

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100.⁶¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 85.⁶² *Op. cit.*, p. 100, n. 1.⁶³ *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. xliii (1895), art. by Professor A. F. Pollard.⁶⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 100.⁶⁵ *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. xx (1889) (under Garbrand), art. by Sir Sidney Lee.⁶⁶ *The Zürich Letters*, translated and ed. by H. Robinson (Parker Soc. edn.) (1842), p. 11.⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

The Parson as Preacher

BY FRANK COLQUHOUN

IT should be made clear at the beginning of this article that I am using the word "parson" in its original and true sense as denoting the man to whom is committed the cure of souls in a parish and who is therefore called to fulfil a pastoral ministry. Next, I wish to assert quite boldly that whatever else he is, the pastor is certainly intended to be a preacher—at least according to the Anglican pattern of ministry. The Ordinal makes that abundantly clear. What is more, the circumstances of our modern life have not in any sense diminished the importance of the preaching office or rendered it superfluous. Nor should we allow the modern stress on liturgy—which seems to be all the rage at the moment—to divert us from the ministry of the Word. To assert that worship is more important than preaching is to create a false antithesis between the two. Again, to argue that the Christian's business in going to church is to give glory to God, not to listen to a man voicing his opinions, is completely to misunderstand the true nature of preaching.

For what is preaching? It has been described as "a manifestation of the Incarnate Word, from the written Word, by the spoken word". Whether or not such a definition is adequate, it does at least serve to focus attention on two facts of fundamental importance: first, that the preacher's supreme (and, in one sense, only) subject is Jesus Christ Himself, the Word made flesh and made sin for our salvation; and second, that the preacher's authoritative textbook is the Word of God written, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. In other words, he not only preaches Christ; he preaches the Christ of revelation. Martin Luther, in quoting the words of the Psalmist, "In the volume of the book it is written of me," inquired, "What book, and what person?" His answer was: "There is only one book—the Bible. There is only one person—Christ". For the preacher that answer is of profound significance.

Furthermore, it must be remembered that true preaching is not simply a human activity. It is rather God in action through human personality. "It is the occasion of encounter," says Thomas Keir in his recently published Warrack Lectures. "It is a man speaking in such a way and under such a direction that the God who is eternal may be heard to utter his solving and saving Word in the situation that is contemporary." He adds: "Whatever preaching is concerned to be, it is primarily and characteristically this—a personal action and that action God's" (*The Word in Worship*, p. 121).

Another recent book on preaching makes the same point. In *A Theological Preacher's Notebook*, D. W. Cleverley Ford defines preaching as the proclamation of redemption or release to men who are imprisoned, so that God actually liberates men through preaching. "This means that the preacher stands between God and the men held in bondage. He stands between the men who are held in bondage and God who is waiting to act" (p. 22). And again: "Through preaching and the response of faith evoked through interpretation of the hearer's environment and experience in the light of the Kerygma, the saving act of God at Calvary becomes a saving act of God now" (p. 24). Yet another new book on the subject, *Preaching and Congregation*, by Professor Jean-Jacques Von Allmen, stresses likewise that preaching is an event in which God acts. In fact, he begins his essay by developing the thesis that "our preaching continues the past preaching of Jesus and looks forward to the Word which He will speak at His return. That is why God Himself is at work, at this present day, when we preach" (p. 7).

All this serves to magnify the preaching office as well as to clarify its function. It is of primary importance that the parson should recognize what preaching really is and as a result should take this side of his work with the utmost seriousness. Nothing is more fatal than for the parson to regard preaching as a mere sideline of the pastoral ministry, or to salve his conscience by persuading himself that in parish work there are other things that matter more than preaching. What things matter more? The serving of tables? That was not how the apostles viewed the ministry. Their priorities were crystal clear: "We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6: 4).

It is reasonably certain that if the parson does not take his preaching seriously, his hearers are not likely to do so either. They at least know the difference between the preacher who goes into the pulpit because he has something to say and the man who goes there simply because he has to say something. Let the parson shake himself free from the "anything will do" mentality and be sure that he *has* something to say—and he will no longer be content with what the late Bishop Chavasse contemptuously dismissed as "pitiful little homilies".

But, of course, if the parson does devote himself in apostolic fashion to the ministry of the Word he will soon find that it makes demands upon his time and his mental energies. It will mean that he must be prepared to do some hard thinking and some serious reading. He will have to take down from his shelves some of those dusty commentaries, lexicons, dictionaries, and other works of biblical reference which he has for too long neglected. And he will have to do this not only to ensure

accurate exegesis of the text of Scripture but also to stimulate his own thinking, so that he has something more to say than the most commonplace sort of remarks. Herein lies the importance of the parson building up some sort of reference library of biblical material and of adding to it from time to time. The mass of such material at present available is positively embarrassing, and the younger man in particular may be bewildered by the choice at his disposal. However, he will soon discover from his own experience and from wise consultation with his older brethren what works—and especially what authors—are most likely to be of assistance to him from the homiletical point of view.

