

Old Age Pension for Retired Pastors

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The paper assigned to me bears the title: "Old Age Pension for Retired Pastors" - a title which clearly indicates that sooner or later during the course of this essay we shall discuss the subject of money - a subject, by the way, upon which many of us pastors, for some inexcusable reason are rather reluctant to speak in the midst of our congregations even in the interest of the Kingdom of God at large. What shall we say then when called upon to present the matter of money for the personal use and advantage of the minister himself? Do we fear to discuss in the presence of our laymen "Old Age Pension for Retired Pastors?" We should not, if we as pastors, and you as Christian laymen, have come to a full realization of the high office of the public ministry, and the corresponding duty which has always been enjoined upon the Church toward that ministry. Let us approach our subject from these three angles:

- I. The High Office of the Public Ministry
- II. The Financial Duty of the Church Toward the Ministry
- III. The Pension Plan, a Practical Application of that Duty.

As we revert to our first proposition: "The High Office of the Public Ministry" - we are fully conscious of the critical smirks a topic such as that invariably would call forth among the people of this world, for as one writer has put it: "It is evident that our materialistic age and thoroughly godless age, has come to regard the minister of the Gospel as a sort of effeminate and unpractical human oddity, a morbid freak, inclined to meddle with and to throw the monkey-wrenches of unpracticality into the machinery of modern man. The portrayal on the movie screen of the simpering, narrow-shouldered, weak-chinned clerical half-man may be a gross caricature, and may be wide open to the charge of malicious perversion and exaggeration, but it does measurably represent the popular conception of the public ministry." And: "Which pastor has not at times chafed under the patronizing air with which his ministry has been regarded by smug and self-sufficient worldlings?"

Sad to say, much of this worldly spirit and godless under-evaluation of the office of the public ministry has crept into the midst of even our otherwise conservatively Christian congregations, and into the hearts of even of some of our otherwise well-instructed pastors and parishioners. Some would look upon this office as one to be sought after according to the subtle and shady deals of some political convention looking for a suitable candidate. Some would regard the minister as one to be hired and fired according to the standards of the machine age about us. Others would regard the pastor as a handy and useful man to have about in times of family emergencies and family quarrels. But to look upon him as an instrument of a loving God who is to shape their lives and souls for time and eternity - that is strange to their mode of thought. It is high time that we revamp our thinking along these lines and to accord the office of the ministry that honor which God in His infallible Word through the mouth of His apostles demands of us.

Though none of these men attempt at any time to minimize their own absolute natural unworthiness - though the one cries: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," and another confesses: "If we say we have no sin the truth is not in us" - and still another laments: "I am the chief among sinners" - yet thinking on their ministry, Paul, speaking for them all says: "Paul an apostle, not of men, neither by any man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead." And again: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made you overseers." And lastly: "And He (God) gave some apostles; some, prophets."

Here, then, the office of the ministry is clearly lifted out of the sphere of the earthly and placed into the sphere of the heavenly, the divine. Here the office of the minister is described as originating not in the consciousness of any human mind, but alone in the loving mind of the infinite God above. Here then the ministry is classed as a calling above any work or labor or profession of this earth - as the work and ministry of

God Himself. As a free gift of His ever-abiding love. The office of the ministry, as to its origin, is not human but divine.

Brethren: Far be it from us to compare ourselves with those apostles of old! Far be it from us to minimize our sins and shortcomings for with them, and perhaps, with greater shame than they, we smite upon our breasts and say: God be merciful to us, poor sinful beings. Still, that very feeling our own unworthiness causes us to ask ourselves the question: Just why are we ministers? Why did we not rather choose some other profession? Why do we remain ministers in the face of trials and troubles which only the ministry can bring? Among the various answers we might give, must we not add also this one: "We are what we are by the grace and will of God"? God made us what we are! What an high office! How could we lower its attainment to the level of political deals! God made us what we are! How could we ever grow weary in the face of trials and troubles!

Representatives of our Congregations: You are living in a world which boasts of its great learning, of its forward strides in science, in the mechanical arts, as the war over there in Flanders fields has abundantly, horribly proved, but tell us: Would this proud, vain world ever desire the help of a pastor, of a minister of Jesus Christ? O, the world is the same today as it was then - "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God" - "eyes have not seen or ears have not heard" - but God, in His love must still give that which in His love He has prepared for them that love Him through the mouth of His ministers: How is it with yourselves? Would you, according to your natures, would you have ever asked for the office of the ministry? Rest assured that as little as you with your own power and strength can come to the Lord, just so little would you of yourselves have desired the service of a minister: No, no, when you receive a minister, it is through the operations of God's Spirit - a free gift of His love!

