

## Chapter 3

# How To Be Impressive In The Pulpit

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Unless you attended a really first-rate seminary, which is unlikely since there are so few of them, probably you have been taught that a clergyman's first, primary, basic, fundamental, highest, most sacred, most precious function, duty and privilege is to preach.

Chances are you have been dunked in the doctrine that you will ultimately rise or sink in your chosen work on the basis of your performance in the pulpit. Also, if you were so unfortunate as to fall under the spell of a persuasive professor of preaching with liberal inclinations, you may even believe that you should take some long-bearded Old Testament prophet as your ideal and denounce the supposed evils of our society as, for example, Amos whacked and lacerated the society of his day. This would certainly be a bad mistake. After all the only pulpit Amos ever filled was at Bethel-and he was requested to resign after one sermon.

At any rate, the interpretation of the minister's role, largely in terms of his preaching function, is encouraged by the laity, which supposes that the delivery of a weekly homily constitutes the clergy's major work load. You will get awfully sick of the jibe "Pretty good pay you get, Reverend, for working one hour a week." This is delivered always by the coarse, hearty type of parishioner who thinks it is original with him. It is best to smile if you can manage it.

However, if you care to achieve more than very modest success in the church,

you must (1) convince yourself that all this business about preaching being your most important task isn't true and (2) convince your congregation that it is.

Let me elaborate. If you believe preaching to be first and most important in the work of a minister, you will naturally devote the largest slice of your time and energy to the preparation of your sermons; thus robbing yourself of the opportunity to address yourself to the genuinely vital and productive duties of your calling.

Any veteran cleric, who has gotten anywhere at all, will assure you that preaching is quite secondary in his scale of values. Yet, we keep getting, year after year, floods of fresh seminary graduates, who are enamored of the image of the pulpiteer. They buy an astonishing number of books. They use up the good working hours of the morning for study. They have a tendency to write out their sermons, polishing and repolishing them. And some of them even plan their sermons for the entire year ahead. This is expensive in terms of precious time and your meager supply of ready cash (books are frightfully costly these days). It is, also, entirely unnecessary.

However, your laymen should be allowed the illusion that preaching is your number one task because the illusion can be made to pay you rich dividends.

Fix firmly in the structure of your basic operating philosophy the fundamen-

tal fact about the ministry of the pulpit, which is: “It is ridiculously-easy and requires but a negligible chunk of your time to be a popular pulpit personality.”

Now if this is true (and rest in the confidence that it is), then it requires no especially-gifted imagination to grasp the possibilities here. So long as your congregation is enthusiastic about you as a preacher, the following benefits will accrue to you:

1. The congregation will be inclined to charity concerning your weaknesses, and you are bound to have some. (“Well, we must remember that good pulpit men are hard to come by,” they will say — a judgment which usually-buries any criticism of your deficiencies.)

2. When your church members don't see you, they will assume that you are sequestered in your study, poring over the Scriptures, the philosophers, the post-Nicene fathers (they haven't, of course, the remotest notion of what a post-Nicene father is); adding to this intellectual sour mash, the catalyst of your own reverent insights and, thus, distilling the spiritual booze, which will give their souls a hearty wallop when you serve it up on Sunday morning. So long as they assume all this, they will not wonder how you spend your time, which permits you a considerable amount of personal freedom.

3. Your reputation as a superior pulpit man will get around, and better paying churches will be after you.

Now is the time, then, to perfect yourself in the skills of the popular preacher. No other professional investment will return such dividends on so small a capitalization. It is a situation comparable to having gotten in on the initial stock offering of IBM or General Motors.

The first rule for the popular preacher to remember as he prepares a sermon is that style is of enormous importance, while content makes little ultimate difference in the congregation's enthusiasm for one's efforts in the pulpit. About 1000 parts style to 1 part content is a good proportion.

No one cares very much what you say when you preach, so long as it is not radically-controversial or disturbing. Your acceptability as a preacher depends almost-wholly on how you say it. A really gifted preacher can deliver an exegesis of “Mary Had a Little Lamb” or extol the virtues of the single tax and send the congregation home in a spiritual trance; while a bumbler can bore it to death with a sensible and relevant exposition of the parable of the prodigal son.

