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The Relation of Preaching and Life in Medieval England

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THE RELATION OF PREACHING AND LIFE IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

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by

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CHAPTER I

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The relationship of preaching and life of the people in any country and in any century can be seen from the evidences which remain. The claim has often been made that the conditions in any given locality and any given time have affected the preaching which was done. The converse is also true, that preaching has affected the course of events in the country and time in which it was done. To what extent these two can be shown to be true, depends a lot on the materials examined as well as upon the extent of the records which remain.

This thesis is to look closer at the period of time which is called "Medieval"; however, there are numerous divisions of time given under that name. In this study, the time element will deal especially with the later medieval period, looking briefly at the times under Alfred the Great (ca.900), and more closely at the time under the Normans, from 1066 on to immediately before the Reformation century.

Often the charge is voiced that there was "no preaching" to speak of in the Church of this day. The charge could and has been substantiated by many writers; however, looking at the evidences which have come down to the present; looking at the studies which have been made by eminent

authors who have had first evidences at their disposal, one can gather that there was preaching done throughout the period which is under consideration. To see if there is a relationship between life as lived by the people of that day and the preaching which was done is the task set in this paper.

CHAPTER II

EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN BRITAIN

When was the Christian faith first preached in Britain? That question brings a host of answers that have all of the earmarks of legends. Dr. Bright speaks of the legend that St. Paul brought Christian faith to the Islands in the following manner:

> The pious fancy which led some of our ecclesiastical antiquaries to think that St. Paul, between his first and second imprisonments had made his way to the great northwestern island, the southern part of which had been recently pacified by the stern hand of Suetonius Paulinus, appealed for its chief, if not only support to a single sentence of St. Clement of Rome, in which Paul is said to "have come to the boundary of the west", -- a phrase most naturally interpreted of Spain.[1]

He also quotes from Eusebius as speaking of some of the Twelve or of the Seventy that they had "crossed the Ocean to the isles called British"; but shows that the reliance is on Origen and when the mission fields are specifically mentioned, Britain is omitted.[2]

The same writer quotes Theodoret, who, he says, combines St. Paul with the other Apostles, and speaks of them as having evangelized the Britons; this seems to rest upon the statement "The Apostles prepared very many habitations

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[1]William Bright, Early English Church History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), p. 1.

[2]Ibid., p. 2.

for God even in the isles of the ocean"; but this implies no more than the wide spread of their teaching and influence. He also mentions the fact that some people have tried to identify the Pudens and Claudia of St. Paul's second letter to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:21) with a Pudens and British-born Claudia as recorded in a poem published some twenty years after Paul's death by a certain Martial; however, he goes on to show that even though Pudens is supposed to have given a gift-site for a temple at Chichester, it does not prove that he was a Christian when St. Paul wrote. Every attempt to show apostolic foundation for the British Church ends in the same hazy reading between lines.[3]

The same must be said of the attempts shown, according to a Welsh story, that Christianity was brought to Britain by a certain Bran the Blessed, father of Caractacus, from Rome.[4]

One of the most beautiful legends is "that beautiful medieval romance which brought St. Joseph of Arimathea with twelve companions to Avalon or Glastonbury, and made his staff take root in the earth, and grow into the famous 'Holy Thorn.'"[5] This is the legend which has associated with it the attempts to say that Christ Himself was in

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[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., p. 3.

[5]Ibid.

Britain with Joseph, having traveled there during the "silent years" of His life. Some make this the basis of the close association and deep interest of Joseph in Christ; however, the evidences are so shrouded in mists that it is impossible to give any credence to the stories.

The same conclusion must be reached with reference to the story of Bede that "Lucius, a British king, sent to Eleutherus, a Bishop of Rome asking that he might be made a Christian."[6]

With reference to the statement by Tertullian, dated at perhaps 201 A. D., "that places in Britain, not as yet reached by Romans, were subjected to Christ," Dr. Bright states that he must have had some reason for making it. He then draws this conclusion:

> we cannot reasonably doubt that some Christians did cross the Channel . . . during the second century, if not earlier, and planted here and there some settlement of the Church. It was "almost certainly from Gaul!" . . .[7]

The first definite mention of Christian evidences in Britain is from the records of the Great Council of Arles in 314 A. D., for it shows among the bishops present, the names of three from Britain; Eborius of York, Restitutus of London, and Adelphius "de civitate Colonia Londinensium."[8]

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., pp. 4 f.

[8] Ibid., p. 9. Bright reports that the best understanding of "Londinensium" is "Lincoln," so it would be "Colony of Lincoln."

The evidences can be followed through a congratulation by Hilary of Poitiers (358-59) for remaining free from the heresy of Arianism and faithful to the Catholic faith; through Chrysostom saying that "even the British isles have felt the power of the Word, for there too churches and altars have been erected";[9] through the work of Germanus of Auxerre and Lupus of Troyes, sent from Gaul in 429, to combat the effects of Pelagianism in the Islands. "They preached in churches, and even in streets and fields and in the open country, to the great encouragement of the faithful."[10]

In dealing with Christianity coming into England, we are not dealing with Roman Christianity in the sense of looking to the bishop of Rome as the spiritual head of the Church. The appeals which were made to the continental churches for assistance were not directed to Rome, but to fellow Christians. The projection of such an outstanding name as St. Patrick (ca.391-461), who became the apostle to the Irish people (Scots), shows this independent development. He successfully withstood Druidism, organized the spiritual conquest of Ireland, sent out 20 bishops, instituted monasticism. This monasticism and the monastic institution became the distinctive characteristic of early

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[9] Ibid., pp. 16-21

[10] Ibid., p. 18.

Christianity in the Islands. The bishops lost out and the monasteries became the deciding factor in the picture of Christianity in the whole of the British Isles. The monasteries flourished and it became the custom for every tribe to endow a monastery. This gave two powerful forces at work in the Church in Ireland; in fact, it finally came to a contest between the atomic principle or decentralized control in the monasteries and the bishops with their central authority. The monasteries were strong and the bishops lost out. The Irish Christians were mission minded, for they sent missionaries into Northern Ireland, Scotland, into the West coasts of Britain.[11]

Another outstanding name is that of Columba, who took twelve disciples and went to the Island of Iona (563-97). In this way Iona became the mother church of Scottish Christianity. The tendency of this movement was for individuals to go off alone in single cells, to a hermit life in a rocky crag or on an island. Aidon is another outstanding name. He went from Iona to Lindesfarne (635-51). This became another "Iona" for Northumbria and radiated Celtic Christianity. The last well known name of this period is that of Cuthbert who went to lonely Farne to be absolutely alone. He was very reluctant to leave his lonely habitat to become a bishop in Northumbria, but finally consented. These items,

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[11]Giovanni Costigan, Class Notes for Survey Course of English History (Seattle: University of Washington, 1942).

the atomic concept of church polity, the tendency to strict asceticism with withdrawal to lonely places, proved to be a weakness in the Celtic Church. Added to this, the fact that the Britons (or Celts) did not try to do mission work among the Anglo-Saxon invaders in the southeastern quarter of the country, led to a withdrawal of the Christians into the northern and western provinces. Those Britons who remained among the conquerers were reluctant to communicate the Gospel to the fierce invaders in their midst.[12]

These fierce invaders remained heathen until the coming of Augustine in 596. This is the entrance of the Roman Church on the scene in southern England. The story is recorded by Bede and Gildas how the monk, who was later to be Gregory I, saw some Saxon youth for sale in the slave market of Rome.[13]

> He again inquired whether these islanders were Christians, or still involved in the errors of paganism, and was informed that they were pagans. . . . "Alas, what a pity that the author of darkness is possessed of men of such fair countenances; and that being remarkable for such graceful outward appearance, their minds should be void of inward grace." He therefore again asked what the name of that nation was, and was answered that they were called Angles. "Right," said he, "for they have angelic faces, and it becomes such to be coheirs with the angels in heaven." Then he proceeded, "What is the name of the province from which they are brought?"

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Edward P. Cheney, Readings in English History Drawn from the Original Sources (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1922), p. 47.

> It was replied that the natives of that province were called Deiri. "Truly are they De ire," said he, "withdrawn from wrath and called to the mercy of Christ." "How is the king of that province called?" They told him his name was Aella, and he, alluding to the name said, "Aellaluia, the praise of God the Creator must be sung in those parts."[14]

When this monk became Gregory I, he commissioned Augustine to lead a mission to Britain. An interesting note is brought out by Hume in telling us that Augustine and his forty monks remained in France, afraid to go over to Britain to propose a new doctrine to these fierce people.[15] Encouraged by Gregory, they took interpreters from among the Franks, who still knew the language, and voyaged to the Island of Thanet off the coast of Kent. They sent a message to Ethelbert, king of Kent, that they had a message from Rome of the assurance of the joys of heaven with the living and true God. The king ordered that they stay on the island and be given all they needed until he could know what to do with them. He had heard of the Christian religion, having married his wife, Bertha, on condition that she should be permitted to practice her religion with Bishop Luidhard, who was sent with her to preserve her faith. After some days the king came to the Island and had Augustine brought

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[14]Ibid., pp. 46 f.

[15]David Hume, The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Abdication of James the Second (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, n.d.), p. 42.

to him outdoors, fearing that in a building the good monk would be able to practice some magic on him. The monk's party came with a silver cross, an image of the Saviour painted on a board, singing the litany; they offered up prayers to the Lord for the eternal salvation both of themselves and those to whom they came to preach.[16]

> When he had sat down, pursuant to the king's commands, and preached to him and to his attendants there present the word of life, the king answered thus: "Your words and promises are very fair but they are new to us, and of uncertain import. I cannot approve of them so far as to forsake that which I have followed with the whole English nation. But because you are come from far into my kingdom, and, as I conceive, are desirous to impart to us those things which you believe to be true and most beneficial, we will not molest you, but give you favorable entertainment, and take care to supply you with your necessary sustenance; nor do we forbid you to preach and gain as many as you can to your religion."[17]

He permitted them to live in Canterbury, and gave them the necessities of life. They lived a simple life and preached to as many as they could. On the East side of Canterbury was the church of St. Martin, reported to have been built while the Romans were still in the Islands. In this church Queen Bertha used to pray. The monks from Rome repaired the church and used it for their worship, or as Bede puts it, "met here to sing, pray, say mass, preach and baptize."[18]

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[16]Cheney, on. cit., p. 48.

