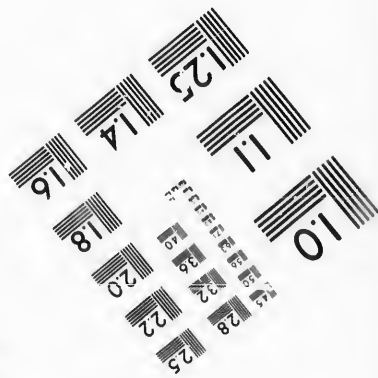
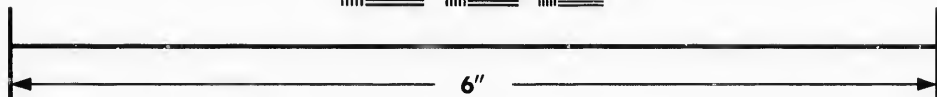
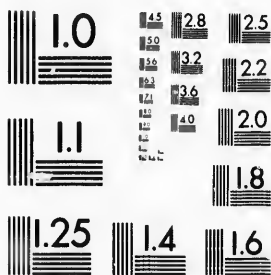


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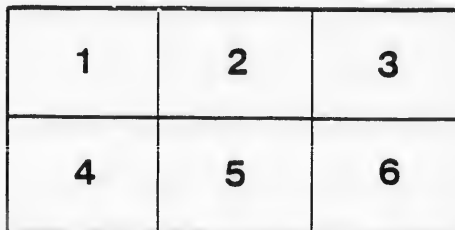
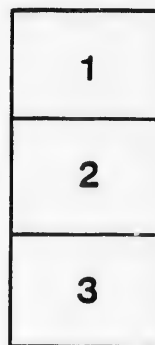
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THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE:

A Sermon

PREACHED AT AN ORDINATION OF PRIESTS,

IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF MONTREAL,

On the Second Sunday in Lent, 1852.

BY

THE REV. J. H. NICOLLS, M. A.

PRINCIPLE OF BISHOP'S COLLEGE, LENNOXVILLE.

PUBLISHED BY THOSE WHO WERE THEN ORDAINED.



MONTREAL:

PRINTED BY JOHN LOVELL,

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1852.



SERMON.

We are unto God a sweet savour of CHRIST, in them that are saved and in them that perish. To the one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?—2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

WERE any one, moved with an ambition to excel, to enquire how he might be sure of occupying a high and lofty station in life, I know not how we could better direct him towards the attainment of his object than by placing before him in its true light the office of the CHRISTIAN MINISTER. Other professions, it is true, offer more to captivate and allure the young man of narrow views or small powers of thought; the gratification of a vain-glorious temper and the love of enterprise draw away very many to the pursuit of ARMS,—an ambitious craving after distinction and the love of power lead others in their youth to seek the prominent position which the BAR and the SENATE offer,—a more enlarged and philanthropic turn of mind marks out the study of MEDICINE as their pursuit to others, who desire to benefit their fellow-men, but look no farther than this present life and the alleviation of bodily suffering; others, again, with lofty views of intellectual greatness, thirsting after knowledge themselves, and desiring to raise the general standard of mental excellence higher, devote themselves to the various branches of SCIENCE to which circumstances or the peculiar bias of their own physical temperament lead them. And they find their ambition gratified, and gain their end: and all these and other secular professions produce numbers of men who attain the distinction which their youthful ambition proposed to their pursuit, and learn at the same time by experience to see the vanity of

earthly things, and to "*desire a better country, that is, an heavenly.*"*

Yet there is also a youthful ambition, which, aiming at a still higher mark, measures esteem and honour by the wisdom and worth of him by whom we are contemned or esteemed, with respect to an unerring judgment, to infinite wisdom. † And we congratulate, the world often congratulates, upon the soundness of their choice, those who select their profession according to this view of things. It is indeed a great and glorious work to devote oneself to *fight* in the battles of the MOST HIGH, to *plead* the cause of the fatherless and oppressed, and aid mercy in triumphing over judgment, to *deliberate* and advise for those who are citizens of heaven, to *cure* the distempers of the mind, and speak peace (where none other can,) to the afflicted and distressed, to *obtain knowledge* of those heavenly mysteries which "Angels desire to look into."‡ It is an honour beyond all honours, to offer, in an especial sense, "ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice," to the LORD of Heaven and earth: to be called "a sweet savour of CHRIST unto GOD," to be "ambassadors for CHRIST,"§ "Ministers of CHRIST, stewards of the mysteries of GOD,"|| feeders of that flock, of which the ETERNAL SON "which is in the bosom of the FATHER," ¶ is the Shepherd. If any be indeed ambitious, here is the loftiest flight to which his ambition can soar.

