The PREACHER *and* PREACHING

REVIVING THE ART

Edited by

SAMUEL T. LOGAN JR.

The Preacher and Preaching

Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century

Edited by
Samuel T. Logan, Jr.

Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company
Phillipsburg, New Jersey

Dedicated to the memory of
Samuel T. Logan
September 24, 1910 – August 21, 1985
"He who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23).

Paperback edition released 2011

Manufactured in the United States of America

The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition as follows:
Main entry under title:

The preacher and preaching.

Includes bibliographical references.
1. Preaching—Addresses, essays, lectures.
2. Clergy—Office—Addresses, essays, lectures.
I. Logan, Samuel T., 1943—
BV4222.P645 1986 251 85-32558

ISBN-10: 0-87552-294-7
ISBN-13: 978-0-87552-294-4

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-59638-396-8

Published in Great Britain as:
Preaching: The Preacher and Preaching in the Twentieth Century
by Evangelical Press, 16/18 High Street, Welwyn, Hertfordshire AL6 9EQ

ISBN 0-85234-230-6

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data available

Contents

Foreword

In 1980, two Westminster Theological Seminary students, Mr. James Pratt and Mr. Richard Craven, came into my office at the seminary to share an idea they had for a book on preaching. They had become convinced that the Reformed pulpit in the twentieth century was neglecting its incredibly rich heritage and failing to provide the kind of homiletical leadership it both could and should. Because of my own interest in the preaching of the Puritans and especially in the preaching of Jonathan Edwards, I immediately concurred with their concern.

We very quickly recognized the need to involve in our discussions someone with more expertise in the field, and we therefore approached Dr. Robert Godfrey, Professor of Church History at Westminster, who was at that time teaching a course entitled "The History of Rhetoric." Dr. Godfrey graciously consented to join us, and together we mapped out the project that has become the present book.

Our first step was to identify and contact approximately thirty leading Reformed pastors and homiletical scholars around the world and to ask them what they thought were the primary deficiencies of the contemporary Reformed pulpit. Most of those whom we wrote responded with excellent analyses and suggestions.

The four of us then spent a great deal of time sifting through the responses we received and trying to identify patterns within those responses. We ultimately came up with the categories that are the topics covered in each of the chapters in this volume.

Our next step was to identify individuals who were, in our

opinion, best qualified to write on the topics we had identified. After a number of months of writing back and forth, we received commitments from the various individuals whom we had identified. Of course, along the way, some of those whom we initially asked to write chapters declined, and others who at first agreed to write chapters later decided they would be unable to do so. Nevertheless, the final lineup of authors is remarkably close to that with which we began.

The various manuscripts came in over a period of two years, and by June of 1984, almost all of them were in hand. I had been granted a study leave from Westminster from July 1, 1984, through January 31, 1985, and I had determined, for a wide variety of reasons, to spend that study leave at Tyndale House in Cambridge, England. I therefore took all of the manuscripts with me and spent approximately two months of the study leave going over the manuscripts line by line, doing the difficult work of editing. I had a unique opportunity, consequently, to be the first to read this book and also to be the only one to see all of the excellent material that, for reasons of space and coverage, had to be edited out of the original manuscripts. I learned a tremendous amount as I read and edited, and I continue to pray fervently that the Lord will use these chapters to achieve the goal that Mr. Craven, Mr. Pratt, Dr. Godfrey, and I had originally envisioned—the strengthening of Reformed preaching to the honor and glory of the name of Jesus.

I do want to express my professional appreciation to each of the authors whose work is contained in this volume for his labors on this project. I certainly want to thank James Pratt and Richard Craven for suggesting the project and Dr. Robert Godfrey for his wisdom as we put it together.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the faculty and the board of trustees of Westminster Theological Seminary for granting to me the study leave that made possible the editing of this book. Thanks also are due to Dr. George Fuller, Miss Dorothy Krieke, Mrs. Viola Braun, Mr. Al Groves, and many others here at Westminster for covering the wide variety of my administrative responsi-

bilities while I was on leave. Mrs. Billie Goodenough and Mrs. Shawna Jones deserve everyone's gratitude for their meticulous work in typing and retyping all of this material.

The opportunity to work at Tyndale House in Cambridge was a marvelous blessing in so many ways. As a center of evangelical Christian scholarship, Tyndale House provides both superb facilities for research and writing and marvelous Christian fellowship and support. My family and I deeply appreciated all that we received there, and I would extend my special thanks to Dr. Murray Harris, Warden of Tyndale House, and to Rev. Iain Hodgins, Bursar of Tyndale House.

On a more personal level, I would like publicly to thank my mother and my father for their Christian nurture, for their unfailing support, and for their continuing prayers. From them I have learned, among many other things, what it means to subsume all of my endeavors under the final goal of advancing the kingdom of Jesus Christ—and that is, of course, also the proper goal of biblical preaching.

Finally, my deepest appreciation goes to Sue and to Taly and to Eric. You made the time in Cambridge as delightful as it was productive. It's the greatest of joys to be involved in the work of Christ's kingdom with the three of you! *Merci beaucoup!*

Samuel T. Logan, Jr.
Academic Dean
Westminster Theological Seminary

Contributors

Jay E. Adams graduated from Johns Hopkins University and earned the B.D. from Reformed Episcopal Seminary, the S.T.M. from the Temple University School of Practical Theology, and the Ph.D. from the University of Missouri. Dr. Adams has pastored churches in western Pennsylvania and in New Jersey. For three years he was on the faculty of the University of Missouri. At present he is the Director of Advanced Studies at Westminster Theological Seminary in California and Visiting Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He also serves as Dean of the Institute of Pastoral Studies at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation located in Philadelphia. Dr. Adams is a frequent lecturer at ministerial and Bible conferences and the author of many books and articles, among them *Competent to Counsel* and *The Christian Counselor's Manual.*

John F. Bettler is a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary and Chicago Theological Seminary where he received his doctorate in Pastoral Counseling. As Director of the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation he comes into contact daily with the real struggles people experience in living the Christian life. As Adjunct Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, he brings that "life" dimension to his classes in homiletics. He maintains a full conference schedule, and his preaching is marked by practical, "how to" application of the Scriptures.

James Montgomery Boice is pastor of Philadelphia's historic Tenth Presbyterian Church, which he has served since 1968, and he is speaker on the international radio broadcast "The Bible Study Hour." He holds degrees from Harvard University (A.B.), Princeton Theological Seminary (B.D.), the University of Basel, Switzerland (D.Theol.), and Reformed Episcopal Seminary (D.D.). He is the chairman of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy and the chairman and founder of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. He is the author of more than thirty books on biblical theology.

Edmund P. Clowney is a graduate of Wheaton College and received the B.D. from Westminster Theological Seminary and the S.T.M. from Yale Divinity School. The Doctor of Divinity degree was conferred upon him by Wheaton College. He has served the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Illinois and New Jersey and as editor of the Christian Education Committee. From his appointment in 1952 as Lecturer in Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, he went on to serve as Professor of Practical Theology, Acting Dean of the Faculty, and Dean of Academic Affairs. Dr. Clowney was inaugurated as President of Westminster Seminary in 1966 and held that position until his retirement in 1982. He has authored numerous journal articles and several books, including *Called to the Ministry*. He and his wife Jean now reside in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he is Associate Pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church.

Richard M. Craven is the pastor of the Gettysburg Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. He received his M.Div. from Westminster Theological Seminary and is presently a Ph.D. candidate in hermeneutics and biblical interpretation at the seminary.

Lester De Koster was Professor of Speech at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1947–69. He was Chairman of the Department of Speech for eleven of those years and Director of the Library for both Calvin College and Seminary from 1951–69.

For the following eleven years Mr. De Koster was Editor of *The Banner*. He is co-owner, author, and Editor of the Christian's Library Press. He has co-authored six titles, has edited *Speaking in Public*, and is the author of *Communism and Christian Faith*, *Vocabulary of Communism*, and *How to Read the Bible*.

David A. Dombek is a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary (B.D., 1972), Philadelphia. He is an actor, director, speech teacher, and drama coach. He has served as a lector in a Presbyterian church. Now a member in the Christian Reformed Church, he occasionally reads with his pastor a dramatic Scripture passage as a dialogue. Living in the Mid-West, he and his wife, Ellen, teach their children at home. He also writes, preaches, and teaches in his church's Sunday school.

Sinclair B. Ferguson is a native of Scotland where he received both his M.A. and his Ph.D. at the University of Aberdeen. He was in the pastoral ministry from 1971–82, most recently at St. George's Tron in Glasgow. He is an Assistant Editor of the Banner of Truth and his numerous books include *Discovering God's Will*, *Grow in Grace*, and *Know Your Christian Life*. Since 1982, Dr. Ferguson has been Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary. He and his wife Dorothy have four children.

W. Robert Godfrey is Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California. He received the A.B., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees from Stanford University and the M.Div. degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He has taught at Westminster (in Pennsylvania and in California) for eleven years. He is a minister in the Christian Reformed Church. He has contributed to *John Calvin: His Influence on the Western World*, *Scripture and Truth*, and *Discord, Dialogue and Concord*. He co-edited and contributed to *Through Christ's Word*, and he edited the *Westminster Theological Journal* for several years. He is married and has three children.

Erroll Hulse graduated with a degree in architecture from Pretoria University, before studying at London Bible College. He worked for the Banner of Truth Trust during its formative years and was pastor of the Baptist Church in Sussex for twenty-three years, during which time it grew from one member into a large and active fellowship. He has written several books including *The Believer's Experience.* From 1970 he has served as Editor of the bimonthly magazine *Reformation Today.* Mr. Hulse has been involved in planting several churches and has been instrumental in establishing ministers' conferences in Britain and abroad. He is at present the minister of Belvidere Road Church, Liverpool. He is married and has four children.

Glen C. Knecht, born in Ogdensburg, New York, graduated from Maryville College in Tennessee, attended Fuller Theological Seminary, and received the B.D. and Th.M. degrees from Princeton Theological Seminary. He also did additional postgraduate study at Conwell School of Theology, Pennsylvania. From 1957 to 1962 he was a missionary evangelist in Tabriz, Iran. He has held pastorates in Maryland and Pennsylvania and since 1983 has been senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, South Carolina. He and his wife, Betty Jane, have six children and three grandchildren. In addition to his preaching and pastoral responsibilities, he is on the board of Multiple Sclerosis for his area and is a member of the Steering Committee for CADRE (Citizens Advocating Decency and Revival of Ethics) for Richland and Lexington Counties.

Samuel T. Logan, Jr., a native of Vicksburg, Mississippi, received his B.A. from Princeton University, his M.Div. from Westminster Theological Seminary, and his Ph.D. from Emory University. He taught for nine years at Barrington College (now merged with Gordon College) and is currently Academic Dean and Associate Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary. He is an ordained minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and did pastoral work in Philadelphia, Penn-

sylvania, in Scottdale, Georgia, and in Lafayette, New Jersey. He is married and has two sons.

Donald Macleod was born on the Island of Lewis off the Northwest coast of Scotland in November of 1940. After studying at the University of Glasgow and the Free Church College of Edinburg, he was ordained to the ministry of the Free Church of Scotland in 1964. From 1964 until 1978, he served in two pastoral charges, including ten years in the city of Glasgow, where he preached five times each week. In 1978, he was appointed as Professor of Systematic Theology at the Free Church College. Since 1977, he has served as Editor of *The Monthly Record* of the Free Church of Scotland.

Joel Nederhood has been a radio pastor since December 1960 for the Christian Reformed Church and has recently also been the preacher and host for the Faith 20 telecast of the Christian Reformed Church. He also preaches regularly in churches and is a conference speaker. He has written *The Church's Mission and the Educated American, God Is Too Much, The Holy Triangle,* and *Promises, Promises, Promises,* in addition to chapters that have appeared in other books and in magazines. He serves as the Director of Ministries of The Back to God Hour of the Christian Reformed Church.

James I. Packer was born in Gloucestershire, England, and educated at Oxford University, receiving degrees in classics and theology (D.Phil., 1954). Ordained in 1952, he served as assistant minister at St. John's Church of England, Birmingham and then became Senior Tutor at Tyndale Hall, an Anglican seminary, from 1955 to 1961. After nine years as Warden of Latimer House, an Anglican evangelical study center in Oxford, he returned to Bristol to become Principal of Tyndale Hall. When Tyndale Hall merged with two other evangelical colleges to become Trinity College, Dr. Packer became Associate Principal. Since 1979 he has been Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Regent College, Vancouver. Married and with three children, Dr. Packer

has preached and lectured widely in Great Britain and America, and is a frequent contributor to theological periodicals. He was an editor of the *New Bible Dictionary* and *The Bible Almanac*. Among his writings are *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, Knowing God, Beyond the Battle for the Bible,* and *Keep in Step with the Spirit.*

James M. Pratt received his Master of Divinity degree from Westminster Theological Seminary. He is ordained to the ministry and is presently serving the First Baptist Church of Torrance, California, as Minister of Youth and Discipleship.

