

# LUTHERAN HOMILETICS

What is it?

Where did it come from?

What does it mean?

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## Preface

I would just like to take this opportunity to thank three men. First Prof. E.H. Wendland who taught me that above all the people who hear a sermon must take home the text, the Word of God. Secondly, Pastor J. Gerlach, who gave me much insight into this topic. Finally Geof Kieta, without whos help many of the references would still be all greek to me.

## INTRODUCTION

*Κηρυξαις το Ευαγγελιον* Preach the Gospel These words are seen by every prof. and student at WLS everytime they enter the chapel. This phrase sums up the whole purpose of WLS, its purpose being the preparation of men qualified to serve our synod as ministers of the Word. During this preparation men spend their time studying God's Word exegetically, isogogically, and dogmatically. All this equips a candidate with the needed knowledge and understanding of God's Word. However, being a pastor does not only entail knowing God's Word, but also being able to share that Word with others. With this in mind the Seminary also equips men to preach the Word of God. The seminary also equips men to be teachers and counselors, but of all the practical studies at WLS it is homiletics which predominates. For it is with the Sunday sermon that the pastor will have the most contact with his people than any other part of his ministry. Therefore, it is quite appropriate the the words Preach the Gospel be seen by every member of the Seminary family every time they enter the chapel.

Preach the Gospel is not only seen on the wall of the Seminary's chapel; it is also found on the cover of the homiletics text book used at WLS. With this text book students at the Sem. are taught how to prepare, and present a sermon which is to proclaim the Word of God to the congregation. This text book does more than just give the student some basic thoughts and ideas about<sup>a</sup> sermon it actually could be called a "how to" book of sermon preparation. The unique, and, in my opinion, the best part of this book is the way it teaches a student to construct the outline of the sermon. The authors admit that there are many ways to construct a sermon but confess that the method taught in Preach the Gospel best serves the needs of our congregations.

The objective of this paper is three-fold. First to briefly describe what method of sermon construction is taught in Preach the Gospel; second, to study the history of this method in the Lutheran Church; and third to discuss the implications of this method and the importance of using this method.

## The Method

Every sermon is to begin with prayer and a sound exegetical text study. Once the preacher has a good grasp on what the text says and does not say, a very important step begins - the building of an outline. The outline is the frame work of the sermon. The outline makes or breaks a sermon. It is the construction of the outline which Preach the Gospel teaches so well.

The preacher begins by taking the text which he has studied and makes an analysis of that text. This procedure is taught on page 23 of the book Preach the Gospel by Book Angels for the major text though briefly the text.

and making an analysis of that text. This procedure is taught on pages 23-33 of Preach the Gospel, chapter three, "Analysis of the Text". The preacher is instructed to look for the major thoughts of the text, making sure that they do not overlap. With the major thoughts of the text noted, one then notes any subordinating points. The preacher then looks for the one major thought of the text. ~~This one major thought of the whole text becomes~~ This one central thought of the whole text becomes the Theme for the sermon. The major coordinating thoughts of the text become the parts of the sermon. The subordinating points in the text are used as part of the expanded outline.

Preach the Gospel, chapter 4, "Structure of the Sermon" goes into great detail in reference<sup>as</sup> to how a theme and parts should be constructed. (pp35-63)

The next step of a sermon is the expanded outline. The expanded outline is just that, an expansion of the theme and parts. Under each part of the sermon the preacher is to support the theme and the particular part with material from the text, material from other Biblical sources, and other extra-Biblical sources such as the confessions. Finally, the preacher is to apply the points drawn from the text to the hearer. This whole process is explained in chapter 6, "Expansion of the Outline", pp.65-78. A simple diagram of an expanded outline would be:

INTRODUCTION

THEME

Part I

A. Explanation of the text.

B. Extra-textual material; Biblical and non-biblical

C. Application

## TRANSITION

### Part II

( same as above)

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion and the introductions prepare and remind the hearer of the Theme of the sermon. The whole outline of the sermon could be summed up this way: Tell the people what you are going to tell them, and then tell them, then tell them what you just told them.

