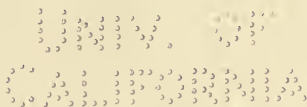


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HOMILETICS AS A THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINE

FREDERICK WILLIAM LOETSCHER

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## HOMILETICS AS A THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINE<sup>1</sup>

Among the many principles which either philosophic or utilitarian interests have employed in organizing the various branches of theological study into a curriculum, there is none more natural or useful than that which divides the disciplines into two classes, the theoretical and the practical. It was Schleiermacher who gave the first adequate treatment of this principle in his discussion of the subjects belonging to this second group, the so-called practical theology. He unfolded their distinctive genius and showed their peculiar function in the service of the church, and vindicated for them a place of equal honor and dignity by the side of the other disciplines. His theological encyclopaedia is, of course, open to the objection from the dogmatic standpoint that it undermines the Protestant principle that the Bible is the only rule of faith. Nor in technical respects does his work in the several fields of practical theology equal the creative impulse which he gave for the scientific cultivation of the whole domain. But since his time it is an established view in the world of theological education that the very existence of the church as a self-propagating institution calls for a science of its living functions.

Into how many distinct divisions this knowledge is to be distributed must be determined in the light of concrete ecclesiastical developments. Besides homiletics, which we may provisionally regard as a part of the necessary service of the Word, there have thus far been erected, in the ever-expanding circle of practical theological sciences, the following: liturgics, or the science of public worship; catechetics, or the science of the religious training of the young and the spiritually immature;

<sup>1</sup>This discussion contains the substance of an Inaugural Address delivered in Miller Chapel, September 24, 1911.

poimenics, or the science of pastoral care; halieutics, or the science of evangelistic and missionary endeavor; archagics, or the science of organized Christian work in the congregation. We do not mention ecclesiology or sociology in this connection, for these subjects ought rather to be treated as belonging to the theoretical sciences.

Now, all these so-called practical theological sciences have this as their essential characteristic: they are, alike in the etymological and in the common meaning of the words, both theoretical and practical. That is, they are, on the one hand, sciences in the strict sense of the term; on the other hand, they are sciences which have it as the one and only reason of their existence that they transfer into the realm of life and activity all that has been yielded for their special benefit by the other, the purely theoretical theological sciences. These latter deal solely with knowledge, the knowledge, we may say, of the essence and of the historical manifestations of Christianity. They, too, may be, and by their professors in theological seminaries commonly will be called practical. And so, of course, they are; but only in that broader sense that they are capable of being made to serve some end that in the narrower sense of the word is practical. In fine, dogmatics, ethics, the various exegetical and historical sciences, whatever other worth they may have, exist for the sake of the church. And just because, when rightly cultivated they do not commonly carry upon their faces the indications of their ecclesiastical value, it becomes necessary to have another science, or rather group of sciences, that will deal with this very problem of the inner and necessary relation of the theoretical disciplines to the varied functions of the church.

It must at once be added, however, that these practical sciences may never rest in the domain of mere knowledge. The *ἐπιστήμη* must become a *τέχνη*. Practical theology as a science will have its theoretical elements; but these will always have reference to an efficient ecclesiastical practice. Pre-supposing as a historic and present necessity the distinction between the clergy and the laity, practical theology labors to train, by every means within its power—the theoretical theological sciences being one of the most important—a succession

of ministers of the gospel who will be "thoroughly furnished unto every good work"; and this task will continue until by its performance the entire *λαός* will have become the real *κλήρος* of the Lord. Meanwhile, Vinet's pointed characterization of practical theology as a whole is true of every one of its branches: "It is the art after the science, or the science resolving itself into an art."

In the light of these general principles we may now dispose of the preliminary question touching the mode in which homiletics, one of these practical theological disciplines, is to be taught. Historically, the two possible extremes in method have presented themselves, the purely scientific and the merely empirical. The former is interested only in the determination of the idea of preaching. The latter, looking solely at the actual exercise of his powers by the young homilete deals only with the most practical suggestions that can add to his immediate efficiency and skill. Neither of these views alone is justifiable. The claims of both must be united. A course in homiletics that does not teach the student how to preach would not be entitled to any place in the schedule of seminary studies. But this does not mean, on the other hand, that the work of the future preacher is to be treated as a mere handicraft. Considered, then, as a theological discipline, that is as one of the studies incorporated into every good training school for the ministry, homiletics must be treated both as a science and as an art; in other words, as an applied science, or as a science that resolves itself into an art.

In the development of my theme, therefore, I shall proceed, in the first place, to set forth the idea or task of homiletics as an independent theological science, and in the second place, to indicate the method by which I shall try to teach homiletics as a practical theological art.

The very name "homiletics" points us to the distinctive subject-matter of this science and the essential nature of its task. Etymology, here as so often in the case of our theological disciplines, is a safer guide than any *à priori* constructions can be. The term is derived from the Greek *ὁμιλία*, which, alike in classical and in New Testament usage, preserves more or less of its original along with the derived meanings—

a meeting in one place, an assemblage, mutual intercourse, friendly conversation upon the basis of common interests. In the four or five instances in which the noun or verb is found in the New Testament, the word denotes a converse that presupposes a kinship in disposition, a sympathetic communion. In the early church the term became somewhat technical, signifying the brotherly, familiar, edifying address made in connection with the Scripture lesson at the private assemblies of the Christians for worship. Out of this address, quite colloquial in its simplicity, grew the more formal religious discourse which became in time, next to the celebration of the eucharist, the principal feature of the church service. Presently, the conception of the *ὁμιλία* was in a double fashion restricted. On the one hand, the word was limited to the religious address made to the community of believers, the truly Christian congregation, while the term *κήρυγμα*, the herald's proclamation of the good tidings, was used to denote evangelistic or missionary preaching. On the other hand, as the preaching of the church came more and more under the influence of the classical traditions of eloquence, the word *ὁμιλία* came to mean what we ordinarily understand by our "homily", a discourse preserving in large measure the simpler structure and style of the primitive religious address, which was often nothing but a quite artless series of comments on the chosen Scriptural passage, while the more pretentious and elaborate synthetic discourses were called *λόγοι*, *orationes*, *tractatus*, *sermones*. Throughout its history, however, even in the golden age of expository preaching, when the homily itself became a more artistic production, the root idea of the word was never lost sight of. Whatever its form may have been, the sermon was essentially a necessary manifestation of the life of the church striving to realize its true aim in self-propagation, a unique expression of that vital principle that everywhere organized congregations of those feeling themselves a community of believers in Christ Jesus.

