

TEACHING HOMILETICS IN OUR WORLD MISSION FIELDS
By one who is not fully conversant in the foreign vernacular
World Seminary Conference
June 21-25, 1976

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE IN THIS AREA

Pastor Paul A. Behn, who taught the course in our Seminary, writes, "A course in homiletics was made available in Hong Kong by men who taught this course previously. It was a simplified course, showing the purpose and aims of preaching theory. Methods of preaching were covered, -sermon contents having the church year in mind, then too, special sermons (baptism, confirmation, etc.)

Coming to the practical side; study of the text and context was made determining what the author is telling us, main thought (theme) parts etc. A great deal of time was spent on the practical part. Individual texts were assigned to each student, asking him to find the main thought, - later the parts, - finally the subparts. The instructor produced master outlines step-by-step, showing how a text is carefully developed."

The course itself dealt with the following topics:

1. An introduction to preaching
2. The preacher and prayer
3. Homiletical prerequisites (text study, outline, delivery)
4. Text selection (Pericope and free)
5. How to study the text
6. The two sermon methods (Analytic & synthetic)
7. The theme
8. Divisions of the theme
9. Application
10. The introduction
11. The conclusion
12. The use of illustrations
13. Making the sermon interesting

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14. The length of the sermon
15. Writing and memorizing the sermon
16. The pulpit greeting
17. The address to the hearers.

ONE NOT FULLY CONVERSANT IN THE FOREIGN VERNACULAR

Perhaps most of our foreign missionaries could be designated as "one who is not fully conversant in the foreign vernacular," since few people even after many years of language study and usage are fully conversant in the foreign vernacular. Nevertheless, I remain eminently qualified to write as "one not fully conversant in the foreign vernacular," not withstanding a three week intensive course in Cantonese before leaving the States and eight months of concentrated language study in Hong Kong.

The thoughts expressed in this presentation reflect perceptions or misperceptions on the subject of Teaching Homiletics in S.E. Asia by one not fully conversant with the foreign vernacular, after being "on the field" for ten months.

The Berlitz course I took in Cantonese was very beneficial. For three weeks, I did nothing but speak and hear Cantonese for 10 hours a day from three Cantonese speaking instructors. The benefits for me were real. It helped me to begin "hearing" the language. In addition it enabled me to speak many of the basic phrases. It was a great asset in getting me off on the right foot for my studies of Cantonese in Hong Kong. It was a considerable advantage the first months of language school to know many of the vocables and some of the linguistic concepts before I left the States. I think

it made the transition to living in a foreign country much easier than it would have been without it and gave me a head start on the language I consider invaluable. I had one extremely good instructor. And in the Berlitz course I think it's essential to have especially talented instructors or the course depreciates in value.

After eight months of concentrated study at New Asia College, I am able to converse in Cantonese on a very basic level. This concentrated study program covers two years of full-time study at the end of which I should be able to converse quite well and have a basic working vocabulary in the area of religion. At this time, however, I am considerably limited in my ability to function with the language in full-fledged conversation and cannot use the language to any considerable degree in teaching. I am not fully conversant in the foreign vernacular.

TEACHING HOMILETICS

Since Pastor Behn left Hong Kong at the end of October, 1975, Pastor John Chworowsky and I have been co-supervisors of one of our national evangelists. The most frequent responsibility and point of contact was sermon work.

The situation was one in which I could speak in English and "things were a little bit clear." (Nida quota) If I tried Cantonese things weren't clear at all. The evangelist on the other hand could speak English and "things were a little bit clear." He could speak Cantonese and things weren't clear at all. When he could understand my words,

much was lost in the meaning. Whatever I'd say, he'd agree; and then go back to Kwun Tong and preach his Sermon.

Usually the evangelist would bring an outline of a sermon that to my mind didn't make much sense and didn't seem to get at the point of the text. There invariably followed the rewriting or suggested variations to the theme and outline. But even then I could never know whether the outline was being followed, or, for that matter, whether the outline even made sense when translated in Cantonese for non-western minds.

For me it has been a valuable learning experience, but imagine how frustrating it has to be for the evangelist to come to a supervisor for aid when the supervisor can't really communicate because the supervisor is not fully conversant with the foreign vernacular or culture.

CRUCIAL AREAS

A. Language and culture

The first time I preached in English in Hong Kong, I was doubly impressed with the necessity of becoming as fully conversant with the language and culture of Hong Kong as possible. I'm sure most of our missionaries have been impressed with the difficulties of constructing a sermon that approaches the thinking pattern and experience of those of a foreign culture. One can search for the proper choice of words or phrase, of an apt illustration and end up with a finished product that one has the feeling perhaps people back in Milwaukee might understand, if not fully appreciate.

But as far as I can see, language and culture are inextricably enjoined. Eugene A. Nida in his book *Customs and Cultures* makes several related points. He says:

"Language is not only a part of human activity, it is the most characteristic feature of human behavior, and the possession of distinct languages is certainly one of the most obvious features which distinguish human cultures."

"Language can and must be learned if the Word of God is to be communicated in the words of men, but this cannot be done outside of the total framework of the culture, of which the language in question is an integral part."

"Linguistic training is of great help, but it is no substitute for cultural submersion."

He makes a strong case throughout his writings that you can't learn the culture without learning the language; and you can't learn the language without also learning much of the culture. After 10 months in "the field" both language and culture are areas we must become fully conversant with if we want to effectively teach homiletics.

