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THE FACTORS OF ATTENTION
IN PREACHING

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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June 1956

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE FUNCTION AND TYPES OF ATTENTION	4
Attention as an Active, Selective Process	4
Passive and Active Attention	6
Passive Attention Preferable	8
III. CONDITIONING THE HEARERS FOR ATTENTION	12
Theory of the Mental Set	12
Determinants Inherent in the Listeners	14
The Aid of Proper Worship	19
Effecting Group Spirit	22
Speaker Audience Relation	28
Miscellaneous Determinants	31
IV. ATTENTION FACTORS INHERENT IN THE SPEAKER AND DELIVERY	36
The Place of Artificial Methods	36
Movement and Gestures	38
Rate of Delivery	43
Mode of Delivery	45
Attention and Various Modes of Emphasis	52
Use of Voice	53
Enthusiasm and Character	56
V. ATTENTION FACTORS INHERENT IN THE MESSAGE	59
Variety in Unity	59
The New and the Old	64
Illustrations	66
Problem Solving Activity	67
Five Techniques for Attention	68
Miscellaneous Methods	71
VI. INTEREST AND ATTENTION	73
Using Native Interests	75
The Interests of an Audience	77
VII. CONCLUSION	83
BIBLIOGRAPHY	85

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The problem that initiated this study centered around the importance that must be placed upon attention. If a man is to preach the Word of God he can do little if he does not have the attention of the listeners to his message. Even the correct doctrinal preaching of the Word will come to nothing if the message cannot gain the attention of the hearers. Attention is one of the prerequisites for effective and persuasive speaking. It has been said that with the audience's attention goes their belief, their willingness to act, their acceptance of the speaker's point of view.¹ The success of business men is often based on their ability to gain attention. A publisher claimed that he sold only five thousand copies of an excellent work, but that he could have sold twenty-five thousand if his agents had forced them upon the attention of people. Druggists claim that if a patent medicine is so advertised to strike attention in a forcible manner, the medicine certainly will be sold.² If this is all true in the business world, if attention is the business man's

¹Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology Of Persuasive Speech (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942), p. 201.

²George W. Crane, Psychology Applied (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1932), p. 55.

major concern to gain sales, then it must be the preacher's concern, if he would preach effectively, to gain his hearer's attention. The writer's own experience of hearing many a topic presented in a dull and uninteresting manner, compels him to discover what can be done to preach the Word while sustaining the hearer's rapt attention.

The writer has explored these factors of attention with reference to the task of preaching. The end purpose is directed toward preaching from the pulpit and not speaking in public in general. However, the writer often uses the words "preaching" and "speaking" and their derivatives interchangeably, for what is written on public speaking is generally pertinent to the pulpit. Nevertheless, there are suggestions and factors of attention mentioned in this study derived from secular sources on public speaking which might be difficult to apply to preaching because of longstanding customs connected with the pulpit. The preacher would have to decide which factors of attention he could apply to his preaching situation without disturbing the minds of his hearers and customs of worship.

The second chapter deals with the definition of attention, attempts to discover the kinds of attention and which types of attention are the most desirable. The third chapter deals with the mental set, or conditioning the hearer for attention. This section brings to the speaker's mind what he will have to do with his audience before he even

comes to handle them. The fourth chapter concerns itself with what the speaker does in delivery, exclusive of the message itself. Its concern is to show the effect that the delivery, in the broadest sense, has on hearers. The factor of the words and the content of the message for sustaining attention is the subject of the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter is somewhat of an extension of the preceding chapter since it deals with the interest factors of the message and their relationship to attention.

Let us consider the case of a driver and a dispatcher. The driver is in a state of consciousness in which impressions are reaching us and should to be heard. Careless like-minded beings to the communication system between taxi driver and office dispatcher. Whenever the dispatcher speaks, that stimulus is picked up and received on the radio. Now, if this state of consciousness were allowed to remain, if we were to notice everything that reached our senses, we would be in a quandary. Life would be a chaos of sensations and our minds would be helplessly amid an unsorted and disordered impressions.⁴

⁴Arthur S. Gault and Nelson T. Howard, *An Outline of General Psychology* (second edition; New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1937), p. 104.

⁵Charles S. Gardner, *Psychology and Learning* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1928), p. 106.

⁶W. D. Garrison, *The Teacher and His Audience* (New York, N. Y.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1901), p. 63.

Gault and Howard, op. cit., p. 104.

CHAPTER II

THE FUNCTION AND TYPES OF ATTENTION

Attention as an Active, Selective Process

The conscious human being has a flood of stimuli bombarding his sense organs. The eye and ear gates, plus the other internal and external gates of sense, are being continually flooded by impressions which demand admittance.¹ In fact, our senses become open avenues by which innumerable impressions are reaching us and demand to be heeded.² Garrison likens human beings to the communication system between taxi driver and office dispatcher. Whenever the dispatcher speaks, that stimulus is picked up and received on the radio.³ Now, if this state of consciousness were allowed to remain, if we were to notice everything that reached our senses, we would be in a quandary. Life would be a chaos of sensations and our minds would be helpless amid so many confused and disordered impressions.⁴

¹Robert H. Gault and Delton T. Howard, An Outline Of General Psychology (Second edition; New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1933), p. 104.

²Charles S. Gardner, Psychology And Preaching (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1928), p. 166.

³Webb B. Garrison, The Preacher And His Audience (Westwood, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1954), p. 65.

⁴Gault and Howard, op. cit., p. 104.

But why is it that we escape from what would be a confused state of consciousness? Not every stimulus in the perceptual field actually is heeded. Two men are riding on a trolley. One man is reading profitably because he can ignore the noise; another with a headache is aware only of his discomfort. We seem to be conscious of only a few of the stimuli clamoring for notice. Why is this? The reason for this is that there is a sort of selective process which allows certain stimuli to be heeded. This process selects some stimuli, while others are neglected. The important is admitted by this process; the unimportant excluded. The significant is received; the trivial is rejected. This process of choosing and elimination is called the attentive process.⁵

Therefore, we are different from the taxi radio because not every sensation, not every stimulus reaches the brain. Our faculty to attend, therefore, screens out unimportant matters. Everything else remains either in total darkness or in a "twilight-border" all of which surrounds our illuminated area of attention.⁶

Thus attention is never a passive state in which an individual merely opens the gateways of the senses so that stimuli may flood in on them, but rather an active and preferential process, in which there is an excluding of certain stimuli and a concentration upon others. To attend is to do something, is to engage in positive action.⁷

⁵Ibid.

⁶Gardner, op. cit., p. 166.

⁷Gault and Howard, op. cit., p. 107.

We "pay attention" signifying action on our part. We at-tend. Our minds are stretched out to something.⁸ When attending to a stimulus our mind goes out to seek it, to explore it, to take it all in.⁹ To be attentive is to be ever in a dynamic state.

Passive and Voluntary Attention

Not all attention is the same, however. Not every kind of attention is as easily acquired as the other, nor can every kind be as easily maintained over a duration. It is therefore necessary to examine the kinds of attention and notice how attention best serves the matter of speaking.

Generally, we may divide the kinds of attention into two areas: passive and voluntary. Passive attention is also known as reflex, or effortless, or spontaneous, or involuntary attention. Passive attention occurs when something is intrinsically interesting and we are simply carried along by it.¹⁰ Passive attention is needed only if a thing is interesting in itself or if it becomes interesting by association.¹¹ No

⁸John Dewey, Psychology (Third Revised edition; New York: American Book Co., 1896), p. 134.

⁹Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology Of Persuasive Speech (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942), p. 201.

¹⁰Gault and Howard, op. cit., pp. 111-12.

¹¹William James, Talks To Teachers (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1925), pp. 100-1.

will-power is required. In fact, passive attention is not only involuntary, but we may attend even against our will.¹² It is a "concentration of consciousness which is not forced by an external stimulus, and at the same time is without internal strain." Some inclination dominates our mind without serious competition. "What we think about when we 'turn our minds loose' and nothing disturbs us are objects of spontaneous attention."¹³ The subject to which we are attending is so interesting that it simply absorbs the mind.

"Voluntary attention seems to require a push from behind. We 'summon our wills' to compel such attention, and call up the whips of conscience and the spurs of good or evil prospects." This kind of attention requires will-power. We must fight off other distracting stimuli and give the right of way to what we are to attend. For that reason, voluntary attention is seldom continuous and sustained. Other thoughts are intruding themselves to take our attention from the subject at hand and therefore this state of mind must be continually cleared. We must keep jerking our mind back to attention.¹⁴ This kind of attention is often conditioned by social pressure, determination, purpose and duty. We may have to forego some

¹²James Mark Baldwin, Elements Of Psychology (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1893), p. 72.

¹³Baldwin, op. cit., pp. 175-6.

¹⁴Gault and Howard, op. cit., pp. 112-3.

pleasure to give attention of this variety.¹⁵ This attention lasts but for a moment and the process exhausts itself in the single act. Unless a trace of interest in the subject shows itself, the mind will fail to follow.¹⁶ This is not to say that voluntary attention must never be used, it might be difficult to present certain truths so aptly as to require passive attention by the hearers. Therefore, it is sometimes through active or voluntary attention that we eventually are able to attend to something spontaneously.¹⁷

Passive Attention Preferable

Speakers should be encouraged to minimize their appeals for voluntary attention. It is true, we cannot ignore voluntary attention. The speaker will want to use gestures, movement, voice inflection and other methods to get and hold attention. In fact, this study will recommend the perfection of some of these methods. But at least as small a demand as possible should be made on the voluntary attention of the hearers. It is generally useless, indeed suicidal, to scold or lecture an inattentive audience into attention. For an attention acquired from the audience "out of a sense of duty" will be at best a divided attention, "and the disagreeable

¹⁵Charles E. Skinner, Ira M. Cast, and Harley C. Skinner, Readings In Educational Psychology (New York: Appleton, 1926), p. 570.

¹⁶James, op. cit., p. 101.

¹⁷Skinner and Others, op. cit., p. 570.

feeling attendant upon the strain not only reacts against him [the speaker] personally, but gives a repellent cast to the truth he wishes them heartily to receive.¹⁸ William James tells teachers that they can easily get attention by "commanding it in loud impervious tones."

But, unless the subject to which you then recall their attention has inherent power to interest the pupils, you will have got it for only a brief moment; and their minds will soon be wandering again. To keep them where you have called them, you must make the subject too interesting for them to wander again.¹⁹

It is much more desirable that the audience attend with passive attention, because they are so absorbed with interest in the message itself. A speaker should strive for the ideal in that he aways the audience with no gestures and a very average use of inflection. This is not always possible, if ever, and therefore the speaker may have to summon the voluntary attention of the hearers. But if the speaker uses the artificial devices for attention as a crutch, disastrous results might occur. The attention that the audience gives centers only upon the speaker himself and his methods rather than upon his message. This is not only psychologically prohibitive for proper attention, but also illegitimate as far as a Christian preacher is concerned. In fact, this applies to any attention getting method. It may even be a pleasant

¹⁸Gardner, op. cit., p. 175.

¹⁹James, op. cit., pp. 103-4.

method, but gains applause only for the speaker whereas the subject matter of his discourse suffers. More often, however, this compulsory kind of attention is unpleasant.²⁰ Besides all this, the speaker does not want people to use up their mental energy by fighting off boredom and distracting ideas, but rather their mental energy should be devoted to what the speaker says.²¹

It is evident then, that the speaker should make every effort to have his speech contain those elements that will allow his hearers to use their passive attention. James, in writing to teachers again says, "the more passive attention is relied on, by keeping the material interesting; and the less the kind of attention requiring effort is appealed to; the more smoothly and pleasantly the class room work goes on."²² The speaker should apply for the kind of attention that will hearers will give naturally, inevitably, and without the effort of the will. Attention should be given to subjects on their own account. Examples of this in the sensory field are loud laughs, bright lights, strong smells, tastes or pains.²³ Or, instances of our passive attention to intellectual objects occur when we are carried along by some train of images, mem-

²⁰Gardner, op. cit., pp. 171-2.

