

we lead a young man to study the sermons of Robertson, or Brooks, or some other master. Then, too, the up-to-date teacher relies largely on man-to-man coaching. In short, no one has yet discovered an easy way of preparing a young man to preach the Gospel.

At the same time we should encourage and help ministers out on the field. Judging from letters that come to me from the British Isles, young men on both sides of the water feel that they ought to become better preachers. They ask, "How?" In answer no one can lay down rules, but still I can hold out hope. Up in Kilmany did not Thomas Chalmers learn to preach after seven years of "pulpit work" as ineffectual as "the quacking of ducks on a mill-pond"? Out at Indianapolis did not Henry Ward Beecher learn to preach in a far different fashion? Neither pastor left his home. In like manner, any young minister whom the Lord has called to preach can learn how. "He that willeth to do His will shall know."

Who then will join me in beseeching the Lord to raise up a generation of ministers who will do for our time what young Robertson did in Brighton a hundred years ago, and what Phillips Brooks did in Boston in the days of our fathers and mothers? Why not prayerfully lay plans for training young custodians of God's super-atomic power? At last we have discovered that no one but the Almighty can meet the needs of our age, and that He chooses to do so largely through the preaching of the only Gospel that can transform a man or a church, a nation or a world.

"Ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me."

The College of Preachers and the Art of Preaching

BY THE REV. T. O. WEDEL, Ph.D.

THE College of Preachers of the Washington Cathedral in America's capital city boasts of being a unique institution, although daughter or sister institutions are being founded here and there, and are sharing with us our peculiar vocation. The College of Preachers probably has the distinction, however, of being a pioneer in its particular field of academic endeavour.

This is no place for a history of the College or the moving story of its founding. Nor shall I discuss the details of its liturgical and prandial routines. Suffice it to say that, since its inception some twenty years ago, it has maintained, with only a few minor changes, a pattern of disciplines once inaugurated by a master pedagog, the College's first Warden, Bishop Philip M. Rhinelander. Within a setting of worship (including a daily half-hour meditation), groups of clergy, numbering from 25 to 30, invited from all sections of the country, spend from a Monday to a Saturday in submission to the College's admittedly strenuous schedule. Morning and evening sessions are in the hands

of a visiting leader, the morning academic session consisting of an hour's lecture in a formal classroom, a second hour of seminar discussion of the lecture (the group having been sub-divided into small sections), and a third hour during which the seminars report back to the leader, with resultant, always vivid, dialectic. This combination of lecture stimulus and listeners' honest reaction ought to recommend itself to pedagogic practitioners who have learned from modern psychology the value of response and participation in the learning process. We here at the College of Preachers have come to believe in it as invaluable.

The preaching disciplines, which after all are to occupy the centre of the scene for the week's work, come in the afternoons. Before these receive detailed discussion, however, a further comment may prove of value regarding the morning and evening lectures. An outsider might readily voice the expectation that a lecture series, for an institution devoted to preaching, would best fulfil its function if it dealt with the art or science of homiletics as such. There are, indeed, a few masters of the pulpit, or professors of homiletics, who are excellent for the needs of the College—particularly notable preachers who share with the men their life in their homiletic workshops. But failures in this type of lecture series are surprisingly conspicuous. Our experience at the College, in fact, can suggest the need of questioning the value of theoretical homiletic pedagogy. How *can* the art of preaching be taught? Must the "what" of the sermon become clear before the "how" can be profitably dealt with? Or, as in training in some of the other arts, is training in the art of preaching possible only by way of practical trial and error? At any rate, though notable exceptions occur, our best conferences, judging by the test of over 500 in the course of the College's history, are those in which a theologian or biblical scholar brings forth his garnered insights into the content of the gospel, but with the preacher's needs as he has to wrestle with that gospel in the pulpit kept in mind. The preacher's greatest need and hunger is for what, in the jargon which life at the College engenders, we sometimes call "homiletic theology." But it is *theology*. On this topic more will be said later.

Our afternoon sermon hours, however, are preaching sessions pure and simple. Some five or six sermons are preached each afternoon, each smaller seminar group listening to the sermons preached by any member of his group, several of these preaching sessions thus being scheduled simultaneously. The phrase "on the job training" has become current in America since the war, describing the kind of schooling in practical skills for which our Veterans' Administration provides government funds for former members of our armed forces. The phrase accurately describes the form which homiletic pedagogy assumes at the College. After a sermon has been delivered in one of our chapels, with a minimum liturgical setting, the group sits down in a seminar room for critical discussion. No holds are barred, except those dictated by Christian courtesy, and by at times very needful charity. A member of the College staff acts as moderator and chief critic. I, myself, stand aghast when I think that, in my own eleven years at the College, I have listened to and have presumed to judge literally

thousands of the sermons preached by my clerical brethren. To be a thus "bepreached" Christian is, as I frequently confess to a conference group, very hard on one's personal religion!

