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The Public School Chaplain's Job

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

IN former times the Headmaster of a Public School usually made himself responsible for the details of its religious life ; but in recent days the Headmaster has become an increasingly busy man, and often finds it convenient to depute the administration of the school's religious life to a chaplain, who is usually assisted (in the larger schools) by several other ordained men. When I use the term "chaplain" in this article I am speaking of the senior chaplain holding the special responsibility I have described ; but most of what I have to say applies equally to any ordained man on the staff of a public school.

1. *The Scripture Lesson.* Whether or not he is responsible for organizing the Scripture teaching throughout the school, the chaplain will certainly teach Scripture himself. Sometimes it is customary for the Scripture lesson or lessons throughout the school to take place at the same time each week, and in that case the chaplain does not teach any more often than his colleagues ; but sometimes the Scripture lessons are staggered throughout the week, and then his opportunity is wider.

The first battle is to establish with each separate set or form that Divinity is an important subject demanding close attention and scholarly procedure. A chaplain coming new to a school sometimes finds to his consternation that some boys have grown accustomed to treat their Scripture lessons as rest periods, or at best as free-for-all discussion groups in which any random assertions are allowed to pass for argument. Amongst the laymen in our public schools there are many great Scripture teachers, whose pupils owe them a lasting debt : but others, it must be admitted, teach the subject merely from a sense of duty, and are apt to welcome digressions too easily or to accept too low a level of industry. Kindly but firmly the chaplain must make it clear that the ethos of his own Scripture sets will not be of this kind.

However much discussion there may be—and, rightly conducted, discussions can be profitable and edifying—the object of the Scripture lesson is faithful and thorough instruction in the foundations of the Faith as set forth in the Bible. It is unsafe to assume much knowledge on the part of the class : a few boys, perhaps, have been well grounded at home or at their preparatory schools, or by some good teacher at the school where the chaplain is working ; but the majority will possess only a hazy idea of the Bible's teaching, even though they may have a respectable acquaintance with the historical facts of the Old Testament and Gospels. The idea that Scripture expounds a systematic philosophy for living is often new to them ; but once they grasp that cardinal fact, their interest is greatly increased.

The chaplain is, perhaps, in an easier position if he is given a free hand with his own personal syllabus, but he can achieve satisfactory results even when he is working within the scope of a syllabus traditionally prevalent in the school. It is tempting to think that Scripture teaching requires little preparation, and that, for example, if the

subject for the term is St. Luke's Gospel, it is sufficient to read the book through with the form, ask for questions and comments, and make such desultory comments as come to mind. Even such casual teaching is not without profit : the Scriptures are greater than we are, and will often disclose their treasures to individual boys despite the incompetence of the expositor : but it is better altogether to work out a careful plan of action, and to have clear in one's mind the particular aspects of doctrine and ethics that one wishes to drive home.

The subject for the term's syllabus may, for example, be some of the services of the Prayer Book ; and the chaplain's object will then be, not only to explain the structure of those services, but also to expound the great doctrinal principles on which they are based, and to show how thoroughly scriptural they are in design and purpose. In the course of discussion pertinent questions will be raised. " Don't you think, sir, that the General Confession rather exaggerates ? " " Surely we can't expect anything really to *happen* when we say these prayers in Chapel ? " Such questions, properly handled, lead straight back to the foundation truths of Scripture, and furnish an opportunity for clearing up misunderstandings and giving positive instruction.

To take another example, the syllabus for the term with a senior set may be of the type that one can conveniently label " Christianity and . . . ", Christianity and Politics, Christianity and the Social Order, Christianity and the Race Problem, and so forth. The zealous chaplain would not, perhaps, select such advanced questions if he were free to choose ; but if the syllabus prescribes them for him, he can quite easily devise a series of lessons in which man's personal relationship with God is set forth as the problem of problems, which must first be solved by the individual before he can hope to think clearly about building a better world. When such subjects are being handled, discussion must be carefully guided ; and the teacher must learn to suppress the irrelevant question without appearing to be either obscurantist or dogmatic.

Written work, conscientiously corrected, must always play its part ; boys will often reveal themselves more clearly on paper than they ever dare to do, or find themselves capable of doing, in speech. Questions propounded in such essays can profitably be adopted as the basis for the next lesson.

If he knows his business, the chaplain will find that his Scripture lessons lead to personal contacts and useful private conversations. Boys may come up at the end of a lesson to put some question, and can then be invited to come to the chaplain's room for fuller discussion—an invitation which they are usually pleased to accept.

