ENCOUNTER WITH SPURGEON

by Helmut Thielicke

In the midst of the theologically discredited nineteenth century there was a preacher who had at least six thousand people in his congregation every Sunday, whose sermons for many years were cabled to New York every Monday and reprinted in the leading newspapers of the country, and who occupied the same pulpit for almost forty years without any diminishment in the flowing abundance of his preaching and without ever repeating himself or preaching himself dry. The fire he thus kindled, and turned into a beacon that shone across the seas and down through the generations, was no mere brush fire of sensationalism, but an inexhaustible blaze that glowed and burned on solid hearths and was fed by the wells of the eternal Word. Here was the miracle of a bush that burned with fire and yet was not consumed (Exod. 3:2).

In no way was he like the managers of a modern evangelistic campaign, who manipulate souls with all the techniques of mass-suggestion, acting like salvation engineers. Charles Haddon Spurgeon—it is he of whom we are speaking—was still unaware of the wiles of propaganda, and completely ignorant of the subliminal influence that operates by appealing to secret images, wish-dreams, and anxiety complexes—and hence begins with the results of psychoanalytical tests. He worked only through the power of the Word which created its own hearers and changed souls.

Now this was not *his* word, the product of his own rhetorical skills. It was rather a word which he himself had "merely" heard. He put himself at its disposal, as a mere echo, and it brought to him the Spirit over whom he did not himself dispose. His message never ran dry because he was never anything but a recipient.

Nor did he live spiritually beyond his means. For he gave out only what flowed into him in never ceasing supply from the channels of Holy Scripture. With pails and buckets he went up even the remotest rills and tributaries of this stream to bring water to the thirsty, and to make fruitful the land of barren souls.

It would be well for a time like ours to learn from this man. For our preaching is, to be sure, largely correct, exegetically "legitimate," workmanlike and tidy; but it is also remarkably dead and lacking in infectious power. Very often it strikes us as an unreal phantom that hovers above and is isolated from what people feel are the actual realities of their life and what they talk about in their language. There can be no doubt that for many preachers it is simply an escape when, in the face of this failure to get returns in the area of preaching, they take flight into the cultivation of liturgical ceremonial and even make a virtue of the vice of wanting to ignore the times and live in some timeless, spiritual world.

In this desperate situation which threatens to break down even the best of men—for it is a desperate thing to feel the burden of souls committed to our charge and not to be able to do anything about it—everything depends upon our gaining some standards for that which is "Theme Number One"* of the church—our preaching.

There is certainly value in attempting to formulate these standards in theoretical terms, but this still does not meet the need. For, since preaching encompasses a tremendously broad complex of procedures—ranging from prayer for the miracle of the Spirit through study of the text itself and the structuring of a sermon outline to the workmanlike mastery of effective speech—real standards can be found only in living examples. Only in such examples does one find that ordered whole in which these multiple procedures have taken on concrete form, and which can therefore perform for the inquisitive observer the function of a blueprint.

*See chapter 27 of Thielicke's *Christ and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1962), pp. 173-180.—TRANS.

One must therefore read sermons like Spurgeon's in order to learn what a sermon can be and what it can give. One must study his commentaries—the greatest of them, a commentary on the Psalms *(The Treasury of David),* comprises seven large volumes—in order to appreciate what careful, painstaking Bible study can be in the hands of a receptive listener, and what a secondary matter it is that this charismatic listener was no great philologist and could call himself only an amateur in theology. (While we realize that the trained theologian dare not bypass the work involved in modern methods of interpretation, still we would be merely pedantically captious and stupid if we were no longer to appreciate this gift of charismatic hearing, this inimitable immediacy which the specially chosen one has to his text. It would only indicate that we had been driven mad by the art of hermeneutics if we were no longer capable of accepting and valuing, as a corrective of our perfect exegesis, the childlike candor of a preacher who could "listen like a disciple."*

