

Editorial

What the world expects of Christians is that Christians should speak out loud and clear. . . . in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt, could rise in the heart of the simplest man.

That they should get away from abstraction and confront the blood-stained face history has taken on today. The grouping we need is a grouping of men resolved to speak out clearly and pay up personally.

These words were spoken not by a Christian, but by a non-believer, who is now dead. . . . Albert Camus. How many more have lived and died, or died while living, not hearing the Good News preached to them? The question is unanswerable, but is it not possible that some preachers could be responsible? Again this is a question which has no *precise* answer. The possibility does present itself that, perhaps, many preachers did not and still do not know *what* preaching is.

Preaching is essentially, and in every instance "conversion preaching." It is God's challenge to man placing his whole existence in question, and this, both in his Baptismal initiation and in the living out of that new life given to him. Thus, preaching has a twofold purpose: to convert one who does not yet believe in Christ, and to re-convert, i.e., challenge anew time and again, those who have already been "sent." If preaching in this latter instance is not seen for what it is, viz., giving the Christian believer the wherewithal to continue to believe, then the consequences are tragic, and the one preaching simply becomes a gong booming or a cymbal clashing.

Jean-Paul Sartre has commented quite pointedly on this in his book *The Words*. Speaking of his Catholic education as a child he says: "I was taught sacred history, the gospel, and the catechism without being given the means for believing." In the former instance of preaching, viz., converting one from unbelief to belief, more often than not one is inclined to think spontaneously of a "missionary" located in some "mission field." But this is not a desirable reaction. In John 9, 1 ff., Jesus is shown opening the eyes of a blind man by sending him to wash in the pool of Siloam (a name that means "sent"). This can be taken as a sign of Jesus' mission in that He is *He-Who-is-sent* to

illumine man with the sight of faith. A man who is baptized is baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12, 13; Eph. 1, 23), and is by that fact *one-who-is-sent* as Jesus is. But Christ gave the commission to preach the Gospel to priests who receive the power to do so through Orders. The urgency of this office was underscored forcefully by Vatican II:

The people of God finds its unity first of all through the Word of the living God, which is quite properly sought from the lips of priests. Since no one can be saved who has not first believed, priests, as co-workers with their bishops, have as their primary duty the proclamation of the gospel of God to all. (*Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, par., 4)

Thus, those who have the peculiar task of preaching in the Church are, in virtue of their Baptism and Orders, men "sent" to enlighten the eyes of those blind to salvation as well as to re-ignite with the Word those who have already been "born again." And this, in order that they might vitally penetrate the God who dazzles them, incarnating the Word into themselves, thereby communicating it to one another to whom *they* are "sent."

With thoughts such as these in mind, the 1966 "Workshop on the Renewal in Scriptural and Liturgical Preaching" conducted by the Catholic University of America under the direction of Fr. John Burke, O.P., took as its theme "conversion preaching." Some of the keynote addresses of that workshop are presented in the following pages. The papers cover three broad topics. Firstly, the factors which go into making the act of faith are treated: the delicate interplay of the emotional and intellectual forces which are a vital part of man's nature, and the society in which belief occurs and whose cultural imperatives are often confused with the imperative of the divine will.

Having put faith into its human context, the discussion moves on to an explanation of faith in its theological dimensions. These papers touch on the relation between kerygma, the very core of apostolic preaching, and belief in revealed mystery; how to use the kerygmatic themes of scripture in contemporary preaching, and the relationship of faith to the Christian Baptism.

Finally, specific suggestions are given for improving the preacher's writing of the Sunday homily.

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