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'SPEAK FORTH THE WORDS OF TRUTH'

By the REV. E. F. KEVAN, M.Th.

IF we are to speak so as to carry conviction we must present what we have to say in an orderly and convincing manner. This means therefore that we must pay attention not merely to the possession of the right material, the truth of the gospel, but also to its effective presentation. It is said that when the Duke of Wellington was asked how one made a speech, he replied, 'Oh, just jump in and splash about.' That, it need hardly be remarked, is not the way to do it. Too many talks in Christian Unions and at other small gatherings have been little more than muttering round a subject with scarcely any coherence or progress of thought to be traced. We are told that Joseph Chamberlain, one of the greatest speakers that parliamentary debate has known, was always at a loss for his speech until he found his line of thought. He had plenty of knowledge, plenty of facts and arguments, but it was all a huge disordered mass of thought until he found his 'line'. Even for so experienced a speech-maker as Mr. Chamberlain it was no easy matter to find the chain of ideas, the line, on which to hang his thoughts, and it sometimes took him three or even five days to do so. The construction of a sermon, then, is the essence of its effectiveness.

PRINCIPLES OF ARRANGEMENT

Let me suggest a few principles of arrangement. You may perhaps appreciate the construction proposed by the unlettered Negro who said, 'First I explains, then I expounds, then I puts in the rouse-ums'! As a rule we may say that explanation and argument come before persuasion and appeal. The intellect must be approached first and the will second. First capture the outposts of the mind, and then, and only then, can you successfully storm and hold the citadel of the heart. Secondly, it is important that feeling should deepen as you enter farther into the message. The emotional intensity should increase as you advance. 'Emotional intensity' is not to be confused with excitement, nor is it to be induced by theatrical methods. It is that aspect of speech which impels a man to do something about the matter. By saying, therefore, that feeling should deepen as the talk progresses, we mean that a man should not find that he has less inclination to obey the truth at the end of the address than he had at the beginning. Again, the argumentative part of the message should be so arranged that the weaker thought leads to the stronger. We must see to it that we never 'wind up' with weak common-places. The talk must be so constructed as to exhibit movement. It is a route march, not a ramble. It must climb; it must proceed from 'The Log Cabin to the White House'.

METHODS WITH 'TEXTS'

Let me share with you what I will call two types of method in dealing with a 'text'. First of all there is the method of working *within* the text. By this I mean dividing up the passage and examining the bearing of the parts on one another. When dealing with large texts or extended passages, you would be advised to work within the 'text'. The teaching of each section should be epitomized in a single sentence, and this in turn provides the 'heading'. The sections should be brought forward for consideration in a logical order, or in their relation to the central theme.

The other textual plan may be called working *outside* the text. This is the method of thinking of the text or the topic in its wholeness so far as it has a bearing on outside things. In the preparation of a talk of this kind, you approach the subject from various positions 'outside' of it, and you see your subject from these different points of view. When it comes to the presentation of your material, this will take on the character of being an application of the theme or the subject to the various needs and situations to which it stands related. You will be wise, of course, not to become a prisoner to any one method but to adopt variety.

THE USE OF HEADINGS

Let me speak to you next about headings. First of all, the phrasing of the headings should be both grammatical and expressive. Each heading should make sense, though it need not be a full sentence, and can often be no more than a pregnant phrase. The headings should be brief, weighty expressions, which both suggest truth and recall the talk afterwards. It is exceedingly helpful to the mind of the hearer that the headings should conform in grammatical style; that is, they should be either all propositions, or all phrases, or all questions. Perhaps this can be made clear by means of an illustration. Let us suppose the theme of the talk is 'All in Christ'. Compare the helpfulness and effect of the following two groups of headings:

Example 1

- (a) The sinner is justified in Christ.
- (b) Does not Christ also give sanctification?
- (c) Christ is the believer's ultimate glorification.

Example 2

- (a) Justified in Christ.
- (b) Sanctified in Christ.
- (c) Glorified in Christ.

