❋ Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America ❋

❋ Transformations in the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric ❋

❋ *Edited by* ❋

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The Sermon as Public Discourse ❋ Austin Phelps and the Conservative Homiletic Tradition in Nineteenth-Century America ❋

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❋Throughout most of its history, America's pulpits (whether in the chapel or the meadow) have been intense focal points of public discourse. Preaching has been a major factor in forming the minds, hearts, and actions of most Americans, and consciously or unconsciously, every preacher's efforts to influence those minds, hearts, and actions have been guided by some kind of homiletic theory. In this essay I analyze an important dimension of nineteenth-century American homiletic theories through a representative figure: Austin Phelps,[1] Bartlett Professor of Sacred Oratory in Andover Theological Seminary (Andover, Massachusetts) from 1848 to 1879.

Phelps's theory of the social effect of conservative Christian preaching was, in its essence, shared by the majority of Northern, and by many Southern, conservative clergymen in the nineteenth century, and its principles were made particularly clear in debates over social reform, especially concerning slavery. Fundamentally, the theory was that *individual* moral/spiritual and intellectual transformation, initiated and then aided by the right kind of preaching, was the key to social happiness; from the fountain of regenerated individual character would spring the right, unforced, and lasting response to every kind of social ill. Direct confrontation of social problems through rhetoric that attempted to incite mass movements only bred division and (usually) violence, and the changes it effected could only be partial, even when it was directed against real evils such as slavery.

Reid's essay on Edward Everett (this volume) explains Everett's efforts to maintain moral/spiritual/civic unity in America, and thereby save the Union, through nonpartisan, epideictic rhetoric that celebrated national heroes, values, and culture. In this effort, Everett (himself an ordained minister) was in harmony with a large body of clergy who used the sermon, a form of epideictic rhetoric, in their own efforts to preserve and construct society by transforming individual souls. They had faith that individuals truly converted to Christ and growing in virtuous character would, at length, naturally agree on and act virtuously in political/social matters. Clark's essay on Timothy Dwight (this volume) shows Dwight's acceptance of this same principle; Dwight taught an "oratorical poetic" that "did the homiletical work of appealing to sentiments that would nurture the regenerate virtue that he believed functions as a powerful public bond." Phelps's homiletics did not focus on "poetics" in this same way; in fact, Phelps is at pains in *The Theory of Preaching* to explain how preaching is not a poetical but a rhetorical undertaking. However, Dwight's use of poetic is at bottom rhetorical, as Clark explains, and certainly Dwight, Everett, and Phelps shared a great deal in common in terms of their theories of the truths and values to be preached, the sources of those truths and values, and the social goals and effects of preaching/oratory.

Though Everett and Dwight are better known to us than the Andover professor of homiletics, Phelps was, in his day, well known and respected by conservative ministers and educators. During his thirty-one years at Andover, over 1,000 students passed through his course in homiletics, many of them becoming teachers of homiletics or rhetoric themselves. In Congregational/Presbyterian circles during the latter half of the nineteenth century, "The Andover Sermon" became a standard of sermonic excellence. It stood for orthodoxy, literary culture, stability, and intellectual power. It focused on individual salvation and moral/intellectual development, it controlled emotion with the reins of reason, and it generally advocated personal and local improvement over national activity (except missionary

activity, which was simply a spreading and strengthening of autonomous loci).

Phelps offers an elaborately developed theory, complete with descriptions of the minister's relations and responsibilities to his congregation and the larger society, the training and character of the preacher, and of course the sources, structure, style, and delivery of his materials. He draws significantly on the classical rhetorical traditions and to a lesser degree on various modern rhetoricians such as George Campbell and Richard Whately, and he is representative of what I call the conservative homiletic tradition in America, a tradition that can best be understood as the sacred mode of America's oratorical culture.

Perhaps the most significant feature of America's oratorical culture is that it conserved the fundamental neoclassical belief in the process of achieving community consensus at the most general level of principles through reasoned public discourse. The sacred mode of that culture shared with the secular mode not only this belief but also many of the same assumptions about the forms and functions of public discourse. They differed chiefly in their concepts of the most powerful sources and formulations of rational argument (the sacred mode looking primarily to the Bible as a touchstone of invention) and in their concept of the immediate goals and effects of their respective kinds of public discourse (Phelps teaching, as I've pointed out, that the primary goal of preaching was the spiritual transformation and subsequent intellectual and moral development of the individual soul). Yet both modes of America's oratorical culture shared the goals of conserving, improving, and spreading civil safety, harmony, prosperity, and moral/intellectual excellence; both believed that the speaker best equipped to advance these goals was the "elite" orator with a particular kind of liberal arts education and social standing; and both assumed a homogeneous population or aspired to create one—a universal consensus of right principle and mutually accepted authority. This effort, Phelps believed, was the highest calling to which mortals could aspire, and the successful minister, he maintained, was the most influential instrument possible, not only of individual but also of social and political good.

Phelps's theory is a fairly late example of this neoclassical rhetoric as adapted for sacred oratory. His theory provided a model of public discourse for a relatively contained community. It was based on the

old Congregational principle of "one flock, one shepherd"—one minister, himself a model of learning and virtue, dedicated to the salvation of a particular community. It was the minister's responsibility to nurture that community in a steady, systematic, progressive way, with as little disruption as possible. His chief influence was the public discourse he engaged in from the pulpit. Among the difficulties in Phelps's theory (from the general perspective of our modern culture and from the perspective of various elements of society in Phelps's own day) were its relation to the larger community—the nation—when events did threaten disruption; certain cultural infelicities (his belief that the ministry was for men only, for example); the doctrinal incompatibility of Calvinism with the practice of sacred oratory that he advocated;[2] and the idea that those suffering under various social evils must patiently wait for organic, Christian salvation to overtake society rather than agitate directly and disruptively for change.

Phelps's rhetorical doctrines were shared not only in general by most educated, conservative Protestants but also in many particulars by an extensive network of colleagues in the conservative homiletic tradition, men such as John Broadus of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, author of the widely used *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*; William G. T. Shedd of Union, Andover, and Auburn theological seminaries, author/translator of *Eloquence a Virtue* and author of *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology*; James Hoppin of Yale Theological Seminary, author of the massive *Homiletics*; and many others. A survey of homiletic texts and journal articles produced during the mid- to late nineteenth century at major theological seminaries in the East and South—mostly Congregational and Presbyterian, but also Baptist and Methodist, since many of them had made the transition to "respectability" by then—shows a strong neoclassical influence.[3]

In this essay, I first make some general observations about nineteenth-century American theories of preaching and their context. I then examine the goals of Phelps's theory of homiletics and analyze some specific features of his doctrine of sermonic composition. After that I consider the nature of the preacher Phelps describes as being capable of accomplishing the goals of sacred oratory, and I describe Phelps's opposition to the professionalization of the Christian ministry, a trend that was bringing America's sacred oratorical culture to a close for many of the same reasons that other kinds of professionaliza-

tion were bringing secular oratorical culture to a close. Finally, I discuss some of the merits, and problems, of Phelps's theory in view of the nineteenth-century transformation of the Christian ministry in America.

Homiletics in Nineteenth-Century America: Phelps and His Context

This volume's collection of essays analyzes principally the transformation of secular oratorical culture in nineteenth-century America, but it was not only secular rhetoric that underwent a transformation in that period; the sacred dimension of oratorical culture also changed profoundly during that century, and it did so for many of the same reasons secular rhetoric changed. For example, the burgeoning democratic spirit of the new nation, which resulted in so much anti-intellectualism/anti-elitism, brought with it a great deal of prejudice against orthodox, seminary-bred preachers. At the same time, the expanding American frontier called for more and more preachers, which the Eastern (and some Southern) seminaries were not able to produce quickly enough, while many of those they did produce were unwilling to take up pastorates far away from centers of culture. These and other factors resulted in a profusion of preachers not trained in the liberal arts and theological "sciences," unequipped with the essentially neoclassical rhetorical training traditionally provided by most of the orthodox Eastern/Southern colleges and seminaries.