But it may be said, on the other hand, that though this be granted, yet it is no less undeniable that the Ministerial is a Profession which involves *difficulty*, *humiliation*, and *responsibility*, such as are unequalled. And in truth this is eminently the case. But this fact constitutes one of the essential glories of this highest of Professions.

We acknowledge in matters of common life the overcoming of *difficulties* to be a credit and distinction: why

* Heb. xi. 16. † Bishop Butler's Sermon, xiii. towards the end.
‡ 1 Pet. i. 12. § 2 Cor. v. 20. || 1 Cor. iv. 1. ¶ St. John i. 18.

not here too? We admire, sordid self-love even admires, the wisdom which is able to *stoop* low to gain its end. *Responsibility* never keeps us back, where interest is at stake. Then why not apply these estimates of character in their highest and legitimate subjects?

Why not be willing to "labour more abundantly" than all the rest of the world; "yet not we ourselves, but the grace of God which is with us?"* Why not, if it so need, be willing to be found in "journeyings often, in perils of all kinds, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness?"† These *difficulties* and hardships are in various degrees met with in many other professions: should it be accounted a serious objection that they may be foretold to be (more or less) the lot of the Minister of CHRIST?

Observe, again, how often the world approves of *humiliation*, (even sordid self-abasement for sordid ends,) and praises it. Let us even here learn by the "wisdom of the world," and in choosing our profession be willing—with Moses, to "esteem the reproach of CHRIST greater riches than the treasures in Egypt,"‡—with the beaten Apostles, to "rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of CHRIST,"§—with St. Paul, "if we must needs glory, to glory of the things which concern our infirmities."|| Yes—"He that glorieth let him glory in the LORD."¶ Those whom "CHRIST strengtheneth, know both how to be abased and how to abound;—both to be full and to be hungry; both to abound and to suffer need."**

And who can avoid *responsibility* if he would? We may, we often do, blind ourselves to the fact; but responsibilities we all have, not only in matters of common life, as to our sovereign, our country, our employers, and the like: but responsibilities, whether we will or no, to the

* 1 Cor. xv. 10. † 2 Cor. xi. 26. ‡ Heb. xi. 26. § Acts v. 41.
 || 2 Cor. xi. 30. ¶ 2 Cor. x. 17. ** Phil. iv. 12.

God who made us. Shall responsibility then turn him back, who would dedicate himself to God's service upon earth? Nay rather let him "look unto the recompence of the reward."* Shall we not be willing to meet all the consequences of "feeding the flock of God, (taking oversight thereof, not lording it over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock,)" in the hope that "when the Chief Shepherd shall appear we may receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."† It is no contemptible motive, in the resurrection, when they that sleep in the dust shall awake to everlasting life or else to shame and everlasting contempt, to "*shine (then) as the brightness of the firmament, or as the stars for ever and ever.*"‡

Grant all that can be objected; the work of the "ministry of reconciliation" is a great and glorious work, a work worthy of the noblest ambition. It is written in the Scriptures that "the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away. If, (adds the Apostle,) the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory."§ Or, to return more immediately to my text, is not that a great and glorious and wonderful office, which, executed in CHRIST's behalf, is unto God a "savour of life unto life, or of death unto death?" Is it not an honour indeed to be counted like our Divine LORD, who "gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour?"||

Let us take again another view, and the Ministerial Office will further appear to be an honourable and glorious office. We are separated from the rest of our brethren into a distinct order. For what purpose? Our work is the completing of that edifice, which is "built upon Apostles and Prophets, JESUS CHRIST Himself being the

* Heb. xi. 26. † 1 Pet. v. 2. 3. 4. ‡ Dan. xii. 2. 3. § 2 Cor. iii. 7.-9.
|| Eph. v. 2.

chief Corner Stone.”* We are ordained for the “perfecting of the saints, for the work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the body of CHRIST.”† We are “joints and bands,” by which this body “having nourishment ministered and knit, together, increaseth with the increase of GOD.”‡ And without us, (not of course without our individual selves, but *without our order*) the Church cannot subsist. The edifying or building up of the Church as it is our work, so is it our glory and excellence. The *honour* of our office is no less than its *usefulness* and its *necessity*. It is declared that whoever receiveth those who are sent of CHRIST, receiveth Him.§ “He that heareth you (says our Blessed Saviour) heareth Me: and he that despiseth you despiseth Me, and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent me.”|| In its purpose, therefore, and in its consequences, as well as in itself, the Ministerial Office is a glory and an honour.

