

THE ESSENTIALS OF THE CHURCH IN REGARD TO THE MINISTRY.

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I AM afraid I must be rather slow of apprehension, but I confess to have been a little puzzled, when I was first given this title, to know exactly what was intended by it. It seemed to have an unpleasant similarity to a piece of Latin Unseen, which, at least in my unfortunate experience, when you have translated every word makes no real sense. However, after transposing the words and guessing and filling in the spaces, as I remember trying to do with the "Unseens," I came to the conclusion that it really meant: What does the Church of the New Age require as essential qualifications for its Ministry? I hope I have not seriously mistranslated it.

Perhaps I may be allowed to preface my remarks by stressing the vital importance of the Ministry not only for the growth but for the very life of the Christian Church. There are, I believe, a few singular and isolated believers who decry all Christian organization, but I think we may safely say that a non-organized Christianity, even if it long survived, would be largely powerless and ineffective. It is difficult, I think, to quarrel with Hooker's strong assertion on this point when he says that "without the work of the Ministry religion by no means can possibly continue" (*E.P.*, V. lxxxvi, i). I do not think I need labour this point. I think I would put in the forefront as one of the essentials for the Ministry which the future Church will demand, and certainly one it will urgently need, that of real undoubted piety. Some of the early Puritans separated from the Church because the members of the congregations included the unconverted as well as the pious. But even if it is an impossible ideal to confine membership of the Church strictly to the elect, certainly a godly ministry is the one great essential. When I use the word "pious" or piety I do not wish to convey any popular misrepresentation of its meaning, but to emphasize its true nature as describing men of deep spirituality and of personal holiness of life. The Church to-day needs for its ministers not only earnest Bible students and men of prayer, but men who are also truly called of God, for as John Newton well said: "None but He who made the world can make a minister of the Gospel." In other words the Church of the coming age will have no use for a merely "professional" Ministry. Men who intend to consecrate their whole life to the service of God and their fellow men must, like the Socialist or Communist orator, be in deadly earnest and be absolutely certain of their divine call. I have been told that it was Spurgeon's custom when a young man sought his advice as to whether he should become a minister of the Gospel, solemnly to answer: "Not if you can be anything else." I think we as a Church need to thank God for the wonderfully solemn and searching question

which our Reformers inserted in our Ordination Service for deacons, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office?" The modern Church certainly does not want men in her ministry like young Thomas Scott, who perjured himself in answering this Question in the affirmative, when, as he tells us, he did not then believe that "there was any Holy Ghost." Somehow I venture to think that this outstanding qualification for the Ministry is largely lacking to-day. Men of ability, men of vision and activity, men of learning and originality we have, although not too many of the latter, and we cannot do without these, but what we need most of all for the Ministry is men of prayer who "daily read and weigh the Scriptures." In short, we want men of deep and genuine piety who have responded to the direct call of the Holy Spirit. For the secret of effective service in the Church of God is personal piety. But although the essential dynamic for the Ministry lies in the divine Call, the realized "gift of Christ" (Ephes. iv, 7 and 11), and not in the mere imposition of a bishop's hands; yet I think the Church of every age will need to see that it has a duly commissioned Ministry.

The Christian Society of believers is the guardian of the "Faith once for all delivered to the saints," and it clearly has a duty to itself to test the professed call of its members to its Ministry and then to give or withhold its official commission. The Apostle exhorts believers "to try the Spirits whether they are of God" because "many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John iv, 1). It is not necessary that ministers should be thus "commissioned" by one and only one historic method, but that they should certainly be thus chosen "by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard" (Art. xxiii). The Holy Spirit is not tied to any outward organ or channel of working, however Scriptural or universal. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." What the Church needs to-day is not so much a Ministry which is ecclesiastically or canonically, or even historically "catholic" or "regular," as one which is spiritually effective. It is the pragmatic test of fruitage which is the great essential as well as the hall mark of a true Ministry. And Christ's followers will surely earn not only the contempt of the world, but the disapproval of their Master if He finds them despising, ostracising or condemning ministries which are attested by fruits which glorify His Name. "The battle of the kingdom cannot worthily be fought while the Body is divided," and those who "cast out devils in His Name are for Him and not against Him." I will return to this point again presently.

Another essential qualification in the modern Church is surely that of a well-equipped Ministry.