Also, political changes during the century profoundly affected sacred oratorical culture. Traditionally, New England towns had been presided over by civil and ecclesiastical authorities who had, with the full consent of the community, watched over the organic political and theological welfare of the people; civil peace and harmony had been considered to have a natural and necessary relation to spiritual health. The motives of both civil and ecclesiastical authorities were to serve the best interest of the community as a whole, to foster civil harmony and safety along with spiritual/moral/intellectual soundness. Men were chosen for such positions from the spiritual/moral/intellectual elite to protect and prosper the community. Typically, both civil and ecclesiastical authorities spoke on important public occasions (election days, executions, etc.). When public disorder threatened, it was as much (or more) the ecclesiastical authority as it

was the secular authority whose discourse called the community back to order, often in the form of a jeremiad.

Though America at the beginning of the nineteenth century was not the New England of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the ideal of the spiritual/civic community was still very much alive as the nineteenth century opened. However, the sociopolitical realities of the new nation were fast changing civil and ecclesiastical relations. In particular, the growing democratic spirit in America brought with it party politics and an emphasis on partisanship, while colleges increasingly emphasized and supported individual/professional success rather than civic service (see Reid, Clark and Halloran, this volume). By mid-century, oratorical culture in America was waning, and, as Bledstein points out, the "culture of professionalism" was waxing; fewer people envisioned their life's accomplishments as "a series of good works or public projects, performed within a familiar and deferential society which heaped respectability on its first citizens" (1976, 173); instead, they saw life as a series of "ascending stages" of personal power, status, wealth, and activity within a narrow, esoteric range.

The orthodox ministry recoiled from these trends for much the same reasons that, according to Reid, Edward Everett recoiled: They threatened the traditional ideals of organic unity, they deposed the ideal of the patriotic/spiritually dedicated civil (or civil/spiritual) servant who used his oratory for the benefit of the whole community or society, and they exalted the ideals of divisive, partisan interests and of the successful individual. This put the clergy in a very difficult position in terms of their sociopolitical activity. On one level was the demand of pro-partisanism that ministers distance themselves from direct political involvement. On another was the spirit of anti-intellectualism and anti-elitism, producing religious reformers and radicals of various kinds and eroding the special status and claims of the orthodox, educated ministry. On yet another level was that manifestation of pro-individualism that was feeding the culture of professionalism. All these things were factors in the increasing professionalization of the conservative Christian ministry itself and its increasing distance from traditional neoclassical rhetorical roots.

There were, however, even into the latter decades of the nineteenth century, important bulwarks of sacred oratorical culture such as Phelps. Phelps saw the various theories of preaching as based upon

one of five principles: (1) the "priestly character of the Christian ministry," Catholic/Anglican theories, which subordinate preaching to liturgy, worship, ordinances, architecture, costume, and the like; (2) "poetic sentiment," preaching that "regards poetic feeling as so nearly kindred to a religious experience, and the cultivation of Taste to a religious culture, that it practically subordinates the pulpit to the cause of polite literature"; (3) "social reform," theories that "aim, in their ministrations, at institutions and customs of society, and political systems more earnestly, if not more frequently, than at individual souls"; (4) "emotion," "preaching which addresses itself, directly and mainly, to the sensibilities of men," depending on "the power of exhortation"; and (5) "the argumentative discussion of theology." This last category Phelps regarded as the basis of "the true theory of preaching, in a land where Christianity is nominally established as the ruling element in civilization" (1857, 4–8).

Phelps's ideal orator was the holy man skilled in speaking, the man who had advanced through the Christian equivalent of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, to emerge with godly character and superb rhetorical powers. Phelps's rhetorical doctrine emphasized lifelong intellectual/moral training in the liberal arts tradition, including training in the classical languages, assimilation of the great works of the past as an essential foundation not only for moral formation but also for rhetorical invention, and training in "scripting for oral performance" (Halloran 1990, 153), which involved the entire canon of classical rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery), the centrality of persuasion on the basis of shared values and beliefs, emphasis on audience analysis and on adjusting rhetorical appeals to the condition of the audience, the importance of neoclassical sermonic structure, the art of making powerful rational appeals based on Biblical truth, the necessity of controlling emotion in pulpit oratory, and the vital importance of achieving balance in every dimension of sacred oratory. Only a preacher thus equipped, Phelps believed, could stand as the highest model of virtue and learning in his community, employing his oratorical powers in persuading and educating others toward the highest personal good. In a Christian context, this meant persuasion to Christian conversion and then persuasion to and education in an ever-deepening Christian character. This, in Phelps's theory, would necessarily result in the highest sociopolitical good. In this sense, the goals of the public discourse of conservative preachers embraced—though they would insist that they also transcended—the secular goals of America's oratorical culture.

The Private and Political Goals of Sacred Oratory

The key to understanding Phelps's rhetorical theory is the idea that the improvement and ultimate perfection of all human societies, the entire race of humankind, depends upon "the moral regeneration of the individual" and that preaching of a certain kind is the foundation for this regeneration.

In this idea of individual moral regeneration, Phelps believed, lay "the rudiment of all that is practiceable [*sic*] for the amelioration of the race." It was "the germ of the whole tree," the foundation of salvation for all humanity. It was vastly superior as "an organ of political and social movement" to the "flimsy engines of reform" that attempted a misguided, direct approach to solving social problems. In the January 2, 1861, annual election sermon delivered to the legislature of Massachusetts, Phelps declared:

> If the organic corruptions of this world are ever to be purged away, it will be done by the Christian church energized by the grace of God in blessing upon the Christian pulpit. That blessing will go forth to the nations in the channel of *individual regeneration*. Its flow will be like that of subterranean rivers. . . . The moral sense of the world has yet to be trained to the perception of this fundamental principle of Christian progress: that individual regeneration underlies the whole system of the improvement of society, in all its ramifications. And in that specific work of individual regeneration lies the strength of the Pulpit as a power of Reform. (1861, 20–21)

Direct attempts at reform—such as abolitionism—were, in Phelps's view and that of much of the orthodox Northern clergy, entirely the wrong way to approach social problems. Such reforms, they believed, were disruptive and divisive and, when advocated in the pulpit, detracted from its true ministration: "Claims are often made upon preachers, in reference to the advocacy of reforms, which can never be conceded, without a diversion of the pulpit from the main design of its existence" (1861, 28). This was not to say that preachers were never to use the public discourse of preaching to directly engage with their audiences on political topics; there were times, Phelps maintained,

when it would be cowardice not to do so. Phelps's election day sermon to the Massachusetts legislature on the eve of the Civil War ends in direct appeals concerning their immediate political decisions. It is very telling, however, that his principal appeal is to their patience and forbearance—to a point—with the errant South: "Up to the limit of national safety, then, we have reason for forbearance. Let the tone of our legislation, and our press, and our pulpits, be generous, until so generous a virtue is silenced by events. If we can yet be heard in debate, let it be in words of temperance and soberness. Let us speak at the height of great argument, as is becoming to Christian states in the discussion of great principles" (1861, 51–52).

