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Burgess . The Value of the Ministry . 1862

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DIocese OF MAINE,  

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FIFTH CHARGE

OF  
THE RIGHT REV. GEORGE BURGESS, D. D.

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JULY 9, 1852.



THE VALUE AND EFFICIENCY OF THE MINISTRY.

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A C H A R G E

DELIVERED TO THE

CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF MAINE,

IN CHRIST CHURCH, GARDINER,

AT THE

ANNUAL CONVENTION,

JULY 9, 1862,

BY THE RIGHT REV. GEORGE BURGESS, D. D.  
~~C. Burgess~~  
BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE.

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PUBLISHED BY VOTE OF THE CONVENTION.

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# CHARGE.

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MY REVEREND BRETHREN,

IN addressing you, your Bishop necessarily speaks, through you, to those amongst whom you labor in the Lord. Not merely is this true because these Episcopal Charges are so often committed to the press, and find a wide circulation in the Parishes of the Diocese; but because whatever impression may be left on your own thoughts will be reflected upon the minds of those with whom you have intercourse so constant, near, various, and sacred.

If, therefore, the Christian ministry, in some of its aspects and relations, be the subject of the present address, I would do something more than simply to stir up your hearts and my own to the watchful fulfilment of our vows of ordination. I would, if I might, display in such a light the value of our office to the maintenance and propagation of the religion of Christ, to every interest of the Church, to the highest welfare of society, and to each individual soul, that both we and the people of our charge should be constrained, in our several ways, more gladly and zealously by far than ever before, to support and honor it in its fullest efficiency.

Had it pleased our Redeemer to leave his truth and



cause in the hands of mankind, or of the company of believers, without any designation of persons, who should preach the Gospel and administer its ordinances, we should have been satisfied that this was the wisest of all possible arrangements. His decision would have been decisive, in the eye of faith and of reason. Officers might still have been elected, on grounds of convenience, to preside over their brethren, or to act on their behalf; but they would have possessed no claim on veneration or acceptance, beyond their personal worth and their usefulness for the purposes for which they were chosen. But He, in His wisdom, called certain persons to His side, whom "He named apostles," or messengers. He said to them, "as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." He charged them with the duty of preaching the Gospel to every creature; of baptizing all nations; of teaching all things which He had commanded; and of remitting or retaining sins, in the exercise of His sacred discipline. He promised to be with them alway, even unto the end of the world; and thus far, it must be a matter of our faith that His promise has been fulfilled. The duty, as extensive as the population of the earth, the protection, as perpetual as the duration of that earth, are the pledges that the apostolic ministry was not to cease till the final harvest of souls. The names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are on the twelve foundations of the new Jerusalem. On these stones rest the walls which enclose the holy city and all its inhabitants. From the apostles come to us the doctrines, the sacraments, the fellowship, the inspired books, the actual, historical existence, of the Gospel and the Church, one and all, and with the rest the ministry;

the threefold ministry ; episcopate, presbyterate, diaconate. It is a mere fact of history, whatever its results may be, that an unbroken chain connects the creed, the communion, the ordinances and the persons of the present generation of Christians with every past generation, and so at last with those who stood on Olivet when the Lord ascended.

It is astonishing that the idea of this succession should ever seem capable of being questioned. Have not the Holy Scriptures been passed down from hand to hand? Have the sacraments ever ceased to be celebrated? Was any person ever baptized, except by one who had been baptized by some other? Has the visible Church ever become extinct, and then sprung up anew from its ashes? Never has it known more than one such revolution as that which the blessed Reformation, three centuries ago, effected in Western Europe. But the generation which lived through that change, had all received baptism from the hands of the priesthood of the previous generation; the clergy were generally the same men after the shock as before; and though casting aside errors which they had learned and unlearned, were never reordained. The Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, which the parent had been taught in his childhood, he still taught his children; and though now he read to them the whole Bible in their own tongue, it was not another Bible but the same which had been locked up in Latin. Even civil revolutions leave much more unaltered than they overthrow. Neither society nor the Church was ever taken down and rebuilt from the foundation upward. All things proceed by succession, till some abrupt and signal change;

and such changes among civilized men, are noted, recorded and remembered, with their limits.

