

The Best Method of Preaching

The Best Method of Preaching
The Use of Theoretical-Practical Theology

Petrus van Mastricht

Translated and Introduced by
Todd M. Rester



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The Best Method of Preaching

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INTRODUCTION

Petrus van Mastricht

The best Christian pastors have always been concerned with true faith, doctrine, and piety. One such pastor and theologian, Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706), was appreciated among Dutch Reformed theologians and New England Puritans in the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century for his emphasis on doctrine and life. The New England pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) is often cited for his high praise of Mastricht in a 1746 letter to Joseph Bellamy: “But take Mastricht for divinity in General, doctrine Practice & Controversie; or as an universal system of divinity; & it is much better than Turretine or any other Book in the world, excepting the Bible, in my opinion.”¹ Edwards, I believe, is not simply endorsing the content of Mastricht’s theological *magnum opus*, but also Mastricht’s method of theology—a method Mastricht claims drives biblical preaching as well. If, as Mastricht asserts, the

1. Stanley T. Williams, ed., “Six Letters of Jonathan Edwards to Joseph Bellamy,” *New England Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (April 1928): 230.

essence of theology is practical, and “the practice of piety is the soul of a sermon,” then it should not be surprising that, in Mastricht’s view, theology must be applied to God’s people through practical preaching.²

It is a basic assumption of the Holy Scriptures that the Christian church advances through the faithful proclamation, reception, and practice of the Word of God. Just as Moses commanded the children of God in the Old Testament to love the Lord their God with all their hearts, with all their souls, and with all their might (Deut. 6:5), so also Christ reinforces this command in the New Testament (Matt. 22:37). Love of God and love of neighbor with every facet of our beings in total submission to and reliance on God are fundamental to the Christian life. For the express purpose of loving the Lord, Moses continues, saying: “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:6–7). The apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, also declares that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

2. Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica Theologia, qua, per Singula Capita Theologica, Pars Exegetica, Dogmatica, Elenctica et Practica, Perpetuâ Successione Conjugantur: Accedunt Historia Ecclesiastica, Plena Quidem; Sed Compendiosa* (Trajecti ad Rhenum, 1699), 1225.

The Scriptures demand that the Christian receive the Word of God as the rule and pattern for his life. The Word of God must transform the person and inform the life. Theory must be united to practice. If faith without works is dead (James 2:14–26), then the Christian’s grasp of truth is no stronger than its practice in love. Practice must flow from theory. The richness of Christian experience is no deeper than one’s knowledge of God and his will (Col. 1:9–10). The Christian life on this earth is the pursuit of thinking God’s thoughts after him, of taking up one’s cross and following Christ, of cultivating the mind that was also in Christ Jesus, of holding to the pattern of sound words, and of being God’s witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth. With respect to divine initiative and sovereignty, what Christian would deny that all of this proceeds by the good pleasure of the Father, in the person and work of the Son, and through the effectual work and presence of the Holy Spirit? With respect to divinely appointed human instrumentality, then, the role of the pastor in the public preaching of the Scriptures is crucial and vital for the regular growth of God’s people in faith, hope, and love.

In light of these things, a perennial question for the training of pastors in the communication of divine truth for the edification of the church is, “How should preaching be done?” Or, as the title of Mastricht’s brief treatise suggests, “What is the best method of preaching?” Mastricht is not interested in preaching for the sake of eloquence, but that his congregants might practice the truth. This reason alone, that this work centers upon the art and craft

of practical preaching, should be sufficient to commend its study and critical reception. Nevertheless, as context aids in comprehension, it is beneficial for the reader to review briefly some of the details of Mastricht's life, influences, works, and emphases in order to appreciate the place of this treatise and its relations within Mastricht's corpus of literature.

The Life of Petrus van Mastricht

Petrus van Mastricht was the grandson of a Dutch refugee from the city of Maastricht to the German city of Cologne during the time of the Dutch revolt against Spain.³ The family name was originally Schoning, but when Cornelius arrived from Maastricht, he adopted the surname "van Mastricht," referencing his former home. Petrus van Mastricht employed the Latinized Scheune-neus as a pseudonym on occasion. Mastricht grew up in a church whose roots were in the Dutch refugee community. This congregation maintained ties with other Reformed