Not being fully conversant with the foreign vernacular has already caused considerable concern in a number of areas for our theological training in Hong Kong.

B. the thought process

One area of concern that has raised many questions and implications for the teaching of Homiletics is the linguistic/cultural implication of thought process. According to numerous writers the thought process of cultures diverse from our own embody diverse characteristics that must be incorporated in any serious attempt to communicate. These writers perceive a characteristic of the Chinese thought

process that is perhaps best designated as indirectness. It is claimed common for Chinese to consistently seek to use third parties in solving problems rather than addressing the problem directly. Austin Coates in "MYSELF A MANDARIN" offers the following example and quotes:

"There was a time when my cook was not making b^acon and eggs in quite the way I like them. I did not dare to tell him so, since this in its very small way, would have been a confrontation. Instead, I telephoned his 'back mountain,' the man who years earlier had recommended him to me and said, 'please ask him not to overcook the bacon.' The speed with which this message was transmitted was reflected in the bacon and eggs next day being entirely to satisfaction.

"The Chinese dislike of direct confrontations is exceedingly deep, pervading Chinese life from beginning to end."

"Everything, from start to finish and at all levels must be done indirectly, to avoid all possibility of any kind of confrontation or showdown."

speaking of interstices

"Here the difficulty is that the Western mind simply will not leave such blank spaces alone. What is in them people ask? They are not a deficiency ... It is simply that there are certain points on which Chinese thought remains deliberately indefinite."

It is also claimed that when discussing problems, many Chinese tend to speak more vaguely, making frequent use of circumlocution. This form of indirectness can become very practical. Recently a stolen car was left on our property. The police were called. Facts were noted. The police left. Our secretary received a call that said essentially, "It is very unhappy that the car is on private property. The owner of the property has to pay to have a car removed. It would be more happy if the car was not on private property. If

however the car is not on private property soon, it should have no additional finger prints on it."

The aspect of indirect thought process and interaction raises many questions for the teaching of homiletics. What does it say for instance in relation to our accepted concept of a sermon outline being tightly constructed and structured. We are committed to leaving no gaps in thought, no interstices. Is it possible that the best way to communicate in an address or sermon across cultural barriers, or within that culture, is to be less direct and explicit than we are used to? *particularly in the area of application* Is it necessary to make our points painfully clear as we perhaps are wont to do. And if so, how do we go about teaching a format for a sermon that we are not familiar with? In addition, what does the indirect thought process and inter action have to say about the manner of preaching sin and the conviction of the sinner as we are used to having it preached in our western style sermons?

D. Application

Perhaps one of the more difficult areas of homiletics to teach without being fully conversant in the foreign vernacular is application. In this respect, understanding the culture becomes absolutely essential, particularly in understanding the areas that are appropriate to deal with and how directly it can be done. The indirectness of thought could influence the national to make the statement of exegesis or dogma and

feel "that's plenty direct, it's up to the person on the chair to apply it."

SUMMARY

When teaching homiletics as one not fully conversant with the foreign vernacular, the instructor is working under considerable disadvantage that can only be sufficiently overcome through strong effort at learning the language and culture. Getting to the common ground of understanding what the text means for a given culture presents great difficulties. One tends to teach (as well as preach) the structured sermon as we have come to appreciate it in our culture. It is easy to forget that the Aristotelian step by step deduction and/or induction may not be appreciated or followed by those of another culture. The outline, the application and the illustrations as well as content and their effectiveness in communicating the word are directly related to linguistic and cultural awareness of the instructor.

SOME METHODS

(of dealing with the teaching of Homiletics by one not fully conversant with the foreign vernacular.)

A. When using English as the linguistic medium for instruction, use word and sentence patterns that follow those of the student. i.e.

In Cantonese

"I at home study"

"I tomorrow buy vegetables"

"I give something to you" or

"I something give to you"

Not as we do in English

"I study at home"

"I buy vegetables tomorrow"

"I give you something"

- B. Record the national's sermons, have them translated and used for study with the national.
- C. Have sermon books available that can provide tangible guidelines in practice for the person being taught. (Important to avoid reaffirming structures of sermons that conflict with the national thought process)
- D. Use a TEE course in sermon preparation adapted to the culture in which the preaching is to take place. (I.E. SERMON PREPARATION I by Norb Becker, published by the Lutheran Church in the Philippines)
- E. Use a sermon form or structure applicable to the culture. Perhaps break the sermon down into more parts that we are used to. Each part can be simply stated followed by a simple application of the individual part. (cf. attached work sheet we are using at this time.)
- F. Have all nationals on the field use the same pericope series.
- G. Have weekly study sessions for all preachers on the field with a discussion of text study, theme outline and application.

(As in the area of Exegesis, is it possible that the Seminary student body could do much of the basic study on texts, themes and outlines for a pericope to be used on the field? The field personnel could still suggest basic alternative applications that fit more closely the culture.)

- H. Have each instructor become fully conversant with the foreign vernacular and the culture as soon as possible.

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SERMON STUDY OUTLINE

Date: _____

To be preached

Written by _____

THE INTRODUCTION

THE THEME

MAIN POINTS OF THE SERMON

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____
- 6. _____
- 7. _____
- 8. _____

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR OUR EVERYDAY LIVES

- 1A _____
- 2A _____
- 3A _____
- 4A _____
- 5A _____
- 6A _____
- 7A _____
- 8A _____

Conclusion: