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The Sermon Methods

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The Sermon Methods.*

The three requisites for good sermonizing are: *a thorough study of the text, a good outline, and good delivery.* Neglecting any one of these will result in poor preaching.

What is perhaps mostly neglected in sermonizing is that which is most important: *a thorough study of the text.* A thorough study of the text is absolutely indispensable for good sermon work. Without it the preacher cannot make a good outline, and without it he cannot be filled up with his subject, which he must be if he would deliver well, for a preacher's delivery is influenced by his mastery of the subject-matter and the conviction and the enthusiasm which it has wrought in his own heart.

A thorough study of the text calls for the imploring of divine enlightenment, the reading of the vernacular, the reading of the context, the careful and painstaking study of the original text, the looking up of parallel passages, and concentrated and intensive meditation. Not until all this has been done, should the preacher decide upon his sermon method and make his outline. Nor should commentaries and other helps be consulted before a tentative outline has been made. By referring too soon to commentaries and sermon helps, a preacher stunts his own mental activity and, as a result, fails thoroughly to understand his text and become thoroughly interested in it. If preachers neglect this important part of their sermonizing, their preaching will soon become stale, and their hearers will get little out of their sermons.

In his study of the text a preacher should be careful to find the *specific chief thought of that particular text*, that thought by which that text *distinguishes itself from other texts which treat the same subject.* This is absolutely necessary for the construction of an outline that is homiletically correct, and at the same time it gives to

* Why sermon methods? 1) The advantage of using any good method is that it keeps one from doing something in a haphazard way, in a hit-or-miss fashion. That in itself is reason sufficient for adopting and using a good method. 2) Method in sermon work compels the preacher more thoroughly to study his text and enables him better to understand it and better to present it. 3) Method in sermon work puts variety into preaching, the thing so much needed in order to arouse and hold the attention of an audience, especially when a preacher must preach to the same people year in, year out. The same text may be treated in different ways. 4) Method in sermon work will, when once understood and used, make sermon work a greater pleasure to the preacher himself by arousing his interest in the possibilities of preaching and thus of keeping his preaching from becoming stale. It will make of one a better preacher. All this is reason sufficient why due attention ought to be given to sermon methods.

sermons that variety which will insure renewed interest on the part of the hearers. Because the specific truth treated in a certain text is often overlooked or ignored, preachers fill their sermons with ever-recurring platitudes, which in course of time become stale and fail to give to the hearers the great wealth and variety of thought which the Bible actually presents. Says Kleinert: "Ein besonderes Aufmerken ist hierbei auf solche Hauptgedanken zu richten, welche dem Text im Unterschiede von andern gleichartigen oder verwandten ein charakteristisches Gepraege geben, seine Physiognomie bestimmen. Es gilt, den Willen des Textes zu erforschen, der in diesen charakteristischen Hauptgedanken zum Ausdruck kommt. Das ist wichtig, um die Stoffindung gegen die Gefahr zu schuetzen, sei es, durch Beharren auf allgemeinen und ausgetretenen Bahnen die Darbietung von vornherein des Interesses zu berauben, sei es, dem Text fremde und verschiedene Gesichtspunkte aufzubuerden. Erst durch die kraeftige Erfassung der charakteristischen Hauptgedanken erhaelt die Predigt die Kongenialitaet mit dem Text, die ihr lebendiges Interesse und den eindringlichsten Nachdruck der Schriftmaessigkeit gibt."

After a preacher has thoroughly studied his text and is ready to make his outline, he must decide upon the *sermon method*. Although some homileticians speak of a number of sermon methods, there are, strictly speaking, only two: the *analytic* method and the *synthetic* method. What some call the expository method and the homily are species of the analytic method. And although it is a fact that the make-up of many sermons is not strictly analytic or synthetic, but either synthetic-analytic or analytic-synthetic, yet these are not two new methods, but merely combinations of the two methods, the analytic method and the synthetic method. Homileticians writing in English usually call the analytic method the textual method and the synthetic method the topical (or inferential) method. This distinction is liable from the outset to convey a wrong impression, namely, that the so-called textual method must be strictly in accordance with the text, while the topical method simply takes a topic from the text and then develops this topic without further careful consideration of the text; and in fact some homileticians would have it so understood. We should, however, *always preach the text*. The reading of the text is in itself a promise to the congregation that the preacher will preach that text. In other words, every sermon should be textual; as we say in German, *textgemaess*.

