

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

The Mission of the Pulpit.

BY THE REV. F. R. MONTGOMERY HITCHCOCK, M.A.

A SUBJECT of discussion in certain circles is the mission of the pulpit, and how far it has failed to accomplish it. The preaching of the kingdom (Matt. x. 7) was meant by the Master to be a spiritual, moral, and social force to raise and regenerate the life of man. The question is, Has the modern pulpit this influence? Without attempting to answer that question, we shall consider what the mission of the pulpit may be in its three aspects—spiritual, intellectual, and social. For to all three the pulpit must be true if it is to fulfil its mission.

1. The spiritual mission is the Christ life, ideal, and regenerative influence. The pulpit must endeavour to promote godliness, deepen spirituality, and assert that righteousness which exalteth a nation. This is most effectively done when the love of God revealed in Christ, and the law of God made manifest in Christ, form topic and exposition, and when the Christ is not merely exhibited in the sermon, but also in the life behind it. For it is to the spiritual in man that the sermon must appeal if it is to move and inspire. And the most spiritual element in our nature is the capacity for the love of God, which is a proof that God has made us for Himself, and that the human heart cannot find rest until it rests in Him.

It was this capacity for the love of God, which inspires the love of men, that our Lord sought to develop, and to it He made His appeals. And this He did by proclaiming the everlasting Gospel of God's love and righteousness, and the redemption of the world from sin by the self-sacrifice of the Son of God. He convicted man of sin, and yet He did not consign him to everlasting remorse, for He showed him a way of return to the Father's home and heart. He convinced man of his need of righteousness, and of the fact that one only loved a stainless life, which was sufficient to fill the hearts of multitudes with an impassioned love, and to serve as the highest moral ideal that

had ever been held up to men. He convinced man of the judgment that must follow, and is all the time following his every action, producing habits which contain the germ of the final doom.

Such convictions produced in the souls of men a desire for a radical change of life and way of thought—the *μετάνοια* of the Spirit. For such appeals went straight to the heart, and awakened all that was best, though a long time dormant, in it—love of God, reverence for His Fatherly Name, faith in His Fatherly character, and a yearning for the extension of His principles of righteousness, which is in a sense the coming of His kingdom.

To the spiritual in man the pulpit must therefore appeal. And to appeal with success and force to the spiritual in man it must be abundantly supplied with the power of the Spirit, who makes eloquent the laggard tongue and kindles with love the lukewarm heart.

St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, one of the greatest of preachers, laid in many ways the foundation of Evangelical preaching. His success was due to that complete conviction of unworthiness that accompanied his greatest efforts, even to his death-bed, when penitential psalms were before his eyes; his intense gratitude to God for the mercy that had changed the current of his evil life and filled his soul with love; and his burning desire to lead men to Him in whom he himself had found redemption and forgiveness. An interesting episode in his life is recorded by his biographer, Posidonius, which illustrates how the practice of the presence of God accompanied all his efforts. After service in the church at Hippo, Augustine once said to his friends: "Did you notice in my sermon to-day how its ending was quite different from the beginning? I believe that God willed that some person who was living in error should be instructed through my forgetfulness. For after touching upon the headings of the subject I had purposed to deal with, I was led into a digression, and made my peroration against the doctrine of the Manichæans, without having originally

intended it." Some days after, the same biographer relates, a merchant called Firmus called on Augustine, and said that he had been a Manichæan, but that he had been convinced of his folly by the discourse of the Bishop. When they inquired what argument in the sermon had this effect, Firmus told them, and then Augustine and his friends fell to admire "the great wisdom of God, who, when He pleases, and whence He pleases, and as He pleases, through learned and unlearned alike, brings about the salvation of souls."

Augustine's appeals were rendered all the more effective by his practising his own rules. He not only moved individuals like Firmus to repent, but he swayed the masses like the great Savonarola, who persuaded the Florentines to burn their "vanities" in the market-place. When a presbyter at Hippo, he induced the people to abandon riotous feasting on holy days. He appealed to them by the passion and death of Christ not to make havoc of their souls. "I did not melt them into tears by first weeping over them," he wrote, "but while I was preaching they wept, and we all wept together." From that day the people gave up their custom, and Augustine had never to address them again on the subject. Another time he was in a church at Cæsarea striving to persuade the townsmen to abandon the cruel sports of the arena, and his speech was punctuated by acclamations. But, not satisfied with this, he adopted a more moving style of oratory, which soon reduced the people to the melting mood. His mission was fulfilled, for he afterwards wrote: "It is now upwards of eight years since that time, and by the grace of God they have ever since abstained from the practice." The force of the pulpit lies, then, in the power to move men.