This is truly a bare outline of what is taught in Preach the Gospel. However, the basic method of sermon construction can be understood even here. The idea is to present what the Word of God has to say in a very logical and orderly manner.

Now that the method has been described it should be given a name. Preach the Gospel explains terminology in this way: "Topical sermons find a subject in a text and proceed to treat the topic with or without reference to the text. Expository sermons expound the text in a strict or in a loose fashion." (p.57) Clearly our method is not topical but expository. But, what kind of expository preaching do we do? The text speaks of three types of expository methods: analytic, synthetic, and homily. Analytic and synthetic are very similar. Both use a very logical and defined outline. The difference is that the synthetic outline does not divide the text horizontally but rather vertically. That is not using the thoughts of the text as they occur, but in a rearranged order. Either way the thoughts of the text are presented in an orderly manner. This is our method of sermon preparation. The

homily is also an expository method of preaching but quite different from the analytic and the synthetic methods. Preach the Gospel describes a homily this way: "In homiletics we define it (homily) more precisely as a cursory exposition of a sermon text, usually without a formal outline, but generally utilizing a theme which serves as a summary or a title, but which does not strictly control the parts." (p.61) This method of sermon construction is viewed as a more free and lively style of preaching, but as Preach the Gospel warns this method tends to become aimless rambling. All this terminology is covered in "Sermon Types", chapter 5, pages 57-63 of the text book.

The interesting point of all this is that Preach the Gospel did not invent the expository/analytical method of sermon construction but rather clearly teaches and advocates a school of homiletics which is historically lutheran, and is perfectly suited for sound Biblical preaching.

## The History

In this section of the paper two questions will be answered: one, where did our method of sermon construction come from? and two, how did it come to us?

Where did this method develop? The answer to that question is with Aristotle and with Melancton. It could be said that Aristotle created it and Melancton made it Lutheran. This of course is a very simple answer, but as I explain I hope you will see what I mean.

Prof. D. E. Sachse explains the homiletical developments

of the <sup>R</sup> reformation in his Evangelische Homiletik (1913), this way:

The reformation brought about a new manner of christian ~~sermon~~ sermon. Luther and his associates had proclaimed with new power the old gospel of the grace of God in Christ, which through faith was grasped. The sermon developed a new significance, in that it would be valued as an essential part of public worship. In the evangelical church it would again be recognized, that the office had to proclaim the Word as well as administer the Sacraments. Luther's Kirchenpostile is a remaining witness to his heroic sermon ability. But as to how one should preach, beyond that he had left behind no particular manuscript. ~~A preacher can~~ Also Melancton had not composed a homiletics. The "Enconium eloquentiae" and the "Elementa rhetorics" which handled worldly oratory and was designed for the exercise of his students. He patterned it after Aristole's three arts of speech: "genus deliberatium, giudiciale, demon-stratium", which for the sermon have no meaning, and fits also "genus institutum". His homiletical exercises were subscribed to, so that his students came to value the unity of the sermon; so there became a preference in the lutheran church for the thematic sermon. (p.21)

So in this way the theologuy of Martin Luther was united with the logic and dialetics of classic greek rhetoric. As stated above Melancton did not create a lutheran homiletics but took greek rhetoric and made it lutheran.

This was accomplished with the publication of Melancton's 'Elementorum Rhetorics Libri Duo', 1542. Sister Mary LaFontain

published a Critical Translation in 1986. Her comments provide useful insight about Melanchton's work.

~~Melanchton was a humanists educator, and the aim and design in the~~

Melanchton was a humanists educator and the aim and design in the composition of his Rhetoric was to formulate the rules of the classical speech-art so that they would serve the needs of the time. His book was intended for use in the schools, and it was used for two hundred years in the public schools of Germany and foreign lands. His aim was to tell plainly and clearly the manner of putting together orations which the rhetoricians recognized. Its whole aim was to develop the proper speech. Every point is illustrated to aid students of law as well as ecclesiastical students. Clarity of thought was primary for Melanchton, and in this respect "oratio" became for him the "explicata animi ratio."  
(pp.42-43)

Melanchton's text was and is more than any student at WLS would want or need for his homiletics class. Yet it was this book which prepared numerous pastoral candidates into sound Lutheran preachers for many years.