By such succession, the ministry has reached us ; and so far as there was any where, after the Reformation, a break and change, its circumstances and its limits are matters of well recorded history. An outward sign, the imposition of hands, attended the admission of any person to any office of the ministry, in the days of the apostles : the same sign attends it now. Down from those days, and back from our own, extends this chain ; and we perceive no interruption as far as clear historical light is thrown ; nor is there the slightest cause to believe that, where that light partially fails, the chain was less perfectly preserved. Those who have doubted this, however discerning in other studies, have not been accustomed to questions involving the credibility of records, and the security of ritual transmission. The sacredness of the rite secures the continuity of the observance in the darkest, quite as much as in the most enlightened generations. This easy but necessary imposition of hands was the part, in the whole service, least liable to neglect. But it is not on such a perpetual, tactual succession that all is dependent ; though not the slightest probability exists of its interruption. Reverence for the appointment of Christ would still meet His approval and His blessing, even had He permitted the chain, beyond our knowledge, to be broken. Without any such dread of losing all through such an occurrence, if it had occurred, it is still hard to conceive how any human mind can be so constituted as not to feel a satisfaction in the thought of transmitted ordination, identifying the ministry of this day with that on which the apostles laid their hands ; and

still harder to understand why a fact so apparently universal as the succession of the ministry, and so apparently in accordance with the very purposes of the institution of the ministry, should be held improbable and be suspected, in the face of all the ritual evidence which we possess. Certainly, until we have some ground for wishing to discredit and discard the fact, we shall never be led to rely on the strange, wild conjectures through which it has been assailed; conjectures that somewhere and at some period, and in some one of the many lines which meet at every episcopal association, and so concur in every ordination, some unrecorded, unimaginable failure may have found place; as if only that we might not be sure of an actual connection with the Lord, so necessarily dear to all pious hearts, so sublime in history, and so obviously accordant with His promise.

The Christian ministry, that which Christ began, and which the Holy Ghost continually replenishes, was a gift, of which He never intended to deprive the Church or the world. It is wherever the gospel is: it is here with us. No land ever became Christian except through the agency of that ministry; and without it no Christian land exists. The only body under the Christian name which ever attempted to live without an order of ministers, dispensed also with the sacraments, and soon withered away. In the ordinary course of things, it is with the Church as with an army; its success is as are its officers. With the character, the vigor and the labors of its ministry, it prospers or decays. If they lack knowledge, the Church walks in darkness. If they are deceived, the blind are led but by the blind, and know not whither they go. If the ministry

be a corrupt, selfish, ambitious, or degraded class of worldly men, the forms of religion must almost necessarily become the means of wickedness. On the other hand, improvement and reformation have often begun outside of their order, but never could advance far without enlisting them on its side. For workmen every cause must have; and these are the workmen, designated, authorized, bound and trained to be to the cause and body of Christ, I might almost say its tongue and its feet, ready to speak and swift to bear good tidings; if not its discerning eye and executing hand. Could they cease; only a miracle could make good their place.

Consider the natural order in which the agency of the minister of Christ yields, to those who receive him, the fruits which nothing on this side of heaven can measure or rival. He comes to those who sat in the shadow of death, and brings them tidings of salvation. He is the channel through which they obtain that knowledge which prophets and kings desired to see and hear, but neither saw nor heard, which "sages would have died to learn"; for he is the messenger of the Gospel. When they have believed the word, he baptizes them as he has been commanded, and they are through his agency admitted into the fellowship of the Church of Christ, with all its privileges and its joys. Then the Church of Christ is there; and there is the word of God; and there, the communion of the saints, the practice of godliness, and the hope of heaven; all through the coming of that one man under his commission from his Lord. Soon, rises some house of prayer, beautiful, more or less, in holiness; and Christian worship, Christian instruction, Christian marriage, Chris-