* * * *

Perhaps the most difficult problem confronting the Christian pastor as he begins to think about his sermons for the following Sunday is to know what line of thought to follow, what text to take up, what passage of Scripture to expound. There are times at least when this decision involves as much time and thought as the actual task of sermon preparation.

Basically, of course, the parish priest will be guided in this matter by the Church's lectionary and by the Epistle and Gospel provided for the Sunday in question in the Book of Common Prayer. Just as we should learn to "pray with the Church", so should we also seek to preach with the Church. And here, let me stress the vast importance of linking our preaching as closely as possible with the Christian Year—not only for the reason already suggested, but in order that our ministry of the Word may be marked by a due balance and breadth. The great landmarks of the Christian calendar—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Passiontide, Easter, Ascension, Whitsun, and Trinity—afford us ample scope for the kind of pastoral preaching which gets to grips with apostolic Christianity in its glorious variety and basic wholeness. "They compel us to keep close to the fundamental doctrines of the faith. They summon us back from the bypaths where we might be prone to linger, to the great highways of redemption. They ensure that in our preaching we shall constantly be returning to those mighty acts of God which the Church exists to declare" (James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God*, p. 111).

In actual fact we all need to be on our guard, as preachers, against an unbalanced and one-sided outlook which justifies the comment, "Ten thousand, thousand are his texts, but all his sermons one." No one is more boring than the preacher who is always harping on the same theme, instead of declaring the whole counsel of God. The gospel of Christ is vaster than any of our pet doctrines and includes them all. Moreover, those "fundamental doctrines of the faith" which are celebrated in the great festivals of the Church's year are all *big* themes and cannot be exhausted in just one or two sermons. They offer almost infinite scope to the Christian preacher. And here is the answer to the parson who (shall we say?) as Christmas approaches, begins to ask himself somewhat wearily, "What shall I preach about this Christmas? I dealt with the story of the shepherds last year—and the angels' song the year before. What is there new to say?" One answer, of course, is to remind this pathetic parson that his people may

not have remembered his last year's sermon as well as he thinks they have. Another is that the great foundation truths of the Gospel have to be repeated to the same congregation again and again, year after year. And a third is that those same truths are many-sided and lend themselves to considerable variety of treatment.

To take the Christmas festival as an illustration : the preacher has a lot more material at his disposal than St. Luke's matchless story of the Nativity in ch. 2: 1-20—though there is enough there for any number of sermons. Here, almost at random, are a dozen other themes for Christmas preaching, all of which cry out for sermonic treatment.

A Song of Christmas (Isaiah 9: 6).

Little Town of Bethlehem (Micah 5: 2).

The Holy Name (Matthew 1: 21).

Joseph : A Neglected Saint (Matthew 1: 19, 20).

Emmanuel (Matthew 1: 23).

The Worship of the Wise Men (Matthew 2: 11).

Characters of the Nativity (for example, Herod, the Magi, the Shepherds, the inn-keeper, etc.).

The Fulness of Time (Galatians 4: 4).

Love Came Down at Christmas (1 John 4: 9).

The Poverty of Christ (2 Corinthians 8: 9).

The Greatness of Christ (Luke 1: 32, 33).

Born of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1: 34, 35).

These are no more than suggestions. None of them takes any account of the magnificent Christmas Day Gospel, Jn. 1: 1-14, which begins with the great themes of creation and revelation, and goes on to relate the incarnation of the Son of God to the regeneration of the sons of men (as does the Christmas Day Collect). Christ was born of Mary that we might be reborn of the Spirit. He partook of our human nature that we might be partakers of His divine nature. Here is a task to challenge any preacher : to relate these profound spiritual realities to the lives and needs of ordinary people in this materialistic age.

What we have said about the Christmas message is also true with regard to Easter. Here, again, the theme is a broad one and can be approached from all kinds of angles. The significance of the empty tomb is manifold and can be interpreted along different lines : evidential, evangelistic, devotional, doctrinal, eschatological. The records of the appearances of the risen Lord, apart from anything else, afford a wonderful field for the preacher to explore. Take, for example, the story of the walk to Emmaus, which is rich in themes for Easter sermons. Here are one or two which suggest themselves : The Companionship of the Living Christ (v. 15) ; The Risen Lord and the Scriptures (vv. 25-27) ; Christ in the Home (vv. 28-30) ; The First Easter Communion (vv. 30, 35) ; The Secret of the Burning Heart (v. 32). Again, the great doctrinal passages in the Epistles bearing on the Lord's resurrection open up another wealthy field of exploration. Let no pastor—and especially the younger man—fearfully imagine that after a number of years he will run short of subjects for Easter sermons. The New Testament offers an almost inexhaustible supply.