²¹James A. Winans, Speech-Making (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1938), p. 134.

²²James, op. cit., pp. 100-1.

²³Gault and Howard, op. cit., pp. 110-1.

ories, or ideas which are intrinsically interesting.²⁴ In fact, any stimuli characterized by intensity, change, movement, rhythm and organic needs dominate us, and we give attention to them without effort.²⁵

Of course, not every object may be so natively interesting to people. We deal with so many subjects that are uninteresting. Certain subjects are not immediately interesting at least, but they may be so through association. Therefore, we may gain a kind of derived passive attention. For instance, a faint tap may hardly be discriminated from other noises. But if it would be a signal, as that of a lover on a windowpane, it would hardly go unnoticed. So, mathematical calculations may bore a man until they have something to do with his income tax. "It is not very often, however, that we give passive intellectual attention to objects in which we have no immediate interest. It takes a powerful motive to induce it."²⁶

²⁴ibid.

²⁵Skinner and Others, op. cit., p. 569.

²⁶Gault and Howard, op. cit., pp. 111-2.

CHAPTER III

CONDITIONING THE HEARERS FOR ATTENTION

Theory Of The Mental Set

The task of procuring attention from the hearer begins even before the speech commences. The listener must be prepared to attend. That is, the hearer must be conditioned so that he more readily attends to the speaker when he begins to talk. Our attention is channeled toward that which we are "set" to receive. We attend more readily when we are in a state of expectation. An individual who waits anxiously for a message interprets any sound as a knock on the door. If a man is eager to buy the late edition, he will immediately take notice of the newsstand which he ordinarily ignored. The individual reacts, therefore, as a runner who is ready to leap forward when the starting pistol is sounded. If a person can be dominated by the proper mental set, if he can be led to a certain state of expectation, the actual stimulus may prove to be only the signal for some already predetermined action.¹

This theory is borne out by experiment. A group of college students was used in an experiment to measure the

¹Henry E. Garrett, General Psychology (New York: American Book Co., 1955), p. 162.

sensitivity of their senses. They reported in a preliminary test when they first felt the tingle of the increasing electric current passing through their fingers. They were then told that the same experiment would be repeated. They were in a state of expectancy; they were "set" to feel the stimulus once again. However, on the second test, the current actually was cut off by opening a concealed switch. Yet, "nearly all of the subjects" soon reported that they felt the current again. In the same way, the students were led to report erroneously warmth in an unheated box, tastes of several sorts of distilled water, and odors in odorless liquids.²

It is apparent, therefore, that if the general purpose or attitude of an individual can be led to be in accord with the message of the speaker, that will be a potent determinant in acquiring his attention. For when a person is in the pursuit of a foreseen end, he tends to notice only that which bears upon the business at hand, and he excludes others.

If one be actively engaged in thinking about some person, event, or object, then by reason of this set, the person will inevitably be noticed if he appears, or the object attended to if it comes [120] within range. Where the mind is preoccupied by certain ideas there is a strong tendency for attention to fix upon matters related to the central topic of thought.³

²Arthur Gates, Elementary Psychology (Revised edition; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1938), pp. 392-3.

³Robert H. Gault and Delton T. Howard, An Outline Of General Psychology (Second edition; New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1933), pp. 119-20.

Determinants Inherent in the Listeners

In order to mold the hearer into a receptive mental set, the preacher will have to anticipate with what attitude his audience already greets him. He ought to take every pain to see how his members are disposed to him and his message. Their "spiritual mental set" will betray the degree of attention that they are willing to give him as speaker.

A congregation can possibly be classified into different groups, all with different attitudes toward the preacher. In the following analysis of the congregation, methods are also suggested for most of the groups by which the preacher may counteract unfavorable attitudes and win over the troublesome parties. There are those with an indifferent attitude and they are found everywhere and among all types of people. They are found particularly in small churches and in rural areas where there is a great deal of exchange in pastors. Such people are neutral toward the preacher and all that he says. They feel that ministers are uninformed, ecstatic people and they think religion is otherworldly with no vital message. There are a lot of those "hangers-on" when a new minister arrives, who listen out of a sense of curiosity, not respect. If the minister would say anything about a change of attitude he would be instantly attacked.⁴ Spurgeon's description pro-

⁴John Edward Lantz, Speaking In The Church (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1954), p. 101.

bably applies most aptly to this group:

Sometimes the manners of our people are inimical to attention; they are not in the habit of attending; they attend the chapel but do not attend to the preaching. They are accustomed to look at every one who enters the place, and they come in at all times, sometimes with much stamping, squeaking of boots and banging of doors.⁵

The preacher may consider that hyperbole, startling statements, intensity, and strong dramatic and emotional appeals are in order for this class. Sarcasm, rarely pertinent, may here sometimes be used. Denunciation and condemnation are occasionally desirable.⁶ In other words, an effective method may be to shock these folks out of their indifference. But this is also dangerous. Rather, the better advice is to be friendly, visit them in their homes and perhaps then they will give the preacher their admiration and contribute an active interest.⁷

At the other extreme are those whose interests are bound up in the church. They are part of its history and present life. People look to them for approval of plans. They are the "pillars." They give solidarity to the church and gather strength about the minister. The danger is that the minister

⁵Charles H. Spurgeon, Spurgeon's Lectures To His Students, condensed and abridged by David Otis Fuller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1945), p. 106.

⁶Edwin H. Byington, Pulpit Mirrors (New York: George H. Boran Co., 1927), pp. 103-4.

⁷Lantz, op. cit., pp. 101-2.

aims at their interests. He should pay attention to those on the out-skirts of the congregation. The other danger is that these "pillars" are not always the most receptive. They do not always care to listen and learn, are dogmatic, half-clergy, half-laity, and sometimes become bigoted.⁸

A member of the third group represents the supercilious hearer. He goes to church but is out of sympathy with it. He is skeptical and the preacher is sure that he is critical. The minister should look upon his presence with the idea that there must be some good that he is here. This type of hearer is a tonic and keeps the atmosphere clear. His presence ought to make one more true and conscientious. The speaker should be careful of defiance and obsequence in himself for such an attitude makes the unbeliever hate and despise the truth. Be frank, brave, and simple.⁹

Perhaps at least related to this group is the well-known hostile, self-righteous class of members. They are found in one group as well as another. Two prerequisites in handling them are to establish a common ground of belief and a fairness of viewpoint.¹⁰ Every statement must be well-substantiated and all doubtful claims discarded. The conversational method is best here, as is a little humor. The reasoning must be

⁸Phillips Brooks, Lectures On Preaching (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1887), pp. 191-4.

⁹Ibid., pp. 194-7.

¹⁰Lantz, op. cit., pp. 102-5.

clear and fair, for if this hearer senses that the speaker is attempting to be "clever" the hearer certainly will not be moved.¹¹

Some, of course, simply come out of habit, having grown up in the church. This member never doubts or denies what the speaker says. Preachers cannot tell, however, how he is inside and the change that he undergoes may be gradual or it may be sudden and vehement. He has a good effect on the preacher in that he shames and inspires, makes him feel his responsibility, reminds him of his duty and feebleness, rebukes anything fantastic or unreal and tempts his plainest, directest, and tersest truth.¹²

Another group are those who simply seek after the truth. They are in earnest about their Christianity. The minister may furnish a quick response to these.¹³

Besides the spiritual, there are other subjective determinants which will effect the mental set of the hearer. Social pressure, for instance, may induce people to listen to something that ordinarily, if left to themselves, they would utterly neglect. This is a very potent force and determines greatly the direction of attention. The person who comes to worship may have had the turn of his attention already

¹¹Byington, op. cit., p. 104.

¹²Brooks, op. cit., pp. 197-200.

¹³Ibid., pp. 200-03.

guided by the social pressure previously exerted upon him in the home, gang, school, business world, or the club.¹⁴

Our previous education is another potent determinant in effecting our state of expectation. Our hobbies, professional interests, social ambitions, and prejudices may all betray the type of education we have received.¹⁵ It is possible to conceive of five different men with as many different backgrounds of education visiting a foreign country and all returning with five different reports which would have reflected on an attention previously guided by their education.

Heredity seems to be another factor though it may be difficult to determine in what degree. It appears that one with a strong physique is likely to have interests directed towards sports and those frail, not so. But one has to be cautious in making assertions in this factor of heredity.¹⁶ Relative to this may be the determinant labeled as "instinctive tendencies." Farmers are naturally interested in farming; one sex is interested in another. An example of this was shown in a survey at New Haven some years ago when six hundred copies of True Story Magazine were sold to the Yale students in contrast to one copy of Century Magazine.¹⁷ In a more general way Spurgeon presents

¹⁴Gault and Howard, op. cit., p. 121.

¹⁵ibid., p. 120.

¹⁶ibid., pp. 121-2.

¹⁷George W. Crane, Psychology Applied (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1932), pp. 58-59.

the mental set which people bring with them to church and how one should deal with this state of expectation:

Those who attend our ministry have a great deal to do during the week. Many of them have family trials, and heavy personal burdens to carry, and they frequently come into the assembly cold and listless, with thoughts wandering hither and thither; . . . [278] We must regard the people as the wood and the sacrifice, well-wetted a second and third time by the cares of the week, upon which, like the prophet, we must pray down the fire from heaven.¹⁸

The Aid Of Proper Worship

After the preceding it may seem as though there is little which a speaker can do to mold the hearer into a receptive state of mind. However, there are methods which allow him to effect an alert, expectant attitude in his hearers. The Christian preacher has at his disposal an instrument whereby he may condition the mental set of his hearers well before the Sunday sermon. For one thing, he has the Church Year which leads the preacher to speak on themes which the experienced worshipper is expecting. Brooks, though, of course biased because of his liturgical background, advocated the use of the Church Year; for, ordinarily, it is true that no hearer can know what theme will be preached on to him. The Church Year leads the people past the great Christian facts year after year. It is concrete and picturesque and portrays in orderly fashion the historical Christ. The people, after a little experience,

¹⁸Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 278.

will be led to expect certain themes during certain seasons of the year. And yet the preacher is allowed the largest liberty for his sermons.¹⁹

The preacher also has the individual Sunday worship periods which in themselves condition the worshipper for the sermon. It will be of help for the proper "setting" of the listener if he realizes that in the service the believers edify one another, even by means of the sermon. The sermon is that and the preacher the one which function "to the end that all be one with one another."²⁰ If that is the job of preaching then the people will have to realize this, look for this and be trained to listen for the purpose of mutual edification. They will have to have an understanding of worship and sermon.

Thus today the Christian worshipper should be trained to experience a lively sense of participation in the service in general, and in the sermon itself. He should feel that through the sermon his fellow [C] Christians are speaking to him and he to them. He should be listening to the sermon with a sense of inquiry and demand; and the sermon itself should encourage a dialectic quality. The preacher should anticipate the questions of the hearer, should sound as though he were getting the varying reactions of his people together, and in general should behave himself as the agent and mouthpiece of the people who are sitting before him.²¹

Furthermore, the various parts of the service can be of support to the sermon. They are the Propers and Ordinaries

¹⁹Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

²⁰R. R. Caemmerer, "Craftsmanship In Worship" (Unpublished manuscript of Passavant Lectures, Maywood, Ill., Jan. 1955), p. 2.

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

for the Day. One of the functions of these parts is not only for mutual edification but to support the sermon and, with the sermon, to present one central theme of the Sunday by means of the entire service. The minister's responsibility then is to develop and guide a unified service of worship in which all the elements, including the sermon, support each other.²² Thus, the congregation will be presented with one theme for the Day to which they will know the sermon is related. And as they participate in the minutes of worship prior to the sermon, the goal of the sermon will become evident. At least the congregation will know of what general area and topic the sermon will treat.

