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THE PLIGHT OF MAN: A STUDY IN
CONTEMPORARY PREACHING

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Prophetic voices are calling for a rediscovery of the preaching task. One of the calls comes from the pen of H. H. Farmer who in The Servant of the Word signals a need for a discovery of the preaching task. He locates the rediscovery in an integral relationship between preaching and theology, a relationship in which theology properly informs preaching. This relationship is hardly accidental, but rather one that is inherent in the Christian faith itself. He states:

We mean, in general, that we are coming to see through a number of converging lines of thought that the activity of preaching is not merely a means for conveying the content of the Christian faith, but in a real sense bound up with that content itself.¹

There are other aspects of rediscovery, and each prophetic voices stresses a different insight. The preaching of the Gospel serves as a springboard for Richard R. Caemmerer's insights into the current state of preaching. He holds that the nexus for renewal lies in the Gospel, and he does

¹H. H. Farmer, The Servant of the Word (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1942), p. 5. The entire first chapter deals with the relationship between theology and preaching.

this while charting fresh preaching accents of the contemporary preaching scene. In a series of articles in the Concordia Theological Monthly, he discusses a new concern of linguistic clarity,² assesses the weight of a new hermeneutic,³ and ponders renewed thinking of the church.⁴ In all instances he finds the contributonal key of these elements in a renewal of a preaching of the Gospel. Roy A. Harrisville decries the low estate of preaching as he begins an article in Dialog with the words, "The American pulpit is irrelevant." Renewal in the pulpit for this author lies in the discovery of a new hermeneutic for our age.⁵ The prophetic voices are present. They sense the need for rediscovery and renewal in terms of the preaching task. They differ only on the focal point of the rediscovery and renewal.

²Richard R. Caemmerer, "Current Contributions to Christian Preaching," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXVII (January 1966), 46-47.

³Richard R. Caemmerer, "The New Hermeneutic and Preaching," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXVII (February 1966), 110.

⁴Richard R. Caemmerer, "Preaching and the Recovery of the Church," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXVII (March 1966), 155-57.

⁵Roy A. Harrisville, "The Word is Near You," Dialog, III (Winter 1964), 36-41.

A Renewed Interest in Man

If there is a concern for revitalization of preaching in general, there is also a specifically renewed interest in man and the problems confronting him. The renewed interest centers upon man's relationship with other men and with the cultural milieu about him. Henry Grady Davis spends a full chapter in Design for Preaching stressing the importance of the concern. He labels the concern for man as a part of the process in interpretation and converges on three aspects of the process: diagnosis, etiology, and prescription. The preacher is an interpreter of man and life. As such an interpreter the preacher diagnoses the genuine situation of man in terms of God, with the proper etiological consideration to the brother and the universe, and follows with a prescription that cuts to the heart of man's true condition. All of these features are vital for the interpretative process, and the process is vital in the task of preaching.⁶

The situation of man interacting with cultural forces is a prime topic of Joseph Sittler in The Ecology of Faith. A

⁶Henry Grady Davis, Design for Preaching, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), pp. 228-41.

key for preaching is the placement of man in the correct context--in this case, the context of a technological age.⁷ The very title of the book indicates the importance of dealing with man in environmental relationships.⁸ Preaching, then, has to do with man. The correct diagnosis of his situation on all levels is of primary importance. In summary, much of contemporary preaching reflects a picture of man and his plight.

This study comprises an examination of sermonic material for clues to the plight of man. Initially the research involves an assessment of the signs of man's plight and places these signs into significant categories of man's existence. After locating and classifying the plight of man, the analysis shifts to the meaning of the plight of man in all of the plight's dimensions. After summarizing various aspects of man's plight and its meaning, the analysis moves to detect the implications of plight and meaning for man and for the preaching task. Finally, several areas for further study are suggested on the basis of the implications.

⁷Joseph Sittler, The Ecology of Faith. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), pp. 21-25.

⁸Ibid., p. 3.

Limitations of the Study

This investigation is limited to three volumes of The Pulpit.⁹ The three volumes span the years 1964, 1965, and 1966. There are a total of 202 sermons in the volumes, with an approximately equal number of sermons in each volume.

Each issue of the journal contains both sermonic material as well as articles which pertain to the preaching situation. The various issues contain from one to four articles. Since these articles comprise an important segment of each issue, it should be noted that the article material is beyond the bounds of the study. The study is confined to the sermons only.

A further limitation involves a distinction between the problem area and the solution area of the sermons. The limit tightens around the plight of the hearer. The preacher's solution is beyond the limits of the investigation.

⁹The Pulpit is published by the Christian Century Foundation, Chicago, Illinois. The publication is monthly, with the exception of the July and August issues, which are combined in one issue.

The Context of Authorship

The religious background of the authors is broad and varied. This background is designated in The Pulpit by a small information box attached to each sermon. At times the designation is narrow: for example; American Lutheran, United Presbyterian, Southern Baptist. In other instances the designation is much broader: such as; Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist.

Table 1 indicates the designation as it is found in the information box with each sermon. Table 2 broadens the designation and shows the four major contributing sources to The Pulpit.

TABLE 1

BACKGROUND OF PREACHERS

<u>Designation</u>	<u>Sermon Number</u>
African Methodist Episcopal	3
American Baptist	3
American Lutheran	1
Baptist	19
Christian	2
Church of the Brethren	2
Church of England	5
Church of God	1
Church of Scotland.	1
Congregational.	5
Disciples of Christ	5
Episcopal	13
Evangelical and Reformed.	1
Jewish.	2
Lutheran.	1
Lutheran Church in America.	3
Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod	3
Mennonite	1
Methodist	47
Presbyterian.	37
Reformed.	4
Roman Catholic.	4
Southern Baptist.	6
Unitarian	1
United Church, Canada	5
United Church of Christ	15
United Presbyterian	7
Unlisted	5
 Designations 28	 Sermons 202

TABLE 2

FOUR MAJOR BACKGROUNDS OF PREACHERS

<u>Broad Designation</u>	<u>Sermon Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Methodist	50	24%
Presbyterian	44	21%
Baptist	28	14%
United Church of Christ	23	11%
Total	145	70%

Definition of Terms

In this study a distinction is drawn between man and Christian man. The object of the investigation concerns Christian man. This distinction involves an assumption that the preacher preaches to the people of God before him and even through them to the world. P. T. Forsyth defines this assumption as he speaks to the relationship between the preacher and the church in Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind.

He is to preach to the church from the Gospel so that with the church he may preach the Gospel to the world. He is so to preach to the church that he shall also preach from the church. That is to say, he must be a sacrament to the church, that the church may become a missionary to the world.¹⁰

The term "man" as used in the study always refers to the man of God, a man among God's people.

The term "plight" refers to the situation of Christian man in the various dimensions of his existence--as those dimensions are described by the preacher. The "sign" of man's plight points to the situation of his life. The meaning of man's plight indicates the attempt by the preacher to relay the consequences of man's situation or plight.

¹⁰P. T. Forsyth, Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind (London: Independent Press, 1907), pp. 53-58.

Summary

There is a renewed emphasis upon man in the preaching task today. The emphasis falls heavily upon man in relation to the life about him. In this research an assessment is made of man's plight in life and the meaning of that plight. The analysis is on the basis of three volumes of The Pulpit, whose authorship covers a broad Christian spectrum. The first evaluation of the sermonic literature deals with a number of basic categories of man's plight.

CHAPTER II

THE SIGNS OF MAN'S PLIGHT

The general preaching renewal today extends to the situation of man in life. This situation involves a plight. The sermons of The Pulpit employ varied signs in depicting this plight. In this chapter the signs are arranged in basic categories. Four categories contain signs which are external, since they refer to man's relationship to culture and fellow-men. These categories are cultural, ministry, ethical, absence of God. One category is primarily internal--the signs of man's personal plight--since here the emphasis is upon man's struggle with himself. A sixth category incorporates a number of miscellaneous signs. The final category includes those sermons which imply the absence of any relevant plight for man. Table 3 contains the frequency level of the sermons in the seven categories. Approximately 85 per cent of all sermons contain signs of man's plight. In the first five categories 72 per cent of the plights are external in nature.

TABLE 3

FREQUENCIES OF SERMONS IN CATEGORIES
OF MAN'S PLIGHT

<u>Category</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
1. Plight of Man in Culture	39
a. isolated faith	12
b. inadequate adjustment	12
c. reflector of values	8
d. lack of participation	7
2. Plight of Man in Ministry	26
a. lack of commitment	12
b. breakdown in sharing	11
c. loss of prophetic voice	3
3. Ethical Plight of Man	24
a. cry for justice	11
b. lack of love	9
c. pain of humanity	4
4. God's Absence--Plight for Man	15
a. disappointing God	7
b. world out of control	4
c. failure to hear	4

<u>Category</u>		<u>Frequency</u>
5. Personal Plight of Man		39
a. anxious	11	
b. sinful	10	
c. self-righteous	8	
d. prideful	5	
e. guilty	5	
6. Miscellaneous Plights		29
a. divided church	4	
b. false emphasis in worship	3	
c. blocking out lordship of Christ	3	
d. poor stewardship of creation	3	
e. lack of responsibility in marriage	3	
f. misuse of Bible	2	
g. unclassified	11	
7. Absence of Man's Plight		30
a. topical lecture	22	
b. biblical study	8	
Total sermons with plights	172	85%
Total external plights (Less categories 5,6,7)	104	72%

The Cultural Signs of Man's Plight

The largest cluster of signs concerning the external plight of man concentrates on man's relationship to culture. In this cluster exist four definite strands which signal the cultural plight of man from different directions.

