

The Reformed Pastor in the Twentieth Century

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THE title suggested to me by the Editor appears at first to call for an adaptation of Richard Baxter's great work *The Reformed Pastor* to the conditions of the 20th Century. *The Reformed Pastor* is one of the classical works in the English language on the pastoral Ministry. It has a message which can never grow old for all those who are called to the Ministry, emphasizing as it does the vital importance of bringing home the Christian message and Christian teaching to the individuals and families committed to our care. It is always a stimulating and challenging experience to re-read Baxter's work, and the fact that it was a favourite book of such a hard-headed thinker as Bishop Hensley Henson proves that its appeal is not dependent on superficial or sentimental theorising.

It is nevertheless true that the principal method of personal ministrations recommended by Baxter is entirely unsuitable to present days. His plan and his practice was to issue a summons to every family to report at his Vicarage at a given time. Apparently they accepted his summons and queued up for their interviews as people queue up to see the Doctor. He then dealt faithfully with each family in turn and thus during the course of the year worked through every soul in his parish. This plan has only to be described to be seen as laughably unworkable under present conditions.

This leaves the writer of the article looking elsewhere for his main theme and it is proposed to approach the subject from another, but not quite unrelated, angle. It is proposed to examine the promises made at Ordination to the Priesthood in the light of conditions now prevailing. To do so is indeed to re-examine the work of 'the reformed pastor', for these questions were essentially a Reformation addition to the service of Ordination. The eight questions thus addressed to the candidate for the priesthood in our Prayer Book were based almost verbatim upon proposals of Martin Bucer in a draft for an Ordination Service which occurs in his *Scripta Anglicana*. Though not published till 1577 this must have been written in 1549, as it was used so extensively in the Anglican Ordinal which first appeared in March, 1550. The eight questions cover eight vitally important aspects of the life of the ordained minister. The themes are :

- (1) The Call to the Ministry.
- (2) The Authority for the message to be given.
- (3) The Pastoral Ministry (a) Positive.
(b) Negative.
- (4) The Minister's own life (a) His devotional life.
(b) His character and example.
- (5) Human relationships (a) In the parish.
(b) Loyalty and discipline.

Let us consider these themes in turn.

The Call.

Suitably enough the first question concerns the call to the Ministry and the candidate has to say that he thinks in his heart that he has been truly called "according to the will of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the order of the Church of England to the order and ministry of priesthood". Naturally, the candidate can only express what he *thinks* is the true situation. By the time of his Ordination he has had plenty of opportunity to consider the matter in the light of informed and mature information. Under present conditions the decision of C.A.C.T.M. is bound to be an important element in the decision. It has, of course, never been true that because a man considered himself called the Church had to accept the matter as a *fait accompli* and proceed to ordination. There have always been examinations of some kind and opportunities for the congregation to express their opinion, if only by remaining silent when an opportunity for objection is given. But no decision of C.A.C.T.M. can replace the fundamental necessity of each candidate being assured in his own mind that he is "truly called".

The true call is qualified as one which conforms to two tests. It must be "according to the will of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the order of this Church of England". Both tests are of great importance. The fundamental test is a test which concerns the will of Christ, the Church thus bearing testimony to the fact that it is only God in Christ who can truly call and commend His servants to the order of the Ministry. But there are other ministries than that of the Church of England and no man should answer this question in the affirmative unless he is convinced that for him at least the Church of England is the sphere of service to which he is called by God. Such a conviction must include a belief that the Anglican way of doing things is at least compatible with the teaching of Scripture and with the mind of God as therein revealed. An affirmative answer to this question ought to rule out any acts of fundamental disloyalty to the Anglican system, whether such acts point in the direction of Rome or Geneva.

The Authority for the Message.

Prominent because of its early position among the questions is the request for a statement that the candidate is persuaded that "the Holy Scriptures contain sufficient doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ". In the Reformation setting this question was of principal importance because Ministers of the Reformed Church of England had to lay aside the superstitious accretions which the mediaeval Church had accepted from a too-ready belief in the authority of tradition. The question is not less important to-day, although its usual application will be somewhat different from that assumed in 1550. The vital question for to-day is not whether any addition to Scripture is desirable, but whether the fundamental message of the Bible (what Hooker calls its "main drift") is reliable and authoritative.