What results from all this avalanche of sermons and sermon listening? The clergy who pass through our College disciplines, many of them repeatedly, would have to speak for themselves. Judged by their rhetoric of gratitude, they profit greatly. At times even parishioners offer testimony of a redeemed pulpit, though it stands to reason that the unhappy mannerisms or theological heresies of a lifetime are not cured in a single short week of even the most searching self-analysis before the mirror of criticism. I cannot speak for our graduates. I must limit myself in this essay to comment on the impressions made on me as listener and critic.

I

One of the most important results of our "on the job training" derives from the group experience as such, quite apart from the homiletic instruction involved. We submit ourselves to group judgment. Our faults are laid bare. They lie bare for anyone to see anyway, of course, but here they receive verbalization. False pride is exposed, false humility is equally scored, slipshod grammar receives comment, sentimental rhetoric is given short shrift, superficial scriptural exegesis is detected. For many a priest all this exposure of his nakedness is a harrowing experience. Never before, not at least since seminary days when the camaraderie of dormitory life had brought with it frank mutual criticism, has the poor fellow, now a "parson of the town" and the respected rector of a parish, been so humiliated. We speak, in our sermons, of "bearing one another's burdens," including the burdens of weakness of character and failings in our vocation, but Christian *koinonia* rarely, if ever, is practised literally. The whispered negative judgments of our parishioners seldom come to our ears. Even a wife, gifted with insight, holds tongue in leash. Her vocation is that of encouragement rather than its opposite—and where is the priest who does not live, if he is not on his guard, in a perpetual mood of discouragement and self-depreciation? Hence, a sermon session at the College can be, and often is, for the preaching candidate, a blow to self-esteem which can rob him of his courage for the morrow.

And yet—with very rare exceptions—the ultimate effect is just the contrary. That fact is for me a source of continuous amazement. Contemporary psychotherapy is discovering the value of what it calls "group therapy". We at the College have evidently practised "group therapy" for decades. "My sermon, I see clearly now, was pretty poor stuff. It was disorganized, its real message buried in a mass of undigested rhetorical baggage. My delivery was lifeless and my voice nervously pitched too high. Why in the world did I ever pick on this fossil out of my 'sermon barrel' for this shameless exposure? Or why did I ever think that a few bright ideas discovered on a lazy Tuesday morning would make a fit 'word of the Lord' when hurriedly pieced together and furnished with a text and put on paper during a hectic Saturday?" Thus may run a typical soliloquy

of humiliation. But then the victim discovers that the others in the group are subjected to a similar, and possibly even more painful, analysis—one in which he, now an alumnus of shattered pride, can play the role of critic, noting faults which are pitifully clear precisely because he has seen them in glaring light in his own pulpit performance. By the second or third afternoon of these sermon disciplines, the group has become a fellowship of humiliation, and, what is more, a fellowship of repentance. And in that experience one of the deepest paradoxes of the gospel comes to life. Coming into judgment is at the same time entrance into grace. Judgment means that some one takes our failings seriously. Some one cares. A Christian fellowship cares. And the joy of fellowship on this deep level outweighs all the pain of humiliation.

"Dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee?" Thus Job once made the great discovery of the paradox of judgment in his dialogue with God—a foretaste of the paradox of justification by grace which is the incomparable glory of the New Testament gospel. Despite the sting of shamed pride, joy in experiencing a fellowship of the Holy Spirit—an experience all too rare even for those in priest's orders—turns some of these sermon disciplines into hotbeds of charity. Feelings of inferiority are transmuted into courage. Many a victim of the corporate judgment encountered at the College has testified that, his failings forgotten, he has entered his pulpit the following Sunday with a rekindled fire burning in his bones.

