

Pulpit & People

**Essays in honour of William Still
on his 75th birthday**

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EXPOSITORY PREACHING:

an historical survey

JAMES PHILIP

The impact and influence of the ministry of William Still on the last four decades throughout the Church in Scotland and far beyond has been, on any estimate, immense and far-reaching, in nothing more than in the pattern it has set for systematic, continuous exposition of the Scriptures, and on none, probably, more than on the present writer who gladly acknowledges his sense of indebtedness to his 'father-in-God' and counts it a privilege to participate in this *Festschrift*, on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday.

The substance of the brief paper which now follows owes its origin to the reading, some years ago, of a biography of J. P. Struthers of Greenock, a remarkable Scottish 'worthy', and notable preacher and evangelist (1851-1915). Struthers maintained a friendship and correspondence over the years with James Denney, of Trinity College, Glasgow. It was the reading of some of the letters that passed between them, particularly Struthers' request to Denney to send him some of his sermons, and 'a text to preach on next Sunday' that led to the realisation that so much of the preaching of those days was 'textual preaching', that this was in fact the pattern followed by many, if not most, of the prominent evangelical figures of the 19th century, such as R. Murray McCheyne, the Bonars, and Spurgeon. A large part of the preaching of the 18th century also and much of that of the 17th seems to have been of this sort, in contrast to that of the early Church and also of Calvin (and some of the other Reformers) who pursued a policy of systematic exposition of the Scriptures, preaching through the entire Bible in the space of ten years.

Even a cursory examination of this phenomenon of changing patterns in preaching makes it clear that there are some basic presuppositions underlying it in terms of the real nature of preaching. It is the purpose of this essay to examine, however sketchily, the historical development of the Church's preaching from its earliest origins in the Scriptures, through the early centuries of Church history, in the Middle Ages, at the Reformation and in post-Reformation times, down to the present day.

Preaching in Scripture and in the Early Church

Preaching has an ancient lineage. From earliest times in the Old Testament, we have the conception of a priestly function being fulfilled by the father in the family, ministering God's word to them, bestowing the divine blessing upon the firstborn, expounding the

mercy of the covenant to his children, and assuming the responsibilities of the priesthood, before a formal priesthood and cultus were established in Israel. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, is said to have prophesied (Jude 14); Noah is termed 'a preacher of righteousness' (2 Pet. 2:5); in patriarchal times the blessings of Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 27:27-29; Gen. 49:3-27) constitute solemn religious addresses. In the time of Moses, when elders were appointed to help him, it is said that 'When the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease' (Num 11:25). The book of Deuteronomy is a series of addresses by Moses, repeating and expounding much of the legislation given earlier to the people of God.

Later still, we find Joshua uttering his farewell discourses to the assembled congregation in what could fairly be called sermonic form, based on the facts of God's dealings with them in the past, and the reality of the covenant into which he had entered with them. At the end of the period of the Judges, God raised up Samuel, and made him his mouthpiece to Israel, and the word of the Lord came to the people through him in a prophetic ministry that changed the face of the land. Still later in Israel's history, we find king Jehoshaphat, in the context of widespread, national reforms, instituting a programme of teaching throughout Judah, in which the book of the law was expounded to the people (2 Chron. 17:7 ff). And in the whole, distinctive prophetic activity from then until the exile, we have conspicuous and impressive examples of prophetic teaching, as men sent from God ministered his living word to their day and generation.

One very clear and obvious evidence of preaching as exposition of Scripture is found in post-exilic times, in the synagogue service which came into its own during the exile as a substitute for the temple and its worship. The famous passage in Nehemiah 8 records how Ezra the scribe 'stood upon a pulpit of wood which they had made for the purpose, and read in the book of the law of God distinctively, and gave the sense, and caused [the people] to understand the reading'.

