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The St Mary's Heritage Project

A Sermon preached at the consecration of
the Right Rev. Walter John Trower, M.A.,
Lord Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway,
in St Mary's Church, Glasgow,
on St Matthew's Day, 1848,
by the Rev. Robert Eden, M.A.,
Rural Dean and Rector of Leigh, Essex.

SOURCE:

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JOHN xxi. 15, 16.

“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.”

While fully conscious of that most common delusion by which we are apt to be led astray in our judgments in unduly magnifying and exaggerating present objects, while comparing them with the more distant ones of earlier and bygone days, yet am I disposed to think that if we estimate fairly all the circumstances of our own day, and take into account the various elements, unknown to our fathers, but which are now actively at work in the moral atmosphere of the world, and consider their bearing upon the welfare and interests of the Church of Christ, we shall not be taking an exaggerated view of the circumstances of our own time, if we regard them as being replete with no common anxiety, and as momentous as any which have encompassed the Church since the period of the Reformation. The flood of light which was poured upon the world by the discovery of the art of printing, the rich stores of learning which were thence unlocked and made patent, wrought undoubtedly one of the mightiest changes which the world had ever witnessed, and nowhere were its effects more visible than upon the Christian Church. But not at once, nor during the three centuries which have since elapsed, were the full powers of that mighty engine exhibited. It has been reserved for our own days to demonstrate far more extensively, both for evil and for good, all of which it is capable. By the extension of education amongst all classes of society, we are in a far different position than any of our fathers were; and so far as its powers may be turned against the Christian Church, we have in the press an engine, which, if unopposed by moral and religious influences, will be found to be far more formidable and infinitely more dangerous than ever were the wild beasts of the amphitheatre, or the fire and the rack to the Christians of an earlier day.

Who can now look round upon the state of the world, or even contemplate the present condition of Europe, without recognizing the power of the public press? Is not the contest now a war of principles? Is it not the result of reasonings engendered by the writings of men of antagonist minds, and has not the press been the channel through which the ideas have been conveyed which have awakened these reasonings? And has not its concentrated force shivered thrones, shaken to their centres the most ancient dynasties, and so awakened the madness of the people, that “men's hearts are failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming on the earth?” And in the midst of these convulsions, this rocking to and fro of the earth, this

antagonism of warring principles, on what does the Christian repose, on what does his hope rest, on what is his confidence stayed? Is it not on this, that he knows himself to be a citizen of a "kingdom which shall not be destroyed;" that however the waves may rage and swell, his home, he knows, is built upon a Rock, high and lifted up, and against which not even "the gates of hell shall ever prevail?" Does he then cower before the powers of the press? does he tremble at the progress of education? can he fear any enlightenment, any expansion of the human mind, which shall make it more susceptible of that which all profess to seek, - the knowledge of the truth? No, my brethren, none of these things make him afraid; they can all be "made to work together for good" to him. This only has he cause to fear, lest when he sees the winds boisterous his faith begin to fail; lest when all seems against him his hope should falter; lest "when men revile him, and persecute him, and say all manner of evil against him falsely," his charity should wax cold, and he should cease to love his enemies.

