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THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE HOMILETICS  
ON INTERPRETING AND PREACHING THE BIBLE

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Randal Alan Williams

May 2006

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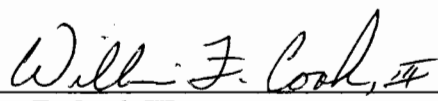
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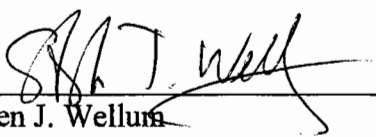
### THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE HOMILETICS ON INTERPRETING AND PREACHING THE BIBLE

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THESES Ph.D. .W675i  
0199702002122

To Ruth Ann

my love, my support, and my greatest friend,

and to

Alan and Anna,

children who truly are gifts from God

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## PREFACE

As I began this dissertation, someone remarked that I would soon be ending a long process of learning. I must admit that his statement seemed encouraging at the time. As I continued the work, however, I came to realize how much more there is to learn. In fact, I have discovered many new things along the way about which I look forward to learning more in the future.

My years of study at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have been great, but they have not always been easy. I certainly could not have completed my education without the help of many whom I have encountered along the way. Many have encouraged, instructed, and prayed for me during the process. I would like to thank several of them by name.

First, I would like to thank my supervisory committee—Drs. Robert A. Vogel, Williams F. Cook III, and Stephen J. Wellum. Dr. Vogel provided insightful conversation and a great deal of technical help in writing. Dr. Cook has offered encouragement in the faith as a mentor and friend for many years. Dr. Wellum's ability to connect the diverse elements of theology with practical application has helped me to see the necessity of looking beyond any one field of study. All have given of themselves during times of personal counsel, in friendship, and in excellent classroom instruction.

I am also grateful to my parents and in-laws. Mom and Dad have never stopped praying for and encouraging me. They always believed in me, even when I did

not. My dad made sure that I knew that advice was available anytime, but never offered it when it was not wanted. My parents-in-law were also supportive. When Ruth Ann and I decided to move away from the farm to pursue my education, their prayer was that God would use us wherever He took us. They have continued to pray for and support us in every way along the journey. I have no doubt that the prayers and support of my parents and parents-in-law have been used by God to accomplish in me something I could never have done on my own.

When I started my education, Alan was a teenager and Anna was just starting school. They have supported me every step of the way. God has raised them up to fear and love Him, and as a father, I cannot think of a greater blessing. As I come to the end of my career as student, Alan and Anna are both taking classes at Boyce Bible College. As they have supported me along the way, I pray that God will allow me to encourage and support them.

I am also grateful to my wife. Ruth Ann has encouraged, supported, and helped me, all the way. She is gifted as a wife, mother, and friend. She has consistently placed Alan, Anna, and me above herself, and she has done so with joy.

Finally, words fail to express the love and gratitude I have for Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. When He chose to live and work in me, He chose a weak and frail vessel. I pray that He will continue to work in me to accomplish great things for His glory.

Randal A. Williams

Louisville, Kentucky  
May 2006

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In his magnum opus, *A History of Preaching*, E. C. Dargan effectively argues that preaching has both developed along with and affected the development of culture.<sup>1</sup> This give and take relationship has also been evident in the relationship between the closely related fields of hermeneutics and homiletics. The practice of preaching has been affected by the development and implementation of biblical interpretation, and biblical interpretation has been affected by the practices of preaching. Evident throughout history, discussions of these relationships have once again taken positions of prominence in discussions of homiletics and hermeneutics.

Individual definitions have been articulated in the works of conservatives and liberals, scholars and preachers alike. Using these definitions, they have sought to identify the relationships and differences between hermeneutics and homiletics in order to minimize the distance between the two fields. That is the primary goal, for instance, of a recent book edited by Joel B. Green and Michael Pasquarello, *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching*: “Our joining of that which has been divided in the modern period,

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<sup>1</sup>In a section entitled “The Place of Preaching in History,” Dargan notes that preaching has both affected and been affected by many elements of culture. The following is a representative list of those areas from this section: “The general course of events. . . the rise and fall of governments. . . customs and morals. . .” and “. . . arts and sciences.” E. C. Dargan, *A History of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 1:8-13. In fact, Dargan states that “the connection of preaching with the progress of human culture is real and extensive.” Ibid., 8-9.

exegesis and homiletics, is intentional. Our hope is that this emphasis on a return to narrative will promote renewed conversation between two mutually informing practices that draw their life from the use of Scripture for the pastoral ministry of the church.”<sup>2</sup> In the following paragraph they continue the thought, stating that their “purpose, then, is to provide examples of reading and preaching that will contribute to the overcoming of such established divisions as theory and practice, text and sermon, academy and church, past and present.”<sup>3</sup>

Most homileticians would agree that this is an important and encouraging development. In practice, the study of Scripture is not an end in itself. Biblical study is not completed until its findings are presented and applied. In like manner, the presentation and application of God’s Word must not be separated from the careful interpretation of the biblical text in order to know what it says.

One issue of discussion that arises from the study of these relationships has to do with questions of authority. For instance, how much authority is inherent in the informative nature of homiletics during the interpretation of a biblical text, and how much authority is innately present in the interpretation of a passage of Scripture during the development and presentation of a sermon? This issue is of particular importance in the discussion of new homiletical theory. If authority is said to rest in the audience, then the imaginative interpretation of a biblical text from the perspective of the hearer is essential.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Joel B. Green and Michael Pasquarello III, eds., *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching: Reuniting New Testament Interpretation and Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 9. These relationships are further explored below as several homiletical methodologies are discussed in light of their hermeneutical foundations.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Elements of this idea, the essential nature of the hearer for an authoritative Word from God, are the genesis behind Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, rev.

On the other hand, if authority is said to rest in the biblical text, then interpretation seeks to discover the message intended by the original author before seeking to apply it to present day hearers.<sup>5</sup>

### **Purpose and Need for the Study**

In the late nineteen sixties, Fred B. Craddock sought to breathe new life into an institution that some believed to be ailing. He thought preaching had again failed to keep up with the times, and was focused on wrong things. Craddock did not want to throw out everything for which the preaching of his time stood. Liberal preaching stressed the need for relevance, and conservative preaching held tightly to the fundamental idea that the Bible was God's Word. Craddock saw value in both, and sought to build a homiletical method that would include both. He also believed that the hearer was becoming further and further removed from the message and its authority. Paramount in his thinking, and the subsequent methodology that followed, was the need to reinstate the audience as a vital part of preparing and delivering a sermon. Believing that "the goal" of the preacher "is not to get something said but to get something heard," Craddock taught that every

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ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001). Others who hold to this position include John McClure, who states that in a conversational homiletic, "Preachers will acknowledge the perspectival quality of Christian truth and, rather than worrying themselves to death over 'relativism,' accept the challenge to identify clearly their own perspective, and place that perspective into serious, ongoing conversation within a plurality of perspectives." John S. McClure, "Conversation and Proclamation: Resources and Issues," *Homiletic* 22, no. 1 (1997): 10-11.

<sup>5</sup>Peter Adam presents this view in *Speaking God's Word: A Practical Theology of Expository Preaching* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 97-102. Other examples include Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and The Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); and Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

effective sermon must involve the audience from the beginning of the process to the end.<sup>6</sup> During this conversation the preacher, the audience, and the text are all vital participants.

Craddock's view was not a new idea, nor has it lost its voice in homiletical discussions today. Conservative and liberal homileticians of both present and past generations have recognized the importance of being relevant, having a basis of authority upon which to stake their claims, and involving their audiences. On more than one occasion I have heard James Merritt, a two term president of the Southern Baptist Convention and excellent conservative Bible expositor, caution young preachers not to talk over the heads of their audiences. "Put all your cookies on the lowest shelf so that everyone can reach them," he likes to say. Furthermore, who among those who study preaching can forget the words of the early twentieth century liberal preacher, Harry Emerson Fosdick, who scolded the dry history lesson preaching of many conservative expositors of his day. Fosdick once proclaimed that "only the preacher proceeds still upon the idea that folk come to church desperately anxious to discover what happened to the Jebusites."<sup>7</sup>

What made Craddock's statement of the need for relevance unique in his time, and so controversial in homiletics today, was the foundation upon which he built his homiletical method. He built his method on the neo-orthodox concept that the Word of God becomes meaningful, and is authoritative truth, only when it is reconstructed within the individual hearer.<sup>8</sup> It is at this point that the cultural context of the times played an

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<sup>6</sup>Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 167.

<sup>7</sup>Harry Emerson Fosdick, "What Is the Matter with Preaching?," *Harper's Magazine* 107 July 1928, 135.

<sup>8</sup>Charles L. Campbell supports this idea with the following simple statement from his summary article on Fred B. Craddock in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*.



important part. The theological notion that truth is in the mind of the beholder was at this time fanned into homiletical flame by the postmodern presupposition that truth is not transmitted verbally by a preacher. Truth is formed by individual hearers as they are guided to it within their distinct communities.<sup>9</sup> In the field of homiletics, this methodology makes itself evident in at least two ways.

First, biblical meaning, along with its inherent authority, is removed from both the biblical text and the preacher who is presenting it. Meaning is placed into the realm of the hearer, and its authority is dependent upon the hearer's acceptance. Following a hermeneutical methodology that is reader centered challenges the notion that meaning is present in a biblical text, and that truth claims proposed from such a meaning are authoritatively true.<sup>10</sup>

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"Craddock's method was informed by the existentialist philosophy and theology of Gerhard Ebeling and Søren Kierkegaard. Campbell, "Craddock, Fred B.," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 94.

<sup>9</sup>Campbell's article on Craddock is helpful once again as he writes concerning this element of Craddock's method: "Craddock drew upon the educational philosophy of John Dewey, which focused on 'helping persons arrive at conclusions, rather than depositing conclusions in their mind.'" Ibid. For a more in-depth analysis of Craddock's method, especially as it relates to forming the message inside the hearer using an inductive method, see Grant Irvén Lovejoy, "A Critical Evaluation of the Nature and Role of Authority in the Homiletical Thought of Fred B. Craddock, Edmund A. Steimle, and David G. Buttrick" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990).

<sup>10</sup>Materials dealing with the meaning of "meaning" are legion. The primary concern at this point is to note that there is a distinction between hermeneutical approaches. Some place meaning in the control of hearers, while others place it outside the control of the community or individual, and squarely in the hand, or pen as it were, of the author of the text. Unless otherwise indicated, I use the simple definition for the word "meaning" given in Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules*: "The meaning of the text is that pattern of meaning the author willed to convey by the words (shareable symbols) he used." Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 38. The goal in using this definition is to eliminate any confusion in the use of the term in this writing and to disclose one of this author's foundational presuppositions: the meaning of a text is the author's willed

Second, the task of interpretation is redefined. Interpretation becomes a matter of making rather than discovering meaning. Interpretation involves reading the text through the lens of a particular community until it becomes individualized and personalized. The result of this exercise is that meaning and relevance are incorrectly equated. Relevance redefines meaning in terms of meaningfulness. In this case, meaning is determined based on the personal application of a text to a specific circumstance. If the stated meaning of a biblical text is not relevant or meaningful, then it must be reread and *new meaning* or meaningfulness sought until the text is found to be relevant to the reader. Once the text is deemed relevant, it is said to have meaning for that reader. Since interpretation is personal, some interpreters seek to move quickly away from biblical texts to present application without seeing the need to state a biblical connection. Others seek to blend or fuse seamlessly our contemporary Christian story with that of the early church described in the biblical text. Finally, others seek to read relevance back into the text. In all three cases, truth becomes a possession of the current community, or individual, rather than a God given absolute.<sup>11</sup>

Such methodologies affect both technical and practical aspects of preaching. Technically, these methods generally rely on hermeneutical foundations that lead homileticians to consider the response of hearers as equal or more important in authority than the biblical text. Therefore, technical elements in preaching, such as the style and

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meaning.

<sup>11</sup>This final position seems to be the direction of some self-proclaimed conservative evangelicals as they seek to align biblical authority with the Christian community. See, for instance, Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001).

structure of a sermon, may receive a disproportionate measure of time and energy.<sup>12</sup> On the practical side, hearers are further removed from the biblical text in general, and the original meaning of the biblical text specifically.<sup>13</sup>

A steady diet of preaching that does not connect hearers with the biblical text makes itself evident in the lives of individuals in at least two ways. First, there is a general decline in biblical literacy. Biblical illiteracy is felt in both the church gathered and the church dispersed. In the church gathered, there is evidence of a basic lack of biblical knowledge, and doctrine is often viewed as an appropriate discussion for professionals only. For the church dispersed, the platform from which to give an effective witness has been diminished by the loss of religious influence. Christian values, themes, and ideas were once a part of the fabric of American life. Now these ideas and ideals, which were founded on Judeo-Christian principles, are absent or distorted. This is true to the extent that even those claiming exposure to the teachings of “church” have a

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<sup>12</sup>The point is not to advocate an attitude that views issues of presentation as irrelevant. It must be noted at this point that failure to work hard on communication skills, or to consider the structure and style of presentation, is also a failure to carry out adequately the task of preaching.

<sup>13</sup>Haddon Robinson recognizes this danger, but seems, at least in recent days, to play down the importance of such a problem, stating that using a first person narrative technique in preaching is no different than the problem faced every day by readers of a Bible, which has been translated into English. In such cases, the Bible has already been removed, by biblical interpreters, at least one step from its original audience. Preachers who use first person narrative methods are really doing no different. Robinson does stress that the preacher needs to remain faithful to the text. He goes on to say that faithfulness to the text is maintained when the preacher has done the hard work of a historical grammatical study of the text in order to understand it. However, if the congregation is ignorant of that study, how can they tell when the preacher is accurately representing it? This summary of Robinson’s statements is based on a question and answer session which followed a lecture on using first person narrative delivered by him at Concordia Seminary, on 5 May 2004. Concordia Seminary, “Interview with Haddon Robinson” [online]; accessed 20 January 2005; available from <http://www.csl.edu/Convocations.htm>; Internet.

hard time defining and discussing these basic principles and ideas from a Christian worldview.<sup>14</sup> In some cases “religious vocabulary” has been discarded or is unfamiliar. In other instances, the terms and concepts have simply been redefined by the times.<sup>15</sup>

Second, because specific principles are not being taught directly from the Scripture, Christians have become dependent on others for the personal application of the Word of God. Whether in methods of narrative preaching where the goal is to convey a biblical message through narrative examples, or in messages characterized purely by application, hearers become dependent on the work of others for the application of God’s

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<sup>14</sup>Consider, for instance, a set of polls conducted by The Barna Group beginning in the year 2000. On the subject of “Beliefs” related to the Bible, 42 percent of the adults polled in 2002 “agreed strongly that the Bible is totally accurate in all of its teachings.” Yet 60 percent of the adults polled the following year, 2003, viewed as morally acceptable “living with someone of the opposite sex without being married.” Thirty percent of those polled that year viewed “having a sexual relationship with someone of the same sex” as acceptable. And 42 percent believed that “having a sexual relationship with someone of the opposite sex to whom you are not married” is acceptable. These statistics were obtained from The Barna Group, “The Bible” and “Beliefs: General Religious” [on-line]; accessed 14 March 2005; available from <http://www.barna.org>; Internet.

<sup>15</sup>It would be a grave mistake to say that narrative preaching is solely responsible for the decline. Many other elements, such as the cultural diversity promoted in America, are factors as well. If, however, the church is responsible for its message, and preaching is at least in part responsible for getting its message to the people, it is clear that preaching in general has failed. One primary failure is that it has not taught and maintained a biblical worldview. The Barna Group makes this connection in the following statement. “America’s spiritual confusion undoubtedly relates to the fact that most people own a Bible but few know what’s in it. Research showing that only 4% of adults, and just 9% of born again Christians, have a biblical worldview sheds light on the distorted view points that reign in the U.S.” The Barna Group, “Spiritual Progress Hard to Find in 2003” [on-line]; accessed 14 March 2005; available from <http://www.barna.org>; Internet. Perhaps even more distressing in relation to our topic is the report issued by Barna on 12 January 2004 entitled “Only Half of Protestant Pastors Have a Biblical Worldview” [on-line]; accessed 14 March 2005, available from <http://www.barna.org>; Internet. Biblical illiteracy, in its totality, may not be attributable to a lack of biblical preaching. A tenable argument can, however, be made that the church’s view of the Bible, and its teachings, will be a reflection of the view held by its leaders and presented in its pulpits.

Word.<sup>16</sup> The availability of published material for personal devotion and spiritual health is simply mind boggling. Much of this material, often offered in reputable stores, is “biblically based” and generally helpful.<sup>17</sup> However, very little of this biblically based material takes the time to show how the life-changing truths taught within their pages are directly related to the Word of God from which they are claimed.<sup>18</sup>

The personal application of the Scriptures develops with Bible knowledge and practice. The old adage that says “much of what we learn in life is caught rather than taught” is true. Listeners who want to read and apply the Bible for themselves need to see how their pastors and teachers handle the Word of God. Albert Mohler states that there is a direct relationship between biblical preaching and teaching in the pulpit and growing

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<sup>16</sup>Application is certainly important, and I would argue necessary. However, the exclusive uses of narrative communicative techniques in sermons tend to connect hearers only with examples of application rather than with the biblical principles upon which they are built. Calvin Miller states that too much narrative preaching results in “the loss of didache (or teaching) in the church,” to the point that “many theologians are growing concerned that the church is losing the ability to define and defend its faith.” Calvin Miller, “Narrative Preaching,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 108. I would argue that Christians who cannot define and defend their faith also cannot apply their faith to new situations. All preaching must guard against this failure. Narrative preaching, as defined elsewhere, is especially vulnerable at this point.

<sup>17</sup>A quick survey, for instance, of the material offered by LifeWay Christian stores reveals a wide assortment of helps and devotional materials written by noted evangelical leaders. The best seller, Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), is an excellent example.

<sup>18</sup>*Purpose Driven Life* is an excellent example in that it seeks “to allow the Scripture to speak for itself, . . . using over a thousand different verses from fifteen English translations and paraphrases,” but does not show how these verses connect the truths being taught from them to the biblical text. *Ibid.*, 11. It is important to note here, in defense of Warren’s book, that the book is to facilitate a devotional journey. It is not an in-depth Bible study. In reality, however, the fast-food appeal of getting something quick, even if it is not satisfying or healthy in the long run, has great appeal for many. In the end, an exclusive diet, composed primarily of these materials, may pose some serious spiritual health risks to the church and individual Christians as well.

disciples. “Churches must recover the centrality and urgency of biblical teaching and preaching, and refuse to sideline the teaching ministry of the preacher. Pastors and churches too busy—or too distracted—to make biblical knowledge a central aim of ministry will produce believers who simply do not know enough to be faithful disciples.”<sup>19</sup> If listeners are not taught through the modeling of exegetical practices in the pulpit, where and how the biblical principles being applied are found, then they will not develop good principles for reading and applying the Word of God for themselves.<sup>20</sup>

### Thesis

As the dominant methodology of the New Homiletic, narrative preaching continues to influence homiletical discussions of all kinds.<sup>21</sup> The thesis of this dissertation is that narrative preaching is not capable as a complete or foundationally dominant part of any homiletical methodology of fulfilling the command to preach the Word. The New Homiletic has raised an important issue that must be heeded by preachers of all persuasions; preachers must seek to be good communicators. Fred B. Craddock, the godfather of the New Homiletic, is at least partially right in saying that our job as preachers, “is not to get something said but to get something heard.”<sup>22</sup> Preachers

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<sup>19</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy: It’s Our Problem” [on-line]; accessed 14 October 2005; available from <http://www.albertmohler.com>; Internet, 2.

<sup>20</sup>This is not to say that a course on biblical hermeneutics should be taught in the place of preaching. However, sermon applications need to be connected to biblical truths, and biblical truths need to be connected to the text. One result of such preaching is a biblically literate church which is prepared to grow in their discipleship.

<sup>21</sup>Defining the New Homiletic and narrative preaching are the goals of chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>22</sup>Craddock, *Preaching*, 167.

are obligated to declare the Word of God to people in ways that they can understand the message. But Craddock's statement fails to account for the command to preach the Word of God whether hearers listen to it or not.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, by focusing attention on the audience, he has placed them back into the center of the homiletical conversation.

Conservative homileticians have made an honest effort to learn valid lessons from Craddock and other proponents of the New Homiletic. It would be unwise, however, to incorporate the elements of the New Homiletic indiscriminately into traditional expository methodologies. These elements, often developed from a desire to communicate with today's postmodern audiences, are not based in illegitimate concerns. Nor are these components of good communication necessarily inappropriate in themselves. When, however, communication concerns prompt the establishment of these components as foundational forces undergirding a homiletical methodology, the outcome may be unhealthy for the church. In fact, there are a number of detrimental effects associated with such methodologies regardless of their foundational presuppositions.

First, there is a loss or displacement of biblical authority. Second, meaning is equated with application. Third, average Christians in the pew become dependent on the preacher for all their spiritual growth. Fourth, narrative preaching, which does not propositionally state a clear message, takes the risk of presenting no clear and specific message. Because no clear message is heralded, listeners may not understand the message or may get it wrong.<sup>24</sup> Fifth, in an effort to be relevant to the specific situation of

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<sup>23</sup>The prophet Isaiah argues in chapter 6 that preachers are to declare the Word of God knowing that it will sometimes fall on deaf ears. God's call for Isaiah to preach was not to get something heard, it was to get something said.

<sup>24</sup>This problem is not restricted to narrative preaching. Preachers may do a poor job of communicating no matter what kind of sermon form they use. However, if no propositionally declarative statements are made, listeners are left to guess at the

the day, preaching is negligent in presenting the whole counsel of God. Sixth, a clear connection with the historical foundation, upon which the Christian faith is built, is lost. Finally, theological truth becomes community or individually centered or is altogether lost.<sup>25</sup>

Preachers must not sacrifice the declarative exposition of the Word of God on the altar of an audience driven, outcome-based communication methodology.<sup>26</sup> This statement does not mean that preachers may neglect communication theory, but emphasizes, instead, the need to evaluate and place these theories in a proper relationship within the task of preaching.

Preachers must also guard against faulty interpretative methods in the preparation and development of their sermons. That means they must be careful in selecting and using both hermeneutical methods and materials. Conservative evangelicals will nearly all agree that there is an inseparable relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics. The goal of preaching is to deliver the Word of God, which means proclaiming what He has said. Based on this goal, conservative preachers often seek out and use the latest scholarly works on biblical interpretation and homiletics.

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preacher's meaning.

<sup>25</sup>In this section, I am indebted to the discussions in "suggestions for future consideration for contemporary preaching," and "suggestions for further research" in Mark A. Howell, "Hermeneutical Bridges and Homiletical Methods: A Comparative Analysis of the New Homiletic and Expository Preaching Theory 1970-1995" (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999), 203-12.

<sup>26</sup>The job of the preacher is *not to make* the Bible relevant, but to present its already relevant message in a way that helps contemporary society grasp its truth. In the same way, the preacher's job is *not to make* people respond by coercion or conscription, but to present clearly, and persuasively, the Word of God, which the Holy Spirit then uses to effect change. These ideas are in line with good expository preaching, which is composed of explanation, illustration, application, and exhortation.



Unfortunately, some of these works are moving in an unhealthy direction. The danger is not, however, always easily spotted since familiar terms, like “narrative,” are being used, but with different definitions.

