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THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

A Sermon preached at the ordination of Mr. Woodman Bradbury, in Melrose, Mass., June 2, 1891, by Rev. Philip S. Moxom, Pastor of the First Baptist Church, Boston.

“And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”—*Matt. 4: 19.*

An earnest and profound Christian thinker once said, “Christianity is an efflux from the person of Christ.” This is a true and deep thought. Ideally considered, Christianity is the radiance of Christ as light is the radiance of the sun. The two are not separable; they are not two but one.

Many thinkers have sought to interpret the person of Christ apart from the unique, divine, revelatory function which He claimed to fulfil, and apart from the total result of His appearance and movement in the world, and to construe Christianity as a system of thought and a scheme of life apart from the transcendent personality of whom it is the product. Their failure to do this successfully is as manifest as their attempt is unphilosophical. There is no solvent in the chemistry of human thought so subtle and powerful that it can separate the person from the product. As a scheme of life Buddhism may be separated from Buddha, and retain its integrity. So Islam may be separated from Mahomet, and Confucianism from Confucius, and Platonism from Plato. But Christianity separated from Christ would be like the diffused solar radiance separated from the sun.

In Christ as the revelation of God and the archetypal man, Christian doctrine,

ethics and order have their continuing source. He is the one divine word without which all other words fall into confusion. In Him alone, we find the clue to the riddle of human history and divine providence. As the astronomer, in order to interpret the order and movements of the solar system, must take his stand with Copernicus in the sun, so the theologian, so every one, who seeks to interpret God and the true order and end of human life, must take the person of Christ as the point of departure for his thought.

Theology, morals, ecclesiology, and even eschatology are all so far Christocentric, that in Him alone is the key to the problem of God and the soul. He, who came forth from the ineffable God and speaks the Word of God, is thus the sun around which all worlds and planets of man's spiritual thought trace their orbits.

In the striking language of the Apostle Paul, the church, which ideally is a redeemed humanity, is “the body of Christ.” He is its head. As the head determines the functions of the body, so Christ furnishes the ever unfolding law of life to the church. In order, then, to have any true and complete idea of the church we must go to Christ. Our conception of the ends for which the church exists, and therefore our conception of the source and

office of the Christian ministry, must be determined from Christ's point of view.

It is my purpose now to consider the origin, qualifications and work of the Christian ministry. The text: "Follow me, and I will make you fishes of men," is an illustration, or rather dramatic expression, of my theme, and clearly indicates the course which our thought will take.

1. The Origin of the Christian Ministry.

The Christian ministry has its origin in the call of Christ. "He saith unto them, Follow me." This is not a call simply to discipleship, for the call is not complete till the words are uttered, "I will make you fishers of men." An order of religious servants is both the expression of a natural human impulse and the supply of a natural human want. The religious instinct of man has always demanded and must always produce special ministers to religious need. Just as our physical nature demands physicians, and our intellectual nature demands teachers, and our social nature demands administrators of law, so our religious nature demands religious ministers.

It has been said, sometimes with a sneer, that the priests invented religion in order to oppress the people for selfish ends. But never was a statement more transparently false and even absurd. The religious impulse is older than prophet or priest, as it is older than church or temple.

Were Christianity simply a religion like Brahmanism or Judaism, it would undoubtedly create an order of ministers to meet the needs of its adherents. But, as Christianity is more than a religion; as it is a revelation and a life, and, in its end, a universal, spiritual cosmos; as it has its spring in the personality of Jesus Christ, and is inseparable from Him; so in Christ and the revelation which He is, and not simply in the impulses or wants of the adherents of Christianity do we find the origin of the Christian ministry.

Historically, the Christian ministry is the successor, not of the Jewish priesthood, nor even of the directors of the synagogue-cultus, but of the Hebrew prophets. Really, however, it is the successor of no elder class or order. Christ, by force of spiritual attraction, as well as by determination of spiritual purpose, centralizes the ministry of His church in Himself. He calls His ministers, not mediately only, but immediately. His commission is their true credential, as His spirit is their source and reason of being. From one point of view the ministry is an outgrowth of the church, developed under the stimulus of its needs. From a higher point of view the ministry is the immediate creature of Christ. The church does not even give a commission. It simply recognizes a commission already given by its Lord.

The impulse to preach the Gospel is from Christ, and is but the response to His call, which is wakened in the heart of him who is called.

