The Preparation of a Discourse.

By Fulton J. Sheen

The preparation is both remote and proximate. How long does it take to prepare a speech? About thirty or forty years; but this is the remote preparation. It takes only an hour or less to serve dinner to sixty people on an airplane. But the preparation of the dinner actually took months or years. Think of how long you spend in the kitchen to serve the cheese, to grow potatoes and ripen an apple.

A speech, too, has a tremendous remote preparation, and this implies three things: study, study, study. There is no simple style; there is only ongoing simplification. One has to study science, literature, history, philosophy, understanding many social currents just to align with one's books. Books are the most wonderful friends in the world. When you meet them and think of them, they are always ready to give you a few ideas. When you put them down, you never get mad; when you take them up again, they seem to enrich you all the more.

After a subject is chosen, say for a lecture, we then begin to write out a plan. We write the general ideas on a sheet of paper; the next day, tear up the paper. The day following we have to start doing all over again. When that new plan is developed we tour it up, so that new teaching is done.

The great advantage of this system is that one is forced to rethink the ideas that have been learned from the inside out, instead of from the outside in. Why should the living mind be subject to the ideas of the dead? A mother who does not forget the child of her womb; neither can a mind forget what it has generated; neither can a creative mind forget to how to a dead man's age.

There are few speakers any more, and fewer orators. Some believe that what they have written is so exact that the creative mind ought to take out to dead a man's age. It is much better, instead of memorizing words, to recreate the idea each day until the subject is alive as a child.

There may be many mistakes when the time comes to think it on your feet, but at least there is this consolation; it is your talk. Whenever we have a talk, there is always the temptation to ask, "Who wrote it?"

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