3. For a much more detailed account of Mastricht's life see: Adriaan C. Neele, *Petrus Van Mastricht (1630–1706): Reformed Orthodoxy: Method and Piety* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); W. J. van Asselt, "Petrus van Mastricht" in *Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlands protestantisme*, ed. C. Houtman, et. al. (Kampen: Kok, 2001), deel 5, 360–62; P. C. Molhuysen and P. J. Blok, ed., *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek* (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1937), deel 10; Friedrich Wilhelm Cuno, "Mastricht, Peter von," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1884), band 20, S. 580; J. H. Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universallexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste* (Halle and Leipzig: J. H. Zedler, 1739), band 19 (M–Ma) coll. 2003–2004.

congregations throughout Europe and especially in the Netherlands. Maastricht's pastor, Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617–1666), was a voice of Reformed orthodoxy and piety for four years (1639–1643) during his childhood. After completing his preliminary studies at Duisburg, Maastricht matriculated at the University of Utrecht in 1647, studying theology under his former pastor, Hoornbeeck, as well as under Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) and Charles De Maets, among others. In 1650, after defending a disputation for his degree, Maastricht embarked on a *peregrinatio academica*, a tour of study that took him to Leiden University, possibly Oxford, and—a destination debated among some scholars—Heidelberg.⁴ He returned to Utrecht and completed his studies by 1652.

From 1652 to 1677, Maastricht served as a pastor in four congregations in German and Danish territories (Xanten, Glückstadt, Frankfurt an der Oder, and Duisburg). In at least two of these congregations, Maastricht operated within a rather ecumenical environment for the period. In Xanten, the classis of Cleves was predominantly Cocceian in its piety and theology, whereas Maastricht tended to be Voetian. It has been observed that Maastricht, however, cannot be strictly categorized as a proponent of the *Nadere Reformatie* (Dutch Further Reformation) agenda, no matter how sympathetic he was to its concerns. This observation has some merit based on Maastricht's irenic statement that the Voetian-Cocceian

4. Neele questions whether Maastricht studied here on his academic tour (*Van Maastricht*, 31n22).

disagreements did not have to be as vitriolic as they were. Mastricht also recognized that a distinction could be made between Cocceian theology and Cartesian thought such that the former did not rest upon the latter, though there could be affinities.⁵ In Frankfurt an der Oder, Mastricht labored in both a congregation and a broader church context that featured a merger of Lutheran and Reformed Protestants. Both of these contexts would have required him to maintain an irenic tone even while pointing out real differences of doctrine and practice.

Besides gaining day-to-day pastoral experience, it was during this time that Mastricht published a first glimpse of his larger lifelong project, the *Theoretico-practica Theologia*. Mastricht credited Voetius and Hoornbeeck with encouraging him as early as 1665 to write his theoretical-practical theology.⁶ In 1666, he published the *Theologiae Didactico-elenchtico-practicae Prodromus*, a relatively small work handling three loci: the creation of humanity, the human duty of humble reverence toward God and an

5. In the *Gangraena*, Mastricht addresses the range of Cartesian thinkers and theologians. See also J. Israel on the developing irenicism among Voetians and Cocceians by the late seventeenth century to the mid-eighteenth century. Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 372–408.

6. Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica Theologia...Praecedunt in Usum Operis Paralipomena seu Sceleton de Optima Concionandi Methodo* (Amsterdam: Ex officina Henrici & viduae Theodori Boom, 1682), **r. “Sisto tandem Theologiae Theoretico-practicae, diu promissae Tomomi-primum, unius jam turn A MDCLXV. (cum consilio Celebb. Theologorum Voetii & Hoornbeecki, eius prodiret Prodromus).”

admonition against pride, and one's *conversatio* or manner of life before God. The method he employed in handling each locus was in continuity with the exegetical method of other Reformed theologians, such as William Ames (1576–1633), Voetius, Hoornbeeck, and Simon Oomius (1630–1706), in its concern for exegesis, didactic explanation, polemical engagement, and practical application.

While serving as a pastor, Mastricht completed his master of arts and doctor of theology degrees at the University of Duisburg in 1669. He then accepted the position of professor of Hebrew and theology at the University of Duisberg in 1670 and served in that capacity until 1677. After the death of his former professor, Voetius, Mastricht was offered the position of professor of Hebrew and theology at the University of Utrecht, which he accepted, beginning his duties in the autumn of 1677. Mastricht labored there until 1700, at which point he began teaching at home due to a physical infirmity. As a result of complications from an infected wound on his foot received from a fall at his home, Mastricht died on February 9, 1706. As a professor in Utrecht, Mastricht also served as an elder in the church, and was a supply preacher in the Amsterdam classis. He was known as a godly professor, practical preacher, and a generous benefactor of seminary students.