tian burial, have their appropriate place and scenery. Who shall tell the value of that personal peace and righteousness, of that social harmony and kindness, of that intellectual culture and development, and far above all, of that eternal joy and glory, which are to have their sources there, as generation follows generation? You may pursue these results as they descend from the barbarian fathers first converted to the Gospel, and so all along through ages of growing civilization and improvement, into the unknown future. You may trace them as they spread from a single spot till their influence has been felt throughout whole lands and continents. You may imagine them, as they attend and form the destiny of the man, from the first lessons and impulses of his childhood, nay, from the time when he was brought, an infant, like the infant Jesus, into the temple, to receive the sacrament of which the spiritual grace is a new birth to righteousness, till he sits down, with all glorified saints, in the kingdom of God; and thenceforth onward to all which may be prepared for the ransomed and sanctified soul, in the life eternal. All began with the seed which a humble minister of Christ was sent to sow; and as far as to the gate of Paradise, he is there, to be the guide of all this progress. Remove him; and what must be the end?

Yes, let the Christian ministry disappear from any region; and how long or how widely would the blessings of the Christian religion remain? The voice of the preacher is silent; and there is no substitute; for, all experience tells that where the ordained herald is not heard or is heard with scorn, the lay teacher of evangelical truth has no audience, or no will to speak. In some

scattered spots, the echoes of public prayer and social song may linger a little while, but they too expire. Where is the hamlet or neighborhood, altogether unvisited by a minister, that long retains even the custom of assembling on the Lord's day? Soon, the house of prayer is desolate, and falls into decay, a melancholy memorial. There is no ecclesiastical organization or fellowship; but a few scattered persons are left, who once met at a sacrament long since disused. The rising generation are all unbaptized, uncatechised, untrained; the Sunday School was closed for want of teachers, almost as soon as the pastor departed. People sicken and expire with no mention of Christ; and men become accustomed to bury their dead, silent and prayerless, without a word of the resurrection. Bibles, unexpounded, and soon unread, grow old on shelves and in closets; and are but beheld as relics of the past. The Sunday rest survives long after the sanctity of the Sabbath; but at length this also yields. Education, literature, commerce, domestic industry, philanthropy, the administration of justice, the institutions of civil liberty, glide into the shadow of heathenism, which appropriates what it may of the influence of Christianity, and goes on in its own development, as from the beginning, becoming even more and more brutal, gross and godless. The startling truth has been more than once demonstrated in the history of the world, that society can exist, and individuals can live and die, without religious belief, worship or customs. In what moral condition, the same history relates with a shudder. But it is not too much to say that all this change would be wrought in any Christian

country or community as a simple consequence of the total extinction of the labors of Christian ministers.

But rather than it should be wrought, who would not be tempted to wish that an earthquake might engulf his city, that the ocean might submerge his native land, or that his posterity might become extinct in the person of his firstborn infant? Unless the Lord should have purposes of mercy beyond, who could desire that the end of all things should not be close at hand? How little would remain to those from whom all had departed, which is bound up with the continuance of the Gospel amongst men! The Gospel came with the ministry; is proclaimed, upheld and propagated through the ministry; and with the ministry would go away and be heard no more. This is no exaggerating picture of the imagination, but a most sober and clear deduction from all experience. Ends without means are not the order of Providence; and the ministry, under divine appointment and by an almost universal recognition, is the express means for bringing divine truth to the hearts of mankind, and dispensing the blessings of Christian worship and fellowship. The more vast are those blessings, the more precious is this agency; and it is in the full light of its necessity, and its power for good, that we are to estimate our duty and that of our brethren of the laity, in maintaining its efficiency, its purity and its honor.

This is best performed by the clergy, when they make full proof of their ministry, using it to the utmost, with all fidelity, zeal and diligence. It is for us to "let no man despise" us. Us, as men, they might despise, even as the offscouring of the earth, for the sake of Him who was



