

BOARDMAN

THE DIGNITY AND IMPORTANCE OF  
THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

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THE  
DIGNITY AND IMPORTANCE  
OF THE  
CHRISTIAN MINISTRY:

AND THE  
*Disloyalty of Churches in our Large Cities*

IN WITHHOLDING  
THEIR SONS FROM THE WORK.

BY THE  
REV. HENRY A. BOARDMAN, D.D.,  
OF PHILADELPHIA.

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PHILADELPHIA:  
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## THE DIGNITY AND IMPORTANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY,

AND THE DISLOYALTY OF THE CHURCHES IN OUR LARGE CITIES,  
IN WITHHOLDING THEIR SONS FROM THE WORK.

THOSE who are interested in the training of candidates for the sacred office, have had their attention called to a fact of peculiar and painful significance, to wit: the small number of young men in our larger towns and cities, such especially, as stand in no need of pecuniary assistance from the Church, who have of late years devoted themselves to this work. Considering the numbers, the intelligence, and the affluence, comprised in our churches, in any of the principal cities, together with the general ability and efficiency of their pastors, it would be reasonable to expect a large and constant accession to the ranks of the ministry from this source. But the case is otherwise. These flourishing churches contribute but a comparatively small number of their sons to this service, particularly if the statement be confined to the class just now specified. It is not, that fewer young men are converted in these congregations than in the rural districts. But they seek other occupations. The preaching of the Gospel has no attractions for them. They prefer a secular to a spiritual calling—the world to the Church.

Every one must feel that there is a fault somewhere. Is it with our children? Is it with our mode of training them? Is it with the prevailing systems of education? These questions are but too pertinent. Different parties might answer them differently. But there is one thing apparent, the sacred office is not held in proper estimation. There is an obvious necessity for inviting both parents and their children to consider this. It may assist them in adjusting their plans of life by a more scriptural standard. It may save them some unavailing regrets.

The general proposition to be laid down, on this subject, is, that GOD HAS PUT SIGNAL HONOUR UPON THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY, BY CLOTHING IT WITH A DIGNITY, AN IMPORTANCE, AND A USEFULNESS, WHICH CAN BE CLAIMED FOR NO OTHER OFFICE.

The terms employed here may possibly bring before the mind the Levitical Priesthood, which was directly instituted by the Deity,

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to stand between himself and the people, to offer sacrifices on their behalf, and to be the only medium by which they could approach him in their formal worship.

It is easy to see, that an order of men clothed with these exalted functions, might justly challenge a pre-eminence in dignity and rank above the rest of the race. But we arrogate no such position for the Christian ministry. The ministers of the Gospel are not *priests*. The New Testament knows no official priesthood but that of our Lord Jesus Christ; himself both Priest and sacrifice, sole Priest and sole sacrifice of the new dispensation. The moment we pass from the Old Testament to the New, the sacerdotal element vanishes. There is no temple, no altar, no incense, no robed and mitred mediators between God and man. The whole gorgeous paraphernalia of the Aaronic ritual has disappeared, and in place of it, we behold a Church severely simple in its worship and sacraments, and a ministry commissioned, not to offer sacrifices, but to *preach* Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

But in denying the sacerdotal character of this office, we derogate nothing from its proper dignity and value. The outward pomp of the Hebrew ceremonial may impress the senses; but we may argue with the Apostle, "if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious." That whole dispensation was in order to this one. The Levitical priesthood and the temple were merely to usher in the Christian minister and the sanctuary. With the great sacrifice promised and prefigured from the time of the Apostacy, there was given to the world the final and complete revelation of the Divine will; the Church was remoulded into its last and permanent form (for this world); and the ministry was instituted to carry forward the great design of its organization.