[17]Ibid., p. 49.

[18]Ibid.

When the king was converted to the faith, he permitted them to preach openly, to build and repair churches in all places. Greater numbers came to hear the word preached, for it appears that preaching was the principal mode of instructing these people.[19]

The work in Kent grew slowly from all indications. None of the surrounding kingdoms were brought into the fold of Roman Christianity. The Celtic bishops in East-Anglia had repulsed successive overtures.[20]

Edwin of Northumbria asked for the hand of Ethelburga (Aethelburh), the sister of Eadbald the King of Kent. He was granted his wish with the provision that Ethelburga and her attendants would be given full liberty of worship, and that king Edwin would examine her faith. If he found that faith superior to his own, he would accept it. Paulinus was sent as her personal bishop. Meeting with little success, he was about to leave the country. King Edwin deferred accepting Christianity; however, when finally he publicly accepted the Gospel, he asked his former pagan high priest, Coifi, who should desecrate the heathen altars and temples of idolatry. To this, the priest replied that he knew of no one who was better fitted to do this than he himself; and he followed through on the plan. King Edwin

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[19]Ibid.

[20]Bright, op. cit., p. 114.

had a wooden chapel hastily erected at York, and here he went through the training of a catechumen, receiving his baptism on Easter eve, April 11, 627. Many of the people followed his example; so many, that this has been called the birth-day of the Northumbrian Church.[21]

With the establishment of the Roman Church in these two important kingdoms of England, a conflict was bound to develop between the Celtic Church and the Roman. The conflict was resolved by a conference, which Bede calls a "synod," at Whitby in 664; this conference was called by Oswy, king of Northumoria. Calculation of the day of Easter and the form of the tonsure were the major points of discussion. Oswy decided in favor of the Roman calculations and the Roman tonsure which was round instead of across as the Celtic; this tonsure, or ceremonial cut of the hair was worn in memory of the crown of thorns which Christ wore.[22] The Celtic monks withdrew to their monasteries like Iona or Hy, some of them went back into Ireland. The influence of the Celtic Church waned from this time forth; while that of the Roman Church grew rapidly.[23]

Though preaching was an important means of communicating the Gospel, instructing the people in the beliefs of

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[21]Ibid., pp. 115-123.

[22]Costigan, op. cit.

[23]Bright, op. cit., p. 209.

the Church, and exhorting them to faithfulness, there are a number of things which contribute to its early decline. Among the things which should be mentioned in this connection are the strengthening of the papal ideas of sacramentalism, sacerdotalism, the veneration of saints, and the host of other distinctly Roman dogmas, as well as the unsettled conditions in the English Isles.

In this latter classification must be placed the raids and invasions of the Danes, which started with the plunder of Lindesfarne monastery in Northumbria in 793; the plunder of Jarrow monastery in 794; the attacks upon Wessex in 851; by 871 the Danes had overrun almost all of England. In that last named year Alfred ascended the English throne, inheriting a bankrupt country. Through dint of hard labor and able leadership in battle, he forced the Danes at the Treaty of Wedmore to accept peace and the Danes bowed to Baptism and became nominally Christian.[24]

The work of uniting the Danes and the English into one nation, begun by Alfred, was carried on by his successors. This work was completed under Edgar (959-975) with the result that the English and the Danes became incorporated into one united Kingdom of England.[25]

Alfred showed a genuine interest in his people in all

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[24]Costigan, op. cit.

[25]A. H. Hore, History of the Church of England (London: James Parker and Co., 1895), p. 81.

of the different aspects of their lives. In his introduction to the translation of the Pastoral Charge of Gregory the Great into Anglo-Saxon he decried the decay which had become characteristic of English learning. Whereas in former times men had come from far for instruction and wisdom, now these things had to be obtained abroad. He points out that not many could understand the rituals (presumably in Latin), nor were there many books which could be read by the people, so he encouraged men to translate the books into English and to study the Latin language.[26]

The change from Anglo-Saxon England to Norman England was prepared by the marriage in 1002 of Ethelred to Emma, the daughter of Richard, Duke of Normandy. In that same year, however, a slaughter of the Danes in England took place. Among those slaughtered was Gunilda, sister of Sweyne, the ruler of the Danes. Pillage began again; in 1013 Sweyne and Canute came to England. Sweyne became king by driving out Ethelred, who fled to Normandy. Sweyne died in 1014, so that Ethelred returned to England as king. After the death of Edmund Ironside, Ethelred's son in 1016, Canute became king of England and ruled until 1035. He treated the Danes and English alike. His sons were such poor rulers that by 1042 Edward the Confessor, the son of Ethelred, was elected king. He was very Norman, and

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[26]James Harvey Robinson, Readings in European History (New York: Ginn and Company, 1904), I, 222.

introduced the French language into the court. This is preparation for the Norman conquest; through him French became the language of the Church and State, the court and pulpit.[27]

With the Norman conquest by William of Normandy, begins the England of modern times. The development of the Church and the place of preaching in this scene does not seems to have been materially affected by the changes in the rulers. It is true that there always was a bit of aversion among the English to acknowledge their subservience to the Roman pontiff. The tie with the continental heritage of culture was strengthened, and we might say that there was a strengthening of the bonds with the continental Church, as well as the introduction of new life through the appointment of Norman bishops; however, the overall effect was not as great as one would assume, i.e., as far as the Church of the people was concerned.

With this general overview of the development of the English nation, with general comments concerning the development of the Church during all of this period, attention will now center on the development of the parish church and the preaching which was done in the overall picture of the church with its different parts of parish church, chapter house, preaching cross and cathedral.

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[27]Hore, op. cit., pp. 88 f.

CHAPTER III

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY LIFE AND THE PARISH CHURCH

In looking for the origin of the parish Church in England, the quest goes back into Saxon history. The parish church had its origin on the estate of the Saxon landowner. The first churches which were in any sense parochial were erected by the thanes to serve the houselings of their estates. The term "parish" as applied to the boundary of a district was unknown in pre-conquest England, nor does it occur in the Domesday survey of 1085-87, the word "manor" being commonly employed.[1]

The sense in which the historian Bede used the term parish in the eighth century signified a bishop's diocese, i.e, the geographical area over which the bishop exercised jurisdiction. The boundaries of "parishes" in Saxon days were little more than civil divisions, co-extensive with the estates granted to the thanes by successive kings and nobles. The connection between the private estate and the church on it was defined by Canute early in the eleventh century: "If a thane has a church on his bocland (estate) to which a cemetery is attached, he shall give it a third part of his tithe." That expression "a cemetery" has

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[1] G. H. Cook, The English Medieval Parish Church (London: Phoenix House, Limited, 1954), p. 18.

significance because there is evidence that before churches were built, the Christian rites were often performed in the open air at a place marked by a stone cross and adjoining a burial place.[2]

The evidence shows that when a visiting missionary would come from some monastic center to preach and to administer the sacraments, the faithful would gather at the cross. In the early days of missionary work, a portable altar would be placed before this cross. Going back this far into the development of the church, it is natural that English climate would make it desirable to build an altar house to protect the altar and the worshipers from the elements. This is the beginning of the parish church. The thane was not concerned too much about the convenience of his tenants, for he built the church convenient to his own dwelling. In some instances this placed the church at the very extremity of the parish. Another interesting sidelight of this development was that in some instances it led to the erection of two churches very close to each other, in some instances in the same church yard. Examples of this can be seen in the Essex churches of Willingale Doe and Willingale Spain, both in the same yard; another example is in Norfolk, North Walsham and Antingham; near Louth in Lincolnshire, the churches of Alvingham and

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[2]Ibid.

North Cockerington are but 30 feet apart.[3]

This break-up of England into parishes was not a sudden thing, but it was a gradual development. It is said that by the middle of the seventh century the Kingdom of Kent had been parcelled out in this manner. Much of the honor for this goes to Archbishop Honorius of Canterbury, but it is to Archbishop Theodore (669-90), the virtual creator of the Church of England, that the parochial division of the diocesan areas throughout the land must be attributed. He encouraged the Saxon landowners to erect churches on their lands, giving them perpetual patronage. The priest who officiated in a church thus founded by the landowner was a private chaplain to the founder. Until the tenth century the rural clergy were mostly unbeneficed clergy, really in the employ of the landowner. When the priest was given the cure of souls, the right to baptize, marry and bury the people on the estate, he came under the authority of the bishop.[4]

By the thirteenth century the limits of parishes were clearly defined and the control was transferred to the church. This was a natural result for often a parish covered two manors, or two parishes made up a manor. After this, all the affairs of the parish were conducted by the church

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[3]Ibid., pp. 19 f.

[4]Ibid., p. 20.

and the priest was no longer a servant of the lord of the manor, but directly under the bishop of the diocese. The parish became a religious community organized with a constitution that recognized the rights of the individual in self-government, though subject to the bishop. The parish elected wardens and officers in a deliberative assembly; these men were charged with care of the church property which often consisted of lands and houses, flocks and herds, as well as the furnishings of the church.[5]

Harking back to the creation of the parish church on the estate of the landowner, the Domesday Book shows the churches as appendages to the manor. From this we can clearly see that the manor created the parish, the church was the property of the landowner and the mass priest was his servant. The lord of the manor therefore held the advowson, i.e., the right of presenting a rector to the church.[6] Salzman gives some interesting definitions in this connection with reference to the meanings of the words which are often heard in connection with parochial affairs. The priest was called the "rector," i.e., ruler or "parson," i.e., the chief person of the parish. He was given a certain amount of land, called the glebe, and a certain yearly sum, chiefly derived from tithes. Out of

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[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., p. 18.

the sums thus received the rector had to keep the church in repair, assist the poor and show hospitality to visitors. In many places this income would amount to a pittance, while in others it would be a handsome sum.[7] The abuse which crept in later, that of the rector "in absentia," led to the rector sending a "vicar," i.e., a substitute to do the menial chores of the parish for a small sum, while the rector pocketed the larger share. Often the lord of the manor would give the advowson of his church to a monastery, then the monks would get leave from the bishop to "appropriate" the church, by which they became the rectors and they would appoint a vicar to serve the parish, or would designate one of their members to do so. At all events, in this manner the monastery would receive the great tithes at least, those of corn and wool; the vicar, at most, would receive the lesser tithes of practically everything else from cabbages to coal mines.