A first strand of man's plight is the isolation of the Christian's faith from the surrounding culture. J. Renfro Sproul offers one analysis of this isolation in the sermon, "A New Creation." He defines the process in terms of the sacred and secular. Too often the Christian views a portion of life in the context of "Church"--this is sacred, while the majority of life comes under the heading of "world"--this is secular. The author suggests that this approach is a false compartmentalizing of life, a separation of church and world.¹ In his analysis this is the first ranking heresy of the day. There is little basic difference in other descriptions, except for a unique emphasis in describing the ways of compartmentalization. Such a unique emphasis moves through the sermon, "God--the Enemy of the Church," by Paul Oestreicher. He emphasizes the church as a religious

¹J. Renfro Sproul, "A New Creation," The Pulpit, XXXVII (September 1966), 19.

ghetto, "a place of refuge, of easy comfort from troubles of the world, where we are assured that all will be well as long as we abide by certain conventions of faith and morals."²

The end result of this view of church and world is blindness to both. William R. Phillippe provides another emphasis in "Our Oriental Christ." Here he contrasts the religious outlooks of Western and Oriental man. He concludes that for the Oriental religion pervades all of life, while for the Western the opposite is true:

Ah, but here is the rub, for we do not accept this at all. We attempt to categorize our religion as a topic distant from all others--from our social life, our school life, our business life.³

This categorizing of religion leads to a rejection of Christ. Three different preachers use three different terms: compartment, ghetto, category--but all three talk of Christian man cutting away his faith and isolating that faith from culture. This is a first strand of man's cultural plight.

A second strand of man's cultural plight involves his inadequate response to culture. A part of the plight catches the Christian in the tension between changing and holding

²Paul Oestreicher, "God--the Enemy of the Church," The Pulpit, XXXVI (March 1965), 20.

³William R. Phillippe, "Our Oriental Christ," The Pulpit, XXXVII (May 1966), 23.

fast. Hoover Rupert, speaking from within the context of campus life, discusses the tension and concludes that the Christian student often loses the capacity to recognize both his problems and resources. In the sermon "Keep One Foot on the Ground" the author portrays the student caught in the tension and thus rendered immobile.⁴ Another variation of this strand is posed by Lyman B. Stookey. He sees man involved in a technological age in which he shapes so much of the stuff of creation that he begins to worship his own ingenuity rather than God. In "Five to One," the author labels this inadequate response as idolatry.⁵ Speaking generally, the Christian in this age is losing the capacity to respond at all. This is J. A. Davidson's suggestion in "What Happened to your Faith?" He answers the question of the sermon title in this manner: "The Church Militant is crowded rather badly by the Church Genteel and the Church Frantic--and the Church Stagnant is a factor to be seriously considered too."⁶ This then is a second strand of man's

⁴Hoover Rupert, "Keep One Foot on the Ground," The Pulpit, XXXVII (September 1966), 14-16.

⁵Lyman B. Stookey, "Five to One," The Pulpit, XXXVI (September 1965), 13.

⁶J. S. Davidson, "What Happened to your Faith?" The Pulpit, XXXVII (March 1966), 5.

cultural plight--his inability to respond, or respond adequately to the cultural factors about him.

Another aspect of man's cultural plight involves his imitation of the surrounding culture. Some eight sermons dwell upon the Christian's continual reflection of society and all but one speaks of this reflection in negative terms.⁷ One author finds the plight for the Christian in the racial dilemma. "The New Testament Answer to Segregation" is a word from Chevis F. Horne to the racially confused church. After dwelling on the New Testament material attendant to the problem, he pinpoints the church's plight in segregation:

When the church is true to the New Testament, there will be only one qualification for church membership; that a person accept Jesus Christ as a Savior and Lord. Race, nationality, and culture will be completely irrelevant. When the church demands a racial qualification it becomes obvious that the church is not being true to the New Testament but reflects the prejudices and values of its culture. It is more the extension of the culture than the redeemed fellowship of Jesus Christ. Rather than the church transforming the culture, the culture has transformed the church into its own image.⁸

The emphases of the plight vary: from the idolization of the

⁷That sermon which speaks in positive terms is an apology for the cliché "white, middle class, protestant. James Armstrong, "On Being Fair to Ourselves," The Pulpit, XXXVII (February 1966), 4-6.

⁸Chevic F. Horne, "The New Testament Answer to Segregation," The Pulpit, XXXVII (February 1966), 15.

state to the idolization of private property and success. The conclusion is that the Christian is in trouble when he simply reflects the values of culture.

There is one final strand. Here the cultural plight of man draws on the failure of the Christian to participate in the culture. John A. T. Robinson's sermon on the Ascension of Christ speaks to this failure. He intimates that the reason Ascension talk is so often confined to a movement in space and a moment in time is that Christians like to confine Christ to heaven. For the author the Ascension has much to say about Christ's rule of the universe and man's participation in it.⁹ At other times the references to man's predicament are forward and clear: a refusal to become involved in the world of politics;¹⁰ a forgetting of the social sickness of urban areas;¹¹ an overemphasis on otherworldliness.¹²

⁹John A. T. Robinson, "Ascendancy," The Pulpit, XXXVI (May 1965), 4-6.

¹⁰Dow Kirkpatrick, "If We Didn't Own a Trumpet," The Pulpit, XXXV (November 1964), 14-15.

¹¹Paul H. A. Noren, "City in Crisis," The Pulpit, XXXVI (April 1965), 16.

¹²Robert H. Bonthius, "The Right Kind of Worldliness," The Pulpit, XXXVI (June 1965), 11-13.

The cluster of strands that comprise the first category of man's external plight are cultural, in that there is a vital interaction between the Christian and culture. The plight of man lies in his attempts to place his faith in a compartment, isolated from life about him--in his failure to respond in faith to a new age--in his readiness to reflect the values of culture--in his refusal to participate in the world about him. These same failures and refusals affect the Christian's ministry in the world.

Man's Plight in Ministry

Man's external plight not only finds expression as a cultural plight, but the expression evidences itself in the Christian's ministry. Three particular limitations of ministry are evident: a lack of commitment; a breakdown in the sharing process; a loss of the prophetic voice.

Much descriptive material from the sermons can be placed into the commitment category. The precise concern here is a lack of commitment in ministering in the world of human beings. In "It is Finished" Henry E. Kolbe describes the lack of commitment as a faltering discipleship. The sermon is Good Friday material dealing with the words of the title, but the preacher raises an interesting question as he

applies the crucifixion to the contemporary scene. He ponders the finished aspect of the crucifixion and asks: "How many are there who think of redemption without discipleship, of receiving without giving, of a gospel without risk, of faith without daring, of grace without effort, of God without morality?" This question appears as the author's analysis of the situation of Christian man. The Christian wants from God but has little desire for an active discipleship, and this is his plight. Another author connects commitment to Christ with commitment to ethical concerns. J. Edward Barrett in "Not Ashamed" dwells largely on a commitment to Christ and relates that commitment to the ring of life. He says, "Men who call themselves Christian have not always thus committed themselves. Sometimes they have not committed themselves to the most obvious type of ethical concern."¹⁴

There are other accents on man's plight in ministry. A most predominant one revolves around the idea of the Christian's sharing with men. This total accent reaches into a number

¹³Henry E. Kolbe, "It is Finished," The Pulpit XXXV (March 64), 12.

¹⁴J. Edward Barrett, "Not Ashamed," The Pulpit XXXVII (September 1966), 13.

of corners. The sharing process extends into the vocation of Christians, and a church where this extension does not take place--this is a static church. In "A Static Church" Frederick M. Meek places this trust in the context of a congregation that has little concern outside of itself.¹⁵ A further corner of the sharing accent involves talk about the Christian's identity with the world. Chester A. Pennington in his sermon on renewal finds the center of renewal in the Christian's encounter with the world. He cites the race problem as a case in point. Too often Christian address is one of superiority and one with the quick answer. There is failure to share common failure with men, to identify with their needs. Only after this identifying can the Christian speak the forgiving word--a word he himself hears.¹⁶

L. Bevel Jones, III, sees the church in danger of losing the promise of God unless the church gets busy speaking the word with boldness. His sermon "The Church for Today" uses such words as complacency, self-centeredness, and hypocrisy to pinpoint the church's current witnessing mood. He portrays

¹⁵Frederick M. Meek, "A Static Church," The Pulpit, XXXV (April 1964), 18.