2. *The Sermon.* The chaplain usually preaches to the whole school once or twice each term, and some schools hold a weekly voluntary service at which it may be the custom for him to preach more often. Some preachers adapt themselves inadequately to a public school audience, and in consequence many sermons each term are relatively dull : hence the congregation usually listens closely to a man who has something definite to say and is not afraid to state his case simply and forcibly.

The attempt to prepare a sermon suitable at one and the same time

for immature boys of thirteen and for sophisticated young men of eighteen-and-a-half constitutes a perennial problem. But it can be done. A middle-aged Cambridge don and his sixteen-year old son both attended the service in Cambridge at which Billy Graham preached last April. Each appreciated the sermon equally : the language was simple enough for the boy to understand, and the problems dealt with were profound enough to excite the interest of the father. Surely that is the secret. The age-long perplexities of mankind—the intolerable spectacle of innocent suffering, the impotence of the human will in the face of evil—confront the intelligent child as much as they do the adult ; but they must be expounded in simple words.

C. E. M. Joad once said that the most responsive audience to address in public was an undergraduate audience ; and I agree with him : but the congregation in an ordinary public school chapel is almost as good. The length of the sermon must, of course, be kept within reasonable limits ; but the congregation is extremely tolerant if they think a man is saying something worth hearing ; and the chaplain gains greater respect if he preaches thoughtful, stimulating sermons of some length than if he allows a fancied public opinion to reduce his sermon to the compass of a “ Lift Up Your Hearts ” broadcast, or seeks to put too much jam in the sandwich. Jam there must be ; and nothing is more appreciated than the telling anecdote ; but boys are quick to detect the cheapjack who is out to entertain rather than to edify.

3. *Confirmation Classes.* At one time Confirmation preparation was largely in the hands of Housemasters, and in some schools that system still prevails ; but in most schools the chaplain and his clerical colleagues now do the work. The confirmandi are usually divided into small groups which come together each week for an hour. In addition there may be occasional addresses for all the confirmandi by the chaplain, by the Headmaster or by some visitor.

This preparation period gives the chaplain his golden opportunity for coming to grips with the boys. Nowadays care is usually taken, by Housemaster or parents, to make sure that the boy presents himself for preparation only when he really feels ready, and consequently the Confirmation classes are composed of genuine volunteers, most of whom approach the matter in a thoughtful and receptive way.

What shall we teach the boys at the time of their Confirmation ? Some would say “ the Gospel ”, others “ the Catechism ” ; and both answers are right. It is unfortunate when an evangelical clergyman feels that there is any real contrast or distinction between these two answers.

First, we must seek to show that belief in God and faith in the Divinity of Jesus Christ, the twin pillars on which Christianity is built, can be demonstrated from reason. The Catechism requires candidates to know the Creed ; and no knowledge of the Creed can be adequate which does not include a rational justification of the words “ I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord. . . . ” With younger Confirmation classes it is unnecessary to elaborate the arguments ; but with many older boys it is impossible to proceed until this foundation has been carefully and firmly laid. The vast majority of boys who present

themselves for Confirmation are quite ignorant of the tremendous weight of evidence that can be brought forward, and regard belief in God and in Christ as dogmas which must be accepted by pure faith.

Secondly, we must teach repentance and faith. That such instruction is required by the Prayer Book is manifest from the third answer in the Catechism: "They did promise and vow three things in my name. First, that I should renounce the devil and all his works . . . Secondly, that I should believe all the articles of the Christian Faith." Again, no exposition of the Creed can be adequate which omits a full explanation of the doctrine of redemption implied by the words "suffered under Pontius Pilate . . . rose again from the dead . . . ascended into heaven". No one, furthermore, can say anything significant about the "forgiveness of sins" and "the life everlasting" without a thoughtful scriptural exposition of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, we must teach the candidates to pray. The Catechism requires a knowledge of the Lord's Prayer, and the assumptions on which it is based; and we have not done our duty until we have shown the paramount necessity of daily prayer, and the Bible teaching concerning it.

Fourthly, we must outline the basis of true Christian living; and no finer text for such a discussion can be found than the Ten Commandments, taken in conjunction with Christ's interpretation of them in the Sermon on the Mount. A useful passage here is Romans 12, which is almost the perfect sermon on "my duty towards God" and "my duty towards my neighbour".

