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Should Rabbis Stop Preaching?, 1936.

SHOULD RABBIS STOP PREACHING?

Should There Be A Moratorium On Sermons In
Church and Synagog?



By
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, November 22, 1936

The subject of my discourse this morning was suggested by a report made by an eminent divine rector of the Trinity Church of New York City in which he suggested that a preaching holiday be instituted - a moratorium be brought on preaching for a year or two or more if desirable. The reason for his suggestion as given by him is as follows:

"...Why cannot a Christian be permitted to go to church to worship without always being assailed by a barrage from the pulpit? There is practically no preaching worth the name to be found. Frankly, a moratorium would be a godsend heartily hailed on both sides by the pulpit and the pew....

"For the most part sermons today are a very poor edition of 'topical' homiletics, a brand of religious pep-talks sailing forth for a transitory popularity under the guise of being inspirational. Truly the miracle of the church is the patience of the laity...

"People should speak when they have something to say. May we pray to be delivered from any more preaching campaigns calculated to arouse a benumbed and harrassed people who have been preached to death. Bishop's crusades, united preaching missions, city-wide drives, the importation of noted orators -- these are samples of the inflictions that advertise their own delinquency."

Now, while these comments of the rector of the Trinity Church apply to the ministers of other Christian churches, by implication they also apply to Rabbis in synagogues and temples. This comment of this eminent clergyman created considerable comment and as you may expect, controversy.

The Institute of Public Opinion which is a national organization which pools the sentiments of the American people was interested in finding out exactly what the laity actually thought about preaching. It canvassed one hundred thousand men and women church members and non-members on this subject - that there be a holiday from preaching for a certain length of time. And the vote,

strangely enough was 87% opposed to such a holiday and 13% in favor of it. Now to a preacher and a clergyman this is rather comforting.

I have been hearing so much criticism as one does hear, about sermons and preaching generally. They are all too long, too dull, too hackneyed, or too scholarly, too popular or too old-fashioned, too sensational, too hot or too cold. One expected a larger negative vote. But this vote is rather comforting.

It is interesting, in this connection, to note that this rector, himself, and the majority of the people who voted for this holiday are members of the Episcopalian Church. This is the attitude of the High Church to the service and the place of the sermon in the service and it is different from other denominations. As he clearly points out, there are two definite attitudes towards the sermon in the service, one held by the more orthodox, and the less orthodox attitude. One looks upon the service as sacramental, a formal ritual of prayers and ceremonials with the sermon incidental and occasional. The other looks upon the service as something prophetic, objective, inspirational and the sermon as integral and focal and that the ritual should be toned down.

That same distinction you will find in the orthodox and reform Temples. In orthodox worship, the sermon is also incidental. The orthodox rabbis have a rather good time of it. They are called upon to preach two or three times a year. The orthodox rabbi traditionally is to preach on the Sabbath before Passover - the great Sabbath, on the Sabbath between New Years and the Day of Atonement - the Sabbath of Repentance and on the Eve of Kol Nidre. The rest of the year he didn't have to preach.

In the Reform synagog, of course, preaching occupies the superior, the focal point in the service. It is interesting to note that whenever a great religious reformation takes place, preaching comes into prominence. Just prior to the Protestant Reformation preaching had languished in the Christian church. The Reformation suddenly thrust to the fore a galaxy of remarkable preachers, expounders of the spoken word - Luther, Calvin Knox. From that time on, the sermon became an important and dynamic feature of the Protestant Church.

That was also true of the Jewish Reform movement. Up to the rise of the Reform movement, and for a time previous to that, especially among the Germans in Eastern European congregations, preaching was also negligible. The Reform movement suddenly found men of the winged word, great preachers - Geiger, Yellinik, Holdheim, Einhorn - men who stirred Jewish life to its very depths and by their example, the sermon has become an essential feature of the service of the Reform-Jewish congregation.

The great examples of this fact, of course, are the religious reform prophets, great spokesmen, preachers and the prophets of Israel. These miracle men of sacred oratory were preachers.

When a religion has something vital to say it will find voices to say it and it will find men to listen to those voices. When a religion becomes old and set and weary, people seek refuge and peace in ritual, not formalism, in the poetical reminiscences of ceremonialism and even its occasional preaching will be distinguished for its manner and style rather than for its substance and passion.

It is interesting that in the Jewish synagog, the sermon has always been, as far as record goes, a feature in the service, occasionally a strongly stressed feature and at other times not so emphasized, but always there.

A hundred years ago, the great Leopold Zuz wrote a monumental work called:

in which he demonstrates the unbroken line of continuity of the sermonic tradition of sermons in the Jewish synagog. In his day the Prussian government interfered with the internal life of the Jewish community and it decreed that there must be no changes made in the Jewish ritual, in the ritual of the synagog, in the service, and that no sermon should be preached in the vernacular - in the German language.

The Prussian government was, of course, incited to do that thing by its extreme orthodox wing of Jews who did not want any new innovations. In reply Zuz wrote this tremendously epochal work in which he shows that as far as we can trace back in the annals of Jewish history, there was always a sermon in the vernacular, whether it was in Aramaic or Spanish or Italian - always the spoken word supplementing inspiration.

