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Essay or Sermon? Recitation or Preaching?

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vocate any iron-clad rules or stereotyped forms which should be observed in this matter. We are willing to confine our preaching to the pulpit, but the announcement hour offers the chance of many an informal heart-to-heart talk with the young, too, and we should not let this chance slip by. But let us be careful to get down to the level of our people in these talks or discussions on the one or the other question of Christian faith or life. Let us not tolerate even a semblance of formalism in ourselves or our work; thus we shall very effectively combat and discourage it also in our people.

In brief, let us pray God to give us wisdom and strength ever more to shape our entire endeavor so that we may helpfully serve our people and our fellow-men and by such service enhance the glory of His great name.

Milwaukee, Wis.

HERM. A. STEEGE.

Essay or Sermon? Recitation or Preaching?

Some preachers write religious essays, learn them by heart, and then recite them in the pulpit. They have not learned to distinguish between the essay style and the oral style. An essay is not a sermon; a recitation is not preaching.

The difference between the essay style and the oral style is more easily demonstrated practically than defined. The essential difference is this, that the essayist writes for the *eye*, while the preacher writes for the *ear*. The reader for whom the essay has been written can take his time in reading it; if necessary, he can reread a sentence or a paragraph or even an entire chapter; he can linger and ponder at will over a word or over a sentence until he understands it. The hearer can do none of these things; he is at the mercy of the speaker and must therefore hear and think as fast as the speaker speaks. Since the preacher preaches to a mixed audience of varying intelligence and education and mental ability, and since the average hearer is not a trained thinker and often not even of quick mental perception, the preacher must speak accordingly; he must, even more than the essayist, cultivate a clear style, using plain words, simple constructions, and short sentences. He must, either in the same or in different words, frequently make use of repetition and must go to greater lengths than the essayist in developing a thought. He must clearly enunciate and put the emphasis where it belongs. He must make judicious use of the pause. He must speak with his eyes, with the expression of his entire face, and with his hands. Because of this difference between the essay style and the oral style the *best* sermons cannot be printed. Even the radio speaker is at a great disadvantage because he cannot get the reaction of his audience which tells him

whether or not he has been understood, a reaction which a speaker so much desires to get; the desirable interplay between the speaker and the hearer is missing. And a man who in the pulpit reads his sermons from manuscript is by that very fact depriving himself of the most essential qualities of good speaking. Reading, no matter how well it may be done, is, after all, reading and not preaching. Our English language still makes a distinction between a reader and a speaker; so does the public.

The difference between the essay style and the oral style must be given due attention in the preparation of the sermon. This difference does not consist in this, that the essayist writes his essay while the preacher does not write his sermon. No, that is not the difference. Unless a preacher for many years carefully writes his sermons in full, giving due care to his language and to exact statements and to a clear development of thought, he will never be able to preach well from a mere good outline. The preacher who relies very much or altogether upon sermon helps or who even copies to a large extent the sermons of others instead of doing original work by thoroughly studying and thinking through his text and his subject-matter, will not only poorly supply the needs of his congregation, but will also, because he has been learning by heart what others have written, recite in the pulpit and not *speak* from the fulness of his text and the fulness of his own heart. Such a preacher may even at some time or another find himself in the position of that young man whose sermon was "a masterly effort, clear as a flute; there was not a word that gave an uncertain sound; it was all very, very good"; but when some one sought to draw him out a little further, the young preacher's conversation "revealed that he did not understand his own message." But the preacher must understand his own message and know what and how to preach to the very particular audience which he is addressing at the time being. This requires not only a most careful study of the subject-matter, but also a thorough knowledge of the needs of his audience and due attention to those psychological and mechanical factors which are needed to instruct well. The difference between the essay style and the oral style should therefore not be lost sight of, neither in the preparation nor in the delivery of the sermon. The preacher's or speaker's style will not be the finished literary style of the essayist, but rather that of the conversationalist. That, of course, does not mean that the essayist cultivates a good style while the speaker need not do so, but rather that the essayist is writing his essay for readers while the preacher is preparing his sermon for hearers. Diligent study, divine enlightenment, and consecration are the prerequisites for such pulpit work.