The matter of establishing the proper state of expectation by teaching the theory of sermon as edification and by educating the worshippers concerning the liturgical parts of the service may be done in several ways. The catechetical classes could incorporate such instructions as could the other regular groups of the congregation such as the men's, women's and youth.²³ The overall theme of the Day and the purpose of each unit could be printed in the Sunday morning bulletin. Or, even better, a carefully worked out brief of three or four minutes in length could be delivered to the worshipping congregation after the prelude and just before the first hymn. It

²²Ibid., p. 13.

²³Ibid., pp. 15-16.

would comment on the several parts of the liturgy, the lessons of the hymns and the lections and indicate into which field the sermon fits with its particular goal.²⁴ The service and the sermon should be publicized well in advance. The advertising should not list merely the title of the sermon but a few lines of interest provoking summary. Organists, chanters, and choirs must not only have learned their pieces, but days in advance they must have understood its overall meaning and mood.²⁵

It is interesting to note that Dale is at variance with this theory and does not think the service should be of one perfect unity. Instead, the hymns should be complementary to the sermon in subject and feeling. There ought be no abrupt change, but rather movement and change. One should not keep the minds and hearts of the worshipper under a monotonous strain. There are great varieties of mood and interest in a congregation. So if one has a sermon which is hard and logical he should sing hymns throbbing with emotion. If the sermon is for the light-hearted and happy people one should sing hymns for the sorrowful and weary.²⁶

Effecting Group Spirit

The psychological factors in shaping the hearer's mental

²⁴Ibid., pp. 18-19.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 21-22.

²⁶R. W. Dale, Nine Lectures On Preaching (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1887), pp. 277-8.

set play an important role. One factor is the effect of the crowd spirit, or the influence of one hearer upon another. The speaker's work will be with less effort if he can make the power of the unified group spirit to bear upon each individual. Griffiths investigated what influence the position of one student had upon another in the obtaining of grades. He discovered that those who sat in the front and rear rows did poorer than those in the middle section. Those on the fringe area fail to feel the physical compactness and polarization of interest and attention which holds the group to the speaker. Moreover, this difference in grades was due not only to the distance from the speaker. For the lower grades were still found in the rear rows of smaller classes where the same rear rows were no farther from the speaker than the middle section in larger rooms. Those sitting in front rows are thought to have poorer grades because they do not fully appreciate the crowd spirit behind them.²⁷

Therefore, if we can weld our hearers into a unified group, then their attention and persuasion can be much more easily acquired. We would never do certain things as individuals that we do as a group, for if we feel that there are enough doing it, the whole crowd cannot be punished. We aspire to be strong and gain assurance from numbers. We are less fearful of consequences, we are less cautious in groups and

²⁷Crane, op. cit., p. 381.

thus do things therein with more abandon because we are less aware of our weaknesses.²⁸ Obviously, it is far more advantageous to have a unified group becoming one in their attention than to have a multitude of individual interests. Two things are done when the audience is thus polarized: the listener focuses attention upon the group and he inhibits other influences.²⁹

Much can be done through means of ritual in unifying the group. Whenever people act together they are impressed with the sense of social unity. Any cheering or applauding are especially valuable because the participants then are being audibly convinced that the members sitting about them are in the same community of interest and feeling.³⁰ Or when people weep, laugh, or shake their fists together they move toward psychological unity. Uniforms, badges, and pins also help effect this. Singing, however, is probably the most effective device for the preacher since he has the hymns and liturgy at his disposal. The choir may then do much in either direction for audience unity. If the purpose of the choir is to entertain passive spectators much harm can be done. Such a choir will be a detriment to the establishment of a cohesive and responsive audience.³¹

²⁸Ibid., p. 380.

²⁹Webb B. Garrison, The Preacher And His Audience (Westwood, N. J.; Fleming H. Revell Co., 1954), p. 70.

³⁰Crane, op. cit., p. 383.

³¹Garrison, op. cit., p. 76.

It is important for the group not just that they act together, but that what they do together puts them into a mood favorable to the speaker. Beecher said,

If I can bring the congregation, before I come personally to handle them, into a triumphant, jubilant state, a cheerful, hopeful, genial state, my work among them will be made easier by one half than [76] if they were in a very depressed, sad state.³²

Naturally, the preacher should try to do all this just before the sermon. At that time, it is bad to take the collection, or to sing a choir number which may prove to be a misfit. The best thing is to have the congregation sing a hymn in a hearty fashion which will prepare for the message of the sermon.³³ It is encouraging to note that one responsive listener can infect the whole group into a favorable state with merely a chuckle or a sob. A "contagious laugh" can increase the response of an audience as every comedian knows. Children and youth may be especially effective at inciting this because they are less inhibited than adults. A group of adolescents sitting together can act as a fuse to set off reactions in surroundings.³⁴

The physical building of worship as well as the seating arrangement have much to do with the social unity among the hearers. The Gothic church with its high arches, long aisles,

³²Ibid., pp. 75-6.

³³Charles Reynolds Brown, The Art Of Preaching, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1922), pp. 165-6.

³⁴Garrison, op. cit., pp. 75-8.

stately obstructive columns, and defective acoustics, is not well adapted to preaching. It is said that bad architecture has hindered the effectiveness of many a good sermon, and an actor would not submit himself to the handicaps impressed upon a minister.³⁵ The reason why the Gothic church puts the unity of the crowd spirit at a disadvantage is because it is designed to produce an atmosphere of hushed reverence. The individual's sense of dependence is heightened in such a building and this will inhibit the motor-vocal responses of the listener. The listener becomes an individual rather than a part of a group.³⁶ The very opposite is true of gatherings that take place in a structure such as a tent. The transitory nature of the canvass structure may account for a more responsive and hence cohesive group, for we are more carefree when our surroundings suggest instability. The converse of this is demonstrated in the massive stone fronts of our bank buildings and financial institutions. Tents are conducive for a feeling of social solidarity and a chummy attitude because class levels are eliminated therein, since poor and rich are thrown into close physical contact.³⁷

As far as the seating arrangement is concerned, people sitting on aisles do not feel the sense of social solidarity that those in the middle of the section feel. Also those who can't see the speaker because of hats, pillars, or heads of peo-

³⁵Brown, op. cit., pp. 156-7.

³⁶Garrison, op. cit., pp. 74-5.

³⁷Crane, op. cit., pp. 382-3.

ple, tend to become restless and inattentive. "A number of such persons scattered through an auditorium reduce the degree of concentration upon the stage of others who are seated in their vicinity."³⁸ A broad aisle immediately in front of the pulpit and stretching away in an empty fashion to the front door of the church is also bad. It is also disadvantageous because it tends to produce a sense of social distinction and separation which is out of place in a church. The people who sit on the broad aisles are liable to be more thought of than those on the side and in the galleries. It is more inspiring to speak directly to columns of human faces.³⁹ It is better for people to sit crowded together than to have them seated in alternate chairs, where it leaves a large block of empty seats. In the latter two instances the people become more individualistic and self-conscious. The person who is being impressed with his isolation presents a greater problem to the speaker than if he were rubbing elbows with others. For as long as people are self-conscious they feel responsible for their actions and become more introvertive.⁴⁰ Beecher also attests to this:

People often say, "Do you not think it is much more inspiring to speak to a large audience than a small one?" No, I say; I can speak just as well to twelve persons as to a thousand, provided these twelve are crowded around

³⁸Ibid., p. 381.

³⁹Brown, op. cit., p. 159.

⁴⁰Crane, op. cit., pp. 379-80.

me and close together, so that they touch each other. But even a thousand people, with four feet between every two of them, would be just the same as an empty room.⁴¹

Speaker Audience Relation

Not only is the relationship of each hearer important to each other for directing attention, but also the relationship of speaker to audience. Often the speaker is in a position either far above or far different from that of the listener so that a barrier is formed. It is true, such a position may induce more respect and hence better listening. But often the tendency among listeners is to resent or misunderstand the position of the speaker, and this should be taken into account.⁴² The ideal church is one that is shaped like a horse shoe with the preacher in between the two ends of the shoe. He should stand before the people where he may be seen from the head to his feet. Moreover, he should be standing as close to the front pews as possible.⁴³ Because of the personal element which flows from the speaker, Beecher endorses the view that the pews be as close to the speaker as possible. A builder wanted to know how Beecher wanted his church built and where the people should be located. Beecher replied,

⁴¹Henry Ward Beecher, Yale Lectures On Preaching (New York: Fords, Howard and Hulbert, 1887), p. 73.

⁴²Robert T. Oliver, Dallas C. Dickey and Harold P. Wilko, Communicative Speech (New York: Dryden Press, 1949), p. 80.

⁴³Brown, op. cit., pp. 156-7.

I want them to surround me, so that they will come up on every side, and behind me, so that I shall be in the centre of the crowd, and have the people surge all about me.

Speaking of that church building, Beecher continued,

It is perfect, because it was built on a principle,-- the principle of social and personal magnetism, which emanates reciprocally from a speaker and from a close throng of hearers. This is perhaps the most important element of all the external conditions to good and effective preaching.⁴⁴

If this principle were followed, however, the question would arise concerning the pulpit or lectern. Should the preacher be "barricaded" from the listeners, or are there advantages to be gained from speaking behind a pulpit or lectern? The lectern is not to hide behind. It is for any needed books, water, or notes. In addition, ministers stand behind them with Bibles on them to give the impression of speaking over the Bible and of basing his comments on the Bible which they find therein. "It also serves the artistic purpose of breaking down the stiffness of the solitary speaker." But the same source argues that the speaker should speak close to the audience following the cue of the lawyer and the salesman who stand as close to the jury as possible and face to face with the customer.⁴⁵

Beecher condemned the pulpit when he spoke of Dr. Storr's church in Brooklyn.

⁴⁴Beecher, op. cit., pp. 72-4.

⁴⁵Howard Francis Seely and William Arthur Hackett, Experiences In Speaking (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1940), p. 194.

He [Dr. Story] stood in that box, stuck up against the wall, and then came a great space, like the desert of Sahara; and over on the other side of it began to be his audience. Before the man can fill such a space the magnetic influence of the man is lost. He has squandered one of the best natural forces of the preacher.⁴⁶

Beecher argues that a man's whole form is part of his speaking. He uses his hands and his feet. A man in one of those "barrelled pulpits" loses the responsibility placed on him as to his body. He gets into a gawky attitude, sags down and has no consciousness of his awkwardness. But if the man is brought out on a platform his force comes out so much more. "The moment a man is brought face to face with other men, then does the influence of each act and react upon the other."⁴⁷

The preacher will also want to guard against anything that he does during the worship period and in all contacts with his people that will produce a negative attitude in his people toward him. It is encouraging that physical characteristics, which people cannot change, were ranked lowest in a list of annoying or disagreeable factors in people. Fifty-seven per cent of the list was related to offensive behavior of others, such as, coughing in one's face, interrupting, spitting, nagging. "Most people hotly resent being treated as inferiors or being 'pushed around.' Conceited people, for instance, are rated by college students as being the most unpleasant."⁴⁸

⁴⁶Beecher, op. cit., p. 71.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Carrett, op. cit., p. 204.