By this I mean that the parson of the coming age will need to be more than a well-educated man. He certainly will need to be that, for the laity will demand a pastor who is at least their equal in ability and intellectual attainments in order that they may properly respect him. I think, before passing on, I ought to

emphasize this point, for I am sure it is essential that the minister of the new age should keep abreast of modern thought and scholarship. He certainly must not give his congregation the impression that he left all regular serious reading and serious thinking behind him with his ordination or university examinations. His sermons must not be, as too often they are still, stale or out of date, showing little or no trace of any acquaintance with the best modern literature. The clergy of the new age will certainly have to maintain the standard of a learned ministry. They will have to be not only scholars, but students. Yes—the effective minister of the future will need to possess more than mere academic distinctions. It has been well said by a recent writer that “the Christian minister should approach men with the knowledge of God, and should pray to God not only on behalf of, but in sympathy with, men” (Ballard, *In the Form of a Servant*, 114), and I think we may safely say that ordinands who have proceeded straight from the sheltered seclusion of the school and the theological seminary to the still more separated and sacerdotal security of the sanctuary, are not likely to make much appeal to the modern layman. They may be well-trained theologians and even earnest and consecrated characters, but the modern Church needs more than this for her clergy. She needs ministers who can understand and enter into the outlook and the problems and difficulties of the business man, of the professional and scientific man and of the man of affairs. A sort of hot-house exotic, with no experience at all of the world, may be able to comfort and cheer old ladies and invalids, but he will make no appeal to the perplexed or perturbed man of the world. Yes! the modern minister will need to be well versed in all-round general knowledge and in practical common sense, and he can only acquire these things by continual and varied study. He will need, therefore, constantly to bear in mind Hezekiah’s charge to the Levites: “My sons, be not now negligent, for the Lord hath chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him” (2 Chron. xxix, 11).

Certainly not the least essential qualification for the Ministry of the new age is that it should be truly prophetic.

The inspired prophet is a man with a message. Like Haggai, he has a definite message from God to deliver to mankind. The modern Church needs prophets far more than priests. It needs men with a truly Evangelical message to deliver—a gospel which is clear, definite and assured. And this brings us to preaching. I hope I shall carry all here with me when I say that I believe a good preaching ministry is as imperative and as important to-day as ever. And I fear I must also add that good preaching is rather the exception to-day, at least in the Church of England. It is too often very mediocre and unattractive. We want many more truly “apostolic” preachers, men like Wesley and Whitfield, who are transparently sincere and are on fire with their message. There should be no shadow of justification for Sheridan’s well-known skit that “actors act as if fiction were real, and preachers preach as though preaching were fiction.” Mirabeau, watching young

Robespierre speaking, exclaimed: "That man will go far, he believes every word he says." Preachers of this sort will do a work for God in any age. I do not in the least share a modern view that the present day facilities for acquiring knowledge and information—the press, the wireless, the journal and the magazine—have relegated preaching to a secondary place. For I believe that Truth mediated through personality, will always possess its strong appeal and its impelling power. When the political parties cease holding their public meetings and their open-air gatherings and confine their efforts to election addresses, handbills and press propaganda, then, and not till then, will it be time to discount the value of preaching. The pulpit will never be superseded by the press, as long as we have preachers who are filled with the Spirit of God, and who are therefore content to be the mouthpieces of His Word "which is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. iv. 12). But if preaching is to hold its own in the future, I think much more time will have to be given to the proper preparation of sermons. I cannot help fearing that the multiplication of meetings and services to-day is often at the expense of thorough sermon preparation, and this is a real loss to the effectiveness of the Ministry. Preachers, and especially those who are glib of tongue, are tempted to deliver their sermons with little or no preparation, and such superficial efforts contain no real message. I expect we should all endorse the experience of that great preacher, Dr. Alexander Maclaren, when he says: "I have always found that my own comfort and efficiency in preaching have been in direct proportion to the frequency and depth of my daily communion with God. I know no way in which we can do our work but in quiet fellowship with Him, in resolutely keeping to the habits of a student's life . . . and by conscientious pulpit preparation." May I say one word here as to the character of our sermons—that it is of supreme importance that all our preaching should have a very practical application to the personal needs and conditions of our hearers. I feel sure that the modern Church will want its preachers to apply their sermons on the Christian Faith and on the Christian life to every-day social and civic relationships. They will want it made clear that the Christian Faith touches and transforms our attitude to every phase of life and does not merely affect the question of our own soul's personal salvation here and hereafter, although we must never forget that primarily it must be a question of that.

