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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERSUASIVE PREACHING
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CAMPUS MINISTRY

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 1957

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CHAPTER I

THE NEW ERA IN PREACHING

Introduction: Purpose of the Study

Gone are the days when every village preacher was a man of weight in his community, when men crowded to hear the preached Word regardless of who was preaching or how it was being done. Preaching has entered upon a period of hard times; it has entered upon a new era.

A brief look at the history of preaching would bear this out. Beginning in Apostolic times, preaching gradually rose in power and influence until it reached a peak with Chrysostom. Thereafter preaching gradually declined for a period of more than ten centuries. The pulpit no longer had a purpose; dogma was settled and all questions were referred to the infallible authority in Rome.¹ The Reformation of the 16th century again restored preaching to its respectable position, but certain factors of comparatively recent advent have greatly complicated the preacher's task. A few of these factors may be worth noting.

For one thing, the whole attitude toward public speaking has changed. Before the development of mechanized types of

¹Webb B. Garrison, The Preacher and His Audience (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1954), p. 17.

entertainment, speeches used to furnish a fair portion of public recreation. This probably accounts for much of the former exhibitionism in public speaking. Today, however, people do not listen to speeches for entertainment, but for information, inspiration, and guidance. The busy attitude of listeners demands that the speaker, instead of putting on an exhibition, say what he has to say and be done with it. Public address has reached its rightful level of utility. Its style is consequently simpler and more businesslike than it was a few decades ago. Radio, movies, and television have all had their influence; all have conditioned the public to an intimate, personal style of composition and delivery. Radio has probably had the greatest influence. With the speaker unseen, and subject matter limited and planned to the exact quarter minute, it does not lend itself to the extravagance of the old-style expansive oratory.² And that is why preachers who still orate and drone in the pulpit draw adverse attention by way of the artificiality and ineffectiveness of their methods.

The new era in speaking carries certain implications for the preacher. It will not do for him to follow time-honored traditions in pulpit oratory and hope that people will flock to hear the Word; no longer can he glibly resort to the theological cliché and phraseology. "If his words

²Arleigh B. Williamson, Charles A. Fritz, and Harold R. Ross, Speaking in Public (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), p. 47.

are to enter men's hearts and bear fruit, they must be the right words shaped cunningly to pass men's defences and explode silently and effectually within their minds."³ In practice this means that the modern preacher will have to learn to speak in the terms of the people he is addressing. It means he will have to learn how they are thinking and feeling; it means he will have to learn with patience how to pierce their apathy and misunderstanding. As an ambassador of Christ it will be his duty to reconcile the Word of truth with the thought-forms of a people estranged from God, and to speak that truth in a way no less convincing than his modern competitors in the field of communication.

The task of the present day preacher finds vivid expression in the following quotation from Richard Baxter.

What skill doth every part of our work require, and of how much moment is every part! To preach a sermon, I think, is not the hardest part; and yet what skill is necessary to make plain the truth, to convince the hearers; to let in the irresistible light into their consciences, and to keep it there, and drive all home; to screw the truth into their minds, and work Christ into their affections; to meet every objection that gainsays, and clearly to resolve it; to drive sinners to a stand, and make them see there is no hope, but that they must unavoidably be converted or condemned; and to do all this with such language and manner as beseems our work, and yet as is most suitable to the capacities of our hearers. This, and a great deal more should surely be done with a great deal of holy skill. So great a God, whose message we deliver, should be honoured by our delivery of it.⁴

³J.B. Phillips, Making Men Whole (New York: The Mac-Millan Company, 1953), p. 44.

⁴James S. Stewart, Heralds of God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 141.

Hence the Christian preacher will seek to direct his message to the ear of his audience in the clearest and most powerful manner possible. He must be like a window through which the light of God's Word shines to the hearer. This implies that the preacher must understand the defects of public speech which cause a man to seem unpersuasive, self-conscious, or distasteful to an audience. It means that he will have to cultivate harmonious cooperation between his own mind and emotions, speech organs and body, to the end that he become a good channel for the Word of God toward people.⁵

And it is to that end that this study is made: to help the preacher understand the obstacles to effective communication, and to suggest guidelines that will be of help in persuasive preaching.

The Ethics of Persuasive Preaching

One of the first questions that comes to mind in a study of persuasive preaching is: "Is it ethical?" Closely related to that question is a corollary: "Does the use of persuasive techniques detract from the work of the Holy Spirit?" It will be the purpose of this portion of the study to answer these two questions.

First of all, is it ethical? Many thoughtful persons

⁵Richard R. Caemmerer, Preaching to the Church (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Mimeo Co., 1952), p. 47.

condemn all persuasion, in writing as well as in speaking. They feel that it is unethical to use techniques of persuasion, that it is somehow taking improper advantage of human beings. Their position is that men should be influenced by reason, not by emotional appeals. But, as shall be pointed out later, many people are reached through the emotions who could never be reached through reason alone.

Furthermore, it should be fully understood that methods must always remain subsidiary to principles in the preaching situation. Preaching has a claim over other forms of communication in its basic purpose. St. Paul, who certainly knew the value of persuasive techniques, always subordinated methods to principles. He insisted that the Christian minister speak "not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."⁶

Hence a preacher will not use persuasive techniques at the expense of preaching the truth of God's Word. But in the contemporary pulpit even Garrison, whose main premise is that principles are more important than methods, sees the need for more use of psychology in preaching. "Under-use, rather than over-use of psychological methods is the rule in the contemporary pulpit," he says.⁷ Walter Bowie would seem to agree with Garrison when he writes:

⁶I Cor. 1:17

⁷Garrison, op. cit., p. 72.

One of the sources of enlightenment to which no minister of today should allow himself to be blind is psychology. The average minister will not be a learned psychologist, much less a psychiatrist; and he had better not pretend that he is such. But every man can make himself intelligently acquainted with the great suggestions which psychology and psychiatry give concerning the human mind and conduct and character. His preaching will be the surer if he knows how men's ideas and conclusions are actually formed and knows how complex a thing the human personality is, with its impulses and its instincts which go deeper than the level of conscious thought.⁸

Ultimately, no one will deny that persuasion and the use of psychological methods can be unethical and dishonest. Just as law and medicine can become harmful in the hands of certain people, so also can persuasive techniques. But there is certainly nothing wrong with a preacher wanting to put God's message across to his people. Rightly motivated, therefore, a preacher can use persuasive techniques without the least detraction from the work of the Holy Spirit.

Definitions, Limitations, and Assumptions

The title of this study may call for a brief explanation. To that end the following definitions, limitations, and assumptions are offered.

First of all, the term "psychology," as used in this paper, is used in a very broad sense to refer to the phenomena of human behavior in the speaker-audience relationship. It

⁸Walter Bowie, Preaching (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 30.

involves the feelings, actions, and attributes of the speaker, the audience, and the individual within the audience.

The term "persuasive" may call for a more detailed explanation. While some writers in public speaking restrict the persuasive speech to one which results in definite overt action, an equal number adhere to a broader definition that makes a speech persuasive when it influences logical thought and results in emotional stimulation.⁹ In other words, persuasion may be thought of in terms of degree as well as of kind. When a man has had appeals, arguments, and evidence presented to him which will direct him to a new or different point of view, we may say he has been persuaded. Just as truly, we may say he is persuaded when he is made to feel keenly and with renewed emotion concerning something to which he had become emotionally inert and apathetic. In the preaching situation both types of persuasion are in demand.

The etymology of the word "persuasion" is not only interesting, but it also sheds light on the meaning. The word comes from the Latin per suasio, meaning "by sweetness." From this it is evident that the ancients also recognized the basic fact that, in order to initiate, activate, and direct a belief or a course of action, it is necessary to make the proposal attractive to the hearers. The preacher who speaks to the spiritual hunger of his congregation is reaffirming

⁹Robert T. Oliver, Dallas C. Dickey, and Harold P. Zelko, Essentials of Communicative Speech (New York: The Dryden Press, c. 1949), p. 214.

the truth of this principle.¹⁰

The word "preaching," as used in the title, perhaps requires less explanation. As a point of departure we may define preaching as "verbal communication of the truth revealed by God in Christ to men and women in their known needs."¹¹ Preaching possesses strength to the degree in which the basic facts of the Christian faith are brought to bear upon the actual needs, desires, and problems of the congregation.

It will be noted that this study is to be made "with special reference to the campus ministry." This is not to imply that the material presented in this thesis is applicable only to the campus ministry. Since the greater part of the student work sponsored by the Lutheran Church is carried on in conjunction with a regular parish program, this thesis was written primarily for pastors involved in such a dual ministry. Basically, the same persuasive techniques must be used in communicating to people of every walk of life. Accordingly, much of the material will be of a more general nature.

In this connection several basic assumptions should be noted. First of all, as has been noted above, the study is

¹⁰Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1946), p. 9.

¹¹David A. MacLennan, Pronouns for Preachers (Great Neck, New York: The Pulpit Press, 1954), p. 5.

based on the assumption that persuasive preaching in no way detracts from the work of the Holy Spirit or from the power of God's Word. Secondly, it is assumed that many of the techniques of persuasive "speaking" are also applicable to persuasive "preaching." Authorities on rhetoric and speaking recognize no special type of speaking called preaching that is essentially different psychologically from other persuasive speaking. Hence there is no special style that deserves to be called religious speaking. The only difference is that the professional preacher is extending his efforts to a group or congregation with more diverse problems.¹²

The third and final assumption is that persuasive techniques are applicable to all people, but that college students present certain additional challenges that would warrant a special study in their area of life. It was during his year of internship that the writer first became aware of this special need of students. While it is true that students are basically just normal people living in the abnormal environment of the university, they are nevertheless subject to unique problems that call for special attention from the campus preacher. These problems will be discussed in greater detail under Chapter II.

Organization of the Study

The study is divided into six chapters. The first

¹²Williamson, Fritz, and Ross, op. cit., p. 48.

chapter is introductory, presenting the problem and purpose of the research, the validation of the study, and a series of definitions, limitations, and assumptions. The second chapter will take up the primary principle in psychological and persuasive speaking: Know Your Audience. Hence the second chapter is entitled: "Analyzing the Audience."

The third chapter bears the title, "Creating Atmosphere in the Preaching Situation," and speaks of the various factors involved in preparing the audience for a response. Many of these factors are beyond the preacher's control; nevertheless, the preacher should be aware of them and make use of those over which control can be had.

The fourth chapter will present the problem of "Holding Attention in the Preaching Situation" and the various methods and techniques to that end. Holding attention is a basic problem in any speaking situation, and preaching is no exception. To create atmosphere only to lose the attention of the audience is futile.

The fifth chapter is entitled, "Creating Response in the Preaching Situation," and will speak specifically to the psychological crowd and the psychological approach. This chapter will lay heavy emphasis on the end goal of persuasion: namely, a response on the part of the hearer. Analyzing the audience, creating atmosphere, and holding attention are all worthless unless this end goal of creating a response is attained.

The sixth and final chapter will present conclusions

reached on the basis of the study.

Several themes will recur in different chapters. For example, the preacher's personality will be discussed both in the chapter on creating atmosphere and in the chapter on creating response. Such repetition is unavoidable in a study such as this, since in both instances the preacher's personality plays an important role. The writer will attempt to avoid duplication of thought in discussing these recurring themes.

Major Sources of Data

The greater part of the data in this study is taken from general works on effective public speaking and the psychology of persuasive speech. Principles laid down for persuasive speaking were re-studied and re-applied to the preaching situation. Accordingly, when the word "speech" or "speaking" occurs in a direct quotation, the implication is that the material is also applicable to preaching.

Books and periodicals dealing specifically with the art of preaching and the campus ministry were also employed, as well as personal experiences enjoyed by the writer during his year's internship with college students.

Your audience. Unless a preacher is aware of the needs

Robert T. Oliver, *The Psychology of Preaching*
 New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1957, p. 272.

CHAPTER II

ANALYZING THE AUDIENCE

Importance of Analysis

Henry Ward Beecher, in his third lecture to the Yale divinity students, emphasized the importance of analyzing and knowing your audience when he wrote:

Now in order to reach and help all these varying phases of your congregation, you must take human nature as you find it, in its broad range. Understand this, that the same law that led the Apostle to make himself a Greek to the Greeks, and a Jew to the Jews, and to put himself under the law with those who were under the law; and that same everlasting good sense of conformity in these things for the sake of taking hold of men where they can be reached, and lifting them up, requires you to study human nature as it is, and not as people tell you it ought to be. If a man can be saved by pure intellectual preaching, let him have it. If others require a predominance of emotion, provide that for them. If by others the truth is taken more easily through the imagination, give it to them in forms attractive to the imagination. If there are still others who demand it in the form of facts and rules, see that they have it in that form. Take men as it has pleased God to make them; and let your preaching, so far as it concerns the selection of material, and the mode and method by which you are presenting the truth, follow the wants of persons themselves, and not simply the measure of your own minds.¹

In these words Mr. Beecher capsules the first principle of the psychology of persuasive preaching: Know Your Audience. Unless a preacher is aware of the needs

¹Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1946), p. 272.

of his audience, his preaching is going to be irrelevant and have little effect.