The posture has much to do with the impression a speaker makes on the audience. He may lose his audience before he rises from his chair. His posture may betray slovenliness, nervousness, or cockiness. He may startle the audience if he approaches the front of the platform with undue haste or he may irritate them if he is unduly slow. But if the speaker is dressed tastefully, if he is erect but not stiff, and if his face reveals alert confidence, then the audience will be calm and expect the speech with pleasantness. However, most speakers are under strain and the question then is, how can the speaker conceal his nervousness from his audience? He must play act, like a nervous batter will conceal his nervousness from the pitcher. He must learn to control his physical activity so that he does not reveal his anxiety to the audience no matter how nervous he is.⁴⁹

Miscellaneous Determinants

Other seemingly minor details may play a great part in a person's attention. Temperature is one of these factors, though perhaps not a dominant one. People are at their best within only a comparatively narrow temperature range. When the listener is so warm that he must squirm, mop his brow, and fan himself, he evidently will be unable to efficiently attend the preacher. If the temperature, on the other hand, falls below

⁴⁹Seely and Hackett, op. cit., pp. 193-4.

a comfortable level, blood will rush to the skin, the brain will cease to function at its peak, listener and speaker become sluggish and the audience disintegrates into many individuals.⁵⁰

An abundance of fresh air is important. This is hard to effect sometimes because there are those who feel that the church should have that "odor of sanctity." Flowers, with their fragrance, tend to put people asleep. That accounts to a degree for the "heavy feeling" at funerals.⁵¹

Spurgeon condemns the style of architecture that does not allow for proper ventilation.

Yet Gothic architecture and silly pride make many persons renounce the wholesome sash window for little holes in the ceiling, or bird traps in the windows, and so places are made far less comfortable than Nebuchadnezzar's furnace was to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

The people in such a condition will have enough to do to breathe comfortably than to think of anything else; for

when people have inhaled over and over the air which has been in other people's lung's, the whole machinery of life gets out of gear, and they are more likely to feel an aching head than a broken heart.⁵²

A brightly lighted building seems to favor a profitable mental set. A person's reaction is favorable or unfavorable based often on the number of people who are or who appear to be present. A brightly lighted building suggests many peo-

⁵⁰Garrison, op. cit., p. 75.

⁵¹Brown, op. cit., pp. 158-9.

⁵²Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 105.

ple which in turn suggests success and popularity of the idea or program. It is attested that many people attended popular services in a midland town simply because of the brightly lighted entrance and the warm attractiveness of the church interior.⁵³ Moreover, a well-lighted auditorium enables the people to see the surrounding crowd, which assists in creating social unity. The mood of the audience is more cheerful in a brightly lighted auditorium and this works in favor with the speaker since it is easier to sway a cheerful audience than a lugubrious one. Darkness tends to awaken fear and awe in a listener which produces introversion. The hearer brings his attention to bear just on himself rather than on the group and the speaker. However, reduced illumination may be of value if a bright spotlight shines on the speaker. This will help to weld group spirit since it prevents certain distractions such as page turning and is instrumental in causing all eyes to seek the source of light in front.⁵⁴ From the speaker's point of view, the church should be lighted enough for the preacher to look into the faces of the people and see their expressions. It should be light enough for the people to see the changing expression of the minister's face.⁵⁵

⁵³Bryan Green, The Practice Of Evangelism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 242.

⁵⁴Crane, op. cit., pp. 378-9.

⁵⁵Brown, op. cit., p. 159.

Symbols have a marked effect on the mental set of listeners as is evidenced when ministers often find it harder to preach in theaters than in churches. Crucifixes, choir lofts, painted windows, and hymn books have a suggestive effect that is lost in the theater setting.⁵⁶ Objects that conform to the principle of symmetry and proportion are generally preferred and this is due to the theory of empathy. We "feel ourselves into" objects and hence ill-balanced or uncertain objects are unpleasing because they occasion the sense of strain and tension in us. Those objects which possess stability give us a feeling of ease and confidence.⁵⁷

Musical tones which are rich and full are more pleasing than high and shrill tones. Tones which combine to yield a smooth effect are more pleasing to discordant and unharmonious tones. Experimental studies show that most people prefer red colors to others and that dark purple is least preferred for both sexes. Red has bright and stimulating qualities whereas purple is dull and unpleasing and for many people has unpleasant associations with mourning and old age. Blue is preferred by both sexes after red. Bedrooms and hospital rooms are often painted a light green or a pale blue green since blue and green are regarded usually as soothing and quieting colors. Because of the contrast effect, complementary colors are usually judged

⁵⁶Crane, op. cit., p. 382.

⁵⁷Garrett, op. cit., p. 191.

to be more pleasing, because they contain the elements of a complete spectrum, a balance of warm and cool, exciting and restful.⁵⁸

Surroundings can help or hinder a speaker. Tidiness must be evident to the hearer. He will listen better, remember longer what was said, and just have more peace of mind while listening if such things are evident: hymnals placed neatly in the pews, pictures hung straight on the walls, window shades drawn evenly, and the contents arranged are orderly and tidy.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 186-9.

⁵⁹Lantz, op. cit., p. 95.

George W. Crone, Psychology Applied (Chicago: North-Western University Press, 1921), pp. 205-6.

Dr. P. Wallingworth, The Psychology of the Auditor (New York: The McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1931), pp. 61-2.

CHAPTER IV

ATTENTION FACTORS INHERENT IN THE SPEAKER AND DELIVERY

The Place Of Artificial Methods

In the second chapter the effort was made to encourage the use of spontaneous attention from the audience rather than the voluntary attention. That is, the speaker should embody in his speech such interesting qualities that the speech in itself attracts such interesting qualities that the speech in itself attracts the attention exclusive of delivery devices which compel attention. Words should be selected with such care that the desired feelings in the audience will be developed aside from his gesticulation and intonation. "In fact, a truly effective speaker can stand with his hands in his pockets and speak in a harsh voice, yet depict pathetic scenes in such well chosen words as to force tears from the eyes of his listeners."¹ Intrinsic interest of the subject matter is the most effective factor in sustaining attention. Eventually, it must be said that the mechanical devices are often irrelevant, weak, and transient. But if the intrinsic interest is lacking the resort must then be to artificial devices.²

¹George W. Crane, Psychology Applied (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1932), pp. 405-6.

²H. L. Hollingsworth, The Psychology Of The Audience (New York: The American Book Co., 1935), pp. 61-2.

external methods, therefore, can be used, and in fact will have to be employed. The sensational methods cannot be condemned out of hand. In fact, when an audience is inattentive because of stupidity, weariness, or anger, as in the case of a mob, or because there are other strong distractions, then even rather extreme forms may be justified. This may also be the case when some audiences gather by compulsion as may be the case in churches, prisons, and classrooms. Of course, not every method that gains attention is justified, yet before giving up a hard situation it is well to try some external, sensational methods and devices with which this chapter deals.³

The general theory of speech delivery should first be understood. Years ago speech was guided by rules. Every gesture had to be correctly timed. If a rule was violated the speaker was simply incorrect although a man like Lincoln succeeded despite his breaking of rules. Delivery and content were on an equal plane of significance. Today the content is regarded as more important than the delivery, and everything else--diction, posture, gestures--are to be a means to an end: the transfer of thought from speaker to listener. Public speaking has one hard and fast rule and that is to communicate. Therefore, speakers make up their own rules. They do not attempt to fit into a pattern, for what will communicate for one may not communicate for another. This does not make speaking

³James A. Winans, Speech-Making (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1938), p. 161.

easier simply because some speakers are weak, do not revel in their new found freedom, and still want to rely on rules. Because a speaker does not develop his own personality and apes other performers, he often fails. The strong person develops his own style, he "grows up" and does not want to be told how to take each step. Much of this stems from the fact that individuality counted for far less in the nineteenth century than it does today. Yet this doesn't mean that all rules go for nought. The speaker cannot do on the platform whatever he chooses. He should be governed by the practical result. He asks himself: "Am I making the desired contact with my audience by doing what I'm doing?" Our purpose then in speech delivery is to discover what is good and what is bad for us as individuals.⁴

Movement And Gesture

There can hardly be any precise rules for bodily activity because of the differences in speakers and occasions. What may prove natural and effective for one speaker seems forced and awkward for another; what may be objectionable in one situation is ideally suited to another. Yet certain suggestions are in place for conduct and bearing.⁵ For one thing, activity

⁴Howard Francis Seely and William Arthur Hackett, Experiences in Speaking (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1940), pp. 188-90.

⁵Robert T. Oliver, Dallas C. Dickey, and Harold P. Zelko, Communicative Speech (New York: Dryden Press, 1949), pp. 51-2.

attracts attention, but therein lies a danger. Good or bad, appropriate and inappropriate action draws attention. For this reason there can be two great evils in public speaking: no activity or the wrong kind of activity. There are two sorts of distracting actions, inappropriate and superfluous.⁶

Speaking negatively then, it must be said that one should beware of gestures that draw attention to the speaker and cause the audience to make remarks about him when all thoughts should be directed toward the subject. "If the best action had this effect I would urge you to forswear it; and if the worst gestures would prevent such a result I would advise you to practice them."⁷ Distracting actions may be particularly disturbing. A speaker may do something which will cause similar responses throughout the audience. An epidemic of coughing may break out over the audience whenever a speaker coughs. Just as a yawn will lead to a multitude of open mouths, so harsh, rasping tones of a speaker with a sore throat will suggest the arousal of a throat tickle in the members of the audience. Whenever the speaker looks at his watch a goodly number of listeners may do the same. Though many may actually not heed the time still it may send some off into thinking about things that have been conditioned to whatever time it may be. Even the unfastening

⁶Seely and Hackett, op. cit., p. 197.

⁷Charles H. Spurgeon, Spurgeon's Lectures To His Students, condensed and abridged by David Otis Miller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1945), p. 272.

of his watch and the placing of it upon the stand partially de-polarizes the audience.⁸ It is true, nevertheless, that personal mannerisms tend to distract attention of only those who are unfamiliar with the speaker. Listeners take the mannerisms for granted, unless they are exceptional habits such as staring at the ceiling and talking in an inaudible voice. After listeners hear a speaker a number of times, mannerisms of "normal dimensions" are ignored.⁹

Spurgeon blames the bad posture and poor gestures in some speakers on fear. To stand before an audience makes them so nervous that their hands are always doing meaningless things.¹⁰ Beecher severely condemns pulpits as "those churns" which teach a man bad habits. The speaker becomes heedless of his posture and learns bad habits in pulpits because the speaker thinks people will not see his bad habits.¹¹ Another reason why lolling over pulpits or leaning on them is bad because it destroys confidence and weakens the force of any utterance. The expression counts for or against the message.¹²

A positive suggestion involves unity of action in gestur-

⁸Crane, op. cit., pp. 389-90.

⁹Wesley B. Garrison, The Preacher And His Audience (Westwood, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1954), p. 80.

¹⁰Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 242.

¹¹Henry Ward Beecher, Yale Lectures On Preaching (New York: Fords, Howard and Hulbert, 1837), p. 130.

¹²Edwin H. Byington, Pulpit Mirrors (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1927), p. 149.

ing. The clenched fist ought not be accompanied by a placid face; nor an intense face with hands behind the back.¹³ The gestures should also be one with the matter. Everything should harmonize; the thought, spirit, language, tone and action should be all of one piece.¹⁴ Furthermore, gestures should be graceful and unobtrusive. Ideally, the audience should have been so absorbed with the ideas presented that they become unconscious of the speaker's movements. His movements become natural signs of his enthusiasm and vigor.¹⁵ Yet the speaker may have to deliberately exaggerate his gestures. Slight gestures and frowns used in face to face conversation will have to be enlarged to more than what we are accustomed to when speaking to a large audience.¹⁶ It is particularly true of large groups of people that they will not think gestures are excessive. The larger the sanctuary and congregation the more action is necessary to communicate the speaker's mood and message.¹⁷

As far as the actual means of gesturing is concerned, the most valuable gestures are facial expressions because the face is the focal point of the eyes of the entire audience and the

¹³Seely and Hackett, op. cit., p. 207.

¹⁴Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 272.

¹⁵Oliver, Dickey, Zelko, op. cit., p. 52.

¹⁶Seely and Hackett, op. cit., pp. 191-2.

