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Bible Forethoughts

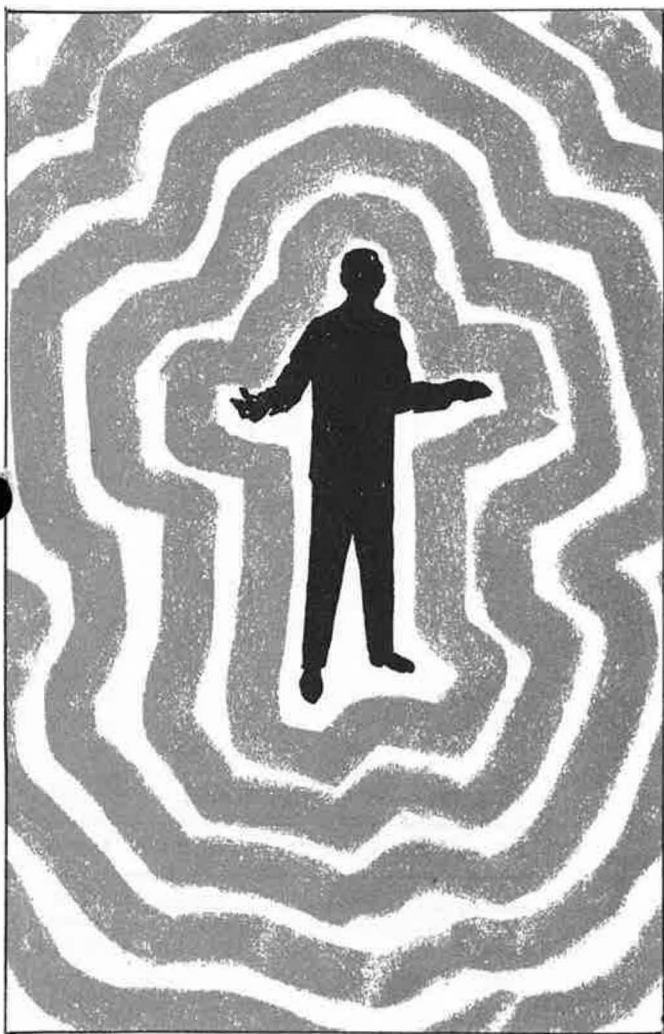
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THE IMAGE OF THE MINISTRY

James Zink, Ph.D.

In recent years a great deal of attention has been given in both the secular and the religious press to the problem of the decline of the number of young men entering the ministry. Two points that are especially emphasized in such discussions are: (1) the loss of prestige that the ministry, as a profession, has suffered in recent years; and (2) the decline in the quality of those who are training to become ministers. As the discussion is developed, the point is generally made that the second problem is directly related to the first. The major problem involved is the loss of prestige that the ministry has suffered.

Sometimes such discussions, especially those which appear in the popular magazines that appear on the news stands, tend to sensationalize the situation. But, that a real problem does exist cannot be denied. It would be wrong, however, to think that the problem is new, for there has always been a concern in the church for the proper qualification of those who would be ministers of Christ. It is, in fact, to this subject that a great deal of attention is given by Paul in his letters to Timothy and Titus. In these letters, Paul gives attention to the work that is to be performed and the quality of person who is to do that work.

Many reasons could be advanced for the decline in the prestige of the ministry. Among these suggestions could be an increasing secularization of modern society. The changing social and economic patterns of modern society have tended to change the outlook of many people in this country toward the ministry as a profession which, by its very nature, demands the respect of people. If this is the reason for the loss of prestige by the ministry, the remedy would appear to be obvious: upgrade the ministry in its techniques and intellectual qualities and it will become a prestigious profession again. The problem with such an approach, however, would be that by such a procedure the very nature of the ministry as ministry would be in grave danger of being impaired.

More importantly, one might wonder whether the ministry has suffered its loss of prestige because ministers themselves have

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not presented an image that commands respect. Ministers may be open to the charge that they have not presented the type of character that deserves to be honored. If this is the case, disillusionment of the people who formerly might have been respectful toward the ministry may be well understood.

Anyone who would be a minister of Christ should guard against development of a great disparity between the profession of religion that he makes and the quality of his life and character as one who knows through personal experience the reality of the grace of God and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit.

The equipment of a minister should proceed, first of all, toward the achievement of the standard that Paul presented to his protegee Timothy: "Set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). In his instructions to Timothy, Paul does not neglect the matter of the personal example that Timothy should set. Paul recognizes that the development of skills and the expansion of intellect are not enough by themselves for Timothy to become a true minister of Christ.

The force of Paul's instruction is indicated in the terminology he uses. The minister of Christ is to be an example to the believers. The word that Paul uses for "example" is **typos** which, in other contexts, indicates an impression made by a die which is stamped onto a piece of plastic material. The implication of Paul's statement is that the minister of Christ should bear in himself the impression of a stamp put upon him by Christ. Timothy, according to Paul, was instructed to show the people he encountered a form of conduct that comes through the new birth. He was to be able to show them, by his own actions, true love, faith and purity.