Here, then, in the very philosophy of Christianity as a spiritual force in human history do we find the basis of homiletics as an independent science. In the beginning was the Word. In time, the Word, becoming incarnate, achieved a



gospel. It wrought a work, it performed an act, so full of divine power, that scarcely had its redeeming efficacy become manifest to men, when there sprang into being under the creative influence of this deed of grace, the three distinctive elements of the characteristically Christian institution of preaching: the Bible, or the completed inspired record and interpretation of the redemptive work itself; the church or the society of believers regenerated by the Holy Spirit; and the ministry, or the succession of officers qualified and called of God to herald or teach the glad tidings of salvation. Scientific homiletics, having as its task the development of the true idea of preaching, will therefore deal chiefly with these three closely connected problems: the sermon in its relation to Holy Scripture; the sermon in its relation to the church; and the sermon in its relation to the personality of the preacher.

I can only allude to some of the more important questions that must be discussed in this domain, if the homilète is to have an adequate theory of his art.

So far as the Bible is concerned, history has abundantly showed that Christianity lives in and through its Word; that is, by the faithful reproduction of the apostolic message in the form of a personal testimony to its content. It is in no sense an accident, but on the contrary a necessary consequence of the different ecclesiastical principles involved, that the Roman Catholic Church does not give the Word the place of honor it has normally held in Protestantism. The *sacerdotium* there eclipses the *ministerium verbi*. Doubtless, in evangelical churches the sermon has often received a one-sided emphasis to the serious detriment of other parts of the service. Still, it cannot be too often repeated that by as much as the pulpit is thrust back, the altar comes forward. Spiritual religion must magnify the Word, the Word of God and the word of the man who truly preaches the Word of God.

It goes without saying, therefore, that the evangelical homilète, when he inquires as to the relation of the Bible to the right idea of preaching, will find all manner of questions presenting themselves. I can only mention a few of the more important by way of illustration. I say nothing here of such matters as the lower and the higher criticism of the Biblical

documents, though it is at once apparent that these controversies have their part to play in fashioning the minister's notions concerning his authority as a spokesman of the Lord. Indeed, this whole question of the authority of the preacher calls for a clear understanding of his prerogatives and duties. In what sense is he an ambassador of Jesus Christ? To what extent does he belong to the succession of the Hebrew prophets and the Apostles? Again, what does preaching Christ mean? How much does the word of the cross include? What, if anything, has the message of the modern pulpit to do with social and political affairs? How is the Old Testament to be made homiletically available? What is the homiletic accent of the Bible in theology? Or perchance, can and may theology, as some aver, be kept out of the pulpit? What is the office of the Holy Spirit in connection with the preaching of the gospel? In what respects is Jesus to be taken as the model preacher?

These and kindred questions are so intimately related to the very idea of the sermon that no homiletics, worthy of the name of science, can afford to ignore them. But this is not the place to attempt a detailed answer for any of them. Suffice it to say that the main task here will be the inductive presentation from the Bible itself of the apostolic as the original and normative type of preaching. For the Scriptures are to the preacher something more than a mere collection of suggestive and inspiring motto-texts. They are themselves the great sermon—not merely the inexhaustibly fertile but the supremely authoritative homiletic treatment of the redemptive facts that form the historic basis of our faith. The homilete's relation to the Bible is always essentially expository. He is not to read his thoughts into the sacred words that give him his message, but on the contrary he is to make their meaning his own.

In order, therefore, to ascertain the right idea of the sermon, scientific homiletics must, in the first instance, go to the Scriptures themselves to learn what preaching was under the most favorable conditions, and at its highest and therefore normative development, in the apostolic age. Indeed, few studies preliminary to practical work in homiletics will be

more fruitful than those devoted to the consideration of the various terms used in the New Testament to set forth the work of the minister as a preacher; such as herald, ambassador, evangelist, teacher, steward, nurse, shepherd, messenger, and, above all, witness. This last has been especially exploited by Christlieb in his *Homiletics*. It is by far the richest and most comprehensive designation of the preacher's function, and the extreme frequency of its occurrence, in the simple and compound forms of the word, has led this author to the serious proposal of substituting the name martyretics for homiletics. And undoubtedly it gives the most vital conception of this whole art. It is elastic enough to embrace both pastoral and missionary preaching. It does a more ample justice than any other to the personality of the preacher, emphasizing the personal security he feels for the reality of that which he proclaims. But, not to dwell upon such a detail, the idea of preaching must be further determined in the light which these characteristic terms cast upon its aim or purpose. Historically, two views have vied with each other. Many would limit homiletic theory strictly to congregational, that is pastoral or "edifying" preaching. Others, paying more attention to the actual conditions of our churches, in which it is by no means safe to treat all members, much less all worshippers at a given service, as genuine believers, insist that homiletics must expand its scope to include evangelism. Sickel has therefore suggested a new name for our science, halieutics, a noun derived from the Greek verb to catch fish, the allusion being to Christ's promise to make his apostles fishers of men. And Stier has similarly proposed the name Ceryctics, from κήρυξ, the herald who proclaims the gospel in its newness to the unconverted, and the problem of the subject-matter of preaching is inseparably connected with these. Here the student will need to consider the validity of what have been called the material and the formal principles of all evangelical homiletics: Christ is to be preached; and the Christ to be preached is the Christ of the Scriptures. This will secure for the cross of Christ the same central significance in the sermon that it has in the gospel itself. Once more, the ruling spirit in which the preacher is to discharge his task enters as an essential element

into the idea of preaching as set forth in the Bible. This can be no other than the consummate Christian grace, the love which will reflect in some worthy measure the love by which God glorified himself in the salvation of men. And not least will this part of scientific homiletics have to wrestle with the final question, How can a modern preacher secure for his message the note that is so conspicuously lacking in the pulpit of our day, the note of authority?

