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Homemade Homiletics

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is 'possible,' that of faith and revelation" (p. 299). But even if Professor Adler had made faith in divine revelation a cornerstone in his philosophy of education, the question would still be whether he accepts the basic teaching of the Bible that man is saved by grace alone through faith in Christ. Catholicism regards the Bible as a source of knowledge and of greater authority than the postulates of reason and stresses the intimate relationship that exists between the believer and Christ. Professor McGucken, as was pointed out before, even asserts that "the Catholic believes humbly and sincerely that the answer to the problem of integration is one word, a monosyllable, Christ. Christianity is Christ" (pp. 280 and 281). Yet nowhere does Professor McGucken clearly indicate that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6) in the sense that only faith in Him, without the deeds of the Law, insures eternal bliss.

We ought now, after this brief comparison of the philosophies of education presented in the *Yearbook*, proceed to suggest basic considerations of a Lutheran philosophy of education. But before doing so, we believe it important to relate the philosophies presented in the *Yearbook* to the historical and educational background which they reflect. Both this background and the fundamental viewpoints of a Lutheran philosophy of education will be discussed in a second article, to be published in the next issue of this journal.

St. Louis, Mo.

PAUL BRETSCHER

Homemade Homiletics

Paper Read at a Pastors' Institute

Homiletics is that branch of theology which treats of homilies, or the making of sermons. And when I have chosen as my theme "Homemade Homiletics," it means just that. They are sermons which have been prayed over, thought out, worked out, polished off, and put into final form for their delivery by the pastor himself. For while we often hear from our pulpits good, soundly doctrinal sermons, which are both instructive and edifying, yea, at times most inspiring, the making of the sermon has all too often been but a gleaning from what other men have thought through and developed. And so, while those who hear the sermon may go home strengthened and encouraged for the tasks ahead of them in the coming week, the pastor will limp home looking for crutches on which to steady himself when he again ascends the pulpit. The sermon will not have proved as helpful to the preacher himself as it would have proved had he faithfully labored over theme and divisions as their originator and perfecter himself.

While I do not deny that there may be times when it may become both justifiable and necessary to make use of another man's development of a given text, that must not be made the *rule*, but ever remain the *rare exception*. For what will be the result if we as preachers are ever leaning on another theologian's thoughts and applications of a given text? We shall remain more or less helpless children, never getting beyond the "Kiddy-Kar" stage. Or, as Scripture more aptly puts it: "When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat." Heb. 5:12. When it is demanded of us that we stand on our own feet, we shall toddle about as those who have never quite learned the sturdy art of walking with sure and steady step. Such preachers remind me of a good old German we had down in the State of Texas. He had become so used to relying on the sage counsel and direction of his faithful wife that when occasion demanded that he give his own opinion on some vital question and that wife was not at hand, he would invariably cry out more or less in despair: "I vish Mary vas here, dat's vat I hope!"

Now, why is it so necessary that the individual pastor sweat and labor over the text all by himself? If he does not, he will never become the *Seelsorger* he ought to be, will never be ready to give an unhesitating account of his faith in moments of crisis, will never have the unswerving conviction in matters of doctrine and practice which God expects of everyone to whom has been entrusted the shepherding of His flock. In conferences, at conventions, at colloquiums, he will all too often be looking for guidance and direction from some trusted leader, instead of standing on his own feet. That is why in times of stress for the Church, when individual conviction based on the inviolable Word itself is at a premium, men will often be looking about for the guidance which is not there. Even the Lutheran Church has had, and will no doubt continue to have, its wavering Melancthons, who will prove the undoing of our Church unless there be among clergy and laity those who, like Caleb of old, having another spirit with him, followed the Lord fully. Num. 14:24. The reason we have so much confusion in our midst today relative to doctrinal matters on the question of unionism is due to the fact that all too many pastors within our Synodical Conference are relying entirely too much upon leadership and doing very little individual study on the points involved. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Jer. 17:5. While we must always bear in mind that Scripture itself enjoins upon us the sacred duty to "remember them which have the rule over us, who have spoken unto us the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of

their conversation" (Heb. 13:7), that very injunction places upon us as individuals the responsibility of knowing what the Word of God says.

"But what has this to do with homiletics?" you ask. It has very much to do in every way. For as a pastor works in his study, so he will very likely do his work in general. It was sage counsel which the English divine gave when he said: "When you come into a pastor's home where the carpet is worn thin in front of the mirror, pray for that pastor. But if you find that the carpet is become threadbare where the pastor labors over his sermons, get that pastor to pray for you."

