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Is Religion Too Easy?

By CARL S. PATTON

THE question is sometimes raised whether religion, in these modern times, is not too easy a thing. Once, to be a Christian, you had to believe doctrines that were hard to believe. When you had to believe, for instance, that God knew from all eternity what kind of person you were going to be and yet made you just the same, and that he not only foreknew but foreordained it; when you had to believe that the number of the saved was very small, and that the great mass of men were made only for the purpose of being destroyed; when you had to believe that God had done things which it seemed to you he ought not to have done, and was going to do others that you could hardly make it seem right for him to do, it certainly was harder to be a Christian. These days you don't have to believe anything that doesn't seem reasonable to you. That is certainly easier.

It was also supposed at one time that everybody, to be a Christian, must have one and the same experience of conversion; and that ministers and church committees could investigate such experiences and, by asking a few questions, could tell whether you were really a Christian or not. If, when you were fourteen years old and had come up to join the church, anybody had asked you as the minister asked Harriet Beecher, "Harriet, if the universe

should be destroyed, could you be happy with God alone?" or if you had often heard the minister say, as Thomas Shepherd said to his congregation in Cambridge, "It is not wishing and desiring to be saved will bring men to heaven; hell's mouth is full of good wishes. It is not shedding a tear at a sermon or blubbering now and then in a corner, and saying over thy prayers, and crying God's mercy for thy sins, will save thee. These are easy matters. But it is a tough work, a wonderful hard matter to be saved"—religion would have been harder for you, without doubt. But now we recognize that God may have endless ways of getting people into his kingdom and that if you can't come in my way, you can come in yours and his.

In these days, too, you are not ordinarily called upon to defend your religion or to suffer for it.

We work occasionally by some profane or obscene fellow with whom we have to remonstrate. Or, we work for some man or corporation that wants us to do what we think is not right, and we have to refuse. But mostly we move among people who make no trouble for us. In all these ways it is an easy matter, comparatively, to be a Christian today.

Now what I have to ask is, "Is it too easy?" Has it, maybe, become a thing

had to believe what looked unreasonable to them, and ministers and church committees asked such dreadful questions; when people made fun of you because you had religion and the gate of the Kingdom of Heaven stood open only just a little crack—I know well enough where I should have been. I'd have been outside, undoubtedly outside. I'm not very far in now. But I'm far enough so that it means everything to me, far enough to be at home with God as I am with you, and to have the inspiration and uplift that belong to the citizen of the Kingdom of God beat upon me like a tide every day. I am

inside the city of God where the faithful and the aspiring live, and I know it, and I am tremendously glad. And I know only too well that there is no heroism or rectitude in me to account for my being there; it is because God has held the door wide open for me and made it easy for me to go through. And in recognition and gratitude, no little service that he can ask of me can be too little and no big one can be too big, but I will do it and thank him for the chance, because he has considered such souls as mine, and made the blessed religion of our Lord and Savior not quite so hard for me.

Ministerial Middlemen

An Interview with Mr. Clarence S. Funk

By FRED EASTMAN

THERE are entirely too many middlemen in the ministry."

"Just what do you mean by that?" I had come to interview Mr. Clarence S. Funk, president of the Agricultural Bond and Credit Corporation, and formerly general manager of the International Harvester Company, concerning his idea of the type of product a theological seminary should endeavor to turn out. I had sought him because I wanted the viewpoint of an intelligent layman aware of the problems of the seminary as well as those of the church at large. Mr. Funk is a prominent member of The Chicago Theological Seminary's Board of Directors and chairman of its finance and building committees. He gives from one to two hours a day of his time to the service of the church in his official capacities and in others where his advice and co-operation are sought. Religion to him is a first consideration in life; and when he speaks of the church, it is

not as one on the outside throwing stones at it, but as one very much on the inside, supporting it, encouraging it, and trying to make it better serve the high purposes for which it was founded. We sat in his spacious office in the Harris Trust Building of Chicago. His desk was clear. We talked for an hour in the middle of the day and without interruption by telephone or caller, although probably a score of persons tried to reach him during that hour. He is a man of middle age, medium stature, grey hair, square chin, and ruddy face. There was no sense of hurry in his manner.

