APHORISMS ON PREACHING

- "What keeps a man from being a pulpit orator is being a pastor" (Martin Franzmann).
- "Theology is necessary to make preaching as difficult as it has to be" (Gerhard Ebeling).
- "The preacher's job is not to apologize for the text but to preach it" (Elizabeth Achtemeier).
- "An evangelical church which looks upon the doctrine of justification by faith as a self-evident banality one no longer needs to dwell upon because other problems are more pressing has robbed itself of the possibility of arriving at solutions to such problems. It will only tear itself further apart. If the article of justification is removed from the center we will very soon no longer know why we are and must remain evangelical Christians. Then we will strive for the unity of the church and sacrifice the purity of the gospel; we will expect more from church order and government, from the reform of ecclesiastical office and church discipline, than these can deliver. One will flatter piety and despise doctrine; one will run the risk of becoming tolerant where one should be radical and radical where one should be tolerant - in short, the standards will be skewed and therewith also what is necessary and right in all reforms for which we struggle today will no longer be comprehensible" (Hans Joachim Iwand).
- "To be called and ordained to the public office is to be called through the church to give public voice to the Word of God. It is not the office holder as such who transcends the congregation by elevation to a higher order, but the Word of God. The only ultimate defense against anticlericalism is the proper preaching of this Word so that the gospel is heard" (Gerhard Forde).
- "If the sermon is prepared too soon it perishes like manna in the wilderness" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).
- "As a witness to Christ, every sermon is a struggle with demons. Every sermon must overcome Satan. Every sermon fights a battle. But this does not occur through the dramatic efforts of the preacher. It happens only through the proclamation of the One who has trodden upon the head of the devil. We usually do not recognize Satan anyway. We do not find him; Christ finds him. The devil departs from him. Satan waits nowhere for his prey as where the congregation gathers itself. Nothing is more important for him than to hinder Christ's coming to the congregation. Therefore Christ must be preached" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).
- "If you are a coward by nature, don't worry. You don't have to be courageous to be a preacher. All you have to do is to get down behind the text" (William Willimon).
• "A preacher's exegesis ought to be like his underwear. He should always have it on but never let it show" (Helmut Thielicke)

• “Homiletics began with the most difficult lesson of all – one’s own listening to sermons” (Eberhard Bethge).

• "… we serve a church the glory of whose history is the fact that its course has always been a firm, determined confessional march; a church that never has had much taste for the mincing minuets of concession and compromise. Those mincing minuets are marvelous things to watch; they look so hard and yet they are so easy. But the hard thing is to march: to be good, not clever; to be faithful, not brilliant; to be honest, not urbane; to be the rough wool blanket that keeps the faithful warm, not the flapping scarf of changeable silk that men admire. No one has promised us that confessing the truth will make us happy, but we shall be blessed - of this we may be sure" (Martin Franzmann).

• "One of the challenges of preaching, for those of us who are called (in Augustine's words) to be 'peddlers' of words,' is to be attentive to words, to be curious about those who make their living through words - such as novelists, comedians, and dramatists - to value those who have the gift of saying things well. Wordsmiths, we are. If preachers are to be good talkers, we must first be good listeners and voracious readers" (William Willimon).

• "When Law and Gospel are improperly distinguished both are undermined. Separated from the Law, the Gospel gets absorbed into an ideology of tolerance in which indiscriminateness is equated with grace. Separated from the Gospel, the Law becomes an insatiable demand hammering away at the conscience until it destroys a person. When Law and Gospel are properly distinguished, however, both are established. The Law can be set forth in full-scale demand, so that it lights the way to order and through the work of the Spirit drives us to Christ. The Gospel can be declared in all of its purity, so that forgiveness of sins and deliverance from the powers of death and the devil are bestowed in the presence of our crucified and risen Lord" (James Nestingen).

• "The churchly preacher always may be known by his manliness and maturity" (Wilhelm Loehe).

• "One thing you must preach: the wisdom of the cross" (Luther)

• "The power does not come from us; rather it lies within the gospel itself. We are but those who deliver it. We are heralds. That is the sacredness of our call" (Anders Nygren, 414).

