America's Attitude Toward the Clergy: Member of the Profession ... By the Rev. Dr. C. ERNEST SMITH, New York Times (1857-1922); Jul 14, 1918; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times pg. 58

America's Attitude Toward the Clergy

Member of the Profession Discusses Its Lost Leadership and Suggests Reasons for the Change: Exclusion from Politics and Ostracism from Social Life

By the Rev. Dr. C. ERNEST SMITH, Rector of St. Thomas's Parish, Washington, D. C.; Author of "Religion Under the Barons." The following is a digest of the text of a speech delivered by the clergyman at a club meeting.

THERE is an American attitude toward the clergy which differs widely from that of the attitude of what we may call officialism, and it differs materially from what we find in the New World. Among other peoples clergy are generally regarded as leaders, and it is their duty to guide society, to expect, or at least to be expected to lead in the matters that concern the majority of the people. They are the keepers of the moral light, the conscience of society, the inspirers of justice and righteousness, the protectors against corruption and fear for the future.

Once, indeed, the good old term "parson" was used, which was a descriptive of the place an American pastor filled in the community as it was nowhere else in the world. Men rejoiced to follow his leadership as representing the forces of righteousness, believing that such leadership was a part of the eternal fitness of things; hence, when it was not furthered by the congregation, the congregation disapproved and feared for the future.

Since Herbert C. Hoover had become Food Conservator he had sent a circular letter to the American people urging them to carry out the country appealing to him for help "as a leader of the people," adding that the same thing might happen in religion and to the church if their chosen ministers neglected the "super leadership." One wonders whether Mr. Hoover was just then in a pleasantry mood, or whether he was thinking of recent times in Belgium when he had seen Cardinal Mercier and his brave clergy winning the admiration of the world by their leadership of the Belgian people. In our city life—It is different in the country—there is no present-day American clerical leadership to be found. It is true that, viewed from other angles, there is no great difference between the way the pastor is regarded here and elsewhere: at any rate, there is nothing to his disadvantage. Nowhere else, however, does the ministering in the hens of his people or in the midst of his congregation than in America. He is provided, always, that his instructions are strictly domestic and parochial in character. On public questions he is supposed to be disinterested clergies. He is a minister of a religion, a preacher of righteousness, and as such he must take care that the Gospel is sought into too close contact with the baseless influences of earthly affairs and worldly ambitions. Should he not conform to this conventional ideal he will be regarded as a renegatianist, a timeserver, a self-seeker, a busybody in worldly affairs, and I know not what besides.

What evidence is there of the existence of this concept of the clerical office? Any large city will readily supply the fact. There is no more parson cent to the small world in which men and women live and move and have their being. There is no more parson in public life; in the business, the philanthropist, the social, the educational, the sporting world, the political, and the ethical. There is no more parson in these worlds do we find the clergy as leaders? There is not a single activity, not even excluding what are supposed to be peculiarly their own, the religious or the ecclesiastical, in which they are exercising any true leadership.

We shall hardly assert that the clergy are not part of the life and politics and have nothing in common. As they forfeited no rights of citizenship by becoming clergy, it would seem that it is as much their duty to be interested in politics as any one else. To be sure, for partisan politics in their public ministrations there is and should be no place, but there are always grave moral questions back of the political setting, and on these the clergy should constantly speak, just because they are clergymen. It was this alone which justified the late Bishop Potter in his efforts to clean New York's Augenue stable.

We presume that ordinarily this will not be denied, and yet strange things have been happening in Washington. Certain "missions" from abroad have been here. They came about war and peace and international relationships. Naturally they were much entertained, not only in a private way, but also officially. Yet as far as we have been able to learn at not one of these official hospitality's were any clergymen present—vigorously being markedly in contrast with their presence at certain of the foreign embassies, where they do these things better. Of course politicians were there, as were representatives of the army and navy; also the people with large pocketbooks, but the one class that should have been invited first of all was not invited at all. Why?

One of these official receptions held by the State Department, and presumably paid for by the American people, was thus referred to in the press: "The invitations, which will this time include women, are necessarily limited to the members of the French and British Commissions, the Supreme Court and Cabinet, military and naval attaches of foreign missions, Senators and Representatives, ranking officers of the army and navy and other high Government officials. Admission to the building will be carefully guarded, each guest being provided with a specially numbered nontransferable card to be presented at the door."

Why so necessary, that the clergy were excluded?

In the interfaithistic world, at any rate, the clergy will come into their own. Surely, in this sphere, clerical leadership will not only be conceded, but eagerly sought for, and this on two grounds:

(a) Because philanthropy is a part of religion. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world." In His parable of the Last Judgment, Christ Jesus makes a quick utterance of what it means when we turn from the lives of the and use what matters of the societies which owe so much to the to so little to any other class of society.

Also before me lies an appeal from the National Council of Churches, the Children, and Children Made Destitute by the World War." It expresses gratitude for support, sends leaflets and asks for distribution. Although the object of this committee is so peculiarly bound up with the work of the clergy, there is on its boards and committees not a single clergyman to represent that which is its sole inspiration for the work. The committee is trying to do.

The "National Hospital and Ambulance in Russia cooperating with Russian War Relief Committees," has two committees in keeping with its double-barreled character, but whose joint circular presents the same monotonous features. Not a clergyman on the board.

