.

Later in the Report we come across a passage that is much more satisfactory: "The main business of the Church as an Educator is to receive into itself the personality of our Lord and let that personality be presented in its fullness alike of majesty and graciousness. Inasmuch as we are Christians we believe that 'the master light of all our seeing' is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, whose life, death and resurrection are the pivot about which all human history turns. Here then we have the supreme test by which the Church's discharge of its teaching office must stand or fall." "He must be brought near; He must become the Master-Companion; otherwise we have only succeeded in teaching about Him. 'Until Christ be formed in you' is perhaps the best expression of the purpose as well as of the duration of the Christian teacher's labours." This is well said, and goes to the root of the whole matter. The message of the Church is not Church teaching as understood by ecclesiasticism—not an "articulated faith" of which the key-stone is a certain view of the ministry which certainly is not found in Holy Scripture—but the interpretation of the Master Companion who is at once Saviour and King.

We miss in the Report the personal note so well expressed in an address by a great Scotch theologian: "Preaching, whatever it was in the past, is in the present day a deeply personal thing. You must have a message which has spoken to your own soul in order to move the souls of your hearers. However you account for it, abstract thinking and abstract expression have no longer the power they once had; the message must be something personal; something that you have felt to come to your own soul with power; that is the sort of preaching that has power over the souls of others." All experience proves this to be the case, and no matter how orthodox our preachers may be in the exposition of "Church Doctrine" in its articulated form, this alone will never make them teachers of

“repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” which still remains the specific message of the Christian pulpit.

We naturally turn to the important work of training for the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments. We need the best training for candidates for the Ministry. Whatever we may think on the subject an educated Ministry is required and expected by the people. No man has any right to stand forth as a teacher of the mind of God as revealed in Holy Scripture unless he has disciplined his reason to think accurately, to make the best use of whatever capacity God has given him to expound His truth and to be in touch with the thought of his time. The subject divides itself into two parts—provision for the present need and the permanent supply of men for the Ministry.

We expected to find in the Report more actuality than is in its pages. The Church to-day has a shortage of something like 2,000 men. Every one knows that curacies cannot now be filled, and a large number of old men who had retired from active work—in many instances with a heroism that has not been acknowledged—have come forward to fill the gaps. They cannot long remain at their present posts, and the lack of workers will shortly be more pronounced than it now is. We must draw from the ranks of the men who have been in the service of the Crown during the past four years. They have largely lost touch with intellectual life. Their theology—if they ever had any—has become rusty, but they have become wise in the University of the Trenches and the North Sea. They have kept their faith and have proved it sufficient in the day of trial. They have graduated in a far harder school than any provided by the universities or theological colleges. Such men have a deeper insight into realities than most of us, and their offers for service prove the genuineness of their zeal and the reality of their desire to serve God in the Ministry. We have seen outline schemes for the training of service candidates that are as foolish as they are pretentious. They are well fitted to kill enthusiasm and to deprive the men of that evangelical devotion and determination to sacrifice their consecrated lives in whole-souled work for God. They must of course be treated as individuals. To send them into a theological college for a routine course with its insistence on Latin and Greek and the heresies of the early Church means a grinding toil that will do them no good and will break their spirit. We often

wonder whether the Bishops realize how little practical value crammed subjects are for after work in the ministry. It would do them good to visit the "libraries" of the men who have slaved to reach pass standard, and have joyfully devoted themselves to forget what they have stored in notebooks!

These men should receive under sympathetic care instruction in Holy Scripture, homiletics and literature. They should be taught the fundamentals simply and clearly and be trained in a short course how to express themselves. Their service in the war should be recognized and permission should be given them to wear on their stoles the medals they have won. There is no fear that their people will think less of them on account of the absence of a university hood. It is probable that as the years pass they will be more highly esteemed than the "regularly trained," and if they are regularly trained they may easily be trained out of usefulness. With all respect for the Advisory Council and Examining Chaplains we do not think they are the best judges of what is needed in the education of this large and special class. Even professors think too much of the machine of which they form part, and are apt to place too great weight on the possession of a certificate duly acquired in the *right* fashion. God has different schools for His children, and the school of war with its manifold temptations faithfully overcome by His grace, gives better character training than cloistered calm and head work in an atmosphere of pious study. We hope our ecclesiastical leaders will bear this in mind.

When we approach the ordinary training of candidates for the ministry we find much in the Report that is of value: "A sound general education is of course absolutely necessary; if it has not been obtained special education narrows the mind. But for all who desire to be ordained priests a full special training—moral, intellectual, devotional and practical—must also be provided and two years should be regarded as the indispensable minimum of time to be devoted to it." We expect under existing conditions that the standard of education throughout the country will be greatly raised. Our universities will be crowded and culture will be widespread. Under these circumstances it is of first importance that men should be impressed by the duty of seeking training that will place them in the van of the people. A clergyman should be above the general level of the education of his people. He should

be able to meet on equal terms professional men in his congregation, and to hold his own with the rapidly growing cultured non-professional class.