Before entering upon a discussion of the more mechanical parts of sermon making, there are certain fundamental truths upon which I desire to dwell in brief. The first of these is the apostolic injunction: "*Let no man despise thy youth.*" 1 Tim. 4:12. While we as younger men should ever bear in mind that there is a Fourth Commandment, which enjoins upon us due respect for our elders, that respect must never take the form of silence when truth is at stake. For silence then, so far from being a virtue, becomes a grievous sin.

To sin by silence, when we should protest,
Makes cowards out of men;
The human race has climbed on protest.
Had no voice been raised against
Injustice, ignorance, and lust,
The Inquisition yet would serve the law,
And guillotines decide our last disputes.

The second fundamental truth is this: "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" 1 Pet. 4:11. The word for "oracles" in the original is "logia," that which is *uttered, spoken, revealed*. This does not mean that we must simply repeat verbatim what God in His Word of truth has uttered, but it means that it must all be based upon that divine Word and be in strict accord with it. It will therefore always be an excellent rule to follow, that when you have discoursed upon some definite doctrines, you do not leave the question until you have quoted directly from Scripture itself the very words which cover the point in question. Then your hearers will know that you have spoken as you have because "thus saith the Lord."

And the third fundamental truth to which I would point is the very last word we have from the pen of Peter: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Pet. 3:18. For unless you grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him who must ever be the lodestar in all your preaching, you may preach ever so eloquently, ever so interestingly, ever so brilliantly, but you are not going to preach *saving* sermons. May it never be said by any of your hearers at the end of any of your sermons: "We would see Jesus." It is told of an American who was visiting

at the time when the two most talked-of preachers in that metropolis were Joseph Parker and Charles H. Spurgeon, that he went to hear both of them. After hearing the brilliant Parker in his pulpit at the City Temple, he spoke to one of the ushers as he left the place of worship: "What a wonderful preacher you have here." On the following Sunday, after having heard Spurgeon in his Tabernacle, he said to the usher on leaving: "What a wonderful Savior you have here." And that alone will be effective preaching which leaves the hearers not marveling at the gifts and abilities of the one who has preached but which makes them adoringly look up to a Savior which has evidently been set forth, crucified among them. Gal. 3:1.

But now regarding the preparation of the sermon itself.

1. If you are able to make use of the original texts, whether they be Hebrew or Greek, do not fail to consult them, even though you may not in every instance be able to make use of them directly. Usually the original texts will give you pointers which will prove very helpful in your sermon preparation. It is seldom that a Walther, for instance, refers to any specific word from the original, but he most certainly indicates that he has made use of it.

2. The very first thing you want to do when you have thoroughly acquainted yourself with the text (and that means that you also have consulted the parallel passages), is to strive to get at the nub of it and to state your theme in as catchy a way as possible. When I say catchy, I use that word in its better sense. Do not seek to be sensational in your selection of a theme, but let it be of such a nature that no one, after having heard it stated, shall have the right to think within himself: "Well, I know what is coming, so I may just as well settle back for a much-needed nap." No, make the theme so strikingly interesting that the hearer will be prompted to say to himself: "That's a question I most certainly will want to hear answered." And since in our day there are very few pastors who have not at their disposal some local paper, especially in the smaller towns, it is well to submit with your announcement of text and theme a brief sentence which gathers within it the central truth of the text or at least touches upon a vital part of the text. It should give your parishioners an idea of what they may have a right to expect in their pastor's sermon the coming Sunday. It has this very salutary value that it makes you think upon what you are to preach about quite early in the week, for announcements usually have to be in by Tuesday morning. It's a good antidote to that all-too-common pastoral weakness — *laziness*.

To sum up this paragraph: Put much time and thought upon your theme. If the great newspapers consider it worth while to employ men whose one duty it is to summarize the day's most

important news item in one pithy sentence splashed across the front page of the paper, certainly it ought to be worth some effort on our part to formulate that "good news" which we are to proclaim in such a way that it shall elicit attention.

3. Every well-prepared sermon ought to have an introduction. I know that there are those preachers who have an aversion to what is generally termed thematic preaching and who argue that you ought to make your sermon an *in medias res iacere* affair. But I also know that for my own part I like to have at least an enlightening introduction, a definite theme, and a logical conclusion. They serve as a handle with which I can carry the sermon home with me and not lose grip of its contents too early in the week.