The entire idea of the Christian ministry is based upon the perpetual supremacy of Christ. He is before all else—before church, before presbytery, before creed. That supremacy He has delegated to no one whether apostle or pope. Christ Himself is the author, and His call is the one supreme authentication of the ministry which rightly bears His name. No apostolical succession, no priestly descent, no consensus of councils, no imposition of hands, not even membership in the visible church, is, of itself, an absolute prerequisite to him whom Christ calls to preach the Gospel. The ordaining act of the church has validity and significance only as back of it is the call which comes directly from Christ to the individual soul.

Out of this doctrine of the absolute supremacy of Christ spring certain clear inferences:—

1. Among Christian ministers, as a body, there is no primacy, except the primacy

of Christ. "Call no man master, for *one* is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." The pretensions of the papacy are a monstrous contradiction of Christ's clear statement. The words of Jesus to those simple Galilean fishermen, "Follow Me," have never been superseded or changed. He who uttered them is the sole master and supreme exemplar and teacher of all whose mission it is to save men through the administration of the Gospel.

2. The Christian ministry is not a sacerdotal organization. In the first place it is not sacerdotal. There is no Christian priest, for as Christ alone is Primate, so Christ alone is Priest. It is a significant fact that in no single instance in the New Testament is the preacher or pastor or bishop (*episcopos*) called a priest; nor is any priestly function enjoined upon him or permitted to him. All believers are called "kings and priests unto God," but they are priests, not in their relations to others, but only in the sphere of the individual spiritual life, as the offerers of a perpetual, joyous self-sacrifice unto God.

This universal priesthood is a priesthood, not of expiation, but of worship, and is bound to no ritual or order of times and places.

In the next place, the Christian ministry is not an organization. It is a brotherhood; not apart from the church, but in the church. Episcopacy is based, not on the fundamental New Testament idea of the Christian ministry, but on the ground of a practical expediency and of an historical development. It may, or it may not, conflict with the true idea of the Christian ministry, according as it is identified in an exclusive way with the Christian ministry, or as it is conceived as a convenient working order, having no absolute authority. In the New Testament, the ministry is a service in which there is no rank, save that determined by faithfulness.

The pastor, preacher, overseer, or evangelist is not the member of a hierarchy. He has no ecclesiastical superior save Him who is "Head over all things to the church, which is His body."

3. The Christian ministry, being not a sacerdotal or ecclesiastical organization, is under no law of formal inheritance, and depends in no way on the transmission of sacerdotal or ecclesiastical authority. Its origin in the person and purpose of the Master Himself ensures its perpetuity. That perpetuity depends, not on any apostolical succession, but on the personal relation which Christ maintains with all His true ministers. The commission is individual, not generic. It is ever new. Christ calls each preacher. Paul's call was as good as Peter's, though Peter for centuries has been called the Primate of the church. Your call, my brother, if Christ has called you in His secret communings with your heart, is as good as Paul's. The church does not call you. It does not give you your commission. It simply examines the evidence of your call that it may authenticate that call to itself. Being assured that to you the Lord has said, "Follow Me and I will make you a fisher of men," it joyfully recognizes your hallowed mission.

On the other hand, you may find help to the interpretation and clear authentication of the call that has come to your heart, through the spiritual insight and judgment of the church. But Christ is Lord. You have to do first of all with Him. His "Follow Me" is the primal, divine word that is the spring of your great enterprise. The moment this vital, personal relation of Christ to each disciple is lost sight of, or denied, that moment the Christian ministry degenerates from a continually renewed embassy from Christ, into a mere ecclesiastical corporation with assumed rights of transmission or inheritance—an inheritance only of ghostly authority and ecclesiastical mummeries, that are of no

more meaning to this toiling, perplexed, sinful and passionate world, than a show of Japanese jugglery.

O my brethren, it is a great thing that Christ calls men to do His work. Let it never be forgotten that He does call men. Christ *is*, not *was*. He walks no more in visible form on the hills of Judea, or by the shores of limpid Galilee. But He does walk unseen the highways of the world to-day, calling as of old, though with voice inaudible to the outer ear, here in the quiet home or the secluded school, there in the busy marts of trade, speaking to the hearts of such as will hear, the words, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

In the supremacy of the living, present Christ, and in the individualness of the call which He gives, is the ground of the perpetuity of the Christian ministry. It continues because Christ continues. As long as He is mediator, so long will He prosecute His work of salvation among men through the magnetic personality, and renewed character, and eloquent voice of servants, whom He calls as directly and as authoritatively as He called Peter from his fisherman's nets, or Matthew from his "receipt of custom."