One of the fundamental purposes of audience analysis is to predetermine: (1) what the audience already knows and has experienced; (2) what the audience will have to accept, if it is to agree to the specific proposal; (3) what the audience is likely to accept willingly; and (4) what must be done to win acceptance of essential considerations that may be resisted.²

Types of Audiences

Perry and Whitesell list four general types of audiences which a preacher is likely to confront. These are the sympathetic, the apathetic, the antagonistic, and the doubtful audiences.³

Most church audiences are "sympathetic"; that is, they have gathered to hear a discussion of the Word of God and are ready to accept what the minister has to say, so long as it is in general conformity to the Scriptures. From the standpoint of persuasion, this is a believing audience. The preacher's aim will not be to convince his audience of the reasonableness of what he is saying, but it will rather be

²Robert T. Oliver, Persuasive Speaking (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1950), p. 155.

³Farris D. Whitesell and Lloyd M. Perry, Variety In Your Preaching (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1954), p. 20.

to stir them to action.⁴ In a campus ministry that involves mostly Lutheran students, this same sympathetic attitude will be in evidence. However, in a campus ministry involving many non-Lutherans or perhaps even non-Christians, the preacher will want to use an approach that instructs and explains more than one which is for the most part inspirational.

A second type of audience is the "apathetic" or indifferent audience. People in this group lack definite feeling toward the message or messenger. This type is quite prevalent in this day when church-going has become a socially accepted thing. Here the preacher's purpose will be to capture attention by using attention-getting material, particularly appealing to the basic concerns of people.

A third audience may be hostile or "antagonistic," although this type is rather rare in the preaching situation. The preacher should be aware, however, that there may always be individuals within the audience who are antagonistic or at least skeptical; this is especially true in the campus situation. The preacher will want to approach such a group on the basis of common ground, making statements with which the person can readily agree, and then lead up to the conclusion. In another situation the

⁴Arleigh B. Williamson, Charles A. Fritz, and Harold R. Ross, Speaking in Public (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1948), p. 364.

best approach might be to frankly and openly state the case and let the decision rest on the intelligence and fair-mindedness of the audience.

Finally, an audience may be essentially "doubtful." The demand in such a case will be for factual material. It will involve the employment of the principles of general semantics.⁵ This type of audience is quite common in a campus ministry and should be given careful attention by a preacher.

In addition to the overall attitude of the audience, the preacher must also take into consideration certain other factors that may "type" an audience. There are the factors of age, sex, educational background, and experience. There are also such physical factors as the size of the audience and the time of the day.

With respect to the age factor, it should be noted that every age has its particular strains and stresses, ambitions, and disappointments. Obviously, therefore, a preacher will not want to preach the same type of sermon to a young peoples' gathering that he would preach to a group at the old folks' home. Broadly speaking, young people are more likely to react to suggestion than are older people. Youth likes to be challenged. Instead of comfort and ease, it wants adventure. On the other hand, older people are full of experience, thought, and observation, which makes them more open to a logical

⁵Whitesell and Perry, op. cit., p. 20.

appeal than to suggestion. Frequent failure in solving life's problems has made them critical and cautious of new ventures. Age tends to take a backward rather than a forward look.⁶ The preacher will want to take these facts into consideration in preaching to different age groups.

With respect to the factor of sex, psychologists say that women are more conservative than men, more religious, more readily disciplined, healthier, and longer lived.⁷ Since, however, a preacher is ordinarily addressing a mixed audience, this factor will not play a prominent part in his sermon preparation.

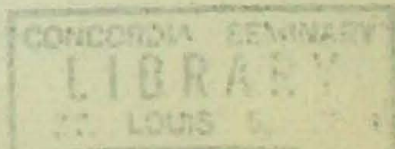
Again, there is the matter of educational background. The amount of formal education one possesses is a rough but suggestive index to his intelligence and mental maturity. The preacher will want to adjust his level of preaching to this index. Another consideration is to ascertain whether certain special fields of educational experience will be represented in the audience. The minds of these people will be especially keen in their specific and related fields, because of their specialized training and experience.⁸

But educational experience is only one type of experience.

⁶Lionel Crocker, Public Speaking for College Students (New York: American Book Co., c. 1941), p. 299.

⁷Eugene E. White and Clair R. Henderlinder, Practical Public Speaking (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1954), p. 26.

⁸Ibid., p. 27.



The prudent preacher will want to take advantage of the whole background and fund of experience of his audience. He will want to apply the principles of accommodation to his preaching. Stolz brings this life-situation preaching into sharp focus when he says:

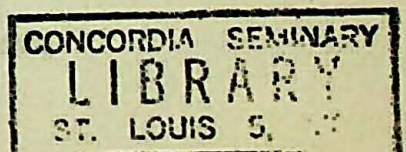
The Twenty-third Psalm, noble as it is in its own right, means little to those who know nothing of the work of a Syrian shepherd who cared for his flock a thousand years before Christ was born. Jesus knew how to adjust His message to the pre-existing circumstances of the various groups He taught. Did He not address the parable of the dragnet which gathered both good and bad fish to fishermen? At any rate He used language which the people understood and wove things with which they were familiar into patterns of unforgettable parables. He knew that one interprets the new in terms of the old.⁹

The preacher who expresses his message in terms of the conditions, daily experiences, occupations, and recreations of his people will be both understood and appreciated. The effective persuasive speech, therefore, will be sprinkled with such phrases as: "You know from your own experience that. . . ."; "You will recall what happened when. . . ."; "All of you have frequently observed. . . ."; and similar references to what the audience already knows.¹⁰

What has been said so far applies chiefly to audiences which are, for the most part, homogeneous. However, most church audiences are a mixture of young and old, educated and uneducated, and of varied experiential backgrounds. This

⁹Karl R. Stolz, The Church and Psychotherapy (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), p. 188f.

¹⁰Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, p. 73.



fact complicates the preacher's task. One solution is to follow the advice given in relation to audiences of varied intelligence: adapt the quality of your ideas to the highest common denominator, and their expression to the lowest.¹¹ In other words, the preacher will want to speak in terms that the least educated and experienced can understand, but the thoughts he expresses will be of such a nature as to hold the attention of the best educated and most experienced. To strike this balance is a task requiring thorough analysis of the audience and a great deal of time in sermon preparation.

Such physical factors as the size of the audience and the time of day should also be considered in analyzing the audience. Overt response is easier to win from a large audience than from a small one. Crowd psychology has little opportunity to manifest itself in a scattering of fifteen or twenty people.¹² The larger the audience and the more closely seated together the individuals, the greater will be the response.

Furthermore, the time of day has a definite effect on audience reaction. Generally speaking, an alert morning group is easiest to address. Attention in the afternoon wanes, and even a relaxing evening atmosphere can be destroyed

¹¹Robert T. Oliver, Rupert L. Cortright, and Cyril F. Hager, The New Training for Effective Speech (New York: The Dryden Press, Inc., 1946), p. 286.

¹²White and Henderlinder, op. cit., p. 26.

if the sermon goes too long.¹³ The effective preacher will want to take this element of time into consideration as he prepares his address.

Basic Concerns of Audiences

The thesis of this chapter is that the preacher learn to analyze his audience so that he can speak specifically to their needs. The question may be asked, however, in what ways the preacher is to become intelligently informed on the failings, aspirations, and difficulties of the members of his congregation. First of all, he may be certain that his own vital needs as a human being reflect those of at least some of his hearers. Furthermore, as a close observer of people, the preacher gleans valuable hints of their desires and distresses. Undoubtedly the most direct method of gathering the information is to question the people.¹⁴ This method has been used with success by many parish ministers.

Perhaps no preacher has made a more objective and vital study of the moral and religious concerns of people than Dr. Harold W. Ruopp. During the period of seven years (1931-1938), Dr. Ruopp, with the help of his students, collected over four thousand definite replies from as many individuals to the one

¹³Lionel Crocker, Business and Professional Speech (New York: The Ronald Press Company, c. 1951), p. 104.

¹⁴Stolz, op. cit., p. 193.

central question: "What is the outstanding question (problem or difficulty) which you face in your thinking and living?" Answers were received from people connected with approximately two hundred local churches. Dr. Ruopp reduced the responses to four groups.

The first group, consisting of 1,912 answers or about 48 per cent of the total number, refers to the individual and his personal life. Futility, insecurity, loneliness, vocational decisions, marriage problems, alcoholism, sex, false ideas of religion and morals, educational lacks, wrong use of leisure time, suffering, economic catastrophes, sickness, loss of loved ones by death, thwarted ambitions, and guilt feelings are included in this group.

The second, consisting of 830 replies or about 31 per cent, refers to the relationships of the individual to the family. Strife between or among members of the family, the problem of the Christian nurture of the young child, inadequate conceptions of married life, homes divided because of religious or economic issues, separation of couples, desertion, infidelity, divorce, and death of spouse are embraced in this group.

The third, consisting of 655 replies or about 16 per cent, refers to the relationships of the individual to larger social divisions. Social inequalities and injustices, the profit motive, exploitation of natural resources, unemployment, sectarianism, lack of civic responsibility, rampant nationalism, the church versus fraternal organizations, and

racial conflicts are listed.

The fourth group, consisting of 526 replies or about 13 per cent, refers to the relationship of the individual to the universe and God. The following representative questions were posed by those questioned: What is the meaning of life? What is God like and how can we find Him? What is the meaning of prayer? What effective techniques can be used in prayer? What is the basis for belief in immortality? How can religion and science be reconciled?¹⁵

Needless to say, the special task of the preacher in the pulpit is the answering of religious questions in the fourth and smallest group. Many of the problems in the first three categories are merely symptoms of the more basic questions in the fourth category. When these basic moral and spiritual issues have been faced and met satisfactorily, many of the difficulties in the other groups will be resolved.

Special Interest Group

One of the purposes of this study is to point out the special problems involved in preaching to college students. This portion of the study will look at the student audience as a special interest group.

A student audience is, in many respects, a select audience. By training students are alert and critical listeners,

¹⁵Ibid., p. 193ff.

people who are accustomed to hear competent and proficient lectures on campus by experts and professionals; they are accustomed to read and to study articles and books by skilled authorities in the various fields of learning. While many of these authorities are people who have let their learning close their minds to the truths of Scripture, they are nevertheless often top-ranking men and women in their own fields of endeavor. The people who come to hear the Word in campus churches are having new worlds opened to them every day, are being taught the applicability and the practicality, the pertinence and the relevance of the things they learn to the daily life of mankind.¹⁶

Again, students are a select audience in that they are subject to certain problems and stresses unique to their age group. The college years are years of decision. Three important decisions are usually made during the years spent on campus, decisions with far-reaching consequences. These are: (1) the choice of a supreme loyalty; (2) the choice of a life work; and (3) the choice of a mate.¹⁷ The spiritual guidance that a student receives during his college years may mean the difference between a happy, well-adjusted life, and complete failure.

¹⁶Curtis C. Stephan, "The Relevance of the Gospel in Campus Preaching," an essay read at the 1956 Student Workers Conference [Chicago, Illinois: Student Service Commission of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1956], p. 1.

¹⁷Robert H. Hamill, Gods of the Campus (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), p. 76.

All of these facts have definite implications for the preacher involved in a campus ministry. First of all, it means that the preacher will have to avoid any mediocrity in his preaching, that he will have to tell his audience something challenging, something persuasive, something provocative, something stimulating, something relevant to their daily lives, something that will prompt them to action, something that will impel them to continue steadfastly in their faith, if he wants to hold them to the church; for they are not the captive audience for him that they may be for others.

Again, the campus preacher must make full use of all the principles of persuasive preaching. He must know his audience, their problems, their ambitions, their needs. For most students the big problem is one of adequacy. They wonder whether they are academically adequate to compete with the intelligentsia of their class. There are also the problems of social and financial adequacy.

But in addition to the problem of adequacy, a student has specific religious problems. Among teachers and counselors there is a general agreement that one of the most common problems presented by college students is their lack of knowledge about religion. This is sometimes called the "religious illiteracy" of the present generation of young people.¹⁸

Considering his environment, this need not come as a surprise. Everyday new and often conflicting ideas come

¹⁸Thornton W. Merriam, "Religious Counseling of College Students," American Council on Education Studies, VII (April, 1943), 39.

crowding in on the student, from classroom lectures and dormitory discussions. Aspects of faith that he once took for granted are called in question: Is Christianity true? What problems does religion solve that science cannot? Aren't morals just a matter of custom and human opinion, instead of divine ordinances of God? Isn't it true that what is virtue in one society is a vice in another? Is there anything which can universally be called sin? What should be the Christian's attitude toward war and military service?¹⁹ These and similar questions are the questions that the campus preacher must be ready to meet in his preaching.

What, then, should be the core of the campus preacher's sermon? Here he would do well to take his cue from the Apostle Paul: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."²⁰ Such advice immediately suggests several "don't's" for the campus preacher. First, he should avoid touching on matters of which he is poorly informed. If for some reason or other he must make a remark in a sermon about organic chemistry or existential philosophy, he should first verify his statement by consulting an authority on the subject.²¹

Secondly, he should avoid the natural inclination to

¹⁹"Use of the College Years for Christ," Leader's Guide (June, 1955), p. 20.

²⁰I Cor. 2:2

²¹Stephan, op. cit., p. 1.

