

Postscript

A. Criteria for Evaluating the Sermon

1. Faithfulness to the Scripture.

A non-textual sermon can still be faithful to the Scripture by being based upon the central message of the Bible as a whole. Luther very often preached without a text at all, but nevertheless scripturally.

2. Faithfulness to the text.

How does the sermon relate to the pastor's exegetical research? Do the individual parts of the text stand in proper relationship to each other? Has anything important been overlooked? Is the central meaning of the text apparent?

3. Faithfulness to the Confession.

Was it preached with an interpretation that is in accord with the teachings of the church, or not? That is, was the Scripture read according to the *sola fide*? Was the sermon in order doctrinally?

4. Faithfulness to the congregation.

This is the distinctive homiletical test. Questions should be asked concerning:

(a) Simplicity in speech and presentation. Has the imagery of the text been fully utilized; has too much been said in one sentence, too much sentence-packing and too many dependent clauses; or are too many literary and rhetorical intrusions employed?

(b) Transparency in construction. Even a homily needs the support of paragraphs—it is no mosaic. Did the interpretation of the text stay on the main track—going off on tangents may be

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appropriate for exegetical research, but not for the sermon; how well does it lend itself to being remembered and repeated?

(c) Is the direction (it might even be called the attack) of the sermon obvious, i.e., what it seeks to accomplish; where has the fight with the devil been enjoined; did everything get bogged down in a mere textual paraphrase?

5. Faithfulness to the commission (objectivity).

Has the Scripture and the church been used as an excuse to present one's own ideas? Did the religious virtuoso speak, or the one who is dedicated to the cause of Christ?

6. Genuineness (subjectivity).

This criterion is difficult to apply to the sermons of others! The preacher must ask himself, "Do I believe what I say? Or am I just making official sounds?"

7. The relationship between the new and the old.

Has the old been said in a new way? Does it cause someone to want to look again into the text? Does the sermon include the two characteristics of interpretation and witness in proper relationship to one another?

8. The relationship between the Law and the Gospel.

Has all that has been said finally degenerated into nothing more than legalism? Has the Gospel been presented so that God's liberating claim to men is audible?

B. Sources of Error

1. Do not pass judgment upon various texts such as "nice," "deep," "true," "correct," etc. We are not judges of the Scripture. We should let ourselves be judged by it!

2. Do not overemphasize the contemporary significance of the Scripture. Its present significance is presupposed. Therefore do not separate the application and explanation of the text, they belong together. Avoid saying, "This speaks exactly to you and me."

3. Do not defend the Word of God, testify to it. You are a preacher, not an apologist.

4. Do not get stuck in the summary paraphrase of the text.

Clyde E. Fant, a Southern Baptist, has made this good stuff available, for the first time in English, in his BONHOEFFER: WORLDLY PREACHING [Nelson/75]. Since NYTS does a lot of sermon-preaching evaluating, I've reproduced here DB's criteria. [The book is in our Library.]