

must be presented as he was in the days of his flesh and as the Scriptures present him. His redeeming work must be made manifest as the Church presents it in Sacrament and Liturgy. For too long much of our teaching and preaching and consequently much of our learning in school and seminary has remained in the realm of the abstract and needs to be transposed into the concrete and personal. The Bible must stand at both ends of our theology. Theology must be drawn from the Bible and must be put back again into the Bible to be prayed and preached.

'What is grace?' says the catechism, and its answer is: 'Grace is a supernatural gift of God, freely bestowed upon us for our sanctification and salvation.' Explain that clause by clause to a class of children or an adult congregation and, however skilfully you do it, their response will be almost negligible. But show them the giver of grace in the person of our Lord, as the Church shows him, not by explaining that he is a Person, the person of God the Son, having two natures divine and human, but by setting forth the things he did and now does for us, and so allowing them to see him and what he is. Then the response will be far different.

The best way, and indeed the only way, of making real to others the person of the Giver of grace is to be, at least in intention and urgent desire, a grace-filled and grace-possessed person oneself.



THE PULPIT PRESENTATION OF THE FAITH

FERDINAND VALENTINE, O.P.

THE subject-matter covered by this title is so wide in extent that we are in danger from the outset of being lost in generalities. For this reason I propose to explore one corner only of its extensive field, by confining myself to the parochial apostolate. I think you will find that the more general principles will emerge.

Let us begin with a quotation:

'Television is a blessing', an American Bishop said recently. 'Spiritually radio and television are beautiful examples of the inspired wisdom of the ages. Radio is like the Old Testament

. . . hearing of wisdom without seeing; television is like the New Testament because in it the wisdom becomes flesh and dwells among us. . . . We are thankful to radio and television for being the most spiritual symbols of the truth by which we are saved.¹

Is that statement true or fanciful? You may have your own ideas about that. There are however one or two incontrovertible facts about this new situation. First, the size of the average radio and television audience is obviously larger than that which could be accommodated in any of our largest Cathedrals or even in St Peter's Square. Secondly, these modern instruments of diffusion lend added power to the individual apostle and give him a sense of achievement. It must be very gratifying to receive a spate of letters telling of help received and of numerous enquiries made for further information. Many converts owe their introduction to the Faith to radio and television. . . . The debate continues.

I

The trouble begins, however, at least in the present context, when these mass means of communication are thought largely to supersede the more traditional methods of the Church, or in any way to rival them. Radio and television cast a spell upon both audience and preacher; their ritual is impressive; rehearsals are carefully carried through; expert and experienced engineers are at one's service; everything is done efficiently, courteously, confidently.

'This thing is important', everyone seems to be reminding us. 'Mistakes cannot be tolerated. When the light goes on, remember—you are on the air!'

A similar situation is arising in our schools. These highly efficient means of mass instruction are now readily available, and if they are used as auxiliaries by school teachers who know their children—their mentality, background, apperceptive powers—then, as means of inspiration, they are legitimate.

But are harassed and overworked teachers sufficiently well-founded in their vocation to use these means with discretion, and not as substitutes? The size of the classes in the average school is increasing; and relatively the number of teachers is decreasing.

¹ Bishop F. Sheen, *Time*. November 19, 1956.

Most of these children have little home-life. Many are 'key-kids' or at least children whose parents go out to work. 'A few children who are undisciplined or worse', writes Doctor Lydiard Wilson, 'can infect a whole class, and the strain of dealing with the overwhelming numbers in such a class is well-nigh intolerable.' (Letter to the *Daily Telegraph*.) We begin then to see the nature of this assault of mass education through radio, television and other 'one-way means of communication' upon the schoolroom.² *Mutatis mutandis* the position is similar for the hard-working parochial priest in relation to his duty as teacher.