While we prefer the terms analytic and synthetic, used by German homileticians, I am not quite ready to say that even these terms have been well chosen. My reasons are the following: 1) Homileticians do not agree in their use of these terms (the order is even reversed) and are much perplexed to give a clear definition of the terms and present

an easy workable basis for sermonizing. Kleinert, in his *Homiletik*, says: "Die Ausdruecke 'Analyse und Synthese,' 'analytisch und synthetisch' werden in der Homiletik herkoemmlich ueberaus haeufig gebraucht, erscheinen aber bei den verschiedenen Homiletikern mit verschiedenen und nicht durchweg deutlichen Vorstellungen verknuepft. Man wird billig bezweifeln duerfen, ob diese Hereinnahme beider Ausdruecke in die homiletische Formlehre der Klarheit dient und dem Lernenden eine deutliche Direktive ueber den einzuschlagenden Weg gibt." 2) The terms themselves, if etymologically applied, are somewhat confusing. The fact is that in every sermon we have both analysis and synthesis. It would, perhaps, be preferable to call the analytic the direct method and the synthetic the indirect or inferential method; but for our present purpose let us abide by the old terms, analytic and synthetic.

Let it be understood from the outset that, irrespective of the method used, a thorough study of the text must form the basis for the outline; the theme must be the chief thought of the text; the divisions must also be taken from the text—the text must be preached. The text dare never serve as a mere motto, a starting-point only. Not on the basis of dogmatics or a commentary or on the basis of parallel passages should the sermon be built, but on the basis of the sermon-text. A so-called topical outline that takes some thought from the text and then ignores it is built upon lines that are homiletically not permissible. The sermon is not a dogmatic treatise which is chosen for the lecture-room in a theological seminary or for a pastoral conference, nor a religious essay which makes profitable reading, but it is a religious address, built upon a certain definite text of the Bible, which is to be expounded and applied for the edification of the hearers. That is the homiletic idea of the sermon.

After the preacher has thoroughly studied his text on the basis of the original text, the context, the parallel passages of Scripture (*Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur*), he must, if he would preach his text, as he indeed ought to, do one of two things: he must either use what the text says in so many words, *expressis verbis*, although he need not say it in the very words of the text (analytic method), or he must use what the text does not state in so many words, but what is nevertheless implied in the text and at which he arrives by way of deduction or inference, by way of the *porisma* (synthetic method). *There is no third thing that a preacher can do with a text.*

The text Matt. 5, 14—16, when analyzed, has the following thoughts: 1) Christians are the light of the world; 2) Christians should let their light shine by doing good works; 3) Christians should let their light shine that men may see their good works and glorify God.

Combining these three thoughts into one proposition, we may

express it thus: Christians should let their light shine before men. That is the theme. That will give us the following *analytic* outline: *The Lord's Admonition to All Christians: "Let Your Light Shine Before Men."* 1. Christians, being the light of the world, can let their light shine. 2. Christians should let their light shine by doing good works. 3. Christians should let their light shine that others also may glorify God.

In the meditation on this text the following thoughts may be arrived at *by way of deduction*: Since only Christians are the light of the world, a member of a congregation who is not a Christian cannot let his light shine and is therefore a hypocrite; and, again, if Christians fail to let their light shine, they cause the world to believe that they are not sincere in their Christianity. One may, then, arrive at the following *synthetic* outline: *Why the World Often Casts It into Our Teeth that There Are Hypocrites in the Church.* 1. Because in the outward church organizations there are members who pretend to be Christians, but are not. 2. Because Christians at times neglect to live as Christians in this world.