Here, too, in the supremacy of the living Christ, and in the individualness of the call which He gives, is the guarantee of the minister's true independence. It was this that enabled Peter to say, in the face of the most august ecclesiastical tribunal that ever sat—the Sanhedrim—"Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. . . . We ought to obey God rather than men."

Christ and Christ's word are the Christian minister's sole, supreme authority. He may reverence the judgments of history, as, in some sense, imperfectly expressing in the coarse, confused lettering of human action, Christ's thought. But his key to the interpretation of history is Christ Himself. That this or that custom, this or that

ordinance, this or that doctrine is old, is not demonstration that it is sacred.

There is no necessary authority in antiquity. Buddhism is more ancient than Christianity. Brahmanism is older than Buddhism. The myths of Egypt and Greece are older than either. The Christian minister does not stand with his face to the past. His source of authority is always present. The new Testament is old in form, but its spirit and thought are modern—they are timeless, because they flow from the heart of Him who is above time. The New Testament interpreted in the light of an ever-present Lord is so fresh and new, that much of it might be written to-day or a thousand years hence, quite as well as nearly two thousand years ago.

The Christian minister may reverence the creeds of the church, and may profit by them, but he is not bound by them. With the wealth of the past in his possession, he lives in the present, always freshly coming upon truth—truth that is old, yet ever new, as Christ is "the ancient of days, yet the bright and morning star."

Thus to Christ Himself must we look for the origin, the perpetuity, and the liberty of the Christian ministry.

II. The Qualifications of the Christian Ministry.

These also are to be determined by reference to Christ. As He is author, so also He is master, model and theme.

It would, in some particulars, be more convenient to treat of the minister's work before considering the question of his qualifications, for the former must in large measure determine the latter.

What the workman must do gives broad suggestion of what he must be. But as both the mission and the qualifications of the Christian minister can be clearly seen only in the light of his relation to Christ, it will not be improper to follow the order indicated by the text. "Follow Me"—that

is the call; "I will make you"—that promises fitness; "fishers of men"—that declares the work. In every part of the text Christ is Himself present, originating, directing and determining.

That only is a true and rightly qualified Christian ministry, which is organized about Christ. As we contemplate Him everything else sinks out of sight, or takes its meaning and worth from Him. He creates the ministry, inspires the ministry, qualifies the ministry and guides the ministry. From this point of view we may see how far, oftentimes, the nominal Christian ministry has departed from its true idea. To this point of view must the church return if Christ's purpose is fully to be realized, and Christ's enterprise perfectly achieved.

"The qualifications of the Christian ministry" alone is a sufficient theme for one discourse, or even for many discourses. In the short time permitted me now I can speak only in the way of suggestion.

It is most interesting and significant that in our day such increased attention is given to this subject. Within a few years a new and valuable literature has sprung up about the question of the Christian preacher's equipment for his work. The sign is good. The more this great theme is studied, the more surely will the thoughts of men be turned back to the great central idea of the perpetual supremacy of Christ, and the more surely will there appear a ministry through which Christ will speak with fresh and mighty power to the world.

For the present, I may sum up the qualifications of the Christian minister in two words. These are (1) *character*, (2) *culture*. These two words must be interpreted largely, and always in the light of the ministers relation to Christ.

1. *Character*. The Greek word character means in the New Testament, impress, image, form. The first qualification is the impress of Christ upon the soul—upon the

thought, the purpose and the temper—of him who is to preach. This implies first of all, a personal, living faith in Christ as a divine Saviour. There may be ministries without this faith, but they are not Christian. The very call itself is conditioned upon this faith; for without it the call is not even recognized, much less received. It implies, secondly, obedience to Christ. The call of the master must have its answer in the full, free consent of the servant. A clear recognition and acceptance of Christ's mastership is at once the expression and evidence of faith, for faith is both a state and an act, or movement of the soul toward Christ. Faith and obedience—faith, not mere credence, obedience, not mere passiveness; faith and obedience—the one eyes to see, the other hands to do; the one knowledge, the other will; the one consent, the other action; faith and obedience fused into unity by the abiding impulse of holy love—this is the soul's complete, true answer to the heavenly call, and this constitutes the primal element of fitness to do the work that Christ commands. Where there is such answer to His call, there is already set the divine impress which marks the elect soul whose exalted mission it is to share, in a peculiar sense, in Christ's great redemptive enterprise.