Preaching in the Jewish race, my friends, began with the great prophets. But there was this distinction. The prophets were not officers or officials of the synagog or a temple and they did not preach during temple worship. Their preaching was occasional. Whenever the prophet felt moved to preach, he got up whether in the market place ~~or~~ or at home, wherever he could get people to listen to him. He got up and preached the word of God. It was like a

living fire in his bosom and he spoke the word as it came to him. But he was the prototype of the preacher in Jewry.

Following the First Exile, preaching became a feature of the religious service on Sabbath and on Holidays and it was an exposition of the sacred texts of the Bible. We have, for example, the story of how Ezra summoned to a place of convocation all the people and he read to them the Torah and proceeded to explain to them in detail its true meaning. That was the beginning of the sermon in connection with the service, the exposition, the interpretation, the explanation of the Bible to the congregation.

By the beginning of the Common Era the sermon was widespread. Many of the Rabbis besides being law-makers were also preachers. And dating from the first six or eight centuries of the Common Era, we have a vast homiletical sermonic literature comprising of what we call Midrash which means the interpretation and explanation - numerous collections of the sermonic teachings of the rabbis. And the Talmud itself is filled with Agada much of it cast in the form of sermons.

In the Middle Ages, preaching was popular particularly among the Spanish and Italian Jews. We have a record of outstanding preachers who taught and guided generations through the spoken word. Among the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe, preaching did not occupy an essential place. In the first place, the service was so long that it didn't leave much room for preaching a sermon. In the second place the rabbis were more interested in law and not lore.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, even there, there began to develop a greater interest in the sermon. Some of the great congregations had permanent preachers, and the prominence of the

magid arose.

With the rise of Reform religion, preaching came again into its own in the synagog. We are accustomed to think of preachers as weak and inconsequential people, more or less irrelevant persons who repeat certain hackneyed truisms.

There have been epochs in history where preachers dominated their generations and molded the institutions of their day. There were periods in the history of almost every country where oft-times the spoken word in the pulpit was feared by crowned heads, by nobility, by the privileged, where words spoken in the pulpit were like thunderbolts, crashing through the ranks of oppressors. These men in the pulpits who guided their generations were looked up to as leaders of their people.

I mentioned before the names of people during the Reformation who influenced the whole course of European history. When you think of the 19th century names like Channing, Theodore Parker, Philip Brooks and Henry Ward Beecher are the ones you conjure when you think of men who molded popular opinion in their day.

And there are preachers today in the Christian and Jewish pulpit of this country and other countries who are still vital social voices in their country and who guide myriads of men and women and which communities ~~xxx~~ would be the poorer ^{but} for their preaching and leadership.

Preaching should never eclipse worship. Great preaching should lead and ought to lead directly to more and more devout worship. Today a test of a good preacher is not whether men praise his preaching but whether men praise God. In our day and in our temples and synagogs, there is the danger of preaching crowding out worship. Many people come to hear the preacher and not to pray. That is bad. It is bad for more than one reason. It is bad for the reason that not every preacher has that great gift of inspiring oratory to draw his congregation. As a result, temples and synagogs and churches are empty.

In the second place, worship is one of the supreme exercises of religion and the neglect thereof atrophies in the long run, the religious sentiment, the religious life of the individual.

The sermon is what the preacher says to the worshiper. Worship is what the layman says to his God. The period of worship is the one period in the week for spiritual contemplation, for reverent contemplation, for spiritual outreaching.

God doesn't need our worship. We need it. God can get along without us, without our prayers. God existed before mankind existed on earth and will exist long after mankind disappears from earth. We don't favor God by worship. Through worship, when it is not mechanical - when it is with intent, with concentration, with absorption, a man is able once a week to reach his inner life, his spiritual life which runs down so badly during the humdrum business of everyday life. Through a period of worship we are able, my friends, to catch a glimpse of the things fundamental - of destiny,

of life and death, of worth and vanity, of good and evil. When we take our souls in a period of reverential worship, somehow we are able to recapture, we are able to see ourselves, our actions against the background of eternity. We are able to drink deep of patience, of peace and humility. That is what worship does to your person.

Men outside of the synagog and temple and church beyond these walls have noise and clatter and screeching of sirens, rattling cans, and flashing automobiles, ringing of telephones, the scurrying and competition of the financial world, the bullying, the rivalries, the hates, the strain and tension of a man-made world.

Here, within the quiet precincts of a sanctity, peace, tranquility, spiritual relationship, here we read no market quotations and no time tables. Here, once a week, for a short period of time, we read prayers redolent with age speaking to the eternal heart, words, visions which echo all the longing and yearning and suffering and aspirations of the soul of man. Here is a period of worship when a man is face to face with himself as he ought to be, face to face with his God.