Nor is the value of these sermon hours restricted to the preacher's insight into his own talents and weaknesses. The mere listening to sermons is itself of equal pedagogic profit. Some one has defined the art of teaching—the preaching art being parallel—as the art of "imagining ignorance". The preacher must be a good "money changer", translating the vocabulary of the Kingdom into language understood of the people. The preacher needs discipline in what we at the College have come to call "listening psychology". As a listener to the sermons preached, the priest is directed to imagine himself to be a typical layman in the pew, preferably a half-converted layman. Let him indulge in such a "role playing", and then ask himself: "What does this sermon being preached really mean to me? Is it over my head? Does it convince? Can I, at its close, summarize its structure? Can I even recall the text?" Listening to a sermon is discovered to be strenuous business. A gulf far too often yawns between a sermon structure clear in the preacher's mind and that structure after it has passed from pulpit to pew and is reconstructed in the listener's mind. How much of a sermon is competently remembered even after a lapse of half an hour? Many a preacher who tries himself out as a listener goes forth with sympathy in his heart for his longsuffering parishioners! Memory, he discovers, is a frail power in man's psychological equipment. The discipline of listening to sermons, to cite one concrete lesson almost uniformly driven home, will cure most of us of the use of much poetry in our pulpits. Poetry is language so condensed that even slow delivery rarely implants more than a phrase or two, or a vague impression of a mood, in the hearer's

consciousness. The preacher thrills to it, since he receives it by both ear and eye. But the listener is usually hopelessly at sea. One of the masters of the preaching art, when leader of one of our College conferences, confessed that he found it unwise ever to cite more than two lines of a poem. Thus employed, poetry can, indeed, be extraordinarily effective. But, so he would advise, a prose paraphrase, in the preacher's own words, of the body of the poem, with a two-line direct quotation, is more effective than long citations.

II

I turn now to a few further insights to which long experience in our homiletic workshops gives rise. Regretfully, I must speak in the first person. I cannot testify for our College alumni. I am, indeed, under the further embarrassment of exposing our failings rather than our triumphs. A critic almost inevitably becomes professionally censorious. His insights take the form of *don'ts* rather than of positive wisdom, though the latter need not be wholly absent. Comfort may come from the fact that even the Ten Commandments emphasize negative precepts. Preaching, as all life, requires the discipline of Law.

One of the most vivid convictions regarding the art of preaching which has come to me concerns the topic of sermon structure already mentioned. How few are the sermons which are built on a firm structure! I use the word "structure" in place of the word "outline" advisedly. Most sermons do have a kind of outline. One of the most common types of outline is that found in the "clothes-line" sermon. A central theme runs through it. As a clothes-line unifies a heterogeneous series of garments hung up to dry, so the theme brings a kind of unity to the sub-topics of the sermon. But the sermon cries out for architectural structure. The arrangement is casual and not climactic. The preacher has shirked the task of working on his material long enough to order it. Even the text has frequently been pinned onto his clothes-line at the last moment, or is hung there at the outset, but is then forgotten until a bad conscience compels repetition in the closing paragraph. The best cure for the unstructured sermon is a return to the Bible, to expository preaching. (Have we the right, in all conscience, to indulge in any other kind of preaching?) Let the preacher wrestle honestly with almost any text of Holy Scripture, encouraging *it* to speak its message, and structure is almost inevitable. The reason is simple. The Bible speaks out of an already structured view of God and man, law and grace, judgment and forgiveness. Illuminate a text in its setting in the Bible. A structured sermon will almost certainly result.

In this matter of a sermon outline, some homiletic textbooks are much to blame. We are told that preparation of the sermon *begins* with an outline. Nonsense! The outline, or preferably the structure, emerges only at the end of the process. We begin with chaos—a chosen text or longer Bible passage, collateral texts, the garnerings from concordance and commentaries, glimmering bits of insight as to applications to contemporary life, parables and analogies. A good sermon grows only in the soil of the preacher's meditative hours.

If he yields himself to the wooing of his text, subconscious fashioning of his sermon will precede conscious verbalizing. At long last a structure emerges. This can, at times, be very simple—the so-called sonata structure, for example (introduction, theme, variations on the theme, coda). It is not meaningless that the tripartite division of a sermon has been long traditional. There is nothing better. The gospel is always paradox. And a paradox yields itself best to threefold development. The important point is, however, that the structure of the sermon *is* the sermon. It is what sermon preparation works *toward*, not *from*. The issue of written sermon or outline sermon is relatively unimportant. Homiletic experts have probably argued this dilemma from the days of St. Paul to our own. I see no reason why the preacher should not become proficient in both forms of delivery. There are occasions when anything short of a complete manuscript is unworthy of the solemnity of the service. There are other occasions when the preacher must speak forth his message even without vestments or pulpit desk.