This ancient lineage in Scripture for preaching lends credence to Calvin's view that the preaching of the Word belongs, with the institutions of marriage and government, to the natural order, or order of creation. For from the beginning God has revealed himself as a speaking God, a God who wills to have communion with his creatures, making himself known to them in grace and love. There is little doubt that from the earliest dawn of revealed history the divine means of communication with man has been preaching in some form or another, that indeed the communication of the divine grace has been in this way. R. S. Wallace maintains that Calvin 'sees in the prominent place given to the preaching and hearing of the word of God within the Church, a restoration of the true order of nature, for we were given the power to communicate with one another "not simply to buy boots and shoes and bonnets, and bread and wine, but to use our mouths and ears to lead each other to the faith that rises heavenwards to the

contemplation of God Himself'.¹

It is clear that our Lord himself stood in this tradition, when he ministered in the synagogue at Nazareth, and expounded the well-known messianic passage in Isaiah 61 to the people, claiming that it was fulfilled in their ears that day. This is an important indication of our Lord's continuity with the old order, albeit the authority with which he spoke was something new and radical, and sufficient to break through the rigid framework of the past, like new wine bursting old bottles. The nature of that authority was that in his teaching a confrontation took place, in which he, the Lord of the Scripture, met with his hearers and challenged them as the rightful Lord of their lives. It was this that was destined to become the pattern for all New Testament preaching that was to follow.

Above all, however — and this is of supreme importance from the point of view of the establishment of an apostolic pattern of preaching — our Lord's ministry was steeped in Scripture. It could be said that in the truest and deepest sense he lived and taught by the Word. In so doing he was simply being true to himself, for of these Scriptures he said 'They are they which testify of me'. After the resurrection he expounded to the disciples 'in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself', 'opening their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures'.

Whether or not the disciples followed this pattern on the one or two occasions during his earthly ministry when they were sent out two by two by him to preach — there is no reason to suppose they did not — it is certain that after Pentecost they did so, as the recorded 'sermons' in Acts make clear. These consist of a brief account of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, according to the Scriptures, and in fulfilment of them, on the basis of which the proclamation of the good news of the gospel of forgiveness through his name was made.

Two things may be said about this. On the one hand, this was the 'pattern' on which the gospels themselves were written; on the other, it follows with great accuracy the development of our Lord's own ministry in the days of his flesh. For it can truly be said that his ministry consisted of two parts, bisected by the great watershed of the Caesarea Philippi confession: before that point, his concern was, by miracle, wonder and sign, by word and action, to show that he was the Messiah promised by Scripture. After that point he was intent on teaching, again from Scripture, that 'the Son of man must suffer and be crucified'. The faithfulness of the apostolic proclamation to this twofold emphasis is impressive, as may be seen from the description of Paul's habitual practice given in Acts 17:2,3, 'opening and alleging that the Christ must indeed have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus, whom I preach, is the Christ'.

Inherent in this pattern is a basic simplicity that is integral to the true

1. R. S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, Grand Rapids, 1961, p. 143 f.

biblical doctrine of preaching, and it is amply evidenced in such passages as Acts 8:4 ff, a passage which may well be taken as a fair indication of the apostolic practice which obtained in the early post-pentecostal era. It can hardly be gainsaid that for the New Testament church, preaching was the most important of all its activities, that it was central to its life, and that it was the source of its spiritual vitality and well-being. This has its own message for those ages of church history, including our own time, in which the church has lost the vision of the power and effectiveness of preaching, and in losing it has lost sight and use of the weapon of spiritual warfare which is mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

The opening up of the Scriptures concerning Christ — such was the legacy left by the early church to posterity; and this must necessarily be the yardstick and criterion by which authentic Christian preaching in any age must be assessed.