"settle" some pressing social, political, or theological issue of the hour. An audience of college students and professors does not desire a learned discourse, a philosophical lecture, nor a political harangue, but a sermon that illuminates, inspires, and actuates. They have come to church, not to be instructed in their areas of specialization, but to learn how to live.²²

In conclusion, it should be said that the proclamation of the Christian religion on the campus as a panacea for the ills of the world will meet with sharp criticism and strong opposition both from without and from within the church. The popular religious idea of the day is that all religions are on a level with one another, that all of them have a right to be heard, that all great religious books are valid expressions of religious truth, that there are various approaches to God, and that there is a multiple choice in the matter of obtaining eternal salvation. One writer put it this way:

Freedom of religion seems to demand such tolerance that it has come to mean the freedom to be as irreligious as a man wants to be and yet be respectable, and the freedom to think whatever he wants to think and to call it Christianity. Who dares set himself up as authority, anyhow, in matters that do not submit to authority or final definition? Besides, does not God declare the truth to every man in his own conscience? Tolerance thus becomes the plaguing sickness of campus religion.²³

Anyone who today presumes to assert that the Christian

²²Stolz, op. cit., p. 186f.

²³Hamill, op. cit., p. 30.

religion is the only true religion, that faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross is the only way of salvation, that the triune God is the only existent God, that the Christian life is the only one that is acceptable to God, must be prepared to stand firmly on the Scriptural doctrine that "through Christ . . . we have access to the Father."²⁴

²⁴Stephan, op. cit., p. 6.

CHAPTER III

CREATING ATMOSPHERE IN THE PREACHING SITUATION

Importance of Creating Atmosphere

A well-written play can be ruined if the acting and staging are ineffective; just as truly, a well-composed persuasive appeal can be ruined unless the circumstances of delivery and the influence of the speaker's personality are favorable. It will be the purpose of this chapter to discuss some of the factors that should be considered in creating atmosphere conducive to persuasion.

As a liturgical church, the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod has a distinct advantage over many other churches in creating a responsive atmosphere. Consider what takes place in a liturgical service. The people kneel, sit, and stand together; they sing, pray, and make confession of their faith together; they become as one in the reverent mood of worship. Such symbols as the cross, the chalice, candles, and altar paraments lend themselves to creating this feeling of unity.² This united feeling is of utmost importance in persuasive preaching. Attitudes of submission and conformity

¹Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1946), p. 90.

²William P. Sandford, Speak Well--and Win! (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1944), p. 44.

characterize the behavior of the individual in a group so united and render him highly suggestible. The tendency to react in any given way is powerfully reinforced by the sight of others doing the same thing.³

Technically, this process of unifying the audience is known as polarization. Polarization can be increased in a number of ways. First of all, it can be increased by having the audience sit close together. In a large church with a small attendance this matter becomes a serious problem. A preacher might do well to train his people to sit in specific sections of the church when a low attendance is anticipated.

In addition to these physical factors, there are also verbal factors that a preacher can use in polarizing his audience. One method is for the preacher to emphasize in the beginning of the sermon the things which the audience agrees upon, so that immediately there is established a strong initial tendency to go along with the speaker. This is sometimes called the "yes response" and will be discussed more thoroughly in the last chapter. This approach is especially important with students, who have a tendency to call into question anything not proved as "fact." Furthermore, there is much value in stressing the unanimity of feeling and belief among the auditors. Majority opinion bears even greater influence in an audience situation than it does when each individual stands

³Andrew Thomas Weaver, Speech: Forms and Principles (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1953), p. 204.

alone.⁴ To this end the preacher would do well to make frequent and emphatic reference to the communion of saints and the unity of believers in Christ. He should point out that, in spite of their various backgrounds, interests, and ambitions, they still have one thing in common: they are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. This "tie that binds" should find frequent referral also in the campus ministry, where a student's first loyalty is constantly being solicited by fraternal organizations, academic groups, and the like.

Less tangible, but certainly every bit as important in creating atmosphere are the matters of empathy and sympathy, both of which identify the speaker with his audience. Literally, empathy means "feeling into." It is really a type of subconscious communication and can best be described as the total muscular response to a situation.⁵ The persuasive speaker aids his cause when his audience enjoys empathizing with him.

Closely related to empathy is sympathy. Sympathy might be called the key to the mental life of other people. Unless the speaker can appreciate other people's feelings, he is likely to fail in any persuasive appeal that he might make.⁶ The speaker with the superior attitude does exactly that: he

⁴Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, p. 172.

⁵Ibid., p. 138.

⁶Weaver, op. cit., p. 305.

places the members of his audience in an inferior position and hence gains nothing but their hostility. The person who would establish a wholesome audience relationship must place the audience on his own plane. A preacher can do this with no loss of prestige whatsoever; he need not lower himself at all, but simply meet the people on a common ground. Through his sympathy with people, through his understanding of their problems and of the qualities of human nature as a whole, he can learn to have respect for all persons and to see in each of them a soul for whom the Savior died. It is only upon this basis of sympathetic audience appreciation that he can hope to establish the right relationship. If he merely simulates an attitude of equality, the subtle attitude of superiority will assert itself in spite of himself and create a negative reaction.⁷ "The well known human race is very quick to detect whether a talk is coming from above the eyebrows or back of the breast bone."⁸ The preacher's only safeguard is to cultivate a deeper understanding and appreciation of human nature. Jesus certainly had sympathy in dealing with people. Today's preacher would do well to follow in His steps.

Virtually inseparable from sympathy is the preacher's love for people. Perhaps no better commentary on this phase of preaching could be given than the following quotation from

⁷Arleigh B. Williamson, Charles A. Fritz, and Harold R. Ross, Speaking in Public (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), p. 100.

⁸Dale Carnegie, Public Speaking and Influencing Men in Business (New York: Association Press, 1950), p. 153f.

Spurgeon:

My brethren, there is more eloquence in love than in all the words that the most clever rhetorician can ever put together. We win upon men not so much by poetry and by artistic wording of sentences, as by pouring out of a heart's love that makes them feel that we would save them, that we would bless them, that we would, because we belong to them, regard them as brethren, and play a brother's part, and lay ourselves to benefit them.⁹

A later chapter will discuss ways in which this sympathetic love can be stimulated.

Techniques in Creating Atmosphere

In a discussion of this nature it is impossible to ignore the personality of the preacher. The present chapter will speak particularly of the physical aspects of personality, and the final chapter will discuss the more spiritual aspects.

There is a psychology of the external or physical expression which must be understood if one is to be effective in delivering a message to an audience. The speaker who thinks of his pulpit relation with his audience only in terms of posture and gesture is apt to overlook many of the essentials of pulpit requirement. He may fail to realize that he will win or lose approval through all the impressions of his mental attitudes and character that the audience gains from his bodily attitudes. To be influential

⁹Oswald C.J. Hoffmann, "Reaching Through Preaching," Wencher Foundation Lectures (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), p. 22.

a speaker must win a favorable acceptance by his audience. In terms of the preaching situation, this means that the preacher will be mentally and physically alert during the liturgical part of the service.¹⁰ While sitting in the chancel he should be keenly aware that he is undergoing a scrutiny by the audience which might predetermine to a large degree the type of response that he is going to receive. Crossing the legs or resting the head on one hand may be enough to create a negative attitude in the minds of many in the audience. Good chancel etiquette is worthy of serious attention as constituting a part of the methodology of persuasion.¹¹

Conversely, the preacher's appraisal of his audience should be more than a merely numerical one. He should observe his audience before he ascends the pulpit to preach; he should study their reactions and their apparent mood. It is usually a good practice to look at the first few rows of people upon approaching the pulpit. In a large audience the preacher should pick out "key" people in various parts of the church, and talk as directly with them as if conversing personally.¹² He should look at individuals, not at a mass of people.

¹⁰Williamson, Fritz, and Ross, op. cit., p. 99.

¹¹Robert T. Oliver, Persuasive Speaking (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1950), p. 48.

¹²Sandford, op. cit., p. 7.

A word about introductions might be in place here. A rule for all introductions would be: seek to find the closest relationship between your subject and your audience, and begin with that. When this is done, the audience at once feels involved in what is to follow, because a common bond has been established between them and the subject. The preacher will also want to associate his own interests with those of his listeners in order to establish a bond of sympathy between himself and his audience. This "common bond" type, while not the only useful introduction, is perhaps the most generally applicable.¹³

An excellent example of this common bond type of introduction was given by the Apostle Paul on Mars Hill in Athens. When he was asked to speak, he first won the hearers' favor by noting that "in all things ye are very superstitious." He then used an illustration to back up that assertion: "I found an altar with this inscription: 'To the Unknown God.' Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him I declare unto you."¹⁴ Brief and relevant, the Apostle's words give an example of the perfect introduction.

Following the introduction, the preacher will begin the unfolding of the proposition at hand. In doing this it might be well to employ what is sometimes called the "psychological method." The psychological method may be defined as a

¹³Williamson, Fritz, and Ross, op. cit., p. 224.

¹⁴Carnegie, op. cit., p. 392ff.

non-argumentative, or inductive, approach whereby a person assembles what may be considered "agreed upon" data; from this finally emerges the proposition around which the sermon is constructed. More specifically, it may be viewed as a problem solving method, in which the speaker endeavors to speak as one concerned with the best solution to the problem which is before the audience for thought and decision. His whole approach is one in which he invites the audience to grapple with him on the problem and to reach the best mutual decision. Thus he seeks to enlist the thought of the listeners as he organizes his materials for the most effective consideration of the issues of the question.¹⁵

The psychological method naturally precludes an argumentative approach. Two highly derogatory statements about argument may be considered. One of them is an old proverb of uncertain origin: "The wise man persuades me with my reasons; the fool convinces me with his own." The other, also of uncertain origin, reads: "To get into an argument is to lose it." The first statement simply reiterates the fact that people are persuaded in terms of what seems most important to them. The second is akin to the parallel statement that "Nobody wins a war." The reasoning is that even if you should overwhelm an auditor with an argument, you may very well lose more than you gain. You obtain his unwilling assent

¹⁵Robert T. Oliver, Dallas C. Dickey, and Harold P. Zelko, Essentials of Communicative Speech (New York: The Dryden Press, c. 1949), p. 247.

to your proposal at the moment, but he may switch back later to his earlier position. And in any event, you have emphasized the fact that your view of the matter was distinctly different from his, and have thereby widened the "social distance" between him and yourself, even though on the particular point at issue you have won.¹⁶

Conversely, the psychological method would demand a "we" feeling between preacher and people. The preacher will certainly want to avoid the "holier than thou" attitude in the pulpit. He should always include himself when he is condemning, if not verbally, at least in attitude.¹⁷ He should make liberal use of such personal pronouns as "we," "you," "you and I," and of such terms as "you know," "we all realize," and "your problems."¹⁸ Unless the preacher identifies himself with the audience in this way, he will likely alienate many of them to his proposals.

A corollary to the psychological method would be a positive approach. A distinction must be made between "positive" and "dogmatic." Obviously, the preacher will not want to preface every statement with an "it seems to me" or a "perhaps." Theodore Roosevelt called such words "weasel words."¹⁹ On the other hand, the preacher will want to avoid any appearance

¹⁶Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, p. 93.

¹⁷Lionel Crocker, Business and Professional Speech (New York: The Ronald Press Company, c. 1951), p. 126.

¹⁸Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, p. 148f.

¹⁹Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, p. 276.

of dogmatism or dictatorialism, particularly at the beginning of his sermon. Any dogmatic statement serves as a challenge; it invites attack. To start a speech by swinging challenges at the audience is like starting a boxing match by swinging blows at one's opponent. It is a good way to get knocked out. A good boxer will first feel out his opponent and then gradually step up the tempo of the match. So also the good speaker starts disarmingly; he parries and pivots and dances his way lightly into position for a knockout blow, before he begins hammering.²⁰

No better commentary has probably been given on this matter of preaching with authority than that by David MacLennan in a recent lecture at the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

A Christian preacher must speak with authority, but "Thus saith the Lord" is the secret of his authority. As a prophet he is a transmitter of the Word of God which carries its own, the Lord's own self-authenticating truth. It is when the prophet becomes more enamored of the quality of the transmitter than of the message and its source that he ceases to be prophetic. . . . Our people do not object to the authority with which we deliver the Word of God to their condition; indeed they provide us with the time and opportunity to discern and meditate upon that Word and to prepare it for effective transmission to them. They do object when we give the impression that on all matters we have the last word, and that Christian humility is a virtue for laymen only.²¹

College students, who are daily challenged in the classroom

²⁰Carnegie, op. cit., p. 150

²¹David A. MacLennan, Pronouns for Preachers (Great Neck, New York: The Pulpit Press, 1954), p. 29f.

to do their own thinking, will come to church with similar thought patterns. To force ideas upon them will only alienate them.

The preacher's whole approach, then, both in words and attitude, should convey a feeling of friendliness and a burning desire to help. Andrew Blackwood put the matter very well when he wrote:

Adopt a friendly attitude towards the people. When you come from the holy of holies with the gospel of redemption, assume that everyone present desires to learn the will of God in order to become a better man or woman. Throughout the sermon let the expression on your face accord with what you are saying. As a rule be sure to look happy; the people have troubles enough of their own without sharing yours. In short, look and act like a bearer of good news.²²

Amid all this friendliness and non-dogmatic approach, one may wonder how a preacher can effectively preach law. As a point of departure, let it be said that it is not necessary to humiliate a person in order to convey a real sense of sin. While a preacher will certainly not want to soft-pedal the law, he will want to present it in such a way that the people are truly struck by the enormous disparity between their own sinfulness and the holiness of God. This can be done very effectively without continually ranting and condemning.