The meaning of this threat becomes clearer when seen from another angle. Briefly, the influence of the industrial revolution plus the invasion of applied science into human affairs, has created mass-society—that is, the grouping of men into large, congested areas of population. These in turn have created the need for a highly centralized authority. . . . It is hardly surprising that this trend should have affected the apostolate. On all sides one hears talk of amalgamation, and of a more unified and efficient exercise of control as a bulwark against a world-system which is massing power and prestige in the hands of the few. In the present context, the upshot of all this has been to create many national and international extra-parochial organizations. However necessary these may be, a certain fascination attaches to the big number, as though its efficacy were in direct proportion to its size. Mass meetings impress. To see crowds leaving Westminster Cathedral on a Sunday creates the illusion that the 'Romans' have indeed brought off a kind of spiritual *coup d'état*. Congresses, too, can be very inspiring, showing forth the latent dynamism of the Church. And the glamour and drive of these large, extra-parochial organizations (among which we must include religious orders of men and women) tend to distract the priest from his parish and to undermine his confidence in his unique and central position as teacher and father.

II

Let us never forget that the priest belongs to his people—to Tom, Dick and Harry. The apostolate can never be impersonal. We cannot save souls by committees; or direct them by means of an

² cf. *The Psychology of Learning*, by B. R. Bugelski. p. 470.

electronic brain. The priest must be one who dwells among his people, one with whom they can speak, eat, walk, share the joys and sorrows of life. He is a real presence—not a voice in a box or a picture in a darkened room. In Christ he is shepherd. 'He calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them.' (John 10, 3.) He knows them and they know and accept him. Through this mutual love and sympathy he learns *how* to teach them in the very act of teaching.

'For so great is the power of sympathy', writes St Augustine, 'that when people are affected by us as we speak and we by them as we learn, we dwell each in the other and thus both they, as it were, speak in us what they hear, while we, after a fashion, learn in them what we teach. . . . And the more so, the closer the friendship between them and us; for in proportion as we dwell in them through the bond of love, so do things which were old become new to us also.' (*De Catechizandis Rudibus*.)

In another place St Augustine says that some priests grow sad when preaching to the dull-witted; for they must come down from their lofty heights and explain step by step through long and devious paths what they themselves can perceive with one rapid sweep of the mind.

'Should this happen to us', he continues, 'let us consider him who gave us the example. . . . However widely our spoken word may differ from the rapidity of our understanding, greater by far is the difference between mortal flesh and equality with God. And yet . . . he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant . . . he became weak unto the weak, that he might gain the weak . . . he became a little child in the midst of us, like a nurse cherishing her children. . . . For it is no pleasure to murmur broken and mutilated words into the ear unless love invite us. And yet men wish to have children for whom they may do this. And sweeter is it for the mother to chew morsels small and put them into the mouth of her tiny son, than to chew and consume larger morsels herself. . . . And so, if the intellect delight us by penetrating the very essence of things, *let us also take delight in understanding how love, the more graciously it descends to the lowliest station, the more irresistibly it finds its way to the inmost recesses of the heart, because it seeks nothing of those to whom it descends, except their eternal salvation.*' (*Loc. cit.*)

Some years ago Father Vincent McNabb distilled the essence of this wisdom of St Augustine.

'When what we say is understood and accepted by Bridget', he said, 'then we are most probably right.'

For him, Bridget was the poor, honest, uneducated Catholic housewife and mother. He meant that when we can so break down truth that it may be understood and assimilated by simple folk, then we know not only when we are right but are also deeply conscious of our own ignorance. The priest, says St Augustine, should not be like the hawk that swoops down from the heights; he must be *Father*. *Men cherish their babes into whose ear they murmur the broken and mutilated words of baby talk. If we are to teach, let us first learn to love.*

It is in this context that we begin to understand the importance of chastity and humility as apostolic—one might almost say, pedagogic—virtues. As priests we have not only chosen to love Christ but to love him as he loves us—with a virgin heart; and our unconditional abandonment in Christ to the will of the Father is rewarded by an increased capacity to love humanly. Chastity so liberates the human love of the dedicated apostle, that freed from the ties of marriage, it might embrace the world. The priest is Christ's man; his hands, feet, mind and heart are the instruments of Christ; in Christ he loves those most who are most in need. We discuss teaching techniques in vain if this love is absent. Loves makes us *want* to break the bread of truth into morsels that souls may be mentally nourished and inspired to learn.