R. C. Sproul received the B.A. from Westminster College, the B.D. from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, the Drs. from the Free University of Amsterdam and the Litt.D. from Geneva College. He is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America. As President and Founder of Ligonier Ministries in Orlando, Florida, he has in view a modern Christian Reformation that penetrates individual lives and, ultimately, all of society. Dr. Sproul is Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, and recently served as President of the Executive Committee of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. He is known for his lectures and seminars and is the author of fourteen books, including *In Search of Dignity, Classical Apologetics,* and *The Holiness of God.*

Geoffrey Thomas completed his studies at University College of Wales, Cardiff, and at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. A Welshman with a Welsh-speaking wife and three daughters, he has been minister since 1965 at Alfred Place Baptist Church (Independent), Aberystwyth, a university town on the mid-Wales coast. He has preached through more than twenty books of the Bible and generations of university students have attended his preaching. He is an Assistant Editor of the Banner of Truth and the present Chairman of the Grace Baptist Assembly Organizing Committee. During his ministry in Aberystwyth, a Christian Book Shop and a home for the mentally handicapped

have been opened to the town. Geoff Thomas is a conference speaker much in demand in many parts of the world.

J. Peter Vosteen received the B.A. degree from The College of Wooster in Ohio and the M.Div. from Westminster Theological Seminary, before going on for further graduate study in New Testament at Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Ordained to the gospel ministry by the United Presbyterian Church of North America, he entered the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in 1959, serving seven congregations in both the United States and Canada. He is currently serving as home missionary and pastor in Boise, Idaho and is frequently called on to conduct seminars and retreats.

Gwyn Walters, Professor of Ministry at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts, graduated B.A., B.D. from the University of Wales, and Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh. Prior to his pastoring experience in Scotland, Wales, and the United States, he was exposed to the rich heritage of Scottish and Welsh preaching. He has preached in Europe, the Middle and Far East, and North America, and has taught preaching in several countries but mainly, and for nearly thirty years, at Gordon-Conwell. He served as President of the Academy of Homiletics.

Introduction: Why Preach?

J. I. Packer

By their questions, it has been said, you shall know them. Honest questions reveal what ignorance, doubt, fears, uncertainties, prejudices, and preconceptions lie within the questioner's mind. By asking questions, even more than by answering them, we lay ourselves open to each other and thereby become (to use the cant word) vulnerable. (That is why some people never ask questions! But those who never ask anything never learn anything either, so the unquestioning attitude is not really one to commend.) I take the question "Why preach?" on which I have been asked to write, to be an honest question, expressing honest uncertainty as to whether there is a viable rationale for pulpit work in our time. I blame no one for raising the question—indeed, I see many reasons why thoughtful people might well raise it—and I shall try to treat it as seriously, and respond to it as honestly, as I take it to be put.

Whose question is it, though? Does it come from a discouraged preacher? or from a weary listener? or from a pastoral organizer who wants more time for other things, and grudges hours earmarked for sermon preparation? or from a student of communication theory, who doubts whether pulpit monologue can ever convey as much as dialogue or discussion, or an audio-visual film presentation or TV? Perhaps the question comes from all four, and perhaps it does not matter for my present purpose which it comes from; for whoever voices it is putting into words real disillusionment with the medium and real doubt about the worthwhileness of the activity. Such disillusionment is, as we all know,

widespread nowadays, and I am happy to acknowledge and accept it as the starting place for a discussion that, if God helps, will have a pastoral as well as a theological thrust. Throughout this essay I shall have all four sorts of disillusioned folk particularly in mind.

Like my fellow-contributors to this book, I propose to defend preaching. But lest you imagine that I am doing this simply to order, I begin with a personal statement. In the following pages I shall magnify and glorify the preaching ministry, not because I have been asked to (though indeed I have), nor because, as a spokesman for the Reformed heritage, I think I ought to (though I certainly do), but because preaching is of the very essence of the corporate phenomenon called Christianity as I understand it. By that I mean that Christianity, on earth as in heaven, is (I echo I John 1:4) fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, and the preaching of God's Word in the power of God's Spirit is the activity that (I echo Isa. 64:1 and John 14:21–23) brings the Father and the Son down from heaven to dwell with men. I know this, for I have experienced it.

For several months during 1948 and 1949 I sat under the Sunday evening ministry of the late D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. It seems to me in retrospect that all I have ever known about preaching was given me in those days, though I could not then have put it into words as I can now. What I received then still shows me what to look and hope and pray for in listening, and what to aim at and pray for in my own preaching. And though I have read and heard much since those days, I cannot think of anything I perceive about preaching now that did not at least begin to become clear to me at that time. When I say, as frequently I catch myself doing, that preaching is caught more than it is taught, it is partly of my own discoveries during that period that I am thinking. I do not, of course, mean that I regard Dr. Lloyd-Jones as the only preacher I ever heard do it right; over the past generation I have been privileged to hear many other real preachers really preaching. I am only saying that it was Dr. Lloyd-Jones's ministry that under God gave me my standards in this matter. And standards

are needed, for not all preaching is good preaching by any means. I suppose that over the years I have heard as much bad preaching as the next man and probably done as much myself as any clergyman you would like to name. Nonetheless, having observed how preaching is conceived in Scripture, and having experienced preaching of a very high order, I continue to believe in preaching and to maintain that there is no substitute for it, and no power or stature or sustained vision or close fellowship with God in the church without it. Also, I constantly maintain that if today's quest for renewal is not, along with its other concerns, a quest for true preaching, it will prove shallow and barren. You see, then, where I am coming from as I take up the question "Why preach?"

How is it, I wonder, that so few seem to believe in preaching as I do? I can think of several reasons why that might be, and to list them will be a good way of opening my subject.

First, *there has been much nonpreaching in our pulpits.* Not every discourse that fills the appointed 20- or 30-minute slot in public worship is actual preaching, however much it is called by that name. Sermons (Latin, *sermones,* "speeches") are often composed and delivered on wrong principles. Thus, if they fail to open Scripture or they expound it without applying it, or if they are no more than lectures aimed at informing the mind or addresses seeking only to focus the present self-awareness of the listening group, or if they are delivered as statements of the preacher's opinion rather than as messages from God, or if their lines of thought do not require listeners to change in any way, they fall short of being preaching, just as they would if they were so random and confused that no one could tell what the speaker was saying. It is often said, and truly, that sermons must teach, and the current level of knowledge (ignorance, rather) in the Christian world is such that the need for sermons that teach cannot be questioned for one moment. But preaching is essentially teaching *plus* application (invitation, direction, summons); where the *plus* is lacking something less than preaching occurs. And many in the church have never experienced preaching in this full biblical sense of the word.

Second, *topical preaching has become a general rule, at least in North America.* Sermons explore announced themes rather than biblical passages. Why is this? Partly, I suppose, to make preaching appear interesting and important in an age that has largely lost interest in the pulpit; partly, no doubt, to make the sermon sound different from what goes on in the Bible class before public worship starts; partly, too, because many topical preachers (not all) do not trust their Bible enough to let it speak its own message through their lips. Whatever the reason, however, the results are unhealthy. In a topical sermon the text is reduced to a peg on which the speaker hangs his line of thought; the shape and thrust of the message reflect his own best notions of what is good for people rather than being determined by the text itself. But the only authority that his sermon can then have is the human authority of a knowledgeable person speaking with emphasis and perhaps raising his voice. In my view topical discourses of this kind, no matter how biblical their component parts, cannot but fall short of being preaching in the full sense of that word, just because their biblical content is made to appear as part of the speaker's own wisdom. The authority of God revealed is thus resolved into that of religious expertise. That destroys the very idea of Christian preaching, which excludes the thought of speaking for the Bible and insists that the Bible must be allowed to speak for itself in and through the speaker's words. Granted, topical discourses may become real preaching if the speaker settles down to letting this happen, but many topical preachers never discipline themselves to become mouthpieces for messages from biblical texts at all. And many in the churches have only ever been exposed to topical preaching of the sort that I have described.

Third, *low expectations are self-fulfilling.* Most modern hearers have never been taught to expect much from sermons, and their habit is to relax at sermon time and wait to see if anything that the speaker says will interest them—"grab them," as they might put it. Today's congregations and today's preachers seem to be mostly at one in neither asking nor expecting that God will come

to meet His people in the preaching, and so it is no wonder that this does not often happen. Just as it takes two to tango, so ordinarily it takes both an expectant congregation and a preacher who knows what he is about to make an authentic preaching occasion. A century ago and earlier, in Reformed circles in Britain (I cannot vouch for America), the common question to a person returning from a service would be, how he or she "got on" under the momentous divine influence of the preaching of the Word; nowadays, however, on both sides of the Atlantic, the question more commonly asked is how the preacher "got on" in what is now viewed as his stated pulpit performance. This shift of interest and perspective is a clear witness to the way in which, from being venerated as an approach by God, searching and stirring our souls, preaching has come to be viewed as a human endeavor to please, so that critical detachment now takes the place of open-hearted expectation when preaching is attempted. The direct result of our having become thus cool and blasé about preaching is that we look for little to happen through sermons, and we should not wonder that God deals with us according to our unbelief.

Fourth, *the current cult of spontaneity militates against preaching.* It is characteristic of some of the liveliest Christian groups today to treat what one can only call crudeness as a sign of sincerity, whether in folk-style songs with folk-style lyrics or in rhapsodic extempore prayer marked by earnest incoherence or in a loose and seemingly under-prepared type of preaching in which raw and clumsy rhetoric matches intellectual imprecision. Charismatic "prophecy" (unpremeditated applicatory speech, uttered in God's name) is an extreme form of this. But where interest centers upon spontaneity rather than substance, and passion in speakers is valued above preparation, true preaching must of necessity languish. Here is a further reason why some earnest Christians have no experience, nor suspicion, of its power.

Fifth, *the current concentration on liturgy militates against preaching.* This is noticeable not only in theologically vague and pluralistic sectors of Protestantism, where it might have been expected

(since nature abhors a vacuum), but among evangelicals too. One of the striking movements of our time is the flow of evangelicals, nurtured as they feel in a world of religious individualism and kitsch, into churches where the austere theocentrism of set liturgies, harking back to patristic models, still survives. Many of them become Episcopalians, and I, an Episcopalian by upbringing and judgment, have no complaint about that. But it saddens me to observe that this liturgical interest, which has led them to leave churches that highlighted the ministry of the Word, seems to have elbowed all concern about preaching out of their minds. It is as if they were saying, "We know quite enough about preaching; we have had a bellyful of it, enough to last us all our lives; now, thankfully, we turn from all that to the world of ceremony and sacrament." But that attitude involves a false antithesis, for the genuine Reformed and Episcopal, not to say biblical, way is the way of gospel-*and*-liturgy, word-*and*-sacrament—the way that informs you in effect that you are free to hold as high a doctrine of the sacrament, the visible Word, as you like, provided that your doctrine of and expectation from the preached Word remain higher. But, generally speaking, the mind set of these refugees from nonliturgical Christendom subordinates preaching to congregational enactment of worship (of which preaching is clearly not thought to be a major part), and thus reduces its importance and lowers expectations with regard to it. Here is yet another reason why some Christians today do not share the high view of preaching that I myself uphold.

Sixth, *the power of speech to communicate significance has become suspect.* In the modern West, cool, dead-pan statements of fact are as much as is acceptable; any form of oratory, rhetoric, or dramatic emphasis to show the weight and significance of stated facts tends to alienate rather than convince. That entire dimension of public speech is nowadays felt to be murky and discreditable. This is largely due to the influence of the media, on which strong feeling both looks and sounds hysterical and artificial, and a calm and chatty intimacy is the secret of success. Part of that influence, too, is the numbing of emotional responsiveness by the constant

parade of trauma and horror in news bulletins and programs on current affairs. Our sensibilities get dulled by over-stimulus; also, in self-defense against attempts to harrow our feelings, we cultivate a sense of noninvolvement; and we end up unable to believe that anything told us or shown us matters very much at all. One, two, three, and four centuries ago, a preacher could use words for forty or sixty minutes together, or longer in special cases, to set forth the greatness of God the King, of Christ the Savior, of the soul, of eternity, and of the issues of personal destiny that were actually being settled at that moment by reactions to what was being said, and the hearers would listen empathetically and believe him. Today such a response would be thought naive, and most folk would at an early stage become inwardly aloof from, and perhaps hostile to, what the preacher was doing, out of caution lest they be "conned" by a clever man putting on an act.

In the same sense in which Jonathan Edwards was a seventeenth-century Puritan born out of due time, Dr. Lloyd-Jones was a nineteenth-century preacher born late, and I cannot be thankful enough that I was privileged to hear him doing the old thing, despite the fact that, as he knew, some of his hearers thought of his preaching as just an entertaining performance, and others found his pulpit passion distasteful, maintaining throughout his thirty-year ministry at London's Westminster Chapel a preference for the cooler communicator who had preceded him. (I knew the congregation well enough to verify this.) But few preachers in my experience have had either the resources or (more important) the resolve to swim against the stream of suspicion and to follow the old paths at this point, and hence many in the churches never hear preachers deliberately and systematically use words to create a sense of the greatness and weight of spiritual issues. This also is a reason why my estimate of preaching is a minority view in today's Christian world, and why it is so widely held that other modes of Christian instruction are as good, if not better.