also despised and rejected. But us, as the dispensers of so great a gift, they must not dishonor, if we can put to silence the ignorance of the foolish. Sanctity and fidelity are before all things the necessities of our office, as of our souls. Without these, ours would be but the priesthood of Caiaphas or of the sons of Eli. An apostolic ministry, too, can be noble though it dispense even with all the outward signs of dignity and of human embellishment. A tentmaker, laboring with his hands, was not behind the very chiefest of them all. No Anglican prelate ever drew more sublime honor to his station than one whose diocese for half a century, was the little Isle of Man, across which he could have walked in a forenoon. But there is a moral dignity which corresponds with the very sacredness of a divine institution ; and which, so far as the circumstances of our social condition will permit, clothes itself in the garb of external restraint from mere indulgence. It is not wise to dispense with all those outward appendages, the presence of which is so much felt by the young, the imaginative, the sensitively conscientious, and those who connect the present habitually with the past. But the common feeling of mankind, demands some equally distinctive marks in the pursuits, tastes and manners of him who stands at the altar, and who preaches the word of reconciliation. A kindly gravity, an universal courtesy, a sustained benevolence, and with these manliness, honor, love of peace, purity of speech, regard for all things wherein there is virtue or praise, a certain readiness to forego any enjoyment at the call of any duty, and a constant sense of the sacredness of our own calling, which is so deep that it utters itself sufficiently without much allusion in speech ; this is the char-

acter which answers, in the sight of all men, to the title which they accord to our condition when they call us "reverend." A forced and painful abstinence from all the common pleasures of social life is worse than needless. A proud affectation of superior holiness is as much to be dreaded as any other abomination. But we must not thus be persuaded to disregard the rules of clerical decorum which have their roots deep in the general conviction of the divine origin and holy purposes of our office. Clergymen who are foremost in any amusement; clergymen who disclose a special reluctance to meet any hardship; clergymen who give themselves to the walks of light literature; clergymen who throw themselves warmly into political discussion; clergymen who have more to do with worldly business than necessity requires, or have less of spiritual occupation than might easily be found; all must contribute to undermine the efficiency of the ministry, so far as this may rest on popular deference.

We must also let our work have its full course amongst the people through strong and various sympathy with their wants, their interests and their feelings. For them, as the ministers of Christ, we live: even Christ pleased not himself; and His ministers, even more than His other servants, are called to "please every man his neighbor for his good to edification." The result of such an habitual effort is mutual affection and confidence. Distance, reserve, reliance on simple authority, the discharge of official duty without personal interest, will deaden all, and may make the pastoral relation a burden on both sides. The minister must be ready to sacrifice much for those for whom he is to render an account. Shall I number among his sacri-

fices, the consent to remain with them long enough to acquire a personal influence, respect and reliance? We ought not to insist on that continuance which means privation, and would end in want. We cannot check, if we would, that actual progress which carries on the preacher, with ripening age and experience, to wider duties and responsibilities. But the worth and efficiency of a parochial ministry are grievously, even if necessarily secured by continual interruption and change. The power of the ministry as a body in the land is thus exceedingly diminished. It is possible that this might proceed so far, that the clergy, coming and going, without time to establish a reputation on solid grounds, might almost seem like adventurers. On the other side, the wish to remain amidst comforts and settled associations, when it has once had time to arise, ought not so to prevail, as to make us unhappy in yielding to the necessity of duty, when our post needs another occupant, or another post needs our labors. We are not our own: we belong to Him who has redeemed us, and has chosen us to this service; and, for His sake, all our interests and our feelings are subservient to the good of those for whom also He died. At times, there may be much hardship in this, more than the laity sometimes dream; it certainly will forbid that our lives should be the easiest and the most uniformly tranquil or prosperous amongst all the paths which mortals tread; but that rests with the Providence of God: it is for us to be guided by His hand, to seek not our own things, but the things of others; and to look for the fruits at last, by which all trials will be repaid.

In striving that the ministry may be effectual to the

growth of the kingdom of Christ on earth and to the salvation of souls, and to this end that it may be held in just honor, we embrace within our view the duty both of those who bear it and of those amongst whom it is exercised. Every thing can be exalted, every thing can be degraded, by customs, modes of speech, and ways of thinking. All Christians must wish that the work of the ministry, and therefore that those to whom it is committed, should be held in honor. Our Lord has said that their reception is his own. He has given them a title to hospitable entertainment and honorable maintenance for His name's sake, and for the blessings which from Him they bring. His first messengers were accredited through signs which no man could behold without reverence. They healed the sick; they spoke with new tongues; they took up serpents, unharmed; they cast out devils. When miraculous tokens ceased, others were granted. In the ages of persecution, men who had confessed Christ or might be called to confess Him, in the face of death, had the same renown which ever attends the valiant soldier of earth or heaven. Foremost in danger, they were also most eminent in the esteem of all believers. Still later in the history of the Church, they preserved their elevation by the almost exclusive possession of letters and high knowledge. Not merely also from corrupt ambition in the priesthood, but from the devout and wise purpose of rulers, to provide for the perpetuity of religious institutions in their lands, a purpose aided by the actual accumulation of ages, it resulted that large endowments were sometimes in the hands of the clergy, and that their order was thus surrounded with some worldly influence and attraction. So,