From such chaste love flows humility, the desire to come down to the level of those we are to teach and to learn from them. We must know what they are—the level, that is, of their knowledge. Therein lies the secret of right method. The people themselves will show us how to set about our teaching. But we must first become like unto them. The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us. So too by analogy our loving sympathy makes us men of the people that by dwelling amongst them we may learn to teach and to uplift them from within as priests of God. That is why the parochial apostolate is so very important. The priest is the chosen apostle of Christ, a man of God sent to become a man of the people; the bearer of a message who finds little difficulty in casting it into the mental mould of those amongst whom he lives. It was because Christ was a Galilean peasant-craftsman, one of the people and at their service, that he knew how to trans-

late his divine message into language they could understand.

So the priest as teacher is sometimes alone with a soul in the confessional or sick room, as the Lord met Nicodemus by night. He teaches small groupings of his people as the Lord taught the Twelve by the lakeside. He speaks to his congregation in church as Christ spoke to the Jews in the synagogue. The true priest as the bearer of Good-tidings loves to pass them on, to share them with others. Almost everything he says or does has meaning as an apostle. . . .

But it is from the pulpit that he speaks formally and officially in the name of Christ.

III

If all this is true, how best can the pulpit be used as a teaching medium? In one sense it is far from ideal. For instance, if it is impossible to teach effectively an heterogeneous mass of three million radio listeners, is it any easier to teach, say, three hundred of the faithful gathered for Sunday Mass?

Sir Ronald Gould, a former Secretary of the N.U.T., said recently:

‘In classes of forty or fifty children there can be no individual instruction worth talking about.’

This was repeated more recently at the Annual Conference at Scarborough, when the newly-elected Secretary, Mr Evan S. Owen, said in his inaugural address:

‘Let us get rid of the old idea that the smaller the child the bigger should be the class. Classes should be small enough for individual attention.’

It is generally accepted in the teaching profession that for the best results the class should never exceed thirty children. This means, of course, children of the same age, with more or less the same apperception. What chance then has the priest of inspiring a group of three hundred of the faithful to think, composed as they are of young and old, the mentally alert and the dull-witted, the learned and the ignorant; those who are anxious to know more about God and those who are spiritually deaf? The priest can inform most of these people, but how can he inspire them to think?

However, let us beware of jumping to conclusions. There is a

vast difference between the pulpit and the school-room. The object of the sermon is to discover the truth that is a way of life, to announce and explain the word of God. At such moments, supernatural processes are set in motion which elude any effort to classify them strictly in relation to the pedagogic art. The gifts of the Holy Ghost are operative in those who love God and wish to find closer union with him. The Gift of Wisdom is a perfection of the understanding enabling the just man to judge of all things according to divine standards, to see things from God's point of view. But although the Gift of Wisdom is essentially the perfection of the mind under the influence of the Holy Spirit, its cause is in the will, in the loving union with God through charity, *secundum quamdam connaturalitatem*.

It is, as St Augustine says, the loving soul that understands, and whose judgments are often more in accordance with the mind of God than those of expert theologians who lack the Gift of Wisdom.

We say of these godly people that they relish divine things; that they are inquisitive to find out more about God, in order to serve him more faithfully. It is in response to this yearning of the loving heart that Christ passes on assimilable truth through the priest speaking in his name. In this context of divine charity then we envisage the reciprocal influence of the priest as exponent of the Christian *way of life*, and his people.

On January 17th, 1895, scarcely two months after his arrival at Venice as Patriarch, Cardinal Sarto, later Pope Pius X, issued an *ad clerum*. He wrote:

'We have far too much preaching and far too little real instruction. Have done with these flowers of eloquence; preach to the people with simplicity and piety; give them the truths of the Faith and the precepts of the Church; tell them the meaning of virtue and the danger of vice. Even people who according to the standards of the world are considered learned are surprisingly ignorant of the most fundamental truths of their religion, and in some cases are not so well instructed as small children.

