

**A CHARGE DELIVERED TO THE
CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF EXETER,
AT THE TRIENNIAL VISITATION IN
JUNE, JULY, AUGUST, AND
SEPTEMBER, 1842, PP. 6-109**

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A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Exeter, at the Triennial Visitation in June, July, August, and September, 1842, pp. 6-109 by Henry Phillpotts

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HENRY PHILLPOTTS

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OF THE

DIOCESE OF EXETER,

AT THE TRIENNIAL VISITATION

IN JUNE, JULY, AUGUST, AND SEPTEMBER, 1842.

BY

HENRY LORD BISHOP OF EXETER.

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THE whole of this Charge was not delivered at any one place. Different passages in it were omitted at different places of Visitation, for the sake of brevity. Some portions were not delivered anywhere. Therefore, the Clergy, by requesting the publication of the Charge, must not be considered as having made themselves responsible for its contents.

Bishopstowe, September, 1842.

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and by exciting the zeal and energy of others, to that revival of a spirit of inquiry into the doctrines of the primitive Fathers, into the constitution of the Church of Christ, and, generally, into matters of high importance to the cause of Gospel Truth, which has spread with a rapidity wholly unexampled since the days of Cranmer. But I enlarge not on these points. He whose station best entitles him to speak of these writers, their own venerated diocesan, has anticipated all other testimony. My object is, to do an act of simple justice to them, at whatever hazard of sharing in the obloquy, which has been heaped not only on them, but on many who, differing from them in important particulars, as I have declared myself to differ, do yet, like me, regard them with respect and gratitude, as good, and able, and pious men, who have laboured most earnestly, and, on the whole, very beneficially, in the service of the Church of Christ.

1. There is one leading particular in their teaching, on which, when I warmly commend it, I venture to assure myself that I shall have the assent of most among you; I mean the stimulus which they have given to a life of *systematic piety*—to a life which shall, in some measure, realise the requisitions and copy the examples of those holy men who compiled our Liturgy, and fenced, and illustrated, and enforced it with the Rubrics. That Liturgy was prepared, those Rubrics were designed, not to regulate the service of one day only in the week, but of every day. Whose fault is it, that its use is commonly so limited? Is it the fault of our people?

At least, is it solely theirs? None of us can truly and honestly say that it is, till he has tried—seriously, earnestly, for some considerable time, tried, and tried in vain—to win his flock to unite with him in that week-day sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, for which the Church has so faithfully provided, especially on all those “Feasts which the Church hath appointed to be observed.”

On this matter, however, I do not pretend to prescribe to you any rule. It must be left to your own judgment and your own feeling. But teach and discipline your feeling; note well the practice of which you read in the history of some of the best and holiest men our Church has ever produced: note, too, the effect of the same practice in those of our own day who are known diligently to follow it. Are they mere formalists? Are they devoid of spiritual and vital religion? Above all, try the practice fairly, devoutly, and in the fear and love of God: try it yourselves, and note its effect on your own souls. Mark whether a holy composure, a pious joy, an increased ability to go through your other services (I will not call them labours), attend not the habitual use of these much-depreciated ordinances.

In country parishes, it may not be easy soon to gather a congregation. Yet often, even there, the aged, the infirm, and some of those whose station exempts them from constant occupation, might be brought gladly to avail themselves of the more frequent ministrations of their pastor, if he shew himself in earnest in executing his high commission, as minister of God’s word, in conformity to the injunction of the Church.

In pressing this matter upon you, I am not ignorant that many good men have thought—some, perhaps, of those whom I now address may think—that the most valuable portion of public worship is the ordinance of Preaching; and we are sometimes told, in a tone of seeming triumph, that the great work, for which our holy office was appointed, is, to “preach the Gospel.”

From the earliest days of the Reformation there have been two parties in our Church—each of them including many sincere and excellent men—who are, and have been, more strongly distinguished by their feeling, if not their language, on this particular, than by almost any other differences whatever.

On which side the voice of the Church has spoken, I need not say. But let me ask, has not experience also spoken? and is not its testimony with the Church? What are the results, the *enduring* results, of the most eloquent, the most fervent, the most successful preaching, if it be not kept in due subordination to the immediate and proper purpose for which the congregation is assembled in God’s house—emphatically called by God himself “The House of Prayer,”—humbly to acknowledge our sins before God—to render thanks to Him—to set forth His praise—to hear His holy word—to ask those things which He knows to be necessary as well for the body as the soul—above all, to feed together spiritually on the body and blood of our blessed Redeemer?

What, I again ask, are the results, the *enduring results*, of the preference of preaching to a service such as this? Has not experience shewn how little they can be depended on?