

Editorial

A PLEA FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHING

DURING the last twenty-five years there has been a subtle change in the preacher's attitude to the Bible and partly for that reason expository preaching is out of fashion. Popular preaching seems now to be based on a psychologized theology—spiritual pabulum for the tender-minded and self-centered. This is perhaps even worse than the former way of approaching the Bible in which the emphasis was on the literal inerrancy of the Word of God. For what the best preachers in that style really meant was that the Bible was the Word of God and that it spoke to men of the will of God. To them the Bible was infallible not in the sense of literal inerrancy but because it was the meeting place of God and man. Once there was a common background in the interpretation of the Bible. Today we have not yet recovered from the repercussions of the critical approach, which continues both to inspire us with new insights and to disturb us with new problems. Modern biblical criticism has made the Bible a living Book for many of us, but we have not yet been able to put up a framework as solid as that of our fathers. For this reason there are many preachers who are diffident about expository preaching and uncertain in their approach to many parts of the Bible. The tendency of many preachers to confine themselves to topical or so called "Life Situation" preaching as distinct from biblical is perhaps due not only to the praiseworthy desire to keep themselves in touch with their people, but also in some cases to a compulsion to put honesty before certainty. It may, however, arise primarily from mental laziness and the fear of disturbing those who are set in their spiritual ways.

Yet, it seems to us that biblical and expository preaching is the only kind of preaching worthy of being called Christian. There is surely only one kind of sermon—that which has the Bible as its background. A man is not invited into a pulpit just to offer to the congregation his own reflections about life in general, but to proclaim to them the revelation of God in Christ, and the only basis of such preaching is the record of that revelation in the Bible. A sermon to be worthy of a place in public worship must, in the first instance, be an oblation to God on the part of the preacher whereby he offers to God the dedicated result of his wrestling with the Divine Word and his understanding of the Divine Will for his day as revealed in the Bible. Unless it is this it is an intrusion upon the act of worship. We must study the Bible itself. There is no substitute for such study—not of books about the Bible, but of the Bible itself. It speaks to our age as it has to every age of a God who is eternally alive in history redeeming men; a God who has done, is still doing, and is waiting to do marvellous things for his

children. Here is a way of escape from that pernicious subjectivity in preaching to which many are prone, based on flashes of insight and personal opinions, and which always stands in danger of becoming what Hugh T. Kerr has called "an intolerable impertinence, a breach of decorum in the House of God, an act of irreverent interference."

Evangelism we must have, but it is not enough. The evangelized need to be instructed in the Christian Faith. We have had too much exhortation and too little instruction. People are wearied of and bored by being exhorted, but the best of them are asking for teaching, especially young people. There is among them an awakened interest in the Bible. They want to know its content and understand its message; and they go to churches where they can get these things. The time is ripe for expository preaching. For too long the preacher has busied himself with elucidation of ethical principles, sociological ideas and current psychological theories, to the neglect of the Sacrament of the Word and the saving grace of "the foolishness of preaching." Preaching with a biblical basis is the clamant need of the hour both for the revitalizing of the life and witness of the Church and the spiritualizing of man's thought and conduct. Expository preaching provides a way of linking the study with the pulpit since it integrates private thought and public expression—often the bane of a minister's life. It also meets the needs of the people who are seeking instruction in the Christian Faith and corrects ignorance of the facts of Christian revelation. Furthermore, it shows how God works in concrete historical situations; that spiritual truth grows out of the very stuff of human life. This gives a much needed objectivity to preaching and saves the preacher from the temptation to feed his flock with side dishes of sanctified humanism which may delight but never satisfy.

W. B.