From the New Testament to Chrysostom and Augustine

The subsequent history of the Christian church, however, down the years shows only too clearly that the high dignity of this pattern was often but indifferently maintained, and sometimes and for long periods obscured and lost altogether. To be sure, the essential simplicity of New Testament preaching and proclamation was preserved and continued in the immediate post-apostolic age, although there is scant documentary evidence to enable the formulation of a reasonable history of its development. But it is true to say that it took the form of a homily (from the Latin *homilia*, meaning 'a conversation', the word appearing for the first time in a letter from Ignatius to Polycarp to describe the word spoken to the congregation), which was essentially a simple, unpretentious address, spoken extempore, although not without preparation, with little in the way for formal structure. The similarity of this pattern to our Lord's preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16 ff) is evident, and it is hardly surprising that it became well established and flourished in the early patristic age, as may be seen in what is possibly the earliest example of the homily, the second epistle of Clement (c. 135-140), and in Justin Martyr's First Apology.

It was as time went on that there was a gradual progression towards a more orderly structure and a more expository character. Historians of the period agree that the movement towards this received its most significant impetus through men like Clement of Alexandria (c. 160-220) and his distinguished pupil Origen (183-254), particularly the latter, who was unquestionably a figure of immense and definitive significance in the early church. It was through him, as one historian maintains, that 'exegesis and preaching were so firmly united that throughout the history of the ancient church and long afterwards they remained intertwined'. His influence was indeed seminal, in that it set a pattern which was followed and developed increasingly from his time

onwards to that of the great and significant figures of Chrysostom (344-407) and Augustine (354-430), with whom the full flowering of the ancient homiletical preaching took place, representing respectively the Greek and Latin branches of the church.

Notwithstanding this immense impact, however, it has to be said that other influences were also at work, which bedevilled and finally obscured the original homiletic pattern of the New Testament. One was, sadly enough, a direct result of what may be called the allegorical method of interpretation, popularised by Origen himself — a more fateful influence, and very different from the definitive direction he gave to the true expository method, finding not only double, but treble and even quadruple meanings in Scripture. In this way the possibility of real exegesis was destroyed: the basic rule of interpretation that everything must mean something else than the merely explicit or obvious led to uninhibited and all too often absurd spiritualisations, and this was one of the major factors in making the Bible a sealed book, finally leading the church to believe that Bible-reading was much too perilous a business for ordinary lay people.

Another influence was that exercised by classical rhetoric, which was in the early Christian centuries a term synonymous with higher education, and by which the preachers of the gospel in the post-apostolic age seemed to become increasingly influenced, possibly in the interests of making the appeal of the gospel in the chief seats of learning and governmental power more persuasive. But the adoption of the oratorical devices long familiar to the Greeks and Romans is what the apostle Paul so expressly disavows in his famous warning in 1 Cor. 2:4 about 'the enticing words of man's wisdom', and represents, not an advance from a more primitive and untutored method to a sophisticated and educated one worthier of the gospel and more likely to enhance its power and appeal, but on the contrary a declension from a biblical pattern which led inevitably to the impoverishment of the church's life.

A third contributory factor in this gradual declension was the growth in liturgy and forms of worship which led to the spoken word having, and being given, far less relative value and, still later, to confining it within the liturgical context of the Mass, a process which constricted and impoverished it and finally relegated it to a place so minor as to be practically irrelevant in the life of the church.

All in all, therefore, the age of Chrysostom and Augustine represented a peak in the ascendancy of preaching; and after this time, and due to the factors already mentioned that were present even before this ascendancy, decline set in. Following their time, and onwards through the Middle Ages, up to the time of the Reformation, the whole concept of preaching both in form and content underwent fundamental changes. It is not that during these centuries there was no preaching, for preaching was revived from time to time through the labours of Dominican and Franciscan friars, among others, but on the

whole it degenerated to a mechanical level, lacking in true inspiration. And a combination of the above considerations with the fact that Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire in the time of Constantine meant that conditions favourable to the progress of preaching increased, Christianity became 'respectable' and with the development of worship in elaborate and attractive forms culturally, preaching gradually became more formal and stately. 'The development of preaching,' as one historian observes, 'towards an oratorical form became an integral part of the general ecclesiastical movement.'

