Ambassadors of God

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Title: Ambassadors of God

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TO

HENRY C. FOLGER, D.Litt.

WHOSE REVERENT SYMPATHY FOR
THE FORMS OF A TRUE WORSHIP
HAS ENRICHED THE PRAISE OF
THE SANCTUARY, THIS VOLUME
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY

THE AUTHOR
PREFACE

The chapters of this book were originally prepared as lectures to be delivered upon the Shepard and Carew foundations at Bangor and Hartford Theological Seminaries. They have since been delivered at Drew Theological Seminary, Madison, New Jersey, and before several ministerial conferences. I am greatly indebted to the Rev. John L. Belford, D.D., for the loan of volumes upon preaching in the Roman Catholic Church, to the Rev. Oscar L. Joseph for his scholarly suggestions, and to the Rev. A. S. Morris, the Rev. Charles A. Ross, the Rev. David Loinaz, and Professor Edgar A. Hall for their valued help in preparing the manuscript for the press.

S. P. C.

Lent, 1920.
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CHAPTER I

THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR PREACHING
But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God.


Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews xii: 1–2.
AMBASSADORS OF GOD

CHAPTER I

THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR PREACHING

Varying values attached to preaching—Implications of the term ambassadors of God—The fundamental sanction of preaching—Hebrew prophets—The Bible and modern criticism—Main conceptions of the Prophets—Their influence upon civilization—The Psalmists—Their range and limitations—Permanent value of the Old Testament—Teaching of Jesus—The Kingdom of God—Christology of the New Testament—Apostolic development of doctrine.

Statements about preaching involve nearly everything under the sun and range from the warmest eulogy to censure of an equal temperature. The streams of praise and dispraise, stricture and defense seldom run dry; the last word seems never to have been said. Under these circumstances, I ask your forbearance during my discussion of an all important theme which has enlisted many able exponents. My only justification for adding to their superior contributions of advice and criticism is that I propose to confine myself as closely as possible to those practical evaluations of preaching which have been derived from my personal experiences as a preacher. It is fortunate for me that your attainments in theological knowledge permit me to take for granted much which otherwise would require explanation. As men predestined and in training for the ministry of the Word, you do not have to wait upon but rather to weigh what I have to offer, accepting only that which you deem applicable to your personal necessities, and judging it in the light of the
learning which has illuminated the Church during the past few decades. Yet notwithstanding the benefits of that learning we have arrived at no finality in the numerous and excellent ideals of preaching hitherto presented. Broadly speaking, few people have the hardihood to deny that the Christian pulpit exerts a wide-spread and salutary influence upon the race, implanting virtuous character, and nourishing social fidelity and religious certitude. But it does not enjoy the very great advantage of universally accepted premises on which to build a scientific theory of preaching, and these have still to be sought in the tantalizing twilight of dogmatic preferences and conflicting precepts. The regenerative qualities ascribed to preaching by those authoritative men who esteem it as the chief agency for upraising and purifying the life of individuals and nations are disallowed by other prominent leaders. In the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox Greek, the Anglican and the Reformed Churches an affectionate reverence for preaching as the noblest human employment of thought and language is found side by side with its moderated approval or candid disparagement. From our viewpoint as sons of Puritanism, the evolution which produced the prophet and later the preacher was essentially a divine ordination; from the viewpoint of ultramontane ecclesiastics that evolution represented an emphatically different process, in which the priestly caste predominated. Many men and women of a secular complexion attribute preaching to purely natural causes and assign it a lower place in public usefulness than Scripture warrants or the Church can concede. All who discuss it are swayed by their varying temperaments and prepossessions; and their conclusions are marked by consequent disparities of conviction. You will further observe that prophetic preaching, to which you should constantly aspire, lives in the realm of imponderables, and endeavors to realize and set forth the abstract ideals of that realm. Throughout the ages prophet and preacher have striven to formulate and express their religious sentiments, but none has ever quite succeeded because the deep things of God