Of the Anglican position on this matter there can be no doubt, particularly in view of the handing over of a Bible to the candidate as the principal ceremony of the service apart from the central one of the laying-on-of-hands with appointed words. There is, of course, to-day

a revived conviction in many Churches and in varying sections within Churches of the abiding relevance of the Biblical message as the basis for all Christian teaching and preaching. Perhaps the danger now arising is that younger clergy will think that the mere quotation of words and the repetition of ideas from Holy Scripture are sufficient means of gaining entrance to the modern mind. A return to Biblical theology in no way relieves the modern minister from the task of interpretation. On the other hand it makes that task more relevant than ever, for in the nature of the case Biblical concepts (e.g. those of covenant and sacrifice) are strange to modern man and remote from his experience. In the process of this interpretation, however, the solid teaching of the Bible must not be evaporated away. Holy Scripture remains the impregnable rock on which Anglican teaching stands, and it is interesting to note that no discoveries of modern science or findings of modern criticism in any way invalidate the principal point which is made by these questions, namely the centrality and sufficiency of Scripture as a guide to the way of salvation.

The Pastoral Ministry.

The next two questions raise the subject of the public pastoral ministry of the would-be priest. The former of the two questions calls on him to minister "the doctrine and sacraments and the discipline of Christ". Perhaps it is not necessary to say much about the doctrine and sacraments of Christ, as all would agree that the ministration of these forms the basic task of the parish priest. The phrase "the discipline of Christ", however, calls for some comment. At the time of the Reformation there were those who held a particular view of what the discipline of Christ meant. Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* was written largely to show that their idea was unduly narrow. The Church, however, does not reject the disciplinary function. However it may be interpreted, the priest is committed to minister the discipline of Christ. At the most elementary level this no doubt includes all forms of Christian teaching, e.g. Sunday School and Confirmation Class; but the matter goes beyond such things and includes more formal aspects of discipline.

At the present time there is a strong movement for strengthening the disciplinary side of the pastoral ministry, e.g. by refusing baptism to children of parents unlikely to bring them up in the faith of the Church. In all such matters it is necessary to steer the middle course between too much rigidity and too much laxity. The fellowship of the Church should be a sufficiently clearly-defined community to make possible the demanding of a certain standard in those who wish to remain its active members. This is, of course, the question which has been demanding the attention of the Lambeth Conference, Convocation and the Assembly in recent years. It is, in fact, very difficult to define what are the minimum duties which every loyal churchman should accept as binding obligations. There is much to be said for Hooker's generous view that every baptised person remains in the Church until he deliberately rejects such membership for himself. On the other hand, as the Church becomes increasingly a minority movement in a nation which is gradually becoming more secular,

minimum obligations may become necessary. It must at least be noted that the promise to minister "the discipline of Christ" is a promise made in the solemn moment of ordination. It is a matter in which Richard Baxter's ideal has an abiding challenge for us all.

The question that follows is also concerned with the pastoral ministry, but this time with what might be called its negative aspect. The priest promises to be ready "with all faithful diligence to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's word". When originally framed this question presumably had in mind two major threats to the Scriptural religion of the Church of England—the threat from Rome and the threat from extreme and fanatical dissenting sects. Continental Protestantism can hardly have been in mind, as Bucer would certainly not have thought this contrary to God's word.

Since the framing of the question important changes have come about which affect the task now to be contemplated. One special change is the acceptance of the principle of toleration. There are few clergy who would think it necessary to "banish and drive away" from their parishes all expressions of Roman Catholic and Nonconformist faith, although they might legitimately seek to strengthen the Anglican convictions of their own people. There are, of course, queer sects which still "lead captive silly women" and even silly men, and in some areas of England this constitutes a measurable threat to the stability of Anglican congregations. Probably "Jehovah's Witnesses" is the most serious movement of this kind, backed as it seems to be by considerable financial resources in America. It would nevertheless be foolish to think that opposition to these queer communities was an important part of the parson's duty under this promise. Surely the most important part of it to-day is the steady fight against the scientific humanism which is often the unquestioned assumption behind the thinking of vast numbers of our people, particularly the older boys and girls of our Secondary Schools and the professional and student sections of the population. The fact that one question is given to the "banishing and driving away" of false doctrine shows that there is a controversial side to the parson's ministry which cannot be ignored. A book like Alan Richardson's *Christian Apologetics* comes into prominence as a useful weapon in the armoury of those who would contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.

It is at this point that the private ministrations of the clergyman are formally raised. In the negative aspect of pastoral work the clergyman promises to make "private monitions and exhortations as well to the sick as to the whole". This includes warnings and straight talking such as are contemplated in the service for the Visitation of the Sick. But, nowadays, when the authority of the clergy in moral questions is, to say the least, not taken for granted, its exercise must call for both tact and courage. Tact, because what we have to say must be so firmly based, and so wisely expressed, that it will be self-authenticating even to those for whom the badge of the ministry is not itself a sufficient authentication. Courage, because it is always tempting to speak smooth words, and difficult to speak the word in

season which we know may run counter to the wishes and prejudices of those to whom it is addressed.