How could you ever lower the office of the ministry in your midst to the standard of the machine age about you? How could you feel disposed to hire and fire whomsoever, howsoever, whensoever you would when God has placed that office among you and will terminate it if and when and how it pleases Him?

So then God's messengers these men are. Now if they are God's messengers, they certainly must have a Message. That they have, and surely when we consider that message we must again wonder at the high office of that ministry. That message Paul sums up for us succinctly in these words: "Now then we are ambassadors of Christ, as though God did beseech you in us; we pray you in Christ's stead: Be ye reconciled to God."

That is the message of these ministers, these ambassadors of Christ. It is not a message of human wisdom - it is not a message dealing only with the passing things of life - it is not a message of this earth only - it is the message which answers the question of the cynical Pilates: "What is truth?" and of the perplexed Greeks: "Why are we here? Wither are we going? Is the soul mortal or immortal?" It is the message which calms the aching soul which deals with the lasting truth of heaven - a message standing before the grim spectre of death, knowing that before it in eternity stands the stern judge who shall pass judgement on the deeds done in this life whether they be good or bad. It is the message, which beseeches that perplexed soul, be it Roman, Greek or American, to stop and hear the cry: Be ye reconciled to God! For this purpose are we here, not to be born to live and die, to be forgotten, or to return to the spirit world, or to be eaten up by our own sins - but we are here to be reconciled to God - to become children of that living Father again who gave His only begotten Son that every one who believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. This is the reason for our existence not to be forgotten or annihilated, but through the Cross of Calvary upon which the Lord of Glory died to return by faith in Him to the hand of God who made us in the beginning.

To bring that message to poor, perplexed souls in all the world God selected not His angels - God thought it not wise to do it Himself - but in His wisdom gave that task and that message over to those whom He calls his ministers.

What a high office! Small wonder it is written, "This is a true saying. If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." Small wonder it is written, "Unto some, He gave apostles."

Brethren in the ministry: When we think of that heavenly message we as ambassadors of Christ are bringing to this sin-sick and puzzled world 'LA in order as Paul says , must we not say "Let no man belittle our calling: We are not just useful adjuncts to the world's social scheme. We are responsible directors of the

world's social health, the agents of the one social philosophy which can make life worthwhile living. Yea, we are more than that. We operate with imponderable forces. We are called primarily not to train good citizens for the temporal state, but to prepare men for the citizenship of the eternal realms. We are to populate heaven. We are to think God's thoughts after Him, and to apply them practically to the dire needs of a dying world. Our task is one which angels might well envy. Key men are we in God's great plan of mercy. The fruits of our labors perish not with the end of time but shall bloom in perfection in all eternity."

Representatives of our Congregations: We stated before, and base our statement on God's clear Word that the office of the ministry in your midst is a Gift, a Gift of God's free love - pure and simple. Perhaps the greatness of the gift will be appreciated by you more fully when you consider the heavenly message your minister brings you and strives to keep pure and undefiled among you.

Some of you may be rich and wealthy, some of you may have attained to some high office of influence in this world - others of you might have experienced days of trial and sore distress - and all of you, if you are active, alive Christians have felt above all the heavy hand of sin resting upon you, have seen the spectre of death and the grim reality of judgment staring at you.

But is it not true, when you were troubled and afraid, some minister, your minister, stood at your side and brought you this message: Fear not, I have redeemed thee - I have called thee by thy name. Thou art mine? Is it not true when doubts assailed you, and you knew not whither you were going, your minister stood at your side and spoke the friendly words: "Fear not: Be of good courage and I will not leave nor forsake you: "When your sins pressed heavily upon you, is it not true, that your minister spoke kindly: Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall become as wool?" When your loved one lay at death's door and you stood helplessly by - and the doctors had given up all hope who was it that was there with the message that alone cheered and comforted? Who was it? The minister who perhaps prayed: "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me: Today Thou shalt be with me in paradise:" Someday, friend - all the things so dear in life, you will leave behind - and in that sole moment of farewell a minister with the ambassador's message will be there saying to you: "You are reconciled to God for Christ's sake: Where He is, there shall you, His servant, be."

How beautiful are their feet, Who stand on Zion's hill
Who bring salvation on their tongues, And
words of peace reveal!

Over against such an high office the Church has always felt correspondingly high financial duties. They are summed up for us in our Catechism under the so-called Table of Duties. Here are these duties over against the pastors and teachers as given there: "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel." "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the Word and doctrine. For the Scripture saith: Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn, and the laborer is worthy of his reward." "Obey them that have the rule over you for they watch over your souls, as they who must give an account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you." Many other Bible passages might be added to bring home to us that same duty. We give you but one more, from the blessed lips of the Lord of the church Himself. Jesus says: "And as ye go - preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat."