"A middleman in business," he said, "is one who performs a necessary service to society. He is a purveyor of goods from the producer to the consumer. We couldn't get along without him, and yet a good bit of our problem in business is to cut down the number of these middlemen so that there may be a more direct relationship between producer and consumer.

Necessary though some middlemen are, they are at best only purveyors of someone else's goods. Now by 'ministerial middleman' I mean a preacher who is simply a purveyor of the thoughts and ideas of others. He has no originality. He has little courage. He is not a leader in any sense. He is without personality and without power. I have seen entirely too many men of this stripe graduated by American seminaries."

"Well, what shall be done about it?"

"The seminaries can do two things about it," Mr. Funk answered, with decision. "They can begin by not accepting low-grade material. They ought to make it difficult, not easy, to enter a seminary, so that men will count it an honor to be accepted. Men without personality, or who in other respects would not be regarded as prospective leaders of their fellows, ought to be steered away from a seminary, not toward it. The second thing is for the seminaries to be so rigorous in discipline of both mind and body that by the time a student is graduated he is a marked man, attractive in manner, persuasive and convincing in speech, strong in leadership."

"You speak of discipline in body and mind," I said, "what sort of discipline of body, for example?"

"I mean that sort of discipline of body which will get a man out of the habit of slouching and of lolling upon the pulpit or the lectern and of wearing a sixteen-inch collar around a thirteen-inch neck and of trying to make last spring's hair cut do until next Christmas. I should like to see a preacher show some outer and visible sign of his inner and spiritual force. If he is careless about his clothes and lazy in his carriage, how do I know he isn't careless about his thought and his devotional life? The seminaries could learn a lot from West Point, if they only would. Every young man knows that it is diffi-

cult to get into West Point, that those who are admitted have been selected from a large number of applicants, and that once a man is in West Point he is put through a course of rigorous discipline that makes him hold his head up and his shoulders straight and walk with a spring in his step, and look and act like a leader."

"You think the seminaries have been lax in this matter of bodily discipline?"

"I do," he answered emphatically, "and so have the writers on religious subjects. I have recently, as a matter of curiosity, glanced through three books on preaching, all written by experts, and in none of them was there a line indicating that the bodily machine, which is the only means provided for preaching, was of the slightest consequence. One reading these books might easily get the impression that it never occurred to any of the writers that a sound body and a well-developed personality were at least a substantial part of the equipment of a young minister. They all seem to think that if a man's mind is trained and his spirit right he will make a good preacher, provided he knows where to look for his second-hand information. You and I have both seen men with plenty of brains and fine spirit who were failures as ministers. The world will always form its impressions of a church by its estimate of its leaders. A vigorous, successful type of man will create an atmosphere of success, whereas the 'poor stick' will visualize to the community his calling and his church. The motion-picture and stage caricatures of ministers spring, I believe, from this failure of preachers to take proper care of their bodily machines. A little while ago the newspapers carried a syndicated set of comments by Medbury making fun of missionaries, which the cannibals refused to accept because they were so 'tough and skinny.'"

"How about discipline of the mind?" I asked.

"That is a matter of curriculum and teaching," he answered, "and I do not feel competent to speak to that question. I am a business man, not a scholar or a teacher. A faculty should be left with a free hand to work out its own curriculum and its methods of teaching. My concern as a layman is with the product the faculty finally turns out, for I have to listen to that product preach and I have to work with him in the service of the church. I want to work with a real leader, not with a mediocre man who only follows someone else or purveys to me someone else's ideas and thoughts. Above all, I object to the 'dear brother' type. In the business world we have learned the necessity of superior men in positions of leadership. The seminaries may catch up, but they haven't as yet. Business *tolerates* mediocrity; too many churches seem to encourage it."

"Be concrete on that point, won't you?" I interrupted. "How does the church encourage mediocrity?"