An adequate view of the task of homiletics must further, as we have said, take account of the fact, that preaching presupposes not only a public but a church. The pulpit is not a mere platform. The society of believers is not a mere natural brotherhood. It is a spiritual *φιλαδελφία*. The proclamation of the message of faith becomes normally, therefore, an essential part of the church service. And this fact in turn directly and powerfully influences the very idea of preaching. It restricts the message to its true sphere, that of religion. It tends to make and keep the speaker devout and reverent and earnest. It stimulates him to make his discourse in the unobjectionable sense of the term artistic; as worthy a production as he can make it for the honor of God and his holy house, and for the delight of the people assembled to celebrate their priceless possessions in Christ Jesus. It inspires him to enter that joy of the Lord which is itself a source of strength for him and his hearers. Wherever, therefore, the idea of the church and of its corporate life fades, there preaching declines. As another has said, "It does not lose in interest, or in the sympathetic note, but it loses in power, which is the first thing in a Gospel. If the preacher but hold the mirror up to our finer nature the people soon forget what manner of men they are".<sup>2</sup>

And this becomes the more apparent when we remember that even congregational preaching does not exhaust itself in the mere elevation or improvement of the worship as such. For while the latter is intended only to express, for the glory of God, the existing faith of the people, the sermon is an effective work in which the expression of the common or ideal faith

<sup>2</sup> Forsythe, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 86.

aims at an ever-deepening influence upon the church members and through them upon the world without. The preacher represents the progressive and dynamic, as against the fixed and static elements of the ecclesiastical life. In preaching, the minister is engaged in an individual action; in the liturgy he merely leads the devotions in the name of the people. In the one case he tries to bring forth the new as well as the old from the treasure-house of the ideal church; in the other, he is content to commemorate what has already been attained. In the former function, he is free to give the fullest expression to his own personality, consistently with the limitations imposed upon him by the common faith and the sanctities that encompass his pulpit; in the latter, he feels himself bound by the appointments that have been prescribed for him by external authority. As a matter of fact, therefore, it is through the free homiletic treatment of its common faith by the pastor that the church works most directly upon its own inner life, and receives the inspiration and leadership that it needs for aggressive, efficient missionary and philanthropic service in the community. It is from this point of view that Baur defines homiletics as that theological discipline that deals with the essence of the sermon as a necessary expression of the church's life.

In the course of the last five or six decades, however, homiletic theory, following as usual closely upon homiletic practice, has made most advance by making relatively more of that third factor that enters into the idea of all true preaching, the personality of the preacher. It was largely because Palmer, anticipating even Vinet in this, again conceived the sermon as determined on the one hand by the peculiarity of the Christian principle itself, and on the other by the individuality of the preacher, that his manual became the most influential of the last century. The common treatises had offered little more than abstract rules borrowed from books of logic and rhetoric; and these were either so general in character that the gulf between theoretical precept and practical performance was quite impassible, or so detailed and minute that they imposed intolerable fetters upon the speaker. To-day the conviction is wide-spread that the only cure for dulness and inefficiency in

the pulpit is not more brilliance of diction or polish of style but a larger measure of moral and spiritual reality in the preacher. Preaching of late may indeed have become poorer in theological learning, but as a whole it is richer in religious and ethical earnestness. The sermon, according to the best homiletic ideals, is more what Luther said it ought to be, something done rather than something merely said. It is not only an intellectual but also an emotional and a volitional communication. The preacher not only thinks but also feels and wills. He puts his personality into an act. He works energetically through words to reach the conscience as well as to inform the mind, to stir the feelings as well as to engage the understanding; in a word, to kindle all the faculties that may in any wise aid in the attainment of his object, the moving of the hearer's will. He desires, in his own measure to become "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people".

True, this whole modern emphasis upon the subjective rights of the Christian worker, as of the believer, has its dangers. There are those who go the length of declaring that the preacher must say nothing that transcends the reach of his own experience, lest his words become of none effect through their sheer emptiness. They quite forget that even the apostles were more concerned to give us the Christ of their experience than their experience of the Christ, and that in the nature of the case many of the teachings of the Bible admit of no experience in this world. Nevertheless, as Dr. Stalker has well said: "What an audience looks for, before everything else, in the texture of the sermon is the bloodstreak of experience; and truth is doubly and trebly true when it comes from a man who speaks as if he had learned it by his own work and suffering."<sup>3</sup> The preacher must, after his own fashion, be a reproduction of the truth in a personal form. The Word must become incarnate in him. If the orator is born and not made, the prophet of God must be born and re-born. And just in proportion as the truth becomes a living reality to him and in him, does his message, like the historic

<sup>3</sup> Stalker, *The Preacher and his Models*, p. 166.

revelation of God that grew organically into the perfect gospel, assume a marvelous multiformity in his sermons. Christ never dwarfs, he always heightens and enriches the individuality of him whom he indwells. The greatest preachers will be the most original, not because they have any creative power—that is a divine prerogative—but because being most receptive they are most reproductive, in giving forth the truth and grace and life which they have themselves received. They need not, and indeed they cannot, preach themselves; yet will their personalities dominate their messages throughout. After all, the greatest problem for homiletics is not the making of the sermon, but the making of the preacher.

From one quarter only has the independence, not to say the very existence of homiletics as a science been challenged. It has often been treated as a mere branch of rhetoric; a misfortune which some of our theological seminaries have done their part to perpetuate in their chairs of so-called “sacred rhetoric”, and from which they have suffered great harm.

