

## Is Preaching an *Art*?

by

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I can already hear the protests: *Preaching? An art? Why, drawing attention to the “art” of preaching will only further expand a preacher’s sense of self-importance when many-a-preacher already suffers an inordinate love of the sound of his own voice!*

Notice how quickly a conversation about preaching can shift from the message to the preacher. This *almost* automatic shift from the art to the artist is more apt to occur in the field of preaching due, perhaps, to the listener’s *almost* automatic identification of the speaker with the message being spoken. This is nothing new. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle himself was hard-pressed not to assign more influence to a speaker’s *ethos* (character) as opposed to *logos* (rational argument) of the message.

In a post on the Words-Made-Flesh blog of *Image Journal*, Scott Cairns states that artistic creation is, in itself, a means of revelation.

*Students hailing from the most prestigious universities in our nation—appear these days to be manifestly unskilled in shaping English sentences. They regularly misuse words, they love to yammer abstractly, and often they fail to recognize when they have not quite produced a sentence at all. They don’t appear to give much attention to linguistic detail. These are the English majors, mind you. How has this come to be?*

*It could be that the latter-day fixation on expression—subcultural, ethnic, political, individual—has led them to privilege what is intended over how it is articulated. They give little attention to how the utterance is shaped on the page, and miss out on learning how good writing always says more than we mean to say. . . . (T)hey fail to find how the act of writing—poring over words, phrases, and sentences as they are pressed to the page—is itself the means of the artist’s discovering new matter to share.*

Cairns concludes that this rule holds for all the arts: writers must love language, painters must love pigment, sculptors must love iron and stone, and musicians must delight in song. Only in this way does each form of art function as an agent of revelation.

If this is accurate, it means that when a preacher pays little heed to crafting the homily, i.e. the organization, unity, harmony, appeal, movement, energy, etc., the preacher is, in fact, ignoring a movement of God's Spirit.