



# The Pilgrim

*“All the trumpets sounded for him on the other side”*

—PILGRIM’S PROGRESS

O. P. Kretzmann

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## *We Have This Ministry*

October, 1971

This afternoon I am doing what the Christophers of our time must really do day by day: give heed to our ministry... We must look back upon the way we have come, examine the place where we are standing now, and prepare for the uncertain years that still lie before us...

Some of us are still in the morning of our ministry and many things need to be done... Others of us are in the late afternoon of reflection and stillness, and the hour when we begin to look for our own passing has come... The sun is going down and the day is far spent...

Curiously, as I began thinking about our ministry, I saw again the prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas:

O Lord, Thou knowest what is best for me; let this then be done when Thou wilt: deal with me as Thou thinkest best; place me where Thou wilt and deal with me in all things as Thou wilt. Behold, I am Thy servant, prepared for all things; I desire not to live unto myself but unto Thee; give me the grace and the glory to do it worthily and perfectly. This is a good prayer for all of us... It moved me to a few words about the attitude which makes such a prayer possible and even understandable...

For a decade now I have watched our ministry in the world where demonic forces go about their daily work to undo it... The result has been a deep and abiding pride and affection for our ministers... In the heat of the day of winnowing and burning I have seen them time and again draw men upward and become in the highest and most mysterious sense partners and co-laborers of the living God in Christ...

The question remains before the Church: what does the institutional church expect of its ministers?... Why do people no longer listen to them as they once did?... The answer is clear... Too many ministers have become journalists, book reviewers, commentators, good mixers, money-makers, and organizers in a world which is crying desperately for answers to basic questions... And some have answered the basic questions of the world

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with the wrong answers... The result has often been an amused contempt for the ministry...

The feeling of the younger generation is that they expect us not to preach to them... Well, our Lord preached, but in the right way... By talking quietly about faith and hope and love and heaven and eternity... Recognizing that men must have faith, He insisted upon opening the human soul to the presence of God and thereby showed us the real purpose and power and actual glory of the ministry...

All this is summed up in words from Isaiah standing before the throne of God: "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."

Here is the very heart of our ministry... The vision of God high and lifted up, the divine call from the altar which brings God to human lips, the forgiveness of sins, the resulting lifting of the soul and the dedication of the heart... Here am I; send me... Throughout all of history it has always been so....

A few hundred years later an old man was sitting on an island in the Aegean Sea... His companions had ' been nailed to the cross, and he was alone... The last thing he had to say to the world and the very last thing he had to say about God was the same vision of angels about the throne, singing of wisdom and strength and honor and glory... But now was added the great burden of the ministry of the new and final covenant...

For the way to the throne of God is through Calvary... That is the way He came to the throne, and it is our way following Him... This is the ultimate vision of God as the One who is stricken, smitten, and afflicted, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... To see God in the final vision, we must first look down, not up, and see Him among the lowliest of men... This our preachers must tell us...

Perhaps seldom in the history of mankind has there been a deeper need for men who will say yes to God... Here am I; send me... Men who will be right and strong and who will stand up when everyone else collapses... Men who have been up to Calvary and down in the valley of blood and

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sweat... Men who know that no suffering or sorrow is unknown to God and that He is present in them to give them their final meaning...

This is the fundamental task of our ministry... To tell the world that there is One among us who binds all the heartaches, the bitterest contradictions of time and circumstance, into a single pattern... One who comes not to be ministered unto, but to minister to us...