The boycott which prevails so effectively in our political and philanthropic world is just as effective in the social world. For some reasons the hospitalities and social courtesies commonly extend to the clergy—save in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, door, no doubt, having no such in mind of that church that their clergy shall be respected—under penalty of loss of voice. It is a very able (Episcopal) Bishop, the head of one of the largest dioceses in the East, who was thus addressed in his dunciad, "I am unable to see how to make the suggestion that you go more about among your people in a serious way. They therein would you know better and you would greatly increase your influence for good."
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The fact that the profession of the clergy is undervalued. In all the churches the clergy is underpaid, and the clerical life is not regarded as a serious choice in the Episcopal Church that a while ago this new clause was passed. The clergy are paid very poorly.

"That it may please Thee to send forth laborers into Thy harvest."

"We rejoice Thee to have sent us, good Lord."

Our young men will have none of it. Men are taking to the law, medicine, business. Our young boys ordained; rather are they cherishing ambitions to see them at West Point, Harvard, Yale. And we are now urging their sons to tread in their footsteps. It is true that this unwillingness to enter the sacred ministry which leads to the disbanding of the clergy may be a temporary idleness if they transcend so reasonable a requirement. But the facts tell a different story. There is abundant evidence that the clergy are not enjoying their rightful place of leadership and therefore have not the necessary authority to work effectively to do the work of the ministry.

There follows, as night follows day, the inability of the church in the proper handling of the conscience and its ruthless exploitations; its ever-growing demands for more money, as if the spiritual service is not efficient service, and its open contempt for man and neglect of God. We have seen the treatment of public prayer and civilisation, and now, in the hour of the world's agony, we are realising our ghastly error—realising that we have been so under taught and our labor for that which satisfies not.

We are now wiser and signs are happily multiplying that even officialdom is beginning to understand that in trying to do without the operation of the representatives of religion it has been guilty of folly. Public servants are now asked to improve their position and service.

There is a complete summer-sault in opinion and practice. From one day to another, a change so complete.

In May and June there were sent out to the clergy of Washington as many as thirty appeals for their help by officials of the Social Service Commission. These naïve urging as an argument for favorable consideration that the Government could not give the service. We are thus being taught and our labor for that which satisfies not.


"Our nation officially recognises the rank of religion among its social forces by sending out to its ministers and officers of the clergy an appeal for its power. It is as if officialdom had suddenly discovered that the Church existed in its midst. This is of great power. While the appeals come all sorts and conditions of men, from men of the legislature to men of national-wide benevolent organisations down to the manufacturers of patent medicines and quick remedies at $2 a box. To mention a few. In a time of trial, in a time of limelight, they all have thisfusing in common, that the Church can help them with a message of hope and assurance."

In June of 1917, put it, "the pulpit is of untold value."

Looking at some recent appeals for help. The New York Supply Commission sent to the clergymen of all denominations throughout the State a request for all the supply that could be regarded as food-saving Sunday. On Sunday the clergy were asked to address their people on the necessity for the food-saving campaign, push the food-saving campaign, and fight the spirit of self-interest in the churches to the utmost. The clergy were urged to present the case for the food-saving campaign in church programmes, in school districts, in the food-saving registration campaign, and to enlist the activity of the clergy in every part of the country with churches to activities in food saving."

And now appeal, which is typical of many others, has the merit of assuming that the clergy can state in their own lan-

ge, their own language. And because they have been trained to do the work of the ministry. But all appeals do not make any such assumptions. Sometimes aid in "in the preparation of a suitable sermon" is gen
erally omitted. And in the present situation is the number of prepared sermons which accompany many appeals many of them of invaluable aid. The Army Loan campaign managers sent out several of these curiosities. If a man did not have the loan of an official to help, they sent. This was turning the pulpit with a vengeance.

This type of appeal is very good, for the better is simply due to the fact that men are realizing that from a public as well as private point of view, the national wealth's most influential citizens is suitu
cial. The stress of the times has taught us that this conversion is not spon
taneous, but is a conversion of people, they naturally crowd out of assistance, and, whether they are states
talistic or not, is a matter of open question of any other kind, where can they go with greater hopes of success than to the Church?

What the Church's power is worth through marvellous no man can say. Nothing in the history of this country with more than a hundred thousand commissioned officers. This army is dedicated to the accomplishment of the church's work. It is the highest ideals which this world knows anything about. Its officers are in daily close personal relationship with the enlisted men and women whose day by day and hour by hour it seeks to imbue with the spirit of the service. In such ways the Church has an influence which no legislator can ever have.

Therefore, representing religion, the mightiest of forces in the building of States and the foundation of lasting institutions, the clergy are the mighty factors in the building of every community. Too long without protest have they acquiesced in the weakness of our official attitude, which attitude should be tolerated no longer. No false modesty should hinder. Individual and group actions which fail in this re
spect should be helped to a better knowledge and a truer practice. The clergy are asked to do a great army. They are not even thinking of their own particular church. Rather are they think
ing of the people committed to their care, to do the first to suffer if religious suffers.

The Clergy must be assured that in this time of trial they should feel that their power of prayer and to stop the drift away from these already open, to recover those already lost. It is a day of grace. If we allow the hordes and the patrolling classes, both of whom are steadily relying upon pa
tural power and the power of the pulpit to help us, we must have the power of prayer. If it is our time, whether public or private, unselfishness as it's very keynote, the full sympathy of the pulpit is behind them. The next step forward will have been taken in making this world, and our own part
cular one, a better world.