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PREACHING

HOMILIES AND SERMONS



LOUIS JACOBS

JEWISH PREACHING

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JEWISH PREACHING

Homilies and Sermons

LOUIS JACOBS



VALLENTINE MITCHELL
LONDON • PORTLAND, OR

First published in 2004 by Vallentine Mitchell

Catalyst House,
720 Centennial Court,
Centennial Park, Elstree WD6 3SY,
UK

920 NE 58th Avenue, Suite 300,
Portland, Oregon
97213-3786 USA

www.vmbooks.com

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:
An entry can be found on request

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data:
An entry can be found on request

ISBN 978 0 85303 561 9 (cloth)
978 0 85303 565 7 (paper)

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Printed by Edwards Brothers Malloy, Ann Arbor, MI

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For my lovely little great-granddaughters
Ella and Hannah Lucie Jacobs and Jordan
Hannah Green

Preface

A word of explanation, not to say of excuse, is called for as to why a preacher from various pulpits during almost sixty years should have decided just now to publish a series of extrapolations of Scriptural verses. First, there is the natural desire of an elderly rabbi, as time appears to be more fleeting than ever before, to rescue from oblivion his efforts in this direction. The truth is that, while I have always tried to prepare my sermons fully before delivery, I have never been at home in using a manuscript and have spoken extemporarily for better or for worse. However, thanks to invitations from Jewish journals, especially the *Jewish Chronicle*, I have published sermonic ideas in print, some of which are published in this volume. These printed homilies extend over a period of around fifty years. It would not have been appropriate simply to reproduce these as they stood. Times have changed rapidly in this area as well, so that a thorough revision has been necessary and much new material has been added.

A homily differs from a sermon in several respects. The sermon is more personal, more spontaneous, has greater flexibility and is far more direct than the homily; naturally so since, in the sermon, a live audience is addressed. Every preacher is aware that he is speaking face to face with his congregation. He looks at them, or should do, while he is preaching. In a subtle way they participate creatively in his message by the way they receive it. A yawn or a sense that he is boring on (in both senses of the word) is sufficient to throw him off his stride. A touch of humour, even an occasional joke, is essential if he is to hold their interest. An element of passion is also an integral part of the sermon, though this can be overdone all too easily. 'What will happen if he gets out?' as the little girl remarked to her mother when listening to a fiery preacher, gesticulating in a high, enclosed pulpit.

A homily is more formal, more structured and more contrived. When it is on a Scriptural verse it should come close to Biblical

exegesis, albeit in subjective rather than objective form. Your homilist is not saying: 'This is the true meaning of the verse.' That is a matter for objective scholars who have to convince their peers of the correctness of their arguments. The homilist is saying something like this: 'It seems to me, from my own experience and from my study of the Torah, that the following idea or ideas can be extrapolated from the verse so as to bear a contemporary significance.'

In this book I present one or more, comparatively short, homilies on each of the weekly portions of the Torah with a few on 'Ethics of the Fathers', the wonderful early Rabbinic work now part of the liturgy for the summer months. Jewish preachers, ancient as well as modern, have generally based their weekly message on these sources. It goes without saying that these are Jewish homilies, addressed chiefly to Jewish readers and therefore particularistic in their stance. Yet the universalistic and individualistic elements in Judaism have not been overlooked. It is hoped that non-Jewish readers will also find points of interest and comparison. Other books I have compiled have their full quota of documentation of sources but I confess that it has been a relief to publish a work free from what has been dubbed 'foot and note disease'. The non-clap-happy congregations it has been my privilege to serve would never have dreamed of calling out 'Amen' to my utterances and have been very sparing even with an occasional *yasher koah*. Perhaps, however, readers of the book will visit some of my effusions, at least, with a touch of the latter.

PART ONE
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The preacher should not make his sermon too long in order not to burden the congregation. However, he should not make his sermon too short either, for it is not right to trouble the people by having brought them to hear something which is too brief. In order to preserve his health, the preacher should go immediately to rest after he has delivered the sermon. He should drink a little fine wine or chicken soup.

Jacob Zahalon 1630–93, *Guide to Preachers*

Israel Bettan's *Studies in Jewish Preaching: Middle Ages* (Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 1939) is still the best account of pre-modern Jewish preaching. First showing how the sermon proper developed from the *derashah* in Talmudic times, Bettan surveys the works of the most famous Jewish preachers from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, although we do not have their actual sermons, only their homiletical Hebrew compilations, that is to say, sermonic themes expressed in literary rather than verbal form. Bettan's chapter headings are sufficient in themselves to point to the great variety of the preachers and the gradual evolution of the earlier sermon to pave the way for the new sermonic thrust in the early nineteenth century: 'Jacob Anatoli: A Thirteenth-century Liberal'; 'Bahya Ben Asher: A Practical Mystic'; 'Isaac Arama: The Preacher's Preacher'; 'Judah Moscato: Child of the Renaissance'; 'Azariah Figo: Critic of Life'; 'Ephraim Luntshitz: Champion of Change'; 'Jonathan Eybeshitz: Passionate Pleader'. The following works presage in a similar way the different mood of the nineteenth-century preacher.

David Darshan of Cracow (sixteenth century) wrote *Shir Ha-Maalot L'David* and *Ktav Hitnatzzelut L'Darshanim* (Song of the

Steps and In Defense of Preachers), translated and annotated by H. G. Perelmuter, Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 1984. David was the first itinerant Jewish preacher whose sermons were published; an amulet writer, and an artist (the jacket illustration is a copy of his illustration to a Kabbalistic manuscript depicting Rabbi Akiba's ascent to Heaven – the picture of Rabbi Akiba gives us some idea of what a Polish Rabbi of the time looked like). Perelmuter describes David as a 'Renaissance man'. This is hardly correct; judging by the examples he gives, his sermons are of the complicated pilpulistic type. Nevertheless, the very form and content of this book (it is incidentally in rhymed prose) show that even among his Polish contemporaries new winds were blowing.