The relation between these two sciences merits a much fuller treatment than it commonly receives in our English homiletic manuals. Indeed, the whole history of our discipline could conveniently and most instructively be written from this point of view. Significant, for example, is the fact that the father of modern scientific homiletics, the Reformed professor of Marburg, Hyperius, gave his epoch-making treatise of the year 1553 the sub-title, *De interpretatione scripturarum sacrarum populari*. True to the spirit of his Church, he conceived the sermon as essentially an exposition of the Bible, whereas the Lutheran practice, confirmed by the attempt of Melancthon to model the sermon upon Greek classical traditions, gave the first place to the idea of oratory. Hyperius, while freely acknowledging the necessity of rhetoric in general, and its great value for preaching, nevertheless began that long process by which finally homiletics could free itself from the bondage of the pagan ideals. It was not, however, till toward the close of the seventeenth century that the name “homiletics” was coined, having been first used by Göbel in the title of his manual *Methodologia Homiletica* (1672), and then by Baier in his *Compendium Theologiae*

*Homileticae* (1677), and Krumholz in his *Compendium Homileticum* (1699). The new name betokened a further emancipation from rhetoric. Nor does it occasion surprise that to this day, where rationalistic influences are predominant, or where, as in the Romish Church, the pulpit is made subordinate, preaching is still spoken of merely as "ecclesiastical eloquence", "the eloquence of the clerical profession", or "pulpit eloquence". Even Vinet, brilliant as his work is in its philosophic penetration, was too strongly influenced by Schott's devotion to the ancient rhetoric. Phelps, Broadus, Shedd, and Hoppin begin with Vinet's dictum: "Rhetoric is the genus, homiletics is the species." But following the impulse given by Schleiermacher, such writers as Palmer, Stier, Baur, Gaupp, Harnack, Kleinert, van Oosterzee, Schweizer and Christlieb have vindicated for homiletics an independent place in the circle of the sciences.

The solution of this much discussed problem is possible only upon a philosophic basis. For historically every conceivable position has been taken, from the one extreme of a perfect identification of the sciences to the other extreme of an absolute mutual exclusiveness. At the outset, it is plain that the term rhetoric has been used in two different senses; the one presenting only the formal, the other dealing also with the substantial or ethical considerations involved in discourse. The former was exceedingly common among the ancients. Rhetoric was often treated as the mere knowledge of means, natural or artificial, worthy or unworthy, by which an orator, quite regardless of his subject, could win the good will of his hearers. This was the conception of the Sophists, which was so severely condemned by Plato as a mere art of shamming, and later by Kant, who described it as an art "which utilizes the weakness of men for its own purposes" and "deceives by means of a fair show". But even in the earliest classical rhetoric the more serious and elevated conception of public speaking, as an ethical transaction, was emphasized. Stress was laid upon the content of the discourse and upon the personality of the speaker. It was maintained that true eloquence was based upon the self-evidencing and convincing power of the truth, when rightly unveiled, and upon the character of



the orator as a man worthy of confidence in the double sense of his being a master of his subject and a sincere and veracious exponent of it. Here, then, we have a conception of rhetoric that begins to level up to the heights of homiletic theory as we have sought to unfold it from the New Testament itself. That the two sciences may have much in common is at once apparent. Eloquence in the pulpit or out of it becomes primarily a moral virtue. And in regard to the formal structure of discourse and many stylistic peculiarities, it is evident that there can be only one set of principles by which to arrange the matter of an address in an orderly, attractive and persuasive way. From this point of view there cannot be two rhetorics: there can be only a sacred or a secular use of the same rhetorical principles.

Nevertheless, the elements of difference between the two sciences are more important than those which they necessarily have in common, even after the utmost concessions have been made in favor of the higher ethical conception of discourse which the heathen rhetoric at its best developed. As we have seen, the sermon deals with the gospel; it has a distinctively religious aim, one which transcends the merely human sphere; and it depends for success primarily upon spiritual methods. In these three principles is grounded the distinction between homiletics and rhetoric, a distinction that is essential though it is not absolute. In the nature of the case rhetoric in laying down rules suitable for all possible discourses, the sermon included, can serve only a formal purpose. As Christlieb has well said: "It is only if, instead of finding the subject of Christian preaching in Christ and His salvation, we find it in the general ideas of duty, virtue, and happiness . . . which also ultimately formed the chief subjects of the best heathen rhetoric, that the distinction in scope and aim between the two sciences, and therefore any difference at all between them, vanishes."<sup>4</sup> If, according to the ethical idea of public address, the very form becomes inseparable from the subject-matter, how can maxims that may have fitted the Greek stage or the Roman forum suit the facts in that field of discourse in

<sup>4</sup> Christlieb, *Homiletics*, p. 17.

which by common consent the subject-matter, the aim, and the method of the address are unique? Only when we define rhetoric in such general terms as to embrace all expression of thought in language, without any distinction as to the matter and the form, can the independence of homiletics as a science be questioned; but such a conception of rhetoric would likewise leave room for no other science whatsoever.

As a mere matter of fact, homiletics has only then flourished when it has been cultivated in its own congenial soil, the field of the theological sciences. Indeed, the influence of rhetoric, in more than one period of the pulpit's history, has been baneful in the extreme. It cannot be too often repeated that the preacher is not the successor of the Greek orator but of the Hebrew prophet. In religious and spiritual matters, the hearer is not convinced by human art but by the demonstration and power of the Holy Spirit. Unction is more than diction.

Meanwhile, however, the homilete, having put first things first, dares to appropriate for his professional labor, as for his personal religious needs, Paul's assurance, "All things are yours." In particular as regards rhetoric, he will act upon Herder's precept: "First till our field as if there were no ancients; then use the art of the ancients, not in order to build our own anew, but to improve and perfect it." Only let homiletics, true to its best developments in the past, grow out of its own independent root, and all the other theological sciences and the church they serve will have reason to rejoice in the goodly fruitage of this tree.

