

## An "Open Letter" to the Clergy at Home.

(Issued in Pamphlet Form by S.P.C.K.)

[Bishop Gwynne writes: "The following letter, which represents the point of view arrived at by many, is written by an experienced Chaplain who has been some time in France."]

It has been thought good by our leaders amongst the chaplains out here that an "open letter" should be written to the clergy at home by one who has had not only some experience of the life and work of the Church in several large and well-organized parishes at home, but has now had the further privilege of experience of life with our officers and men in the trenches, with those "further back," and with other chaplains of all denominations.

This letter, it need hardly be said, is written in no spirit of criticism, but with the earnest desire that we should face together a common problem, fulfil a common responsibility, and rise to a common opportunity.

Coming from home one finds that the result of one's experiences out here is nothing less than staggering and bewildering.

Three great facts seem to stand out as accepted and established as the result of our experiences of the last two and a half years.

### I. The Sense of Need.

It is generally agreed that there is a really awakened consciousness and need of "something" amongst our men. The evidence that such a need does exist, and that they feel that something is lacking in the fulness of things, is shown, not merely by their natural desire for help, safety, or companionship in hardships and danger, but even to a much greater extent by their deep-rooted craving for a counter excitement or stimulus whenever they are in rest or circumstances offer such opportunities:

"Thou hast made us for Thyself and we are restless till we rest in Thee."

It is not merely that they crave for help and protection because they feel their own insufficiency. There is a far deeper reason. They are like the disciples of old on the lake. They have obeyed a "Stranger voice" which gave them an order and a call. And now, like the disciples, they are amazed at their "success," at the unthought-of and unsuspected power to suffer and endure with they have been endowed. For that is the answer which, in His faithfulness, God has given to their obedience to the call of duty; though still many of them "know not that it is Jesus" Whom they serve. Even so they do want, I believe, to offer and to worship if they can find a satisfying and lasting object for their devotion.

### II. Christianity—The Answer.

The war, so far from shaking our faith in Christianity, has, we all agree, revealed it in its true value as the only satisfaction of human needs.

Our "creed" (in the widest sense of the word) has come not only untarnished, but with added brilliance, through the strain and stress of the war and its problems. The Cross has been "vindicated" by the spiritual experiences of the past two and half years, not merely because it has stood all tests, but because it goes further: it "adopts the offensive," and stands revealed as the only answer to the riddles which the war has asked. The Cross still "stands amid the ruins," and we are more than ever before convinced that it will stand.

### III. The Failure of "Organized Christianity."

The Church, or "Organized Religion," has admittedly failed to provide the means of supplying the needs of our men, and of satisfying their aspirations. The bulk of the men seem to view organized religion with suspicion or indifference. Not for a moment would I suggest that they are irreligious, for, in the widest sense of the word, they are intensely religious. There is a sincere and deep-rooted belief in God as a Father, and an amazing conviction, shown in the region of the life and will, as to the place held by love amongst world-values.

But to the majority of them the Church does not appeal because it does not seem able to develop their "natural" longing for God, or to bring home to them a satisfying interpretation of "Love." Of course, there are brilliant and numerous exceptions, not only in the case of individuals, but also in certain battalions, especially territorial battalions, where the chaplains were known, and where organized religious observances had become "established" as a regular part of routine and life. But even here there are signs of change as new drafts take the places of the original men. It is a sad fact that, in spite of a history of devoted service, of the countless saintly lives of Churchmen, of the carefully organized machinery of the Church, and (in many cases) of the definite and systematic teaching given by many able and loving teachers, the Church has failed to grip the lives of the majority of our men, for she has neither evoked from them the spirit of service nor supplied their spiritual needs. Nay, one would go even further, and say that many men who "professed and called themselves Christians" at home have lost their grip upon "Churchmanship" out here. For they have found that the call upon their spiritual service, and the strength of their belief in spiritual values (sacramental or otherwise), which in former days were adequate, are insufficient to stand the strain of new surroundings and overwhelming needs. Naturally, such a condition of things makes the religion of men "inarticulate," and it only adds to the pathos of our position when we realize what vast efforts are made by a number of men (a far greater number than we have any idea of) to satisfy their needs in prayer. I know a chaplain who, when a raid was about to take place, suggested to a sergeant taking part in it that some prayers should be said with the men before "going over the top," and who received the reply: "Don't make any mistake, sir; I've never known a man go over but what he says a prayer first." And you have your R.F.C. pilot who tells you "I simply couldn't do my job up there amongst the 'archies' unless I was always conscious of Another Presence."

I shall never forget how, at a meeting of N.C.O.'s in connection with the Army Mission, when I said, "At any rate, very many more men say prayers than we chaplains think," a wholehearted and universal murmur of assent ensued. And yet in the majority of these cases there was but feeble or spasmodic inclination towards any form of "organized religion."

