

# 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

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THERE is an American attitude toward the clergy which differs from that of other peoples. It is the attitude of what we may call officialdom, and it differs materially from that of officialdom elsewhere. For whereas among other peoples clergymen are generally regarded as leaders, among ourselves officialdom neither expects nor desires such leadership.

Once, indeed, the good old term "parson," that is, the person, was as truly descriptive of the place an American pastor filled in the community as it was anywhere in the world. Men rejoiced to follow his leadership as representing the forces of righteousness, believing that such leadership was part of the eternal fitness of things; hence, when it was not forthcoming they were keenly disappointed and feared for the future.

Soon after Herbert C. Hoover had become Food Conservator he sent a circular letter to every clergyman throughout the country appealing to him for help "as a leader of the people," adding that it would be "a calamity to the nation and to the church if their chosen ministers neglected to exercise their proper leadership." One wonders whether Mr. Hoover was just then in a pleasantly reminiscent mood of boyhood days 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 in the world is he more appreciated when ministering in the homes of his people or in the midst of his congregation than here, provided, always, that his ministrations are strictly domestic and parochial in character. On public questions he is expected to be discreetly silent. He is a minister of religion, a preacher of righteousness, and as such he must take care that the Gospel is not brought into too close contact with the baneful influences of earthly affairs and worldly ambitions. Should he not conform to this conventional ideal he will be regarded as a sensationalist, 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 conception of the clerical office? Any large city will readily supply the answer. Washington will do this as well as any other, perhaps better, because Washington is more representative than any other. Here things are done more by authority than elsewhere. Here officialdom flourishes more luxuriantly. An exotic in other places; it is a native plant here.

Now in Washington, as in New York or San Francisco, there are different little worlds in which men and women live and move apart from each other. There is the religious world, the political, the business, the philanthropic, the social, the educational, the sporting world, the legal world, and so on. Now in which of these worlds do we find the clergy as leaders? There is not a single activity, not even excluding that which we suppose 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 have no part in political life; that they and politics have nothing in common.

As they forfeited no rights of citizenship by becoming clergymen, 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 out New York's Augean 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 so far as we have been able to learn at not one of these official hospitalities were any clergymen present—their absence being markedly in contrast with their presence at certain of the foreign embassies, where they do these things better. Of course politicians were there, so 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, chiefs and counselors, military and naval attachés 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 necessarily limited that the clergy were excluded?

In the philanthropic 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 this, 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 acquittal and condemnation to turn on how men have fed the hungry and clothed the naked. The clergy are not pastors of souls only. They have an equal responsibility to care for needy bodies. Consequently, philanthropy is their business, as it is the business of no other class in the world.

(b) Because of the work done and results achieved by the clergy in recognition of this God-given duty. Due to their constant insistence upon full recognition of this duty by all who acknowledge their

spiritual authority, the astonishing result is conceded that 95 per cent. of all the money given for charitable purposes throughout the United States is given by the men and women of the churches.

Obviously, therefore, clerical leadership will be welcome here. Nothing of the kind. Look over the governing boards of such organizations as even the Red Cross, the Committee of Mercy and similar societies, and the astonishing fact reveals itself that the clergy are effectively boycotted! The very men on whose co-operation and good-will success in appealing for funds mainly depends are carefully excluded from membership; acknowledged to be essential in the gathering of the money, they are allowed no voice in its disbursement.

There lies before me a letter sent by the Red Cross to thousands of the clergy asking them to form committees in their parishes and to see to it that each member of the same be provided with Red Cross literature! This letter has the usual garnishing of names which we find upon official letter paper of the kind. They are mainly drawn from political life, but other interests are well represented. Religion alone is excepted! It furnishes not a single name. The omission, remarkable in any case, becomes positively astounding as we read over the lists of names and see what manner of men the societies which owe so much to the clergy and so little to any other class delight to honor.

Also before me lies an appeal from the "Committee of Mercy for the Women and Children Made Destitute by the World War." It expresses gratitude for support, sends leaflets and asks their 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 religion which is its sole inspiration for the work the committee is trying to do!

The "American Hospital and Ambulance in Russia, co-operating with Russian War Relief Committee," has two committees in keeping with its double-barreled character, but their joint circular presents the same monotonous features. Not a clergyman on the board.

The boycott which prevails so effectively in our political and philanthropic worlds is just as effective in the social world. For some reasons the hospitalities and social courtesies commonly extended to prominent men are rarely extended to the clergy—save in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, due, no doubt, to the insistence by the members of that church that their clergy shall be respected—under penalty of loss of votes. It was a very able (Episcopal) Bishop, the head of one of the largest dioceses in the East, who was thus addressed in his Diocesan Convention: "May I venture to make the suggestion that you go more about among your people in a social way? Thereby they would know you better and you would greatly increase your influence for good."

Promptly the Bishop replied: "I heartily agree with my brother and thank him for his suggestion, but since I have been in this city I have received exactly three invitations to dinner and have accepted them all. What more can I do?"

Another Bishop, also of the same church, a man whom it was an honor to know, and who had a right to enjoy much social attention, quite irrespective of the fact that he was a clergyman, was accused by the local society sheet of the large Eastern city to which he had come as its chief representative of religion of trying to break into its social life!

This attitude is mainly responsible for

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the fact that the profession of the clergy is undermanned. In all the churches the office of pastor now goes begging. So serious is the shortage in the Episcopal Church that a while ago this new clause was added to the Litany:

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

"We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord."

