



From Sermon Formation to Preacher Formation: Requires a Room Free of Power

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Empirical research highlight the request for the pastor's authenticity

- Churchgoers appreciate authentic and committed preachers who stand behind their words, because they do not absorb what the preacher says in a one-to-one intellectual way,
- rather, they *create meaning*, and the sermon becomes an 'incarnation' of meaning in which both preacher and congregation are stakeholders.
- *Authenticity* and fidelity to one's faith are key concepts in ministry and in preaching.
- Pastors experience their lives and spirituality as closely interwoven with their ministry.
- Ministry is less an office and more a personal vocation and a part of the pastor's identity.
- Ministry is less about exercising the authority of an office and more about embodying authenticity,
- thus, the preacher's person cannot be separated from preaching and ministry; and professional development cannot be separated from personal and spiritual growth.

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What do these empirical results mean for pastoral and homiletical training?

- Can spiritual growth be a part of the homiletical training, and can authenticity be learned?
- I argue, yes – but it requires a class-room free of power (or at least, power is reduced as much as possible),
- and traditional homiletic teaching needs to add a further level which *moves from sermon formation towards preacher formation*.
- It This can be done by means of a *learner-centered approach to teaching*.
- in the *learner-centered approach to teaching* the student's personality, integrity and faith are recognized and respected.
- The basic idea is that the *maieutic approach* has the power to change and facilitate growth from inside and only the preachers themselves know how to improve.
- With the *appreciative learner-centered approach* to teaching, the students are free from the judgmental and evaluative eyes of both the teacher and their fellow-students.

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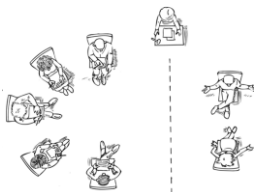
What is the learner-centered education?

- It is a redefinition of *teaching as the facilitation of student learning* (John Dewey)
- In the traditional *teacher-centered classroom*, the aim for the teachers is to transfer their knowledge to the students, whereas the focus in *learner-centered classrooms* is on the student's motivation and ability to obtain knowledge and put it into practice.
- Redefinition of education objectives in terms of *learning outcomes* rather than of *teaching inputs*
- Focus in the learner-centered approach is on the person who is learning, not the teacher who is teaching
- The teacher's goal is not to provide answers for the students; rather is it that the students ask questions and struggle to find the answers themselves
- Learning takes place in the tension field between *cognition* (academic knowledge), *psychodynamics* (personal engagement), and *relationship* (in the interaction among participants) in the *situation*. (Knud Illeris)
- The teacher is less an academic lecturer and more a *leader or a guide* who facilitates a room of learning in which the student works in the tension field between *theory and homiletic theory* (cognition), *personal faith and commitment* (psychodynamics), and the *interaction in a peer group of colleagues/students* (relationship), *practicing preaching* in the classroom (an apprenticeship situation)

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An example is the Reflecting Team:



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The Reflecting Team applied to homiletic training

- Change or transformation *cannot be applied from the outside*, a teacher telling students what is wrong with their sermons. This will easily be perceived as a threat activating the instinct of self-preservation, and in consequence one's theology, faith, personality, and one's ability to learn is reduced.
- Rather personal and professional improvement arise from the inside.
- Is based on an anthropology seeing human beings as possessing the motivation and the necessary resources to grow in relation to their surroundings by means of communication.
- The intention and willingness to improve is already *within* the student/preacher.
- The purpose of the method is to provide a room of reflection and inspiration for each participant.
- The basic rules of **no analyzing, no evaluation, no judging, no fixing, no saving, no advising**, and not setting anyone straight give the student the opportunity to reflect on deep personal and theological issues in their preaching practice without the feeling of being under pressure.

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How the learner-centered approach is experienced:

- "I experience the teaching method as a major freedom, because (deep sigh)... at least that is my experience from the Pastoral Institute, where everything you said was analyzed and evaluated and put into theological frames, and often there was a correct answer as to whether the sermon was good or bad, right or wrong... plus the fact that you do not have to deal with this kind of question here, that's really nice. The only thing I as a preacher have to concentrate on is what does my sermon do to others—not on whether I have done it right or wrong from one or another premise. So it is a great relief."
- "It has been so rewarding, because the others do not project themselves into my sermon. They only had to talk about how they have experienced my sermon—that is why I dare to preach for them!"
- "The method is also an exercise in being more tolerant towards other people, because you work from the principle of not evaluating and rating what others provide; and this is useful (not only in the preaching class, but) in ALL contexts of ministry; and indeed in the pastoral care situation—which actually is at stake here in the preaching class and towards each other. This is a very healthy exercise."

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But if students are not offered faultfinding feedback, how should they otherwise develop professionally?

- "The teaching is very gentle but also very challenging. It is harder, since you have to put yourself at risk and reveal yourself."
- "I develop theological self-confidence by learning to put myself at risk and by taking as a starting-point what I'm touched by in the text."
- "(Sermon preparation) has become more existentially demanding. For one thing is to write a theological lecture, I can very easily do that—I've written lots of essays during my study of theology, both long and short, that's no problem. But having to talk about what I believe and about what I think and about what I'm unsure and insecure about, and about what provokes me and things like that, that is to be exposed. And to expose myself is simply harder, and therefore more demanding."
- "I have never experienced a teaching situation so existentially demanding and personally transformative, so I'm often so exhausted after the preaching class, as I have to digest and process the outcome of the training."
- "For me, sermon preparation has become more and more like a spiritual digging, where I read the text for next Sunday, and then I think what in this text provokes me, or what does it tell me, or what in it grips me. And then I wonder all week long—when I have time, 5 minutes here and there—what in this text is challenging and why does it provoke me and what I can say about it? In this way I learn something about my own theology, and myself. Then on Saturday night I write it down and on Sunday morning I preach the sermon. So it is not sermon preparation, it has become a spiritual excavation, about which I happen to preach."

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The congregation's benefit of learning-centered education

- The congregation of course have also noticed the change, and they say: "Something has happened. You preach in a different way", and then they like it.
- They say that they can feel I'm more present in the church, because they think that I have a greater confidence in what I'm doing, even though I'm nervous before I'm going to preach.
- "More people comment positively on the sermon."
- "More non-regular churchgoers—such as guests at a child's baptism—comment positively on the sermon."

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Thank you for your attention

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