The Private Life of the Minister.

The next two questions call us to look within, to those deep roots without which no ministry can hope to bear rich fruit ; to those deep wells from which alone the minister can hope to bring to his hearers the water of life.

The first of them concerns his life of prayer, Bible reading and study. "Diligence" is what is asked in prayers and of the reading of the Bible. Diligence means affectionate perseverance, a regular duty accepted joyfully. In modern conditions the minister may not find it easy to fulfil this promise. The pressure of domestic chores and of parochial duties can all too easily undermine the devotional foundations of ministerial life.

Here, perhaps, it is suitable to say a word about the daily services. An increasing number of clergy of all schools of thought are coming to accept both the obligation and the privilege of reading daily the appointed service of Morning and Evening Prayer. It is not always possible to conduct them publicly, and when they are used privately a wide measure of adaptation seems legitimate. Their basic features, however, are the Psalms and the Lessons. Everything else is supplementary. When this point is recognised it should go far to correct any Evangelical prejudice which may remain against the acceptance of this custom as a regular duty. It would be certainly odd if the Evangelical wing of the Church, which claims to cling most loyally to the centrality of Holy Scripture, should lag behind other schools in the loyal observance of that scheme of Scripture-reading laid down by the Church and observed by an increasing number of our brother clergy. It must, of course, be understood that the primary purpose of the daily service is not the devotional strengthening of the individual clergyman but his bearing of a share in the joyful duty of regular worship and attention to God's Word due from the whole Church. There are, however, many to whom the sense of fellowship with others makes acceptable what might otherwise become a burden. All the while we are keeping in touch with the Psalms and the Lessons of the daily service, we are showing some measure of "diligence" in reading Scripture in accordance with our promise.

Studies which help to a knowledge of the Holy Scripture are also undertaken. Nowadays there are few subjects of study which do not in some way or another illuminate the Word of God. Notice, however, that in the last resort there is something to be laid aside—"the study of the world and of the flesh". Many will feel that the phrase in the long exhortation "draw all your studies in this way" is a happier way of making the same point. Only the individual can decide the best way of fulfilling the promise. Thus, for example, it would be a breach of the promise to devote long periods of time to, shall we say, the study of the Stock Exchange or of some secular employment if its object was the furtherance of material or worldly gain. If the "supplementary study" is one which can be dedicated to the life and the ministry it can be undertaken with sincerity and without sense of guilt.

Having thus dealt with the private spiritual life of the would-be priest the Bishop then turns to the question of his example, i.e. of his moral character and behaviour. The priest is expected to "frame and fashion" his own life and that of his family according to the doctrine of Christ, making them both "wholesome examples and patterns to the flock". This is an entirely scriptural question. Not only did Our Lord make it plain that His disciples were to let their light shine and by so doing bring glory to God, but the Pastoral Epistles lay great stress on the example which must be set by the Ministry. Titus is bidden to show himself in all things "an example of good works".

The minister must regard his responsibilities as reaching beyond himself and extending to his home and family. In the days when the question was framed it was a new thing to have an openly married clergy and it says much for the boldness of the Reformers' outlook that they brought the family of the minister into the central section of the Ordination itself. Most thoughtful observers would agree that the life of a Christian home is one of the most powerful witnesses for Christianity in existence. The clergyman whose home life is a standing testimony to the transforming and ennobling power of Christ is contributing more than he can tell to the extension of the Kingdom, and this was never more important than to-day when, through lack of Christian conviction, English homes are breaking up with terrifying rapidity. Notice, too, the attractive word "wholesome". The clergyman and his family are to be *wholesome* examples to the flock of Christ. This has both a positive and negative meaning. It means that all that is unhealthy, malicious, impure and unworthy must be banished from the Parsonage. It means, also, that there should be in the parson's home a quality of life, a sensitiveness to human need, a wise enjoyment of the really worthwhile things in life, so that all who come within its walls may learn something of what life in Christ can mean. The element of *koinonia* is so central in Christianity that it cannot be fully set forth in any individual life. Home life, on the other hand, must be a life in community and it can therefore reflect far more fully than can an individual the possibilities of Christian experience and achievement.

It may be of interest to mention at this point that many theological colleges, my own included, are doing something to associate wives and fiancées of students with the training provided. Sometimes this takes the form of special courses, sometimes of a fellowship for wives and fiancées within reach of the College. Whatever may be the form in which the concern is expressed the concern itself is of great importance. We have not yet reached the stage of the Colleges on the mission field where it is usual for wives and children and, I believe, even cattle and chicken to arrive for the course, but we are certainly moving somewhat in that direction!