Hoornbeeck, Voetius, and Mastricht on Theology

Two significant influences upon Mastricht's theological perspective, didactic method, and approach to pastoral ministry were professors at Utrecht—Voetius and

Hoornbeeck. Voetius was a theologian who shaped Maastricht's approach to philosophy, theology, piety, and the pastoral ministry. Among historians of philosophy, Voetius is a theologian most known for his vocal and visceral rejection of Cartesian philosophy and opposition to theologians who sought to synthesize Cartesian method and principles with Reformed theology. Defending Christian Aristotelianism, the Senate of the University condemned Cartesian thought in March 1642 while Voetius was *Regius Professor* of the University of Utrecht. Among historical theologians, however, Voetius is known for his participation at the Synod of Dordt and opposition to the Remonstrants, his support and use of the *Synopsis Purioris* as a professor, his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, his volumes of scholastic theological disputations at the University of Utrecht, his curricular plan of education for seminarians, and his influence upon Reformed church polity.⁷ As much as Hoornbeeck, Voetius was devoted to practical theology. For example, he outlined his approach to practical theology in a series of six disputations. Voetius also devoted two volumes of disputations to practical questions of piety and worship. Voetius was another Protestant and Reformed representative of the integration of practical piety and scholastic orthodoxy.

Given his defense of the use of scholastic theology as a polemical tool for engaging Roman Catholic theologians, it might seem counterintuitive to assert that Voetius was a

7. For a bibliography of the works of Voetius, see A. J. van der Aa, *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden* (Haarlem: J.J. van Brederode, 1876), deel 19, 296–303.

proponent of practical theology, especially in light of how heavily the older scholarship juxtaposes practical piety and scholastic theology.⁸ Yet, in response to the questions, “Is the study of and familiarity with scholastic theology in some way consistent with practical theology?” and, “Does familiarity with and consideration of the former corrupt and overturn the latter?” Voetius responded: “‘Yes’ to the former, ‘No’ to the latter. No more than a meticulous exposition of practical theology overturns the other: ‘Test everything; hold fast to what is good’ (1 Thess. 5[:21]). William Perkins and William Ames are two outstanding examples of practical theologians.” Mastricht was also in agreement with Voetius that practical and scholastic theology are not inherently antithetical, the latter being a polemical tool and the former being the application of theological determinations.

Another influence, Hoornbeeck, is perhaps best known as the author of the two-volume work *Theologia Practicae*,⁹ a pastor within the Dutch Further Reformation movement, and a professor of theology and Old Testament

8. E.g. Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching: Volume II, From the Close of the Reformation Period to the End of the Nineteenth Century, 1572–1900* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), 78–80. Voetius is held forth as a dry, somewhat pietistic scholastic given to topical preaching whereas Cocceius is portrayed as a true biblical exegete who was concerned with application and practice. For a more accurate picture of Voetius in English, see Joel R. Beeke, *Gisbertus Voetius: Toward a Reformed Marriage of Knowledge and Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999).

9. Johannes Hoornbeeck, *Theologiae Practicae*, 2 vols. (Utrecht: Henricus Versteg, 1663, 1666).

at both the University of Leiden and the University of Utrecht. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* describes Hoornbeeck as representative of “the type of an orthodox theologian of the Netherlands, combining with the scholastic method the most earnest zeal for a life of practical piety.”¹⁰ Hoornbeeck was also renowned as a polemical theologian for his work *Summa Controversiarum Religionis*, as well as a practical theologian for works treating, among other things, the evangelization of “the Indians and the heathen” in the New World, the observance of the Decalogue, Sabbath keeping, spiritual desertion, the art of dying well, and an oration concerning prudence, or on the study of peace and concord.¹¹ Hoornbeeck typified the environment of high scholastic orthodoxy and practical piety that framed Maastricht’s formative years.

Hoornbeeck asserted that true Christian theology is essentially practical because “Theology never teaches one only to speculate but always directs the action of the will towards some object whether good or evil, so that we may detest and flee the latter and truly so that we may love and pursue the former, and at every point in the same mode and order be directed to God.”¹²

10. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908–1912), 5:362. Cf. Pierre Bayle, *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical* (London: by James Bennet, for G. Strahan, J. Clarke, et al., 1738), 6:232–34; A. J. Van der Aa, *Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden*, deel 8, part 2, 1230.

