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Prophetic preaching, 1931.

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CONFERENCE
ON
PREACHING

OCTOBER 12, 13, 14, 1931

ROBINSON CHAPEL
AND
COPLEY CHURCH



BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
72 Mt. Vernon Street

PROGRAM

MONDAY, OCTOBER 12

AFTERNOON SESSION: 2:30. Robinson Chapel.
72 Mount Vernon Street

CHARLES REYNOLDS BROWN
College Preaching

SAMUEL MACAULAY LINDSAY
Expository Preaching

EVENING SESSION: 7.30 Copley Church
Exeter and Newbury Streets

LYNN HAROLD HOUGH
The Preacher as a Comprehensive Scholar

MILES HENRY KRUMBINE
Preaching to an Age of Scepticism

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13

MORNING SESSION: 9:00. Robinson Chapel

ARTHUR WENTWORTH HEWITT
Preaching in the Rural Church

FREDERICK FRANKLIN SHANNON
Preaching to the Preacher Himself

AFTERNOON SESSION: 2:30. Copley Church

JOHN HAYNES HOLMES
Preaching in the City Church

FORUM: President Daniel L. Marsh

EVENING SESSION: 7:30. Copley Church

WILLIAM LEROY STIDGER
Mine the Mighty Ordination

ADNA WRIGHT LEONARD
The Incoming Tide of Spiritual Eagerness

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14

MORNING SESSION: 9:00. Robinson Chapel

WILLIAM SAMUEL MITCHELL
The Seven Day Sermon

FRED WINSLOW ADAMS
Preaching Through Worship

AFTERNOON SESSION: 2:30. Copley Church

JOSEPH FORT NEWTON
Different Types of Preaching

FORUM: President Daniel L. Marsh

EVENING SESSION: 7:30. Copley Church

ABBA HILLEL SILVER
Prophetic Preaching

ROBERT ELLIOTT SPEER
Preaching out of Life

The music at the Conference will be in charge of
Professor James R. Houghton.

President G. Bromley Oxnam, who was to have
presided at the Conference, is unexpectedly pre-
vented from being present. He is now on a trip to
the Orient.

PROPHETIC PREACHING

* *

ABBA HILLEL SILVER

Much of what I shall say on the subject of "Prophetic Preaching" I have already said elsewhere when discussing "The Church and Social Justice." Religion has given man both a theosophy and a social program, the former as a means of adjusting himself intellectually to the universe and to ultimate reality, the latter as a means of adjusting himself most helpfully to his social environment. Metaphysically, religion concerns itself with the nature of the universe and the purpose of existence. Socially, religion concerns itself with the establishment of the most perfect order of society. Prophecy, while deriving its propulsion from the metaphysics of religion, was largely devoted to its social program. The preacher, who makes this social program central in his public ministry, is of the prophetic school, and his voice will be added to the mighty chorus of voices whose power moved the world.

At the outset let me say that in my experience, the subjects which appeal most to a congregation and "reach home," are not those which concern the great tasks of social reconstruction, but the "homely" subjects, those which relate to parents and children, to marriage and the home, to human struggle and aspiration, to the meaning of human experience and how to face life. Great preachers have been praised by admiring hosts for their courageous discussions of world problems. They have been blessed by grateful hearts for the helpful way in which they illumined for them the "homely" facts of their own lives.

In my preaching, I try to be a humble follower of the great prophetic teachers of my race. Nevertheless I always try to bear in mind,

hard though it often is, that my function is that of teacher and guide, not agitator or propogandist. My weapons can not be those of hate or class struggle. Occasionally the hot, impatient word will leap to the lips. Occasionally the hand will reach for the scorpion whip at the sight of outrageous wrong. But I force myself to remember that in the spiritual order, it is the law of kindness which yields the ultimate victory. Our task is to persuade through reason and through love, and our appeal is not to class interest, but to justice and compassion and human solidarity.

I find it very difficult to define more sharply this thought of mine. It is very hard to draw the line between leadership and propoganda, between education and agitation, and I am aware that pusillanimity and worldliness often hide themselves behind this distinction. But I am sure that the spiritual man will quickly detect the difference and will understand.

