

Religious Life and Work

Nisi Dominus Frustra—"Except the Lord, it is in vain."

The Twentieth Century Minister

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It is altogether in accordance with the new spirit of unity and co-operation abroad amongst men that the rank and file of the church should be invited at this crisis to join in the anxious deliberations of their spiritual leaders. The voice of the people has been the voice of God at all times and certainly not more so in past ages than now, when the general advancement in education and culture has so far reduced the gap between layman and professional as in many respects to obliterate the distinction. In the face, therefore, of a common crisis, we ought boldly to grasp at this opportunity of exchanging views, however conscious we may be of the grave responsibility we are now assuming.

Any such undertaking as this is fraught with many dangers; in political and in religious matters, every one regards himself as an authority whose opinion must be worthy of immediate consideration. At all times and from many quarters the church has had reason to expect harsh criticism, and yet contributions of a constructive character at this time may be conspicuous by their absence.

Re-Statement of Ideals Would Advance Religion.

Nor need this absence of constructive criticism and suggestion occasion serious discouragement or dismay. The church at least, whatever else, must in the very nature of things, be conservative and, while keen to lead, must exercise a prudent judgment in setting a medium pace. A restatement of the old ideals and functions of the Christian minister, therefore, would very much advance the cause of true religion at this time. Such a cataclysm as the Great War is apt to upset our judgment and lead us to believe that the past was entirely wrong. The war, we are told, and the attitude of the nations as a whole leave the church no other alternative but an advanced position at the head of the moving army. There is a profound awakening in education throughout the world. All ranks, all professions are organizing their forces. Why not the church? Nay, why not the church in especial, since all else is subsidiary to the spiritual?

True indeed, but already the columns of the press groan with new schemes and forward movements that upon closer inspection are found to be both old and retrograde, betraying nothing more clearly than the great need of vision and statesmanship that the Church will require to exercise in the years to come. Where, then, are those leaders to come from and how is this vision and statesmanship to be acquired? That may best be answered by a direct consideration of the ideals and functions of the Christian minister.

The Qualities That Make for Success.

The qualities that make for success in the church are baffling in their complexity; on the practical, intellectual and emotional side of his nature the minister must indeed be well equipped. After all, while the Word of God is inspired, its execution can only be accomplished through the human medium, frail and unreliable at the best. It must be interpreted by the minister and applied by the congregation, and the reaction of the former upon the latter depends upon personality, intellectual equipment and practical experience, of which the greatest is personality, since while enriched by the others, it is independent of them.

As to personality, we note that the young probationer must have an avocation, must be prepared to sacrifice everything for that, must be distinguished by sincerity, probity, forcefulness, humility in act and speech, must give abun-

dant proof of a capacity to impress himself upon others by spontaneous suggestion. In a word, there must be ever present an innate aptitude for leadership.

In regard to intellectual equipment, the theological student should, in addition to a competent training in his own more limited field, be well versed in history, economics, educational theory, even medicine, and as many branches of science as he cares to study. He cannot know too much.

Experience With Nature and God.

Then, with a strong personality, supported by an intellectual equipment of no mean order, he will go forth to test his strength, to gain his practical experience, in the open, in Northern Ontario, the prairies of the Northwest, the valleys of British Columbia, or the distant regions of the Yukon. Here conditions are severe and the elemental is oftentimes nearer the surface than in the more highly developed civilization of our large towns and cities. Like the prophets of old—our most powerful preacher will be he who has met his God in lonely sojourn by field and flood, where in those exquisite moments of which every leader of men must be capable, he has dreamed dreams and in virgin purity of heart seen visions of God manifested in sea and sky, wavelet and cloudlet, in the lonely bird at sunset or the tiny flower at the dawn of the rosy fingered morn. His must be the inspiration that will make us tremble to the very core of our being, that will elevate us to the heights of sublime action.

Much to be Learned Among the Pioneers.

Nor in his lonely sojourn will the elements of a rich human experience be wanting. Through the fiery furnace of sin, sorrow, humiliation, the sordid in every form known to mortal man he may have to go. There, and there alone will he learn fully to appreciate the depths of infamy and heights of self-sacrifice, of which the human being (I might almost say the same human being), is capable. It is there that his preconceived notions of self-righteousness, the doctrine of sin and the damnation attendant thereon, the necessity or even possibility of a profession of faith leading to salvation, all that, I say, will be there put to the tremendous test of practical experience amongst men, the pioneers of their race, spending their lives in making the rough places smooth for the generations to come; men whose urgent necessity is instruction in how to live, not how to die.

We are reminded of one such in the Okanagan Valley who, some five years ago, on his deathbed was asked by a Presbyterian minister if he would care for a prayer of intercession. "Don't bother," he said. "I have lived my life in my own way without considering God; why should I torment him now?" and yet, these same men can be as tender as children, whom they love with the most unselfish devotion, and in a moment of crisis they will surrender all, life itself, that others may survive.

Restored at last to the city, our minister will have to remember times without number that—

"— tasks in hours of insight willed

"Can be through hours of gloom fulfilled."

Here, the enemies of the church claim, is the scene of past failure, present heart burning and future testing; here they say, was consummated that coalition with reactionary forces which has alienated untold thousands from the benefits of church worship. Of that more anon; suffice it for the