11. For a listing of Hoornbeeck’s works, see A. J. van der Aa, *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden* (Haarlem: J. J. van Brederode, 1867), deel 8, part 2, 1230–34.

12. Hoornbeeck, *Theologiae Practicae*, 1:7.

In this context of directing the action of the will, Hoornbeek noted that in its concern for good and evil, virtue and vice, and holiness, theology is moral or spiritual, and thus practical. The most practical skill, science, or doctrine is the one that directs to the highest good. In this view, the practical and speculative are diametrically opposed:

For this reason there is not any doctrine or science—and this includes theological doctrine or science—that can be called theoretical and practical simultaneously. Not because there are not those things about which a theologian theorizes: as a matter of fact one first perceives all things and must consider their characteristics, before preceding to their practice, but because one never only and chiefly speculates, or considers speculating alone as an adequate end.¹³

As Hoornbeek pointed out, this does not mean that practical theology does not consider theory, but that it does so always with an eye toward practice.¹⁴

Since the nature of theology is essentially practical, this leads to the question of how theology must be taught. Shortly after emphasizing the importance of Scripture in the Protestant Reformation and scriptural exegesis in theology, Hoornbeek turned his attention to the handling or treatment of theology:

Certainly the handling or method of handling [theology] proceeds by steps: the first step is to dogmatics,

13. Hoornbeek, *Theologiae Practicae*, 1:7.

14. Hoornbeek, *Theologiae Practicae*, 1:2.

then polemics, and from there to practice: which is the course of students: nor is theology or any of its heads absolved, until after it establishes what must be maintained and pursued with respect to the truth, likewise so you may know how one can withstand and defend against any enemies and objections; and finally so that it may be heard as one hears the most august queen, who teaches how someone ought to live with reference to her command and dignity, and thus theology in itself is never disjoined or separated from practice.¹⁵

Mastricht was in fundamental agreement with Hoornbeeck with respect to the essential nature of theology, as well as with respect to the proper method of instruction. For example, in his final edition of the *Theoretico-practica Theologia*, regarding the nature of theology, Mastricht asserted, "Christian theology is not theoretical, or theoretico-practical, except from its method of treatment, as we have delineated it; but it is purely and especially practical."¹⁶ With respect to the method of treatment, Christian theology demands:

What Christ means in John 17:3 and Isaiah 53:11, and it is theoretico-practical: that is, it is neither theoretical only, which rests in some sort of contemplation of the truth; nor is it practical only, which has some sort of knowledge of the truth...but it conjoins theory with practice, and is an ἐπίγνωσις ἀληθείας

15. Hoornbeeck, *Theologiae Practicae*, 1:11.

16. Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica Theologia* (1698), part I, I.i.34.

της κατ' ἐυσέβειαν [Titus 1:1], a knowledge of the truth which is according to piety.¹⁷

Both Hoornbeeck and Mastricht used the following comment of Lucius Lactantius (c. 250–c. 325) to summarize their position that whatever we know we must do: “Neither can religion be separated from wisdom, nor wisdom from religion: because God is the same one who must be known, which is wisdom, and honored, which is religion; though wisdom precedes, religion follows. The prior is to know God, the latter is to worship God.”¹⁸

Regarding the method of theology, Mastricht emphasized starting with examining and expositing the whole of the Scriptures on a topic, didactically establishing the definition and boundaries of a doctrine, then polemically engaging erroneous views, and finally elucidating how the doctrines discussed impact the life of the believer.¹⁹

Mastricht and Cartesian Thought

Compared to many modern pastors who shy away from engaging philosophy and its impact upon the Christian faith, Mastricht engaged philosophical views that he viewed as dire threats to Christian faith and practice. In continuity with Voetius and in reaction to the growing influence of Cartesian thought among Reformed

17. Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica Theologia* (1698), part I, I.i.20.

18. Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, trans. Anthony Bowen and Peter Garnsey (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), book 4, chap. 4. Cf. Hoornbeeck, *Theologiae Practicae* 1:6; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica Theologia* (1698), part I, I.i.20.

19. Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica Theologia* (1698), part I, I.i.5.

theologians, Maastricht wrote several treatises polemically engaging the spectrum of moderate to radical Cartesian philosophers. The first argued for the supremacy of Scripture in philosophical matters against Christopher Wittich (1655).²⁰ The second was a systematic evaluation of Cartesian thought as it affected the doctrine of Scripture and theology (1677).²¹ Another pseudonymous work engaged Petrus Allinga (1680).²² A fourth, *Epanarthosis* (1692), was written against Balthasar Bekker's Cartesian interpretation of the spiritual world.²³ Cartesian thinkers, theologians, and pastors among the Reformed included, among others, Christopher Wittich (1625–1687), Frans Burmann (1628–1679), Lambert Velthuysen (1623–1685), and Petrus Allinga (d. 1692). Of the four works, the 1677 *Novitationum Cartesianarum Gangraena* was most well-known in Reformed, Lutheran, and Catholic circles across Europe.²⁴

20. Maastricht, *Vindiciae Veritatis Et Autoritatis Sacrae Scripturae in rebus Philosophicis Adversus Dissertationes D. Christophori Wittichii* (Utrecht : Johannis a Waesberg, 1655).

21. Maastricht, *Novitatum Cartesianarum Gangraena* (Amstelodami: Janssonio-Waesbergio, 1677).

22. Cephas Scheunenus, pseud. Petrus van Maastricht, *Cartesianismi Gangraena Insanabilis. Duodecim Erotematum Illustrium Decadibus, Frustra Curata Per P. Allingham, Pastorem... Enneade Erotematum Vulgarium, Demonstrata a C. Scheuneno, Etc.* (Ultrajecti, 1680).

23. Petrus van Maastricht, *Ad Verum Clariss. D. Balthasaren Beckerum, S. S. Theol. Doct. Epanorthosis gratulatoria. Occasione Articulorum, quos Venerandae Classi Amstelodamensi exhibuit. die XXII Janu. 1692. Exarata a Petro van Maastricht* (Anthenium Schouten, 1692).

24. Neele, *Van Maastricht*, 42–43. Neele's discussion identifies international and ecumenical recognition of the *Gangraena*.

In the preface of *Gangraena*, Mastricht identified at least twelve major ways that Cartesian thought undermines Christian orthodoxy.²⁵ A few of these errors that impact theology and practical piety are: (1) Methodological doubt is the tool in which everything must be doubted until it is perceived clearly and distinctly. This short-circuits faith and leads to a state of perpetual doubt or, worse, atheistic unbelief. (2) Philosophy, based on human reason, is as equally certain, revealed, and divine as theology, based on divine revelation. This is the basis for the claims of radical Cartesians that philosophy and autonomous, skeptical reason are the true interpreters of Scripture, and that philosophy is the queen of the sciences and theology is its handmaiden. (3) The essence of God consists only and purely in thought. (4) God could do truly contradictory things and even deceive if He so willed. (5) God's omnipresence consists only in His extrinsic operation. (6) Unbelievers can arrive at the entirety of a true natural worship of God, except for the mode of redemption. (7) The human intellect does not and cannot err in the perception of clear and distinct ideas.

As respects the nature and attributes of God, Cartesian philosophy maintains that in our conception of or thinking about God we ought to maintain that God's will is prior to God's intellect. More specifically, God's decree is the prerequisite for God's knowledge of possibles (*scientia possibilium*), and thus is concerned with a knowledge

25. Mastricht, *Novitationum Cartesianarum Gangraena* (1677), ***1r-***4r.

of vision (*scientia visionis*). In Cartesian thought, God's decree is based on a discursive knowledge of possibles (*scientia visionis*) rather than an intuitive knowledge of Himself. For comparison, Mastricht states in the 1699 *Theoretico-practica Theologia* that the proper understanding is that God knows all things in Himself (*in seipso*), not in themselves (*non in ipsis rebus*).²⁶ God knows "in one glance, without composition or heterogeneous distraction: God perceives all things without any *discursus*, abstraction, or other kinds or creaturely ways of knowing that arise from imperfection."²⁷ According to Mastricht, the Cartesian view of God's discursive knowing vitiates God's simplicity, aseity, immutability, and eternity.

Finally and most importantly, Mastricht argued that Cartesian thought is particularly gangrenous in its evisceration of the doctrine of Christ's hypostatic union and reinterpretation of Christ's divine nature in Cartesian categories. In so doing, Cartesian thought strikes at the vital heart of the Christian religion.

