

Claims and Opportunities
The Christian Minister



THE
PREPARATION OF THE
MODERN MINISTER

BY

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THE PREPARATION OF THE MODERN MINISTER

The end should determine the means. The preparation a man receives should be determined by the work he is to do. The answer to the question, What kind of training should a minister have? is found in the answer to the question, What is to be the minister's work? When we know what he is to do we shall know how to train him to do it.

What, then, is the true ideal of a minister's work? We may answer in brief that he is to be the chief exemplar, teacher, and functionary of the Christian religion to the people of his charge. This involves five essential things, and these five things have determined the general organization and course of study which have been adopted by practically all branches of the Church in their training schools for ministers, and which, as thus approved by the wisdom and experience of the past and agreed upon by virtually the whole Church, should still constitute

the basis and body of every thoroughgoing course of ministerial training, whatever modifications of detail may be made to meet the demands of any particular time or community, and however opinions may vary as to the relative stress to be laid upon each of these five disciplines, fundamental in the preparation of the minister.

In the first place, in order that the minister may be a true exponent of the Christian religion, he must himself have had experience of its power. Before a man can shine he must burn. "The outer must be preceded by the inner; public life for God must be preceded by private life with God; unless God has first spoken to a man, it is vain for a man to attempt to speak for God. . . . The prime qualification of a minister is that he be himself a religious man—that before he begins to make God known, he should first himself know God."¹ His experience of God will be the measure of his power with men. If he does not speak with enthusiasm—and let us remember in passing that the word means, etymologically, "having God within"—if he does not speak with enthusiasm he does not speak with effect.

¹ James Stalker, "The Preacher and His Models," p. 9.

The Old Testament prophet was the prototype of the New Testament preacher. There are three words in the Hebrew which are translated "prophet." Two of these words mean to see, and the third means to speak, and to speak out of the overflowing fullness of the heart. Here then are the essential ideas, spiritual insight and spontaneous, irrepressible, magnetic speech. "These prophets are not mere messengers. They are not like a telegraph boy who takes a sealed letter from the office and carries it to some one and does not know what it contains. They are not like phonographs to whom the message is communicated and by whom the message is repeated. Their messages are not dictated to them; they are not merely amanuenses who write down what is dictated. The message enters into them, transforms their nature, makes them what they are. So they are holy men, spiritual men, godly men, with the message wrought into their own consciousness and coming forth from their own consciousness. It becomes part of their nature. The word is in their hearts as a burning fire shut up in their bones. They cannot keep it to themselves; it must find expression."¹

¹ Lyman Abbott, "The Christian Ministry," pp. 240-241.

Since "Christian theology is the science of the Christian religion, as revealed in the Bible, developed in history, and believed and practiced in the Church," and since the minister is the official exponent of this religion, he must of course master this science in its four recognized divisions, to be presently named; but more fundamental and decisive than all other branches of theology in the preparation of the minister is what we may call *experimental theology*—that personal experience of God by which he receives into himself the divine message and makes it a part of his life. Only as the truth has been vitalized in a man's own heart will it come with living power to other hearts. *Pectus est quod theologum facit.*

In the second place, in order that he may be an authoritative exponent of the Christian religion, the minister must know how Christianity came to be; that is, he must have a first-hand acquaintance with the record of the revelations of God through Israel and Christ and the Apostles. Therefore he should know both his Old Testament and his New,¹ not only as to their general factual and doctrinal contents as ex-

¹ *Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet, Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet*, Augustine.

hibited in the English Version—such a knowledge is now common in the theological lay public of Protestant countries, and he is to be the leader and teacher of that public—but he should know them also in the form in which they were originally given, and should be able to expound them to his people with the confidence of assured knowledge of the sources. This is *exegetical theology*, and since the Bible is the instrument which God uses for bringing men to the knowledge of Himself as He is revealed in Jesus Christ, this thorough study of the Bible which prepares a man to interpret it to his fellow-men should always occupy a very large place in the training of the minister for the duties of his office.