When Melanchton the heart of any good speech, be it legal or theological, is an orderly construction. Melanchton says, as translated by LaFontain (1986):

Since every speech consists of subject matter and words, the first concern should be with the matter, then with the words.... First of all in this matter of preparing a speech the subject matter should be determined and selected, and when this has been determined, the subject matter must be the subject matter, and the words must be chosen of

in an orderly manner. Therefore, the choosing of the subject matter and the arrangement of the material revolve around the content; style is concerned with words. For those things which we have turned over in our minds and arranged in a certain order must afterwards be presented in meaningful terms. (p.81)

As I write this I can not help but hear the pages of Preach the Gospel in my ears. Melancton recognized that all speech that is to be understood must be arranged in a logical order. This must be done especially in a sermon.

Melancton can be accused of letting reason get the best of him, but not here. Melancton<sup>?</sup> using logic and reason to present God's Word did not intend to subject God's Word to reason.

But in sacred literature it is to be noted that in dogma and precepts the literal wording is to be retained, lest anything discordant be brought into any article of faith or clear passage of Scripture. For in what regard the meaning taken from other evidence passages is to be accepted.

Besides, in dogma and precepts there must be no deviation from the word of the Scripture when an absurdity affects only the understanding of the reasoning. (p.160)

When applying the rules of rhetoric the Word of God was to be proclaimed and not changed.

Clearly our expository - analytic/synthetic method of preaching is an heir of the <sup>R</sup> reformation. But what does the family line look like? How did we inherit a historic style of homiletics? The simple answer to that is that we inherited confessional homiletics the same <sup>way</sup> we inherited confessional dogmatics. As before, allow me to explain.

The thematic analytic sermon seemed always to exist as long as there was orthodoxy. This can be seen in the history of our homiletical method. The great dogmatician Johanne Gerhard produced a series of sermons based on the gospel lessons of the church year. (Homiliarum Sacrum in Pericopas Evangeliorum, 1636). Throughout the entire text Gerhard takes each text and logically divides it into two or three main points. This method is also evident in the sermons of M. Chemnitz. In "Echt evangelische Auslegung Sonn und Festtags Evangelein des Kirkenjahrs" St. Louis, 1872, which is a collection of sermons by Chemnitz, Lenser, and Gerhard the logical outlining of Melancton prevails. Sound Lutheran homiletics prevailed, like dogmatics, until the time of pietism.

The move away from, so called, dead orthodoxy to a more heartfelt religion coincided with a move away from expository analytic preaching. Once again Prof. Sachsse describes what happened (1913):

The study of homiletics was shaped differently under the influence of Pietism.... It is already apparent in the definition of homiletics. It is a spiritual aptitude, which is assimilated under the guidance of the Spiritual grace, in the heart and is aquired through the ordered use of certain means. It is for this reason a supernatural aptitude. It borders on recognition of divine things and sanctification of the will, on self denial and on upright life. These are only worked through the anointing of the Holy Ghost. The preacher must also be born again. The text of the scripture ought to be exactly expounded and led to "loci communes"; it sanctions that many preachers are no longer <sup>bound to</sup> ~~bothered~~ with the

old pericopes. In the execution he avoids conspicuously worldly rhetoric and disagrees expressly with the oratorical art of Aristotle. (p.25)

The new preachers wanted nothing to do with the old way of doing things. Their goal was not to present the facts of scripture in a clear and logical manner, but their's was the aim to move the hearer to greater heights of holiness. For example Prof. Sachsse later points out that the miracles of Christ were not presented as manifestations of His divine glory - an objective truth, but as a "foreshadowing (als Vorbilder) of the spiritual miracle which Jesus still works in us today" (p.25) Clearly the move away from an objective theology coincided with a move away from a clear and objective presentation of what God says in His Word.