It is evidence of the substance and also of the excellence of form in Spurgeon's sermons that—removed from the situation in which they were originally preached, and also from the magnetism of Spurgeon's personality!—they lose very little in print. Not for a moment do they give the impression that we are reading merely historical testimonies to which we no longer have any immediate access and which come alive only in the act of reinterpretation. Even for us they are still a bubbling spring whose water needs no filtering or treatment. And I venture to ask: Of what other preacher of the nineteenth century could this be said? I would not know of a single one, even among the greatest (to speak of German preachers), not Schleiermacher, nor Johann Tobias Beck, nor even Ludwig Hofacker. Indeed, which sermons of the years before World War I—what am I saying: which sermons of the twenties and thirties could we still read today without the additional incentive of a historical interest,

*The allusion is to Luther's translation of Isa. 50:4: "He wakens my ear that I may hear like a disciple."—TRANS.

and without feeling it was less ourselves who were being addressed than the fathers and brethren of days gone by?

But this bush from old London still burns and shows no signs of being consumed. Here Christians dare to speak of miracle.

Having in addition the good fortune to possess a book by this man in which he interprets himself and instructs his students on how they can do such preaching themselves—and, what is more, tells them what they must first *become* in order to be capable of it—we can only regard all this as a wonderful gift and look forward to the joy of a new discovery. At least one man who has known the burden—and the joyous privilege—of having to preach finds himself unable to keep silent now that he has begun to surmise what a preacher like Spurgeon could mean for our generation.

It is for this reason that in the second part of this book we undertake to recover and present some of these sunken treasures.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born in 1834 and died in 1892. His early years were filled with inner conflict and painful searching until the age of fifteen when, under the influence of a stirring address delivered by a lay preacher in a small Primitive Methodist chapel, he found his way to faith. For the rest of his life he remembered January 6, 1850, as the day of his conversion and new birth. The notation of the exact time when his life as a "new man" began may remind us of certain of the conventionalities of Pietism which are also familiar to us. Such an association is in fact suggested by the Puritan and Methodist tradition to which he was related through his family and his own development. Yet we shall see that with respect to both his personal inclinations and his spiritual attitude he cannot be adequately characterized by that label; he was far too original—and hence too unique—to be easily classified in terms of the history of theology.

He was only sixteen years old, a junior schoolteacher, when by chance he had to preach his first impromptu sermon to a few farmers gathered in a cottage. When it turned out to be successful

and his listeners were moved, he continued his preaching activity. This event attracted the attention of many devout people and in 1851—at the age of seventeen—he was called by the little Baptist congregation in the village of Waterbeach to be their preacher. In a short time the young "boy-preacher," as he was called, created a sensation and people flocked from great distances to hear him. Even at that time men recognized that it was not only a matter of his youthful exuberant eloquence evoking excitement, and of curiosity drawing people to this spiritual child prodigy, but that he was endowed with the power of the effectual Word: people were actually changed, and moral laxity was replaced by order and peace.

It is a testimony to the extraordinary maturity and self-insight of the "boy preacher" that success did not delude him. Instead he became aware of his lack of theological preparation and repeatedly and energetically sought admission to a theological seminary. By a strange providence he did not succeed in this but was obliged to remain an autodidact, a self-taught man.

While this set severe limitations on his training in theology, his self-education became all the more unusual in the form that it took. He did not exhaust himself in an indiscriminate, chaotic, book-devouring hunger for education, but rather gave evidence even at that time of a disciplined and purposeful system of study which, undergirded by intellectual power and determination and an astonishing memory, also disclosed itself later in his ability to organize his literary work on a large and well planned scale. During the course of his life he gathered about him a considerable group of assistants who aided him in his twenty years of work on the commentary on the Psalms, exploring for him the rich source materials in the British Museum, providing him with excerpts, and combing through the works of the Puritan fathers for him. The tremendous number of book reviews which he published in *The Sword and the Trowel,* a monthly magazine established later, indicates further how widely and critically and systematically he read for himself and educated himself. After

