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SOME RESOURCES OF THE MODERN PREACHER

EDWARD INCREASE BOSWORTH
Oberlin Graduate School of Theology

Christian ministers are very conscious today of looking out on a world that is dark and discouraging. There are, however, fundamental reasons for expecting within the lifetime of those now preparing for the ministry unusual success in the great work that they have undertaken. Success comes through intelligently facing the great facts of life, and men know more today about three of these facts than ever before.

1. We know more about what we mean by *the will of God*. Our idea of what we mean by "will" comes to us from experience with our own wills. The will is the intelligent push of a personality on its environment, the set of a personality toward a goal. The will of God is a form of energy in the midst of which we live, which is set toward the securing of an honest and friendly world. It tends to rise in every individual, claiming him for the honest and friendly life. It tends to rise in the common life of man, to make all social institutions, laws, and customs honest and friendly. In ways that are sometimes gentle and sometimes rough it is crowding men up against the necessity of working with it to make truth and beauty, in moral relations honesty and friendliness, universal and secure in the civilization of the world.

The minister's great and indispensable work is one of leadership in making the masses of men, into whose hands power is so rapidly passing, aware of the will of God, aware of an energy near enough to them to give them being and keep it going, distinct enough from them to give them a chance to be themselves. Our better understanding of what we mean

by the will of God enables us to show men where to look for it, how to recognize intelligently the "feel" of it, and how to share in its great push toward the honest and friendly world. The Christian minister can interpret the will of God to men in terms of that which is most real to them, the universal experiences of plain daily living.

2. We know more about *the nature of man* than we ever did before. We have not only the results of psychological study but we have seen the naked nature of man uncovered by the war. We have seen man's lust, his greed, his brutality, and we have seen his high purpose, his idealism, his self-sacrifice. We have seemed to see these qualities in the same individual. We have seen "bad" men catch a glimpse of some phase of the great vision of an honest and friendly world and under its inspiration in the brutality of battle go stumbling and cursing on their way into some vital accord with the will of God.

We are seeing this same incongruous combination of the good and bad of human nature in whole nations. During the war the great idea of co-operation for the creation of an honest and friendly world entered for the first time in a dominant way the practical politics of the whole world. All nations and tribes of the world felt its influence at the same time in their practical politics. Mohammedan chieftains from the heart of Africa and Arabs from east of the Jordan discussed President Wilson's "fourteen points" with keen interest. And now this insistent idea is compelling nations and tribes in all the world at the same time to bring all phases of their life before its judgment seat. All things good and bad in political, industrial, social, and international relations must appear in bewildering confusion, and experience some new degree of adjustment to the great idea—adjustment to the unfolding will of God.

Here is our great chance as Christian ministers, specialists in character, to work with new knowledge of human nature and

fresh hope of success for the moral evolution of the individual and the race.

3. We know more than we ever did before about *the religious experience of Jesus Christ*. The tendency to investigate the life that expresses itself in literature has operated in the study of the Christian gospels. As a result we are slowly making our way into the presence of the religious experience of Jesus. We begin to see the hard problems that he faced, the fierce temptations that he resisted, the vague ideals that he made definite and secure, the processes of moral redemption that he wrought out in personal religious experience. He has become for us the world's supreme leader and savior in the great push of the will of God in the life of man toward an honest and friendly world, because he had the supreme religious experience with the will of God; and because through the influence of his immortal spirit he has been able to lead men into a morally redeeming share of his own experience.

And so, although we have come to a place where the world looks dark and discouraging, it is a place where long avenues of growing knowledge and power converge. In this place the Christian minister stands, with a larger chance than ever before to contribute to the moral evolution of man.