In the national crisis of impending civil war, Phelps believed, it was entirely appropriate that sacred oratory should be employed in reasoning about the principles involved in the debate between political factions, in exploring the consequences of various actions, in advocating particular actions, and in urging individuals, organizations, and communities to stand resolutely against sin and error at every level of human interaction. In this sense, in such exigencies, the public discourse of the pulpit was often not greatly different from secular oratory. But the key point for Phelps was that such a usage of the pulpit, though sometimes necessary, was unfortunate; the pulpit's *natural* ministration was part of an organic, God-ordained process by which humanity should be steadily regenerated. It could best accomplish this by basing itself on Biblical thought and addressing itself to human reason: "It is the chief office of a preacher to express [the] correspondences between the written word of God and man's own rational decisions" (1857, 31).

This did not mean, Phelps insisted, an unthinking acceptance of past theological systems; "even a true religious faith, when once established, does not long perpetuate itself uncorrupted, on the mere strength of traditionary evidence" (35). Each age had to interpret the revelations of God for itself, in light of its own questions, discoveries, speculations, problems, and events. But Phelps and his conservative colleagues firmly believed in the correspondence between God's truth, in the Bible and other forms, and man's rational faculty—and in pulpit oratory as the principal public forum in which these truths must be used to persuade and edify individuals and communities to the highest forms of virtue and social happiness. The best way, the safest, deepest, most enduring and fruitful way to do this, they

believed, was to keep the pulpit as much as possible to its specific Christian ministration and to minister faithfully to the individual flocks to which God had called them.

Not all Congregational/Presbyterian or other orthodox preachers agreed with this principle, of course. Near the other extreme were abolitionists like Theodore Weld,[4] who endured mob opposition as they traveled about, directly stirring up social action, divisiveness, and trouble of all kinds as they preached against the detestable sinfulness of slavery and demanded that the slaves be freed immediately. I say *near* extreme because although Weld was one of the most important abolitionists, he was not an "extreme abolitionist"; he did not preach that the slaves also should immediately receive full political rights with whites (that would take some years, even by Weld's proposals), nor, before the Civil War began, that their rights should be won by war. But he did advocate immediate freedom from bondage for slaves and the immediate start-up of the machinery that would give them full rights.[5]

A prominent example of a Congregational minister who took a middle position, advocating something between revolution and evolution, was Henry Ward Beecher. After 1846, Beecher often thundered against slavery from the pulpit, but his organic view of the institutionalized church and God's plan for the nation, as well as his comfortable pastorate of a large and fashionable Brooklyn Heights congregation, pulled him up short of joining the abolitionists. Even so, Beecher would sometimes sound off violently against slavery, earning himself the reputation of a fearless antislavery champion. His theatrics, too, magnified this image. For example, on several occasions he brought a slave, in chains, with him into the pulpit and preached a highly emotional sermon in which the slave would be "auctioned off to freedom." And once the Civil War had begun, Beecher was a relentless advocate of the Union cause, so much so that the Union government sent Beecher to England on a speaking tour to garner support for the war effort.

For Beecher and others like him (in practice, if not in notoriety), and certainly for those like Weld, Christian ministers were not only *justified* in direct political activity extending both to their own pastorates and to the world at large, they were also *obliged* to perform it. Preachers who did not take direct political action to address social wrongs were often ridiculed by the slavery reform advocates and

other political activists who called them "aloof," "half-men," and so on. Phelps was sensitive to these accusations and in his writings and sermons made it very clear that he believed clergymen should be the most important political influence in the nation, "manly men, . . . immersed in the tides of opinion and feeling around them . . . directly, currently, vigorously affecting men's lives" (1882, 68). Phelps firmly believed that pulpit oratory, far from being aloof or disconnected from political influence, should be the greatest of all agents of social change. The orthodox preacher "preaches a system of truth which in its practical relations is correlative with all forms of human life, and with history through all time. Its genius is that of practical agitation and change. It is transforming, it is subversive, it is revolutionary. It cometh to send a sword on earth. Its destiny is to overturn and overturn and overturn" (1861, 15). One could imagine that many abolitionist preachers would heartily agree with this. Yet the method of "overturning" social wrong in Phelps's theory differs markedly from that of "immediatists."

In Phelps's view, preaching should change society organically, not suddenly, disruptively, violently. The moral force of preaching should bear upon the human mind like "atmosphere upon the globe's surface." The moral changes it effects should be general, complete, solid, lasting. It should be based on a permanent and progressive moral/intellectual development, engendered in individual souls, "expanding and blooming into the graces of a Christlike character," which would then of necessity bring about societal improvement:

> Lifting thus the individual mind, Christianity *sets to work a power which is diffusive*. The man is a part of humanity: he begins to move it, as he himself is moved. The individual is an elevating force to the family, and through the family to the community, and through the community to the state, and through the state to the age, and the race. Christianity presupposes what history proves, that individual consciences, thus illuminated, intensified, redeemed from the dominion of guilt, will sway the world. Dotting the globe over with points of light, they radiate towards each other; each reduplicates the illuminating power of another. (1861, 39)

The regenerated consciousness of these communities would then, in a natural process of development, generate ideas such as "the equality of the race, the brotherhood of man with man, the nobility of woman,

the inhumanity of war, the odiousness of slavery, the dignity of labor, the worth of education, and the blessedness of charity" (40).

It is important to recognize that in Phelps's theory of preaching, all the themes listed above were proper topics for pulpit oratory, but only in the context of a steady, systematic moral/intellectual development on the part of the congregation. The problem of addressing the social evil of slavery is an excellent example. Like most of the orthodox clergy, and conservatives generally, Phelps abhorred the activity of the abolitionists, especially the more extreme ones: those who traveled about giving highly emotional, disruptive orations, vituperating slaveholders, making demands for immediate action, and so on. He equally abhorred the activity of the extreme *anti*-abolitionists. Phelps's own method involved the "temporary toleration of evil followed by timely efforts for its extinction." Twenty years after the Civil War, in an article for *The Congregationalist* entitled "The New England Clergy and the Anti-Slavery Reform," he wrote:

> We claim that in the forefront of the warfare of antislavery opinion, which this group of states conducted, stood our churches and their ministry. We claim for them more than this. We claim that if they had been let alone they would have been successful. If, starting with even the public sentiment of Virginia a hundred years ago, the great forces of Christian opinion had been left to work in their normal way, unhampered by the inflammatory politics of the extremists on either side, slavery would have succumbed to moral power. To doubt it is to doubt all Christian history. The negro would have come up to the rights of liberty, as he *grew* up to the duties of liberty. He would not have been *exploded* from the cannon's mouth into the miserable fiction of it which he has today, in which he has neither the intelligence to prize, nor the power to use, a freeman's ballot. Every decade adds to the proof that our ministry, and those who thought with them, were right in their faith that liberty *grows*; it never sails into the sulphurous air on the wings of dynamite. (1884, 1)

In Phelps's theory of preaching, then, pulpit oratory is—or should be—the most profound agent of personal and social change. It focuses upon individual spiritual/moral/intellectual development and regards that as the basis for broader political change. Its primary subject matter is Biblical truth, though it does sometimes discuss current political issues in terms of their relation to an overall system of Christian truth and responsibility. Its principal forum is the individu-

al congregation; it insists that the preacher confine himself, for the most part, to administering to his own flock; his public discourse must be primarily dedicated to brightening his own "point of light." This, and not "the strife of parties, the frivolities of politics" (1861, 48), was the key to national and to universal salvation.

However—and this is the second great key to understanding Phelps's theory—the preaching required to bring about the needed "moral regeneration" could be performed only by a particular kind of preacher and a particular kind of preaching. The next section of this essay characterizes the nature of America's sacred oratorical culture by describing Phelps's "argumentative discussion of theology," which he alternately called "the true theory of preaching."