All too few young clerics, starting at the front door of their career, trouble themselves to ask the question. “What do my people want from a sermon?” Rather, they ask themselves “What had I ought to give my congregation when I preach?” Which is only another form of the question “What do I want to give them?”

Fundamentally, preaching at its best is one of the entertainment arts, and the successful pulpiter will always think of himself first as an entertainer. His problem is much the same as Jack Benny's or Shelley Berman's or Mort Sahl's. He has to stand up and keep the customers interested in what he is saying or business will fall off at an alarming rate. The following chapters will examine the techniques of pulpit entertainment.

## **Entertain The Customers**

The old pros of the pulpit know that they should always aim to do three things for and to the customers (congregation) in every sermon:

### 1. Make them laugh

### 2. Make them cry

### 3. Make them feel religious

This does not mean that people in church should be induced to guffaw like drunks in a night club. The amenities of civilized churchgoing preclude this sort of congregational behavior. A preacher should not aim to be a belly-laugh comedian — but, he should be a hearty-giggle humorist, or he is unlikely to be called to a major league pastorate.

This level of skill is attained by loading the sermon with funny stories. They don't need to illustrate anything (one can always contrive to make a story fit); they just need to be funny.

The wise young clergyman, then, will early begin the habit of collecting funny stories. Buy books of them, clip them out of newspapers and magazines, paste them in scrapbooks or keep them in files. You can never have too many of them.

Let us, now illustrate how to go about selecting a funny story for pulpit use. Let us suppose you are preparing a sermon on Christian missions. One of your points will likely be “The joys and advantages of being a Christian.” Now, when you come to this point in the sermon you can say, “Of course there are disadvantages to being a Christian. Sometimes people take advantage of the Christian's spirit of benevolence. This reminds me<sup>1</sup> of the story of the Jewish man who was converted to Christianity. After he was baptized and received into the church, he went home and was met at the door by his son who said, 'Pop, I need \$5000 for a new sports car,' and his father gave it to him. As he came into the front room, his daughter came in and said, 'Father, I'm going to

Europe and the trip will cost \$5000,' so he gave it to her. As he went into the kitchen to see what was cooking, his wife said to him, 'Dear, I've ordered a new mink coat and it costs \$5000.' So he gave it to her.

“Then, alone for a moment, he meditated on all this.

“Here I've been a Christian for a half-hour,' he said to himself,' and these damn<sup>2</sup> Jews have taken me for \$15,000 already.”

Here is a nearly-ideal humorous sermon illustration. For one thing, it does illustrate a point more or less. (And though we have previously noted that this is by no means necessary, it is a good idea to connect up your stories to the sermon wherever possible — and it usually is.) More important, it subtly-reinforces your people in one of the prejudices to which they cling with tenacity and makes them feel comfortable about it.

You can be certain that any middle-class, standard-brand Protestant congregation is anti-Jewish. Not blatantly anti-Jewish, of course. You would get the gate in no time at all if you preached the Gerald L. K. Smith line. Also, hardly any of your good people would admit to prejudice against Jews. It isn't popular to do so, and, besides, everyone wants to think he is tolerant. Most of your members even know and like some individual Jewish family. But to a person they think of Jews as avaricious, selfish, grasping and quick to take advantage of the other fellow. At the same time, they feel vaguely guilty about feeling this way.

So with this illustration, you have managed to imply **(a)** that Jews are actually like we all think they are, and **(b)** if Jews would only become Christians they would immediately become generous, warmhearted and unselfish like us, and

(c) the Christian religion is demonstrably superior to the Jewish religion and, by implication, to all other religions.

So in this one brief story you have succeeded in extending permission to hold a prejudice, absolved the people of their guilt over holding it,<sup>3</sup> and have made them feel good about being Christian because Christians are superior people. And all this has been accomplished in the most entertaining of ways — through a funny story.

You cannot hope to turn up so ideal an example of the humorous story for pulpit use every week in the year. But, if you keep it in mind as a model, it will help you in your selections and remind you to make the people laugh.