J.B. Phillips has some very interesting thoughts on this matter. He writes:

Christ very rarely called men "sinners" and as far as we know never attempted deliberately to make them feel

²²Andrew W. Blackwood, The Preparation of Sermons (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948), p. 207.

sinners, except in the case of the entrenched self-righteous, where He used the assault and battery of seathing denunciation. . . . This is not, of course, to say that the life and words of Christ did not produce that genuine sense of guilt and failure . . . but it is undeniable that He did not set out to impress a sense of sin on His hearers.²³

What Phillips says is true; ordinarily Jesus did not condemn verbally except in the case of the self-righteous Pharisees. Christ's presence was enough to convey a feeling of inadequacy and guilt. In advocating the same approach for today's preacher, however, Phillips seems to forget that the modern preacher is not a Christ, and accordingly he cannot convey so sharply the feeling of wrong through his own personality. Phillips' comments, however, are certainly deserving of consideration by the preacher who is prone to continually condemn and humiliate his congregation.

Finally, a word should be said about the style of delivery that will be most conducive to creating a favorable atmosphere in the preaching situation. Many books have been written on this question, but probably the safest statement yet made on the matter is that the best style is that which calls no attention to itself. Rudolph Flesch, in The Art of Plain Talk, advises short sentences with an average length of eleven to seventeen words; the avoidance of too many words with suffixes and affixes; the use of many personal references; and the avoidance of long words, technical words, and empty words like

²³J.B. Phillips, Your God Is Too Small (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1954), p. 115.

prepositions, conjunctions, and connectives.²⁴

The modern emphasis in the field of speech is on the conversational approach. A modern audience, regardless of whether it is fifteen people at a business conference or a thousand people under a tent, wants the speaker to talk just as directly as he would in a chat, and in the same general manner that he would employ in speaking to one of them in conversation.²⁵ Waterhouse reiterates this when he writes:

Whether we deplore it or not, there is no "market" today for the old-time oratory that once delighted hearers. There are still stylists who for their own sakes remain faithful to the tradition of taking trouble with the wording and delivery of their sermons, but the most popular modern preachers simply talk conversationally and rely on psychological rather than literary or oratorical factors to get their message "across."²⁶

Waterhouse gives the impression that the conversational approach rules out the need for much preparation. Actually, the conversational approach requires as much or more preparation than does the old type oratorical sermon.

Many authorities speak more of a conversational attitude than of a conversational style. The conversational attitude is not "polite conversation," but a basic relationship for the transmission of ideas and feelings when one is conscious of a participating listener. It is a relationship which is not limited to a particular technique or style of delivery,

²⁴Rudolph Flesch, The Art of Plain Talk (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, c. 1946), p. 58ff.

²⁵Carnegie, op. cit., p. 197.

²⁶Eric S. Waterhouse, Psychology and Pastoral Work (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1940), p. 186.

but which has its being in naturalness, simplicity, directness, and absence of display. It is manifested in the speaker who avoids trying to act out the virtues of another's delivery, and who makes a consistent effort to be himself. It is manifested in the speaker who is ever conscious that the audience is made up of silent members of the conversation, contradicting him, not understanding him, asking him questions, thinking, feeling, and acting with him.²⁷ The Lord's invitation in Isaiah might serve well as the preacher's invitation to his people as he steps into the pulpit: "Come now and let us reason together!"²⁸

From what has been said of the conversational approach, one might conclude that it has only virtues. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The conversational manner has dangers as well as virtues. It fails of effectiveness when carried too far. The teacher who comes to be regarded by his class as "just like one of us" abdicates his function of leading the class to become something other than what it was when he assumed his position. So also a preacher who enters fully into the mood, feelings, and beliefs of his listeners soon disqualifies himself as an influence capable of remaking them in the image of his own convictions and desires.²⁹ Hence the very strength of the conversational approach becomes also its

²⁷Williamson, Fritz, and Ross, op. cit., p. 54.

²⁸Isaiah 1:18

²⁹Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, p. 187f.

greatest weakness.

Furthermore, because of their belief in a conversational approach, some preachers have fallen into the habit of monotonous soliloquizing. The good news of the Gospel, however, calls for enthusiasm and earnestness. This, of course, becomes second nature with the preacher who believes what he says and longs for everyone present to share in his belief.³⁰

Hence the conversational approach also creates certain problems. This makes it all the more imperative for the effective preacher to make full use of the advantages of this approach to offset any disadvantages entailed.

C. The College Student Situation

What has been said thus far with regard to creating a favorable atmosphere in the preaching situation is applicable to all types of audiences. However, there is one aspect that should be given special consideration in connection with the campus ministry. This is the matter of the positive preaching. How to preach with conviction, without giving the impression of dogmatism, is a unique problem for the campus minister. There are times, there are places, there are subjects, there are audiences, where too much "positiveness" will hinder rather than help. The college student situation is a case in point.

In general, the higher the level of intelligence of the

³⁰ Blackwood, op. cit., p. 203.

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In general, the higher the level of intelligence of the

³⁰Blackwood, op. cit., p. 203.

student audience, the less successful will more forceful assertions be. As thinking people, students want to be led, not driven to a conclusion. They want to have facts presented and to see the conclusions drawn from those facts. They like to be asked questions, not to have a ceaseless stream of direct statements poured at them.³¹ In the preaching situation this may seem impractical; actually, however, it can be carried out very effectively with antipathal questions and answers. The campus preacher should anticipate the objections and questions that will be raised mentally by his audience, verbalize those questions, and then give the sound scriptural answer to them. Similar techniques will be discussed in chapter five of this study.

³¹Carnegie, op. cit., p. 150.

CHAPTER IV

HOLDING ATTENTION IN THE PREACHING SITUATION

Importance of Holding Attention

Attention occupies a central position in any psychological analysis of the speech situation. A speech, to be effective, must be able to secure and hold attention. This is not as easy as one might presume. A person listening to and observing a speaker is being attracted simultaneously by many stimuli, both from within his own body and from without. It is the speaker's obligation to see to it that the speech stimuli are more potent in their effect upon the listener than are the other distracting stimuli.¹

For a preacher to appreciate the nature of his task in gaining attention, he might do well to consider certain fundamental physiological and psychological processes that go on in all human beings. Every person is engaged in a never ceasing struggle to maintain feelings of physical fitness, adjustment, and well-being. As a consequence of this continuous striving, there is constant tension between the person and his environment. He is usually either in a state of excitement and elation or else in a contrasting state of fatigue and depression. He is always seeking and seldom attaining perfect adjustment.

¹Andrew T. Weaver, Speech: Forms and Principles (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1953), p. 163.

He reaches it only to slip quickly past it, either into too much tension or too much relaxation. As this delicate balance between hypokinesis (too little activity) and hyperkinesis (too much activity) is disturbed, he is predisposed to pay attention to those stimuli in the environment that may contribute to its re-establishment.² It is the task of the preacher to afford such stimuli.

The normal audience inclination to stop listening is the most serious limitation of mind that a speaker confronts.³ Analysts vary in their estimates of the duration of an act of attention. Hyland made numerous measurements and concluded that a perceptual element could not be retained continuously for a second. Pillsbury was less radical when he estimated that the duration of a single act of attention is from three to twenty-four seconds, most often five to eight seconds.⁴ When psychologists wish to test the number of objects that can be taken in a single perception, they expose them for only one-fifth of a second; a longer interval of time would allow the shift of attention.⁵ With these

²Ibid., p. 165f.

³Arleigh B. Williamson, Charles A. Fritz, and Harold R. Ross, Speaking in Public (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), p. 44.

⁴Webb E. Garrison, The Preacher and His Audience (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1954), p. 66.

⁵Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1946), p. 203.

facts before him, the preacher can at once see the enormity of his task. The attention of his auditors demands variety, and unless he provides it in abundance for them, they will seek it outside his speech. There are always distractions and counter-attractions to which they may turn for relief.

Closely related to the problem of a short span of attention is the question of how long a sermon should be. Needless to say, the day of sermons of almost interminable length is gone. Two things have contributed to the reduction of the time allotted to the sermon. First, worship and preaching have been unified. Every part of the service is integrated into the dominant purpose of the hour. Secondly, the brevity of radio speeches has developed a sort of time unit for all public addresses. Most radio speeches or news reports and commentaries are made in fifteen minutes or less. People have become habituated to the well-prepared, concise radio address, and when they go to church they bring with them a corresponding pattern of expectation. Accordingly, most modern speech writers agree that a preacher who has a message worth delivering should be able to deliver it in twenty minutes or less.⁶

Such arbitrary setting of a time limit on the length of a sermon is quite disturbing to many preachers. An interesting commentary on this point is made by Charles R. Brown in

⁶Karl R. Stolz, The Church and Psychotherapy (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), p. 196f.

The Art of Preaching. Dean Brown writes,

The clock has nothing to do with the length of a sermon. Nothing whatever! . . . A long sermon is a sermon that seems long. . . . And the short sermon is the one that ends while people are still wishing for more. It may have lasted only twenty minutes or it may have lasted for an hour and a half. If it leaves the people wishing for more, they do not know nor care what the clock said about the length of it. You cannot tell, therefore, how long a sermon is by watching the hands of a clock; watch the people. See where their hands are. If the hands of the men are for the most part in their vest pockets, pulling out their watches to note again how long you have been at it, this is ominous. See where their eyes are! See where their minds are, then you will know exactly what time of day it is for that particular sermon. It may be high time for it to come to an end.⁷

In view of the controversy on this particular point, it would be the safest procedure for each preacher to adjust the length of his sermons to the particular circumstances in which he finds himself, always bearing in mind, however, the mental fatigue factor and the brief span of attention.

Closely related to the matter of fatigue is a phrase coined by Herbert Spencer, "economy of attention." He uses the analogy of a machine. The engineer tries to make the machine work with as much efficiency as possible. So must a speaker who tries to hold attention work for efficiency. He must get his ideas over with the least possible effort on the part of the listeners. He must use all the rhetorical devices at his command in order not to waste attention. He must study the word, the phrase, the sentence, the voice and action, all

⁷Dale Carnegie, Public Speaking and Influencing Men In Business (New York: Association Press, 1950), p. 324.

for the purpose of using the most efficient means in arousing and holding attention.⁸

Before proceeding to various techniques for gaining and holding attention, it should be noted that psychologists ordinarily speak of two kinds of attention: primary and secondary. When the speaker first goes into the pulpit, people are usually interested in him as another individual; this is considered primary attention. Usually it doesn't last very long, nor should it. As the speaker gets into his subject, secondary attention is aroused, attention that is directed particularly toward what is being said. If the idea is strong enough, it will command attention. If not, attention will waver and the task of gaining and holding attention begins.⁹

Logical Order in Presentation

In discussing a logical order in presentation, it is presupposed that the speaker has something to present logically. Self-evident as this may seem, most speech authors devote at least several pages to this very point. Lord Bryce summed up the view of these writers when he stated:

Always have something to say. The man who has something to say, and who is known never to speak unless he has, is sure to be listened to. Always know before what you

⁸Lionel Crocker, Business and Professional Speech (New York: The Ronald Press Company, c. 1951), p. 82.

⁹Ibid., p. 81.

mean to say. If your own mind is muddled, much more will the minds of your hearers be confused. Always arrange your thoughts in some sort of order. No matter how brief they are to be, they will be better for having a beginning, a middle, and an end. At all hazards, be clear. Make your meaning, whatever it is, plain to your audience.¹⁰

Of all speakers, the preacher in the pulpit should have something to say. He is speaking on the most important matter that can be discussed, man's relation to his God. And although much of what he will say may reach beyond logic and into the realm of the "mysteries of God," he does not have to present it in a mysterious, illogical order. Logical order in presentation is a prime requirement in holding the attention of an audience.

John Dewey, in his book, How We Think, presented an analysis for logical presentation that has found wide acceptance. It is also applicable to the preaching situation. Dewey said that all thinking toward a decision involves five steps. First, there is a "felt difficulty," an awareness that something is wrong, a sense of a need for a change. This first step is reached through the preaching of the Law, by holding the Law up as a mirror for the individual to see how far he has departed from God's own standards. Secondly, there is the analysis of the cause of the difficulty. In every case, of course, the cause of the difficulty will be man's corrupt nature. Third, there is a survey of the possible means for satisfying the need.

¹⁰Carnegie, op. cit., p. 418.

Here there is a slight variation for the preacher as a public speaker since there is only one solution to the problem of sin. However, the preacher can point out other solutions that are attempted (rationalization, positive thinking, work-righteousness) and show how each fails to satisfy the need. The fourth step, then, is an evaluation of the solution chosen. Here the preacher would point to the all-sufficiency of Christ's redemptive work. Finally, the preferred solution is acted upon.¹¹ The preacher here calls for a response from the hearer, either in terms of greater faith or in terms of more sanctified living.

A similar order of presentation is suggested by Perry and Whitesell. They speak of a psychological division of a sermon, using as a guideline Alan Monroe's motivated sequence. This sequence also lists five steps. First, there is the attention step, which is to make the audience want to listen; then the need step, which is to create the idea that this is the thing to do, believe, or feel; then the satisfaction step, which seeks to get the audience to agree with the proposition; then the visualization step, which is to cause the listener to see himself enjoying the satisfaction of doing, believing, or feeling this action; and finally comes the action step, which asks the hearer to do, believe, accept, or feel what is presented.¹²

¹¹Robert T. Oliver, Persuasive Speaking (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1950), p. 88.

¹²Faris D. Whitesell and Lloyd M. Perry, Variety in Your Preaching (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1954), p. 133.