"First, by having a lot of little churches which do not provide a man's job for a real leader. Second, by the seminaries' fallacious reasoning that they must accept a lot of mediocre men in order to supply the demand from these mediocre churches. Don't you see that the seminaries are trying to improve a bad situation by giving a weak church a poor leader? That's what I mean by encouraging mediocrity. Whenever did a weak leader cure a bad situation or develop a weak church into a strong one?"

"Would you have the seminaries train men simply for the strong town and city churches? There are a lot of very needy places in the country which you probably classify as weak churches. What would you have the seminaries do for them?"

"I would have the seminaries challenge their best young men to tackle just such

churches in their first few years out of seminary," he replied. "Let them show their courage and their consecration by applying themselves to the most difficult fields, no matter how obscure or lonely they may be. Those are the places where men should develop themselves and strengthen their fiber. They are good training schools. After the young minister has had a few years in such places, he will be far better prepared to tackle the larger city churches."

"It doesn't seem as simple as that to me," I interposed.

"Well, what's wrong with it?" he asked.

"There are two things wrong with it," I said. "First, when a city church goes to seek a new preacher for its pulpit it doesn't go out into the bush or into those most difficult places of the land to find him. It usually seeks some young preacher who is already in a city church and tries to steal him away from that church. And second, the most difficult places are often mission tasks among immigrants or negroes or southern mountaineers and such groups. Did you ever hear of a city church seeking its pastor from a missionary among such groups?"

He drummed his fingers upon his desk, "No," he said, "of course not, but the city churches will always be able to take care of themselves. I can see that there are highly specialized fields which require special types of men. It takes courage to go into them. But my main point still holds: the seminaries must develop strong leaders and not simply ministerial middlemen if they expect to change weak churches into strong ones or to solve the difficult problems in mission work at home or abroad."

"How about the financial investment in The Chicago Theological Seminary? Do you believe that it would be justified if we made the entrance requirements

higher and the discipline so rigorous that the number of students would be appreciably cut down?"

"I am sure of it," he answered. "Knowing full well the large investment of money, and the labor and sacrifice back of it, I feel confident that the church at large will back up a policy which puts its whole emphasis upon quality of product without regard to quantity. I for one would rather see a seminary graduate a small class of high-grade men than a big classe of middlemen."

"What, in your opinion, constitutes a strong leader—the type you would like to see the seminaries produce? Are you thinking primarily of a man who is a good executive, or of one who is a scholar, or of one who is a poet?"

He leaned back in his chair and considered the matter. "That is not easy to answer. I suppose different situations will require different kinds of men. Executives for some, scholars for others, and poets for still others. Most of us probably want a combination of all three which is rare, but every first class man will find his place. Whatever a man is, we want him to be original and show some signs of spiritual and personal power. In general I should say that an able religious leader should have a knowledge of God's revelation in the past. He must also know the human needs of our own day and generation. But he will still be pretty useless and only a middleman unless he can be such a leader that he can draw men and women into fellowship with God."

Town and Country Churches

A Paper Adopted by the Faculty on January 21, 1927, as an Expression of Its Views

THE Seminary recognizes that it is in the agricultural center of the United States and that not only Chicago but all the smaller cities and towns of this vast area are dependent on the vitality of life upon the farms.

The Seminary realizes also the seriousness of the present crisis in American agriculture. It is not exaggeration to say that the most serious problem in industrial democracy is not the struggle between labor and capital but the question as to whether we are to build our cities with a standard of life which cannot be matched on the farm.

The Seminary recognizes further that the great majority of its students will go into towns of the middle west and that

they should be trained to know the welfare of these people whom they serve.

In approaching a situation like this, the Seminary must first be mindful of the duty which it owes to every student, a duty which can be stated briefly as follows:

1. It should discipline and develop his personal, religious, intellectual, and imaginative life.

2. It should train him to render a similar service to the individuals of his parish through effective preaching, pastoral work, and his church's ministry of worship.

3. It should prepare him to analyze and understand his future parish to the end that he may lead his church in the application of the Christian Gospel in the social and ethical life of that community.