

Fishers of Men.

A CHARGE

TO THE

CLERGY OF THE JURISDICTION OF ASHEVILLE

BY THE

BISHOP OF NORTH CAROLINA
(Joseph Blount Chesire.)

1896

CHARGE OF THE BISHOP.

Brethren of the Clergy:

The Canons of the General Convention do not undertake to legislate very specifically upon the pastoral duties of a Bishop. They barely indicate the *minimum* of care and oversight proper to the office, and leave large liberty to the individual. This is a recognition of the fact that the relation of a bishop to the Church and to his people has a deeper foundation than in the canonical provisions of any particular national church, and involves duties the performance of which cannot be secured by minuteness of canonical requirements. But this happy reserve in our legislation carries with it to a conscientious man only a more constraining sense of obligation. Being left to his own conscience, he is the more anxious not to be found wanting; and a law which seeks not to control his action elicits his most earnest endeavors to perceive its real requirement, and to fulfil to the utmost its spirit and meaning.

In this spirit of wise suggestion rather than of exact prescription Canon 19, Section IX, Title I of the Digest declares that "it is deemed proper that every Bishop of this Church shall deliver, at least once in three years, a charge to the Clergy of his Diocese." I do not know that what I have now to say to you deserves to be dignified by that name, in view of the weighty and momentous character of such utterances as have under the designation of charges been put forth by the great men who have preceded me in the Church in North Carolina. But none the less I am moved to address you at this time upon a matter which seems to me to be of the utmost practical importance, and I would fain avail myself of the above quoted provisions of our Canon to give weight and authority to that which I shall deliver. I speak out of deep conviction,

and I address myself to the facts of our situation. I do not feel that the Canon requires me thus to speak; I but take advantage of its provision to give sanction to what I feel impelled to say.

From the bottom of my heart I thank God that I feel under no necessity of exhorting the Clergy of Asheville to be faithful to the great principles and truths of the Gospel sent down to us from heaven. We are not ignorant even in these remote mountains of the unrest and discord in certain parts of the Church, and we fully appreciate the danger which in some quarters seems to threaten the purity and integrity of the faith. Knowing these things, we rejoice in the comfortable assurance afforded us by the noble Pastoral Letter of 1894 that our fathers and leaders are sound in the faith, prompt to declare and to defend it. But we have no divisions among ourselves in these matters. With one heart we desire the prosperity of Christ's holy Apostolic Church, and with one mouth we confess the faith once delivered to the saints. Nor are our peace and mutual love disturbed or threatened by those who, dissatisfied with the worship and services of the Church as she herself sets them forth and orders them, seek to improve upon her ways by additions and variations taken from this or that unauthorized source. We possess that good and pleasant thing spoken of by the Psalmist; we are brethren and we dwell together in unity. I know of no jars or strifes or divisions among us. And this peace and love, like the dew of Hermon which fell upon the hill of Zion, is the Lord's promise to us, we humbly trust, of His blessing and of life forever more. Thanking Him therefore for this happy state, and rejoicing in mutual love and confidence, let us address ourselves to the work which lies before us.

The subject upon which I wish to address you at this time is:

The Duty of the Clergy of whatever order to be Fishers of Men.

I. The kingdom of God in the world hath its internal and its external function, its duty to its own members and its duty to the world. I do not propose to institute any comparison between these, or to endeavor to fix their relative importance. That were an unprofitable and perhaps

impossible attempt. All vital functions are in their several ways essential. But the peculiarity of some condition or situation may give a temporary importance or prominence to some one function above the others. We see this in the very beginning. Our Lord's commission to the Apostles in the concluding words of St. Matthew's Gospel includes the twofold function of first converting the world; and second, of bringing those converted into sacramental union with Christ and training them up to the full perfection of Christian life. But the actual situation is plainly indicated by the form of the divine command, and the first direction has reference to the duty lying immediately before them: "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations." And so the Apostles were first of all preachers. The situation made them such. Even the Deacons, ordained in the first instance with special reference to an entirely different function of the ministry, were by the necessities of the case, forced into the same position as preachers, when they proved to have suitable gifts and capacities. We are to-day faulted at times because we so commonly license Deacons to preach, and put them in charge of congregations and missions. It is to be considered that in some sort we but yield to the same necessity which set St. Stephen to disputing with the Cyreneans and Alexandrians, and with them of Cilicia and of Asia, and which sent St. Philip as the first Evangelist to Samaria to preach Christ unto them.

The first duty of the minister of Christ therefore is to catch men. Upon his success in this part of his office all his ability and opportunity to do the other parts of it may depend. It was so in the beginning; it continues to be so in a measure still. Even in those happy regions, if there be any such, where none are outside the pale of the Church, multitudes will be found who are in fact without any sufficient knowledge of the saving and sanctifying grace of Christ in the heart. These must be caught. Their attention must be engaged, their sensibilities must be touched, their affections must be called forth and developed. By the hands of a man they must be drawn to the Man, that in Him they may become men indeed.