The sermon should, of course, touch life in the raw. It should not avoid the pressing every-day social, political or economic problems with which men are struggling. Quite the contrary. Great preaching has always had something of the volcanics of prophecy. Wherever palpable wrong exists, wherever men suffer from the bitter inequalities of our economic order, there the minister's voice should be heard admonishing, chastising, counselling, and pointing the way to concrete and specific measures for relief and amelioration. Unless we speak fearlessly and at decisive moments, of the social wrongs which persist, of the evils of our profit system of exploitation, of economic insecurity, of unemployment, of the rights of labor to organization and to a fuller share in the social goods, unless we denounce corruption in government and in high places, we are faithless shepherds indeed.

Prophetic preaching concerns itself primarily with the reconstruction of society after an ideal pattern of social righteousness. It

derives its mandate from an overwhelming faith in a righteous God. To do justice and to love mercy is to worship Him. To be holy in thought and speech is to dwell in His presence. Neither cult nor ritual nor formal prayer nor sacred shrine are the channels of divine communion, but the passionate aspiration towards moral perfection. The preacher who holds these truths foremost in his preaching moves in the noble tradition of ancient prophecy.

The prophetic preacher will be driven by the dynamics of such a faith to a morality of battle and struggle. The axioms of faith lead to tremendous ethical mandates. Every human life must be regarded as a reflex of divinity. Every act of wrong and injustice therefore, mars and defaces the image of God in man. Oppression and exploitation are more than violations of social laws. They are sacrilege and blasphemy. They thwart life - God's life in man. They distort and mutilate that which is the end and goal of all being - the free unfoldment of personality. The religious teacher will not rest content with a gospel of personal salvation. He will strive to bring about a social order which will insure to all men freedom for moral self-realization. He will weigh all social institutions in the balance of spiritual utility. If found wanting, he will set about to reconstruct them, or, if need be, to destroy them. His morality will be militant, and, when necessary, revolutionary.

Hence it is that the profoundly religious leaders of all times were the mightiest spokesmen of social justice and its uncompromising champions. It was from the lips of men touched with the burning coal of divine faith, from the lips of the prophet, the seer, the man of God, that the first great cry for justice leaped out upon the world. They who sought God most zealously spoke of human rights most fearlessly. It was in the name of God, the stern and righteous Judge, that those spiritual men of valor wielded the whip of their fury upon those who ground the faces of the poor and turned aside the way of the humble. It was in the name of God, the compassionate and the merciful Friend, that they pleaded the cause of the orphan and the widow

the beaten and the broken of life. It was in the name of God, the Father of all men, that they espoused the cause of a human brotherhood which, over-leaping the dread boundaries of ancient enmities erected by fear and greed, leads men to turn their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Herein lies the first great service which the great preacher, through his historic agency the church, has rendered and can continue to render the cause of social justice. He can function as the motive power of enthusiasm for all programs of social amelioration. He can be the dynamo of spiritual energy for every great human enterprise. Speaking betimes and oft of a God Whose ways are justice and truth, Whose worship is goodness, and upon Whose high altars only the sacrifice of righteousness is acceptable, the minister can so sensitize the minds of men to moral values, that when a situation confronts them, involving a clear moral issue, whether in their private life, or in their social, political or industrial life, they will be moved to choose the good and eschew the evil.

The first great service then, which the minister can render the cause of prophetic justice, is to galvanize by education and inspiration the will of men so that they will seek justice and pursue it. He can enkindle a crusading zeal for the Kingdom of God, which will be a kingdom of this world, fashioned out of the lowly clay of this life but after the pattern and grace of highest perfection.

The minister, however, must not remain content to speak of social justice in the abstract. The church is not an academy for speculative sciences. It is a dynamic agency equipped for social reconstruction. It must enter the arena of life and do battle for its sanctities.