Believing then that the powers of good and evil have never before been displayed in such active development as now, that the powers of evil are endeavouring, with much subtlety and plausibility, to enlist the invaluable blessing of extended education on the side of error and scepticism, that Rationalism is striving to darken the meaning of the Word of God with more than Rabbinical mysticism, and in a different direction; but with equal subtilty to effect the same object, by endeavouring to make the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints, and embodied in our Creeds, a dead letter, unless quickened by the infidel spirit of development, where, we may ask, are the soldiers of the Church militant to look, to whom are the children of our beautiful Zion thus beleaguered to turn their eyes for guidance and support, but to those who by their office are placed in the fore front of the battle, the Standard-bearers of the Cross of Christ? Impregnable as we believe the Catholic Church to be, because its foundations are deeply laid on the everlasting hills, and "the Lord is round about His people for ever," yet, as of old, must its breaches be repaired by the citizens of Zion; and if it be God's will that its sacred walls are to be rebuilt in troublous times, and its enemies be active in interrupting the work, we must yet, as of old, look to our Ezras and Nehemiahs, to those whom God has set over us as our rulers and governors. And who at such a time is sufficient for these things? Who in this season of danger will desire to be captain of the Lord's host? Who will now covet the dignity of an episcopal throne, where the full knowledge of its awful responsibility is vividly impressed upon him? Happy is the man who has found it when he sought not for it! Happy art thou, my brother, dear friend of my early youth, who, whilst tending thy little flock in another fold, wert thought worthy, and found meet, by thy Divine Master, to be chosen a shepherd of shepherds in these lowly pastures! He will gird thee, my brother, and He will strengthen thee for thy gentle government of His people; He will be near thee at what time the storm falleth upon thee; He will support thee, if at any time, when thou seest the waves boisterous, thy faith begin to fail; and He will cheer thee, in the hour of despondency, with His own most gracious promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee!" I would say to thee, in the words of St. Basil to the Bishop of Iconium, "Quit thyself like a man, and be strong, and go before the people whom God hath committed to thy trust!"

It was impossible to meditate upon the interesting and solemn circumstance which would bring us together to-day, the consecration of a brother Presbyter to the apostolic office of a Bishop, without, at the same time, calling to mind the peculiar circumstances

and the peculiar difficulties which at this moment surround and beset the Christian Church. The perilous times of the latter days seem to be coming upon us; and as these must demand the increased vigilance of the watchmen placed upon the walls of Zion, so do our dangers lead us to look more anxiously towards those who are called to preside over us in the Lord, and to look well to our spiritual armoury, to see whether our weapons are meet and fitted for defence; whether those who are to wield them are skilled in the use of them; and whether those who are to fill the gaps when we are gone, are being duly trained and marshalled. And when, as it is our wisdom to do in every doubt, in every difficulty, in the prospect of every danger, we turn to the Word of God for guidance and direction, it appears to me that the passage which I have selected for my text from the Gospel appointed for this solemn service, is most especially suited for ministerial guidance in these times, not only from its peculiar enforcement of love to the Saviour as the guiding motive of His pastors, but from the nature of the charge itself, "Feed My Lambs," "Feed My Sheep." When our Lord commended to St. Peter in this threefold charge the care of His flock, we must remember, as St. Augustine teacheth, that "in this one Peter was figured the Unity of all pastors, of good pastors, that is, who know that they feed Christ's sheep for Christ, not for themselves." [Hom. on N. T. p. 685.--Library of the Fathers.] And it will be well for those who are links in that unbroken apostolical succession from this humbled, loving, and undaunted Apostle, to believe these very words to be still flowing from the Redeemer's sacred lips, and addressed immediately and individually to each of them, "Lovest thou Me?" "Feed My lambs," "Feed My sheep," that so the apostolic descent of office may ever recognize the responsibility which is laid upon it, and be exercised in that spirit of love, which is the Saviour's breath, and which alone can enable us to master every difficulty, and to bear up under every discouragement.

In these words, "Feed my lambs," addressed to St. Peter, we find the authority given to the Church to educate and train for heaven every child admitted into the Christian fold. And while they contain nothing which shall forbid the Christian child to "add to his faith knowledge," and to cultivate and to pursue all other studies which may serve to expand the mind and adorn the soul, yet they do most manifestly imply that a mere secular education, apart from those religious principles which the Church of Christ is authorized to inculcate, is not the food which can nourish the lambs of His fold. That there are, however, those who think otherwise is notorious; and in their zeal to educate the ignorant, perplexed by the difficulties which are created by religious differences, they are tempted to exclude altogether, or, at best, to dilute the doctrines of the Christian faith in their system of education. But against such a system not only does the whole Catholic Church lift up her voice, but the providence of God has so graciously ordered it in our day, that the result of the experiment which has been made in some other countries of Europe shall at this moment be teaching a solemn lesson of warning to other churches and to other lands. It is true, alas! that it may be urged that the Church has not duly fulfilled her mission, and the masses of an untaught and vicious population may be pointed to as evidence that the lambs of the fold have not been tended, or the sheep would not so have strayed. How far this charge may be brought home to the pastors of the flock it is not for man to say. Perhaps, however, there is not one of them who, on looking back, would not sorrowfully confess that he might have exerted himself more, that he might have been more earnest, more zealous, more active in his Master's cause. It may be that others, too, must share the blame, who have