'The people thirst to know the truth; give it to them; give them what they need for the salvation of their souls. The sermon should be constructed according to the capacity of the people; it should be aimed to touch the heart and not merely to

charm the ear. Its result should not be the glory of the preacher but the repentance of the sinner and an increase in those who approach the sacraments. Oratorical eloquence has nothing apostolic in itself; it is purely profane and wholly lacking in supernatural influence. The sermon might be pleasing to the people, but their hearts are not touched; they leave the House of God as they entered. To quote St Augustine: *Mirabantur, sed non convertebantur.*'

Still, granting the truth of all this, it would be utter folly to pretend that as apostles we should not study the basic principles of the learning process, and accommodate our method of teaching to them. We have already tried to explain that it is a right attitude to those we teach which enables us to adopt and use right method; the attitude, that is, of 'giving ourselves away' to others, of putting ourselves in the place of others, that by so doing we may know the degree of their knowledge and their ability to learn—or, more colloquially, how much they can take in. We have to inspire them with the will to learn, and want to help them to grow in knowledge.

IV

Perhaps at this moment you may be saying to yourselves, 'Why isn't he more practical? Surely he could tell us that first we should speak to be heard, that we should know what we are talking about, that we should use simple language and helpful analogy, that wherever possible we should base our teaching on the Scriptures?'

There are two answers to this question: first (more personal), I have met few priests who have not had their own decided views on this matter of presentation and technique. One can only presume it is a very individual affair. Secondly, one may know all the tricks of the trade in theory and yet fail utterly in front of the people. To stoop and condescend to them is unworthy, and in any case sheer waste of time. We must respect, love and know those we are talking to. Nothing is more pathetic than the learned preacher who, so to say, 'mugs up' topical allusion, and then in his sermon refers to Manchester United with a knowing smile, or to the Treble Chance, or to Tommy Steele, when for all he knows Tommy Steele may play outside left for the United. Or again,

a priest may be familiar with the text-books and literature of Froebel and Montessori and yet scare the wits out of young children, or if they are boys and a little older, find them unmanageable.

'Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart.' As teachers we must be infinitely patient and have the humility to learn from those we would teach, whatever be their mental capacity. For just as the priest can stoop and pretend to speak from the height of a child, so he can stand on tip-toe and pretend to know more than he does about theology, art, philosophy, anthropology and what not. The best margarine, the hoardings tell us, is indistinguishable from butter. Or as C. S. Forester once said of his Hornblower series: 'You Navy-men would be amused if you realized how little I know about ships.'

Let us, then, do our best and have the courage to be and to accept ourselves. How can we get together with others in search of truth if all the time we are trying to be somebody else? The best way of getting to know others is to be honest about oneself, and not to be afraid of being found out. We priests, alas, soon learn the value of cheek and of the resolve never to get stuck for an answer. As an old Dominican said of a young friar some years ago: 'At a moment's notice that man would undertake a Caesarean section or take command of the Atlantic Fleet.'

Or as one teenager said to another at a retreat I was giving: 'He'd be all right, dear, if he didn't think he was God.'

V

Again we ask: How best can the pulpit be used as a teaching medium?

Absolutely speaking, we can help others to acquire knowledge in two ways: the one more direct, 'telling', and the other indirect, which may be called 'revealing', or from the student's point of view 'discovery'. The teacher can either give the relationship between two ideas, eliciting little or no contribution from the student, or he can create the right mental situation whereby the student can discover the nexus or relationship for himself, and stimulate him to reflect, to test and examine, to suspend judgment in the quest of truth until he is sure he knows that he knows.

It is perfectly obvious then that naturally speaking the pulpit

can never be any more than a means of 'telling'. We are not suggesting that it is ineffective. It may have to be supplemented, but at least it is necessary as a means of informing the faithful and of reminding them of the Church's teaching, their duties as Catholics and the priorities of the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless it remains a 'one-way' teaching medium, like radio, television and film. The priest cannot give to each listener an individual attention.

