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Biblical Preaching

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Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages

Haddon W. Robinson

Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980

230 pp.

Why review a book published eight years ago? Because in August 1987 it reached its fifteenth printing, and because it is a sound homiletical primer. Besides, it owes its source and much of its substance to Henry Grady Davis who taught homiletics at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago from 1937 until his retirement. Davis' *Design For Preaching* (Fortress, 1958) was and remains a generative source of homiletical theory and practice—including the recent development of narrative preaching. From a homiletician's viewpoint, Robinson has adapted Davis for the "Evangelicalist" wing of North American Protestantism, orienting himself especially toward expository and non-lectionary preaching, and simplifying both Davis' wordy style and his complex categories and terms (Davis devoted one chapter to terminology!). From a preacher's viewpoint, Robinson has mapped out an exceptionally clear journey from text to delivered sermon.

After teaching homiletics at Dallas Theological Seminary for 19 years, Robinson became president of Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary in 1979. He has a high view of Scripture and of preaching: "... when a preacher fails to preach the Scriptures, he abandons his authority. He confronts his hearers no longer with a word from God but only with another word from men...God speaks through the Bible...Something awesome happens when God confronts an individual through preaching and seizes him by the soul" (18 f.). That he is no narrow biblicist is evident as he proceeds through ten "stages" of sermon development. In "stage 2," study of the passage of Scripture, he recommends specific lexicons, concordances, grammars, word-study books, bible dictionaries, and commentaries (almost all from "conservative" publication houses).

Robinson defines "expository" preaching as "the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his readers" (20). Which means that the theme (idea, concept) and all its parts derive from the text, and are developed purposefully so that God through scriptural preaching will speak. Stages 1 and 2 in the development of a sermon are the choice and study of the passage; Stage 3 is the discovery of the "exegetical idea"; and Stage 4, its analysis (using Davis' three "functional" questions, What does it mean? Is it true? What difference does it make?, which Robinson calls "developmental questions"); Stage 5 is the formulation of the "homiletical idea"—a "memorable" re-statement of the "exegetical idea" which satisfies two questions, What is the preaching talking about? What is being said about it? (which are

Davis' two "structural questions"); Stage 6 is the determination of the sermon's purpose; Stage 7, the selection of a sermon "shape" to accomplish this purpose (a creative amalgam of stage 4 and Davis' "organic forms"); Stages 8 and 9 are outlining the sermon and developing the outline; Stage 10 is the preparation of the Introduction and Conclusion. The final two chapters deal with style and delivery. Illustrative examples from his own and other's sermons are plentiful.

While Lutherans center authority in the gospel and use the Bible to preach the gospel (the repetition of Scripture, or careful interpretation of Scripture, do not guarantee that the preaching will be the Word of God!), this "Evangelicalist" stress on preaching Scriptures is appropriate as biblical illiteracy increases. And every preacher will benefit from Robinson's amazingly clear coverage of the stages along the way from text to sermon while keeping aware of the rationalistic and didactic tendencies of the "Evangelicalist" approach to Scripture and preaching.

A minor observation: Robinson, for all his stress on the importance of the Conclusion, fails to write one! A major criticism: unrelieved masculine language. This may have been borderline excusable in 1980; it is unacceptable in 1987. Both author, and even more, the publisher—since it is a re-printing—are to be roundly denounced for that. An additional cause for shame is the three illustrative instances in which women are portrayed negatively (e.g. "... there are drab words as unattractive as an anemic woman", 177).

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