• "Just as it was in the first century, so it is today: faith comes through preaching. But this preaching must then be done in the power of the Word of Christ. A man may be ever so brilliant and eloquent, moving and wise, but it does not become preaching
until he himself is taken captive by God's Word and has no other desire except to let the Word speak" (Bo Giertz).

• "Among the means which the church uses to save souls, preaching stands first. It is the means by which those are called who stand afar off, and those who have been called are rendered steadfast in their calling and election. In preaching, the church does not aim to support the holy Word by human art, but the chief matter is not to hinder its power and operation and not to impose upon the Word any power of operation which does not befit it...In great confidence in the divine Word he therefore despises every sort of machinery. He has a method, the method of simplicity. He does not seek to win friends for the Lord Jesus Christ by means of human eloquence, nor by exciting the feelings, nor by a meretricious excitement of the nerves....His insistence and compulsion are not the insistence and compulsion of human impatience, but a patient waiting on the Word. He gladly waits, knowing that precious fruits do not grow in a night. And he waits upon all his sheep, for he knows that the Lord has his own hour, his own haste, but also his own delays" (Wilhelm Loehe).

• "The chief thing in the service of worship is not your opinion, as you might be inclined to present it in your sermon; the chief thing is and remains the text. Guilt is not absolved and the dying are not raised up by your believing and opining; here it must be: Thus it is written; this is what the messenger of Jesus of Jesus is saying to you. For the ministry, therefore, the first and most important duty is to keep open the lines of communication and community with the apostles, in order that we may use their message at the right time and in the right way. To use it we must know it and to know it we must remain in communication with them" (Adolf Schlatter).

• "We should preach the Word, but the results must be left solely to God's good pleasure....In short, I will preach it, teach it, write it, but I will constrain no man by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion. Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept (cf. Mark 4:26-29), or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it" (Luther).

• “The Lutheran assertion that...preaching, in so far as it is Biblical preaching, is God’s own speech to me, is very difficult to maintain in practice. Instead it is very easy to slip into the idea that preaching is only speech about God. Such a slip, once made, gradually alters the picture of God, so that he becomes the far-off deistic God who is remote from the preached word and is only spoken about as we speak about someone who is absent” (Gustaf Wingren).

• “A proper sermon should be like holding out to a child a shining red apple or to a thirsty man a glass of fresh water and asking: Wouldn’t you like it? In this way we
should be able to speak about the things of faith so that hands were stretching out faster than we could fill them” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).

- Preaching that confirms this self-understanding of ‘I make my own choices’ is already outside the limits of the proper decisive and asserting preaching that Luther described at the beginning of *The Bondage of the Will*. Either preachers fulfill their task of speaking decisively or they assume that the will is really as free to decide for itself as it sometimes seems to be” (Friedrich Mildenberger).

- “It is the burden of the argument in the *Bondage of the Will* that words about bondage intend to dominate and take control of the relationship. They inevitably take the shape of a defense mechanism against God. Scripture is treated as though it were material suitable for making a theory about the proper relationship between God and humans. This theory is then thought to be put into practice when human beings accept it and try to live according to it. But this is a false theology in Luther’s view, a theology of glory. Humans remain in control according to such a theory. Scripture becomes our tool by which we bring God to heel. The theory is used to make God our debtor. But then we are caught in the trap of our own making. It is as Isaac Singer was once heard to say, ‘We must believe in free will, we have no choice!’ The drive toward freedom of choice ends in bondage. It is not the task of theology to construct a theory of God that is supposed to win us over by attractiveness. It is the business of theology to foster preaching of the Word of God” (Gerhard Forde).

- “We are not to preach only one of these words of God, but both; we are to bring forth out of our treasure things new and old, the voice of the law as well as the word of grace. We must bring forth the voice of the law that men may be made to fear and come to a knowledge of their sins and so be converted to repentance and a better life. But we must not stop with that, for that would only amount to wounding and not binding up, smiting and not healing, killing and not bringing back again, humbling and not exalting. Therefore we must also preach the word of grace and the promise of forgiveness by which faith is taught and aroused. Without this word of grace the works of the law, contrition, penitence, and all the rest are done and taught in vain” (Luther, AE 31:364).

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 III.30.2006