Such, then, is the task of homiletics as the science of preaching; and such are the principles that secure for this branch of theoretical knowledge a place of honorable independence in the circle of the sciences.

But, as we have already said, homiletics must be something more than a science. It belongs to the practical theological disciplines, all of which have this as their distinctive function, that besides giving the minister of the gospel the true conception of his work they aid him by practical counsels to perform that work in the most effective way. Homiletics, then, must itself reduce its scientific principles to a technique. It cannot rest content with its conclusions in the domain of pure knowl-

edge. It has a further duty than the development of the mere idea of the sermon. It must show how this idea may best be realized. The science must resolve itself into an art.

But at the very threshold of this task, homiletics is confronted by the allegation that preaching cannot be taught as an art, and that, even were this possible, it would not be desirable. Thus even so great a preacher and so noble an expositor of preaching as Phillips Brooks declares that "the definite and immediate purpose which a sermon has set before it makes it impossible to consider it as a work of art, and every attempt to consider it so works injury to the purpose for which the sermon was created".<sup>5</sup> And he continues: the sermon "knows no essential and eternal type, but its law for what it ought to be comes from the needs and fickle changes of the men for whom it lives. Now this is thoroughly inartistic. Art contemplates the absolute beauty. The simple work of art is the pure utterance of beautiful thought in beautiful form without further purpose than simply that it should be uttered . . . Art knows nothing of the tumultuous eagerness of earnest purpose." There is some truth in this characterization of art; and Brooks is justified in speaking as he does against the vice of "sermonizing". But he is using the word "art" in an extremely limited sense; and even then it may fairly be questioned whether, for example, the world's great poems could properly be embraced in this sweeping verdict. Be that as it may, the fact remains that, so far as preaching is concerned, art, considered in the first instance as the use of appropriate means to gain chosen ends, is absolutely indispensable. Art thus understood need have nothing to do with mere artifice or artificiality. It is the deliberate, reasoned use of suitable means. But even in the more ideal sense of the term, does not the very glory of the preacher's work lie in his capacity to express "beautiful thought in beautiful form", and does not such utterance inevitably give a certain expansion and delight, as well as moral impulse, to the mind of the hearer? Indeed, is there any art in which the ideal and the practical are so harmoniously blended? The best answer to Brooks is

<sup>5</sup> Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching*, p. 109.

Brooks himself—the grace and skill of his sermonic art. Far truer is the remark of Vinet: “What, in truth, is art but nature still? Art, from the first moment is present in every creation; if, then, you would exclude art, where will you begin the exclusion? You see at once that you can never ascend high enough. What we call nature, or talent, is, unconsciously to itself, only a more consummate, more spontaneous art. What we call art is but prolonged or perfected instinct, which in all cases is only a more elementary and more rapid process of reasoning. If instinct removes the first difficulties that present themselves, will it also remove the next? That is the question. And it presents itself again under another form. Does looking hinder us from seeing? Does not looking aid us in seeing?”<sup>6</sup> We may add that as a matter of history, the most gifted preachers, like the greatest poets, have cultivated their art with laborious assiduity.

Then again, there have not been wanting those who have condemned homiletic art on what they conceive to be the lofty grounds of religion. They are fond of quoting such texts as this: “But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak.” But dare any one apply this promise of extraordinary help made to the apostles for an extraordinary need to the case of a pastor drawing his salary in regular installments from a congregation he has vowed to serve with the best use of all his talents? Just as far-fetched is the exegesis that invokes Paul’s statements about “wisdom of words” and the “philosophy” of some Greeks at Colossae as an excuse for the systematic neglect of the study of Hebrew or dogmatic theology. Nor is it safe for any young minister on purely *à priori* grounds to number himself among those exceptional servants of God with whom art has all the spontaneity of instinct in a genius. For nothing is more fatal to talent than to mistake itself for genius. Meanwhile, the rank and file of our preachers must remember that God helps them who help themselves through the best use of the gifts he has given them. Here, too, the saying applies in all its scope:

<sup>6</sup> Vinet, *Homiletics*, p. 33.

“If a man strive, yet is he not crowned except he strive lawfully.”

On the other hand, however, it behooves alike the student and the teacher of any practical art to cherish a sober estimate of what may be accomplished. No homiletic training can ever be a substitute for native endowment. It can give no new powers of speech. It may do much to kindle and intensify, but it can never impart, the divine spark of true eloquence. It can furnish correct principles and helpful precepts; but the application of these is always a personal matter for the student himself. As Phelps tersely puts it: “In brief, it can make the business practicable, but it can never create the doing of it. A man must work the theory into his own culture, so that he shall execute it unconsciously. This he can do only by his own experience of the theory in his own practice till it becomes a second nature.”

With this conception of homiletics as a theological art, how can the discipline best be taught under the concrete conditions under which the work must be done in our theological seminaries? This, then, is the remaining question before us.

In attempting a solution of this problem, I have tried to do full justice to the two principles which, I take it, are fundamental in this task: that the distinctive trait of all art is its synthetic quality, and that efficiency in the exercise of any practical art depends upon the thoroughness with which its theories are converted into an adequate technique.

I have time only to indicate in a general way the method by which I hope to give effect to these two principles in my conduct of the work in homiletics. I must be brief, for I am well aware that at this late hour there is nothing, among the many things that may be said of homiletic or of any other art, that is more to the point than Longfellow's line, “Art is long, and time is fleeting”.

On the one hand, then, the instruction must be vitally and constantly related to all the elements which in their combination make the sermon. Preaching as an art is the harmonious synthesis of the three factors which the science of homiletics has taught us enter into the very idea of preaching; the subject, the congregation, and the speaker, or the content of the mes-

sage, its adaptation to the hearer and the personality of the preacher.