The minister cannot, of course, align ~~himself~~ himself with a propaganda for one specific economic system as against another. He must not

involve himself in economic dogmatism. To do so would be to suffer a severe loss in spiritual prestige and authority. The minister would be compelled either to champion an existing order, in spite of its sundry and inevitable flaws, or an imaginary order, which might fail even to approximate the virtues claimed for it. The prophetic preacher is not concerned with systems but with the safeguarding of principles which each age must be challenged to work into such a system as will best meet its economic needs. Whether it be capitalism, socialism or communism, there are basic principles of human rights and essential human ideals at stake in each, and the minister must under all conditions remain free to defend these ideals for which no system is adequate guarantee. Neither the rule of king, demos or proletariat is sufficient insurance against abuse of power, exploitation of men and the defeat of the spiritual promise of human life.

Nor should the minister be called upon to play the role of arbiter in the numerous minor economic disputes which daily arise in our society, concerning which only the expert economist can today speak with any degree of wisdom or authority. Numerous labor controversies, for example, occur today which do not at all involve such clear-cut moral issues which would warrant the minister in throwing the weight of his influence on one side or the other. The minister ought not to fritter himself away by introducing himself into every minor economic wrangle which may possess little or no social significance.

There are, however, economic problems in modern society of vast social import, reaching to the very heart of our civilization and affecting the whole structure of society, concerning which the church, and its spokesman, the minister, must speak, and in no uncertain terms. Conditions of palpable and vast wrong persist throughout the world, which thwart the rich promise of human life, consign millions to degradation and defeat, and fill the habitations

of men with anguish and sorrow. Greed and lust and oppression devastate life. Untold millions are starved by poverty and physically and spiritually drained by exploitation. Millions of children are broken upon the wheels of industry. The burdens of our economic order lie heavily upon the shoulders of our womanhood. The dread of unemployment, old age and disability hang like a pall over the working classes. Nowhere in the world today do those conditions of justice and opportunity fully obtain which would make possible the free, untrammelled unfoldment of personality, the harmonious development of all of God's children according to the measure of their capacities.

In the face of these conditions the church and its minister, cannot, dare not, remain silent. They must cry aloud. They must lift up their voices like a trumpet to declare unto the people their transgressions. Else their vision is a lying vision and their ritual an abomination. It is true that the church has always cared for the victim of social injustice. It fed the poor, clothed the naked, sheltered the homeless, healed the sick, sustained and comforted the denied and the dispossessed of the earth. Nearly all the agencies of mercy and relief in the world are the creations and wards of the churches. The church was indeed a compassionate mother. But it must do more. It must not wait until the flotsam and jetsam of social wreckage come drifting to its doors. It must anticipate disaster. It must labor for a social reconstruction which will afford all men a better chance of security and happiness. The church must summon its adherents to a close scrutiny of social ills. It must stimulate research and inquiry into their possible remedies. It must place the social responsibility for ameliorating these conditions squarely upon the shoulders of its devotees. It must demand the application of their best intelligence and highest motives to this task. It must arouse and disturb them with the desperate challenge: "Ye are your brothers' keepers," and drive them on to ever new experimentations in perfecting this stewardship. It must voice the maximum idealism of life, calling for a condition of society

in which man will at all times be primary, and the satisfaction of his legitimate needs superior to profit or the accumulation of wealth, in which rewards will be commensurate with service, and in which none shall partake of social goods who does not contribute to the social weal. It must organize the religious consciousness of the world and the mighty hosts of the faithful for strategic action at decisive moments.

If the church and the minister cannot propel men to seek ways of lessening the bitter inequalities of economic life and of securing for all men who ~~KNOW~~ toil adequate satisfaction of their legitimate needs, it stands convicted of incompetence and spiritual bankruptcy. The sons of Mary will smile upon its inanity and the sons of Martha, upon whom the Lord has laid the crushing burdens of life, will turn upon it in the dread hour "when whirlwinds of rebellion shake the world," and will destroy it. When the Dumb Terror of Russia, after the silence of the centuries, found voice to make its reply, ~~IN~~ it spoke as the Red Terror and hurled itself in devastating fury upon the church and its ministers which had consistently betrayed it by joining hands with its oppressors.

Some will say that this program which I have outlined is platitudinous. They will charge it with being "gloriously safe." It is safe only as dynamite is safe, before the spark is applied to it. It may remain just a medley of fine phrases, having an overtone of sanctity. Or it may become a cleansing whirlwind let loose upon the world. It depends entirely upon the man and the sincerity with which he subscribes to this program. Some will use it as a cloak for hypocrisy and spiritual double-dealing. For others, it will be an irresistible call to action, to leadership and to sacrifice. Platitudes are truths which all men accept and - ignore. They cease to be platitudes and becoming alarming battle-cries as soon as men cease to ignore them.