Much could be said on the subject of sermon delivery—the use of the voice, to cite one instance. At the College of Preachers, a voice instructor has been a member of the staff from the beginning. What listening agonies could be avoided if preachers would be humble enough to profit from experts in voice culture! It may be of interest to note that the most common fault to be found in our use of the voice is that it is pitched far too high. It is as if the lower strings of a violin were allowed to rust, since they are not used. Is it fanciful to trace the cause of this misuse of the voice to lack of faith—want of faith in ourselves, which, in turn, means want of faith in God? When we are poised and at peace within, our voices naturally fall into the warm, lower tones. When we are victims of pride, and of anxiety, they grow tense and the pitch rises. The preacher's voice is itself a symbol of his faith in Him who could counsel us: "Be not anxious—even when you stand in the pulpit and speak in My holy Name".

Sermon criticising at the College, as the reader may suspect, becomes a homely affair. We detect slipshod diction, windy gesturing, or an unsure stance. An intra-mural vocabulary of criticism has grown up in the College, descriptive, in not overly dignified fashion, I fear, of common faults. Such is the phrase "chicken-drinking", for example. It employs a barnyard analogy to depict an innocent, though unhappy, mannerism. Watch many a preacher who is a reader of manuscript sermons. His head moves up and down as on a hinge, the face turned upward as if he were preaching to the archangels in the rafters, and then down for another glimpse of his pulpit desk. The congregation before him gets never a glance.

III

Far more important than these little matters of pulpit etiquette, however, is the analysis of the content of our sermons. On this issue, my long term of sermon listening causes me to speak with deep and almost desperate concern, though here briefly and with reserve. After only a few years of steady sermonic diet, it dawned on me that an informal statistical survey of the sermons passing across my desk or

listened to in the chapel would clearly reveal the preponderance of one type of sermon, and that this type somehow missed the full meaning of the gospel. This statistical conclusion has since been further confirmed, though very recent years indicate the coming of a change. To call these sermons heretical—the stigma of the Pelagian heresy would be the obvious one to apply—would be ungracious, and, so far as the preacher's intentions are involved, unfair. The preacher would pass an examiner's test in the orthodoxy of his doctrinal beliefs quite easily. But examine his sermons, and, more particularly, the interpretation which the listening layman will take home with him after the sermon hour, and the preacher should be awakened to a great concern. A gulf somehow yawns in our churches between the pulpit on one side and the lectern and prayerdesk on the other. A chasm appears also to exist between the preacher as he reads his text-books on doctrine and the same preacher when he is in his homiletic workshop.

Most of our sermons, if the basic problem of motivation is thoroughly examined, fall into the category of *ought* sermons. Sub-categories of this are the "we must", the "let us", and the "if only" sermon. This *oughtness* finds its validation in the teachings and the example of Jesus. With no intention of ignoring incarnational theology, the figure of the Christ, nevertheless, is reduced (theologically speaking) to that of Master. The Christian life is pictured as under the compelling sanctions of imitation and discipleship. An ethical resultant is homiletically presented in glowing terms as itself the gospel. For its attainment, helps falling under the category of "grace" may, to be sure, be needed. On this issue, though not always on the basic one, Anglo-Catholic sermons will be more precise, stressing the value of the sacraments.

Texts for our sermons (I could prove this statistically) are pre-vaillingly from the four gospels; the Old Testament and the epistles of the New Testament resisting easy subjection to a discipleship appeal. Are not the "gospels" obviously "the gospel"? We can think of nothing higher than to present Christ to our people. And are not the "gospels" the nearest we can come to Him?

It would require a delicate surgeon's knife to separate truth from error in such presentations of the Christian faith. *Oughtness* is, clearly, essential in God's covenant with His people. What else is the Law as we meet it in Exodus and Deuteronomy or in the Sermon on the Mount and in St. Paul's ethical discourses? But the *oughtness* of our exemplarist gospel of discipleship is somehow different from the Law of Deuteronomy, with its terrifying sanctions of doom if met with disobedience. Nor is it the Law as St. Paul deals with it as that which "kills". Law has been subtly transmuted into "ideals". We could take seriously Baron von Hugel's profound saying: "No amount of *oughtness* can take the place of one *isness*."