through means of the most various character, it has pleased the Providence of God to protect the ministry of His Church from contempt, even in the eyes of those whose thoughts might not rise beyond that which is external and earthly. The wisest are not insensible to the power of such associations as seem appropriate to worth, dignity or sanctity; and cannot desire to see those whose office is revered, personally occupying the last and lowest place in the social scale; and minds less mature receive often their strongest impressions from the clothing in which religion is presented to their view, whether it be coarse or refined, austere or graceful. None of us who wished to recommend a cause to general acceptance would consent to give it the aspect of poverty, neglect and scorn. This would not be less contrary to all practical judgment than to the feelings of the heart. Covetousness or indifference will thwart any end, and justly; for, why should we expect that others will much regard that which we value so little as willingly to keep it famished and all but helpless?

A church or temple, poorly built, cheaply furnished and negligently sustained, tells either the indigence or the irreligion of the worshipers. A clergy or a clergyman, faithful in the discharge of the sacred office, and left to any thing like want, is a living proof of a people without substance, or without heart, or without Christianity. As a matter of feeling, who that loves the Lord could consent that His messengers should not receive ample hospitality? As a matter of faith, who could expect a blessing while he should withhold this respect towards those whose commission they bear? As a matter of interest, who could estimate the work of a laborer, ill trained, ill supported,

disheartened and distressed, at the same value with that of one who has all the education, the resources, the means and the comforts which give skill, efficiency and alacrity?

Let us linger a little at this consideration. A father who has a son in the ministry, a son who has a father there, will have no difficulty in deciding on the kind and measure of provision which should be made, if it be possible, for those who labor in the word and doctrine. But there prevails, in the minds of some persons, an impression that the purity of an order, with which they have no personal connection, and to which they give no children of theirs, is best guarded by holding that order on the verge of penury. We might possibly concur with them, were there no choice except between this and the pomps and temptations of luxurious wealth. But as between a kindly and moderate or even generous provision and that which is stinted, pinching and precarious, the choice of no reasonable and righthearthed Christian can waver. Where God, in his Providence, imposes the burden of want, it may be welcomed, like any other affliction, because it comes from Him; and through His grace, it may become a blessing. But it is not for any Christian deliberately to wish it and plan it for any of his fellowmen; and not surely for those whom it must deprive of many aids for the performance of the most important and the holiest work on earth. God has ordained that "they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." It is no longer a question whether the office could be adequately exercised by men earning their bread in the several callings of secular life. That question is decided by divine appointment. There may be many exceptions; but the rule is fixed, that the

laborer is worthy of his hire, and should receive it from those for whom he labors, so soon as they, in sufficient numbers, acknowledge the obligations of Christianity.—Till then, he has the same claim on those who send him forth as their missionary. He is worthy of his hire; and that hire should not be the meanest, if you wish him to be a strong and diligent laborer.

At the head of every parish, all Christian people desire a wise, a well instructed and pious teacher; a good preacher; a respected and respectable man, exercising some beneficial influence throughout the community, and attracting to the ways of peace through the example of a well ordered and amiable Christian household. Education, books, channels of information, and leisure for study, are indispensable to the formation of such a man, and such an influence and attraction are wonderfully aided by that culture which is hardly to be attained amidst the struggles of severe penury. All this is abundantly evident; and no one questions it, unless through fears of the pressure which may be laid upon the people for the honorable and comfortable support of their ministers. It was never heard that such an addition to the income of a clergyman as made him not affluent but at ease was lamented by his parishioners as long as it imposed no burden on themselves. Wealth is neither more nor less perilous to a clergyman than to others; for if it bring to him any peculiar temptation to sloth, it may also be believed, from the motives which he has obeyed and the vows which he has assumed, that he may the more feel himself constrained to be a good steward, and a cheerful giver, ready to distribute, glad to communicate. But that degree of competence which

leaves him free to labor with an undivided mind, and provides him with all necessary aid, is simply what every one who loves his neighbor as himself would gladly make the general lot of Christian ministers.

