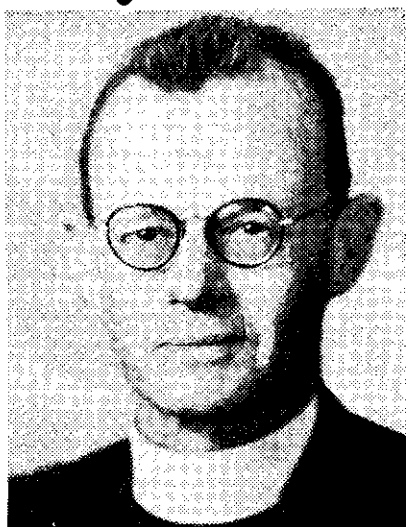


My Poor Boy . . .

MY Poor Boy!—Or is it my rich boy?

As you have made up your mind to follow my calling I think I had better try to give you a little inside information about it. Mark that word "inside." You have been brought up in a Manse and so you may think that you already possess that sort of knowledge. But the trouble is that there are some things that can only be known through personal experience. . . You may feel certain that you have already a very fair idea of what a Minister's life is like, but even though you have lived pretty close to it your knowledge is still "outside" knowledge, and the peculiar dangers and frustrations as well as the rewards and satisfactions are only hearsay. Dangers! Surely not dangers in this work; isn't it the safest and most sheltered of occupations? All the on-lookers think so; but wait awhile and you will find out. From the very hour that you are ordained you will find yourself in the unfortunate position of being able to make headlines in the paper more easily than anyone else in the country, with the possible exception of Judges and Cabinet Ministers! . . . There's room for argument as to how much ordination may increase a man's power for good; but there isn't the least doubt that it increases his power to do harm a hundredfold. If a mechanic or a craftsman of almost any kind makes a mistake, he can go back and do the job again and get paid twice for doing it; but your mistakes will be public property; and that will hurt you where it hurts most; because it will do harm to the Church of Jesus Christ, which you love more than you love yourself, or you wouldn't be doing the job. That's one danger for you, my boy, right away, and a second develops immediately from the first—that having had a nice sharp lesson you will pull in your horns and become so cautious that you lose freedom and originality. Make no mistake about it, there are quite a number of things that would justify my starting this letter with "poor boy."

Here's another of them, I quote from a wise and experienced American bishop—"There are times," he says, "when one is a little ashamed of being a clergyman. I am not ashamed of the ministry itself. I am ashamed to be identified with that which the other men in the smoking compartment conceive it to be. In the back of their heads is the conviction that most ministers are engaged in snooping into other people's business, regulating other people's morals and endeavouring to standardise other people's brains. They regard all ministers alike as 'moral uplifters.' They think of the minister's life as narrow, bigoted, joyless, censorious, rigid, ungenerous in judgment and petty in aim." That is, I think, pretty accurate. Not as a description of what the minister is; but of what they think he is. Now that sort of thing is not a small matter to have to contend with—it means that in most communities you will find at least some enemies ready-made. Men, and women, too, who will be only too pleased to distort your words or actions and pull you down if they can—nothing personal, you understand, just because you are a minister of religion and they would like to catch you slipping! But surely, you say, you can just go on in your own way and take no notice of that sort of thing? It's not so easy as you might think, and it's complicated by the fact that these very enemies are part of your responsibility, you have to be concerned about them.



. . . Being the counsel offered by the REV. G. A. NAYLOR (above) to a young aspirant to the ministry. This is one of a series of talks heard recently from 3YC, and currently from 1YC. The text is here slightly abridged



There is literally no end to the mistaken ideas which people cherish about the ministerial life—one of the strangest of them and it's practically universal, is that it is a "sheltered" life. . . If a man is any good in this job at all he will share most intimately in pain, sorrow, distress and evil of every kind. You will find quite soon that you will be pitch-forked into incredible situations; meeting over and over again the sort of strain which most people only run across once or twice in a lifetime. And, mark this, my boy, you will not be able to develop a protective callosity to these things. . . The time will come when you will take your thousandth funeral—when it does come I hope that you will have as much compassion, as close a feeling for the people standing beside the grave, as you had the first time that you heard the sods fall on a coffin-lid. . . The hardening influence of custom can be no defence for us if we are doing our work as it should be done. We have to feel the "need" of our people all along the way. Not forgetting that some of their need is the sharing of happiness; which can be quite as important as the sharing of anxiety or sorrow. Oh, yes, I know what some people think—all this simply boils down to the fact that a minister has to learn to be a fairly competent actor so that he can slip adroitly out of one mask and into another! Now that is cutting pretty close to the bone, it is the easy way out and there are some of us who take it. . . Pretence is probably the greatest occupational risk, and destroys a certain number of us. . . and speaking of occupational risks the greatest occupational disease is giving good advice. But for once I can indulge in that and reminiscence, too. Once upon a time I met a great man, a really great man, one who dealt with princes and paupers with the same unvarying courtesy, who had carried the lives of many in his hands, who never let down anyone. At the time I was much concerned as to whether I ought or ought not to tackle a piece of work that was offered me. I knew that it was altogether outside my size; but there was no one else available. I talked it all over with the G.M., who knew the area very well, and I can still remem-

ber the substance of what he said—it was something like this:

"Mr Naylor, if you attempt this you will have to deal with some very difficult people, some very hard ones and even some that are really bad—it will be quite as tough as you think, and I expect you will be quite inadequate for it; but if only you are sincere, completely and unreservedly sincere, nothing else will matter."

