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The Protestant minister in an immigrant community

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The Protestant Minister In an Immigrant Community.

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Prepared in the Department of Social Service
under the supervision of Dr. Harry F. Ward,

by William J. Ashforth.

The Protestant Minister in an Immigrant Community.

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The Protestant Minister in an Immigrant Community.

As the Protestant minister faces an opportunity for service in an immigrant community, the supremely important thing at the outset, is not the opportunity, but the man himself. In his own heart the victory is lost or won. If it throbs with Christ-like love for these folk, the task has found its man. He can then go before his people as Jesus did and read the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; he hath sent me to proclaim release to captives, and recovering of sight to the blind to set at liberty them that are bruised." Whether the people bear him witness in wonder, anger, or cooperation, the man and the task are inseparably linked.

And a call of need like this is always a call to suffer. When we heed love's prompting, we have to pay love's price. Jesus was stoned in Judea, but he returned again to Judea in answer to a call of need. And we read that Paul returned again to Lystra where he was stoned. The minister may not come in contact with hurled stones in this work, but he will probably have to face something nearly as bad. As a pioneer he will have to blaze his way through many intellectual and social and other forests. But in the words of Paul we

find a principle adequate to such a life-work: "To the Jews I became as a Jew that I might gain the Jews. To the weak, I became weak that I might gain the weak: I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some." The overmastering passion of love found here, the passion of his Master, was the solvent that made Paul fluid for the service of humanity. According to the principle of love underlying our purpose and the willingness to suffer, if need be, will be measured the success of our endeavors amongst these brothers that have drawn near from over the sea.

We must make our approach to this work from the community standpoint, for the church of Jesus Christ is the servant of the community, and its own salvation and that of its constituency is linked with that principle. The minister's personal leadership will be directed not so much to building up the church, but to evangelizing the community. John Wesley said, "We are in the communal life to redeem it by service, and by any and all service that we can render". The immigrant is a part of the community and a part of the church life also, if the church is acting its part as a servant in the community. For in giving a formative ideal of what the community is to be and do; in initiating, inspiring, and

supporting movements and agencies for the realization of civic ideals; and in generating and applying the power of a self-sacrificing public spirit, the church contributes in an immeasurable way to the life of the body politic. The community gains by being faced with the religious ideal of what it ought to be, and the church by having proclaimed an ideal for its community. And such an ideal will deliver the church from self-consciousness, which paralyzes spiritual purpose and power.

Furthermore, the community must be viewed in the light of its world relations. For it is true, as I read in an Italian book the other day, "we are citizens of the world." It is said that Napoleon always carried in his pocket a map of Europe. The minister needs to carry in his mind and heart a map of the world, and make the plans for his community such that they will relate to the kingdom of God in its widest proportions. There is a sense in which every minister needs to feel with John Wesley 'the world is my parish'. But how significantly true this is of him who ministers to these peoples coming from all parts of the earth to this 'Promised Land'. To him there will be but one race, and all of it

needing to be lifted up to the ideals of God as set forth by Jesus in his life. Edward A. Steiner says, "This is both scientific and orthodox, and only as the church believes in this common kinship, can it begin the task which is before it." Very pertinent here also are the words of Bishop Lewis, "The task of the churches of America is that of building a face out of all the faces of all the peoples of all the earth like unto the face of Jesus Christ." It is with a new universalism like this that the church will get her Pentecost.

In order to minister well, the minister must understand much. He must gain a historical appreciation of these people in its psychological and sociological aspects. He must come to know the antecedents of these neighbors—their customs, home life, tastes, temperaments, points of view, philosophy of life, previous religious experience and present attitude toward religion. With a knowledge of these things will come loving sympathy and the realization that "The same God-given impulse which sent Abraham out to found a new people, and the Pilgrim Fathers across the ocean to lay the foundations of a new republic, has sent the representatives of all the old races to become integral parts

of the brotherhood of humanity, which we are creating painfully and slowly, not without sacrifice and tears, in our America."

As he understands them his heart will be thrilled with the old truth: "God hath made of one blood all the nations of the earth." For deep down in every soul he will find universal spiritual motives and passions. He will find a hunger and thirst after liberty, and the desire for opportunity, not only to satisfy the material needs of life, but the religious aspirations of the soul as well. He will be moved as he sees these folk, starved of the attainment of their ideals for so long, and still starved in this promised land, and yet undaunted. In the last analysis then his success will depend upon the way he knows God and the way he knows the people, and the two are inseparable.

