

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

The Clergyman's Duty with Regard to Reading.

BY THE REV. H. J. WARNER, M.A.

Vicar of Yealmpton.

MOST clergymen are tempted, in these days of multifarious calls upon their time, their strength and their money, to regard the duty of "reading" as a counsel of perfection. Other duties come into conflict with it—duties of apparently greater urgency, of more direct advantage to the souls, and, may we not say? the bodies, of those committed to their care. The opposite temptation besets those whose *compulsory* reading, for Degree or Holy Orders, has just come to an end; I mean the young Priests and Deacons. On their behalf, therefore, I should like to present to all Rectors and Vicars a petition of right, more particularly because their youthful bashfulness prevents them from presenting it themselves. As we get older, we naturally acquire "the pen of a ready writer" in the composition of sermons; but the first efforts of the newly-fledged consume much time and toil. The writer had only one Vicar, and, without drawing the parallel of the fable of the lion and the ass too closely, the said Vicar took the lion's share of the preaching himself. That the congregation appreciated this division was proved by the testimonials which they gave to each on vacating their ministerial charges respectively. And let me urge upon my younger brethren in the ministry to take full advantage of this alleviation from preaching. Too quickly will come the days when you will long for those quiet hours of study, free from the primary responsibility of a parish and a thousand and one interruptions, and long in vain. Your Vicar's library will be a better one than your own. Borrow his books, read, learn, and inwardly digest them; do not mark them; be sure to return them and that promptly. Do not emit a sigh of relief because you have no more examinations.

You have not got through your "finals" when you wear

your stole for the first time lengthwise. "Cucullus non facit monachum." On the contrary, you will now be subjected to a constant examination by a whole host of examiners, less sympathetic, because less cultured, than those you have faced in the University schools or the episcopal palace, the results of which will not be "out" until that Day when the secrets of all hearts, yours and theirs, shall be disclosed.

"Give heed to reading," was the advice of the aged and best-read Apostle to the young minister. St. Paul had proved the value of his reading when speaking and evangelizing at Athens, at Ephesus, and the neighbouring district. Apostolic succession will not weaken its claim upon that sapient individual, "the man in the street," because the clergyman proves that he has followed the Apostolic command. Reading should have the same effect now as it had then upon all seekers after truth; they will make a bonfire of all that trashy literature which previously they supposed to be so clever and found so fascinating. They will see that it is not a mere question of preference of one branch in the tree of knowledge for another, as, for instance, history for science, but the grave alternative, Diana or Christ, wrong or right, death or life. Their eyes will be opened to its real character, with its moral and spiritual consequences.

Moreover, the clergyman who is well versed in any subject is not placed by his parishioners in the same category with a layman who is a *specialist* in the same subject. It is well known that the supreme interest and work of their clergyman is religious, and that his sacred office is concerned not with the seen and temporal, but with the unseen and eternal. Studies in other directions are therefore regarded by them as ancillary to theology, to religion. Those who demand a religious education for their children expect an educated religion for themselves; and they will not accept as a substitute either an ignorant, uncultured pietism, or a pedantic, despotic ritualism.

For this advance in education and educational ideals among all classes the Church is happily very largely responsible. In

all ages the clergy have been not only preachers but teachers. Beginning as ἀγροαμματοὶ καὶ ἰδιῶται in the official and popular judgment, they are known now as learned clerks. And particularly is this so with the clergy of the English Church. "Clerus Anglicanus stupor mundi." Our forefathers have gained for us, both with Romanist and Nonconformist, a prestige for sound and sober scholarship. It is for us to see to it that this prestige is not a præstigia, an illusion, or counterfeit. The highest honour we can pay the intellectual giants who were in the land in those days is not slavishly to quote them, but to confirm or correct their conclusions by independent study, albeit under the guidance and inspiration of their example and methods. "One ill requiteth one's teacher," said Nietzsche, "by remaining always his scholar." Neither by them, nor by commentators in the old time before them, has the Word of God been exhausted. It is as true now as when first spoken: "Every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man that is a householder which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." To do this every such scribe should be properly equipped. He ought to be able to read and readily translate the three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Dead languages unto the world, they are not so unto the Church. Are we straining the detail that "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," was written upon the Cross in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, if we declare that if we are to preach "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" with accuracy and fulness, we can do so only by a knowledge of these three languages? No one ought to be ashamed to take down his Gesenius, or his Bruder and Winer, and patiently investigate the various shades of meaning of some crucial word in every place where it occurs. Such systematic study will yield a more abundant harvest than many commentaries. It wonderfully strengthens the critical faculty, and lays the foundation of sound scholarship. The ditch makes the hedge. If Martin Luther's golden discovery or recovery of the true meaning of *pœnitentia* revolutionized the current religious teaching of the Dark Ages,

and gave millions "joy and peace in believing," may there not still be words and phrases which have not yet yielded up all their message from the Holy Spirit—words and phrases which, we cannot doubt, when rightly apprehended, would go far to settle many of our controversies, and bring those who profess and call themselves Christians into unity, peace, and concord? Scriptural metaphysics will be found more profitable than German metaphysics as in—