As has been briefly demonstrated, Mastricht's upbringing and formal education indicate that there was an exposure to and agreement with a deeply practical piety, a rejection of Cartesian philosophy, and a firm loyalty to a confessional dogmatic theology. His subsequent career as both pastor and theologian was a flowering of

26. Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica Theologia* (Utrecht: Thomas Appels, 1699), Part I, II.xiii.11, 145. "Deum omnia intelligere, non in ipsis rebus, sed in seipso."

27. Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica Theologia* (1699), Part I, II.xiii.11, 145.

these seminal influences in his publications. Three concerns typified Mastricht's works from the start of his career to its end: an anti-Cartesian defense of an eclectic, Christian Aristotelianism of the day; a theoretico-practical method in treating of theology; and a deep concern for a highly doctrinal and practical preaching to inculcate piety among God's people.

On the Use of the *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*

In the editions of the *Theoretico-practica Theologia* published during Mastricht's lifetime, he placed a methodological treatise on preaching before the theological system in the 1682 edition, then afterward in the 1699 edition.²⁸ As with the *Theoretico-practica Theologia*, this treatise on preaching had antecedents in Mastricht's pastoral career and developed over the course of his life.²⁹ The subtitle of the 1681 disputation at Utrecht was "on the use of the theoretico-practica theologia," indicating its continuity with his methodology and theology. The next year, this

28. Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica Theologia...praeaedunt in usum operis paralipomena seu sceleton de optima concionandi methodo* (Ex officina Henrici & viduae Theodori Boom, 1682); Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia, qua, per singula capita theologica, pars exegetica, dogmatica, elenchtica et practica, perpetuâ successione conjugantur: accedunt historia ecclesiastica, plena quidem; sed compendiosa* (1699).

29. Neele estimates that Mastricht's undated *Methodus Concionandi* (Frankfurt an der Oder: M. Hübner, [n.d.]) was published during the 1660s (Neele, *Van Mastricht*, 38). The 1681 edition and the *Methodus Concionandi* are verbatim. See Mastricht, *De Optima Concionandi Methodo Paraleipomena* (Utrecht: ex officina Meinardi a Dreunen, 1681).

disputation was included within Mastricht's theological system. Mastricht viewed theology and preaching as integrally related: if the order of treatment of theology is biblical exegesis, systematic formulation, historical analysis, and polemical engagement, terminating in the practice of piety, then preaching is an adaptation of this method to the pastor's congregational context. Mastricht aims at the heart of the matter when he places a chapter on saving faith after the preliminary questions of theology (the method, nature, and definition of theology, and the doctrine of Holy Scripture) and before the traditional structure of God and His works. Theology aims at leading a person to a knowledge of the truth for the purpose of bringing about saving faith. All other matters of practical piety hinge on true saving faith. The relationship between theology and preaching is therefore a continuum. If the theoretical-practical theology is the doctrine or instruction of living to God through Christ, then preaching is its God-ordained public means of communication and application. The didactic summit of theology is the sermon: the public call of the church to faith in God and life before Him as His child. But though the sermon is the didactic summit of theology, it is only the beginning of life *coram Deo*. It is a signpost to wayfaring believers; it is not the destination. It should be a help along the way, informing the mind, inflaming the heart, and exhorting the will.

Mastricht's treatise on preaching is a pastor's guide to the parts of a sermon coupled with practical advice and admonition for seminarians and pastors. It is brief at only twelve folio pages. Mastricht self-consciously aimed for

brevity, contrasting his work with those who write so much on preaching that they generate manuals as thick as whole systems of theology. The work challenges pastors not to cheat their congregants of practical application, hiding behind an elegant array of words, illustrations, and elaborate or arcane exegetical points, excusing a lack of practical application from God's Word by a lack of time. Such sermons thrill the ear but dull the heart and stupefy the will. Finally, a godly sermon must engage the whole person. The best sermon is clear and the points are arranged such that not only can the pastor easily memorize the sermon, but the congregant can readily recall it to mind in the day of trial for his benefit as well as that of his neighbor.

In conclusion, Mastricht is a helpful reference point for our own understanding of theology and its use or application. His corpus of writing challenges those pastors who all too willingly retreat from the philosophical and theological issues of our day. His theological method is a refreshing change from viewpoints that are prone to idle speculation or, at the other extreme, a praxis that has cut its moorings from Scripture. With respect to preaching, we find a method that encourages pastors to lay before the people of God the knowledge of the truth that leads to a fervent hope in God and faithful life before Him. It is my hope that this edition of Mastricht's work on preaching may function like an appetizer from a master chef, refreshing but leaving one hungry for more; and that it would encourage pastors in their own duties to nourish those hungry and thirsting after righteousness.