The return to thematic preaching also coincides with the return of confessional Lutheranism. Claus Harms did not author a book of homiletics but did author a book of practical theology, which contains the advice to retain the traditional form of Lutheran preaching. Prof. Sachsse describes (1913):

From his rich experience he drew all kinds of practical advice and pastoral admonitions. He rejected the homily.... He demanded thematic preaching... (p.34)

This can be seen from his "Pastoral-Theologie in Reden an Theologiestudierende. Erste Buch: Der Prediger." (1834)

Accordingly, there went to begin also here in this country, that one no longer gives the "Exordium" (Theme), but rather speaks a prayer or a passage, a verse, and then proceeds to the text. This method ought not to be censured boldly by me, but still I can let it be considered valid only as a "rapere  
~~non est in consilio sed in consuetudine~~

in media res", if one has special grounds for it... the people however, who indeed have a sense of propriety and love a certain circumstance, love a sermon which has an "exordium" quite better than one, "da man mit der Thur ins Haus fallt".

(p.89)

Harms clearly viewed preaching as a presentation of the truths of Scripture. He knew the objective of the sermon was to proclaim those truths clearly and logically.

Harm's (1834) view point can be seen when he speaks about homilies:

That is also my judgement, as often and as I have heard and read homilies: they talk much, but don't satisfy. They talk much; one hears all kinds of things, here and there something interesting, a new explanation, a suitable allegory which is in the life of Christ... However there is no point in them, no known way in them, no understanding,... which achieves something and works this that the hearer says at the end, 'we will take this with us'... (p.92)

Harms disliked the homily because it was not suited to the type of preaching done by confessional Lutherans. It didn't proclaim, it rambled.

Just as Harms and those who followed him influenced and formed the theology of our ecclesiastical forefathers so also Honeccke and Walther were taught to preach analytically. Both men produced works filled with wonderful examples of sound Lutheran preaching. Admittedly, both men had different "styles" of preaching but both men strived to preach logically and clearly. Their goal was to preach the text. Walther's sermons have been translated into English and published by Concordia Theological Press of

of Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1984 - Old Standard Gospels and Standard Epistles by C.F.W. Walther. Hoenecke's "Predigt-Entwurfe uber die altkirchlichen Evangelien und Episteln nebst einigen Freitexten" N.P.H., 1907, hasn't been translated, but can be quite useful for anyone who is preaching on the historic series. The book doesn't contain whole sermons but rather expanded outlines. These outlines can be translated and used to produce fine English sermons. Hoenecke's basic outline for all these sermons is the same: theme, parts, explanation of the text and then application.

Since Hoenecke himself was a student of the expository/analytic method of sermon construction, it is only natural that he would in turn teach this method to his students. As the one man God used more than any other in the establishment of our seminary, Hoenecke can be credited with the honor of establishing WLS as a school where sound lutheran preaching is taught. For example read this description of homiletics as printed in the seminary's 1907-1908 catalogue:

Of course homiletics as the theory of preaching is dealt with briefly at the beginning of each year of study, however it is essentially carried out with the students in the practical treatment of the church's gospel and epistle pericopes, and indeed in a two-fold manner, which they are instructed in the construction of themes and outlines. After three weeks, all have to deliver written outlines and each of them has to work out and expound one point of the outline. The epistle pericopes are assigned in a different manner, in which several outlines are given by lecturers in a written form. (Dr. Hoenecke. After Christmas, history of preaching and every three weeks a written outline on the part of the students covering free texts. Prof. Koehler) (p.7)

The reference to Dr. Hoenecke's class on the history of preaching would be of great interest but I have found no material with which I can say one thing of another. No matter, it is quite clear that one type and one type of homiletics has been taught at WLS. The very same method which became part of the lutheran church from its very beginning.