There is, then, no secular office or rank which may claim *so august an origin*. In all the arrangements of human affairs, we devoutly acknowledge a superintending Providence. He is the source of political authority and civil government. "The powers that be are ordained of God." His agency has been exerted in framing the various types of Christian civilization, and establishing the professions and occupations which find place in the social structure. But for none of these was the way specifically prepared by a preliminary dispensation extending through many centuries. None of them is shadowed forth in those holy oracles which embody all that the Deity saw fit to communicate to man, during a period of four thousand years, for his perpetual guidance. This honour belongs to the sacred ministry alone. And we claim for it herein a superiority to any and all the distinctions, organic or subordinate, which pertain to human society.

This estimate of the office will be confirmed, by adverting to *the circumstances attending its institution*.

In the 68th Psalm there is an eloquent passage descriptive of



the Saviour's ascension, surrounded by shining ranks of angels. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, *thou hast received gifts from men*; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." The Apostle, in writing to the Ephesians, cites this passage and applies it to Christ. And he then refers to the ministry of reconciliation by way of exemplifying these *ascension gifts* received by the Saviour from the Father, and by him bestowed upon the world. "And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The very minuteness of this enumeration, comprehending as it does, both the extraordinary and the ordinary, the temporary and the permanent officers of the Church, shows the importance to be attached to the transaction. No sooner has the Redeemer returned a conqueror to his throne, and entered upon his glorious reward, than he establishes the *ministry* on a perpetual foundation, as one of the first and greatest blessings with which he can endow the world. Had it been some political or scientific dignity which he created with this solemnity, it is impossible not to believe that it would have commanded the reverence and stimulated the aspirations of mankind in all ages, as the noblest of all distinctions. Is it less august or less worthy of homage, because it is a spiritual, not a secular office?

So far from it, we derive from this circumstance another argument to illustrate its pre-eminent worth and importance: it is *spiritual in its aims and objects*.

It is the common characteristic of the pursuits which are habitually, though not always avowedly compared with it, that they begin and end with this world. Commendable they may be, useful, essential to the very existence of society, and implicated with our dearest earthly relations and rights; but they belong exclusively to the life that now is. Let us glance at the two professions which attract to themselves so large a portion of the educated talent of every Christian country. No one would permit himself to disparage these professions. No State can rise to a high pitch of civilization, without a learned and able judiciary, and a skilful medical faculty. The annals of the bar and of medicine present an array of distinguished names, which reflect honour upon the human race. And yet it will not be claimed for them, that the objects they contemplate are the most important which can engage the human mind. One of them has to do with questions of property and personal liberty, and with the administration of government. The other is concerned about health and life. Restricting the view to the pre-



sent world, there are no subjects better deserving our profound study, or more suitable to exercise our best powers, than these. But they are shut in by the narrow horizon of the orb we dwell upon. Not one of them pierces that fragile curtain, which divides the seen from the unseen, the transient from the eternal.

Nor is this the whole truth. The too common effect of them, with ardent minds, is, to blind them to all which lies beyond their field of view. There are honourable exceptions, but eminent lawyers and physicians are not apt to be active Christians. Their pursuits are too engrossing and too distracting, to encourage any special attention to the study of the Scriptures. It must even be charged, that, as actually prosecuted, they often foster prejudices which are unfriendly to the personal reception of the Gospel. It is somewhat unusual for men deeply enlisted in these professions, to become Christians. It is well if those who are Christians, do not allow their piety to deteriorate under the influence of their absorbing avocations. This is, by no means, a uniform result, but numerous examples mark the point as one of danger.

When we turn from these two professions to the third, which, like them, is distinguished by the epithet, "liberal," a widely different scene opens to the view. The ministry, it is true, is not dis severed from the present world. The themes with which it is conversant, are interlaced with all our affairs, with our duties and our pleasures, our temptations and our trials, our successes and our reverses, with all our business, all our plans, all our desires, and all our motives. Its jurisdiction comprises whatever life comprises, whether it be life in the senate or in a cell, life on a throne or in a hovel. But this is not its whole field. The broad realm with which the Christian ministry has to do, is eternity. It addresses itself to man's immortal nature. Without overlooking his terrestrial relations, its primary concern is with his relations God-ward. It seeks to reclaim him from his apostacy, to renew the concord between himself and his Maker, to assist and guide him in the duties of this life, and prepare him for the life to come.