¹⁷John Edward Lantz, Speaking In The Church (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1954), pp. 52-53.

face may be much more expressive than any other part of the body because of the extremely complex system of muscles. The head as a unit is not as expressive as the face, yet is very effective in emphasizing a person's words.¹⁸

This would seem to encourage the importance of eye contact between speaker and audience. There should be eye contact especially when the speaker comes to exhortation, but yet there are times when this may be ignored. The sublimity of doctrine may occasion an uplifted gaze and at other times the eyes may gaze about as they will.¹⁹ Or eye contact is not appropriate perhaps when dealing with visionary concepts such as the description of a new heaven and earth in Revelation 21 and Isaiah 6. It is also inadvisable to have direct eye contact when saying something that may offend someone.²⁰

The hands and fingers are also expressive means for gesturing. The index finger means something to the audience. It centers the audience's attention on that exact point which the speaker is making. The significant sentence that accompanies the gesture sticks with the audience. The clenched fist as a gesture is meaningless when it doesn't convey the impressions of physical strength. Therefore this gesture should be avoided usually by small women and by men with delicate hands.²¹

¹⁸Seely and Hackett, op. cit., p. 200.

¹⁹Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 252.

²⁰Lantz, op. cit., p. 59.

²¹Seely and Hackett, op. cit., p. 206.

As to the question of how often ought the speaker gesture it may be said that informal occasions call for many gestures. A lot of gestures are required especially with the young since they crave action. However, old people care for very little gestures. Not much gesturing is needed at a formal occasion like a funeral or even at a worship service.²²

The following are a set of suggestions for gestures which partly summarize this study of gesticulation.

1. "All gesturing should aid communication and not detract from it."
2. The speaker's range of gesturing and range of vision should be as wide as, but no wider than, the width of the congregation he is speaking to. One should not look out the window or gesture to the wall.
3. All gesturing should be placed between the speaker's body and the congregation.²³
4. Bodily expression should be unified.
5. In general, posture and gesture should be as graceful as consistent with the thought expressed.
6. Since hands and arms are so significant in conveying meanings, they should be as inconspicuous as possible when not employed in gesturing.
7. Gestures should employ strength and character.²⁴

Rate Of Delivery

Consideration should be given to the rate of speaking as

²²Lantz, op. cit., pp. 62-3.

²³Ibid., pp. 59-61.

²⁴Seely and Hackett, op. cit., pp. 212-3.

one of the external devices. The problem becomes apparent when the following facts are revealed: The average speaker talks at about the rate of 125 to 160 words a minute. However, it is estimated that we can think about four times as fast as a person can speak, or at the rate of five hundred words a minute. This leaves an excess of 350 words a minute of extra thinking time for the listener. What can be done with this extra time? This source puts the responsibility on the listener. "We must, therefore, use this time constructively to watch the speaker, observe his manner and expression, and constantly analyse what he is saying."²⁵ Conversely, it seems to be the responsibility of the speaker to provide the hearer with a manner and expression that will tempt his watching and with a message which he will be impelled to analyse and consider.

Generally, however, it is safe to say that the rate of the speech should be energetic, varied, and suited to the occasion. The rate should be slower when talking to a large group, when using a public address system, and when solemn or impressive subject matter is treated. However, when scenes of excitement are described it is best to do that with rapid speech.²⁶ With specific application to illustrations, the speech should be clean, accurate, and quick; for the audience will tire quickly

²⁵Oliver, Dickey, Zelko, op. cit., p. 79.

²⁶Ibid., p. 57.

when they must think faster than the speaker.²⁷

Mode Of Delivery

Related to the foregoing is the mode of delivery. There are a number of modes of which reading is one. There are advantages to this method. The very fact of the manuscript which the people realize is apt to give the people the assurance of a worthy message. There is an instinctive suspicion of the man without a manuscript until people are sure of his character and intellectual habits.²⁸ The use of a manuscript is often condemned because it tends to draw attention from the message. Macartney said that "in season and out of season, year after year, and to the average congregation, there can be no question that the sermon that does the most good is the sermon that is preached without notes." Yet Garrison claims that actual tests do not substantiate this. Alan H. Monroe in measuring the reaction to numerous student speakers found more "good" speakers used notes than "poor" ones. F. H. Knower reported similar results. At least the moderate use of notes is not an appreciable source of distraction.²⁹

Another advantage is that the read sermon obviously has been written out and there are distinct advantages in writing

²⁷Beecher, op. cit., p. 174.

²⁸Arthur S. Hoyt, The Work Of Preaching (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1921), p. 299.

²⁹Garrison, op. cit., pp. 85-6.

out one's material. One becomes thorough when he writes something out; he will weigh his thoughts and in all assure a worthy message. It leads to precision of language. It avoids the careless, inexact, foolish words of the speaker and thus there is less danger of misunderstanding; for a special fault of the pulpit is exaggeration. Moreover, writing leads to an orderly development of the sermon, and the truth can be related in its proper proportion.³⁰ But the written sermon as a claimed advantage for the read sermon can also be an advantage for other modes of delivery, such as delivering without manuscript the memorized written sermon.

Will a hearer pay as much attention to the read sermon as to another method? What are the disadvantages of the read sermon? They are seen when the advantages of what is called "extemporaneous preaching" are made clear. Briefly, this method is that by which not the subject matter, but the words are extemporaneous. The language may come at the moment, but the subject has been well thought out.

Here let me say, if you would be listened to, do not extemporize in the emphatic sense, for that is as bad as reading, or perhaps worse, unless the manuscript was written out extemporaneously; I mean without previous study. Do not go into the pulpit and say the first thing that comes to hand, for the uppermost thing with most men is mere froth.³¹

"He knows what he is going to say, but does not know how he

³⁰Hoyt, op. cit., pp. 298-302.

³¹Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 108.

will say it" defines the extemporaneous method. It presupposes study and mastery of the subject, even the exact order and then freedom of expression.³²

Now, the advantages of speaking extemporaneously supposedly show the weaknesses of the read sermon and the sermon preached from notes. The delivery may be hampered in a read sermon. The speaker may have to stoop to catch a line and will not be in the proper speaking position. The voice may be injured because of the cramped vocal organs.³³ The extemporaneous speaker lacks in accuracy, but he may gain more in ease, directness, and vigor. When the preacher is preparing his manuscript he cannot always tell if something should be repeated, but when speaking extemporaneously he can watch the people's faces and discover which statements require more clearness.³⁴ This seems to be the greatest advantage over the read sermon based on the theory that preaching is a two-way traffic. It depends on receiving communications from the audience as well as giving them. The interest of the audience will drop if the real attention of the speaker's voice and eyes is on the paper. "He will be like a tennis player with nobody to play with; no balls coming briskly from the audience side of the court."³⁵ The faces of

³²Hoyt, op. cit., p. 311.

³³Ibid., pp. 305-6.

³⁴R. W. Dale, Nine Lectures On Preaching (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1877), p. 165.

³⁵Halford B. Luccock, In The Minister's Workshop (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1944), pp. 197-8.

people reflect a thousand shades of thought and the speaker may want to make any number of modifications of his statements after he sees and feels the effect of what has been said. In fact, not until the speaker stands before his audience can he imagine certain points of application. Therefore, the speaker ought to be in direct, free communication with the audience.³⁶

An experiment bears out clearly the advantage of speaking directly over something read, notwithstanding the findings reported by Garrison. The discrepancies in his findings with what follows may be due to the fact that he was reporting on speech from notes while this experiment had to do with just the read sermon.

Actually, two experiments were performed. In the first one a story was spoken from memory to a group of sixty-one students, and the same story was read to a smaller group of thirty-nine students. Both groups were instructed to write immediately what they could remember and they were also made aware that the materials concerned a special test and should be attended to with an interest in competition for score. Those who heard the story read averaged 40 with a mean variation of 6.2 while those who heard it spoken averaged 41.6 with a mean variation of 3.3. When the audience is attending competitively obviously the matter of reading or speaking is of small matter. However, in the second experiment no importance

³⁶Beecher, op. cit., p. 214.

was attached to the lecture. An identical period of time was given to the reading and speaking and it was made sure the two classes would hear the same kind of emphasis, pauses, and intonation because of long previous practice by the two speakers. But the scores reported in this experiment were greatly different. The group that was read to averaged a score of 49.6 with a mean variation of 14.4 while the other method averaged 67.5 with a mean variation of 15.7. It seems then that the audience is disposed to give one-third greater attention for spoken utterance than for reading. When an ulterior motive for attending is employed, reading and speaking are about equally effective.³⁷

While this experiment throws the weight on the extemporaneous method over the speech that is read, the extemporaneous method is not necessarily the most desirable over every other method. This extemporaneous method still has the defects which the written and read sermon avoid. The foregoing experiment may also be used in favor of other methods. The speaker may memorize his sermon and thus combine, to an extent, the advantages of the previous two methods. The advantage of memorizing the written sermon is better speaking to the written sermon. However, the disadvantage is that it trains the memory at the expense of other faculties. The mind becomes absorbed in re-

³⁷H. T. Moore, "The Attention Value Of Lecturing Without Notes," Journal Of Educational Psychology, X (1919), 465-9.

memorizing what follows.³⁸ It is almost impossible to give the impression of spontaneity in the memorized speech. It is almost sure to become an exhibition of the physical aspects of speaking: posture, movement, gesture, and voice. It also makes it impossible for the speaker to adapt the content, manner, and length of the speech to the unexpected moods, desires, and interests of the audience.³⁹

One more method has much to commend it over the others. Garvie approves the plan which fixes the outline so well in the speaker's mind so that the sermon may be spoken without reference to notes.⁴⁰ But Hoyt fills out the description more so. The message is carefully written out, the outline is memorized, the sermon itself thought through and then presented without notes. This method preserves accuracy of language and thought, trains in expression, and still keeps the freedom and naturalness of speaking. At first the speaker will be hampered by his effort to remember, but this will pass with more experience.⁴¹

Caemmerer calls this method "functional memorizing." The sermon has been written and rewritten. When this task is completed the speaker rehearses the sermon to himself as though

³⁸Hoyt, op. cit., p. 325.

³⁹Seely and Hackett, op. cit., p. 251.

⁴⁰Alfred E. Garvie, A Guide To Preachers (Fourth edition; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), pp. 262-4.

⁴¹Hoyt, op. cit., p. 326.

he were speaking to his audience. At first he may be halting where the organization and sequence of thought and sentences is unfit. Some material, while he is making this first attempt, may be disposed of while other more significant material which has come to mind may be incorporated into the sermon. He will perfect his sermon after several attempts at this and after increasing experience.⁴² This method does away with many of the disadvantages of the other methods while still retaining the advantages.

It is part of the speaker's job in delivery to observe the group and how the hearers as a whole or individually are responding. It would be in his best interest to know where the influence of the speaker is most effectively felt in the audience itself, and where the behavior of the group tends to be most listless. The following are practical conclusions for the speaker in his effort to control the attention of the hearers:

- (1) The influence of the performer does not travel across the audience in concentric circles, nor in waves, nor in straight lines of advance; it proceeds zig-zag to the most susceptible centers of persons, from which points it radiates in local areas.
- (2) Do not be misled by the behavior of random numbers of the audience; try first to locate the susceptible centers of influence and in the beginning be guided by them.
- (3) In an audience seated at random, the most susceptible points are likely to be those near the center of the group; but in many audiences those seeking seats well to the front are likely to be the most ready to react and the most favorably disposed.⁴³

⁴²R. R. Caemmerer, Preaching To The Church (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Mimeo Co., 1952), p. 56.

⁴³Hollingsworth, op. cit., p. 49.

Attention and Various Modes Of Emphasis

The experiment of Jersild on the modes of emphasis in delivery are especially revealing. The material in this experiment consisted of seventy separate statements, each of which could be delivered with an emphasis device and was presented to ten groups of students, totalling 253, who were tested for immediate recall. The modes of emphasis were: concentrated repetition, distributed repetitions, verbal emphasis, pause, loudness, banging one's fist, gestures, slowness of speech, and the emphasis value of statements at the beginning, middle, and end of the speech.