Therefore the layman ought not to think lightly of the habit of worship. He ought not to be so much concerned about the repetitious quality of the service. I have heard men and women say, "all those prayers are repeated week after week." These people have unconsciously become the victims of that furious change. Their movies, their radios, their newspapers give them - new bills, new fares - and they have bound up their

lives with that picture of furious change which is harmful to them.

You have plenty of change without. It is helpful to have one brief period devoted to things which are changeless, timeless, to quiet down the tempo. The very fact that these prayers are old, many ancient, many of these prayers the self-same prayers which your father and generations before them repeated - that very fact is a stabilizing, stirring, spiritual thing. You join the ages as it were. You join company with all the generations before you when you utter those same prayers which they uttered.

After all is said and done, my friends, it isn't so much what the prayers say that is important. It is what you read into them that is important. It is the juice that you squeeze out of them that is important. I know! And I can look back to my childhood and see the figure of someone very dear to me who would sit in the twilight of the Sabbath Day and read the Hebrew Psalms. I knew that most of the meaning of those Psalms in the ancient Hebrew were not known to that devout worshiper and yet as she read them and as the tears moved down her cheeks, I knew that a world was moving because she was pouring the world of her soul into those Psalms. It is communion. It is give and take.

Prayer is merely a landmark that points the way to unknown and undiscovered continents. Somehow we have lost the art of praying and it is a great loss.

No, I don't think, my friends, that rabbis or ministers ought to stop preaching. I don't think that by their stopping that worship would be emphasized. I do think that the quality of their preaching

ought to be of that character as to stimulate greater worship on the part of people. There is, of course, one great drawback. Preaching should not be routinized, perfunctory. The very fact that a man has to preach at a fixed relentless period every week regardless of whether he has some thing worthwhile crying to be said, must make inevitable for a certain amount of neagerness in the sermon. Perhaps ministers ought to preach less and then they would preach better. That is possible if the layman would cultivate the habit of attending services whether the subject is sensational enough to get him up on a Sunday morning.

Don't make the rabbi do violence to the classic traditions of Israel, by making him preach the sensational. There is plenty of it outside. Don't demand of him that he cater to the sharp appetites of a hasty generation.

Whenever religion is vital, it will find voices to utter it and men to listen to it. There are still great voices in the world today speaking the message of true religion.

The great model for every rabbi and every minister of course is the prophet preacher, the man who came to his people and said, "Hear the word of God", to the rich and the poor and the great and the small. A great preacher is one who models himself after the prophet whose standard he can, of course never hope to reach to whom the word came "Cry aloud, lift up your voice like a trumpet and declare unto my people their sins and their transgressions." As long as there will be men to speak that word to their generation there will be men to listen to it and preaching will remain a noble and revered calling.

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BY O. M. WALTON.

The talk in business and civic circles about uniting northeastern Ohio in common regional enterprises, with Cleveland as its metropolitan center, has come near to accomplishment in the religious program following the appearance of the National Preaching Mission here.

Rev. Franklin D. Butchart, secretary of the Cleveland committee of 100 which brought the mission party here, reports that 45 auxiliary meetings of from one to eight days have been arranged in county seats and larger towns of northern Ohio.

Upwards of 100 clergymen and women lay leaders, going in teams of two or more under auspices of the Cleveland Church Federation, have already carried the preaching emphasis to half these communities. The rest will be served before Dec. 10.

the values in inspira-

quotations and illustrative incidents. It has the indorsement of a number of theologians who read it in manuscript form.

New Features Added to National Religious Broadcasts.

November has brought two new radio programs to the national series sponsored by the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. Rev. George Stewart, minister of the First Presbyterian Church, Stamford, Conn., will speak in "The Call to Youth" over WEAf network at 12 each Saturday noon. "The Church and the World Today" will be treated by Rev. Alfred Grant Walton, pastor of Tompkins Avenue Congregational Church, Brooklyn, N. Y., over WJZ and network Saturdays at 8 a. m.

The Federal Council is continuing its morning devotions at 8 a. m. daily over WJZ. From this station also originate Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick's "National Vespers" at 4 p. m. Sundays, and Dr. William Hiram Foulkes' "Homespin" at 11 a. m. Wednesdays. Other WEAf features are the "Radio Pulpit," with Dr. Ralph W. Sockman, at 10 a. m. Sundays, and Dr. Walter W. Van Kirk's "Religion in the News," at 6:45 p. m. Saturdays.

Beginning at 8 a. m. tomorrow, the Cleveland Church Federation will resume its daily devotions over

BY OSCAR A.

There are only 33 r days until Christmas seem a long time for y go up on the seventh rium at the May Co tomorrow, it will appe and his reindeer are j corner.

At least the childre on the floor will find tainment to remind th ing-hanging time is and closer. The bigg is a giant topsy-turvy up of large replicas which will be on sa the toy department. includes the elephant world's largest elep Duck and the rest o Mickey Mouse comic cluding a large barnya ing familiar tunes.

The arrival of Santa and his reindeer is sch day after Thanksgiving sit in state in his hu listen to the hundred and their hopes for w ings.