In accordance with this general design, the subjects with which it is occupied, and which it is commissioned to press upon the attention of the world, are the most momentous ever presented to the human mind. Regarded simply as an exercise for the intellectual powers, the examination of such themes as the nature and attributes of the Deity, the primitive condition and the fall of man, redemption, the incarnation and death of Christ, the new birth, the ground of pardon, death and its consequences, and the future states of the righteous and the wicked, are deserving of the earnest study of the most gifted of our race. The proper tendency of such investigations is to strengthen the mind and improve the heart. And whatever advantages of this sort they may involve, must accrue to those who are brought into daily and familiar contact with them. But it is not for themselves they are dealing with

these subjects. It is for the well-being of their race. It is to stay the curse in its devastating career; to bring back this revolted world to its allegiance, and to prepare myriads of lost sinners for the felicity of heaven. If you speak of jurisprudence, what are human laws and human tribunals, when compared with that Divine jurisprudence which aims at adjusting the high relations between God and man, and employs the ministry in working out its sublime results? If you speak of the healing art, what is medical skill with its rarest and best achievements, when compared with the 'balm in Gilead, and the Physician there?' If you speak of the benefits conferred by these professions upon society, who shall name them as in rivalry with that philanthropy which snatches men from an eternal hell, and raises them to the purity, and more than the happiness of angels?

Let the appeal be made to facts. Sum up the *results* of a life honourably devoted to one of these secular professions, and weigh against them the *results* of a life faithfully dedicated to the Christian ministry. Let the two examples be chosen with fairness from the same grade as to learning and ability. It will not be denied, that the career of your profound jurist or your able and sagacious physician, may present a spectacle honourable to humanity and refreshing to every cultivated mind. But place alongside of it the life and labours of one who has brought the same measure of talent and corresponding acquisitions into the work of the ministry. And then, lifting the curtain so that the aggregate results of these two lives may be seen as in the light of eternity, decide which has been spent to the best purpose; which has yielded the most fruit; which has accomplished the most for the true ends of our being.

It is too apt to be forgotten, that while other professions supply numerous incidental methods of doing good, and while they can sometimes reach objects in this way, which are beyond the sphere of the ministry, yet with this latter calling, doing good is not an incident, but the very design of its institution. It is the occupation of a minister to do good; that for which he is made a minister and to which, in so far as he is imbued with the spirit of his Master, he devotes his powers. It is doing good, too, in the highest form and the most effective way. While the whole influence of his labours goes to fit men for the duties of the present scene, and cheer them under its trials, it tells directly upon their eternal well-being. It purifies and elevates their moral nature. It harmonizes their jarring passions. It nourishes every right sentiment and affection. It brings them into sympathy with whatever is pure and lovely and of good report. It helps to train them for a glorious immortality.

Is there any other profession of which this can be said? Challenge whatever merit you may, for those who have served their country well in the senate or in the field, in the walks of business or in the walks of science; can it be denied, that their achieve-

ments lack in a great measure those qualities which stamp the fruits of a faithful ministry with grandeur and stability? Do they partake of the indestructibility of the soul? Will they last while the soul lasts? Will they elude the final conflagration, and reappear amidst the glories of that realm where not only the ransomed bow before Immanuel, but

“ Archangels sound his lofty praise,  
Through every heavenly street,  
And lay their highest honours down  
Submissive at his feet ?”

Questions like these require no answer. The end and aim of these pursuits is earthly and temporal; it is only the spiritual which is imperishable.

