

Editorial

FROM CLASSROOM TO PULPIT

WITH this issue of the *Journal* we greet a new generation of clergymen graduated from our Canadian theological colleges. They have each completed a course of study carefully designed by their churches and their teachers to equip them for their calling. They have attended lectures and have participated in seminars to learn the techniques of biblical interpretation, the heritage of the Christian faith, and contemporary issues in theology. They have also been instructed in the art of preaching, the responsibilities of a pastor, and other aspects of so-called Practical Theology. Now they have been sent out into the Church to shepherd the faithful and into the world to proclaim the unsearchable riches of the Gospel.

Usually the experience of being suddenly cast adrift in the work of a parish creates a feeling of inadequacy for the actual tasks that confront the young graduate. This inadequacy is first felt in dealing with concrete problems of pastoral supervision and church administration. The complaint is often heard that the colleges have failed to provide sufficient training in the practical aspects of the ministry. However, there are many things which the young clergyman can only learn through experience. Classroom instruction in the daily practice of the ministry can only achieve partial success, for its relevance often does not become apparent except in concrete situations. Even field work or a summer mission field does not totally prepare a student for his first charge, for there is a subtle difference between the relationship of a student and that of a minister to his congregation. The former is recognized as a student appointed for a brief period only, and his foibles are often condoned or overlooked; not so with the graduate who is to serve his parish for a number of years and who is expected to display mature judgment in act and word.

For someone thrust into a parish where new situations are as unexpected and varied as the individuality of the men and women who create them, no case book or rule of thumb can provide all the answers. The ongoing life of the Church is, however, a common responsibility shared with the young graduate by bishops, presbyteries and more experienced colleagues. The wise young ordinand will early seek their counsel and will certainly avoid the fatal error of regarding himself as a *prima donna* who cannot take advice.

Yet, in spite of the urgent demands of practical problems, the greatest challenge to the young minister will come in an area where he may sense no difficulty at all. It will be the problem of utilizing what he has so recently learned about the Bible, church history, and Christian thought in his

sermons. It is not being suggested that he should regale his congregation with the intricacies of pentateuchal criticism or the dangers of Apollinarianism. But these things should inform his preaching, and the sad fact is that too often they do not. One of the serious temptations the young preacher will face is to leave off the rigorous discipline of biblical criticism and preach ideas suggested by the words of the English text. Another temptation will be to treat theology as the hobby of the specialist and so of no concern to the layman. To yield to such temptations would limit preaching to the small range of ideas assimilated during student days or to allow it to conform to the prevailing temper of the times.

This is not good enough for the present age. The lives and outlook of people today are undergoing a reorientation at least as radical as that preceding the Reformation. To read a journal such as *Scientific American* is a salutary and sometimes disturbing experience for the contemporary theologian. Just as the views of Galileo and Copernicus and the discovery of new peoples in the antipodes and the Americas unknown to earlier Christian anthropologists called for a reassessment of earlier theology, so modern views of the nature of the universe and of life, including the possibility of life on other planets, mean that the story of salvation must be seen in a new perspective. The rapid political developments of our day, with the rising power and influence of non-Christian peoples, are creating an entirely new climate for the Church, different from that which existed when Christendom was almost synonymous with western civilization or when the development of colonialism was paralleled by the expansion of Christian missions. In some ways, Christianity is once again becoming a minority religion as it was before the time of Constantine.

In such an age it is not enough for the preacher simply to continue the routine of the past. He must discover for himself and for his people the relevance of the biblical message for the new age. And he must instruct laymen in the basic theology of Christianity in such a way that they can clearly distinguish it from popular contemporary ideologies. In this task a knowledge of great theologians such as Augustine and Luther who performed similar functions in their day is an indispensable guide. In other words, the young minister of 1960 must make a conscious effort to utilize his theological education in his preaching. More than ever it is important that he should be a practising biblical critic and theologian if he is to provide leadership for his people in the exciting ministry that lies ahead.

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