Shaker Strollers Pre Gay Comedy Saturd

"The Sparkling Je of the gay and a which the Shaker S Saturday morn

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ght, 1936)

ix' Theory S. Scrutiny

Nov. 14.—(AP)—
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man that he might
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buyers were conspir-
was focused on the
y receipt of protest-
m Texas and Okla-
vers, expressing the
trust laws were be-
buyers' price fixing

the Institute, originally
being to record public opinion on
political issues, is also able to record
the sentiment of the masses on other
questions as well.

Dr. Fleming's Proposal.

Dr. Fleming's proposal, embodied
in the annual report of his church,
raised many an eyebrow in the
preaching profession. Mincing no
words, he wrote:

"... Why cannot a Christian be per-
mitted to go to church to worship without
always being assailed by a barrage from
the pulpit? There is practically no preach-
ing worth the name to be found. Frank-
ly, a moratorium would be a god-send,
heartily hailed on both sides by the pulpit
and the pew . . .

"For the most part sermons today are
a very poor edition of 'topical' homile-
tics, a brand of religious pep-talks, sail-
ing forth for a transitory popularity
under the guise of being inspirational.
Truly the miracle of the church is the
patience of the laity. . .

"People should speak when they have
something to say. May we pray to be
delivered from any more preaching cam-
paigns calculated to arouse a benumbed
and harrassed people who have been
preached to death. Bishop's crusades,
united preaching missions, city-wide drives,
the importation of noted orators—these
are samples of the inflections that adver-
tise their own delinquency."

Dr. Fleming's remarks were
greeted with a stony silence in most
quarters of the ministry. But some
clerics sprang forward to attack,

In addition, the Institute will
report the result of a poll on
another timely topic—Social Se-
curity.

These reports will appear ex-
clusively in next Sunday's Plain
Dealer.

him, while a few defended his po-
sition.

Dr. John Haynes Holmes, pastor
of New York's Community Church
said he believed Dr. Fleming was
"terribly wrong," and added: "His
charge that there is practically no
preaching worth the name today is
a gross slander on scores of his
brethren.

"Christianity never had greater
preachers than at this hour, as wit-
ness Dr. Fosdick, Bishop McConnell,
Professor Reinhold, Niebuhr, Dr.
Henry Sloan Coffin, and the late be-
loved Dr. S. Parkes Cadman.

"A moratorium on such men
would be moral bankruptcy."

Two Views of Worship.

The inter-denominational differ-
ences in voting in today's poll clear-
ly illustrates two main aspects of
religious worship—the sacramental
and the sermonic. According to tra-
dition a church service is priestly—
there are altars, sacraments.

SEE JOBS FOR

history. About 200 new models will go on view, new lines of passenger cars being found in the main exhibition hall and north hall, while in the arcade commercial vehicles and trailers will await inspection. Parts and accessories will be in the spacious corridors.

First impression received by the visitor on entering the hall will be restful. He will be greeted by an attractive rock garden and electric fountain with its rainbow of soft colors, then a southland vista will unfold.

An idea of the show's magnitude is gained upon discovery that illumination of the main arena in which the feature cars will make their bow will require the consumption of 500,000 watts per hour. This is the equivalent of lighting a community of 400 homes of seven rooms, according to the chief electrician of the hall.

In addition to the "Motorcade of Fashion," offered for the first time this year, in which the new cars will strut under their own power, other special attractions are listed, such as the "Little Theater of the Auto," where car manufacturers will present films abounding with action; the safety exhibit of the Cleveland Auto Club and an interesting traffic test for drivers to be conducted

der type Dycor engine to load in the normal ranges."

Both types of the supercharged line are the same as in the regular Cord models: a Westchester 5-passenger sedan; a 5-passenger convertible phaeton sedan with disappearing top and a sportsman's coupe with a similarly disappearing top. This latter model has an extra large baggage compartment for the carrying of golf clubs, guns, hunting suits, etc.

Smart Car Here.

The owner-chauffeur driven berline, on a 132-inch wheelbase, is a two purpose car that is unusually smart. The partition glass between the front and rear compartments disappears completely into the back of the front seat when not in use and the car becomes a regular sedan with considerable extra roominess. It follows the lines, in general appearance, of the regular Cords, but due to its longer wheelbase, there is an additional five inches in length of the rear compartment and two inches in the front compartment. An additional inch and a half of head room has also been provided.

The regular 1937 Cord is a totally new type automobile, individual in styling. Its makers claim for it exceptional ease of handling, and a

balanced (passengers) is sure sway, top heaviness and tossing, smooth and stable. Passengers do not car and sit down. the door and sit they would into

Remote

Gear shifting is The shifting control the steering driver chooses to simply by moving with the tip of the necessity of hand from the four forward ratio is mostly for its use reduces over 30 per cent flowing power with

omy. There are no front compartment a gear shift lever the emergency brake under the cowl freedom of movement the comfort of passenger is recessed. Seats are deeply sprung and padded

