

How Well Do Our Homiletical Principles Apply to Work with People of Other Cultures?

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A satisfactory answer to the question raised by the title could best be obtained after an extensive review of the homiletical principles involved and a study of the results which have been obtained on the various fields where they have been used. We were not able to do the latter and we don't have time to do the former here in our conference. However, we can briefly mention some of the homiletical principles which we hold to be valid and on the basis of the experiences and observations of those present, we can seek to answer the question before us.

The principles which we will consider are for the most part covered in the little volume, *The Sermon, Its Homiletical Construction* by R.C.H. Lenski.

Using A Text

Evidently this homiletical principle is valid and does work with people of other cultures. We did not invent the practice of using a text. This dates back to Origen (185-254), to the early Christian Church, the apostles, and to Jesus Himself. Using a text should work today among people of other cultures because this practice has come to us via other cultures, even though they were very closely related to our own. It is not just the using of a text, but the correct use of the text. It is not just a heading for the sermon, a topic for our discourse, a nail on which to hang homiletical thoughts. It is to serve as the basic source of our sermon, to give it direction and to set the limits of the particular sermon.

Pericope Texts And Free Texts

Generally speaking we hold that the better system of the two is the pericope text for the regular main worship service and reserving for the most part the use of the so called free texts to special or second services. For us there are valid reasons for using the system of a set series of texts.

1. No time is lost in searching for a text for each Sunday's sermon.
2. Beginners are not well prepared for the selecting of the best texts.
3. In a set series of texts all the important doctrines and the ethical content of the Scriptures are covered during the year.
4. Hard texts as well as easy texts are used in a set series.
5. Helps are generally available for the pericope texts.

Free texts are best reserved, or come unto their own for special services.

Division

Here we give consideration to the construction of the sermon. For us a sermon is not just another discourse. It is a discourse of a special kind and for a special purpose, hence it is made up in a special way. It is not merely a collection of Biblical and Christian material. It is not just pulpit talk, and if it were, it could best serve its purpose if it had good order in its preparation and in its presentation. It is also to match, match the church and the service. We are usually geared for preaching to a congregation, in a church building, in a liturgical service. This has much to do with the form that our sermon takes, its orderly arrangement, its language, and the manner in which it is presented. Not only our goals but the setting in which it is preached determine its homiletical construction. Generally the sermon is quite formal. These are good principles and we say that they work. But one sometimes wonders just how well they work even

in our own culture, so it is a valid question to raise, “Do these principles work well among people of other cultures?”

Another item treated under this heading is the matter of theme and parts, the essentials of the sermon being unity, organization, and progress. Hence our sermons are constructed with theme and parts and developed accordingly. The theme is to be the total of the parts and the parts the natural divisions of the theme. This is not done just for neatness or good order. It is done to aid the preacher in preparation and presentation and to aid the hearer to arrive at the desired goals, to come to know the true God and the Savior, Jesus Christ, and to increase in faith and godliness. The fact that we arrange our materials as we do under theme and parts is because of the way we think, our thought patterns, and in order that we might understand and be understood. If people of other cultures think differently from the way that we do, we certainly ought to consider whether the things that work for us also work well for them.

Types Of Sermon Outlines

We generally think of two kinds of outlines: the analytic and synthetic. The one being an arrangement of the thoughts or the parts just as they are found in the text. The other is using the material in the text, but in an order different from the one that is used in the text itself. Both methods, if done well work for us, but we should also consider the matter of the homily even though it does not strictly fall under this heading. The homily does not treat the matter of theme and parts in a logical way, but the theme is rather a descriptive unity of the parts. Generally it has more than the two or three parts that we are used to. Expository preaching, that is the practice of going through a book verse by verse and chapter by chapter is not generally used by us, but others do use this method. Would these last two methods work in other cultures? Would they work better than the way we construct our sermons?

Beginning And Ending

Our sermons have an introduction that should lead directly from the text to the theme. While a sermon needs no formal conclusion, yet it may be in order to use one. It may be a short recapitulation, an application, hymn verse etc. It should be something that will add *to* the sermon rather than something *added* to the sermon.

Questions for Discussion

1. In many native religions among people of different cultures, preaching has no place. Is preaching as we know it so foreign that it does not work well? Would some other form of "preaching" or announcing the Gospel work better?
2. Would our form of preaching have the advantage that it would be distinctive and so work better?
3. Should our service be the liturgical type that we generally employ with the sermon constructed to fit into this context?
4. Does our sermon fitted for the above type of service work outside of this context? Does it work well?
5. Does the use of a text have the same validity among people of other cultures that it has among us? If it is used correctly, does it serve the same purpose?
6. Are our national pastors prepared to make good text selections, or would it be best to stick with a pre-selected series of sermon texts?
7. Does a pericope system, besides giving accent to the church year and the important doctrines of the Bible also serve to unify our work on a particular field?
8. Would it help us to draw up a new series of texts for unified use on a field to fit the particular needs of that field?

9. We speak of progress in a sermon and arrange our materials to accomplish this/ Do people of other cultures have different thought patterns so that what we think of as making progress in a logical way does not work for them?
10. Would it work better to preach "one part sermon" settling on one point and giving it repetition?
11. Are most of our services the regular main worship service? If not, could we make use of other forms of preaching in place of the theme and parts sermon. Homilies? Expository-verse by verse preaching?
12. What about the length that will work? Is 20-25 minutes the right length? The limit? Not long enough?
13. If interest span is short, or other conditions curtail the length of the sermon as we know it, could we use 1 part sermons? Could the sermon be divided so that the different parts would be preached at different places in the service in place of all at one time?
14. Could several shorter sermons be used in a service? We do this on Good Friday. The unity is in the overall theme and emphasis given to single points under that theme.
15. Must there be any "one way"? What other options are open to us with our present principles? Are other principles workable?
16. Have you tried something different that has worked for you? Would it work on other fields? Have you tried something that didn't work?
17. Are our sermons as formal as we generally think of them? Would it work better if we were more free in preaching? In construction? In language? In style? In manner of presentation?
18. Does humor have any good use in our preaching? Not to entertain, but to help us reach the goals that we have set for ourselves.
19. Our preaching is "one sided." Would it work (work better) to have the hearers take part?