" Kant's book,
A world of words, tail foremost, where
Right, wrong—false, true—and foul and fair,
As in a lottery wheel are shook,
Five thousand crammed octavo pages
Of German psychologies."

A clergyman, with such sure ground under his feet, steps out firmly and confidently. A word opens up to his trained eye an extensive panorama of the Holy Land. He is mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. He speaks with authority, and the confidence of the shepherd is imparted to his flock. "It pleased God to save them that believe"—*διὰ τῆς μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος*, not *τοῦ κήρυκος*, or even *τῆς κηρύξεως*—the message pure and simple, not the messenger or his method.

But scholarship is not scholasticism. We must make ourselves familiar, not only with the content of revelation, but with the attacks which are made upon it from without, and with the reasonable difficulties which it presents to the minds of others. To ignore either of these is to be unfaithful to our Ordination vow. Our ministry must be practical and deal with the present conditions of inquiry, but to swallow whole the latest theory of Modernism as the immutable result of critical and scientific research is to risk an acute attack of theological dyspepsia which inflicts discomfort, not only on the sufferer himself, but also on his friends and acquaintance. If anyone with the care of souls can bring himself to believe that the Old Testament, for instance, is written "backsy-vor," as they say in the West, he is bound to ask himself, before he proclaims his opinion, what effect it is likely to have upon those committed to his charge, and how he

will so guide and govern those souls that they do not make shipwreck of their faith. Reading must show to him that the spade is mightier than the pen, that the archæologist in the field does not uphold the textual critic in his study, and that the farther back the discoveries of the former reach (as, for instance, the oldest Babylonian version of the Flood, published by Professor Hilprecht) the more is the Bible confirmed. All objections, of course, are not of the same strength as that put forth with all gravity in a book on the Creation, published a short time ago—viz., that the record of the naming of the animals in Genesis could not be chronologically placed, because it occurs *after* the instalment of man in the Garden of Eden, and that would mean that the animals would not keep to the paths, but trample over lawns, flower-beds and vegetable-plots, without the slightest regard for the damage they would do!

On the other hand, we cannot repress inquiry. We cannot issue Papal Encyclical Letters like "Pascendi Gregis," of which Mr. Lilley writes: "It is indeed difficult to see how Pius X. can persuade himself that he has here discharged that duty of feeding the Lord's flock. . . . He has once more forbidden the flock to wander beyond the narrow pen of scholasticism, where every scanty blade has long since been nibbled to its hard and sapless roots." Patient study will protect a clergyman from professional suicide, as Hugh Miller committed actual suicide because he could not compress the results of geological research into the traditional six days of twenty-four hours each. We must follow the prophet's advice and keep to the old roads, but old roads have to be strengthened and adapted to modern traffic. A clergyman's duty is to ascertain "What saith the Scripture?" which is not the same as "What do men say that the Scripture saith?" and then to preach it in full assurance of faith. There cannot possibly be any final and irreconcilable antagonism between revelation and science. Let us note that "science" is derived from the *present* participle. Science is the process of knowing, not the product of knowledge. The true scientist is constantly admitting that "the last word," the settled

and unalterable result, the infallible proofs of science on many points, have had to be abandoned.