A Rabbi more deserving of the title 'a Renaissance man' is the seventeenth-century Italian scholar, Jacob Zahalon, author of *Or Ha-Darshanim* (Guide for Preachers), translated by Henry Adler Sosland (The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, 1987). This is the first preacher's manual ever to be published. This guide for preachers, novel in itself, has a remarkably modern tone. Zahalon has sections on the subject and content of the sermon; on its quality, length and manner of introduction; on the proper use of the voice and on the manner of speaking and on the use of gestures; on the purpose of preaching sermons and on their proper conclusion; on concern for the preacher's health as a means to more effective preaching.

Apart from the above, the only work of advice to preachers did not appear until the publication of A. Cohen's *Jewish Homiletics*, (Jewish Chronicle Publications, London, 1937). Dr Cohen was lecturer in homiletics at the College. Among other matters, Dr Cohen offers advice to preachers on the homiletical use of the Bible, the non-Biblical sources of homiletics, on words, on ideas and illustrations, sermon composition and delivery.

Part of the aim of Zunz's most famous work, *Gottesdienstliche Vortraege der Juden* (1832), was to demonstrate, when this was challenged by the Prussian government (under the influence of Orthodox groups who saw the sermon in the vernacular as the beginnings of Reform), that preaching is not an innovation but an ancient Jewish institution. While this is true, the traditional *derashah* was, in fact, replaced in the nineteenth century by a new type of Jewish sermon, the *Predigt*, as it was called in Germany. There were a number of important changes in language, style and content which, first in Germany and then in other European

countries, gave a completely new cast to the sermon. This new type of sermon was delivered in the vernacular and, unlike the occasional *derashah*, it was a regular feature of the service. It sought to express Jewish values in a contemporary idiom and in the thought-patterns of the day. Woven around one central theme, the modern sermon developed in orderly fashion, without academic digressions on the texts quoted, emphasizing edification rather than pure instruction. Although the early-nineteenth-century preachers in Germany were not rabbis, preaching, instead of being relegated to a special functionary, eventually became the preserve of the Rabbi and one of his most important duties in Western countries. Among the well-known preachers in nineteenth-century Germany were: Eduard Kley, Gotthold Salomon, Abraham Geiger, Samuel Holdheim, Jehiel Michael Sachs, Samson Raphael Hirsch and David Einhorn; and in the twentieth century: Siegmund Maybaum, Nehemia Anton Nobel and Leo Baeck.

Dr A. Altmann, a great scholar and no mean preacher himself (I often heard him preach when he served as communal Rabbi in Manchester), wrote on the history of early Jewish preaching (ed., *Studies in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Intellectual History*, Harvard University Press, 1964, pp. 65–116), showing the influence of the Protestant pulpit on the development of the modern Jewish sermon. The early German preachers consciously modelled their sermons on the patterns of Christian homiletics and used Christian guides to the art of preaching. Even Isaac Noah Mannheimer, the most outstanding nineteenth-century preacher who pleaded for a closer link with the Jewish homiletical tradition, admitted that ‘we, as pupils and disciples, as novices in the art of preaching, which we have been practising only a little while, can learn a great deal from the masters of the art, and we have gratefully to accept every guidance and instruction offered to us in their schools. Zunz, in his brief career as a preacher at the New Synagogue in Berlin (1820–22), was influenced by Schleiermacher. It is even on record that the most popular Christian preachers of the time, such as Ritschl and Schleiermacher, used to hear the young preachers at Israel Jacobson’s temple in Berlin and give them, after the sermon, ‘manifest hints and directives’.

A reaction soon set in. There was a persistent demand for a truly Jewish homiletics, arguing, in Mannheimer’s words, that ‘it is always better to feed on one’s own resources than to live from alms’. However, generally speaking, the reaction in the nineteenth-century

a mounted only to a greater use of rabbinic, especially midrashic, material as exemplified in the sermons of the illustrious preacher Adolf Jellinek in Vienna. Jellinek's preaching attracted many of the intellectuals of the day who, in their quest for Jewish identity, needed the reassurance that Judaism was supremely worthwhile and still capable of making important contributions. Jellinek was fond of preaching that too many were saying: 'Now Israel's eyes were dim with age, he could not see' (Genesis 48: 10), whereas the truth was that Moses still spoke and God still answered him in thunder (Exodus 19:19). Jellinek's methods and strong Jewish emphasis influenced Jewish preaching everywhere. A later occupant of Jellinek's pulpit, Hirsch (Zevi) Peretz Chajes, for example, preached to a bar mitzvah the story of the woman whose vessels were miraculously replenished by the oil (2 Kings 4:1-7). The never-ending power of Judaism is always available if only Jews will provide the vessels with which to contain it. No matter how great the Jew's spiritual demands, Judaism is capable of satisfying them.

Tobias Goodman is credited with being the first Jew to preach in the English language. Two of Goodman's printed sermons are: *A Sermon on the Universally Regretted Death of the Most Illustrious Princess Charlotte*, preached on Wednesday, 19 November 1817, at the synagogue, Denmark Court, London (the first sermon to be both delivered and printed in English) and *A Sermon Occasioned by the Demise of Our Late Venerable Sovereign, King George the Third*, preached on Wednesday, 18 February 1820, at the same synagogue (A. Barnett, *The Western Synagogue Through Two Centuries*, 1961, pp.48-51). In December 1828, a Committee of Elders was appointed at the Bevis Marks Sephardi Synagogue in London, to inquire into the best means of elevating the tone of public services. Among their recommendations was that an English sermon based on a text taken from Scripture should be delivered every Saturday afternoon. Before delivery, every sermon should be examined by a committee of three elders for statements contrary to Jewish doctrines or hostile to the institutions of the country (J. Piccioto, *Sketches of Anglo-Jewish History*, 1956, pp. 318-20). This would not be permissible nowadays. In the USA, preaching in the English language was introduced much later. Some preachers, like the Reform Rabbi David Einhorn, preferred to give sermons in their native German. Einhorn declared: 'Where the German language is banned, there the reform of Judaism is nothing more than a brilliant gloss, a decorated doll, without heart, without soul, which the

proudest and the most splendid theories cannot succeed in infusing with life.' Nevertheless, the sermon in English won the day, as was inevitable. The English sermon was developed to a fine art by such preachers as Simeon Singer, Morris Joseph, Chief Rabbi Joseph Herman Hertz, Israel Mattuck, A. A. Green, Abraham Cohen and Ephraim Levine in England; Stephen S. Wise, Israel Herbert Levinthal, Abba Hillel Silver, Solomon Goldman and Solomon Bennett Freehof in the USA. Two annual collections of sermons in English were published by the Rabbinical Council of America (Orthodox) from 1943, and from 1954, the collection by rabbis of all three groups as *Best Jewish Sermons*, edited by Saul I. Teplitz.