II. In the multiplicity of duties which crowd upon the rector of a parish, and in the business of administering its various departments, and directing its activities, not only

his time is consumed and his energies all but exhausted, but there is danger of his forgetting the main purpose of his ministry. Even a high degree of spiritual life in the minister may receive such a bent as to turn him away so that he does not fully see this duty of which I now speak. The services of the Church, by the joy and happiness which he finds in them, may degenerate into a kind of spiritual self-indulgence, a bond of sweet communion between the members of the Church, half forgetful of their mission to the world. His sermons may unconsciously address themselves to his own moods and experiences, or at any rate be such as to reach and interest those only who have attained to something of his own point of view. Such services and such sermons may have their place and importance in the life of the Church. The zeal and energy and devotion expended in the services and worship of the Church and in the exercise of our spiritual faculties and affections are a source of power. The life of the Church is largely in the devotional life of its members. Efforts directed upon itself may do something toward its own development. I do not deny it. There is real power in a church full of life and devotion, even when it is not fully alive to its duty in positive aggressive work. In a manner it declares the Word of God and brings men to a knowledge and sense of the truth. But as we are situated in this particular field the vast body of our people lie beyond the sphere of any such influences, and we have hardly one or two congregations strong enough to exert any such indirect power.

III. Our congregations are weak and scattered. Our Clergy find themselves grappling with the problem of building the Church up from the ground. Nine-tenths of all the work in this Jurisdiction is the work of evangelizing populations entirely ignorant of the better ways of the Church. Even where we have little handfuls of people and feeble mission organizations our own people in many cases are but ill-instructed, and the sole prospect of growth lies in aggressive missionary work. Usually the missionary finds himself without house, school, or any of the material which he is accustomed to think of as the necessary means and instruments of successful enterprise. Now, what I wish to say to you, my dear brethren, is that in

such a situation the one thing necessary, that to which you must address yourself, *is to catch men*. It is not to build school-houses, or rectories, or even churches. It is to get men. It is to lay hold upon the human life of the community. This may seem to you a truth so obvious to notice that it is hardly worth my while to dwell upon it, or even to state it. You will all agree with me at once that this is so. And yet I tell you, my dear brethren, as a result of my observation and experience in our missionary field, that while we all say this with our lips we too often do not realize it in our hearts or show it in our work. When a missionary goes into such a field as I have indicated he is tempted to think that the first thing necessary is a church or a chapel. Or, if there be church or chapel already, he thinks that he must have a school-house or a rectory. And instead of putting his whole soul into the work of preaching the Gospel to men, he is tempted to put his soul into appeals for help to buy and to build. He keeps up the services of the Church with regularity and goes his rounds of parochial and missionary labors, but that upon which he spends himself, into which he puts his hopes and efforts and enthusiasm, and that by which he counts his success, is this material part of his work. I suppose that one thing for which a Bishop should be of use in the practical life of the Church is that in overseeing his field he may come to a truer knowledge of its real character, condition, and needs, than one who is constantly occupied in pastoral or missionary work in one part of it. For nearly three years I have been overseeing the work in this part of North Carolina. I have made three pretty thorough visitations of the whole field. I speak not of any particular portion of it, and I do fully recognize the faithful work which has been done, and is being done, in all parts where we have ministers. But I do say, as the result of careful observation and reflection, that there is this danger growing out of our present condition of needing so many things, that we may make a mistake as to the proper way of doing our work, and of obtaining what we need most of all. It is not primarily the duty of a minister to build churches, or chapels, or schools, or parsonages. His first duty where there is no church is to preach to men, and to bring them under the power of the truth, and to minister to them in spiritual things. Thus bringing men to the truth, he comes to need

churches and all the rest. But except as he catches men he has no need for all these things, and his appeal for them can have no legitimate basis except in the success of his more important work of catching men.

So long as we look upon those external things as the means whereby we must seek to do our work, so long will the Church be weak and helpless. On the other hand, so soon as we put the catching of men first, and consider these other things as purely subordinate and secondary, so soon shall we begin to lay hold with power upon the communities where we labor. Get the men; possess the life and interest of the community; and all else will follow. It would not be difficult to find instances in plenty of churches and chapels erected for the purposes of housing congregations to be caught by that means, which stand yet unoccupied, and silent from month to month. It will be difficult to discover even one single example of a faithful missionary who has built a church of living souls, and who has failed to find a material fabric in which to house them.