Religion has not always been faithful to its informing purpose. After the first great impulse which creates a religion embodies itself into an institution, it loses much of its daring and courage. All religions at the first moment of their revelation, when they leap hot and frenzied from the soul of some God-intoxicated seer, are purging fires, consuming flames. They speak in thunder and sweep life with a "besom of destruction." They are "set over nations and over kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build anew and to plant."...The World stands aghast and frightened. It turns upon the prophets of the new revelation and crucifies them, only to kneel a moment later and worship them.

But soon the hot coals of religious passion cool off. The heroic mood vanishes. Loyalties lose their sacrificial quality. The voice crying in the wilderness becomes an echo, faint and timid. Enthusiasm is quenched in habit. Religion becomes institutionalized. Hierarchy and vested interests appear. The church becomes an end in itself. When its interests are at stake it will compromise and yield and betray men in their direst needs.

This danger, of course, is inherent in all organization. Whatever moral pioneering has been done in the world has been largely the work, not of groups, but of individual spiritual adventurers, rebels and non-conformists. Revelations never come to groups. There were schools of prophets in ancient Israel, but they were merely the monitors of ancient superstitions. It was only after the individual separated himself from the school and the group and pursued his own solitary quest of truth, that prophecy discovered its authentic voice and mood.

The church, therefore, freighted down with organization, must constantly war against itself to save its soul. The church must protect itself against the downward drag of institutionalism and the paralysis of

will which result from over-organization and prosperity. The church triumphant often spells the faith defeated. How often has the church been a flunkey to the rich! How often has its revolutionary passion for justice and social righteousness been leashed by worldliness and sycophancy! The church set out to admonish men to put away the evil of their doings, to "cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow," but it ended by truckling to the powerful and the rich, and by sharing in the spoils of the marauders and exploiters of society.

In the Temple at Jerusalem, there was a flute fashioned out of reeds, an old flute, having come down from the days of Moses. The sound of the flute was sweet and beautiful, ravishing the souls of worshippers. But one day the priests at the sanctuary decided to decorate the flute, and they covered it with gold. The flute was never the same again. Its sweet, clear, cool tones were now harsh, metallic and jarring. Gold had coarsened its melody...

Can the church survive prosperity? It is not so difficult after all to be a voice crying in the wilderness. It is far more difficult to be a voice - clear and courageous - crying for justice amid the pomp and splendor and costliness of a Temple or a Cathedral, which is built and supported by those who must often become the very target of the voice's invective.

But the prophetic minister must do just that. He must deliberately choose the "via dolorosa" - the hard road of conflict and persecution. Else he will become a tragic futility in modern life. Thoughtful men will turn away from him and will seek their light and leading elsewhere. The youth of the world will come to regard him as a mere survival, an anachronism, interesting but irrelevant.

PROPHETIC PREACHING

Abba Hillel Silver

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But the ^{prophetic minister} ~~church~~ must do just that. ^{He} ~~It~~ must deliberately choose the "via dolorosa" - the hard road of conflict and persecution. Else ~~it~~ ^{he} will become a tragic futility in modern life. Thoughtful men will turn away from ^{him} ~~it~~ and will seek their light and leading elsewhere, ~~and~~ the youth of the world will come to regard ^{him} ~~it~~ as a mere survival, an anachronism, interesting but irrelevant.



When I first graduated I followed the orthodox method of selecting a text and expounding it. Occasionally this practice led to very satisfying results. By drilling into a text I sometimes struck some rich vein of thought. But more often the text led me into unnecessary wriggling and intellectual plastering. I found myself forcing slats into mortises not intended for them. I learned that it was easier to get a suitable frame after the picture was done. And so early in my preaching career I abandoned the text for the theme. As I develop my theme illustrative texts usually present themselves in abundance.