—Todd Rester



Editors' Note

This little book on preaching, translated from Latin and Dutch, is intended to whet your appetite for what is to come in the projected publication of Petrus van Mastricht's massive dogmatics, *Theoretico-practica Theologia*, which is presently being translated and published by the conjoined efforts of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society and Reformation Heritage Books. In this book, we have taken the liberty to insert chapter titles into the text, so that the reader is not confronted with run-on text without breaks.

Lifetime membership in the Dutch Reformed Translation Society is available for a one-time, tax deductible gift of \$100. Members support the society's continuing work, receive periodic newsletters, and may purchase society publications at the cost of production. Membership gifts may be sent to P.O. Box 7083, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49510. For more information on the Dutch Reformed Translation Society, see www.dutchreformed.org.

—Joel R. Beeke and Nelson D. Kloosterman



Preface

The Advantages of Using a Theoretical-Practical Method of Preaching

I. In the eighty-first year of this century, in the year of our Lord, on the seventh of December, I had published the disputations on the use of this Theoretical-Practical Theology that has already been asserted, and had set forth the parts of its theology. I did not set forth those disputations in haughtiness; for I cheerfully and frankly confess that they do not possess anything that could commend them to anyone—especially not in this most self-indulgent age—either from their learning and erudition, or that could demand any praise: but I have done this so that I may present in abbreviated form the method of that theology that would be pursued, and may acquaint my readers a little with it. Indeed, I designated it as “best,” not because I imagined that what I advanced would be good even in a moderate sense, much less the best. In fact, it is not even my method, but that which, not only the great men—William Perkins, William Ames in his *Medulla*, Oliver Bowles, Guilelmus Saldenus in his brilliant *Ecclesiaste*,

and especially the celebrated Johannes Hoornbeeck in six or seven disputations “On the Method of Preaching” (*De Ratione Concionandi*), as well as several others—had a little while ago revealed, but also the whole British nation, so that I do not need to mention our Utrecht; indeed, all those more devoted to practice and practical things throughout the whole world happily observed it for the great good of the church, so that I could not claim that it was mine. Therefore, I called it “best” because, compared with any other method, it especially seemed to serve the edification of the church. I have found it, through the seventeen years of my ecclesiastical office, not only the most convenient to me as the one preparing to preach, but also the easiest and least cumbersome to my hearers, seeing that among the catechumens there are those who by its aid are able aptly to follow the thread of my sermons, and my listeners openly profess that they perceive at least the same degree of usefulness from these disputations (*repetitiones*) as from these sermons. Not only this, but also by its use our Utrecht church has lifted up its head above the others “as do cypresses among the bending shrubs,”¹ so that there is no need to mention anything concerning the British churches, which have flourished with such great care under its use.

I have also mentioned four reasons for my opinion regarding the goal of this method; but I have touched upon them only briefly here, as I would speak more copiously if such a short space would bear it.

1. Virgil's *Eclogues*, 1:26.

First, it is advantageous for a minister's preparation for preaching, that he may tie his reflections not to his own limited precepts, but to universal ones, and by their aid discover an abundance of things to say, from which he may later select those that are most useful for the church: for, with respect to a sermon, one ought not to think that there is anything that cannot be referred back to its topics: nor, in fact, that there can be anything within the reading of the writings of others, no matter how disordered, that you could not refer back to its laws, rationale, character, motive, means, mode, and so forth.

Second, it is advantageous for the hearers who, once acquainted with this method, can conveniently follow the thread of the sermon, commit it to memory, and review it at home with their families, without which, as Ames wisely admonishes, all the usefulness of the sermon dies.

Third, it is advantageous with respect to the very things that must be mentioned that will everywhere obtain their order and place. This order will procure both brilliance and elegance for the things that must be mentioned, connect them to the things that have been said, and from this supply its perspicuity.

But especially, fourth, it is advantageous for the practice of piety, which is the soul of a sermon, so that by its assistance, virtues and vices as well as other things are displayed from their very foundational principles throughout all their essentials. From what has been observed it is grasped that, as long as this method has been in use among the British and our Utrechters, praxis has flourished as happily as possible and practical writings were published

daily. Whereas on the contrary, when that method has expired, gradually a meticulous practice has subsided. For example, there was once an Amsterdam printer—I do not know how many practical writings he printed from the English idiom into our Dutch language in one or another year—but now, after several years, he scarcely publishes one practical book.