a number of intermediate posts in which the churches were always too small to accommodate the crowds of people and in which he frequently preached in the open air, in vacant barns, once even from the gable of a house, he moved in 1861 to the famous Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. Here until his death he preached Sunday after Sunday to some six thousand people. His largest meeting drew an audience of twenty-four thousand persons in the Crystal Palace on Fast Day in 1857. Even in a time when loudspeakers were unknown, he had no difficulty with his clear, resonant, and penetrating voice in making himself heard in the farthest corner.

When he preached for the first time in the large Surrey Gardens Music Hall, crowded with nearly ten thousand people, a few mischief-makers cried out "Fire! Fire!" Though Spurgeon remained calm in the pulpit and endeavored to restore quiet, he was unable to stop the panic. For the rest of his life he could never forget the horrible spectacle in which seven persons were trampled to death and twenty-eight injured. In his mind it became a symbol of the "darkness" that can befall the very people of God, a good example of the trials and perplexities that make them give heed to the Word.

The nightmare of this horrible scene shadowed his life for a long time afterward and first began to retreat when he thought of the words, "Therefore God has highly exalted him" (cf. Phil. 2:9).

"The fact that Jesus still remains exalted even though his servants lie never so low upon the ground, led me finally . . . back to peace."

So for him joy and pain, success and discouragement again and again became spiritual visitations with which he sought to cope by spiritual means. For him nothing was to be interpreted merely in terms of its immanental context in time; he saw everything in the light of eternity.

It is characteristic of the nature of his preaching ministry that, despite the turbulence of a successful life in which he was sur-

rounded by crowds of people, he did not allow himself to become swamped with externals and consumed with busyness. Instead he immersed himself in the quietness of prayer and meditation, receptively filling his mind and soul, and then went forth recreated from these quiet hours to pour himself out without reserve. Hence the temptation of becoming the star preacher and enjoying the respect and adulation of men held no attraction for him. Neither did he become a "soloist." Instead, as a serving member of the church, he sought out the "ensemble" in which to work. It was there that he radiated his spirit, in order to impart not only the effects of his gifts but also the gifts themselves, and not in order merely to attach people to the greatness of his own personality.

The most important result of his labors was the founding of the Pastors' College (1857), in which with the help of his co-workers he trained nearly seven hundred preachers and evangelists. Out of this work came *Lectures to My Students,* extracts from which are given in the second part of this book. These lectures are distinguished by the fact that they give to the reader far more than technical rules for the art of preaching. They are an inexhaustible store of stimulating material.

Of course, the lectures do provide training in the formal side of preaching as well. The technical aspects of rhetoric and oratory, including the use of the voice, gestures, and facial expression, and the structuring of a sermon, are important enough to be the subject of all-round training; for "the solemn task of preaching the gospel demands everything that a man can give, the very best." For this reason we are responsible not only for what we say, but equally for *how* we say it. Our tools too must be kept sharp. Not only our spiritual knowledge but also the means of its communication are entrusted talents, meant to be used for service. Spurgeon is well aware that many preachers stand in their own way because uncontrolled mannerisms—some defect of speech, a monotonous delivery, a repulsive facial expression, a constantly clenched fist or a continually pointed finger—curb the

congregation's willingness to listen, or produce a deadly—and spiritually deadening!—boredom.

While dilating at length upon this catalogue of rhetorical vices, Spurgeon does not make the paradoxical mistake of talking about that which is boring and tedious in a dull and prosy way. One will find few instances in literature where something that is conducive to boredom is discussed in such a sprightly and amusing fashion. The technique Spurgeon employs in this connection is that of caricature and humor. He can picture before their eyes marvellously comic pulpit figures, and make his hearers vow spontaneously never to become such a dreadful preacher as that.