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I find that the subjects which appeal most and "reach home" are not those which concern the great tasks of social reconstruction, but the "homely" subjects, those which relate to parents and children, to marriage and the home, to human struggle and aspiration, to the meaning of human experience and how to face life. Great preachers have been praised by admiring hosts for their courageous discussions of world problems. They have been blessed by grateful hearts for the helpful way in which they illumined for them the "homely" facts of their own lives.

But rarely do I discuss books or plays in the pulpit. I find that there is hardly one or two books a year which is legitimate subject

matter for pulpit discussion. I know that one of the greatest temptations to a minister is to capitalize the interest already created in a book or a play in order to draw people to the church, and to present a digest of it - a task requiring little effort of preparation, - garnished with a sprightly running commentary. I have sometimes succumbed to this temptation myself. But all this is book reviewing - not preaching.

I try not to be doctrinaire in my preaching, pedantic, or authoritarian; and yet I do not make the pulpit an open forum or a debating platform, where all sides of all questions are presented. That I leave for my class-room. To the pulpit I try to bring the positive, directive message, based upon convictions arrived at after the closest study of which I am capable. If I am not clear in my own mind about a certain subject I do not speak of it. A confused, uncertain guide who does not know the road himself cannot lead.

I do not try to exhort, but to interpret and to illumine. As convincingly as I can, I present the judgment of religion, as I see it, on this or that social problem, or phase of human experience. I present the accumulated life-wisdom of religion, garnered from the long centuries and the deep contemplation. The result I reach after is illumination, insight, perspective.

I spend little time in defending religion per se. I let the cogency and vitality of its message speak for it. I find that most people are not hostile to religion. They wonder whether it has anything to offer to the groping mind and the famished heart of the world.

I do my best work when I have been deeply stirred by something which I witnessed, read or experienced. A prolonged, uneventful period of quiet study and reflection will give to my sermons a refined academic air and perhaps

the polish of an essay. They will well in print, but as sermons they fail of their objective. They leave the listener unmoved and unilluminated. They are not living trees, - only lumber. When however I have been emotionally or intellectually stirred by something with which I contacted in my pastoral work or communal work, - some flash of rare human courage, or sacrifice or joy, some glint of human tragedy, something which plumbs the depths, - then there is added the touch of the living coal to the spoken word. Wings soar. There is a lift and an inrush of the spirit. A mood is created. Something happens!

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pulpit. When I began my ministry I found the task of memorizing very arduous. I spent one and sometimes two days in memorizing. Through continuous application I can now memorize my manuscript in half an hour.

I do not try to be "modern." I do not aim to impress my congregation with the latest scientific patois, or with current shibboleth-phrases, bandied about by the intelligensia. I have found that a new terminology does not necessarily imply a new truth. Many discarded and obsolescent ideas have a way of reintroducing themselves into human thought, tricked out in the youthful livery of pseudo-scientific modernity.

I do not attempt to preach to the "modern mind." The modern mind is a passing phenomenon. I try to speak of and to the eternal spirit of man. Man's basic needs and soul-hungers remain the same. There are things which are unchanging and immovable and there are values which are from everlasting to everlasting.

There are certain principles which are indispensable to any age regardless of its intellectual, political or economic contour. Whether the age is one of faith or reason or scepticism, whether its economic arrangement is capitalistic or socialistic, and its political organization democratic or autocratic, certain basic ideals are inseparable from it. Without them it cannot endure. They are the quintessential values which carry any civilization along, which conserve its best traditions, and which effect those adjustments which new conditions make necessary. Just as there are qualities of personal character which were precious in the sight of men five thousand years ago and which will hold their identical worth among men ten thousand years hence - integrity, social mindedness, self restraint, courage, loyalty - so there are social values,

intellectual and spiritual out-reachings of the human race and paramount tasks with which mankind burdened itself from the beginning and which will persist until the end.

These abiding social values are quite old fashioned. They are neither clever nor smart nor heady like a new wine. They are as unsensational as a mathematical formula, - quite like the mathematical formula to which the physicist would reduce the whole complex and exciting universe of ours.

Virgil concludes the four books of his Georgics with an epilogue in which he says: "Thus I sang of the care of fields, of cattle, and of trees, while great Caesar thundered in war by deep Euphrates, and gave a victor's law unto willing nations."