Or in the course of the meditation the thought will impress itself upon the preacher that great stress is laid upon the doing of good works by Christian people and that a Christian becomes guilty if he does not do good works. *By way of deduction* he will then arrive at the following *synthetic* outline: *Of What Is a Christian Guilty whenever His Life Does Not Conform to His Confession?* 1. He is not true to what God has made him, vv. 14. 15. 2. He is not only missing an opportunity to lead others to Christ, but becomes a stumbling-block on their way to salvation, v. 16.

The text 2 Tim. 4, 1—5, when analyzed, presents the following outstanding thoughts: 1) The Christian minister is charged to preach the Word of God: only, at all times, in the right manner. 2) This charge is very necessary because many will not endure sound doctrine, but turn to false teachers and their fables.

When the apostle says to Timothy, "Make full proof of thy ministry," he sums up, or combines, these thoughts into one statement. The preacher therefore will decide upon the following *analytic* outline: *The Lord's Charge to a Christian Pastor: "Make Full Proof of Thy Ministry."* 1. How a Christian pastor should do this: a) Preach the Word only, v. 2 a. b) Preach it at all times, v. 2 b. c) Preach it in the right manner (Law and Gospel), vv. 2 c. 5. 2. Why a Christian pastor should do this: a) Because God has commanded it, vv. 1. 2; b) because of the great danger that some will turn away from sound doctrine and lose their salvation, vv. 3—5; c) because ministers must give an account to God of their work, v. 1.

In his meditation upon the text a sermonizer finds that the

preacher who faithfully preaches the Word of God will meet with opposition and will perhaps become discouraged, while at the same time he will find that God has commanded him to preach and that God will call him to account. *By way of deduction* he may arrive at the following *synthetic-analytic* outline: *Why Should a Christian Pastor Not Become Discouraged when, though Faithfully Preaching the Word of God, He Meets with Opposition?* 1. Because by faithfully preaching the Word of God, he does what God has called him to do, vv. 1. 2. 5; 2. because the Lord has foretold that a time would come when people will not endure sound doctrine, vv. 3—5; 3. because in the final analysis not man, but God, will be the preacher's Judge and his Reward, v. 1.

A definition of the two sermon methods may be given in the following words:—

The *analytic* sermon method uses the express statements of the text, *expressa verba textus*, although not necessarily in the same words or always in the same order. Usually the parts, which are those given by the text, are found first, and the summary of these form the theme, or proposition. The analytic method proceeds from the parts to the whole.

The *synthetic* sermon method uses the *deductions or inferences or porismata* which are derived from the text. Usually the theme is found first and then the parts. The parts also take their *material* from the text, but their *form* from the theme.

(To be concluded.) JOHN H. C. FRITZ.

Dispositionen über die von der Synodalkonferenz angenommene Serie alttestamentlicher Texte.

Cantate.

Jer. 15, 15—21.

Ein treuer Prediger hat keinen leichten Stand, besonders wenn es gilt, die Sünde zu strafen. Das hat Jeremias erfahren müssen. Das Volk war gottlos und weigerte sich, Buße zu tun, Kap. 2—11. Da mußte ihm Jeremias Gottes Zorn und Strafe ankündigen, Kap. 13, 1—14, 6. Jeremias bittet aber wieder für das Volk, findet jedoch kein Gehör; denn Gott ist des Erbarmens müde, Kap. 14, 7—15, 9. Im Gegenteil muß Jeremias nun noch einmal Tod und Verderben verkündigen. Das macht ihn bei den Leuten verhaßt. Obwohl er recht-schaffen ist, hadert jedermann mit ihm, B. 10. In seiner Trostlosigkeit nimmt er seine Zuflucht zum Herrn. Es folgt ein Zwiegespräch. Daraus lernen wir uns zum Troste.