“To-day there are widespread discussions as to whether Hebrew should be studied in theological seminaries as a compulsory subject; and when one or two seminaries had made it elective, others were compelled to ‘go them one better’ by making Greek also elective. There is nothing to be said about this, except that where it takes able men and puts them out into the ministry without these, the theological seminary is unspeakably cruel, and the man who consents to this impoverishing of his equipment

is short-sighted in the extreme. The man who will take time for a full preparation and who has the courage for hard work, and who has before him that one true and lofty ideal for his forty years of pastoral labor, would always passionately resent the treatment which induced him to forego his full equipment in the knowledge of the Scriptures. It is not meant that he is to become an expert in higher criticism. But it is meant that he must be able intelligently, broad-mindedly to judge of the theories which on all hands are being thrown up by the experts, so that, as one of the greatest among living scholars has said, he may possess 'an intelligent acquaintance as to what is certain, probable, and doubtful in the sphere of Biblical criticism.'"¹

In a suggestive article on "The Homiletical Worth of the Study of Hebrew"² Professor W. N. Donovan shows that the Hebrew language is of profit to the preacher in its influence on his own personality, broadening his intellectual horizon by acquainting him with the thought method of the Semites, accus-

¹ W. Douglas Mackenzie, "Practical Training for the Ministry," *The Homiletic Review*, December, 1907, p. 417.

² *The Biblical World*, July, 1908, p. 51.

toming his mind to new views and distinctions, and deepening his sympathy as the emotional traits of another race are explored; in its effect on both the content and delivery of his message, furnishing as it does an abundance of warm, living imagery setting forth things fundamental in life, stimulating his appreciation of moral values, breaking through his Anglo-Saxon habits of thought and expression, "puncturing with vital suggestion the hardened familiarity of our thought and feeling," and rendering the heart and mind more responsive to the appeals of the spiritual life; and in the inspirational power which it has from its intimate association with the most spiritual messages given to the race. No one should underestimate any factor that brings out more clearly the exact flavor of the message, or brings one closer to the Spirit-filled men. Such a factor must be the language through which these messages came to the world. "Give a bright man only a year's seminary course in Hebrew, and he will be going back of our best translations with satisfaction to his intellect and profit to his soul."

But, while the language offers these great advantages to the man who has the ability, energy and time

to acquire it, they do not justify the claim that every minister must study Hebrew. The writer is stating normal advantages for the normal man. "Exceptional men should have exceptional training adapted to their exceptional gifts. . . . So far as this paper succeeds in gaining its purpose, it has in view the great mass of students for the ministry, not the men phenomenally unable to acquire a language, nor, at the other extreme, the brilliant linguist whose especial endowments enable him to gain especial profit from any language-study, but the mass of reasonably equipped, earnest, practical men. To such the study of Hebrew offers assured advantages, homiletically, and in practical personal development."

The practical value of a knowledge of Greek is still more indisputable—so clear indeed that, though there are some who question even this, it is still generally admitted.

In addition to the thorough and detailed study of selected Scriptures in the original languages—and surely the regular course in seminaries should include at least the masterpieces of the Old Testament and the New in the form in which they were first given—the prospective minister must become famil-

iar with the Word in its English dress. He must have a ready command of the general contents of the Bible and each of its books. The microscopic method must be supplemented by the telescopic. The study of the English Version should be given a large place in each of the three seminary years—sufficiently large to give the student a clear conspectus and a firm grasp of each of the books and of the Bible as a whole.

In the third place, in order that he may be an authority on the Christian religion, the minister must know what Christianity has done in the world and how it has done it. This branch of his preparation is called *historical theology*, or Church history, since it traces the growth of Christianity with all its instructive experiences and developments from the founding of the Church to the present time, giving the minister the benefit of the accumulated wisdom and experience of the past, teaching him how to avoid the errors and mistakes of his predecessors, preventing him from “mistaking old errors in a new dress for new discoveries,” vivifying his knowledge of the content of Scripture teaching, and showing “God in the march of his providence illustrating his word.”

In the fourth place, in order that he may be a true exponent of Christianity, the minister must know the general system of Christian truth as a whole, the unity, harmony, and completeness of the revealed religion as an organism; he must have a comprehensive, scientific, orderly view of "the doctrines and duties of Christianity as now held and understood on the basis of the Scriptures and the history of the church"; he must be as much at home in the New Testament epistles as in the narrative parts of Scripture, but thinking intensely through their intense thinking, thus making his sermons not merely interesting but impressive with the weight and grandeur of New Testament thought; he must acquire such a grasp of the entire content of Scriptural teaching as will enable him in the light of the whole to interpret aright any particular part, to avoid scrappiness and incoherence in his presentation of it, and to give to the mind of the hearer the satisfying feeling that every partial truth has the pressure of the whole truth behind it.¹ This department therefore, *systematic theology*, has, like the others, great practical value. It is vitally related to the minister's efficiency.