Churches, chapels, schools, organs, parsonages, glebes, all the externals of Church work, however necessary, are not the life of the Church. They are but like the shell of conch or of the pearl-oyster, or the stony envelope of the coral insect, beautiful, it may be, necessary, practically indispensable, essentially associated with the life as means or conditions of living; but they cannot make life. On the contrary, life can and does and *must* make them. Given the life, they follow. The life secretes the shell inclosing it. So the life of the Church, which is the grace of God operating in and upon the hearts and souls of men, cannot be created by any outward means or agencies, but on the contrary creates them. Spend therefore your efforts, your thought, your enthusiasm, pour out your very life itself upon that Church which in your several fields you are building out of the living stones of converted and consecrated men and women and children, and those other lesser matters will come in due time. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.

IV. As a necessary preliminary to catching men, we must know men. When a missionary enters upon any field of work the very first thing he should do is to make

himself acquainted with the people, all the people. He must not wait for the people to seek him out; he is sent by his Master to seek them out. He is not to hamper himself or limit his work and acquaintance and friendships by social conventionalities. He must use these means and conditions of mutual intercourse, but not be ruled by them. He must make himself the friend of all. He represents the love of God, and the love of God is a real love, not a form of words. And if the minister of Christ has really come to know the love of Christ he will find a way to the love and confidence of the people among whom he lives. There is no such source of strength and influence in the ministry as this of knowing and loving the people to whom we minister. The difference between a ministry founded on this close relation between us and our people and a ministry merely diligent in services and functions is simply the difference between a ministry successful in catching men and one which is not thus successful. There is perhaps room in a strong, rich, prosperous church for the mere ecclesiastic, the functionary, but in a missionary church he is an incumbrance and a weakness. The people of our mountain country for the most part know nothing about the Church, and in too many instances have been carefully taught to hate it. The mere performance of the services of the Church will have no influence on them whatever. They will not listen and do not understand our arguments and explanations. But they have hearts and they can appreciate a good man *if they come to know him*. I believe the superiority of the Church is seen in the superiority of the man and woman whom she forms and develops. Therefore I charge you, my brethren of the Clergy, to live among the people whom you serve and to cultivate their acquaintance, and to know them in their families and in the workshops and fields; and let them see how Christ by you loves and seeks them, and when they come to know this they will begin to care something about the Church, and not until then. Of all the hollow and hopeless failures that is the hollowest and most hopeless of the missionary who does not thus build upon the love of God for man, not merely proclaimed from the pulpit but manifested in himself and exercised upon the people whom he serves. The minister of the Gospel who in declaring God's love does not express his own love, and who does not feel

himself growing in actual love to the individuals of his flock, so that he longs for their love and values their regard, had better stop and examine himself and make a new start, and try to get into the right way. He may minister a sacrament, and that may have value, but he will prepare very few persons to receive a sacrament duly, and he will teach very few to desire or to seek the sacraments and means of grace.

V. And thus knowing the people whom you serve, and loving them, you will speak to them that which they really need to know and that which they will understand. In order to speak the truth effectively we must not only know the truth; we must also know our hearers; and we must adapt our message to our hearers. We must learn to give them what they need in such a way that they will feel that it is what they need. The noblest conception of truth expressed in the most eloquent language has no value to the man whose hearing is so defective that he cannot hear the preacher. Now, suppose that instead of physical deafness it is an intellectual or moral obstruction which keeps the preacher's message from coming home to him; in this case also the preaching is equally thrown away. Now, I know, my dear brethren, from my own experience that our sermons sometimes fail utterly because we do not adapt them to our audience. We go off upon some interesting line of argument or of reflection which pleases us, and leave our hearers behind. Preaching implies a hearer as well as a speaker. When there ceases to be a hearer there ceases to be a preacher in any real or useful sense of the word. Our discourse may be learned, eloquent, true, but unless it be a word spoken from our heart to the heart of the man to whom we are sent, it is not the word which Christ has sent us to speak. We hear of sermons above the heads of the hearers; the trouble with such sermons is not that they go above the heads of the hearers, but that they do not come out of the heart and conscience of the preacher. He is speaking to himself or to some imaginary audience, and not to the people before him. "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed."

But I will not further enlarge upon a matter in which many of you might teach me. I ask you to think of what I have said and to remember that I do not speak as feeling myself competent to instruct you, but as being in God's

providence called to oversee your work, and therefore bound to point out, as best I can, the things needed, and the means of best furthering our holy enterprise of building up God's kingdom. I charge you as good stewards of the mysteries of God, as ambassadors for Christ, to remember that you are sent to the life of the world, to lay hold upon it, to convert it, to win it for God. That is the great end of your ministry, the glory of God in the salvation of men. You are setting forth God's glory and making full proof of your ministry just so far as you are bringing men and women and children to know God and to become sharers of the divine life. That is the purpose of your ministry, and that alone. By that you shall be judged at the last. I beseech you judge yourselves by that now.

JOS. BLOUNT CHESHIRE, JR.