Another item in the church picture which should be mentioned is the founding of chapels of ease. These were established where people had difficulty in getting to the parish church, because of bad roads, weather or the danger of robbers. They were, naturally, in outlying districts and were built and supported by the people who used them. The mother church, however, retained the rights of baptism,

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[7]L. F. Salzman, English Life in the Middle Ages (Oxford: University Press, 1927), p. 116.

marriage and burial. The tithes were still paid to the mother church on certain festivals. Later, by ordinance of the bishop, these would become parish churches.[8]

The number of churches in England is difficult to estimate during any period. For instance the Domesday Survey does not give an accurate account of the churches in England for less than 2000 are mentioned. A direct quotation from Cook in this respect is pertinent:

> Documents relating to the Taxation of the English Church by Pope Nicholas IV, prepared by order of Edward I in 1291 gives more definite statistics. The number of parish churches by the end of the 13th century was approximately 8,085 to which must be added 450 chapelries.[9]

The accuracy of such statistics has been questioned by many writers. G. C. Coulton in his book on the Black Death lays the reason for these inaccuracies to the use of Roman numerals.

> . . . not until the end of the period did Arabic numerals come into fairly common use for the simplest purposes; they always remained the exception rather than the rule; but without Arabic numerals, even the most elementary arithmetical calculations, could be done only by round about methods. Let the reader, for instance, try to multiply 82 by 79, or divide 6778 by 82, with nothing but Roman numerals.[10]

This comment was made in connection with the numbers

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[8]Cook, op. cit., p. 21.

[9]Ibid., p. 20.

[10]G. C. Coulton, The Black Death (New York: Robert M. McBride and Co., n.d.), p. 43.

who died from the Plague, however, the calculations apply equally well to any counting or calculating which was done.

Though the church was primarily built for the religious worship of the people, that parish church filled many another need in the lives of the people, for it was the center of their social life as much as the manor or villa was the center of their work life. This held true all the way up to and beyond the Reformation. This parish church was associated with every event in the yearly round of parochial life. It was used as a hall, as the place for fairs or markets. At times it would resemble a corn exchange, or it would become the storehouse for many sorts of items. The strong box of the church became the depository for valuables as deeds and the like. The festivals of the church were the holidays from work for the people. These festivals called for merriment, and the nave of the church was the spot where such things were held. Very often these celebrations included an ale, called "church-ales." The ale for this was made in the parish brewhouse with malt that was purchased by the wardens from church monies, or from monies given by the parishioners, according to their means. These church-ales were accompanied by dancing in the church proper. The monies realized from these ales were marked for a number of purposes; some went to make necessary repairs to the church, some to provide a dowery for some poor brides in the parish, others might be

distributed as alms to the poor.[11]

One of the special observances which dated back to an ancient custom was the celebration of the parish wake, a feast commemorating the building of the church and its solemn dedication. These also took place in the nave and often became riotous celebrations. They must have brought condemnations in their wake. We can see this from the declaration of Charles I as late as 1633 countermanding the prohibition of "feasts of dedication of churches commonly called wakes . . . but the justices of the peace shall look to it that all disorders there may be prevented or punished."[12]

The parishes which used a monastic church undoubtedly had their difficulties on this score. The supposition is that the monks would "permit no parochial high jinks within the walls" as Cook puts it.[13] By the end of the fifteenth century, many of the churches replaced their brewhouses with a church-house or hall, which was used for "the ales, wives dancing and other social activities."[14]

Another facet of parish life which should be mentioned in this connection are the parish gilds, because they

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[11]Cook, op. cit., pp. 28 f.

[12]Ibid., p. 29.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

also staged such social activities. The first gilds were really benefit societies and burial clubs, interested in works of charity, and in having mass said in behalf of brethren, living and dead. They had their origin in the Corpus Christi celebration founded by Pope Urban IV in 1264 in honor of the Sacrament of the body of our Lord. This celebration was marked by a solemn procession of the Blessed Sacrament and a display of pageantry by members of the gild. These gilds had some very prominent members like Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI and Edward IV. After the Black Death these gilds increased, so that some churches had two and three of them. A comment by a sixteenth century preacher quoted by Cook gives a good characterization of these doings:

> Many country folk who keep certain gild commemorations come together on certain days of the year and hold their feasts within the church, perchance because they have no houses large enough to hold so great a company, and thus with surfeiting and drunkenness and other filthiness they do profane the sanctuary of God.[15]

Many attempts were made to control these things, as well as church fairs, however, they seem to have persisted in many quarters.

All of this shows that the parish church from earliest times, all through the Medieval ages was very closely linked with the life of the individual parishioner. The people

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[15] Ibid., p. 31.

who were so closely asscciated with the church are the people to whom the preacher preached. They made up what would be called in modern terminology "the congregation."

With this in mind the preacher of the Medieval age takes his place in the many spots where he did his preaching.

CHAPTER IV

THE PREACHERS

In asking who this preacher was, we come up with an answer which is varied to say the least. Perhaps it would be better to ask the question as G. R. Owst puts it in the very first words of his book, "Who can lawfully preach?," which he calls a typical question put by the Regimen Animarum. He shows the accreditation which is necessary.

> Priests, deacons and subdeacons, if they have preferment and the care of souls (si habeant prelationem et curam animarum), because those so entitled preach by reason of their preferment, not by reason of their order.[1]

The regular spokesman in the pulpit was thus naturally the bishop and the curate or beneficed parson, who was charged with the ministry to souls. Of course, there were many others who did preaching, especially in the later Medieval time, "Monks and Mendicants, University graduates in theology, vicars, chaplains, pardoners and recluses, even the Templar and Hospitaller." But all of these were admitted to the ranks of preachers only by special privilege, being licensed by their own prelati; and by the person charged with the care of the souls in the place where they preached.[2]

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[1] G. R. Owst, Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period (Cambridge: University Press, 1926), p. 1.

[2] Ibid.

In speaking of the prelati as being the bishop and the parson, there must be included with these the officers like archbishop, archdeacon, the "great abbots" who might have charge of a congregation. Remaining, however, with the simple classification of the bishops, realizing that they are representative of the entire group of higher clergy, an understanding can be grasped of the quotation of Dr. Lyndwood by Owst:

> Bishops indeed can preach everywhere, unless expressly prohibited by diocesans, following that saying in Matthew, "Go ye out into all the world and preach!" made to the apostles, in whose place the bishops are their successors. None the less they cannot bestow the authority to preach upon others save within their own dioceses.[3]

The bishop and archbishop would preach in their own cathedrals to the people who made up their parish. Their office would also demand of them they preach on the visitation of a parish or of the chapter house. But even here, when people would expect the bishop to preach, very often they would have someone in their company who did the preaching for them. Some of the reasons for this will be dealt with in a following section.

The bishops encouraged one another in their duty of preaching to the people under their spiritual care. In this connection, Owst has a quotation from Richard Fitzralph, Archbishop of Armagh which shows such an exhortation from a

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[3]Ibid., p. 8.

sermon once preached at Avignon on the duties of bishops:

> And Jesus went about all Galilee, as a zealous physician goes about among the sick, administering suitable medicines for any and every complaint. The Lord Jesus indeed went about each region in turn; but we (prelates), who are pastors of a single region each, have not the necessity "to go about the regions." Nevertheless we ought to go about and examine the several complaints of our people, and diligently attend to those among the people who are afflicted with the disease of avarice, that we may make some sermon concerning the evil of avarice, to the restoration of health.[4]

There were some good reasons why the bishop did not preach oftener, for in many instances he was involved in more than being the spiritual leader of the flock. He could very well be like Odo, the half brother of William the Conqueror, who was the Bishop of Bayeus, but at the same time was the Earl of Kent. Another example of this is the Bishop of Durham, who was not only the spiritual head of the see, but also lord of the Platinate of Durham; and the seal shows the episcopacy on the one side and the lord in full armor on the other side.[5]

In other instances, some bishops were titular heads of more than one episcopal see of the church; and it was quite evident that they could not fulfill their preaching responsibilities in two places at the same time. Taking these different things together, it readily can be seen

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[4]Ibid., p. 15.

[5]L. F. Salzman, English Life in the Middle Ages (Oxford: University Press, 1927), p. 33.

that the bishops in some instances would have such a multiplicity of duties that it would leave little time for preparation of the sermon to be preached to the parishioners. Some of the larger bishoprics undoubtedly had much business which would of necessity consume the time of the noble cleric at the head of it. There must, however, in all fairness be added that there was a goodly amount of laziness involved in this lack of preaching, as well as unsuitability for the office which they claimed to fill. An interesting light is shed on this in a quotation concerning the Bishop of Durham, Louis de Beaumont; it deals with his consecration:

> . . . it is said that he understood not Latin, and could scarce pronounce it. At his consecration, he was to make a formal profession, but he could not read it though he had been instructed in it for days beforehand; having arrived with many promptings from others at the word "Metropolitan" which after many gasps could not pronounce it, finally said in French, "Let that be taken as read!" All bystanders were amazed, mourning that such a man should be consecrated bishop. Another time, when conferring Holy Orders, he could not pronounce the phrase in aenigmate, he said in French to those who stood by, "By St. Louis the man was a clown that wrote this word!"[6]

When the bishop did preach, it was customary for him to grant an indulgence to those who came to hear him. On his visitations, though people might be disappointed that the great lord of the church did not preach himself, he

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[6]Ibid., p. 113.

would customarily grant an indulgence, even though someone of his company occupied the pulpit in his behalf. Such is the overview of the upper eschelon of the prelati in the period.