Our young men will have none of it. Mothers are no longer keen to see their boys ordained; rather are they cherishing ambitions to see them at West Point or Annapolis. Even the clergy are not now urging their sons to tread in their footsteps. It is true that this unwillingness to enter the sacred ministry which was wont to appeal to the noblest of our boys, and which still holds for some its rare fascination, has been explained differently: Lack of material rewards is said to be a chief cause. Inability to accept the creeds and doctrinal standards of today is assigned as another. Again the cause is found in the demand that the clergy shall always remain young under the penalty of enforced permanent idleness if they transgress so reasonable a requirement. But the true cause surely lies rather in the abundant evidence that the clergy are not enjoying their rightful place of leadership and therefore have not the necessary influence effectively to do the work of the ministry.

There follows, as night follows day, the worship of materialism with its lowering of the conscience and its ruthless exploitations; its ever-growing demands for higher rewards while rendering less efficient service, and its open contempt for man and neglect of God. We have been putting our faith in commercialism and civilization, and now, in the hour of the world's agony, we are realizing our ghastly error—realizing that we have been spending our strength for nought and our labor for that which satisfies not.

But we are wiser now and signs are happily multiplying that even officialdom is beginning to understand that in trying to do without the co-operation of the representatives of religion it has been guilty of folly. Public servants are turning to the clergy for help as never before. There is a complete summer-sault in opinion and practice. From one extreme men are rushing to the other. In May and June there were sent out to the clergy of Washington as many as thirteen appeals for their help by officials of the Administration alone. One of these naively urged as an argument for favorable consideration that the Government recognized religion! Here are the exact words with which the circular begins, showing the particular character of this recognition. Its writer must be somewhat of a humorist:

"Liberty Loan Sunday. Treasury Department. Office of Director of Publicity. Washington, May 23, 1917.

"Our nation officially recognizes the rank of religion among its social forces by a decennial census of religious bodies."

It is as if officialdom had suddenly discovered that the Church existed in its midst; also that the Church has great power. While the appeals come from all sorts and conditions of men, from Federal and State officials and managers of nation-wide benevolent organizations down to the manufacturers of patent medicines and quack remedies at \$2 a bottle, and people with a passion for the limelight, they all have this feeling in common, that the Church can help them as nothing else can; as a Red Cross circular of June 7, 1917, puts it, "the pulpit is of untold value."

Look at some recent appeals for help. The New York Supply Commission sent to the clergymen of all denominations throughout the State a request that July 1 be regarded as food-saving Sunday.

On that Sunday the clergy were asked "to address their congregations on the necessity for the development of the food-saving conscience, push the food-saving registration campaign by instilling enthusiasm among the women of the congregations, bring every teacher in the Sunday schools, and pupils of Sunday schools, into the food-saving registration campaign, and to enlist the activity of the women's organizations connected with churches to activities in food saving."

This appeal, which is typical of many others, has the merit of assuming that the clergy can state in their own language just what is required of them. But all appeals do not make any such assumptions. Sometimes aid "in the preparation of a suitable sermon" is offered. Indeed, one of the oddities of the present situation is the number of prepared sermons which accompany many of the requests for help. The Liberty Loan campaign managers sent out several of these curiosities. If a man did not like one sermon he had others to choose from. This was tuning the pulpits with a vengeance.

That things are thus changing for the better is simply due to the fact that men are realizing that from a public standpoint a boycott of the Commonwealth's most influential citizens is suicidal. The stress of the times has taught them this much. Very proper, very timely, is their conversion. When men have a job on hand, such as Mr. Hoover has, the changing over night of the wasteful habits of a hundred million people, they naturally cast around for assistance, and, whether they be statesmen, philanthropists or public servants of any other kind, where can they go with greater hopes of success than to the clergy?

What the Church's power is when thoroughly marshaled no man can say. It is an army of many millions strong, with more than a hundred thousand commissioned officers. This army is dedicated to the accomplishment of the noblest work and to the achievement of the highest ideals which this world knows anything about. Its officers are in daily close personal relationship with the enlisted men and women whom day by day and hour by hour it seeks to imbue with the loftiest ambitions of usefulness and service. In such ways the Church has an influence which no legislator can ever dream of possessing.

Therefore, representing religion, the mightiest of factors in the upbuilding of States and the foundation of lasting prosperity, the clergy should be so regarded in every community. Too long without protest have they acquiesced in officialdom's attitude. That attitude should be tolerated no longer. No false modesty should hinder. Individuals and organizations which fail in this respect should be helped to a better knowledge and a truer practice. The clergy are asking nothing for themselves. They are not even thinking of their own particular church. Rather are they thinking of the people committed to their care, who will be the first to suffer if religion suffers.

The clergy must be assured that in their efforts to open the closed houses of prayer and to stop the drift away from those already open, to recover from their evil ways the alienated masses and the patronizing classes, both of whom are steadily relapsing into paganism, and to bring into the life of our time, whether public or private, unselfishness as its very keynote, the full sympathy of every class of their fellow-countrymen is behind them. Then a great step forward will have been taken in making this world, and one's own portion of it in particular, a better world for man's brief earthly dwelling. Then Mr. Justice Brewer's judicial declaration that "this is a Christian nation" will receive a new justification.