I should like also very briefly to stress the importance of a sympathetic Ministry. I am inclined to allot almost the first place to this essential qualification. It applies even to our preaching, for a harsh, unsympathetic sermon, with no pathos in it, will make no appeal, however doctrinally correct it may be. But it concerns especially our pastoral visitations. I think we may safely say that one of the surest evidences of a truly sympathetic pastor is that he is a good listener. To quote a recent writer again: "There are some teachers who can do everything except listen,

and for want of that one thing they can do little" (Ballard, III). It is not easy for those who have never suffered want or pain themselves to sympathize truly with the needs and ailments of others, but they certainly can't do so if they are too selfish and self-centred to bother to enter into the difficulties and troubles of their parishioners. A minister to be truly effective must cultivate "the heart at leisure from itself to soothe and sympathize." The parson who *will* do all the talking in his visits will never, in my humble judgment, be of much help to his flock.

I cannot conclude without touching on an essential which the Church of the future will, I am persuaded, increasingly feel its need of: That is, of a truly Catholic Ministry. Consistently with its loyalty to revealed Truth and to the Faith of the Gospel, the coming Church will be content with nothing less than a Ministry which is universally owned and recognized by all pure and faithful branches of the Christian Fellowship. For I feel strongly that one of the greatest needs for the effective work of the Church of the future will be that the "One Fellowship which already exists should become, if not organic, at least 'visible,' and acknowledged by the outside world." You will remember, I expect, the description of the armies of Israelites which came to Hebron to David (1 Chron. ii. 38). We read that they were "men of war that could keep rank, who came with a perfect heart to make David king over all Israel," and we are told that "all the rest of Israel also were of one heart to make David king." The Church to-day sadly needs more men of "one heart" who are able to "keep rank" and who are not always disputing about the credentials of its officers in the one great Army, but are men who will walk side by side with the one supreme object of enthroning Christ in the hearts and lives of their fellows. Surely we must say that in face of the forces of opposition and evil which are so powerful and menacing the great Christian Army should reckon it an intolerable disgrace to squabble over the constitution of its different regiments, or over the position and status of its leaders—its officers and privates. Instead of this it should concentrate as one united and solid phalanx in its sacred determination to make "Jesus King." It was when in the early days of Christianity the whole Society of believers was a true and visible brotherhood based on the one hope of salvation through the one Lord and Saviour of mankind, that the Church of Jesus Christ won its greatest victories. And the nearer we get back to this ideal condition the more effective will be the ministry of the Church to-day. We can never fully impress the world if we continue to dispute over such secondary and non-essential matters as the exact or necessary form of polity for the ministry, when the essential thing which should unite us all is its object and purpose. St. Paul tells us clearly that this supreme purpose was "The perfecting of the saints and the building up of the body of Christ."

The Church therefore needs ministers to-day, who with all their culture, intellectual knowledge and up-to-date methods of work—with their eloquent and attractive style of preaching—will still

have ever before them this one grand consuming passion of "building up the body of Christ"—or in other words, of winning souls who may "come not only unto the knowledge of the Son of God," but "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. iv. 12, 13). They may, within limits, "become all things to all men," but it must always be with the end in view that "they may by all means save some." "I pray you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God" must always be the great burden of the minister's primary message and work. I feel it is most important in these days to stress this fundamental necessity of preaching the atoning work of Christ. The burden of the Christian message is now usually laid on service and self-sacrifice, and I would be the last to deny the importance of this truth. But there is too often a tendency to exalt Christ as a great Leader, Teacher and Hero rather than as a Saviour from sin. Now in a really effective ministry all such appeals for social righteousness, however right, necessary and valuable they are in themselves, must take a secondary place. They must never in any way be a substitute for true "repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." We must never forget that the essence of Christ's Gospel and the great purpose of His Mission was the salvation of men from sin. "Once in the end of the world He appeared." What for? Not even to preach a gospel of social justice and equity—but "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." "How rich a prize," exclaimed that saintly Caroline divine Dr. Henry Hammond, "for the expense of a man's whole life, were it to be the instrument of rescuing one soul from ruin." It is ministers filled with this spirit who are essential if the Church of the new age is "to build up the Body of Christ."

There is constant evidence that our great missionary societies have learnt the importance of issuing their publications in the best form and with all the advantages which literary skill can provide. The popular report of the C.M.S. issued under the title *The Open Door* is an excellent example of all that the account of a year's work can be. It is not only full of interesting matter giving the romance as well as the facts of the work in the Society's various spheres, but it is also written with interesting and attractive details, and altogether in a style to increase the interest of old subscribers and to win the support and sympathy of fresh supporters.

The same can be said of the Record of Mission Work Among the Jews published by L.J.S. under the title *Bread Cast Upon the Waters*. Missions to the Jews have a special interest for a wide circle, and many will be glad to have this brightly written and excellently illustrated account of the latest doings of the Society in its diversified scenes of activity.