But what is to be the nature of the introduction? It must lead from the text into the theme. Otherwise it serves no useful purpose. But what, in essence, is to be its contents? Wherever it is possible, it is well that in your introduction (when you are preaching on a Gospel or an Epistle text) you make use of some Old Testament story. For our hearers need to become acquainted also with what the Prophets had to say. If that were not the case, why would we find the apostolic preachers so often resorting to this very thing? Or, if not from the Old Testament story, make use of some well-known historic fact which will serve the purpose. Just by way of illustration: If preaching on a text like Rom. 8:1 ("There is therefore now no condemnation," etc), I would use as my theme: "The Man Whom God Cannot Curse." As my introduction to that theme I would make use of the story of Balak and Balaam, Num. 22. Or, as an instance of a Gospel text, the account of Christ's temptation in the wilderness, you might well use as your theme "The Real Battle of the Wilderness," introducing that by a narration of the well-known closing campaign of our Civil War. If you want to use as the theme for your Easter sermon: "How Do You Punctuate the Easter Message?" (which, by the way, is not an indifferent theme), you might introduce that by showing the importance of proper punctuation. A man's fortune (as in the case of a Joseph Leiter) may be ruined by the improper placement of a comma. Or a man's life might depend upon it.

4. Your sermon must not only be *zeitgemaess*, but it must be *textual*. Yes, there are indeed many truths set forth in the Bible, but you must confine yourself to the truth which is presented in the text you have before you. You must not preach *about* the Law and the Gospel, but preach Law and Gospel. There is in only too many sermons a mere moralizing about the Law. And that will never convict of sin. Conviction of sin is, of course, the Law's primary purpose. "Every mouth must be stopped and all the world become guilty before God." Rom. 3:19. So preach the Law that the

gates of heaven are slammed shut in the face of everyone. For we shall never get a better definition of what it means to preach Christ Crucified than that which our sainted Walther has given us: "So to preach the Law that it drives the greatest saint to despair; so to preach the Gospel that it gives the greatest sinner hope."

Your main objective must, of course, be to comfort poor sinners. You really have no other calling. It is only accidental, "a foreign work," as our Confessions put it, when Christ preaches the Law. But it *must* be preached in all its damning enormity. For again, to quote Walther: "Without the Law, no one would appreciate the Gospel: Without the Gospel, the Law would profit us nothing." But make sure that you in your description of a believer make room for those poor souls who have not gotten farther than the father of the boy with a dumb spirit, who cried almost in despair: "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." Mark 9:24. "Do not, for God's sake," cries Walther, "draw a false picture of a Christian; but whenever you have drawn the picture of a Christian, see whether you can recognize yourself in that picture." And it won't hurt your hearers to note that the very grace of God which you proclaim with faith's true abandon, is a grace after which you yourself are reaching out with trembling hands.

5. "What about sermon material?" you ask. You must, of course, know your Bible. And when you quote from Scripture, be sure it is correct. Look up each passage. Then our precious Confessions, which are all too commonly being neglected in our day. And don't forget that our faithful old members will not object to hearing some of the Catechism truths interwoven into the body of the sermon. I know from my own early years in the ministry how I was anxious to get at something which could provide me "immediate help." For my concern was to be able to put down in black and white so many thousand words. I used to think that Luther was rather verbose and at times beside the point. But I had not as yet learned to know Luther. Whatever you do, don't neglect the great Reformer in your sermon preparation. If you have not as yet been able to supply yourself with his "Saemtliche Schriften," see to it that you begin without delay saving your pin money for that one objective. And read Luther daily, whether it be for the sermon you are struggling with or for the more general purpose of coming to a more perfect appreciation of the Gospel. I doubt that there has ever been a preacher since apostolic times who has so lived, moved, and had his being in the unconditioned Gospel as Martin Luther. Now, I am not against your reading of other good sermon material, remember. But that must be left until you have worked out the complete sketch of your sermon. For otherwise it will very likely go with you as it did with me: After having

read what a Walther had to say on a given text, I simply didn't know how to treat it otherwise.

