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CREATION AS ILLUSTRATED BY EVOLUTION.

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Charles Darwin taught that new species of plants and animals have come, and continue to come, by the same route as that taken by all babies, namely, by being born of older individuals; only differing by the circumstance that the new individuals have varied somewhat from the parental features. In the concluding chapter of his *Descent of Man*, he draws the parallel between the origin of a distinct species by descent from a lower form, and the origin of an individual by the laws of ordinary reproduction. And he tries to forestall the charge of atheism by adding that the birth both of the species and of the individual "are equally parts of that great sequence of events which our minds refuse to accept as the results of blind chance."

To this general doctrine he appended a series of interesting speculations, naming them collectively *natural selection*, which in effect made the result mainly depend on second causes, and largely upon the chapter of accidents. Perhaps we should add that sometimes he seemed, notwithstanding his disavowal, to regard the accidents as blind. He often seemed to regard chance not as an instrument of Providence, but as a substitute for Providence. He indeed admitted, as mathematicians can prove, that there is no absolute chance in the course of nature; but he was not of a philosophical mind, and hence people were puzzled, when by the aid of chance he explained phenomena which had been usually ascribed to supernatural activity. It was this feature which gladdened the foes of religion, and dismayed many of its friends.

I shall always feel grateful that before the appearance of Dar-

## THE MINISTER AS AN INTERCESSOR.

BY REV. RUSSELL CECIL, D. D.,

*Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church, Richmond, Va.*

It is one of the chief functions of the office of the Christian minister to pray with and for the people. In that respect there still inheres in the office one important duty of the Levitical priest which was to represent the people before God. While it is true that all believers are now priests, and have immediate access to the throne of grace, yet ministers of the gospel are necessarily leaders of the church in its devotions, and by reason of their official position they are recognized as intercessors. We do not here raise the question as to the efficacy of ministerial intercession in comparison with the prayers of private individuals—that belongs to the nature of the ministerial office—but we have it in mind to discuss the manner in which this duty should be discharged.

### I.

The serious nature of the service of intercession should engage the earnest consideration of all Christian ministers. It is no light matter to undertake to voice the desires of souls in their approaches to God, and to ask for them such blessings as they need and such as are agreeable to the divine will. Nothing could be more incongruous than the prayers that are sometimes offered not only in the services of the sanctuary, but also on special occasions by those who are put forward to lead in this holy exercise. The thought, the language, the tone of voice, the attitude are all inappropriate, and combine to produce an impression anything but salutary and devotional. The conclusion of the thoughtful worshipper is that not a moment of reflection had been given by the leader to the subject before endeavoring to present the claims of the people before God. Such performances betray one if not all of three things: An inadequate conception of the sacred nature of the duty of intercession; a lamentable inability to conduct the exercise in an edifying manner; an inexcusable, not to say, sinful carelessness. No minister can become a satisfactory

and helpful intercessor for the people who is not deeply impressed with the holy and significant character of the work which he is engaged in doing. There must weigh upon his heart the sins and the sorrows of the saints, their infirmities, their trials, and their aspirations. He must remember the infinitely exalted nature of God, and at the same time God's fatherly love for his children, his interest in their welfare, and his willingness to hearken to their cries; he must be conscious of his own unworthiness, and at the same time of the all-prevailing merit of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Intercessor with God for men; he must be mindful of the promises of God to hear and answer prayer and of the examples of believers in all ages of the church who have tested his faithfulness; and he must approach God with that spiritual boldness which is born of unwavering confidence in the character of the Most High.

## II.

The service of intercession demands preparation. We pass by that necessary preparation of heart which all Christian ministers are presumed to have when they answer the call of God to enter this work. Of course, the unconverted man has no fitness for the service of intercession and the unconsecrated man has no power with God. The intercessor on earth, like the Intercessor in heaven, must have *living* communion with the Father. But there is other preparation of a secondary nature, and scarcely less important, which should be earnestly sought.

First, the minister should be acquainted with the wants of the people; if he is not, he cannot represent them before the throne of God. If his knowledge of men is theoretical rather than practical and sympathetic, how can he intercede for them? Many prayers are academic. They are constructed after a model in the language of the schools, and while useful on some formal occasions, they do not meet the hearts of men and make them burn with holy aspiration after God. The true intercessor must know the people and love them. He must weep with them in their sorrows, he must be able to voice their confessions of sin, and he must clothe the agonies of their souls, as he wrestles with God for them, in the language of the home and of every-day experience.

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First, the minister should be acquainted with the wants of the people; if he is not, he cannot represent them before the throne of God. If his knowledge of men is theoretical rather than practical and sympathetic, how can he intercede for them? Many prayers are academic. They are constructed after a model in the language of the schools, and while useful on some formal occasions, they do not meet the hearts of men and make them burn with holy aspiration after God. The true intercessor must know the people and love them. He must weep with them in their sorrows, he must be able to voice their confessions of sin, and he must clothe the agonies of their souls, as he wrestles with God for them, in the language of the home and of every-day experience.