It is quite natural to move from the "overseer" to the one who was the man on the scene in the parish field in its truer sense, the local parish priest, or using the distinction from prelati to his curati, the one charged with the cure of souls. The remains of the preaching done by these humbler men in the parish are few, so that it is difficult to get a clear picture of the amount of work done by them in this field. This is understandable for the average parish parson to this day does not have his preaching activities recorded in most instances. Owst makes the observation that there is only limited reference to the preaching activities of the great men in the Registers and other ecclesiastical documents, and goes on to say:

> How much more natural it is to find that such references in them to the ordinary parish clergy are rarer still! If the evidence of their delinquency, their incompetence and idleness did not abound on the other hand, "no news" here might well be taken as the sign of "good news," and a general healthiness in the body clerical.[7]

There is evidence, however, that the parish priest did preach. The characterization of the faithful "persoun" of Chaucer, was not something which was a figment of the

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[7]Owst, op. cit., p. 21.

author's imagination, but brings us a record that there were faithful curati. Of him Chaucer writes in his Prologue:

> A good man was ther of religioun,
> And was a povre Persoun of a toun;
> But riche he was of holy thoght and werk.
> He was also a lerned man, clerk,
> That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preache;
> His parisshens devoutly wolde he teache. . . .
> On-to his povre parisshens aboute
> Of his offring, and eek of his substaunce. . . .[8]

Even tough the parson in his own prologue claims he is not a learned man, there surely is something typical in this characterization by Chaucer. This kind of a man would not be very apt to record his sermons; for most of the sermons recorded by others were directed to men like him. From the time of Charlemagne on, there were such collections of homilies. These collections were designed to bring the tenets of the Christian faith to the parishioners. One such collection of homilies was by Edric, a monk of Abingdon. They were appointed to be read in the churches in lieu of sermons. These were expositions of the teachings of the Ango-Saxon Church on many vital points of Christian doctrine.[9]

When reading the requirements which are outlined for the parson, the impression is received that the qualifications

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[8]Goeffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, edited by F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, c.1933), ll. 477-489.

[9]Cook, op. cit., p. 36.

were indeed adequate. Owst quotes a Master Robert Rypon, a sub-prior of Durham as saying in a synodal sermon that a good life is the preacher's first qualification, and added to that competent knowledge, "restat quod scientia est curato necessaria." To this is added, "Curati are required to have a knowledge of Holy Scripture with which they may preach to the people the Word of God."[10]

This same preacher goes on to show us the medieval preacher's essential library:

> And this knowledge, according to the Canon (dist. 38), consists specifically in the following - "The books which it is necessary for priests to study and know are the Book of the Sacraments, the Lectionary, the Antiphoner, the Baptisterium, the Compotus, the Canones Poenitentiales, and Homilies throughout the year for Sundays and Festivals." And if the priest's or "curate's" knowledge of any single one of these is lacking, hardly is he worthy of the name of priest. . . . I do not say that he is bound to know all these things by heart; but it suffices that he should know how to read them distinctly, understand them clearly, and expound them plainly as often as it is his duty.[11]

There are some records of these humbler servants defending themselves in their preaching. Owst quotes one of them and says that it is in a manuscript which "seems to be the work of an unpretentious homilist . . . diminutive, unadorned, unrubricated, in faded brown ink upon no vellum,

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[10]Owst, op. cit., p. 28.

[11]Ibid., p. 29.

but paper stained and coarse. . . ."

> And (if) a bishoppe or a doctoure stond up to preche the worde of God, muche pepull will drawe the therwarde to here hym; and ziff he repreye vices and synne, the peple will not gruche never a dele azeyns hym, ne thei will not forzett is wordes. But lat a sympull preste as I am seth the word of God to you, and ze sett no price thereby. . . . Thus ffareth grett mens wordes now adayes, thei ben taken grett hede of, and pore mens words been sett on syde.[12]

Another testimony quoted in the same source, is said by the writer to be from the fifteenth century English version of Gesta Romanorum:

> I have been a preste this fourty wynter and more, and have fastid, waked, and prayde, gone on pilgrimage, and prechid, and by the mercy of God I have tornyd many soules to God.[13]

However, lest the impression is left that all of the poor parsons of the medieval period were maligned individuals, who were actually following in the footsteps of the Apostles, following the instructions which were given them, and following the examples of the parsons who have been quoted, the other side of the picture deserves a seeing and a hearing. The Master Rypon quoted earlier gives a general indictment, relating to the lacks:

> Assuredly, some of them (the pastors) are destitute of this food, because many know not how to expound a single article of the Faith, nor one precept of the Decalogue;

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[12] Ibid., p. 21.

[13] Ibid., p. 23.

> and - what is worse - when they lack "this bread" themselves, they neglect to learn what they do not know. Nary rather, what is worst of all, many of them despise knowledge and teaching, and reject knowledge; or, if by chance they have any knowledge, or a moderate amount of it, by entangling themselves in secular affairs, or giving themselves up to pleasure, they cast that little away in their folly.[14]

The exhortations which were given the clergy in this respect, seem to indicate that there was need for such prodding. A writer, referring to a council which was convened at Oxford in the year 1223, says:

> . . . priests were exhorted "not to be dumb dogs, but with salutary bark to drive away the disease of spiritual wolves from the flock."[15]

From another council that convened in the year 1281, at Oxford there exists a document known as Peckham's Constitutions, drawn up by John Peckham, Archbishop of Canterbury, in which the charge is recorded:

> . . . every priest having charge of a flock do four times a year on one or more solemn feast days . . . instruct the people in the vulgar language on the Articles of the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Evangelical precepts, the seven works of mercy, the seven deadly sins, the seven principal virtues and the seven Sacraments.[16]

The fact that these constitutions are reiterated through the years, surely gives indication that there was need for such exhortation and command.

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[14] Ibid., p. 29.

[15] Cook, op. cit., p. 36.

[16] Ibid.

That there was appalling ignorance among the clergy on this level is evident from the complaints which were made against the clergy all through the Middle Ages. The people, ordinarily, would look to their parish priest to give them instruction in the fundamentals of the Christian faith; but many parish priests knew as little as their parishioners. To show this appalling ignorance, Salzman cites an instance which comes after the Reformation, Bishop Hooper's visitation in 1552: "scores of clergy who could not tell who was the author of the Lord's Prayer, or where it was to be found."[17] This author also quotes from "Parson Sloth" in the Vision of Piers Plowman:

> I have been priest and parson for thirty winters past,
> but I cannot solfa or sing, or read a latin life of saints;
> But I can find a hare, in a field or in a furrow,
> Better than construe the first Psalm or explain it to the parish.
> I can hold a friendly meeting, I can cast a shire's accounts,
> But in mass-book or Pope's edict I cannot read a line.[18]

There are a number of things which contributed to this decline and negligence. Possibly the greatest contributing factor in this was the development by the church of the very things which she wanted her priests to preach. Among these things might be mentioned sacramentalism, their lives began and ended with sacraments of the church; the veneration

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[17]Salzman, op. cit., p. 113.

[18]Ibid., p. 112.

of saints; extolling the virtues of "holy" pope; and what passed for virtues in those days, chiefly submitting to ecclesiastical authority. To these things would have to be added the parson "in absentia." Some of these parishes had good incomes from tithes and were much sought after, very often going to people who had influence, but little ability and no inclination to serve the people in their parish. They preferred to be in the populous centers like London and York, on the Continent or elsewhere, leaving the care of their parish to a vicar whom they hired for a pittance. On the rare occasions when they returned and wanted to occupy their pulpits, Owst makes a very interesting comment on this:

> After all, perhaps, it was sometimes better that rectors should not return to occupy a neglected village pulpit. Their song on such random visits was apt to be all of one tune and that an exceedingly bad one:
>
> But ever among al other nede
> His owne erende wol he bede,
> That their brynge heore offrynges
> To chirche, and heore tythinges.[19]

With the decline of the respect in which the parish priest was held, there were fewer men who were willing to enter into this work with proper preparation. The appeal of the other vocations open to bright or ambitious young men also had its effect upon this. Owst raises this plaint in a quotation "Why does the Law School have a hundred or two

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[19]Owst, op. cit., pp. 45 f.

hundred pupils, where the School of Theology has not even five?"[20] There can be no doubt that the Black Death in the middle of the twelfth century had some effect upon this also, for it took many a parish priest, and replacements were not of the highest order. Evidence is given by Coulton that this in a measure brought on the Wyclif movement with its emphasis on preaching to the people. There were deep seated changes which were wrought by this Black Death, for with this comes a clamor for reform. This writer quotes from some of the Wyclif propositions:

> Item, (they hold) that no rector or vicar or prelate of any kind is excused from residing personally in his own parish by the fact that he is in the service of a bishop or archbishop or pope. Item, that it is not lawful for a priest to set his services to hire. . . .[21]

The suppression of this movement for political reasons did not help the cause of the clerics in England. This did not add to the respect which the parishioner had for his parson.

Still the priests performed functions related to the lives of the people of their parishes, whether this was in the city or in the village. They exercised the offices of Christian worship as it was then conducted:

> . . . they read the Scriptures, preached, prayed, sang, said masses, and heard confessions; they performed funerals and marriages and baptisms;

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[20] Ibid., p. 33.

[21] G. C. Coulton, The Black Death (New York: Robert M. McBride and Co., n.d.), p. 112.

