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Editorials

Commitment To The Lutheran Confession

PETER BRUNNER

Reflections On A European Trip

DAVID P. SCAER

A Place For Humility In The Search For Unity

RICHARD J. SCHULTZ

Give Attention To Reading

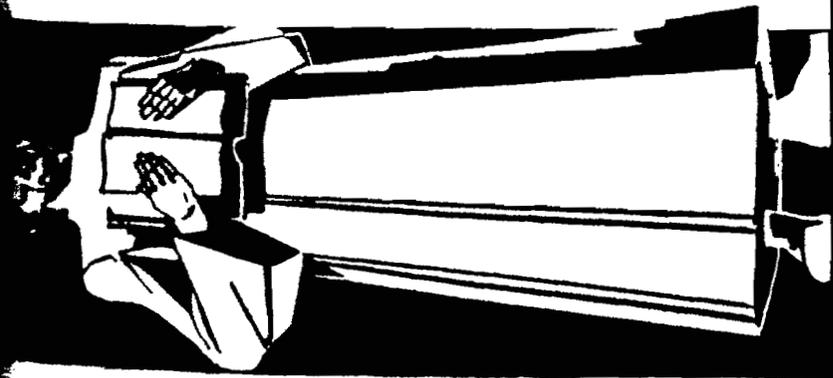
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Theological Refractions

Book Reviews

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Give Attention to Reading

HENRY J. EGGOLD, JR.

IN HIS LATE YEARS Charles Laughton captured audiences with his reading. On the evening of his performance people jammed the hall. At curtain time he strolled onto the stage with a stack of books, seated himself on a high stool, and just read. The audience hung on his words, enthralled.

Charles Laughton knew how to read. He followed the rules of oral interpretation faultlessly.

Behind every skill are rules which the master of his craft follows. Oral interpretation also has rules. The rules are surprisingly few, and reading according to the rules can improve any man's oral interpretation.

This article hopes to help you improve your reading of the Scriptures. Lionel Crocker once said that a person can ignore the rules for oral interpretation only if he is naturally good. But few people are. Most of us have to know what the rules are; we must master them and then spend the rest of our lives practicing.

The first thing a reader ought to do is to understand the passage. For example, Psalm 90 has a somber mood because it was written in the wilderness when God's people were both digging fresh graves and covering old ones, day after day. It is always very helpful to know the context of a given selection.

Then, too, a person must convey the emotions behind the words of a speaker in a given passage. Our voice has to tell not only what the person said, but must also reveal his emotional state as he said it. If you think that I am saying that you must play as many roles as there are speakers, you are correct.

Having mastered the mood or moods of a selection, the oral interpreter has to read the passage so that it sounds like *ad libbing*. To do that a person must know the rules for emphasis and for pausing. Isn't it remarkable that in ordinary conversation we generally follow the rules, but when we read we often do not? The following are rules for emphasis and for pausing.

I. Some rules for emphasis

1. Generally, stress is indicated by increasing the volume and raising one's pitch. When you wish to give emphasis to a whole passage, change your tempo. If the action is exciting, increase your rate. To indicate pathos or deep feeling, speak more slowly, and at times, more quietly.

2. Stress the word or words which carry the thought. Don't try to stress too many words; avoid the kind of patterned stress of the local newscaster; avoid the habit of stressing all verbs.

3. Emphasize the new idea or the contrast but subdue an old idea. Try this rule on Proverbs 4:7: "Wisdom is the principal thing:

therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding." Did you emphasize *wisdom, principal, get, and understanding*? Good! Few people read this passage correctly the first time:

Revelation 10:9-10: And I went unto the angel and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said to me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.

Did you read it like this: ". . . and it *was* in my mouth sweet as honey; and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly *was* bitter"?

4. Stress contrasting words, but stress the second word in the contrast more heavily than the first. Example: Matthew 23:8: "Be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." Did you stress *ye, Rabbi, one, Christ, brethren*? (You didn't stress *master*; it's an old idea. Or did you?)

5. Sometimes you emphasize adjectives rather than nouns. Example: Psalm 37:23: ". . . the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." Of course, you emphasize *good*, because otherwise your hearers might wonder who orders the steps of good women! Almost always it is the adjective modifying the word *thing* which carries the weight. Example: Matthew 17:11: "Elias truly shall come first and restore *all* things."

6. Many readers accent prepositions incorrectly. This is the rule: If a preposition is followed by a pronoun, accent the word before the preposition. Try this sentence: "But Thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us." *Mercy* is accented because it is the word before the preposition which is followed by a pronoun.