¹⁶Chester A. Pennington, "What Does Renewal of the Church Mean?" The Pulpit, XXXVI (February 1965), 15.

the witness not as an optional task but as part and parcel of the church of the Spirit. The church faces a genuine deficiency when she ignores this charter.¹⁷

Three sermons speak of the church's loss of a prophetic voice with a loss of ministry. The term "misfits" describes Kelly Miller Smith's conception of a prophet. The prophet discerns the will of God and acts accordingly. In the sermon "The Misfits" he summarizes the plight of the church without a prophetic voice:

The tragedy of it all is that the church, that agency which should make a difference, accentuates the problem. Instead of crying out against this preoccupation with "our kind of people," the church in far too many instances has simply reflected the evil which it should be condemning. As E. Stanley Jones has made it clear, the church should be a prophetic voice, yet it is but a resounding echo.¹⁸

Kelly Smith's "echo" gives way to Alfred McBride's "false prophets." His sermon contrasts the true and the false prophet. The description of the false prophet includes factors: an uncritical nature toward the establishment; a critical nature only toward the true prophet; a desire to let people sleep. He concludes that the prophetic stirrings in the church today are largely by the false prophets attempting

¹⁷L. Bevel Jones, III, "The Church for Today," The Pulpit, XXXV (October 1964), 14-15.

¹⁸Kelly Miller Smith, "The Misfits," The Pulpit, XXXVI (January 1965), 11-13.

to silence the true prophetic voices and lull people further into sleep.¹⁹ Kelly Smith's "echo" and Alfred McBride's "false prophets" are complemented by Joseph Fletcher's "sentimentality." In his assessment of the situation "Christianity Not Religion" a sentimentalism blocks out prophetic doing and obedience.

A lack of commitment, a breakdown in the sharing process, a loss of the prophetic voice--all of these are signs of the Christian man's plight in ministry.

The Ethical Plight of Man

The sermons examined under this heading have an affinity to the sermons analyzed under the first two categories of this chapter. All involve a strong interaction between the Christian man and society. The title of this portion of the study comprises an area where the Christian confronts the needs of society. The term "ethical" refers to man's conduct in the area of society. The Christian's hampered response to the confrontation with the needs in society is summed up by the word "plight." There are three component parts of man's ethical plight: a failure to respond to the cry for

¹⁹Joseph Fletcher, "Christianity Not Religion," The Pulpit, XXXVII (January 1966), 18-19.

justice; the lack of love toward the human family; an insensitive reaction to the pain of humanity.

The initial component in man's ethical plight is a Christian's failure to respond to the cry for justice in society. This is Lowell Russell Ditzen's point in the sermon "The Reforming Church." After citing numerous needs of modern men, the author contends that the answer for these needs lies not in books of prayer, creeds, canons, and liturgies, but in the old Testament concept of love.²¹ In his sermon W. W. Finlator preaches about "World at Peace, a Spiritual Imperative." The preacher cites this priority: "Justice comes before compassion, and both justice and compassion come before reverence or religion." He suggests that the spiritual leaders have urged men to reverse the order.

Similarly, we have said that charity and compassion must precede justice. People don't need minimum wage and enfranchisement, but they do need our affection. We love and we understand our minority people. As long as we give them charity and religion, justice can wait-- unless outside agitators stir thing up.²²

This general picture of man's failure to respond to a cry

²¹Lowell Russell Ditzen, "The Reforming Church," The Pulpit, XXXVI (October 1965), 4-5.

²²W. W. Finlator, "World at Peace, A Spiritual Imperative," The Pulpit, XXXVII (November 1966), 4-5.

for justice needs coupling with specific areas from which the cry arises. One such area is race relations. In "Holy Partisans and Godly Troublemakers" Lloyd J. Averill scores Christians for their overwhelming desire for inoffensiveness. For him this is a mark of an irrelevant people. He spends a good deal of the sermon substantiating the point through the racial question. The author argues his case by stating, "No one can have God for his Father who does not have Martin Luther King for his brother." This is man's ethical plight. He desires much to do with the former but little to do with the latter.²³ In the same vein Fletcher W. Swink discerns an alternative approach which avoids the cry for justice--the alternative of contentment. In "When the Saints Go Marching" he comments: "For us the temptation is very great to sit comfortably and, like butterflies by the roadside, preach contentment to those who feel the pains of discrimination."²⁴ This judgment on the Christian's response to the racial question corresponds with Robert E. Seymour's judgment on the poverty issue. "Our Prejudices Against the

²³Lloyd J. Averill, "Holy Partisans and Godly Troublemakers," The Pulpit, XXXV (April 1964), 4-7.

²⁴Fletcher W. Swink, "When the Saints Go Marching," The Pulpit, XXXVI (February 1965), 25.

Poor" is a picture of man's prejudice problem. When man confronts the poor, his prejudices deafen him to their cry. Rationalization after rationalization on the part of the Christian not only leaves the poor in distress but at the same time thrusts the Christian into a plight.²⁵ These sermons indicate that the cry for justice is a strong cry, while Man's response is weak.

The lack of love provides a second component for man's ethical plight. Fundamentalism--moralism--immaturity--debasement--these words represent avenues by which four different preachers converge on the lack of love in the Christian's relationship with others. The first author, Kenneth E. Clarke, voices a note of confidence for the present age; for this age offers a fresh opportunity to affirm the lordship of Christ. This approach is in contrast to a current which is contrary to the mind of Christ. The author sees fundamentalism as that current and as a tool for demoniac power. The demoniac aspect is that fundamentalism absorbs the Christian "in minutiae" and kills his potential for "community through neighborly love."²⁶

²⁵Robert E. Seymour, "Our Prejudices Against the Poor," The Pulpit, XXXVII (October 1966), 22-23.

²⁶Kenneth E. Clarke, "Why Do You Stand Looking Into Heaven?," The Pulpit, XXXVII (May 1966), 4-6.

Isaac C. Rottenberg uses Arthur Miller's play "After the Fall" as a vehicle for distinguishing between moralism and love. He equates the capacity of both Miller and the Bible to show "this refusal of man to be responsible, to bear the blame--the refusal to know and acknowledge that now man meets after the Fall." The meetings after the Fall are the ongoing picture of men destroying one another. To say that love solves all things is nothing but a brand of cheap moralism until man first beholds his lack of love.²⁷ On the other hand Emerson S. Colaw credits the lack of love to the immature responses of the Christian in a time of stress. Particularly at the time of criticism the Christian may lose his ability to judge properly. When this reaction occurs, the Christian is "betrayed into unwise actions and thus injures our relationships with others."²⁸ Finally, in "Growing in the Likeness of Christ," Paul E. Schrodt finds that a false concept of love usually leads to a twin end: "the loss of self-control and debasement of sex."²⁹ Man's ethical plight lies

²⁷Isaac C. Rottenberg, "After the Fall," The Pulpit, XXXVII (May 1966), 4-6.

²⁸Emerson S. Colaw, "Jesus and His Enemies," The Pulpit, XXV (December 1964), 16.

²⁹Paul E. Schrodt, "Growing in the Likeness of Christ," The Pulpit, XXXVII (September 1966), 24-25.

in the absence of a genuine love which can properly motivate the sexual situation.

The inhumanity of men, one to another, comprises a final component of man's ethical plight. Two preachers pose the plight from different perspectives. H. Eugene Peacock in "What Is It?" applies the story of the tower of Babel as an indication of man's pride. The nub of this pride lies in the search for equality with God. At this point man reacts toward man in an inhuman way. Thus, "Man's inhumanity to man is one of the gravest problems we face today."³⁰ In contrast Charles W. Hoover follows a different route in assessing man--a route which he feels avoids debasing man. The sermon, "What Do We Mean--Son of God?" charts out the author's route. He indicates that each Christian has the potential for, as was the case with Jesus, a son-relationship with God. One need only to trust God and to permit God to adopt one as a son.³¹ In answering the question of "how" in respect to the Incarnation, the author concludes "that God does not require us to go against the logical processes of thought to maintain

³⁰H. Eugene Peacock, "What Is It?," The Pulpit, XXXVII (March 1966), 20-23.

³¹Charles W. Hoover, "What Do We Mean--Son of God?" The Pulpit, XXXVII (March 1966), 20-23.

true faith in him." The thrust of his thought puts any other response to the "how" of the Incarnation into the category of a debasement of man.

The Christian man stands in an ethical plight. There are cries for justice today in society. The inability to respond is one component of the plight. There are myriads of relationships among people which survive only through love. The lack of love in these relationships is man's plight. Many pains afflict humanity. Man's plight is that he is insensitive to those pains. When the component parts are placed together, there emerges an ethical plight which impinges upon the Christian.

God's Absence--A Plight for Man

For all of the authors examined God is present. But their sermons suggest the apparent absence of God for a large number of Christians. Some authors find that for most men there is a deep concern about the apparent disappearance of God from the contemporary scene. Other authors share this view but stress primarily the idea of a world out of control. Still others observe both of the above--the disappearance of God and a world out of control--but place their maximum stress on man's failure to hear or see God.

Indeed, for many men God is absent from the contemporary scene. God has disappeared. The "Death of God" is Theodore P. Ferris' analysis of man's plight in the apparent absence of God. Initially he points out that "to neutral observers, God has disappeared from the scene of contemporary society." The lack of vertical guilt, the disassociation of God from natural disturbances, the confinement of history to purely human factors, all lead the neutral observer to conclude that God is absent. Then the author says, "To this extent, it is fair to say that there is some truth in the report that God is dead. He has disappeared from our thinking."³² The responsibility for the plight rests with the Christian rather than with God. W. E. Garrison also raises the question of God's disappearance as he writes about "The Living Christ" in his Easter sermon. First, the writer paints the excitement of Easter as the Christian's recognition of the living Christ. This portrait includes the depiction of Christ as a present power who is able to move men in the Way. Citing the Apostle Paul, he finds that the Christian can do all things through Christ. Then W. E. Garrison raises the question in reference to Christ's presence:

³²Theodore P. Ferris, "The Death of God," The Pulpit, XXXVII (February 1966), 10-11.