With this, the influence of classical oratory began inevitably to make itself felt. As one historian says, 'In the traditional and accepted education system rhetorical studies occupied the chief place. If educated at all, a man was educated in rhetoric . . . so when the schools were opened to Christians, without persecution or social disfavour, there was opportunity for them to receive the customary oratorical training from the best teachers . . . also, their hearers were so educated. There was a demand for oratory and rhetoric, and the Church tended to oblige.' Already, by the time of Chrysostom the cult of popular preachers and sermon tasting had become established; and soon when the influence of the scholastic theology of the universities, which from the beginning were clerical institutions, took over, the decline of the ancient, traditional preaching was inevitable: the speculative tendencies of Aristotelian logic in its application to the interpretation of Scripture imposed an intolerable burden upon preaching which virtually destroyed it as an effective means for communicating the gospel.

The mediaeval Schoolmen's patterns of preaching, moreover, became incredibly complex, with all manner of ramifications, divisions and sub-divisions, showing a punctiliousness that to the modern mind is not only artificial but ludicrous. What T. H. L. Parker calls the 'amazingly complicated and subtle form' which they gave to the sermon was rigid and artificial, and it is scarcely surprising that such a pattern became increasingly superficial and powerless. Both content and seriousness of purpose were lost, and preaching sank into an inevitable decay, which had the touch of death upon it.

The Reformation

The time of the Reformation saw a marked, indeed fundamental change. The antecedents of the movement that was destined to revolutionise the whole of Europe go as far back as Wyclif and his Lollard bands, who initiated what Dargan calls 'that wave of mighty reformatory preaching' in the later part of the fourteenth century. It was Wyclif who first departed decisively from the mediaeval pattern, both in form and content, returning to the homily and making preaching once again, as in the early patristic age, the exposition of the Scriptures. It was this noble heritage that was passed on, through John Hus, to Luther and other Reformers, and that became under God the

foundation of the Reformation. It was an idea whose hour had come; for Wyclif's Lollards travelled the length and breadth of England, spreading the message of the gospel and making known the Word of God to the common people through the use of Wyclif's translation of the Scriptures into the English language. It was a movement that gathered momentum and became ultimately irresistible, and the Reformation became a glorious fact, setting the whole of Europe aflame with its liberating message of grace.

The transformation in preaching was astonishing. It would not be too much to say that it came into its own in a way that had not been known since the fifth century. It is certainly no accident that Chrysostom and Augustine were the fathers to whom the Reformers looked back with great approval, for they unquestionably stand in that early tradition.

But while it may be true that it was Luther who first 'rediscovered both the form and the substance of this preaching' (Parker), it was supremely in the Reformed, as distinct from the Lutheran, tradition that the continuous exposition of Scripture, brought again into its own by Origen and confirmed by Chrysostom and Augustine, found its fullest expression and reached its greatest heights. The output of the Reformers was prodigious, and makes it clear just what a central place preaching now had in the life of the church. Calvin and Zwingli in particular, with Bullinger following them, preached continuously through books of the Bible, often in the greatest detail, as may be seen from the large number of sermons on particular books.

The implications of this revolution can hardly be over-estimated. With the preaching of the Word being recognized as the primary task of the ministry, preaching resumed its proper place in worship; the Mass was 'dethroned from its usurped reign in the Church', and 'the pulpit, instead of the altar became the central point' in the Reformed churches. 'Preaching was bound to the Scriptures, both in form and in substance. The purpose of preaching, the Reformers said, was to lay bare and interpret the Word of God in Scripture. Hence they set up the Scripture as the criterion by which all their preaching must be judged.'² Preaching became more prominent in worship than it had been since the fourth century.

We must now turn our attention to two matters in particular which have a direct bearing on our theme, both integrally related, and emerging from what has been said: (i) the basic presuppositions underlying the essential need felt by the Reformers to make a clean break with the mediaeval scholastic form of preaching and return to the earlier, patristic model, the expositional homily; and (ii) the Reformed doctrine of preaching itself.

