

THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

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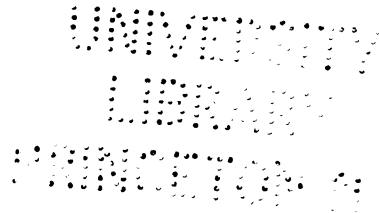
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THE MAKING OF A MINISTER

ADDRESS

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THE word "minister" in the Scriptures has many uses, but for our purpose on this occasion, it means "the minister of the Word". He is the chief officer in the church of Christ, and his multifarious duties are indicated by such scriptural titles as ambassador, bishop, evangelist, minister, pastor, preacher, presbyter, teacher, and steward. Among these titles, priest does not appear, and indeed is made conspicuous by its absence. The sacerdotal function attaches to the whole body of believers, and not in any special or exclusive sense to ministers of the Word. It is the privilege of any disciple of Christ to offer spiritual sacrifice unto the Lord without the mediation of an ecclesiastical functionary. We are not, therefore, concerned with the question of the making of a priest.

The minister of the Word should be a man. It does not appear that women were called to this office in the early church. Women were engaged in many Christian activities, and their labors were highly blessed of God, but they were not designated as ministers of the Word, and it can not be shown from the New Testament that any woman occupied this office.

The kind of man needed must be learned from the Holy Scriptures. The office is many-sided, and the duties of it are grave and responsible. The minister

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must labor in the spiritual realm, in an atmosphere both strange and uncongenial to worldly minds, and into which no one should venture rashly without an adequate acquaintance with the character of the work required of him and some manifest fitness for it. God can without doubt use any kind of a man to work His will, and the history of the church shows that for the glory of His grace He has often "chosen the foolish", "the weak", "the base", and "the despised" "to confound the wise" and "the mighty" (1 Cor. 1:26-29), and He will presumably continue this course as long as His infinite wisdom directs; yet from our point of view, as enlightened by the teachings and example of the apostles and our own experience, we believe that the best material out of which to construct a minister of the Word is a manly man. Whatever the great Head of the Church may do, as it pleases Him, in the selection of material, He has not authorized those acting in His name to "lay hands suddenly" (1 Tim. 5:22) on any kind of a man who offers himself for the ministry. Some men are constitutionally unfitted for the office, and should be firmly rejected, as an honest builder rejects an unworthy piece of timber in the construction of a handsome edifice. We should encourage manly men, of noble minds and honest hearts, to undertake this work.

Of course the minister should be a godly man; that is, a God-like man; one whose knowledge of God is first hand; not a simulator, or an imitator, or even that sort of an investigator, who is "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7); but a man of deep spiritual experience, who has heard the voice of the Spirit in his own soul and has obeyed it, and has become like God in his love of truth, of righteous-

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ness, and of men. It is impossible to make a true minister of the Word out of an unregenerate and ungodly man.

He must also be a God-called man. There is a difference here which some seem willing to obscure. A godly man and a God-called man are not necessarily identical. Not every godly man is called to preach. The minister should be able to say,

“Sunset and evening star
And one clear call for me!”

It is just as impossible to make a minister of Christ's evangel out of an uncalled man as it is out of an ungodly man. “No man taketh this honour to himself”, not even the devout child of God. It is bestowed from above. God chooses those who are to preach the Word, and in some way makes clear to them His will. Various elements may enter into a call, the man's own convictions, the indications of providence, the judgment of the Church, the desire of his friends, but a call there must be.