But the thoughtful mind may say: we cannot understand how Christ, who lived nearly twenty centuries ago and then disappeared in a cloud of mystery, can really be with us now, except as a memory of what we have read or heard about him.³³

This question points to a precise plight for man. How vivid is the Christian's awareness of God's activity in the present?

Stephen L. Yale says that most Christians have lost the awareness of God's active presence. He traces the loss to a combination of pleasure and boredom that imprisons the present. In "The Honey and the Worm" he states:

And those of us who do live in the present often find it a prison. We declare that we are living for the moment; perhaps in action, though not acknowledged, we seek to eat, drink and be merrily comfortable. Yet we find boredom to be pleasure's partner--and the greater the pleasure, the more intense the boredom that follows. To live for the moment is to futilely attempt to grasp it and not let go. We assault it, and in our attack destroy what it would have given us.³⁴

There are different ways of describing the absence or disappearance of God. They equal a plight for the Christian.

Another way of speaking about God's absence lies in the definition of man caught in the forces of life which seem beyond his control. The implication is again that God has departed from the scene of life. This is the direction of

³³W. E. Garrison, "The Living Christ," The Pulpit, XXXVII (April 1966), 5-6.

³⁴Stephen L. Yale, "The Honey and the Worm," The Pulpit, XXXVI (June 1965), 14-15.

David O. Woodyard's sermon "Away with the Manger." The sermon centers upon John the Baptist's question through his disciples to Jesus, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" The writer translates the question into contemporary form when he asks: "Is there a new possibility for my life?" Then he describes the anguish of existence, as it is mirrored in a character of Eugene O'Neill's play "Days Without End." These are the marks of the anguish of existence: an inner anguish motivated by forces over which man has no control; the lot of a victim not of man's choosing; the form of existence without purpose; the actions of existence without a pattern.³⁵ Here is the picture of man caught amidst the uncontrollable forces of life, in a full dilemma.

Finally, there is the lost capacity to hear God in the middle of life. "The Christian and the Silence of God," a sermon by James M. Wall, attests to the loss of hearing. First, the present generation is aware that the normal ways of communication with God have become mere forms. Man attempts to assert independence from God, and thus he loses God. More than this--man denies his fallen nature and attempts to

³⁵David O. Woodyard, "Away With the Manger," The Pulpit, XXXVI (December 1965), 11-12.

cover up the denial by the creation by a private paradise. The writer concludes that man has lost his humanity, and thus for the present generation God is silent, but only because man has no ears with which to hear. Now the writer speaks on this same point once more, only this time in terms of man's moral ambiguity. God is silent, but God is not at fault. The plight belongs to the Christian. The Christian man cannot hear the cry of the neighbor. Since God speaks to man through his neighbor, it is impossible to hear Him.³⁶

The writers of the sermons in the present category speak of the disappearance, the absence, or the silence of God in a world controlled by other forces. Yet they all agree that God is very much present. The difficulty lies in man's hearing rather than God's speaking, man's visibility rather than God's disappearance. The proper question is not "Where is God?" The proper question is "What is man?"

The Personal Plight of Man

The single category dealing with man's internal plight encompasses the personal nature of that plight. The terms "personal" and "internal" bear a connotation that links the

³⁶James M. Wall, "The Christian and the Silence of God," The Pulpit, XXXVII (February 1966), 23-24.

dilemma of the Christian to sources primarily--within the Christian, with little interaction to outside factors. There are five smaller areas within the category of the personal, five areas in which the plight of man surfaces to the front and center of life: The depiction of anxious man; sinful man; self-righteous man; prideful man.

The description of the anxious man is a description of a Christian in fear. That fear takes many forms. In the sermon "On the Judgment of Men and the Judgment of God" S. Collins Kilburn locates the Christian's fear in judgment by a fellow man. He describes some of the "subtle judgments men fear," a moral condemnation, a fear of the label "inferior," a psychologizing which labels man "a problem." The outgrowth of this fear is a paralysis at every turn of life.³⁷ William L. Eichelberger in "The Sign for our Times" says that he believes "that two of the most severe problems of our age are anxiety and fear." He finds the basic plight of man is the unwillingness to admit dependence upon God.³⁸ One author concentrates on the possibilities of being human and

³⁷S. Collins Kilburn, "On the Judgment of Men and the Judgment of God," The Pulpit, XXXVII (June 1966), 19-20.

³⁸William L. Eichelberger, "The Sign for our Times," The Pulpit, XXXVII (March 1966), 15-17.

concludes that man is afraid to be human. Delwyn R. Rayson in "Awareness" describes Sigmund Freud's theory of dependency as anchored in sexual terms. He takes issue with Freud and contends that man's yearning for safety in the world is largely a matter of anxiety and fear. The anxiety forces man for narcotic safety zones and thus reduces him to an uncritical robot.³⁹ These sermons picture man's plight as one of anxiety and fear.

Another area of man's personal plight deals with a general description of sin. The plight of the Christian is that he is a sinner. The descriptions of the sinfulness branch out in all directions, but there is one underlying theme that pervades all of the sermons--man does not realize the gravity of his sin. Donald Macleod typifies the mood in "The End of the Beginning." He mourns the fact that Christmas has become a charade, argues with the "God is dead boys," and the "totally secularized way of life," then proceeds to discuss the lightness with which man concerns himself about sin. The author sums up his criticism:

Indeed, today many become flippant when they discuss this subject and declare the idea of sin is outdated.

³⁹Delwyn R. Rayson, "Awareness," The Pulpit, XXXVII (October 1966), 4-5.

A man may have his complexes or be poorly adjusted to big environment and his fellows, but no one can hold him responsible for these except as he may evade education, the most plausible cure for them all. Any one who makes this claim simply indicates how dated he really is. Sin is sin.⁴⁰

The plight of man is sin--and especially the fact that he does not realize the sin.

Self-righteousness and hypocrisy are words which characterize another area of man's personal plight. While eight sermons delve into the subject, one sermon in particular speaks for all of them. "The Scandal of the Cross" by Richard C. White is a sermon which depicts Christians as self-righteous. He contends that Jesus died for the wrong people and finds Paul sensing the same thing in his Damascus experience. The author states:

The scandalous foolishness which must be shouted from the churchtops of our land is that Christ is still dying for the wrong people--he is dying to awake us to our self-righteousness. He is giving his lifeblood to show us the fiction of our piety.⁴¹

He continues by pointing to the definition of Christianity as "the good life" and contends that Christians are so terribly

⁴⁰Donald Macleod, "The End of the Beginning," The Pulpit, XXXVII (December 1966), 7-8.

⁴¹Richard C. White, "The Scandal of the Cross," The Pulpit, XXXVII (April 1966), 14.

benevolent that they want to spread this "good life." He sees Christians in their blindness always desiring Christ to die for the heathen and never for themselves. Finally he says that Christians crucify Christ, "by our self-righteousness, our piety, our stately churches and efficient evangelism, our foreign aid and patronizing pretense of concern. . ."⁴² The self-righteous attitude of the Christian is a sign of his personal plight.

The guilt of man is also his plight. The sermons which concentrate on guilt as a problem for man use guilt connection with another malady. Henry Kuizenga in "A Million Gods and One" believes that unless man chooses between God and the idols he is destined to a guilty life.⁴³ The theme of guilt also moves through the sermon "East of Eden" by David C. Van Sickle. He describes man as a wanderer who longs for another land, a land where existence is rooted in God. The author uses Arthur Miller's play "After the Fall" to picture a longing for meaning and existence. He cites the leading character of that play, Quentin, as the man on a search for

⁴²Richard C. White, "The Scandal of the Cross," The Pulpit, XXXVII (April 1966), 14-15.

⁴³Henry Kuizenga, "A Million Gods and One," The Pulpit, XXXVI (October 1965), 18-21.

meaning. The word "guilt" does not occur in the sermon; yet, this is precisely the mood that the author creates--the mood of a man who knows he should be home but cannot reach that home.⁴⁴

Four sermons suggest that man's pride causes difficulties for him. The pride of man extends itself in false attempts to justify pride, in a prideful self-interest, in a vain seeking of God, and in a false dependence upon the "self." Ronald P. Byars claims that self-centeredness and pride are at the bottom of sin. Actually the writer is working with the evil of sin in this Lenten sermon. But he narrows the broader idea and places the prime emphasis for sin and man's plight on the matter of self-interest and pride. They are with us all of the time and work like an infection that leads to death.⁴⁵

The sermons under consideration all describe the plight of man. It is a plight primarily within man's person. The signs of the plight are: anxiety or fear; sin in a general

⁴⁴David C. Van Sickle, "East of Eden," The Pulpit, XXXVII (April 1966), 20-22.

⁴⁵Ronald P. Byars, "Lent--Reminder of Reality," The Pulpit, XXXVII (March 1966), 9-11.

sense and the failure to recognize the extent of sin in a specific sense; self-righteousness; guilt; pride.

The Miscellaneous Plight of Man

A number of sermons, twenty-three, appear incompatible with the five previous categories. Still, all of these sermons deal with some form of man's plight. Table 3 on page 40 indicates a phrase--summary of the plights.