Over the last thirty or so years there has been a push, especially evident within the larger context of religious studies, toward the use of narrative as the lens through which everything could be clearly viewed. David Allen outlines the buildup toward the dominance of narrative ideas as follows: “In the last third of the twentieth century, narrative became the Cinderella of literary criticism. From there it became the darling of theologians as well with the rise of narrative criticism, narrative theology, narrative hermeneutics, and finally narrative homiletics.”<sup>27</sup> This push was not all bad. Recognizing the need to interpret narrative literature as a whole was, for instance, a hermeneutical move in the right direction.<sup>28</sup> As Allen states, “The problem came when narrative was given a privileged status over everything else.”<sup>29</sup> A new movement in narrative methodology has recently developed which emphasizes the church’s part in the continuing narrative. The goal of this movement is the application of narrative interpretation to the church through narrative preaching.<sup>30</sup> The hermeneutic associated with this homiletical methodology is built upon the foundational belief that present day interpreters are current participants in God’s continuing salvation story. Their goal is,

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<sup>27</sup>David Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism: An Evangelical Comes to the Dance,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (2001): 69.

<sup>28</sup>William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 433-37.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>See, for instance, Green and Pasquarello, *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching*.

therefore, to interpret the rest of the story (that is the biblical part) as an earlier, but inseparable, part of their own. This argument, a rejection of the notion that two horizons exist that need to be “fused together” or “bridged,” rightly seeks to read Scripture in relevant terms.<sup>31</sup> It wrongly assumes, however, that truth has its nexus in the current, cultural application of the Word of God rather than in a historically fixed, accurate, and sufficiently communicated revelation of God in the biblical text. This blurring of the distinction between truth and present application can become dangerous if it is allowed to obfuscate the need for and use of objective standards.

Bryan Chapell may be correct in his assessment that the influence of the New Homiletic is waning as “the homiletics world—particularly the Evangelical homiletics world—is showing increasing caution toward *the dominant use* of story in preaching” (emphasis mine).<sup>32</sup> That does not, however, mean that its influence is gone or forgotten.

In light of these statements, at least two concerns remain. First, a renewed emphasis on expository preaching comes with an emphasis on the use of commentaries and other biblical resources in order to gather material to be used in the sermon. This is, no doubt, a move in the right direction if a part of the goal of preaching is to connect the hearers with the Word of God as presented in the biblical text. Some recent and forthcoming commentaries and helps, however, are founded on narrative hermeneutical

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<sup>31</sup>See, for instance, Joel B. Green, “Scripture and Theology: Failed Experiments, Fresh Perspectives,” *Interpretation* 56, no. 1 (2002), 5-20, for an argument against what he calls “linear hermeneutics,” which seeks to interpret Scripture by moving across the gap from “what it meant,” to “what it means.”

<sup>32</sup>Bryan Chapell, “The Future of Expository Preaching,” *Preaching* 20, no.2 (2004): 9. I emphasize the phrase “the dominant use” because I believe that it represents both a vulnerable weakness and an important instrument for defining a set of criteria for determining when the use of narrative, or story telling, becomes detrimental to biblical preaching.

principles.<sup>33</sup> How, then, will the use of materials found in these resources affect a resurgent conservative expository homiletic?

Second, the use of narratives, or story telling, is known to be an effective component of good communication. Since conservative homileticians want to be good communicators, they are incorporating these components into their methodologies. Must these conservative homileticians jettison the use of all narrative elements in their preaching? No. But they must not incorporate them without evaluating their use and misuse in light of their theological foundations. Part of this evaluation will depend on their ability and willingness to define with clarity each element of their homiletical method in light of their hermeneutic foundations. By doing this, they can develop a set of criteria by which to judge narrative and other elements in order to insure their healthy use. By developing and using such a set of criteria, conservative evangelicals will be able to continue their conversations within the larger world of homiletics without losing their distinction from it. They will also be able to make use of narrative's much needed contribution without allowing it to overshadow or eclipse biblical truth.

As members of God's continuing narrative, the church community has become the dominant force for interpreting His Word for Christians in a postmodern world. It uses shared stories as its primary method of communicating truth. In an article entitled "The Church, Why Bother?" author Tim Stafford rightly reminds Christians that "There

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<sup>33</sup>For instance, with the publication of Joel B. Green and Max Turner, eds., *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), the forthcoming Two Horizons Commentary series was announced. This commentary is described as "a completely new kind of commentary on the New Testament designed to reintegrate biblical studies with contemporary theology in the service of the church." Amazon "Editorial Review" [on-line]; accessed 1 November 2005; available from <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/080284541X/002-7360168-3793604?v=glance>; Internet. See also, Stanley P. Saunders, *Philippians and Galatians*, Interpretation (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001).

is no healthy relationship with Jesus without a relationship to his church.”<sup>34</sup> Few, if any, conservative evangelical preachers would disagree with such a statement. Being a part of the church is not, however, by itself enough. We must also recognize the truth that without knowing the Word of God, we cannot know and grow in our relationship with Him or His church. Following Stafford’s lead, we might ask a slightly different question: “The Bible, Why Bother?” Simply put, the testimony of believers—even preachers—can not be substituted for the Word of God. Narrative or other illustrative material, even if it has a biblically true message behind it, is simply not enough.

### **Interests and Presuppositions**

I am grateful that I was reared in a Southern Baptist church that valued biblical preaching. Expository preaching was the centerpiece of our pulpit ministry. This was especially true during my years as a teenager. Our pastor was interesting to listen to, relevant to our times, and always challenged us to ground what we believed (and were to live) in the biblical text. As I grew older and felt God’s call on my life to teach and preach His Word, I struggled. I wanted to be as interesting, relevant, and moving as my

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<sup>34</sup>This summary statement of the article was provided for the reader on the first page of an article by Tim Stafford, “The Church—Why Bother?” *Christianity Today*, 49.1 (2005), 1 [journal on-line]; accessed 31 January 2005; available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/001/26.42.html>; Internet. I included this article as a relevant example because although it rightly presents the church community as a vital part of the Christian life, it does so as if it were the most important single element for Christian growth. In fact, the article presents the necessity of fellowship without ever showing a connection between the church community and the Bible. Even worse, the article seems to say that the Word of God is, in comparison to fellowship, of lesser importance because believers can gain exposure to it from other sources. “They [those who do not attend church] need not lack the Word of God. The Bible is available through Barnes & Noble, and will undoubtedly continue to be published at a profit even if all the Christians get raptured away. Radio and TV offer excellent Bible teaching. So do books and magazines” (9). In such presentations of the church, the study of God’s Word is no longer central to worship or life.

pastor had been. Somewhat shielded from mainstream homiletics, I was introduced during my first year at Bible college to the New Homiletic in its application as first person narrative preaching. This form of delivery was viewed as a legitimate method for reviving a dull preaching ministry. That is one in which the preacher had lapsed into the humdrum, methodical motion of a consistent (but boring) expository method. Now ten years later, although I believe that narrative elements have a place in the ministry of the church, I am convinced that narrative preaching cannot faithfully, as the foundationally dominant part of any preaching methodology, be used to fulfill the role of preaching.

### **Organization of the Study**

The goal of this dissertation is twofold. First, it seeks to describe the impact of narrative homiletics on contemporary trends in interpreting and preaching. Then it seeks to offer basic guidelines for developing homiletical methodologies which remain true to orthodox theological presuppositions. Before this twofold goal can be accomplished, the historical relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics must be explored. There are, in fact, three areas of historical research which are important to this project. First, the historical relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics, including their development and definitions, must be surveyed. Second, the title “New Homiletic” implies an antithetical, old, or former homiletic that must be summarized. This summary provides a basis for comparing the Old Homiletic and the New Homiletic.<sup>35</sup> Finally, the effects of the New Homiletic, its foundation, trajectory, and recent influences must be surveyed. As this discussion continues, past and present definitions of narrative preaching are

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<sup>35</sup>For purposes of clarity, the easiest way to distinguish the two in the following discussion is to simply call the preceding or traditional homiletical model the Old Homiletic in contrast to the New Homiletic.

presented. Then narrative preaching as the primary representative of the New Homiletic's methodology is contrasted with the definitions of other homiletical streams. The work of Fred B. Craddock provides a stable point of departure for this part of the investigation.

### **Beginning with a Proper Hermeneutic**

A brief historical analysis of the movement of homiletics through history shows a close tie to hermeneutics. This is especially true in the area of hermeneutical foundations. For instance, when a preacher's hermeneutical foundation is based on the presupposition that truth is propositional in nature and given by God in His revealed Word, the biblical text, he will seek to interpret the Bible as the very Word of God. When this is true of hermeneutics, homiletics follows along the same path and is concerned with communicating what the interpreter has found to be stated in the Bible, which is the very Word of God. When, however, it is presupposed that truth is given by God directly to a subject (individual) through the mediation of His Word, interpreters seek to experience for themselves the Word of God. Following such a hermeneutic, homileticians are concerned with facilitating an event in which God communicates again or anew, through the preacher's words. The issue at stake is an important one for all preachers, especially Southern Baptists, for it rises from the same issue that was at the heart of the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention. More than *the record of or containing* the Word of God, the Bible *is* the Word of God.<sup>36</sup> There can be no doubt that the preacher's belief about the Bible (doctrine of inspiration) will strongly affect his presentation of it in

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<sup>36</sup>For a brief summary of relevant changes reflected in the 2000 revision of the *Baptist Faith and Message*, see R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "The Scriptures, BF&M Article 1," in "An Exposition from the Faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*" (Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001), 1-2.

the preaching event.

Homiletics does not need a new methodology that is founded on new developments in communication theory. It needs, instead, to return to an old homiletical idea, one which bases homiletical methodology on its hermeneutic foundation. That is not to say that the homiletical methodology of the early church, revised and restated by the Reformers, does not need to be reassessed, revised, and restated in every age in order to address valid concerns from contemporary voices. It is to say that many of the concerns raised in opposition to what may now be collectively called the Old Homiletic are silenced or abrogated when a right relationship between biblical hermeneutics and homiletics is restored. What one believes about the Bible directly affects what one believes about preaching.

### **Beginning with the Early Church**

It is hard to evaluate a current trend in homiletics without setting it within its context. Such a context must include both historical and contemporary elements. Homiletics of the early church were concerned with much the same dilemma with which preachers are faced today. God had called them to a specific task. They were to “preach the word” of God. In context, this statement specifically means that they were to deliver His Word to His people. What they believed about the task of preaching had a direct impact on the methodology that they chose for accomplishing that task.

The same is true today. Homiletic methodology is formulated on one’s theological beliefs. These beliefs should be based on deeply rooted, firm, and unchanging, presuppositions. More current, and less firm, pre-understandings related to the particular application of a methodology should be subjected to these foundational

beliefs.<sup>37</sup> The similarities and dissimilarities between contemporary homiletical methods and those of the past reveal a change in areas of pre-understanding and presuppositions related to the theology of preaching. Yet the terms used to define elements and goals of preaching are often the same, or so close, that any examination that is not deliberate and discerning may not even notice the differences. A biblical theology of preaching must, therefore, be restated and reaffirmed with clarity of terms and sound resolve.

### **Beginning with Craddock**

Although the foundational ideas of the New Homiletic did not find their genesis in the work of Fred B. Craddock, they certainly found their contemporary popularity in it. An unimposing man, Craddock's storytelling prowess has garnered great acclaim among many preachers. In fact his influence was so prevalent during the last third of the twentieth century that Baylor University named Fred B. Craddock, in 1996, one of the twelve "most effective preachers in the English-speaking world, according to a worldwide survey."<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, his books on preaching, *As One without Authority*,

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<sup>37</sup>In hermeneutics, the term "pre-understanding" is generally defined as the lightly held beliefs about a passage of Scripture, which are developed based on one's current cultural context, and may change with each reading of a text. "Presuppositions," on the other hand, are deeply held beliefs that do not change with each new situation or reading of a text. The connection I am drawing is that homiletical methodologies should be developed on the level of their theological presuppositions, rather than on a current reading (pre-understanding) of communicative trends. For a discussion on the difference between the terms "pre-understanding" and "presupposition" in hermeneutics, see J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 85-94.

<sup>38</sup>According to an online article, this survey received 341 responses from seminary professors and editors of religious periodicals. In these responses, 1,548 preachers were nominated as the most effective preachers in the world. This top twelve list included well known names such as Billy Graham, Lloyd Ogilvie, Haddon Robinson, John R. Stott, Charles Swindoll, Barbara Brown Taylor, and William Willimon. Baylor University Survey, "Top Twelve Preachers" [on-line]; accessed 24 August 2004; available from <http://pr.baylor.edu/story.php?id=000323>; Internet. In 2000, *Ten Great*



*Overhearing the Gospel*, and *Preaching* are so highly esteemed by the homiletical community as a whole that they have been reissued as reprints. In the case of two of these works, a second edition has been completed with very little done in the way of revision. In fact, when invited by the editor of the revised edition of *As One without Authority* to “make any changes in the text that you wish,” Craddock recounts, “I nixed that request immediately. Were I to approach the book thinking, I should have said this, I should not have said that, I should be clearer here, I should update there, the result would not be this book but another one. So, I stood with Pilate: ‘What I have written I have written.’”<sup>39</sup> We have, therefore, a stable set of works representing an accurate statement of Craddock’s position from which to develop a clear understanding of the foundation upon which proponents of the New Homiletic have built.

We also have the resultant works of a number of representatives of the New Homiletic as they have erected their own methodologies on the foundation of Craddock’s seminal works. They do not, to be sure, take everything which Craddock presented as gospel. But they eagerly accept the opening which he provides.<sup>40</sup>

Finally the recent emergence of evangelical works promoting the acceptance or implementation of narrative preaching indicates its continuing influence upon adherents

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*Preachers: Messages and Interviews*, edited by Bill Turpie, put into book form complete messages of ten of the preachers featured on the Odyssey Network program *Great Preachers*, which sprang out of the Baylor University study. Bill Turpie, ed., *Ten Great Preachers: Messages and Interviews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

<sup>39</sup>Craddock, *As One without Authority*, vii.

<sup>40</sup>These include David Buttrick, Richard Lischer, Thomas G. Long, Eugene Lowry, Gail R. O’Day, Barbara Brown Taylor, and Paul Scott Wilson, to name a few representatives. The primary source for surveying these representatives is a set of essays written by individuals who learned from Craddock and presented both what they gleaned from his work and built on it in *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, ed. Gail R. O’Day and Thomas G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

to more traditional approaches. I will focus on two works that represent two distinct streams in homiletical development. The first is by Haddon and Torrey Robinson, entitled *It's All In How You Tell It*.<sup>41</sup> The second book is a compilation of essays edited by Joel B. Green and Michael Pasquarello, III, entitled *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching*.<sup>42</sup> These two books present narrative preaching from evangelical points of view as currently relevant models which should be employed in order to reach people in our postmodern world.<sup>43</sup>

### Methodology

In order to evaluate the impact of contemporary narrative homiletics on interpreting and preaching the Bible, this study analyzes the relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics in past and present preaching methodology. To perform this analysis, a historical survey describing the relationship between hermeneutics and

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<sup>41</sup>Haddon Robinson and Torrey W. Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It: Preaching First-Person Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003). This approach seeks to construct a methodology which includes narrative preaching on an orthodox hermeneutic foundation.

<sup>42</sup>Green and Pasquarello, *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching*. This methodology seeks to include narrative preaching as an extension of the theological presupposition that the biblical text is only a part of the continuing narrative.

<sup>43</sup>There are, of course, other conservative evangelicals who have promoted narrative preaching in various ways. Millard J. Erickson and James L. Heflin, for instance, end their chapter on "Narrative Doctrinal Preaching" as follows: "The preacher has a number of options available for the shaping of the sermon. An exciting part of the weekly and daily task of preparation is deciding which one to employ in a given passage. The nature of the text itself, that is, its form, facilitates the decision. With so much narrative in the Bible, the *story sermon* is a good and viable option" (emphasis mine). Millard J. Erickson and James L. Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins: Doctrinal Preaching in a Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 219.

homiletics during four major pre-postmodern time periods is conducted.<sup>44</sup> Next the relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics in the postmodern era is evaluated. This section of the study focuses particularly on the seminal works of Fred B. Craddock. His work provides a notable historic marker for a line of popular trends in homiletics over the last thirty plus years.<sup>45</sup> This analysis shows the connections between Craddock's inductive method and the narrative preaching of the new Homiletic. It also helps in defining the differences between the Old and New Homiletic.

Finally, a survey of several recent works in homiletical theory is conducted in order to reflect the continuing effects of the New Homiletic. The connection between the use of narrative preaching and some present evangelical homiletical trends is shown, and the strengths and dangers of narrative preaching are delineated. In the end I argue that although the influence of the New Homiletic is waning, it is still evident in all streams of homiletics. Proponents of conservative homiletics must, therefore, continue to evaluate the influence of narrative preaching on their methods. They must also maintain their hermeneutic foundation in light of the ongoing homiletic conversation.

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<sup>44</sup>These time periods consist of a Patristic Period (AD 100-600), Medieval Period (AD 600-1500), Reformation/Post-Reformation Period (AD 1500-1600), and Modern Period (AD 1600-1900s). This survey uses the historical survey work of others, and primary sources where possible, to identify the hermeneutical convictions from which scholars and teachers built their homiletical methods. Two aspects, characterized by the following questions, are of particular interest in this study. First, "What did they believe about the role of Scripture in preaching?" Second, "What did they believe about the preacher's role, or purpose, in preaching?"

<sup>45</sup>This historic period in homiletic theory is benchmarked to 1971, which is the year in which Craddock's most influential work, *As One without Authority*, was first published. That is not to say that homiletical theory including, or presenting, narrative preaching was unheard of prior to Craddock's writing. In fact, the mid and late 1960s are replete with examples of individuals calling for new methods in a deconstructed world. It is, however, the moment in history when the foundations of the New Homiletic were introduced to, and accepted by, the world of preaching at large.

In the conclusion of this study, a summary of the impact of narrative homiletics is given from hermeneutical and homiletical perspectives. Then the primary result of these impacts on the church is stated, and cautions for using narrative in the future are suggested. These cautions are not given in order to discount the use of all narrative elements in preaching. Instead, they are given in order to encourage continued emphasis on the use of good communication techniques within the biblical mandate for preachers to preach the Word.

## CHAPTER 2

### DEFINING AND JOINING HERMENEUTICS AND HOMILETICS IN THE PREACHING TASK

#### **Introduction**

Postmodernism has contributed a healthy suspicion related to the use of technically distinctive terms. This is especially true of terms related to religious endeavors which are themselves often viewed with suspicion. These suspicions are not unique to extreme liberal or conservative interpreters and preachers. The suspicions of conservative evangelical preachers are not, however, based on the same presuppositions which inform adherents of postmodern philosophy. Postmodern thinkers are suspicious of definitions because they believe that meaning is ever in a state of flux, and is subject to the will of a reader or community. Individuals who do not buy into postmodern ideas, on the other hand, believe that authors use words in order to express particular and lasting meaning. These conservative interpreters and preachers should be suspicious of terms used today because postmodern thinkers often redefine important terms by reading new meaning into them derived from their (or their communities) point of view.

Terms such as hermeneutics and homiletics are good examples of how meaning is not only developed over time but can in some cases be used to connote different things to different people. In some cases the meaning of these terms is being reshaped in order to fit them together into systematic arrangements that are dictated by particular cultural

context. In these arrangements, elements which were once used to define homiletical characteristics are being used to characterize hermeneutical activities.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, hermeneutical ideas are being shifted over into discussions of homiletic practice.<sup>2</sup> To further complicate the issue, some are calling for a return to a unified single field of study which does not emphasize the distinctive nature of either.<sup>3</sup>

What follows is an effort to provide a basic definition of these two distinct terms that can provide a standard for each from which we can judge the different methods being attributed to them. These basic definitions do not deny the vast nature of these

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<sup>1</sup>Although not exclusively, I have in mind at this point elements such as imagination, which were once thought (by conservative homileticians) to be important only in sermonizing. Now many are calling for a redefinition of the role of imagination during both the interpretation and preaching processes. There are a number of recent articles and books related to the subject. Thomas H. Troeger notes the shift as he states, "Homiletics, which began as the discipline of sacred rhetoric, is becoming the discipline of imaginative theology." Thomas H. Troeger, "Homiletics as Imaginative Theology," *Homiletic* 12, no. 2 (1987): 27. Peter Gomes has suggested that imagination is to be used to move from the text to the good news of the text. Peter J. Gomes, "A Matter of Trust and Imagination," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 30, no. 4 (2003): 279-93. Glen Scrogie argues for the use of a "baptized" imagination in interpreting and preaching the gospel. Glen A. Scrogie, "Hermeneutics and the Meditative Use of Scripture: The Case for a Baptized Imagination," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 2 (2001): 278-84. See also, Charles Rice, *Interpretation and Imagination: The Preacher and Contemporary Literature* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

<sup>2</sup>On this side of the equation, issues like authority are being shifted from hermeneutics to homiletics. For instance, authority was traditionally said to be located in God's Word. In more recent discussions, it has increasingly become a part of homiletics where preachers do not preach with authority, but simply help hearers discover a personally authoritative Word of God for themselves. This is the impetus behind Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001). See also Walter Brueggemann, "Biblical Authority: A Personal Reflection," *Christian Century* 118, no. 1 (2001): 14-20.

<sup>3</sup>This idea is at the heart of proposals such as the one presented by Joel B. Green and Michael Pasquarello III, eds. *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching: Reuniting New Testament Interpretation and Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003). Examples of the need to unite these fields are also notable in the writings of theologians. See Jens Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

fields of study. The purpose is to show how their basic definitions have worked together throughout history in order to accomplish a single unified task. Both hermeneutics and homiletics are crucial to the task of preaching the Word.

In order to accomplish this goal, the common beginning of hermeneutics and homiletics is demonstrated along with the development of each into distinct fields. Finally, recent trends calling for the two to be reunited are highlighted, and suggestions for a proper relationship within that unity are presented.

## Origin of the Terms

### Hermeneutics

The term *hermeneutics* has its lexical roots in Greek culture. Some have argued that the term may be related to the Greek god Hermes, who was said to be the messenger between the gods and human beings.<sup>4</sup> His job was to explain to human creatures what the gods demanded of them. Simply put, he was to interpret for people the needs, desires, and demands of the gods. Although it might be entertaining to focus a definition of hermeneutics on the characteristics attributed to Hermes, the concept did not originate with him or his name. In fact, it is difficult to know whether Greek myths about Hermes gave rise to a specific use of the term used to describe the task of interpretation or if the terms existed giving rise to his name. Nevertheless, a simple description of his assumed task can certainly inform us as to how the term was defined just before and

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<sup>4</sup>See, for instance, Henry A. Virkler's opening remarks in *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes on Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 15, and John Rutherford's description of "Hermes," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:687.

during the writing of the New Testament.<sup>5</sup> At least as it relates to the communication of the gods with human beings, it was recognized that hermeneuts were speakers of a god's word.<sup>6</sup> We do not need to place a heavy emphasis on these ideas, however, since the concept of interpretation and terms for describing such activities existed long before Greek language or Greek mythology.