The sense of imperfection, however, attends the best efforts of man. One often feels that his words are not making the desired impression. Here, too, we have Augustine to console and help us. In his treatise on the "Art of Catechizing the Ignorant," written for his friend Deogratias, a deacon in Carthage, he tells us that the same thing frequently happened to

himself, but that he found out that the people were not always as fastidious as the preacher, and the reason he gave was this : " The latter sees the beauty and dignity of a passage at a glance, but is unable to express himself by reason of the tongue not being able to keep pace with, or to do full justice to, the thought. However, one should not conclude that the words are utterly wasted, for every one in this life sees in a glass darkly. Moreover, we must try to be interested in our subject, and explain it in a cheerful spirit, for then we shall be listened to with greater pleasure. But this cheerfulness is the gift of God, and is to be made a subject of prayer."

A young clergyman once wrote to the present Archbishop of Armagh for advice in preaching. The reply was : " Be earnest in your subject, and earnestness will follow." That was true, for the subject with which preachers have to deal, being the Church's one foundation and the inspiration of true living, is well calculated to quicken the earnestness of those who have to present the Gospel of Christ to the soul and adapt it to the needs of men. A sympathetic knowledge of the soul's wants, human shortcomings, and mortal sorrows, helps the preacher to feel that he has a message from God to deliver to man ; while an intense love for his Master helps him to bring his every thought into subjection to God, and a sincere devotion to the ideals of Christ inspires him to adapt to the multitudinous and multifarious problems of human life the Divine teachings of the Word. Thus, earnestness in treatment of the theme begets that earnestness in dealing with men which is the only thing that moves them. More attractive methods may be employed. The style of the preachers of the early Jewish synagogue, who were, as Edersheim tells us in his " Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah," distinguished for " manners, tone, vanity, self-conceit, and silliness, and often thought more of attracting attention and applause to himself than of benefiting his hearers," may be imitated with a considerable degree of *éclat*, as it is to-day in Italy (see Dr. Wordsworth's " Tour in Italy"). But St. Augustine has shown us that simplicity and pathos are the

most effective aids of the preacher; and these are acquired, not by a profound study of one's own self and personality, but by an earnest study of one's subject and one's hearers, and by a real conviction of one's own unworthiness, and of the transcendent glory of one's theme—the exalted Christ—and of the ever-present and all-quickenng Spirit of Truth—the great forces behind the preacher.

2. So far we have spoken of the spiritual aspect of the pulpit's mission. That mission has also an intellectual side, for the mind of man requires to be educated and developed, just as his spirit, on the lines of the kingdom of heaven which alone command and ensure progress. There is much that is educational and mind-illumining in the sphere of the pulpit. Soul-stirring appeals, soul-reviving orations, exhaust not the programme of preaching. Our Lord addressed Himself to minds as well as to hearts. The pulpit must, therefore, keep pace with the march of intellect. Time must be had to prepare appropriate discourses; sympathy must be acquired with the mental and moral problems of the day. Men of science, members of the learned professions, must not be allowed to retire in discontent because they have received a stone for bread. In former times it was thought that no sermon was so bad but some good might be gathered from it. But it is a healthy sign of our times that no one will now accept the excuse for insipid utterance and flimsy argument that, after all, it was "only a sermon."

There is no justification for ineffective preaching and incompetent preachers in days when the interest in the Bible has grown so greatly that devotional exposition and intelligent application were never more welcomed, and when the whole atmosphere of the scientific world, for a moment inflated with pride, has become charged with sympathy with the religion of Him Who revealed the humanity of God and the divinity of man. The feeling that he is surrounded by intelligence keen to detect false syllogism, circular reasoning, poor preparation, or lack of force, is calculated to put the modern preacher on his

mettle, and to make him pray more and work harder than he might otherwise do. When Demosthenes was asked wherein lay the secret of oratorical success, he answered, "In action—action—action (*ὑπόκρισις*)!" Were one asked, Wherein lies the secret of pulpit power? he might truly answer, In sympathy. This sympathy is also threefold: sympathy with the Christ which saves us from that aloofness and stiffness which may really be due to some natural shyness or self-consciousness, but which appears to be indifference; sympathy with the subject which gives that thrill of earnestness to the treatment which provokes attention; and sympathy with the people which lends that directness to speech—that touch of humanity to argument and that glow of almost Divine love to appeals that impress and attract, console and move.

