

Editorial

EDUCATION AND THE MINISTRY

IT is probably true to say that never before have such strenuous efforts been put forth by the Church to ensure the adequate preparation of its ordination candidates for their great life-work. The Central Advisory Council of Training for the Ministry, through its secretaries and its Selection Centres, does its best to uphold a high standard, and to shut those "back doors" into the Ministry which, in the past, have been so great a weakness to the Church. The Theological Colleges seek to work hand in hand with the Central Council. The tendency is to increase the length of time of training demanded of ordinands. Candidates for the Ministry are helped financially to a greater extent than ever before by grants from the Government, from central funds, and from Church societies. This is all to the good, for the staffing of the Church of England is terribly depleted, and the need for reinforcements is urgent in the extreme. Most of our Colleges are full to the doors; but the process of training is bound to be slow, and the time taken in bridging the gap between need and supply must inevitably be long.

Faced by such conditions, there is always a temptation for the Church to say in effect: "We will lower our standard and our demands, in order to speed our supply of men." This temptation must at all costs be resisted. Indeed there is need for all who are concerned with the supply of ordinands, directly or indirectly, to ask themselves two questions. *First*—What is it that we seek from our theological colleges in the way of education for the Ministry? *Secondly*—Are the men whom we are preparing for Holy Orders of such a calibre that they are likely, so far as we can judge, to respond to such education? Clearly, the second question cannot be dealt with here—it affects all those who from time to time send up from their parishes to the Bishops and to the Theological Colleges men whom they are recommending for training. But the second question turns on the first. We will consider it briefly.

Dr. John Mackay, missionary, theologian, and President of Princeton Theological Seminary, has defined the supreme missionary task of our time as being "the clarification of Christian truth, and the preparation of Christian crusaders." It would be hard to find a better definition of the function of the theological education which should be given to those in preparation for the Ministry. Incidentally, Dr. Mackay's words act as a sure guide to those who are thinking of sponsoring a

would-be ordinand. Is he of such a character that he will be able to clarify Christian truth, and become a Christian crusader? The answer to *both* parts of the question should be "yes" before we can have any confidence in going further with him. Let us look at both parts of Dr. Mackay's definition.

(1) *The Clarification of Christian truth.* It is in the process of his theological education that a man should hammer out the essentials of his Gospel. *His* Gospel, I say. His, in the sense that St. Paul could say, "*My* Gospel." Only so can he *preach*—as distinct from delivering himself of essays—when he has a Gospel which he has made his own, when he has gone through the (often painful) process of clarifying Christian truth for himself.

John Bunyan refers to "holy Mr. Gifford, who made it much his business to deliver the people of God from all those false and unsound tests that by nature we are prone to. He would bid us take special heed that we took not up any truth upon trust, but cry mightily to God that He would convince us of the reality thereof, and set us down therein by His own Spirit in the holy Word." Dr. H. Wheeler Robinson quoted these words in his inaugural address at the opening of Hackney, New and Regent's Park Colleges in October, 1920, and added this comment: "To be another Gifford to another Bunyan is the sustaining passion and ambition of every true College teacher."

This means that our theological colleges must never regard it as their task to produce generations of rigid dogmatists, in the generally accepted sense of that term. (Who was it who said that "dogmatism is puppyism come to maturity"?) We do not want to see a succession of men who say of their contemporaries what Matthew Arnold is reported to have said of Carlyle: "I am dogmatic and right; Carlyle is dogmatic and wrong"! No. Our ordinands must realise—as indeed we all must—that all theology *exit in mysterium*. There is a shadow round the Cross. We deal with what Temple called "the unfathomable abyss of deity." But the ordinand must seek, during his course, so to clarify Christian truth that there may be formed for him a central core of the great certainties of a well-built faith, for which he would be prepared to die, by which he will be enabled to live, and to the exposition of which he will gladly dedicate his life. Clarification in his own mind—interpretation for other minds—that is the ordinand's task. And it is the function of the theological college to help in that vital work of clarification and interpretation of Christian truth.

(2) *The preparation of Christian crusaders.* As this process of clarification and interpretation goes on in the course of an ordinand's education, it is imperative that there go with it a deepening consciousness that he is preparing for a crusade. He is training for embarkation on a holy war. He has a divine discontent with the *status quo* (which the schoolboy so brilliantly translated as "the mess we're in"). He is to represent his King to a world largely hostile to Him. It is therefore of primary importance that he should get to know the mind

of his King. He will do this in a variety of ways, of which probably the two most important will be :

(a) *Corporate worship and fellowship.* The Chapel, with its ordered services and times of prayer, will be central to his life and thought. The less formal periods of prayer with his fellows will be hardly less valuable. It is "*with all saints*" that the ordinand, like the rest of us, comes to comprehend what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge and so is "filled with all the fulness of God." He cannot reach this alone.

(b) *Individual communion with God.* The peril of *theological* education is that familiarity with holy things which tends to take the edge off the sensitiveness of a man's spiritual life. There is only one way by which this disaster—no less word can adequately describe it—may be averted. It is the way of individual communion with God. Jesus "ordained twelve that they might be with Him"—that was His primary purpose. "That He might send them forth" was secondary. The inversion of that divine order (of which St. Mark reminds us in chapter 3, verse 14) has led, time and time again, to the loss of a deep spirituality which is not always incompatible with ecclesiastical preferment, but which is disastrous to a real *ministry*.

By some such tests as these, the adequacy or inadequacy of theological education may be gauged. By the same tests may the capacity of an ordinand be estimated.

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