

## **Our responsibility to the poor**

by Archibald Alexander

"The poor have the gospel preached unto them."

This must have been a new thing, or it would not have been given to John the Baptist as a proof that Jesus was the Messiah. In our public system of religious instruction in cities and villages, the poor are too much overlooked. They cannot afford to give money to the church. They cannot appear in costly apparel, and they do not love to be stared at on account of the coarseness of their clothes.

Go into the churches of any Protestant denomination, and you will probably find a large, respectable audience of well-dressed people quietly occupying their own pews, and listening with more or less attention to the instructions of the pastor; but where are the miserable poor? In society they form a large proportion of the people, but here we see perhaps a few old women, the beneficiaries of the church.

There must be some more effective measures for conveying the gospel to the destitute poor than our splendid churches furnish. The system of tract distribution by pious men and women, who, as far as they have opportunity, converse with the people on religious subjects, is excellent. This system, in New York, has been the instrument of much good to the poor. But cannot a plan be contrived and carried into effect, by which they can be brought within the sound of the gospel? I think there can. Let every rich church build a meeting-house, plain but commodious, and let them, under the direction of their pastors, employ some zealous, self-denying young minister to go about and collect as many of the poor as he can, and preach to them in a plain, familiar, affectionate style. At first perhaps few would come, but by degrees the number would increase. The preacher must be assisted and encouraged by the occasional presence of the pastor and other officers or members.

In every Christian church there are men and women who wish to do good, but they know not how to go about it. Let each of these go out into the lanes and dark alleys of the city, and persuade at least one poor person to go with them to the preaching of the gospel. All such exertions are useful to the person himself, whatever may be the effect on others. Let the meeting-house be seated with benches, and every

seat be in common; so that the first person who comes shall have the right to occupy it. And let the missionary to these people speak kindly to them, and inquire into their needs and afflictions, and make known cases of extreme suffering to those whose office it is to relieve distress--the deacons.

In the villages and country places there are often found many poor, miserable families, who are never seen in the church for lack of a place to sit, for lack of decent clothing, or for lack of disposition. Let five or six people agree to visit these families in turn, and let them provide a room for evening meetings, and let the pastor, as often as he can, preach to them; or let some layman read to them a tract or short sermon. Time is short. Try, try what can be done!