His delight in caricature is applied not only to external behavior but also to the mentality of certain clerical coxcombs, culture-struck abbés, and fashionable gentlemen preachers. The ridicule to which he subjects these figures—and ridicule kills!—becomes for Spurgeon as it were a function of the judging and condemning law. And yet, in that he describes all this from a vantage point of security and is aware of that discipline of the Holy Spirit which drives these infirmities from our hearts, he can say all this with a smile and a twinkle in his eye and turn even destructive criticism into a means of edification. "I commend cheerfulness to all who would win souls." And why should not this cheerfulness be effective already in the training of the soul-winners themselves?

Important as is this formal, outward, "fleshly" aspect for those who would minister the Word of God made flesh, it is only a small sector of the whole circle of seminary instruction. The circle itself can be described only in terms of the effort to give preachers a comprehensive education.

First, it was a matter of education because Spurgeon's influence upon his seminarians was not limited merely to the communication of knowledge and techniques; he sought rather to ground and build them as persons and to make them capable instruments for the task committed to them. Second, this educa-

tion was comprehensive, because it permeated all dimensions of life and nothing was allowed to go unexposed to the magnetic field of this commitment.

In this kind of education, work upon the spiritual dimension of existence came first. It took the form of pastoral care given to future pastors. It was a matter not merely of exhortation to a life lived in constant association with the Holy Scriptures—lest that life be regarded as a burdensome yoke of the law—but rather in every word of actually bringing that life into being by making the ubiquity of the Scriptures a real and living fact.

When Spurgeon speaks, it is as if the figures of the patriarchs and prophets and apostles were in the auditorium—sitting upon a raised tribune!—looking down upon the listeners. You hear the rush of the Jordan and the murmuring of the brooks of Siloam; you see the cedars of Lebanon swaying in the wind, hear the clash and tumult of battle between the children of Israel and the Philistines, sense the safety and security of Noah's ark, suffer the agonies of soul endured by Job and Jeremiah, hear the creak of oars as the disciples strain against the contrary winds, and feel the dread of the terrors of the apocalypse. The Bible is so close that you not only hear its messages but breathe its very atmosphere. The heart is so full of Scripture that it leavens the consciousness, peoples the imagination with its images, and determines the landscape of the soul by its climate. And because it has what might be called a total presence, the Bible as the Word of God is really concentrated life that enters every pore and teaches us not only to see and hear but also to taste and smell the wealth of reality that is spread out before us here.

Those who listened to these lectures of Spurgeon lived, even "according to the flesh" *(kata sarka)*, in the atmosphere of the Bible. They no longer needed to be exhorted to take the Bible seriously; it penetrated into what the psychologists call the "image level" of their unconscious. Even the admonition to prayer was hardly needed, for the words that reached the hearer were spoken by one who himself had come out of the stillness of eternal

communion with God, and what he said to the hearer had first been talked about with the Father in heaven.

For Spurgeon the really determinative foundation of the education of preachers was naturally this work on the spiritual man. The education of preachers must not be directly pragmatic; it must not be immediately directed to preaching as its *goal.* Otherwise the process of education becomes an act of mere training, the teaching of technical skills. The preacher must read the Bible without asking in the back of his mind how he can capitalize homiletically upon the texts he studies. He must first read it as nourishment for his own soul. For the light which we are to let shine before men is borrowed light, a mere reflection. He who will not go out into the sun in order to play the humble role of a mirror, reflecting the sun's light, has to try to produce his own light, and thus gives the lie to his message by his vanity and egocentric presumption. Besides becoming unworthy of being believed, he is condemned to consume his own substance and expend his capital to the point of bankruptcy. Because he is not a recipient, he must himself produce and seek to overcome the empty silence within him by means of noisy gongs and clanging cymbals. Thus he ends in the paralysis of emptiness, and his empty, droning rhetoric merely covers up the burned-out slag beneath.