He was, of course, altogether right, and every year has brought me fresh evidence of it. That's why I repeat it to you—I have made a considerable crop of mistakes and blunders and, if I have time enough, I will probably make a good many more; but the only ones that really hurt in recollection are those which I made when I lacked sincerity. Let me see if I have been running off the rails—no, I don't think so, because I was nattering about this business of having to switch from the sharing of sorrow to the sharing of gaiety, and the great question of whether it can be done without pretence? Yes, I think it can, the secret isn't really a secret at all; it is just part of the Christian life and it lies in the word "affection." I use that instead of "love" because "love" is getting a bad spin from the crooners and by other unprincipled people who can turn it into all sorts of shapes—but "affection," that's a good honest word with a quite definite meaning. Affection is the key; if you really have it for your people you have only to look at them and you will be able to forget your own mood and catch the sense of their need, whatever it is. Oh, yes, and speaking of affection, I must warn you about one thing—there are probably still some well-meaning old buffers about who will talk to you as they used to talk to me about the need of "winning the love of your congregation." That is an insinuation of the devil himself—if there's one thing you should never worry your head about at all it is the question of whether your congregation has affection for you or not. All that matters is that you have affection for them. Don't care two straws about trying to gain it from them, your business is to give affection—they will probably give you more than you deserve, anyhow, but for heaven's sake, don't set out to try to get it!

But can you give them affection? It sounds all right, it looks all right on paper; but when it comes to actually dealing with them—that's another story. The average congregation holds at least some very unlovable people. People who won't understand what a fine fellow you are, vain people or busybodies or censorious or unrighteous people—can you be fond of them? They will so often pull down the things you have worked hard to build up, they will exasperate you and curiously enough and most unreasonably, you will exasperate them. . . But these are the people you are called to serve, and if you get to know them you may find they are worth serving—

if they seem to you to be the last and the least and the lost, still they belong to Christ as you belong to Christ, and you know what He said about, and what He did for the last and the lost and the least.

It is getting to be a long letter, have you noticed, as you read, that I have been shifting my ground a bit? When it comes to speaking of the actual work that we have to do, I have got right away, at least in my own mind, from the things which might make me say "poor boy" to the things which make me say "fortunate boy." For the service you are entering on is truly perfect freedom and great joy. If I have overstressed the matter of ministering to the pain-ridden or the dying, it is because even these things, more often than not, are a great privilege, being admitted to intimate acquaintance with pain, sorrow, anxiety and disaster usually means the chance to be just as closely associated with faith, courage, devotion and all the splendours of the human spirit. . .

It's a great life, the minister's life. You keep great company; if there are some awkward folk in a large congregation, they are a small minority—most of your people are the salt of the earth, the people who keep a community sane; they may not be very vocal about it; but they take a stand by decency and justice, they accept responsibilities, they are the strength of their country and without them a community, our society itself, would slide down greased ways.

It is true that there is one thing about our work that grieves some of us—we feel a little envious at times of the craftsman's satisfaction in having done a perfect job. . . That satisfaction is denied to us. Sometimes people will praise you and tell you what a fine sermon you preached, or how well you did this or that. But you will always know that it was not good enough—you will know that if you are the best minister in the country you are still not good enough for the poorest and smallest charge. Our satisfaction can never be that of achievement; indeed, I suppose that it is small matter for us, because we find that degrees of success or failure are all swallowed up in one great wonder—wonder that we, being what we know ourselves to be, should have been called to the most fascinating, the most significant work, that is offered to man. To minister to men, women and children; to stand beside them in their fear or their joy. To be commissioned to help them to see this life in the light of eternity. To administer the sacraments. To attempt to use words so that they also are sacramental and set God forth.

Who is sufficient for these things? We are not. We can only wonder that God uses foolish men as He does use them.

I began with "My poor boy," and I pointed out some of the reasons that might justify the term. But how small they are compared with these other reasons which make me very glad for your sake that you have been called to this richness.

INDEPENDENCE FOR MALAYA

WHEN Malaya becomes an independent nation on August 31, the event will be of more than neighbourly interest to some people in New Zealand—the Malaysians at present here. In Wellington there are about 20 of these visitors, who will be heard in a programme of interviews from the YAs and YZs on Friday, August 30, at 9.15 p.m. Some of these Malaysians are students, some, Malayan officials who have come here either privately or under the Colombo Plan. They will be talking about their feelings on Malayan independence, their activities here and how they are getting on in New Zealand, and what they will do with the knowledge they have gained when they return to Malaya. The speakers emphasise the national unity felt by the differing races of Malaya.

In addition to this programme and the BBC one, "This is Malaya," to be heard from the Main National Programme this Sunday, August 25, there will be a programme sent from Malaya to mark its independence which will be heard from the same stations (YAs, 4YZ) on Sunday, September 1.