

Called to Serve in the Sacred Ministry of the Church.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE FINAL REPORT ENTITLED 'TRAINING
FOR THE MINISTRY.'

BY THE REV. R. J. COBB, M.A.

THE Archbishops' Commission has rendered a service of first importance to the Church in the publication of this 88 page booklet (Press and Publications Board of the Church Assembly 2s. 6d.), with its remarkably full survey of the whole range of problems connected with the selection and training of our Clergy. The careful study of the Report gives a real appreciation of the immediate situation which the Church faces, of the full consideration which is given to all matters which may aid in meeting that situation, and a definite indication and recommendation of means which it is proposed to adopt for the equipment of Ordination Candidates and younger Clergy for their Ministry. One important aspect of this report is the opportunity it gives to the Church at large to understand something of the mind of those who are largely responsible for the recruitment of our Ministry. While the whole of the matter is of immediate interest, some of the recommendations are of revolutionary character and it is of the utmost importance that all who have this matter at heart should make a point of studying them for themselves. We need to have a well-informed body of Evangelical opinion with regard to them.

These notes are not intended to be a Review of the Report itself, but to draw attention to one or two matters of special interest, the scope of the Report being sufficiently outlined in our first paragraph. The thorough nature of the work which lies behind the Report is indicated by the publication of an Appendix "A" which consists of a Note on the Responsibility for Ordination and draws together the Documentary Evidence from all periods of Church History. It is limited in that it proceeds from 'the settled establishment of the monarchical episcopate in the Church (behind which it is unnecessary for our present purpose to penetrate)' and this is worth noting as the first point which an Evangelical will be inclined to criticise in the whole Report. For there seems singularly little in the Report as a whole to relate the conception of the Ministry to the New Testament ideals: it is true that the analysis of the New Testament conception is not essential to the argument of this Appendix, but it would have been the more welcome here in view of the fact that it is wanting elsewhere in the Report. On the other hand it is interesting to find included an explicit reference to the practice of the Church in America where the function of the Bishop is limited to that of a 'constitutional executive' with his action in ordination subject to the recommendation of a Standing Committee in his Diocese whose independent approval of each candidate is essential. This contrasts, of course, with our position where the final responsibility rests with the Bishop alone: the recognition of which fact lies behind the whole recommendations of the Report.

In those sections which deal with Recruitment and Selection, the Commission faces the fact that 'the thought of ordination is utterly remote from the minds of the vast majority of men of the kind which in earlier days normally at least considered, and often went forward to ordination,' and proceeds to make a call for positive and vigorous action in the matter of presentation of the claims of the ministry. They suggest that information about the ministry should be available and accessible, a picture given of the vocation, and so forth, while it is good to notice the caution 'In all that is done to suggest the ministry of the Church as a vocation or to encourage boys to consider it seriously, nothing must be said or done which tends to disguise its difficulty and gravity, or treat it merely as an attractive form of life or even a life of social service, rather than as a life based wholly on a deep and sincere devotion, a love of God expressing itself in a love of human souls for whom Christ died.' We should be glad to see this expressed a good deal more strongly, the great lack of the Church to-day being that of the true sense of Vocation, and the general temper of our time being far too much inclined to that form of 'direction' which inclines to regimentation and conformity to certain ideas and standards, rather than the full conception of the outworking in life of the Life and Power of God which is ours through the New Birth. There seems no suggestion of seeking evidence of such an experience and indications of the Working of God's Spirit through the prospective candidate, but it is a relief to read the warning 'Precocious devotion to ecclesiastical observances is not seldom taken for more than it is really worth.'