The fact that Spurgeon thus works first upon the souls of these prospective preachers and repeatedly challenges them to work upon their own souls, however, is based not merely upon the desire to achieve a sensible balance between income and outgo, but ultimately upon a basic fact of faith, which is that the arm of the Lord is stretched out over the earth without any help on our part, and therefore that it is not *we* activists who have to take him by the hand and drag him over the continents and the farthest islands of the sea. God is Lord even apart from the instrumentality that we put at his disposal with our talents. His kingdom comes even without our efforts.

Therefore the disciple can take the long view and persevere.

He who is co-ordinated with eternity dare not allow himself to be harassed and hounded by time. Thus Spurgeon makes many comments which are comparable to Luther's calm statement that while he quietly sat and drank his little mug of Wittenberg beer the gospel ran its course. Nervousness is sinful. It is, so to speak, the psychopathological form of unbelief, which takes over too much responsibility itself and to the same degree loses its confidence that God reigns and is looking after his cause.

"It was for this reason," says Spurgeon, "that Jesus, full of wisdom and compassion, said to his disciples, 'Let us go into the desert and rest awhile.'" And then he goes on to say, "What! When the people are fainting? When they are like sheep without a shepherd? How can Jesus talk of rest? When the scribes and Pharisees, like wolves, are rending the flock, how can he take his followers on an excursion into a quiet resting place?" When the decisive battle is beginning and the enemy is breaking through on every side, can one retreat to rest quarters? But, says Spurgeon:

> The Lord Jesus knows better. He will not exhaust the strength of his servants prematurely and quench the light of Israel. Rest time is not waste. It is economy to gather fresh strength. Look at the mower in the summer's day, with so much to cut down ere the sun sets. He pauses in his labour—is he a sluggard? He looks for his stone, and begins to draw it up and down his scythe, with *rink-a-tink, rink-a-tink, rink-a-tink.* Is that idle music—is he wasting precious moments? How much he might have mowed while he has been ringing out those notes on his scythe! But he is sharpening his tool, and he will do far more when once again he gives his strength to those long sweeps which lay the grass prostrate in rows before him.

Nor can the fisherman be always fishing; he must mend his nets. So even our vacation can be one of the duties laid upon us by the kingdom of God.

Reading this, one can think only in sorrow—or in anger!—of the many different practical forms of education in the church today. Whereas Spurgeon enjoins us to remember that preachers must not think too highly of themselves as instruments but in

faith accept the fact that they are dispensable, we hound our young vicars—not everybody does this, I know, but many do!—chasing them from examinations into the bustling business of pastoral services in the big cities, from funerals to marriage, and from the pulpit to doorbell-ringing, opening the pores of the body of Christ to all the bacilli against which, after all, we should be mobilizing the antibiotic of our message of peace. We keep killing flowers in the bud, because we are no longer capable of letting things grow. And we can no longer let things grow because down underneath we have forgotten how to pray "Thy kingdom come," and in its place have put our "manager's faith," our belief that everything can be produced and organized. We preach "Do not be anxious!"—and at the same time worry ourselves to death about whether everybody will hear this. We say, "God reigns"—and still we run about madly keeping the ecclesiastical machinery going. We proclaim man's passive righteousness (the righteousness that comes from God)—and still we behave like activists. We preach eternity; but when Jesus asks us, "Did you have enough of everything?" we will have to reply, "Oh, no; we didn't have enough time." This is why we preach peace and radiate restlessness. This is why we give stones instead of bread, and men do not believe us. The faith is refuted by the incredibility of those who proclaim it.

In the period of rationalism—and therefore in times long since past—it may have been true that knowledge seemed to be a refutation of faith; the attack upon faith came from the "world," which supposedly was in possession of knowledge. Today the judgment has begun at the house of God itself: we deter faith by our own incredibility.