While vast political events were sweeping by him and mighty changes affecting men and nations were taking place all around him, the poet was nevertheless content to sing of the tillage, of planting, of the rearing of cattle and the keeping of bees. This was due not so much to his love of "inglorious ease," as he himself modestly suggests, but perhaps more subtly and profoundly to his intuitive surmise that here in nature, in fields, treed and cattle, in the revolving seasons, in the eternal life-hunger of living things, in birth and resurrection, - in the things which endure though all else change, - were the abiding realities of life, the things which survive the rise and fall of empires and great Caesars thundering by deep Euphrates.

It is of these enduring realities in the moral world that I try to preach. I seek to correlate the temporal with the eternal, to point out the deep channels beneath the surface eddies and the furious cross-currents of the day and the hour. I try to recapture for men something of their lost

spiritual equilibrium and perspective and to lead them into the quieter fields of thought where one may reflect not so much on what is timely as on what is timeless.

Of course the busy restless men of our generation, caught up in our social and intellectual upheavals, do not all care to listen to this type of preaching. But greater preachers than our age can boast of, found themselves sometimes voices crying in the wilderness...

I do not mean to suggest that the sermon should not touch life in the raw or that it should avoid the pressing every-day social, political or economic problems with which men are struggling. Quite the contrary. Great preaching has always had something of the volcanics of prophecy about it.

Religion has given man both a theosophy and a social program, the former as a means of adjusting himself intellectually to the universe and to ultimate reality, the latter as a means of adjusting himself most helpfully to his social environment. Metaphysically, religion concerns itself with the nature of the universe and the purpose of existence. Socially, religion concerns itself with the establishment of the most perfect order of society. Prophecy, while deriving its propulsion from the metaphysics of religion, was largely devoted to its social program. The preacher who makes this social program central in his public ministry is of the prophetic school, and his voice will be added to the mighty chorus of voices whose power moved the world.

Prophetic preaching concerns itself primarily with the reconstruction of society after an ideal pattern of social righteousness. It derives its mandate from an overwhelming faith in a righteous God. To do justice and to love mercy is to worship him. To be holy in thought and speech is to dwell

in his presence. Neither cult nor ritual nor formal prayer nor sacred shrine is the channel of divine communion, but the passionate aspiration toward moral perfection. The preacher who holds these truths foremost in his preaching moves in the noble tradition of ancient prophecy.

The prophetic preacher will be driven by the dynamics of such a faith to a morality of battle and struggle.

Wherever palpable wrong exists, wherever men suffer from the bitter inequalities of our economic order there the minister's voice should be heard admonishing, chastising, counseling, and pointing the way to concrete and specific measures for relief and amelioration. Unless we speak fearlessly and at decisive moments, of the social wrongs which persist in our society, of the evils of our profit system, of exploitation, of economic insecurity, of unemployment, of the rights of labor to organization and to a fuller share in the social goods and of the moral drag of wealth; unless we denounce corruption in government and in high places we are faithless shepherds indeed, or rhetoricians hurling ourselves at nothing.

But always I try to bear in mind, hard though it often is, that my function is that of teacher and guide, not agitator or propagandist. My weapons can not be those of hate or class struggle. Occasionally the hot, impatient word will leap to the lips. Occasionally the hand will reach for the scorpion whip at the sight of outrageous wrong. But I force myself to remember that in the spiritual order it is the law of kindness which yields the ultimate victory. Our task is to persuade through reason and through love, and our appeal is not to class interest but to justice and compassion and human solidarity.

We work with an institution and through an institution, and, therefore, we must learn the bitter lesson of patience and practice it. There is a desperate gravitational down-pull to every organization and he who presumes to be a leader within an organization must be content to moderate his pace to its slow pedestrian tempo. Else he gets outside the range of vision of those whom he wishes to lead, and is no longer of any service to them. A living thing is called an organism because it is organized. Life depends upon organization. An ideal becomes a reality when it functions through an organization.