(i) Over against the situation that obtained in the mediaeval church, in which the Bible had become a sealed book, because of the alleged

2. T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God*, London, 1947, p. 21.

difficulty, not to say impossibility, for ordinary, untrained people, of studying the Scriptures without the danger of error, the Reformers resolutely believed and taught the essential *perspicuity* or intelligibility of Scripture to the ordinary spiritual mind. John Knox's words to Mary, Queen of Scots make this point well:

The Word of God is plain in itself; and if there appear any obscurity in one place, the Holy Ghost, Who is never contrary to Himself, explains the same more clearly in other places: so that there can remain no doubt, but to such as remain obstinately ignorant.

Elsewhere, in *A Most Wholesome Counsel*, written in July 1556 to his brethren in Scotland 'touching the daily exercise of God's most holy and sacred Word', Knox speaks of the need to study widely, reading whole books at a time — 'ever ending such books as ye begin (as the time will suffer)' — and to 'join some books of the Old, and some of the New Testament together; as Genesis and one of the Evangelists, Exodus with another, and so forth'.

Here, as J. S. McEwen points out, we have, admirably stated, the essentials of the Reformed doctrine of the *perspicuitas* of Scripture. He adds:

The Bible is not a rag-bag of assorted proof-texts, as the mediaeval church had made it: it is a unity of revelation, and is to be read in the light of the revelation which it, itself, communicates. Take it where you will, it tells — chapter after chapter — the one story of God's unfolding plan of redemption. Isolated sentences torn from their context, may well be unintelligible or even misleading; but their meaning will become plain when they are read as parts of that great story. Therefore read widely to learn the story, before reading narrowly to elucidate the meaning of single texts.

It is true that in the above-mentioned *Wholesome Counsel* Knox is referring to the reading of the Scriptures; but this does not mean, and Knox does not suggest, that the man in the pew can dispense with the man in the pulpit.

Knox is well aware that the ordinary believer may have neither the time nor the ability to reach that conspectus of all Scripture which is essential to a balanced interpretation of the Faith in its wholeness, for the well-being of the Church and of the individual believers who require to hear the Word in its wholeness for their edification to the faith, the labours of trained exegetes, theologians and skilled preachers are essential.

But the *perspicuitas* of Scripture did mean this: that the wayfaring men, though fools, would meet their God in the Bible, hear His voice, take His promises and comforts and rebukes personally and directly to themselves, and understand enough of what was being said to them to receive, by faith, salvation.

The profound significance of all this can scarcely be exaggerated, in relation to the Reformers' adoption of, or rather reversion to, the continuous exposition of Scripture practised in the early centuries of the Christian era. On the one hand — and this was particularly true at the time of the Reformation — there was a clamant need for a knowledge of the Scriptures to be imparted to the common people.

They had been denied it for so long, and now men were hungry for the Word of life. How else could that knowledge be imparted, except by the most comprehensive exposition of all its parts? On the other hand — and this is even more basic and fundamental — the Reformers maintained that Christ and the Scriptures were inseparable, in the sense that it is only in and through the Scriptures that Christ can be known. Therefore to communicate a whole Christ and mediate a whole salvation, a whole Bible is necessary, for Christ is in all the Scriptures. ‘Search the Scriptures’, said our Lord, ‘for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me’ (John 5:39).

It can hardly be controverted that in respect to both these considerations, the wheel has come round full circle; for today, there is a widespread ignorance of the Scriptures throughout the land, and — thankfully — a growing awareness of the need for a presentation of the message of the whole biblical revelation with a view to the production of a balanced and mature Christian character in the lives of God’s people.