So before we fall upon Spurgeon to analyze him homiletically as a purveyor of model sermons, we should first allow ourselves to be led to the place where such model sermons become possible, namely, the place of spiritual calm and sovereign laisser faire. The children of God can afford to dwell there precisely because they are the children of *God.*

Spiritual processes cannot be described without emphasis upon the *place* where they can occur. The man who does not work at the art of preaching without ulterior purpose, but who is always thinking of how the article will sell and perhaps also of how he can keep the market going, becomes a *routinier;* he becomes a servant, not of the kingdom of God, but of the task of perfecting the preaching machinery. What he says may be "legitimate"; the manner in which he says it may be "pleasing"; and the way he puts it may be a masterpiece of ecclesiastical "strategy." And yet what comes out will be a paradoxical self-refutation of the message, because his own existence testifies against it. What then takes place—all very correctly and in accord with the rules of the art—is the mere threshing of empty straw. The well-oiled machine no longer serves; it makes propaganda for an institution which, after all, should itself be only a servant. What the church then does is simply an act of self-assertion on the part of one institution engaged in competition with other institutions.

The result of all this may be some kind of success, but it is not the fruit of the Spirit. It may be quite possible to register certain influences that the church has exerted upon public life, but they are not the salt that preserves from decay nor the leaven that determines the taste of the bread. The grain of wheat of the messenger and the grain of wheat of the church as institution must first be hidden in the earth, in quietness and calm passivity; it must first die if it is to be able to spring up and bear fruit. Yet we work feverishly, pushing things along with artificial fertilizers; we are perpetual "producers," worshipping the gods of production. That is why the valley of dry bones spreads all around us. We are pragmatists, awed by the art of influencing people; we have forgotten the lesson of the grain of wheat about dying in order to be. Only he who dies and rises again with Christ can credibly bear witness to the death and resurrection of the Lord. But because we do not live in the magnetic field of Good Friday and Easter we merely act "as if" he had risen again. That is why the handy formulas and well-aimed addresses

help us not a bit. The enemy who goes about at night, sowing his weeds among the grains of wheat which we have ostensibly scattered in the name of Jesus Christ, is the Grand Inquisitor who comes from our own midst and organizes the Christian enterprise with a view to success. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

"Theme Number One" in the message of Spurgeon is the news about *where* spiritual existence becomes possible: the news that the straight line is precisely not the shortest connection between two points—between the theological seminary and preaching in the pulpit—but that a detour is needed. The most out-of-the-way point on this detour is quiet stillness. Not only the heart must rest, but also our legs. It is not only grace that cries out for stillness, but nature as well. The higher the top of a tree reaches, the more securely must it be grounded in the earth in order that storms may not uproot it.

The storm that Spurgeon is thinking of primarily is the turmoil and temptation of success. For success exposes a man to the pressure of people and thus tempts him to hold on to his gains by means of "fleshly" methods and practices, and to let himself be ruled wholly by the dictatorial demands of incessant expansion. Success can go to my head, and will unless I remember that it is God who accomplishes his work, that he can continue to do so without my help, and that he will be able to make out with other means whenever he "cuts me down to size."

So behind everything a man does in the vineyard we can detect the spiritual attitudes that constitute his true colors. Humility, calmness, and trust are what really do the job—and tell the story! We cannot understand the work of Spurgeon unless we take his integrity into account. We cannot duplicate his work unless we take our place with him at the same point of spiritual existence. As with all great men the example of what he is has greater significance than the example of what he does.

But the spiritual quality we are concerned with here is not something that can be understood as an isolated sector of life.

The resulting picture would then be only that caricature of a man, the "spiritualist." The self of the spiritual man, like that of any other man, is an indivisible whole. And therefore it cannot be divorced from the nature in which it has been incorporated by the will of the Creator. Though the idea of an *analogia entis,* a ladder from nature to grace, appears nowhere in Spurgeon's writings as far as I can see, the two are nevertheless related to each other. But, of course, this vocation of preaching cannot be expressed by ontological means but only with reference to him who as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the *one* God and therefore unites all the dimensions of our existence into one.