TABLE 4

MISCELLANEOUS PLIGHTS

Man's plight lies in:

a divided church	(4)
a false emphasis on worship	(3)
blocking out the lordship of Christ	(3)
poor stewardship of God's creation	(3)
the lack of responsibility in marriage	(3)
the misuse of the Bible	(2)
a careless teaching of the doctrine of the Trinity	
the failure to work at prayer	
ingratitude for blessings of God	
the failure to utilize all of the divine armor	
confining his hope to this world	
an overemphasis on experience	
a poor stewardship of money	
placing the creature before the Creator	
the belief in the idea of hell	
doubting the virgin birth and atonement	
mistaking rewards of life for the goal of life	

The authors of the sermons describe the situations of life as they confront the Christian man. The title "A Divided Church Equals a Skeptical World" pinpoints the theme of Robert P. Montgomery's sermon. In preaching on church unity, the author scores Christian divisions. As the world views current divisions within the Christian fold, the only result is skepticism. He concludes that these divisions destroy the church's witness to the world.⁴⁶ Billy Graham finds the Bible crucial for the Christian man in the sermon "Christ and Human Need." Basing the sermon on Mark 10:46-52, the story of blind Bartimaeus, he is convinced that man is blind. His analysis of the cause for blindness focuses upon the Bible and man's failure to follow it. He summarizes the failure:

There are thousands of people today who are suffering from spiritual vertigo. They have their eyes off the instrument panel. They are going by their own reasoning or by their subjective intuition. This is one of the problems with modern theology. We have taken our eyes off the instrument panel which is the Bible.⁴⁷

This failure to keep the eyes on the instrument panel puts man in a critical situation.

⁴⁶Robert P. Montgomery, "A Divided Church Equals A Skeptical World," The Pulpit, XXXVI (December 1965), 18-19.

⁴⁷Billy Graham, "Christ and Human Need," The Pulpit, XXXVII (October 1966), 8.

The two former sermons are representative of concerns that occurred in multiples. There were also solo themes that speak of man and his problems. One author feels that prayer is the sleeping giant of the church. Herbert Miller cites man's predicament when he describes the unimportant things for which the Christian prays. In "The Sleeping Giant" the writer finds prayer for pay raises, good grades, handsome husbands, as something less than crucial. The fact that prayer is work also causes the stumbling of the Christian. For these reasons the man of God hardly taps the resources of God through prayer.⁴⁸ "The Whole Armor of God" by Frederick Schroeder encourages God's people to utilize all of God's help in life. When God's people fail to do just this--utilize all of God's help--they have a major problem. The author illustrates how Christians usually desire that armor of God "that offers the least interference with our freedom of choice and action." Rather than take the breastplate of righteousness into the marketplace of everyday life, God's man prefers to wear the breastplate at home or at church.⁴⁹ The belief in a

⁴⁸Herbert Miller, "The Sleeping Giant," The Pulpit, XXXVII (December 1966), 19-20.

⁴⁹Frederick W. Schroeder, "The Whole Armor of God," The Pulpit, XXXV (June 1964), 4.

concept of hell is Hillyer H. Straton's way of posing a plight for man. In "Hell is Portable" he talks about the current revolt against hell. The writer finds it unique and healthy that in a century which has witnessed so much horror people are revolting against the thought of hell. For the author the source of the loss lies in a renewed understanding of God's mercy, a release from the chains of a double predestination. From the author's perspective all of this is well and good. But there is still that tension between love and wrath--a tension worth preserving. Man's plight is that he trudges on with an outdated idea about hell--an idea which stresses torment and anguish.⁵⁰

The fact that sermons in the "miscellaneous" area do not relate to other categories or do not cluster heavily around a particular theme does not diminish their importance. Each is unique in the discovery of man in a particular plight.

⁵⁰Hillyer H. Straton, "Hell is Portable," The Pulpit, XXXVI (July-August 1965), 27-28.

The Absence of a Plight for Man

In a total of thirty sermons there is little evidence of man's plight. The sermon topics are many: from the sacraments to pacifism; from John the Baptist to the funeral. Two distinct patterns emerge. The first pattern finds the preacher almost exclusively absorbed with biblical material. In either pattern the reader or hearer is seldom confronted with a plight of problems.⁵¹

The first pattern provides a varied selection of topics but a common absence of man's plight. In the sermon by Gaston Foote, "Can Human Nature be Changed?," the point of the sermon is that man's nature does change, and God carries out that change. There are hints that all is not well with man. One hint in this direction occurs when the writer says: "We need a change of heart." Beyond this there is little which points to a particular plight of man.⁵² The same pattern opens up again as Gordon W. Mattice talks about wills. A writing of a will is linked with good stewardship and mission.

⁵¹For an unexplainable reason the bulk of the thirty sermons fall in Volume XXXV (1965). The actual count reads: 1964 (3); 1965 (21); 1966 (6).

⁵²Gaston Foote, "Can Human Nature be Changed," The Pulpit, XXXV (July-August 1964), 29-21.

A meaningful will testifies to one's faith. When there is a will upon death, even distant relatives receive a share. The basic current throughout, "Your Last Will and Testament," finally boils down to death. Since all men eventually die, everyone needs a will.⁵³ Christmas becomes an occasion for a talk on the "Birth of Christ" by Thomas C. Cannon--a talk which excludes any particular problem for man. The early portion of the sermon summarizes Charles William's play "The Seed of Adam." Then the writer broaches the subject of man and says: "Too often, when we consider the joys of Christmas, we settle for lesser joys."⁵⁴ This is his strongest sign for a Christian's dilemma. Sometimes a sermon contains all of the necessary words for announcing a problem for man. Yet, the words never quite fall in that sequence. Such words as: white; Anglo-Saxon; Protestant; nigger; conflicts; racism, rape; Jew; union member; ethics; poverty; moral freedom; social vices; hypocrites; superior--all of these words are placed in a sequence which supplies little evidence for man's plight. In "On Being Fair to Ourselves" James Armstrong employs a panorama

⁵³Gordon W. Mattice, "Your Last Will and Testament," The Pulpit, XXXVI (November 1965), 24-25

⁵⁴Thomas C. Cannon, "Angels on the Way Delayed Us," The Pulpit, XXXVI (December 1965), 20-22.

of powered words. But he does this in such a way that the possible dilemmas for man fail to appear.⁵⁵ Lectures on a variety of topics--to the exclusion of man's plight--indicate a distinct preaching pattern.

The sermon built almost exclusively upon biblical material provides a second pattern. 1 Cor. 15:57-58 provides a backdrop for the discussion of Paul's approach to money. J. A. Davidson's sermon "The Economics of Christian Fellowship" dwells upon an imagined meeting of the Corinthian church. The point of the sermon revolves around what the author calls a mundane and material approach to money. He feels this is Paul's view of economics, and he agrees. While the last few paragraphs relate the textual insights to the hearer, little inkling of a dilemma for man is evident.⁵⁶ Simon J. DeVries uses the occasion for preaching as an avenue to probe some of the problems of biblical interpretation. He cites this goal in an opening paragraph:

The living God once spoke on Sinai, and surely he speaks to men from Sinai still. But so long as rationalistic and subjectivistic modes of interpreting the biblical

⁵⁵James Armstrong, "On Being Fair to Ourselves," The Pulpit, XXXVII (February 1966), 4-6.

⁵⁶J. A. Davidson, "The Economics of Christian Fellowship," The Pulpit, XXXVI (November 1965), 16-17.

text prevail, we shall never really come close enough to hear even the echo of his voice.⁵⁷

The basis for the discussion is an assortment of texts from the book of Exodus--centering in the reception by Moses of the Ten Commandments. The author describes the first approach as an "antisupernaturalistic historicism." For the author this means that all theophany is explained in human terms. A second way of coming to grips with the text--and equally irreverent--it is the literal method of interpretation. He cites the absurd implications of the literal method:

They are, first, that the Bible gives and intends to give a reliable literal record of actual historic events analogous to the detailing of a crime in a lawyer's brief or (closer to hand) to a movie director's script and scenario; second that what happened on Sinai occurred in such a way that you could have photographed it had you been there and were you so well trained and equipped as Cecil B. deMille and his crew.⁵⁸

The author's solution to the problem of interpreting the Sinai event comes under the heading of "sacred drama." In this drama Yahweh's acts for Israel are recreated by the worshipping

⁵⁷Simon J. DeVries, "The Vision on the Mountain," The Pulpit, XXXVI (June 1965), 4.

⁵⁸Ibid., 5.

community.⁵⁹ In all of the talk the hearer does not face a dilemma. The stuff of life, the problems of the hearer's own human situation, are beyond the thrusts of the sermon. In place of man's plight the writer chooses to discuss the options of interpreting a biblical event.

H. Richard Rasmusson's concern expresses itself through the Incarnation. Pondering the words of the fourth Gospel, "And the Word Became Flesh," he concludes that these words invest humanity with a new dignity. They heighten man's reverence for himself and others and demonstrate God's care for man. Finally, he urges the hearers to demonstrate their faith on the human scene. Most of the sermon deals with a biblical motif; a plight for the hearer is absent.⁶⁰

A topical lecture or a biblical study are two ways of classifying the thirty sermons--sermons which fail to locate a particular plight of man. While in most cases the topical lecture prevails, the biblical study also receives sample presentation.