The interior beading is finished as the exterior

1. Subject suggested - rector of Trinity Church. (Note) - By implication
In a desire to discover what is really in the mind of laymen -
the "Institute of Public Opinion" took a poll - 100,000
87% to 13 joined retention of sermons - Opposed to Moratorium
then, at least, is conforming to a Rabbi or Minister - Judging
by criticism we hear about sermons ^{too} long, ^{too} dull, too
hazy, or too radical, too old-fashioned or too severe
toward, too scholarly or too popular, too hot or too cold - one
expected a much larger negative vote.
2. It is interesting that the votes & their most in favor of
proposal - were Ephesians - by Church men. This is
of course due to their ^{special} concept of a rel. service - which is
sacramental - ^{formal} ritual of prayer, ceremonials - wherein
the sermon is incidental and occasional. With other
Chr. ^{part. the Evangelical} denoms - the rel. service is imperative and prophetic
- didactic - sermon integral & central - ritual ceremonial
toned down.
3. ~~This is true also of Orthodox~~ The same distinction may
be found in modern times but Orthodox (Ref. Jordan)
In Orthod. - was not regarded as a fixed feature of the
Rel. services. Rabbi would preach occasionally
- 3 times a year.
In Reform - it became fixed point of service
4. With every great ~~reform~~ rel. reform movement -
the ^{even} protestant world comes into prominence. Before
the Prot. Ref. 16c - preaching had largest dissemination

Reformation - projected purveyor preachers - Isaiah Zung -
Calvin - Knox - and estab. Sermon as vital part of Service.

5. So with Reform Judaism - 19C. - some of greatest
preachers of all time Abraham Geiger - Samuel Hildesheim -
Adolf Jellinek - David Einhorn - and many others.

6. Just as the first great rel. reform movement
in Israel - 8-6C. - called forth the miracle of the
spoken word in the mighty, thundering, sacred
oratory, the prophets -

7. When a Rel. has something new to say to mankind
or some old eternal truth perennially new & fresh -
it will find voices to say them - and even to listen
to these voices. When it becomes set - old - worn -
& somewhat irrelevant to contemporary life - it will
shelter & rest itself in ritual, formalism and poetic
unimportant ceremonialism - (all all forms of post.
orthodoxy) and even its acknowledged freedom will be
disregarded for its manner & style rather than for its substance
& vitality.

8. A hundred years ago - Leopold Feuz - Prussia -

9. Preaching began with prophets - Unofficial, not part of Service -
Set tone - Heroic model for all future preaching.
After Exile - Preaching devel. in connection with Service - as
exposition of Scriptures - Sabbath - Holidays.
Ezra - לֹלֵךְ בְּפִי בְּיָדָא

12. But there are men today in Chr. & J. pulpits who are vital
forces for civic righteousness in their communities - holders
of public power - champions of ideas - trusted guides
of regiments of men nowhere -

Communities moved to the power - without their light
& leadership.

13. Preaching, however, should not eclipse worship.

Great preaching should inspire to devout worship.

The test of great preaching is not whether men will
praise the preacher - but whether men will praise ^{God} ~~praise~~
- For our day - in our Temples - worship is in danger
of being so eclipsed. Men come to hear the preacher -
not to pray! ^{for a copy later} ~~that~~ And that is bad! For many
reasons -

In the first place - the preacher may not be as ~~not~~ ^{not} affecting
as he might. Then men don't come at all!

In the second place - worship is a supreme rel. exercise
which, if neglected, atrophies the rel. life of an individual.

The sermon is what the preacher says to the worshipper.
Prayer is what the worshipper says to his God. - It is the
heart's communion with the divine - It is the period
of reverent contemplation - & sp. outreaching -

Then worship - not mechanical but intent, active and
absorbed - one recharges his spiritual life - which runs down
in the ^{passing} ~~mundane~~ business of every-day life - one glimpses
again the things fundamental - destiny - life death - Good
and Evil - Worth and Vanity - one recaptures the
wider perspective - the large outlook - one's life and

activity is defused against a lost planet, reducing - One
dunks deep of patience, and peace and humility.
Without are reducing reducing - and nothing can -
and reducing reducing, and reducing reducing - ~~and~~
and the reducing reducing the reducing the
rivalry, the reducing the reducing and reducing
of a reducing reducing. Here is peace and reducing, and
a reducing reducing. Here is reducing and
rest. Here one reducing reducing, and reducing
directions and reducing reducing - but reducing
redolent of age - echoes of the reducing heart of humanity -
Here reducing with the reducing reducing - reducing
and reducing and reducing, the reducing man. Here
is one reducing - where a man is reducing force
with reducing reducing reducing reducing - the reducing reducing

14. We should not lightly thrust aside the reducing Workshop.
It is not reducing who need it. It is reducing who need
it! - Do not complain of its reducing reducing
You have plenty of excitement reducing reducing!
You have reducing reducing reducing - provide you
with new bells reducing reducing - You
need a little that is reducing, in your life -
A reducing, reducing of reducing is like a reducing reducing.
It reducing the way. It is not what it reducing
say - that is as important as what they reducing
your heart say - When you repeat them
devoutly and with your mind, reducing their
meaningful reducing reducing

Truth preaching the world will always hear - and always
Crave!