This is doubtless the reason why in Spurgeon our bodily existence can repeatedly be spoken of as a kind of substructure of the spiritual life, without however allowing—as the Marxist doctrine of substructure and superstructure might suggest allowing —the physical-natural part of our being to assume the determinate role. It cannot assume that role, if for no other reason than this, that in God himself the Creator does not have precedence of the Redeemer; the first article of the Creed does not have pre-eminence over the second.

Spurgeon wishes to tell us that our body too—just like our "heart"—is ordained to be a servant; and because it is to be the instrument of him whom we preach, it must also serve the preaching. Our spirit and soul and body together (cf. I Thess. 5:23) constitute the totality of the spiritual self, and therefore all of them together are entrusted to the supervision and training of those who in the name of the Word made flesh are charged with the education of ministers of the Word.

So even the physical side of speech, including voice culture and gestures, is not merely a matter of the rules and techniques of rhetoric. It is a part of the service which the speaker must render to the Word and its utterance, the service which he is supposed to perform in love for that neighbor to whom he owes this Word.

This does not mean that we scorn the techniques of rhetoric;

they are only put in their proper relative place, their spiritual place. Apart from this place they degenerate into the principle of art for art's sake, a means of striving for psychological effect. It was precisely the masses that Spurgeon had to speak to, plus his own susceptibility to the appeal of the atmosphere they generated and his masterly ability to play upon the instrument of an enthusiastic crowd, that compelled him to exercise special self-control in order to avoid the threat of rhetorical excess. For "if there is anything that is likely to add more fuel to the flames of human vanity than the success of an actor, it is the success of a preacher" (Bruce Marshall).

He obtained this self-control, not from the discipline of the law, but rather from the recollection of what God had bestowed upon him and of the stewardship he had to render as a servant. Just as exegesis is philology in service and dogmatics is diaconic thinking, so rhetoric becomes an *ars instrumentalis* and thus a province of theology. It is, so to speak, taken over from the faculty of arts into the faculty of theology. Just as philology in service does not contribute something less than philology proper to exegesis (but rather employs all the rules of textual and literary criticism as well as interpretation), and just as diaconic thought is not something less than disciplined thinking (but rather respects the laws of logic and by no means practices intellectual glossolalia or devotes itself to the Dadaist cult of the paradox), so spiritual rhetoric in Spurgeon is not something less than good rhetoric and workmanlike skill, but is rather a matter of strenuous training, employing what was known in his time of the physiology of the larynx and the psychology of the listener. *Except* that this heathen rhetoric is baptized and made a part of the activity of the community of Jesus Christ.

Here again Spurgeon subjects our present-day preaching to some critical questions. Have we not taken the perfectly proper recognition that it is not we but the Word itself that creates a hearing for itself and made of that recognition a "pretext for evil," an excuse for slovenly neglect of rhetoric? Is it not a mis-

conception of the doctrine of justification when we allow "by faith alone" to become an abstention from works, including the work of rhetoric? When a man preaches the pure Word of God and the pews are empty or those attending go to sleep in church, we are all too ready to make a virtue of our lack of success and talk about the offense that must necessarily accompany the preaching of the gospel. We have a great talent for persuading ourselves that it is not only the stones which can cry out but that the empty pews too will testify for us. And yet it may have been due only to the miserable structure of our sermons that people who value intellectual order were unable to follow them without torturously abusing their minds, and finally giving it up. Perhaps it was also our poorly used voice that caused people to indulge in church rather than at home their desire for sleep. Or we stood like stockfish in the pulpit, or we revolved our arms like paddle wheels, or we kept threatening with our fists, or rattling our dentures—in short, we did not pay enough attention to, we did not cultivate, the instrumental factor. We did not *grieve* over the poorly fired, porous "earthen vessels" of our disorderly sermon outlines and our miserable rhetoric. On the contrary—what a strange perversion!—we were pleased with them because, after all, the wretchedness of the vessel seemed only to enhance the treasure it contained.