To attain this position he should possess not only a university degree but a university education. The two things are not synonymous. The older universities provide something that is not found of necessity in the new universities. It exists, however, in every university centre and in the various college societies the candidate for the Ministry should find his place. He should learn to be clubbable, to have his opinions pulled to pieces without resentment, to learn that infallibility drops from his shoulders as soon as he professes to impose his prejudices on all his friends and acquaintances. One of the chief needs of the day is a ministry that sees things in perspective, that recognizes the difference between fundamental truth and the opinions of the market place or the narrow circle of men who think alike. Most of us have learned more out of the classrooms than in their stimulating or drowsy atmosphere, and we hope that anything like a segregated life for theological students during their university career will be opposed by those who have weight in the councils of the Church. The clergy must be able to hold their own in the world if they are not to degenerate into dogmatists of coteries who are more ignorant than themselves, and the best school for gaining this power is the school of the college unions and clubs where frankness, if at times brutal, has the virtue of sincerity.

Post-graduate training should be on wider lines than it now follows. There is too great a tendency to turn out men in one mould. There is not sufficient elasticity in the courses, and the Bishops' examinations are not always conducted on right lines. It is sometimes e.g. possible to obtain full marks on Holy Scripture without any knowledge of the text of Scripture, and whatever view men may hold of inspiration the old motto "bonus textuarius, bonus theologus" is still true. In our universities there are a variety of courses in which men can graduate according to their individual gifts. It is not so in the average theological college. The ordinary man—of whom we are thinking—must take the specified course and pass in that. It happens that a man without linguistic gifts has to waste valuable time on language that might be spent more advantageously on philosophy, history or literature.

It requires a large college and a strong staff to give all men the training for which they are specially fitted, and one improvement in our present system would be the determination of Bishops not to recognize smaller colleges except for Honour men who are engaged on specialized advanced courses. The ordinary man will not develop his mind or manhood to its fullest capacity in a small hall with a few companions and still fewer tutors.

The ideal course would be large colleges devoted to the training of candidates—free from theological colour. If our Church were united this would be possible, but in existing circumstances it is an unattainable boon. The Church of Ireland has greatly benefited from its Divinity School—we use the word “its” without prejudice—being attached to Trinity College, Dublin. There, however, the pronounced conflict of ideals so prevalent in England finds no place. We must continue evangelical colleges and colleges of other schools where men will find an atmosphere conducive to the development of their capacities. These however ought to be sufficiently large to permit a number of tutors of different types to engage in the work, and it is essential that the gulf between teachers and taught should not be so wide as to prevent the most cordial relations between them. Christianity is a personal religion, and the closer a man is brought to the professor to whom he looks for guidance the better for him in his after work.

For many years past it is acknowledged that the Church of England has not received into its ranks its due proportion of the best men in the universities. It is openly stated that socially and intellectually the standard has declined. It should be the object of the Church to remedy this defect, and it can only be done if there be a more spiritual outlook on the part of the Church as a whole. We have lost ground because we have not been true to the foundation truths we expound. We have become so divided that the ordinary layman cannot conceive how it is possible for men so sharply divided to co-operate as teachers in the same Church. Whatever may be thought of the validity of our formularies as a proper check upon the holding of certain contemporary opinions, there can be no doubt as to their aim in connexion with Roman teaching. The men who framed them were specialists in Roman doctrine and did their utmost to purge our services and formularies of the errors they repudiated. We can only expect to be a powerless Church among

the seventy per cent. of the nation that nominally adheres to us, if the nation considers us dishonest in our outlook. It is not a time for camouflage of any kind, and "The Teaching Office of the Church" forces all thinking men to ask three questions.

1. Why have we with seventy per cent. nominal adherents not nearly that proportion of worshipping Christians in our Churches?

2. Why have we to deplore the fact that nothing like this proportion of Honour graduates enter the Church when contrasted with the other professions?

3. Why is it impossible for a Committee that dealt with the Teaching Office of the Church to give a clear unambiguous summary of the Church's message?

The reason is plain—we have lost our power and have failed in our mission because our divisions have given the country a conviction that dishonesty lurks somewhere, and no spiritual force can be effective unless it upholds truth and is honest in its professions of unity. Truth has many facets, but they all reflect the same light, and the pity of it is that the light reflected by Church teachers is by no means the same and cannot by any stretch of charity be identified as coming from the one source. Until that ends we greatly fear that attempts to reform the machinery of teaching will be ineffective. Not by machinery—no more than by dialectic—has it pleased God to save mankind.

THOS. J. PULVERTAFT.