But what is preaching? My general view will have emerged already, but a full formal analysis seems desirable at this stage, before we attempt to go further.

First, then, a negative point. Preaching, I urge, should be defined functionally and theologically rather than institutionally and sociologically: that is, it should be defined in terms of what essentially is being done, and why, rather than of where and when it happens, and what corporate expectations it fulfils. The New Testament leads us to think in these terms, using one of its two main words for preach (*euaggelizomai*: literally, "tell good news") not only of Paul addressing a synagogue congregation at Pisidian Antioch and groups gathered in the marketplace at Athens, but also of Philip sitting in a chariot speaking of Jesus to its one occupant (Acts 13:32; 17:18; 8:35). Much modern criticism of preaching arises from observations of sermonizing in churches: hence the frequent wisecracks about the pulpit as a coward's castle, and the preacher as standing six feet about contradiction, and resentful references to preaching *at* rather than *to* the hearers. Of course, most attempts at preaching do take place in church buildings, but that is not the point. What I am urging here is that preaching should be conceived as an achievement in communication. Regarding sermons, my point is that once preaching is defined in this functional and theological way, the performances that draw such comments as I cited will be seen not to be good preaching, and perhaps not to qualify as preaching at all.

Putting the matter positively, I define preaching as verbal communication of which the following things are true:

1. Its *content* is God's message to man, presented as such. For the evangelical, this means that the source of what is said will be the Bible, and furthermore that a text will be taken (a verse, a part of a verse, or a group of verses), and the truth or truths presented will be, as the Westminster Directory for Public Worship put it, "contained in or grounded on that text, that the hearers may discern how God teacheth it from thence." The preacher will take care to make clear that what he offers is not his own ideas, but God's message from God's book, and will see it as his task not to talk for his text, but to let the text talk through him.

Also, as one charged, like Paul, to declare "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:26–27)—that is, all that God does for mankind and all that He requires in response—the evangelical preacher will relate the specific content of all his messages to Christ, His mediation, His cross and resurrection, and His gift of new life to those who trust Him (as Edmund Clowney points out in his chapter). In that sense, the preacher will imitate Paul, who when he visited Corinth (and everywhere else, for that matter, *pace* some wayward theories to the contrary), "resolved to know nothing . . . except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). That does not mean, of course, that the evangelical preacher will harp all the time on the bare fact of the crucifixion. It means, rather, that he will use all lines of biblical thought to illuminate the meaning of that fact; and he will never let his exposition of anything in Scripture get detached from, and so appear as unrelated to, Calvary's cross and the redemption that was wrought there; and in this way he will sustain a Christ-centered, cross-oriented preaching ministry year in and year out, with an evangelistic as well as a pastoral thrust.

2. The *purpose* of preaching is to inform, persuade, and call forth an appropriate response to the God whose message and instruction are being delivered. The response will consist of repentance, faith, obedience, love, effort, hope, fear, zeal, joy, praise, prayer, or some blend of these (see Samuel Logan's discussion of "The Phenomenology of Preaching"). The purpose of preaching is not to stir people to action while bypassing their minds, so that they never see what reason God gives them for doing what the preacher requires of them (that is manipulation); nor is the purpose to stock people's minds with truth, no matter how vital and clear, which then lies fallow and does not become the seed-bed and source of changed lives (that is academicism). The purpose is, rather, to reproduce, under God, the state of affairs that Paul described when he wrote to the Romans, "You wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted" (Rom. 6:17). The teaching is the testimony, command, and promise of God. The preacher entrusts his hearers to it by begging them to

respond to it and assuring them that God will fulfil His promises to them as they do so. When they wholeheartedly obey, he gains his goal.

3. The *perspective* of preaching is always applicatory (as John Bettler argues later in this volume). This point is an extension of the last. As preaching is God-centered in its viewpoint and Christ-centered in its substance, so it is life-centered in its focus and life-changing in its thrust. Preaching is the practical communication of truth about God as it bears on our present existence. Neither statements of Bible doctrine nor talk about Christian experience alone is preaching, not even if the speakers get excited, emphatic, and dogmatic, and bang the table to make their points. Religious speech only becomes preaching when, first, its theme is Bible truth, or rather, the God of Scripture, in the hearers' lives—when, in other words, it is about the Father, Son, and Spirit invading, inverting, illuminating, integrating, and impelling us, and about ourselves as thereby addressed, accused, acquitted, accepted, assured, and allured—and when, second, the discourse debouches in practical biblical exhortation, summoning us to be different in some spiritually significant way and to remain different whatever pressure is put on us to give in to unspiritual ways once more (Rom. 12:1–2).

The idea of practical biblical exhortation requires some comment. The traditional view was that biblical instruction and narrative reveal and illustrate general truths about God and man, and about the kinds of attitude and conduct that God loves and rewards on the one hand, and hates and judges on the other. The interpreter's task was then to distil those general principles out of the historical and cultural specifics of each passage and to reapply them to the modern world, on the assumption that whatever else has changed, God and man, sin and godliness, have not. The method of moving from what the text meant as the writer's message to his envisaged readership to what it means for us today was by principled rational analysis—a discipline requiring historical and exegetical finesse of the kind displayed in critical commentaries, plus light from the Holy Spirit for discerning the spiritual

roots of modern life and so making a contemporary application of truth that goes to the modern heart. Startlingly, it appears that the classic account of this discipline is John Owen's *Causes, Ways, and Means, of understanding the Mind of God, as revealed in his Word, with Assurance therein: and a Declaration of the Perspicuity of the Scriptures, with the external Means of the Interpretation of them*, a work published in 1678. Though later books have of course updated and expanded many of Owen's points, none seems to cover all his ground. But however that may be, it is a matter of demonstrable fact that this is how Reformed and evangelical preachers have reached their practical biblical exhortations for more than 400 years, and indeed how they still do.

But since Barth it has become common to deny that Scripture reveals or embodies general principles about God's will for and ways with His human creatures, and to affirm instead that God speaks a new word directly through the biblical text to each new situation. On this view, the interpreter's task is (putting it in our post-Barthian jargon) to "listen to" and "wrestle with" passages till he feels that some "insight" triggered by them has become clear to him; then he should relay that insight as "prophetically" as he can. But with the discipline of identifying and correlating general principles removed, as this view removes it, and the analogy of Scripture (that is, its internal consistency, as the teaching of God) disregarded or denied, as it usually is by this school of thought, imprecision, pluralism, and relativism flood in whenever the attempt is made to determine what God is saying at the present time, and there is no way to keep them out. Here is not the place to analyze or critique this phenomenon in detail; suffice it to say that it is not at all what I have in mind when I speak of applicatory biblical exhortation as an integral part of preaching.

4. *Authority* is also integral to the notion of what preaching is, namely, as is now clear, human lips uttering God's message (again, Samuel Logan's chapter explores this point more fully). Preaching that does not display divine authority, both in its content and in its manner, is not the substance, but only the shadow of the real thing. The authority of preaching flows from the trans-

parency of the preacher's relation to the Bible and to the three Persons who are the one God whose Word the Bible is. As Erroll Hulse demonstrates later in this volume, it is only as the preacher is truly under, and is seen to be under, the authority of God and the Bible that he has, and can be felt to have, authority as God's spokesman. To spell this out: he must be evidently under the authority of *Scripture,* as his source of truth and wisdom; he must be evidently under the authority of *God,* as whose emissary he comes, in whose name and under whose eye he speaks, and to whom he must one day give account for what he has said; he must be evidently under the authority of *Christ,* as a subordinate shepherd serving the chief Shepherd; and he must be evidently under the authority of *the Holy Spirit,* consciously depending on Him as the sole sustainer of vision, clarity, and freedom of mind, heart, and voice in the act of delivering his message, and as the sole agent of conviction and response in the lives of his hearers.

Let Paul be our teacher here. "Unlike so many," he wrote, "we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God" (II Cor. 2:16–17). Here we see the transparency of a consciously right relationship to the authoritative message, the authoritative God, and the authoritative Christ. (Paul, of course, knew the authoritative message from oral instruction and personal revelation, whereas preachers today must learn it from Scripture, but this does not affect the principle of fidelity to it once one knows it.) "My message and my preaching," wrote Paul again, "were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (I Cor. 2:4). Here we see the transparency of a consciously right relationship to the Holy Spirit as the one who authenticates, convinces, and establishes in faith. In this Paul stands as a model. Where these relationships are out of joint, the authority of preaching—that is, its claim on the conscience, as utterance in God's name—weakens to vanishing point. Where these relationships are as they should be, however, proof will be given again and again of the truth of Robert Murray McCheyne's dictum, that "a holy minister is an awful

weapon in the hands of a holy God." In less drastic language Paul testified to what McCheyne had in view when he wrote, "We also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God which is at work in you who believe" (I Thess. 2:13).

5. Preaching mediates not only God's authority, but also His *presence* and His *power* (see Geoffrey Thomas's remarks below). Preaching effects an encounter not simply with truth, but with God Himself. There is a staggering offhand remark that illustrates this in I Corinthians 14, where Paul is arguing for the superiority of prophecy (speaking God's message in intelligible language) over tongues. "If the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?" (Expected answer: yes.) "But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!' " (I Cor. 14:23–25). Whatever else in this passage is uncertain, three things are plain.

First, prophecy as Paul speaks of it here corresponded in content to what we would call preaching the gospel—detecting sin and proclaiming God's remedy.

Second, the expected effect of such prophecy was to create a sense of being in the presence of the God who was its subject matter, and of being searched and convicted by Him, and so being moved to humble oneself and worship Him.

Third, in the experience of both Paul and the Corinthians, what Paul described must have occurred on occasion already, otherwise he could not have expected to be believed when he affirmed so confidently that it would happen. That which has never happened before cannot be predicted with such certainty.

There have evidently been times since the apostolic age when such things have been known to take place once more: the Puri-

tan David Clarkson, for instance, in a sermon entitled *Public Worship to be Preferred before Private,* was presumably talking from experience when he declared, "The most wonderful things that are now done on earth are wrought in the public ordinances. Here the dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and those that hear do live. . . . Here he cures diseased souls with a word. . . . Here he dispossesses Satan. . . . Wonders these are, and would be so accounted, were they not the common work of the public ministry. It is true indeed, the Lord has not confined himself to work these wonderful things only in public; yet the public ministry is the only ordinary means whereby he works them."[1] What Paul describes is rare in our time, no doubt, but that does not make it any less part of the biblical ideal of what preaching is, and what it effects. Perhaps the point should be put this way: preaching is an activity for which, and in which, the awareness of God's powerful presence must be sought, and with which neither speaker nor hearers may allow themselves to be content when this awareness is lacking.

The above analysis was needed because the ordinary concept of preaching as sermonizing (filling a stated slot of time with religious monologue) is too loose and imprecise, and the usual definitions of preaching, as was said before, are not sufficiently functional and theological, for our present purposes. If the definition I have given draws criticism as being too narrow, I must endure it; but I cannot see that the New Testament will sanction any lower concept of Christian preaching, and therefore it is in terms of the view I have stated, this and nothing less than this, that I continue my argument.

Now that we have seen what preaching is, we can move on to the heart of this essay. We are now in a position to address directly the question of my title: Why preach?

First, it should be noted that here we have really two questions in one. Objectively, the question is, What theological reasons are there for maintaining preaching as a necessary part of church life?

1. David Clarkson, *Works,* vol. 3 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1865), pp. 193–94.

Subjectively, the question is, What convictions should prompt a person to take up, sustain, and keep giving his best to the task of seeking to preach according to these awesome specifications? I take the two questions in order.

With regard to the first, I herewith offer some theological reasons for regarding preaching as a vital and essential part of Christian community life in this or any age. The suspicion is voiced nowadays, as we have seen, that pulpit monologue is an inefficient way of communicating and that books, films, TV, tapes, and group study and discussion can all be fully acceptable substitutes for it. With this I disagree, and in this section of my essay I am consciously arguing against any such views. Certainly, preaching is communication, and communication must be efficient; there are no two ways about that. But preaching is more than what is nowadays thought of as communication. God uses preaching to communicate more than current communication theory is concerned with, and more than alternative forms of Christian communication can be expected under ordinary circumstances to convey. I have nothing against books, films, tapes, and study groups in their place, but the place where God sets the preacher is not their place. The considerations that follow will, I hope, make this clear.

First, *preaching is God's revealed way of making Himself and His saving covenant known to us.* This is an argument drawn from the nature of God's revelatory action, as Scripture sets it forth.