It was found that the beginning and end position are clearly more advantageous than the middle. There is a decided superiority for a person's attention, however, at the beginning as compared with the end. The high scores shown for the primary positions become all the more impressive in view of the fact that the time interval separating the presentation and the recall test is longer for items which fall at the beginning of the exercise than for those which occupy the end position. Because of the lapse of time, one would ordinarily think the final statements should have the advantage by virtue of their recency. The first impressions leave their lasting effects.

Five, four, and three concentrated repetitions rated highest, in that order. Yet the value of increased repetitions does not rise in proportion, nor are four repetitions twice as effective as two. The effect of increased repetitions ap-

pear to follow the "law of diminishing return." Far more effective is the distributed repetition, that is, to allow some time to elapse between the first and second presentation.

The comment, "Now get this," impresses more effectively than does two distributed repetitions, and is as effective as the first degree of primacy. The remark, "Did you notice that?" is superior to the other artificial emphases employed. In general, it appears that the accessory verbal stresses are more advantageous than those effected by gestures, loudness, or any of the other devices employed in this study. The pause is effective in that, at least, it impresses an item more strongly than to repeat the item immediately after its first impression. Still, two distributed repetitions are more advantageous than the pause. Impressive intonation, banging one's fist, and gesticulation, although of relative low value, stand out as a positive aid to recall and rate above the statements in the middle section of the talk for impressiveness. Slowness of speech fares very badly. Not only did it rank the lowest in all the emphases, but it actually operated as a detriment to recall.⁴⁴

Use Of Voice

The speaker's voice and his use of it certainly comes in for a dominant part in the control of attention. An obvious

⁴⁴A. T. Jersild, "Modes Of Emphasis In Public Speaking," Journal Of Applied Psychology, XII (December, 1928), 611-20.

suggestion is that the voice ought be loud enough to be distinct, otherwise a distant hearer will tire of strain and give up trying to attend. Certain factors enter into distinctness: not just amount of but also tone of voice, the rate of speaking, and projectile quality.⁴⁵ Though the speaker will want to articulate his words as carefully as possible, he should keep in mind that his method must not draw attention from what is being said. As is the case in gestures, bodily movement, or any other aspect of speaking, whenever the speaker is overcareful in articulating his words, he diverts the mind of the audience to how something is being said rather than to the message itself.⁴⁶

Luccock prefers the worst voice in its native state than what is called the "perfect voice" of the radio announcers.

The orotund solemnity with which we are assured of the merits of cigarettes and soap powder is, of all instruments, the least effective in the pulpit. It is the kind of steady assault against which the mind puts up all its defenses. Eventually its soporific power rivals that of laudanum. The reason is that such a "perfect voice" loses its human qualities.⁴⁷

Spurgeon gives several suggestions on the proper use of voice for attention. The preacher should speak out clearly, distinctly, and boldly at the very outset and thereby command attention by his manly tones. Though he should be outspoken at

⁴⁵Hoyt, op. cit., p. 370.

⁴⁶Oliver, Dickey, Zelko, op. cit., p. 62.

⁴⁷Luccock, op. cit., pp. 195-6.

first, yet the speaker should not start at the highest pitch lest he be unable to rise when the occasion calls for it.⁴⁸ Spurgeon puts the utmost importance on suiting the voice to the matter, and being, above all, natural in everything. One ought not be jubilant over a doleful subject, and on the other hand, he ought not drag heavily where the tones should be merry, if he wants to command attention.⁴⁹ Further, the voice should never indulge in monotones. The speed of the voice should be varied continually, sometimes dashing rapidly, at other times moving in quiet majesty. The accent and emphasis should be attended to in order to avoid the sing-song. The tone must be varied, sometimes letting the bass roll, and at other times speaking as though in conversation, just so that there is change. "Human nature craves for variety, and God grants it in nature, providence and grace; let us have it in sermons also."⁵⁰ One of the most helpful methods in securing attention and in keeping the material varied is the pause. "Keep on, on, on, on, on, with the commonplace matter and monotonous tone, and you are rocking the cradle, and deeper slumbers will result; give the cradle a jerk, and sleep will flee."⁵¹

⁴⁸Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 96.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 99.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 108.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 115.

Enthusiasm and Character

The speaker may have mastered all the techniques of delivery and yet it may all go by the board if there is no enthusiasm and character to his person. Flesch sums it all up:

You can sit down at home, think up a beautiful speech or article, rewrite it a dozen times, stuff it to the brim with brilliant ideas, startling facts, breath-taking beauty of language. Then it gets exposed to an audience and what happens? Absolutely nothing. Some intangible element is missing. Nobody is interested; nobody pays attention to what you have said.

He continues that the reason for this is a lack of emotion. No one can take in anything without at least a flicker of interest. In order to arouse that interest the speaker must arouse some emotion. An emotional bridge must be built between speaker and hearer.⁵²

Just as we much more enjoy talking with an alert and animated conversationalist, just so does an audience profit more by an alert and animated public speaker because of the infectious interest he arouses. Without this alertness, the hearers may conclude that the speaker lacks interest in his own subject. The comedian profits by a "dead-pan expression" but it is not likely to excite attention from the audience for an issue of civic or religious dimensions.⁵³ So the speaker himself must be interested. He must show that his subject weighs heavily

⁵²Rudolf Flesch, How To Make Sense (New York: Harper And Brothers Publishers, 1954), pp. 182-3.

⁵³Oliver, Dickey, Zelko, op. cit., p. 52.

upon his mind and consequently dedicate all his faculties to the deliverance of his subject. When the hearers see how the topic engrossed the speaker, then it will eventually engross them.⁵⁴

This quality of enthusiasm is a prerequisite for salesmen. For one thing, enthusiasm incites the salesman himself to greater effort.⁵⁵ Moreover, the customer as well as the audience feels the mental state of the salesman. It will not do merely to get attention, but to attract the right kind of attention. One should ask himself how he may be unconsciously influencing others by himself--by his appearance, his voice, his manner, his attitude. Like begets like, and therefore speakers had better beware of any unfortunate responses they elicit from the audience which are suggested by their own manner and attitude. "For we influence very largely in ways far more subtle than we suspect. We shake hands; and instantly we are condemned! Too limp!"⁵⁶ Enthusiasm is infectious, but so is doubt and uncertainty, and this is liable to put the audience into a state of indecision. The salesman or speaker is more likely to lead to success if he possesses a conquering mood, for it is well nigh impossible to lead an audience to action if the speaker lacks enthusiasm. He is more likely to be convinced

⁵⁴Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 113.

⁵⁵Crane, op. cit., p. 239.

⁵⁶H. A. Overstreet, Influencing Human Behavior (New York: People's Institute Publishing Co., 1925), p. 15.

rather than do the convincing.⁵⁷

The preacher, of course, cannot afford to be enthusiastic alone. There must be a structure of character and personal worth that will undergird his enthusiasm. People are susceptible to the force of sincerity. Trickery gives rise to unpleasant feelings and hence we repel such. We know that unscrupulous people employ it to our hurt. Such people usually use superlatives and stretching of truth. We are on guard for anything that will catch us in a trap, that is unreal or insincere. "Sincerity, on the other hand, does not give rise to this 'sales resistance' with its inhibitions; so we are motivated much more easily thereby." A speaker who is deeply and sincerely concerned with his subject will sustain marked attention from the audience even though he may be an unpolished speaker.⁵⁸ Of course, the preacher who first settles in his charge will not as easily gain attention as a preacher of some years who is among his people as children, who share a thousand memories with his people, and is esteemed for his age and experience. One's whole life has to be in accord with his words, so that finally, after years, not only the attention but also the veneration of the congregation will be sustained. "If by our prayers and tears and labors our people become spiritually healthy, we need not fear that we shall lose their attention."⁵⁹

⁵⁷Crane, op. cit., pp. 235-6.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 46-7.

⁵⁹Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 113.

CHAPTER V

ATTENTION FACTORS INHERENT IN THE MESSAGE

There are some subjects that are so interesting of themselves that nothing more is needed to create interest than the mere statement of them. More often, however, the problem of holding attention involves more than this in the materials. One will constantly have to inquire about what methods will have to be used to keep the audience's attention. Every material will have to be analysed in terms of its attention holding qualities. One source lists these qualities as follows: concreteness, vividness, familiarity, vitality, variety, novelty, suspense, conflict, humor.¹

Variety in Unity

One important element for attention is change or variety. Pillsbury is quoted as saying that change, whether in size or intensity, whether it increases or decreases, attracts attention. We notice, for example, a whistle of changing pitch while a constant one escapes our notice. One will even notice the ticking of a watch when it stops, although the continuous ticking has not at all been noticed. Objects that move toward or away from us are noticed, but would not be noticed if they

¹Robert T. Oliver, Dallas C. Dickey, and Harold P. Zelko, Communicative Speech (New York: Dryden Press, 1949), p. 206.

remained stationary.² Garrison calls contrast, or ordered change, "the most important single element in commanding attention." Highway engineers say a broken center line holds attention better than a solid line no matter what its color or width. A blinker at an intersection is better than a light shining without interruption.³ The application is evident for the speaker: "The prescription is that the subject must be made to show new aspects of itself; to prompt new questions; in a word, to change. From an unchanging subject the attention inevitably wanders away."⁴

On the other hand, it is important that one central thought be presented to the audience, and that that be repeated until it is sufficiently driven home. Too often the speaker has nothing but change, tries too much and thinks his hearers are capable of understanding several major thoughts in one period. In exposition, however, there is need of "pounding in" a single idea. The hearer cannot always review and ponder and so impress his thoughts. If the speaker has forcefully expressed one thought he has done well enough.⁵ For this reason speakers

²Robert H. Gault and Delton T. Howard, An Outline Of General Psychology (Second edition; New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1933), p. 118.

³Webb B. Garrison, The Preacher And His Audience (Westwood, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1954), p. 78.

⁴William James, Talks To Teachers (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1925), pp. 103-4.

⁵James A. Winans, Speech-Making (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1938), p. 202.

should not despise redundancy when they prepare their message. Our message does not always get through because of "semantic noise." People don't pay attention, their thoughts wander, they are tired, bored, worried, etc. Therefore, things have to be said over and over.

No, don't disparage redundancy: it's the only weapon you have against the semantic noise that surrounds you. You say you believe in what you are saying? You say you have already repeated it five times? Go ahead: say it twenty times more in twenty different ways. Maybe then someone will begin to catch on.⁶

This theory of "driving home" one's point is evident in other areas of communication. A dramatist once said a playwright must "inform an audience of what is to be done in the play, later to call its attention to what is being done, and finally to point out what has been done." In order that the speaker may effectively do this he will have to employ what are called "clearinghouse sentences." They are sentences that introduce, transport from one topic to another, and that summarize.⁷ Moreover, there are "language semaphores" which help listeners "stay on the track, bridge gaps, detour momentarily, swing around curves, and rejoin the main line." Examples are: however, nevertheless, consequently, thus, therefore, next, finally, now then. Yet these may clutter and be abusive to clarity. A rule then to follow in employing these is: "employ

⁶Rudolf Flesch, How To Make Sense (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1954), pp. 151-2.

