

17th Century Preachers Socked It to Kings

By R. G. WALESKA

A best seller, 300 years ago, which devastatingly laid satire on the "establishment" of the French Court of Louis XIV had a special chapter "On The Pulpit". Surprisingly, "The Characters", by Jean de La Bruyere, became a public hit.

It might seem odd that preachers and pulpit-masters should be material for a book; it might never succeed in our times when great preachers are as rare as whooping cranes and the faithful submit to the Sunday sermons rather than listen to them.

In the 17th Century it was a different story. Predication was considered the principal instrument by which to transform man's heart and promote the great, the Christian, society.

And there were so many outstanding preachers that one Father Henry who compiled a "library" of master-works of predication filled 23 volumes and yet had to discard three quarters of the material he would have liked to incorporate.

Some of these preachers were adored like the Beatles today — with the difference that their fans were no squealing teenagers but the elite of the age. Their sermons were events. To miss them meant that one was not "with it."

Louis XIV never missed a Lenten or Advent sermon in the court chapel. There he sat — the "Very Christian" King, surrounded by his queen and his mistresses — past and present, listening meekly as the Bossuets, Bourdaloues, Mascaron gave him literally hell.

Today there is a great hullabaloo when a pastor raises a mild question or two about a controversial war in the presence of a democratic head of state. To Louis XIV, this superb orator, this embodiment of all grandeur, a preacher was the moustache of God. He suffered the violence of his anathemas and his too precise allusions as deserved penances sent to him by God.

And even when he had become the domesticated pious husband of Mme. de Maintenon he permitted the court preachers to denounce his wars, the sufferings they caused to the peoples, the contrast between their poverty and the luxury of Versailles, the moral laxity of his court, vice in high places — you name it, he took it.

One day some of his courtiers complained about the brutal punning they got from one of the court preachers. "He did his duty," the King answered, "it's now up to us to do ours."

When speaking about the famous preachers of the 17th Century the name of Jacques-Benigne Bossuet (1627-1704) comes first to mind. Actually he was better known as the foremost religious writer of his time as the arbiter of the French episcopate, as the promoter of the Gallican Liberties, as the conscience of the court, as the deadly polemicist than as an orator. He was not one of the popular stars.

Most of his sermons one knows of were preached in Paris in small churches and in convents between 1659-

1670. At the same time he preached four Advent and Lenten courses, fewer than other preachers whose names no one remembers. After 1671 the envious hostility of the Archbishop of Paris, Harlay, limited his public appearances in the capital to four occasions — all funeral orations which have become part of French literature.

The last of them was preached at the funeral of the great Conde at Notre Dame early in 1787. At the end of it he announced that from here on

he would reserve for his flock "the rest of a faltering voice and of an ebbing ardor."

Saint-Beuve suggested that the prospect of losing their greatest preacher just as they were mourning their greatest general, must have chilled the audience with premonitions of the impending decline of the reign.

There was above all the Jesuit Father Bourdaloue (1632-1704). Year in year out for 35 years his sermons (ill-edited Notre Dame to the rafters.

People came to blows for a few inches to stand on.

There was an air of excitement in the air like in the theatre before the curtain rises over a first night. And then HE came, fogging his way through the crowd, climbed up the stairs to the pulpit stood there for a long moment with closed eyes. Then he began to speak — gently at first then gathering momentum and raising his voice to that "thundering and terrible tone" as he fulminated his anathemas. He rarely

preached for less than three hours.

At the end of the century there was a new crop of preachers of which the Oratorian Jean Baptiste Massillon (1663-1742) has become the most famous. Massillon's first appearance at the royal chapel was a sermon he preached for the Advent of 1689. Afterwards the king paid him one of those graceful compliments of which he had the secret. "When I heard other preachers," he said, "I have been greatly

pleased with them. When I hear you I am greatly displeased with myself."

Massillon's most remarkable sermon was probably his funeral oration for Louis XIV at the Sainte Chapelle. He stood for a long while in silence. Then letting his eyes wander over the audience he pointed to the escutcheons suspended all over the black draperies, which wore the letters L. L. G. — Louis le Grand — "Then he started out: "God alone is great, my brothers!"

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(The texts of the ne... are on Page...)
By FATHER FRED...
Washington — (NC) changes are of immediate priests, but they are all ward the people. Even change is intended to h... gregation to pray better...
On Nov. 11 the Nat... of Catholic Bisho... approved the English t... three eucharistic pray... version of the Ro... now called Eucharistic P... eight new prefaces.
Bishop Sheen has ann... 1, 1969 as the starting d... the new texts in the... Diocese.
The congregations s... and profit by the clear... anced wording of the... prayers in which God is... blessed.
The new eucharistic p... the people directly and... times — in order to ke... united to the inner pu... Eucharist, to celebrat... death and resurrection... Church's offering to God...
These four times are... vitation and response... the eucharistic prayer... thanks... to the Lis... bless, and thank God);... acclamation of the peop... ("Holy, holy, holy... memorial acclamation... words of Christ are sa... final Amen of assent... tion to the concluding...
The English translat... Latin prayers and pre... pared and examined by... consultants, then submi... comments of some 700... their own comments... same — but it was do... translation of the Rom... 1967.

Thanksgiv
Masses Se
In Diocese

Catholics throughout... will be invited to a spec... Thanksgiving" — to be... each parish on Thanksg... another series of 1968... of the 100th year of the...
Pastors have been ask... the special Mass as... possible, so that the p... sands of the faithful in... throughout the 12 count... to God at the same ho... thanksgiving for past... hopeful petition for ble... future.
Preparations are pro... still another diocesan... highlight — a concert... ing the 100th year of the... the 75th year of St. Ber... nary. It will be presen... night, Dec. 10, in J... lege Arts Center and w... history of Catholic mus... cal and concert — thr... centuries.

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