The Hebrew people, from which we gain much of our understanding about God and His creation, had a deep appreciation for the need to communicate across difficult language barriers. The Aramaic word פִּשְׁרָא, for instance, is translated in Daniel 5:12 "to interpret." In this passage we are told that King Belshazzar was confronted by the appearance of mysterious writing on the wall which he could not understand. So the king called for someone to interpret or explain to him what it said. In the end Daniel, described as a man "in whom is a spirit of the holy gods," was called in to interpret the writing for the king (Dan 5:11).

The need for interpretation extends beyond the basic need of human beings to understand God, to our need to communicate with other human beings. But even this need is related, for Christian preachers, to the relationship between God and his special

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<sup>5</sup>This idea is easily demonstrated by reading the account of what happened to Paul and Barnabas as they ministered in Lystra during their first missionary journey. After God had healed a lame man through Paul and Barnabas, the people sought to worship them. "When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, 'The gods have become like men and have come down to us.' And they *began* calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker" (Acts 14:11-12).

<sup>6</sup>The source of this word, in Hermes' case, was directly received as one of the gods. In the case of human spokesmen, these words could have originated from direct communication between individuals and these gods, or they could have been received in visions or dreams. In either case, *hermeneutics* was defined as the task of translating the verbal expression of the gods into the vernacular of the people.



creation, man.

The need for interpretation among human beings can be traced back to the Tower of Babel where God is said to have separated the people of the earth by confusing their language so that they could not understand one another.<sup>7</sup> Much more could be said, but the point is that we can easily see that the concept of interpretation existed much earlier than Hermes or Greek culture, and it extended to the relationships between God and human beings, and human beings to human beings. By the time of Plato and Aristotle, Greek intellectuals had begun to develop concepts related to the practice of hermeneutics. These ancient scholars had designated terms as referents for these concepts.<sup>8</sup> I will, therefore, base the remaining portion of this discussion of hermeneutics on the historic use of the Greek verb ἐρμηνεύω.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Gen 11:6-9.

<sup>8</sup>A good example of the depth of this development may be found in Aristotle, *De interpretation* (On Interpretation), in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941). In a section on “The Origin of Hermeneutics,” Paul Ricoeur claims that the definition of hermeneutics can be traced back to *De interpretation*, and he stated that hermeneutics, according to Aristotle, is related to “textual exegesis . . . and understanding signs.” Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretation: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 4. “In fact, meaningful discourse is *hermeneia*, ‘interpretation’ reality, precisely to the degree that it says ‘something of something.’” Ibid. These observations are important in later discussions related to the rise and continuation of the New Homiletic. It seems that during the last fifty years, scholars in many fields began to question the legitimacy of Christian ideas, arguments, and presentations. Many believed that Christianity had been fashioned from Greek philosophy. Although adherents of the New Homiletic may not believe that Christianity is a Hellenistic creation, they do adhere to the idea that Hellenism dictated the form by which Christianity communicated its message. Believing that older forms of preaching were simply a matter of tradition, they argue that it is not necessary to use a traditional form for communicating the Word of God.

<sup>9</sup>See David G. Burke, “Interpretation,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 2:862-63 for a brief survey of all the Greek terms that are translated “interpret” or “interpretation.” His treatment of these terms is of particular importance in that it leads to a statement of the definition of *hermeneutics* from a traditional point of

David G. Burke gives the sense of a traditional definition as follows: “In brief, hermeneutics has traditionally been understood to be the working out of *rules* and *methodologies* for interpreting scriptural texts. Already in the time of Aristotle rules were derived for the interpretation of literary texts; a number of these are still in effect.”<sup>10</sup> I emphasize the words “rules” and “methodologies” because, from its earliest beginnings, hermeneutics has emphasized a mechanical aspect of interpretation. In more recent days, however, some have emphasized a different aspect of hermeneutics. James A. Sanders, for instance, defines hermeneutics as follows: “Hermeneutics in general terms is the *art* of understanding. More specifically, it refers to the method and techniques used to make a text understandable in a world different from the one in which the text originated” (emphases mine).<sup>11</sup> In his statement, Sanders clearly states that the specific task of hermeneutics involves “method and techniques,” but it is also notable that he refers to the use of them as an art. I do not wish to draw too harsh a distinction between the two. After all, one may refer to the finished work of an auto-mechanic as a work of art. “He can fix anything on my car. He just seems to have the touch.” But can the distinction, especially in areas of interpretation, be taken too far by defining hermeneutics as an art rather than a science?

It has been argued that hermeneutics is best described in terms of both art and science. In fact, both art and science are used accurately to define the historic and contemporary senses of the term. Not wanting to place undue emphasis on either,

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view.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 2:863. Emphasis mine.

<sup>11</sup>James A. Sanders, “Hermeneutics,” in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 175.

William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. state that “interpretation is neither an art nor a science; it is both a science and an art.”<sup>12</sup> Their point is that neither should be emphasized. An emphasis on one or the other reveals something about the presuppositions with which one approaches the tasks of interpreting and preaching the Word of God.<sup>13</sup>

In order to emphasize a different approach, some replace the terms “science” and “art” with “philosophy.” Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard state that some, “like Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Fuchs, Ebeling, Gadamer, and Ricoeur use hermeneutics in a more philosophical sense to identify how something in the past can ‘mean’ today or become existentially significant in the modern world.”<sup>14</sup> In the case of these examples, a new hermeneutic is offered, which is more concerned with determining the meaning of meaning or with issues of epistemology.

Others are calling for a return to a theological hermeneutic in order to promote theological communication with application. In *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics*, Jens Zimmermann states that the fundamental characteristic of a theological hermeneutic is, as summarized in the writings of Martin Luther, “its understanding of reality as

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<sup>12</sup>William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: word, 1993), 4. They do not define art in terms of its aesthetic value, but in terms of moving through the process with ease.

<sup>13</sup>This aspect of the relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics is explored later. At this point it is important simply to note that the two are interrelated. In fact, one’s preaching methodology is an accurate reflection of one’s views of interpretation. Craddock reminds us of this connection in the following: “How one communicates is a theological commentary on the minister’s view of the ministry, the church, the Word of God, sin, salvation, faith, works, love, and hope.” Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 44.

<sup>14</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 6 n. 4.

constituted by the divine word.”<sup>15</sup> These efforts are characterized by an emphasis on God’s actions in presenting His Word rather than on human efforts to discover them. Hermeneutics and homiletics are joined together in this effort as God’s speech acts are seen as His life changing communication with His creation. Zimmermann summarizes his position this way: “In the end, theological hermeneutics provides us with interpretative principles that allow interpretation to be truly ethical and character forming, the very things that both philosophical hermeneutics and radical postmodern hermeneutics strive for.”<sup>16</sup>

Within discussions of meaning, the locus of meaning becomes a paramount issue.<sup>17</sup> It may be described in terms of what the author originally intended to say. It may be viewed as a message fixed within the text. Or it may be stated in terms of what the reader or hearer understands the text to say or do.<sup>18</sup>

Orthodox theologians tend to emphasize God’s role as the author, preserver, and authenticator of meaning. Neo-orthodox theologians generally emphasize human roles as composers, conveyors, and endorsers of meaning. Sanders exemplifies these traits in his definition of hermeneutics:

Hermeneutics is the *art* of understanding such an expression in the world of the hearer or reader. The hermeneut, engaging in the act of understanding, is also a text, as it were, and the encounter between the two is an act of intertextuality. Every text

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<sup>15</sup>Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics*, 46.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 322.

<sup>17</sup>Klein, Bloomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 8-12.

<sup>18</sup>Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, Kevin Vanhoozer discusses the location of meaning in light of its locution, illocution, and perlocution in *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

read or heard is already an interpretation of earlier texts incorporated into it, exhibiting its own hermeneutics of understanding those earlier texts.<sup>19</sup>

So hermeneutics may be defined as both the art and science of interpretation, which must in the end take into account the interpreter's view of the source, context, endorser of meaning, and corollary (attendant accompanying) authority.

## Homiletics

The term *homiletics*, like hermeneutics, has its lexical roots in ancient Greek. Derived from the verb ὁμιλέω, this term means simply to communicate or speak with someone.<sup>20</sup> Verbal expression is fundamental and invaluable for sharing with other individuals things like information, one's feelings, needs, or commands.<sup>21</sup> The Early Church Fathers believed that God had given them something to present, and they built their preaching methodology on this rudimentary idea. In fact, the term *homily* was applied to a particular kind of preaching that was practiced by these earliest of Christian

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<sup>19</sup>Sanders, "Hermeneutics," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 175-76.

<sup>20</sup>E. C. Dargan states that *homiletics*, as "a discipline is of late origin," but was occasionally discussed by early church fathers such as "Gregory of Nazianzen, Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great." E. C. Dargan, "Homiletics," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel M. Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950), 346. The term had two basic meanings during the Patristic period. On the one hand, it could refer to the association of a group of people, and on the other, it was used to refer to the act of communication, speaking, or preaching. G. W. H. Lampe, ed., "ὁμιλέω," in *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 951.

<sup>21</sup>This is not to imply that the sole purpose of language is the communication of information. In *Is There Meaning in This Text?*, Kevin Vanhoozer argues that language expresses meaning as communicative action. At one point he brings up a question directly related to our discussion. He states that "human beings, are *homo laquens* (the speaking animal), but what precisely is our relation to language and how central is it? For Derrida, the human speaker is more a slave than a master of language. . . . Fortunately, the categories 'master' and 'slave' do not exhaust the options for describing the relation of human beings to language." Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*, 201. His point in the end is that language that communicates does what the author intended for it to do.

preachers. It referred simply to presenting the Word of God (the Holy Scriptures) to their audiences. O. C. Edwards identifies this type of preaching as one of “two different kinds of preaching that were practiced” by John of Antioch and Constantinople, who is also known as Chrysostom (nicknamed the Golden Mouth).<sup>22</sup> These sermons or homilies were characterized basically as the exegesis or commentary on specific passages of biblical texts that were delivered in a conversational tone.

The conversational characteristic of this style prompted John A. Broadus to state that they were more like prayer-meeting talks than the expository sermons of the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Broadus’s point was not that these early preachers did not expose the truth found in biblical text, but that they were more than commentaries on texts. In fact, these early sermons were filled with the explanation and application of biblical texts delivered to their audiences in light of the circumstances they faced. In keeping with both the idea that God had given them something to say and that they had an audience that needed to hear the Word of God, early examples of homiletics reflected both.<sup>24</sup> These preachers believed that they were to deliver the Word of God, which they understood as biblical truth that was to be taught to a particular audience through the exposition of a

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<sup>22</sup>O. C. Edwards, Jr., *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 1:72.

<sup>23</sup>John A. Broadus, on Chrysostom, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of The Christian Church*, ed. P. Schaff et al. (New York: Christian Church Literature, 1888-1889; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 13.6.

<sup>24</sup>Excellent examples may be found in the works of Chrysostom and Augustine. Chrysostom’s *Treatise on the Priesthood* as well as many of his sermons exhibit this homiletical understanding. Chrysostom, *Treatise on the Priesthood*, as well as a number of excellent sermon examples may be found in *John Chrysostom*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vols. 9, 10, and 13, ed. P. Schaff et al. See also Augustine, *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, pt. 1, vol. 11, *Teaching Christianity: De doctrina christiana*, intro., trans., and notes by Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1996).

biblical text.

As homiletics continued to develop, it began to focus more on the art of communication, and eventually lost its focus on the biblical text. Throughout his survey, Edwards shows that this process took place over time, and was shaped by several things. For one thing, preachers began to lose confidence in their ability to interpret the Scriptures. Edwards, for instance, summarizes this movement during the early Medieval period as a time in which homilies were created and popularized.

These collections come from a time when preachers were experiencing a loss of nerve. With the demise of Latin culture, clergy no longer considered themselves or their contemporaries to be competent to interpret the Scriptures. Instead, they ransacked the sermons of the Fathers for words through which their own generation could be guided safely into the harbor of truth. It is these gleanings that scholars have labeled 'homilies.'<sup>25</sup>

A second shaping force centered on the growing distance between the populace and the church.<sup>26</sup> As these shifts occurred, the purpose of preaching turned toward getting a hearing among the people rather than declaring a message from the Church. Failure on the part of the medieval bishopric to connect the biblical message with the people led to an unformed, unimpressed, and unmoved laity. A new form of preaching was needed.

The result was preaching that spoke from the perspective of the people rather than simply following the biblical text. This new preaching had a different feel or style to it. James J. Murphy applies the descriptive labels of "artistic sermons" and "thematic

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<sup>25</sup>Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:158.

<sup>26</sup>Edwards is again very helpful in showing the general trend in preaching as it relates to the culture of the times. See, for instance, his section on the rise of "Irregular Preachers," where he cites the growth and power of the church, corruption of the priests, and the expanding growth in the population as elements that exacerbated the growing divide between the people and the church. *Ibid.*, 1:211-12.

sermons” to this new sermon style.<sup>27</sup> Seeing the need for change, “Franciscans and Dominicans were prominent among those who developed a new way to preach. Previously, most preaching had been done in the form of homilies that expounded one of the biblical readings appointed for the liturgy and applied it to the lives of the people. Now a new style of sermon was developed.”<sup>28</sup> This new style further marked the movement of the sermon away from the exposition of Scripture in the pulpit as it sought to connect hearers directly with the meaning of the text. Edwards notes that the form of the sermon itself was being shaped by something other than the text: “An important and easily overlooked aspect of this new form is that it represents the beginning of the assumption that sermons ought to have a pattern instead of taking their shape from the biblical passage expounded.”<sup>29</sup> The result was that the meaning of the text was displayed in a structured sermon pattern rather than through homilies which were often verse by verse expositions of a text.<sup>30</sup>

The messages of the preaching friars were also popular because they spoke from the point of view of the people. They were men who worked among the people,

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<sup>27</sup>James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1974), 311-44.

<sup>28</sup>Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:217. It should be noted that much of what was occurring in the churches of the time was done in Latin, which was not the language of the people. Also, many of the sermons were actually the sermons of previous generations, dusted off and at times read verbatim.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>30</sup>Edwards includes an abstract of Robert of Basorvorn *Forma Praedicandi* in *A History of Preaching*, that “represents the full flowering of the form” found in the preaching of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. *Ibid.*, 2:179-93.



practicing what they preached.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the friars did not believe that the people needed to be schooled in the biblical texts, but that they needed to be connected to the God Who gave the Scriptures. This connection could best be made by explaining the thematic idea(s) taught in a text rather than explaining them directly from a biblical text. The new form was effective, and the popularity of the friars spread quickly. Edwards argues that these thematic sermons were effective in gaining an audience in part because they were not the only sermons being heard: “The very existence of thematic preaching, then, implies that the local pastors were laying down a solid foundation in the Christian faith, the foundation upon which the friars built.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, thematic preaching spread because it was built on a pre-laid biblical foundation.<sup>33</sup>

As happens when any form of communication becomes popular, other forms began to fade. Biblical illiteracy grew as homiletics emphasized the communication of ideas as they were understood by the preacher rather than conveying the ideas as they were presented in the biblical text.

The Reformation would act as the catalyst for the next major change in homiletics. As Luther and others in the movement called for a return to Scripture as the sole source for truth and authority, commitment to preaching that connected hearers with the biblical text was renewed as well. Homiletics was once again defined as communicating the Word of God. By 1561, Heinrich Bullinger had put pen to paper

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<sup>31</sup>As noted above, the distance between the clergy and the populace was increasing. Preaching friars closed the distance by living and working among the people.

<sup>32</sup>Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:219-20.

<sup>33</sup>This point is important to later discussions in that it shows the importance of biblical preaching and teaching as a pedagogical force which prepares people to hear the Word of God.

stating the essence of the preacher's task and defining its source and authority: "The duties of ministers are various; yet for the most part they are restricted to two, in which all the rest are comprehended: to the teaching of the Gospel of Christ, and to the proper administration of the sacraments."<sup>34</sup> At first glance, this statement may not seem to have any bearing on this discussion. But as Bullinger continues in this section, he explains how these two tasks come together under one setting, the preaching of the Word of God: "For it is the duty of the ministers to gather together an assembly for worship in which to expound God's Word and to apply the whole doctrine to the care and use of the Church, so that what is taught may benefit the hearers and edify the faithful."<sup>35</sup> So the essence of the preacher's task centered on the preaching of the Word of God, which these reformers believed to be the very Word of God: "Wherefore when this Word of God [defined earlier in the same section as canonical Scripture] is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believed that the very Word of God is preached and received of the faithful."<sup>36</sup> Based on these ideas, it is easy to see that homiletics (at least from a Reformation perspective) focused on proclaiming the Word of God as given in the biblical text. With this assertion it is also easy to see again the connection between hermeneutics and homiletics. Hermeneutics seeks to interpret the biblical text as the Word of God so that preachers can apply sound homiletical methods in declaring His Word.

A definition of homiletics which focuses on the proclamation of a correctly

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<sup>34</sup>Heinrich Bullinger, *Second Helvetic Confession*, in *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, ed. John H. Leith (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), 158.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 158-59.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

interpreted Word would not last, however. With the rise of Darwinism, liberalism, and higher critical methods of biblical study, the Bible was no longer viewed by many as the Word of God to be proclaimed.<sup>37</sup> Over the last fifty years the swing of the pendulum, representing the extremes of homiletical focus, has continued to expand. The greatest expansion of the boundaries has come from the New Homiletic. Since the 1960s, greater emphasis has been placed on communication, especially in the area of the role of the hearer as the determiner of the message.<sup>38</sup> It is not a coincident that the role of the listener in homiletics has grown as the role of the reader in hermeneutics has grown.<sup>39</sup> In both cases, the limits of their definitions and the relationships between them have been pushed far beyond their traditional understanding. But they have also been pushed in the same direction. In areas of both hermeneutics and homiletics the hearer has become the focus in such a way that the meaning and the message are dependent on them.

Now there is a new movement among several fields of theological study to

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<sup>37</sup>Allen H. Sager writes in an essay on "The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy 1918-1930" that "while the teaching of the evolutionists raised questions about the factual reliability of the Bible, religious modernists, armed with biblical criticism, a comparative study of religious, and a quickened social conscience, began to call into question entire bodies of teachings and practices which had long been regarded as sacrosanct and unchanging." Allen H. Sager, "The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy 1918-1930," in *Preaching in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit, 1630-1967*, ed. DeWitte Holland (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), 259.

<sup>38</sup>Summarizing this general trend, F. Gerrit Immink states that "during the closing decades of the twentieth century, American homiletics was dominated by the so called 'New Homiletics,' and now, during the first years of the new millennium, the emphasis has been moving further away from the modernist *logos* to a post-modern *poetics*, a further turn to the listener: how is faith enacted by the listener?" F. Gerrit Immink, "Homiletics: The Current Debate," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 8, no. 1 (2004): 89.

<sup>39</sup>David Allen notes a parallel movement in similar areas in "Preaching and Postmodernism: An Evangelical Comes to the Dance," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (2001): 62-78.

soften the extremes in favor of systematic development that seek to unite seemingly diverse fields. Areas of concern related to homiletics have, for instance, been expanded to mean more than ideas related to getting something said or getting something heard.<sup>40</sup> Those following a narrative theological approach to homiletics focus on the church as it is currently living out God's continuing narrative.<sup>41</sup>

It is in the transition to this new focus that some of the characteristics and effects of narrative homiletics become apparent. With the rise of the New Homiletic, preaching focused on what needed to be heard rather than on what needed to be said. In "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way through the Sermon," Glenn L. Monson summarizes the last stage of development leading up to the work of Fred B. Craddock, as follows: "If the classical understanding of the preacher as rhetorician, and the Barthian understanding of preacher as 'herald' had anything in common, it was that both viewed the task of the preacher as 'getting something *said*.' Fred Craddock changed all that. Craddock said that the task of the preacher was 'to get something *heard*.'"<sup>42</sup> Craddock's methodology focused attention on the hearer as an essential part of the message.

Craddock's focus on the hearer appears to be analogous to that of the New Hermeneutic.<sup>43</sup> Just as the communication of a preacher's message is dependent on the

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<sup>40</sup>These brief characterizations are elsewhere attributed to traditional and new homiletical methods, respectively.

<sup>41</sup>Green and Pasquarello, cited above, present an example of this idea and are used throughout the rest of this discussion as examples of this movement.

<sup>42</sup>Glenn L. Monson, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way through the Sermon," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 43, no. 4 (2004): 306.

<sup>43</sup>Although Craddock does not claim a direct connection to the New Hermeneutic, the fact that both focus on the intersection of personal experience and the biblical message as the locus of the Word of God is a significant. Fred B. Craddock, "Recent New Testament Interpretation and Preaching," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*

hearer's experiences, the new hermeneutic holds that interpretation is dependent on the interpreter's experiences as well. James M. Robinson states that "it is a central recognition of the new hermeneutic that language itself says what is invisibly taking place in the life of a culture."<sup>44</sup> Therefore, accurate communication takes place when the reader or hearer relates to the words and the experience behind them. Paul J. Achtemeier summarizes this key point as follows: "Only if the matter in the text is a matter of existential concern to the interpreter can the interpretation be valid."<sup>45</sup> One of the distinguishing marks of the New Hermeneutic is that the Word of God is not a valid Word unless it is validated by the interpreter's experience. It is only a short step from the interpreter as determiner of meaning to the listeners as determiner of the preacher's message. In accordance with Craddock's foundation, narrative approaches to preaching generally seek to empower hearers so that they may discover, develop, and authorize the Word of God for themselves.<sup>46</sup> It is not, therefore, uncommon when reading the works of the New Homiletic to come across statements calling for preaching that connects with present day listeners through a shared or new story.<sup>47</sup>

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66, no. 1 (1973): 76. For an excellent summary of the roots and early development of the New Hermeneutic, see James M. Robinson, "Hermeneutic since Barth," in *The New Hermeneutic*, ed. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobbe, Jr. (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 1-77.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>45</sup>Paul J. Achtemeier, "How Adequate is the New Hermeneutic?" *Theology Today* 23, no. 1 (1966): 103.

<sup>46</sup>Narrative preaching in this case is defined in terms of the New Homiletic. Delineation of the various definitions of narrative preaching is one of the tasks of chapter five.

<sup>47</sup>A primary source for studying this idea is the work by Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles L. Rice, *Preaching the Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). Story preaching is also the subject of a book by Amanda Joann Burr, *New Life for*

In light of this homiletical concern, what then is the relationship between the biblical story and the present one? The next section explores the relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics as the two work together to present the biblical story for today.

## **Building Blocks and Buildings**

### **Patristic Period**

The basic premise that homiletical methods generally follow hermeneutical trends has been true throughout most of the history of preaching. This understanding is not, however, without qualification. In the New Testament and early New Testament Church period the two were not sharply defined or separated from each other. Biblical hermeneuticians during the Patristic period followed the New Testament pattern, and sought to interpret the Bible as heralds in order to teach the Word of God to His people.<sup>48</sup>

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*the Old, Old Story: A Guide for Developing Story Sermons* (Arlington, VA: Thornsby Bailey and Brown, 1989). Burr develops her idea on the subject based on the belief that both the giving and receiving of God's Word are culturally bound. "The limits of the Canon (The Holy, accepted by the Christian Orthodoxy, never-to-be-deleted-from-or-added-to Bible) were established centuries ago by men who dominated the intellectual and religious communities of entire cultures and societies. Through no particular fault of their own, they had a limited perspective. The new stories do not intend to imitate or replace Scripture, only to interpret it more effectively for today's ears." Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>48</sup>Hughes Oliphant Old states that these three elements, heralding, good-news, and teaching, were part of the understanding of the Apostles and the early church. Mark's use of three of words related to preaching, κηρύσσειν, εὐαγγέλιον, and διδάσκειν, "demonstrates some fundamental things about the way the early Christians understood the preaching ministry of Jesus." Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1:1222. Old also goes on to show how the early church continued to implement these ideas as its preachers and teachers related preaching to the proclamation of a correct interpretation of Scripture. "When Christians met together to worship God they continued to read the Law and the prophets . . . much as faithful Jews had done for centuries, but the difference was that now the Law and the prophets were understood in a different sense. It was the responsibility of the ministry of the Word to make this new understanding clear." Ibid., 1:251.