¹ "The Clerical Life," p. 58.

“Great preaching only breaks out of the deep rich soil of a great theology. The age of great preachers has always been the age of great religious beliefs. Preaching, to be robust, trenchant, down-reaching, soul-searching, will-compelling, life-moulding, must be theological, dogmatic, authoritative. The great preaching has always and only been done by the theological athletes, by men who believed something, by men who were saturated and steeped with the spiritual certitudes, by men who could think God’s thoughts after Him and thread their way through that ordered plan by which God saves the world to the glory of His grace. We notice, if we have read any history, that the notable spiritual world-movements and upheavals have all been inspired by great convictions of truth. From the Apostolic age to the Augustinian, from the Reformation to the Puritan, they have been theological ages. The great epochs have been theological; the great revivals have been doctrinal; the notable revolutions have been driven under the lash of great moral and doctrinal convictions.

It is a fatal mistake to suppose that a minister or church can get on without a theology. An individual

it has been said, may get on with religion, but 'a church must have its dogma.' Its vitality will ebb if you devitalize its creed, or cut it down to the vanishing point. The world with its great heart-hunger, with its corroding misery, is not going to make large place for the clerical invertebrate who goes to his work mumbling his half-beliefs and disseminating his unreasoned opinions, throwing out his theological conjectures like half-spans that rest on no solid piers in midstream and reach no further shores of assured certitude. . . . It is not from too much theology the Church suffers but from far too little. It is not from too much dogmatism and authority the pulpit is weak, but from the lack of the positive note and the authoritative accent born of great convictions of the larger truth.¹

So Dr. W. A. Bartlett, pastor of the First Congregational Church of Chicago, speaking of decadent churches, finds the explanation of them in the insufficient training of the theological seminaries. "They are teaching more things than ever, but not always the one thing needful. The young man who goes into

¹ Samuel H. Howe, "The Place of Theology in Preaching," *Bible Student and Teacher*, October, 1906, pp. 244-5, 247.

a community as minister has often very vague ideas concerning the great doctrines of the Bible. He has a kind of pottering knowledge of many things which makes him believe that the regeneration of the neighborhood is to be brought about through a gentle, ethical, social settlement régime. He dabbles in politics, economics, clubs, and various worthy institutions, which were never intended to take the place of the Church, and becomes a kind of errand boy for everything from the bricklayers' union to a woman's guild, to provide soft food for people without teeth. The Church has one great mission, and when it faithfully-fulfils that mission it will never lack in interest and power. The mission of the Church is to preach to mankind the whole counsel of God."

Let it be noted that neither Dr. Howe nor Dr. Bartlett is a theological professor. They are both active pastors, and they urge the study of systematic theology in the interest, not of mere scholarship, but of practical efficiency in the ministry.

In like manner Professor Peabody of Harvard holds that the neglect of theology is a grave mistake which threatens the usefulness of the ministry, and he laments that feeling and action are crowding out

of the foreground of interest the function of thought, that the passion for service is supplanting the passion for truth. "Not less of religious fervor and not less of practical activity are demanded of the representatives of religion, but a new accession of intellectual power, the capacity to translate the message of the Timeless into the dialect of the present age. The specialization of knowledge has prescribed to the minister of religion a definite sphere, and no amount of hastily acquired information about politics or economics or social reform can atone for the abandonment of his own province. On other subjects others are better trained than he, and may listen to his counsel with compassion, if not with contempt. If he gives up thinking about religion, he gives up his place in a learned profession. He may continue to be a devoted priest, an efficient administrator, a devout soul, but the direction of the mind of the age is transferred to other hands." ¹

In the fifth place, in order that he may be an effective exponent of Christianity, the minister must know how to utilize the results of his exegetical, historical, and systematic study of revealed truth for the

¹ *The Harvard Theological Review*, January, 1908.