So much in brief as to the material out of which the minister is to be constructed; now as to the method. With material of the right kind furnished, what of the process through which it should be put in order to make a minister? It should be said that entire harmony of view does not exist in different branches of the Christian church upon this subject, but this is not the time or the place to discuss divergencies of opinion. An effort will be made simply to suggest in outline certain things which are of value in this process; it would be rash to say “things which are essential”. With the right kind of material in hand, who can point out definitely what

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things are essential to the making of a minister? Some things we know are of value to any minister, but when a man is evidently sent of God with a message to the people, it is hazardous for us to prescribe things which we believe to be essential to him for the proper delivery of it. It cannot be forgotten that some men who have fulfilled a fruitful ministry have entered upon their work with very little of what is usually regarded as helpful preparation. This is not an indication, however, that preparation is useless to the man of God. Any able-bodied man with an axe in his hand can go into the woods and build some sort of a house to shelter himself from the weather, but if he were a well trained carpenter with a chest of fine tools at his hand, he could build a better house. The fact that some men have preached the gospel with power without having received any special preparation for their work does not argue that they might not have done it more effectively had they enjoyed the advantages of theological education.

Early environment is an important factor in the making of a minister. Family life, youthful association, school and college experiences contribute not a little to the formation of his character and to his usefulness in the service. The apostle Paul owed much to the superior advantages for mental and moral culture which he enjoyed in the plastic period of youth. His life from the beginning was evidently projected upon an elevated plane by his parents, and he himself had always cherished high ideals of personal piety and duty; and to his early training no doubt much of his remarkable efficiency as a minister was due. He appreciated the same thing in Timothy, and took occasion to remind his son in the faith of the religious atmosphere of his mother's home and of his education from childhood in the Holy

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Scriptures. Many of the great preachers have traced the elements of their power to these early sources. We can hardly overestimate their value in the make-up of the minister, and the church will find herself poor in ministers of the right kind unless the spirit of Christ dwells in our homes and schools and colleges.

But on this occasion we are chiefly interested in the work of the theological seminary. Many useful ministers have never seen the inside of a seminary, but schools of the prophets and institutions for the training of men in sacred learning have existed in the church throughout the most of her history, and the vast majority of those who have served in the sacred office have received their preparation in such institutions. As we are celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of a great theological seminary, the character of work done in such an institution demands our attention.

It may be said at the outset that it should not be mechanical. Students are not to be regarded as empty barrels to be filled with theology, headed up with a diploma, and thus made ready to be shipped to various parts of the world where they can be opened on the Sabbath day for the spiritual nourishment of the people. Nor are they thermos bottles to be charged with hot air, or only with "milk for babes"; but they are living men to be trained for a holy service to living men and women. The work done in the seminary therefore should be instinct with life and in close touch with human interests. Human needs and sorrows, human hopes and aspirations should lie upon the hearts of instructors, and no effort on their part should be spared to quicken the sympathies of their students with the suffering and struggling masses of mankind.

Let me mention as the first requisite of a theological

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seminary a wholesome spiritual atmosphere. It may be thought by some that this goes without saying among those who have devoted themselves to the sacred calling, but that is not true. The student of theology is tempted to become spiritually morbid on the one hand, or spiritually apathetic on the other. One needs to be encouraged in healthy normal development, and another needs instruction in spiritual ideals and the toning up of his notions of the kinship of ministerial character and conduct. If the spiritual atmosphere of the seminary is either too fetid or too frigid, the best results in the making of ministers can not be secured. One extreme is perhaps as dangerous as the other. In the active work the course of the true minister lies between religious fanaticism on the one side and worldliness on the other, and unless therefore he comes from the seminary with a robust character, with clear conceptions of gospel truth, and with sound views as to the spirituality of the church both in its purpose and in its method, he is almost sure to be "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

This is not the time or the place to discuss with any fulness matters of curriculum. There are some things, however, which I wish to say. The course of study in a theological seminary should be comprehensive in its scope and scientific in its methods. It should embrace everything that can throw light upon the origin and history, the significance and worth of Christianity; it should honestly face all the difficulties of revelation and inspiration; and it should refuse to deal superficially with any of the great problems of supernatural religion. A theological school above all others should be thorough in its investigations of the foundations on which revealed truth rests, and should send its students out to their

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work well established in their faith in the Holy Scriptures. Men who do not believe the Bible, the source from which their message comes, certainly can not preach it to others. Preaching to be effective must be positive and dogmatic, not negative and apologetic, and what the character of it shall be must depend upon the kind of instruction the minister receives in his seminary. The teachers in our seminaries therefore should be scholars second to none in their own departments, but they should also be men of faith; otherwise, the students who sit at their feet will have no message worth delivering. Ministers should not be educated to disseminate unbelief, but, as Paul says, they should be so "established in the faith" (Col. 2:7) as to be guides and helpers of those who seek a firm footing in the divine truth. If our seminaries are to turn out men of feeble faith, they had far better cease to exist. Unbelievers are plentiful enough now without training men to add to their number.