⁵⁹Simon J. DeVries, "The Vision on the Mountain," The Pulpit, XXXVI (June 1965), 4.

⁶⁰H. Richard Rasmusson, "The Word became Flesh," The Pulpit, XXXV (December 1964), 19-20.

Summary

Chapter II of the study has made an assessment of the signs of man's plight. These signs are visible in 85 per cent of all sermons under consideration.

There are four external categories of man's plight-- cultural, ministry, ethical, absence of God. The sermons in the external categories depict man's plight in relation to his culture and fellow-men. Approximately 72 per cent of the sermons are in the external categories. A number of significant signs cluster around the Christian's interaction with culture. An examination of the sermons uncovers the image of the Christian isolating his faith from culture, experiencing difficulty in adjusting to culture, reflecting cultural values, and hesitating to participate in the culture of the day. In the plight of ministry the Christian's ministry diminishes in the world. The roots of this diminishing ministry are in a lack of commitment, a breakdown in the sharing process, and a loss of prophetic voice. The Christian faces also an ethical plight. In the face of injustice in society, a loveless life among men, and a humanity in pain, he remains silent, fails to release Christian love, displays insensitivity to the pain of humanity. Man also faces a

plight in the absence of God. He senses that God has disappeared and left a world out of control. The authors stress what they consider the cause of God's absence, namely the failure of man to hear God.

The one internal category is comprised of the personal plights of men. These signs characterize the Christian as anxious, sinful, self-righteous, prideful, and guilty. While the characterization of man in this way had connections with culture and other men, the primary emphasis is on the tension within man himself.

Two final categories are labeled as "miscellaneous" and "absence of a plight." Each miscellaneous sermon contains a plight of man which does not cluster sufficiently over a particular theme. Two distinct patterns emerge in the thirty sermons where there exists no plight. The majority of sermons assume the form of a lecture about a particular topic. Other sermons consist largely of biblical material.

In the second chapter the signs of man's plight have been assessed and categorized. Chapter III discusses the meaning of man's plight.

CHAPTER III

THE MEANING OF THE SIGNS OF MAN'S PLIGHT

In the previous chapter the signs of man's plight were located and categorized. The Christian's plight is a multiple one; cultural, personal, ministerial, ethical, an absent God. In this phase of the study the sermons are analyzed for possible meanings of man's plight.

Man's plight is his problem, dilemma, a predicament in life. In this analysis the term "meaning" refers to the direction or consequences of man's plight. For example if a Christian faces a cultural plight in the violation of faith from culture, what is the meaning or direction of such a plight for his life? If a man is in a dilemma when he senses God's absence from life, what is the meaning or consequence of such a dilemma for his life?

In the following analysis the emphasis centers upon a horizontal meaning, a vertical meaning, and an absence of meaning for man's plight. The ratios of these three meanings to the categories of the previous chapter are listed in Appendix I.

Horizontal Meaning of Man's Plight

Man's plight contains horizontal meaning. This means that the sermon authors attribute to man's plight a horizontal direction. The dimensions of this meaning include a personal collapse for man, a breakdown of ministry among men and an impending doom for the world. Thirty-one per cent of the sermons in the study contain a description of man's plight with horizontal meaning or direction. This meaning is confined to man himself and the surrounding world of men. In Table 5 the frequency of meaning is counted according to three major categories of the chapter.

TABLE 5

FREQUENCY OF MEANING FOR MAN'S PLIGHT

<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Horizontal	62	31%
Vertical	40	20%
Absence	100	49%

The authors describe the horizontal direction of man's plight when they speak of his personal collapse. In the sermon "Living with Yourself" Paul Ramsey finds that all attempts to

evade conscience lead to man's destruction. The author calls conscience itself a plight for man. Conscience, in its accusing and excusing capacity, shows man his true self. Employing legal terminology, he sees the conscience in the role of a judge in the life of man. This plight compounds itself when man attempts to triumph over the conscience. The author cites the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, as the advocate of man's rising above conscience. In The Genealogy of Morals Friederich Nietzsche points to a collapse of morality when man rises above conscience. Paul Ramsey visualizes another meaning. In man's attempts to rise above conscience, morality may well lose out. When this occurs, man faces destruction. The author's meaning for man's plight is limited to man's relationship to himself.¹ In "Less than the Stars" A. Leonard Griffith finds that the meaning of man's plight is his miserableness. On the basis of Ps. 131:1-2 the writer compiles a list of interwoven plights of man which always leave man in some state of misery. Ambition runs away with man, and he is miserable. Man becomes too preoccupied with those areas of religion which he does not understand, and the result is frustration. Man

¹Paul Ramsey, "Living with Yourself," The Pulpit, XXXVII (July-August 1966), 4-7.

insists upon answer when disaster strikes, and the consequence is misery. All of these meanings for man's plight--misery, frustration, disgust--are confined to the horizontal level of man himself. The meaning of man's plight is a personal collapse.²

The breakdown of ministry among men points to a further meaning for man's plight. Paul H. A. Noren adds together the signs of the church's plight and concludes that the church fails to minister to the crisis of the city. In "City in Crisis" the author first enumerates two problems of the city: anonymity and impersonalization. Man's plight consists in his insensitivity to these dilemmas of the city. By treating the dilemmas as a statistic, man fails to comprehend the cities' many lives filled with personal tragedy. The author pictures the church as a group of people who are too busy with their own selfish and myopic concerns. The meaning of this plight lies in a broken ministry to the people of the city.³ Christians are too busy to face and settle their quarrels, and this means they are not reconciled to one

²A. Leonard Griffith, "Less than the Stars," The Pulpit, XXXV (July-August 1964), 12-15.

³Paul H. A. Noren, "City in Crisis," The Pulpit, XXXVI (April 1965), 15-17.

another. This is James Wm. Morgan's theme in the sermon "Controversy in the Community of Faith." The first part of the problem is the Christian's reluctance to face and discuss the problems of the day. The author states:

So, my first point: let us stop being ruled by unexamined cliches and half-truths and have the courage to bring these matters into the open discussion of the community of faith which is the church.⁴

The author agrees that unity in the church is important, but that genuine unity comes only after the issues are faced and discussed. He finds a cleavage between clergy and laity, an unwillingness on the part of both in dealing with each other in love. Refusal to face the issues of the day, unwillingness to discuss common problems, stubbornness on the part of both clergy and laity, all of these signs throw Christians into a dilemma. The meaning of the dilemma is an unreconciled church which does not carry out God's plan for the world.⁵ This meaning is horizontal, for the dimensions are limited to the Christian and his fellow Christians.

Some writers view the meaning of man's plight in terms of a world headed for destruction or doom. Byron L. Johnson

⁴James Wm. Morgan, "Controversy in the Community of Faith," The Pulpit, XXXVII (January 1966), 15.

⁵Ibid., 16-17.

is one of these preachers. In "The Cost of Peace" he lists the sacrifices necessary for peace: giving up hatred, retribution, fear, greed, impatience, sloth. It is the plight of man that he refuses to make these sacrifices. The meaning of the plight is held before the reader in the last lines of the sermon, when the author says:

These it seems to me, are the costs of peace, that we must be prepared to pay if we are to succeed. We know what the cost would be if we fail.

The cost is the destruction of the earth.⁶ James Earl Massey's sermon "The Church Must be Redemptively Involved" labels the church as a servant church in the world. This church's plight is the failure to confront the world in God's name; sometimes a failure to invite men to God because of conflicting interests; sometimes a failure to identify with men because of comfort and class; sometimes a failure to sustain redemptive action; sometimes a false contentment with piety and correct doctrine. He sums up the plight by saying:

Our blindness to the struggled of the world around us must be confessed. We must confess a solidarity of guilt with our nation for allowing sub-christian social ethics, sub-christian political concerns, and sub-christian economic and employment practices to continue unchanged and unquestioned.

⁶Byron L. Johnson, "The Cost of Peace," The Pulpit, XXXV (October 1964), 16-18.

But this plight, in the author's estimation, has consequences for the world. In a world which is moving in the wrong direction, the consequences of the Christian's failure to serve spell out doom and destruction for the world.⁷

Man faces a plight with horizontal meaning. In the first sense this means that man is in a state of personal collapse. Secondly this means that man's ministry to man is broken. Finally, this means that as long as man remains in his plight, there is doom ahead for the world. There are other possibilities. In the next portion of the research assessment is made of the possibilities of a vertical meaning or direction for man's plight.

Vertical Meaning of Man's Plight

To say that man's plight contains vertical meaning is to say that man's plight contains consequences which transcend the world of men. The consequences of the plight center around man's relationship of God. In Table 5 on page 52 there is a frequency listing of forty preachers who dwell upon the vertical meaning of man's plight. They describe

⁷James Earl Massey, "The Church Must be Redemptively Involved," The Pulpit, XXXVII (June 1966), 4-7.

man's plight and relate his plight to God. At times the authors describe the relationship in terms of God's judgment upon man. In other instances they view the relationship as a rejection of God by man. At other times the authors picture the relationship between God and man as one of separation.