This leads me to say a word about courses of sermons. These undoubtedly have a real value in the parochial ministry, especially at such seasons as Advent and Lent. And it may not be out of the way to suggest that the long Trinity season, which admittedly tends to be a bit dull, since it lacks the dramatic movement of the first part of the Christian Year, affords an excellent opportunity for courses during the summer and autumn months. At such times subjects can be dealt with which are not altogether appropriate for special seasons of the year.

Courses of sermons have a number of advantages. For one thing, they are good for the parson himself, for they provide him with a chance of doing some specialized reading and study in connection with the selected topic, and they also enable him to know his sermon themes well in advance. They are also good for the congregation, for they not only serve to stimulate interest in the preaching ministry but also enable the man in the pew to learn something about subjects which, in the ordinary course of events, would probably not be dealt with from the pulpit.

Clearly enough, there are some subjects which are too big to be encompassed by just one isolated sermon, and as a result the preacher is inclined to leave them alone. Take, for example, the Ten Commandments. What is the use of trying to preach a single sermon on the Commandments? The preacher requires plenty of elbow room in tackling a topic of that kind. A course of sermons is the only solution in such a case, and happily there are some valuable books available to assist the parson who undertakes this task; for example, *The Ten Commandments* by Cosslett Quin and *Smoke on the Mountain* by Joy Davidson.

There are other Bible passages which constitute a unity and which can only be dealt with adequately by a series of addresses. A notable example, of course, is the Sermon on the Mount. Another is the Lord's Prayer, which forms part of that Sermon and which can hardly be covered satisfactorily in one study. Here is an ideal theme for a Lenten course of addresses.

Do we preach enough *theological* sermons? Perhaps from time to time, at least, we ought to attempt a series of addresses on Christian doctrine. Such a series might well consist of an exposition of the Apostles' Creed under the title of "The Faith We Confess". Or what about introducing our people, for a change, to the Thirty-Nine Articles? This would have the advantage of exploring new ground as far as most lay people are concerned; and the Articles are easily accessible to them at the back of their Prayer Books. Certain carefully selected Articles could well be dealt with in the form of a series of questions, such as the following:

Who is Jesus Christ? (Article II.)

What is the Church's Rule of Faith? (Article VI.)

How can Man get Right with God? (Article XI.)

Why Bother about the Church? (Article XIX.)

Why Sacraments? (Article XXV.)

The Subject of the Sacraments would certainly require more than one sermon. Indeed, both Baptism and the Lord's Supper would provide

excellent themes for a series of addresses. There are few matters on which church people generally need to be better informed.

This naturally suggests another subject for courses of sermons—that of Christian *worship*. Such courses should be linked up as closely as possible with the Book of Common Prayer. It is a dismal fact that church-goers get scarcely any Prayer Book teaching nowadays. Cranmer's prefaces to the book of 1549 would provide a basis for a sermon or two on the principles of Christian worship, and these could be illustrated in subsequent addresses dealing with the daily offices and the eucharist. Particular parts of the Prayer Book could well be used for a series of sermons on the various elements of worship; for example, the General Confession (penitence); the *Te Deum* (praise); the General Thanksgiving (thanksgiving); and the Prayer for the Church Militant (intercession). The Prayer Book canticles also provide obvious material for a series of expository addresses. The same is true of many of the Psalms. Here, by way of illustration, are the titles of a series of expository sermons which I have preached on selected Psalms:

- A Penitent's Plea (Psalm 51).
- A Pastoral Idyll (Psalm 23).
- A Psalm of the Sanctuary (Psalm 84).
- A Song of Victory (Psalm 46).
- A Symphony of Praise (Psalm 103).

All kinds of other subjects will readily suggest themselves for courses of sermons. For example, the outstanding characters of the Bible (both Old Testament and New Testament); or a series could be given on some of the neglected characters of the Bible. Again, certain of the shorter books of the Bible (for example, the minor prophets in the Old Testament, the epistles in the New Testament) provide good material. So do the parables of our Lord. Or a series could be devoted to some of the great chapters of the Bible; or to the turning-points in our Lord's ministry; or to some notable converts in the Acts; or to the friends of St. Paul; or to the letters to the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3. These are intended merely to indicate how plentiful are the themes at the disposal of the preacher. And apart from courses on directly biblical subjects or passages, there are current social and moral issues which could well be dealt with in a series of Sunday evening sermons, showing what the Gospel of Christ has to say about such matters as money, work, marriage, divorce, family life, the state, race relations, war, gambling, and so on.