failed to second the endeavours of the ministers of God. But better far will it be, instead of losing time or charity in any mutual crimination, to see what steps may now be taken by those engaged in ministerial duties; and, gathering wisdom from the experience of past days, to seek to provide for the “lambs” of the flock food which may also, and at the same time, nourish even the “sheep,” who by reason of weakness need to be fed with milk, and not with strong meat. I propose, therefore, to touch upon three points connected with ministerial duties, which, from their very nature, may justly claim consideration and attention, and to which I believe I shall not be considered as attaching an undue importance by those to whom I am addressing myself. The points are those of Public Catechizing, Daily Prayer, and Frequent Communion.

You will pardon me, Right Rev. Fathers and Rev. Brethren, if, as a stranger, I should, in my ignorance of your Church's practice, seem to assume that a mighty instrument for good, provided by my own Mother Church for feeding the flock, but, alas! too generally disused by her pastors, may not have been as constantly and perseveringly used in your own Apostolic Church as it might have been. I allude not to catechetical instruction in our schools, but to that important part of the ministerial office, Public Catechizing. I should scarcely be justified in remarking upon its special value, as a means of feeding at once the “lambs” and the “sheep,” from my own knowledge of its great power, but armed with the testimony of so many Bishops of your sister Church, the Church of England, in its favour, I feel myself relieved from the suspicion of presumption in speaking of it here, and I present even their views and opinions as entitled to no more weight with you than as the views and opinions of brother prelates and fathers of the Church whose talents and judgment you may value. And when we find among vast numbers of the adult population professing Christianity a lamentable ignorance of the first principles of their holy faith, and this ignorance accompanied not only with a low standard of morality, but also with much gross depravity and wickedness, we shall, I conceive, be only too ready to avail ourselves of every suggestion which may serve to stay the torrent of vice, and to impart heavenly light to a people sunk in gross darkness. The few extracts which I shall give from the writings of some of our English divines will show that as regards ignorance and vice there is a painful similarity between their times and our own. [For these extracts I am indebted to that valuable compilation drawn up by the Rev. John Ley, Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford.]

In the year 1591 Archbishop Whitgift, addressing a letter to one of his suffragans, in which, after alluding to the dissoluteness in manners and ignorance in the common sort that reigned in most parts of the realm, “for that the youth,” he says, “are not trained up in the chief and necessary principles of the Christian religion,” adds, “This mischief might well, in mine opinion, be redressed, if that, which in this behalf hath been wisely and godly provided, were as carefully executed; viz, by catechizing and instructing in churches of youths of both sexes on the Sabbath days and holidays in afternoons, and that, if it may conveniently, before their parents and others, who thereby may take comfort and instruction also.”

In a letter of Archbishop Abbot's, explaining the former directions about preachers in 1622, he says: “Now the people bred up with this kind of teaching, and never instructed in the Catechism and fundamental grounds of religion, are, for all this airy nourishment, no better than ‘abrasae tabulae,’ mere table books, ready to be filled up with the manuals and catechisms of the popish priests, or the papers and pamphlets

of Anabaptists, Papists, and Puritans.” He then directs, as from the king, that in all parish churches there should be renewed on the afternoon of Sundays that primitive and most profitable exposition of the Catechism, wherewith the people, yea very children, may be timely seasoned and instructed in all the heads of Christian religion; the which kind of preaching (to our amendment be it spoken) is more diligently observed in all the reformed churches of Europe than of late it hath been here in England.