Think of the very words "discipleship" and "imitation". They have become so hallowed in the Christianity of the last hundred years that they connote Christianity itself in miniature to the average layman. Nor would this writer presume to recommend dropping them from our Christian vocabulary. A simple unprejudiced reading

of the *whole* New Testament, however, should give us pause. The central act in the drama is the Resurrection, with the Ascension and Pentecost following. Two eras are sharply divided. Jesus as Master becomes Lord. He is not called Master again. The relationship of disciples to Master is no longer what it once was. The word discipleship does not occur in the epistles of the New Testament. Nor is the ideal of "imitation" of Jesus, in the post-Resurrection era, any longer a simple ethical concept. The word "imitation", like the word discipleship, will not be found in a concordance of the Authorized Version of the New Testament epistles, though the phrase "be imitators of God" can translate the Greek of Ephesians v. 1. The ideal is not absent (see Philippians ii. 5-10, or 1 Peter ii. 21), but the passages in which it occurs require careful exegesis. The utterly simple fact is that Christianity is a post-Resurrection, post-Ascension faith. The gospel story is essential to that faith. But to take the "gospels", or even hallowed texts from their pages, and to ignore the post-Resurrection apostolic confession that Jesus is *now* ascended Lord, is to preach the New Testament backwards. Dig deep enough beneath many of our sermons and they will be found to be preaching a pre-Resurrection Christianity—which is not Christianity at all, but, instead, a sentimental Judaism, Judaism with Deuteronomy left out! We ought not to be surprised that more realistic faiths are winning the allegiance of the multitudes.

I can recall the startled eye with which I once read a striking warning on this issue of "the gospels or the Gospel" in a volume of Peter Taylor Forsyth, that great prophet of a reborn biblical Christianity. "The Epistles," he says, "are more inspired than the Gospels. We are in more direct contact with Christ. We are at one remove only. The Gospels, with their unspeakable value, are yet but propaedeutic to the Epistles; and *most of the higher pains and troubles of the Church to-day arise from the displacement of its centre of gravity to the Gospels.*"¹ These are winged words. Their author would be the first one to protest if they were understood as belittling the evangelists of the New Testament, or sermon texts culled from those priceless pages. But he is right in placing a warning sign before a moralistic "discipleship Christianity". The word "discipleship" may receive redemption, even though the apostolic era did not use it. It requires, however, the setting of the apostolic faith. The imitation of Christ is symbolized in baptism. We die and rise again, receive the gift of the Spirit, and are henceforth "in Christ." To be a disciple of Him who "shall come to judge the quick and dead" is, if presented in terms of moral idealism, an impossible burden. The burden must be transformed into a gift of grace. The Gospel is the good news of that gift. An imperative becomes an indicative. The historic disciple-group, after the Resurrection and Pentecost, received the gift and became Christians. Do we wish to turn clocks back? We may, in some of our sermons, run the danger once voiced, I believe, by John Oman, of merely turning publicans into pharisees.

This essay, in its closing section, has departed far from the "art"

¹ The italics are mine. The quotation comes from *Theology in Church and State*, Hodder, 1915, p. 31.

of preaching. Yet no word on preaching would be true if it did not firmly transcend aesthetic concerns. Preaching is an art, let us grant. As art it can be taken seriously. But the proclamation of the Gospel does not require aesthetic genius. A child can babble the old, old story. An unlettered parishioner can show it forth in a saintly life. Unless the preacher can discover (or re-discover) the meaning of the mighty acts of God and declare them before men, all the artistic triumphs of a popular pulpit can be to him damnation. "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"

Evangelistic Preaching

Preaching for Conversion

BY THE REV. BRYAN S. W. GREEN, B.D.

THERE are signs that preaching is coming back into fashion in the Church of England. It has always been prominent in the Free Churches, but the art has been allowed to decay in the Established Church. It is, I think, true that the general level of preaching in England is to-day higher than it was, though still far from good. But there is not enough Gospel preaching—and still less "preaching for conversion." Sermons can contain much good Gospel teaching, and yet not be truly evangelistic, resulting in conversions.

From one point of view all real preaching is evangelistic, for preaching to be preaching must be a declaring of the Word of God. This Word is about God's character and His purpose for man. This is the Gospel, for even in the judgment there is good news. God will not tolerate anything that frustrates His purpose to save man and to redeem His world.

While this is true, it is worth considering whether an ordinary, good biblical sermon differs from an evangelistic sermon. Differences there certainly are—both of content, and of technique and delivery.

I

The keynote of this kind of preaching is perhaps to be found in its note of urgent demand. A verdict is demanded, and a response must be made to the offer of God which is being proclaimed. In the mind of the preacher, as he speaks, there is an expectancy that God the Holy Spirit will do something in the hearts of the hearers. He expects "results." This attitude is often stigmatized as unworthy, and called a "looking for success." But in reality it is very different. There is nothing emotional or of "the flesh" in this. The evangelistic preacher believes that God means men to say "Yes" or "No" to the message of the Gospel. To some it will be a savour of life, to others a savour of death. Such a response is often visible—and this is what is meant by looking for results.

This question of "results" and the "verdict" is vital, because I