It is also interesting that the very same method of sermon construction is also taught at Lutheran Seminary, Lutheran Church of Central Africa, Lusaka, Zambia. Prof. E.H. Wendland produced Preach the Word - a study in homiletics, 1970, and in this text the very same method is taught as is taught in Preach the Gospel. This isn't surprising since both texts are descendants of the homiletics always taught at WLS. What is interesting is that ~~the~~ this one method is viewed as proper for lutheran preachers whether they are preaching in german, english, or some bantu dialect. In Preach the Word Prof. Wendland answers the question, "Why do we have an outline?":

There are those who may argue that an outline keeps us from expressing our thoughts freely and that it hinders the directing of the Holy Spirit. They say that Jesus and the Apostles did not follow an outline. In Africa we have also heard it said that an outline may be the method followed by other civilizations, but that most Africans have a different method of expressing themselves.

We disagree with all such arguments. The words of Jesus follow a very definite plan, as we can see from the example of the parable of the Sower. Paul's epistles follow a carefully planned structure of thought. Africans, too, appre-

ciate a sermon that is clearly thought out and presented.

An outline not only helps the preacher think clearly, but it also assists him in keeping to his subject. It helps the hearer in following the thoughts of the sermon. The lack of a clear outline often ends in nothing but confusion.

We maintain that an outline is not only necessary, but that it should be stated with emphasis in the sermon itself so that both the preacher and the hearer know where they are at. We may use different ways of stating our theme and chief parts in a sermon, but we should not try to hide them. Not to state them could very well mean that we do not have them at all. The place to state them is right after the introduction. (p.8)

This sums it up very well. It is not a new argument, in fact it ← is a very old argument, that is the point on this paper. None the less, it is valid. Expository-analytic/synthetic method of sermon preparation has always and will always best suit the needs of a confessional Lutheran church.

## The Editorial

Everytime a pastor of a whole church body is faced with difficult times, they are tempted to think "I must be doing something wrong". After that conclusion has been rationalized one then begins to look for what needs to be changed. More often than not the wrong changes are made, because usually the needed corrections are more complex and difficult. ~~This can be seen at the time of "dead orthodoxy, pietism", the problem was that people~~

Today, one often hears that to keep up with the world around us pastors need to liven-up their sermons. They need to be more entertaining and exciting. I'm sure that many faithful men have delivered "boring" sermons from their pulpits, and I will too. However, the solution to this common problem is continued and active striving to improve upon what one has been taught, not a dumping of a tried and true method of homiletics.

There is a paralel situation in the area of liturgics. People and pastors who are tired of pages 5-15 may be tempted toss out the liturgical survice on the whole. However, as we know this would be foolish for "western rite" is best suited to the confessions which we hold. Thus our synod did not attempt to follow non-lutheran form and keep lutheran content in liturgics. So also it would not be wise to toss out lutheran homiletical form and still try to keep lutheran content in our sermons.

The question may be asked, "Can it be done?" The answer is yes and no. Let me explain. By some people and on some occasions other forms of sermons may work well and do a fine job of proclaiming the Word. But no other form works as well as the method we have been discussing. The point can be made this way. We say, "YOU ARE SAVED" most other church bodies say, "YOU CAN BE SAVED". We view scripture as the objective Word of God. The facts of Scripture apply to all the world no matter how individuals may feel. It is these facts which are proclaimed from the lutheran pulpit. It is for this very reason that a method which focuses on the presentation of facts best suits our sermons. It suits the needs, not the perceived needs, of our people.

Other methods focus primarily on the emotions of the hearers. The goal of many other church bodies is to affect a felt change in the people who listen, and not to present the facts of God. It is

the people who listen, and not to present the life saving truth of the Gospel. The two views are diametrically opposed and so are the methods used to present those views. These may seem to be harsh statements but if history is to be learned from and not just memorized and forgotten, then one will realize that the homiletics classes which students of WLS must take have always been and will always be best suited for a man preparing to be a Lutheran pastor.

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