These last remarks lead me to stress something else, and something of particular importance for the evangelical preacher, namely, the need for *applying* the Christian message to the actual, concrete situations of life in which our hearers find themselves. It is possible for the parson to get so wrapped up in his studies, so absorbed with biblical and theological issues which are matters of concern to him, that he loses sight of the world of reality outside. It is also possible for him to take refuge in evangelism, so that his preaching becomes virtually all *kerygma* without any *didache*. I cannot but feel that sometimes the preaching of simple "Gospel sermons" is, in fact, a form of escapism, or a mark of sheer laziness. It is true, our people need to be converted;

but they also need to be edified and instructed and equipped for the battle of life in the world. Merely to preach to them, Sunday after Sunday, the way of salvation is not going to help them very much to grapple with the pressing problems and temptations which beset them in their ordinary business or social affairs. We must go on to show them that Christianity is also a way of life, and a hard way at that : a way which makes serious demands and challenges both their sense of values and their standards of conduct.

If in our preaching we divorce the Christian ethic from the Christian evangel, can we be surprised that our ministry produces such few mature, intelligent, and sanctified Christians ? In his useful little book *Consistent Christianity*, Michael Griffiths gives this all too typical testimony : " In my own student days it was fashionable to criticize any sermon which did not enlarge upon sin, the cross, and how to become a Christian, as though every sermon must contain these ingredients irrespective of what passage of Scripture was being expounded. We were fast becoming advocates of impository, rather than expository, preaching ". He adds : " Surely in our reaction against those who never preach for conversion, it is foolish to go to the opposite extreme and never preach about anything else ! Perhaps it is this distorted view of the content of the Christian Gospel which explains the not uncommon excuse of non-Christians that they fail to see any difference between the lives of Christians and their own. If Christians have evangelistic services for breakfast, lunch, and tea—then no wonder there is a dietary deficiency in the matter of day-to-day living " (p. 19).

It is vital that our preaching should have an honest, realistic, down-to-earth quality. If it is true *biblical* preaching it assuredly will not lack that quality. Far from being remote from the world it will be closely related to the world. As the Good News which is rooted deeply in the incarnation of the Son of God it will reflect the relevance of religion to life, of creed to conduct, of worship to work.

This, as I have indicated, is a matter of special concern to those of us who are evangelicals. We often, and rightly, find fault with those preachers whose sermons are little more than moral essays and who seem to be entirely taken up with the passing matters of the moment. While we do not want to fall into that sort of snare, we must be careful that we do not make the opposite mistake and neglect the practical implications of the faith. If we are to make full proof of our ministry we must prepare people for life as well as for death, for the realities of this world as well as for the bliss of the world to come. We must show them (as I have sought to demonstrate recently in my little book *Total Christianity*) that being a Christian means living a new life as well as experiencing Christ's saving power, joining the Church, and accepting the creed.

* * * *

There is no space left to deal in this article with technical matters relating to the preparation and delivery of sermons. Many of these are of genuine importance ; though in actual fact it is extremely difficult to write about them in a general way, for in the end every parson has to

work out his own technique, and there is no such thing as a perfect pattern.

But a word must be added on one point of even greater importance. We cannot be content with our preaching so long as it is "in word only"—even though that word may be sound and biblical and scholarly. It must be our earnest desire that the Word of God should come to our people through us "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1: 5). How is this to come about? Not simply by adopting correct techniques according to the homiletical textbooks, or by delving into the right commentaries and preaching a thoroughly sound message. Something more is required, and that something more is spiritual unction, which in its turn is the result of prayer. But the prayer in question is not simply the preacher's own: it is also the prayer of the congregation. Indeed, the parson's greatest joy and comfort in his ministry is to know that he has around him a band of godly praying people, who, in a true sense, are workers together with him in the ministry of the Word.

I conclude this article with a further quotation from Von Allmen's *Preaching and Congregation*, to which I made reference earlier. Another thesis of his is this: *Without the work of the Holy Spirit the Word which God has spoken to the world in His Son cannot be effectively translated or made present.* He comments: "This requires from us, before, during, and after the sermon, intense supplication: there is no true preaching without epiclesis. But this fact is also reassuring: in carrying out our arduous work as preachers we are not alone" (p. 31).

An Examination of the Proposed Burial Service for Suicides

BY ROGER BECKWITH

THE law of the Church of England, as contained in the rubric preceding the Prayer Book burial service, and repeated in part by Canon 68 of 1603, is that this service, designed for the burial of Christians, is not to be used in three specified cases. It "is not to be used for any that die unbaptized, or excommunicate, or have laid violent hands upon themselves". The reasons for these exclusions are plain. An unbaptized person is not recognizably a Christian. A person who has been excommunicated, whether as "an open and notorious evil liver", as having "done any wrong to his neighbour by word or deed, so that the congregation be thereby offended", or as harbouring "malice and hatred" (to use the Prayer Book language), has placed his Christian profession under such deserved suspicion that he has been excluded from the Christian fold. If he dies unrepentant, he cannot be buried as a Christian. A suicide is a person who has committed so