Human Relationships.

The last two questions seem to pick up the thought of human relationships in general, perhaps under the influence of the home life which has been mentioned in the previous question. The former of

them calls on the priest to set forward "quietness, peace, and love" among all Christian people, especially those committed to his charge. This again is a permanent and classical task of the Christian minister. Our Lord said that the mutual love which was to reign in His community was to be the principal means whereby all men should know that they were His disciples. The importance of this theme is emphasised by the legend (it can hardly be more than that) according to which the aged St. John, when too old to preach, was lifted into a pulpit and was able to say nothing but the words, "Little children, love one another"; after which he was lifted down again!

The reconciling mission of the Church is, of course, firmly grounded in Christian theology. It is the purpose of God to sum up all things in Christ, and the Church which is the agent of this reconciling and united purpose must itself, like Zion, be at unity within itself. Thus the minister is called upon to promote true unity, i.e. true Christian relationships in his parish. Like St. Paul he will sometimes have to deal with the problem of Euodias and Syntyche and help them to be of the same mind in the Lord. All problems of human relationship call for forethought and care. No small part of a clergyman's task is keeping these relationships sweet and happy. He must undertake this task not only to make things go smoothly (and thus to make the annual sale of work a financial success) but because of the purpose and nature of Christian community life in Christ.

In these days there is a further aspect of the work undertaken in this promise. It is to contribute to the unity of the divided Church of Christ. When the Prayer Book was written the prospect of tolerating Christian communities other than that of the Established Church was not in view. Nowadays it is part of the accepted part of society and thus the clergyman is faced with the relationship between different sections of Christ's Church. He is called upon to set forward Christian unity *as much as lieth in him*. This implies that there are some things which he cannot do. He cannot, for instance, take on himself the full responsibility of arranging inter-Church relationships in advance of those which are authorised by the Church of which he is part and an authorised minister. It is, however, a known fact that the leaders of the Churches have gone further in the way of union than have most parish priests and most congregations. Every parson will find plenty of opportunity in his parish to help forward the cause of Christian union among the scattered sections of the Church.

The last question raises yet another aspect of human relationships: those between the clergy themselves, and particularly between the curate and the vicar. Ecclesiastical relationships present a very varied picture. There are many cases where the standard of fellowship achieved is higher than in secular employment, but there are others where the standard reached is lower than would be expected and tolerated in secular work. This is perhaps occasioned by the fact that much of the ordinary rough-and-tumble discipline between employers and employed is considered out of place in the Church. Without this discipline it is easier for jealousy and moods of self-concern to spoil relationships. In accordance with the spirit of Tudor times the problem is presented to the would-be priest entirely in terms

of *his* side of the matter. He is expected to follow with a glad mind the admonitions of his seniors. This, in one sense, is sound enough, for he is responsible only for his side of the question and therefore can only accept responsibility on that plane. It is also true, however, that relationships cannot be ideal unless both sides (vicar and curate) know their mutual responsibilities. Obviously a high standard of loyalty and understanding is called for. In answering this question the would-be priest pledges himself in advance never to become the centre of a "curate's party". The temptation to-day is all too easy and sometimes presents itself in very subtle ways. The new curate usually has youth, keenness and attractiveness on his side. He is straight from College and has all the latest ecclesiastical and theological ideas in his armoury. The vicar may be tired, frustrated, disappointed and cynical. Under such circumstances it is all too easy for well meaning lay people to rally round the curate and to give him quite a wrong sense of his own importance.

It will be seen that although the present situation is widely different from that contemplated in 1550, the questions of the Ordinal raise matters which no clergyman of 1950 can afford to ignore.

Church and State and Present Day Problems

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TO understand fully the "city" of to-day we must know something of the "town" of yesterday since usually the present is based largely on the past. Similarly it is impossible to deal intelligently with Church and State *to-day* without a short retrospect on Church and State *yesterday*. We must not forget that the English Church is older than the English State. While England was still divided into what was called the Heptarchy there was already one single English Church, and this actually paved the way for a united English nation. For the English nation was formed under the fostering care of the English Church, and centuries before the Conquest Church and State worked together in the closest co-operation. Leading churchmen were usually also statesmen who administered justice on clergy and people alike in the courts of the land. It was a bad day when William I altered this harmonious fellowship by setting up separate Church Courts. It led to inevitable friction between Church and State because these Church Courts administered, not English Statute Law, but Roman Canon Law with a final appeal to the papal and not to the king's Court. The English bishops had also to take an oath of fealty to the Pope which might and often did conflict with their allegiance to the Crown.

This dual position soon challenged the supremacy of the Crown, with the result that strong churchmen like Anselm and Becket wished