Yet is there attaching necessarily to this as to other places of glory and honourable distinction, a feeling also of a different character—a twofold feeling of awe. If the Minister of CHRIST be thus a chief medium of blessing to his people, it cannot but be an awful thing to despise and trample under foot, as some do, their authority. The Minister of CHRIST may be sent to a house that is not worthy,¶ and his salutation of peace may return to him void: he may be called upon to shake off the dust of his feet against the house or city that will not hear him nor receive him, and it is written that “it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.” And if the Minister of CHRIST be thus rightly and fairly an object of awe to the world, is he not much more so an object of awe to himself. His office makes him indeed a savour of life and of death, according as the people “will bear or will forbear.”** If his preaching be not to them who

* Eph. ii. 20.

† Eph. iv. 12.

‡ Col. ii. 19.

§ St. John, xiii. 20.

|| St. Luke x. 16.

¶ St. Mat. x. 13—15.

** Ezek. ii. 5.

hear it the power of God, then the cross of CHRIST is made of none effect, the preaching of it is "foolishness to them that perish."*

But what if he be besides, a savour of death, not simply through his office, but through his maladministration of it. Is it not an awful thing to contemplate the possibility of our losing souls—souls that never perish,—through our own fault or carelessness: that when the Great Shepherd counts His sheep, and other pastors give theirs "with joy,"† the hireling shall render up his with grief and shame; having fled from his charge because he was an hireling; and now he calls upon the mountains to cover him, because with lies he has made the heart of the righteous sad, whom CHRIST hath not made sad, and has strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he shall not return from his wicked way, by promising him life:‡ —now in anguish he cries aloud in vain for the "wings of the morning that he may dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,"§ in order to flee from the presence which he cannot endure knowing that he has "brought into bondage" the little ones of Christ, "has devoured them, has taken of them, has exalted himself over them, has (as it were) smitten them in the face."|| Then,

Brethren in the Ministry, "what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for, and hastening unto the coming of the day of God?"¶ ourselves, and leading on our flocks to the same awful expectation. Surely if all Christians are bound to "try and examine themselves," much more are we! Have we then done so, are we willing to do so? Or do we turn away from the glass, because we behold there only a "man's *natural face*?"** Let us ever employ in solemn thoughtfulness, those holy seasons which the wisdom of the Church—a wisdom which churehmen, alas! two often fail to appreciate, because they do not apply

* 1 Cor. i. 18. † Heb. xiii. 17. ‡ Ezek. xiii. 22. § Ps. cxxxix. 9.
 ¶ 2 Cor. x. 20. ¶ 2 Pet. iii. 11. ** St. James i. 23.

her rules each one to his own case, whether they be clergy or laity :—let us ever thus employ the seasons which the wisdom of the Church has set apart before she calls forward to fill her offices, those who are to be henceforth as “cities set upon a hill,” the “little leaven” which “leaveneth the whole lump” of the Christian Church, the “salt of the earth, which, if it has lost its savour, is cast forth and trodden under foot!” Our people are called upon by the Church to devote part of the week which precedes these solemn occasions to prayer and intercession. Do we remind them that they ought to do so? Do we lead them to recognize this their duty, as of incalculable importance both to the Ministry at large, and to themselves in particular? Do we, like the Apostle, bid them, “Brethren, pray for us?”*

Let us, then, “walk circumspectly,” more even than other Christians, “not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time,”† examining our stewardship, that we may be ready to give an account with joy when it is said to us, “thou shalt be no longer steward.” At these four seasons of the year let us devote ourselves, as far as possible, to retirement, meditation, self-examination, and prayer.

“It may serve,”‡ writes the truly pious Nelson, “as a direction to all those who are candidates for Holy Orders, seriously to examine themselves whether they are moved by the HOLY GHOST to take upon them that office and ministration: for though they may impose upon man, yet God sceth their hearts, and all those various motives by which they are influenced in so great a concern.”

Let us begin then at the beginning, and examine ourselves even here—are we moved by the HOLY GHOST to aid in this work? This question is indeed proposed *but once by the Church*—on admission to the Order of Deacons; and it being assumed that it is answered sincerely then,

* Heb. xiii. 18. † Eph. v. 15. ‡ Festival of St. Matthias.

it is fairly assumed also that there is no need of asking it again. Yet is it not therefore to be dismissed from our thoughts, or neglected as a thing gone by.

Surely you, my younger brethren, who are to be promoted to the Priesthood this morning, having used the office of a Deacon well,* so as to purchase to yourselves a "good degree," are bound to ask yourselves, nay, I doubt not you have asked yourselves, very solemnly and seriously, "Am I inwardly moved by the HOLY GHOST to take upon me the office of the Priesthood, with its privileges and its responsibilities?" O! what is the act which you are contemplating, if your conscience cannot answer, "I trust so."