Logical presentation goes far in unifying a speech and consequently in holding attention. But there are other factors involved in unifying the speech. From a negative standpoint, the persuasive speaker will want to avoid introducing stories merely because they are interesting, or citing facts simply to display his information, or formulating arguments to demonstrate his skill in logic, or phrasing his ideas as an exercise in stylistic display. He will, however, want to state the proposal simply and directly in terms of the desired audience response, center his appeal around several key ideas, and use internal summaries and a strong final conclusion to draw all of the evidence together.¹³ In a textual sermon the preacher would do well to choose a key phrase from the text and to repeat it frequently during the course of the sermon. Such procedure not only impresses the text upon the minds of the hearers, but it also insures against a preacher's frequent tendency to wander from the text.

In conclusion, it might be said that the surest test for the logical order and unity of a sermon lies in the preacher's preparation for delivery. If he finds himself continually running into blank walls, it is usually because the progression of thought is faulty. When one thought leads logically to the next, preparation for delivery is made relatively easy.

Elements of Interest

After attention has once been secured, it needs to be

¹³ Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, p. 150ff.

held. To aid the speaker in doing this, various attempts have been made to determine the elements of interest, or the factors which are so essentially interesting that they may be counted upon to hold a typical audience's attention. These elements of interest include concreteness, conflict, the familiar-unusual combination, and variety.¹⁴

Among ordinary church-goers, a gloomy observer estimates that about two per cent of the preaching gets across. Now that psychologists have begun to test the "audience response" in church, some of them would raise the proportion a little, but not far.¹⁵ Frequently it has been found that the basic problem in such ineffective preaching is the lack of concrete words. A preacher has a tendency to speak in abstract theological terms that mean absolutely nothing to the person in the pew unless they are illustrated in terms that they can understand. Dr. Oswald Hoffmann made this point very clear when he said,

In the midst of an impassioned sermon, words like "grace," "sin," and "righteousness" whistle past the hearer's ears. He thinks he knows what the preacher is talking about, but he is not quite sure. Then, all of a sudden, the word "justification" whips by. Now he knows for sure. He doesn't know what the preacher is talking about.¹⁶

To make his meaning clear, therefore, the effective preacher

¹⁴Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1946), p. 207ff.

¹⁵Andrew W. Blackwood, The Preparation of Sermons (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948), p. 184.

¹⁶Oswald C.J. Hoffmann, "Reaching Through Preaching," Wencher Foundation Lectures (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), p. 18.

will have to illustrate the abstract in terms of the known.

Jesus Himself used this procedure when He spoke to the people in parables. When the disciples asked Him why He taught the public by parables, Jesus answered, "Because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand."¹⁷ And so the Savior solved the problem by describing things the people did not know by likening them to things they did know. The kingdom of heaven, what would it be like? How could those untutored peasants of Palestine know? So Jesus described it in terms of objects and actions with which they were already familiar: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven . . . like unto a merchant seeking goodly pearls . . . like unto a net that was cast into the sea."¹⁸ And what held true at the time of Jesus, still holds true today. Consider these words from a contemporary young preacher:

If I tell my people that they must "do all things to the glory of God," they snore on. But if I tell them they can slop their hogs and change baby's diapers and milk cows to the glory of God, not only their eyelids raise, but their eyebrows too.¹⁹

The first element of interest in a sermon, then, comes in making the abstract understood through concrete words and illustrations.

¹⁷Matthew 13:13

¹⁸Carnegie, op. cit., p. 357.

¹⁹Hoffmann, op. cit., p. 21.

A second element of interest worthy of consideration is that of conflict. Conflict always arouses interest; the competition in athletics and the business world would tend to bear this out. Nor should a preacher neglect this basic element of interest. He has the greatest conflict in the world to speak about: the conflict between Christ and the devil, between Christianity and the world, between the old man and the new man. The fact that the hearer is in the very midst of this conflict and not a mere spectator makes it an even greater element of interest. If the preacher can make this conflict real for his people and show them how they are constantly involved in it, he has gone far in holding their attention.

A third element of interest is the combination of the familiar and the unusual. In the familiar-unusual combination the known is explained by something less known. That is, familiar facts are presented in a new light or unusual facts in contrast or comparison with the well known.

A fourth element of interest is variety. The speaker must seek variety in all that he does. That this applies also to the preacher is eloquently testified to by the fact that one whole volume, Variety in Your Preaching, is devoted to suggesting ways and means to secure variety in the preacher's sermonizing. Monotony is the preacher's most subtle enemy. Monotony in action, voice, mood, or content of speech is deadly for any persuasive attempt.

Nor is monotony necessarily a matter of quality of

expression. Even an excellent and expressive delivery grows monotonous unless it is varied. A speaker may be endowed with ease, poise, and grace, and yet put his audience to sleep because he repeats the same movements over and over again. "The effect is like listening to the ticking of a clock or concentrating visual attention upon the swinging pendulum."²⁰ Thus, a speaker may express himself very well with one hand, but if he continues to use only that hand and arm, the audience will eventually notice it, and begin to wonder if there is anything the matter with the other arm.

Virtually inseparable from these four elements of interest is the existential element. Because of the current interest in existentialism, it might be well to present Luther's view of the existential element as determined by a contemporary theologian.

Luther was as aware of the existential element in preaching as any modern theologian. But he did not expunge the "then" with an overemphasis on the "now." He stressed both. He did not thrust aside the Deus dixit in his enthusiasm for the Deus loquens, nor the historical for the existential consideration. He insisted on both. The redemption was accomplished once for all, and it is bestowed as a gift on every sinner when he comes to faith. At this point the written and the spoken Word merge into the one Word, the Gospel.

The struggle to make the Gospel of Christ contemporaneous, to bring the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection "into the present," is the concern of every right preacher. He lives in the written Word. He preaches the Gospel that he finds there.²¹

²⁰Williamson, Fritz, and Ross, op. cit., p. 119.

²¹Herman A. Preus, "The Written and Signed Word," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXVI (September, 1955), 650.

Finally, a word might be said about humor in the pulpit as an element of interest. As a whole, the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and its clergy have minimized the use of humor in the pulpit, and rightly so. The matter of sin and the way of salvation, which should form the heart of every sermon, are not laughing matters. Andrew Blackwood, representing another branch of Protestantism, is also opposed to the use of humor in the pulpit, unless used sparingly as a means of holding attention. Quoting Philipps Brooks, he says,

Humor is one of the most helpful qualities that the preacher can possess. . . . The truest humor is the bloom of the highest life. . . . But humor is something very different from frivolity. People sometimes ask whether it is right to make people laugh in church by something you say from the pulpit--as if laughter were always one invariable thing; as if there were not a smile which swept across a great congregation like the breath of a May morning, making it fruitful for whatever good thing might be sowed in it, and another laughter that was like the crackling of thorns under a pot.²²

In general, it would be well for a preacher to avoid the use of humor, even as an element of interest, unless for some reason his audience should be knowingly antagonistic. In such a case, humor may help to break down hostility. In any case, however, humor should be used sparingly in the pulpit.

Effective Language Guides

Probably more thoughts are lost in communication by virtue of faulty language than for any other reason. As

²²Blackwood, op. cit., p. 256.

William Pierson Merrill points out:

There are too many men in the pulpit who know a good deal, and think well enough, but have never gained the mastery of effective and simple language, through much companionship with the best writers, through deliberate and painstaking cultivation of a homely, forceful use of words. A preacher without skill in words is like a knight with no knowledge of sword play.²³

Aware of this constant threat to effective communication, a preacher will want to choose language of special quality in expressing his thoughts. Among the requirements for good pulpit language are the following: oral quality, clarity, objectivity, impressiveness, variety, and language that is adapted to the speaker's personality.

First of all, language should be chosen for its oral qualities; it is primarily meant to be heard, not read. That there is a great difference between written and oral language is proved again and again by good writers who are poor speakers, and poor writers who are good speakers. A writer aims at a comparatively indefinite and scattered audience; the speaker talks to a specific, well-defined group. Accordingly, the speaker's language should be much more personal and direct. To achieve directness he should make frequent use of personal pronouns such as "you" and "we"; he should employ short sentences, contractions, and appropriate idioms to promote directness and personalize

²³Batsell Barrett Baxter, Speaking For the Master (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1954), p. 115.

his appeal.²⁴

Again, spoken language should possess clarity; that is, it should be accurate, simple, and concrete. The words of St. Paul certainly apply to the preacher in the pulpit: "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."²⁵ An intense desire to foster understanding is going to force the preacher to use the language of today and not the mid-Victorian, King James, or the technical terminology of abstract theology. That the language of King James is not the language of today is clearly illustrated in the following quotation:

Words have changed in definition and connotation since the day when King James II told the architect, Sir Christopher Wren, on the dedication of St. Paul's in London: "I consider it, sir, amusing, artificial, and awful." It was amusing to the king because he liked it; artificial because it was a masterpiece of skill and artifice; and awful because the imposing dome over the pavement of the great church sent a chill of awe and reverence through the observer. All this requires a great deal of explanation today, as you have seen.²⁶

Often a preacher finds joy in knowing that he is not only serving the same God as the saints of the past, but that he is even using the time-honored phrases which meant so much to them. But to his modern hearers he will only seem to be in love with the past. His words may have beauty and dignity,

²⁴Eugene E. White and Clair R. Henderlinder, Practical Public Speaking (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1954), p. 261f.

²⁵I Corinthians 14:19

²⁶Hoffmann, op. cit., p. 17.

but it is the beauty and dignity of a past age; and his message often appears to be wholly irrelevant to the issues of today.²⁷

Furthermore, pulpit language should be objective. It is apparent that words have relative rather than absolute meanings, and that language has meaning only in terms of the associations established by individuals between the verbal symbol and the object or concept to which it refers. Also, a symbol never tells everything about the object or concept to which it refers.²⁸ In terms of the pulpit, this means that the preacher will have to take the abstract terms of theology and illustrate them with objects known to his hearers.

Again, pulpit language should be vivid and impressive, if it is to hold attention, maintain interest, and create a lasting impression. Originality in the choice of words often lends force and impressiveness. Parallel structure, commonly taking the form of a recurrent phrase or sentence, also lends impressiveness to an oral discourse.

One of the most important guides for effective language is variety, especially in sentence structure. A proper balance should be sought between declarative, interrogative, exclamatory, and imperative sentences. Very often the

²⁷J.B. Phillips, Your God Is Too Small (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1954), p. 22.

²⁸White and Henderlinder, op. cit., p. 259.

effectiveness of questions is neglected as a means of drawing the audience into an active consideration of the proposal. Such questions may take a variety of forms also. There are rhetorical questions, or questions that answer themselves. There are questions of fact, designed to emphasize the speaker's evidence; questions of opinion, designed to suggest attitudes favoring his proposal; test questions, intended to establish a standard for judging issues; suggestive questions, which really embody arguments in question form; such as, "Isn't it true . . .?" Finally, there are also definitive questions, used to pin down the thinking of the audience to the precise points the speaker wishes to consider, such as presenting two alternatives in a question.²⁹ People like to be challenged, and one of the most effective means for challenging people in an audience is by questioning them.

As a final guide to effective language, there is the matter of the speaker's personality. Language should be adapted to the speaker's own personality, interests, attitudes, and background. As a group, preachers are probably the most guilty offenders in this matter. Very often they feel obligated to concoct some special kind of language for use in the pulpit.³⁰ As a result, preaching often sounds very artificial. A preacher, therefore, should always think

²⁹ Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, p. 149.

³⁰ Wilfred Womersley, Working Wonders With Words (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1951), p. 84.

melodiously, for the only kind of effective speech he will ever be able to make is one which reflects his normal thinking processes and his normal manner of mental phrasing.

In conclusion it should be noted that effective language does not necessarily imply common or cheap language. Great newspapers have demonstrated that seeking understanding necessitates no loss of dignity in language or accuracy in reporting. It simply requires telling the story with a will to be understood. Oswald Hoffmann cites the early church as an example to be followed in this respect:

The early church did not just tell its story that way. If we read the New Testament correctly, the first preachers told it as the GOOD NEWS. They had a personal interest in the telling and in the way the story was received. They wanted people to believe, and that fact alone made all the difference in the world for their preaching. For them, preaching took the form of a conscious reaching for the understanding and belief of people, whatever other form it may have had.³¹

Techniques In Delivery

Although a complete research paper could be made on this one phase of persuasive preaching alone, an attempt has been made to single out those factors which would prove most important in the preaching situation. These include the rate of delivery, the use of the pause, the use of the eyes, facial expressions, and bodily movements. Certain psychological factors, such as the "spread of attention," will also be discussed.

³¹Hoffmann, op. cit., p. 18.

First of all, the rate of delivery: should the man in the pulpit speak slowly, moderately, or rapidly? That depends in part on his temperament, and even more on his message. Francis L. Patton, former president of Princeton University, stated:

No one but a dunce would proceed at the same rate all through a sermon. Begin at a moderate pace, and later at times trip along lightly. When you come to something you wish the hearer to remember, be sure to say it slowly.³²

Of chief importance is a thoughtful and appropriate variety of rate. Every speaker has a characteristic optimum rate at which he verbalizes with most convenience to himself. But he should accelerate as he is stirred by the excitement of his subject; he should underline important ideas by slackening his pace. A uniform rate, whether fast or slow, will appear thoughtless and mechanical.³³ The drastic effects that such speaking might have on the audience is vividly expressed in the following quotation:

Spacing all the words and syllables in a sentence at an exactly equal distance from each other, will enable you to pronounce every word correctly, to articulate precisely, and to convey your thoughts by words beyond any possibility of misunderstanding. At the same time, you will send your listeners to sleep if you do not drive them crazy!³⁴

Secondly, there is the matter of the pause. Very often this particular device has been neglected by preachers,

³²Blackwood, op. cit., p. 212.