⁷Howard Francis Seely and William Arthur Hackett, Experiences In Speaking (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1940), p. 111.

word semaphores when their use makes for increased clarity, ease of understanding, and smoothness of the flow of language and thought."⁸

This then may present a clash in that, on the one hand, change is urged for attention, and on the other hand, a repetition and "hammering in" of one main idea is encouraged. To resolve this, first of all, a distinction must be made between merely holding attention through a given period and to hold attention to those given ideas which will accomplish our further purposes. If the former is all that is desired, it is possible to hold attention by a series of disconnected "hits," whether they be jokes, stories, epigrams, or any other resource of composition and delivery. But this is a waste for a speaker with a purpose, such as a preacher, unless he has used those methods to make a unified impression. We have emphasized the need for change, and the need for impressing important thoughts. Now, to resolve any apparent clash between the two, we must emphasize the need for unity.⁹ In other words, all the elements of change should be effectively organized. There ought not be mere diversity, or mere multiplicity, "but diversity within an organized whole."¹⁰

⁸Ibid., p. 109.

⁹Winans, op. cit., p. 200.

¹⁰H. L. Hollingsworth, The Psychology Of The Audience (New York: American Book Co., 1935), pp. 58-9.

This is exactly what William James tries to impress upon teachers.

Above all things, make sure that it [the topic treated] shall run through inner changes, since no unvarying object can possibly hold to the mental field too long. Let your pupil wander from one aspect of your subject, if you do not wish him to wander from it altogether to something else, variety in unity being the secret of all interesting talk and thought.¹¹

The speech then should group all its changing elements around the one central idea. When the subjects are thus arranged in orderly fashion, we more readily give attention than when they are in a jumble of odds and ends. Noises, it is true, often demand our attention, but they do not hold it and are far less perceived than tunes which have order and form.¹²

Dewey says that the human being does just this; reduces variety to unity, and breaks up unity into variety. When we listen to an engine that renders regular and even beats, we immediately emphasize one and slur another, in order to introduce rhythm. The clock changes eventually from tick, tick, to tick, tock. The engine renders a regular alternation of weak and strong beats, and thereby monotony is destroyed. Yet, rhythm works the other way also, in the direction of introducing unity. If we listen to the ticking of two clocks, we will not take the irregular combination of beats as they come

¹¹James, op. cit., pp. 111-2.

¹²Henry E. Garrett, General Psychology (New York: American Book Co., 1886), p. 158.

to us, but we try to combine them into a regular system. Thereby we reduce mere variety to an underlying unity.¹³

The New and The Old

In similar fashion there must be a combination of the new and of the old in our speech for attention. Objects draw attention to themselves which are out of the ordinary and they do so in proportion to their rarity or strangeness. Our consciousness is kept alert when the new makes its entrance. Consciousness is at a low tension for people who live under monotonous conditions, but people live at high tension when they live in a changeful environment. "Consciousness focalizes upon the unusual, for the obvious reason that there is where it is needed in the guidance of adjustment."¹⁴ Finally, too much familiarity no longer attracts the mind. Novelty is needed then, even if it is a change, such as the stopping of the continuous ticking of a watch. A matter is accentuated when it becomes the unexpected in the midst of routine.¹⁵

Anything strikingly new or different will attract attention, but we must not overestimate the importance of novelty. It can catch attention, but does not always hold it. Actually,

¹³John Dewey, Psychology (Third revised edition; New York: American Book Co., 1886), p. 185-6.

¹⁴Charles S. Gardner, Psychology And Preaching (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1928), pp. 168-9.

¹⁵Dewey, op. cit., p. 127.

the extremely novel has less holding power than the moderately novel. It becomes uninteresting because we cannot contact it to something, we cannot compare and identify it to anything. So our minds become baffled and often we simply ignore it.¹⁶ The old, or that which is at least familiar is needed, for we are not interested in something that has no connection with our past experience. "The psychological rule is that there must always be a large ingredient of the familiar in the unfamiliar."¹⁷

So then the principles of familiarity and novelty limit each other. The perfectly customary, or the absolutely novel, do not attract the mind. The old must be amid the new; the novel in the wanted. For the mind can deal with the new and varying only to the extent that the old and permanent elements are found therein. And, on the other side, there would be no change, no expansion, no growth without the new element. Stagnation results without the interest of novelty; but without familiarity, meaninglessness results. For speech-making, therefore, we must have a judicious mixture of old and new. When new ideas are presented to an audience, they should be presented so that their relation to familiar ideas is apparent. When old matters are presented, we should give them new as-

¹⁶Winans, op. cit., p. 143.

¹⁷Dewey, op. cit., pp. 127-8.

pects, relations, and applications.¹⁸ William James therefore advises:

And the maximum of attention may then be said to be found whenever we have a systematic harmony of unification between the novel and the old. It is an odd circumstance that neither the old nor the new, by itself, is interesting: the absolutely old is insipid; the absolutely new makes no appeal at all. The old in the new is what claims attention,--the old with a slightly new turn.¹⁹

Illustrations

Illustrations are a potent means of securing the hearer's attention. An audience, being like primitive people, likes to think in a succession of images. Therefore, the hearers naturally enjoy a series of stories.²⁰ It is well to remember that those illustrations are the best which originate from the preacher--the things he has experienced, observed, been told or read, as long as they do not give more attention to him than the subject.²¹ Spurgeon gives seven purposes of illustrations, at least two of which bear directly on the matter of the hearer's attention: "to secure attention and create interest; to get hold of the inattentive and careless."²²

¹⁸Winans, op. cit., p. 143.

¹⁹James, op. cit., p. 108.

²⁰George W. Crane, Psychology Applied (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1932), p. 398.

²¹Edwin H. Byington, Pulpit Mirrors (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1927), p. 188.

²²Ozora S. Davis, Principles Of Preaching (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), p. 237.

Bearing in mind the theory of impressing one important idea in the speech for proper attention, the illustrations will have to be analysed in that they actually serve their purpose as a factor of attention. The following rules guide in the use of illustration: (1) "Unity of central idea." There must be more than just resemblance, but actual unity between the illustration and the truth illustrated; (2) "Subordination." The forceful illustration stands alone and the truth to be clarified is obscured by neglect. "No figure is an end in itself; it exists wholly for the truth of the sermon;" (3) "Blending." The significance here is that there should be a handling of the illustration in our literature so as to make it a part of the sermon, not detail "lugged in or stuck on."²³

Problem Solving Activity

We are interested in conflict. We may hate or take joy in it, but rarely are we indifferent to it, though it may be anything from a dogfight to a struggle with nature. One of the reasons why we may like to hear a story of conflict is because, through imagination, we become spectators or participants in the struggle.²⁴ Gault and Howard say much the same thing when they say that attention is really a problem solving activity. It is true that many movements of our casual life

²³ibid., p. 243.

²⁴Winans, op. cit., p. 152.

have to do with trivial things which do not seem to present a problem. Yet, even in such cases, there seems to be at least a degree of anticipation, a bit of uncertainty as to the outcome of our experience. Our attention must have an object which presents a query, a problem. "But all attention, however right its movement, arises in response to uncertainty and movement."²⁵

Of course, the fact cannot be overlooked that every attentive situation has its certainties and assurances. Our minds would explode under the impact of questions if this were not so. Our problems come to us in the setting of realities and that is what gives us the means to solve them.²⁶ Dewey says that attention selects with reference to some end the mind has in view, "some difficulty to be cleared up, some problem to be solved, some idea to be gained, or plan to be formed."²⁷ It seems that if the speaker can make his hearers to feel a problem that must be solved, or a need to be filled, he will have a powerful instrument by which he will hold their attention.

Five Techniques For Attention

H. A. Overstreet has discovered several techniques by which one may secure and hold attention. One such method is

²⁵Gault and Howard, op. cit., pp. 124-5.

²⁶Ibid., p. 126.

²⁷Dewey, op. cit., pp. 134-5.

called the Yes-Response Technique. When a person says "No" and is in earnest about it, his whole neuromuscular system is saying "No." His entire organism sets itself into a condition of rejection. Sometimes there may be, though in minute degree, actual physical withdrawal or readiness for withdrawal. However, when a person says "Yes" none of these withdrawing activities take place and the organism is in a forward-moving, accepting, open attitude. "Hence, the more 'Yesses' we can, at the very outset, induce, the more likely we are to succeed in capturing the attention for our ultimate purpose."²⁸

Another method is the "Putting-it-Up-to-You" technique. This is best shown by example. A pamphlet on training children appears with such expository statements as, "Many children fuss about their food." How mild and uninteresting this is compared to statements put in the form of personalized questions: "Does your child fuss about food?" This is different because here something is aimed directly at the person. He is asked a question and is expected to reply. The chances are that the person would reply, to himself at least, "Why it surely does. What about it?" or some such reply. The trouble with the expository method is that it does the telling, it puts the sense of superiority all on the side of the expositor. It is far better if the expositor asks a question, not

²⁸H. A. Overstreet, Influencing Human Behavior (New York: People's Institute Publishing Co., 1925), pp. 17-18.

for quizzing's sake, but because he is interested to know the hearer's answer. The hearer is given credit for knowing something and the place of superiority is shifted to the hearer instead of the speaker.²⁹

A third technique for capturing attention is by challenge or antagonism. A courteous statement of beliefs that conflict with those of the audience, or a condemnation of their customs or heroes, usually will arouse attention. A distinguished clergyman preaching to a group of college students, said, "You have often been told that you are to be the leaders of the future. I have some doubts about that."³⁰ This can be very dangerous if it antagonizes the hearers against the proposal and makes them ready for combat. Challenge must show good sportsmanship by giving the opponent his due. It is more effective when it enlists others to join in the fight.

Not, "Come, see me wipe up the earth with this false prophet;" but rather, "Come, let's join in the fight." The very essence of all power to influence lies in the ability to get the other person to participate. The mind that can do that has a powerful leverage on his human world.³¹

What is called the kinetic technique is another method for sustaining attention. It involves the idea that there must be movement if we want to hold attention for very long. Whatever is offered by way of stimulus must move. It is perhaps

²⁹Ibid., pp. 18-20.

³⁰Linans, op. cit., p. 153.

³¹Overstreet, op. cit., p. 23.

the most fundamental of all requirements. It is for this reason that a story holds us, because a story obviously moves. But a story must not be rambling for this technique involves movement towards something. The good story carries us along--to something.³²

The fifth method of this list Overstreet calls the Chase Technique. The weakness of many a speaker is that he simply hands out an idea. He merely tells things, one after another and thereby does not get his audience chasing after his ideas. Yet we have the desire for the hunt deeply in us and we love to be in a quarry. The speaker does best then if he presents his ideas as a quarry if he wants to capture attention.³³

Miscellaneous Methods

The foregoing does not exhaust all the possible methods there are to capture attention. Many others, however, are probably variations of what has been said, or, at least, are related. The element of surprise is related to the idea of change and Spurgeon gives it some importance. The speaker ought not say what everyone is expecting him to say. He ought keep his sentences out of ruts.

If you have already said, "Salvation is all of grace," do not always add, "and not by human merit," but vary it and say, "salvation is all of grace; self-righteousness has not a corner to hide its head in!"

³²Ibid., pp. 12-13.

³³Ibid., p. 14.

Also, anything that is in the audience's recent consciousness is highly favorable because it possesses an emphasis since it still remains more vivid and distinct. Remoteness dulls the intensity of an impression, but if an occurrence is recent in the minds of the hearers it is more likely to be recalled than others.³⁴

An audience will always listen when it is curious. This curiosity may be aroused by previous announcement or by a curious title although one should give some clues to the real subject in his title. Curiosity during the speech may be aroused by keeping the hearer guessing as to his real stand on the matter. Or, the speaker may play a trick on his audience, but if the audience is not really satisfied, the hearers may resent the trick. One is peeved when he finds out that a great secret is, after all, merely trivial.³⁵

Finally, attention must always be on the move, it can not be static. Attention is an active performance, and its business is to make clear the uncertain and vague. We are reckoning with things when we attend. We can continue only to objects which develop. Therefore, only those objects which bear upon our interests or plans are attended to, and only while their possibilities remain unexhausted. "In the instant in which an object becomes 'clear,' attention leaves it and passes on."³⁶

³⁴Dewey, op. cit., p. 126.