This knowledge, however, is not for the good of the minister alone. The church must come to understand before it can successfully serve. All these pent-up longings must be translated into terms such that the people may understand, for the majority of our churchmen today do not know them in real life at all. They think of them only as hands that work, or as tools of industry, or the recipients of charities; the mud-sills

sunk out of sight and mind which support the fabric of society, and not as real human beings with the same feelings, passions, motives, and aspirations. The present attitude of indifference and hostility must be changed to one of intelligence and sympathy. The words of Dr. Tupper are very pertinent here: "Before Protestant Churches are equipped for effective work with the un-churched New Americans they must be converted."

There is a deeper sense in which the immigrant needs an interpreter than that of translating his speech into ours. I speak of the interpretation of his soul-his real self and his best self. He is the victim more often of the ignorance and stupidity of others than of his own. Jane Addams cites how often she has had to interpret the real immigrant to the city of Chicago. Her first-hand knowledge has been of invaluable worth in making others see. What a joy for the Shepherd who knows his own sheep by name to perform such a service. Its importance will be far-reaching, for when the veins of democracy are cut by injustice, foundations are laid for the most serious of crimes. Somehow the community must come to know and love these people.

In developing a ministry to the immigrant it is necessary to know the facts that indicate possible points of contact and the forces already at work in the assimilation process. Thus a thorough-going survey of the field is one of the first tasks. This study may be done by the pastor or by carefully selected leaders under the pastor's direction. In most cases the latter method would seem the more preferable, for it is one of the best ways of arousing a larger interest and of shaking out of its indifference and lethargy a church or community without conscience in the matter. In fact, it seems of paramount importance that the membership of the church be used as much as possible, for the minister cannot become a leader of the immigrant population, unless he is first a leader of his given constituency.

The results of the survey will differ according to the locality, but it should reveal, at least, the distribution of the immigrant population; the housing and living conditions; the agencies already at work, and the contact between the community and the immigrant. Detailed plans for such a survey may be obtained from several sources.** Those who participate in

** "What Every Church should Know about Its Community" from the Methodist Federation for Social Service, Evanston, Ill.

this work should be made to realize that they are out after real facts and not in search of opinions. Some particular case should be investigated thoroughly in relation to each of the main things to be considered.

Having made the survey, the facts revealed will need careful analysis to determine the needs of the situation. In many instances the need will be apparent at a glance at the data. Much will be brought to light, however, by careful comparisons and charts which might otherwise be passed over. Whereas only a few have been engaged in the survey, now a much larger group should be called in and interested. After careful discussion and the formulation of charts, the results should be given to the church and to the community. In doing this care should be taken to give the results in such a way that the immigrant will not become incensed. We must never forget that he has pride too.

It is of great importance that the minister and his committee determine the science underlying a correct ministry to the need. Most church workers have but little knowledge in the field of social reform. This is especially emphasized by Dr. Steiner. He points out that through the experience of social workers, certain great principles have been established to meet

certain economic and social needs. These must be known and be used as a basis for community service. Haphazard good intentions will not meet the situation. Actual harm may be done. Blindness, disregard for the truth, will not avail, even in the name of religion. We must combine the love of social science with the love of man. While unscientific methods deal only with effects, and tend to make bad conditions linger and often make dependents; scientific methods deal with causes and tend to eliminate them entirely by getting at their source, and make for independency. With all willingness and appreciation we admit to be very good the charity that feeds the hungry, nurses the sick, visits the prisoner, and lifts fallen humanity, but charity of this nature alone, can never bring about the salvation of society. Dr. Batten writes, "Social love that goes back to causes and conditions of crime and poverty and misery, that seeks to remove bad causes and set good factors at work, that seeks to understand the mighty factors of heredity and environment and enlists them in the work of man's redemption--this alone can achieve the progress of the race and cure the ills of society."

The plan for the work then, will provide for

preventive and constructive measures; prevention-to remove the ills, and construction-to move toward perfection. The first is redemptive and aims to save life, while the second aims to give the saved life the highest possible development. We speak of them separately, but they cannot really be separated, for when adequate relief is actually organized, it develops naturally into constructive methods. Prevention will be concerned with such foes to progress as poverty, disease, vice, and crime. Construction will deal with child development, the control of industrial and living conditions, and the organization of the State for proper social control, and such other things as the situation demands.