Able and sympathetic preachers at times feel that they are not in touch with their hearers, that they are not teaching or reaching them. Some soar serenely above, others grovel meanly beneath. Some are too brilliant, others too stupid. All such fail to "grip." But the true preacher will strive to understand his people. Here again Augustine bears us company. He confesses his own failure in the words: "My preaching always fails to satisfy myself. I am displeased with myself because my tongue fails to utter the thoughts that rise in my mind and the feelings that surge in my breast. I want my hearers to understand what I myself understand, and I feel I am not helping them to do so."

With regard to catechetical instruction, he also lays his finger on the weak points with every catechist, and points out the necessity of sympathy.

The need of sympathy with one's people cannot, then, be too strongly urged. We must know what they are thinking, what they are reading, and what they are doing. Want of sympathy with the ordinary life of mankind, and lack of courage to resist the popular fads of the age, are fatal to a preacher. There is hardly a subject that may not be treated by a sermon. Everything that interests mankind is a concern to him who

would influence mankind. The teaching of the Son of man throws a light upon every phase and problem of that vast network of relations and responsibilities called life. With that life, then, the preacher must be in touch. He must apply the principles of Christianity fearlessly, but without offence, to the questions of the day. He must point out that in the light of the Incarnation there is no sharp line of distinction to be drawn between the secular and the sacred, that the grace of prayer can sanctify every need, work, and recreation, and that the influence of the love and example of Christ should be brought to bear upon the Ministerial Cabinet just as much as upon the Cathedral Chapter, and upon the social club just as much as upon the parochial vestry. Wherever there are men and women, there is life to be raised, and Christ alone can raise life. The motive that He inspires, the ideal that He imparts, the grace that He bestows, alone can lift men to a higher and a better than their highest and their best. It is not the Cross, as merely the symbol of a finished redemption, but as also the embodiment of a Christian principle and purpose, that should be held up in the pulpit. We cannot preach Christ and Him crucified and be silent on the principle of suffering for others, of living, and working, and dying for men.

3. We have now passed into the third aspect of the pulpit's mission—the social. The expediency and wisdom of entering into questions of capital and labour, and of giving pronouncements upon political matters from the pulpit, is extremely doubtful. It would, however, be as great a mistake for the preacher to take no interest in those great political and social movements that affect the property, position, and prospects of the community as it would be for him to interfere more than his responsibility and his prudence would warrant. But by bringing to bear upon the leading questions of the day a sanctified common sense, he may help in a general way to elevate the arena of social discords, and he may assist in purifying the atmosphere of practical politics by pointing to a higher end than the success of a party or the advancement of

an individual, even the mission of the nation in the moulding of the world.

There is an extensive range of subjects here. All that concerns the national life, the personal life, and the home life and its sanctities ; the duties of the single and the married state ; the mutual life and confidence that should bind together husband and wife ; the tender ties that link the life of the parent and the life of the child ; and those bands of brotherhood that should make the whole family of Christ of one mind and one heart—these subjects, which engrossed the attention of the greatest of all preachers, supply themes for exposition and exhortation. Such subjects, treated with average ability and more than average conviction from the standpoint and in the Spirit of Christ, would establish the pulpit as a great spiritual and moral power to raise the tone, refine the morals, and to save the souls of men.



Was St. Paul Right in taking his Last Journey to Jerusalem ?

A REPLY.¹

BY THE REV. G. F. W. MUNBY, M.A.

IT is not easy to bring one's self to admit that the Apostle St. Paul, to whose writings all Christian people owe so much, made the grievous mistake attributed to him in the above paper. It is said, in this paper, that the Apostle thought himself to be "guided by the blessed Spirit of God" when he was "not so guided," and that, in making this mistake, his error was caused first by his "not laying aside his own will," and secondly by his "not using his reason properly."

It must be admitted that the argument in favour of this view is stated with much ability, and evidently with the sincere desire

¹ See Canon Kelk's article, with the above heading, in the *CHURCHMAN* for January, 1907, p. 35.