Every one understands the meaning of those clear words. The ministry is to be supported not only with prayers and praises, but in a very material way, with the necessary things of life, among which gold and silver, the common media of exchange are included. The ministry is to be placed not on the plane of the alms beggar, but as one who is as worthy of his financial meat as any other honest workman is worthy of the money paid out to him in return for the services he has rendered. Neither is the salary of the pastor to be looked upon as something which is to be doled out to him because nothing else can be done about it, but as something which

God in heaven wants given him as fair return for the wonderful work he has done. Nor is it to be paid out to him with a sour face and grudge, but with cheerfulness as unto one who is worthy of double honor.

This is the duty of those with whom these messengers of God come into contact and who receive the message of the King from their lips. This is the duty of those whose souls have been saved and whose hearts have been established and made firm against every evil wind of false doctrine and belief through the message which those men by the grace of God have given them. This is the financial duty of the Church over against its ministers.

Thank God the Church has not only felt that task but has always performed it. Already under the economy of the Old Testament the minister of the Most High were well provided for with the wherewithal to live in this world. The Levites had their food, their homes and even their cities given them by the Church which they served. And though Paul in the New Testament for very valid reasons refused to accept support from any who might have used such support as an argument against the message which he proclaimed, yet he did accept, and that gladly, the offerings of his Philippian congregation for his own personal use.

But God forbid many a congregation today has become derelict in that God-imparted duty of according double honor to those who have served them with Word and Sacrament: Shame on those who would support such a thought. They have forgotten those few words: "Double honor." They have forgotten that they are responsible for that pastor's welfare even when his work among them is done.

Is that double honor, when one who has given his all - his faculties and his goods - his strength and his life for years on end to one certain group of people, and then when the sun for him begins to set in the west, and the light in his eyes grows dark, and his knees begin to weaken, and his voice begins to falter, - is that double honor to him, to have paid him so little during his years of service as to have made a restful eventide for him impossible? Is that double honor to him to ask him to retire with the pious phrase: "The government will take care of you." "Get as much as you can, others are doing it." That is not only dishonoring the ministry, but it is sidestepping the duty, the function of the Church of God. That is doing something which even the heathen would not do - which an unchristian government would not wish upon one of its workers. And by the way, the government by its refusal to provide for churchworkers, points the Church to its task of remembering its leaders also financially until the Lord calls them home.

But you say, many a congregation has in some measure lived up to that heaven-imposed obligation. Many of them refuse to shunt their pastors into the unused ash-heap to be forgotten as the old car wreck in the auto-dump, but provide for them that which is necessary until death opens the gates of heaven for them. Our Synod also has a plan in operation to take care of those who are incapacitated, we agree and we thank God for all the good done in that direction but most of these plans are either costly, or unfair, or inefficient. Many pastors in our circles are calling for something more definite and concrete and worth while.

That something worthwhile Missouri claims to have found in the Pension Plan. For a moment let us retrace our steps and call to mind some of the causes which prompted the honorable Synod of Missouri to inaugurate the present Pension Plan among its workers and congregations.

As we indicated before, some sort of system of support for our incapacitated pastors has for years been in force even among the Wisconsin Synod. But as stated before all of these plans were found by Missouri to have either one or all of three serious drawbacks about them. These faults are costliness, unfairness and inefficiency. "While," they say, "thousands of workers are spending their strength and their lives in the service of the Church year after year, and while every year of service rendered adds rapidly accumulating obligation of the Church, nothing is being done by it towards preparation for the time when the workers themselves become incapacitated or leave dependents.

This hand to mouth method is unfair, say they. (Here one might stop and give an example of the hand to mouth affair in our Synod. 5-15 dollars a month for a pastor in our Synod - so that one pastor told me the other day: If a Wisconsin Synod pastor cared to retire, he would have to make up his mind to starve to death." This is unfair for those who have the benefit of the worker's service; pass their obligation on to the next generation, so that for instance you laymen here today, who are being served by a certain pastor, allow your children, who may not have much of his services, to pay for the benefit you derived during years past.

And lastly this present system of support as we still have it and Missouri once had it, is inefficient. Why? Because the children say, "Why should we pay for what father enjoyed?"

In 1919 an attempt was made to repair the rather weak and faulty structure of pastor's support in that Synod through the so called endowment method, in which that venerable body gathered 3 million dollars into one fund, the interest of which was to take care of the entire problem for all time to come. But the goal was not reached, the liabilities were underestimated and the interest insufficient, so that ere long, Missouri was back feeding their pastors as they say by the hand to mouth method (But that was much better than we). Hence rigid investigations were instituted also before an application for support was granted, a procedure very humiliating to the applicant, and repulsive to the Board of Support. See Report.

This then, to me, is a direct application of the duty which the Church has over against its pastors - it is an attempt also to train those congregations which are lax and lukewarm in the realization of their duties in the right direction, in the way which they shall go.