DIRECTION FROM THE THEME

The importance of giving direction to a talk is greater than some people are inclined to allow. I want, therefore, to urge you to a clear definition to yourself of the *theme* on which you are speaking. Recently I had a letter from a friend of mine asking me to speak at a conference on a certain subject. The words in which he put this to me were vague, and so I wrote asking for a little elucidation. My friend was honest enough to reply to my question as to what exactly he wanted me to talk about, by saying, 'I don't know either'. That did not matter very much in our correspondence, and we were able to sort things out together, but it matters very much indeed that when you or I begin some talk we should know the point that we propose to make. The value of a clearly defined subject or theme will be that it will keep the talk in shape. It will be the arbiter of what is to be included and what is to be cut out. The essential quality of a theme is that it should be clear. A politician is reputed to have remarked, after a speech in an electioneering campaign, 'that he had succeeded in making himself sufficiently obscure that no one would be able to quote his pledges against him if he failed to fulfil them in the house.' Martin Luther is reported to have said, 'A preacher ought so to preach, that when the sermon is ended the congregation shall disperse saying, "The preacher said this".' The test of sound construction is that the conclusion and the theme shall be seen to correspond precisely. If there is not this exactness of correspondence then it means you have lost your way in the preparation of your talk. Before you are satisfied, therefore, that your preparation is adequate, make sure that having indicated in your theme

where you were going you really have travelled the course and reached the destination intended.

STANDING BEFORE THE LISTENERS

Perhaps now we may leave questions of the construction of the address, because I want more particularly to share with you some important considerations which have to do not so much with the preparation for speaking as with the act itself. Someone has prudently asked, 'Why trouble to load your gun if you cannot shoot straight?' The things — many of them very common-place — about which we are now going to think have to do with the 'shooting'. Let me give you a portion of a letter written by the late Dr. Alexander Whyte to one of his assistants who was about to be ordained. He writes, 'Beseech for a special blessing on your first sermon in that pulpit. And throw all you are into it: into the *delivery* of it. I am not afraid for its matter or its language — but I am not without some fear as to its delivery. . . . Do not despise delivery, falling back upon matter. The matter is dead without delivery. Delivery! Delivery! Delivery! said Demosthenes to the aspirant. You able fellows are tempted to despise delivery as being "popular". I implore you to rise above that delusion, and to do your very best by your message by delivering it in your best possible.'

THE SPEAKER'S APPEARANCE

I think the public speaker ought to be careful about his appearance. Not many of us are responsible for our looks, but we can at least be neat. There is no excuse for the slovenly appearance of some speakers. The poorest man may be tidy. Keep the jacket buttoned together. Let there be no rows of fountain pens or silver-topped pencils lined up on parade on the outside breast pocket. The less signs of jewellery there are the better. If you wear glasses, see that these are firmly in position, not constantly needing to be replaced on the top of your nose. If you are a frequent speaker in public, may I ask you also to see to it that your teeth receive attention. Black, broken or missing teeth are very unpleasant to those who have to look at you while you speak.

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR BODY

It matters very much how we stand when we are speaking. All oddities and eccentricities should be eliminated, while at the same time a man must be his own self. The body should be upright, the chest out, shoulders back and head erect. There should be no stooping over notes and muttering into the pages. Avoid all lolling and leaning — unless the occasion be an extremely informal one in which sitting on the corner of the table is the appropriate attitude. I wonder what you do with your eyes when you are speaking at a meeting. Speakers sometimes seek their inspiration by peering up into the roof of the church or gazing at the ceiling. Do not be afraid to look your hearers in the eye. If you are afraid to do this, go back and prepare your talk again so that you are confident that it meets the need of the hearts of those to whom you are speaking. Do not, of course, 'fix' a person with your eye, as this is embarrassing and discourteous, but at the same time do look your hearers in the face that they may know that it is truly to them you are speaking. The fear of not looking at an audience is one to be overcome in the very first days of public speaking. May I say, however, that so far from there being anything in their faces to be afraid of there is often very much inspiration to be gained from them.

Have you found your hands a worry to you, wondering what to do with

them? You are not alone in this. Beware of a kind of penguin flap of the hands. Some delight in finger-tip touching; while the man is still to be found whom Spurgeon describes as 'washing his hands with invisible soap in imperceptible water'. Avoid fidgeting with your hands. A friend of mine had the habit of continually buttoning and unbuttoning his coat, until one day in the midst of speaking he found himself standing with the button loose in his hand.