To accomplish this task preachers sought to discover the original author's intended meaning.<sup>49</sup> Interpretation was not, therefore, a separate but essential enterprise related to the task of preaching. On the other hand, the study of God's Word was not separated from the call to proclaim what He has said. Believing that God inspired human authors to write down His words, these interpreting preachers or preaching interpreters followed the simple conviction that the Bible was God's Word expressed through human hands.

Augustine declared that God says what Scripture says.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, when a preacher speaks from, and in line with, God's written Word, he speaks God's very words. That is why these early interpreters and preachers could stand in their pulpits and boldly proclaim with assurance, "Thus saith the Lord."

In the early days of the church, the inseparable relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics was evident even in the diverse preaching methodology practiced by those who followed the Antiochene and Alexandrian methods of interpretation.<sup>51</sup> A careful historical study of New Testament interpretation reveals the

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<sup>49</sup>This assertion is predicated on statements made in the sermons of the early church fathers which seek to explain the intended meaning of the biblical writers. In his fourth homily on the gospel of John, for instance, Chrysostom explains why the Evangelist "merely hints briefly at the Incarnation" in the beginning of his gospel in order to highlight the original intent. Chrysostom, "Homily 4," in *Saint John Chrysostom: Homilies 1-47*, trans. Sister Thomas Aquinas Goggins (New York: Gatherers of the Church, 1957), 44. This idea is also supported in the findings of Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 33-36.

<sup>50</sup>"O Lord, is not this Scripture of Thine true, for Thou art truthful and Thou, as the Truth, didst give it forth? . . . In reply to these words, Thou dost say to me, for Thou art my God and Thou speakest in a loud voice in the interior ear of Thy servant, breaking through my deafness and crying out, 'O man, to be sure I say what My Scripture says.'" Augustine, *Saint Augustine Confessions*, in *Writings of Saint Augustine*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1953), 5:448.

<sup>51</sup>Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 33-36.

stark differences between the interpretative methods of these two schools.<sup>52</sup> Yet despite their differences, these two schools agreed that the goal of interpretation was to determine what God has said, and then apply what He has said to contemporary life.<sup>53</sup>

Those following the Alexandrian school of interpretation sought to plumb the depths of God's revelation for its spiritual or deeper meaning. To accomplish this goal, an allegorical method of interpretation was used. Since the goal of the preacher was to proclaim the Word of God, such interpretation found its way quickly from interpretation to application.<sup>54</sup>

Of particular fame was Origen of Alexandria. Origen developed his interpretative method in line with the hermeneutics of his time, and presented his allegorical interpretation as one among three levels of interpretation. In his work *A*

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<sup>52</sup>The predominant interpretative methods prior to the New Testament, as well as during the time of the early church fathers, were based on the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. Following a Platonic hermeneutic, interpreters seek to understand the meaning of the text by looking for the perfect form behind the text. Alexandrian interpreters, therefore, looked for the deeper, spiritual truth behind the text. For Aristotle, however, things are knowable only in their context. So Antiochene interpreters, following this basic idea, sought the author's intended meaning, available from a literal reading of the text. For a discussion of these ideas, see essays by Robert B. Sloan, Jr. and Carey C. Newman, "Ancient Jewish Hermeneutics," and Robert W. Bernard, "The Hermeneutics of the Early Church Fathers," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke, and Grant I. Lovejoy, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002).

<sup>53</sup>Few would deny the truth of this idea for the Antiochene school. But some also argue that this was the goal of those at Alexandria as well: "Origen contended that God had inspired the original biblical writer to incorporate the allegorical meaning into his writing. Thus, what Origen considered the highest meaning of Scripture—its deeper spiritual truth—was already implicit in Scripture, not something invented by the interpreter." Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 35.

<sup>54</sup>Evidence for this connection is clear in the preaching of Origen and Augustine, as well as many who followed. See Edwards' comments on Origen's use of allegory in interpretation and preaching, for instance. Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:40-42.



*History of Christianity*, Kenneth Scott Latourette writes that Origen, from an early age, wanted to understand the deeper meaning he believed was hidden in God's Word: "Possessed of an eager mind, he perplexed his father by questions about the deeper meanings which he believed lay behind the words of Holy Writ."<sup>55</sup>

If Origen and others of the Alexandrian school believed that the Bible was God's Word given to His people, why would they feel the need to use an allegorical method of interpretation? One cannot be absolutely certain. What is known, however, is that literal interpretations common in his day sometimes resulted in scriptural contradictions and difficult or morally perplexing ideas.<sup>56</sup> Simply put, some preachers of that day believed that literal interpretations alone led to humanly unexplainable concepts and irreconcilable contradictions.<sup>57</sup> Latourette summarizes Origen's position as follows: "Believing the Scriptures to be the word of God, he held that nothing in them was to be believed which is unworthy of God."<sup>58</sup> Origen believed that the Bible must not contradict known facts, and what it says about God in one place must not be contradicted by what it says about Him in another.

Origen and others sought a method that could settle the conflicts that were sometimes created by literal methods. Their solution was to use allegory as an

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<sup>55</sup>Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1953), 149.

<sup>56</sup>Indeed, the problem of seemingly contradictory statements within the biblical text is still a topic of great concern, and every interpretative method applied must answer tough questions of unity within the biblical text.

<sup>57</sup>The term literal is being used at this point to indicate a sense of interpretation gained through the natural grammatical-historical reading of the text. This idea is set against the allegorical sense of interpretation that was used to seek the deeper or hidden meaning of the text.

<sup>58</sup>Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 149-50.

interpretative tool. Allegory provided a method that could be used to overcome difficulties associated with the literal interpretation of Scripture.

Once Origen had been driven by persecution from his Alexandrian home to Cæsarea Palestine, he continued to develop the allegorical method for studying Scripture. The result was his classic threefold method of interpretation:

He saw in the Scriptures three levels of meaning: first, the common or historical sense which is on the surface for the simple-minded; second, the soul of the Scriptures which edifies those who perceive it; and third, for the perfect, a meaning hidden under what superficially is repugnant to the conscience or the intellect but which, discerned, can be expressed by allegory.<sup>59</sup>

Much of Origen's work is lost to us today. Still, enough of it, as well as the writings of others describing his work, has survived for us to understand his desire to guard the integrity of the biblical message.<sup>60</sup> In his commentary on the Fourth Gospel, for instance, he vigorously defends his use of allegorical interpretation to harmonize the Scripture: "The truth about these matters lies in intelligible realities [those found by non-literal exegesis]. . . . If there are those who receive the four Gospels but do not think that the apparent inconsistency is solved through non-literal exegesis, let such people tell [how else to solve it]."<sup>61</sup>

Even if direct access to original sources, were lacking, it would still be easy to

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 150.

<sup>60</sup>See, for instance, Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R. P. Lawson (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957), Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible Philosophy in the Third-century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983), and Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen, *The Fathers of the Greek Church*, trans. Stanley Godman (New York: Pantheon, 1955).

<sup>61</sup>Bernard, "The Early Hermeneutics of the Early Church Fathers," in *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 95. The passage from Origen's writings, which Bernard is quoting, is his translation from the French translation of Origen's Commentary on the Gospel of John, *Commentaire sur Saint Jean*, trans. into French by Cécile Blac (Paris: Sources Chrétiennes, 1966-1982), 10.3.10.

see the effects of his threefold, allegorical method in the preaching of those who followed Origen. Augustine's allegory of the good Samaritan, for instance, followed some 200 years later, but is considered a classic and noted example of Origen's method applied. In it, each detail of the story is pressed like an olive to release its rich oil or spiritual message. These great preachers of the first and second eras of Christian preaching were diverse in many ways. Even so, there was a common thread running between these two giants. They carried into the task a profound respect for the biblical text as the Word of God.

The point I hope to stress by highlighting these examples is that their use of allegory in interpretation grew out of a high view of Scripture. So the purpose of these early hermeneuts and homileticians in using allegory did not stem from a desire to remove biblical authority. Their goal was to know and present God's truth in order to place themselves, and others, under its authority.<sup>62</sup> Even so, such interpretations led to the idea that the plain truth is not enough. The meaning of Scripture was not, at least in its literal interpretation, always perspicuous.<sup>63</sup> To further exacerbate the problem, allegory as an interpretative method, and expressed in preaching, made it nearly impossible to test the

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<sup>62</sup>Edwards states that "they really believed the interpretations they came up with were what the passages meant, what God intended for them to learn from the words of the prophet or apostle." Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:108. Augustine's connection between the Bible as God's Word to be interpreted and preached as presented in his *De doctrina christiana* is the topic of further discussion elsewhere.

<sup>63</sup>At this point, I am defining *perspicuity* in terms of Scripture's ability to communicate the biblical truth without the help of complex hermeneutical principles. For an in-depth discussion of the perspicuity of Scripture, see Gregg R. Allison, "The Protestant Doctrine of the Perspicuity of Scripture: A Reformulation on the Basis of Biblical Teaching" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1995).

message derived from Scripture with Scripture itself.<sup>64</sup> Interpreters, preachers and hearers were left without a firm canon for testing truth. Finally, the loss of a knowable canon (a specific meaning attributed to a biblical text) by which to measure truth resulted in an expansion of authority beyond the biblical text itself.<sup>65</sup> The trend described at this point began as a way to settle issues not easily settled by interpretation. In the end, it developed into an expansion of the canon that resulted in the official Church becoming a foundation of authority greater than the biblical text.

The other school of interpretation taking root in the early church was known as the Antiochene school. This school, influenced more by Aristotle than Plato, sought to discern the facts, or plain truth, presented in the biblical text. This truth could lead them to better understand God and what He expected of them. They interpreted the gospels literally, for instance, in order to know and proclaim the historical truth of the coming of the Christ.

John Chrysostom is a well known preaching representative of this group. He

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<sup>64</sup>Not everyone who used allegory used it as the primary means for interpretation. As stated elsewhere, Augustine used allegory in his preaching, but according to Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, his stated method of interpretation followed three basic rules. First, clear passages of Scripture were to be used to interpret unclear passages. Second, church tradition was used to decide still unclear passages. Finally, the context of the passage was to be used when the other two had failed. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 36-37.

<sup>65</sup>An expression of this expansion of authority takes place, for instance, in the Middle Ages as the church, more than Scripture, becomes the arbiter of truth and possessor of authority. "To guard true doctrine and to guide the believer, the church developed the *regula fidei*, the rule of faith based on apostolic teaching, patristic writings, decisions of church councils, and creeds." James T. Spivey, Jr., "The Hermeneutic of the Medieval and Reformation Era," in *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 102. All these canons seem good at first. What began, however, as a way to handle theological disputes within the church (I am referring at this point especially to the use of apostolic succession of the church leadership to settle issues) was soon used as a source of personal power, and became contemptibly corrupt.

was such a great orator, originally trained for a career as an advocate, that he was given the nickname “the golden-mouthed.”<sup>66</sup> Like members of the Alexandrian school, Chrysostom sought God’s truth delivered in the Scripture. But he sought it plainly spoken and literally interpreted. These ideas are clearly evident in the preface to his homilies on the gospel of John.

For the son of thunder, the beloved of Christ, the pillar of the Church throughout the world, who holds the keys of heaven, who drank the cup of Christ, and was baptized with His baptism, who lay upon his Master’s bosom with much confidence, this man comes forward to us now; not as an actor of a play, not hiding his head with a mask, (for he hath another sort of words to speak) nor mounting a platform, nor striking the stage with his foot, nor dressed out with apparel of gold, but he enters wearing a robe of inconceivable beauty. For he will appear before us having “put on Christ” (Rom xiii. 14; Gal iii. 27), . . .

For the words of John are nothing to those who do not desire to be freed from this swinish life, just as the things of this world to him are nothing. The thunder amazes our souls, having sound without significance; but this man’s voice troubles none of the faithful, yea, rather releases them from trouble and confusion; it amazes the devils only, and those who are their slaves.

Wherefore Christ Himself exhorted, saying, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine.” (Matt vii. 6) He calls these words “pearls,” though in truth they be much more precious than they, because we have no substance more precious than that. For this reason too He is wont often to compare their sweetness to honey, not that so much only is the measure of their sweetness, but because amongst us there is nothing sweeter.<sup>67</sup>

In these three brief passages, Chrysostom highlights the plainness of the apostle John, his writing, and his message. That is not to say that in their plainness these three are bland. Even in the picturesque language used by Chrysostom, clear concepts are stated.

The Antiochene school sought to promote literal interpretation. Some of its leaders, however, became embroiled in theological controversy. As they were

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<sup>66</sup>Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 98.

<sup>67</sup>This passage comes from Homily I, which is the Preface of Chrysostom’s homilies on the gospel of John [on-line]; accessed 7 January 2004; available from [http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF1-14/npnf1-14-05.htm#P177\\_1921](http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF1-14/npnf1-14-05.htm#P177_1921); Internet.

discredited, so were their methods of interpretation. Then with the extension of the canon to apostolic succession (an ancillary result of the great councils), and later to the official officers of the Roman Catholic Church, the literal hermeneutic of the Antiochene school waned. Robert Bernard summarizes the loss of Antiochene influence on hermeneutics as follows:

Tracing the exegetical theories of the Antiochene school is, unfortunately, a difficult task. The Antiochenes became embroiled in a controversy over the person and work of Christ; the names of many Antiochene Christians became connected with Nestorianism, the view that Jesus had two separate persons and natures. Condemned as a heresy, Nestorianism cast a shadow over those associated with it.<sup>68</sup>

With the loss of one of the major schools of thought concerning interpretation, the Church, and its methods of interpretation headed into a new challenge.

### **Medieval Period**

The Middle Ages brought challenges of their own into the realm of hermeneutics and homiletics. The threefold allegorical method set forth by Origen continued to be the method of choice for interpretation. Following the Platonic notion that the visible world was just a representation or shadow of the real world, interpreters believed that the biblical text was just a shadow or faint representation of the truth. In order to better discover the truth, they continued to follow the dominant threefold method of Origen. These interpreters and preachers were not, however, content with the method as it had been passed to them, and added a fourth category to Origen's three. Along with the literal, allegorical, and moral categories, interpreters sought the anagogical sense. Anagogical interpretation sought to apply all Scripture to the ultimate or future eternal meaning beyond this present earthly life. John Cassianus followed this method in his

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<sup>68</sup>Robert W. Bernard, "The Hermeneutics of the Early Church Fathers," in *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 93-94.

monastic guide *Conlationes*, which “influenced all later interpreters.”<sup>69</sup> Although Medieval methods of interpretation were predominantly of this type, Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard argue that interpretation also included “traditional” and “historical” interpretation.<sup>70</sup> These remnant ideas are particularly noticeable in the works of Pope Gregory I, and the Venerable Bede.

Unfortunately, scholars from this period forward began to rely on the work of others for discovering the meaning of Scripture. Rather than working with the original languages, and seeking to interpret texts for themselves, they used commentaries, summaries, and marginal notes to discover truths about biblical texts. James T. Spivey describes this movement in interpretative methodology as follows:

The Fathers had constructed theology exegetically, directly upon biblical interpretation. However, early medieval scholars such as Pope Gregory I and the Venerable Bede compiled their theology by borrowing from those patristic sources and from comments of successive generations of editors. Step by step their editorial theology distanced itself from Scripture.<sup>71</sup>

The homiletical result was the same. Sermons were separated from the study of Scripture as they relied on the editorial work of others on the Scripture. With this development, the barrier or wall separating the people from the Word of God increased.

There was also a general decline in the exercise of God’s call to preach the Word during this time. E. C. Dargan is helpful in setting the overall task of preaching against the backdrop of the times: “In an age like that of the fifth and sixth centuries it would be vain to expect any particular sphere of human endeavor to manifest tokens of

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<sup>69</sup>Spivey, “The Hermeneutics of the Medieval and Reformation Era,” 103.

<sup>70</sup>Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 37-38.

<sup>71</sup>Spivey, “Hermeneutics of the Medieval and Reformation Era,” 103-04.

vigor which were lacking in the general life of the times.”<sup>72</sup> In other words, as life in general moved into a shadowy time of despair, preaching followed. Problems with preaching may have added to the overall decline of the times. It should not, however, be charged as solely responsible for the effects seen in such negative basic generalizations. In fact, Dargan seems to argue that other Christian failings added to the failure of preaching. He does this by showing that failures in the pulpit were not the only failures of the time. Other Christian failings included things such as the loss of personal piety, which Dargan believes was stimulated by the advancement of worldly enterprises and pleasures. He also cites changes within the worship of the church as outside influences reshaped worship inside the church. He states, “We should not fail also to take account of the growth of liturgy and forms of worship. While these preserved a prominent place for preaching in the services of the church their effect then, as too often since, was to make the spoken word of far less relative value than forms of worship.”<sup>73</sup> Dargan’s point highlights the fact that preaching was on the decline. If preaching had been doing what it was supposed to do, it would have affected issues of piety and responsibility, and it would not have given way to the cultural leaning of the times.<sup>74</sup>

Another interesting tie to be made at this point is the one between the emphasis on an officially dictated liturgy and the proclivity of interpreters and preachers to accept the hermeneutical and homiletical work done previously on the texts by others. The

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<sup>72</sup>Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching: From the Apostolic Fathers to the Great Reformers AD 70-1772* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 1:108.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>74</sup>I pause to note that this observation, like many others, should be made from a position of humility since it is often much easier to see the failings of the past than the present.



authority wielded by preachers of this time period was founded on the official position of the church, and not on the biblical texts themselves. In a fairly deriding remark about the early part of this time period Dargan states that, “The little men of the declining age usually try to live on the brains of the great men who have preceded them. But inexorably history writes it down that the brains of one generation are not sufficient brain-food for the next.”<sup>75</sup>

Things would continue to decline in later centuries as the basic tendencies to accept the studies of others continued to prevail. To further complicate things the church had at an earlier time placed restraints on preachers, further solidifying this downward trend. Dargan describes one example as follows:

In the *Captularia* of Charlemagne and his successors numerous regulations are found in regard to the character and duties of the clergy, and preaching comes in for its share of attention. There is much insistence upon the duty of preaching and even the material of the sermons is prescribed to some extent; as for example, priests are forbidden “to feign and preach to the people, out of their own understanding and not according to the sacred Scriptures, new or uncanonical things.”<sup>76</sup>

This trend would not, however, hold complete sway over those who were called to preach the Word.

Toward the end of the Medieval Period there was a shift back toward the interpretation of the Bible. No single element or event is responsible for the shift, and many aspects of Christianity were involved. Robert Bernard states that “six factors affected the development of hermeneutics after the twelfth century: university scholarship, literalism, scientific inquiry, religious dissent, the mendicant orders, and

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<sup>75</sup>Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, 1:111.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 1:134. The quotation within Dargan’s statements is from a *Captularia* dated AD 789, and is found in *Patrologia Latina*, tom. 97, col. 182.

Aristotelian studies.”<sup>77</sup> The Council of Vienna (1311), for instance, mandated the study of the Bible in its original languages in the universities. A number of studies and publications on hermeneutics and preaching also began to stream forth. One example, a work written by Guibert of Nogent, was appended to a commentary on the six days of creation, and was simply called “A Book about the Way a Sermon Ought to Be Given.”<sup>78</sup> His was the “first new homiletical textbook since Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*.”<sup>79</sup> During this period, literature on hermeneutics and homiletics also grew because of the rivalry between the Catholic church and early reformers or pre-Protestant scholars. Hermeneutics and homiletics were held closely together during the Dark Ages. However, little emphasis was given to either until the latter stages of this era.<sup>80</sup>

Elsewhere, it was noted that the interpretive methodology of the Antiochene school had lost favor within the church. Their commitment to literal interpretation did not, however, die out all together. By the end of the Medieval period a hermeneutical reform was beginning to take shape. Spivey notes that there were at least four key elements of a hermeneutical shift that took place during this time period. First, “Christian

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<sup>77</sup>Bernard, “The Hermeneutics of the Early Church Fathers,” 106.

<sup>78</sup>Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:175.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Edwards states that during the Renaissance of the eleventh and twelfth centuries a renewed interest and confidence in the study of Scripture and preaching was felt. “Loyalty to patristic authority remained, but with a difference. There was coming to be the kind of confidence that is reflected in a well-known statement of Bernard of Chartres to the effect that he and his contemporaries were like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants. . . . The mere fact that they looked out from the vantage point of the accomplishments of the Fathers enabled them to see farther than the Fathers had. While Bernard’s words did not refer to preaching in their original context, they nevertheless exemplify the new willingness to risk originality that distinguishes the preaching of this period from what preceded it.” Ibid., 1:174.

humanists employed textual criticism to determine the authorship, dating, and quality of text.”<sup>81</sup> This observation is noteworthy, in that it shows that a renewed interest in the critical study of the biblical text was a contributing factor in the call for reexamining the canons used by the Church to establish its doctrines. These doctrinal beliefs then formed the foundation upon which the preaching of the times was built.

Second, “Christian humanists emphasized literal interpretation as the primary means of finding the essential meaning.”<sup>82</sup> Like the aforementioned hermeneutical shift, this one calls for an accounting of the interpreter in which an established text must be able to bear an ascribed meaning. For those who held tightly to this hermeneutical idea, it would no longer be acceptable, on the part of the official Church or pastor, to proffer a doctrine without showing where and how it fit with the meaning of a biblical text.

Third, “Christian humanists translated the Bible directly, without the aid of glosses, and developed a tradition of private judgment which the church criticized.”<sup>83</sup> In line with the first two, this shift highlights a renewed focus on the Scripture as something set above the comments of its exegetes and admirers. In doing so, the traditional interpretation of a passage by the Church was viewed as helpful in understanding the text, rather than as authoritative explanation of the text. In spite of the opposition of the Church, this shift in focus would not be dissuaded.

Finally, “Christian humanists studied the Bible in the original languages and published printed editions of the Bible in the original languages.”<sup>84</sup> This idea was also a

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<sup>81</sup>Spivey, “The Hermeneutics of the Medieval and Reformation Era,” 110.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

blow to the authority of the Church as an official canon by which doctrine was measured. Since the Vulgate translation of the Bible and the Apocrypha, by Jerome (AD 331-420), the Bible had served the Church as a theological expression of its own beliefs, and was, as a possession of the Church, enforced by it. With the discovery of better original language manuscripts, and the subsequent study of them, some of the doctrinal expressions inherent in the Latin Vulgate were challenged.

The new result of these key hermeneutical shifts was an increasing challenge to Church dogma because of an increased emphasis on the study of the biblical text. Interpreters and preachers still face these same challenges today. They must decide whether the Bible or the message of the Church is the source of authority. Is the authority of the Word of God found in the contemporary message presented by the church, or is it inherent in the biblical text? The answer to this question would eventually shake the world and its aftershocks are still felt from time to time.