Fifthly, we must explain the Sacraments. The fact that an undue emphasis is placed on baptism by some clergy to-day is a special reason why we should explain its true significance and the necessity for an informed personal response which it implies. The Holy Communion should be seen, not merely as one of the three means of grace (along with Bible reading and prayer), but as a great opportunity for periodically renewing that total commitment to Christ ("here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves . . .") which the Prayer Book clearly expects from every candidate before his Confirmation—a requirement implied by the first question of the Bishop to the candidate: "Do ye here, in the presence of God, and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your baptism; ratifying and confirming the same in your own persons, and acknowledging yourselves bound to believe, and to do, all those things which your godfathers and godmothers then undertook for you?"

Such is the outline of the teaching to be given in the actual Confirmation classes; and that teaching, in the interview which should take place with each candidate, can be made, in varying ways and degrees, the basis for a personal challenge to the candidate to receive Christ as his Lord and Saviour. Many will be found ready to take that great step of faith; others, when questioned, will be found to have an insufficient understanding of the Gospel to make such a decision intelligently, or perhaps an unwillingness for true repentance and a taking up of the Cross. Those who fall into this second category may

sometimes wish to postpone their Confirmation for the time being : others will want to go ahead nevertheless ; and it is often wise to let them do so, so long as they clearly understand that the Confirmation Service, for them, will be no more than a formal identification of themselves with the Christian Church and the Christian cause, and will be proleptic in respect of personal faith and allegiance to Christ.

4. *Chapel Services.* The impression created by the chaplain on these occasions is of the first importance for his reputation, and hence for his usefulness in the school. The form of the daily service in chapel, in so far as it is an abbreviation of " Morning Prayer ", is often fixed by tradition ; but within that framework it makes all the difference what prayers are chosen, how they are read, and how they are introduced. The chaplain will have acquired an asset of lasting value if, by referring to some of the excellent books of prayers on the market, he can compile for himself a comprehensive anthology which is at once scriptural, dignified and challenging. The importance of a reverent and orderly Communion Service cannot be overstated : but little need be said here, for it is only necessary to read the incomparable words of the Prayer Book.

5. *Discussion Groups.* Religious discussion societies of various kinds have long existed in the public schools ; whether or not it is traditional for the chaplain to be in charge, his interest and participation will usually be welcome to the boy or master who acts as President of the society. The chaplain must beware of saying too much at such discussion societies, or of seeming to state his views too dogmatically ; moreover he will be prepared to let the boys have their say, however wide of the mark their views may be, without feeling bound to correct every heresy in detail.

But he himself will sometimes feel it desirable to invite small groups of boys, drawn perhaps largely from his former Confirmation candidates, to meet together in his room for Bible study and discussion. Too often boys who make a real decision for Christ at the time of their Confirmation show little evidence of progress afterwards ; and the need to follow them up with post-Confirmation instruction cannot be over-emphasized. Much diplomacy is needed to make sure that every boy who would like to attend such a discussion group is invited to do so, while at the same time ensuring that no pressure is ever brought to bear and that those who are losing interest feel perfectly free to drop out.

6. *The Library.* The chaplain should make it his business to ensure that a respectable library of helpful religious books is in existence somewhere in the school, and is readily available to the boys. Often enough the school Librarian will be glad to receive suggestions for the purchase of fresh books, so that the theological section of his library may be adequately stocked. At some schools there exists a special Scripture library, located perhaps in the chaplain's class-room or in his private room, from which boys are allowed to borrow books. The evangelical chaplain will naturally wish the views of his own party to be thoroughly well represented in such a collection ; but he will be well advised to include an adequate selection of worthwhile books by writers of schools other than his own. Boys will read such books,

whether he provides them or not ; and if he is responsible for lending them to those who wish to read them, he will be easily able, by a wise word here and there, to make sure that they read with discretion and discernment. Much of the teaching which we should like boys to understand has been well set forth by writers whose general views are decidedly Modernist or Catholic ; a good example of both tendencies is Bishop Gore, whose volume on *Belief in God* could surely be read with profit by any intelligent senior boy troubled with intellectual doubts. C. S. Lewis is a more modern example of a writer found edifying by many evangelical Christians, especially in the sphere of apologetic and of practical Christian living, despite the fact that his soteriology is sketchy and sometimes unscriptural. Our pupils must learn to "discern the things that differ".