Surely, also, we who are already under this yoke, even the most venerable in age amongst us, is still bound to ask himself this awful question, "Am I fulfilling my duties sincerely as one who came forward under the declaration made before the Church of CHRIST, that he was moved by the HOLY GHOST to undertake these duties?" "The fruit of the SPIRIT is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."† Can we, indeed, assure ourselves that our "Heavenly Father is glorified by our bringing forth much fruit?"‡ that our ministrations as well as our lives are marked by these characteristics? Unless we can, the motive of the HOLY GHOST within us to this great work must be doubted.

Next, let us enquire what has been, or what is, our purpose and object in seeking the ministry. Is it indeed that we may proclaim to a lost world this one great truth, "worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,"§—to exercise "the ministry of reconciliation," as ambassadors of CHRIST,—as though GOD did beseech by us, to pray men to be reconciled to GOD?|| Or have we, perchance, been drawn to the work by secondary motives? I will not say in

*1 Tim. iii. 13. †Gal. v. 22. ‡St. John xv. 8. §1 Tim. i. 15. ||2 Cor. v. 20.

such a country as this, by mercenary motives, but there may be secondary motives at work even here, which I will not stop to enumerate, believing gladly that you, at any rate, who are met together here to-day to receive a new and enlarged commission, are actuated by a sincere and singleminded purpose, and feel it your privilege, as it is your duty, to live for the one purpose of winning souls to CHRIST.

In order then to execute this purpose effectually (for there can be no good effect wrought where the Divine blessing is withheld) are you, are we all, fully persuaded that we have a full right to claim as ours the *promised blessing*, "Lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world?"* How any can go forth to labour in the LORD's vineyard who have any shadow of doubt whether they have been lawfully called and sent by Him, how any can take upon him the care of the flock who is not appointed to the charge by the Good Shepherd, or those whom He commissioned to "go and (teach or) make disciples of all nations," how any one can go forth as a herald of the glad tidings of salvation or as an ambassador of peace, who has any doubt of the patents under which he acts, it is hard to tell. Without a full assurance of the soundness of our title, how can we act with confidence of success?

Let us, therefore, while we are far, very far, from despising the inward call of the HOLY SPIRIT actuating our hearts, (the necessity of which the Church has placed as a bar which must be lifted ere any entrance at all can be gained to the Ministry of the Church), thank God that ours is no disputable title, but is derived confessedly from the one Great Sender, through His Apostles. Let us, I say, *feel that we have* this commission, let us most highly prize it: let it be the spring of all our energies that we are indeed labouring with the promise of CHRIST's blessing. But let

* Matt. xxviii. 20.

the word of God,"* that more than two edged which is quick and powerful, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and a discernor of the thoughts of the heart. Thus waging war with sin, let us never forget that even we ourselves have a "war in our members;" whilst fighting against an open enemy, we are always liable to overlook the unseen secret one, and neglecting to "keep under our bodies, and bring them into subjection, we may, after preaching to others, be, any of us, himself a cast-away."†

We are led by this view to two more duties of the Christian Minister, about the discharge of which we do well to examine ourselves, viz., the necessity of our being illuminated with true knowledge and understanding of God's word; and our setting it forth and showing it not only by our preaching but by our living. And these two duties are all that time will allow us to consider at present.

"The Priest's lips (writes the Prophet) should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of Hosts.‡" "Give attendance (writes an Apostle) to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."§ "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Let us remember that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."|| And why? It is added, "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Let us then, being stewards of the mysteries of God, be ever "diligent in the reading of Holy Scriptures, and such studies as help to the knowledge of the same,"¶ that we may be ready also to bring forth out of our double** treasure-house "things new and old."†† "Preach the word: be instant

* Heb. iv. 12. † 1 Cor. ix. 27. ‡ Mal. ii. 7. § 1 Tim. iv. 13.
 || 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. ¶ Ordination Service. ** Old and New Testament.
 †† Matt. 13-52.

in season, out of season : reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.”*

Lastly, let us bear in mind that it is not merely by our lips but by our lives that we are to recommend to our flocks “the glorious Gospel of our blessed God, committed to our trust.”† What, though it be true, that we “speak (any of us), with the tongues of men and of angels,” that we “understand all mysteries and all knowledge,” how shall we succeed in “persuading men” if they do not see by our actions that we value the salvation which we preach, that we are ourselves deeply conscious of the demerit of sin, that we feel the “blessing” of being “turned every one of us from our iniquities,”‡ that we have a living and true faith, that we value, ourselves, the means of grace which we recommend to them? Let us make it then a constant subject of reflection, that one who is not himself “of good behaviour,” who wants “a good report of them that are without,” who “ruleth not well his own house,”§ will always find ready tongues to exclaim, “how shall he take care of the Church of God?”