Heart's communion - Period of Rerement coming - outbreathing
Then worship - not mechanical -

Recharges

Glimpses thing Fundamental - destiny

Recaptures wide perspective - one's life - background

Drinks deep -

Without - screaming screams - Peace -

Here is inwardness

Turn - tables - market quotations -

Face to face

We should not lightly -



9. Who not complain of repetitions - Plenty of change -

Movies -

Land - marks - not what they say

10. Rabbin should not stop preaching - will at high worship
Intelligently

11. Routine - Perfunctory - Perhaps if -

Expert sensational - Cater

12. Perfect model - prophets - $\frac{5773}{5772}$ 1000

1. Subject suggested - rector - By implication
Desire to discover - "Institute of Public Opinion" poll.
877-13. Comforting

2. Episcopalianism - sacramental - Orthodox Reform

3. With every great rel. Reform - Reformation -
Reform Movement - Prophets

4. When a rel has something vital to say

5. Leopold Zung

6. Preaching began with prophets

Rabbi's & Talmud - Midrash - Spain -
Germany & France - p 1317

66 p 1 61 61 61

Living Word - Vernacular - Vast Homiletical Literature

7. Weak - incomprehensible - Channing - Parker - Burke - Bush
Living to-day

8. Should not eclipse Worship
Great preaching should lead - direct

Test -

For our day - Temple - Men come to hear - Bad!
- Worship is a supreme - athletics
The sermon is what

Sermon 463

ABSTRACT OF ADDRESS DELIVERED BY DR. ABBA HILLEL SILVER AT THE TEMPLE, ANSEL
ROAD AND EAST 105TH STREET ON SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 22, 1936

SHOULD MINISTERS ~~STOP~~ STOP PREACHING?

When a religion has something vital to say to mankind, it will find eloquent voices to say it and men to listen. When it becomes set, wearied and somewhat irrelevant to contemporary life, it will shelter itself in peaceful ritual and poetically reminiscent ceremonialism. Even its occasional preaching will be distinguished for its manner and style rather than for its substance and vitality.

Preachers are sometimes thought of as weak and inconsequential. But there have been great epochs in society which were dominated by great preachers who moved and molded their generations. They were tremendous social forces in their day. Their voices in the pulpit were like thunderbolts bringing fear into the hearts of ~~many~~ oppressors and exploiters of mankind. Think of Luther, Zwingley, Calvin and Knox during the period of the Reformation. Think of the influence which was wielded by Channing, Parker, Brooks and Beecher in our own country. Think of Geiger, Jellinek, Einhorn and Holdheim and the impact of their ~~no~~ word upon their generation.

There are today in the Christian and Jewish pulpits of America men who are forces for civic righteousness in their communities, molders of public opinion and trusted guides of myriads of men and women. Their communities would be the poorer but for their light and leadership.

Preaching, however, should not eclipse worship. Great preaching should lead to more devout worship. The test of good preaching is not whether men will praise the preacher but whether men will praise God. The sermon is what the preacher says to the worshiper. Prayer is what the worshiper says to his God. In our day and in our Temples, worship is in danger of being eclipsed. Most people come to hear the preacher, not to pray. That is bad. Worship is a supreme

religious exercise which, if neglected, atrophies the religious life of the individual. Through worship - not mechanical but intent, active and absorbed - a man recharges his spiritual life. He glimpses again the things fundamental - destiny, life and death, good and evil, worth and vanity. He recaptures the wider perspective, the larger outlook. His life for a moment becomes defined against the background of eternity. He drinks deep of patience and peace and humility. For one quiet hour at least in the week, he reads not time-tables or market quotations but prayers which echo the eternal hunger of the human heart. He listens to memory-laden words and phrases which are freighted with the great yearning and suffering and aspirations of the soul of man.

Preaching, of course, should be less routine and perfunctory.

Preaching once or twice a week, at fixed unrelenting periods, without waiting for the urgency of something really worthwhile crying to be said, must make inevitably for a certain amount of meagerness in the sermon. Perhaps if preachers preached less they would preach better. But then the laity ~~must~~ must cultivate the habit of attending divine worship even when there is no sermon.

The layman can help the preacher to remain true to the classic traditions of his calling by not ~~expecting~~ expecting the sensational in the pulpit. The pulpit should not be called upon to cater to the over-stimulated appetite of our age for the novel and the sensational. The movies, theatres and radios provide men with new bills and new fare constantly. Men have plenty of excitement outside of the church. It is good to devote one period a week to the timeless, changeless and unsensational facts of existence and to slow down the tempo of their excited lives.

463
11-22-36
Should rabbis
stop preaching

(My)
The subject of my discourse this morning was suggested by
a report made by an ^{TLe} eminent ~~divine~~ Rector of the Trinity Church
of New York City in which he suggested that a preaching holiday
be instituted, - a moratorium be brought on preaching for a year
or two or more if desirable. The reason for his suggestion as
given by him is as follows:

"...Why cannot a Christian be permitted to go to church
to worship without always being assailed by a barrage from the
pulpit? There is practically no preaching worth the name to be
found. Frankly, a moratorium would be a godsend heartily hailed
on both sides by the pulpit and the pew....