In Eastern Europe the older type of *derashah*, delivered in Yiddish by the *maggid*, still predominated, but certain new features manifested themselves even here. The winds of change in the Jewish world moved the *maggidim* to find a rather more sophisticated approach. Preaching in Yiddish became directed to the needs of the individual as well as the community. The Haskalah movement was frequently attacked by the *maggidim* with the weapons of public oratory. With the rise of Zionism, many of its opponents used the same weapons to combat it, while others, sympathetic to Zionism, preached the love of the Holy Land and the legitimacy of Jewish nationalistic aspirations. Professor Selig Brodetsky, addressing Jewish audiences in the East End of London on Zionism, would ask them first: 'Do you want me to speak in English or in Yiddish?' 'English,' was the usual reply. 'Yiddish we know already.'

In point of fact, there emerged in East European centres a new type of nationalistic preacher given the name *mattif* ('speaker', Micah 2:11), to distinguish him from the old type of *maggid*. Under the influence of the Lithuanian Musar movement, with its strong moralistic thrust, the *derashah* began to place greater emphasis on ethical matters. The hell-fire preaching of R. Moshe Yitzhak, the Kelmer Maggid (1828–1900), the most popular of the folk preachers, was directed largely against dishonesty in business and general dishonest conduct (D. Katz: *Tenuat H-Musar*, vol. 2, 1958, pp. 395–407). Many of the *maggidim* went to the USA, England and South Africa, where their preaching was directed against the widespread desecration of the Sabbath and neglect of the dietary laws, abuses unknown in their native countries. *Maggidim* still flourish in the State of Israel, but there has been little development of the sermon in Hebrew and the rabbi-preacher is virtually unknown

there as a regular and respected synagogue functionary. Among the Yiddish preachers of renown were: Hayyim Zundel Macoby, known as the Kaminitzer Maggid, J. L. Lazarov, Z. H. Masliansky, Isaac Nissenbaum, M. A. Amiel, Zalman Sorotzkin and Zeev Gold. Amiel, Rabbi of Antwerp and later Chief Rabbi of Tel-Aviv, was well-read in general and in Jewish philosophy, and some of his sermons are really theological essays in the manner of those of Anatoli and Arama, mentioned above, in the Middle Ages.

The Revd Simeon Singer, in 'Where the Clergy Fail', an address delivered to young preachers on 17 January 1904 (*Lectures and Addresses*, 1908, pp. 203–25), describes the aim of the Jewish preacher thus: 'to teach the word of God to their brethren, young and old; to help them to the perception of the highest truths of religion; to uplift their souls out of the rut of the common, the sordid, in life; to speak a message of comfort to the sorrowing, of hope to the despondent, of counsel to the perplexed, of courage to the struggling and aspiring'. This lengthy sentence in good English prose is typical of the style of the Anglo-Jewish clergy (note the term) one hundred years ago, when the Rabbis, even if they had *semikhah*, as did Singer himself, had the title of 'Reverend' and were 'minister-preachers'. The sole Rabbi was the Chief Rabbi. It is all an echo from the past. Yet Singer's advice, though no doubt influenced by the patterns and customs of the Church of England, was acceptable everywhere as the ideal. The whole is based on the belief that the art of preaching can be taught. We have seen earlier that this was the belief of Zahalon in seventeenth-century Rome. In this conviction, the major rabbinic seminaries have departments of homiletics. Siegmund Maybaum taught homiletics at the Hochschule in Berlin, Israel Bettan at Hebrew Union College, Mordecai Kaplan at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Abraham Cohen at Jews' College. The popularity of such courses depended naturally on the skills of the teacher. Yet, to this day, there is a tendency among students at rabbinical seminaries, and among many of the teachers, to look upon homiletics as a branch of Jewish learning inferior to the other branches and as a subject that requires few qualifications or little training. It is often said, to the detriment of pulpit work, 'Almost anyone, with an amount, however small, of Jewish knowledge, can get up and deliver a sermon.'

The modern Jewish sermon is usually based on a text chosen from the *sidra* or the *haftarah* read in the synagogue on the day when the sermon is delivered. Books of the Bible which are not

read in public, such as Job and Proverbs, rarely furnish texts for sermons, though they may be quoted in support of a position the preacher adopts. Normally the sermon is delivered after the Sefer Torah has been returned to the Ark. While the note of exhortation is never entirely absent from the sermon, many preachers, nowadays, prefer to use the sermon chiefly as a means of instruction, imparting information about Jewish faith, history and teachings. The length of the sermon varies from preacher to preacher, but on the average is about twenty minutes. Preaching from a prepared manuscript is the rule for some preachers, while others prefer to speak extemporaneously. Dr Altmann, in an address to preachers, made the point that once you have got it down on paper freshness and spontaneity are lost; but it is recognized that adequate preparation is essential for every type of preaching. A sermon falls somewhere in between a casual talk and a lecture, every detail of which is present before the ascent of the podium. Oratory has now generally yielded to an easier, more relaxed conversational tone. Few preachers would today follow the example of Leo Baeck, of whom it was said that he never used the personal pronoun 'I' in the pulpit. On the other hand, few would adopt an overfamiliar colloquial style like the preacher who said: 'The prophet Isaiah said and I heartily agree with him'!