And don't forget your hymnbook. You will find that there is no better way of approach to a dying member than to be able to recite or sing for him or her some treasured hymn learned in the days of their youth. And why shouldn't our members know where a particular hymn stanza fits in with eminent force on some vital truth you are expounding? It simply isn't true that you cannot learn to quote with effect hymn stanzas in your sermons. The greatest hindrance you will have to overcome is that ever-present "hang-about" — *laziness*.

6. Nor should profane literature be ignored. While it is true that he who preaches must preach as the oracles of God, it is also true that they who did preach thus in apostolic times did not refuse to make use of profane literature. Paul, especially, shows that he is not a stranger to the prevalent philosophies of his day. If it can serve no other purpose, it may prove an excellent base against which operations of attack may be made. For the vain talkers and deceivers must be met squarely with the truth which alone can make us free.

But while the gleanings from profane literature will seldom supply us with much real material for a thoroughly doctrinal sermon, there are exceptions, *e. g.*, Lowell's section of his *Present Crisis* which reads thus: "Truth forever on the scaffold," etc. Shakespeare has occasionally some good theology. For instance, Portia's speech: "The quality of mercy is not strained," etc. Milton may be made use of to good effect, especially his *Paradise Lost*. Or John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. I shall ever be thankful to my sainted pastor because he so often elucidated portions of his sermons with Aesop's Fables. Though spoken well-nigh fifty years ago, I shall never forget how he drove home the point that "Undank ist der Welt Lohn" by relating the simple story of the farmer who took pity upon the benumbed viper, which after it had been warmed at the hearth, fatally bit the farmer's little child. In the Norwegian, Ibsen, in spite of the fact that he is not exactly an example of orthodoxy, has many a striking passage which may well be made use of in your sermons. What could be more to the point than what in his drama *Brand* he says about the world's conception of love?

Hvad verden kalder kjærlighed
Jeg ikke vil og ikke ved;
Guds kjærlighed jeg kjender til,
Og den er ikke veg og mild;
Den er til dodens rædsel haard,
Den byder klappe saa det slaar, etc.

It is well for any pastor to have a file for what I, in my files, have listed as "Worth-while Poems." Just by way of illustration:

When defining the Christian virtue of humility, which Luther calls "the mother of all virtues," what could be more fitting than this little gem from the pen of Tryon Edwards:

Humility, the fairest, loveliest flower
That grew in Paradise, and the first that died,
Has rarely flourished since on mortal soil.
It is so frail, so delicate a thing,
'Tis gone, if it but look upon itself;
And they who venture to believe it theirs
Prove by that single thought they have it not.

Or what can be a more touching tribute to what Paul inculcates in Rom. 8:28, than this thoroughly Christian concept of absolute trust in God, which an anonymous poet has termed faith:

I will not doubt, though all my ships at sea
Come drifting home with broken masts and sails;
I will believe the hand which never fails,
From seeming evil worketh good for me.
And though I weep because those sails are tattered,
Still will I cry, while my best hopes lie shattered:
I trust in Thee.

I will not doubt, though all my prayers return
Unanswered from the still, white realm above;
I will believe it is an all-wise love
That has refused these things for which I yearn;
And though at times I cannot keep from grieving,
Yet the pure ardor of my fixed believing
Undimmed shall burn.

I will not doubt, though sorrows fall like rain,
And troubles swarm like bees about a hive;
I will believe the heights for which I strive
Are only reached by anguish and by pain;
And though I groan and writhe beneath my crosses,
I yet shall see through my severest losses
The greater gain.

I will not doubt. Well anchored is this faith;
Like some staunch ship, my soul braves every gale,
So strong its courage that it will not quail
To breast the mighty unknown sea of death.
Oh, may I cry, though body parts with spirit,
I do not doubt, so listening worlds may hear it,
With my last breath.

But let me not close until I have at least given a few of Luther's excellent admonitions regarding sermon preparation and preaching: Let us ever bear in mind his: *Bene orasse, bene studuisse*. And in fairness to our hearers, let us not fail to remember Luther's classic remark: "Ein Prediger soll diese drei Tugenden haben: Erstlich soll er koennen auftreten, zum andern soll er nicht stilleschweigen, zum dritten soll er auch wieder aufhoeren koennen." Or, as we were taught it at our Seminary in my day: "Frisch auf, Maul auf, und hoer bald auf." And finally: "Gott moege uns vor den Predigern behueten, die allen Leuten gefallen!"

Princeton, Minn.

NORMAN A. MADSON