As a result of man's plight God judges man. This is Theodore L. Trost, Jr.'s conclusion in the sermon "The Forgotten King." The author finds man in a plight of moral chaos. There is contempt for authority. Few are able to tell right from wrong. At the bottom of all of this stands man's faulty view of sin. He likes to speak of sin abstractly as alienation. In the author's estimation sin is always specific. God judges man's sin. He says:

Yet the prophets tell us there are times when God "gives men up to their own destruction." Perhaps that's an unfamiliar thought to a generation which has sincerely believed God wouldn't do anything like that for any reason. Well, like it or not, God who does not will the death of any man does not let us escape his judgment.

This judgment is the consequence of man's sin. God's judgment upon man is a concern also for Donald E. Collins in "The Light of the Incarnation." Writing on the meaning of Advent,

⁸Theodore L. Trost, Jr., "The Forgotten King," The Pulpit, XXXVI (March 1965), 16-17.

the author focuses upon God's judging activity both past and present. This activity was manifested by Jesus as he encountered the self-righteous religious community of his time. In the present day man sins abundantly. He constantly attempt to cover up this sin with a host of false remedies. For man this cover-up is futile. Man's hope lies "in reclaiming the light of Advent which declares God's judgment on sin and calls to repentance." Sin with its false remedies places man in a plight. In this plight God judges man.⁹ The theme of God's judgment upon man is a dominant theme for the vertical meaning of man's plight.

Some of the authors interpret the vertical meaning of man's plight as the rejection of God by man. In the sermon, "The Sign for Our Times" by William L. Eichelberger there is a description of man's plight as one of anxiety and fear. Man is aware that he is his own worst enemy. He compensates for this swareness by searching for security. Man finds security in his mastery of the universe, a mastery which edges God out of the picture.¹⁰ In the author's evaluation this plight means a rejection of God.

⁹Donald E. Colling, "The Light of the Incarnation," The Pulpit, XXXVII (November 1966), 18-19.

¹⁰William L. Eichelberger, "The Sign for Our Times," The Pulpit, XXXVII (March 1966), 15-17.

For Cloma A. Huffman the term "death" represents meaning for man's plight. In "Frail Man and the Healing God" the writer speaks of man as dead in spirit. This death has three sources. The first source is a realization that man's power to destroy is greater than his moral power. The second source of death consists in false beliefs, such as racial prejudice. A final source of death for man's spirit involves a despair over his helplessness in life. This is the shape of man's plight, a dead, exhausted, and poisoned spirit. That man is in such a plight not only means the death of his spirit but also the death of his faith in God.

The author states:

We are frail men. We are in grave danger. Our peril is frightening because destructiveness, false beliefs and despair have sucked at our strength. These are three silent musketeers who loyally stand together as one, and three who live as one to bring death to our faith in God.¹¹

The rejection of God by man is one of the vertical dimensions of his plight. The words vary--rejection, rebellion, death--but the meaning is constant. Man's plight means that he rejects God.

¹¹Cloma A. Huffman, "Frail Men and the Healing God," The Pulpit, XXXV (March 1964), 18-21.

The preachers also speak of man's plight as concluding in a separation of the man from God. Martin E. Marty works toward this conclusion in his sermon "The Guilt of Unbelief and the Gift of Faith." He recognizes man in plight when he says, "The writer worries about a kind of atheism or idolatry on the part of people who get so engrossed in God's creation that they forget to think about God." This is a form of unbelief, but there is more; for this form of unbelief turns from God's presence in stubbornness.¹² The writer senses a vertical dimension for man's plight. The very plight of man contains consequences for his life with God. In the context of this sermon, those consequences are life without God, a separation from God. In a different approach Tylor E. Roth speaks of man's separation from God in the sermon "Destination Known." The author describes life as a journey. Through Faith the Christian obtains the capacity for discovering God as he travels on life's journey. The discovery of God is at the same time life with God. There is another possibility. God's presence can be cancelled out by sin. Possibility becomes reality when God's light is

¹²Martin E. Marty, "The Guilt of Unbelief and the Gift of Faith," The Pulpit, XXXVII (January 1966), 11-13.

refused. Here is life apart from God.¹³ The writer locates the plight of man, and then he relates this plight to God.

Forty writers of The Pulpit delineate three forms of vertical meaning for man's plight. God judges man. Man rejects God. A separation exists between God and man. These writers carry the consequences of man's plight beyond a horizontal level, a level confined to the world of man.

The Absence of Meaning of Man's Plight

Some thirty sermons failed in indicating a plight for man. Seventy sermons contain evidence of man's plight, but they fail to attach meaning, direction, or consequence to that plight. These sermons differ from the sermons in the horizontal and vertical categories, not in that they fail to discuss man's plight but in that they do not ascribe meaning to man's plight. The following assessment concerns this latter group of seventy sermons. The question could be raised concerning the material which serves as a substitute for the meaning of man's plight. The majority of substitutes call for action on the part of man; an imperative, a definition, an alternative. The minority of substitutes are concerned

¹³Taylor E. Roth, "Destination Known," The Pulpit, XXXV (January 1964), 13-14.

with some form of God's activity. It is important to note that a call for action on man's part and talk about God's activity exist in sermons with horizontal and vertical meaning. Their uniqueness in the seventy sermons in this assessment lies in their roles as substitutes for the meaning of man's plight.

When an author describes a plight of man, he follows the plight, at times, with a horizontal or vertical meaning for the plight. When this is not the case, the author usually substitutes by calling man into action. The call to action can assume the form of an imperative. In the sermon "Two Notes in the New Testament" Theodore R. Ferris detects man's plight in hypocrisy and self-righteousness. These are marks of an old age. The Christian has a choice. He can choose to fashion a new age. The author urges him to take the choice for a new age with numerous imperatives. He says: "Keep your mind out of the deep freeze . . . Look at that Life . . . let the splendor of it burn out your despair."¹⁴

A further form of call to action lies in a definition of the situation. Harold A. Bosley claims that man's plight in

¹⁴Theodore P. Ferris, "Two Notes in the New Testament," The Pulpit, XXXV (April 1964), 16.

his attempt to find a satisfying faith at a cheap price. In the sermon "Faith Comes Hard" the author first cites man's plight and then spends the balance of his effort in defining a solution to that plight. He suggests that the Christian serve God now rather than at some distant time. Three avenues of service are offered by the author: worship, study, service. The author defines an avenue for man's action rather than providing a meaning for his plight.¹⁵

In "Casting Out Demons" J. Claude Evans provides the reader with alternates. First, he describes man's plight as a plight of anxiety, which is due to a self-centered view of life. On the one hand man can be possessed by these demons of anxiety. On the other hand man can be possessed by Christ; in Christ's possession the demons are unable to distort life. He states: "Either we will be possessed by demons or we will be possessed by Christ." In concentrating on the alternates, the author chooses to omit a significant meaning for man's plight.¹⁶

¹⁵Harold A. Bosley, "Faith Comes Hard," The Pulpit, XXXV (April 1964), 16.

¹⁶J. Claude Evans, "Casting our Demons," The Pulpit, XXXVI (January 1965), 17-19.

In a minority of sermons where the authors failed in finding meaning for man's plight, there is a substitution for this absence in a focusing upon some form of God's activity. Robert A. Raines focuses upon God's activity for the major part of his sermon "Nothing but Jesus Christ." Initially he writes concerning the Christian's anxiety in a new age. The basic concern is whether or not the Bible, creeds, and gospel make sense to modern man. The author indicates God's activity in Christ enlivens the Bible, creeds, and Gospel. The Bible is a living word; a Christian creed is a signpost pointing to the living God; the Gospel is Jesus Christ bearing all of our griefs. This material which focuses upon God's activity serves as a substitute for a description of the meaning or consequence of man's plight.¹⁷

¹⁷Robert A. Raines, "Nothing but Jesus Christ," The Pulpit, XXXVI (January 1965), 17-19.

Summary

In Chapter III the factor of meaning in man's plight was weighed. The sermon writers--31 per cent--indicate that man's plight carries a horizontal meaning, a direction confined to the world of men. These writers indicate that man's plight signals a personal collapse for man, a breakdown of ministry among men, and an impending doom for the world. Other sermon writers--20 per cent--conclude that man's plight contains vertical meaning, consequences which move beyond the world of man to God Himself. They see this meaning in different forms. Three predominant forms are God's judgment upon man, man's rejection of God, and an existent separation between man and God. Almost half of the writers--49 per cent--do not provide a meaning, direction or consequence for man's plight. The majority substitute a call to action in place of a horizontal or vertical meaning. A minority move from a description of man's plight to a pondering of some form of God's activity.

CHAPTER IV

IMPLICATIONS OF THE SIGNS AND MEANING OF MAN'S PLIGHT

Today there is a general rediscovery of the preaching task, and a specific rediscovery of man and his world in relation to this task. This research has comprised an evaluation of the signs of man's plight in life and the meaning of those signs for man. The primary sources for study are three volumes of *The Pulpit*, a preaching journal whose authors display a broad and varied background. In the analysis the term "man" refers primarily to the man of God or Christian man. The term "plight" represents the dilemma of man in contemporary life.

In Chapter II various categories were established in examining the signs of man's plight. Man's plight is an external plight in that the signs point from man outward to culture and the world of men. Christian man is also in a cultural plight. In this plight he isolates his faith from culture, find difficulty in adjusting to culture, reflects the values of culture, fails in participating in culture.