By character, then, I mean *being*, informed by Christ and moulded by Him into beauty and strength. How much this involves it would be difficult to express in few words. It involves real personal acquaintance with Christ. No mere knowledge of an historical figure and an historical plan of redemption will be of itself of any worth. The preacher must not simply know about Christ; he must know Christ. He must not simply know about redemption; redemption must be a begun and progressive experience in his own soul. He must have learned the way, through outer court of historical revelation, and gateway of prayer, and ante-

room of faith, into the holy of holies of clear, spiritual communion with his Lord.

How shall he fitly declare the counsels of the King except he come from the King's council-chamber? It is only through such close personal acquaintance with Christ—with God in Christ—that the minister will learn the secret of truth and receive the unwasting impulse of love that together will make him "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed."

Before everything else must be put fellowship with Christ. Only by realizing in experience what Paul has expressed in the words, "No longer do I live, but Christ liveth in me," can we learn and receive that which gives highest value and power to all attainments of learning and discipline and skill in dealing with men. Such attainments are not rendered unnecessary, but through our fellowship with Christ these attainments are penetrated with a spiritual quality that raises them all to a new power.

Nearness to Christ is the minister's safeguard against the subtle, deadly scepticism which so often steals into the heart through the doorway of intellectual pride. It is his unfailing tonic amid the miasmatic discouragements that often envelop him in his contact with the world, and with an unsanctified church. It is his sweet nourishment when toil brings weariness and the soul is ready to faint under the burdens of care and grief. It is his refuge when the winds of temptation threaten to sweep him from his path into the abyss of guilty self-indulgence and unfathomable shame.

Constant communion with Christ makes him strong, where otherwise he would be weak; brave, where otherwise he would be cowardly; wise, where otherwise he would be foolish; pitiful and patient, where otherwise he would be hard and hasty; and hopeful, where otherwise he would be despairing. It is through his communion with Christ that the graces

and strengths of holy character become permanent possessions of his soul. The closer he is to Christ the more perfectly the discipline of sorrow does its work, and the more deeply is his thought let into the secrets of the divine purpose in the history and destiny of men.

Character, then, interpreted as the deepening impress of Christ upon his soul, through intimate acquaintance and constant fellowship with Christ, is the first qualification of the Christian minister. It underlies everything else, and determines the value of everything else in the way of mental attainment, and constitutes the principal feature of that spiritual process which is the fulfilment of Christ's promise, "I will make you fishers of men." This qualification is not attained at once, but it must have its beginning in the heart to which effectively comes the Saviour's call.

2. *Culture.*—By this I mean all that complex attainment of knowledge and method and power which is got mainly through contact with the literature and life and industries of men. The minister's culture, equally with his character, is determined by his relation to Christ. For Christ is his model and theme.

I need not speak now, at any length, of the part which preparatory education, as of the school and college, plays in fitting him for his work. All that is of very great importance. A true loyalty to Christ urges him to make the most and best possible of all his faculties, and ordinarily this can be done only through the most thorough mental training. We are learning to take this for granted. We are learning that God puts no premium on incapacity, and that if, as has been said, God has no need of our knowledge, much less has He any need of our ignorance. The training of the schools is preliminary and foundational. Upon it must be built up the large structure of a manifold culture. The minister's culture, as to its

direction and scope, is determined by his relation to Christ and by his specific work as the preacher of Christ's Gospel and the executor of Christ's idea of the kingdom of God among men. The chief elements of the Christian minister's culture are, broadly stated, knowledge and method.

The knowledge which he is to seek includes knowledge of books and knowledge of men; or, more accurately stated, knowledge of men through intercourse with books and acquaintance with the many phases of actual life about him. If to know God is first, to know men is second. Indeed, these are not separable. God and men are as closely joined as objects of knowledge as they have been joined by the apostle as objects of love.