The True Theory of Preaching

Phelps's writings are full of statements about the intellectual quality of true preaching, the power of sacred rhetoric to influence the human mind, and the importance of drawing on the principles of effective rhetoric from the writings and examples of great orators past and present in order to achieve the same kinds of effects the great ones achieved. At the same time, Phelps, like St. Augustine and Calvin, believed that spiritual conversion was a sovereign act of God. These two principles seem to clash until one looks carefully at Phelps's theory of spiritual regeneration. In *The New Birth*, Phelps writes, "All human instrumentalities and expedients by which truth is intensified, and so made appreciable by human sensibilities, are powerless to change the heart. Authority, sympathy, reasoning, eloquence, the magnetism of person, and whatever else enters the mystery of persuasion, in which mind impels mind by the enginery of speech, may change well-nigh everything in man except his character" (1867, 61–62).

At first blush, this would seem to undercut Phelps's entire theory of the role of oratorical art in human persuasion. But Phelps in fact believed that in the realm of sacred oratory, human instrumentalities and expedients were not left alone; if all the proper components were in place, the "suasive working of truth" would be "energized by the Grace of God," because God chose to do it (61). This qualification, it seems, was Phelps's concession to the Calvinistic doctrine that salvation was the free gift of God and came by God's will alone. That

concession being made, however, Phelps goes on to articulate a powerful homiletic theory based on human ability to make choices as a result of ethical, emotional, and (predominantly) rational persuasion. Calvinism, he admitted, was "not a rhetorical doctrine," and in the "crisis of the soul," it "flies out the window" and "must fend for itself." Many of its doctrines, he wrote, "if held in the pulpit, must be held in silence" (1881, 479).

This stance would have been considered quite radical by the main contingent of Andover founders, but as Daniel Williams explains in *The Andover Liberals* (1970), modification of Calvinistic doctrine was a continual process at Andover. Even so, Phelps was one of the least liberal of the Andover liberals, and he set his rhetorical theory in opposition to other liberal currents swirling around him. For example, he resisted the idea of "evolution of the soul," or "developmental salvation," a theological analog to Darwin's theory of organic evolution. In the years after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, many of Phelps's colleagues at Andover (and elsewhere) had begun to redefine salvation as a continual, gradual development of character. This doctrine Phelps stoutly opposed: "The development, then, of an existing germ of holiness is not the scriptural idea of a change of heart. In other words, no process of self-culture can be equivalent in its fruits to the divine act of regeneration" (1867, 52). At the same time, since regeneration of character was absolutely essential to salvation and since God chose to consecrate or energize truth to the work of that regeneration among humanity, and since he had chosen the instrumentality of human preaching to bring his regenerating truth to bear upon the human soul, it was the duty of those he called to this work to master the art of sacred rhetoric and use it in God's service.

Phelps believed, then, that ministers could approach the task of pulpit oratory without the encumbrance of a "mystical" attitude as regarded the operation of the human mind in its response to proper modes of persuasion. This point was essential with Phelps; throughout his writings one finds statements such as, "Ours is a religion of the pulpit, not of the altar" (that is, it operates by the intellectual power of pulpit oratory, not by mystical rites and ordinances), and this:

> The philosophy of its working [that is, Phelps's homiletic theory] is in entire accordance with the laws of the human mind. Not only is success in preaching practicable, not only is it ordained of God, but the *rationale* of the process by which it achieves success contains nothing contradictory

> to the laws of the human mind, or suspensive of those laws. Divine decree in the work does not ignore those laws. Decree embraces and energizes the very laws by which mind acts on mind in this work. Preaching therefore has no concern with any miraculous process in its ways of working. Conversion is not a miracle. Persuasion to repentance is not a miracle. Persuasion by preaching is achieved by the very same means and methods of speech by which men are successfully moved by eloquent address on other than religious subjects of human thought. On the evangelical theory the pulpit claims no exemption from dependence on natural laws. We do not expect to escape the consequences of their violation. We entertain no such notion of dependence on the Holy Ghost as to encourage neglect or abuse of the arts of speech. We use those arts, depend upon them, look for success in them, as if we had no other hope of success than that which encourages speech in the senate or at the bar. This again we believe. We come to our work as philosophers as well as preachers. The telescope is not constructed with faith in the operation of natural laws more wisely than the theory of preaching is with faith in the laws of the human mind. (1881, 493–94)

Phelps does not explain at length what he means by "laws of the human mind," apparently because he believed them to be self-evident. *The New Birth* does contain scattered statements about the mind that seem derived from Thomas Reid and the Scottish Common Sense school, whose principles had been widely appropriated by American theologians in defense of rational theology. But Phelps's statements along these lines function primarily to clarify his position that the regenerate human mind operates under precisely the same laws as does the unregenerate mind; it is only the objects of thought and the character of the thinker that are changed at the new birth:

> Yet no regenerate man knows anything of a re-creation of his nature, or a multiplication of his powers. No Christian is conscious of new faculties. None exhibits such in common life. A converted man thinks, reasons, remembers, imagines now; and he did all these before conversion. A regenerate heart feels, desires, loves, hates, now; and it did all these before. A new-born soul chooses, resolves, plans, executes; and it did all these before. The chief subjects of thought are changed—they are revolutionized. The prime objects of love and hatred are changed—they are transposed. The supreme inclination of the affections is changed—it is reversed. The *character* of the purposes is changed—it is transformed. (1861, 30–31)[6]

Yet a true preacher did more than bring his flock to an initial conversion or moral transformation; the new child in Christ was not the fully-grown man or woman. A true pastor provided a thorough, lengthy, systematic, intellectual/moral development for his congregation in the form of carefully developed sermons based on the entire range of Biblical text, which text Phelps believed to contain the seeds of the profoundest thought on earth, the stuff out of which the highest kind of oratory could be mined, fit food for the "craving" felt by awakened minds for "stern and strong thought, argument, faultless and vitalized logic" (1857, 34). A systematic treatment, by the way, was an excellent recipe for avoiding various controversies, disproportions, and disruptions; the preacher using a systematic approach was in less danger of being accused of riding any particular "hobby horse," political, theological, or otherwise.

It was vital to find the right Biblical text for each rhetorical occasion, because from the text was derived the proposition, the intellectual backbone of the sermon.[7] In essence, Phelps's whole art of oratory centered around the task of formulating the right scriptural propositions for the needs of a congregation and then finding the right "rhetorical forms" through which to "energize" those propositions to their minds and hearts. Although the proposition derived from a scriptural passage was often a fairly simple one, the rhetorical art needed to actually make it part of the listener's moral/intellectual makeup was complex, or to use Phelps's term, "elaborate." But the proposition itself had to be a direct, crisp, unconcealed address to the intellect, and it constituted the most important piece of intellectual weight in the sermon, the greatest insurance against emotional excess, and the greatest educating component of a sermon. Phelps writes,

> Preaching ought to break up the conglomerate in which thought and feeling, error and truth, spiritual power and animal magnetism, divine suggestion and Satanic temptation lie molten together. Men need to be taught by the pulpit to know what they believe, and why they feel, what emotions are legitimate to one truth, and what to another, and why they differ. Truths need to be individualized by analytic preaching. Only thus can the popular experience of them be deepened by discriminating knowledge. . . . We must generalize less, and analyze more; exhort less, and argue more. We must divide and isolate, and specify and concentrate our most profound conception of elemental truths.[8] That kind of preaching to which a free use of the expedients of logical expression is a

> necessity is the only preaching by which the pulpit can accomplish its work as an educating power. . . . Those discourses which commonly produce epileptic and cataleptic phenomena in the audience are rambling discourses. Thought without an aim, emotion without a purpose, stimulation of the sensibilities without intelligent gravitation to an object let loose upon feeble minds [produces] the most unmanageable tendencies to pathological distortion. A center of thought rigidly adhered to, even in the wildest of ranting discourse, would tend to preserve the mental balance of hearers by the mere conservatism of intellect in its control of feeling. Animal sensibilities can scarcely master a mind which is thinking intensely and consecutively to one point. (1881, 289, 301)

