

to write over the portals of Duke University, "This is the house of God; this is the gate of heaven". But it would not be true.

What we can say is that the results so far reached in parapsychology are favourable to the basic Biblical and Christian position, and unfavourable to a position of pure materialism. There are factors apparently operative in the life of man that link on to certain experiences of men of God in the past and in the present. These experiences are not thereby explained, but the sceptic can no longer dismiss them as the relics of outworn superstition. This is the point at which we have arrived. It will be thrilling to see where we go from here.

The following three books are easily obtainable, and give the relevant facts, whether or not one agrees with the authors' conclusions :

*The Personality of Man*, by G. N. M. Tyrrell (Pelican, 1946).

*The Reach of the Mind*, by J. B. Rhine (Faber, 1948, 10/6).

*The Imprisoned Splendour*, by Raynor C. Johnson (Hodder & Stoughton, 1953, 25/-).

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## Some Reflections on the Fifth Ordination Question

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**W**HEN after his preliminary year of ministry a deacon is ordained to the priesthood of the Church of England he is asked by the bishop eight questions. The eight brief, almost curt answers given by the deacon as he leaves forever the diaconate and enters on his priesthood, may legitimately be designated the eightfold ordination vows of a priest. After one year's experience of what it means to a man to hold the office of a deacon, he makes, in the Presence of God, and before the congregation assembled, eight solemn promises. It would be all to the good if all worshippers in our churches would read for themselves the eight questions asked; if this were done, they would be better acquainted with the duties and functions of an Anglican priest. They would know more wisely and accurately what to expect, and what not to expect, of the shepherd who has been appointed by the Chief Shepherd of the diocese to have charge of the flock.

The reflections which follow deal with the fifth of these questions : "Will you be diligent in prayers and in reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and the flesh?"

### I

To begin with, let it be stated emphatically that the priest-about-to-be is asked eight questions. This fifth question about prayer and sacred

study is only one of them. The other seven questions are equally searching and fundamental. It is not suggested that the fifth question should be over-emphasized at the expense of the other seven. To do this would be to encourage the neglect of many necessary and important duties appertaining to the office of a priest. The particular duties involved in the fifth question cannot be treated in isolation. A priest who spent all his time in the saying of prayers and reading the Bible and other literature to the neglect of other ministerial work would scarcely succeed in his ministry.

Nevertheless the fifth ordination promise matters intensely, because on its due fulfilment depends the carrying out of at least three of the other promises. At his ordination the priest promises to "instruct the people committed to his charge out of the Scriptures"—"to teach only that which may be concluded and proved by the Scriptures". He also vows "to give faithful diligence to minister the doctrine as The Lord hath commanded, and teach the people to keep and observe the same". Again, he undertakes "to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's Word", and to frame and fashion himself and his family according to the doctrine of Christ. It is worth pointing out that in the eight questions asked by the Bishop the word *doctrine* is mentioned three times. Strong emphasis is laid on the duty of a priest to teach and instruct the Christian doctrine as the Bible and the Church have delivered it. How can the priest do this adequately if he himself is not first thoroughly and accurately instructed himself? It is true indeed that this fifth question cannot be studied or asked in isolation. "How can the blind lead the blind?"

## II

Another reason why this fifth question matters so much is because of the nature of religious knowledge, and still more of the manner of acquiring such knowledge. In the opinion of the writer this particular point has never had the attention given to it which it deserves. In a volume entitled *With Christ in God, a Study of Human Destiny*, Shirley C. Hughson discusses in a particularly illuminating chapter the meaning of religious knowledge. He points out how this knowledge is derived from a life of association with God. The words 'theology' and 'theologian' have changed their meaning in the course of the centuries. In the early days of the Church the words had no reference to scholarly erudition in the science of religion. Theology, according to the Fathers, indicated a knowledge acquired not by study but by prayer. A theologian was one who had acquired an intimacy with God through contemplation rather than through the investigations of reason. St. Benedict, who had no scholarship in our modern sense of the word, was described by St. Gregory as "learnedly ignorant and wisely unlearned".