(ii) The indissoluble bond between Christ and the Scriptures has significance for the Reformers’ doctrine of preaching also, for indeed the one is the corollary of the other. T. H. L. Parker discusses this at some length in a fine chapter of his book on Calvin, and sums up the distinctive characteristics of the great Reformer’s position:

Preaching is the Word of God, first, in the sense that it is an exposition and interpretation of the Bible, which is as much the Word of God as if men ‘heard the very words pronounced by God himself’;

Secondly, preaching is the Word of God because the preacher has been sent and commissioned by God as his ambassador, the one who has authority to speak in His name;

Thirdly, preaching is the Word of God in the sense that it is Revelation. It is the Word of God when God speaks through the human words, revealing Himself through them and using them as the vehicle of His grace.

To use Calvin’s own words, ‘He deigns to consecrate the mouths and tongues of men to His service, making His own voice to be heard in them’; and ‘Whenever God is pleased to bless their labour, He makes their doctrine efficacious by the power of His Spirit; and the voice which is in itself mortal, is made an instrument to communicate eternal life’. It is not so much that Calvin identifies the spoken, human word with the living Word of God — the distinction between the two is always there — but rather that he recognises that God is pleased to speak in the word that is preached, as indeed is made clear in the important message in Acts 10:44: ‘While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word’. In other words, the Holy Spirit is given in the preaching of the Word (i.e. when true preaching takes place, for it can never be taken for granted, as a matter of course, that this anointing takes place every time a man chooses to speak forth the truth of the gospel — orthodoxy of doctrine of itself

does not guarantee the unction of the Spirit), making the word spoken a living word from on high that creates faith, mediating forgiveness and newness of life.

There are two necessary corollaries or implications of this doctrine of preaching. One is that it is the *preaching*, rather than the preacher, that is of decisive importance, the message rather than the man. Far from 'new presbyter' being 'old priest writ large', a familiar enough accusation, he is in fact the 'servant of the Word', and it is the Word, not the man, that makes the impact and accomplishes the work of grace in men's lives. This is of greater significance than is often realised. If the gospel were, of course, simply a story to relate, then the important consideration would be the preacher — his style, his presentation, his oratory. But if it is, as the Apostles and Reformers held, the power of God unto salvation, and not simply something attended by the power of God, then the emphasis necessarily passes from the preacher to the thing preached, and from the 'excellency of speech' and the 'enticing words of man's wisdom' to the message that comes 'in demonstration of the Spirit and of power'.

The other corollary of the biblical doctrine of preaching is that since it is God that speaks to men in the proclamation of the Word, no man, however spiritually mature or sanctified, is ever in a position of no longer needing that ministry or submitting himself in obedience to it. Parker sums up the Reformer's attitude thus:

None may think that he has advanced beyond the necessity of hearing preaching because he is able to interpret the Bible for himself. No doubt if preaching were merely a man giving spiritual advice to his religious inferiors, then the spiritually advanced would no longer need this help; but since in preaching God Himself speaks to men, no one may say that he knows sufficient or is sanctified beyond need of help from God.³

A greater appreciation of this important truth would surely serve to deliver the people of God from the cardinal error of confusing the proclamation of the Word of God with an exercise in public speaking, to be assessed, judged, criticised and even patronised, instead of accepted humbly and joyfully in a spirit of obedience and submission as a word from on high. The Apostle Paul says it all in his memorable words to the Thessalonians:

For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

The Post-Reformation Scene

It is all the more surprising, therefore, in view of what has been said, that yet again the early homiletical exposition of Scripture should have been departed from in the later 17th century, and onwards, almost to our own time. Even a cursory examination of the preaching in the

3. T. H. L. Parker. *The Oracles of God*, London, 1947, p. 61.

various traditions, Reformed, Lutheran, Puritan, Anglican and Presbyterian obliges one to conclude that the characteristic method of Calvin and his associates was eventually superseded by other and very different patterns of preaching. This is not to say that post-Reformation preaching became barren or moribund; indeed, it is certainly true to say that 'the British pulpit of the 17th century was a living factor of the age' (Dargan), and that it dominated public life in many of its aspects. But it is also true to say that it was subject to influences that served to detach it from the earlier simplicity of the Reformers', and indeed of the Apostles' insights. One historian comments,