> they instructed the ignorant, comforted the sorrowing, visited the sick, cheered the dying, helped the penitent, succored the poor; sometimes they rebuked the sins of the great, and sometimes, alas! they imitated them . . . .[22]

In view of the fact that there are others who did preaching on the Medieval scene, it is necessary to reserve judgment of that preaching until later. In closing this section of the present study, a quotation from Owst, made by a sub-prior of Durham, should serve to draw these things together:

> What punishment therefore do the priests of today merit, who enter upon their churches with the cure thereof, and rarely or never preach the word of God? Forsooth, neither do they preach a good life by their actions, which is called the preaching of an exemplary life. Assuredly, they are worthy of the everlasting death of the soul, which is the death of Gehenna.[23]

Still, it will have to be said with Salzman:

> And however far the Church as a whole fell short of the Christian ideals, there were always many good priests to teach those ideals, by word and example and to uphold truth and justice.[24]

With this, we turn to the other stars who occupied the pulpits in the Medieval period to see their effects upon the life of their times.

With the coming of Christianity to England, Augustine brought with him forty monks, who founded a chapter house at

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[22]Edwin Charles Dargan, A History of Preaching (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1954), I, 225-226.

[23]Owst, op. cit., p. 47.

[24]Salzman, op. cit., p. 112.

Canterbury. During all of the early years of Roman Christianity in England, the monks from this beginning were active in the spread of Christianity. As history moves through the centuries, however, there is a decay which sets in, brought on by the lack of need for a vital missionary program, the growing wealth of the monastic orders, the relaxing of the rules of the order, the decimating of the ranks of the monasteries by the invasions of the Danes, who seem to have raided first the rich monasteries. When Dunstan, who was born in 925, became Archbishop of Canterbury, he set about to clean house, instituting a reform under the Benedictine Rule. Dunstan had come from one of the three great monasteries in England, Glastonbury; a fact which led him to elevate the monks in opposition to the canons and the clergy, this led to the schism between the secular clergy and the regulars. Blunt brings out that signs of this conflict can be seen in the decorations of the churches with carricatures of the monks.[25] This writer also states that most of the abbots, principal ecclesiastical officers and bishops of England came from the monasteries.[26]

Corruption, however, catches up with the monks again. They come to the point where they do no menial labor, but have hired servants in the monastery to do their farming,

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[25]I. J. Blunt, Sketch of the Reformation in England (London: John Murray, 1832), p. 24.

[26]Ibid.

cleaning, cooking, serving at tables and almost every other chore. Giraldus Cambrensis, a writer of the twelfth century, on his return from the study of theology in Paris, relates an account of his eating with the monks of Canterbury. He complains about the richness of the fare, enumerating sixteen dishes, prepared by "cunning cooks"; he also complains that they had "wines in ample profusion . . . anything and everything but ale, the boast of England and more especially Kent." He draws the conclusion, what would the founder of the order, St. Benedict, say about all this?[27]

The evaluation of this decline with reference to the pulpit given by Owst seems to be correct:

> But vital, potent interest in preaching, whether to those from within or from without the sacred cloister, appears to be dead.[28]

It is true that the monks did some preaching, however, generally it was not on the parish scene. They were called upon to preach at synods; on occasion, they might preach in their chapter house, especially at the festivals of Palm Sunday and Good Friday. Even at these latter, however, often the preaching would be done by some special visitor from the University. When a new abbot or prior was to be installed, the monks would be subject to preaching, but, here again, it would in all probability be by an outsider.

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[27] Ibid., p. 34.

[28] Owst, op. cit., p. 49.

There are some rare instances where a bishop would have a gifted monk as his preacher for visitations, taking him from his cloistered walls for this purpose.

The monastery, from which many of the sermon books of the day had come did not feel the need for producing any more. John Capgrave, in a sermon at Cambridge, speaking of the canons of St. Victor in Paris, said:

> We have in oure libraries many sundry bokes that to (two) chanones of that hous made, on of hem hite Hewe, the othir hite Richard; notabel clerkis thei were and men of holy lyf.[29]

They felt no need to add to these things, for the old wine was by far the best as far as they were concerned. Those collections of earlier homilies, expositions and *exemplaria* were sufficient for their needs.

The changes in the ideals of the monks can be seen in the quotation in Owst, where the monk is made to say, "I wish to live in peace in a convent; to read and sing. I don't want to rush through the world, with all its wearying labours." The monastery was looked upon as a retreat from the world, which took away the only stimulus for original, up-do-date preaching, namely, the touch and contact with the common people.

Even in the churches of the abbeys, the monks, most often are not the preachers; even in Benedictine establishments,

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[29] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

we see the rival Mendicant friar doing a stint in that pulpit.[30]

Even though the monk was able to grant forty-days indulgence to anyone who listened to him preach, as far as the parochial scene is concerned, the monk was not a force with which to reckon in the late Medieval period.

The most interesting character, and he was truly a character, was the man who was not too particular about where he did his preaching. It made no difference to him whether that preaching was done in the pulpit or out of the pulpit, for he knew that he would have an audience for a number of reasons. The man referred to is the Mendicant Friar, a part of the preaching host that came into being in the late middle of the medieval period.

These mendicant orders came into being during the twelfth century, and found their way into England. They were organized, as preaching orders to deal with heresies, for example, the heresy of the Waldensians. There were four of these groups, the Franciscans, or Friar Minors; the Dominicans, or Black Friars; the Carmelites, or White Friars; and the Augustins or Grey Friars. They operated on a different principle than did the monks. Though they took a vow of poverty, and at the beginning this excluded the owning of houses or property, it became evident that they

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[30]Ibid., p. 51.

would need bases of operations in different areas, so the right was granted them to own property. They were not allowed, however, to own anything more than the chapter house: no fields or revenue producing properties were to be held by them. Their entire keep was to come from begging, whence their name, Mendicants. The first settlement of the friars was at Canterbury in 1234 by the Franciscans; in 1221 the Dominicans opened a house at Oxford. Soon all four of them had flourishing houses at both Oxford and Cambridge.

These begging orders had the direct backing of the pope, for they had been founded with his express permission and blessing. The power and authority of the popes was maintained by them against both the seculars and the monks. The rivalry between these groups grows apace as we approach the end of the Medieval period. It should also be said that the friars were known as patrons of the arts, they helped in matters theological, dealt with civil law, were collectors of books. Their establishments were literally show-places in the Medieval world, something which attested to their ability to wheedle money from people both great and small.

As the first need, for which the orders were organized faded into the background of history, these men had to seek other reasons for their existence. They became emissaries with large portfolio to keep the papal supremacy before the people. They also entered into the local scene in England in many ways, some good, some bad. Owst cites the geniuses

of the preaching art as the Franciscan Bernardino, the Dominican Savanarola, the great Berthold of Regensburg, to show the stature of some of the men in these orders. Not everyone in these orders, however, could match up to these names. He does show that in every dispute in which the friars reached historical proportions, that these disputes raged about the pulpit steps:

> They dispute long with the Universities, and the question of the examinatory sermon must enter in. They dispute with the secular clergy, and it becomes a struggle amongst other things for right of way to the parish pulpit. They dispute with prelates and scholars over the subject of evangelical poverty, and a London preaching-cross becomes a strategic point in the campaign. In politics, behind the throng of noisy rebels and discontents, whether in the rebellion of Simon de Montfort, the Peasants Revolt, or risings which follow the deposition of Richard II, we catch glimpses of passionate, eloquent friars stirring men on to resist the tyranny or the unsurpation which mars the hour.[31]

Their rise in popularity showed that they filled a need in the parish scene, stating their intent was helping the curates. Chaucer's friar in the Somnour's Tale brings out the need as the friar saw it in the words, "Thise curatz been ful necligent and slowe."[32] Owst shows that the Bishops' Registers throw some light on this too:

> Laymen explain at a perochial visitation, for example, with regard to the preaching of their vicar, that whereas his predecessors had been wont to call on friars for the purpose, the

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[31] Ibid., pp. 55 f.

[32] Chaucer, op. cit., l. 1816.

> present incumbent did not care for them, and gave little encouragement if they happened to appear on the scene.[33]

In a world in which there were no newspapers, nor books in the modern sense, no means of communication that was by any means rapid, these men who traveled about, were well posted on what was happening in the world through the travels of their fellow friars, could portray a picture of strange places, and provide a widening of the horizons of the average man. These Mendicants served a useful purpose as Owst so nicely shows:

> It is to the glory of the Mendicant preachers of all the Orders that, as champions of the poor, they attacked the tyranny and oppression of the lord, the weaknesses of the knights, the ravages of retainers, the cunning and extortion of the merchants, the corruption of the law, in short, every conceivable form of injustice in the land. With passionate violence they arraigned the social frivolities of the age in high and low alike, the amusements men preferred to the holy services of the Church.[34]

Lest the impression be left that the Mendicant was a picture of pious virtue, it should be pointed out that the exact opposite was true. These men had the country of England divided into domains or "limits" which they worked regularly with their begging. The picture which Blunt draws is a good one:

> He could preach where he would; if he could not

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[33]Owst, op. cit., p. 72.

[34]Ibid., p. 80.

> lawfully take possession of the church of the minister, he could erect his ambulatory pulpit at any Cross, in any parish, and rail (as he regularly did) at the supineness and ignorance of the resident pastor . . . . He could confess whosoever might come to him.[35]

It is understandable why "black sheep" in the parish sought him out, as Chaucer shows in his Prologue:

> Ful swetely heard he confession
> And pleasaunt was his absolucioun; . . . .
> Therefore, in stede of weping and preyeres
> Men moot yeve silver to the povre freres.[36]

It appears that their only interest was in glorifying their own orders and to gather monies for them. This was done at the expense of the different parts of the Church's clergy, for it is reported that they took so much from the local parish that the offerings fell off; the clergy of the cathedrals were made poor by these beggars. Blunt presents a nice picture of these friars squabbling among themselves:

> The poor ploughman who sought instruction in his creed at the hands of the Friars Minor, was only told, as he valued his soul, to beware of the Carmelites; the Carmelites promoted his edification by denouncing the Dominicans; the Dominicans, in their turn, by condemning the Augustins. "Be true to us," was the language of each; "give us your money, and you shall be saved without a creed."[37]

These friars came in for a good bit of denunciation from Wycliffe and his followers. In one of his sermons,

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[35]I. J. Blunt, Sketch of the Reformation in England (London: John Murray, 1832), p. 37.