Sermon illustrations are taken from the personal experience of the preacher, Jewish history, the Midrash, natural science and psychology, and, latterly, Hasidic lore. L. I. Newman's *Hasidic Anthology* (1934) and Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim* (1947–84) have come to serve as a rich source for sermon illustrations. Quotations from secular literature are used to develop a theme. In a typical outline of a sermon on Kol Nidre by Milton Steinberg (*Sermons*, ed. B. Mandelbaum, 1954, pp. 58–63) there are references to the Geonim, Walter Pater, Tennyson, Leibnitz, Omar Khayyam and W. L. Phelps. Louis Rabinowitz (*Out of the Depths*, 1954, pp. 332–5) builds a Kol Nidrei sermon around a poem by the modern Hebrew writer Zalman Shneur. In a Day of Atonement sermon by Israel H. Levinthal (*Steering or Drifting – Which?*, 1928, pp. 128–35) there are quotations from Judah Halevi, the Talmud, the prayer book, a Christian legend, folk language, the Bible and the Midrash. Preachers in the USA often take for their theme a book, film or play that has received much attention for its treatment of some moral or religious question. Some sermons conclude with a prayer. This and other pulpit pretensions were, however, severely criticized by

Franz Rosenzweig in his scathing attack on preaching entitled 'Sermonic Judaism' (N. N. Glatzer: *Franz Rosenzweig*, 1953, pp. 247-50).

The chosen text and the way it is treated depend on the individual preferences of the preacher but, judging by published sermons, certain themes are constant. Each of the festivals, for example, has its particular message so far as the preacher is concerned. The theme of Passover is freedom; of Shavuot, Jewish education (in Orthodox pulpits, the immutability of the Torah); of Sukkot trust in God and thankfulness for His bounty; of Hanukkah spiritual light; of Purim Jewish peoplehood; of Rosh Hashanah the need for renewal; and on the Day of Atonement sin and atonement. The wise preacher on Yom Kippur will resist that too -strong type of admonition which panders to the masochism of some 'congregants and the *Schadenfreude* of others who are only too ready to declare: 'He gave them what for.' In addition to the weekly Sabbath sermon the rabbi preaches on the special occasions in the life of his congregation: anniversaries, weddings, funerals, installation of officers, at bar mitzvahs, and at his/her own induction. A number of rabbinic manuals contain sermonic material in capsule form for the Rabbi's use on special occasions (e.g., H. E. Goldin: *Ha-Madrikh*, 1938).

The modern Jewish sermon frequently addresses itself to particular problems that agitate the Jewish community as well as to wider issues of universal import. There is much discussion on the extent to which politics should be introduced, but few Jewish preachers accept a total ban on political questions. In a famous *New Yorker* cartoon, a bishop advises a young curate: 'My boy, you will do fine as long as you keep off controversial topics such as politics and religion!' There are numerous instances of rabbis seeking to influence their congregations either when a topic is a source of controversy within the community or when they feel that widely held views are contrary to Jewish teaching. Themes treated in the contemporary pulpit are: the supposed conflict between religion and science, the role of the State of Israel, the permissive society, intermarriage, Jewish education, war and peace, social injusticeracial discrimination, the taking of drugs, on the 'Death of God' movement, fair housing, the use and abuse of wealth, the estrangement of the Jewish intellectual from Judaism, recreation, the need to care for the hungry and oppressed, the relation of Judaism to other religions. The 1986 edition of *Best Jewish Sermons*,

published in the USA, contains sermons on these and similar themes by representatives of Orthodox, Reform and Conservative Rabbis who, notwithstanding their organizational differences, show close agreement when dealing with such wider themes. Rabbis have fought to free the pulpit from control by the leaders of the congregation. When Stephen Wise was being considered for the influential post of Rabbi of Temple Emmanuel in New York, Louis Marshall, the president, held that in controversial matters the pulpit must remain under the control of the trustees. Wise refused to consider the post under such conditions and eventually founded the Free Synagogue to uphold the principle of pulpit liberty.

In nineteenth-century America the slavery issue was addressed, from the Jewish pulpit. Morris J. Raphall preached that slavery is a divinely ordained institution, since it is mentioned in the Bible. David Einhorn, however, attacked slavery from the pulpit as 'the greatest crime against God'. As a result, his life was placed in jeopardy and on 22 April 1861, Einhorn and his family were secretly escorted out of Baltimore.

With the rise of the Reform movement, the issue of Reform was hotly debated from the pulpit. A favourite text for the Reform sermon, used by Geiger and others, was: 'One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth for ever' (Ecclesiastes 1:4). The 'earth' represents the essential, unchanging spirit of Judaism, which must be interpreted by each generation in the light of its own needs and insights. Such an interpretation was dismissed by the Orthodox as far-fetched homiletics, contrary, moreover, to the doctrine that the Torah is immutable. For the Orthodox, if the 'earth' is made to represent the Torah, it remains unchanging through all the generations that come and go. It often happened, in fact, that the same set of texts would be used by both Orthodox and Reform preachers in support of their respective positions. The 'wicked son' of the Passover Haggadah was, for the Orthodox preacher, the Reform Jew who asks: 'What is this service for you?' For the Reform preacher the son who represented the Reform point of view was the 'wise son' who was ready to ask all the intelligent questions demanded by the new age.

On this topic of Orthodox and Reform preaching it can be noted that Chief Rabbi N. M. Adler preached in London, on the second day of Passover in 1868, a sermon against the abolition of

the second days of festivals in the Diaspora, a matter which at that time had begun to be an issue between Orthodoxy and Reform. His son and successor, Hermann Adler, at the beginning of the twentieth century, refused to permit a synagogue under his jurisdiction, the Hampstead Synagogue, to appoint Morris Joseph as minister-preacher, because Joseph had published views 'at variance with traditional Judaism'. Joseph had written that he did not look forward to the restoration of sacrifices in the Temple of the future and, therefore, could not honestly pray for this to happen. Solomon Schechter, at that time living in Cambridge, pointed out that if doctrines were to become the test of a minister, then the greatest names in Jewish learning – Zunz, Graetz, Herzfeld, Joel, Gotthold, Solomon, Rapoport and others – would never have been permitted to preach in a United Synagogue (R. Apple: *The Hampstead Synagogue*, 1967, pp. 23–7). Chief Rabbi J. H. Hertz preached a series of sermons, *Affirmations of Judaism*. (1927), attacking the new Liberal movement founded by C. G. Montefiore and others. Hertz made no concessions, but why should he have done? Pulpit ire and fire can be overdone, but the most effective of preachers are those who occasionally, at least, get excited. Of Hertz it was said that he preferred the way of peace if there was no other.