It can be readily seen that such a plan will provide for all of the needs of the immigrant-physical, mental, social, and spiritual. It will produce assimilation of such a character that the best that the immigrant has brought with him will be conserved and blended with the best ideals of America. Latent energies of every kind will be developed until they are manifest in noble manhood and womanhood. The words of Mary Antin give us the true ideal: "The arrival of the

immigrant should not mean the eradication of what he brings with him in the way of ideals; the best that is in him should be made to coalesce with the best that is in America."

It is our purpose now to offer a few suggestions for a ministry of that nature. For clearness, it seems best to give these somewhat separately, although in actuality, the physical, mental, social, and spiritual are inseparately interlinked. Life is not made up of compartments, but it is an indivisible unit.

One of the first tasks in ministering to the physical life will be an attack upon disease with the purpose of preventing it. We have learned that disease is not something sent from God, but that it is usually due to some man-created thing--bad air, bad water, bad food, bad housing, or bad milk. Through ignorance and poverty, the immigrant is a ready subject to all these. The minister can promote in the community a campaign for public health that will provide for preventive and constructive agencies, and for an educational program as well, in regard to the conditions and their remedies. The preventive measures will provide for the removal of germ-breeding conditions and for pure milk and food supplies; the constructive measures will be

concerned with proper housing, proper nourishment, recreation, and child welfare. The educational program will keep the public informed through the pulpit, the press, the school, bulletins, and such other agencies as are available. In all ways possible active health sentiment must be aroused. It is not of the least importance that the minister himself become a living exponent of personal hygiene.

A few words in regard to the constructive agencies are pertinent here. Not only the immigrant, but the entire community is affected by bad housing. It touches the individual, the family, and the neighborhood, and corrupts the whole fabric of society in its civic and social life. The late Jacob Riis wrote, "You can't let people live like pigs and expect them to make good citizens." No housing evils are necessary, and none need be tolerated. We must make the community see that bad houses are not so much a reflection on the people who live in them, as they are ever and always a reflection upon the intelligence and moral tone of the community.

Probably the highest single cause of infant mortality in this country is bad housing, so with its removal we are helping the child to life. A large per-

centage of the children of immigrants do not have proper care at birth. There is a real opportunity here for Christian women to minister to the needs of mother and child. In many homes proper nourishment and cleanliness are not known. The babies are usually tended by older sisters, and Little Mothers Clubs may be organized to teach them, but these will be of little avail if provision is not made so that the teachings can be put into practise.

In a large degree the economic status of the immigrant laborer is a determining factor in his life in this country. We must see that he does not labor under conditions that will undermine his health. We must see that he has a right wage and a fair industrial opportunity. Where there is need of adjustment and lack of justice we must see that the fault is corrected. The industrial employer should be made to explain by the use of lectures and pictures how to handle the machinery so that accidents will not result.

The minister can be of great service by arousing sentiment that will provide for adequate recreation for the adults and for the boys and girls. It will mean much to the laborer after his hard toil. Its value to the child cannot be overestimated. A little

Italian boy said to me, "Every boy plays if he gets a chance." It lies with us to make that chance possible, and to see that there is a wholesome place to play and time to play; for play is essential to the best general development of body, mind, and character. The words of Dr. Coe are significant here: "Quickness and accuracy of perception; co-ordination of the muscles, which puts the body at the prompt service of the mind; rapidity of thought; accuracy of judgment; promptness of decision; self-control; respect for others; the habit of co-operation; self-sacrifice for the good of the group--all these products of true education are called out in play and games." We must always keep the fact in mind also that recreation needs sufficient instruction as well as other things.

The main principles suggested in connection with the physical betterment will apply in connection with the mental development. Ignorance of our language is the most keenly felt handicap of the immigrant. They are eager to learn English, and classes for this purpose often afford the most feasible means of approach for individual and organized effort. They are at work during the day so the only solution is the night school. I know of nothing that will give such

great returns for the outlay involved. In this way we may help to preserve the unity of the home by helping the parents to become acquainted with the laws, language, and customs of this country, so that they can adequately advise, guide, and instruct their children. Congestion will tend to lessen, for the immigrant who knows English is not only able to learn of opportunities in other places, but is less hesitant to go where he may not be surrounded by people of his native language. Then too, the teaching of English will naturally lead to instruction in American customs and civic ideals. Our teaching should be not to teach them how they may attain citizenship in the easiest way, but to give them an adequate understanding of American ideals.