### **Make Them Cry**

Now we come to the art of making them cry. Of course we do not mean that actual tears must flow (although if the custodian regularly comes upon damp discarded Kleenex when he picks up after the service, it is a heartening indication that you are consistently striking the bull's-eye). A lump in the throat and a quivering sensation in the breast, however, are quite adequate.

For making them cry, so to speak, your best bets are stories about old-fashioned virtues and values, patriotism and self-sacrifice. If you tell them properly, these will always do the trick.

Let us inspect a brief example of the lump-in-the-throat story.

A poor, but scholarly and conscientious preacher has a little girl who desperately wants a new dress for an important party at the home of a wealthy parishioner. Her

father sadly tells her there isn't any money for a new dress (build up his pain and anguish). She can't understand it, so, finally, her mother takes her into her father's study, points to the rows of books and says, "Darling, here is the reason there is no money for a new dress."

The point here, which is calculated to open up the tear ducts, is that the little girl must give up what all little girls have as an inalienable right to possess, in order that her poor, struggling father may have the tools to do the Lord's work.

The story, of course, is full of logical holes. One could just as well conclude that her father sacrificed his daughter's welfare to his passion for scholarship. Why did he need all those expensive books? Why couldn't he have sacrificed a little for his daughter's sake? If his parishioners wanted a scholarly preacher, why shouldn't they pay the freight?

But be assured that your hearers will never even think of these questions. They will only feel sad and tearful over the plight of the little girl caught in the meshes of a necessary self-denial that a high and noble end may be achieved.

This story has the added advantage of a subliminal, but persistent suggestion, that the clergy bears the burden of great hidden expenses, which, you will discover, is all too true. It could easily produce a substantial book-allowance item for you in the next church budget.

You must not be too crude with the "cry stories," of course. Little Nell dying of malnutrition in the garret because Papa spends all the money at the saloon served her day, but the modern congregation, however plebeian, will not respond to it and might even chuckle—which would be disconcerting to you to say the least.

The untimely-passing of a lovely young thing in the bloom of youth, leaving behind a desolate and inconsolable lover, is a theme with excellent possibilities; so long as it is made clear that the love relationship has been entirely spiritual in nature. Turn the Lady of the Camellias into a church deaconess or a virgin school-teacher, and you will be amazed at the lachrymose response you will get.

### **Make Them Feel Religious**

Now we come to the problem of making them feel religious. This is the easiest of the three because it is mostly a matter of nomenclature. You need only employ a sufficient number of words and phrases which are loaded with “religious” meaning to accomplish the desired end.

For quick reference, the author here includes a brief lexicon of graded religious words and phrases. Roughly, a number one word or phrase has twice the religious punch of a number two and three times that of a number three.

## **LEXICON**

**Faith of our Fathers (1)**

**Bible-believing Christians (1)**

**Repentance (3)**

(Many people are not enthusiastic about repenting.)

**Salvation (2)**

(A good word, but carries some overtones of the camp meeting.)

**The Bible says (1)**

(Billy Graham's favorite phrase. Most congregations will believe anything you say if you precede it with this phrase.)

**Christ-centered (1)**

(Use this often.)

**Righteousness (3)**

(Given the lowest rating because it implies that Christians ought to behave themselves according to a standard stricter than many church members care to observe.)

**God-fearing (1)**

(Your people aren't afraid of God, of course, but they enjoy thinking that they are.)

**Serve the Lord with Gladness (1)**

(This has a fine biblical and literary ring to it, sounds as if you are calling for instant, forthright action, but is sufficiently-vague as to require nothing at all from your hearers. Hard to beat.)

**The Good Book (2)**

(Older members will like it, but it is a little dated for younger people.)

**Sin (or sinners) (1)**

(Every sermon should include one or the other. These words conjure up images of bordellos and orgies and black lingerie — which images have an entertainment value in themselves. Your people will never connect the words with anything that middle-class white Protestants do, so you can flail away at sin and sinners to your heart's content.)