THEOLOGICAL PREACHING

So far in this essay I have tried to give a brief, objective account of preaching with particular emphasis on what has happened and is happening in this field in modern times. Now I want to be a little more subjective and consider the question of theological preaching. Having spent years studying theology, I naturally demonstrate my bias. What follows is largely a repeat of a lecture I gave to the Rabbinical Assembly of America, entitled *The Pulpit as an Instrument of Theological Teachings* (*Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, New York, 1969, pp. 9–24). The lecture was received quite well by my colleagues of the Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative) but was subjected to criticism, of which I have taken note.

Of all the different types of sermon the theological is undoubtedly the most neglected in the synagogue. One of the reasons for this neglect is the unfortunate notion that it is somehow unJewish to do theology at all, so that 'Jewish theology' is considered to be a contradiction in terms. A widespread Midrashic (Jerusalem

Talmud, *Hagigah* 1:7) quote is: 'God says: "Would that they had forsaken Me and kept My Torah."' This is, needless to say, a misquotation, since the Midrash clearly does not mean to imply that God wants us not to think about Him. The meaning is rather that God is prepared, as it were, to settle for uninformed, self-seeking observance of the Torah (*shelo lishmah*) because such is the intrinsic power of the Torah that even this will eventually lead Israel to Him. 'The light she contains will restore them to the good.' To see theological thinking and discussion as an offence insults the memory of Saadiah and Maimonides, Cordovero and the Ari, Shneur Zalman of Liady and Hayyim of Volozhyn and, in modern times, Moses Mendelsohn, Schechrer, Rabbi Kook, Kaufmann Kohler, Samuel S. Cohon, Buber, Rosenzweig and Leo Baeck.

Nor is it true that theology is a harmless but irrelevant pastime, a luxury we can ill afford in our age when so many practical problems press in on us. Even on pragmatic grounds, theology is important because how Jews lead their lives depends on how they conceive of the purpose of Jewish existence. 'Show me a man's philosophy,' said Chesterton, 'and I'll show you the man.' Is it not correct, for instance, that all the divisions among religious Jews on the scope and obligation of Jewish observances depend ultimately on differing views regarding a basic theological question, the meaning of revelation?

It is also a mistake to imagine that Jews who come to synagogue and listen to sermons have no interest in theology. The opposite is much nearer to the truth; that in an average Jewish congregation nowadays one is likely to find a number of hungry souls who are merely irritated by appeals to Jewish pride or loyalty but who have an intense desire to know what Judaism is, who are well aware of what Judaism would have them do, but are puzzled as to what it is that Judaism would have them believe.

Theological instruction is, consequently, a legitimate and necessary function of the synagogue pulpit. The wise preacher will, of course, vary the type of fare he offers. Too rich a diet of theology, as of any other pulpit topic, will produce an imbalance and succeed only in giving people spiritual indigestion.

There is, however, a difficulty particularly inherent in theological preaching. The sermon is not a lecture. A sermon has rightly been described as 'truth mediated through personality'. It is the preacher's task to convey to his congregation how he personally sees Jewish life. It should be far removed from a detached,

academic exercise. And yet theology, by its very nature, is abstract, metaphysical, elusive. Theology appears to be concerned much more with the making of maps with which to explore the unknown than with the existential situation of Jews in the here and now. The 'Queen of the Sciences' is not easily coerced from her regal aloofness to engage in full participation in the hurly-burly of the world of our normal experience.

The difficulty can be met if the preacher is always on the lookout for definite, concrete experiences in his own life and that of his congregation to serve both as pegs on which to hang theological ideas and as actual illustrations of how these ideas are to be used. A consideration of the doctrine of the Hereafter becomes arresting if delivered at a sermon during the Yizkor service when each one is thinking of his departed and reflecting perhaps on his or her own mortality. If the newspapers carry a report of an uninformed attack on Jewry or, for that matter, of too fulsome praise, then is the time to preach on the Chosen People idea. The publication of the latest best-seller on 'the death of God' is as opportune a time as any for discussion in the pulpit of the Jewish doctrine of the living God. Actual questions put to the rabbi by college students, for example, or even by little children in the Hebrew school ('who made God?') can serve as springboards for theological preaching. A Jewish mother told me of a conversation she overheard between her two little boys aged five and seven. The younger boy asked his brother: 'Do you believe in God?' The older boy replied: 'I did when I was your age but I have grown out of it now.' If, God forbid, a disaster such as an earthquake occurs, the Rabbis will be expected to comment on how they cope as Jews with the problem of pain and evil in the universe. (Here a note of warning should be sounded. I would not myself speak on theology when a member of the congregation has passed away, but confine pulpit references in that instance to praise of the deceased and the severity of the loss sustained. While thinking of a particular person known to the congregation and whose relatives are there in the synagogue, it is virtually impossible to speak on the problem of suffering without appearing to vindicate God at the expense of the tears of this particular bereaved family.)

As for the techniques of theological preaching, these will naturally differ from Rabbi to Rabbi. Many of the homilies in this book are theological in nature, but here I want to present a further number of general suggestions for theological preaching.

A sermon on the nature of God describing how the Neo-

Platonic distinction between God as He is in Himself and God as He manifests Himself to His creatures was adopted by the medieval Jewish thinkers. (I am not suggesting that terms like 'Neo-Platonic' should be used in a sermon. If name-dropping ever has a place it is not in the pulpit.) Reference can be made to the Zoharic interpretation (*Zohar* 1:1b) of: 'Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these?' (Isaiah 40:26). For the *Zohar* *Who? (mi)* is *deus absconditus*, of whom only the question: 'Who is He?', can be asked with no answer forthcoming to the inquiring mind of finite humans. *These (elleh)* refers to God in manifestation, whose glory fills the earth – the world of of division and multiplicity, of diverse creatures and complex forms of being, through which, in Von Hugel's phrase, He can be apprehended but not comprehended. One might even go on to consider the very radical Kabbalistic view that God as He is in Himself (*En Sof*) is not mentioned at all in the Bible (so elevated is that aspect of Deity above all human thought and language) except by hint and that *elohim (mi and elleh combined)*, the God of vital religion, *deus revelatus*, is brought into being, as it were as part of the divine self-revelatory process. This is one way of trying to cope with the problem of reconciling the 'God of the philosophers' with the 'God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'. Such ideas can be developed further or criticized according to the individual bent of the preacher and the intellectual capacity of the congregation. I have found, and I am sure the majority of my colleagues have found, the intellectual level of Jews who come to synagogue to be exceedingly high.