Under this conviction, in the old time, whole nations separated for the local clergy a certain proportion of all the fruits of the land, and gave them suitable dwellings. Elsewhere, individuals, having large possessions, or else communities uniting their efforts, appropriated lasting endowments, that the public worship of God might be sustained from generation to generation. Glebes, parsonages, parochial funds, have been made even in our own land, the portion of those who, as to worldly sources of gain, may be said, like the Levites, to have no inheritance in Israel. But the dependence of the ministry, is now, and amongst ourselves, almost entirely on the free contributions of their people, or of those who by missionary aid, supply the deficiency left through the inability of rising or decayed or permanently small congregations. In favored portions of the land, amongst the wealthy, and in compact communities, populous but not too populous, the provision is adequate. It is painfully inadequate, in all the less peopled and less opulent regions. It weighs most unequally on those from whose contributions it proceeds. It brings manifold ills in its train; the uncertainty of support, the capricious subscription, the straitened household, the danger to pastoral independence and fidelity, the frequent removal, the inequality of places in the house of God, the tendency to exclude the poor, the indirect means of collecting funds, through appeals to the love of amusement or to mere humanity or goodnature rather than to duty. All these do



not meet in a single instance ; they are the separate evils of different arrangements ; and it is far easier to lament them than to suggest a faultless method. But the best antidote to all such evils must be in a generous, Christian conception of duty to the ministry, as to the great institution of the Lord for preserving, propagating and making effectual the word, and the means, of human salvation.