**The Kingdom of God (1)**

(Your congregation has heard this phrase from every preacher that ever served them, so they consider it a true mark of a devout and stable minister.)

**Holiness unto the Lord (1)**

(Not one member has a clue as to what this means, but it is one of the most euphonious and soul-satisfying phrases in the lexicon.)

### **Heaven (1)**

(No preacher ever got fired for preaching about heaven, so long as he made it clear that he thought everyone in his congregation would get there. )

### **Hell (3)**

(Just as well lay off this one or use it sparingly.)

These examples should suffice to give you the general idea of how to go about making your people feel religious. As a rule of thumb, rely heavily on those words and phrases which evoke pleasant religious feelings: and use with considerable economy any word, which might make people uncomfortable or fidgety (which is why we warn against preaching about hell, for you would be surprised at the members of your flock who are trying to quash the suspicion that they might end up there).

## **Notes On Preaching Without Notes**

Let us, now, turn our attention to some do's and don'ts of preaching; little practical suggestions — each by itself a small thing perhaps — but put together adding up to great things for you, so far as preference in your calling is concerned.

At the top of the list of those items which you should do is this: Always preach without manuscript or notes of any kind.

Young clergymen seldom grasp the value of perfecting themselves in the “noteless” style of sermon delivery. Most of us have weak memories and feel horribly insecure without the comforting presence of a manuscript on the podium in front of us. Not one person in a thousand feels naturally-inclined to this style of delivery. It is this very-scarcity of noteless preach-

ers which works to the advantage of the man who is one.

When you preach without notes, the focus of attention for the congregation is not your sermon, but your performance. Since most of your listeners are paralyzed and inarticulate in front of an audience, with everything they intend to say written down and before them, they are vastly amazed that anyone can stand up and talk for twenty minutes or so, without visible aids to the memory, no matter what he says.

This situation obviates the need for undue concern over the content of your sermon; since hardly anyone will be more than casually interested in what you say, thus lightening your preparatory-labors and granting you many extra hours every week to do with what you please-hours, which your less gifted brethren of the cloth will spend sweating over the manufacture of a manuscript for Sunday morning.

You may have already observed that the possession of a noteless preacher is a genuine status symbol for a church, the ecclesiastical equivalent of a chinchilla coat or recognition by the headwaiter at Le Pavillon. These confer status because they are rare, and rare status symbols cost quite a bit of money. This law operates, just as surely, in the ecclesiastical world as in the secular world; and a noteless preacher always-commands a higher salary than even the most profound of his brethren, who encumber themselves with manuscripts.

Those fortunate few congregations blessed with a noteless preacher become inordinately proud of him, and brag about him much as they brag about breaking 80 at golf or being invited to the Governor's for tea. They never comment that their

preacher is learned or witty or forceful or devout or thought-provoking or inspiring. They always say, "You know, he preaches without a single note."

Also, the noteless style endears you to the extremely-pious members of your flock who tend to be suspicious of written sermons on the grounds that excessive advance preparation allows insufficient opportunities for the workings of divine inspiration. The extemporaneous homily seems to them to come from the heart instead of the head, and is, thus, a sure sign and seal that their preacher is "spiritual."

Since the pietists are a hard-core type of group in the congregation, sticking together like scotch tape and presenting a solid front in both their enthusiasms and their dislikes, it is a group with which to be reckoned. A sensitive ecclesiastical politician can always smell an impending change of pastorates by sniffing the wind near the pietists of the congregation. If the pietists are voicing criticisms of their pastors, no matter how few and mild, the cloud, no larger than a man's hand has, appeared on the horizon and this pastor is well-advised to start looking for another job, because the pietists will eventually get him. They are as relentless as Javert. Therefore, the wise pastor will learn how to cater to this group, and noteless preaching is one of the best ways to commend himself to it. Exhaustive research by the author has failed to turn up a single case of a noteless preacher falling into disrepute with the pietists of his congregation.

### **A Preaching Program Which Can't Miss**

As you begin your career of labor for the Lord, you must keep in mind that, while the content matter of your sermons

is not too important if your style is adequate, there are some types of sermons which are almost-guaranteed to win enthusiastic-reactions from your congregation.