The Bible shows God the Creator to be a communicator, and the theme and substance of His communication since Eden, to be a gracious, life-giving relationship with believing sinners. All the factual information and ethical direction that He currently communicates through His written Word feeds into this relationship, first to establish it through repentance and commitment to Jesus Christ, and then to deepen it through increasing knowledge of God and maturing worship. This is the covenant life of God's people, which is both initiated and sustained through God's personal communion with them. Now the Bible makes it appear that God's standard way of securing and maintaining His person-to-

person communication with us His human creatures is through the agency of persons whom He sends to us as His messengers. By being made God's spokesmen and mouthpieces for His message, the messengers become emblems, models, and embodiments of God's personal address to each of their hearers, and by their own commitment to the message they bring, they become models also of personal response to that address. Such were the prophets and apostles, and such supremely was Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son, who has been well described as being both God for man and man for God. That is the succession in which preachers today are called to stand.

Why does the New Testament stress the need for preaching (as it does in many different ways: see Matt. 10:6–7; Mark 3:14; 13:10; Luke 24:45–49; Acts 5:42; 6:2–4; 10:42; Rom. 10:6–17; I Cor. 1:17–24; 9:16; Phil. 1:12–18; II Tim. 4:2–5; Titus 1:3; etc.)? Not just because the good news had to be spread and the only way to spread news in the ancient world was by oral announcement, though that was certainly true. But it is also, surely, because of the power of "incarnational" communication, in which the speaker illuminates that which he proclaims by being transparently committed to it in a wholehearted and thoroughgoing way. Phillips Brooks was profoundly right when he defined preaching as "truth through personality." The preacher's personality cannot be eliminated from the preaching situation, and what he appears to be is a part of what he communicates—necessarily, inescapably, willy-nilly, and for better or for worse. So the preacher must speak as one who himself stands under the authority of his message and knows the reality and power of which he speaks; otherwise the impact of his personality will reduce the credibility of his proclamation, just as a man's baldness would reduce the credibility of any sales pitch he might make as a purveyor of hair restorer. The committed personality is in this sense integral to God's message, for God uses it to communicate his own reality as his messenger speaks. But for fullest awareness of the messenger's committedness we need to have him confront us in a "live" preaching situation; "canned" preaching on a tape, and "stage" preaching on TV, and "embalmed" preaching in the form

of printed sermons are all unable to communicate this awareness to the same degree. Thus the need for preaching "live" remains as great as it was nineteen centuries ago. It is still supremely through preaching, that is, through the impact on us of the message and the messenger together, that God meets us, and makes Himself and His saving grace known to us.

How to communicate the reality of the God of Scripture across the temporal and cultural gap that separates our world from the world of the Bible has exercised many contemporary minds. It is not always noticed that God provides much of the answer to this perplexity in the person of the preacher, who is called to be a living advertisement for the relevance and power of what he proclaims. The flip side of this truth is, of course, that should a preacher's words and life fail to exhibit this relevance and power, he would be actively hindering his hearers' knowledge of God. I suspect that the widespread perplexity today as to the relevance of the New Testament gospel should be seen as God's judgment on two generations of inadequate preaching by inadequate preachers, rather than anything else.

Second, *preaching communicates the force of the Bible as no other way of handling it does.* This is an argument drawn from the nature of Scripture itself.

Holy Scripture is, in and of itself, preaching. From one standpoint, it is servants of God preaching; from another, profounder, standpoint, it is God Himself preaching. Some of its sixty-six books are already, explicitly, sermons on paper (I think of the prophetic oracles of the Old Testament and the apostolic letters of the New); some are not. But all of them without exception were written to edify—that is, to teach people to know the living God, and to love and worship and serve Him—and to that extent they all have the nature of preaching. To preach them is thus no more, just as it is no less, than to acknowledge them for what they are, and to let their content be to us what it already is in itself. The Bible text is the real preacher, and the role of the man in the pulpit or the counseling conversation is simply to let the passages say their piece through him. *Simply,* did I say?—but it is

far from simple in practice! For the preacher to reach the point where he no longer hinders and obstructs his text from speaking is harder work than is sometimes realized. However, there can be no disputing that this is the task. And by preaching the Bible one makes it possible for the thrust and force of "God's Word written" (Anglican Article 20) to be adequately appreciated, in a way that is never possible through any type of detached study, or any kind of instruction in which a person speaks for or about the Bible as distinct from letting the Bible speak for itself. Bible courses in seminaries, for instance, do not beget an awareness of the power of Scripture in the way that preaching does.

Preaching the Bible is the affirming and exploring of the relation between God's Word (written and transmitted as Scripture by the agency of the Spirit, and now written on and applied to our hearts from Scripture by the same agency) and human lives—in other words, it is the exploring of its relation to ourselves. The activity of preaching the Bible (of which I take the public reading of Scripture to be part) unlocks the Bible to both mind and heart, and the activity of hearing Scripture preached, receiving what is said, meditating on the text as preaching has opened it up, and letting it apply itself to one's own thoughts and ways actually leads us into the Bible in terms of enabling us to comprehend and lay hold of what it, or better, God in and through it, is saying to us at this moment. Where such a personal relation to the Bible has not become part of one's life, though one may know much about its language, background, origins, and the historical significance of its contents, it remains in the deepest sense a closed book. And those who in this sense do not yet know what to make of the Bible will not know what to make of their own lives either. One way to express this is to say that our lives are in the Bible, and we do not understand them until we find them there. But the quickest and most vivid way in which such understanding comes about is through being addressed by the Bible via someone for whom the Bible is alive and who knows and can articulate something of its life-changing power. This is a further reason why preaching is always needed in the church: whenever preaching

fails, understanding of Scripture in its relation to life will inevitably fail too.

Third, *preaching focuses the identity and clarifies the calling of the church as no other activity does.* This is an argument drawn from the nature of the church, as we learn it from Scripture.

In every age the church has had an identity problem, and in some ages an identity crisis. Why? Because the world always wants to assimilate the church to itself and thereby swallow it up, and is always putting the church under pressure to that end; and to such pressure the church, at least in the West, has constantly proved very vulnerable. The results of it can be seen today in the extremely weak sense of identity that many churches have. Their adherents think of them more as social clubs, like Shriners, Elks, Freemasons, and Rotarians, or as interest groups, like political parties and hikers' associations, than as visible outcrops of one worldwide supernatural society, and they are quite unable to give substance to the biblical thought that God's people, as the salt and light for the world, are required to be different from those around them. The problem is perennial, and there is always need to proclaim the Bible, its gospel, its Christ, and its ethics, in order to renew the church's flagging awareness of its God-given identity and vocation. Preaching is the only activity that holds out any hope of achieving this; but preaching can do it by keeping before Christian minds God's threefold requirement that His people be Word-oriented, worship-oriented, and witness-oriented. A comment, now, about each of these.

The church must be *Word-oriented:* that is, God's people must always be attentive and obedient to Scripture. Scripture is God's Word of constant address to them, and woe betide them if they disregard it (see II Chron. 36:15–16; II Kings 22:8–20; Isa. 1:19–20; Jer. 7:23–26; Rev. 2:4–7, 15–17, etc.). God's people must learn to "tremble at his word" (Ezra 9:4; Isa. 66:5), listening, learning, and laying to heart; believing what He tells them, behaving as He directs them, and battling for His truth in a world that denies it. Preaching, as an activity of letting texts talk, alerts Christians to the fact that God is constantly addressing them and

enforces the authority of Scripture over them. The church must live by God's Word as its necessary food and steer by that Word as its guiding star. Without preaching, however, it is not conceivable that this will be either seen or done.

The church must also be *worship-oriented:* that is, God's people must regularly celebrate what God is and has done and will do, and glorify His name for it all by their praises, prayers, and devotion. The preaching of the Bible is the mainspring of this worship, for it fuels the devotional fire, constantly confronting Christians with God's works and ways in saving them (redeeming, regenerating, forgiving, accepting, adopting, guarding, guiding, keeping, feeding), and thereby leading them into paths of obedient and adoring response. Indeed, from this standpoint biblical preaching is implicit doxology throughout; the biblical preacher will follow Scripture in giving God glory for His works, ways, and wisdom at every turn, and will urge His hearers to do the same. This is the first reason why preaching should be regarded as the climax of congregational worship. From this flows the second reason, namely that congregations never honor God more than by reverently listening to His Word with a full purpose of praising and obeying Him once they see what He has done and is doing, and what they are called to do. But it is precisely through preaching that these things are made clear and this purpose is maintained.

Should it be objected that the liturgical drama of the Lord's Supper rather than the preached Word of Holy Scripture ought to be central and climactic in our worship, the appropriate answer is that without the preached Word to interpret the Supper and establish on each occasion a community context for it, it will itself become dark in meaning to us, and eucharistic worship will then be spoiled by waywardness and somnolence in our hearts. This is why, historically, Word and sacrament have been linked together as partners in the worship of God, rather than set against each other as rivals for our attention.

Finally, the church must be *witness-oriented:* that is, God's people must always be seeking to move out into the world around them to make Christ known and disciple the lost, and to that end they must "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who

asks [them] to give the reason for the hope that [they] have" (I Pet. 3:15). Apart from the preaching of the Word, however, the church will never have the resources to do this; it will constantly tend to forget its identity as the people charged to go and tell, and may actually lose its grip on the contents of its own message, as it has done many times in the past. History tells of no significant church growth and expansion that has taken place without preaching (*significant,* implying virility and staying power, is the key word there). What history points to, rather, is that all movements of revival, reformation, and missionary outreach seem to have had preaching (vigorous, though on occasion very informal) at their center, instructing, energizing, sometimes purging and redirecting, and often spearheading the whole movement. It would seem, then, that preaching is always necessary for a proper sense of mission to be evoked and sustained anywhere in the church.

Thus preaching is able to maintain the church's sense of identity and calling as the people charged to attend to God's Word, to obey it as His children, and to spread it as His witnesses. But there seems no way in which without preaching the eroding of this awareness can be avoided.

Fourth, *preaching has some unique advantages as a mode of Christian instruction.* This is an argument drawn from the nature of the church's teaching task.

Preaching is teaching, first and foremost. It is more than teaching; it is teaching *plus* application, as was said earlier; but it is never less than teaching. It is a kind of speaking aimed at both mind and heart, and seeking unashamedly to change the way people think and live. So it is always an attempt at persuasion; yet if its basic ingredient is not honest teaching, it is fundamentally flawed and unworthy. I shall now suggest that its monologue form, which is so often criticized as a hindrance both to teaching and to learning, is actually a great advantage in regard to both. Let me explain.

I grant that, because preaching is monologue, artifice is needed (some have it naturally, others have to acquire it) to ensure that

hearers stay awake and are kept interested, involved, and thinking along with the speaker as he proceeds. But that is no hindrance when the preacher has the artifice and the congregation knows that it is there to learn. And when this is the case, the monologue form helps greatly. The preacher can use words to do what he could not do in ordinary conversation, or in discussion. He can, for instance, spend time building up a sense of the greatness of what he is dealing with: the greatness of God, or of eternity, or of divine grace. Thus he can educate his hearers' sense of the relative importance of things. Or he can pile up reasons for believing a particular truth, or behaving in a particular way, or embracing a particular concern, and so hammer his points home by cumulative impact. Thus he can deepen his hearers' sense of obligation. He can hold a mirror up to his hearers, exploring their actual states of mind, with their various conflicting thoughts, faithful and faithless, in a way that would otherwise require a full-length novel or play. He can search consciences and challenge evasions of moral and spiritual issues with a forthrightness that would be unacceptable in ordinary conversation, or in a casual chat. Also, as one who prays for the unction of the Holy Spirit for the delivery of his message, he can allow himself a more intense, dramatic, and passionate way of speaking about the awesome realities of spiritual life and death than everyday speech would sanction; then he may look to God to honor the vision of things expressed by his honest disclosure of his feelings and reactions. In short, he will see it as his responsibility to make his message as clear, vivid, searching, "home-coming" (Alexander Whyte's word for applicatory), and thus memorable, as he can, and to use all the rhetorical resources and possibilities of monologue form to that end. My point is simply that these resources are considerable, and if they are wisely used, hearers who are there to learn (as all hearers of sermons should be) will gain more from the sermon than they would do from any informal conversation or discussion on the same subject.

These things are said to encourage not the Spirit-quenching artificiality of "putting on an act," but the spiritual alertness, realism, and sheer hard work out of which effective communica-

tion of what Whyte called "the eternities and the immensities" is born.

Another thing that monologue makes possible is the exhibiting of individuals' problems as problems of the community, by bringing them into the pulpit for biblical analysis. By this means a wise preacher may in effect do much of his counseling from the pulpit, and in so doing equip his hearers to become counselors themselves. This is a further great advantage of the monologue form to those who have the wit to use it.

Educationists have a tag that there is no impression without expression, and teachers are taught that a third of every lesson in the classroom should be expression work. How can this requirement be met, it is asked, in the case of pulpit monologue? And how can there be effective learning from the monologue if it is not met? Organized discussion of sermons preached, congregational deliberation on the issues raised, and pastoral enquiry as to what changes (if any!) the preaching has effected in particular hearers' lives provide together the answer to these questions. That this threefold follow-up of preaching is in practice a rare thing may be a valid criticism of pastors, but it does not in any way invalidate monologue preaching from Scripture as a primary form of communication from God.

