

We need to find out what we are supposed to be. We are 'God's ministers'—His servants, mouthpieces, ambassadors, the stewards of His mysteries, and surely He has a blueprint for ministerial activity in His Word. Do we know our marching orders? Now is the time for us to find out! Should this ultimate goal affect our present preparation? May it not be left to that time when preparation is ended? But if we do not have this vision now, then we cannot expect to gain it later in a 'valley of dry bones'. The call of the prophets preceded their ministry. For them the 'Thus saith the Lord' depended upon a reception of His Word, and an utter obedience to it. So it does for us.

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THE PERSONAL LIFE OF THE MINISTER

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IT IS DIFFICULT to think of any other profession concerning which such an article would need to be written. Law, medicine, education have their own professional standards and etiquette, but the personal life of lawyer, doctor or teacher is of no direct concern to the profession. The minister's case is different, because his work is different. 'We are pledged', said Bishop Hensley Henson of Durham in one of his ordination charges, 'to a consecrated life not merely to the pursuit of a profession.' On another occasion he succinctly defined that minister's work as 'the public aspect and formal expression of his life, and that', he added, 'is altogether "holy to the Lord"'. The old ideal of the parson, the 'persona', in the parish had much to commend it. Before the complicating factors of large population increase and mass communication intruded, the parish parson's whole life was his ministry. With his family he was called to live a representative Christian life in the midst of his cure and his people were to learn Christ, not only—possibly not chiefly—by his sermons in Church, but by his life and works exhibited in ordinary human contacts. The importance of this may be illustrated from a slightly different context in the principles of the Dohnavur Fellowship founded by Amy Carmichael in South India in 1901. The official description of the work, appended to each of the Dohnavur books by its author, includes the following: 'We have no workers who are only preachers. "We have heard the preaching, can you show us the life of your Lord Jesus?" said a Hindu to one of us.' The churches of this country have developed a settled, professional ministry of the Gospel and any fundamental change in this system is unlikely. But the lesson may certainly be learned that the minister's life preaches. Far too frequently this is forgotten, the official takes precedence of the personal and the ministry suffers. For this purpose it does not matter whether the official image is that of priest, pastor, preacher or administrator (and we find all of these in most of our denominations). If the minister as a man is indisciplined, unstable or immature, no amount of theological learning, doctrinal correctness, pulpit eloquence or evangelistic energy will compensate.

Thus the personal life of the minister is concerned with the sanctification of the man who holds the office. The office itself, even if we dignify it with the name of the sacred ministry, will not suffice to sanctify him. The prayer, the almsgiving and the fasting which are done in secret (Mt. 6) bring the open reward of a holy life and a fruitful ministry.

It is at this point that we must take note of the profound social changes which have come to affect the ministry in the first half of the present century and more especially in the last twenty years. Most of our tradition in pastoral theology was developed against a background of comparative security and leisure for the minister which have gone for ever. The modern minister must normally find time and energy for the maintenance of house and garden, the care of a young family and the assistance of a wife, overtaxed with domestic duties. At the same time he is hampered by shortage of money to buy books and of time to study them. He may learn in principle from his predecessors, but he must work out his own solution.

If we consider this problem in relation to what has been said about the need for the sanctification of the man behind the minister, we shall find that much has been gained as well as lost in the changed circumstances.

The modern minister is no longer committed of necessity to a middle class way of living (if indeed this distinction has any surviving meaning). He is still set apart for the ministry of the Gospel, but the circumstances of his life are not otherwise markedly different from those of the rest of his parish or congregation. His children will quite likely attend the same school and his wife shop at the same shops as the bulk of his parishioners. He will share the same social services (including the waiting room at the doctor's surgery). He will very likely read the same newspaper (though, for his better information, he may struggle to take that affected by the top people as well). The parsonage door may well be opened by the minister's wife, hastily removing her apron, with the steam of washing emerging from the kitchen behind her, or the caller may be intercepted on the way to the house by the minister himself, none too respectably dressed, doing his stint in the garden. Here is the human contact, the opportunity for preaching by life, but here is more, the very raw material for sanctification, for it is in his personal relationships and not merely in his individual life that the minister must seek to be sanctified.

The first circle of relationships to be considered is that of the home and family (I assume the minister to be married). Here he is provided with a continual source of experience and discipline. 'One that ruleth well his own house', wrote St. Paul to Timothy, 'for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?'