Nor let it be supposed that this is a mere human estimate of the sacred office. In the passage already quoted from Ephesians, it is set forth as the grand function of the ministry, to perfect the saints, and edify the body of Christ, until the whole Church shall be redeemed and sanctified and made ready for her Lord; even as another Apostle has it, as a bride is adorned for her husband. Of all the institutions in our world, that which is of chief account in God's esteem, is the Church. It was for the sake of the Church he created the world; for its sake he preserves the world; and when his purposes concerning the Church are accomplished, he will destroy the world. There is even ground to believe that he has put greater honour upon the Church than upon any other work of his hands throughout the universe, and that he will derive from it a greater revenue of glory. For the strong presumption is that no other sphere has been honoured with such a display of his perfections as that presented in the plan of redemption; and we are assured that it is the theme of adoring study to the principalities and powers in heavenly places.

It can be no trivial privilege then to have a place in the Church, even the very humblest place. It were better to be a door-keeper in that house of God, than to dwell in the proudest of earth's palaces. But the ministry are exalted beyond this. It is their august and benevolent mission, although poor earthen vessels, without merit or efficiency of their own, to carry forward, as humble instruments in God's hand, the enlargement and the victories of the Church. He has sent them forth as his heralds and ambassadors, to publish the salvation, and to say unto Zion, “Thy God reigneth!” He employs their agency in bringing sinners to repentance, and gathering them into his fold. A large proportion of those who are saved, are converted through their labours. It is by his own blessing upon their fidelity and zeal, that the Saviour is to see of the travail of his soul; and that the last and richest of his “many crowns,” is to be jewelled for the great coronation-day.

Quietly, it may be, they pursue their work; here, among the

outcasts of a large city; there, among the reckless seamen on the strand; here, among the jungles of Hindostan; there, among the clay villages of Africa. The world takes small note of their toils. It is taken up with the doings of camps and cabinets, with literature and science, with trade and industry. But to His eye who sees all things, and gauges all by an unerring standard, theirs is the *great* interest of earth. In comparison with the work those unobtrusive, uncared-for men are doing, the deliberations of senates and the flotillas with which commerce decorates the ocean, are of trifling moment. These are the agents and symbols of earthly kingdoms; those are humble architects, indeed, but not one blow they strike, nor one prayer they breathe, is lost; for they are carrying forward a kingdom which is to last forever.

Nor need it much concern them, that they lack human sympathy. They are more than compensated by the sympathy their work awakens in a better sphere. Earth slumbered when its Saviour was born; but Heaven filled the midnight air with hal-lujahs. So earth heeds not the labours of that Saviour's servants; but heaven looks on with eager gaze; and for every soul that is won from sin and Satan, a fresh tide of joy is poured through all their glittering ranks; for there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. This conflict with the powers of darkness, is theirs no less than ours. Other wars waged in our world may or may not interest them. But to everything pertaining to this war, they are keenly alive. And since the ministers of religion are appointed to be the standard-bearers in this contest, it may be presumed that these bright spirits feel some peculiar sympathy in their toils and trials. That cannot be an insignificant work, which thus concentrates upon itself the regards of the heavenly hosts. Nor is that an office to be contemned even by the loftiest of earth's potentates, around which cherubim and seraphim love to hold their encampment.

Other views of the ministry will suggest themselves to any person disposed to pursue the subject. Let this very partial and cursory survey of it suffice to justify the sentiments which have been expressed, respecting the low estimate of it entertained in our churches. Unless we have altogether mistaken the teachings of the Bible, there is no other office among men which God has clothed with such honour, none which he has made so indispensable to the progress of our race in virtue and holiness, and to their everlasting well-being. How surprising and how mournful it is, that a profession which he had graced with all this dignity and worth, should come to be disparaged, even by those who owe to it, under God, their own deliverance from the curse and all their hopes for eternity! What a miserable return is this to make to him who bestowed this office upon the world, as one of the very first and greatest of his ascension-gifts, and who has linked with it the happiness of the race in all coming generations!