In the course of the [17th] century, it is possible to say, the sermon passed from a period in which its form and content were governed by certain rhetorical and homiletical ideals to a period when it became almost a province of literature, in so far as conformity to the prevailing literary standards was required also from the preacher.⁴

Another historian confirms this view in a fine and perceptive analysis of the influence of the French classical sermon:

Unquestionably it contributed mightily towards a heightening of the prestige of spiritual oratory since it was not until the nineteenth century that sermons ceased to be classed as literature. But from other perspectives we may raise the question whether or not this influence was sound, whether or not it rather led preaching astray.⁵

In a brief summary of the preaching of Jacques Saurin (1677-1730), the Huguenot preacher, by common consent one of the greatest of the Reformed preachers of the time, he has this to say:

In Saurin, however, the Calvinistic proclamation experienced a thorough transformation both in content and form. For him, the orthodox Calvinistic formulations had lost their meaning. He was less the disciple of Calvin than the creator of the modern Reformed sermon He wished to be faithful to Scripture, but he replaced the old expository homily by a sharply logical and cogently argued address in which the short text, often a single verse of Scripture, was subservient to the subject.⁶

This transition is seen clearly in much of Puritan preaching, and it has to be conceded that textual preaching came into its own in the great Puritan tradition. At the same time, however, this tended to lead to very complex and often very involved — and sometimes seemingly endless — patterns of divisions and sub-divisions, which bear a striking resemblance to the mediaeval, scholastic 'arts of preaching' (*artes praedicandi*) more than to Calvin's and the early Reformers' simple homiletic style.

Understandable reactions against the stiff, formal pedantry of this later Puritan method did not, however, lead to a return to Calvin's pattern; for the impact of the Enlightenment began to be felt, and even when the notable influence of men like John Tillotson represented an

4. W. F. Mitchell, *English Pulpit Oratory*. London, 1932, p. 46.

5. Y. T. Brilioth, *A Brief History of Preaching*. Philadelphia, 1965, pp. 147, 148.

6. Y. T. Brilioth, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

emancipation from the somewhat stifling and needlessly complex preaching patterns in the interests of simplicity and homiletic plainness, the end-result of that emancipation was ominous. Charles Smyth, in *The Art of Preaching* maintains that the Anglican piety of the 18th century under his influence became 'a piety that had digested Revelation into Reason, and consequently took little interest in Christian Doctrine except as a support for Christian Ethics'. Smyth's conclusion is,

As recast by Tillotson, the sermon lost its heroic note, and became a moral essay, the vehicle of a sober, utilitarian, prudential ethic, rather than a proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. In the hands of his contemporaries it had seemed indeed to belong to literature altogether, rather than to homiletics.

Much more could be said, and indeed would need to be said, about the influences that shaped 18th century preaching, and left their mark on that of the 19th century, a task well beyond the scope of this essay. But it is fair to say that even in the best evangelical preaching of these two centuries — as for example in Charles Simeon in the 18th (1759-1836) and Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) — it was the classical, Puritan tradition, which grew out of the *artes praedicandi* of the Middle Ages that was followed, rather than the simple homily of the Reformers, and those who followed Calvin's practice of systematic, consecutive exposition of the Scriptures in these centuries — and indeed in the 20th century, up to the present day — have been conspicuous as exceptions rather than the norm.

It is to be hoped that those in our own day who have the vision of the dynamic potential that this method represents will exercise an increasing influence on the preaching ministry of the late 20th century. It can hardly be controverted that so far as the circumstances which led the Reformers to this pattern are concerned, the wheel has come round full circle: the need is great today — as then — in face of the widespread ignorance of the Scriptures throughout the land, and nothing less than a systematic and comprehensive unfolding of the message of the Scriptures will serve to combat that ignorance, and provide the dynamic for reformation and renewal. Without this, the process of decay in the life of the church is likely to continue, and its future history likely to be short.