As regards the first, the subject-matter of preaching, homiletics can render an invaluable service to the theological student by relating all his work in the seminary to the needs of the pulpit. Some one has said that every university ought in these days to have a professorship of things in general, because owing to the extreme specialization of the sciences many a man after four years of college work is sadly puzzled in trying to organize his intellectual world into an orderly, unified system. And this difficulty is likely to be increased, rather than diminished, when the student enters upon his seminary course. Certain it is that he frequently has no proper notion of the relations which his highly diversified studies bear to one another and to the work of the ministry. He not seldom comes to the close of the day's exercises feeling that what he has heard in the several class-rooms may fill note-books with a variegated lore, but not satisfy the mind of a prospective homilete or the heart of a would-be pastor. He begins to think that he is in real danger of being over-educated, and that he can become more efficient as a minister of the gospel, if he will not burden himself with any excess of scientific knowledge.

It is, indeed, a difficult problem to bridge this gulf for the student. But I am convinced that more can be done by the practical chairs than commonly is attempted in our American institutions of sacred learning. The method employed in some of the Scotch seminaries is highly to be commended. The professors in the practical department devote a substantial part of their courses to this specific task of showing how the whole body of instruction bears on the equipment of the preacher and pastor. And I do not know of a more useful service that I ought to try to render than to pass in review the courses of our curriculum in order to emphasize not only the practical character of their results but also the homiletic benefits of the peculiar discipline imparted in each case.

But there is still another and more practical expedient. I refer to that used in the homiletic seminars of the German universities, a method for the introduction of which into this

Seminary the marked development and popularity of our extra-curriculum classes paves the way. With smaller groups of students thus banded together the problem can be quite satisfactorily solved by having the scientific and the practical work done under the guidance of the same professor. Of course, his limitations are here the serious concern. He can in no sense vie with the specialists in their particular fields. But if he is not utterly disqualified for his position, he can, at least in some of the departments, be both scientific and practical in his methods, and that, after all, is here the main consideration. At any rate, he can encourage the students to use in their own independent work in such classes the most thorough scientific methods they have learned in the prosecution of the theoretical disciplines, in order that under his guidance they may then utilize their results in the actual production of apologetic, expository, doctrinal, ethical, sociological, or historical sermons. To what extent the scientific end of such work may be emphasized it scarcely becomes me to intimate. But I may be pardoned for adding that I certainly should never have accepted the invitation to this chair, had I not felt convinced that one of its richest opportunities lies in the possibility it offers in such classes for combining, at first hand, scholarly work in favorite departments with practical exercises in the formal statement of results for the pulpit.

And there is still a third way by which a professor of homiletics can show the students the practical significance of the other work done in the curriculum. The sermons submitted in writing or delivered by them may be made the basis for this instruction. Now and then, for instance, a man will need to be told with great plainness that if the pulpit is his objective point, then for him the course in voice culture is the most important of all. Another, perchance, must learn how to bring his dogmatic and ethical wings together for a truly homiletic flight; preaching his doctrines with ethical applications in view and his ethics in their doctrinal origins. Still a third may need the reminder that he is supposed to preach only the whole counsel of God, not also all the results of the latest scholarship on some point of merely antiquarian interest, to say nothing of the latest guesses of some rationalistic critic

who in any event would not leave the pastor a preachable Bible. And here, no less than in the constructive part of the course, there need not fail the word of guidance that shall make the cross of Christ borrow radiance from every page of text-book and from every course of study in the school of sacred learning.

But homiletic art, as we have intimated, demands a still richer synthesis. There is a second factor that enters into the construction of every truly successful sermon,—its adaptation to the hearer. Indeed, this is a consideration of scarcely less importance than the subject-matter itself. And yet many a preacher fails at this very point. As a student in the seminary he may even have distinguished himself by his scholarly attainments; but as a pastor trying to minister to a particular congregation he at once shows that he is hopelessly out of touch with the concrete environment in which he finds himself. More pathetic still are the chapters that sometimes follow this mournful introduction to the story of his professional life: the older he grows the more obvious is his aloofness from the age of which he is supposed to be a part. He simply does not understand the great law of adaptation by which the sermonic material is made not only intelligible but also interesting, attractive and impressive. With all his learning he is the victim of a defective culture, in consequence of which he may have to labor under a contracted usefulness to the end of his days.

What, then, can a professor of homiletics do to prevent or to remedy such an evil? In general it may be said, he can give both inspiration and practical guidance for the attainment of the more adequate culture that is needed. He can project the scope of his task beyond the narrow confines of the student's academic years and emphasize the principles by which alone the pastor can secure and maintain a high intellectual efficiency in the pulpit.

For one thing, he can expedite the experience of the future preacher by helping him in advance to understand the signs of the times in which his ministry will lie. Here, I take it, is the secret of that deep and wide influence which the "Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching" at Yale University has exerted. The incumbents have been men of distinguished use-



fulness in the active pastorate, and as such they have commonly dealt, not with the details of homiletic technique, but with the large questions that pertain to ministerial efficiency in the modern world. As Dr. James Stalker, one of the most helpful of these Lecturers, said to the students, "there is room amidst your studies, and without the slightest disparagement to them, for a message more directly from life, to hint to you, that more may be needed in the career to which you are looking forward than a college can give, and that the powers on which success in practical life depends may be somewhat different from those which avail most at your present stage".<sup>7</sup> And throughout his lectures he, like most of his predecessors and successors on that foundation, lays great stress upon the point I am now emphasizing, the necessity of a thorough understanding of the peculiar and distinctive features of our age. And as I conceive the work of this chair, one of its most useful services is that of aiding young men to a secure homiletic platform as they stand with the ancient gospel on their lips before the marvelous complexities and difficulties of our modern life. No young man ought to be left altogether to the tender mercies of his own experience in grappling, as many a one must do with the very instinct of intellectual self-preservation, with the problem of interpreting the conditions under which he will have to exercise his ministry. He ought to be told in advance something about the absorbing interest of this generation in its material welfare and of the influence that this is likely to exert upon the content and form of his message. He must know the significance of the inductive process of investigation as employed in the natural sciences, and the bearings of this fact upon men's conceptions of the Supernatural in history. He must realize what changes psychology has wrought in the valuation of many religious phenomena, as well as in the province of pedagogical and therefore also of homiletic methods. He must understand the shifting of the centre of gravity in our ecclesiastical life from narrow partisan polemics to the broader statesmanship found, for example,