Pursuing this line further, one might preach on: 'For man may not see Me and live' (Exodus 33: 20) and contrast this verse, as the Rabbis (*Yevamot* 49b) did, with the verse in Isaiah (6:1): 'I saw the Lord.' The Rabbinic distinction is between the lucid speculum and the dim speculum. Rashi adds the subtle explanation that Moses knew that, through the clear glass, in reality, one cannot see but Isaiah, who saw 'through a glass darkly', deluded himself that he could see. The idea can be developed that the more gifted human beings are with spiritual insight the greater their reluctance to talk about God's nature. For Maimonides (*Guide* 1:59) the difference between the wisest of men and ordinary folk is that the former know so much better how little can be said about the divine.

In preaching on faith in God, it is helpful to point out that many deeply religious persons have been troubled by doubts and that there is nothing to be ashamed of in being so troubled. Nahman of

Bratzlav even goes so far as to say that man is bound to have doubts since this is endemic to the human condition, for man is a finite creature incapable of grasping the Infinite. A powerful text from Nahman's writings is his comment on: 'So the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was' (Exodus 20:18). The 'people', those who lack faith's courage, recoil as soon as they are faced with religious problems. They remain at a distance. Moses, however, the heroic 'knight of faith', presses on to find God in the darkness itself. One of the best treatments of this whole question of tension in the line of faith is to be found in the sermon notes of Milton Steinberg ('Discovery of God' in: *From the Sermons of Rabbi Milton Steinberg*, ed. Bernard Mandelbaum, New York, 1954, pp. 73-84). Incidentally, Milton Steinberg's writings contain a good deal of theological material, attractively presented, which can be used by the Rabbi. Otherwise, there is little enough material upon which the theological preacher can draw. One work which should be mentioned and which deserves to be better known is the theological, Hebrew anthology, *Ha-Elohut*, by Israel Konovitz (New York, 1905). Solomon Schechter's *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York, 1961); Montefiore and Loewe's *A Rabbinic Anthology* (London, 1938) and A. Cohen's *Everyman's Talmud* are also useful aides.

A part of faith's tension is the need to affirm both the inescapable nature of religious commitment and human free and willing choice. On the one hand humans cannot escape the 'hound of heaven'. Jonah takes a ship to Tarshish to evade his responsibility (this would be equivalent to someone taking a jet from New York to San Francisco when he has a duty to perform in London), but God does not allow him to escape. Yet, if this aspect of the matter alone is stressed, God is conceived of as a celestial puppet-master who moves people as He wills, with them playing no part in their decisions. Many people do, in fact, tend to think of God in this way. However, on the deeper level the meaning is that man's ultimate happiness and self-fulfilment lie in obedience to God's law, and this is demanded of him not as something foreign but as something intrinsic to his nature. Jews can respond willingly to the call of duty because the obligations of Judaism are natural expressions of the deepest longings of man created in God's image. In the verse from the Evening Prayer, the Israelites '*willingly* accepted God's sovereignty'. If, according to the Midrash, God compels the Israelites to accept the Torah by threatening them with the

mountain suspended over their heads, their eventual response is: we will do and will hear. Bahya Ibn Asher notes that the Hebrew word *yimlokh* in the verse 'The Lord will reign for ever and ever' (Exodus 15:18) is written defectively (without a *vav*) to imply that God is, as it were, deficient in the sterner aspects of sovereignty. He is not to be conceived of as a despot forcing unwilling subjects to do his bidding but as desiring their free response in love.

This aspect of religion is to be observed particularly in the ethical life. Should one have the intention of carrying out a religious precept (*kavvanah*) before performing acts of good fellowship and human love? The teachers of the Lithuanian Musar movement debated this question (Dov Katz, *Tenuat Ha-Musar*, vol. 5, Tel-Aviv, 1963, pp. 138–9). Rabbi Solomon Zalman Dolinsky used to recite the formula 'For the unification of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Shekhinah (*leshem yihud*), before he performed an act of mercy. However, Rabbi Simhah Zussel of Kelm had a surer ethical touch when he argued that 'one should fulfil precepts of this kind out of natural feelings; they should stem the natural benevolence of a kind heart'. To invoke in this area the concept of a *mitzvah* is to frustrate the purpose of the command. Rabbi Simhah Zussel gives an interesting turn to the verse: 'Love thy neighbour *as thyself*. Just as self-love is natural to man, requiring no calculations or special intentions, so should be his love for others. The man who has to have the intention of performing a *mitzvah* before he can love others will never progress beyond the I-It relationship, to use Buber's terminology, when what is required is the I-Thou. On the negative side, this ties up with Maimonides' famous analysis, in the sixth of his *Eight Chapters*, that with regard to ethical wrongdoing the better man is the one who has no need to exercise self-control in avoiding such things as theft and dishonesty but avoids them out of the goodness of his heart.

An apparently unpromising text for the relationship between religion and ethics is the verse: 'And Enoch walked with God' (Genesis 5:24). There is a Kabbalistic legend that Enoch was a cobbler, and when he stitched the upper part of the shoe to the lower he brought about unifications in the upper worlds. In its original form, this meant that Enoch was a contemplative recluse who did not think about the actual work he was doing but had his mind on the divine mysteries and thus promoted harmony between the upper and lower worlds, but the Musarists found such a notion ethically offensive. A cobbler with his mind on the Zohar instead

of the work in hand will, in all probability, botch the job he is doing, be guilty of producing shoddy work, and gain money under false pretences. For this school the meaning is rather that by doing his job honestly and with integrity, by making good shoes, in his regard for his customers, Enoch served God and produced harmony in the upper worlds. (For this interpretation see Rabbi E. Dessler's *Mikhtav Me-Elijahu*, London, 1955, pp. 34–5.) Admirers of the Quaker family Cadbury used to boast that every tin of Bourneville cocoa manufactured by their firm was a good argument for religion. The question of a religious attitude towards vocation is of relevance here.

Prominent among theological topics which should receive treatment in the pulpit is the concept of revelation. Professor Manson of Manchester University used to tell how the renowned Biblical scholar, George Adam Smith, used to urge his pupils who were studying for the Christian ministry to avoid referring specifically to Biblical criticism in the pulpit even though they themselves should be thoroughly acquainted with the discipline. 'It is necessary to wash regularly,' he said, 'but one does not go out in public with soap-suds still on one's face.' This advice is still not without value if it is confined to the more technical aspects of critical theory. However, many of our people do have some idea of the tremendous strides modern Biblical scholarship has made and they wish to be instructed how to see the Bible in the light of the new knowledge. It can safely be assumed that the average congregant nowadays does not subscribe to the doctrine of verbal inspiration and recognizes that the Biblical books have to be seen against the background of the times in which they were written. Part of the preacher's task is to demonstrate how, none the less, these books stand out from the cultural environments in which they were written and whose vocabulary, literary style and even religious ideas they use; how, in the words of the famous epigram they are 'eternity expressing itself in time'.

Umberto Cassuto's work on the Pentateuch is far from being scholarship's final word on the subject, but is a happy hunting-ground for the preacher in this connection. Cassuto points out, for instance, that in nearly all ancient Near Eastern cosmologies there are unrelated monsters of chaos. The gods cannot begin to create until these monsters are destroyed. Cassuto connects these monsters with the *taninim* of Genesis 1:21. The author of Genesis (if we are talking of some acceptance of critical theory, it is permissible to

use such a term) does not attack the old concept by direct assault but rejects it by implication. Far from God being unable to create until he destroys the pre-existing monsters, He creates the *taninim*. In this connection, Dr Hertz's comment on the Flood against this background is similarly helpful, though some of us would prefer not to treat the story of the Flood as factual.

Biblical passages such as that of the Flood should not be avoided in the pulpit. There is no harm at all, and occasionally much good, in repeating the note of catastrophe sounded in these passages: a corrupt world cannot survive. To preach otherwise in the name of what passes for Jewish optimism is a surrender to sentimentality, but this kind of thing should not be overdone. Thinkers who delight in telling us that God may wish to destroy His world are also not speaking with the voice of Judaism. Professor Suzuki, for instance, says (*Zen Buddhism*, New York, 1956, p. 275) that he cannot help being in deep sympathy with the Biblical writer who makes God soliloquize in this way: 'The Lord saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan he devised was nothing but evil all the time. And the Lord regretted that He had made man on earth, and his heart was saddened. The Lord said: "I will blot out from the earth the men whom I have created – men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky, for I regret that I have made them"' Genesis (6:5–7). Suzuki continues: 'Is God now in earnest engaged in the gigantic task of effacing man from the earth? Apparently He is. If so, inasmuch as man is man, he must have a philosophy to cope with the situation. Can Zen offer this?' Whether or not Zen can offer this is another matter, but it is astonishing that Suzuki should have stopped short of the last verse in the passage he quotes: 'But Noah found favour with the Lord.' As Judaism sees it, there is always a Noah who makes the whole experiment worthwhile and introduces a new world and a new beginning. There is a middle road to be trodden between facile Victorian optimism and stark Buddhist pessimism.

In preaching on the theme of revelation it is essential to acknowledge frankly that once fundamentalism has been abandoned there are whole areas in which it is difficult to know where the word of God is to be found in the Bible. People do, indeed, find such an attitude irritating and expect certainty in the pulpit, protesting that the last thing they need is a doubting rabbi. The solution is for the Rabbi to point out that the search for Torah is

itself Torah and as all the certainty of Torah. Long before the rise of any historical school, some of our great teachers expressed this idea. The Maharal of Prague, for instance, noted that the benediction before studying the Torah is: 'who has commanded us to busy ourselves with words of Torah' (*laasok be-divrey Torah*). We are not commanded to know whether Abbate or Rava is right in any absolute sense but rather to 'busy ourselves' in the words of both Abbaye and Rava, and this engagement is the Torah over which the benediction is recited. Helpful, too, in this connection is Mowinckell's examination of the Bible as 'the word of the Lord' (*dvar ha-shem*). He notes that *davar* means 'thing' as well as 'word'. The believer in verbal inspiration holds that in the Bible (for the Jew, the Bible as interpreted in the Rabbinic tradition) he is in possession of the *ipsissima verba* of the authors, indeed of God Himself. The more sophisticated believer cannot accept this notion for the soundest of reasons, but he, too, can find himself gripped by the divine 'thing', by the existential situation in which he struggles hard to discover what it is that God would have him do. He relives, as it were, in infinitely small measure, the experience of the prophets who were seized with an overwhelming conviction of complete commitment to the divine will. Rabbis should not allow themselves to be stampeded into dogmatism by the accusation of vagueness. To the objection that 'the fundamentalist lacks charity, the liberal clarity', they should retort, it is better to be vaguely right than definitely wrong.

A preacher should not be scared to introduce the idea of demythologizing. For instance, many thoughtful people, while acknowledging that the story of Adam and Eve is a myth, just do not know what to do with the story, how to understand it as relevant to their lives. The Rabbi can quote the famous Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 4:5) on the reason why the human race is descended from one couple, that is, from Adam and Eve. This is to teach that whoever destroys a single life is considered as having destroyed a whole world, and whoever saves a single life is considered as having saved a whole world. Another reason is for the sake of peace, that no man should be able to say to his fellow: 'My father is greater than your father.' This is yet, another reason that the sectarians should not argue, as they would have done, that if many human beings were created originally, there are many gods. Finally, that God, unlike a human king, uses one seal and yet the 'coins' He stamps from it are all different. There is no doubt that

the Rabbis who first expressed these opinions really did believe in Adam and Eve as historical figures, but in speaking as they did, they remind us of the true significance of the narrative and so make it as relevant for us as it was for them. It is not impossible that the particular emphases to which the Rabbis call attention were actually in the minds of those who told the story in the first place. This approach is valid for many other Biblical passages, the story of Jonah, for instance. Intelligent people now see that whether or not a big fish really can swallow a man is quite beside the point and fades into insignificance in relation to the living truth taught by this marvellous tale. It has rightly been said that the fish that swallowed Jonah was a red herring.