It is thus abundantly clear that no congregation can be healthy without a diet of biblical preaching, and no pastor can justify himself in demoting preaching from the place of top priority among the tasks of his calling. From the objective point of view, therefore, the question "Why preach?" is now answered. All that remains is to say something about the convictions that, under God, work in a person's heart to make him a preacher and to keep him preaching despite all discouragements, thus constituting his personal answer to the question "Why preach?"

Jeremiah told God that "the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot" (Jer. 20:8–9). Does anything correspond to this in the experience of Christian preachers? The answer is yes. There

is a God-given vision that produces preachers, and any man who has that vision cannot sleep easy without making preaching his life's work. The vision (that is, the awareness of what God sees, and wills to do, and to have His servants do) embodies a series of related convictions, somewhat as follows.

First, *Scripture is revelation.* Heaven is not silent; God the Creator has spoken, and the Bible is His written Word. God has made Himself known on the stage of history by prophecy, providence, miracle, and supremely in His Son, Jesus Christ, and Scripture witnesses to that. God has disclosed His will for the living of our lives, and the Bible proclaims His law. God undertakes, through the interpreting work of the Spirit who inspired Scripture in the first place, to teach us how this revelation bears on us; thus it is promised that His Word shall function for us as a lamp for our feet and a light to illuminate our path, as on a dark night. God's Word is described as a hammer to break stony hearts, fire to burn up rubbish, seed causing birth, milk causing growth, honey that sweetens, and gold that enriches (Ps. 119:105; Jer. 23:29; I Pet. 1:23–2:2; Ps. 19:10). The Bible is in truth, as the Moderator of the Church of Scotland tells the monarch in the British coronation service, the most precious thing that this world affords.

There is, then, available in this world a sure message from God, tried and true, unfailing and unchanging, and it needs to be proclaimed so that all may know it. The messenger who delivers it will have the dignity of being God's spokesman and ambassador. No self-aggrandizement or self-advertisement is involved, for the messenger neither invents his message nor asks for attention in his own name. He is a minister—that is, a servant—of God, of Christ, and of the Word. He is a steward of God's revealed mysteries, called not to be brilliant and original but diligent and faithful (I Cor. 4:1–2). Yet to be God's messenger—to run His errands, act as His courier, and spend one's strength making Him known—is the highest honor that any human being ever enjoys. The servant's dignity derives from the dignity of his employer, and of the work he is set to do. "Ministers are ambassadors for

God and speak in Christ's stead," wrote Charles Simeon. "If they preach what is founded on the Scriptures, their word, as far as it is agreeable to the mind of God, is to be considered as God's. This is asserted by our Lord and his apostles. We ought therefore to receive the preacher's word as the word of God himself."[2] There is no nobler calling than to serve God as a preacher of the divine Word.

Second, *God is glorious.* God has shown His wisdom, love, and power in creation, providence, and redemption, and all of His self-revelation calls for constant praise, since it is infinitely praiseworthy. Man's vocation, in essence and at heart, is to give His Maker glory (praise) for all the glories (powers and performances) that God shows him. The chief end of man is to glorify God, and in so doing to enjoy Him, and that for ever, as the first answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it. God's doings should be known and celebrated everywhere, and when His rational human creatures fail to honor Him in this way, they rob Him of His due, as well as robbing themselves of their own highest happiness. For human life was meant to be an infinitely enriching love affair with the Creator, an unending exploration of the delights of doxology, and nothing makes up for the absence of those joys that come from praise.

It is the preacher's privilege to declare the works of God and lead his hearers to praise God for them. "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together" (Ps. 43:1–3). Some have thought that what makes men into preachers is the desire to dominate, but what really animates them is a longing to glorify God and to see others doing the same.

Third, *people are lost.* Mankind's state is tragic. Human beings, made for God, are spiritually blind and deaf, and have their backs

2. Charles Simeon, *Let Wisdom Judge,* ed. Arthur Pollard (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1959), pp. 188–89.

turned to Him. Whether clear-headedly or not, they are bent on self-destruction through self-worship and self-indulgence. Their souls starve in a world of spiritual plenty, and they mar their angelic abilities by their brutish and beastly behavior. Made for God's love, they bring down on themselves His wrath by defying His will. Made for glory, they are consigning themselves to hell. The preacher sees this, and compassion drives him to speak. He wants to take the arm of everyone he meets, point to Christ, and say "Look!" He sees his ministry as a form of Samaritanship to ravaged souls—an expression of love to neighbor, therefore, as well as of love to God. He is a man driven by zeal to share Christ.

Fourth, *Christ is unchanging.* "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). The Christ who is to be preached today is the Christ of whom Bernard wrote in the twelfth century,

Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts,
Thou fount of life, thou light of men,
From the best bliss that earth imparts
We turn unfilled to thee again;

and of whom John Newton wrote in the eighteenth century,

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.
Jesus, my Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King,
My Lord, my life, my way, my end,
Accept the praise I bring.

So the preacher knows that when he depicts the Christ of the New Testament as the living Lord and Savior of guilty, vile, and helpless sinners today, he presents not fancy but fact, not a dream but a reality. The need of this Christ is universal; the adequacy of this Christ is inexhaustible; the power of this Christ is immeasur-

able. Here is a wonderfully rich message on which to expatiate, a gospel worth preaching indeed!

Furthermore, the preacher knows that Christ's way is to step out of the pages of the New Testament into the lives of saints and sinners through the speech that is uttered about Him by His messengers. In Gustav Wingren's words, "Preaching is not just talk about a Christ of the past, but is a mouth through which the Christ of the present offers us life today." "Preaching has but one aim, that Christ may come to those who have assembled to listen."[3] To be the human channel of Christ's approach in this way is unquestionably a huge privilege, and no preacher can be blamed for feeling it so and making much of his role accordingly.

Fifth, *persuasion is needed.* God treats us as the rational beings that He made us. Accordingly, He does not move us to Christian responses by physical means that bypass the mind, but by persuading us to obey His truth and honor His Son. The preacher, as God's mouthpiece, has the task of persuading on God's behalf, and the role is a vital one since where there is no persuasion people will perish. Preaching is the art not of browbeating, but of persuading, in a way that shows both respect for the human mind and reverence for the God who made it. Christian persuasion requires wisdom, love, patience, and holy humanness. It is a fine art as well as a useful one, and it becomes for preachers a lifetime study, concern, and challenge.

Sixth, *Satan is active.* The devil is malicious and mean, more so than any of us can imagine, and he marauds constantly with destructive intent. Though he is, as Luther said, God's devil, and is on a chain (a strong one, though admittedly a long one), he is tireless in opposing God, and sets himself to spoil and thwart all the redemptive work that God ever does in human lives. As one means to this end, he labors to ensure that preachers' messages will be either misstated or misheard, so that they will not have the liberating, invigorating, upbuilding effect that is proper to the

3. Gustav Wingren, *The Living Word* (London: SCM, 1960), pp. 108, 208.

preached Word. Preaching is thus, as all real preachers soon discover, an endless battle for truth and power, a battle that has to be fought afresh each time by watchfulness and prayer. Preachers know themselves to be warriors in God's front line, drawing enemy fire; the experience is gruelling, but it confirms to them the importance of their task as ambassadors for Christ and heralds of God, sowers of good seed, stewards of saving truth, shepherds of God's flock, and fathers guiding their spiritual families (II Cor. 5:20; Luke 8:4–15; I Cor. 4:1; Acts 20:28–32; I Pet. 5:2–4; I Cor. 4:15; Gal. 4:19). In the manner of front-line troops they frequently get scared by the opposition unleashed against them, but they do not panic, and their morale remains high. The challenge of beating back Satan by God's strength, like that of communicating effectively for Christ, is one to which they rise.

Seventh, *God's Spirit is sovereign.* Through the Spirit's agency in both preacher and hearers, the Word of God becomes invincible. If fruitfulness depended finally on human wisdom and resourcefulness, no preacher would dare to speak a word, for no preacher ever feels that in his communication he has been wise and resourceful enough. And if God's power was exerted only in helping the preacher to speak and not in causing the listeners to hear, preaching, however wise and resourceful, would always be a barren and unfruitful activity, for fallen human beings have no natural power of response to the divine Word. But in fact fruitfulness depends on the almighty work of God the Holy Spirit in the heart. So preachers, however conscious of their own limitations, may nonetheless speak expectantly, knowing that they serve a God who has said (Isa. 55:10–11) that His Word will not return to Him void. With this knowledge supporting them, it is the way of real preachers to show themselves undaunted and unsinkable.

Such, in sum, are the convictions that produce *reformed* preachers. As we review them, it becomes very obvious that a "reformed" preacher in the seventeenth-century sense of that word, which corresponded roughly to our use of "renewed" and "revived," will need to be a Reformed preacher in the twentieth-century sense of that word, that is, Augustinian and Calvinistic in

belief; for all the seven items I have mentioned are characteristically Reformed tenets. Nor should this discovery surprise us, for it is a matter of historical fact that the Reformed tradition has been more fertile in producing reformed preachers over the centuries than has any other viewpoint in Christendom. I affirm with total confidence as I conclude, that able men with these seven convictions burning in their hearts will never need to scratch their heads, in this or any age, over the question whether preaching is a worthwhile use of their time. They will know that preaching God's gospel and God's counsel from the Scriptures was, and is, and always will be, the most honorable and significant activity in the world, and accordingly they will tackle this task with joy. It cannot, surely, be doubted that it will be a most happy thing if God increases the number of such preachers in our time.

PART ONE
THE MAN

1

The Minister's Call

Joel Nederhood

There is something strange about the subject *the minister's call.* One reason is that so few people actually have it, it might almost fit under the subject of abnormal psychology. Another is that it is totally subjective, and those who possess it in its strongest form find it difficult, even awkward, to express exactly what it is for them. And, of course, the subject is part of "religious experience," and many of us feel somewhat embarrassed whenever we venture into this area.

Even so, it is important to talk about the *call;* there are many concerned people in churches who would like to get some things straight about it. Maybe if they could understand what the call is, they would be able to understand their minister better. There is no question that he has been touched by something different from the influences that normally touch people, and possibly his call is the explanation for his behavior. Church members are deeply concerned about their preachers, after all, for they realize that in a curious way they are dependent on these individuals who in turn often seem dreadfully dependent on their congregations. There is, unfortunately, an ambivalence between churches and their pastors, and it is caused by the congregation's frequent puzzlement regarding just what it is that their pastor has and refers to, often in times of special stress, as his call.

But if there are certain questions and misgivings regarding the call within congregations, they also exist among ministers themselves. Some have simply abandoned any pretense of having any special call, and they have dedicated themselves to their work just

as any other professional might dedicate himself to his. If it is necessary to discuss the matter of *call* so that the churches will be better equipped to look for "called" pastors and to relate to them once they have found them, it is even more necessary for ministers themselves to possess clarity with respect to their understanding of their own call. They should know what the call is, and they should be sure that they have it; else they should get out of the ministry. And possessing certainty that God has called them to the ministry of the Word, they should neither waver nor vacillate in their pursuit of their calling. A minister who is sure of his call is among the most poised, confident, joy-filled, and effective of human beings; a minister who is not is among the most faltering and pitiable.

False Forms of the Call

It is important first of all to clear away some of the false forms the call can so easily take, for the trouble that churches are having nowadays with their ministers and that many ministers are having with themselves suggests that a significant number of people in the ministry these days are not truly called. Unfortunately, it may well be that some of the very people who insist on their calling most strenuously may in fact be responding to something that is not the call at all.

Certain elements of the ministry as we know it tend to call into play a variety of motivations that may strongly impel a person to enter this work without his having been authentically called to it. Consider that the ministry is practically the only activity these days that allows a person to speak uninterruptedly for extended periods of time to an audience that feels obligated to give attention to what is being said. Whatever one wants to say about the effectiveness of preaching so far as the congregation is concerned, there can be no doubt that for people who love to speak, preaching provides satisfactions duplicated nowhere else. If a preacher has some native talent and few scruples, there is virtually no limit to what he can accomplish with the people who listen to him.

Audience manipulation is practiced not only by the television industry; preachers do it all the time. And no tradition is exempt: Pentecostal ministers do it, but Reformed pastors can develop their ways, too. The attraction of the pulpit, in this naturalistic sense of attraction, can create a compulsion to preach that is real, but is not necessarily authentic.

Another motivation that can be very strong though by no means authentic relates to the automatic stamp of goodness the ministry gives to those in it. Today, of course, there is a cynicism abroad regarding ministerial virtue, but usually at the time a person begins to prepare himself for the ministry, he is unaware of this cynicism. In many instances, there is no more effective way to receive the approval of one's parents, and possibly of aunts and uncles as well, than to announce that one is preparing for the gospel ministry. All of us prefer to be considered very, very good rather than only moderately so, and consequently a person's entrance into the ministry in order to achieve approval is not exceptional.

