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Editorial

ON BEING A SUCCESSFUL MINISTER

IN his book *The Death of Christ* James Denney observed that we would only approach the ideal church when our "evangelists were theologians" and our "theologians were evangelists." One wonders how much support could be mustered for Denney's thesis in the membership and ministry of the Church today?

Evangelism and theology have all too often been alienated from each other and in their alienated state have been rejected by large numbers of the working ministry. Hence there has arisen in the Church the spectacle of a large body of clergymen who are neither evangelists nor theologians. We have now the category of the working minister who is busily engaged in making the local congregation thrive. He is caught up in an activism that makes him work to the point of nervous exhaustion in order to show a statistical increase for the record book. The quality of his work is judged on the basis of comparative figures from year to year. Seldom has the clergyman time to ask in all of this busy productivity, "To what end?" The most serious problem that faces the busy minister today is to find time to study and to reflect on the meaning of the gospel and the nature of the Church and so keep all the "busyness" of the ministry in proper perspective.

Clergymen, however, should not be asked to bear all the blame for this situation. The demands of congregations and sometimes of denominational leaders is that the ministry should be successful, and success is judged frequently by the current standards of success in the secular world, *bigness*, "*busyness*" and *affluence*. When such pressures are put on the clergyman, already overworked because of inadequate assistance and striving to manage an over organized Church, a subtle shift can take place in his thinking. His own objectives of Christian ministry are changed from the cultivation of costly commitment to Christ, encouragement of an energetic discipleship of the cross-bearing type, and serious reflection on the meaning of the service of a God of Love and Righteousness, towards the creation of a happy, well adjusted religious organization whose chief reason for existence is to meet the superficial needs of a people who are no longer anxious to hear the judging, saving Word of God.

These pressures which have forced the minister to spend more time in administration, organization and office counselling and less time in his study and in pastoral visitation, must be examined for what they are. People have real, demanding and legitimate needs and the clergyman must seek to meet them with the best resources at his disposal. His ministry is carried on, however, not only in conversation with a demanding world but in conversa-

tion with the God who has called him to minister to the needs of the world as He Himself in infinite Wisdom perceives them. Conversation with the world about him does not give the clergyman a true insight into the real needs of his people unless his conversation with God gives insights and perspectives which will enable him to assess them properly. A thoughtful, theological, biblical approach to the task of the ministry must always be taken if one is to avoid the very real dangers that confront the ministry today.

How long the Church can survive this activist, administrator concept of the ministry no one can say. We are prepared to venture, however, that if our generation will not come to grips with the crying needs of our time and seek to answer them by serious theological effort and agony of spirit, we shall bequeath our problems to a generation after us who will then be forced to answer out of the physical agony and enslavement of a world that was not served with the liberating gospel of Life.

Prior to the Reformation in the 16th century there were many voices raised against the prevailing and generally accepted patterns of ecclesiastical thought and practice. There were few who would listen. A whole new world was being born in the late medieval period and the Church by and large was oblivious to the import of the times. Small wonder that the Reformation movement shattered the complacency of the Church with revolutionary violence. God will wait for no one. If His Church will not come to grips with the issues of life by her own disciplined theological and biblical studies then God will force her to think of them in minority, if not illegal, groups that once more she may become a true witness to His Name.

A.L.F.