

MAKING THE MOST OF MINISTERIAL MATURITY

BY HENRY CHARLES SUTER

In consideration of the increasing command issuing these crucial days from churches to "give us a young man for our minister," one feels compelled to comment critically as well as caustically upon this matter of so-called maturity in ministers. The average theological student finishes his course of study at thirty, and if he seeks an advanced degree, concludes at thirty-five his college course. This is usually the utmost limit put upon the age of ministers, at least for any prominent pulpit of today, in some cases a man "not over thirty-five," and in most cases cited, "certainly this side of fifty."

Thus it is decreed by congregations and acquiesced by even ecclesiastical authorities, that a minister is most acceptable at thirty-five, when at forty, he is somewhat discounted, while at fifty he is seemingly undesirable at many accountable churches. Thus it means that a man's ministerial career is but a matter of fifteen to twenty years at the best; hence we should be open to proposals for utilizing the remaining portion allotted to life's maturity.

It might be contended that in the other callings the same situation pertains, in that the more experienced men and women of mature age are being pushed out and younger people promoted to occupy such positions. Particularly is the thinner pay envelope being used to bring about this objective. But it must be pointed out this applies to commercial matters and not to professional callings. In the medical profession there is still a premium put upon old age and experience, in that people will not trust young practitioners in critical cases, since by demanding the old doctor, he will diagnose according to the whole history of a patient. His experience being accounted of more consideration than his academical preparation. Consider the practice of law. The longer a lawyer has been citing cases, the more dependable his defence of yours. Moreover, at the mature age of fifty-five or sixty, most of them are promoted to the honor of some higher court and, when older still, have been given places upon the supreme bench.

Not long ago, a man who was approaching the age of retirement

in the Christian ministry was called to become president of a large university in this country. As accounted in ordinary ability, he had attained the age of discount in the ministry, but apparently considered at a high premium in the affairs of education. Thus, it is evident that experience is an asset, and age an advantage in law, medicine, and education, but not in the ministry of religion, or the profession of the clergy.

Yet here is the rub; experience is the principle factor in religion, as well as the teaching of it to others, since it is not a matter of truth and theory only, but the minister must be able to speak in all such things from experience. Still with this experience comes the possibility of the discontinuing of his services, since he is not on the salubrious side of sixty.

So much, then, for the critical side of the argument; let us now revert to the constructive. It is suggested that all ministers should possess a secondary avocation, upon which to fall when at forty-five or fifty the Christian Church has no further use for his services. He is energetic in body and eager of soul to invest his abilities as ever he was, but the Church is looking for men "under forty" or thereabouts. Further, these suggestions might be considered by our seminaries and adapted to the subsidiary gifts and secondary aptitudes that most of their students are acquiring, in the light of the knowledge they have attained on the matter of maturity in the ministry. It might sustain those students who started too soon to escape the shock when this truth was first thrust at them, as well as persuade those to resume who decided it better to discontinue ministerial study, fearing to meet with this maturity.

The first consideration, then, in addition to our ministerial calling might be Insurance. Many ministers have found this occupation analogous to the ministry in that its salient sales evaluation speaks of future happiness of home; care for the aged; relief in sickness; and readiness for the rainy day, even including the deluge—all matters of importance to ministers. Many insurance companies are manned by ministers who already know it requires the alertness of an athlete, the persuasion of a parson, and the sagacity of the saint to make it successful.

The second consideration suggested is salesmanship. Particularly with some publishing house. During the minister's training he has learned that there are books that speak, books that shriek, and books

that merely slobber. What an opportunity to champion the cause of the best books, without being compelled to boost those published by the particular denominational house to which he had dedicated his life. There is a larger liberation by literature coming to that minister who can open the door to others in the matter of promoting good reading. For why should he, as a minister, be put on the shelf like a book, when most of his brethren of other professions are being put on the bench, or put on lists of specialists, or put in colleges as principals and presidents?

A third consideration in future occupation might be found in gardening. A course taken in this art should prove useful during the nine days' wonder of his brief ministry, as well as profitable to his pocket as a second vocation when the first no longer claimed him.

Finally there is writing. If every minister should be given a course in journalism while in college, there would not be so many ministerial confessions concerning their inability to write in these days. Certainly it is a trite saying that writers are born, not made: but it is true that some practical training in this connection would create better English in the expressions of a man who has given the cream of his life to the Church. By teaching our theological students to write, they will assume a literary style and acquire an accuracy of expression, which when closed from the pulpit by the decrees of ecclesiastical powers, may yet continue to prove more powerful in written word and more mighty in moving greater multitudes.

Let us recall that even Jesus had a secondary calling beside that of being the Savior of the world, for was he not a carpenter, and it may be during those silent years of Our Savior, when perhaps He felt He had lost the support of His people, He went back to the carpenter's bench. Remember Paul was a tentmaker and was mighty proud of the fact that he was dependent upon no particular party for a living. Even the disciples when they felt the claim that they be fishers of men cease, fell back upon their other occupation of fishing for food in the sea, and doubtless were persuaded there was a more substantial supply to be obtained to keep body and soul together even in old age, than ever they hoped to possess while fishing on land. This, then, is the manner in which the minister may master the dead line of ecclesiastical majority: by additional avocations make the most of ministerial maturity.