Three facts, then, are revealed to us:—

- (i.) The men are ready because they have felt the need of something which they have not got.
- (ii.) The certainty (which we hold more strongly than ever) that in Christianity lies not only the satisfaction of all human needs, but the secret of "life" as being the "fulness of joy."
- (iii.) Yet the efforts of our Church seem to leave the majority of the men indifferent or even unsympathetic.

If these facts are as true as they appear to be, the only possible conclusion to which we are driven is that somehow or other we have

failed in the manner of the presentation and commendation of our Faith.

### IV. Reasons for Our Failure.

The purpose of this letter is to suggest possible reasons for our failure, but to do so in a great spirit of hope. This hope will spring from our firm and unwavering belief that the Church is the "Body of Christ," the embodiment and instrument of the love of an all-wise, all-powerful God. And there is the further hope that just *because* we have been driven by circumstances to face realities, to learn new lessons, to acknowledge our failure, and to confess the inadequacy of our methods, now it is possible for the loving power of God to work out His purposes. We shall not have lived through the past months of the war in vain if, at least, we have broken down that impression of "smug" self-satisfaction which we have given (perhaps all unconsciously) to so many of our men.

Certainly we are not crying "stinking fish," but we are crying "bad fishermen," and there lies our hope.

Let me, then, humbly try to suggest some of the possible reasons for our failure, just as they occur to one out here:—

(a) *Impatience and Lack of Sympathy.*—Is it that we have been impatient and unsympathetic in the past? I was discussing this matter the other day with an officer who is a keen thinker (before the war he was an artist), and he laid great stress upon the importance of taking into our calculations one great fact. Even before the war changed everything, the spirit of development, change, and even chaos, seemed to be moving in all departments of life, and therefore anything in the nature of too "nice" definition or of a religion too concisely organized, seemed almost impossible. He pointed out that there are certain great "principles" which are eternal and will abide, but that we must beware of the danger of cramping or obscuring them by impatience or a natural desire for definiteness. It seemed to me that here was a suggestion worthy of our consideration and self-examination. Have we been impatient with the spirit of the age and been anxious (as he put it) to "answer questions which have not been asked"?

(b) *The Spirit of Materialism.*—Again, could we truthfully say that we have been unaffected by the spirit of "materialism," which holds so strong a sway? The desire for tangible "results" and the spirit of "competition" are purely materialistic, yet they have entered largely into our work and life, and thereby, quite unconsciously, have tended to lower our estimate of spiritual values as the real values. And have we not, on the other hand, done something to encourage this spirit in those whom we would teach and help, by representing religion all too often as "something to do you good" rather than as a means of drawing out all that is best in a man? Have we not allowed ourselves to strive to make religion and religious observances "attractive" instead of staking all upon higher grounds of appeal to service?

(c) *Limited Views.*—But perhaps one of the chief reasons for our failure has been our tendency to "departmentalize" life and religion. Somehow or other, we have largely succeeded, by our lives, our teaching, or "organization," in giving men the impression that "religion" and "life" correspond, as it were, to "Sundays" and "weekdays." The war has brought this failure home to us very clearly. Out here Sunday is like any other day (only very often "more so," as it happens), and, living as we do side by side with the men, we are forced into seeing how supremely important it is that the occasions and men of religion should be

closely united  
common life  
force of cur  
any religio  
strange to t  
and work. V  
in sympathy  
their "job,"  
secreation an  
foundation  
to see the  
a line of ap  
duce this in  
what men r  
need of "si  
tianty? A  
more to ou  
work; a re  
a challenge  
they do and  
is to begin  
and then to  
ing to brin  
fore, unreal  
We long  
God) shall  
God not or  
glad, willir  
those mean  
His word f  
true that t  
men have  
and dedica

"Come ye  
I will mak  
seems to b  
and I will  
in and for

It is the  
tions into  
evitably l  
drafts  
sary to th  
tively find  
aspirations

And thi  
of the wa  
tion, for  
men in F  
home, an  
self-sacrifi  
and patri

*Self-Sa*  
us that it  
got. Mu  
that we r  
we must  
for these  
of our r  
need of tl  
in our pi  
add the  
been ma  
almost c  
sive mov  
field abn  
only giv  
sent tim  
nearly al  
but after  
alive to  
powers  
Then, an  
light shi  
self as a  
eousness  
whole,"  
which sl

*Comra*  
that if o  
to bring  
war wer  
irreconc  
women,  
the pow  
its very  
Russia  
the call  
hopes f  
Lord de  
power t  
embraci

Our  
it has  
which l  
big, ca  
the uni  
*Hero*  
this, si  
men wi  
they l