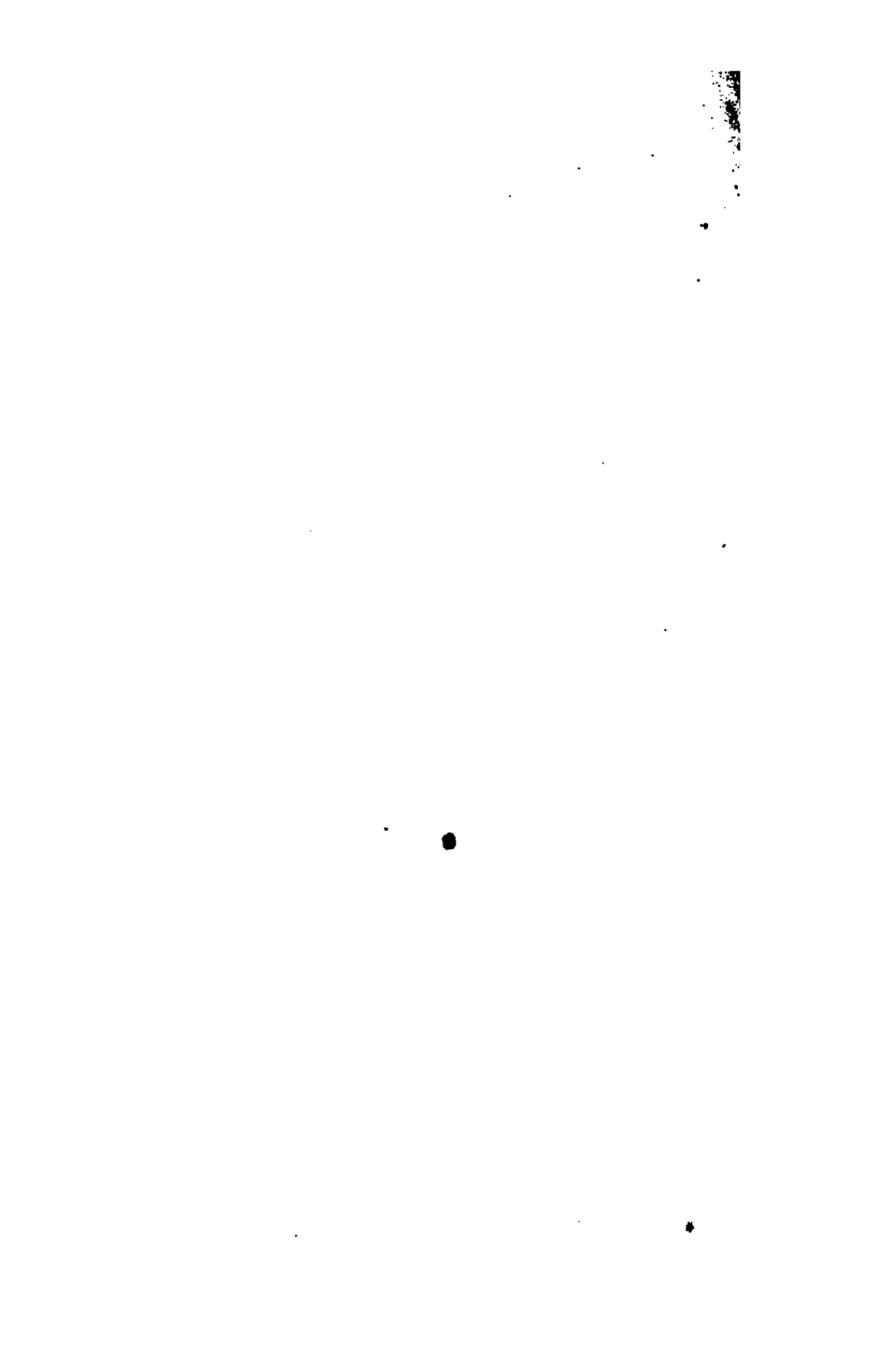
If it were certain that the continuance of the ministry, and with it, of the sacraments, the Church, and all the blessings and the hopes of the Gospel, on any spot where a man and his family would dwell for generations, did absolutely depend on the amount which that man should give from his income, his labor or his estate, for its maintenance, what proportion would that man be willing to offer ? Is there any limit ? Would any one who believes in a life to come give up his religion, for himself and his children, rather than give up any portion or the whole of his possessions ? Would not any man of wealth consent at once to cut off so much of his accumulations as might be demanded ? Would he not prefer to die so much the less affluent, and die with the hope of the gospel, rather than so much the more affluent, and without that hope ? Would not the poorest man consent to sacrifice a day's labor in every week, rather than all which he and his household owe to the existence of the Christian religion all around them and for them ; the ministry, the Church, the Lord's day, Sunday Schools, education, baptism, holy matrimony, devout burial, missions, almsgiving, fellowship, faith, hope, love, contentment, peace, and the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent ? Unless life eternal is a dream, rich and poor alike ought to sell

all they have, to forsake all that they have, rather than lose the pearl of great price; and if that they may be saved, they must call on the name of the Lord, we must still ask, "how shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

And, in closing, let us yet add with the apostle, "how shall they preach except they be sent?" Authority, commission, training, order, precede and accompany a truly and permanently efficient discharge of the great office of an ambassador of Christ. Without these, assemblies may be gathered to listen to an unordained speaker, and perhaps to bow to his eloquence, and go away impressed, awakened or reprov'd. But unless churches be organized, maintained, instructed, and held in union, the summer shower is hardly more uncertain or fleeting than such a religion. The Saviour made provision that His might last and work forever. From generation to generation, men, sober, grave, temperate, sound in speech and in faith, vigilant, blameless, proved and then set apart by an holy ordinance, were to be the teachers of His Church, the preachers of His Gospel, the pastors of His flock, the spiritual guides of His people. While such a class, with such a character, remains and is counted worthy of honor and support of every kind, His work must prosper, because He gave it to such hands to be by them fulfilled. In proportion as such a ministry shall fail to exist, or shall lose the regard of all Christians, and so shall forfeit its own efficiency, the faith will be exchanged for vague, distracted opinions and unmeaning forms of expression, and the

whole Church, without harmony or zeal, will be nearly what any single congregation is when it is long without a wise and faithful minister.













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