PREACHING

INTRODUCTION

Everyone knows that preaching is at a discount today. There are very few outstanding practioners of the art, and in certain respects the mood of the age is hostile to it. Dialogue, discussion, debate—these are the popular methods of communication. The idea of an individual pontificating from the pulpit—or platform—is somewhat incongruous in an age which has often been characterized as the era of the common man. At the same time, this is also the age of the expert. Specialization has proceeded at such a pace that few are able to keep abreast of developments—in science and technology, in philosophy and the arts, in theology and religion—even at the popular level. It is not only the common man but also the expert who is a key figure in society today.

In evaluating the role of preaching in the life and witness of the Church, we who are evangelicals turn instinctively to the Bible, in order to see what part this activity played, particularly in the New Testament era. This issue of the *Journal* (which is offered as a contribution to the more effective functioning of local churches as well as to the thinking and understanding of individual Christians) therefore commences with a research article on 'Preaching in the New Testament'.

The writer, D. R. Jackson, read Classics at Cambridge and Theology at the London Bible College. After spending two years in New Testament research work, he joined the staff of LBC in 1967. In addition to his lecturing and tutorial work he exercises a preaching ministry which is greatly esteemed. He is thus in a good position to write about preaching in the New Testament. His article is valuable, not only for its discussion of the act of preaching, but also for its treatment of the content. Especially useful is the summary of our Lord's teaching on the Kingdom of God. The very full notes are an invitation to further study of the theme treated in the article.

There are many types of preaching. The literary sermon, couched in language which might be termed 'flowery', and replete with literary allusions, from time to time enjoys a vogue. It has few practitioners today, and there is probably little demand or need for such delicatessen fare. The topical sermon dealing with matters which are of topical interest seems to have gone out with the old 'social gospel', though it is the standby of a few—notably Lord Soper, who is master of it. For somewhat obvious reasons, it has appealed even less than the literary sermon to Brethren audiences, though there may be a place for it. There are many other types of preaching—good, bad and indifferent—but the greatest of these is undoubtedly expository preaching.

Unimaginatively used, this method conceals pitfalls for the unwary. For a preacher to plough through long books of Scripture, chapter by

chapter, verse by verse, word by word, can become weariness to the flesh and heaviness to the spirit! Furthermore, if inadequate application is made, expository preaching can be utterly irrelevant to present needs. Enlightenment as to the situation in the eighth century B.C. or the first century A.D. may be of little more than antiquarian interest to men and women who are grappling with the issues of the twentieth century. Exposition of the text of Scripture demands not only exegesis but also synthesis with the overall teaching of Scripture and application to the needs of the congregation. To do this effectively, a scholarly approach is not enough: pastoral concern, and if possible a pastoral connection with the congregation involved, are *desiderata* (as also, it need hardly be said, are spiritual discernment and unction).

Dr. L. C. Allen serves as our guide in this area, and succeeds in making many rough places plain. Despite his predilection for Old Testament textual criticism (his Ph.D. thesis was a comparison of the Hebrew and Greek texts of Chronicles), in part, no doubt, because of it, Dr. Allen is an outstanding practitioner of the art of expository preaching. His article on that subject is drawn not only from books but also from his experience. What he has to say will be of help to preachers, Bible Class leaders and, indeed, all who are concerned to study and teach the Bible. Written with verve as well as wisdom, his contribution should serve to encourage those who are already engaged in this kind of preaching, and may well fire the interest of those who till now have been content to impart a collection of 'blessed thoughts' or indulge in undisciplined dilation upon a text or a theme.

Inasfar as public preaching is a major means of conveying the gospel to the unconverted and building up the people of God in their faith, it is obviously important to ensure that 'the whole counsel of God' is imparted. Some may incline to the view that this may safely be left to the Holy Spirit, working through individual preachers. But it may very well be asked whether this is a matter which we are entitled to confide to the spiritual discernment of invited preachers. Is it not something for which we who have pastoral responsibilities are responsible?

There are few—if any—who have qualms about inviting specific men for specific ministry (at any rate at meetings other than for breaking of bread). If we feel assured that God can guide the secretary (or, better still, a small committee) in the choice of preachers, is there any valid reason why He should not guide in the choice of subjects.

All the weight of New Testament precedent and principle seems to indicate that the local church is the focal point of Christian instruction (evangelism is perhaps another matter). So the first area from which expounders of the Word should be drawn is the local church itself. Our Lord never meant to endorse the saying 'No prophet is acceptable in his own country'; and to assert that a local brother's gift would necessarily be unacceptable if exercised on any but an occasional basis is to impugn that gift. Our current practice of inviting preachers—almost as a matter of

course—from outside is bad enough. To expect them to be conversant with the spiritual needs of a local church other than that with which they are personally linked seems a piece of gross spiritual impertinence. Granted the need for most local churches to supplement such gifts as they have been given with ministry from gifted men from other local churches (whatever their ecclesiastical complexion), the necessity is incumbent upon the elders concerned to ensure that a balanced spiritual diet is provided.

This demands a preaching syllabus. Dr. J. R. K. Savage is not only a research scientist at Harwell but an elder of Norcot Mission, Reading, with wide preaching experience. He has drawn up a preaching syllabus for a two year period, covering one service on Sunday and one mid-week service, allowing six spare weeks for special occasions. Many of the topics suggested he has himself used in preaching. The particular merit of his scheme is that it shows the wide range of Bible doctrine which needs to be covered in a full-orbed presentation of the gospel.

Two other schemes have been contributed, both being attempts which have actually been made to provide a consecutive ministry in the context of a local church. Mr. R. Morris has kindly provided a list of topics covered during a period of two years in the Sunday morning Family Service held at Culver Grove Hall, Stanmore. We have also been provided with a syllabus for midweek services used at Elmfield Chapel, North Harrow, Middlesex during a period of four years. About one third of the subjects were taken, I believe, by the brethren in fellowship at that local church.

It is not suggested that one of these schemes should be treated as a model to be followed. Rather, they are intended to stimulate thought and action. It will not do for those whose responsibility it is to appoint preachers to use this as a means of abdicating all responsibility for the content of the preaching. Too often, the only control seems to be the negative one of eliminating those whose preaching—for one reason or another—is unacceptable. What needs to be done—and what some visiting preachers are the first to welcome—is to provide guidance as to the subject matter which is required. This, incidentally, should result not merely in the establishing of local churches in deeper understanding of, and fuller obedience to, the faith, but also in the enriching and enlarging of many a preacher's ministry. It is to be hoped, therefore, that those responsible for such matters will first of all take steps to ascertain how far existing arrangements meet the need. They are then invited to consider whether a syllabus (ideally implemented by gifted men from the local congregation, supplemented as may be thought necessary or desirable by men from beyond) would meet the need more adequately. The examples given may then be used as a basis for hard spiritual thinking in the construction and implementing of a syllabus that will be the means of bringing the full range of Biblical teaching to bear upon the full extent of local need.

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