In using this language, I do not forget that it is a Divine prerogative to call men to the ministry. "No man taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God." Nor has the Church ever suffered so much from any one cause, as from mere man-made ministers. But it is one thing to defend the prerogative of God; quite another to weave a disguise for our own worldliness. The sacred office constitutes no exception to the general law of Providence, that men must be *trained* for the particular sphere they are to occupy. God does not now summon men, one from his plough, another from his fishing-net, a third from the receipt of custom, and endow them by a celestial afflatus with the gifts of prophecy and miracles. Claiming the same right in the offspring of his people as in themselves, and comprehending them alike in his covenant of grace, he leaves it to Christian parents to educate their children for him; and he will then, in due time, show them in what vocation they may best serve him. It is not our duty; it is not our right to say, "This child *shall be* a minister of the Gospel." It is our privilege, and it may be our duty, to say, "If the Lord will, I desire that this child may be a minister; and I will endeavour so to educate him as believing that he may, peradventure, be called to this work."

Just here is where sin lies at the door of the Church. So entangled with the world is the Christianity of our great cities, that, as a general thing, Christian parents do not admit the *claims* of the ministry upon their sons, nor put forth any suitable exertions to train them for it. The tone of society is intensely secular. The incidental education our children receive, so much more potent for good or ill than their formal studies, is but slightly leavened with true godliness. The impressions made upon their minds by current events, are away from real religion, not towards it. As they traverse the jocund path of youth, numerous objects appeal to their natural sensibilities and vagrant passions. They are smitten with ambition. They feel the stirrings of avarice. They sigh for adventure. Religious services lose their zest. And when a profession is to be chosen, they have neither heart nor fitness for the ministry of reconciliation. Not unfrequently the prime consideration which turns them aside from it, is the sordid one of a support or a fortune. Many a young man of promising ability and exemplary character, has spent his days in amassing money, who, humanly speaking, might have been a burning and shining light in the ministry. It was his misfortune to lack wise and faithful counsel. And in place of the glorious fruits of an earnest ministry, all he has had in the end, to show for life, has been a heap of golden ore; or, possibly, a sorrowful record of fortunes made and lost, winding up with an impoverished manhood and a damaged reputation.

Will it be controverted, that there is an evil here which demands the calm and serious attention of the Church? It is one of the



beneficent fruits of the present auspicious revival with which our country is visited, that it has greatly augmented the number of candidates for the ministry. But the whole bearing of the argument with which we have been occupied, is upon the disloyalty of our *metropolitan* Christianity in withholding the children of the covenant from the service of the sanctuary. It need not be disguised, that the ministry *requires* to be recruited from the ranks of those who enjoy the social advantages common to the youth in these cities. And there is no household amongst us, which might not regard it as a signal distinction, to have one of its sons called of God to this high office.

I will not dwell upon the crowded state of the other professions. Every one knows that they are filled to repletion. The ministry alone needs to be largely reinforced. From hundreds of millions of our race, the cry is wafted to our ears, "Come over and help us." There is no hope for these millions except in the Gospel of Christ. For "how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed; and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard; and how shall they hear without a preacher; and how shall they preach except they be sent?" As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things."

Is there any nobler, loftier, better service to which a child can be dedicated, than this? Will the parents here take their children and lay them a living sacrifice upon the altar, and say, each for himself, "Here, Lord, I give to thee my best earthly offering. Accept this beloved child as thine. Renew his heart. Enrich him with thy grace. Help me to train him up for thee. Baptize him with thy Spirit. And show him in thine own time and way, how he may best serve and glorify thee in the Church." Can it be doubted, that if this were the prevailing temper among Christian parents, God would bless and honour the Church by calling many more of its sons into the ministry?

Nor is it parents only who are concerned in this matter. A discreet and faithful teacher may do much, to direct the minds of pious youth to this important subject, and to guide them to the threshold of the sacred office. What a blessing to be instrumental in introducing even a single youth of genuine Christian character and proper intellectual qualifications, into the ministry.