We should not fail to notice, in addition, that the ministry provides a number of advantages that can tend to draw people to it. It is perhaps somewhat tactless to remember that there have been times when preparation for the ministry has exempted young men from military service, and young men who preferred not to endure the rigors of combat have felt the call during times when the draft was in operation. And speaking of the military, the fact that in many countries clergymen are brought into the services as part of the officer corps illustrates the special treatment traditionally given members of the cloth.

There are a wide range of perks that ministers receive, ranging from favorable treatment by the Internal Revenue Service to discounts on furniture and jogging shoes. In some instances, ministers can run a number of items such as their automobile licenses through their church's books and avoid sales tax. And then there are gifts; if nothing else, some congregations tend to be generous when ministers leave them, and though the sentiment may be suspect, the gift is nonetheless real. And with all of this, ministers are often well taken care of. Now, it is true that this varies from

denomination to denomination; even so, many ministers whose income may be relatively low discover over the decades that they do all right in the long run. One thing is sure: they are usually exempted from participating in the hectic tension that is often part of earning a living these days.

What this all comes down to is this: the ministry is not a bad job, and there is no doubt that for some it is the best job they can get. And since a minister's work is generally not understood by his parishioners, and since it is possible for him to call a wide range of activities his "work" (for example, running errands for his wife—after all, she is a part of his flock, too), it is possible for a minister to create a relatively easy job for himself; some take advantage of that possibility.

If what has been said thus far is offensive, what now follows will be even more so. But it should be recognized that the ministry also provides certain psychological types with satisfactions that are not available elsewhere. Anyone who enjoys hearing "true confessions" will enjoy the ministry. People will tell ministers things they would tell no one else. Women will sit across the desk from a clergyman and without batting an eye tell him about sexual encounters that are mind-boggling; they will expect the minister simply to sit there and coolly evaluate their behavior. Another thing: because a person is a minister, women will sometimes treat him as if he were a eunuch—they will shower him with affections that between other people would be frowned on. There are some in the ministry today who enjoy these contacts with the opposite sex, which they can have in a thoroughly legitimate way. No one could accuse them of anything, for after all they are simply fulfilling the duties of their office.

It is not very pleasant to review such dimensions of the ministry, which can easily become the foundation for motivations that are strong, but not authentic. It is necessary, though, for motivation in the best of circumstances is always mysterious, and ultimately only God knows our motivations perfectly. Because some dimensions of the ministry can excite improper motivation, those who consider themselves called to the ministry need to examine themselves to make certain that they have not entered the work

because of a motivation related to something just described. A minister who experiences an extremely high degree of discomfort in his work and who may be on the verge of a nervous breakdown should ask whether his own presence in the ranks of the clergy has been caused by impulses that are not entirely pure. For his own good and the good of his congregation, he should discontinue his attempt to fulfill a task that can be properly executed only by those who have been truly called.

It is also important to be aware of improper motivations for the ministry, for no minister is completely free from what has been reviewed. It is possible, for example, that a minister, whose original, strong, authentic sense of call diminishes at some point in his career, might fall back on one or more of the motivations just reviewed, to make up for the deficiency and carry him through. For example, a person who deeply loves to preach might stay with the ministry even though his original call has deteriorated. A minister needs to be aware of this possibility so that he will be able to monitor what is going on in his life.

Biblical Data and the Call

When one examines the Bible for direction concerning the ministerial call, the data are not entirely helpful for those who wonder if God is calling them to the ministry, nor is it all that helpful for those who have served in the ministry for some time and want to evaluate their sense of calling in the light of Scripture. The called people found on the Bible's pages cannot be directly compared to what we know as the ordinary minister of the Word.

One might examine the call of Moses, for example, in the hope of finding insights into the nature of calling. One writer concluded from the conversation between God and Moses at the burning bush that "there are no volunteers" so far as the ministry is concerned. Once, when I read that writer's devotional on this subject just before retiring for the night, I shuddered as I recalled I had volunteered to some extent as I moved closer and closer to

the ministry. Certainly I had never been confronted with anything quite as startling as a burning bush, and my protestations concerning my own lack of qualifications did not compare with Moses' declaration of his inability spoken while he stood without his sandals in the presence of divine glory.

It is true that within the Bible, there are few, if any, religious functionaries who stepped forward and urged God to accept them for special service; surely there were some whose religion was impure and tainted who tried that approach, but they were rebuffed: Simon the Sorcerer is an example. Ordinarily, those who functioned in the legitimate service of the God of Israel came into their office through heredity, and those who really were the movers and the shakers in the Old Testament era were brought to their special work because God demanded their services and assured them that He would qualify them: Amos, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others.

And when one comes to the New Testament, he finds that those who were really significant in shaping the life of the church received their call in an inescapably recognizable way. The apostolic band illustrates this, especially when the most illustrious of the apostles, Paul, is included. What a mistake it would be if those who suspected that God was calling them to the ministry would not act on their suspicion until they had received a Damascus Road experience! And what insufferable arrogance would attend the ministry of anyone who would claim that he had experienced something similar to what the apostle Paul experienced!

As we discuss the ministerial call, we must use the Bible with extreme care. Surely, we must remember there is a sense in which what we consider the ministerial office (as in organized churches) did not exist in its present-day form during the time covered by special revelation. The church during the apostolic era was a part of the special work of God designed to serve as a foundation for this age in which we presently express our several callings. At the same time, the biblical data help us understand what the ministerial call is in this age, for it is the foundation for the church in which ministers work today.

For our purposes, the revelation about Timothy and his office is the closest we have to something that can be used nearly as it stands when we think about the ministerial call. In the case of Timothy, there are obviously differences between his situation and ours that may not be forgotten, among them his special and close relationship with the apostle Paul; even so, when we read about Timothy, we are reading about a person whose function in the early church was significantly similar to the function of a minister in the church these days.

So far as the Timothy material is concerned, the most directly applicable to our thinking about the call today is the "man of God" material with which I Timothy is concluded and which reappears in II Timothy 3. The minister today, it must be conceded, is no modern counterpart of Moses, nor even of the apostle Paul, but he is merely a "man of God," which is in itself quite something. If the observation is made that not only ministers are "men of God," but all Christians should be that (women as well), this observation is certainly correct. For the minister today is really nothing more than an ordinary member of the church of Jesus Christ who is called to express His nature as "man of God" in an especially high degree.

Surely, he can learn from Moses and Abraham and all the great leaders of the church of all ages, but he may never simply assume that their prerogatives, dignity, and tasks are his today. A minister is a very little person, in comparison, a person with a narrow task: he is a man of God, with a specific call. In his case, as in all others in the church, it is extremely important that he does not think of himself more highly than he ought to think; he must, in fact, regard others as better than himself.

The Call and General Faith Development

Though the direct biblical data relating to the minister's call are not as extensive as we might wish, some principles derived from Scripture can certainly be developed. In the first place, it is very important that one's call be considered only within the context of

maturity. In some instances, very young men—while they are still children in fact—will announce that they are going to be ministers. This could well be an authentic leading of the Lord. However, it is best to treat precocious announcements with a measure of skepticism; for the person involved and for whatever parishioners he eventually serves, it is best that the ultimate determination of one's call be made in connection with mature faith.

Although this is not the place to discuss fully the way faith matures, it is necessary to make some remarks about this subject. In the case of a child who has grown up in a covenant home and has been molded by Christian nurture from childhood, the maturation of faith occurs as a gradual movement from the faith that is natural for a child to adult faith. The faith of a child is real, but it is faith defined by the fact that the child is a child, and its distinguishing characteristic is that it reflects the faith of the parents. Throughout the teen-age years, the child moves through a "sundering" phase in which he severs his ties with his parents so far as his personality is concerned. What awesome and mysterious years these are! During them, ideally the child should move from a faith that depends on and reflects his parents' faith to an adult faith. This is a time of questioning—it has to be, no matter how painful this process may be. This is a time of rebelling even, and sometimes the rebelling is necessary in order that the child will arrive at a faith that is actually purer and better than his parents' faith. Finally, the child becomes his own person. He is a man, and the faith he has is the faith of a man. He is an adult, and the faith he possesses is that of an adult.

If a person comes to faith later in life, it is important to evaluate the call after a period of time has elapsed following his conversion. Often a person who is saved during the late teens or the twenties or even later immediately concludes that God is calling him to the ministry. It is easy to mistake the general feeling of relief, joy, and praise that a person experiences when he has been rescued from darkness and set in the marvelous light of life in Christ as the call to the ministry. It may well be no such call at all.

The Bible explicitly warns us about giving special spiritual responsibility to "novices," those who have just recently come to faith (I Tim. 3:6). It is difficult to avoid doing this, however, for, when a young man is saved after having lived an especially debauched life of sin and he announces that he wants to serve Jesus for the rest of his life in the ministry, one is inclined to encourage him to do exactly that. And often God does call people into the ministry who have been rescued from a particularly gross life of sin, and He may call them practically simultaneously with their call to salvation. Even so, because of the need to make sure that the ministerial call is authentic, the final evaluation of a person's call should be held off until the person has demonstrated that his call is not rooted in emotion, but is seasoned and true.

To be specific, if a person is converted later in life, he should not conclude that he is called to the ministry until he has spent some years in a regular church, hearing the proclamation of the Word and possibly taking up some form of ministry within the church such as teaching Sunday school. If he is serious about being a minister, he should very carefully test the call he feels he has, and that necessarily will take some time.

Those who fill the ministerial office must be among the most mature of Christian people, and consequently, it is important to recognize that the call in its most authentic form will be expressed in the lives of those who have benefited from a certain degree of maturity in every area of their lives, and especially in connection with their spiritual development. The very person who counseled Timothy against enlisting *novices* in the ministry of the church was himself a person whose personal experience involved an exceedingly quick movement from false religion to the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even so, as a religious person, Saul the persecutor possessed an exceptionally high level of spiritual knowledge and discernment, and even in his case, his full entrance into his ministry did not occur until the Lord had prepared him with special instruction (Gal. 1:13–23). Maturity, or seasoning, is an extremely important element in determining the authenticity of calls.

Becoming Conscious of the Call

It is important now to spotlight what is involved as one's consciousness of his call develops within the context of a mature faith. So far as the call to the ministry is concerned, there is a development of one's consciousness with respect to it. It may be true that in some instances one's call can fall like a thunderclap into his life and his consciousness of what God wants him to do is immediately present. For most ministers, however, their becoming called to the ministry involves a development over an extended period of time. As it began, they may have been somewhat embarrassed about the direction their thinking was taking, but over the years, their call became the most dominant force in their lives. In any case, in this material, the feeling of being called into the ministry will be viewed as something that comes over a period of time, something that develops with the passing years.

And at this point, it is important to describe precisely what we are speaking of when we speak of the *call* to the ministry. Unfortunately, the idea of *call* has largely disappeared from our vocabulary, though there was a time in American life when it was talked about in connection with a wide range of human activities. The following statement regarding the way the concept of call operated during the Puritan period is enlightening:

> Directly related to the Puritan view of the prescribed institutional structure of society was an understanding of "calling" and "office." William Perkins characterized calling as "a certain kind of life, ordained and imposed on man by God, for the common good." The call was to the individual, but it was to serve in a social institution. God's calling to an individual to be a magistrate, for example, had meaning only insofar as the office of magistrate in the divinely ordained state served the commonwealth. The calling of a minister was to accept the office to preach the gospel in the church of God, and the calling of a father only had meaning as it related to an office in the family.[1]

1. Gordon Spykman, *Society, State, and Schools: A Case for Structural and Confessional Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 55.

Put in its simplest form, the call to the ministry as it is presently being discussed is the call to ministry of the Word and the sacraments; it is a call to a church office. There are of course a host of functions that surround and attend the ministry as it is presently expressed among us; for example, a minister is often required to express a prominent social role; ministers frequently decry the wide variety of activities they are expected to be skillful at performing. The ministerial call, though, as we think about it, is the conviction that one has been set apart by God to proclaim the message of His Word and administer the sacred sacraments, which Jesus has provided the church. In this connection, the inner conviction of the apostle most certainly carries over to the minister today: "Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (I Cor. 9:16).

The whole matter of preaching is worthy of prolonged discussion (and that is being done elsewhere in this volume); for now it should be noted that preaching involves the minister of the Word in an expression of extraordinary obedience. It is this obedience which sets preaching off from other forms of public address, and by means of this obedience, the minister is bound to proclaim the message entrusted to him by the Lord and that message alone. It has often been pointed out that the idea at the center of the biblical word for *preach* in the New Testament is the idea of *herald,* and a herald was merely a messenger who dutifully communicated the message his commander instructed him to bring to some other general, possibly even to the general with whom his commander was at war. Heralds are characterized by their absolute loyalty to the person who has sent them. And the call involves a similar obedience to the Lord who sends the minister with one message and one message only: the message contained within the Bible and personified in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The responsibility the minister has for the administration of the sacraments derives from his primary responsibility as a Word proclaimer, for the sacraments do not have an independent function—they derive their function from the Word of God for which they are a sign and a seal.