accomplishment of the two great ends for which the Church exists, self-propagation and self-edification, evangelistic work and pastoral work, ingathering and upbuilding. This consummation of sacred learning to which all other departments look and by which they become useful for the establishment and extension of the Kingdom of God in the world is *practical theology*—"the science and art of the various functions of the Christian ministry for the preservation and propagation of the Christian religion at home and abroad."¹

The preparation of the modern minister will include special training in each of five divisions: First, experimental theology, which has to do with the man's own experience of the religion which he preaches; second, exegetical theology, which has to do with the record of those revelations which constitute the Christian rule of faith and practice; third, historical theology, which has to do with the past history and growth of Christianity; fourth, systematic theology, which has to do with its present status; and fifth, practical theology, which has to do with its future pros-

¹ Philip Schaff, "Theological Propædeutic," p. 448.

pects. These five things still constitute the backbone of theological training. They are indispensable to a full ministerial equipment. Each of them has a distinctly practical end. They are studied not merely for knowledge but for use, not for the gratification of intellectual curiosity but for the promotion of practical efficiency. The supreme aim is not to make accomplished scholars and specialists in the various departments of theological science, but to make good ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will serve Him and His Church with increasing efficiency year after year.

Some of those who advocate the abandonment of this broad, generous, and thorough discipline, and the substitution for it of biology, hypnotism, mental and physical hygiene, and a psychology and pedagogy, which deny the possibility of any such break as is implied in conversion and the new birth, do unquestionably minimize or eliminate the supernatural element in religion, throw overboard the Biblical doctrines of grace, and "leave Christianity merely a system of morals and the best only of natural religions." But not all of those who advocate the addition of other studies to the seminary curriculum and who

demand a change of the relative emphasis put upon the different parts of the course are of this radical and destructive type. The very statement of the subject assigned me, "The Preparation of the Modern Minister," implies that some such change is needed, and this assumption is correct.

Most of the changes called for lie in the last of the five great departments outlined above, practical theology, the science and art of the functions of the minister, the study of the methods by which he brings the saving truth to bear upon the individual and the community of his own time. The modern minister has a fourfold function: as pastor, as leader of public worship, as administrator, and as preacher. It seems to be generally conceded that most of our seminaries give their students adequate preparation for their work as pastors and as leaders of worship. They are taught the best methods of pastoral visitation, as the friends and counsellors of their people, and the best methods of personal work with the inquirer, the doubter, and other classes of individuals needing special guidance and help; and they are carefully instructed in the orderly and edifying conduct of public worship and in the high function of interpreting

the people to God. But it is claimed that they are not always adequately prepared for their work as administrators and preachers.

As the minister is to be the executive head of his church, and as the modern church, especially in the cities, is in many cases an elaborate and complicated organization, he should, before undertaking to lead and use it as a force in the community, have some instruction in business methods, in church finance, in the keeping of church records, in the organizing of the membership and the developing of its activities, in his relation to the other officers of the church and its various organizations, men's societies, women's societies, young people's societies, and especially to the Sunday school. The seminaries, almost without exception, are now providing instruction in the history of religious education, the principles and methods of teaching, the organization and administration of the Sunday school and the training of its teachers.

The main function of the minister is the preaching of the Gospel. Therefore the curriculum of the seminary should be planned with the controlling view of fitting men to preach. And let it be remem-

bered that the preacher is a man who has something to say and the power to say it. His preparation should cover both points. However genuine and deep his personal experience of divine grace and however rich and full his knowledge of the divine word, unless he has aptness to teach and power of public utterance he cannot preach. His mastery of the art of discourse is one of the vital things in his fitting for his supreme function.

There are certain special subjects, besides those already mentioned, which need to be taken account of in a practical way in the preparation of the present-day minister. One of these is apologetics. Our age is not only one of uncertainty and unrest on the part of many within the Church in regard to religious subjects, intelligent, thoughtful, and earnest people who need competent guidance that they may be reassured and confirmed in regard to vital points of faith, but it is also an age of subtly reasoned scepticism and bold attacks upon the central positions of Christianity which must be understood and met with scholarly thoroughness and Christian fairness. "Large service can be rendered by all who help to restate the old facts and unchanged

truths in terms that will make them vivid and vital to others.”¹

Another of these special subjects which should have attention in the department of practical theology is comparative religion. Modern exploration, modern commerce, and modern missions have put Christianity into closer contact with all the religions of the world than it ever was before and have imposed upon the Christian minister a stronger obligation to study the relationship, the virtues, and the defects of the various religions of mankind, and to vindicate by comparison and contrast the divine origin and character of Christianity and make good its claim to be the ultimate religion. That this is necessary for the Student Volunteer, who expects to do his work in a foreign land, is at once evident to all. But it is necessary also for the minister in the home-land, confronted as he is by a swarm of “fad religions,” which number their votaries by thousands.