Indeed, brethrer, ours is an awful charge and office, as well as a glorious one : and well may we cry out “who is sufficient for these things?” Yes, *who is sufficient*, or, *who is not sufficient*? The answer to both questions is one, *No man. No man is sufficient in his own strength* for such a work, *any man is sufficient who is led to it, is guided in it by the “unction of the HOLY ONE.”*|| Most undeniably are we not sufficient of ourselves : but, if we are faithful, *sufficiency will be given us of God* : He can, He will “make us able ministers of the New Testament.”¶

Oh, then, brethren in the Ministry of Christ’s Church, let us not fail to seek the strength which is from above, that we may be made sufficient, that we may be called “to do all things through CHRIST strengthening us.”**

* 2 Tim. iv. 2. † 1 Tim. i. 2. ‡ Acts iii. 26. § 1 Tim. iii. 5.
|| 1 John ii. 20. ¶ 2 Cor. iii. 6. ** Phil. iv. 13.

It is promised by the LORD through his prophet : " They who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."* Weariness and faintness are the lot of us all. The Minister of the Gospel has ever to bear the burthen and heat of the day : and you have a burthen to bear, which many others have not. I do not speak merely of the " things which are without," bodily toil and bodily sufferings ; of the scorching heat of the summer noonday, or the pelting shower, the swollen river to be crossed, or the treacherous ice, the pitiless winter storms, the chill northern blast, the sometimes untracked field of snow, or the nightly journey through the uninhabited forest, with no company but the few solitary stars, which appear in a streak of the canopy of heaven seen between two dense walls of trees :—no other company did I say ? Let me be careful to add, if we do not remember at such times Him who " stretcheth out the Heavens like a curtain."† Such scenes are trying enough, but they are nothing at all when compared with the things which we experience ‡ For instance, after the cold cheerless journey, to find, perchance, the empty unwarmed building, unprepared for the service to be performed in it, which too unmistakeably tells of their indifference, to whom we come to " preach Christ Crucified." Or the ill-concealed laugh and unseemly joke, which we detect in the very instant when we are offering prayer to the Throne of Grace, or speaking solemn warning words of heaven and hell : or the hand withdrawn, when we have been earnestly pleading

* Isaiah xl. 31.

† Ps. civ. 2.

‡ It may be well to mention that these cases are *not imaginary* ones, nor cases of solitary experience. It may perhaps excite a smile amongst our more favoured brethren " who sit at home at ease," but it will serve to show what the country missionary's work is, to be told of a clergyman's having had to perform service, as the writer once did himself in a country " school-house" by the light of a solitary home-made candle, (which *scarcely* made darkness visible,) snuffed from time to time, when the reader was evidently *labouring* over the reading of the lessons even, by the kindly fingers of one and a second, of (to say the truth, however) a small but attentive audience.

for aid to extend the kingdom of our Redeemer, or to provide for His needy ones, even by those who profess to value their privileges as Christians : or again the moody silence which prevails when we turn the conversation towards the topics of sin and its appointed means of pardon, when but a few minutes before, tongues vied with one another, in the discussion of worldly schemes and thoughts.

Where is our sufficiency to meet such trials, if God renew not our strength? "For this cause" only can it be that we faint not, that "though our outward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day by day."* Then let us diligently seek this strength : we shall find it if we look for it along with those who were the first "partakers of the heavenly calling,"† which we prize, by a stedfast continuance "in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and (above all) in prayers."‡ Let these then be our chosen employments, the study of the Word, meditation, communion, prayer.

Let then the conclusion to this our present work be in *prayer*, that God may so strengthen and enable us, that we may find a sufficiency for our otherwise overwhelming work. May He give us grace so to speak and so to live, that our "savour" may be "of life unto life:" may the dew of His grace falling plentifully upon His people dispose their hearts to receive us as His appointed ministers, and to "embrace and ever hold fast the hope of everlasting life," which we are sent to hold out to them. While Paul plants and Apollos waters, may the Almighty "Giver of all good gifts" grant the increase—that both we who call you, and you who are called, may be able to say in confident anticipation, with the Apostle, "now ready to depart,"—"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the LORD the Righteous Judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that LOVE HIS APPEARING.§"

* 2 Cor. iv. 16. † Heb. iii. 1. ‡ Acts ii. 42. § 2 Tim. iv. 8.