Once again the issue of preaching is tied closely to the hermeneutical movement of this era. By the twelfth century, two “tokens of the revival” of preaching based on a renewed hermeneutical emphasis are evident.<sup>85</sup> First, Dargan notes: “There is a greater regard for preaching on the part of the clergy themselves. The shameful neglect of the past centuries begins to be redressed, and the mediaeval Christian Israel suffers no longer so great a dearth of ‘teaching priests.’”<sup>86</sup> These teaching priests were charged with knowing and teaching God’s Word. Second, he states, “The other token of revival is the converse of this; it is that the people of all classes began to show more respect for the real

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<sup>85</sup>Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, 1:181.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

preacher and more interest in his message.”<sup>87</sup> By real preachers, Dargan has in mind those who preached from the biblical texts in the language of the people. This interest predates by nearly two hundred years efforts to print and place Bibles into the hands of the laity. But it is further evidence that people wanted to know both God’s message and its source of authority.

These hopeful beams of light do not mean that things had completely returned to former days, when Chrysostom and Augustine declared God’s message from God’s Word. But they were, nonetheless, rays of hope. The point is that both interpretation and preaching were receiving due emphasis again. Emphasizing the disparity still existent between these twelfth and first century interpreters, Dargan highlights the tenacity with which elements of allegorical interpretation hung on through this time period: “The interpretation is of course still allegorical, if possible even more absurd than in former times. Centuries must pass before the pulpit could be delivered—and even yet is not wholly delivered!—from bondage to this ancient and intrenched abuse of Scripture.”<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, both hermeneutics and homiletics were emphasized, and both gained strength during this time.

### **Reformation/Post-Reformation Period**

At this point Martin Luther, Desiderius Erasmus, and John Calvin enter the picture. A notable preacher in his own right, Martin Luther is the most prominent name associated with the Reformation. His role in the hermeneutical shift of the times was,

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 190.

however, more along the lines of advocate or spokesman, than as a technician.<sup>89</sup> The work of Erasmus in collecting, translating, and collating translations of the Greek New Testament is incredibly important at this point. Erasmus was very interested in the study of the Bible in its original languages, and devoted his efforts to the task. David S. Dockery states that both Luther and Erasmus were important figures in moving hermeneutics back toward a literal interpretation based on the original text: “Yet it was Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), more so than Luther, who through the influence John Colet (1466-519) rediscovered the priority of the literal sense.”<sup>90</sup>

On the other side of Luther was John Calvin (1509-1564). Dockery states, “Luther was a prophet, a preacher; Calvin a scholarly lecturer.”<sup>91</sup> Luther is sometimes characterized more in terms of his preaching than his scholarship. He was the face and voice of the Reformation.<sup>92</sup> That is why such works as his “ninety-five” theses, tacked to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg on 31 October 1517, are spoken of more in

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<sup>89</sup>This statement is not intended to take away from the many, and important, works of Martin Luther. Nor is it meant to depreciate the depth of his abilities. It should be noted, for instance, that Luther translated the Bible into German, his native tongue. That is a notable feat for any scholar. His translation was so good that, according to Latourette, “none other neither before or later equalled it in dignity and felicity of expression.” Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 719.

<sup>90</sup>David S. Dockery, “New Testament Interpretation: A Historical Survey,” in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 26.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>92</sup>Luther did not stand alone in his fight. “Members of the staff of the University of Wittenberg rallied to Luther’s defense. One of these was Philip Melancthon (1497-1560). . . . Newly installed as professor of Greek, he became convinced of the soundness of Luther’s position and to some extent was an echo, although by no means merely an echo, of the older man.” Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 710.

light of the “immense sensation” they caused than the content which they contained.”<sup>93</sup>

John Calvin, on the other hand, is viewed as a scholar’s scholar. Dockery states, “Indeed in the eyes of some he is regarded as the greatest interpreter in the history of the Christian church.”<sup>94</sup>

In the preceding discussion of the hermeneutical shift taking place in the Reformation, several preachers of note have already been mentioned. That is because the fields of hermeneutics and homiletics were viewed as one. Three particular interpreting preachers of the Reformation that demand mentioning are Martin Luther, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli.<sup>95</sup> Dargan describes Luther’s entrance into the preaching ministry as one of hesitation at first: “As is well known, Luther was reluctant to enter on the work of preaching, and only did so at the request of his ecclesiastical superiors while still a monk, in 1515. At once, however, he began to realize the value of preaching, and the orator’s instinct within him was awakened, so that he sometimes preached as many as four times a day.”<sup>96</sup> Calvin was also recognized for the emphasis he placed on preaching. In spite of

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 708.

<sup>94</sup>Dockery, “New Testament Interpretation,” 27. Once again, this is not to say that Calvin did not preach, but that it is his scholarship in biblical studies which gets the most attention.

<sup>95</sup>Although not as obvious as the parts played by Luther and Calvin, Zwingli’s role emphasizes a critical element in the development of the relationship between interpretation and preaching. He emphasized preaching through biblical books and focused worship on the exposition of Scripture rather than the Eucharist. Although unified at this point, these two ideas represent the two fields which soon become separate disciplines of study. Edwards summarizes Zwingli’s commitment to Scripture as follows: “Instead of Luther’s emphasis on justification, he was more involved in the humanist’s desire to return to the sources (*ad fontes*), and thus he wanted to emphasize the Bible as the exclusive source of Christian doctrine. His battle cry was not *sola fide*, but *sola scriptura*.” Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:304.

<sup>96</sup>Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, 1:370.

his busy schedule, Calvin preached at least once a day. Of Zwingli it is said, “As a preacher Zwingli must occupy a high place in history. Preaching with him as with Luther was the main thing, and by it chiefly he gained and kept his hold upon the people and carried out his work of reform.”<sup>97</sup> The work of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and others during this time period calls out attention once again to the fact that those who were on the cutting edge of hermeneutics were also active in the pulpit.

Dargan offers this summary of the outcomes of the Reformation efforts to emphasize and combine faithful hermeneutics and powerful homiletics: “But the glory of Reformation preaching—that great principle in which all others are necessarily involved—was its use of Scripture. In the hands of the reformers the Word of God again comes into its heritage and rules the pulpit.”<sup>98</sup>

### **Modern Period**

Following Luther and Calvin, a cultural shift began to take hold. Specialization began to separate the sciences and people. The medieval system of education had fully developed and was bearing fruit in the form of systematic and logical discussions that basically had no hearing outside the academy. Once again the message being delivered to the people and the source of those messages were being separated. This separation had been seen a number of times and in other related fields. In fact, it may be described in terms related to the characteristics ascribed to Scholasticism as it emerged from the Medieval period. Scholasticism “relied on philosophical methods and

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 1:408.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 1:376.



the use of reason to make clear divisions and distinctions within a body of knowledge.”<sup>99</sup>

These “clear divisions and distinctions” translated into a separation between study and practice or orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Karen O’Dell Bullock describes this phenomena as it relates to the modern period as follows: “A third characteristic of this movement was that theological formulations were generally produced and argued within the context of academic circles, not borne out of local church life.”<sup>100</sup>

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, another issue dividing the building blocks from the building began to take shape. This division would surface as questions of the origin and nature of the Bible were raised. Until that time, the dominant view was that the Bible was the Word of God, written and preserved by Him. Friedrich Schleiermacher focused the attention of interpreters on a different approach.<sup>101</sup> During that time, attention moved away from God as the final or ultimate author of the biblical text. Biblical authors were human beings writing from a human perspective, and must be interpreted as such. This distinction removed the onus of authority from the Bible, as God’s written word, to that of a human author inspired with a message about God.

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<sup>99</sup>Donald K. McKim, “Scholasticism,” in *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 250.

<sup>100</sup>Karen O’Dell Bullock, “Post-Reformation Protestant Hermeneutics,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 119. This division is also evident in the opposite extreme, pietism. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard describe pietism as follows: It represented a reaction to the arid intellectual dogmatism of Protestant scholasticism and the sterile formalism of Protestant worship services.” Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 42.

<sup>101</sup>Schleiermacher’s approach focused attention on interpreters as the receivers of God’s revelation rather than on the biblical authors as the writers of His revelation, See, for instance, his statements regarding inspiration in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 89. Millard Erickson summarizes Schleiermacher’s approach as follows: “In an extreme form, that of Schleiermacher, revelation is any instance of conscious insight.” Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 331.

Preachers following this hermeneutical approach could not declare that only biblical truth is authoritative.

Horace Bushnell applied this idea to homiletics. For example, he believed that human language cannot adequately express spiritual things, and concludes that the arbiter of truth is human experience. His position is clearly stated in an essay which originally appeared in the magazine *Hours at Home*:

I shall endeavor to exhibit, as far as I can in the restricted limits of this article, the fact that our Christian Gospel is a Gift more especially to the Human Imagination. It offers itself first of all and principally to the interpretative imaginings and discernings of faith, never, save in the manner, to the constructive processes of logic and speculative opinion. It is, in one sense, pictorial; in every line or lineament is traced in some image or metaphor, and by no possible ingenuity can it be gotten away from metaphor; for as certainly as one metaphoric image is escaped by a definition, another will be taken up, and must be, to fill its place in the definition itself.<sup>102</sup>

So the message, located in the metaphor of the biblical text, may become known only through the imagination of the hearer or reader. More than discernings of faith, imagination is used here to describe one's ability to relate through corresponding existence.

Not everyone agreed with these hermeneutical shifts. One group of scholars and preachers including Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, Benjamin B. Warfield, and J. Gresham Machen, representing what came to be known as Princetonian orthodoxy, responded by teaching that Scripture could be studied and understood in a way that produced and presented propositional truth. Scripture was for these scholars a source to be mined for truth. Still others within this camp, characterized and later known as fundamentalists, made Scriptural inerrancy and authority a litmus test for orthodoxy.

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<sup>102</sup>Horace Bushnell, *Horace Bushnell Sermons*, ed. Conrad Cherry (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 97.

Many preachers fall into this broadly summarized group. The following is an excerpt from a single sermon which is representative of this diverse group. As Benjamin Warfield begins a sermon entitled, “The Gospel of the Covenant,” he emphasizes the point that biblical texts need to be studied in order to determine their meaning:

In the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand our Lord presented Himself symbolically to man as the food of the soul. For, as Augustine reminds us, though the miracles wrought by our Lord are divine works, intended primarily to raise the mind from visible things to their invisible author, yet their message is not exhausted by this. They are to be interrogated also as to what they tell us about Christ, and they will be found to have a tongue of their own if we have skill to understand it.<sup>103</sup>

Nevertheless, arguments against this view persisted. As added fuel to the fires that were drawing interpreters and preachers away from the authority of Scripture, methods of textual criticism began a rise to prominence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During this period, hermeneutics focused on the biblical text, and once again preaching was not far behind. Proponents of textual criticism said that if the preacher could determine with accuracy the original text, then its message could also be mastered. A scholarly idea, this method sounded somewhat promising for those who wanted to establish a canon whereby to measure truth. In fact, this method was applied by both conservative and liberal scholars. Textual criticism as a whole, however, did not lead to a better grasp of the biblical text as truth. Many of the scholars promoting these methods did not seek to determine the Word of God, as had the Princeton theologians. Rather than strengthening the biblical foundation of interpreting and preaching, these theologians favored textual criticism as a tool developed for the purpose of disproving the historical reliability of the biblical text.

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<sup>103</sup>Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Savior of The World: Sermons Preached in the Chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), 217.

Liberal scholars had long since abandoned the idea that a divine author could or would have revealed himself in the Bible. Beginning with the presupposition that miracles simply could not and therefore do not happen. Bultmann, for instance, sought to identify the history or historically accurate events and statements behind the biblical text.<sup>104</sup> Left with a rapidly shrinking historically accurate text, preachers once again, following the interpreter's lead, were more concerned with the kernel of truth or the message beneath the inaccurate, but meaningful, husk.<sup>105</sup> In this case, the biblical narrative was believed to be nothing more or less than a literary vehicle for transporting the message.

Preaching in Europe and America, though divided between the different schools of interpretation, began during this period to focus more on social issues than biblical truth. Europe was leading the way and what would take place in American hermeneutics and homiletics is best explained by examining the European version which preceded it. The problem may best be observed in what is known as the Down Grade Controversy faced by Charles H. Spurgeon.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (London: S.P.C.K., 1960), and *What Is Theology?* ed. Eberhard Jungel and Klaus W. Muller, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997). See also, Morris Ashcraft, *Rudolf Bultmann: Makers of the Modern Theological Mind* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1972).

<sup>105</sup>Leopold Melevez, *The Christian Message and Myth: The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (London: SCM Press, 1958). This idea is prevalent among liberal preachers and scholars as they seek from the Bible, or in some cases other sources, a personally relevant message beneath the text.

<sup>106</sup>Articles on this subject appeared in *Sword and Trowel* in 1887. Spurgeon's first article on the subject was published in August. Charles H. Spurgeon, "Another Word Concerning the Downgrade," [on-line]; accessed 20 July 2005; available from [http://www.baptistpage.org/Reading/DownGrade\\_Spurgeon/02\\_TheDown\\_Grade.htm](http://www.baptistpage.org/Reading/DownGrade_Spurgeon/02_TheDown_Grade.htm); Internet. For a summary of the controversy, and these articles in particular, see John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1992).

Spurgeon warned that if the Bible were seen to be less than completely true and to be less than completely authoritative, it and the truths found through the study of it would be preached less and less. Once headed down that slippery slope, return to the top would be unlikely if not impossible. Morals were still a major topic of preachers during this time period, but right morals were defined more by pious people than according to God's Word. Dargan describes what follows as a time in which preaching was plentiful but generally not rooted in anything solid.<sup>107</sup> In other instances the academic specialization of interpretation, theology, and preaching, caused preachers, teachers, and students to focus their attention only on one field of study.

Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, the effects of modern philosophy and science had gripped preachers and preaching in America. Struggling with the vast and quickly changing but in many cases universally accepted body of knowledge being presented to them, many preachers chose to focus on morality and human problems. Their goal was to effect moral change in what they saw as an increasingly corrupt society. Harry Emerson Fosdick was a example of this philosophy of preaching.<sup>108</sup> Accepting the prevailing view that the Bible was simply inadequate to explain the origins of life, and a system of higher criticism that stated that the biblical text was not historically accurate,

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<sup>107</sup>For an in-depth summary of the period in Europe, see Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, vol. 2, pts. II and III. In this section, Dargan points out a number of problems in the pulpit of the day. These problems are easily characterized around the three Aristotlean artistic proofs of *Logos*, *Pathos*, and *Ethos*. Their messages (*Logos*) were based on human foundations, were often liturgical by nature, and did not move the passions of the people (*Pathos*), and were not evident in the lives of the preachers (*Ethos*). That is not to say that all preaching of that day failed. In fact, Dargan gives a number of examples of excellent preachers from that time. Many are highlighted because of their warm hearts, effective oratory style, and in some cases personal piety. Fewer of these best known European preachers were also know as interpreters and theologians.

<sup>108</sup>Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:665-73.

Fosdick sought to instill in his hearers the higher moral teachings represented in the writings of the biblical authors.

Liberal preachers were not the only ones struggling with these issues. Preachers and teachers of all stripes felt the pressure to conform to the conventional wisdom of the times. Many, driven by their convictions, made the choice to be preachers rather than scholars. Those who refused to accept the teaching of the academy or debate them in a scholarly setting were often labeled as fundamentalists. The result for preaching was a diverse group of committed individuals with radically different views. Conservative and liberal preachers were passionate about their beliefs, and both preached from that passion a message they believed was relevant for their congregations.<sup>109</sup>

### **Summing up this Survey**

Several comments related to the relationship of hermeneutics and homiletics are appropriate at this time. First, since the inception of preaching, interpretation and presentation have both been viewed as important elements. The nature of God's Word, the need for new translation work, and the authority behind preaching have all received different amounts of attention and emphasis during different generations. But these three elements have been common in every age.

Just as Aristotle set forth three distinctive areas of rhetoric, the three areas mentioned above are still of importance for preaching.<sup>110</sup> The indispensable relationship

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<sup>109</sup>C. Allyn Russell provides an excellent survey of American fundamentalism, which shows the diversity of those who were labeled among its ranks. C. Allyn Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism: Seven Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).

<sup>110</sup>Although I am not arguing that Aristotle's threefold nature of rhetoric is exhaustive in dealing with preaching, I do believe that *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* provide helpful categories for viewing the historical relationship of the Bible, the preacher, and

between these three is best understood in light of God's call to preach.<sup>111</sup> R. Kent Hughes puts it in simple terms as he states that in preaching "the pleasure of God is a matter of *logos* (the Word), *ethos* (what you are), and *pathos* (your passion)."<sup>112</sup> These three elements are part of the same process which moves from knowing the Word of God through good hermeneutics to its presentation through good homiletics.

Second, a primary difference in the development and implementation of hermeneutics and homiletics from age to age is reflected in the relationship shared between the two.<sup>113</sup> What began as one responsibility with two interrelated parts became in many instances two diverse enterprises with seemingly disparate goals. By the middle of the twentieth century this division had reached notable proportions.<sup>114</sup> The desire to bring these elements back together has brought with it both advances in and challenges to the call for preachers to preach the Word.<sup>115</sup>

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the audience in the development of hermeneutics and homiletics.

<sup>111</sup>See the section in chapter 3 under the heading "One Office: A Threefold Nature."

<sup>112</sup>R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), xii.

<sup>113</sup>That relationship is shown below as one of dependence and necessity in traditional theological systems. There have always been faithful preachers who have maintained a traditional relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics. As described above, however, those voices have not always been strong nor have they always been in the majority.

<sup>114</sup>Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:677-85.

<sup>115</sup>It should also be noted that there have always been some, in every age, which have not allowed the two to be divided. When Edwards, cited above, talks about the resurgence of orthodoxy in preaching, he is in many ways highlighting the reuniting of biblical hermeneutics and homiletics. The point of the above survey is to describe a view that has captured the allegiance of many. It will be shown later that the key to keeping hermeneutics and homiletics together has been a commitment to a doctrinal view of revelation which views Scripture as the authoritative Word of God.

Finally, the development of a separation between these fields can be viewed in terms of the separation between the academy and the church.<sup>116</sup> The first is said sometimes to be more involved with knowing what the text said, while the second is more involved with communicating and living out what the text says. But in the end, it may indicate a problem in the realm of spirituality. If hermeneutics provide preachers with the bricks for building sermons and homiletics puts bricks together for the public to live in, it is no wonder that preaching has struggled for so long. If the two are set against each other as if they are enjoined in a competition, then the goal of preaching simply will not be accomplished. Both must be submitted to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Finally, if preachers are going to do the work they were called to do, then both must be used as God intended.

### **The Place of Both In Biblical Preaching**

#### **The Call to Reunite**

Elsewhere, it has been shown that there is a call to reunite hermeneutics and homiletics. That call is being extended from orthodox and neo-orthodox theological points of view. As goes hermeneutics, so goes homiletics. Or simply put, homiletics has generally followed hermeneutics. At least that is how it appears to have been according to this historical survey of the last two thousand years. During the first three hundred years or so, there was a close relationship between interpreting and preaching. As time went by, the mounting body of knowledge and questions asked created two distinct and

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<sup>116</sup>This statement is not reflective of all academic endeavors, but is reflective of the big picture in the history of American universities, which have shifted away from their historical roots. For a summary of the historical shift within the American university system, see George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford, 1994).



separate fields of study.<sup>117</sup> As interpretive methods continued to develop with the times, preaching also changed. In recent times, there seems again to be an emphasis on the relationship between interpretation and preaching. This melding of the two has brought a renewed call for a unified approach.<sup>118</sup> The question of whether hermeneutics and homiletics should be united is being answered with a resounding yes. These developments bring both advantages and disadvantages.

### **A Unifying Foundation**

Whatever its final form, the relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics must have a unified foundation, and this foundation should be built on two principles. First, this foundation is not in every respect the same for all forms of literary study and public proclamation, but is specific to the preacher's call to preach the Word of God.<sup>119</sup> This distinction is based on the presupposition that the Bible is unlike any other book ever written. Following the teaching of Peter that Scripture is the work of the Holy Spirit

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<sup>117</sup>The idea that the expansion and specialization of particular elements within a field of study had led to the development of diverse and separate entities is certainly not limited to the fields of hermeneutics and homiletics. Peter Stuhlmacher, in *How to Do Biblical Theology*, says that much the same thing has happened within the study of theology as it relates to the Old and New Testaments. "The Christian Bible has been made up of both Testaments since the time of the ancient Church, and churches ever since have had good reason for their belief that the two-part canon bears witness to the triune God. Nevertheless, it has become standard procedure in exegetical scholarship to work with the Old and New Testaments separately and to discuss the question concerning the unity of both testaments in the one Christian canon only on special occasions." Peter Stuhlmacher, *How to Do Biblical Theology* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1995), 1.

<sup>118</sup>This is, in fact, the motive behind the book edited by Green and Pasquarello, *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching*.

<sup>119</sup>This is an important distinction in that it reminds us that although it is proper and at times profitable to learn from academia as a whole, the import of methodologies used in fields that are outside biblical studies and homiletics are limited by their very nature.

through man, our relationship to the Bible is different from the one we may have with other writings. Peter states it as follows: “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a *matter* of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:20-32). His argument is simple. The Bible is the Word of God, not the word of men. In light of this discussion, that means that the academic study of the Bible for declaring God’s Word must not be separated from the Spirit’s work. Furthermore, it means that it must be handled in a way that is at least in part different from the way one handles other literary works. Paul also reminds his readers that “accurately handling the word of truth” is not to be done for academic argumentation, but as a part of the preacher’s call “as a workman who does not need to be ashamed” (2 Tim 2:15). Both the study of the biblical text and its presentation must be guided by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Second, this foundation must also recognize the linear relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics. Much has been written over the years regarding the need for a hermeneutical circle or spiral.<sup>120</sup> When, however, this same idea is moved into the realm of the relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics a great danger appears which must be addressed up front. Is it right for a sermon to go looking for a text, or must sermons be derived from the interpretation of a biblical text? This question is not as simple to answer as it may at first seem. Is it legitimate, for instance, to look for a passage that gives hope in the resurrection in order to comfort gathered family and friends at the funeral of a faithful believer? The best way to resolve the question is to look at the interaction between the two fields of study. There is a linear relationship between

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<sup>120</sup>Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991).

hermeneutics and homiletics which must be maintained. The homiletical task is to expose the meaning discovered through the interpretation of the text, explain it in current terms, help listeners to see its current application, and then encourage them to put these applications into action.

The recent movement to reunite hermeneutics and homiletics is encouraging.<sup>121</sup> As the two are reunited, however, interpreters and preachers must seek to do so with a careful reconstruction of the foundation upon which the call to preach was first founded. The Word of God is unique, and the call to preach His Word must be firmly rooted in His Word.

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<sup>121</sup>See earlier references to Green, as well as the coming sections discussing the three streams of thought promoting narrative preaching.