The necessity for careful attention to the principles and methods of evangelistic work at home and mis-

¹ J. R. Mott, “The Future Leadership of the Church,” p. 20.

sionary work abroad is so generally recognized that simple mention of them here will be sufficient.

How does the minister stand related to modern sociology? Nothing is more characteristic of much of the Christianity of our time than the deepening of its conviction that Christ came to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, here and now, as distinguished from the introduction of a new order of things at the millenium or some other remote period in the future, and the consequent increase of its emphasis on social reform, the reconstruction of society, the regeneration of man's moral, intellectual and bodily life, as well as his religious or spiritual life, the elimination of poverty, degradation and misery, the promotion of social equity, economic justice, civic righteousness, clean politics, public health, and the like. What should be the minister's relation to these movements for the betterment of the social order?

The importance of determining carefully the principle on which work for social reform should be undertaken by the minister and the far-reaching and tremendous consequences of a mistake at this point are impressively set forth in a thoughtful article on "The Gospel and Social Reform," by Dr. D. W.

Simon, in *The Homiletic Review* for October, 1908.

It has been said that socialism and Christianity are alike in that both of them seek a new social order. "They are unlike in the method by which they propose to secure the new social order. Socialism attributes what is evil in men to the evil system, and proposes to change the system that it may change the spirit. Christianity attributes what is evil in the system to the evil spirit in men, and proposes to change the spirit that it may change the system."¹ For instance, socialism proposes to change our industrial system, with its principle of competition, and make the community one great corporation, whereas Christianity proposes to change the spirit and the motives of the men who are carrying it on, substituting the principle of love for the spirit of selfishness. So the minister is not to deal with the scientific details of political or industrial organization and the technical problems connected with capital and labor but to instruct the people in the moral principles of a true social order. His function is not executive but inspirational. The economist, the journalist, the

¹ Lyman Abbott, "The Christian Ministry," p. 143.

statesman must work out the machinery which shall make effective the movements for social betterment. "But the minister has an infinitely higher function. He has his hand upon the springs of all action. He deals with principles, not policies; with motives, not methods. He is to inspire with true idealism the hearts and consciences of his fellows. In our prosperous and materialistic age and land, the supreme need is for vision, and the highest office is that of seer. That is the precise social function of the modern minister. And there is no one else who can take his place; no one else who stands for the ideal, pure and simple."¹ "If ministers will leave the professional teachers to expound the secular, that is, the empirical side of social science, the newspapers to reflect such conclusions as are reached respecting social science, and the politicians to embody those opinions and principles in law, and will devote themselves to the spiritual study of the Book and of life, they can be leaders of the leaders. They can lay the foundations on which other men shall rear the superstructure."²

¹ C. D. Williams, "The Claims of the Ministry upon Educated Young Men," *The Intercollegian*, November, 1905, p. 26.

² Lyman Abbott, "The Christian Ministry," p. 163.

The preparation of the minister from first to last should be kept as close to life as possible and should aim constantly to give him all needed power to deal effectively with present-day men and women and children. As Schauffler suggests: "He must be better acquainted with the Church sons than with the Church Fathers, more familiar with Jim and Sam than with Origen and Chrysostom. His speech must be the speech of the street, the home and the heart." The great subjects above mentioned should all be taught with a constant view to their bearing upon the actual needs of the men and women now in the world.

Our conclusion is that while the time-tested discipline of the seminaries is better adapted as a whole to the preparation of the modern minister for his work than any other which has yet been proposed and that while its essential features should therefore be retained, it is nevertheless capable of improvement by some changes of proportion and emphasis, bringing into greater prominence the English Bible, administrative and teaching work, comparative religion, missions, and above all the studies that make directly for the promotion of pulpit power.