[36]Chaucer, op. cit., ll. 221-232.

[37]Blunt, op. cit., p. 41.

Wycliffe said:

> And yif thou go doun to freris, that ben befforis, and shulden be mekerste, more worship of their bretheren takith no man in this world, as bi kneling and kissyng of feet; that thou the ministre of freris and other service at mete and bedde, more than eny bishop doith. And so Cristis reule in these preestis is more reversid than in worldi lordis. And sith their professen and seien this gospel bothe in word and in oth, it is open that these false ypocritis disseyve the pople, and harmen the Chirche.[38]

In another sermon he speaks of the three chief enemies of Christ's law, popes and cardinals, bad bishops and rulers, and the mendicant friars:

> . . . the thridde is these Pharisees, possessioners and beggeris. All these three, Goddis enemyes, traveilen in ypocrisie, and in worldli coveitise, and idilnesse in Goddis lawe. Crist help his Chirche from these fendis, for they figten perilously.[39]

It was difficult for these men to continually speak of their "poverty" and travel around in clothing which Chaucer said "Of double worstede was his semy-cope";[40] they had difficulty defending themselves against the nice living which they had in their houses, their well filled faces and rotund bodies. There can be no doubt that this Mendicant hypocrisy dealt the orders a staggering blow.

In preparing to take leave of the friars there are

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[38]James Harvey Robinson, Readings in European History (New York: Ginn and Company, 1904), p. 499.

[39]Ibid., p. 498.

[40]Chaucer, op. cit., l. 262.

several points which should be remembered; points in their favor. These points are drawn from Owst: 1. The friars, anticipating the Lollards, had adjusted the balance between the Mass and preaching; in some instances had given preaching a superior place; 2. they had accustomed the ears of the people to criticism of the bishops and other dignitaries of the church; 3. they had begun the political sermon with its constant discussion of much needed reform. Fox though he was in trying to sneak into the local parish to usurp the authority of the parson or curate, he still did the people a real service. The people never completely turned against him for they realized that their own sons could enter the orders to seek the prominence which many of the friars had achieved.

The next group of preachers who make their appearance upon the parish scene, Owst describes as "Wandering Stars," and truly that is what they were. In this classification we find such things as the pardoner, who came with his indulgences and relics, seeking confessions, promising absolution upon the making of an alms offering. He might come with forty days indulgence making an appeal in behalf of a Hospital. This pardoner might be licensed by papal bull or by episcopal letters. The pardoner might make a special plea in behalf of some diocesan matter; it might be

> . . . for the fabric of our cathedral of Exeter, in Lent, when other quests cease for the time being, for the fabric of York Minster, for the

> maintenance of lights in Winchester Cathedral, for the repair of a parish church in Herefordshire, or even for the support and repair of the great bridge of the city of Exeter, and the chapel of the Blessed Mary situate upon it.[41]

He was charged with collecting

> . . . broche, ryngs, poke, belle, candell, vestiments, borde clothe, towelle, pygge, lambe, wolle, peny or pennyworthe . . . .[42]

Chaucer pictures him telling his story, the Pardoner's Tale, and saying at the end,

> But sirs, o word forgat I in my tale,
> I have relikes and pardon in my male,
> As faire as any man in Engelond,
> Whiche were me yeven by the popes hond.[43]

There were abuses of this entire procedure, with false pardoners making their appearance. Even the legitimate ones made claims beyond what their pardons actually contained to deceive the simple folks and get more money from them. An Article of the Oxford Petition of 1414 has a long-winded condemnation of this, which Owst quotes:

> Whereas the shameless pardoners purchase their vile traffic in farm with Simon, sell Indulgences with Gehazi . . . but what is more detestable still, although not in holy orders, they preach publicly, and pretend falsely that they have full powers of absolving both living and dead alike from punishment and guilt, . . . by means of which they plunder and seduce the people . . . affording them frivolous hope and an audacity to commit sin: therefore, let the abuses of this pestilential sect be blotted out

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[41] Owst, op. cit., p. 102.

[42] Ibid., p. 100.

[43] Chaucer, op. cit., ll. 919-923.

from the threshold of the Church.[44]

Another group of those who shoot across the sky can best be characterized by a note in Owst, which is a quotation from Dr. William Litchfield:

> Mich peple that are bonden to cylence, as religyouse folke, ankyres and ankereses, are like to floode zatys of a mylne, wyche long tyme withstandith the water and kepith it, that it flow not. Bot when the flowdezatys ar opened, then shotys the water at onys. Thus many suche peple kepyn silence for a tyme in certen places. But wen the place or occasion of spekyng comith, then they speke to mych and veyn. Thus did the frendes of Job, that were comen to comfort hym. They sate still vii days; but wen they begonnen to speke, they couthe not stynt her tonges.[45]

Owst tells the story of a certain William de Swynderby, who was called William the Hermit, who taught the people that they should not bring their tithes to their churches. He was placed under excommunication, but still attracted many listeners to his discourses. This star, fades quickly, however.

The phenomena of Wycliffe and his Lollards has been briefly referred to. They could be dealt with in this section in detail, however, we do not feel that they would add much to the picture, for they, too were silenced. With the coming of heresy and its suppression, there comes what

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[44]Owst, op. cit., p. 105.

[45]Ibid., p. 122, Note: De Tractate V Sensibus.

[46]Ibid., pp. 122-127.

Owst calls "golden pulpit silence."[47] This was brought on mainly by the issuance of Archbishop Arundel's Constitution of 1409; originally designed to silence the Lollards, it enforced a rigorous system of episcopal preaching licenses. In effect, however, it made every bishop reluctant to give a license, for fear that he might become involved. It also urged the parish priests to confine their discourses to the simple topics as outlined by the Peckham Decrees. The last point of this Constitution asked the clergy to confine his criticisms of clergy to a clerical audience, and his criticisms of laymen to lay audiences.[48]

This covers the picture of the preacher in the parish among the people. There are several other interesting items which should receive brief attention.

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[47] Ibid., p. 41.

[48] Ibid., pp. 41 and 141.

CHAPTER V

THE PREACHING SCENE

The preaching which was done in services, seems to have been "between the creed and offertory, or else after the latter. The second occasion is an affair for the Sunday afternoon."[1] That a sermon was to be preached every Sunday seems to have been the exception in the later period of Medieval times. The great preaching season was Lent, when there might be a sermon every day. This appears to be the time when the Mendicants were in their glory. The appeal which was made at this time is characterized by a quotation in Owst:

> Good men, the tyme of lenten (is) entred, the wiche tyme we must clense us of all our mysdedis that we have done before; and this holy tyme we should absteyne us more from synne and wrechednes than another tyme of the zere. . . . Now shall we strength us to faste, to come to churche, and to serve God in holy prayeurs, and to shryve us of oure mysdedis. . . .[2]

The places of preaching have been alluded to in this study, however, the more prominent might well be mentioned again. The Cathedral would be a natural place, with visiting clergymen often occupying the pulpit. The parish church was, of course, a natural place for this to be done. A

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[1] G.R. Owst, Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period (Cambridge: University Press, 1926), pp. 144 f.

[2] Ibid., p. 147.

third place was outdoors, at the Cross. These were crosses in the church-yards or cemeteries adjacent to the church. They might also be crosses which were erected at cross-roads, in market places, or other prominent spots. Paul's Cross in London was a very popular place; this cross is located in St. Paul's cemetery in London.[3]

The pulpit also comes in for passing consideration. In modern times the impression is apt to be carried back to the Medieval period that the pulpit was a fixed fixture in the church, however, such does not seem to have been the case. In many instances the pulpit was a temporary, mobile affair, which could be set up and taken down. This seems to have been especially true of the pulpits which were used in preaching at the crosses. Though some of these later became permanent stone affairs also.[4]

When these pulpits were set up out of doors at the cross of the church yard, there would be elaborate hangings which were used in connection with them. Some of the old prints also show the preacher arrayed in costly garments; elaborate, to say the least.

Together with these items, some comment must be made on the question of language. The language of the church was Latin, which was constantly used in preaching to clergy,

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[3]Cf. Appendix A, illustrations 2 and 3.

[4]Cf. Appendix A, illustration 4.

in synod, in the monastery, in the friary, in the cathedral, or wherever the clergy were gathered. When it comes to the consideration of the sermons which were preached to the people, they must have been, for the main part, in the language of the people. Here the trail leads from the Celtic language, which was the language of the original inhabitants of England, through the language of the Anglo-Saxons. Augustine in coming over with his forty monks, brought with him interpreters who still knew the language from their earlier life in Germany. In carrying on their missionary work, these monks must have learned the language of these people and preached to them in it. With the coming of the Normans, England becomes tri-lingual. By the fourteenth century, however, the language of England becomes definitely English. Chaucer did much to bring this about with his writing. It is true that the spelling, as can be seen in some of the quotations in this study, was not regular or set as yet. During all of this time, most of the preaching was done in the language which the people spoke. Salzman gives a quote from the days as follows:

> We understand not the Mass, and cannot pray thereat so well as we should, nor feel so great reverence as if we understood it. We understand every word of the sermon, but the Mass we understand not, nor know what is being read or sung; we cannot comprehend it.[5]

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[5]L. F. Salzman, English Life in the Middle Ages (Oxford: University Press, 1927), p. 113.