The person of the minister, then, must be seen in the closest possible connection with the Word of God. The apostle's words in I Corinthians 4 apply to ministers: "So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (vv. 1, 2). Ministers are men in bondage to the Scriptures. Understand, this is what we are talking about in connection with the call. If it is clearly understood that we are talking about men in bondage to the Word of God and totally committed to proclaiming it, all of the other somewhat incidental elements that attend the ministry, which may give it a certain attractiveness to certain kinds of people, fall away. A minister is called to proclaim the Word of God, and his life is an expression of obedience to this one central task.

Now, of course, that is not the only thing the minister does with his life; it is not even the only thing he does effectively. The work of the minister most certainly must be complemented by the work of others within the fellowship. But at the moment, we are considering the ministerial *call* and this must be defined narrowly: *it is one's conviction that God would have him faithfully proclaim the Word of God.* The ministerial call is that and nothing more, and those who want to serve God in the ministry must make sure they have it; and those who have this call must make sure they obey it.

For our purposes, the development of one's consciousness of the call can be seen in connection with certain interior events that occur within the person being called. The call, after all, is an interior reality for a minister of the Word, and therefore consciousness of it grows in connection with a number of events that occur within a person. These events are deeply personal, and though they may occasionally be put on display by way of personal testimony, on their deepest level there is an inexpressible sacredness about them. Even so, it is necessary to talk about them if we are going to understand how the specific interior phenomenon we know as the *call* fits into a person's life.

"Conversion"

It is important to begin with conversion, for conversion is the fundamental prerequisite for the performance of any Christian service. When we speak of conversion these days, we most generally see it in relation to the experience that accompanies turning away from a lifestyle that is patently ungodly. We think of those who have been on drugs, those who have been enslaved by alcohol, and those who have lived in open and obvious rebellion against God. In many instances people who have been part of the current wicked scene are transformed by the powerful grace of God and turned into special servants of the Almighty. Today, Chuck Colson's book *Born Again* provides us with a classic case of such a turning.

But conversion must be viewed somewhat more broadly when we talk about it in connection with the ministry. Many who enter the ministry come from a background in which they have been exposed to the Christian faith from childhood. It is an inestimable privilege to be part of the covenant community and to grow up in a covenant home. Yet, coming from this background provides a special danger for an individual who contemplates the ministry. Such a person may never experience confession of sin and the steadfast turning away from sin that is part of conversion.

Even though growing up in a covenant community may have tended to shelter a person from gross forms of sinfulness, the covenant experience should enable a person to see the true nature of sin in general and to see sin in his own life very clearly. In fact, it is precisely the continual preaching of the Word of God that should take the scales from our eyes and enable us to see ourselves for what we really are.

In any case, a person serving in the ministry of the Word should be able to talk about his own conversion. It is true, of course, that some have difficulty describing a very specific time when this happened in their lives. Even so, a minister should be able to identify for himself, though he might not want to do so for others, when it was that he began to see himself as a miserable sinner whose only hope for salvation lay with the sovereign grace

of God. He should be able to identify, further, when it was that he determined, with the help of God, earnestly to fight against sin in his life.

A study of the Bible leaves one with the unescapable conclusion that it is absolutely essential that each of us be able to say, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). It would be a mistake to pass over Jesus' story of the Pharisee and publican as an entertaining glimpse of His evaluation of the Pharisee sect; we must rather understand that if we wish to "return home justified," we must humbly confess our sins, too. And the apostle Paul insisted on calling himself the foremost of sinners (I Tim. 1:15). We may not fail to notice that when Paul stood before the cross, he did not view it as something that was of great value for certain people who were still in their sins, but he saw it as that which he himself needed desperately.

The truly called minister of the Word of God is a person who has himself drunk deeply of the fountain of life after he has thirsted mightily for the salvation that God alone provides; he is a person who has himself searched with desperate longing for contact with the Lord after he has felt disqualified for such fellowship. As he dispenses the medicine of life eternal, he does so as a person who himself knows that it is this medicine and this alone that has preserved him. Otherwise how can there be enthusiasm for the great task of gospel proclamation? After describing the believer's only comfort in life and in death as the certainty that he is not his own but belongs to Jesus, the Heidelberg Catechism asks how it is possible to enjoy this comfort; the answer begins with the statement that one must first know his misery. Only then can he experience the sweet refreshment of God's glorious salvation. And only then is there the necessary foundation for the minister's call.

"Centering on Christ"

Another essential component in the development of the ministerial *call* is the absolute necessity of the minister's having a per-

sonal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Since Erroll Hulse discusses the subject of personal piety in the next chapter, I will make just a few brief comments here. It is the possibility of experiencing a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus that is the distinguishing feature of the Christian religion. At the center of this religion is the Triune God, whose love endures forever, and this God has expressed His love fully in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we are met by Jesus on the pages of the Bible, we discover Him as a person who delighted in experiencing personal relationships with His followers. Jesus' personality was one that turned Him outside of Himself toward others. Even when He was confronted by vast crowds of people, He had compassion on them (Mark 6:34) and unselfishly made provision for their needs. He often extended His hand of healing to lone individuals in great distress. He invited people to come to Him (Matt. 11:28) and assured them that they would find rest in His fellowship, doing His will. In the Gospel of John, the Jesus who invites people to come to Him declares that they must abide in Him as well (John 15:1–8).

It should be clear from this that *centering on Christ* involves seeking to know as much as possible about His person and His work. But there is more to *centering on Jesus.* While every Christian surely must have a personal relationship with the Savior, that is especially necessary for the minister. The ministerial office makes no sense if it is filled by someone who does not have a special relationship with Jesus. This should be very clear in connection with the matter of obedience and the call. The call is a call to special obedience; the called minister is a person who knows that Jesus is his Master. As has been noted, a preacher is a herald who carries out his duties in obedience to his commander. And for a minister, Jesus is the commander. If a person doesn't really know Jesus, he doesn't have a commander, and ministers who try to function as ministers without knowing the Lord act very strangely indeed.

Having one's faith centered on Jesus enables a minister to have a certain poise that he would otherwise not have—an imperviousness to the usual judgments people make about one another. As

we think about this, it is certainly useful to think about the way the apostle Paul viewed his relationship with Jesus. Listen to him, for example, when he says, "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me" (I Cor. 4:3, 4). Yes, indeed, a minister knows that Jesus, his Savior, is the one who continuously appraises his ministry.

Having a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ will enable a person to endure the injustices and hardships that accompany the ministry. There can be no question that ministers are often misunderstood, if not by their parishioners then certainly by non-Christians. If they are truly faithful to their calling, they will be required to experience danger at times. How can they do this unless they are following Jesus who, though He was reviled, reviled not again?

A personal relationship with Jesus—how important it is! A minister most certainly must be a person who can speak of his love for the Savior. He must feel himself united with Him through faith, and he must delight to speak with Jesus in prayer. It is the story of Jesus that the minister proclaims. A minister must be able to sing, without sentimentality, but with deep running reality:

> I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
> Of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love.

A minister who is truly called loves to tell the story of Jesus . . . of Jesus and His love. And he loves to do that because he knows Jesus personally. His life, his faith, is centered on Jesus Christ.

"Fascination With the Bible"

One of the more humbling elements of the Christian faith is that it is rooted entirely in the Bible. We can talk about Jesus, for example, but our Jesus-talk is worthwhile only if it is talk that reflects the Bible's message about Jesus. The anchoring of the

Christian faith in the Bible can be very frustrating for religious leaders who are extremely creative, as many religious leaders tend to be. There is no room for invention in the Christian faith. The majestic religious ideas that we are capable of putting together and the intricate ways of salvation we are able to construct are less than worthless—they are detrimental for true religion and true spirituality. To be a Christian means that a person voluntarily limits his religious thinking to the Bible's material and voluntarily allows the Bible to function critically with respect to all of his religious experience.

It is important to emphasize this because it is a fundamental tendency of human life to invent religious edifices of one kind or another that become considerably more attractive than the biblical material. After man's fall into sin, he did not become less religious than he was before, but the religious dimension of his life was short-circuited; man became the great idol maker and idol worshipper. Even the people of God, who possessed God's true revelation, could not resist the idolatry of the nations that surrounded them—they worshipped worthless idols and became worthless themselves (Jer. 2:4). Our idol love must be curbed and destroyed. And this can happen only if our religion is biblical throughout.

That is why those who are truly called to the ministry of the Word of God must be men for whom the Bible becomes the center of their attention. Fascination for the Word—yes, this is necessary. The minister must come to the point early in his development where he recognizes that here at last is something in our world that is a direct word from God. From then on it is this Word that becomes central. A minister is a person who thinks about the Bible a lot, reads it a great deal, memorizes it, puzzles over it, and keeps coming back to it over and over again. How unfortunate that there are many seminarians who admit that they have never read the Bible through from cover to cover! If a person learns to be satisfied with a brushing acquaintance with God's Word, there can be no question that such a person is not truly called to the ministry. A minister is a person for whom the Bible

is the most exciting book, and he willingly dedicates his life to living with it.

Fascination with the Bible, love of the Bible, obedient reading of the glorious book—these accompany the call to the ministry of the gospel. Those who don't like books and who aren't particularly interested in the Book of books are mistaken if they should ever think that God has called them to the ministry.

Examination of Gifts

What has been discussed thus far with respect to the call deals with elements of the Christian personality that all truly committed Christians possess in one degree or another. Conversion, centering on Jesus, fascination with the Bible—surely each of these must be found in all Christian lives. These are what we pray for when we pray for one another. But the developing consciousness of the *call* to the ministry must go beyond these, for the ministry of the Word is a specific function within the body of Christ, and the minister must have certain gifts in addition to those which all Christians have in common. It is somewhat dangerous to formulate a listing of the gifts required, but such a listing is necessary, so long as it is remembered that the list should not be absolutized. The Lord is able to use a wide variety of people in His ministry, and there are certainly cases of effective ministry by authentically called preachers of the Word who have been singularly ungifted. But such cases should be viewed as exceptional, and both the individual who thinks that God may be calling him to the ministry and the church that evaluates the ministerial candidate are obligated to examine him in terms of whether or not he has gifts.

To begin, then, we can assume that God endows those whom He truly calls to the ministry with the necessary intellectual capacity. Now, when we talk about the gifts of intellect, there is obviously a wide range among ministers. For our purposes, however, it is practical to assume that when God calls a person to the ministry, He will provide the person with intellectual capacities

sufficient to enable him to handle the general course offered by an accredited seminary. This involves study in the original languages of the Scriptures, systematic study of church doctrine, and studies of the Old and New Testaments. This material confronts one studying for the ministry with material that demands a certain level of intellectual ability, and if a person cannot handle this material satisfactorily, we should assume that he is not being called to the work of the gospel ministry.

Closely related to intellectual gifts are the gifts of self-discipline. Self-discipline must be considered also in connection with the moral life of the minister, but it is also closely related to the way a person handles the formal requirements for the ministry. For it is possible that a person may well have the intellectual capacity to handle a seminary course, but not have the self-discipline that enables him actually to accomplish academic goals. This does not necessarily mean that a person is fundamentally undisciplined or lazy; it may simply mean that he is unable to express his ability of self-discipline with reference to academic activity.

The seminary experience not only provides those who are preparing for the ministry with the opportunity to study specific course material, but also provides a training ground in which they can develop abilities that they will be required to use as they do their work later on. For example, memorization is an important element in the performance of one's ministry, and for most people memorization demands self-discipline. Higher education provides students with the opportunity to develop their ability to memorize, and if a person discovers that he does not have the ability to do this, he is probably not called to the ministry of the Word.

Another important gift a minister should possess is the gift of communication. It is not necessarily eloquence that is needed—in fact, eloquence can sometimes be counterproductive for communication since it calls too much attention to itself. What is needed is an ability to attract people's attention as one speaks, and keep that attention, and succeed in transferring from the mind of the minister to the mind of the hearer a certain amount of information.

In connection with the *call* to the ministry, it is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of the gift of communication. If a person doesn't have this gift, there is no way he can be useful in the ministry of the Word. Now, we must remember that there are all sorts of other ways that the people of God serve one another within the church, and it is certainly no disgrace if a person is not able to communicate. If a person who thinks he is called to the ministry is in fact incapable of communicating the gospel but is not aware of this deficiency, the church should gently inform him of his lack.

A minister must have the gift of communication, but, again, it must be stressed that this gift is not a finished product that God presents to certain people; it is rather an ability that must be developed over the years. That is especially true nowadays when ministers communicate the gospel in a highly competitive situation in which people are exposed to many forms of communication. The way a minister communicates will necessarily change over the years; it will change during the course of a single day as he is required to communicate the gospel to different kinds of people. It will not do for a minister simply to adopt a certain way of doing his speaking and expect it always to be effective. Ministers who do this often attribute their lack of communication success to the hardness of the hearts of their people when in fact it is rooted in their own unwillingness to adapt to their audiences.