There is laid open also a marvelous opportunity for brotherhood. Let every man take to himself a brother from among these folk and the kingdom of God will become a reality in many homes. He can breach the dangerous gulf that is apt to come between parents and children. And if some good woman will become a sister to the home, who shall foretell the results. Then too, the night school furnishes a wholesome social center for people who would otherwise have to congregate in

some bar-room for want of a better place. For most of these people employ the saloon for a social center more than for any other purpose. The night school need not be and must not be a finality in any of these respects. It is only a door giving access to mind and heart and to larger opportunities and greater responsibilities.

Provision may be made for classes of various kinds, such as sewing and literature and music and cooking. There must be careful cooperation with the public school for someone must make sure that it is adapted to the needs of the children. Likewise cooperation with the library may be productive of very fruitful results. And of no small importance is the task of giving vocational guidance. If this Promised Land is to yield its true fruitage to these peoples, a guiding hand will be needed to help them to their proper places. Dr. Ward tells of an immigrant boy who was arrested for some wrongdoing. He was studied and it was noticed that he had a fondness for art. Accordingly he was sent to an art school and he became a good artist. His parents wanted him to work in a factory. Every juvenile Court will reveal many such cases. We must prevent this waste

and none are better fitted to give the guidance necessary than the Christian minister and the Christian Church.

As we turn now to consider how we may help from the social point of view, we will find that an uplifting social center is one of the best agencies for ministry. Where it is feasible the school-house would seem to be the best place for this purpose. All can feel free to meet here regardless of race or creed or party. Edward J. Ward gives us these words spoken by an Italian at such a public meeting: "When you meet the Italian half way as you do in the social center, recognizing that he, as an Italian, has something to bring, something to contribute to the common store, then you teach him to love and honor the American flag and all that it stands for to him; then you make him feel friendly, you make him feel that he is a man, you make him feel that he must be worthy of his larger citizenship."

The streets and parks may be used for civic holiday celebrations and pageants. None of these things need deprive the church from becoming also a center for social welfare. They will rather help the church to become acquainted so that it can perform its social duties.

We have already spoken of the value of recreation. It is the task of the church to see that there is proper recreation for all. It has a marvelous opportunity to promote those sports that quicken and perfect the operation of the senses, and of those that develop the memory and the play of the imagination. Aside from general recreation, clubs for the boys and the girls may be organized. These will furnish infinite opportunities for helpfulness. It will fall to the lot of the church more than to any other agency to provide social opportunities for the adult women. A neighborhood party at the school-house has been found to be a good way to establish a point of contact. At such a meeting Mrs. Gazcoyski said to one of the ladies, "Lady, why you aska us poor women come here, why you care?"

All of the work that we do to help the physical, mental, and social will converge at last in the spiritual life. The abundant life will come for these people very much in proportion to our efforts in these directions. The Sunday School will prove to be one of the greatest agencies for conserving and developing the Christian life of the youth. The night school and the social hour will all lend themselves to telling and living the life of the Master. Bishop Burt learned Ital-

ian from a young Italian woman while she learned English from him. In their study they read the New Testament together, and once in a while he would pause to explain the meaning, until she not only knew English but the Christ as well. She has become one of the best workers for the Master in Italy. Many are the modes of ministry, but beneath them all must be the spirit of Jesus Christ. The one who goes about as a friend in his name will return bringing precious sheaves. In the last analysis the plans will not assimilate, but the personality behind the plans. Dr. Davis writes, "Our message to them is the apostolic message, and it must be conveyed by the apostolic method: personal contact, personal service, personal love." We must make our goings in and out amongst them like unto the Master's walk with the disciples on the way to Emmaus—So that their hearts burn within them by the way.

It will be noted that most of the plans mentioned provide for a community ministry. This is no disparagement to personal ministry, for community ministry demands personal consecration and effort of the very deepest kind. It is not expected that the suggestions will be carried out in detail in any one community,

but they will reveal at least the principles upon which the work must be based. The measure of success will not be the many things attempted, but the one thing done well; nor will it be found in the one child helped to a better life, but in the family preserved as a unit and brought into the kingdom of God. And finally it will be found in the redemption of all the families in the community and in their highest possible development.

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Many other books might be mentioned, but these are the chief ones from which inspiration and material was used. Numerous Magazine articles concerning this subject were also read and much good material found in them.