Comparing a congregation in church with a modern congregation would lead to great disappointment as far as the preaching scene is concerned. The picture is drawn by a number of writers that the congregation might be made up of people, standing (there were no pews at this time), sitting on the floor or on some ledge in the church, walking around, talking, carrying on their business, laughing, or doing other acts of irreverence. Salzman quotes St. Bernardino as saying:

> There are many ignorant folk who, when the priest is celebrating, come drunken from the taverns or wait outside the church, talking of their oxen and worldly matters, and even of obscenities; nor do they enter the church until the elevation, at which they gaze in utter irreverence, with their heads partly or wholly covered and their stiff knees scarcely bowed; and thus - after running noisily to see the Body of Christ, half inside and half outside of the church - suddenly, after the barest glimpse of Him, they run off again as hastily as if they had not seen Christ but the devil![6]

Some of these items would make interesting studies in themselves. They are given here merely to present a little fuller picture of the preaching scene.

Some evaluation of the preaching done in the period has been given in the body of the paper, however, an effort shall be made to draw these items together a bit in conclusion.

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[6]Ibid., p. 114.

CHAPTER VI

AN EVALUATION

To truly evaluate the preaching done in Medieval England goes beyond the scope of this paper, for it would involve a consideration of things like the hair-splitting of the Schoolmen, the exaggerations of the mysticism of the period, a detailed discussion of the heresies of the Lollards with the first signs of revolt from the papacy, and a host of other subjects. This would also necessitate a detailed study of the sermon manuscripts of the age which have come down to the present, which are not readily accessible for such a study, nor is it necessary for the present study. Still, some general comments about the preaching of the period are not out of place, but should prove helpful and suggestive of further study of the entire field of preaching as related to the lives of people in the parishes of this period.

In trying to evaluate the preaching which was done in the Medieval period, taking into consideration its effects upon the lives of the people in the parish, the conclusion must be reached which is given by Dargan, who shows that the popular preaching was such as characterized the Roman Catholic age with which we are dealing:

> . . . the traditional allegorical interpretation and other misuses of Scripture, the excessive employment of legends of the saints and other

> unscriptural material as authoritative, the doctrines of penance, purgatory, and confession, the veneration amounting to worship of the Virgin - all these and other outgrowths upon the Gospel we have learned to recognize as characteristics of the medieval preaching. . . . But we must not forget that along with these things the work of Christ as the Saviour, and the only Saviour, was vividly presented, and the duty of repentance and faith strongly urged together with the practice of Christian virtues as the fruits and evidences of a real Christian experience.[1]

In any consideration of the evaluation of the preacher, and the preaching which was done, it must be remembered that some radical changes had taken place in the picture of the church from earliest Apostolic times. The growth of the liturgy and the forms of worship must be taken into account. While these preserved a prominent place for preaching in the service of the church, their effect was to make the spoken word of far less relative value than the forms of worship. Preaching was constantly under the trammels of the liturgy. The heirarchical spirit, which was full grown in this period, conceived of the preacher as priest rather than prophet. Dargan has an interesting comment on this, quoting James Fleming:

> . . . the worst effect of all was that wrought on the preacher himself, changing him from a messenger of God into a petty mediator and dispenser of God's mercies and punishments! This led to the preaching of church discipline rather than Christian morals, of penance rather than repentance. The heart of the Gospel was too often wrapped in

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[1]Edwin Charles Dargan, A History of Preaching (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1954), pp. 243 f.

> the rough and insipid husks of externalism and it was more than the simple sinner could do to get at the kernel.[2]

In looking at the men who should have been most interested in breaking the Bread of Life to those under their spiritual care, the prelate and the curate, it can be understood how they never quite met the challenge and the requirements.

The bishop was a busy man because of the host of duties which were entailed with the office he held. Add to this the possibility that he was also involved in politics, perhaps holding some secular office in addition to his clerical one; perhaps even holding several bishoprics; not too interested in the spiritual care of those under his charge; ill-equipped to fulfill the office which he held; perhaps living in sins which should never mar the office of the bishop; and you have a picture which would lead to a reluctance, if not downright inability to meet the challenge of preaching to people.

The parish priest might find himself in the same dilemna. He may have held several benefices "in absentia" with an ill-equipped vicar on the scene; both of them may have been living in open sin of adultery; neither may have been interested in any more than their share of the tithes which were brought by the faithful; they may have been more

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[2]Ibid., p. 110.

interested in the enjoyment of the pleasure of life than in the preaching of the Gospel. In this connection the following quote from Dargan is surely appropriate:

> There was a medieval proverb to the effect that if a man would enjoy himself for a little while let him kill a chicken, if for a year let him marry a pretty wife, if for life, let him become a priest. The easy and envied life of a priest, however, was only the lot of the more favored. . . . there were among the prelates and those who had the better places luxury and easy living that almost baffle belief. Along with these there was a worldliness, a carelessness, a moral obliquity that are only to well attested. Even when we make all necessary deductions for exaggerated lampoons of the satirists, the idle tales of the people, and the overstatements of aroused and indignant reformers, the real facts at the bottom are hideous enough. Ignorance and incompetence were small faults in comparison with the moral unfitness which disgraced the clergy of the age. Avarice and luxury, greed and ambition, simony and extortion went together. And, worse than these, open concubinage and general looseness of life are well known sins of the secular clergy.[3]

Men who could be characterized like this, surely were not fit to fill the pulpit and proclaim the message of Christ Jesus, though they might stumble haltingly through the celebration of the Mass or some of the other offices of the church.

When it comes to a consideration of the friar and the pardoner, the picture of them preaching also carries with it an understanding that they finally came to the point where they were only interested in entertaining their

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[3]Ibid., p. 298.

audiences. They were interested in getting something from them into the coffers which they were charged or felt obligated to fill. Perhaps the Italian saying in a commendation of any spicy and not too delicate joke could be applied to their sermons especially, "it was good enough for a sermon."[4]

By and large their mission was not the salvation of sin-lost souls, but selfish personal gain, for their living came out of the monies they were successful in drawing from the people. That living was determined by the amount they were successful in getting.

No one would fail to follow the argument of Cardinal Gasquet, who goes to great lengths to show that there was preaching in the age immediately preceding the Reformation and in all the period before that. An evaluation of that preaching is, however, another story. The preaching was both good and bad. Most of it was bad by virtue of the false doctrine which had grown up in Roman Catholicism, and the fact that it was done for selfish, personal benefit. Gasquet also develops the thought that many a faithful parish priest in his homely homilies, discourses and addresses to his parishioners, would give them food for their spiritual life.[5]

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[4]Ibid., p. 302.

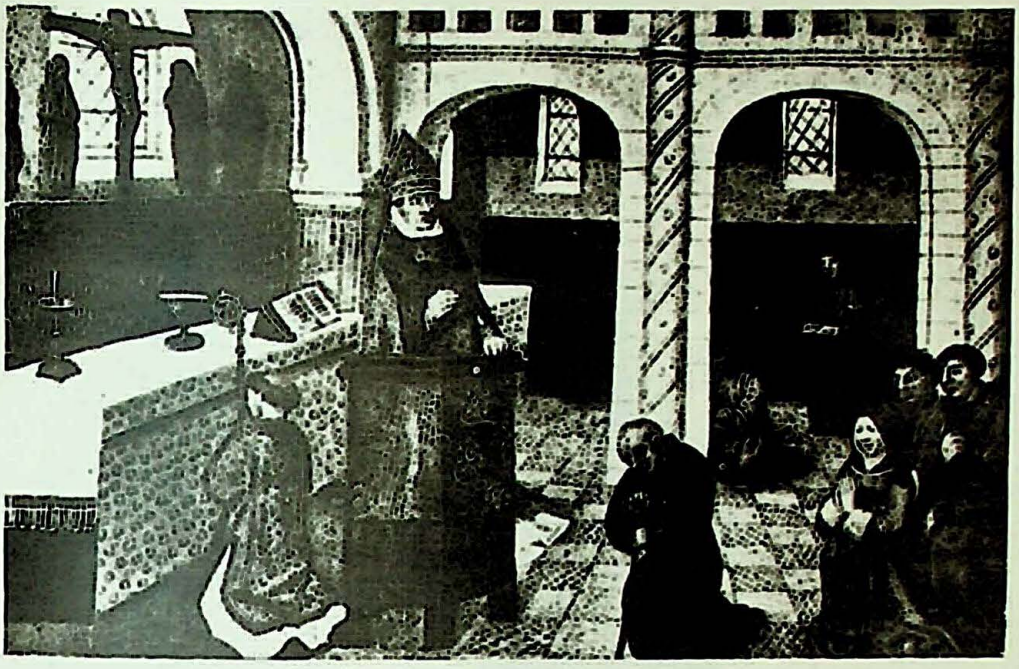
[5]Cardinal Gasquet, The Eve of the Reformation (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1927), pp. 246 f.

Granting that there was much preaching done in this period, the question still remains: if the people were instructed in the sacramentalism of Roman Catholicism, would they feel much need for a Gospel which brought them the assurance of God's mercy and grace through the atoning death of Christ Jesus?