There are two contrasted dangers, first that of neglecting the family in the pressure of the ministry and secondly that of allowing the family to intrude. Although it is easy to cite an impressive list of notable and Christian men and women who have been children of the Manse or the Vicarage, it is also true that there have been all too many apostates and delinquents from the same sources, and this has not been entirely due to a natural reaction of child against father. The minister needs to safeguard time for his family, to be with them and entirely at their disposal. If he does not do this, not only the family, but also the ministry will suffer. On the other hand the minister must be careful to guard his ministry from family intrusions. Simply because he is so much at home there must be appointed times of study and of prayer with which neither wife nor child must be allowed to interfere.

This leads on to the positive part which home and family may play in the work of the ministry. To secure smoothness of administration as well as time for prayer and study there is much to be said for the system of having a church office apart from the parsonage to which the minister withdraws as the main centre of his activity. But, in the opinion of the writer, this can never replace in pastoral effectiveness the natural human contacts obtainable through a ministerial home which is open to all comers. The clear principle of the New Testament is that the minister, as well as the Christian layman, must be given to hospitality (1 Tim. 3: 2; 1 Pet. 4: 9; Heb. 13: 2). This is not only a Christian social duty but an unparalleled evangelistic and pastoral opportunity. Again and again men and women have been won for Christ, or have received guidance and encouragement in their service for Him, through Christian homes which have been open to them. The minister should expect this of his people and he should be careful to set them an example. This will mean hard work and inconvenience, not only for the minister's wife and family, but for the minister himself, for his home will no longer be a place of escape or of easy relaxation, but a continual field of service.

The second centre of sanctification is the congregation, the body of regular worshippers which forms the church of which the minister has the charge. This is likely to be a very varied company of those who are growing in spiritual stature, though the rate of growth may in some cases not be particularly noticeable. In the language of 1 John, some will be children, some young men, some mature.

Now a varied community life inevitably means friction and discomfort. In fact it is the friction in a community which both enables it to grow and holds it together. A collection of people without this creative friction is a mere crowd, without proper personal relationships. But the minister responsible for this Christian community is himself growing. It is to be hoped that he has attained a measure of maturity, but he is certainly not

perfect. He is no more free from the attendant dangers of growth in a community than are the rest of the members. This may provoke in him one of two reactions. On the one hand he may be tempted to assert himself and to 'lord it over the charge allotted to him' (1 Pet. 5: 3). Far too many ministers grow to despise their flock and to censure and criticize them, even in the hearing of others, instead of praying for the patience and insight to understand them. On the other hand the minister may allow 'himself to be drawn into the bickering and disagreement, to become leader of a party or a clique in the church, and so to forfeit his title to be a true pastor.

The third circle of sanctification is the wider community, particularly those who live in the parish or district, but are outside the church's normal range of influence. For these his calling as a minister of the Gospel gives him both a concern and a responsibility. But this does not mean that he will find relationships with them easy or congenial. To start with, they cannot be expected to look at things from a conventional Christian point of view and he will be faced with the problem of how far he should accommodate himself to them in things not clearly forbidden. Changes in social habit have been such that some of those questions which, for the evangelical of twenty-five years ago were as good as settled, if not by personal conviction, at least by group pressure and convention, are now open again. The minister must make sure that his answers are worked out at a deep level and are not mere reflections of Christian (or worldly) convention.

Apart from this the minister will often be faced, in his relations with the wider community, with attitudes or practices, which he would certainly not allow in his own life or that of his family and would censure in the case of members of his flock. Is it necessarily right, however, to do this in the case of those who make no real Christian profession? The minister will have to consider here underlying motives and, in his efforts to commend the Gospel, will encourage the good motive even if it leads to the wrong action, rather than look for an outward conformity or respectability which may cover a bad motive. The example of our Lord as recorded in the Gospels is most instructive in this respect and is the minister's surest guide. Sometimes the minister will be faced by deliberate attempts on the part of men and women of the world to shock what they consider to be his sensibilities. It is part of the minister's sanctification that, without condoning sin, he becomes very nearly unshockable.

But most important, with regard to the wider community, is the minister's witness as a man. He must be determined to be free from the love of money or of the slightest suggestion of luxury—his house, his furniture, his clothes, his habits, his car and his holidays all need consideration here. He must fight the temptation to be unbusinesslike or unpunctual, although the circumstances of his life may well provide him with excuses for yielding to it. Above all he must be scrupulously honest and a man of his word in all dealings, even where he stands to lose by it. It is the man and not the minister who stands to commend the Gospel. The minister is only the one set aside by Christ with the responsibility of preaching it.

These, then, are the three circles in which the minister must seek his sanctification. They provide in abundance the circumstances which the Father uses to chasten us—and He does it 'for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness' (Heb. 12: 10). The personal prayer life of the minister remains essential, but the response to the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God is to be made in the sphere of the minister's personal relationships. It is through the man that the minister works and his humanity achieves its significance as it comes into contact with the humanity of others.