Now, one cannot deeply know men in the present without knowing men in the past. Men to-day are in great measure the product of the past. Each generation has its roots in the preceding generation. What those in the past have done and thought and felt has expression and result in the present. He, who in Christ's name is to deal with living men, will seek to know them through acquaintance with history, the record of what men have done; with philosophy and science, the record of what men have thought; with poetry and tragedy and art, the record of what men have felt. In this way, too, he will learn the purpose of God with men, as that purpose is wrought out in the long course of human experience. He will seek also to know the structure and laws of the universe, the order and phenomena of nature, the mighty lettering of God's thought in earth and water, in rock and flower, in sun and star. His calling opens up to him the whole domain of human knowledge, for all knowledge has relation to the moral evolution and spiritual destiny of men.

Foremost among the minister's sources of knowledge will be the Bible. In a

peculiar sense that is the Word of God, and through acquaintance with that will the preacher learn not only the righteous and merciful purpose of God toward sinful man, but also the nature and tendencies of man himself. No book mirrors the deeper aspects of human life so clearly as does the Bible. But to know the Bible most thoroughly, the minister must seek to know all that throws the light of illustration and interpretation upon its pages; therefore must he be a wide and patient student. All knowledge is subservient and ancillary to spiritual truth. All truth of nature, of art and of philosophy has its goal in God. All its lines mount in shining spirals to Him who filleth all things with His power and glory. But all knowledge that the minister gains must be made vitally practical by acquaintance with living men. The wide, many-pictured volume of present life lies before him. He must con its pages until he knows the secret of human thoughts and dispositions, and hopes and fears, and joys and sorrows, and temptations and sins. Here knowledge shades into method, and method is shaped by the matchless model which is given in the life and deeds of Christ.

Christ knew men. He was close to humanity, because, in a deeper sense than is true of any other man, He was of humanity. He felt the heart-beat of the world, and read its deepest, most serious and most vagrant thoughts. Therefore, the true minister will get close to the actual life of men. Thus only can he have sympathy with them, and without sympathy he can neither be like his Exemplar, nor have large and beneficent power. It is only by getting close to men that he can secure that culture, both of mind and heart, which his work demands. His culture must fit him to the times in which he lives. He must speak the thoughts of God in the tongue of his own age. To do this most perfectly, let him

take continual counsel with Christ. Christ spake to the ages, yet He spake most fitly to the generation amidst which He wrought and suffered.

Thus, in all his work, in all his search and use of knowledge, in all his methods of reaching after men's hearts, the minister of Christ must perpetually return to his Lord for guidance. Living close to Christ, and ever learning of Him, the Christian preacher will be a wise and successful laborer, even though he be providentially hindered from attaining much knowledge, which he craves; while he who turns aside from his divine Teacher and Guide, though he be enriched with the spoils of all learning, will fail of that result which alone is true success, the quickening of society with the truths and motives of divine revelation, and the salvation of men.

And now I have but a moment in which to speak of

III. The Christian Minister's Work.

That work is defined by the text, "Jesus saith, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Here again are we referred to the One Exemplar, Christ. He said of Himself, "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

This was His work, to save men. This is the great work to which He calls His servants. Christ's mission determines and defines the preacher's mission. We shall get no better definition of preaching than this, the utterance of divine truth in order to save men. All the work of the Christian minister is subservient to this end. He must invite and persuade and instruct and comfort and rebuke and warn. In manifold ways must he labor and plan.

He must use many and various methods and means. But toward this goal must he ever move, that goal toward which Christ moved, though it had to be by a path that led through weariness and pain to a bitter cross. To save men, that is, to bring them to Christ; to secure them, not from penalty, but from that which makes penalty, as a knife makes wounds. To save men, that is, to lead them to repentance and faith, to teach them the truths of the Spirit, to inspire them to duty, to waken them to love, to build them up in spiritual manhood moulded in the image of Christ, and thus, through the redemption of individuals, to organize a redeemed society, a Christian State, and, in all States, the kingdom of God. More than any one else, the Christian minister is the reformer of society, the promoter of education, the creator of liberty and the conservator of righteous law.

Brethren, as we contemplate the work to which we are called, how vast and wonderful it appears. It holds within its zone the civilization of the future, the final triumph of righteousness, the perfected sovereignty of love, and the everlasting blessedness of heaven. As we contemplate it, well may we exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?" "Our sufficiency is of God." "We can do all things in Him, who strengtheneth us." Holy calling! Hallowed labor! Blessed reward!

UNTO HIM THAT LOVED US, AND WASHED US FROM SINS IN HIS OWN BLOOD, AND HATH MADE US KINGS AND PRIESTS UNTO GOD AND HIS FATHER, TO HIM BE GLORY AND DOMINION FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN.