This was not to say that emotion was excised from preaching in Phelps's system, only that the emotional force of true preaching must always be heavily counterbalanced by the weight of intellectual preaching that has come before; it is force contained, controlled like a diamond drilling tip into the channel that drives home the intellectual/spiritual matter of the sermon. At that point, the preacher must end his sermon and leave his words "to do their own work silently upon the will" (511).[9]

In Phelps's view, the true art of composing and delivering a sermon was complex and demanding in the highest possible sense.[10] It could not be done by the unlettered preacher, the overemotional revivalist, the self-seeking "professional," the lopsided esthete, the audience-ignoring technical theologian, or the morally weak orator. It required the holy man skilled in speaking, who had received the necessary literary, rhetorical, and moral training. It required a pulpit orator, a man whose Christian *paideia* had developed in him the character, the culture, and the rhetorical power necessary to lead others to permanent spiritual/moral transformation and to nurture them systematically in godly character. The next section of my essay examines Phelps's description of the training, the character, and the rhetorical powers of the true preacher.

The Nurture and Nature of a Minister

In *The Theory of Preaching*, Phelps writes, "The ideal of a preacher which I have uniformly had in view is that of a Christian scholar using his scholarship with the aim of a Christian orator" (1881, 576). Contrast this with the Methodist revivalist Lorenzo Dow's doctrine:

> What I insist, upon my brethren and sisters, is this: larnin isn't religion, and eddication don't give a man the power of the Spirit. It is grace and gifts that furnish the real live coals from off the altar. St. Peter was a fisherman—do you think he ever went to Yale College? No, no, beloved brethren and sisters. When the Lord wanted to blow down the walls of Jericho, he didn't take a brass trumpet, or a polished French horn: no such thing; he took a ram's horn—a plain, natural ram's horn—just as it grew. And so, when he wants to blow down the walls of the spiritual Jericho, my beloved brethren and sisters, he don't take one of your smooth, polite, college larnt gentlemen, but a plain, natural ram's horn sort of man like me. (Hatch 1989, 20)

"Crazy" Lorenzo might just as easily have pointed out St. Peter's lack of attendance at Andover Theological Seminary. The seminary itself had been founded by some of New England's most orthodox Congregationalists and Presbyterians, largely in reaction to the distressing proliferation of "lay preaching," though the appointment of a Unitarian to the Hollis Professorship of Theology at Harvard in 1805 was also a strong motive. However, the deeper concern of the orthodox clergy is clearly evident in the *Sermon Preached at the Opening of the Theological Institution in Andover* by Timothy Dwight. The greatest threats to the orthodox ministry, in his view, were not educated heretics such as the Unitarians (though they were bad enough) but the uneducated pretenders to the ministry:

> There are, however, many persons in this and other Christian countries who declare, both in their language and conduct, that the desk ought to be yielded up to the occupancy of Ignorance. While they demand a seven-years apprenticeship, for the purpose of learning to make a shoe, or an axe; they suppose the system of Providence, together with the numerous, and frequently abstruse, doctrines and precepts, contained in the Scriptures, may be all comprehended without learning, labour, or time. . . . Multitudes of them can neither speak, nor write, nor even read English with propriety. They can neither explain, nor understand, the great body of Scriptural passages. . . . Should the Gospel be attacked by an Infidel; they are unable either to answer his objections, or to tell what are the proofs, on which its authority rests as a Revelation from God. Should the translation of a text be called in question; they could neither explain, nor defend it. Should a geographical, or historical fact be mentioned; or a local custom alluded to; it might, so far as they are concerned, as well have been written in *Arabic*, as in *English*. (1808, 7–8)

One finds this same sentiment on the part of the orthodox clergy from the postrevolution era onward. The conservative, university-bred preachers continually warned against the dangers of an uneducated ministry. Such men were incapable, said Lyman Beecher, of exercising "that religious and moral and literary influence which it belongs to the Ministry to exert." They were impostors, greenhorns, incapable of leading humanity to salvation. For its part, the "uneducated ministry" continually lambasted the "learned doctors," the "man-made, devil-sent, place-hunting gentry" (Hatch 1989, 178). As Hatch observes in *The Democratization of American Christianity*, "Instead of revering tradition, learning, solemnity, and decorum, as did Timothy Dwight and Lyman Beecher, a diverse array of populist preachers exalted youth, free expression, and religious ecstasy. They explicitly taught that divine insight was reserved for the poor and humble rather than the proud and learned" (1989, 35). Hatch's book ably demonstrates that the clash of the "dissident religionists" with the orthodox clergy was a class struggle, a forerunner and an outgrowth of America's democratic groundswells as much as an ideological/theological struggle. This is unquestionably true, yet there were profound and legitimate intellectual/theological differences between the two camps.

It was in the context of this kind of popular denigration of the value of liberal arts education, including graduate theological and rhetorical education, that Phelps and his colleagues enunciated their doctrines of the *paideia*, or rather the Christian *doctrina*,[11] that a true Christian orator must undergo if he is to be an instrument in God's hands for converting and nurturing human souls. Phelps's program involved intensive, life-long intellectual and moral formation, much of it through reading great literature,[12] especially literature "steeped in religion."

The objects of reading such authors included "mental discipline . . . the growth of the mind, not mere accumulation of knowledge"; "self reflexivity . . . standards of judgment, and critical taste"; "familiarity with the principles of effective thought and expression"; and "assimilation to the genius of the best authors" (1883, 98–105). This last object was the most telling, for Phelps believed that God used the instrumentality of great books as part of the process of transforming the human mind, and that only those men who had properly assimilated the godly germs of intelligence contained in the world's great literature possessed the proper mental soil for the growth of true sermons. Assimilation of great literature was also a vital component of moral

growth. Phelps in fact believed, along with his colleagues, that the inspiration available to humanity in the modern age was unavoidably dependent on this assimilation of the "food" God had provided his ministers; the "plenary inspiration" enjoyed by the original prophets and apostles, and which people like Dow mistakenly assumed to possess, was no longer available to humankind. In its place was now "partial" or "homiletic" inspiration, based on the interaction of God's spirit with the intelligence in the preacher's mind that had been acquired through the process of assimilation just described. In any case, the Christian *paideia* described by Phelps is typical of the conservative brand of American homiletic theory and fundamental to the sacred oratorical culture in which the preacher functioned. It provided not only the rhetorical sensibility necessary to it but also the common ground of intellectual and moral substance that undergirded America's oratorical culture as a whole.