"For the most part sermons today are a very poor
edition of 'topical' homiletics, a brand of religious pep-talks
sailing forth for a transitory popularity under the guise of being
inspirational. Truly the miracle of the church is the patience
of the laity...

"People should speak when they have something to say.
May we pray to be delivered from any more preaching campaigns
calculated to arouse a benumbed and harrassed people who have been
preached to death. Bishop's crusades, united preaching missions,
city-wide drives, the importation of noted orators -- these are
samples of the inflictions that advertise their own delinquency."

Now, while these comments of the ~~redor~~ of the Trinity Church
^{SPECIALLY} apply to the ministers of ~~other~~ Christian churches, by implication
they also apply to Rabbis in synagogues and temples. This comment of
this eminent clergyman created considerable comment and as you
may expect, controversy.

The Institute of Public Opinion, which is a national
organization which pools the sentiments of the American people, was
interested in finding out exactly what the laity ~~actually~~ thought
about preaching. It canvassed one hundred thousand men and women,
church members and non-members, ^{AS TO WHETHER} on this ~~subject~~ ^{should} that there be
a holiday from preaching for a certain length of time. ~~And~~ the vote,

strangely enough was 87% opposed to such a holiday and 13% in favor of it. To a preacher and a clergyman this is rather comforting.

I have been hearing much criticism about sermons and preaching generally. They are all too long, too dull, too hackneyed, or too scholarly, too radical or too old-fashioned, too sensational, too hot or too cold. One expected a larger negative vote. But this vote is rather comforting.

It is interesting, in this connection ^{AND} to note that the rector, the majority of those who voted for this moratorium are members of the Episcopalian Church. Their position reflects the attitude of the High Church towards the service and place of the sermon in the service. As the rector clearly points out, there are two definite attitudes towards the sermon, one held by the more orthodox, another by the less orthodox. One looks upon the service as sacramental, a formal ritual of prayers and ceremonials wherein the sermon is incidental, and occasionally. With other Protestant denominations the religious service is prophetic, inspiration and didactic. The sermon is integral and focal and the ritual is toned down.

That same distinction may be found in modern times between reform Judaism. In orthodox worship, the sermon is incidental. The orthodox rabbis have a rather good time of it. They are called upon to preach two or three times a year. The orthodox rabbi traditionally ~~is to~~ ^{ed} preach on the Sabbath before Passover - the Great Sabbath, on the Sabbath between New Year's and the Day of Atonement - the Sabbath of Repentance and on the Eve of Kol Nidre. The rest of the year he did not have to preach. In the Reform synagogue preaching occupies the focal point in the service. It is interesting to note that with every ~~great~~ ^{religious} spiritual reformation the spoken word comes into prominence. Preaching had languished in the Christian church prior to the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation suddenly projected a galaxy of remarkable and powerful preachers, expounders of the spoken word - Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox. That was also true of the Jewish Reform movement. For a time previous ^{to Reform} preaching had languished.

The Reform movement suddenly found men of the winged word, Abraham Geiger, Adolf Jellinek, Samuel Holdheim, David Einhorn - men who stirred Jewish life to its depths and following their example, the sermon has become an essential feature of the service in our congregations.

When a religion has something vital to say it will find voices to say it and it will find men to listen to those voices. When a religion becomes old and set and weary, and somewhat irrelevant to life, it will shelter and rest itself in ritual formalism, and poetic reminiscence (like all forms of political orthodoxy) and even its occasional preaching will be distinguished for its manner and style rather than for its substance and vitality.

It is interesting that in the synagogue the sermon has always been, as far as record goes, a feature in the service, occasionally a strongly stressed feature, at other times not so emphasized, but always there.

A hundred years ago, Leopold Zunz wrote a monumental work called: — — — — — in which he demonstrated the unbroken continuity of the sermonic tradition. In his day the Prussian government interfered with the internal life of the Jewish community by decreeing that there must be no changes made in the ritual of the synagogue and that no sermon might be preached in the German language. The Prussian government had been incited to do this by an extreme orthodox wing of Jews who did not want any innovations. In reply Zunz wrote his epochal work. He proved that as far as we can trace back in the annals of our history there always had been a sermon in the vernacular. - - the spoken word supplemented ^{the} inspiration.

Preaching began with the prophets. But there was this distinction. The prophets were not officers or officials of the Temple and they did not preach during Temple worship. Their preaching was occasional. Whenever the prophet could get people to listen to him, in the market place or at home, he got up and preached the word of God. It was like a living fire in his bosom and he spoke the word as it came to him, and he set the tone - the heroic model for all future preaching.