The church as an institution and the professional theologians often betray the curious tendency to regard everything that once was filled with pagan meaning as being forever doomed to be a bogy; they make it the cause of fondly and anxiously cultivated complexes. For a long time natural science was such a bogy for us, simply because philosophically it once insisted that nature is a self-contained economy of forces, and by so insisting set up the doctrine of "self-sufficient finitude" and hence engaged in polemics against any kind of incursion from the Beyond, such as "supernatural" miracle. But ever since then, we have not been content to repudiate this philosophical misuse of science, but have continued to make science itself an object of distrust, attaching our anxiety complexes to it. Then finally we found that it was no

longer possible to recover our loss of intellectual integrity in this way when science showed that it could no longer be ignored and wrung from us a belated, though still rather sour, acceptance.

In exactly the same way sacred rhetoric has become this kind of a bogy for us, merely because it was practiced by Demosthenes, Seneca, and other pagans and *(horribile dictu!)* by the Catholics. The latter instance seems to compromise it especially, for in this case—particularly among the Jesuits—does not fondly cultivated oratory clearly show that rhetoric is cursed with the concept of *coöperatio* (the idea that man co-operates as a partner in his salvation) and thus with a heretical doctrine of justification? Are not these people admittedly failing to allow the Word *alone (solum!)* to do its work? Are they not coming to the aid of the Word by means of human initiative, oratorical effort, sensationalism, mesmerism, and techniques of persuasion?

It is instructive and thought-provoking that it is possible to reply to all these critical objections with exactly the same rejoinders that were employed by Paul in the Letter to the Romans against the libertine misusers of his doctrine of justification and by Luther against the Antinomians: "What then? Are we to sin"—are we to be sloppy rhetoricians!—"because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey. . . ?" (Rom. 6:15-16). This means, after all, that you belong to him with all you have and are and are capable of, including your rhetorical resources. Freedom in Christ is no soft spot for the lazy. And the grace that does not enlist a man to serve but is misused as a license for Christian sloppiness and dilettante slovenliness degenerates from costly to cheap grace.

By the way in which Spurgeon, who was thoroughly grounded spiritually and certainly not out to create an effect, takes rhetoric seriously, he compels us to rethink this problem theologically. It is not sufficient that a theological faculty should, somewhat

shamefacedly, hand over this job of rhetoric to some retired actor. To have theology in one classroom and a rumpus in the adjoining room is certainly one way not to see nature and grace together!

The physical nature of man, however, has still other relationships to his spiritual existence. While it is true that man's physical nature ultimately expresses itself in rhetoric—in the form of voice, facial expression, and gesture—as a kind of final phase in its process of expression, it is also true conversely that man's physical nature has its proper place in those antechambers which must be traversed if anything like spiritual health is even to exist. In other words, because a man is *totally* claimed by his service, the natural, physical side of his person must also be directed toward service. We never gain spiritual health just by continually praying or meditating or consuming ourselves in blind and furious devotion to service, but only by giving to the creaturely side of our life too its proper due; by daring, so to speak, to be men who are not merely "reborn," but also and in the first place simply "born."

> To sit long in one posture, poring over a book, or driving a quill, is in itself a taxing of nature; but add to this a badly ventilated chamber, a body which has long been without muscular exercise, and a heart burdened with many cares, and we have all the elements for preparing a seething cauldron of despair, especially in the dim months of fog—
>
> "When a blanket wraps the day,
> When the rotten woodland drips,
> And the leaf is stamped in clay."

Thus does our study become "a prison" instead of a place of service, Spurgeon continues, and our books become "the warders of a gaol" instead of helpers of our joy. "A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind's face, would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is next best." *This* is the co-ordination of nature and soul, as Spurgeon sees it!