³⁵Winans, op. cit., p. 158.

³⁶Gault and Howard, op. cit., pp. 114-5.

CHAPTER VI

INTEREST AND ATTENTION

One great and essential factor for attention is to hit at what interests people. Attention and interest have close connections. They are related as cause and effect and either may be the cause of the other. William James said, "What-we-attend-to and what-interests-us are synonymous terms."¹ Some psychologists completely identify interest and attention, maintaining that they are one and the same thing. Yet, there does seem to be a difference, for attention is transitory while interest may be permanent. We are able to retain an interest in a science even though we may not have devoted attention to it for a considerable time.² Still there remains an intimate and powerful influence one upon the other, for, "Whoever treats of interest inevitably treats of attention, for to say that an object is interesting is only a way of saying that it excites attention."³

If the speaker wants to secure the attention of his hearers he must be interesting. It is just a matter of common ex-

¹James A. Winans, Speech-Making (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1938), p. 133.

²Michael Maher, Psychology (Sixth edition; New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), p. 353.

³William James, Talks To Teachers (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1925), p. 100.

perience that when a person is interested in something, the object is attracting him; it catches and holds his attention so that he attends to this object without effort.⁴ Pleasing utterance, graceful gestures, and other devices for attention are all desirable aids in public speaking. But the speaker will have to have something to say, otherwise all these devices produce nothing fundamentally valuable. The speaker's message will have to hit the interests of the people. Though the speaker has a non-musical voice and no arms at all, a hearer can have his attention captivated if he is told that his house is on fire, his children kidnapped, or that he has won an automobile.⁵ With such areas of interests being touched upon, our attention will be rendered with a greater spontaneousness and ease. The hearer becomes less wearisome since attention to that which interests us does not demand the same output of mental effort.⁶ It certainly is bad to fatigue the hearers. But shortness is not the only remedy for that. "The true way to shorten a sermon is to make it more interesting."⁷

⁴Charles E. Skinner, Ira M. Gast, and Harley C. Skinner, Readings in Educational Psychology (New York: Appleton, 1926), p. 575.

⁵George W. Crane, Psychology Applied (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1932), p. 393.

⁶James Mark Baldwin, Elements Of Psychology (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1893), p. 78.

⁷Henry Ward Beecher, Yale Lectures On Preaching (New York: Ford, Howard, and Hulbert, 1887), p. 234.

There is a further importance for the speaker for being interesting based on two counts. Often an audience asks nothing more than that the speech be interesting. The audience holds it as her natural right to be interested. And the speaker must satisfy this demand for interest if he wants to have the audience's attention. The other reason is that few speakers are able to go through their speech with spirit without evidences of response from the audience. The audience influences the speaker's mood by their enthusiastic approval and reception. It would be worthwhile for a speaker to interest even one hearer in order to get a sympathetic following. But unless the speaker has most of his hearers following easily, he often does not do well. When the whole audience is keen in its attention, then he is at his greatest freedom in speech.⁸

Using Native Interests

We need to employ voluntary or attention with effort to objects less interesting or uninteresting. Passive attention is better for the hearers, however, and for this desirable kind of attention we need objects which are interesting in themselves, that is, native, or objects which become interesting by association, or artificial interests.⁹

Since some objects are natively interesting and in others

⁸Swinars, op. cit., pp. 131-2.

⁹James, op. cit., pp. 100-1.

interest is artificially acquired, the teacher must know which the natively interesting ones are;--other objects can artificially acquire an interest only through first becoming associated with some of these natively interesting things.¹⁰ Actually, many of the objects of professional interest are originally repulsive. It is only through their connection with natively interesting objects such as one's personal fortune, social responsibilities, or especially by the force of habit, that they grow to be the things for which a man cares.¹¹ The idea then is to associate the uninteresting to the natively interesting. This borrowed interest, incidentally, becomes as strong and real as that of the natively interesting object. Moreover, the borrowing does not lessen the interest of the source, since both objects taken together become more interesting, perhaps even more so than the originally interesting portion was by itself.¹²

This then is a major consideration: to make a dull subject interesting, associate it with something already interesting. But it will not be effective just to have any connection with an existing interest. The connection cannot be far-fetched, must be made in a skillful way, and the native interest with which one is seeking association should be an inter-

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 91-2.

¹¹Ibid., p. 98.

¹²Ibid., pp. 94-5.

est readily awakened.¹³ James sums up the matter:

Begin with the line of his native interests, and offer him objects that have some immediate connection with these. Next, step by step, connect with these first objects and experiences the later objects and ideas which you wish to instill. Associate the new with the old in some natural way, so that the interest, being shed long from point to point, finally suffuses the entire system of objects of thought.¹⁴

The Interests Of An Audience

If an audience falls asleep before the speaker he should not scold it for being unappreciative and ignorant. In advance, the speaker should find out what the interests of the group are, what are their levels of education, aversions, ages, sex, vocations, hobbies, and whatever else may effect their attention. A salesman, for instance, should ask the question, "Why should these people buy my product?" not, "How can I sell my product to these people?" Of course, he may have no other purpose but what he expects them to do, but he will fail to enlist their cooperation if he does not constantly keep aware of their basic desires.¹⁵

There are certain general areas that point to the sources for establishing interest. There is an interest in people for meeting difficulties. Life becomes insipid and intolerable if

¹³Winans, op. cit., pp. 137-8.

¹⁴James, op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁵Crane, op. cit., p. 393.

it is absolutely free from pain and fear. Everything would be gone if all causes of pain, danger, conflict, and failure were eliminated. Life would be pure satisfaction and we would grow as tired of it all as we would of a game which we knew we were going to win. In a game as well as life, uncertainty, difficulty, and failure are as necessary if we will be interested and satisfied, as good luck and victory.¹⁶

Somewhat similar to the foregoing is the theory of moving to a goal. Almost any object, act, process, or change in objects that can be directed by one's own activity to a definite end, is interesting on its own account and furnishes its own drive. Yet, if it is interesting it must accompany some difficulty and, at the same time, present a prospect of successful issue.¹⁷

Certain "touchy subjects" often initiate a great deal of interest, especially those involving racial, religious, or sectional prejudices. This is also illustrated by the interest that is built up in a college class when certain fraternity questions are brought up.¹⁸

Novelty gains our interest, but this is based upon our power to assimilate it. If novelty alone were more interesting, we would not pass by so many things with only a glance. But

¹⁶Skinner, Gast, and Skinner, op. cit., pp. 581-2.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 581.

¹⁸Winans, op. cit., p. 154.

we do pass by many new ideas and facts which we feel are remote from our experiences and return to the most familiar topics. Our interests are keenest when they are the things we know most about.

I am myself not presenting a novelty, but rather an almost proverbial truth, as is evidenced by the expression "busman's holiday." A man who knows says that "a railroad man on a holiday spends most of his time down at the yard watching them get number eight ready." Are the so called brain-workers different?

But the big area where our interests finally seem to be centered is in the self and man himself. The characteristic of attention is that it is directed toward some end and ultimately this end is the self. The activities of attention are based in the interests of the self and are directed toward those ends which will satisfy the self. "Starting-point, goal, and way are all found in the self, therefore."¹⁹ Spurgeon says that speakers must make the people feel that they have an interest in what we are saying to them.

This [116] is, in fact, a most essential point, because nobody sleeps while he expects to hear something to his advantage. I have heard of some very strange things, but I never did hear of a person going to sleep while a will was being read in which he expected a legacy, neither have I heard of a prisoner going to sleep while the judge was summing up, and his life was hanging in jeopardy. Self-interest quickens attention. Preach upon practical themes, pressing, present, personal matters, and you will secure an earnest hearing.²⁰

¹⁹John Dewey, Psychology (Third revised edition; New York: American Book Co., 1886), p. 133.

²⁰Charles H. Spurgeon, Spurgeon's Lectures To His Students, condensed and abridged by David Otis Fuller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1945), pp. 115-6.

It must be emphasized again that we are interested in things that affect us. Whatever causes pain or pleasure to us grasps our interest. Or, things that we have shared with ourselves tend to develop an emotional interest in us. "Objects are interesting only as they affect us or are associated with objects that affect us."²¹

Therefore, the preacher need not seek for the great, the remote, the romantic, but the things that have to do with people: the common, the familiar, the low. "Blood-warm" material should be sought after. To live with people so genuinely and to such an extent that the people become a source of preaching, "is, for the preacher, kissing the earth, a deeply religious practice."²² Therefore, Luccock quotes Dr. J. H. Oldham who is concerned about a new approach. Rather than starting with Christian doctrine that is fixed and settled and that only needs to be taught and applied, he would begin at the other end. The preacher ought patiently determine what are the needs of men today and how the Gospel says something to those addressed which they will recognize to be relevant.²³ Excluding, of course, whatever implication these statements might have in the tampering and wateringdown of the Gospel to the function of

²¹Baldwin, op. cit., pp. 246-8.

²²Halford E. Luccock, In The Minister's Workshop (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1944), p. 73.

²³ibid., p. 55.

personality-adjustment and the like, still the point seems to be well made. Our sermons should be applied to or at least should involve the interests of people. Since the interests of people center around the self, this would mean that our preaching should involve the people themselves. In other words, preaching must be audience-centered.

The matter of having one's sermons audience-centered is the test which Dr. Fosdick applies to his own sermons. His own test tries to reveal where his interest in words has subordinated his interest in people.

Uniformly I am through with my manuscript on Friday noon. The next stage is one of the most important of all, for, fearful that in working out my subject I may occasionally have forgotten my object, and may have gotten out of the center of focus the concrete personalities who will face me on Sunday, I sit down on Saturday morning and re-think the whole business as if my congregation were visibly before my eyes, often picking out individuals, and characteristic groups of individuals, and imaginatively trying my course of thought upon them, so as to be absolutely sure that I have not allowed any pride of discussion or lure of rhetoric to deflect me from the major purpose of doing some things worth while with people. This process often means the elision of paragraphs that I liked very much when I first wrote them, and the rearrangement of order of thought in the interest of psychological persuasiveness.²⁴

This interest in the self does not mean that a hearer's interest is centered only about himself. To be sure, his interests are related to his own situation, his life and health, his property, the means whereby he may acquire power and reputation, things that touch upon his sentiments and affections.²⁵

²⁴Ibid., p. 68.

²⁵Winans, op. cit., p. 146.

But there is such a thing as human interest; man is interested in man. We are interested in the affairs of other people. This is closely associated with our interest in activity, but our interest in people is not only associated with people in action. We are interested in celebrities, but we are also interested in "just folks," men, women, and children. "Man is perennially interesting to man," says Carlyle, "nay, if we look strictly to it, there is nothing else interesting." We are not so much interested in the poles, Mr. Dooley said, but that men could discover them. A complete revelation of the life of the simplest man would make the most interesting life ever written.²⁶

²⁶Ibid., p. 149.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The writer has come to several conclusions based mainly on the two types of attention; passive and voluntary. Since the passive attention of the audience is more desirable, the preacher ought concentrate upon the message and employ those qualities which will gain a spontaneous attention to the words and message of the speaker. Though they are secondary and must be subordinated to making the message interesting, the artificial devices involved in the delivery must be carefully managed. This is not to minimize the importance of conditioning the mental set of the hearers. We may have to reconsider our thinking on certain matters involved in conditioning, or at least take as much notice as possible of the ordinary conditioning factors.

For further study, a closer examination of language and its attention-holding qualities could be made. An answer should be sought as to what types of nouns or verbs, what sentence and style structure best holds attention. A detailed study of "conversational speech" and how it sustains attention should be developed. A study of architecture as an influence on speaker and hearer should be made on the basis of the findings in chapter three of the influence of architecture. Memory and attention have close associations which

should be further explored. It ought to be determined what the laws of memory are with regard to the securing of attention.

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