From all these things, a brevity of method arises that has a few universal precepts that can easily be applied to every argument, that may always be present to the memory, and which would direct your preparation for preaching and assist your hearers. For I could never have approved of the custom (*institutum*) of those who compose dense volumes concerning the method of preaching, the perusal and even the reading of which demands as much time of theology students as a proper syntagma of theology. This is not to mention what must be committed to memory and, even more, be brought over into praxis; in addition to what must be applied to the text, so that by this point they would be so worn out that, at last becoming exhausted, they would cast aside all concern for method. Moreover, they would devote the whole time to the exposition of the words, to the extent that they are forced to send away young and starving hearers without any practice, without the longed-for nourishment of the soul, with the bald excuse of the lapse of time; but they may have this one thing in their favor, namely, that they have supplied a learned and elegant sermon.

Finally, such preachers comment on the individual expressions of the text in such a way that they are not able

to elaborate, in a manner in keeping with their office, any argument, whether a theoretical or practical one, with great loss to both their hearers and their own practice (*praxeos*).

Therefore, I claimed, and still claim, that this method alone, which is quite brief, is full and complete and it alone has universal precepts that can be applied to every ecclesiastical argument. Furthermore, I will claim that it is the best method until I might be convinced to the contrary by arguments, to which, just as I am sincerely prepared to yield, so also I am ready to uphold that it is the best method against anything to the contrary. Therefore, to these appetizers I will now address the subject of the best method of preaching, which I formerly prefixed to the system of theology in the 1682 and 1687 volumes, without adding anything, lest I should fall into the same Scylla that I have pointed out to others. I will speak about the parts of preaching, and the parts as well as the arguments of the parts, as well as the rules by which we are directed to each part, and concerning the affections that in each part should be stirred; finally, I will demonstrate all [the points] in an example by means of a detailed exposition of Colossians 3:1.

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The Basics of Sermon Arrangement

The Parts of Preaching

II. And so, there are four things that must be observed in preaching: invention, arrangement, elaboration, and delivery, which, in turn, faithfully extend outstretched, helping hands to each other.

Twofold invention

III. Invention is either relating the argument to the people or a text suitable for the argument. It will supply an argument related to the condition of the church and carefully noted from the time, place, and other things; in whose selection must appear:

- A. That one would not search for something obvious, familiar, or of interest only to the speaker; or
- B. Not whatever seems intended to attract the applause of the common people, but rather what is most suitable for edifying the church, which should be the guiding star of the entire sermon.

For example, someone observing in his church an excessive zeal for this world and a lukewarmness toward spiritual piety might undertake an argument concerning a heavenly manner of life. A suitable text for the selected argument should: (1) be taken from only the canonical books of Scripture, which are the most effective in convicting the conscience; (2) not be excessively prolix, so that the time for the argument not be snatched away first by a rather prolix explanation of the words; and (3) not be excessively brief, so that the preacher would make his argument less clearly and plainly, and even produce in his hearers a suspicion of affected brevity.

For example, an argument chosen regarding a heavenly manner of life could be built upon the text of Colossians 3:1: "And so if you have been resurrected with Christ, seek the things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."

The arrangement of a sermon and its laws

IV. The arrangement (*dispositio*) is that by which the things invented or being invented are reduced to something pleasing first to the intellect and then to the memory in an order analogous to the subject matter (*res*). The rules of arrangement shall be these:

- A. The absence of confusion, in which there is not any order preserved.
- B. An absence of a cryptic order (*ordo κρυπτικὸς*), in which at least some order is preserved, but at every point hidden in such a way that none is

apparent to the people, with no other result than that the orator loses even the author of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher, who possesses skill in concealing a matter.

- C. An absence of inconsistency, by which in individual sermons the preacher follows a different order, so that it happens that the hearers—especially the ruder sorts—could not become familiar with his method, and take away the contents of the sermon from memory, without which, as Ames observes, all the fruit of the sermon perishes.
- D. It will be helpful in this matter to make known to one's hearers formulas of connections and transitions, unless consideration of a more advanced and polite audience, in order to prevent their disgust, suggests something different. Although also at this point consideration for the ruder sorts, who are the greatest and majority in number, must be observed, since the more erudite can accommodate themselves more easily to the capacity of the ruder ones than vice versa, the ruder ones to the capacity of the erudite.