<sup>7</sup> Stalker, *The Preacher and His Models*, p. 5.

in the aggressive leadership of our denominational Boards for harmonious and effective coöperation in spiritual and philanthropic labors at home and abroad. He must know the meaning of the profound social unrest of these days, and of the insistent and universal demand that our ministers shall give intelligent and courageous direction to the work of making social applications of the principles of the gospel. And in this connection he may need the reminder that our Biblical commentaries have too often been written by scholarly recluses who may have tried hard enough to see the social message of Christianity in the right perspective, but who have failed because they have lacked the sympathy, the insight, the wisdom begotten of a personal experience of the world's need of such a message. In fine, the student must be encouraged and fitted to live the homiletic life of the twentieth century, lest the church, as well as the Christian agencies outside of the church, pass him by to take up the legitimate order of the day. He cannot possibly have too much scholarship, but at every cost he must learn to focus his scholarship upon the real issues of life and make his knowledge fruitful of good. He must understand the age, if for no other reason than to be able to talk to it in the intelligible forms of a living faith. He must put upon the pure gold of his gospel a stamp and superscription that will make his homiletic coinage current throughout the whole realm of his ministerial influence.

And here the beneficent ministry of general literature may well be invoked to aid the future preacher in his necessary self-cultivation. It is by no means an accident that the three most gifted and influential teachers of homiletics whom this country has produced, Dr. Broadus, Dr. Shedd and Dr. Phelps, have written so extensively and so forcibly upon this subject of the importance to the pastor of a growing knowledge of the world's best literature. These writers have not deemed it beneath their dignity to show how even in these days of intellectual scraps and mental dissipation through ephemeral reading, it is possible for one who would resolutely go upon the nobler errands of the mind, to secure a choice culture through converse with the sceptred immortals in the literary history of the race. To inspire men who are rightly to re-

gard themselves as the servants of one Book to become nevertheless the masters of many other books that are worthy of a life-long study, is about as useful a service as a seminary professor can render. Nothing is more practical or valuable than the giving to a fellow-man of a higher ideal by which he may come into the fuller possession of himself. And in the department of homiletics this is the truly apostolic way of overcoming evil with good in the case of those who are tempted to use the meretricious hints and helps, the elaborate cabinets of sermonic skeletons and the well indexed collections of ready-made illustrations and quotations which avarice is so quick to place into the hands of ignorance and indolence.

But the most subtle element of the three which in their synthesis make the sermon is the personality of the preacher. It has well been said: "The effect of a sermon depends, first of all, on what is said, and next, on how it is said; but hardly less, on who says it." And if we are justified in regarding the spokesman of God as a personal witness to the truth he proclaims, and in making goodness, therefore, a prime qualification for the ministry of the gospel, then our seminaries must ever be schools in which men will grow in the grace as well as in the knowledge of the Lord. For homiletics, accordingly, the fundamental problem is the problem of the spiritual life of the minister. He must not only know about Christ, he must know Christ; nay, he must have Christ and Christ must have him.

Now, of course, all teachers in a seminary have this burden of responsibility resting upon their hearts and consciences. They are all, first of all, ministers of grace to those whom they instruct. They are all concerned with this task of making the student, like that disciple whom Jesus loved, a true divine. But here, too, the teacher of homiletics has a special duty and a unique privilege. Not only is he led by the very nature of his course to speak heart-searching words on such subjects as the call to the ministry, the personal requisites for the office, and the conditions for the realization of spiritual power in preaching. But before him and in the presence of their classmates the students, many of them for the first time in their lives, give expression in public to their most sacred re-

ligious convictions, and in this atmosphere of prayer and devout meditation a personal word from the professor will often mean more than lengthy general counsels, however appropriate, given under less favorable circumstances to a whole class or the entire student body. By as much as these matters are more intimately related to the personality of the man, by so much the more readily may the class-room in homiletics become, next to the stated services of the sanctuary, the assembly-place for the focusing upon the hearts and minds of the prospective preachers the constraining and sanctifying power of the motives which they have themselves avowed in seeking the gospel ministry. Nor ought these services to fail to do their part in bringing the highest principles of duty to bear upon the daily routine of study. Moreover, as in dealing with the question of the minister's future intellectual life many helpful counsels may be given, so in connection with this problem of his spiritual development after his entrance upon his profession, much can and should be done in the way of making practical suggestions as to books of devotion, habits of reading and meditation, methods of work, and the best ways of cultivating personal piety amid the engrossing duties of the pastoral office.

Such, then, in broad outline, is my conception of the way in which the synthetic nature of homiletics as a theological art may be most advantageously realized. But this, as we have remarked, is only one half of the task. The second of the two questions remains. How can this art be most effectively taught as a technique?

Measured by the amount of time it will require, this part of the work in homiletics is, of course, the most important. But concerned as we now are solely with the method of instruction, we may dispose of this problem with a few brief remarks.

In the first place, the whole mass of homiletic theory must constantly be related to the final purpose which this discipline has in view, the securing of an adequate technique. All the instruction must be practical. The lectures or the text-books used must abound in concrete examples and illustrations. Much will have to be said that will be speedily outgrown in

the experience of the preacher, but which may serve a most useful purpose in moulding his tastes and fashioning his sermonic methods for the future. The directions and counsels must always be sufficiently minute and detailed to be really practicable, while on the other hand those rules will be most serviceable which are presented as the results of sound basal principles. Here, as in the teaching of every art, the best guidance is that which helps the beginner to help himself and thus outgrow his need of a teacher.