Bishop Andrewes says, that when catechizing was left off in the Church, it soon became darkened and overspread with ignorance. The Papists, therefore, acknowledge that all the advantage that the Protestants have gotten of them, hath come by this exercise; and it is to be feared, that if ever they get ground of us, it will be by their more frequent and exact catechizing than ours. [These words of the great and good Bishop Andrewes should come home to us in the present day with peculiar force, when the Church of Rome is most assiduously, and it will be admitted with no little wisdom, endeavouring to get the advantage of us “by their more frequent and exact catechizing.” Having discovered that there was no weapon like this when wielded against her by the Church of England, can any blame her for using it against her opponent, if she thinks she has suffered the weapon to fall from her hand as though she no longer valued it, or had forgotten its temper and keenness? It is a happy thing that we have awakened to the fact that hearing the Catechism is not Catechizing; but it will be happier still if we suffer ourselves to profit by Bishop Andrewes’ warning, and endeavour by our “more frequent and exact catechizing” to maintain “the advantage which the Papists acknowledged we had once gotten of them.” We shall be grievously mistaken if we think that preaching will supply its place.

In Bishop Hall’s dedication to the old religion occurs this remarkable passage: “It was the observation of the learnedst king that ever sat hitherto on the English throne, that the cause of the miscarriage of our people into Popery and other errors, was their ungroundedness in the points of Catechism. How should their souls but be carried about with every wind of doctrine, that are not well ballasted with solid information? Whence it was his said late Majesty gave public order for bestowing the latter part of God’s day in familiar catechizing. It was the ignorance and ill-disposedness of some cavillers, that taxed this course as prejudicial to preaching; since, in truth, the most useful of all preaching is catechetical. This lays the ground, the other raises the walls and roof--this informs the judgment, that stirs up the affections. What good use is there of those affections that run before the judgment? or of those walls that want a foundation? For my part, he adds, I have spent the greater half of my life in this station of our holy service; I thank God not unpainfully nor unprofitably. But there is no one thing of which I repent so much, as not to have bestowed more hours in this public exercise of Catechism; in regard whereof I could quarrel with my very sermons, and wish that a great part of them had been exchanged for this preaching conference.” In another place he gives the observation of King James the First, in which he fully acquiesces, that the reason why so many of ours were perverted to popish superstitions was, for that the people were not grounded by due catechizing in Christian principles. And, surely, he adds, that if ever there were or can be a time wherein this duty of catechizing were fit to be enforced, it is this upon which we are fallen, when the souls of Christian people are so hard laid at, not only by Popery, Anabaptism, Antinomianism, but by the confounding and hellish heresies of Socinianism, Anti-Trinitarianism,

Pelagianism. Prodigious mischiefs! tending not only to the disturbance of our peace, but to the utter destruction of Christianity.

I will conclude these extracts from some of our divines, and which might be copiously multiplied, by the observation of a well-known amiable and devout layman, John Evelyn, who, writing in his journal of the date of September, 1655, remarks, "On Sunday afternoon, I frequently staid at home to catechize and instruct my family, those exercises universally ceasing in the parish churches: so as people had no principles, and grew very ignorant of even the common points of Christianity; all devotion being now placed in hearing sermons, and discourses of speculative and notional things."

Now, while all will recognize the importance of catechetical instruction to the little lambs of the flock, urging "precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little," it does appear to me that the ignorance and spiritual necessities of a large portion of our adult population, unable, from positive ignorance of the meaning of terms, to receive much of what is conveyed even in the simplest sermons, would render a system of public catechizing a boon of no ordinary value, conveying information not only to the child who knows his ignorance, but to the adult who is too proud to admit it, and which, like the lancet in the sponge, might pierce the swelling by an unperceived and mollifying application. I am fully conscious of the difficulty of this mode of conveying instruction in such sort as shall interest and inform those of riper years, for it has been truly remarked that "a boy may preach, but it requires a man to catechize;" yet, nevertheless, if its importance be recognized and its value felt, this difficulty may by practice be overcome. For what is too hard for love to attempt, and what will not the love of souls accomplish? "Lovest thou me?" "Feed my lambs." "Feed my sheep."