³³Richard R. Caemmerer, Preaching to the Church (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Mimeo Co., 1952), p. 51.

³⁴Womersley, op. cit., p. 119.

probably because of the evil connotations connected with the so-called "dramatic pause." However, an experienced preacher can make frequent and effective use of the pause. Where a tyro might strive to emphasize by raising the pitch, increasing the volume, or quickening the pace, the effective speaker will remain silent. Especially does he pause when he wishes to stress a word or phrase. Sometimes he pauses momentarily just before he utters the significant word or phrase; more often he pauses afterward. At times he may pause both before and after. Thus, paradoxically, the most impressive parts of a sermon may come while the preacher remains silent, waiting for the Spirit to impress on the hearer's mind and heart an idea or a picture.³⁵

The general fault in the use of the pause is a tendency to shorten it unduly. Every preacher has probably experienced a time when he momentarily lost his train of thought in a sermon. The ensuing pause may seem embarrassingly long to him, while very often his audience isn't even aware of it. Nevertheless, every speaker needs a second here and there for breathing and for thinking, and every listener needs a moment or two now and then for digestion of what has been said.³⁶

Abraham Lincoln often paused in his speaking. When he had come to a big idea that he wished to impress deeply on

³⁵Blackwood, op. cit., p. 210

³⁶Womersley, op. cit., p. 123.

the minds of his hearers, he bent forward, looked directly into their eyes for a moment, and said nothing at all. This sudden silence had the same effect as a sudden noise; it attracted notice. It made everyone attentive, alert, and awake to what was coming next. Nowhere is silence more golden than when it is judiciously used in talking.³⁷ Though not writing on the techniques of good delivery, the author of the book of Ecclesiastes offers sound advice when he observes that "there is a time to keep silence" as well as a time to speak.³⁸

Another frequently neglected aspect of delivery is eye contact. Andrew Blackwood speaks of the eyes as a sort of "second voice." The eyes of the man in the pulpit always speak, either effectively or ineffectively. They speak effectively when the preacher looks his hearers in the face, and keeps looking at them throughout the sermon. There are two distinct advantages for the speaker in thus intently watching the people he is addressing. In the first place, his gaze is a legitimate demand upon them for their attention. Looking at a crowd is one of the primary means of getting and holding attention. In the second place, watching them will be some insurance against his falling into an abstract process of soliloquizing, of thinking out loud, instead of adapting his thoughts to their needs and to their

³⁷Carnegie, op. cit., p. 209.

³⁸Ecclesiastes 3:7

responses. It is a guard against his not giving consideration to his listeners.³⁹

Obviously, a preacher cannot look at each of his hearers at the same time. Accordingly, he will have to use techniques that have been found effective in the use of the eyes. First of all, he should avoid merely looking in the general direction of the audience without focusing his eyes on any one particular group or person. Listeners are quick to detect a blank stare or a far-away look, and will react negatively.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the speaker's eyes mirror his thought. If he is worrying about himself and his speech, his eyes will signal this fact. The hasty glance at the audience, the fixing of the eyes on the ceiling, the dropping of the eyes to the floor, all signal preoccupation to the audience.⁴¹

It has been noted that a preacher can look only at the tiniest part of his audience at one time. Accordingly, he will want to look, sincerely and intently, at one group or person until an idea has been completed, and then move on to another. The sincerity of his eye-contact with any one group at one time will indicate itself also to the rest. The true preacher will actually think of individuals at whom he is

³⁹Williamson, Fritz, and Ross, op. cit., p. 129.

⁴⁰White and Henderlidor, op. cit., p. 229.

⁴¹Lionel Crocker, Public Speaking for College Students (New York: American Book Co., c. 1941), p. 39.

looking.⁴² Except for necessary reference to notes, a preacher should keep his eyes on his listeners, or he may lose them.

Not only the eyes, but also the whole face and its expression should convey thought to the hearers. The muscles about the eyeball are said to be the most responsive of all to personal mood; they give the "bright-eyed" effect to a person telling a pleasant story, or create a dull demeanor to the person wrapped in gloom. The preacher should avoid the mistaken sense of decorum that freezes his face into a set pattern. He should have the same play of facial expression in the pulpit that he does in private conversation. He should respond facially to his goals of persuasion and his moods of tenseness and relaxation, of earnestness and joy, as he moves through the subject matter of his sermon.⁴³ If he does this, the preacher will escape the scathing denunciation of one writer who said, "The modern preacher's face is that of a sphinx, his action that of a wooden soldier, and his voice that of an electric motor."⁴⁴

Finally, the whole body should be employed in persuasive preaching. Body movement communicates to an audience the speaker's enthusiasm, his fear, his indifference, his joy, or his anger. The eye is more shrewd than the ear. The ear

⁴²Caemmerer, op. cit., p. 53.

⁴³Ibid., p. 52.

⁴⁴Mark W. Loe, So You Want to Speak (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, c. 1951), p. 58.

may be fooled by words, but the eye catches the setting of the word. Psychology informs us that knowledge is obtained through the five senses in about the following ratios: sight, 85 per cent; hearing, 10 per cent; touch, 2 per cent; smell, $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent; and taste, $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.⁴⁵ The speaker who neglects to perfect himself in the art of appealing to the eye is denying himself one of the primary channels for effective communication.

Furthermore, there is a close relationship between bodily movement and the voice. Bodily action not only furnishes the visible symbols of speech, but it makes possible the vocal symbols as well. Satisfactory voice control, involving as it does the coordinated operation of a large number of relatively small muscles, can be acquired only after general muscular control has been established. Many textbooks attempt an impossible differentiation between body and voice. Voice is just as physical as are other bodily actions.⁴⁶

Needless to say, bodily movement must be relevant and appropriate if it is to be effective in persuasion. Motions which in no way accord with the thought being expressed will create a negative, artificial effect. Accordingly, it is necessary for the speaker to feel very intensely what he is saying, and to express himself muscularly. Only in that way

⁴⁵ Whitesell and Perry, op. cit., p. 111.

⁴⁶ Weaver, op. cit., p. 63.

will his bodily movement prove natural and in harmony with his words.⁴⁷

It is virtually impossible to draw up a set of rules that will prescribe the "perfect" bodily movement for a particular thought. Bodily movement should be the spontaneous outgrowth of feeling deeply about the subject. Some authorities become quite disturbed by any discussion of gestures or bodily movements whatsoever. One of them writes:

Nine-tenths of the stuff that has been written on gesture has been a waste of good white paper and good black ink. Any gesture that is gotten out of a book is likely to look like it. The place to get it is out of yourself, out of your heart, out of your mind, out of your own interest in the subject, out of your own desire to make someone else see as you see, out of your own impulses. The only gestures that are worth one, two, three are those that are born on the spur of the instant. An ounce of spontaneity is worth a ton of rules.⁴⁸

George Rowland Collins, writing in Platform Speaking, says essentially the same thing.

When you speak, forget action entirely. Concentrate your attention on what you have to say and why you want to say it. Put all the fire and spirit of your being into the expression of your thought. Be enthusiastic, sincere, deadly earnest. Some action is bound to result. Your restraints will be broken down if you make the inner thought-urge strong enough. Your body will respond with some kind of expressive action. In all your actual speaking, think only of what you want to say. Do not plan your gestures in advance. Let the natural urge determine the action.⁴⁹

In view of these statements, a person hesitates to even

⁴⁷Williamson, Fritz, and Ross, op. cit., p. 104.

⁴⁸Carnegie, op. cit., p. 224.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 223.

generalize on types of gestures or bodily movements. A few words on the subject, however, might be in order.

In general, a speaker should seek for just as much individuality in his attitude-revealing movements as is compatible with the following principles: (1) stepping back, pushing away with the hands, lowering the hands, and shaking the head to indicate rejection, dislike, refusal, condemnation, and similar negative feelings; (2) stepping forward, raising the hands (especially with the palms up), drawing in with the arms, leaning the body forward, and nodding the head to indicate acceptance, a favorable reaction, praise, recommendation of a proposal, and similar affirmative feelings.⁵⁰ The backward movement is also effective for transitions, while the forward movement is used primarily for emphasis.

The amount of movement needed depends upon various factors in a speech situation. An audience that is fatigued, sleepy, or uncomfortable may react favorably to more movement than will an audience that is refreshed, wide awake, and sensitive to more delicate types of stimulation. A large audience usually likes more movement than does a smaller audience. Audiences made up of people who live active lives and who work with their hands enjoy more movement on the part of the speaker than do sedentary mental workers. About the

⁵⁰Robert T. Oliver, Rupert L. Cortright, and Cyril F. Hager, The New Training for Effective Speech (New York: The Dryden Press, Inc., 1946), p. 196.

only safe rule to follow is this: study the situation, learn about the habits and tastes of the audience, and adapt the action to the requirements of the particular situation.⁵¹

In general, it is found that persons on the periphery of an audience lose attention faster than those in the center. Eisenson refers to this difference in attentiveness as the "spread of attention." There is a good psychological basis for this difference. An audience is made up of individuals who respond to one another as well as to the speaker. Their mutual responses function on an empathetic basis; one individual in an audience unconsciously imitates the muscular tensions of another. Hence, the tensions of groups of people within the audience will tend to be similar; tension and relaxation, attending and non-attending, will take place almost simultaneously, beginning probably with one or two of the most susceptible members of the group and spreading to other members within the group.⁵² If the speaker is aware of these particularly susceptible members, he would do well to concentrate on them and set up a sort of chain reaction. The importance of audience inter-stimulation will be further discussed in the last chapter under the heading, "The Psychological Crowd."

Audience analysis does not cease when the preacher steps

⁵¹Weaver, op. cit., p. 68.

⁵²Jon Eisenson, The Psychology of Speech (New York: F.S. Crofts and Co., 1938), p. 229.

into the pulpit. Throughout his sermon the preacher should be watching the faces of his listeners to determine how successfully he is putting across his information. Preaching is not one way communication! The audience is constantly telling the speaker how it is receiving his message by changes in facial expression, smiles, frowns, averted glances, shifts of posture, yawning, nodding of the head, moving of the feet, and coughing. If some listeners look confused, the speaker would do well to review briefly the material already presented, define a troublesome word, or introduce additional explanation. If the auditors look uninterested, it might be well to increase the volume or animation. At any rate, the speaker should be sensitive to the difficulties of understanding experienced by his audience. When presenting difficult or technical material, he may want to reduce his rate of speaking. He should not expect others to remember a name or term the first time it is mentioned; instead, he should repeat any important term at least twice in close proximity.⁵³ In short, by being alert to audience reaction and by being enthusiastic in his delivery, the speaker will be much more successful in holding the attention of his audience.

Finally, the persuasive speaker should not only be aware of the psychological responses of his audience, but he also should take cognizance of the physiological processes

⁵³White and Henderlinder, op. cit., p. 290f.

of his auditors and of himself. So far as his audience is concerned, there are three ways in which the speaker can react to their bodily states. First, he may surrender to them. If his audience is tired, or sleepy, or hot, or uncomfortable, it may well be that the best thing to do is to stop speaking. In such a case the audience has not, of course, been persuaded, but it may well be more favorably inclined toward the speaker on future occasions.

Second, the speaker may be able to utilize and adapt the physiological drives of his auditors to his purpose. An audience that is physically uncomfortable may be all the more readily stirred to anger and protest by a speaker who wishes to attack the status quo. A quiescent, comfortable audience, on the other hand, is apt to be easily open to suggestion to let well enough alone, to accept things as they are. Crusading zeal is more responsive under conditions of physical restlessness than of physical lethargy.

Third, and finally, the speaker may actually create in his audience the physiological urge which will best serve his purpose. To make a man hungry, a verbal picture may do almost as well as the sight of food.⁵⁴ To describe sin with all of its hideous effects may do almost as well as to witness those effects in person. The effective preacher will not want to ignore physiological processes that may aid in pressing home the GOOD NEWS of salvation in Christ.

⁵⁴Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, p. 141.

CHAPTER V

CREATING RESPONSE IN THE PREACHING SITUATION

Importance of Creating Response

As has been noted repeatedly in this study, the end goal of persuasion is either some overt action on the part of the audience, or else some change in the feelings, attitudes, or beliefs of the hearers. All the effort expended in analyzing the audience, all of the methods used to create atmosphere, all of the techniques for holding attention are wasted unless this end goal is attained.

It is fitting, then, that the study should conclude with a discussion of the vital factors involved in creating a response on the part of the audience. A study will first be made of the psychological crowd, then of the psychological approach, and finally of the preacher's personality. All play a vital role in creating a response in the preaching situation.

The Psychological Crowd

A psychological crowd is a group of individuals who, by virtue of the fact that they are all reacting to a common source of stimulation and stimulating one another, show tendencies to respond in a more or less uniform manner.¹

¹Andrew T. Weaver, Speech: Forms and Principles (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1953), p. 204.