Closely allied to his cultural plight is a plight in ministry. A lack of commitment, a loss of a sharing capacity, a failure to speak prophetically, these signs constitute man's plight in ministry. Also the Christian is an ethical plight. Here he fails in hearing the cries of injustice about him, displays a lack of love in relationships with other men, and becomes insensitive to the pain of humanity. The apparent absence of God further signals a plight for man. He senses that God is absent from the scene of life; therefore the world is out of control. Man fails to hear God's voice today. This is a final dimension to God's absence.

While the four previous categories are external in nature, a fifth category concerns the inward or internal movement of man's plight--a personal plight. In this plight a number of signs cluster about man's anxiety, sinfulness, self-righteousness, pride, and guilt.

When signs fail to cluster in sufficient quantity around a particular plight, these signs are placed in a miscellaneous category. A number of sermons did not contain reference to man's plight at all. A majority of these sermons took the form of a topical lecture, while a minority of these sermons focused almost entirely upon biblical material.

Approximately 85 per cent of all sermons under study developed a plight for man. Of the five initial categories approximately 72 per cent concentrated upon man's external plight--his relationship to culture and the world of men.

The question was then raised as to the meaning of man's plight. Approximately 31 per cent of the authors dwell upon a horizontal meaning--one confined to the world of men. They describe the consequences of man's plight in terms of a personal collapse for man, breakdown of ministry among men, and impending doom for the world. Some 20 per cent of the authors detect a vertical meaning for man's plight--a dimension involving a relationship to God. At times the relationship is one in which God judges man. At other times the emphasis is upon man's rejection of God. Still, on other occasions the authors characterize man's relationship to God as one of separation. Almost one-half of the sermon authors--49 per cent--do not find meaning for man's plight. But the majority do describe man's plight. As a substitution for the meaning of that plight, they either call man to some form of action or dwell upon a facet of God's activity.

Implications of the Research

The foregoing examination of the sermons indicates that preachers consider man in a plight. These authors describe man's plight primarily as an external plight rather than an internal plight. The largest number of authors fail to attach a meaning to man's plight. While a smaller number recognize horizontal meanings for man's plight, only a remnant of authors ascribe vertical meanings to the plight of man.

It is evident that there is a concern for man's problem or plight on the part of the sermon authors. In 85 per cent of 202 sermons the authors dwell upon some aspect of man's plight.

A further implication of the study is that the sermon authors describe man's plight as primarily external in nature rather than internal in nature. An external plight begins with man and moves outward toward culture and relationships among men. An internal plight moves and concentrates upon man. The authors are saying that primarily man's plight involves his relationship to culture and to other men. The signs of man's plight cluster around five major categories, comprising a total of 143 sermons: cultural plight, plight

in ministry, ethical plight, absence of God plight, personal plight. In these sermons 72 per cent of the descriptions of man's plight focus upon the external nature of the plight. Special emphasis is given to man's cultural plight as a whole. In the four external categories certain themes are dominant. Man isolates his faith from culture and fails in adjusting to the cultural currents about him. Man is in a plight in ministry largely because of a lack of commitment and a breakdown in the sharing process among men. Man's ethical plight occurs because he fails to hear the cries for justice in society and lacks the capacity for love. The single internal category, the personal plights of man, equals in size the largest external category. But viewing the five categories as a whole, the authors' attention centers primarily on man's plight in culture and in relationships among men.

A final implication of the research is that in the largest number of instances the sermon authors fail to attach a meaning, a direction, or a consequence to man's plight. While some authors describe a horizontal meaning for man's plight, the smallest number depict man's plight as vertical. Of the total collection of sermons approximately 49 per cent did not contain a meaning for man's plight. As a substitute for this meaning the authors either call man to action or

depict a facet of God's activity. In 31 per cent of all sermons the authors suggest a horizontal meaning for the plight of man. This means that they view the predicament of the Christian in relationship to the surrounding world of men. At times they relate horizontal meaning as a personal collapse for man or as impending doom for the world, while at other times they emphasize a breakdown of relationships among men. The smallest number of authors--20 per cent--relate man's plight to God. God's judgment, man's rejection, or separation provide the accents by which man's plight is connected to God.

Assuming that the authors use their sermons in a preaching situation, the hearers could find that they possess a plight. Their plight primarily involves their relationship to culture and the world of men. There is a 50 per cent possibility that they will hear meaning attached to their plight. If this is the case, the meaning most often will deal with relationships to others, less often with God.

Conclusion

The plight of man and the meaning of that plight for his life are crucial for the Christian's awareness. Arthur L. Teikmanis touches the nerve of this encounter. He writes:

When preaching is directed to personal needs, worshipers in the congregation respond, sometimes with smiles and then again with tears, sometimes with excitement and then again with deep reverence, sometimes with quiet thoughtfulness and then again with a challenging disturbance . . . Such creative and redemptive experience in the service of worship is mediated only by the preacher who knows his people and their needs, whose heart is filled with empathy, love and understanding, who knows the true meaning and significance of preaching.¹

That continuing studies in preaching might contribute to this experience is a worthy goal.

The source of movement for the hearer, the effect of a preacher's religious affiliation and his description of the hearer's plight, the preacher's role and the hearer's needs--these are the issues which might be subjects for further study.

¹Arthur L. Teikmanis, Preaching and Pastoral Care (Englewood Cliffs: Preston-Hall, 1966), p. 21.

Questions for Further Study

The assessment of the sermons in *The Pulpit* suggests several questions for further study. One possible question relates to the movement of the sermon hearer from one position to another. Man is in a Plight of some shape and form, and this plight involves meaning for his life, The position of a Christian can be the position of a man in an ethical plight. Surrounding the Christian are cries of injustice from people in society. The Christian is insensitive to these cries, and this is his plight. And this means that God judges him for his insensitivity. How does the Christian move from the position of his plight and judgment to the position of new life? How does the Christian become sensitive to the cries of the people of society. Richard R. Caemmerer ponders this question in Preaching for the Church. He describes the movement process: "As the preacher moves his hearer along the path of spiritual progress toward a goal of conviction or behavior, he is at the same time helping to release him from a difficulty and deficiency, a malady." Then the writer concludes that the power for this movement is the "Message of the Cross."²

²Richard R. Caemmerer, Preaching for the Church . St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), pp. 35-39.

In a recent preaching study, The Preaching Pastor, Charles F. Kemp focuses the second part of his study upon such movements in the hearer as: from doubt to faith, hostility to love, pride to humility. The author feels that preaching can help in these movements. Through a host of sermons by different preachers, a number of power sources are displayed for the movement of the hearer.³ The question of the hearer's movement could be pursued either through a study of sermons or through a study of preaching manuals.

Another question arising from this research concerns the background of the preacher and the indications of plight and meaning. Does the religious background of a group of preachers produce a consistent frequency of plight and meaning? What are the variations among the major backgrounds represented in the study? The Pulpit contains four or five major contributing sources, and this factor places a limitation on the breadth of such a study. There are ample preaching sources outside of The Pulpit to complement a study of this nature.

A final question worthy of research attention concerns the relationship between the preacher's ministry and the

³Charles F. Kemp, The Preaching Pastor (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), pp. 35-39.

preacher's capacity in meeting the needs of the hearer. In Preaching and Pastoral Care, Arthur L. Teikmanis contends that preaching and pastoral care are necessary as complements of one another. The preacher knows the needs of his people primarily through daily contracts with them. He states:

It is through our calling and counseling that we become acquainted with our parishioners--the oversensitive and suspicious, the irresponsible and the rebellious, the proud and the arrogant, as well as those questing for deeper knowledge, love and understanding If there is to be a healthy wholeness in our churches and in our ministry and within us as preachers, we need to find a way to integrate our words with our deeds, our preaching with pastoral calling and counseling.⁴

In The Pulpit there are a number of authors who at present do not serve in the role of parish pastor. For instance, does their non-parish role lessen their capacity for preaching to the needs of people?

⁴Ibid., p. 32.

APPENDIX I

The appendix registers the frequency of vertical, horizontal, and absent meanings concerning man's plight. The meanings are registered according to the basic categories of Chapter I.

<u>Category</u>	<u>Horizontal</u>	<u>Vertical</u>	<u>Absence</u>
1. The Plight of Man in Culture	(15)	(10)	(14)
a. compartmentalized faith	3	5	4
b. inadequate adjustment	4	3	5
c. reflector of values	3	2	3
d. lack of participation	5	0	2
2. The Personal Plight of Man	(12)	(11)	(16)
a. anxious man	4	2	5
b. sinful man	3	3	4
c. self-righteous	2	3	3
d. prideful man	3	1	1
3. The Plight of Man in Ministry	(10)	(6)	(10)
a. lack of commitment	3	1	8
b. breakdown of sharing	6	4	1
c. loss of prophetic voice	1	1	1

	<u>Category</u>	<u>Horizontal</u>	<u>Vertical</u>	<u>Absence</u>
4.	The Ethical Plight of Man	(14)	(5)	(5)
	a. cry for justice	6	3	2
	b. lack of love	5	2	2
	c. pain of inhumanity	3	0	1
5.	God's Absence--A Plight for Man	(5)	(4)	(6)
	a. disappearing God	3	1	3
	b. world out of control	2	0	2
	c. failure to hear	0	3	1
6.	Miscellaneous	(6)	(4)	(19)
7.	The Lack of a Plight for Man			(30)
	Total	62	40	100

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