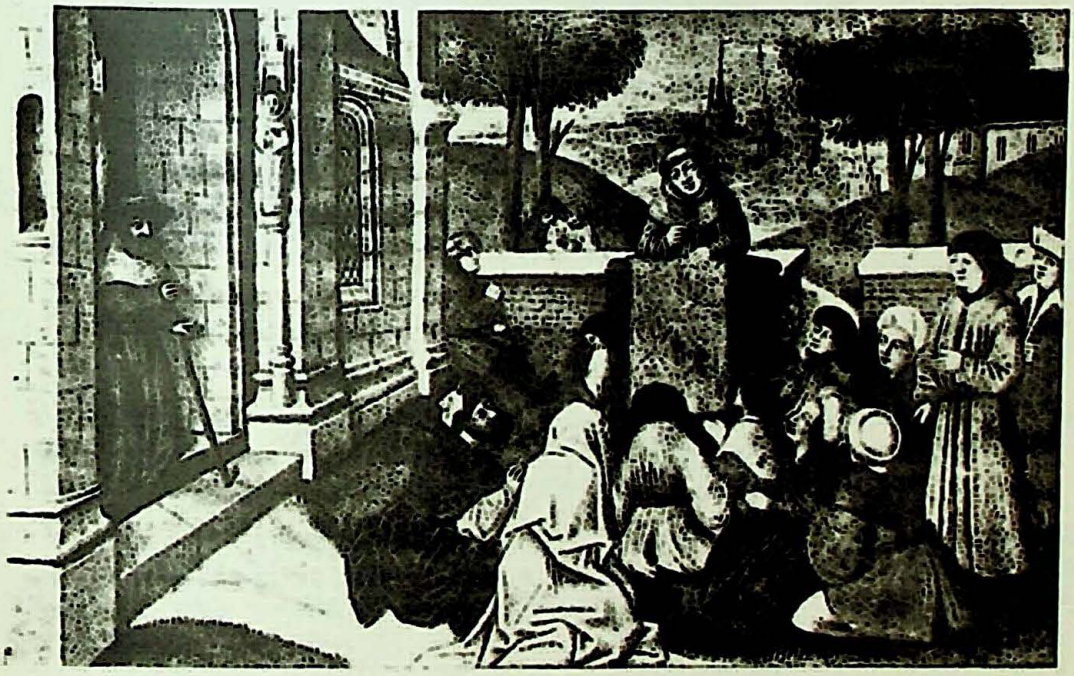
No one would ever deny that much of the preaching which was done in the period under consideration had some worth, even though it did not bring men repentantly to the foot of the Cross. The man who came with news from the rest of the world, the man who entertained the people with his bag of tricks and anecdotes, the man who spearheaded social and political reform with the correction of abuses and inequities in this field, all of these served a good purpose. The question still remains, however, would not these things detract from the true purpose of preaching as the Apostles understood and practiced it? Would it not force the Gospel of Jesus Christ to take second, perhaps third or fourth place?

In the face of all of these harsh criticisms, negative statements, derogatory remarks, bleak pictures, it must be remembered that there were faithful parish priests who broke the Bread of Life to their flocks.

APPENDIX A

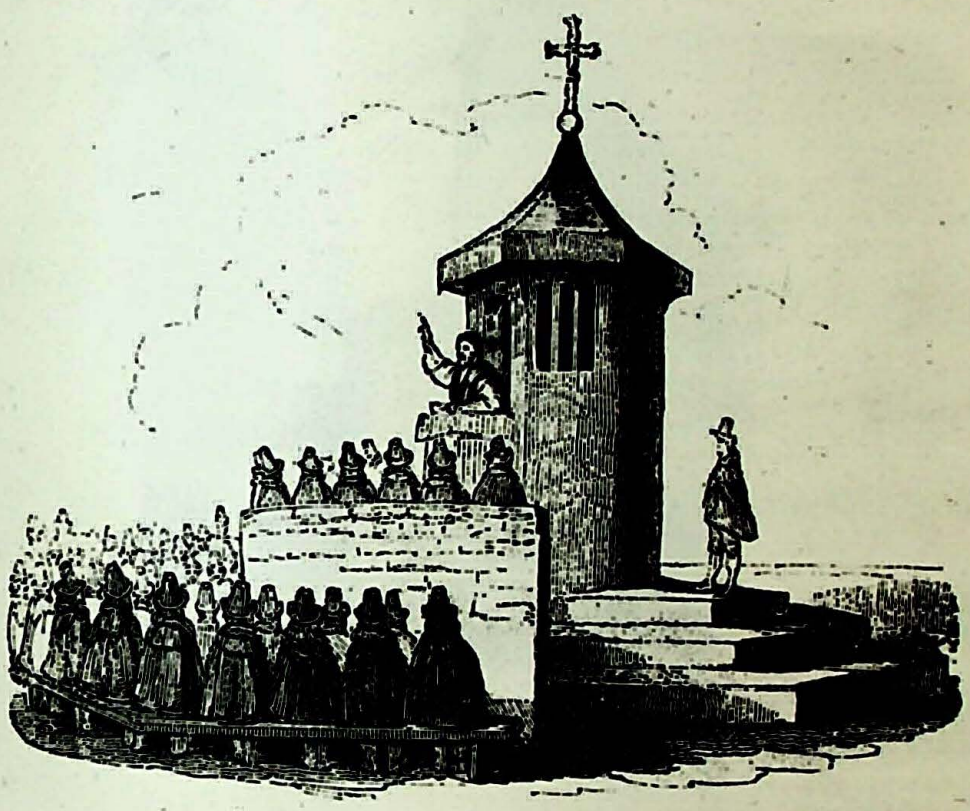


A Bishop preaching



A Friar preaching outside a Church : c. 1480

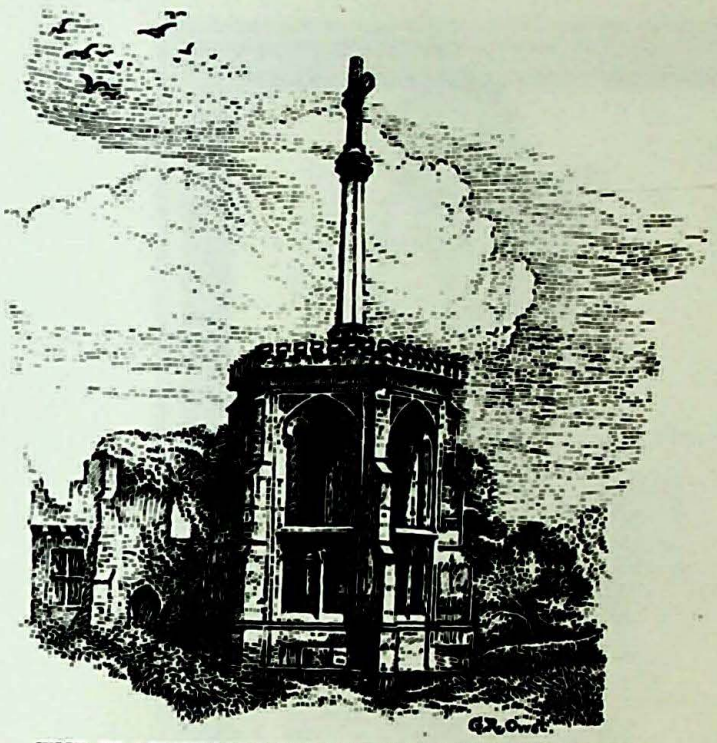
Fig. 1. Two illustrations of preaching scenes from Fitzwilliam Museum, MS. 22, shown in L. F. Salzman, English Life in the Middle Ages (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 115.



PAUL'S CROSS.

Fig. 2. St. Paul's Preaching Cross, taken from the Frontpiece in I. J. Blunt, The Reformation in England (London: John Murray, Aldemarle St., 1832).

This picture is obviously from a date later than that under consideration in this paper, however, it gives some idea of the prominence and development of these Crosses as preaching places.



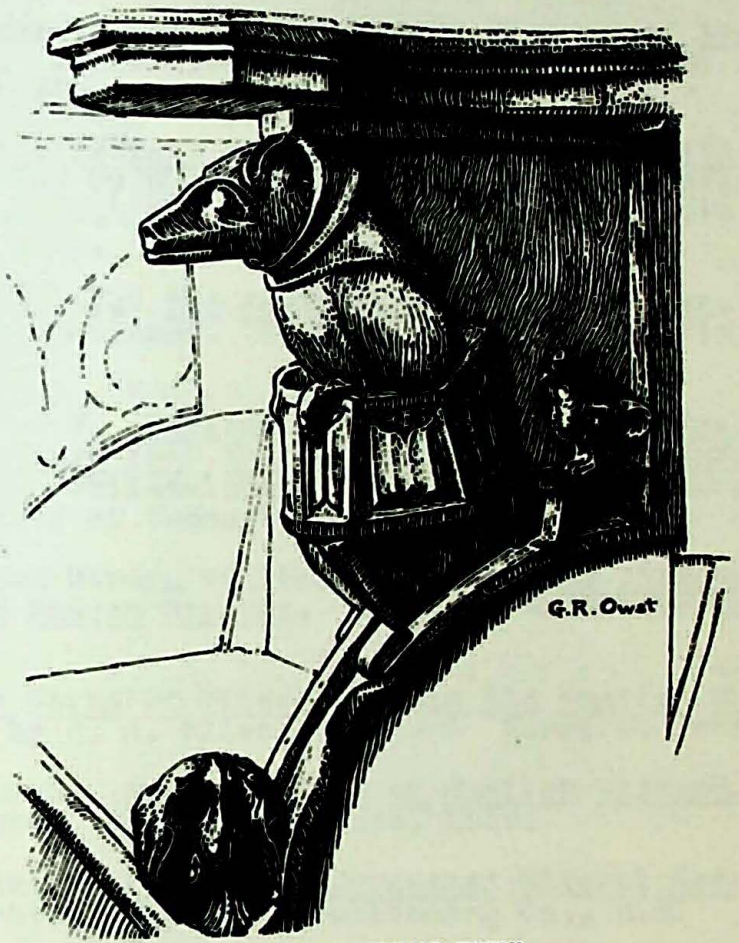
THE BLACKFRIARS PREACHING CROSS, HEREFORD

Fig. 3. This illustration of The Blackfriars Preaching Cross, Hereford is from G. R. Owst, Preaching in Medieval England (Cambridge: University Press, 1926), p. 197.

THE HERMIT PREACHER
(*From MS. Roy. 14. E. iii, fol. 9^{b}.*)

Fig. 4. This illustration of The Hermit Preacher is from G. R. Owst, Preaching in Medieval England (Cambridge: University Press, 1926) p. 117.

This figure also shows a good illustration of a simple, moveable pulpit, easily carried and easily set up.



THE "PREACHING FOX"
(Christchurch Priory, Hants)

Fig. 5. This illustration is from G. R. Owst, Preaching in Medieval England (Cambridge: University Press, 1926), p. 86.

The illustration shows a carricature of the Mendicant Friar or the Pardoner sneaking into the pulpit to use his sly tricks upon the good people of the parish.

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