But while the curriculum of the seminary should be broad and thorough, it should not be forgotten that all men who are called to preach the gospel are not called to become technical scholars. There are different departments of church work for which men should be specially prepared; and experience shows that, for the attainment of this end, the course of study in the seminary has not always been happily arranged. It has been too much of a procrustean bed upon which all classes of students, if they desire a degree, are compelled to lie. The law of adaptation of means to end has not been wisely applied. In recent years, this matter has been receiving more attention and it should continue to do so. In addition to a comprehensive and thorough-going required course, why should not the seminary add a large number of

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electives, adapted to fitting men for the growing needs of the church? The complicated religious activities of our day demand a variety of ministers, and many think that the theological seminary is a failure as a place for preparing men for meeting the demands of present conditions. It is charged that the men sent out are not fitted to grapple with the task before them, and that they are outstripped by others trained in the school of experience and in minor institutions, who are laboring in organizations of an undenominational character. There is enough truth in this charge to awaken the church to the importance of equipping her seminaries for dealing intelligently with every species of practical church life. We can not disguise the fact that many extra-ecclesiastical movements owe their origin to a wide-spread feeling that the church is not meeting in an adequate manner the demands of the age in furnishing men capable of dealing with present day practical problems. I do not appear as an apologist for movements of this kind, nor do I admit that the church is inadequately equipped for evangelizing people of all grades of society and for taking care of the needy, but I do believe that there is a weakness in her system of theological education which if corrected would render unnecessary most, if not all, of the extra-ecclesiastical movements of the day. I believe thoroughly in the doctrine that the church is the divinely ordained agency for the evangelization of the world. Our seminaries should cultivate more and more the missionary spirit, and instruct their students in the vast work of modern missions. Every student who leaves the halls of a theological school should be a missionary. Whether his life work be in a seminary, in a city church, in the slums, on the frontier, or in the foreign field is a

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matter of secondary importance compared with the interest he feels in the evangelization of the world and the earnestness with which he devotes himself to it. It is an open question in which position he can be of greatest use. The efficiency of every minister will depend upon his personal piety and equipment, but the pastor or the theological professor can be as truly missionary in his desire to obey the command of the Master as the man who labors among the heathen.

More attention also should be given to the study of expression. It is strange that men who have consecrated themselves to the gospel ministry should care so little to cultivate the art of public speaking; and yet, nothing is truer than that many a good sermon fails to be effective because of a poor delivery. Our seminaries should make more of this matter, and more emphasis should be laid upon the importance of correct composition and impressive delivery. The forms in which truth is clothed and the manner in which it is presented are matters of vital moment which many a minister learns, or far more frequently discovers that he has not learned, long after the day of his usefulness has passed. A man charged with a great message to the people should certainly study the best way to deliver it. Of what use would a magazine gun be on the field of battle in the hands of a man who did not know how to operate it? How can a pious and learned minister of the Word fulfil the functions of his office if he be unable to clothe the truth in living words and utter them with a voice and emphasis which will claim the attention of the people? I know this subject usually receives indifferent attention in the seminary, but after more than thirty years' experience in preaching the Word, I am convinced that the process of making

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ministers might be improved if more serious study were given to the arts of composition and delivery.

I close with the remark that Christian people everywhere feel that humanizing influences should be thrown around the young men in our seminaries; that they should not be cloistered scholastics, withdrawn from the stirring life of the day; but that they should be men of loving hearts, who, when they come forth to their work, are able to sympathize with the poor and needy, and know how to dispense the gospel of the grace of God to our perishing race.