The main body of the Report is concerned with the provisions for and problems of the Training of the various types of candidate. Inevitably the discussion is largely concerned with the intellectual equipment of the men, and also to supply as wide an experience and training as is possible. It is recognized that recruitment from widely varied ranks is essential; the boy who comes straight from school may be in mind where many of the recommendations are concerned, but there is also recognized the wisdom of the calling into the Ministry of men who have wide experience in business and professional life before they contemplate taking Orders. While in this Report stress is laid on the desirability of a University Degree, with the widened contacts and experience that University life provides, there is special consideration to be given to the more directly vocational approach which can only be found through the Theological College, and the Commission recognizes the fundamental importance of such training. It is here of course that the Evangelical is most intimately concerned with the provisions of the Report. On the whole the review of the difficulties and drawbacks of our present system are very fair: we fully appreciate the way in which there has been a tendency for the syllabus to become overloaded, and are grateful for the stress that is laid on the need for slowing down the demands, so that there may be less of an atmosphere of cramming for examination in the work of the Theological College. No one knows better than the staff themselves the way in which the present system tends, in the words of the Report, to 'too much lecturing in the Colleges.' But, at the same time, there is a heritage of tradition which must not be surrendered lightly. Many will have a feeling of uneasiness about the way in which the Colleges may become

in practice secondary in their influence to the newly-proposed Regional Committees and Directors of Training to be appointed by the Bishops.

In the press attention has been drawn to the proposal that there shall be special training in teaching, taken at a Teachers' Training College, as part of the normal course of preparation. But that is simply part of a very wide scheme of plans for providing specialised training—or opportunities for such—for many who have particular gifts. It is acknowledged that such practical experience and knowledge of the Theory of Teaching will be of undoubted benefit to all, but there is a danger if specialisation is allowed to become the order of the day that the fundamental task of the Ministry in discharge of Parochial responsibility be somewhat over-shadowed. The Report does remark that the work of specialists—such as those engaged in co-operating with the medical profession, in the social services, in approach to students, and so forth—may be to some degree undertaken by lay people, and this appeals to us as a very important suggestion. There could, and should be, means of linking definitely the work and gifts of laymen in these aspects of the work of the Church, leaving the Clergy the more free to concentrate on discharge of their primary responsibility. The Evangelical will certainly welcome proposals of such a nature.

With regard to the first years in Orders, the Report makes provision for continued training, and in so doing follows the line which has been adopted in some Dioceses and proved valuable. There is no doubt that the difficulties of the first years are better faced and solved where the newly ordained man is conscious of working in closest fellowship with others like himself, and with opportunities for study and discussion together. The idea of Refresher Courses also is not new, but in all this there is an impression given of an approach to the problem which may tend to a type of 'conformity to type' among the clergy that will not be welcome. At the same time the suggestion of such courses is a definite approach to a very real problem, that of the meeting of the need for opportunities of withdrawal for a time from parochial work for definite study.

Inevitably the final word is concerned with the Financial implications of the proposals: the Commission is not afraid to demand that the training of clergy should be a first charge on the resources of the Church. That certainly is a sound point, but it is rather interesting to note that the last page of the booklet is devoted to a table showing 'Monies Contributed for Training 1918-1937' and a little puzzling to know just what conclusions are to be drawn from the tables presented. Why these particular Funds are selected is not clear; they serve to indicate that certain special Funds of Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical organisations provided 10% of the total for this period, but they seem to take no account of other funds utilised by these parties or of donations and other money given by Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics through the Central Board and Diocesan Boards. It is difficult to see just what reliable information is given here in regard to the way in which the financial burden of training has been borne: but of more value in this respect is the hint given in the Report in speaking of Theological Colleges 'which owe their establishment to private sources, but which constitute at present the most considerable aggregate contribution towards the training of the Clergy of the Church.' That

is sufficient to remind those who have the responsibility of implementing the suggestions of this Report that a very great deal of support for training and provision of facilities has come from those who would desire that it should be used for the maintenance of a definite type of Churchmanship.

From all this the far-reaching implications of the publication of these recommendations are obvious; we need as Evangelicals to examine them and be ready to exert our influence when the time comes for discussion preparatory to setting in motion the schemes of training here envisaged. A wholesale reorganisation is contemplated with the concentration of a great deal of influence in the hands of Regional Committees. The status and place of the theological college and its actual scope may be very different from the present system. We may feel it specially necessary to re-assert our conviction of the value of the parochial system and a parochial ministry, we certainly shall want to see a more definite recognition of the fact that the Church's primary task is that of the presentation of Christ, and the fulness of His Salvation. This will only effectively be accomplished when the first desideratum in the candidate for Orders is the personal experience of the Grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord, and the consciousness that he is 'inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon him this Office and Ministration.'