If you will never forget that your beloved parishioners are primarily interested in themselves: their spiritual aches and pains, their desire for whatever they equate with happiness, their urge to succeed socially and financially, the preservation of their provincial prejudices; then you will do the bulk of your preaching on these subjects.

One eminent New York preacher, whose name escapes us at the moment, (Freud would probably have been able to account for our forgetfulness) has become the best-known Protestant clergyman of our generation, has made pots of money and acquired all the good things which come the way of the sensationally-successful preacher simply by remembering this one simple fact. Buy his books, hear him at every opportunity, and imitate him insofar as it is possible for you to do so, and you, too, will hit the ecclesiastical jackpot. Your people, you will discover, have an insatiable-appetite for sermons on how to improve themselves or solve their emotional (spiritual) problems, so long as the panacea you offer them does not require them to **(a)** quit doing anything they like to do, **(b)** spend any money or **(c)** submit to any very-rigorous or time-consuming spiritual discipline.

What you need, then, is a formula tailored and trimmed to the above specifications. The author suggests that whenever you preach a "how to use the Christian Faith to get what you want" type of sermon, (and you should be preaching just such a sermon eight Sundays out of ten) it is well to rely on a formula which varies no more than the rotation of the earth.

The formula is this: Whether the sermon deals with the problem of loneliness, frustration, marital felicity, getting ahead in one's business or whatever, the solution to the problem is always:

**(a)** a catchy, easily-remembered Bible verse (variable with each sermon according to the topic)

**(b)** a simple, sunny little prayer to repeat, as needed (also variable, as above)

**(c)** an exhortation to have faith (this item is invariable. You don't have to be specific about faith-in fact, it is better if you are not specific-just urge faith. Faith in faith is the best-selling item in your line of goods, you will discover. There is very little sales-resistance to it).

One obstacle you will need to overcome, in training yourself to preach Sunday after Sunday on these "helping yourself through the Gospel" themes, is the immense-boredom you will suffer. Since you will be preaching essentially the same sermon nearly every Sunday, changing only the title, the text and the illustrations; you will find it difficult to convince yourself that your congregation will not be bored, too. But it won't, and this you must accept as an article of your homiletical faith. No one has yet come up with a satisfactory explanation for this phenomenon. It is just a fact of life. Trust it and act on it.

The remaining 20 per cent of your preaching can be devoted, for the most part, to sermons for special occasions. These should be keyed to our more important national holidays. Many youthful clergymen, inspired no doubt by the highest and most pious motives, begin their careers by using the Christian calendar as a guide for their preaching. But, the wise ones quickly-discard this antiquated prac-

tice. The only days in the so-called church year which merit a special sermon are Christmas and Easter — and these merit it because they have evolved into important national, commercial holidays rather than for any vestigial religious significance still clinging to them.

Following is a month-by-month listing of the special days you will want to observe from the pulpit along with suggested themes for the day.

## **JANUARY**

First Sunday-New Year's Day sermon. Topic: "Twelve Joyous Months With Jesus."

## **FEBRUARY**

Sunday nearest Washington's birthday. Topic: "Faithful to the Faith of Our Nation's Founder." (This may be changed on alternate years to the Sunday nearest Lincoln birthday. It involves only a slight change in the topic, which might be "Faithful to the Faith of Our Greatest President." The sermon can be substantially the same.)

## **MARCH**

No particularly-important special day unless Easter falls in March.

## **APRIL**

Easter Sunday (usually). Topic: "Looking Forward to a Good, Old-Fashioned Heaven." (Do not forget to give the Easter-only churchgoers a thorough lacing for their failure to show up the rest of the year. This gives the regulars a sense of their own righteousness and spiritual superiority, and the Easter-only crowd expects to catch it from the preacher because they always have. They will not mend their ways, of course, but they hardly feel they have been to church if you fail to flay them.)



## **MAY**

Second Sunday-Mother's Day. Topic: "Our Mother's Faith."

## **JUNE**

Third Sunday-Father's Day. Topic: "Faith of Our Fathers."

