

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE FOLLOWING STUDY belongs to the field of practical theology. For this reason we shall not discuss the content of preaching: to define and examine that content belongs rather to systematic theology. We need only say that our study deals with Christian preaching, which the New Testament calls indifferently the preaching of the kingdom (Acts 20: 25), of repentance and conversion (Acts 26: 20), of repentance and remission of sins (Luke 24: 47), of the Gospel (Gal. 1: 11), of a wisdom not of this world (1 Cor. 2: 6); or again the preaching of the Word of God (2 Cor. 2: 17), of the Word of the Lord (Acts 8: 25), of the Word of faith (Rom. 10: 8); or simply the preaching of the Word (Acts 4: 29). This preaching, however it is described, is nothing other than the preaching of Jesus Christ (Acts 8: 5, 2 Cor. 11: 4), of His cross (1 Cor. 1: 18, 23), and of His resurrection (1 Cor. 15: 1, 4), of the events which, between Christmas and the Ascension, changed the course of the history of the world, by rescuing it from perdition and giving it a future with value and meaning. All that we are charged to say to the world is included in the expectation, the incarnation, the passion, the glory, and the promise of return of our Lord. And our preaching is no longer faithful when we depart from this Christological framework.

We need not therefore inquire into *what* we have to preach. Our purpose is to examine what happens *when* we preach, how to bridge the gap between the source of preaching and those to whom it is addressed, what is preaching's place and role in the service, how we should prepare our sermons, and what ecumenical duties arise from the Reformed claim to be "the Church of the Word".

Practical theology consists in applying the findings of exegesis, Church history and systematic theology to the concrete problems of the Church. This particular character of practical theology has its advantages and disadvantages: the chief advantage is that it reminds us that Christianity is an incarnational religion; the chief disadvantage is that it is difficult to translate studies in practical theology into other languages without misleading and disappointing readers who find them-

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

selves in different situations, and to whom the discussion seems too theoretical at the very points where they are looking for a practical emphasis. I hope that readers of this book will not have too strong a feeling that it deals in mere theories; and the following remarks may answer some possible objections:

I am a member of a Reformed Church, and not of a minority Church in a predominantly Anglican, Lutheran or Roman Catholic country, but of the National Reformed Church of Switzerland. Though I have tried as far as possible to omit references to my personal situation, this will be quite plain from the outset. But since, in the twentieth century, it is no longer possible for different confessions not to know one another, and not to know what are one another's strengths and weaknesses, joys and shames, my readers will certainly forgive me for not wanting to disown the country and the confession in which God has called me to serve Him. I know that the Church problems of England and Switzerland, though fundamentally similar, take on different forms in the two countries. I have several times touched on these problems—especially on the capital problem of the apostolic succession—but I have not treated them exhaustively. I wanted to do no more than help local clergy and ministers, of whatever confession, who love their calling, to a better understanding of its grace and its greatness, and also to a fuller recognition of its responsibilities. But I could only hope to succeed in this aim by taking as my starting-point the calling of pastor as it is practised in the Church of which I am a member.