The key to recovery of the prestige of the Christian ministry lies in this advice that Paul gives Timothy. It is important to note the emphasis that is put on the truly spiritual qualities that Paul calls for as essentialities for a true ministry. This instruction indicates where the emphasis in a minister's relationship with other persons lies and how an effective relationship may be established and maintained. Paul would have Timothy to understand that the minister of Christ will be honored when he is honorable; he will be respected when he presents a pattern of respectability.

WHAT BASIS FOR LOYALTY

Allan Isom

You walk up to the house and knock. A well dressed man opens the door and gives you that, "Well, what do you want" look. After introducing yourself, you tell him that your business is religion. (You've come to convert him). This discussion may or may not continue depending on his response. All the while each one has been sizing up the other.

It is at times like this you wish for more wisdom, knowledge and strength. You want to do good; you would like to win a soul to Christ. A former professor of mine once said every religious group is united around a central idea which gives meaningfulness to its members. And if one removes this unity it disrupts the entire group. Ever since that time I have frequently pondered this thought and wondered if it might help meet that situation at the door.

What causes a Baptist to be so loyal to his denomination even though he will say he does not agree with all Baptist doctrine? Why will a Catholic obey his priest when told not to come to your service? These are crucial questions because they strike at the heart of the personal worker's problem — loyalty to one's religious group and indifference to change.

Our task is to open men's minds so the truth can be seen. But there will be no meeting of the minds unless we understand what is important to them. And each religious man sees importance in those ideas which relate to the central idea around which his group is united. Below is a discussion of various themes around which religious bodies find their loyalty and unity.

One group finds its unity around the phenomenon known as "religious experience." One is never considered as "in" until he has had such an experience. And until such experiences occur the group will consider that person as on the periphery regardless of how much Bible he knows or how much doctrine he has obeyed. Therefore doctrine is less important than religious experience for this group. You will hear representatives saying, "It doesn't matter so much what you believe about certain doctrines relating to the church. The important question is: Have you been born from above?" In this group we would

place various denominations which would not consider themselves as belonging together even though a basic religious experience is important for initiation into each.

Next we come to those who place their confidence in the hierarchy. The line of authority or chain of grace is fundamental to them. It is through the office of the priest that one seeks God and through this office God seeks man. The person occupying the office is essential only as he fills the office. Therefore, the priest can be sinful and not damage the believer's salvation. Security is found in his attachment to the office the priest occupies. It is from this office that the grace of God reaches the individual believer. The hierarchy from the Pope to the priest is all important. Therefore the Catholic must become subject to the hierarchy of the church because this is his communication line to God.

The next group views the doctrine of the church as very important. The individual member thinks his beliefs are Biblically centered and is ready to discuss them. He also accepts views based upon books to which a degree of revelation is given. This group is commonly referred to as "sects" as opposed to "protestant."

A fourth group feels they have inherited a rich faith from their fathers and that it is sufficient. They would see their church as the best for the times. A sharing together of this tradition would be very important for them. In this group one would find many of the more "traditional" protestant churches.

Admittedly we cannot force every person into the molds defined in this article. But this does explain why one who centers his religious views around an emotional experience becomes emotional in discussing his faith. Doctrinal agreement may not be as essential for identity in the group as these experiences. Often you can show him a passage in the Bible which contradicts his beliefs and he will pass it off as merely your interpretation. He has eyes to see but he refuses to see because this threatens his faith, his unity, and his security in his church relationship.

How then can you approach such a person? The best way is to build his confidence in the Scriptures. Then one can turn to a "thus said the Lord." As you set forth the authority of the Bible get him involved in a personal study of the Bible. This will open

his mind to new thoughts and raise the possibility of his seeing how to obey our Lord. So give him material to read and study with him.

The same basic approach is good for all people whether they be Catholic, traditional protestant or from a sect. For some groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses one needs **to get them to major in the plain simple truth God has for us rather than majoring in the spectacular. By confronting all prospects with the authority of the Scripture and keeping in mind the basic unifying factor of their faith and being "as wise as serpents but as harmless as doves" we should become better missionaries for the Lord.**

Let us find our deepest sense of unity in the doctrine of what to do to be saved, as well as in why we need to be saved and in Who saved us. Let us, as did the early church, live and breathe Jesus the Christ the Son of the living God. **Let us never forget "the love of the Lord Jesus Christ how that though he was rich yet for our sakes became poor that we through his poverty might become rich." (2 Cor. 8:9) As we attempt to change one's thinking concerning the Scripture may our basic motive be because Jesus "is the way, the truth, and the life." No man can come unto the Father but by Him (John 14:6)**

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