## **JULY**

Sunday nearest Fourth of July (might fall on last Sunday in June). Topic: "God's Chosen People." (Stressing, of course, that America and Americans are God's examples of what He expects other nations and other peoples to be like. This sermon may, also, be used at American Legion rallies and other patriotic occasions. It is a sure-fire hit.)

## **AUGUST**

These are the dog days for church attendance. No special days. Better take your vacation in August.

## **SEPTEMBER**

Sunday nearest Labor Day (could be last Sunday in August). Topic: "God's Labor Laws." (Point out that the laboring man needs to get back to the old-fashioned values of an honest day's work for an honest wage, and gratitude for the enterprising and risk-taking capitalist who makes his job possible. Express sympathy and concern for the good workmen of America caught in the evil grip of organized labor. Since you are likely to have few members of labor unions and lots of employers in your congregation, this will be one of the most popular sermons of the year.)

## **OCTOBER**

Last Sunday-Reformation Sunday. Topic: "The Menace of an Alien Religion." (Reformation day isn't much of a special occasion in our churches, but it does afford an opportunity to whack the Roman Catholics. Since there is a mood of tolerance in the air, what with the late

President Kennedy and the late Pope John, care must be taken to attack the still-unpopular aspects of Roman Catholicism — the political aims of the Vatican, the mumbo-jumbo of its priestcraft, that sort of thing.)

## **NOVEMBER**

Sunday before Thanksgiving. Topic: "God's Blessing Means God's Approval." (The theme here is that God has blessed America beyond the blessings of any other land, which means that God likes us best.)

## **DECEMBER**

Christmas Sunday-Topic: "The Babe from Heaven." (There is simply no way to preach an unpopular sermon when you have a baby, motherhood, heaven, humble shepherds and adoring wise-men about which to talk. Stick to the pageantry of Christmas. Beware of exploring the meaning of the Advent very much, beneath the surface aspects of the story, for this can get you into trouble.)

Had this book been written a few years ago, the author would have issued an iron-bound injunction against any preaching which attempts to relate the Gospel to contemporary social issues. Nothing subtracts from the marketability of a preacher so much as having the label "liberal" pinned on him. Not many of us invite attacks on our theological orthodoxy these days because 99-44/100 of any modern standard-brand congregation is so theologically-untutored that it wouldn't be able to recognize a heretic. It has no way of distinguishing between theological orthodoxy and heresy. But, it is quick to spot any slight-leaning toward liberal social views in its pastor. Heresy today is social rather than theological, and every congregation has its self-appointed Torquemadas anxious to oil the rack or heat up the fires around the stake.

It would be best, therefore, if the preacher could entirely avoid any reference to any subject which has a side to it capable of being construed as "liberal." The author can remember when church life had a lovely, serene, otherworldly flavor to it because preachers did not concern themselves with temporal problems. But, this day has disappeared; because we now live in unhappy times, in which every newspaper brings tidings of some social problem, which directly involves religion, the church and the faith and which forces us to make some kind of response.

It is, in fact, a decided-advantage to you to be known as a fearless and forthright and prophetic pulpit voice-so long as you can achieve this reputation without being thought liberal. So you will have to venture out into the choppy and shoal-filled waters of preaching on social issues. There is no avoiding it, or the author would counsel you to do so.

## **The Danger Of Being Specific**

This, then, is the most dangerous part of the preaching ministry. But, if you will follow three simple principles, you can mitigate the dangers of shipwreck.

The first principle is this: Never be specific as to the Christian position on any burning, social issue of the day.

For example, if you feel compelled by current events to preach on racial segregation, never, repeat, never, suggest that integration is the Christian solution. In fact, eschew the term "integration" entirely. It is far too specific.

The points you will want to make in this sermon will go something like this:

1. Extremism in racial matters is the chief evil.

2. The colored people ought to reflect on the great strides forward they have made, and not be too impatient for too much too soon.

3. Brotherhood and Christian love will point the way. "You can't legislate love" is an excellent phrase to use here. (Since the congregation will define "Brotherhood" and "Christian love" to mean a kind of vague good will toward colored people, so long as they stay in their place, they will take no offense at this.)

