

THE POWER OF THE PULPIT

themselves have sought, but one which has been imposed upon them. The responsibilities of it are of no enviable kind; they must give an account of their stewardship, and such an one as no other men must render. Nor are the disabilities and dependencies of the office to be envied. No honest, right-minded man was ever invested with it without much fear and trembling; nor is there one among them all who would ever have consented to this investiture but for the constraints of conscience. They have been *thrust* forth into the harvest. The office is upon them, nor may they disclaim either the responsibilities or the commission, without being recreant to their trust.

Now this is one of the strong peculiarities of the pulpit, and places it upon high vantage ground. Its legitimate occupants are divinely commissioned men. Inspired men they are not, but sinning and fallible, like their fellows; yet do they utter his truth, not on their own responsibility, but God's; not in their own names, but his; not for themselves, but for him; not as men merely, but as accredited ministers of their divine Lord who sent them. Their messages are not wise counsels merely, nor are they merely seasonable rebukes and encouragements, which men may regard at their option: they come clothed with obligations that are authoritative, and authority infinitely above that of those who utter them. Though they themselves are but men, sinning men, worms of the dust, they speak in God's name, and what God himself would utter were he in their place. It is not simply the authority of *truth* with which they speak; for then every man who utters truth would be invested with this authority: it is the authority of truth uttered by those whom God has raised up, and qualified, and sealed by solemn sacrament, and sent forth, and specially authorized to utter the things that are commanded them of him. This is one of the elements of power which belongs to the pulpit, and which gives it a prevalent and permanent superiority over every other method of religious instruction. Arrogant as this claim may be in the views of some, despised as it may be by others, and abused as it has been, is, and will be, by an ambitious and tyrannical priesthood – this pre-eminence God has given it.

God's arrangements are all wise. His wisdom, whether regarded absolutely and in itself, or relatively to us, challenges our highest homage. Its arrangements in the particular we are contemplating are enlightened and benevolent. It seems to be lowering the great