## CHAPTER 3

### HERMENEUTICS AND THE OLD HOMILETIC

#### Introduction

There is an indispensable and foundational relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics in the Old Homiletic.<sup>1</sup> This relationship may be defined in terms of the preacher's purpose, the preacher's message, and the preacher's power. It was established in the New Testament preaching of the Apostles, and was picked up and reapplied in successive generations by preachers who held to traditional orthodox theologies. The basic presupposition undergirding this relationship is that God has spoken and continues to speak through His inspired Word, which is the biblical text. Predicated on this basic truth, preaching may be defined as one office with a threefold nature.

#### One Office: A Threefold Nature

R. Albert Mohler, Jr. states that "a theology of preaching begins with the

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<sup>1</sup>The terms *Old* or *Traditional* are often applied to homiletics in limited ways. In *As One without Authority*, Fred Craddock defines deductive methods as "the movement of sermons in the mainstream of *traditional* preaching" (emphasis added). Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 45. His definition reflected a specific element within the homiletic conversation during his time, but was indicative of several underlying foundational issues which developed into the methods presented today within the movement known as the New Homiletic. In the following, I will also define the *Old Homiletic* in a limited way. The *Old Homiletic* is founded on the theological principle that God has chosen to reveal Himself through the preaching of His Word, which *is* the Bible. The goal of this section is not to describe the relationship of individual hermeneutical principles to homiletical methods, but to show the impact of its main presupposition as the unifying element between the two.

humble acknowledgment that preaching is not a human invention but a gracious creation of God and a central part of His revealed will for the church.”<sup>2</sup> The proposition, that preaching must be done because it is a God given task and responsibility for His church, is an essential part of any biblically accurate homiletical methodology. This notion is not, however, required to stand alone as the primary foundation for proponents of the Old Homiletic.

The assertion that preaching is done at the command and commissioning of God has traditionally been united with another basic presupposition. Finite human beings can know God only to the extent that He has chosen to reveal Himself. When these foundational elements are united, methodologies that are used to accomplish the preaching task seek to unite the fields of hermeneutics and homiletics.<sup>3</sup> Since God has chosen to reveal Himself through the preaching of the Scriptures, preachers must seek both to understand God’s revealed message and to present that message to others.

In order to define further a theology of preaching, Mohler relates the command to “preach the word” to the Trinitarian nature of God. He does so using the following

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<sup>2</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “A Theology of Preaching,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 13.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Adam, *Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Expository Preaching* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); John MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Waco: Word, 1992); Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); and John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) are modern examples of orthodox homiletical methods which stress the importance of uniting hermeneutics and homiletics. Each stresses the importance of both interpreting and presenting the Word of God (the Bible) to those whom they are called to minister. In order to accomplish the task, careful exegesis is used to determine what the Bible says. Then during the sermon the text is exposed in such a way that its message is clear, and possible ways of applying it are highlighted.

basic threefold outline: God is first of all, God the Father—Who speaks; second, He is God the Son—Who saves; and finally, He is God the Spirit—Who illuminates.<sup>4</sup> The remainder of this chapter is an exposition of this threefold idea as it relates to the homiletical methodology of the Old Homiletic. For this discussion I have restated these three areas as homiletical concerns: the preacher's purpose; the preacher's message; and the preacher's power.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Preacher's Purpose**

From the perspective of the Old Homiletic, the first question that should be asked of preachers is, Why preach? The answer is, "We preach because God has spoken, and He has chosen to continue speaking through the preaching of His Word." In fact, preachers have been created and commissioned by God for this task. Throughout history, preachers of the Old Homiletic have both studied and proclaimed God's Word because they believed it was the duty for which they were created.

Peter and John set the pattern which was followed by later generations as they declared to the religious leaders in Jerusalem: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."<sup>6</sup> These Apostles were doing more than telling the truth

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<sup>4</sup>Mohler, "A Theology of Preaching," 14-19. This is a summary statement based on the three major sections of the article.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. Although the following is not intended to be a direct summary, explanation, or expansion of Mohler's article, the preacher's purpose, message, and power are reflected in the article as a whole. "The God Who Speaks" has chosen to do so through the preaching of His Word. "The Son Who Saves" is the focus of Scripture, which is the source of the preacher's message. And, "the Spirit Who Illuminates" is intended to highlight the work of the Spirit as the preacher's power.

<sup>6</sup>Acts 4:19b-20. All Scripture quotations in this chapter are taken from the NASB, unless otherwise indicated.

which they had observed. They were heeding God's created purpose for their lives rather than the politically correct judgments of the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

Paul further explains the idea of being created to bear witness by stating that his preaching was based on an undeniable call that God had place on his life. "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel."<sup>7</sup> Gordon Fee summarizes Paul's argument in this text as follows: "His [Paul's] point is a simple one, and it has nothing to do with 'inner compulsion.' He cannot boast in the task of proclaiming the good news of Christ to the Gentiles because that is what he must do by divine design."<sup>8</sup> In other words, Paul did not submit simply because of a feeling. He willingly submitted to the call to preach the gospel because that was the task for which he believed God had designed or created him.

The call to know and preach God's Word is predicated on the notion that there is a God Who has determined to reveal Himself. He has determined the method by which He will be revealed. Finally, He has determined the vessels through whom He will be revealed. Paul drives this final point home with the simple syllogistic argument found in Romans: "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?"<sup>9</sup> For adherents of the Old Homiletic, preachers preach because they have been commanded to.<sup>10</sup> Paul believed that

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<sup>7</sup>1 Cor 9:16.

<sup>8</sup>Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 419.

<sup>9</sup>Rom 10:14-15a.

<sup>10</sup>This is not their only motive, but it does rightly locate the purpose of preaching in God's call. Other motives, such as gratitude and love, are born on the wings

he had to preach because God had chosen to reveal Himself through preaching and had chosen him for that task.

Preachers of the Patristic period also recognized the gravity of such a call, and viewed it as one of great responsibility. For that reason Chrysostom rejected the early overtures of the church leaders to take up the office. In *On the Priesthood*, Chrysostom writes that the reason he sought to avoid the office of the priesthood was because of its enormous responsibility. Likening the responsibility to that of commanding a huge commercial ship, Chrysostom says the leaders would not consider his refusal to pilot such a ship a refusal of arrogant independence. “Do not thus [that is force him to take on a more important task], I pray and beseech you. I know my own soul, how feeble and puny it is: I know the magnitude of this ministry, and the great difficulty of the work; for more stormy billows vex the soul of the priest than the gales which disturb the sea.”<sup>11</sup> In the end, he did accept the call that was pressed on him as the will of God.

For these early ministers, the duties of a priest included the practice of preaching. Through their preaching they were convinced that God was speaking to His people. Cardinal Michele Pellegrino quotes from several of Augustine’s sermons in order to make the point that Augustine believed that the mission of a bishop was carried out in a twofold manner: through word and sacrament. He writes:

He is very conscious that it is God’s word he is preaching; thus he begins one sermon by saying, ‘What I am about to say is *not my idea* but God’s.’ And on another occasion, in Carthage: ‘The holy gospel which we have just now heard read to us calls our attention to the forgiveness of sins. That is the subject *I must discuss* in my sermon. *I am in fact a servant of the word*; not my own word, of course, but

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of a correct understanding of the preacher’s message, and its effects through the work of the Spirit.

<sup>11</sup>Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, ed. Philip Schaff, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1889), 9:49.



the word of God and our Lord.' . . . Through the scriptures God orders Augustine to speak to the people and join them in searching out the meaning of the scripture passage. Preachers seeking popularity with the crowd may pass over in silence the stern demands of the gospel and use their own words rather than those of God or Christ, but then they will be shepherds who feed themselves instead of their flocks (emphasis mine).<sup>12</sup>

Augustine's emphasis on the idea that what he is preaching is "not" his "idea" is notable.

Augustine believed that Scripture dictates both that he is to preach and what he is to preach.

Issues related to the preacher's purpose surfaced again as a major topic of conversation during the Reformation. Because of the conflict over issues of authority, especially as it related to the priesthood within the Roman Catholic Church, Calvin and other Reformers defined again the preacher's purpose in terms of God's call upon their lives. Leroy Nixon describes the clarity with which Calvin makes this distinction between the Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church.

Calvin, in his letter to Sadoleto, September, 1539, "tells of his vocation by God, and of his consequent right to speak in the name of Him who had put His word in his mouth and written His law upon his conscience. God had called him, and laid upon him a duty which he could not evade without defying God." "Calvin conceived that God spoke to him directly without any intermediate person or institution." Calvin "made a man's right to enter the ministerial office depend upon his vocation by God." "The minister of the Word was a preacher who had to speak to the people concerning the truth and will of God."

At the origin of all ministry, there is a call. The preacher does not choose himself. He receives, willingly or unwillingly, a charge.<sup>13</sup>

Since the Reformation, the notion that preachers are called with the purpose of declaring God's Word has continued to be an important part of the foundation for

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<sup>12</sup>Michele Pellegrino, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, pt. 3, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (Brooklyn, NY: New City, 1990), 1:97.

<sup>13</sup>Leroy Nixon, *John Calvin, Expository Preacher* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 56.

followers of the Old Homiletic. Merrill Unger summarizes this call in *Principles of Expository Preaching* as follows: “In addition to an experience of regeneration and spiritual fullness resulting in the enjoyment of the Spirit’s unobstructed teaching ministry, the Bible expositor must possess the settled conviction that God has called and separated him to the Gospel ministry as a life work.”<sup>14</sup> Issues related to the necessity of God’s call on preachers have continued to be an important element in homiletical discussions. Recent efforts to modify traditional stances tend to address the call to preach in light of challenges to authority and absolute truth fostered by postmodernism.<sup>15</sup>

The Old Homiletic is founded on a simple principle. God has chosen to reveal Himself, and has determined that His revelation is to be communicated through the preaching of His Word. There is no clearer statement of this position in recent times than that given by Peter Adam in *Speaking God’s Words*.

As we have seen, the two great foundations of the ministry of the Word can be summarized in the phrases *God has spoken* and *It is written*. Our third foundation is found in the phrase *Preach the Word*. That is to say, preaching depends not only on having a God-given source, the Bible, but also a God-given commission to preach, teach and explain it to people and to encourage and urge them to respond. The origin of the ministry of the Word is that God has given his words to his servants to pass on to others.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Merrill F. Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955), 59.

<sup>15</sup>Although Craddock did not necessarily see himself as postmodern, this element of postmodernism makes up a significant part of background behind Craddock, *As One without Authority*. David L. Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism: An Evangelical Comes to the Dance,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (2001): 62-78. Postmodernism is by its very nature difficult to define. Its most consistent characteristic is, however, clear and observable. Postmodernism rejects the notion that there is any such thing as objective, or absolute, truth. Therefore, it rejects the authoritative statements of any philosophy or methodology which make absolute and objective claims.

<sup>16</sup>Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 37.

Conversation partners may have changed through the ages, but the foundation for preaching has not. Preaching methodology which is based on the foundation of the Old Homiletic promotes the preaching of God's self-revealed Word. They preach because God has spoken, and has chosen human vessels through whom to repeat His Word in the hearing of a new generation.

### **The Preacher's Message**

Preachers preach because they must. God has revealed Himself and has commissioned individuals as the vessels through which He will speak, and He has given them a message. The writer of the book of Hebrews states that God's Word is most clearly declared in Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup> Although God had spoken through the prophets, Christ Incarnate was the fullest revelation of God. The New Testament writers saw Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and the Early Church recognized the Apostolic witness in the same way. The result was the canonization of the Christian Scripture. With the formation of the canon, the Bible has been accepted as the source of God's Word. It is, therefore, the source of the message to be preached and it is its authority.<sup>18</sup> When these two ideas are rightly defined and understood, they set the standard for preaching.

Whatever one determines about the preacher's message, it will never express the Word of God more clearly than when it is presenting Christ.<sup>19</sup> At this point, it is important to note

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<sup>17</sup>Heb 1:1-3a.

<sup>18</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 17-25; Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); Donald G. Miller, *Fire in Thy Mouth* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), 55.

<sup>19</sup>All future references, unless otherwise indicated, define "the Word of God" as Scripture. Sidney Greidanus sets this definition in light of the *Belgic Confession* saying that "a preacher standing in the tradition of the Reformation realizes that he must preach

that the Word of God to be preached is the biblical text, which presents Jesus the Christ Who is the Word. The relationship between these two in the preaching context is deliberate. Since God has chosen to reveal the gospel through the biblical text, that means preachers most clearly present Christ when they preach the Bible. Paul charges Timothy with the duty of preaching by simply saying, “preach the word.”<sup>20</sup>

Adherents of the Old Homiletic believe that the Bible *is* the Word of God. When this is clearly (deliberately) articulated as a foundational belief, they also believe that Scripture is necessary for determining the message.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, they believe that it endows their sermons with authority.<sup>22</sup> Placed together, these statements teach that the message behind the text cannot be divorced from the propositional truth presented in the text. In fact, truth is not made irrelevant because it is presented in a historical setting, but is instead protected from abuse or misrepresentation by retaining its historical context.

These advocates of the Old Homiletic believe that the message behind the biblical text must not be separated from the biblical text itself. For these interpreting preachers, Augustine’s ancient dictum is still true: “When the Bible speaks, God speaks.”<sup>23</sup> So when the writer of the book of Hebrews states that “the word of God is

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the Word and only the Word. . . . He realizes that the Reformation’s *sola scriptura* remains the fundamental criterion also for his preaching. Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Kampen, the Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1970), 1.

<sup>20</sup>2 Tim 4:2.

<sup>21</sup>The parenthetical statement is a reminder that some build homiletical methods without first carefully determining and articulating a theological foundation.

<sup>22</sup>Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 13-56.

<sup>23</sup>Augustine, *Saint Augustine Confessions*, in *Writings of Saint Augustine*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1953), 5:448.

living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart,”<sup>24</sup> these interpreters and preachers believe that he is stating that the Bible is still relevant and actively involved in shaping their present-day lives. The message stated in the biblical text is relevant for all times, and is the Word of God to be preached.

Augustine recognized this relationship and said the preacher needs to know what Scripture says before he can preach the Word of God. In *De doctrina christiana*, he devotes the first three of his four volumes to the task of setting forth rules related to the task of interpretation (hermeneutics).<sup>25</sup> Yet many who study preaching today believe that *De doctrina christiana* is the first book devoted to homiletics. O. C. Edwards states that in this four volume book, “Augustine provided a guide to his preaching method in the form of *the first homiletics textbook* ever written [emphasis mine]. . . . Its title, *De doctrina christiana*, is often translated as ‘Concerning Christian Doctrine,’ which is misleading. It suggests that the book is concerned with the content of Christian teaching, its ‘doctrine.’ A brief glance, however, is enough to see that the book is about something else.”<sup>26</sup> That “something else” is interpreting and presenting the Word of God.

The messages of the early Church Fathers were Bible-inspired and Bible-filled.

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<sup>24</sup>Heb 4:12.

<sup>25</sup>Augustine, *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, pt. 1, vol. 11, *Teaching Christianity: De doctrina christiana*, intro., trans., and notes by Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1996).

<sup>26</sup>O. C. Edwards, *A History Of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 1:106. Although the first three books deal primarily with hermeneutical issues, Edwards rightly understands the unity of this four-volume set as a book on the proclamation of the Word of God.

That meant that they focused on the study of God's Word in order to present His message.<sup>27</sup> This is not to say that they were not concerned about relevance or style. These early homiletics believed that God's Word was relevant to all aspects of their lives, and the preacher was to present it in the clearest and most convincing manner possible.<sup>28</sup> In fact, that is why Augustine did not consider the work complete until he had finished a fourth volume in *De doctrina christiana*.

Volume four of *De doctrina christiana* was written to promote homiletical principles for communicating what the interpreter had discovered. Although it took approximately thirty years to complete the four books, Augustine was committed to both parts from the beginning. Hermeneutics and homiletics were both important. He begins the first book with the following statement. "There are two things which all treatment of the scriptures is aiming at: a way to discover what needs to be understood, and a way to put across to others what has been understood. Let us first discuss the way of discovery, and after that the way of putting our discoveries across."<sup>29</sup> Although many years passed between the time he began book one and book four, Augustine emphasized his

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<sup>27</sup>This is not to say that their hermeneutical methods were without problems. As elsewhere stated, allegorical methods of interpretation were the norm until the Reformation. However, their goal in using these methods was to determine the message God had placed in the text so that they could then present it to their hearers.

<sup>28</sup>Concerned about this very issue, Chrysostom states that it is the duty of the priest to present God's Word to the best of his abilities. "Public preaching needs much labor and study," and again later he states that "the skillful in preaching need more study than the unlearned." This he argues, in section seven, is not because the priest is to seek the hearing of the people but because "he must order his words with a view to pleasing God alone." Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 9:70-73.

<sup>29</sup>Augustine, *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Teaching Christianity: De doctrina christiana*, pt. 1, intro., trans., and notes by Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1996), 11:106.

commitment to both hermeneutics and homiletics by restating it as he began book four.<sup>30</sup>

During the Reformation, John Calvin restated this conviction regarding what the preacher is to preach. Based on the belief that God accommodates Himself to or stoops down to make Himself known to human beings, Calvin states that there is a direct connection between the work of preaching and the Word of God. He opens his comments on Second Timothy 4:1-4 with the following admonitions.

*I charge thee, therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ.* It is proper to observe carefully the word *therefore*, by means of which he appropriately connects Scripture with preaching. This also refutes certain fanatics, who haughtily boast that they no longer need the aid of teachers, because the reading of Scripture is abundantly sufficient. But Paul, after having spoken of the usefulness of Scripture, infers not only that all ought to read it, but that teachers ought to administer it, which is the duty enjoined on them. Accordingly, as all our wisdom is contained in the Scriptures, and neither ought we to learn, nor teachers to draw their instructions, from any other source; so he who, neglecting the assistance of the living voice, shall satisfy himself with the silent Scripture, will find how grievous an evil it is to disregard that way of learning which has been enjoined by *God and Christ*. Let us remember, I say, that the reading of Scripture is recommended to us in such a manner as not to hinder, in the smallest degree, the ministry of pastors; and, therefore, let believers endeavor to profit both in reading and in hearing; for not in vain hath God ordained both of them.<sup>31</sup>

It is easy to see from Calvin's statements that, although the exact form of preaching may be different from that of earlier generations, it is nonetheless committed to the same foundation. The substance of the message must be biblical, but simply reading the text is not enough.

This same understanding of the preacher's message is true for adherents of the Old Homiletic in the last century. As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, a battle over the accuracy and historicity of the Bible led to a heated battle between liberal

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 201.

<sup>31</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 251-52.

and conservative evangelical interpreters and preachers.<sup>32</sup> Liberals claimed that the Bible could not be viewed as inerrant and authoritative in the light of science and progress. These homileticians believed that everyone would be better off if preachers focused their sermons more on the present needs of the congregation, and less on the Bible as the definitive source for truth.<sup>33</sup>

The Fundamentalists rejected these assertions, and continued to hold tightly to tradition. For these orthodox theologians, the Bible remained God's authoritative word to humanity.

Harry Emerson Fosdick and Clarence Macartney are recognized as leading spokesmen for these opposing homiletical streams. Conservative Evangelicals believed that the loss of the Bible in the pulpit was dangerous because it signaled a loss of critical and authoritative truth. Macartney declared during the first commencement at Westminster Seminary in 1930 that "a deleted Bible has resulted in a diluted Gospel. Protestantism, as it loses its faith in the Bible, is losing its religion."<sup>34</sup> According to William S. Baker and Samuel T. Logan, this conviction was so strong that "when [J. Gresham] Machen and the Westminster faculty supported an independent board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions and the formation of a new, orthodox Presbyterian

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<sup>32</sup>As these ideas are related to American preaching, see DeWitte T. Holland, ed. *Preaching in American History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969).

<sup>33</sup>Paul Scott Wilson, "Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) Baptist—the Authority of Pastoral Counseling," in *A Concise History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 154-61; Edwards, "Pastoral Counseling through Preaching," in *A History of Preaching*, 1:663-76.

<sup>34</sup>Clarence Macartney, quoted in C. Allyn Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism: Seven Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 199. Both Fosdick's and Macartney's sermons, along with introductory material, are located in *Sermons That Shaped America: Reformed Preaching from 1630 to 2001*, ed. William S. Baker and Samuel T. Logan, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2003).



denomination, Macartney and twelve other trustees resigned from the board [of Westminster] in January 1936.”<sup>35</sup> These conservative theologians felt that this effort would further weaken their beloved churches. They would stay and try to maintain a positive influence.

In more recent times, proponents of the Old Homiletic have continued to express the importance of the biblical text in the sermon. In their discussions of the subject, the biblical text is described as having a position of authority in the sermon. It is the sermon’s source, dictates its substance, and should influence its style.<sup>36</sup> In the preface to his book, *Speaking God’s Words*, Peter Adam gives a list of eight points he intends “to argue, expand and illustrate” in the remainder of the book.<sup>37</sup> His commitment to the essential relationship between the biblical text and preaching is self-evident since this relationship is explicitly stated in four of the first five:

1. The role and priority of preaching as part of the ministry of the Word.
2. The need for the Bible to determine the content and style of our preaching.
3. What preaching will and will not achieve.
4. The need of the three elements of exegesis, application and exhortation within preaching.
5. The role of the sermon in modeling and teaching responsible and theological use of the Bible and application to modern life.
6. How we can learn from models of ministry and preaching generations of believers.
7. The need for the preacher to love and serve the congregation.
8. The role of preaching in producing conversions to Christ, and both individual and

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<sup>35</sup>Barker and Logan, *Sermons That Shaped America*, 327.

<sup>36</sup>Greidanus describes the preacher as a “hermeneutist” in *Sola Scriptura*, 5-6. “The preacher as hermeneutist expresses the fact that: (1) he interprets the Word, (2) he translates the Word, (3) he proclaims the Word, and (4) that these activities cannot be separated.” Ibid., 5. See also, Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*; Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*; MacArthur, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*; Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, and Stott, *Between Two Worlds*.

<sup>37</sup>Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 10-11.

corporate maturity in faith.<sup>38</sup>

For modern proponents of the Old Homiletic, the biblical text is an essential part of the preparation and presentation of the sermon. This relationship was clearly stated in the Reformation, and continues to present a clear theological foundation for preaching. Just as Heinrich Bullinger restated Augustine's dictum in light of the conversation of his time,<sup>39</sup> Adam restates it in light of the current homiletical conversation. "Perhaps the best way of describing it is to say that when human beings explain the Word of God, preach it, teach it, and urge people to accept it, then the Word of God achieves its purpose, and this is one of the normal ways in which God brings his Word to human beings."<sup>40</sup>

At issue during the Reformation, and the writing of the Second Helvetic Confession which followed in its wake, was the question of authority. The Roman Catholic Church believed that God spoke directly through the Pope as head of the Church. When the Pope speaks, he speaks with authority God's Word, passing it on to others. The Reformers rejected this notion, believing that even the word of the Pope must be subjected to the test of God's Word, canonical Scripture. The non-negotiable cry of *Sola Scriptura* meant that a sermon must be tied to Scripture if it was going to be proclaimed as the Word of God. Furthermore, it could be proclaimed with authority only if it was His Word. Still true today, adherents of the Old Homiletic believe that the Word of God has not been preached unless the Bible has been preached.

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid. Although not explicitly given in the third statement on the list, Adam argues that preaching relies on the Bible to achieve its goal.

<sup>39</sup>Heinrich Bullinger, *The Second Helvetic Confession*, in *Creeds of the Churches*, ed. John H. Leith (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1963), 133.

<sup>40</sup>Adam, *Speaking God's Words*, 118.