The preacher who acquired the proper Christian *paideia* also acquired, as a natural accompaniment, the proper ethos for preaching, and this, in fact, Phelps regarded as the most important of his persuasive powers. Interestingly, Phelps's discussion of ethos seems to merge with a discussion of logos and pathos in his final lectures on sermonic "application" in *The Theory of Preaching*. In essence, he argues that it is the intellectual solidity of the sermon and the man who preaches it, along with the equally real and perceived moral loftiness of the preacher, that authorize him to employ emotional appeals at this point and that make such appeals genuinely (not ephemerally) effective:

> Eloquence in all its forms is built on, or more significantly is built *in*, intense character in the man. This is as fundamental to secular as to sacred eloquence. No man can be eloquent in any thing, who has not, *quoad hoc* [*sic*], an intense working of his own character. His personal intelligence, his personal faith, his personal consciousness of an object, the utmost strain of his will-power are the vitalizing forces. Not adroitness in command of language, not zeal in the form of paroxysm, but the character of the man, in an intense unity of purpose, is the soul of speech in those lofty forms of it which we dignify as oratory. (1881, 457)

As I have suggested, Phelps evinces in this belief a strong affinity with Quintilian's *vir bonus* doctrine. He continues to refer to the character of the preacher throughout his discussion of pathetic appeal

in the lectures on sermonic application; it is virtually impossible to separate his treatments of pathos and ethos. "The character is the speech, the man is the speech," he writes, and it is the "sanctified character" of the preacher that lends both passion and authority to his words (461). For Phelps, ethos meant the shining through of this sanctified character in both the appeals made in the pulpit and in terms of the preacher's general reputation for piety, compassion, and learning. However, Phelps was careful to distinguish true ethos from its counterfeit. The ethos of the ideal sacred orator was effective precisely because he did not aggrandize himself; he focused attention on God, doctrine, principle, truth, service. His congregation saw him as the embodiment of virtues and learning universally aspired to; it was not anything individualistic or charismatic that made them trust him but the fact that he stood as a covenanted, organic part of the community and had become a good disciple of Christ, just as they were all trying to do. The function of his ethos in the social discourse of pulpit oratory was consistent with the neoclassical ethos of the best kind of orator.

The counterfeit of true ministerial ethos, against which Phelps firmly stood, was the practice of putting *oneself* at the center of one's discourse. Despite his and his colleagues' efforts, however, emotionalized preaching and religious movements that centered on personalities, as well as the increasing professionalization of the Christian ministry, continued to erode the sacred mode of America's oratorical culture.

Phelps's Stand Against Individualism and Professionalism

Phelps was concerned that the legitimate ethos of the sacred orator not be confused with the tendency to personality cults that began to burgeon after the Civil War (see Clark and Halloran and Antczak and Siemers, this volume). Calhoun notes, for example, that the highly successful evangelical ministries of Henry Ward Beecher and Dwight L. Moody depended largely on "exploiting their own personalities and private lives." Their sermons were full of personal anecdote. Beecher's sermons frequently employed "something involving himself, his own experience or feelings, and his relationship to his hearers," while "Moody iterated stories about the revival process, a large proportion of which afforded what later fan magazines might

call 'exciting glimpses' into the life of the celebrity revivalist" (Calhoun 1973, 261–62). However, Phelps was even more deeply concerned about trends towards professionalization in the Christian ministry, which he saw operating right at Andover and all around him in his own tradition.

Before saying more about professionalization in the Christian ministry, however, I must clarify the senses in which conservatives used the term "professional." Timothy Dwight's 1808 *Sermon Preached at the Opening of the Theological Institution in Andover* was based on Matthew 8:52: "Then said he unto them, therefore every scribe, who is instructed unto the Kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man who is an householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." Dwight begins by explaining that "a scribe . . . was a person professionally employed in expounding to the Jewish nation the law of God." The modern equivalent, he declared, was the "minister of the gospel . . . educated to the service of the church," whose treasure was "useful professional knowledge" (1808, 3). Later, he enumerated the "five great divisions" of Theological education—"Natural Theology, Christian Theology, Sacred Literature, Ecclesiastical History, and the Eloquence of the Desk" (1808, 4–29)—and explained the need for and advantages of professional specialization in each of these fields at the new seminary.

It was the specialized, professorial Bartlett Chair of Sacred Oratory that Phelps came to occupy forty years later, at mid-century, just about the time when, according to Bledstein, the "culture of professionalism" was establishing itself in America. In view of Bledstein's time frame, it is interesting to note that for many decades before Phelps came to Andover, the Christian ministry in America had been referred to as a profession. Phelps and his colleagues were aware of the modern meaning that the word was taking on, but it is clear from the contexts in which they use it, and from their comprehensive philosophies, that they saw "profession" and "sacred calling"[13] as synonymous. When Phelps uses the phrases "our great profession" or "our calling" in reference to the Christian ministry, he is using the traditional sense of "profession": to acknowledge or claim, publicly, one's status as an emissary of God's Word and to claim the truth of or acknowledge, in the work of one's life, that Word itself. Profession and professation and confession (of one's status and God's Word) were much the same thing. In medieval Europe, a profession specifically

meant an avowal of faith upon entering a Christian order. This was the fundamental sense in which Phelps and other traditionalists still used the word, unless they were criticizing the secular encroachments onto its meaning.

Phelps was acutely aware of those encroachments, of course. He knew that many young graduates of theological schools saw the Christian profession as a "career" in the sense just coming into vogue: a "course of life" that took one from the stage of esoteric education through successive stages of advancement in social status, power, wealth, and honor among one's colleagues. It was also coming to mean, in the ministerial profession as well as in secular professions, a broad scope of choice among specialities. Many graduates of Andover Theological Seminary, as well as those from many other seminaries, were leaving to become agents or board members for various benevolent or moral societies, educators with various fields of specialty, administrators in missionary organizations, and ecclesiastical administrators of various sorts. One of the principal reasons for this was the reluctance of many graduates or practicing ministers to accept callings ("calls") from small, poor, or rural churches, especially those in the rough Western regions (regions that reached much farther east at that time than presently). It was not simply that they feared hard beds and backwoods cooking; poor churches or churches far away from centers of cultural richness did not look promising to young ministerial professionals—that is, to those who expected the Christian ministry to provide them a career, a ladder of "upward mobility." This is one of the major reasons why the Methodists and Baptists spread so rapidly into the West, while the Congregationalist/Presbyterian churches grew relatively slowly from the late eighteenth century onward. Not only could Methodists and Baptists enter the ministry with less formal preparation, but they regarded the Christian ministry almost exclusively as a missionary, preaching, and pastoral ministry—at least until, later in the nineteenth century, they began to hunger for social respectability and to suffer their own professionalization.

Phelps's reaction to the professionalization of the ministry in his own tradition was strong. His personal letters chronicle his grief and alarm at the trend. The concluding lecture to his Andover students each year usually dwelt on the evils of self-seeking professionalism and extolled the traditional virtues of selfless service to one's entire charge, especially to the uncultured and poor. This certainly did not

mean that the young minister was to let his own culture slip; Phelps reiterated in his final lecture that "the ideal of a preacher which I have uniformly had in view is that of a Christian scholar using his scholarship with the aim of a Christian orator" (1881, 576). That aim was to reach *all* of humanity with Christ's saving Word and to elevate them all into full Christian manhood and womanhood. Phelps referred to the Methodists and their "apostolic adaptation to the lower classes" (580), admitting with "some alarm" the disjunction between theory and practice in conservative homiletics: "A scholarly ministry taken as a whole . . . is working away from the unscholarly masses of the people." Phelps seemed almost to plead with his students to use their training to serve the lower classes; high culture, he insisted, is vital to a preacher's ability to be "made all things to all men, that [they] might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). The profession of Christian ministry, Phelps insisted, existed for that reason; its practical function was to save and exalt all humanity. Phelps told his students:

> I wish, therefore, to commit these homiletic discussions to you with the most solemn charge that you receive them with a spirit of practical good sense and of practical piety . . . a preacher had better work in the dark, with nothing but mother-wit, a quickened conscience, and a Saxon Bible to teach him what to do and how to do it, than to vault into an aerial ministry in which only the upper classes shall know or care anything about him. You had better go and *talk* the gospel in the Cornish dialect to those miners who told the witnesses summoned by the committee of the English Parliament, that they had "never heard of Mister Jesus Christ in these mines," than to do the work of the Bishop of London. (1881, 582–83)

This insistence on selflessness and connection with "the masses," to subordination of individuality to community, higher authority, and larger causes, though not a new theme in the history of Christianity, yet had particular significance in Phelps's day, when the Christian ministry was being transformed on many levels. Phelps's position, and that of his orthodox colleagues, was still framed within the traditional oratorical culture. The learning and rhetorical power of the sacred orator was properly engaged in a social discourse dedicated to the welfare of the community, and the orator himself stood "above" the masses only in the sense of his embodiment of knowledge and virtues endorsed and aspired to by the community. His position as leader, shepherd, counselor, was the result of his following a call from

God; his was a response to God's ordering of things, not a self-envisioned, self-advancing career. His relationship with the people was on the basis of their recognition of his call and their covenant with him. His discourse was most successful when it did not stress his individuality but when it reinforced the community's values and their mutual acceptance of an authority to which they all submitted themselves—and when it reasoned with them in what Phelps called the "rhetorical forms"[14] or "adapted forms" of God's truth: forms of social discourse designed to convert and edify the individual soul and create the fundamental consensus upon which the entire community could stand.