There are some obvious exceptions to this rule: a. when there is a contrast of two pronouns following the preposition (I'll wait for you and for them.); b. when the word before the preposition is a pronoun (Take it with you.).

II. Phrasing

Phrasing is important because it gives the reader an opportunity to glance ahead, and gives the audience a chance to grasp the meaning of what has just been said. Natural places for pausing are after a passage containing a unified idea, after the speech of one person and before that of another, or when there is a change of mood.

1. Do not pause for very comma. You look at the punctuation for the meaning, then you look at the meaning for your phrasing. Example: "Come here, Joe, . . ." In ordinary conversation you pause after *Joe*, but not before it. Always pause after a vocative.

2. Almost never pause before a restrictive modifier. Example: Proverbs 15:9: ". . . he loveth him that followeth after righteousness." But almost always pause before and after a restrictive modifier. Example: "My mother, who lives in Spokane, is very old." If you

paused only after *Spokane*, you would create the impression that somehow you had another mother some place!

3. If two things are grammatically connected with a third, pause after the first and second, or after the second, but never only after the first. Example:

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of Thy holy Word we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, . . .

The rule says that you are to pause after *embrace* and after *fast*, or you may pause only after *fast*. But you are not to pause only after *embrace*. Try to read the passage in these three ways, and you will see the wisdom of the rule.

Incidentally, this collect has a list: ". . . hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them. . . ." Lists ought always to be read at the same pitch level and with the same force.

4. When reading a sentence containing a connecting word, especially a relative pronoun, followed by a parenthetical expression, subdue the connecting word and do not pause after it. Example: Romans 5:8: "But God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The rule says that you are to pause after *us* and after *sinners*, but not after *that*.

5. When there is a long clause before the connecting word, it is usually best to pause after the clause and before the connecting word. (Some of the connecting words are: *that*, *if*, *then*, *while*, *who*, *which*, *because*, *as*, *since*, *for*, *although*, *lest*, *inasmuch as*). Example: Mark 14:35: "And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. The rule says that you should pause after the word *prayed*, not after the word *that*.

6. At times, by effective pausing a person can extract two ideas out of a sentence instead of only one. Example: Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image." Note how effective a pause is after the word *man*.

7. In certain sentences it is important to see whether an adverb modifies what precedes it or what follows it. Example: Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit." The problem here is whether to read the word *not* with *walk* or with *after the flesh*. It is obvious that *not* ought to be read with *after the flesh*.

8. When two ideas are in conjunction, read the whole first idea and pause at the end of it before reading the second. Example: Ecclesiastes 8:12: "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, that fear before him." Here it is correct to pause after *prolonged*, but not after *times*.

These are the few, simple rules that can improve your oral interpretation of the Scriptures. After you have learned the rules, practice reading the Scriptures aloud. In this exercise a tape recorder is your best ally. Some men tape their Sunday services. Doing that will enable you to hear yourself as others hear you.

If a person gives attention to reading, he may not become a Charles Laughton, but if he becomes better tomorrow than he is today, his labor will not be in vain.

Try this simple test before you look at the answers below.

In each of the following passages, underline the word or words which receive the principal accent.

1. Isaiah 35,9: No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there.

2. Prov. 12,19: The lip of truth shall be established forever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.

3. Romans 5,19: For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

4. Eph. 4,6: One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

5. John 11:24-25: Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

In each of the following passages indicate by a diagonal line (/) when you will pause.

1. James 5,1: Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

2. John 8,42: Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.

3. Psalms 11,4: The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.

4. Romans 5,8: But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

5. John 20,26: And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

Answers to the simple test:

1. Isaiah 35,9: No lion shall be there, nor *any* ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the *redeemed* shall walk there.

2. Prov. 12,19: The lip of *truth* shall be established *forever*: but a *lying* tongue is but for a *moment*.

3. Romans 5,19: For as by one man's *disobedience* many were made *sinners*, so by the *obedience* of one shall many be made *righteous*.

4. Eph. 4,6: One *God* and *Father* of all, who is *above* all, and *through* all, and *in* you all.

5. John 11:24-25: Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the *resurrection* at the *last day*. Jesus said unto her, I am the *resurrection*, and the *life*: he that *believeth* in me, though he were *dead*, yet shall he *live*.

1. James 5,1: Go to now, ye rich men,/weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

2. John 8,42: Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father,/ye would love me:/for I proceeded forth and came/from God: neither came I of myself,/but he sent me.

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5. John 20,26: And after eight days/again his disciples were within,/and Thomas with them:/then came Jesus,/the doors being shut,/and stood in the midst,/and said, Peace be unto you.

Suggested Reading:

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