But this subject, above all, makes its appeal to *young men* who have given themselves to the Saviour, and have hope of eternal life through his blood. I may not affirm that it is your duty, any of you, to enter the ministry. Better to cut off a right hand or to pluck out a right eye, than to do this unless you are called of God. But I may and must say to you, that but for a low standard of piety in the churches, this subject would lie before your minds in a different light from that in which young men are apt to contemplate it. I say, a low standard of piety. There is a vast amount



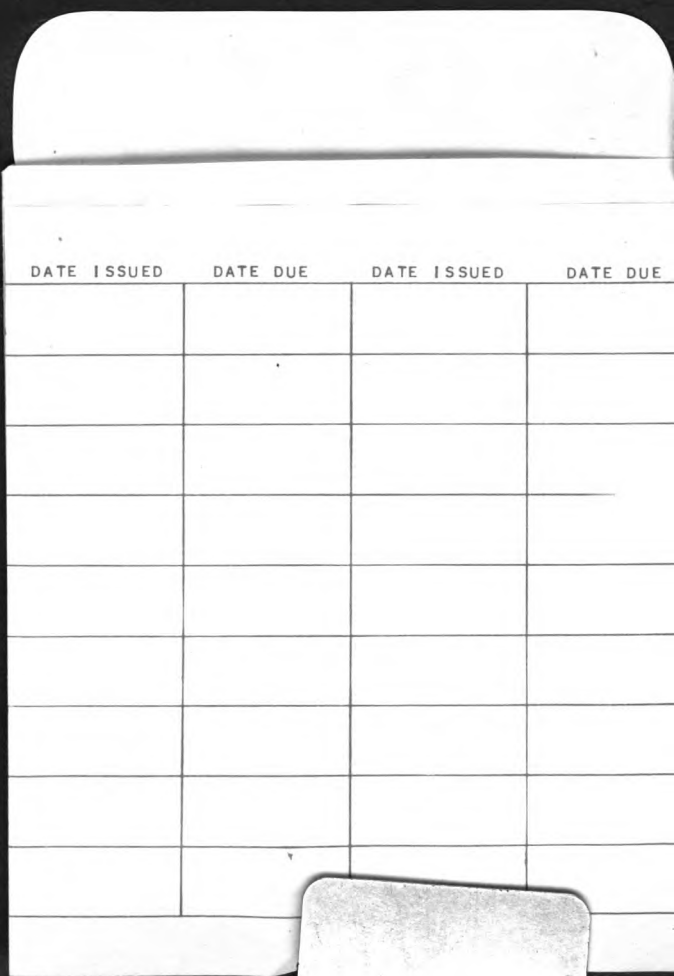
of Christian activity in the land, and there are, by God's blessing, numerous conversions, but all this may consort with an inadequate standard of religion. If this were elevated to the scriptural point, it would be a matter of deep anxiety and of importunate prayer with Christian parents, that it might please God to bless them and their households, by bringing at least one of their sons into the ministry. In this way, you would be trained to reflect more upon the subject of personal religion. And, once brought into the Church, you would weigh with greater seriousness the question, whether you were or were not, called to preach the Gospel.

This may still be the duty of some among you, who have already *embarked in other pursuits*. It has repeatedly happened within these walls, that young men have exchanged other professions, with bright prospects of success and honour opening upon them, to devote themselves to the nobler service of the sanctuary. And in every one of these instances, God has crowned them and their ministry with a rich blessing. May he so order events, that what has been, may be again and again in this place.

All I can do, is to commend this question to your serious and prayerful consideration. And as one of the helps to the due estimate of it, and to your own growth in grace, let me counsel you to read, that is, to have in hand habitually, the reading of such works as the lives of Henry Martyr, Legh Richmond, McCheyne, and others of kindred character. Peradventure, the Providence and Spirit of God may yet show you, that you have something higher and better to live for than the accumulation of property, or the fading laurels of some secular profession.

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