Psychologists have shown that men have a strong tendency to conform to the reactions of others in a crowd. Thus it is, when dealing with more than one person at a time, the skillful speaker tries in every possible way to merge the individuals into a group so that he can deal with them all in the same way. The mental inertia of a group, its readiness to yield, and its normal dislike to oppose enable the speaker to control and direct the mental processes of the polarized group. So long as reaction continues on the crowd level, the speaker's influence is much greater than it would be were he talking only to an individual of the group.²

There are a number of factors involved in this partial surrender by the individual to crowd reaction. First of all, the individuals in an audience are conscious of belonging together; sociologists call this consciousness the "we-feeling." Secondly, the individual tends to act in unison, having his normal tendencies to conform heightened by the audience situation. This tendency is usually known as "social facilitation." Thirdly, patterns of relationships become established within the audience itself. Ideally, all the members are oriented toward the speaker; but within the audience some members are also secondarily oriented toward some particularly responsive individual who becomes their "leader" and whose responses they tend to repeat or mimic.

²Jon Eisenson, The Psychology of Speech (New York: F.S. Crofts and Co., 1938), p. 200.

This pattern of status-relationships within the audience may be designated by the psychological term "configuration."³

Configuration is highly important in persuasive speaking, and will therefore be given further consideration. Studies have shown that, while all people are suggestible to some degree, there are certain persons who are particularly suggestible. These are the persons on whom the persuasive speaker will want to concentrate. There are many factors that render a person suggestible: that is, especially ready to react to stimuli furnished by other people. One of the principal of these is the submissive attitude. Most people are submissive in the presence of those who have prestige of one sort or another. A preacher, as a messenger of God, carries a great amount of such prestige. His life, however, must be in conformity with that of a messenger of God or a negative reaction will result; the importance of the preacher's personality will be discussed later.⁴

Age is also a distinct factor in suggestibility; children are more suggestible than college students, and college students are more suggestible than adults. Women are said to be measurably, but not much, more suggestible than men. The experience, general knowledge, and intelligence of the individual are also factors, although not as important as

³Robert T. Oliver, Persuasive Speaking (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1950), p. 182f.

⁴Weaver, op. cit., p. 199.

might be assumed.⁵

The lines of influence operative from a speaker to an audience are established first between him and those persons who are most suggestible, and most favorable to him and his purpose. It is an immense advantage to a speaker to have a number of these potential allies in his audience; without at least some of them, his task is going to be greatly increased.

The persuasive speaker will therefore want to keep his eyes and ears open for signs of cooperation on the part of individuals in his audience. When he sees heads nodding in agreement, facial expressions indicating willingness to accept what is being said, and postural tensions manifesting interest and delight, he should try to strengthen such responses and utilize them for the purpose of stimulating others who are so affected.⁶

The behavior of a psychological crowd can hardly be neglected by the persuasive preacher. He must understand these basic principles of group dynamics if he is going to look at his audience as something more than a number of individuals sitting in close proximity.

The Psychological Approach

In discussing the psychological approach in persuasive

⁵Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1946), p. 540.

⁶Weaver, op. cit., p. 203.

preaching, it is first of all necessary to be aware of the various channels or avenues through which a speaker "gets through" to the hearer. Three avenues of motivation are frequently mentioned in this respect. First, man is recognized as an emotional being, and much of what he believes, desires, or avoids is determined by his feelings. Second, man is described as a creature of reason; he understands facts, interprets them, and solves problems with his intelligence. Finally, man governs many of his actions and reaches many of his conclusions by a process of pseudo-reason, which has been termed rationalization.⁷ As shall be seen, the province of the persuasive preacher centers in the first two avenues, those of emotions and reason. A man who sees life within the framework of sin and grace has no need for the third avenue of rationalization.

Many branches of the Christian church have taken a rather dim view of emotional appeal in preaching. The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod would probably fall into this category. This dislike for emotional appeal is most likely a result of the extremes to which this approach has been used by some Pentecostal and other "enthusiastic" groups. However, to feel that emotion is unworthy of the pulpit is to ignore the basic facts of life. Most of what really seems important to man is deeply involved in emotion: friendships, ambitions, hopes, fears, likes, and dislikes.

⁷Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, p. 163.

Even the ideas that a man cherishes are important to him simply because he does cherish them, which is to say, because he has some emotional attachment to them. To be emotional means to feel deeply about a subject, to have a sense of personal involvement in it. The emotional person is one who enters into a situation and becomes a part of it. A purely objective person is one who stands aside as a mere spectator to the situation. It is needless to argue whether it is better to do one or the other. In point of fact, most normal people find that if a situation is important to them, they do respond emotionally to it. Whether or not they should do so is merely an academic question.⁸

All this has certain implications for the persuasive speaker, especially when speaking before an audience with varied backgrounds. He must find an avenue of motivation that reaches the greatest number of his listeners, and, ordinarily, that avenue is through the emotions. "The common denominator of every audience is their emotion."⁹ Love and grief, and their opposites of hate and joy, with all their various gradations, run through every audience, regardless of the cultural status of the group. To ignore this basic truth is fatal for persuasion. Emotion has been called

⁸Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, p. 112.

⁹Lionel Crocker, Public Speaking for College Students (New York: American Book Co., c. 1941), p. 303.

"persuasion's breath of life."¹⁰ Action is seldom the result of cold reasoning, but rather of the warmth of desire. If a speaker cannot stir his listeners, he cannot hope to persuade.

There are three distinct functions which may be served by the emotional appeal. The first is to disarm the audience, to remove its barriers of suspicion and possible hostility, and to make it willing to listen. The second function of emotion is to create a general mood which will provide a proper atmosphere for the speaker's plea. Both of these functions were discussed at length in Chapter III. The third function of emotion is to energize the audience's support of the speaker's proposal by linking it with the human or emotional drives.¹¹ These drives are the fundamental bases for almost all human action, and the persuasive preacher will want to know what basic appeals strike an answering chord with these drives.

First of all, there is the appeal to altruism. Altruism might be defined as the spirit of benevolence or devotion to the interests of others. This appeal is often neglected, but can be very effective with certain types of men and women who are not reached on the basis of self-interest. Scriptural

¹⁰Arleigh B. Williamson, Charles A. Fritz, and Harold R. Ross, Speaking in Public (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), p. 355.

¹¹Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, p. 169f.

examples of such altruism can be found in the cases of Moses and his father-in-law in the Old Testament, and the good Samaritan in the New Testament.

Secondly, there is the appeal to aspiration, the universal hunger for spiritual happiness and a sense of completeness. It reaches those who are especially conscious of past failings and who long for a better life. Scriptures offer examples of aspiration in St. Matthew's account of the rich young ruler, and in St. John's account of Nicodemus.

Again, there is the appeal to curiosity, to that which appears novel, unfamiliar, or mysterious. This appeal can be easily abused and accordingly should be used with caution. However, Jesus made effective use of it in the case of the woman of Samaria and Zacchaeus.

Again, there is the appeal to duty, the urge to do a thing because it is right or to refrain from a thing because it is wrong. Here one could point to the parable of the talents in St. Matthew. There is the appeal to love, love of God, of others, and especially to the love of Christ.¹²

Furthermore, there is the appeal to cooperation. The life of a church depends upon all working together. Often a preacher can secure action by asking that individuals forget their own prejudices and work for the common good. Yet again, there is the appeal to ideals. The power of the appeal will

¹²Faris D. Whitesell and Lloyd M. Perry, Variety In Your Preaching (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1954), p. 25f.

differ with various audiences. Idealism will usually be quite effective with youth, but much less effective with older persons. Finally, one could mention the appeal to adventure. This is often overlooked in the work of the Lord, when really nothing could be more exciting and adventurous than telling people of their salvation in Christ and its implications for their daily living.¹³

The second of the three avenues of motivation listed earlier was that of reason. Even though an emotional appeal is superior to an intellectual appeal from the standpoint of persuasion, this does not mean that the intellectual appeal has no place. As a matter of fact, the two can be used together very effectively.

In addition to knowing the various types of appeals, the persuasive preacher will also want to be aware of how an audience reacts to a specific appeal or suggestion. H. L. Hollingworth lists seven laws of suggestion which help to align audience thinking with that of the speaker. First of all, the hearer likes to act spontaneously and on his own initiative; accordingly, the more indirect the suggestion, the more it can be made to be an original determination or plan or conclusion on the part of the listener. Secondly, the dynamic power of a suggestion will be greater the more forcefully and vividly it is presented. Third, the speaker will want to align the suggested act with pre-established

¹³Crocker, op. cit., p. 358f.

tendencies. This, of course, would undergo some modification in the preaching situation. Fourth, the action power of a suggestion varies directly with the prestige of its source. This will be discussed later in this chapter in considering the preacher's personality. Fifth, the strength of a suggestion will be determined in part by the degree of internal resistance it encounters. Sixth, the strength of suggestion varies with the frequency with which it is met. And finally, in appealing for a specific line of action, no interference, substitute, rival idea, or opposing action should be suggested.¹⁴ These seven laws will receive further consideration in the following paragraphs.

Hollingworth's first law advocates "indirect suggestion." This consists of implanting an idea in the mind of a listener without seeming to do so. In persuasion the value of this technique cannot be over-emphasized. Pascal once said, "We are more easily persuaded, in general, by the reasons we ourselves discover, than by those which have been suggested to us by others."¹⁵ Alexander Pope voiced the same opinion when he declared, "Men must be taught as if you taught them not, and things unknown proposed as things forgot."¹⁶ Frequently, as a person listens to a speech, his mind leaps ahead to formulate a conclusion which is suggested but never phrased by

¹⁴Eisenson, op. cit., p. 233.

¹⁵Dale Carnegie, Public Speaking and Influencing Men 'In Business' (New York: Association Press, 1930), p. 450.

¹⁶Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, p. 248.

the speaker. This is an ideal means of instilling a proposition in the mind of an auditor; for he then thinks of it as his own and will consequently cling to it as his own conclusion.¹⁷

This doesn't mean, of course, that direct suggestion has no place in persuasion. There are certain speaking situations (and the pulpit is one of them) where direct suggestion can be used very effectively. In general, the following guidelines are helpful in determining whether to use direct or indirect suggestion. Direct suggestion can be used when the audience is polarized, when the speaker's prestige is high, when the majority of the auditors are quite young, when immediate and definite action is called for, and when the speaker is the complete master of the speech situation. Indirect suggestion should be employed especially when the audience is mentally alert, when the educational level is high, when the speaker's prestige is low, when the majority of the auditors are adults, when the goal is to create a certain belief or attitude rather than action, and when the speaker is comparatively unskilled.¹⁸ In this connection it might be stated that an audience composed mostly of college students can be reached through indirect suggestion more readily than through direct suggestion.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 234f.

Regardless of what type of suggestion is used, the speaker's appeal should always show the hearer how he will benefit by following a certain course of action. Never should an appeal ring with an "I want you to do this" tone. The man who would succeed in Christian communication should be wise in the use of pronouns. They play a vital role in persuasion. Luther once declared that all religion lies in the pronouns.¹⁹ The persuasive preacher will want to use the pronoun "you" in preference to the weaker "we" or self-centered "I."

Also very essential to persuasive preaching is the affirmative approach. A good speaker gets a number of "yes responses" at the very outset of his speech. He thereby sets the psychological processes of his listeners moving in the affirmative direction.

The psychological patterns here are quite clear. When a person says "No" and really means it, he is doing more than saying a word of two letters. His entire organism--glandular, nervous, muscular--gathers itself together into a condition of rejection. There is, usually in minute but sometimes in observable degree, a physical withdrawal, or readiness for withdrawal. The whole neuro-muscular system, in short, sets itself on guard against acceptance. Where, on the contrary, a person says "yes," none of the withdrawing activities take place. 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 proposal.²⁰

¹⁹David A. MacLennan, Pronouns for Preachers (Great Neck, New York: The Pulpit Press, 1954), p. 14.

²⁰Carnegie, op. cit., p. 300.

In this regard, the importance of the introduction to the sermon was referred to earlier in the paper.

As in the case of direct and indirect suggestion, so also in the case of affirmative and negative approaches; neither can be marked as the only approach. To use a very striking example of "effective negation" one could point to the Ten Commandments. However, it can be said that the most effective suggestion is in the affirmative form and that that form should be used unless the speaker has some special reason for preferring the negative statement.²¹

Hollingworth's sixth law of suggestion stated that the strength of suggestion varies with the frequency with which it is met. As a means of emphasis, repetition cannot be neglected. Oliver claims that it is the most effective form of emphasis up to three repetitions.²² After that the law of diminishing returns sets in.

In creating a response on the part of the audience, the role of the conclusion is highly important. Its composition should always be given careful and thorough consideration. Too many preachers look upon it as a rather perfunctory thing, just something to get the job done. Obviously, they do not understand the vital function of the conclusion. Instead of looking upon it merely as a means of winding up, they ought to value it as the last chance of accomplishing a definite

²¹Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, p. 237.

²²Ibid., p. 215.

purpose, the purpose held in mind from the beginning. Rather than perfunctory, it should be dynamic, the last blow that sinks the nail into the wood. It is no place to introduce new material or new proposals, but to make a final impression upon the audience with some new vital use of the proposal already advanced.

