

This is the thought that comes over me as my mind turns this morning to this ordination of priests for service in the Church of God. I think of the incalculable influence that the ministry can wield in society for good or for evil, for time and for eternity, of the power committed to their hands, of the part they have played now for the last 1800 years in the evolution of Christian Society, and I contrast with that, not by way of complaint at all, the scant notice that the world at large is accustomed to take of an ordination. What does history tell us? Christianity has been incomparably the greatest moulding influence for good in every department of human society for over 1800 years. But the teaching and spread of Christianity has depended on the regularly ordained ministry. What they taught is what has been currently believed, and what was currently believed has in the main been acted upon. When the clergy have failed in their duty the spiritual life of the nation has waned, moral restraint has given way, and licentiousness has run riot. Deprive this land to-day of its Christian clergy and you go very far towards depriving it of the knowledge of the only power on earth that brings peace to the human heart, that makes progress possible, and keeps society from disintegration. Most emphatically can Christ's words be applied to the Christian ministry, "Ye are the salt of the earth," though under ordinary circumstances it need by no means be confined to them.

So much then for the importance and the significance of this occasion. I turn and remind you that you see before you this morning what must send your mind back to apostolic days, bind you to the past and make you feel what we mean by the historical continuity of the English Church. We are an historic Church. We have our roots deep in the remote past. What you see in this ordination is no feature of merely recent times. The historian tells us that in those early days when St. John was still alive, as in the times that followed, the Church of God had the same three orders of the ministry that you see represented here to-day, bishops, priests and deacons, and that when any man was set apart for the sacred ministry of the Church it was done in solemn assembly after examination, and proof of his fitness, and by the imposition of

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