## The Preacher's Power

The preacher's power is contingent upon both the preacher's purpose and message. As stated elsewhere, the preacher's purpose is not based on a personal goal, but the fact that he has been chosen by God and given the message that he is to proclaim. The subject of the preacher's power is similar in nature to that of the other two in that it does not come from the preacher. Mohler writes, "The preacher stands before the congregation as the external minister of the Word, but the Spirit works as the internal minister of that same Word."<sup>41</sup> God is the source of power in preaching, and He has assured its success.

From a human perspective, it is a mystery that God has chosen to reveal Himself through preaching. One simple way of handling this mystery is to recognize the difference between the way God thinks and the way humans think. He has chosen to use a method which humans would not have chosen. The Old Testament explains this incongruity simply as the difference of perspectives between God the creator and His creation. "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD."<sup>42</sup>

Paul builds one of his chief arguments on this truth. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he describes the difference between the ways of God and the ways of human beings in terms of the cross. In the terms of his day, thoughts of a Messiah dying on a cross were viewed as both nonsensical and offensive.

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is

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<sup>41</sup>Mohler, "A Theology of Preaching," 18.

<sup>42</sup>Isa 55:8.

the power of God. For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE."

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.<sup>43</sup>

The cross did not make sense to human beings as the means through which God would save men. Preaching does not make sense as His method of bringing the Word of God to them, either. Preaching is powerful because it is not of human origin, but of Divine design.

The second element of the preacher's power has to do with the content of the message. Again, this is true because the message does not originate with the preacher. It is not based on his ideas. In the biblical passage above, Paul states that power is not found in just any message. The message that is powerful is the gospel message, which proclaims Christ and Him crucified. That is why Paul can make such a confident claim in Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Paul contends that this gospel is the Word of God, which Timothy had learned from the Scripture,<sup>44</sup> was charged to continue in,<sup>45</sup> and was to proclaim to others.<sup>46</sup> The heart of this message is Jesus Christ, and its power is in the accomplished work of Christ. But it cannot be

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<sup>43</sup>1 Cor 1:17-25.

<sup>44</sup>2 Tim 3:15.

<sup>45</sup>2 Tim 3:16.

<sup>46</sup>2 Tim 4:2.

separated from the Scripture, which is God's chosen method of revelation. In the methodology of the Old Homiletic, the gospel is not constrained by the biblical text, even though it is contained in and transmitted by the text. In other words, the biblical text is God's ordained presentation of the gospel, which has the supernatural ability to transform, by the work of the Holy Spirit, those who come into contact with it. This is not to say that the words of the biblical text possess some sort of magical power of their own, but that the truth contained in and transmitted by them is backed by the power of God. So when God declares in John 3:16 "that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life," the power of God's promise is present in the text.<sup>47</sup> The content of the preacher's message is an important element of the preacher's power, for whenever preachers preach God's Word, they preach with the inherent power of His Word.

The third element of the preacher's power is related to the work of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Word of God was given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,<sup>48</sup> the Holy Spirit also plays a role in its interpretation and reception.<sup>49</sup> Mohler writes, "it is the ministry of illumination that allows the Word of the Lord to break forth. Both the preacher and the hearers are dependent upon the illumination granted by the Holy Spirit for any understanding of the text."<sup>50</sup> The work of the Holy Spirit is essential in such methodologies, for it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convince people of the truth and

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<sup>47</sup>See Anthony C. Thiselton, "The Supposed Power of Words," *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S., 25, no. 2 (1974): 283-99, for a discussion of the need to develop a mediating theory related to the power of words which takes into account the two opposing theories known as the dianoetic and dynamic theories of understanding the power of words.

<sup>48</sup>2 Tim 3:16.

<sup>49</sup>1 Cor 2:4-5; 2 Pet 1:20-21.

<sup>50</sup>Mohler, "A Theology of Preaching," 18.

convict them of the need to respond.<sup>51</sup>

Adherents of the Old Homiletic do not believe that the preacher's power comes from the preacher. In their view, the preacher's power must be attributed to God's call, the gospel message, and the work of the Holy Spirit. On this topic, for instance, Augustine charges his students to seek the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives with the understanding that He must also work in the hearer.

Or is it to be understood that even with the Holy Spirit giving bountifully to teachers in the things they have to teach, their functions as men are not canceled out; and yet all the same, *neither the one who plants is anything, nor the one who waters, but the one who gives growth, which is God?* (1 Cor 3:7)<sup>52</sup>

Augustine strengthens his argument with an illustration which highlights the work of the Holy Spirit in preaching as a sovereign act of God: "Medicines for the body, after all, which are provided for people by human beings, only do good to those whose health is restored by God. . . . So in the same way the assistance of sound doctrine provided by a human teacher is only then any good to the soul when God is at work to make it any good. . . ."<sup>53</sup>

Charles Haddon Spurgeon restates the position around fifteen hundred years later.

We know of a surety, doctrinally, and we know it with equal certainty by experience,

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<sup>51</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 534-39. In John 16:8-11, Jesus teaches that these ideas are part of the work of the Holy Spirit. Although there is some debate over the exact nature of Spirit's role as the One who convicts and convinces, it is clear that the power to do these things is His, and is not the role of the witness. For discussion of these concepts from a homiletical standpoint, see Gregory Wylie Heisler, "A Case for a Spirit-Driven Methodology of Expository Preaching" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003).

<sup>52</sup>Augustine, *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Teaching Christianity: De doctrina christiana*, pt. 1, 11:219-20.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 220.

that we can do nothing towards the quickening of men apart from the Spirit of God. If he does not come, and give life, we may preach till we have not another breath left, but we shall not raise from the tomb of sin even the soul of a little child, or bring a single sinner to the feet of Christ.<sup>54</sup>

Mohler provides a recent restatement of this idea as he emphasizes the primacy of the Spirit's work in the preaching event. "To preach 'in the Spirit' is to preach with the acknowledgment that the human instrument has no control over the message—and no control over the Word as it is set loose within the congregation."<sup>55</sup> Preachers have power because God has chosen to speak through them, given them His Word to speak, and through the Holy Spirit insured its effectiveness.

This is not to say that preachers do not play a part in the effectiveness of the sermon. The role of getting something said implies doing it in such a way that it is heard. From the very beginning, homileticsians were concerned with delivering relevant messages to specific audiences. Therefore, they neither discounted the importance of rhetorical skill nor encouraged it as a legitimate source of the preacher's power.

In fact, many of the greatest preachers were also rhetorical giants. Origen, Chrysostom, and Augustine were great orators as well as theologians. Augustine states in *De doctrina christiana* that although rhetoric is a powerful tool for persuading people, he would not spend time teaching "the rules of rhetoric which" he had "learned and taught in the secular schools."<sup>56</sup> He does this for several reasons which he goes on at length to

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<sup>54</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, "Come From the Four Winds, O Breath!" (sermon delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, Thursday Evening, May 15, 1890) [online]; accessed 8 June 2005; available from <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/2246.htm>; Internet.

<sup>55</sup>Mohler, "A Theology of Preaching," 19.

<sup>56</sup>Augustine, *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Teaching Christianity: De doctrina christiana*, pt. 1, 11:201.

articulate. In summary, rhetoric did not need to be taught in his books on preaching because it can be learned in other ways, at other times, and from other places. In other words, rhetoric was seen as a useful tool for preaching, but was not necessary for achieving its goals.

The goal of rhetoric was thought to be very different from the goal of preaching. Rhetoric was seen to have as its primary goal the speaker's responsibility to move or convince an audience. That was not the goal of the preacher. In fact, rhetoric, as a form of competition, posed a danger. It could be used to persuade, whether a message presented truth or not. Because of this danger, early church fathers encouraged the use of rhetoric with caution. Nevertheless, rhetoric should be used by the preacher when possible, since those who teach the truth should take every advantage in teaching it.

More important than the concept of whether rhetoric is itself useful or not, Augustine was concerned with preaching God's Word. He believed that preaching with wisdom (which he associates with knowing God's Word) is more important than preaching with eloquence. Preferring those who can both speak "wisely as well as eloquently," Augustine warns against the notion that the two are equal in value. "Those, you see, who speak eloquently are listened to with pleasure, those who speak wisely, with wholesome profit."<sup>57</sup>

Since the goal of preaching is not pleasure, emphasis on rhetorical skill or the art of persuasion must not outweigh the declaration of God's Word. If one must be

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 204. Augustine's reshaping and use of rhetoric within a Christian understanding of the call to preach is evident throughout his *De doctrina christiana*. Through his treatment, "he created the church's first homiletic and set the canons of Christian rhetoric for more than a millennium." Craig A. Loscalzo, "Rhetoric," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 411.



sacrificed, it must be rhetoric. There is simply no real value in persuading people to follow a false message. Having made clear the distinction between the two, Augustine ends by encouraging both in their proper order. “But what could be better than the pleasantly wholesome, or the wholesomely pleasant? The more eagerly, after all, what pleases is sought here, the easier it is for what is wholesome to be imparted.”<sup>58</sup>

### **Homily with Application and Exhortation**

Founding their homiletical methodology on the belief that God has chosen to reveal Himself through the preaching of His Word, many proponents of the Old Homiletic preached their sermons using the same basic structure. A text was chosen and read, often described and explained, and then applied to the times in which it was preached. In spite of this basic pattern, it is notable that not all sermons looked the same or were given in the same style. Some common elements are evident, however, in representative sermons preached through the ages.

In their earliest form, many proponents of these sermons took on a style most often identified as a homily. Chrysostom, for instance, delivered sixty-seven homilies on the book of Genesis, ninety on the book of Matthew, eighty-eight on the book of John, and many others, a large portion of which are on the Pauline Epistles.<sup>59</sup> In these homilies

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<sup>58</sup>Augustine, *doctrina christiana*, 206. The belief that preaching should be “wholesome,” and “pleasant” is still at the heart of many homiletical discussions today. Preaching is often said to be doctrinally boring, or entertaining and shallow. In the end, homiletical methodologies reflect the hermeneutical foundations upon which they are built. For adherents of the Old Homiletic, communication is important; however, the message must not be sacrificed for the sake of good communication. For an example of the debate, see William H. Willimon, “Preaching: Entertainment or Exposition?” *Christian Century* 107 (1990): 204, 206.

<sup>59</sup>J. F. D’Alton, *Selections From St John Chrysostom*, the Greek Text edited with Introduction and Commentary by J. F. D’Alton (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1940), 37. As an example of the voluminous nature of the resources

Chrysostom often opens with the introduction of an idea found in a particular text of Scripture. Next, he works his way through the text, often in the form of a commentary, tying statements in the text to other biblical texts. Finally, he ends the message with a relevant application.<sup>60</sup> Many volumes of these homilies have been preserved, and much may be learned about the Word of God from them.

Edwards states that “credit for creating the classical form of the homily has to go to the one who is also known as ‘the first Christian systematic theologian,’ Origen.”<sup>61</sup> Although certainly true from the sense of the New Testament church’s homiletical development, the genre known as homily was not created by early Christian leaders. In fact, the homilies of many of the early church fathers followed closely the traditional form of writing and presentation used by Jewish religious leaders from before the New Testament era.<sup>62</sup> A connection between the extant writings of these non-Christian interpreters and many early Church Fathers is easily seen. Although allegorical interpretation was often evident, early Jewish writings present their hermeneutical findings with daily applications for their times.<sup>63</sup> Theologians and preachers from both

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available, Stephen Neill states that “apart from other and more theological works, we have no less than six hundred of his sermons and homilies. Each of these would take up about fifteen pages of ordinary print (they must have taken about an hour to deliver) and together they would fill twenty fair-sized volumes.” Stephen Neill, *Chrysostom and His Message: A Selection from the Sermons of St. John Chrysostom of Antioch and Constantinople*, trans. Stephen Neill (New York: Association Press, 1962), 16.

<sup>60</sup>See Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:31-48.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 1:31.

<sup>62</sup>See the section in chapter 2 defining *homiletics*, for information on the background which gave rise to Origen’s homiletical method.

<sup>63</sup>The connection is clear when the hermeneutic methods found in early church are compared with those of non-Christian methods leading into and during New Testament times. See William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard,

the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools of interpretation adopted and shaped their sermons in this basic style.<sup>64</sup> In the end Origen, Chrysostom, and Augustine, certainly placed their lasting imprints upon the genre, as three renowned Christian preachers of the early Church era.

Scholars today should not be surprised that the basic form of preaching has continued to follow the basic form characteristic of homilies found in Jewish synagogues. Their heritage is the same. The theological conviction of these early preachers was not unlike that of the Jewish rabbis.<sup>65</sup> God had spoken to the people through the prophets and was continuing to speak to them through His Word. Although the cultural application of homilies in preaching changed and developed in order to meet the times, its basic foundational structure remained constant into the Middle ages.<sup>66</sup>

The basic foundational structure of the homily in use from the church fathers to the early Middle Ages can be described as verse by verse exposition with application and exhortation. John Chrysostom's methodology, for instance, is summarized by Stephen Neill as follows: "Chrysostom works steadily through the chosen passage; he tries to let

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*Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 21-36, for example.

<sup>64</sup>Evidence for this exists in our earliest extant example of a sermon-like document from Alexandria. Edwards states that although there is no way to know for certain whether or not it was delivered orally, "it follows the literary pattern of a homily and does so remarkably well." Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:31.

<sup>65</sup>They believed that Scripture was to be mined in order to know how God expected them to live. See the conclusion in Robert B. Sloan Jr. and Carey C. Newman, "Ancient Jewish Hermeneutic," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke, and Grant I. Lovejoy, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 70.

<sup>66</sup>In the Renaissance period of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, preaching began to take on a new form. See Edwards' treatment of this period in *A History of Preaching*, 1:174-209.

it speak to himself, and hopes that in this way it will speak to his hearers. He often appears to wander; but in reality he never loses sight of the main theme that he has in hand.”<sup>67</sup>

To be certain, early Christian preachers did not always follow exactly the pattern described above. The diversity of the preserved work of the early church fathers shows that the sermons can be further divided into several sub-genre. Chrysostom, for instance “preached” a number of “homilies” defending his refusal to accept the office of Bishop. These homilies are best described as apologetic speeches and not preaching. Edwards points out that much of the current study of Chrysostom’s work revolves around these apologetic homilies.<sup>68</sup>

Scholarly curiosity with the particular homiletical genre, know as apologetic homilies, has grown out of a desire to understand the historical situation facing the early church and its preachers.<sup>69</sup> This study is certainly important for understanding the life and times of the early church. In order to understand their theology of preaching, however, the clearest statements are found by studying sermons and writings on the topic of

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<sup>67</sup>Stephen Neill, ed., *Chrysostom and His Message: A Selection from the Sermons of St. John Chrysostom of Antioch and Constantinople* (New York: Association Press, 1962), 17.

<sup>68</sup>Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:77-86. Although not the focus of discussion at this point, Edwards also points out the importance of Chrysostom’s catechetical preaching during this time. From these sermons a great deal can be learned about the basic doctrinal beliefs of the church at that time.

<sup>69</sup>A good example of these sermons may be found in the twenty-one sermons Chrysostom preached in order to calm down and call to repentance the city of Antioch after it erupted in a serious disturbance over excessive taxes imposed on it by the Emperor Theodosius the Great. “These are his twenty-one *Homilies on the Statues*, so-called from the overthrow of the imperial statues which gave rise to them.” Philip Schaff, ed., *On the Priesthood*, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 9:11.

preaching itself.

In his first homily on the book of Matthew, for instance, Chrysostom argues that it is necessary to study the Bible in order to hear God's Word. He believed that human depravity brought with it a need for something other than the direct communication from God. He starts his argument for this theological truth with examples from the Old Testament and then quickly relates it to the New Testament. Finally, he relates it to himself and the people of his day.

For that the former was better [that is that God would write His word on the hearts of His people], God hath made manifest, both by His words, and by His doings. Since unto Noah, and unto Abraham, and unto his offspring, and unto Job, and unto Moses too, he discoursed not by writings, but Himself by Himself, finding their mind pure. But after the whole people of the Hebrews had fallen into the very pit of wickedness, then and thereafter was a written word, and tables, and the admonition which is given by these. And this one may perceive was the case not of the saints in the Old Testament only, but also of those in the New. For neither to the apostles did God give anything in writing, but instead of written words He promised that He would give them the grace of the Spirit: for 'He,' saith our Lord, 'shall bring all things to your remembrance.' . . . But since in the process of time they made shipwreck, some with regard to doctrines, others as to life and manners, there was again need that they should be put in remembrance by the written word.<sup>70</sup>

In the end, Chrysostom's conclusion is that God's word is heard through the preaching of His written Word, the Bible.

Based on this principle, the biblical homilies of Chrysostom follow a pattern of verse by verse expositions with application. Speaking of the majority of extant ancient sermons, Edwards defines the basic style of preaching used from Origen all the way into the Middle Ages simply as homily. "To the extent that 'homily' is a technical term, it refers neither to the length of the sermon nor to the conversational nature implied by the word's etymology as some have claimed, but to verse-by-verse interpretation and

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<sup>70</sup>John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of The Christian Church, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1888), 10:1.

application of a biblical passage. Thus, a homily is what would be called expository preaching today.”<sup>71</sup>

Although the basic form of preaching defined simply as homily is said by Edwards to have lasted “until the High Middle Ages,” preaching as the exposition and application of God’s Word has never been completely lost.<sup>72</sup> Modern expository preaching retains this foundational connection with the preaching of the early church. The final section of this chapter presents the same foundational principle, which connects modern and ancient preaching, as the immanent unifying element between the fields of hermeneutics and homiletics.

### **The Biblical Test: A Unifying Foundation**

Under what has been defined above as the Old Homiletic, preaching in modern and ancient times is unified by a commitment to the biblical text as the Word of God. This unity was certainly strained at times. By the end of the Middle Ages, for instance, the artistic nature of the sermon became the focus.<sup>73</sup> The distance between biblical text and sermon was also increased as “schoolmen who applied logical deduction to propositions from the *regula fidei* and the glosses invented a systematic theology that the

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<sup>71</sup>Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:47.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>73</sup>The shift may at first appear subtle, in that these sermons are still said to be biblical. The difference is immediately evident, however, in the fact that biblical texts are presented in thematic blocks rather than through exposition. See for instance, O. C. Edwards’ explanation of “the explosion of preaching in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,” where he states that a major shift in the emphasis of preaching occurred during that period in preaching methodology. “An important and easily overlooked aspect of this new form is that it represents the beginning of the assumption that sermons ought to have a pattern instead of taking their shape from the biblical passage expounded.” Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:221.

church wielded authoritatively in every realm of life.”<sup>74</sup> Edwards describes the connection between the scholastic movement in theology and preaching in terms of their common structure. Both developed systematic divisions of organization during this time.

The reasons for association are obvious enough: at about the time scholasticism had its beginning, there appeared a new form of preaching that, instead of being formless as previous preaching had been, had its parts carefully coordinated according to a central plan. Thus what thematic preaching and scholasticism have in common would be systematic division of one form or another.<sup>75</sup>

As homiletical structures used during this period are studied, a fundamental deficiency is revealed. This deficiency may be described in terms of an ever widening gap between the biblical text, and the congregants to whom it is presented. Fortunately for biblical preaching, this separation would not become permanent.

A great benefit of the Reformation is that it reunited the study of Scripture with preaching, and it stated with clarity their belief that their relationship was biblically mandated. Coming out of the Reformation the relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics is presented again as a linear relationship, where interpretation seeks to understand the message of God presented in the biblical text. Then this understanding is formed in light of a systematic and biblical theology. Finally, it is presented for a particular audience in such a way that the Word of God is exposed, illustrated, and applied.<sup>76</sup>

In such a linear relationship, the presentation of the Word cannot rightly

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<sup>74</sup>James T. Spivey, “The Hermeneutics of the Medieval and Reformation Era,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 106.

<sup>75</sup>Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:223.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:283-326. Edwards gives an excellent summary of these ideas in chapters 12 and 13 under the titles, “The Reformation Preaching of Luther and Melancthon,” and “Calvin and the Reform Tradition.”

proceed prior to, or irrespective of, interpretation. Placing one ahead of the other does not, however, make one less important than the other in the end. Although this idea may be criticized as overly simplistic, it is helpful for looking at the foundations on which competing homiletics are built. As suggested in the sections above, a linear relationship emphasizes the belief that the message preached must be founded on a correct understanding of the biblical message as it is presented in a biblical text. Although sermon relevance and presentation are essential parts of fulfilling the command to preach the Word, they are ineffectual without the Word to preach.

The idea that preaching is just words unless it is the presentation of the Word of God flows naturally from the unifying cry of the Reformation, *Sola Scriptura*. As the Roman Catholic Church had taken on the ever increasing role as a Christian canon, it had moved away from the belief that the Bible is the final authoritative Word of God. The Bible was to be handled by the priests who were to pass on the messages which the Church deemed appropriate for the people. In such an arrangement, the Church had separated the people of God from His Word rather than connecting them with it. Whereas the Roman Catholic Church saw itself as the mediator of God's message for the times, the Reformers denied the accuracy and authority of any message which was not derived from and tested by Scripture. The only way to connect the people with the Word of God was to connect them with canonical Scripture. In order to do this, preachers needed to emphasize again the twofold task of interpreting the biblical text and delivering the message as it is presented in the biblical text.

Since the Reformation, other challenges to the unity of hermeneutics and homiletics have come. One of the greatest challenges grew out of the rapid development or expansion of different fields of academic study. Rooted in the scholasticism of the



Middle ages, pushed forward by the Enlightenment, and multiplied by Modernity, specialization became a persistent seed of division.<sup>77</sup> Scholars studying hermeneutics became entrenched in schools of biblical studies, while those studying preaching were wrapped up in the world of social change which they believe comes through the communication of the Word of God. As the separation between the fields of interpretation and communication has been allowed to flourish, preaching has suffered. Fosdick's criticism that much of the expository preaching of his day had become boring may well have been accurate. The problem was not, however, due to the fact that it was biblical exposition. The problem was that preaching hermeneutics had separated themselves from good homiletic practices. Fosdick, on the other hand moved away from preaching the biblical text as the Word of God toward a definition of preaching which viewed the preaching event as a psychological session for the masses.<sup>78</sup> According to the Old Homiletic, both errors can be corrected by returning to the basic foundation upon which its methodology was built. Preaching that fulfills the homiletical call to preach the Word, must involve the biblical text in preparation and presentation.

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<sup>77</sup>Edwards is helpful at this point as he highlights similar trajectories in fields other than homiletics. Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:223. The overwhelming nature of academic endeavor as a seed of division is not unique to the areas of interpretation and preaching. Peter Stuhlmacher states concerning the development of such a division between studies of the Old and New Testaments, for instance, that these division are understandable even though they are harmful. "It is understandable, because there exists a scholarly division of labor: historical scholarship and the theological penetration of the Old and New Testaments have become so complicated in the last 150 years that individual scholars are barely, if at all, able to command a view of all the biblical disciplines and are, therefore, unable to do scholarly work in the areas of both Old and New Testament." Peter Stuhlmacher, *How to Do Biblical Theology* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1995), 1-2.

<sup>78</sup>Wilson, "Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) Baptist—the Authority of Pastoral Counseling." See also, Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:663-76.