This definition of Theology is surely true, provided it is qualified. The more modern view of theology, the Queen of Sciences, is equally true. It is an instance of both—and, not either—or. Theology is emphatically acquired by study as well as by prayer, by long years of patient research and intensive concentration on standard works by

learned men who are acknowledged experts. Meditation, however sincerely and zealously the priest may think about God, will only issue in "mere thinking" unless it is allied with sound learning and the willingness to read great books about Religion. Intuition is a very real window through which the soul can view the mystery of the Being of God, but without the discipline (sometimes wearisome and long) of tackling stiff theological works intuition by itself can be a false guide. A life-long study of the works of Richard Hooker or Jeremy Taylor will bring a Christian student to the haven where he would be—and peace at the last—more surely than intuition.

St. Benedict was an exceptional man of God and the ordinary parish priest is not intended to be "learnedly ignorant and wisely unlearned". Moreover, this outlook of the mind of the shepherd affects profoundly the sheep. "He that winneth souls is *wise*."

### III

A third reason why priests should maintain their studies not only at the beginning of, but all through their ministry, is because of the indirect influence sacred study has on preaching.

It cannot be stated too emphatically that the preaching of sermons is a major duty of a priest's work and should take priority over many other necessary duties. The priest at his ordination is solemnly given authority to preach. When the Bishop "delivers to every one of them kneeling the Bible into his hand" the words spoken are crucial: "Take thou authority to preach the Word of God".

It is much to be regretted that in certain ecclesiastical circles this duty of preaching is belittled. One of the reasons why the Church of England does not influence the nation as it should, and in some quarters has lost its grip on the minds of Englishmen, is because preaching is not taken in a serious enough manner. Anglicans here can learn a real lesson from the Presbyterian ministry and the place of "preaching the Word" in the Presbyterian Churches. Too often in the Church of England "the hungry sheep look up and are not fed". Let it be said that this is by no means always the fault of the shepherd. Over and over again other necessary and pressing duties legitimately prevent the weekly sermon from being properly prepared.

The fault so often lies with the system rather than with the individual parish priest, who is overworked and faced with an impossible situation. How can one clergyman faced with the duty of ministering to some 10,000 people in an industrial parish—sometimes singlehanded without an assistant priest, possibly find adequate time to prepare a sermon—sometimes three sermons—for any given Sunday?

It is precisely at this point that the fifth Ordination promise saves the situation. "The reading of the holy scriptures" and "such studies as help to the knowledge of the same" and "the laying aside the study of the world and the flesh" do exercise an *indirect influence* on preaching far more than is realized. Those priests who do manage, in spite of all the multifarious and pressing calls on their time (and patience!), to devote certain hours each day to sacred study (let us use the word *theology* in its widest sense) do preach more inspiring sermons. It is the indirect influence brought about by the regular

study of theology that produces the sermon that helps. It is true that there are some exceptional preachers to whom the Holy Spirit has granted the gift of preaching the Word, who are "learnedly ignorant and wisely unlearned"; but they are specially gifted men. The ordinary parish priest, if he wants to instruct the congregation committed to his charge through "teaching sermons", does this best out of a mind steadily soaked in biblical theology and sacred study.

The scientific and mechanical outlook of the modern man does not alter the fact that the priest at his ordination is given authority to preach the Word of God. English congregations, when they attend their parish church, expect to learn from the preacher the truth about God and Jesus Christ and The Holy Spirit and the Christian religion derived from the Scriptures. They do not go to Church to listen to lectures on science. Not less but more in a scientific and mechanical and largely materialistic civilization is it necessary for preachers to study the Scriptures and Christian doctrine and such other studies as may help men to understand theology. St. Paul's words to his young friend and fellow-minister, Timothy, still have a message for the modern Church: "Give heed to reading . . . to exhortation . . . to teaching. . . . Neglect not the gift that is in thee given thee with the laying on of hands. Be diligent in these things—Take heed to thyself and thy teaching" (1 Tim. iv. 13-16, R.V.).

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#### "THE REVISION OF THE COMMUNION SERVICE"

**A**N article on the above subject by Canon D. R. Vicary appeared in our last issue. At the request of the Council of the Church Society a further article on the same subject will appear in our next issue, written by a member of the Council of the Society.

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