Again, the intercessor should be intelligent in the revealed will of God. Many men do not lead well in prayer because they do not know how to pray or what to pray for. Indeed, we all need, as the disciples of old, to be taught to pray. We must know the will of God if we are to ask those things which are agreeable to his will. Much prayer comes to naught because it is not in line with his will as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The best preparation for prayer is the study of the Scriptures. If we knew his revealed will, we should not cross it in our petitions. Prayer is communication between our souls and God, and we should know what God has to say to our souls in his word, and then we will know better what requests to make of him. This is especially important in the matter of intercession for others. How unfortunate it is for a minister to offer unscriptural petitions, that is, to ask for things in public prayer which are obviously contrary to the revealed will of God! And yet this is not an infrequent occurrence; for example, when prayers are partisan, sectarian, of purely selfish. God does not promise to answer those prayers which strike at the foundation of his kingdom, which is a kingdom of truth and peace and love.

Moreover, the minister should make preparation for intercession in thought and language. It is somewhat surprising that while most ministers feel the necessity of making some preparation for speaking to their fellowmen on religious subjects, they act as if preparation were needless in speaking to God in behalf of their fellowmen. The impression appears to prevail among many, who discard the use of liturgical prayers, that there is something inherently wrong in studying or writing a prayer. Prayer, they think, should be left to the spontaneous ebullition of the religious emotions and the expression of these emotions to such language as may occur to one at the moment. In answer to this notion it may be said that whatever may be one's practice in his private devotions in this respect, the position is erroneous as regards public prayer in which one presumes to lead a company of worshippers. That calls for meditation, the arrangement of one's thoughts in systematic and logical order, and the selection of clear and appropriate language. Surely there is no virtue in a prayer which is a perfect jumble of rhapsodical exclamations from beginning to end. If a minister desires to become edifying in prayer as an intercessor for the people he should

make both the thought and the expression of prayer matters of study. Effectiveness in this exercise, as in preaching, so far at least as the outward impression is concerned, is the result of hard and persistent labor. Of course, mere beauty of thought and expression in a prayer does not make it "prevail" with God, but it is more helpful to the worshipper, and it is more honoring to the Heavenly Father to whom it is addressed. Familiarity with the language of the Scriptures and frequent devotional writing are highly beneficial to those who would perfect themselves in the forms of prayer. The prayers of the church also which have come down to us through the centuries are well worthy of study. The wants and experiences of God's people in all ages are much the same, and the language of devotion for one is ordinarily suitable for another. The prayers of David have been adopted by multitudes of others in different nations and have afforded a satisfactory vehicle for the expression of their pious devotions. No better models can be found for those who desire to attain proficiency in the language of intercession.

### III.

The occasions upon which the minister must exercise the function of intercession are numerous and varied. In general they may be designated as public and private. He must voice the prayers of the people in the public exercises of the sanctuary, in the administration of the sacraments, in the conduct of funerals and weddings, in the ordination and installation of church officials, in dedication services, and at the opening of ecclesiastical, political, legislative, and educational assemblies. It is impossible for him to perform the service required of him under such varied circumstances acceptably to the people and in a manner honoring to God without careful preparation. Some ministers who pray well in the church where they are accustomed to officiate make lamentable failures on unusual occasions. They seem to be unmindful of the fact, until the exercise begins, that the thought and language of the prayer should be adapted to the occasion and should bear some relation to the matter in hand as expressive of the desires of those present. Hence the prayer is sometimes painfully embarrassing because so obviously inappropriate. No conscientious minister of God should flatter

himself into supposing that without previous thought he can appear in any assembly on any occasion and offer a suitable and edifying prayer. No one should imagine that even if he could do it that there would be any virtue in the performance; that is, that such extemporaneous prayer would be more satisfactory to men or more acceptable to God than one which had been carefully prepared. A minister should be willing to act as intercessor for the people on public occasions, when requested to do so, but he should be mindful of the gravity and sacredness of the service he is to render, and he should be ready to lift the thoughts and desires of the assembly to God in fitting language.

In saying that the minister must also exercise the function of intercession in private, reference is not had to his own private devotions. His personal spiritual life is not the matter now under discussion. There are many private occasions when he must pray with the people. These are found at the family altar, in pastoral visitation, in homes of sorrow, at sick beds, in hospitals, in prisons, and with penitents. The minister should cultivate great facility in the use of the language of intercession if he wishes to serve God's people acceptably as such occasions may require. Much of his most useful ministrations in the gospel must be accomplished in this way. The thought which brings conviction to the sinner, light to the penitent, comfort to the sorrowing, or help to the weak may be suggested in prayer. In homes of darkness it seems to be easier to speak to God than to man, and it is the experience of many a pastor that he frequently finds himself in the midst of surroundings in which utterance is difficult until he kneels to God in prayer. Then the heart melts and the words flow, and he is able to suggest that scriptural truth which is a balm to the suffering soul with which he is laboring.

Some ministers appear to be out of place in sick chambers and in scenes of distress. They have no message for the tempest-tossed and the troubled. If such men could only remember that they are the appointed intercessors for the suffering saints, and if they would cultivate the spirit and language of prayer suitable for all conditions in life they would find their task easier and more satisfactorily accomplished.

This function of the ministerial office is not sufficiently emphasized. It does not occupy large enough place in the minds



of young men who are preparing for the ministry or in the minds of many of those who have already entered upon their work. It is perhaps overshadowed by the importance attached to the sermon. We should not permit our fear of merging the gospel minister into the priest (a condition from which the church has suffered much) prevent us from giving proper attention to the matter of intercession. The sermon is a serious thing, but so also are the prayers of the minister. Who can estimate the power of them in building up the kingdom? Tennyson says:

“More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?  
For so the whole round world is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”