The problem here is to avoid any suggestion that white Protestant Christians have been, at any point, remiss in their attitudes or actions; and at the same time, outline a solution which involves new attitudes and actions (since any idiot can reason that if what we have always done isn't working, we had dam well better think up something else).

This is a delicate, but not insoluble dilemma for the preacher. The way out is to keep handy a set of non-specific words and phrases which allow the members of the congregation to fill in their own meaning. "Brotherhood" and "Christian love" have already been mentioned. It is always a good idea to urge your people to employ more of "the spirit of Christ" in the solution to social tensions, since hardly any of them know what this means, but practically all of them think they do.

What you have working for you here is the average American citizen's touching faith in simple solutions to vast and complex problems. And people who believe that a balanced budget or bombing Cuba or a Republican administration would solve the problems of the nation and the world will have no difficulty believing that your non-specific phrases are clear Christian answers and that you are, therefore, a keen and courageous preacher.

A second principle to follow, in preaching on social issues, is to preach on problems which are as remote as possible from your community. You can denounce the government of South Africa with all the vigor at your command; but, be careful about denouncing political corruption in your own city, because some of your good members might be involved. Criticize, to your heart's content, the Godless New York stage, but don't knock the local movie house, because someone in your congregation may be leasing it to the operator.

The third principle, and perhaps the one of pristine value to you in preaching on social issues, is to reserve your righteous indignation for those questions on which there is no substantial disagreement among your members.

As this is written, the Supreme Court ruling on prayer in the public schools is getting a lot of attention in the press. Since most of your people have been led to believe, by the papers they read, that the Supreme Court is systematically-undermining the American way of life; they will welcome several sermons on "this atheistic decision." This issue should be good for several years, yet. But, by far, the safest social problem on which the preacher may take an unequivocal position is the temperance question. You are aware, of course, that in the newspeak of the temperance movement temperance doesn't mean temperance. It means total abstinence from the use of beverage alcohol.

Your congregation is made up of members who advocate temperance and members who drink without apology, the proportions varying with the size, sophistication and urban or rural character of your community. But, both groups expect the preacher to trot out a temperance sermon every so often, in addition to frequent

blasts on the subject, as a subpoint in other sermons. The temperance people love to hear you lambaste booze, and the drinkers are not offended by it, because they understand that this just goes along with your job. A preacher who doesn't preach temperance sermons is as unthinkable as a Frenchman who frowns on love. This is the one social issue which involves no danger, whatever, no matter how violent your denunciation.<sup>4</sup>

If you understand your people, their hopes and fears and prides and prejudices (and every truly-successful pastor does understand these things); then, all you need to do to be a highly-regarded pulpit man is to tell them what you know they want to hear. After all, they are badgered and buffeted by worldly-cares six days a week, and they need a sanctuary from all this on Sunday. They should be able to come to the Lord's house when the sweet church bells chime secure in the knowledge that they will find it here. They should come anticipating a jolly, sprightly, positive, entertaining, non-controversial homily from their beloved man of God, aware that no discouraging or disturbing word will be spoken from your pulpit.

If your good people can count on this kind of preaching from you, you can count on their heartfelt appreciation expressed in their continuing affection, fulsome praise, a solid reputation as a fine pulpit man; and more tangible evidences of gratitude in the form of salary increases, better housing, and maybe a trip abroad for you and your wife, with all expenses paid. Your true reward (apart from a perfectly legitimate joy in your professional success) will be, of course, the knowledge that you have served the Lord by comforting his people-and this is the knowledge which maketh glad the heart.

1. One is always “reminded” of a story in the pulpit, even though hours have been spent locating it and it is a part of the manuscript.
2. In less-sophisticated churches substitute “darn” for “damn.”
3. Absolution of guilt has always been one of the first functions and duties of a priest.
4. The author knows of three churches, which realize a considerable amount of annual income from the leasing of property on which alcoholic beverages are dispensed. Yet the pastors of these churches continue to preach anti-booze sermons with, apparently, the complete approval of their congregations.