Types of conclusions include recapitulation, summary, and example. Recapitulation is a final allusion to most or all of the outstanding phases of the address, with a drawing together of the whole. Summary differs from recapitulation in that it may ignore many of the phases discussed and emphasize the essence of what was said. Rather than a repetition of specific points, it is a re-enforcing of the culminating ideas. Example, on the other hand, is often more effective than either recapitulation or summary. This is the conclusion that ends in a broad, inclusive illustration exemplifying the main ideas of the sermon.²³

A few guidelines for conclusions might be mentioned. First, it should be brief. A few sentences will usually suffice. Second, it should be bright; never should a sermon end on a condemnatory note. The conclusion is a good place to emphasize once more the "good news" of the Gospel. Third, the conclusion should be energetic and end on a strong note. The speaker should not run down like a clock. In all too many cases the audience can anticipate the speaker's closing

²³Williamson, Fritz, and Ross, op. cit., p. 236f.

sentence.²⁴ When this is true, it is time for the speaker to work on his conclusions.

Finally, a word regarding "precurrent responses" and "deliberation" may be in place. The term "precurrent responses" may be defined as adjustments that the individual makes which get him set and prepare him for a final reaction or response.²⁵ Very often it happens that there is a waiting period between the original stimulation of the individual and the time when the desired reaction may be completed. It is during this period that precurrent responses come into operation. They may continue for an indefinite time, usually becoming more potent the longer they wait for consummation. Occasionally, environmental and physiological changes may decrease the potency of precurrent responses. A case in point would be that of two unchurched college co-eds who were moved by a particular sermon to inquire about adult instruction class. During the short period that followed, one of the co-eds was moved by precurrent responses to ask for a private instruction in order that she might hasten her becoming a member of the church. The other co-ed pledged a sorority, became interested in its activities, and the precurrent responses were virtually erased.

"Deliberation" is a precurrent response in its slowest

²⁴Crocker, op. cit., p. 117.

²⁵Eisenson, op. cit., p. 257.

form. In persuasive situations, deliberation means "delayed action." Action resulting from deliberation is likely to be more lasting because all the alternatives have been studied and the chosen course seems to be the best under the circumstances. In general, it can be said that deliberation is most relied upon in matters of consequence in the individual's life, while quick responses are efficacious in matters that are relatively unimportant.²⁶

. The Preacher's Personality

Some preachers might very well object to a discussion of the preacher's personality in a research paper on persuasive preaching. To do so, however, is simply to ignore facts. Nearly every authority in public speaking devotes a full chapter to the speaker's personality. Accordingly, the subject will also be considered here.

A brief look at the word "personality" might serve as a point of departure. The root meaning of personality, which comes from the Latin per sonare, is to "speak through." Persona was the name given to the mask worn by an actor in Roman drama. The persona had a triple function: it attracted attention to the actor; it revealed the type of character he represented; and, with a built-in megaphone, made his speech more easily audible.²⁷ In the preaching situation, it is the

²⁶ Crocker, op. cit., p. 328f.

²⁷ Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, p. 93.

second of these functions that is most important.

Personality, in the sense of a revelation of character, is of first importance in any teaching situation, and preaching is no exception. When spiritual values are involved, what a person is is far more determinative of effective transfer than what he has acquired. This truth has been expressed in many ways. Phillips Brooks once said, "Preaching is truth through personality."²⁸ Emerson expressed the same idea when he wrote, "What you are shouts so loud, that I cannot hear what you say."²⁹ Many writers in the field of public speaking refer to this aspect of speech as "ethical proof." Ethical proof includes the preacher's total personality, his attitudes, his intelligence, his sincerity, his tact, and similar qualities which create confidence and good will. It is always a factor for or against the speaker, whether he recognizes it or not.³⁰

The most important personality qualification for a Christian pastor is a profound personal Christianity. Dr. Hoffmann stated this truth quite effectively when he said,

Christian preaching--wherever it still reflects the spirit of the New Testament--comes from the heart of a man who has been touched personally by the compassion of God. He knows the reaching quality of divine compassion in Jesus Christ. He trusts Christ himself for personal salvation, with everything that it implies.

²⁸ Paul Lindemann, Ambassadors of Christ (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), p. 151.

²⁹ Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, p. 91.

³⁰ Whitesell and Perry, op. cit., p. 102.

He hasn't reached out for Christ. Christ has reached out for him. As the preacher mounts the pulpit, Christ is reaching out to him again for his heart and his hands, in the Word He has given him to preach to others.³¹

Unless a preacher has himself found Christ, he will never be able to lead others to Him.

A second important personality qualification is the preacher's "social stimulus value."³² This quality is determined by his feeling about other people, other people's feelings toward him, and his own attitude toward himself. A speaker who is known to his audience as a friend and associate has, to a significant degree, either succeeded or failed in his persuasive effort even before his speech begins. The audience has formed an opinion of him as a person--of his integrity, intelligence, motives, and conscientiousness--and inevitably brings this opinion heavily to bear in judging what he may say. Whatever a speaker may say in a twenty to thirty minute speech seldom can be impressive enough to reverse judgments about him that are based upon all the audience knows of his past life and present status. There is little doubt that effective social living is a part of persuasive speaking.³³

In his guide for student pastors, Pastor Richard Jesse

³¹Oswald C.J. Hoffmann, "Reaching Through Preaching," Wenatch Foundation Lectures (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), p. 15.

³²Richard A. Jesse, "The Ideal Student Pastor," Introductory Student Pastor's Workbook (Chicago, Illinois: Student Service Commission, 1954), p. A-10.

³³Oliver, Persuasive Speaking, p. 47.

proceeds to enumerate other important personality qualifications, qualifications especially necessary for the campus ministry, but also applicable to the ministry in general. Among these are intelligence, culture, ability to adjust, aggressiveness, and poise. The student pastor especially needs a high level of intelligence, because he is dealing with a select group whose intelligence quotient is above that of the general population. Furthermore, he must be a person of culture, both as to his manner, manners, and conduct, and as to his acquaintance with the fields of formal culture, past and present. In addition, he must be able to adjust quickly to new situations, to move intellectually and emotionally from the subjective to the objective world and back again. Finally, he must possess the qualities of aggressiveness, poise, courage, fairness, generosity, and patience.³⁴

Thus far the personality aspects discussed apply to the preacher regardless of whether he is in the pulpit or not. This is a legitimate approach too, since the preacher's personality outside the pulpit will certainly be reflected in the pulpit. There are certain aspects of personality, however, that should be mentioned in specific connection with the preaching situation.

First, a word about the preacher's attitude in the pulpit. In an earlier chapter it was suggested that the

³⁴ Jesse, op. cit., p. A-10.

minister preach with love and a desire to help. It is also necessary for the preacher to speak with determination. The better he can convey to his listeners a sense of his own urgency and make his audience respond with feelings of personal responsibility for acting, the better persuader he will be. It is important to remember that like begets like. If the preacher is alive and alert in the pulpit, both mentally and physically, he will also stimulate the life and actions of his hearers. If he is lackadaisical, they will also be lackadaisical. If he is reserved, they will be reserved. If he is only mildly concerned, they will be only mildly concerned. But if he is deadly earnest about what he says, and if he says it with feeling and spontaneity and force and contagious conviction, they cannot keep from catching the same feeling and attitude.³⁵

No single attribute was mentioned so frequently by speech authorities as a prerequisite for creating response as was sincerity. It is, after all, the sincerity of the heart and the evident passion for souls that moves an audience. An actor gave as the reason for the superior popularity of his own profession over the ministry the following: "We speak fiction as if it were truth, and you speak truth as if it were fiction."³⁶ Dale Carnegie expressed the same truth in these words:

³⁵Carnegie, op. cit., p. 137.

³⁶Lindemann, op. cit., p. 148.

Regardless of the pretty phrases a man may concoct; regardless of the illustrations he may assemble; regardless of the harmony of his voice and the grace of his gestures; if he does not speak sincerely, these are hollow and glittering trappings. If you would impress an audience, first be impressed yourself. Your spirit, shining through your eyes, radiating through your voice, and proclaiming itself through your manner, will communicate itself to your auditors.³⁷

Sincerity should be distinguished, however, from over-seriousness and over-intensity, which too often border on fanaticism. Nor is sincerity only sentimental emotionalism. It is the true expression of what the speaker thinks and how he reacts to an idea. It gives the persuasive speaker one of his strongest elements of conviction.³⁸

Furthermore, the persuasive preacher will preach with enthusiasm. The word "enthusiasm" is derived from two Greek words: en, meaning in; and theos, meaning God. Enthusiasm is literally "God in us." The enthusiastic man is one who speaks as a person possessed by God.³⁹ The psychologist who listens to the majority of the well-known modern preachers would have little doubt that their power lies in their ability to transmit their own enthusiasm and nervous tension to others. It is this quality which invests the man and his message with a certain impelling intensity. It establishes a kind of rapport with the hearers, which makes an ordinary

³⁷Carnegie, op. cit., p. 390.

³⁸Williamson, Fritz, and Ross, op. cit., p. 350.

³⁹Carnegie, op. cit., p. 136.

remark seem more illuminating.⁴⁰

Another reason why enthusiasm is so important is that it reduces the possibility of dogmatic delivery. When one is engrossed in the subject of a speech and feels quite strongly about it, there is always a risk that the minds of the listeners will be repelled by an attitude of "I tell you." There is a very real, if rather fine, distinction between impelling and compelling an audience to a conclusion, but it is not easy to remember when absorbed in a speech. Hence, the speaker who is sincerely enthusiastic and who can communicate that same enthusiasm to others has a distinct advantage in the persuasive situation.⁴¹

The matter of enthusiasm sometimes becomes a problem for a preacher, however, since there is frequently a lapse of time between his preparation and delivery. For example, it often happens that the preacher prepares a sermon on a subject in which he initially takes a warm and enthusiastic interest. During the preparation his emotional reaction to the subject is marked; he feels himself filled with the force and drive needed to make a moving and effective address. Then several days pass while he is waiting to deliver the sermon. His emotion cools and he becomes "cold" on the

⁴⁰Eric. S. Waterhouse, Psychology and Pastoral Work (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1940), p. 201.

⁴¹Wilfred Womersley, Working Wonders With Words (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1951), p. 182.

subject. The result is a dull and uninspired delivery.⁴²

Hence, for every sermon there should be an emotional as well as an intellectual preparation for delivery. The well known Chautauqua lecturer, George W. Bain, declared that if he were to speak on poverty, he would purposely seek a route to his meeting place by way of the slums, so that his heart as well as his mind would be prepared.⁴³ Martin Luther, in his own characteristic way, said, "If I wish to compose or write or pray or preach well, I must be angry. Then all the blood in my veins is stirred, and my understanding is sharpened."⁴⁴ A preacher must not only know the facts he wants to present, he must also live them. He must be acquainted with and responsive to the emotions, motives, and yearnings of mankind. He must mingle intimately with all groups of people. Hospitals, prisons, reformatories, schools, colleges, dormitories, and factories--all should be visited by the preacher who wants to enter into the feelings of his hearers. Similarly, the preacher with a campus ministry should spend as much time as possible on campus with his students, observing first hand their special needs and interests.

There can even be an emotional preparation immediately

⁴²Robert T. Oliver, Rupert L. Cortright, and Cyril F. Hager, The New Training for Effective Speech (New York: The Dryden Press, Inc., 1946), p. 42.

⁴³Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, p. 173.

⁴⁴Carnegie, op. cit., p. 136f.

before the delivery of the sermon. A wise choice of hymns may go far in setting the proper atmosphere and creating the necessary enthusiasm for a persuasive speech. The preacher should look at his audience as people who are in need of help, and his one desire should be to offer such help. That is his God-given duty and privilege. When the people see in the pulpit such a witness who is aflame with the experience of the Gospel, they are impressed not by the preacher but by his message. They are likely to see "no man any more, save Jesus only."⁴⁵

⁴⁵Mark 9:8

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The writer of this paper is fully aware that the principles set down in this study are not necessarily new or original to himself. They are principles that have been used extensively over the years by people especially concerned with effective communication. What the writer attempted to do was to take these principles and apply them directly to the preaching situation. He sincerely feels that ignorance of psychology and speech techniques on the part of many preachers has hindered their effective communication of the Gospel. He feels that far too many pastors ascend their pulpits on Sunday morning with little or no knowledge of the phenomena of human behavior that are taking place before him. Far too many look at the preaching situation as being nothing more than people in pews and a preacher in the pulpit. The psychological overtones are all but ignored.

The writer further feels that there is nothing unethical about using persuasive techniques in preaching. There is nothing unethical about wanting people to know and understand more clearly their relation to God; and ultimately, if that is not the prime motive of the Christian minister, he would do well to re-examine his whole purpose in life. Actually, the persuasive techniques suggested in this study

are little more than basic educational psychology; ideally, they should be second nature with the contemporary preacher. Should some of the suggestions sound new or strange, it might be attributed to the fact that somewhere in the ministerial curriculum there has been a serious oversight. The writer feels a definite need for a course in educational psychology or psychology of speech in the ministerial curriculum.

Preachers on the university and college campuses especially need such training. The present day college student has an inquiring mind that automatically closes to high-handed dogmatism, regardless of its source. This is not to say that students of the past were not of an inquiring nature, but it simply re-emphasizes the fact that the college campus presents a special challenge in effective preaching. Through patient sympathy and understanding, students must be led deeper into the Christian faith. Any attempt to forcefully drive them only leads to alienation.

The writer feels that he has accomplished his purpose in this study if he has made himself and his fellow laborers in Christ more aware of the possibilities for effective preaching. Ultimately, no one who is plagued with the weaknesses of a sinful flesh is going to become indispensable in winning souls for Christ; as a person, however, who has been chosen by God Himself to tell others of the Savior, the present day preacher will not want to leave a stone unturned in making that communication as effective as possible.

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