Time, I fear, will scarcely allow me to do more than touch upon the two other points connected with the ministerial office; points, not like the former one, directed to the inculcation of first principles, but to the edifying and building up the Christian in His most holy faith. Soothing and cheering as are the promises scattered through the Word of God, encouraging the devout Christian to seek in his closet communion with his God and Saviour, yet not less cheering and animating are those promises, which, contemplating the Christian, not in his individual but in his corporate character, lead him to look for a yet nearer presence of his Saviour, "where two or three are met together" to worship Him in the Courts of His House. Had the world lost its allurements, had its occupations become less engrossing, and its baits less attractive, then, but not till then, at least as it appears to me, might the fire upon the altar of the daily sacrifice of prayer and praise be suffered to go out. Once indeed I thought, in years that are past, that none would be found to join in this daily sacrifice, until I remembered that it was the office of the priests not to suffer the sacred fire to go out; but I have been permitted to see no day pass, since I began to accomplish that part of my office, without two or three gathering together day by day to claim the fulfilment of the Saviour's promise, to shut out for a time the absorbing claims of the world, and to renew and kindle afresh their devotion and zeal in running their daily course of duty and of trial. How far this is practised here, or how far it may be practicable, it is not for me, a stranger, to say; that it would be appreciated by many a devout layman, oppressed with worldly care and business, or sinking under daily toil to gain his daily bread, I cannot for one moment doubt. But in reflecting upon the food with which Christ's pastors may nourish His sheep, I could not but feel that as their daily wants

need daily supplies, so are there no pastures more fair, and none, save one, more nourishing than those of daily public prayer and praise.

That one, that best and sweetest of all, is that which brings us nearest to the Cross of Christ, the Feast of His own most sacred Body and Blood. Ordained for the express purpose of strengthening and refreshing the soul, we cannot, we must not wonder if souls become weak and weary if this food be unduly withheld. We little know how great hindrance we may cause to the growth in holiness of souls committed to our care, if we feed them not often with that "bread which came down from heaven." Bound to do all that in us lies to make our people holy and perfect in Christ, what means or instrument can we use so well suited to accomplish this as the frequent celebration of those holy mysteries, in which Christ vouchsafes to feed His people with the spiritual food of His own most precious Body and Blood. Surely "Touch me not" is no longer the Saviour's repelling warning to a loving disciple, now that He hath "ascended to His Father." It is now, as then, a warning against familiar approach. It is now, as then, an implied caution against even the thought of benefit from any material touching. This cannot be, because He hath ascended. But it does imply, that now that He is in heaven we yet may touch Him. If by the breath of prayer, if by the hand of faith, oh! how much more by "the communion of the Blood of Christ, by the communion of the Body of Christ?" [1 Cor. x. 16.] Suffer His children thus to come to Him, thus to touch Him. "As many as touched Him were made perfectly whole;" and so it will be now: "virtue will go out of Him." Vividly as the holy Eucharist brings before us the one great truth, that it is the blood of Christ which alone cleanseth from all sin, it does yet more; it seals to every penitent believer that very cleansing, it assures him of his Redeemer's favour and goodness towards him, that he is a very member incorporate in His mystical body, that by the merit of His most precious death and passion he is an heir through hope of His everlasting kingdom. O, ye dispensers of these heavenly mysteries, "freely ye have received, freely give" Let none hunger for this heavenly food, and not be satisfied; let none thirst in vain while ye staunch the fontinel of His blood. "Lovest thou me?" is still the question which your Master asks. "If ye love me, keep my commandments," is still the test which He demands of all. May it be your happy lot in the end of your days to be able to say, "I have duly fed thy lambs, I have abundantly fed thy sheep!"

One word only in conclusion that a word of gratulation and of thankful joy. Of gratulation, that the choice of your Bishop has been so manifestly and so strikingly overruled by the Spirit of God, that none can for one moment question, but that the Holy Ghost has chosen him and made him overseer of this flock. Obey with a ready mind him whom God hath so peculiarly called and sent. His rule over you will be with gentleness and love. Of thankful joy, that I have been permitted to be associated with him in this manner at the solemn hour of his consecration.

But not only do I joy in this, but in being permitted to occupy this place to-day, I joyfully feel what it is to be in closest communion with a sister Church, to be received at your altar, though a stranger, yet as a brother, and humbly to offer my earnest prayer in behalf of this your ancient Scottish Church, that though troubled - perplexed - cast down, she may never be destroyed - that her Bishops and pastors, though poor like their Master, may yet make many rich, though having no thing, may yet be possessing all things - that her people may live "in godly peace and concord, be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and

charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”