Gesture comes in for consideration at this point. Gestures must suit the thoughts. They have been defined by Dr. Black as 'emotion in action'. Beware of contradictory gestures, in which you discover yourself proclaiming the love of God with clenched fists. Watch also lest your enthusiasm betray you into ludicrous gestures.

MANAGEMENT OF THE VOICE

I suppose I ought not to omit some discussion of the use of our voices. Avoid all artificial mouthings of words or lisping and dronings. These do not help the hearer. Let there be no 'holy tone' for devotional talks. Conversely, do not roar and shout. Lax of Poplar tells of a costermonger's wife who reported to him that her husband was at home with a sore throat. While telling him this she was suddenly struck with a bright thought, and said to Mr. Lax, 'Of course you and my 'usband's much the same, you both gets yer livin' by 'ollerin'.' I think I can recall certain preachers of whom that remark would be undoubtedly true. Do not preach as if you are anxious to split the roof. Of all the important cautions that have to be said on the use of the voice none is more important than the urgent plea that you will *never drop your voice*. By a curious perversity, on the very word or phrase which we wish to emphasize some of us drop our voices so low that nobody is able to hear the word that we wish to stress. Nervous coughs and throat clearings should be suppressed at once, and you can do so if you have the will. There is no need to drink water during the course of a talk. Then there-ah is-ah always-ah the-ah person-ah who-ah likes-ah to talk-ah like-ah this-ah. All rhetorical stutterings of the B.B.C. kind should be shunned.

NOTES OR NO NOTES

Let me give a final word on the use of notes. Some have the gift of speaking without the aid of notes at all. This is good if a man is able to keep on a straight line and not repeat himself and turn in circles. Some have tried the method of recitation, but this is stereotyped and artificial. Others read their talks in full; but the paper can be a great barrier between the speaker and the hearer. The only advantage that I can see in the talk that is read from a manuscript is that when the speaker comes to an end he stops. The best method of all is extempore speaking with the aid of notes, and I beg of you to do this whatever the personal cost and embarrassment of the early stages may be. Remember, however, that extemporaneous speaking is not the same thing as extemporaneous thinking. The thought must be prepared, but the words must be free: they must be fluid to the situation of the moment.

In all these things our prayer will ever be,

'Lord, speak to me, that I may speak
In living echoes of *Thy* tone'.

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'WRITE - AND MAKE PLAIN'

By RONALD INCHLEY

APART from Church services, how many meetings have you attended over the past year? Too many to count, no doubt. But what do you remember of them? Are not the majority just a vague, general impression of 'a good word', or a painful memory of a wasted evening? On the other hand how many books have you read? Probably not as many as you would have liked because of this tendency to rush off and hear 'old so-and-so'. But if the book has been a good one (and all of us can carefully choose our reading), how rewarding the experience will have been! And when we want to refresh our memory on a particular argument, or to warm our hearts a second time at the fire of the author's own devotion, the book is there, waiting patiently on its shelf, ever ready to renew its ministry.

To read Christian biography is to be struck by the important part played by literature in the lives of the Church's outstanding leaders. Other influences were undoubtedly at work. But so often at a critical juncture, or during a formative period, it was the message of a book which was decisive. It was to books that Charles Simeon turned when, as a freshman at Cambridge, he discovered that he must take Holy Communion and felt the need to prepare himself for it. First he read *The Whole Duty of Man*; then he procured a book by Bishop Wilson on the Lord's Supper. Reading this led directly to his conversion. George Whitefield, when he needed spiritual help at Oxford, obtained it from such books as Law's *Serious Call*, Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*, and Matthew Henry's *Commentary*. Wilberforce, the great social reformer, first began to think seriously about his spiritual needs after reading Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, a book which he had picked up by chance. His own book, *Practical Christianity*, was similarly used to bring many others into the full blessing of the gospel. Thomas Chalmers, for example, one of Scotland's greatest preachers, had his whole outlook revolutionized by this book with its emphasis on the need for a personal experience of Jesus Christ.

THE NEW WRITER'S OPPORTUNITY

But if books and articles are to be read they have to be *written*; and it is with this aspect of the matter that this article is chiefly concerned. There is today a great need for writers, both men and women, who will speak to their own generation in language which can be understood and in thought forms which are relevant to the situation in which we find ourselves. Unfortunately, as many examiners know, not all those who have had a university or college education are able to express themselves clearly and forcibly in