The prophets of old were not covenanted ministers of specific groups of people, who turned to them for daily guidance and instruction. They were free, knight-errants of the spirit, who had no fixed pulpits and served no congregations, and instructed no youth. They had no fixed abode and no shrine which they called their own. The modern minister is more of the priest or the sage than the prophet. He is head of an historic institution. And by that very token he can not roam as free as his spirit would wish. Thus while heroic martyrdom frequently was the lot of the prophet - a martyrdom never-the-less real, if not as heroic awaits the true priest of men who must build patiently from within and attempt a social reconstruction, piece-meal, and against terrific institutional resistance. The Rabbis of old had the temerity however, to maintain that "The Sage is to be preferred to the prophet."

I find it very difficult to define more sharply this thought of mine. It is very hard to draw the line between leadership and propaganda, between education and agitation, and I am aware that pusillanimity and worldliness often hide themselves behind this distinction. But

I am sure that the spiritual man will quickly detect the difference and will understand.

Some will say that this program which I have outlined is platitudinous. They will charge it with being "gloriously safe." It is safe only as dynamite is safe, before the spark is applied to it. It may remain just a medley of fine phrases, having an overtone of sanctity. Or it may become a cleansing whirlwind let loose upon the world. It depends entirely upon the man and the sincerity with which he subscribes to this program. Some will use it as a cloak for hypocrisy and spiritual double-dealing. For others, it will be an irresistible call to action, to leadership and to sacrifice. Platitudes are truths which all men accept and - ignore. They cease to be platitudes and become alarming battle-cries as soon as men cease to ignore them.

I always know when I have preached well; not through the expressed reactions of those in the pew - though these are, by and large, a fairly reliable index, - but through my own reactions. When I have given utterance to something very close to me, emanating from my inner self, to something necessary and vital, which I feel to be, in substance and manner, in the main stream of the great religious traditions, I know that I have preached well.

When I first graduated I followed the orthodox method of selecting a text and expounding it. Occasionally this practice led to very satisfying results. By drilling into a text I sometimes struck some rich vein of thought. But more often the text led me into unnecessary wriggling and intellectual plastering. I found myself forcing slats into mortices not intended for them. I learned that it was easier to get a suitable frame after the picture was done. And so early in my preaching career I abandoned the text for the theme. As I develop my theme illustrative texts usually present themselves in abundance.

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Begin I find that the subjects which appeal most and "reach home" are not those which concern the great tasks of social reconstruction, but the "homely" subjects, those which relate to parents and children, to marriage and the home, to human struggle and aspiration, to the meaning of human experience and how to face life. Great preachers have been praised by admiring hosts for their courageous discussions of world problems. They have been blessed by grateful hearts for the helpful way in which they illumined for them the "homely" facts of their own lives. — *stop*

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decisive moments, of the social wrongs which ^{in our society} ~~still~~ persist, ~~of~~ the evils of our profit system, ^{of exploitation}, of economic insecurity, of unemployment, of the rights of labor to organization and to a fuller share in the social ^{and of the moral drag of wealth} goods; unless we denounce corruption in government and in high places we are faithless shepherds indeed. ^{stop or rhetoricians hurrying ourselves}

^{at nothing} But always I try to bear in mind, hard though it often is, that my function is that of teacher and guide, not agitator or propagandist. My weapons can not be those of hate or class struggle. Occasionally the hot, impatient word will leap to the lips. Occasionally the hand will reach for the scorpion whip at the sight of outrageous wrong. But I force myself to remember that in the spiritual order ^{it is the law of kindness which} yields the ultimate victory. Our task is to persuade through reason and through love, and our appeal is not to class interest but to justice and compassion and human solidarity.

I find it very difficult to define more sharply this thought of mine. It is very hard to draw the line between leadership and propaganda, between education and agitation, ~~and~~ ^{hide} and I am aware that passillanimity and worldliness often ~~elude~~ ^{hide} themselves behind this ^{injustice} distinction. But I am sure that the spiritual man will quickly detect the difference and will understand. ^{stop}

I always know when I have preached well; not through the expressed reactions of those in the pew—though these are, by and large, a fairly reliable index,—but through my own reactions. When I have given utterance to something very close to me, emanating from my inner self, to something necessary and vital, which I feel to be, in substance and manner, in the main stream of the great religious tradition, I know that I have preached well.

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