And as of God's Word, so of God's Church. The clergyman must be a good Church historian. But his duty in this respect is not discharged by feeding upon the scraps flung out by Church Defence Leaflets. Unfortunately we have no good Church history. Criticism has thrown the ordinary histories into confusion. Neander is antiquated, but has not yet been superseded. However, material is accumulating, as in the Berlin Academy's edition of Hippolytus, and the more we read and weigh such testimony, the more confidently can Churchmen exclaim: "My lines have fallen unto me in a fair ground; yea, I have a goodly heritage." We realize, as Von Hartmann points out in his "Philosophy of the Unconscious," that "Life is not only to be found in the present. It is not merely strength for which the living ring of the tree is debtor to its forefathers, but, by holding them in its embrace, expansion likewise; wherefore, for the newly-sprouting ring, as for the tree, the first law is really to embrace and enfold all its predecessors; the second, to grow from the root upward, self-independently." The orthodox, the conservative, the dogmatic position, *may* be the right one, but as right dividers of the Word of Truth we have to meet the objector on his own ground. It is in vain that in the twentieth century we furbish up the obsolete weapons of the Apologists of the first age of the Church. As Professor Eucken observes in his "Main Currents of Modern Thought" (p. 472, English translation): "There are many to-day who wish to be religious, but are not in the least attracted by ecclesiasticism; they are as much repelled by the Church as they are attracted by religion. The cause of this state of affairs is perhaps to be sought in the existence of a wide gap between the traditional form of Christianity and the civilized life of the present day. . . . While ancient Christianity attempted to communicate new power and fresh living courage to a tired and intimidated humanity, religion has now to do with a humanity full of strong desire for life and restless activity."

A clergyman with this theological and historical grounding is best qualified to approach other subjects, particularly the subjects which comprehend the present practical work of the Church. There is the vast and intensely interesting work of foreign missions. He cannot be content with uttering platitudes which are no longer beatitudes; with describing relationships between Christianity and other world-religions which no longer obtain. There are, also, sociological questions which are being widely discussed, especially by the so-called working-classes, from the high ideals of a Scott Holland or a Mallock to the grossness of a Boxall, who quotes with approval the German maxim, "Der weg des Tieres ist der weg Gottes." Get together a class of your more intelligent parishioners of any age or social class to study some subject *with* you. We are all members of the Pestalozzian School. "Discendo doces: docendo disces." From such a class will present themselves to you inquirers after the ways and means of "getting into the Church," an expression which you will at once be able to correct. By sympathy with such inquirers, by your intimate knowledge of their character and mental ability, gained largely in such classes, by personal help in those subjects requisite for ordination, especially in their Latin and Greek, you will have done something to relieve the stress and strain of those incumbents who are suffering from a dearth of curates. The country clergy in their seclusion, the town clergy with their access to libraries, can read papers and give addresses respectively on devotional and practical subjects; and thus it will come about that not merely "Clerus Anglicanus," but "Ecclesia Anglicana stupor mundi."

But many a parish priest will ask, "How is it to be done? Little time, little room, little money render it impossible." Well, much may be done by careful and skilful stevedoring of time, room, and money, and by brotherly co-operation. An interleaved Bible is of great value where the possessor follows the advice of Captain Cuttle: "When found, make a note on." Reading is profitable, not from the quantity of books read, but from the quality and the amount absorbed. *Res angusta domi*

demands a careful selection of books, which is a distinct gain, not an insuperable restriction. Brother will lend brother a book which he has found helpful himself. If *you* find it helpful, make a synopsis of it for future reference, and return the book quickly that some other brother may receive a like benefit. Trust not to *printed* synopses. Burn your Paley's ghosts and your Pearson's skeletons *et hoc genus omne*. You can never quicken them with the life of the originals, and they encourage lazy and slipshod reading.

Reading widens a man's outlook; makes him tolerant of opinions different from his own; enables him to respect where he does not accept another's standpoint, if he is sure that that other is as sincere and diligent a seeker after truth as he claims to be himself, and wishes to be so regarded; weans him from that obscurantism which is the besetting sin of pietism and ritualism; takes him out of the dim and dreary slum of the town or the ruts of rusticity, and sets him within the spiritual and intellectual communion of saints and seers. It makes him stable when novelties in Church and State throw the ignorant and ill-informed into a panic.

Bishop Westcott (and who had a better right to speak it?) said: "That which gives us the greatest pleasure is not the *possession* of knowledge, but the *acquiring* of it. In knowledge, as in everything else, it is the pursuit that is of first-rate importance, and nowhere does Plato better display his great wisdom than in defining man as 'the hunter of truth.'"

Let all your reading be consecrated to the service of God, and be begun, continued, and ended in prayer, that it may be said of you as was said of Bishop Lancelot Andrewes: "*Dr.* Andrewes in the school; *Bishop* Andrewes in the pulpit; *St.* Andrewes in the inner chamber."

NOTE.—The writer may be permitted to call attention to Dr. Williams's Library, Gordon Square, London, from which books may be borrowed free of charge. The only expense to readers is the postage of books both ways, and the annual list of books added to the library, price 2d. The library is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., except Saturday, when it closes at 1 p.m.