Conclusion

For Phelps and for many of his colleagues in the conservative homiletic tradition, the sermon still functioned as a form of public discourse designed to preserve and create consensus at the most fundamental levels. The ideal orator was conceived to be, as in classical systems of oratory, a man embodying all the very best moral/intellectual virtues and powers—an elite personality using his rhetoric to persuade audiences to correct belief and advantageous social action. As such, Phelps believed ministers and their persuasive discourse stood at the very center of social change, and they functioned at the same time to conserve a system of knowledge and values that made possible the mode of rational persuasion by public discourse that we generally associate with classical rhetoric. Again, the parallel to classicism is seen in the conception of the orator as devoted not to personal advancement or relying on abstruse or exclusionary discourse but fully devoted to the community, a permanent member of that community, and using discourse based on shared values and beliefs, adapted to a popular audience, to promote the safety and development of the entire community. Even in its general forms and in many of its principles, the homiletics of Phelps and his colleagues displayed a clear neoclassical influence; nearly all their treatises on the art of sacred rhetoric are organized around the classical canons and result in a synthesis of classical theories and Christian materials and motives.

Phelps's theory of preaching, then, is representative of what I call conservative homiletic theory in America. It conserved, to a significant degree, various features of classical rhetoric, and it conserved the old Congregational ideal of one flock, one shepherd—the ideal of the holy man skilled in speaking who dedicated himself primarily to the saving and edification of one community. His theory focused on the intellectual dimension of preaching and condemned enthusiastic preaching that did not have sufficient intellectual ballast. At the same time, it allowed for a genuine application of emotional force, as long as the emotion was in proper relation to its intellectual foundation. Preaching in Phelps's system was designed not only to convert but also to edify, to educate, to provide a congregation with a complete diet of moral/intellectual food. Preaching therefore had to be not only Biblically based but also as systematic as possible, though the forms of these systematic sermons had to be carefully adjusted to the needs of the congregations being addressed. The congregation so edified by its pastor would grow up to Christlike character and would spread the fruits of that character in steady, permanent forms, improving not only the local community but also, ultimately, the nation and the world. The ministration of the pulpit, therefore, had to confine itself, for the most part, to the specific Christian enterprise, bringing up sociopolitical issues only within the framework of the congregation's comprehensive moral/intellectual formation and discouraging the various and divisive forms of immediatism. This check on the form of political involvement constituted a modification of the old Congregational ideal, but Phelps believed it was necessary to accommodate the political reality of the nation. It was still consistent in spirit with the old ideal. The public discourse of the true preacher in any age, Phelps was convinced, constituted the most moral and most lastingly effective form of political activity.

Phelps advocated these ideals for over thirty years at Andover Theological Seminary and was an important factor in keeping them alive to the end of the century. However, even during his tenure at Andover, a large percentage of Andover graduates went on not to pastorates but to other professional posts. On this count his own homiletic theory might have worked against him; its stress on the level of culture required for true preaching might have contributed to his students' anxiousness about being isolated on the rough frontier.

It was unquestionably true, however, that the orthodox Protestant ministry, the chief guardian and inculcator of America's sacred oratorical culture, was being transformed, professionalized, through-

out the nineteenth century (though with far greater speed in the second half than in the first) and that the Andover students of Phelps's day were only following a well-established trend. One of the impetuses for that trend was that early in the century, the clergy had crossed swords with the divisive influence of party politics and had lost. They had sided with the Federalists, the "Friends of Order," people who resisted democratic and electoral politics and shared the clergy's commitment to the old order of religious nurture, civic and spiritual unity, and rule by a moral/intellectual elite. In time, however, as the Federalists entered more deeply into party politics, the clergy was largely shunted aside as a political liability. The clergy itself, still wanting to promote unity and avoid the accusation of politician partisanship, turned to forming voluntary and various debating and benevolent societies, attempting to hold off public disapproval by distinguishing between these and direct political action. The difference was that voluntary societies were "organized for discussion rather than action" and "did not formally advocate any particular position" (Scott 1978, 106). Scott points out that even in terms of the physical space used for public discourse, there was a distancing: Whereas before the church had been a common gathering place to discuss public issues, now lecture halls and lycea were used even by church-sponsored groups like temperance leagues. Unfortunately, all this contributed to the further diminishing of the clerical ethos as the official guardians of public order. As this dimension shrunk, the clergy was forced more and more into a professional stance. One of the most telling features of this stance, according to Scott, was the fact that clergy became more and more perceived as doctors of a sort: physicians of the soul, specialists in a partitioned and personal dimension of human reality—an essentially apolitical one. Scott also indicates that the subject matter of much orthodox preaching became less "heavy" even theologically; it became more personal, anecdotal, "friendly." This trend toward the trivialization of the pulpit is one that Phelps stoutly resisted; his theory of preaching demanded the spiritual and intellectual content needed to accomplish its ambitious goals.

From the 1850s on, according to Scott, "the role of religion in sustaining the broader public culture consisted of laying out the Christian dimensions of public issues" (151). But whereas Scott sees this as a great reduction in the political power of the clergy, Phelps saw

it as one dimension of a comprehensive power wielded by the clergy, a power that, if allowed to function properly, would be more permanently and universally effective than any other agent of social change.

The question is, then, why wasn't Phelps's theory of preaching allowed to function properly—that is, why didn't the orthodox ministry hold to it, why didn't the public discourse of preaching within the sacred oratorical culture gather strength and effect the comprehensive social transformations that Phelps and his colleagues envisioned? My essay has suggested that, fundamentally, America's sacred oratorical culture faded away for the same reasons that its secular counterpart died out: Generally speaking, it suffered a transformation from an oratorical to a professional culture. The spirit of democracy, the exaltation of individual judgment and personality, the rise of specialization, and the new visions of "career" and professional success that Clark and Halloran describe in the Introduction to this volume all had their peculiar effects upon and manifestations in the conservative Protestant ministry, the traditional guardians of sacred oratorical culture. That culture cannot be said to have entirely died out, nor would it be fair to call Phelps's homiletic theory an entire practical failure; many of the preachers Phelps prepared for the ministry in his day did a great deal of good in America and abroad, both personally and politically, and there are still religious seminaries, and some individual preachers and congregations, that have "conserved" many of Phelps's ideals and look to historical figures like Phelps for inspiration. Certainly, religious thought and conviction, often profoundly affected by preaching, still constitute an important groundwork for social discourse and activity of various kinds. However, the personal culture and rhetorical power of the preacher Phelps idealized, the context and connection with the congregation he envisioned, and the organic effects of conservative preaching he anticipated cannot be said to have been realized on the scale he hoped for. America's sacred oratorical culture yielded to the forces of an increasingly professionalized and heterogeneous society, and it lost ground to those denominations and religious movements that exploited emotion, formed personality cults, or simply produced a greater missionary force because their missionaries were not required to pass through a rigorous liberal/theological/rhetorical arts training and were usually more willing to penetrate into and continue to serve in poor, remote, or uncultured territory.