Many years ago a well-known, liberal Anglican vicar addressed the synagogue study group on the way he read Biblical stories of the kind mentioned. He gave the illustration of the Cinderella fairy-tale. Is the story true? If by this is meant, was there really a girl called Cinderella with a fairy godmother and a glass slipper that fitted only her foot, the answer is no. But if we mean do poor, neglected young girls with few prospects dream by the fireside of meeting the Prince Charming who will take them away from it all, the answer is yes.

One of the best ways of dealing with theological themes from the pulpit is to treat a good deal of theological language as symbolic, and to pursue the idea that much of Biblical language serves as a pointer to deeper significance. One way of considering Biblical symbols in this manner is the exploration of the good life as a way, a mountain or a ladder reaching from earth to heaven; the word of God as a tree, a hammer, a book, the sea, fire, water, milk, honey; the righteous as a cedar or a palm tree; man as dust and ashes. The Midrashic literature is full of rich spellings out of such Biblical symbols.

The symbol of the mountain ('who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord?') has great power even if the point is taken that it is an impersonal symbol. The distinguished mountain climber, Sir Arnold Lunn (*A Century of Mountaineering*, London, 1957, p. 15) has shown that the ancient Hebrews were the first to appreciate the beauty and strength of mountain scenery. The Greeks, for example, disliked mountains because, as Homer pointed out, they were useful only to bad men. The Hebrews did not accept utility as a criterion. The mystery and majesty of mountains were seen by the ancient Hebrews as a revelation of God's glory. Lunn is too

one-sided, but there is truth in what he says. Preaching on ascending the mountain of the Lord, the Rabbi can perhaps allude to three aspects of mountain climbing. First, guides are essential for the more difficult climbs. Judaism provides these in the great Jewish teachers of the past. These, like all good guides, had a genius for direction finding, but they had to proceed at first by trial and error; because they worked hard to discover the best routes, they were able to be of help to us as we endeavour to walk in safety in dangerous places. Second, every mountain climber knows the lure of the summit. Rest is required periodically on the way up but the peak always beckons. Jewish life, lived adventurously and by means of stamina, is a constant striving towards a perfection that can never be fully attained in this life. The Rabbis even say that the disciples of the wise have real rest neither in this world nor in the next. Third, some ascents are so demanding that they can be attempted only by a team working together, as in the conquest of Everest. Judaism places great stress on the community because some of the most elevated spiritual insights are possible only when the members of a group dedicated to their quest work together in harmony and assist one another.

One example among many of Midrashic use of symbols is the sermon *Mekhiltta DRSBY to Exodus 19:18* (ed. Hoffman, p. 100) on why the words of the Torah are compared to fire. Fire is life-giving and the words of the Torah are life-giving. Fire must be approached with caution. If a man keeps too far away from fire he is frozen, but if he approaches too near he is in danger of being scorched: a useful warning to religious enthusiasts to keep at a suitable distance. Just as a small burning coal can help to kindle a great bonfire, so the words of a 'little' man can set the soul of a 'great' man afire. And just as people whose daily work is connected with fire have a scorched appearance so, too, students of the Torah are distinguished from others by their speech, their general conduct and even by the way they dress.

No ingenuity is required to see how this Midrash can be developed into a full-scale theological sermon. The Torah has provided the world with life-giving warmth and illumination and is still capable of so doing. The Torah is so tremendous as a force that it must be approached gradually and with care. Precisely because it kindles man's heart and mind, he must ever be on his guard against intolerance and fanaticism or a hazy, mindless overheating. Furthermore, each person has his own way of looking at the Torah

and even a 'little' man can make his contribution. It is said that the Hafetz Hayyim would ask a little boy to tell him some Torah because, he said, every Jewish person has his (we would also say her) 'portion of the Torah' which no one but he can reveal. Finally, people who adhere find their whole being changed. They are, in the words of the Rabbis, 'children of the world to come'. Rabbi Yerucham Leibovitz, the Mashgiah of the Mir Yeshivah, used to say if an American or an Englishman or a Frenchman goes anywhere in the world he betrays his origins by his mannerisms, his vocabulary, his accent and so forth. In the same way the person touched by the Torah is set apart by the vision he has seen. A soul that has been set alight by Sinai is never the same again.

Finally, a word might be said about the style of theological preaching. Here more than anywhere the rabbi must express his thoughts clearly. If he is uncertain about some aspects of the subject, as, indeed, he is bound to be, let him state quite clearly the reasons for his uncertainty. Solomon Schechter's remarks (*Studies in Judaism*, Philadelphia, 1945, vol. 1, p. 231) that 'the best theology is not consistent' has some force as a warning against facile solutions to the profoundest questions and as a reminder that we cannot fit the Deity into our tidy schemes. However, if it is taken as justification for loose and woolly thinking in the area of religion, it can lead all too easily to glorification of the absurd and a tacit admission that theology has nothing to do with truth. Holy nonsense is still nonsense; and in theological preaching, precisely because of the abstract nature of the subject, the pulpit language should be supple, energetic and intelligible, light and not too categorical. The fatal temptation, as I know from experience, in writing and preaching on theological topics, is to camouflage precision with ponderous, solemn language in the mistaken belief that this alone is suitable to the seriousness and profundity of the theme. It is this attitude more than any other which has contributed to the hostility in which theology is held in some quarters.

There is a story told of Martin Buber. (When I repeated it years ago while proposing a vote of thanks to Buber he denied that it was true and said it was apocryphal.) It is said that soon after Buber had settled in Eretz Israel he was complimented on his Hebrew: 'Professor Buber, your Hebrew is excellent. I understand every word you say.' Buber is said to have replied that he would not be satisfied with his Hebrew until people would not be able to understand a word he said. For all the admiration for Buber's

thought, it can hardly be denied that Buber is hard going. The old device in the language of sermons is particularly apt for theological preaching. Let the ideas you express be those of the most profound thinkers, but let the language you use to express them be that of the daily newspaper. The deeper the subject the greater should be the demand for clear, simple language. Or, as someone has said: you do not have to be fat in order to drive fat oxen.