Can it ever be sufficient to 'tell' people about the faith? Surely they should be led to *think* about it and to integrate it vitally into their everyday lives; to look upon it as a *way of living*—a participation in the Christ-life extending to the thoughts, words, interests, actions of every moment of the day. If this is true, then the presentation of the Faith from the pulpit must be supplemented by parochial activities of every kind—confessional direction, retreats, guilds, confraternities, discussion groups, the training of catechists, dramatic and choral activities and so on. The inspiration 'to think about the Faith' should not spring from any motive extraneous to the life of the learner, but from his vital need for the plenitude of the Christian life. It is this which fosters and brings to fruition the learning process inaugurated in the pulpit, making the immanent activity of the mind a function of the very life that inspires it, and never dissociating the things of faith from environment. These group meetings which supplement the presentation of the Faith from the pulpit become a living experience; and the more ardently the members of these groups seek life in its true Christian fulness, the more steadfastly will they seek truth. The Church alone who is the appointed guardian of truth can give the life which inspires it; and the priest can teach in her name only in so far as he himself participates in the Christ-life.

Let us end this paper by stressing once again the need for individual attention in the presentation of the Faith.

'Getting at the meaning of things', wrote the late Father Castiello, S.J., 'is as personal an operation as digesting one's food, or getting well from an illness. No one can digest or get well or see the meaning of a thing for another. The duty of the teacher therefore is to place the student in the mental situation whereby he is able to abstract meaning for himself. . . .'

'Students learn', remarks B. R. Bugelski, 'but teachers do not teach in the sense that they do anything to the student. No one

can knock sense into somebody else. The function of the teacher is to prepare the situation and the chain of events, in such a fashion that the learner acquires the "connections".³

The teacher therefore is not the efficient cause of learning. The efficient causes of learning are reality and thought. The teacher is the instrument. He creates the mental situation and stimulates the immanent activity of the student; makes him want to attend and want to learn. It is the part of the student to abstract the meaning of a thing from the concrete situation. That is why inspiration is the highest qualification of any teacher.

It is therefore most important for the priest who desires to bring forth meaning, to take into account the 'apperception' of those he is teaching, the contents of their minds also, and to link up new ideas with old. It is his duty to prepare the apperception in such a way that when he introduces a new idea, the student will be able to correlate it with what he already knows. As this power of perception and assimilation is personal and differs in each case, individual attention on the part of the teacher is absolutely essential.

Truth is as native to us as love. And it is our privilege to foster the growth of knowledge and to pass on to others a love of truth by patiently assisting them in its joyful discovery. But this requires a contemplative attitude to life, whereas our restless world is impatient to be informed, to be told, as though education were a kind of stitching together of a heap of knowledge. That is why insistence on modern means of mass communication is so deleterious to the human mind, and particularly to that contemplative attitude we need so badly in our quest for truth and the deep things of the spirit. Meaning is a oneness. Only when a man unifies does he understand.

VI

To conclude, then, let me summarize this paper in the following fourfold statement.

The priest as teacher should be inspired by the love of souls. His approach should be directed by a knowledge of the needs of particular people, their background, language, education and so on. Only then can he help them to assimilate new ideas and to understand the things of God.

³ *The Psychology of Learning*, pp. 457 and 460.

The pulpit is an instrument in this process of stimulating the immanent, mental activity of the faithful; it informs, reminds, encourages, uplifts, warns. Above all, the sermon or instruction in a public church is a divinely privileged occasion requiring episcopal sanction.

But to be completely effective, particularly in our own day as a means of presenting the Faith, the pulpit must be supplemented by group activities, through which individual attention and a vital integration into the fulness of the Christian life are made possible.



PAROCHIAL SERMONS

BEDE BAILEY, O.P.

RECENTLY I was given the new H.M.V. issue of Chaliapin singing excerpts from the opera *Boris Godunov*. A copy of the Russian text, with a line-by-line literal translation, is provided with the record. Chaliapin's wonderful voice and artistic sense make a whole of the music and of the words, so that even if one were quite unable to follow their meaning, some of the highly-taut emotions would be received by the listener.

I put the record on for a friend one afternoon and gave him the text. At a first hearing it is not easy to follow. For twenty minutes we listened to a great dramatic performance. When it was finished, I asked what he thought of it. 'He had a wonderful voice; and he was putting his whole heart into it, but I couldn't follow why he sang just as he did. Listening to him was rather like being at Mass, with the priest going through a whole rigmarole of different actions, and using different voices, and taking up different positions, and I don't know what he's doing it all for. He's putting his whole heart and soul into it, but most of us don't know why he acts as he does. It's our fault, of course, for not taking the trouble to find out.' I do not think the last remark