Following the First Exile, preaching became a feature of the service as ^{an} exposition of the sacred texts read on Sabbath and on Holidays. The Bible tells how Ezra summoned all the people to a place of convocation and read to them the Torah and proceeded to explain to them in detail its true meaning. By the beginning of the Common Era the sermon was widespread. Many of the Rabbis besides being law-makers were also preachers. We have a vast homiletical literature, the Midrash, which means the interpretation and explanation ^{dating} from the first six or eight centuries of the Common Era. The Talmud itself is filled with Agada much of it cast in the form of sermons. In the Middle Ages, preaching was popular particularly among the Spanish and Italian Jews. We have a record of outstanding preachers who taught and guided generations through the spoken word. Among the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe, preaching did not occupy as essential a place. In the first place, the Piyutim made the service so long that it did not leave much room for ~~preaching~~ a sermon. In the second place the rabbis were more interested in law ^{than in} ~~and not~~ lore. But even ~~there~~ in the 17th and 18th centuries, a greater interest in the sermon began to develop. Some of the large and famous congregations had permanent preachers, and the prominence of the magid rose. With the rise of Reform preaching came again into its own in the synagogue.

We are accustomed to think of preachers as weak and inconsequential people, more or less irrelevant persons who repeat certain hackneyed truisms. Yet there have been epochs where preachers dominated their generations and molded the institutions of their day. There were periods in the history of almost every country where the spoken word in the pulpit made monarchs tremble and nobility quake. There were times when words spoken in the pulpit were like thunderbolts, crashing through the ranks of oppression, privilege and wickedness. Such preachers were guides and leaders to their generations.

A Theology

second place, worship is one of
it atrophies the religious li
acher says to the worshipper. W
It is the heart

the feeling of inferiority, the haggling, the squabbling, the competition, the

rivalry, the bitterness, the strain and tensions of a man-made world. Here, there is peace and quiet, tranquility, a sense of timelessness. Here we ^{don't} read no market quotations ~~and~~ no time tables. ~~Here is an awareness of rest.~~ Here we read prayers, redolent with age, speaking to the eternal heart; words and visions which echo ~~all~~ the longing and yearning and suffering and aspirations of the soul of man. Here is a period of worship when a man is face to face with himself, as he ought to be; and with his God.

We should not lightly thrust aside the habit of worship. It is not God who needs it. We ought not to be so much concerned about the repetitious quality of the service. There is plenty of excitement outside! I have heard men and women complain "all these prayers are repeated week after week." These people unconsciously have become the victims of that furious craving after change, ^{new programs and new bills, new faces} that marks our age. Their movies, their radios, their newspapers constantly give them with a pattern of furious change which is harmful to them. You have plenty of change without. You need a little that is changeless to quiet down the tempo.

A fixed form of prayer is like a well-loved land-mark ^{which} points the way. ^{to be known and understood} It is not what the prayers say that is important but what they make your heart say. ^{continued}

The very fact that these prayers are old, many of these prayers the self-same prayers which your father and generations before them repeated - that very fact is a stabilizing, stirring, spiritual thing. You join the ages as it were. You join company with all the generations before you when you utter those same prayers which they uttered.

After all is said and done, my friends, it isn't so much what the prayers say that is important. It is what you read into them that is important. It is the juice that you squeeze out of them that is important. I know! ~~and~~ I can look back to my childhood and see the figure of someone very dear to me who would sit in the twilight of the Sabbath Day and read the Hebrew Psalms.

I knew that most of the meaning of those Psalms in the ancient Hebrew were not known to that devout worshipper and yet as she read them and as the tears moved down her cheeks, I knew that a world was moving because she was pouring the world of her soul into those Psalms. ~~It is communion. It is give and take.~~

~~Prayer is merely a landmark that points the way to unknown and undiscovered continents. Somehow we have lost the art of praying and it is a great loss.~~

No, I do not think, my friends, that Rabbis or ministers ought to stop preaching. I do not think that an end to preaching will help men to return to worship. I do think that the preaching should be of a quality as to stimulate to worship as well as to a life of service and aspiration. There is, of course, ^{So many} one ~~great~~ drawback. Preaching should be less routine and perfunctory. The very fact that a man has to preach once or twice a week at fixed unrelenting periods regardless of whether he has something worthwhile crying to be said, makes inevitable a certain amount of meagerness in the sermon. Perhaps if ministers preached less they would preach better. But then the layman must cultivate the habit of attending divine worship when there is no sermon.

The layman can help the preacher remain true to the classic traditions of his calling by not expecting the sensational in the pulpit. The pulpit should not be called upon to cater to the overstimulated appetites of our age for the novel and the sensational.

Whenever religion is vital, it will find voices to utter it and men to listen to it. There are still great voices in the world today speaking the message of true religion.

The ~~great~~ model of every Rabbi and every minister ~~of course~~ is the prophet preacher, the man who came to his people, to the rich and the poor ^{To} and the wise and the unlettered, and said, ^{Hear} "A the word of God". ^(Heb.) A great preacher is one who models himself after the prophet whose standard he can, of course, never hope to reach to whom the word came "Cry aloud, lift up your voice like a trumpet and declare unto my people their sins and their transgressions." (Hebrew)

As long as there will be men to speak that word ^{to} their generation there will be men to listen to it and preaching will remain a noble and revered calling.