Again, training in sermonic technique may be conveniently given upon the basis of an inductive study of worthy representatives of the homiletic art. In this connection I cannot forbear alluding to the provision which the governing Boards of the Seminary have in their wisdom made for the benefit of our students by securing for them the opportunity of making a limited number of visits to some of our great metropolitan churches. I am not one of those who believe that the chief desideratum for the theological student of to-day is that he shall spend a considerable fraction of the brief academic year in so-called practical work, whether it be in the neighborhood of his seminary, or in the slums or the mission Sunday Schools or the highly organized parish activities in our great cities. But having during the past year received the written and oral reports of the students who availed themselves of this privilege of hearing some of our ablest preachers of the gospel, I cannot but express my opinion that this policy, under the restrictions that have been imposed by the Faculty, is amply justified by its results. To the best of my knowledge and judgment, it is a distinct aid to the work of the entire practical department; an aid, too, which the student may secure without entailing a disproportionate cost in time or strength.

But I would here particularly emphasize the critical study of the published sermons of the acknowledged masters of the homiletic art. This is a method that merits a much more thorough application than is commonly made either by the student or the minister himself. True, an adequate history of preaching is still to be written; but special periods have been fairly well treated in our own as in other tongues. At any

rate, the material itself in our English and American literature is exceptionally rich. The cultivated minister will not ignore the works of men like Hooker, South, Barrows, Taylor, Tilotson, Howe, Bunyan, Whitefield, Hall, Chalmers, Robertson, Maclaren, Jonathan Edwards, Bushnell, Beecher, and Brooks. Nor will he fail to study sympathetically and critically the sermons of the living preachers who best understand the art of putting the evangel into the forms that win and hold the modern mind. By means of such a study the young homilete comes to a more objective understanding of himself. He discovers his native bent, the limitations of his gifts and methods, and the conditions of his future growth. He learns also what is of perennial worth in the substance of the message itself, so that he may the more boldly proclaim, not what he guesses the people may want, but what he knows they must need. Care has to be exercised in securing proper variety in the representatives chosen for special consideration. There will then be no danger of a servile imitation or of a one-sided and eccentric development. The aim throughout is something more than a mechanical transfer of ideas or peculiarities of form. There ought to be a real transfusion of spirit from the master to his reader. And for this purpose the biographies of the celebrated preachers are an invaluable aid. They admit us into the secret of those vital processes that find their consummate expression in the finished sermon. They disclose the tools and methods of the master's workshop; but more than that, they put us under the spell of his nobler ideals. In such an atmosphere we feel the truth of Wordsworth's lines:

We live by Admiration, Hope and Love,  
And, even as these are well and wisely fixed,  
In dignity of being we ascend.

And most of all, technical training must be perfected by the actual practice of the art. *Fabricando fabri fimus*. The important question here is that concerning the amount of actual pulpit work that a seminary student may undertake during his course. Obviously, no uniform answer can be given. Few members of theological faculties would approve the suggestion of President Faunce of Brown University,

when he says: the department of homiletics "should keep every student preaching or teaching on every Sunday during his three years in the seminary, and so make sure that, whether he have ten talents or one, that which he does possess is not hidden in a napkin, but ready at any instant for the service of man". Certainly, this is an extreme which, to say the least, can be justified only in extraordinary cases. From the standpoint of good work in homiletics alone, to say nothing of the just claims of the other courses, it will be far better, in this formative period of the preacher's development to put the emphasis upon quality rather than quantity. Many a tragedy in the early and later years of ministerial life may be traced directly back to those misspent years of preparation when the young preacher, quite unconsciously, his judgment warped by the deceptive breezes of a momentary popular favor, irretrievably sacrificed his worthiest sermonic ideals. Far more fortunate will be the student who, discouraging all excessive demands upon his time and strength, will never allow himself to become accustomed to, much less satisfied with, any inferior work, but will resolutely and persistently, by dint of the utmost care in the planning and writing of his first sermons secure the best results of which he is at the time capable. This being conceded, there ought to be abundant classroom exercises in homiletic technique. The custom of having students preach to their classmates in the presence of the teachers who are to criticize the sermons as to their matter, form and delivery, is often made a subject of unfavorable comment, not to say of cheap ridicule. No doubt, it would be far better if the same audience could transfer itself to the more congenial atmosphere of some regular church or chapel service, the criticism being left for another occasion. But this is seldom possible, and meanwhile the best must be made of a difficult situation. Even under these circumstances, however, great good can be done. Where the criticism is what it should be, incisive yet kindly, thorough but sympathetic, constructive rather than negative, giving new and better points of view, supplementing deficiencies, making the most of the strong qualities of the preacher, and aiming throughout at a positive enrichment of his homiletic personality, there, as my experi-

ence leads me to testify, some of the most useful and therefore by the students most highly appreciated work of the department may be accomplished. Here as perhaps nowhere else the instruction of the seminary may be made vital, personal, and in the deepest sense of the word practical.

I have done. In this general discussion of principles and methods I have contented myself with the simple purpose of unfolding my conception of the work to which I have been summoned. But believing as I do, that our evangelical churches owe their very life to the faithful preaching of the Word of God and that the prime object of this school of sacred learning can be no other than the training of able and efficient ministers of the gospel who may continue to be what their predecessors from apostolic days have ever been, the most useful men of their day and generation, I must utterly have missed my aim in this address, if I have not succeeded in making clear my sincere conviction, that in the modern theological seminary, the department of homiletics, as the cutting edge of the whole curriculum and the meeting-place in which the best cultural influences and the strongest spiritual forces of the institution are most directly and fully converted into power for service in the kingdom of God, is second in dignity and importance to no other. Alas! that here, too, however, it is far easier to form than to realize one's ideal. But taking encouragement from the call which has been given me, and from the cordial welcome of my colleagues in the Faculty and the student body as a whole, as well as from the year's work I have already been permitted to do, I shall continue to find my chief comfort and support in him from whom cometh all our help. May his strength perfect itself in my weakness, and his grace glorify itself in filling up the measure of my varied need, that my labor in this chair may be for the good of his church and to the praise of his name.