In any case, this gift is absolutely essential. And here is another one: the gift of judgment, or we might call it, the gift of wisdom. The exercise of the ministry as we know it today often occurs in a highly charged and complex situation. Gone are the days when the minister was an authority figure within the community who lived somewhat to the side of normal human events. Today the minister functions right in the middle of ordinary life. In some instances, a minister will be required to conduct his work as part of a staff. And always, if his church is of any size at all, there are all sorts of events occurring, as young people interact with one another, as children and parents interact, and as various groups and even factions in their churches interact with each other. Along with this, as a minister brings the Word of God into the

lives of his people, he is dealing with that element of human life about which there are the strongest convictions. Religious conscience is the most tender and puzzling element in our lives, and ministers touch conscience all the time. Ministers these days are a part of the complex dynamic themselves, and with all of the other interactions, their congregations interact with them, too.

Against this background it is absolutely essential that a minister possess the gift of judgment, the gift of wisdom. He must have the ability to understand what is really happening among the people he is most closely related to, and he must be able to respond to the situation in such a way that does not make it worse, but better. Such judgment can be exercised only if a minister is able to maintain a certain degree of emotional distance from other people and from the circumstances in which he finds himself. The only kind of person who can maintain such distance is a person who is at ease with himself, has a proper amount of self-esteem, and possesses self-confidence.

Now, it is in connection with judgment that ministers have a special problem. The kind of person who has many of the gifts for the ministry is often a person who has great perception not only of himself but of others, and he is a person who himself needs a great deal of emotional support. Ministers are among the most sensitive of people, and they are exceptionally vulnerable, for they are always in a dreadfully exposed position. It is for these reasons that when ministers get involved in difficult situations, they often make those situations worse rather than better. Instead of bringing to the situation that which can lead to solutions, they themselves become part of the problem. Or worse, they can sometimes create totally new problems that make the existing ones pale into insignificance.

That is why a person who is to be a minister should have the gift of judgment. If one wonders whether he has the *call,* he should ask himself whether he usually makes matters worse or makes them better when he gets involved in a situation. In the Army it used to be and perhaps still is that an officer would not be promoted until he had been evaluated by his peers. Those who are preparing for the ministry should be evaluated by their peers,

too, in terms of whether they possess the gift of judgment. And the church, when it evaluates candidates for the ministry should examine this element of their lives very carefully. Those in the ministry who are unable to express wisdom and judgment in their work cause the church a great deal of harm.

Evaluation of Attitudes

No discussion of the call would be complete, however, without giving attention to the attitudes that should be considered integral elements of the ministerial calling. The person called to the ministry of the gospel must possess the prerequisite qualities of faith such as those which can be described in terms of conversion, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and deep interest in the Bible as the Word of God. In terms of matters such as these, the minister does not differ from any mature Christian person. And the gifts that have been discussed above are often found among other members of the body of Christ. Ministers have them, but they are by no means their exclusive possession. It is in connection with certain inner attitudes, however, that the peculiar, definitive structure of the call comes to its distinctive expression.

What are these attitudes? It is difficult to describe them with precision or identify them with neat labels. But they can be thought about and reflected upon, and those who think about their own call should think about these attitudes a great deal.

They are attitudes that relate to the ministerial call as a call to a special level of voluntary Christian obedience. *Obedience* is the key word, the key concept. If one is unwilling to view himself as being related to Jesus in a special bond of obedience, he should not consider himself called to the ministry. A minister must ordinarily express levels of self-discipline and self-sacrifice beyond those required of other Christians, and such levels can be achieved only if a minister feels himself in a special relationship of obedience to Christ. The words of Paul to Timothy are very useful in this connection: "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved

in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer" (II Tim. 2:4). The idea of *soldiering* and the idea of *commanding officer* are extremely important for anyone who considers himself called to the ministry of the gospel. A person with the call is not a civilian; he is an enlisted man, a soldier, and the one person who is uppermost in his mind is his commanding officer.

As a called person, the minister of the gospel must express his obedience with reference to the flock of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the supremely awesome dimension of the ministerial task: a minister is Jesus' earthly representative who must care for the flock that Jesus has purchased not with silver or gold, but with His own precious blood. "Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). These words, spoken to the elders of Ephesus, apply with special force to those called to be ministers of the Word and the sacraments.

So then, those who feel themselves called are obligated to assess the state of their own souls to ascertain whether they have properly sensed the magnitude of their task so that they can be sure they will be able to exhibit levels of obedience that are necessary if a person is usefully to fill the ministerial office. And this process can be carried out by a self-examination designed to determine whether the minister is willing to do certain things required of those who have the obligation of expressing that special level of obedience to their commanding officer Jesus. Among the attitudes flowing from a sense of obedience to Christ that must be present in anyone called to the ministry are the following:

1. Self-discipline, not just in academics, but in all of life, from prayer and Bible study to proper habits of rest and exercise.
2. Self-sacrifice, a genuine willingness to endure hardship in terms of finances, peer esteem, physical comfort if the cause of Christ demands it.
3. Self-giving, not only to the powerful and wealthy, but also to the weak, the poor, to any who are needy in any way—an actual willingness to wash the feet of others.

4. Self-control, a sense of the Spirit's sanctifying work in one's own life, an awareness that Christ alone is one's Master.

There are probably other inner attitudes that could be presented as being necessary. But these may function as examples of what should characterize the minister of the gospel. It would, of course, be a mistake to suggest that no one should consider himself called to the ministry unless all the attitudes presented are perfectly present in his life. Alas, it is simply impossible for any person to approach the ideal all the time and in every respect. Even so, the attitudes discussed provide us with significant points of reference and can function as helps for those who are looking at themselves closely in order to determine whether God is truly calling them to the ministry of the Word. And thinking about this can be as useful for those who have been in the ministry and are seeking to determine the strength of their call.

The Call Over the Years

It is necessary that a person who works as a minister of the gospel be truly called by the Lord to this work, and it is possible for a person who is himself called to this work to talk about the call from various perspectives. Even so, it must be understood that the call to the ministry cannot be easily defined and delimited and identified—each individual who has been called will necessarily experience the call to the gospel ministry in a way that is peculiar to him. The *call* is not experienced in the same way at every point in a person's life. In other words, the *call* is not a hard, absolute entity that a person suddenly receives once and for all and that is that, an immovable point that is there, firm and steadfast, somewhere in the minister's soul, a constant that never changes.

It is possible to think about the way the ministerial call is experienced by remembering that it modifies as a minister passes through various stages of life. The initial call to the ministry may be experienced when a person is still quite young. As people

speak to an individual who seems to have the gifts and attitudes described above, he may begin to wonder if the ministry is something that he should consider seriously. And it often happens that in these early stages there is a rebellion against the idea of the ministry because it is viewed as extremely restrictive and unrewarding. Then, there could well come a point when the young person is convicted of his call—possibly through a speech or a sermon, possibly through certain events that make it clear to him that God wants him in the ministry, possibly through the continued encouragement of God's people.

The initial experience of the call, however, should not be automatically viewed as an authentic call to the gospel ministry; rather, it provides the impetus for the individual involved to begin a process of preparation and testing. It is usually necessary for a person, once he feels himself called to the gospel ministry, to become involved in a period of intensive training that could last as much as eight years. This period of training should be viewed as a time in which God wants those who feel themselves called to examine themselves carefully, and some of the matters included in this present chapter could well help in that examination. In addition, the person who is preparing himself for the gospel ministry should willingly receive the evaluations of others—of family and friends and fellow students. If a person is truly called, the time of preparation can become a time for a deepening of the ministerial call, so that by the time the candidate is about to take up his work, he feels certain that God wants him to do this work and no other.

As a minister progresses through his career, he will experience his call in a number of ways and a number of degrees. Ministers are people, human beings—of course they are! But this means that they are subject to changes in their lives' circumstances. Many of them marry and raise a family and all of them have experiences that cause heart break. Ministers have their own emotions to contend with, their own natures. Ministers often drift into patterns of behavior and thought that are detrimental so far as their own spiritual life is concerned. They can sometimes feel themselves very alienated from other people and, yes, even alien-

ated from God. Ministers go through mid-life crises, and they become emotionally and mentally unable to handle their work.

What all this means is that ministers themselves must expect that their own experience of their call will not be a constant support. From time to time, they will find that they must re-evaluate their own ministry and the calling they have. The material in this chapter is designed to help ministers evaluate just where they are with respect to their own call, and if they recognize there was a time when their sense of calling was considerably stronger than it now is, they should earnestly and deliberately rearrange their lives and reorganize their thinking so that they will again be able to experience the reality of the call.

As difficult as it is to talk about the ministerial call and as difficult as it is for a minister to evaluate his life in this regard, it is essential that there be a conscious awareness of problems surrounding the ministerial call. For it is actually impossible for a person without the call to function usefully in the gospel ministry. And this is why it is so necessary, if a minister's feeling of being called fades away, that he work at determining exactly what is happening in his life. There is evidence that some who have had a strong call to the gospel ministry at an early stage of their lives for one reason or another discover that it has left them. If this happens, a person should not doggedly continue his work—he will save neither himself nor those who hear him.

At the same time, one whose sense of call has deteriorated alarmingly should not quickly assume that he should leave the gospel ministry. It is important to remember that when it comes to the *call,* we are talking about an interior event that takes many years to develop fully and we should expect that under ordinary circumstances it remains for a person's entire lifetime; when it is not very prominent for one reason or another, its lack of prominence should be attributed to temporary circumstances that will be corrected with the proper remedies and with the passage of time.

The internal call, if authentic, will be confirmed by an external call from a congregation to do the work of the gospel ministry. If

a minister whose own sense of internal call becomes somewhat threadbare at a given time nevertheless continues to be sustained by a strong and unmistakable ecclesiastical call to his ministry, he should assume that as he prays and continues to function in his office, the Lord will visit him anew, or from time to time, with a strong internal conviction that God has called him to be His minister.

The Call—A Reality!

When one reviews this chapter, the overall impression it gives is that one must be very careful with respect to the call, for some may think they have it and be mistaken. Unfortunately, the current situation with respect to the ministry demands that discussions of the call convey this note. But the fact remains that God does call men to the ministry of the gospel.

His action is what causes men to be called to the gospel ministry, a fact that must never be forgotten. For this reason any discussion of this subject demands that we develop an ability to examine the inner life of those who claim the call to see if God has assuredly called the person in question. One young man who felt called to the ministry declared in the publication of his denomination that he was indignant that the church would presume to test his call in terms of whether he had the prerequisite gifts. His indignation was misplaced. Those who claim that God has called them must cheerfully submit to examination.

The church may rejoice in these days that God is still building His church, and one of the instruments He uses is the ministry of the Word and sacraments. And so God continues to call men to the ministry of the gospel. He endows them with the gifts we have examined, and He creates through His Holy Spirit the prerequisite faith conditions in their hearts. It is God who creates the strength of the call within the man involved and brings him to the point at which he knows assuredly that he has that special responsibility of gospel proclamation, so that he finally must say, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel."

In the light of God's sovereign calling to the ministry—which is experienced somewhat along the lines discussed in this piece—the call to the ministry of the Word is entirely positive, and, on balance, its impact in the life of the called clergyman is positive through and through. This does not mean that there are not elements of the call experience that are upsetting, even traumatic; but over the long term those who are called to the gospel ministry feel themselves to be among the most privileged of men.

And their task is easy. Those who have Jesus as their Master discover that it is true, as He said, that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. This is true of every Christian, but it is true to the fullest degree of those whom God calls and qualifies for the gospel ministry. There are, of course, descriptions of the Christian life in the Bible that suggest it is arduous. One thinks, for example, of the apostle Paul's frequent comparing of the Christian life to the running of a race; in Philippians 3:13, 14 the language he uses indicates that he is thinking of a highly trained athlete who is putting all of his strength into the last few yards as he throws himself toward the goal. Surely, such a figure of speech has a special application to the gospel ministry; even so, the work of the ministry is easy, for those whom the Lord calls, He also qualifies. Athletes at the height of their powers, at the moments of greatest exertion, experience their greatest exhilaration. The Master, Jesus Christ, is an easy Master—those who are truly called will testify to this.

Therefore, let whatever is said about the gospel ministry never be used to turn anyone aside from this great work. Those who suspect that they may be God's called men should not shrink from examining themselves with care to determine the reality of their call. If there is the slightest possibility that a man is called, he should eagerly begin the necessary preparation, knowing that as he does so, God will clarify what He wants him to do.

There must be special prayer on behalf of the people of God that God Himself will work mightily in the hearts of the people He has prepared for this special service. He is the one who calls. And He is doing that even today. There is such a thing as a special call to the ministry of the Word and sacraments. Those who have

it should be among the happiest people in the world. Many of them are, usually. Possibly what has been written here will strengthen many in their sense of being called and give them the poise and the joy those who love them want them to experience all the time.