7. *Pastoral Work.* As already suggested in the section about Confirmation classes, the foundation of a successful ministry amongst public schoolboys is the ability to find time for personal interviews and to turn them to the best account. All Confirmation candidates will be interviewed as a matter of course ; but interviews will often accrue as the result of Scripture teaching, or of a sermon preached, or of a question raised in a discussion group, or in connection with the borrowing of books. Moreover most boys are quite ready to drink a friendly cup of tea in the chaplain's room, and are pleased rather than embarrassed if he takes the opportunity to enquire how they are progressing in the Christian life and to offer a few words of encouragement or advice. No hint of an inquisition must ever creep into such interviews ; but boys are quite prepared to speak frankly to their chaplain about themselves and their problems if they feel that he is sympathetic and tolerant, and if they have his assurance that any disclosures they may make are in strict confidence. Boys who are unhappy or in trouble do not often have the courage to take the initiative in seeking the chaplain out : but if he can tactfully take the first step, without in the least seeming to intrude, they are usually only too ready to unburden themselves.

8. *The Chaplain and his Colleagues.* It is of the first importance that the chaplain should be on friendly terms with all his colleagues on the staff, and especially with the Housemasters, with whom he must work in close collaboration. This again is a field for diplomacy, in which Christ's ambassador must take pains to allay any small jealousy or suspicion that might be felt by Housemasters who are sometimes older and more experienced than he. Amongst the Housemasters at our public schools there are many men of great practical wisdom and insight, and they are often able to give the chaplain information which is of the highest value to him in seeking to help some particular boy. Many schoolmasters to-day feel that theology is a realm in which they are quite at sea, and they are only too glad to leave the chaplain to sort out the boys' theological problems. So long as the chaplain confines himself to his proper work, and does not seek to interfere in the general administration of the school, he has little to fear.

Some schoolmasters, as they grow older, tend to become somewhat rigid in mind ; and amongst the middle-aged members of the staff the chaplain, especially if he is a young man, will not perhaps find much

scope for exercising his ministry. The case is quite different, however, with the younger masters, especially those who have just arrived. They bring with them from the university the tradition of free and frank discussion, and the chaplain will often find an opportunity, in the course of a friendly discussion on general matters, to urge the claims of personal religion.

"Priesthood and Sacrifice"—A Reply

BY THE REV. A. R. FOUNTAIN, M.A.

MANY of us will be very grateful for the Bishop of Chelmsford's sermon on Priesthood and Sacrifice which was published in *The Churchman* for September 1954, and which, if one judges aright, was an attempt to join the two main streams of thought about the Eucharist in the Church of England to-day. At the same time, and with great respect, there must be many of us who disagree with the Bishop over his interpretation of the eternal self-offering of Christ in relation to the Sacrament of the Holy Communion. The danger of trying to define the Sacrament, and to clothe the mystery of our Redemption in words which will not be misunderstood, is proverbial; and it must be remembered that in this, as in other matters, two views which apparently contradict each other may in fact be trying to express the same thought. Nevertheless, when all that has been said, the interpretation of the words "the one Oblation of Christ finished upon the Cross" in Article 31 is a major dividing point in the Church of England at this moment. Further discussion of this issue is all to the good, and may lead to greater enlightenment and a drawing together of two divergent views. My only excuse for entering the lists upon this issue is the hope that someone better qualified may be persuaded to take up the points that are raised.

The comparatively modern attempt to substitute, at least in thought, the words "eternal self-offering" for the words "one Oblation of Himself once offered" in the Consecration Prayer is theologically a confusing one, and, in so far as it refers to the Sacrifice of the Cross, has no confirmation in Scripture. However much truth there may be in the paradox that the Nature of Him Who once offered Himself upon the Cross is eternally to offer Himself to the Father, it is not the Cross which is being offered to the Father as though He needed to be continually reminded of it, for the Cross is eternally at the heart of God Himself. The focus of our attention in the Holy Communion is upon the visible declaration of something which has been accomplished by God; it is the Sacrament of our Redemption. As far as we are concerned in the Atonement it is of less concern to us to know the inner meaning of it in the relationships of the Persons of the Eternal Trinity than to know the declaration through it of God's love to us "while we were yet sinners". As Dr. M. A. C. Warren puts it, "The essential thing to know for our soul's salvation is that here it is God Who does something and not man" (*Strange Victory*, p. 83). The Atonement is something wholly other than ourselves; it is something which God has done for us which we could not do for ourselves. We have nothing to