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Editorial

THE PASTOR AS THEOLOGIAN

THE question raised for the pastor in this editorial is not: Will he, or will he not be a theologian? The question is: Will he be a good theologian or a bad one? By "a bad theologian" is meant one whose theological assumptions, the assumptions by which he interprets the meaning of the Christian faith and its issue in life, remain unexamined, and are not subjected to the discipline of correction and reinterpretation by which growth in faith occurs.

The term "theologian" has several uses in common speech, some legitimate and some not. Too often today the term is one of abuse, used only to designate scholars who are thought to dwell in an "ivory tower" apart from life, where they spin complex theories of no relevance to the working pastor. It is easy to avoid a serious discipline one does not wish to undertake by dismissing it with scorn. Legitimately, however, the term "theologian" is applied to specialists in various fields of Christian study, such as Biblical, historical, or doctrinal. Use of the term in this sense would be clarified if the proper adjective accompanied it when a specialist in some department of theological study is meant. But "theologian" has legitimately a much broader reference as well; it refers to one who is concerned for the Word of God, for its true meaning and experience, and for its correct and relevant articulation. In this sense theology is the concern of every Christian, and to be a Christian is to be a theologian.

The pastor, however, has a special claim resting upon him to be a theologian, not necessarily as a specialist, yet in a more intensive and extensive way than a lay Christian. He is called to be the shepherd of his people. He is ordained to minister the Word of God to them in preaching and sacrament, to deepen their understanding of their faith, to enlarge their experience of it, and to help them to express it in their living. As such a shepherd he is especially called to be a theologian, indeed to be continually a student of theological thought. To deny that he has this role as a pastor, to let his theological concern grow dormant, to fail to keep his theological interest active and his theological understanding growing, is to fail in his ministry to his people.

The role of the pastor as theologian is three-fold. Firstly, he must endeavour to keep abreast of the latest thought in all fields of theological study. This he may do through publications such as this one and through reading selected significant books. In this task he may rightly look to the "specialist" for guidance. Secondly, he should endeavour to think through his work as a pastor theologically, and to see the vital relation between Christian truth and his practice as a preacher and pastor. Finally, he may

contribute significantly to the theological thought of the Church. In his pastoral work he may gain theological insights into the meaning of the Faith in the arena of his ministry where the Holy Spirit works in the lives and fellowship of his people. This last aspect of his role is seldom seen by the pastor, but it does, even if carried on only in a local area of the Church, make for dynamic relations between pastors and those whose business it is to develop the theology of the Church in special fields of study.

If this concept of the pastor's role as theologian seems to lay an impossible burden upon the busy pastor, there is need for pastors to reconsider the meaning of the ministry, and to reassess their labours and their use of time, so that place may be found for this most important duty. The Church's life will be mentally, morally, spiritually and hence evangelically shallow unless her chosen leaders speak and act out of serious wrestling with theology.

G.W.B.