There were other drawbacks to Phelps's theory, as I have suggested. For example, even though he envisioned the day when the educational and political advantages of the few would be spread to the many by the steady growth of regenerated individuals and communities, his system was undeniably elitist. Of course, Phelps and the conservative clergy were not the only class in the nineteenth century to believe that a general, gradual, "evolutionary" development of the human race was taking place—most profoundly in conservative, educated, Protestant New England and perhaps a few adjacent states.[15] The institutions, the laws, the culture, the *people* of Protestant New England were seen as being at the forefront of God's transformation of humanity, and it was vital to support the steady progress of His work; immediatism in any form—anything forced by man's impatience, ignorance, violence, or willfulness—was to be avoided at almost any cost. Not even the individual soul should be pushed towards conversion too quickly or emotionally; it needed proper Christian nurture.

But the most obvious difficulty with Phelps's *modus operandi* for social change, which insisted upon the temporary toleration of evil, was its slowness in changing things for those under the present lash of evil. One can imagine that a slave suffering under this lash might not find comfort in the promise that the true theory of preaching, if allowed to operate without the interference of political extremism, would, within a generation or two, free his children or grandchildren. Yet from Phelps's point of view, and from that of a large body of orthodox clergy and laypeople, this delay was lamentable but necessary. Solid, permanent, lasting peace and improvement can come, they believed, only as individual souls are converted to Christ and built up into Christlike character, and the most powerful agent of this personal and social change is "the argumentative discussion of theology"—social discourse carried on by a true preacher according to the true theory of preaching.

Notes

1. Phelps, the son of an orthodox Congregational minister, pursued his own development as a pulpit orator deliberately throughout his liberal arts schooling at Geneva College, Amherst, and the University of Pennsylvania, taking classes in classical and modern rhetoric at all three schools. He then went on for ministerial training at Union Theological Seminary, Yale Theological Seminary, and (briefly) Andover Theological Seminary.

In 1842, he accepted a call to pastor the Pine Street Congregational Church in Boston. Six years later, he resigned to accept the professorship of sacred rhetoric at Andover Theological Seminary. At Andover he wrote, in lecture form, thousands of pages on the art of sacred rhetoric. Much of this material later appeared in book form: *The Theory of Preaching* (1881), *Men and Books* (1882), and *English Style in Public Discourse with Special Reference to the Usages of the Pulpit* (1883). Phelps also published numerous articles on the subject of homiletics as well as a number of theological and devotional books. These theological and devotional works were themselves significant parts of his corpus of homiletical writings, since their themes, such as spiritual regeneration and Christian character, often bore important relationships to preaching.

2. At the same time, we must remember that many of America's preachers, even great evangelists, have been Calvinistic and felt no contradiction between their doctrine and practice, and that during the nineteenth century, the belief that the ministry should be confined to men was nearly universal.

3. Nineteenth-century American homileticians drew upon broad resources in forming their theories of rhetoric: modern British rhetorics, especially those of Campbell and Whately; various Christian homiletic treatises from ancient to modern times; and the rhetorical models provided by the Bible and by famous preachers through the ages. They also drew directly upon major classical theorists, principally Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and St. Augustine.

4. Weld (1803–1895) had intended to become an ordained minister. Although he attended theological seminary, his reform activities, especially abolitionism, kept him from graduation and ordination (as for abolition activism, it was a matter of crossing the authorities and being expelled from the seminary, but it is also true that he became so absorbed in moral causes that he didn't have time or inclination to earn formal ministerial credentials). Weld had many offers to pastor churches despite his lack of a divinity degree, but he turned them all down, preferring to attack the world's evils through direct and very intense involvement in benevolence and reform movements.

5. As I note Weld's position and even the position of "much of the orthodox Northern clergy" on the "divisive and disruptive" effect of abolition activists, I must acknowledge that there was some profound shifting of sentiment as the nation approached civil war. As animosities between North and South heightened, some who had opposed abolitionists began to tolerate and then even to support them in varying degrees. Weld himself began to sound much more like an immediatist as war approached. When the war actually started, some pulpits that had preached tolerance and forbearance

now sounded the battle cry. My impression is that even Phelps was in favor of ending the war through Union military victory once fighting had begun—but this did not change his convictions about the nature of Christian preaching or its preeminence in bringing about permanent, comprehensive social improvement.

6. Elsewhere in his writings, particularly in *The Theory of Preaching*, Phelps makes it clear that he believes the human mind to be addressable by the three Aristotelian modes of persuasion and that logos is the most important mode. He also discloses his opinion, which he professes to share with Aristotle, of the close relationship of rhetorical art to the science of psychology and to other sciences.

7. Though inventing the proposition was the most important part of sermonic composition, it was yet only one phase of the process. *The Theory of Preaching*, a text 600 pages long, treats at length the art of sermonic invention for each of the many parts of a sermon.

8. Note here the dialectical approach Phelps is advocating as a way of arriving at formulations of elemental truth. Again, he seems to agree with Aristotle—at least with one interpretation of Aristotle—that rhetoric is the "counterpart" of dialectic; that is, he seems to be arguing that a form of dialectical reasoning can and should be used in rhetorical invention, in this case the invention of the proposition of a sermon.

9. The most profound object of preaching, writes Phelps, is simply to bring people into the presence of God, to let the soul feel its "moral loneliness with God": "There is a point in the development of the work of divine grace at which it is expedient that human persuasion should cease. It has done all that it can do. It has tried every thing but silence. Wisdom dictates that now the awakened sinner should be left alone, and for this reason,—that he is alone with *God*" (1881, 549).

This idea of Phelps's shows an interesting parallel with the ancient idea of *kairos*, which has been translated as "the opportune moment," "the right measure," and "balance." This concept is prominent in sophistic rhetoric, and though Phelps and his colleagues never wrote of the sophists except with the standard disapproval (for their time), this is one idea they seemed to share with them. But it is accurate to say that Phelps believed the primary object of preaching was to create a *kairos* for the soul, by providing a careful balance of intellectual, ethical, and emotional appeals, just the right measure to bring the human soul to the verge of decision.

10. I have only touched here on the complexities of Phelps's theory. It is helpful to visualize each component of a sermon in Phelps's system as a level of a pyramid, with application at the apex. Building up to that apex are text, explanation, introduction, partition (division), body (development), and conclusion (consisting of inferences, remarks, and application). Phelps's theory for handling each of these parts is elaborate.

11. I here use the term *doctrina* in the Augustinian sense explained by Eugene Kervane: "When Augustine uses *doctrina* he means what the Greeks meant by *paideia*, education in the broad sense that constitutes a comprehensive intellectual and moral formation" (1966, 100).

12. However, sermons constructed under the true theory of preaching would not be "esthetic" products; Phelps, though a sophisticated literary scholar, was strongly opposed to bellelettrism in sermons. True sermons could, however, legitimately be called "literary," in this sense: "Let us count that as the most perfect literature, which is most perfectly adjusted to the most perfect ends by the most perfect uses of the materials and the arts of speech" (1881, 8).

13. Bledstein cites in this connection William Perkins's classic definition of a calling, "a certain kind of life, ordained and imposed on man by God for the common good" (1976, 176–77).

14. ". . . those forms in which [theology] is susceptible of presentation to the popular reason, and susceptible of use as motive power upon the popular conscience and heart" (1861, 36).

15. When Darwin's theory of evolution became current, conservatives appropriated his ideas in various ways ("social Darwinism," "social/spiritual Darwinism," etc.), but it is not accurate to say that their ideas about the gradual transformation of humanity through conservative Christian preaching and culture depended on Darwin; those ideas predate him.