## Conclusion

When seeking to understand the Old Homiletic, it is essential to note that the relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics is so close that the two cannot be separated. In fact, they were not viewed as distinctly separated elements until sometime after the late Middle ages. With the rapid accumulation of knowledge and the rise of specialized academic fields of study these areas of interest began to separate. Even so, the separation between them has been minimized during successive eras by those who have held tightly to the hermeneutical principles which broadly define the Old Homiletic. The cycle of history shows that as hermeneutics is separated from homiletics, preaching is separated from its call to preach the Word, and hearers are further separated from its application. The Reformation marked a historical reunification of the two. Attacks against this unity have, however, continued since the Reformation.

Challenges have come in many forms. The Old Homiletic has, however, remained solid even during times of unpopularity. Its strength is in its distinct and simple hermeneutical foundation. Believing that their hermeneutical findings are essential but not an end in themselves, and that homiletic presentations must declare with clarity the Word of God as presented in the biblical text, these preachers have continued through the ages to call for a rebuilding and restating of the traditional relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics. They believe that these revisions and restatements of the Old Homiletic must continue in light of new challenges. But these revisions and restatements must not neglect either interpretation or communication.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Modern day advocates of the Old Homiletic have written on the subject in light of various contemporary discussions. They include Bryan Chapell, Edmund Clowney, Sidney Greidanus, John MacArthur, Stephen Olford, Haddon Robinson, and Hershael York, to name just a few. A discussion of Robinson's recent work is taken up later, as a well respected example of the Old Homiletic who devotes a book to the topic of

New homiletical methods should be tested according to the foundational presuppositions upon which they are said to be built. The three elements used in defining the Old Homiletic here are suggested as an accurate way of testing new methods to see if they are valid or not. In some cases, homileticians have built new methods on traditional views of Scripture but have overemphasized elements of communication. When this occurs, these elements must be changed or modified in such a way that they accurately represent the foundation upon which they were said to have been built.

At other times, the disconnection between foundations and methods occur when terms are not carefully defined. Variations within conservative evangelical homiletical circles are of concern, because they pose the real threat of negating or obscuring the theological foundation from which truth and authority flow. A careful evaluation based on a clear definition of terms is the only way to determine whether these homiletical methodologies can stand securely on their own theological foundations.

## CHAPTER 4

### HERMENEUTICS AND THE NEW HOMILETIC

In this chapter the relationship between hermeneutics and the New Homiletic is explored. For this task, an overview of the methodology implemented by Fred B. Craddock, called by some the “godfather of the New Homiletic,”<sup>1</sup> is presented. His methodology is set forth as a historical marker from which to evaluate the movement, and its foundation, as a whole. As the foundation for Craddock’s method is examined, I also focus attention on what other proponents of the New Homiletic say about building upon Craddock’s work.<sup>2</sup> This discussion highlights two convictions which are deeply held by adherents of the New Homiletic: effective preaching is dependent on hearers, and it is narrative by nature.<sup>3</sup> I begin with the work of Fred B. Craddock who is credited with

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<sup>1</sup>The origin of this title cannot be determined precisely, but it is related to the fact that Craddock’s work set forth a basic methodology from which the work of those who followed him may be measured. Stephen Farris uses the title in the opening remarks of his review of *Listening to the Word*, in *Homiletic* 19, no. 2 (1994): 15. I have also, however, heard the phrase used by a number of preaching scholars such as Daniel Akin and Michael Duduit in open discussions of the New Homiletic.

<sup>2</sup>A primary source of reference for these comments is found in a Festschrift honoring Craddock. Gail R. O’Day and Thomas G. Long, eds., *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993). In these essays, homileticsians who built their methods on Craddock’s work describe the elements of his foundation upon which they have continued to build.

<sup>3</sup>This is not to say that all preaching must be narrative, according to the New Homiletic. Proponents do, however, believe that preaching should seek to speak in the most acceptable cultural genre. The New Homiletic believes that narrative is the most effective genre for getting something heard.

laying a new foundation for homiletics.

### **Craddock's New Foundation**

#### **The Need for a New Foundation**

Fred B. Craddock's contribution to homiletics is seen in the construction and display of a new foundation for new homiletical theories. The 1960s marked a major change in the history of modern man.<sup>4</sup> This new epoch in time was no less important than other major epochs. Times were changing rapidly, and the ways in which humans responded to issues of life were trying to keep pace with the change. Following the example set by Europeans, modern Americans began to lose confidence in things which had traditionally offered comfort and stability. Strategies for facing the questions of life that had been based on science, government, and the church had all been charged in the court of public opinion with failing to deliver on their promises of peace and prosperity. Whether this charge was accurate or not, the reputation of each had been damaged.

Postmodern thinking was driving what appeared to be the last nail in the coffin of the latest versions of each. This nail consisted of a new philosophical emphasis, and was being driven by the popular rejection of foundationalism because it had failed to provide unchanging, universal, or absolute truth. Codified in the work of Jacques

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<sup>4</sup>Looking back nearly forty years later, it is irrefutable that many changes were ushered in during the sixties. From space travel and color TV in the world of science, to the introduction and assimilation of religions from around the world, dominant ways of thinking were challenged in every area of American life. In his 18 July 2005 web-log, R. Albert Mohler notes the magnitude of that connection in areas of cultural belief. "Today's culture wars can be directly traced to the cultural transformations of the 1960's. As a matter of fact, that critical decade represented nothing less than a cultural revolution of sorts—a revolution Stanley Kurtz describes as 'both a fulfillment and a repudiation of the vision of America's founders.'" R. Albert Mohler, "Two Competing Religions—The Legacy of the 1960s" [on-line]; accessed 20 July 2005; available from [http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary\\_read.php?cdate=2005-07-18](http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2005-07-18); Internet.

Derrida, a French literary critic, philosophers called for the deconstruction of all statements of absolute truth.<sup>5</sup> Faced with the new postmodern paradigm advocating a contextual understanding and fluid definition of truth, homileticsians asked a simple question: Would preaching survive?

Most homileticsians agreed that preaching must continue, so their question took on a different emphasis.<sup>6</sup> If preaching did survive, what would it look like? For many, the answer to this question was found in a new vision for the shape or style of preaching. They began their search with the unqualified belief that whatever preaching looked like, it must be different.<sup>7</sup> A new way of preaching had to be found. It was at this crucial time in the history of preaching that several voices were being raised in favor of something new.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994). This movement ultimately falls by its own standards since according to principles of deconstruction there are *absolutely* no absolutes. Even the most basic proposition of deconstructionism cannot be fully embraced as an absolute truth, by its adherents.

<sup>6</sup>Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, rev. ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 21. In fact, seizing the opportunity provided by the prevailing attitude toward preaching, Craddock sees in the great depth of the crisis greater possibilities. "Those of us vitally concerned with preaching, perhaps possessed of unjustified hope, tend to interpret the measure of the depth to which the pulpit has fallen as also the measure of the height to which it should and can rise."

<sup>7</sup>This idea fits well with the single defining element of postmodernism. Because truth is always evolving, methodologies for determining and presenting truth must also be evolving.

<sup>8</sup>In *A History Of Preaching*, O. C. Edwards highlights the work of several homileticsians during the last half of the nineteenth century as they sought to solve "A Crisis In Communication." In chapter 32, he includes Fred B. Craddock, David Buttrick, and Edmund A. Steimle as major contributors to what many have called "A More Excellent Way" for reaching postmodern audiences. O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 798-827. The three individuals, highlighting preaching as "inductive," "phenomenological," and "story" respectively, provided the skeleton upon which the flesh of the New Homiletic would be hung. For a more in-depth discussion of the methodologies of these three homileticsians, see Grant Irven Lovejoy, "A Critical Evaluation of the Nature and Role of Authority in the Homiletical Thought of

These new voices, along with their new theories, were getting a hearing. One voice that clearly stands out is that of Fred B. Craddock.

### **The Representative for a New Foundation**

Fred B. Craddock is without a doubt one of the most influential individuals in the history of modern American preaching. Whether one agrees or disagrees with his method, his preaching has inspired audiences and preachers alike. The following paragraphs offer a few of the reasons Craddock's influence is notable for all modern studies in homiletics.

**Well known and respected.** First, Craddock is an influential figure in homiletics simply because he is well known and respected in the field. He is the Bandy Distinguished Professor of Preaching and New Testament, Emeritus, in the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. He is an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and has served as the pastor of Christian Churches in Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Georgia. He is well known throughout the world of preaching, and is often headlined as a guest speaker and teacher at preaching conferences. Craddock has, for instance, delivered the Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale, the Scott Lectures at Claremont School of Theology, the Adams Lectures at Southeastern Baptist Seminary, the Schaff Lectures at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, the Cole Lectures at Vanderbilt, the Westervelt Lectures at Austin Presbyterian Seminary, the Mullins Lectures at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the Earl Lectures at Pacific

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Fred B. Craddock, Edmund A. Steimle, and David G. Buttrick" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990).

School of Religion.<sup>9</sup> In fact his influence was so widespread during the last third of the twentieth century that in 1996 Baylor University named Fred B. Craddock one of the twelve “most effective preachers in the English-speaking world, according to a worldwide survey.”<sup>10</sup> Finally, born in 1928, Craddock is still a popular speaker, teacher, and preacher at conferences. His insights as a homiletical innovator are still respected and sought after even though he is past the age when many have retired or faded away.<sup>11</sup>

**A desire to get the message heard.** Second, Fred. B. Craddock continues as an influential figure in homiletics because his main desire for preaching resonates with that of others who are actively involved in homiletics. Preachers want their hearers to get the message. The 1960s had been a time of turmoil, and upheaval. Authority was viewed as passé at best, and oppressive at worst. Mainline liberal preaching had left congregants without faith. Higher critical methods—an illegitimate offspring of the great Enlightenment period—had placed the burden of truth squarely in the hands of humanity. Then, when the Bible had been reduced to the inadequate accounts of finite human beings, the so-called preaching of the Word of God began to lose traction. Since objective truth was gone, voices clamoring for a new method of discovering absolute

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<sup>9</sup>Meridian Herald Inc., “Fred B. Craddock” [on-line]; accessed 10 May 2004; available from <http://www.orpheusdei.com/meridianherald/craddock.htm>; Internet.

<sup>10</sup>See n.38 in chapter 1 for more information on this survey. “Top Twelve Preachers” [on-line]; accessed 24 August 2004; available from <http://pr.baylor.edu/story.phd?id=000323>; Internet.

<sup>11</sup>Fred. B. Craddock was, for instance, the featured preacher on the first night of the Festival of Homiletics in May 2005. According to an on-line brochure, the title of the 2005 Festival of Homiletics conference was “Preaching and Living the Sermon with Sacred Storytelling” [on-line]; accessed 16 June 2005; available from <http://www.festivalofhomiletics.com/2005agenda.html>; Internet.



truth were also becoming silent.<sup>12</sup>

Adding weight to arguments against the notion that a preacher could claim to stand and declare the Word of God, philosophers like Jacques Derrida were introducing epistemological methods which devalued historical and ahistorical methods which were used for discovering truth. They favored new, postmodern methods which sought to identify truth with the cultural construct of the times. Recognizing the crisis which was being advanced by a decline in relevant, biblical preaching, and the philosophical landscape of the times, Craddock longed for people to understand once again God's message for their lives. He also believed that God's message is closely tied to the biblical text.<sup>13</sup> Melding a Barthian or neo-orthodox theological understanding of the Bible with the liberal epistemological ideas of John Dewey, Craddock found his answer. He pushed for a homiletical method that would draw from the experiential truths of the Bible a message that would be available to people wherever they were at the time of its delivery.<sup>14</sup>

Craddock's method teaches that effective communication is always memorable

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<sup>12</sup>David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

<sup>13</sup>When Craddock refers to the Word of God, he is not speaking specifically of the biblical text. He is speaking of the church's interpretation of the biblical text. This is an important hermeneutical distinction for understanding the foundation upon which he builds his homiletical method. "The Word of God, if it is to be located, is to be located in movement, in conversation, in communication between scripture and church." Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 106.

<sup>14</sup>Charles L. Campbell, "Craddock, Fred B.," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 93-95. See also the section on Craddock in Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 154-59. I am indebted to the brief summary article about Craddock by Campbell for Craddock's connection to John Dewey. The idea that truth is dependent on an individual's personal construction is an essential element for understanding Craddock's method.

and personable. In this case personable does not mean that the message is delivered specifically toward, or for, a person. A personable message means that communication occurs when individual hearers discover for themselves meaning in the sermon. These two ideas, that communication is memorable and personable, stand behind the glowing praises given in honor of Craddock by Barbara Brown Taylor. She writes in the introductory section of a book of his sermons, entitled *The Cherry Log Sermons*: “If you have ever heard Fred Craddock preach, then this book needs no introduction. You will remember the sound of his voice, the way he drops his chin and looks over his glasses, the way his eyes disappear when he laughs.”<sup>15</sup> In this statement, Taylor emphasizes the key notion that memorable communication occurs in the context of an event and involves more than just words. Memorable and personable communication includes the little things like body language, voice, and so forth.

But even without these elements, Taylor believes that there is something about Craddock’s sermons that will make them memorable and personable for readers. The memorableness of the message relies ultimately upon the hearer as she connects ideas in the message with past and present memories. In fact, these messages can become memorable as they are applied by new hearers listening to them in light of their own personal situations.

Taylor notes that these key ideas are advanced by Craddock’s inductive method, which she describes as an alluring opportunity to overhear someone else’s conversation.

If, on the other hand, you have never heard Fred Craddock preach, then you will be doubly grateful to him for allowing this volume to be published. In it, you will

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<sup>15</sup>Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Cherry Log Sermons* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), xi.

*overhear* conversations between a master preacher and his congregation about questions of faith that really matter. Within these conversations, *you will hear* other ones—between the Bible and the believer, between the church and the world, between every human being who ever wanted to draw nearer to God and the God who became flesh for that very reason.<sup>16</sup>

Taylor's point is that Craddock's method of preaching works because it is an exciting and new opportunity for hearing God. As listeners overhear messages that were delivered to others, excitement is generated in them as they connect the story with their own story, and it is transformed into a new message that is both memorable and personable.

**Provided a new and open foundation.** Finally, Craddock is an influential figure for studying the New Homiletic and its influences, because his new foundation for preaching created an environment of openness on which a wide variety of homiletical theoreticians have found acceptance to build.<sup>17</sup> According to Eugene L. Lowry, narrative homileticians followed closely on Craddock's heels. He writes: "What Craddock did was to open fully a new door. He called it 'inductive preaching,' but many of the people who have walked through that door have worn name tags saying 'narrative preaching.'"<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid. Emphasis added. The idea of *overhearing* is a key element of narrative theology, hermeneutics, and preaching that must not be missed. It presumes that present day readers of the Bible cannot count as their message what they believe to be the author's historically intended message because they are not a part of the original conversation. Instead, we are just eavesdropping on a bigger conversation, and the best we can hope for is a personal understanding of its meaning. This idea is set forth in Craddock's second major work, *Overhearing the Gospel*. In it Craddock draws from the existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, rev. ed. (St. Louis: Chalice, 2002).

<sup>17</sup>Edwards notes that "while the New Homileticians were in agreement about the inadequacy of traditional preaching to meet the needs of men and women today, their ideas of what sort of preaching is needed instead are by no means so uniform." Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 802. There is, however, in Craddock's methodology a sufficiently open foundation for these diverse homileticians to build.

<sup>18</sup>Eugene L. Lowry, "The Revolution of Sermonic Shape," in *Listening to the Word*, 94. The New Homiletic is technically made up of several genres of preaching style.

Finding acceptance for his new homiletical method, Craddock opened fully the door through which many and diverse preachers have walked comfortably.

The group who first walked excitedly through the door has continued to grow and has in recent years become more diverse. Those who walked through in the beginning may generally be identified as neo-orthodox in their theology. The element that binds this group together is its common concern for preaching that is existential in nature.<sup>19</sup> Preaching that reveals the Word of God is, therefore, personally relevant and is conditionally authoritative. These individuals built their methodologies on this foundational element and eagerly became known as proponents of the New Homiletic.<sup>20</sup>

Not everyone who followed Craddock agreed completely with his homiletical methods. Lowry says, for instance, “I have no doubt that Craddock wishes that some of us who have walked through that door would have turned another direction instead. . . . What apparently happened is that by prompting a fresh reappraisal of sermon shape, Craddock gave the homiletical world permission to entertain radically new ideas about preaching.”<sup>21</sup> Craddock’s emphasis on sermon shape has also caught the attention of

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Although Craddock’s method was built strictly speaking around an inductive style, the primary genre of the New Homiletic which his method gave rise to is narrative.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas Long, “And How Shall They Hear?,” in *Listening to the Word*, 167-88. Long argues that homileticians today (at least those of the New Homiletic) believe that the audience and the preacher together create an experience of meaning. See also, David L. Allen, “A Tale of Two Roads: Homiletics and Biblical Authority,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 3 (2000): 489-515.

<sup>20</sup>This idea is the premise behind *Listening to the Word*. These well-known and diverse homileticians, biblical scholars, and theologians wrote these essays because they were grateful to Craddock for opening up a new world of opportunity to them.

<sup>21</sup>Lowry, “The Revolution of Sermonic Shape,” 94-95. It is important to note in Lowry’s statement that Craddock’s emphasis on shape gave rise to “radically new ideas about preaching.” In truth, however, it is Craddock’s foundational theological presupposition that gave rise to these new methods. Homiletical methodology should be

theologically orthodox preachers. In fact, Craddock's call to remember one's audience finds welcome agreement among orthodox and neo-orthodox homiletics alike.<sup>22</sup> That is not to say that they agree in terms of their foundations. But both seek to recognize the importance of audiences. The discussion has become so prevalent in homiletics today, some theologically conservative homiletics have also ventured through the methodological door Craddock opened, and are eagerly foraging in these new found lands of opportunity.<sup>23</sup>

Over the last thirty years, Craddock has had a notable effect on homiletical theory. Whether his contribution is celebrated or not, its influence has changed the way

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the result of one's theology of preaching. In *A Theology of Preaching*, Richard Lischer seems to take the position that the driving force behind the New Homiletic is an atheological emphasis. Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1981). But it is precisely its theological foundation that allows narrative preaching as defined by the New Homiletic to stand. F. Gerrit Immink seems to agree as he evaluates the New Homiletic in light of Lischer's work. "Does this (an emphasis on the hearer) imply a loss of theology, as Lischer seems to suggest? Not necessarily. It might very well imply, however, a radical shift in theological reasoning." F. Gerrit Immink, "Homiletics: The Current Debate," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 8, no. 1 (2004): 92.

<sup>22</sup>Vocal conservative proponents of remembering one's audience are many. Consider, for instance, John R. W. Stott's work *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), or D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972).

<sup>23</sup>Haddon Robinson is a well-known conservative proponent of expository preaching who has been foraging ever further into narrative homiletics. His latest book on preaching, a joint effort with his son, Torrey W. Robinson, bears the title *It's All in How You Tell It: Preaching First-Person Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003). Although it remains to be seen whether Robinson is really moving away from biblical exposition in the sermon, some of the language he is using is very close to that which was used during the development of the New Homiletic. He says, for instance, "Crafting a first-person sermon uses all of the analytical skills you have mastered in studying the biblical material, but it requires more. It calls on you to use *your imagination as an interpretative tool*" (emphasis mine), *ibid.*, 13. I examine Robinson's work elsewhere as an example of the impact of the New Homiletic on contemporary interpretation and preaching.

preaching is discussed and practiced, and it will continue to be relevant to preaching in the foreseeable future.

### **Primary Element of the New Foundation**

Edwards states that “influences in the development of his [Craddock’s] thought include the existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard and the ‘New Hermeneutic’ of Gerhard Ebeling. He is also an advocate of John Dewey’s educational theories.”<sup>24</sup> These three are most evident in a single hermeneutical presupposition. Craddock believes that the Word of God is by nature experiential. Following the hermeneutic of Ebeling, he states that “to say the scripture *is* the Word of God or that scripture *contains* the Word of God is to identify the Word of God too completely with only one partner in the dialogue.”<sup>25</sup> Unless someone hears the message, there is no Word from God. Both the preacher and the hearer have a role in the communication of the Word of God. “Just as sound is vibrations received, so word is a spoken-heard phenomenon.”<sup>26</sup> This idea is applied to the biblical text as the interpreter listens to the text to see what God has to say. As the process unfolds, the preacher must recognize that the text was written by a specific author to a specific audience. Therefore, the interpreter’s task is to “overhear” the conversation between the biblical author and his intended audience.<sup>27</sup>

Craddock’s methodology also grows out of the logical conclusion that communication, as seen in everyday life, is bidirectional. Preachers and hearers both

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<sup>24</sup>Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 802.

<sup>25</sup>Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 106.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 109-10.

have responsibilities in the preaching event. Craddock states the responsibility of the preacher as follows: “Now to be effective, a preacher must expose herself to all the dangers of the *speaking* (rather than the *speech*) situation. She not only trusts her words to the hearer but opens herself to their responses.”<sup>28</sup> The twofold nature of his statement is the subject of much of the rest of the book. At this point in the explanation, however, it is the nature of preaching as guidance and conversation partner, rather than proclamation and declaration, that is emphasized. In other words, the Word of God is not something that can be delivered by a preacher to a congregation. It must be communicated in an open way that allows listeners to participate.<sup>29</sup>

Next, Craddock states the responsibility of the hearer. “She [the preacher] believes the sermon needs the hearers to be complete. Conversation is not an individual production. The event of the word of God needs the ear, for faith comes by hearing (Rom. 10:17).”<sup>30</sup> Because preaching the Word of God is conversation rather than proclamation, God has not spoken until someone hears. “It has been urged that this method respects rather than insults the hearers and that it leaves them the freedom and hence the obligation to respond.”<sup>31</sup>

In examining these foundational ideas, it is important to note that Craddock is forthright in connecting his homiletical methodology with his theological foundation even

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>29</sup>In *Overhearing the Gospel*, Craddock’s hermeneutic is expressed as he builds his homiletical paradigm around a statement by Søren Kierkegaard, asserting that participation of the hearers includes overhearing. As the book unfolds overhearing is expanded to include the imagination as the creator of *possible* conversations between the preacher, hearers, and the biblical text during the sermon preparation.

<sup>30</sup>Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 106.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 55.

though he denies the necessity of a direct relationship between theology and the content of the sermon. He states the importance of these relationships in simple terms: “How one communicates is a theological commentary on the minister’s view of ministry, the church, the Word of God, sin, salvation, faith, works, love, and hope. And it is probably a clearer and more honest expression of one’s theology than is the content of sermons.”<sup>32</sup> In other words *how* the preacher preaches can be as, or more, important than *what* the preacher preaches. In fact, Craddock states that “effective preaching calls for a method consistent with one’s theology because the method is message; form and content are of a piece.”<sup>33</sup>

Craddock’s methodology grows faithfully out of his hermeneutical foundation. He does not believe that the biblical text is the Word of God, even though he believes that the Bible plays an important part in preserving and passing on the Word of God. Instead, God communicates His Word to individual hearers as all the elements of the communication event come together to produce meaning for them.

### **An Inductive Methodology**

Craddock’s inductive methodology grows out of his belief that the hearer must be allowed to participate in the preaching event in order for the message to be successfully communicated. He believes that the inductive method works best because it features three key elements; participation is dependent on compatibility with current ways of thinking, respect of the individual’s right to authoritative autonomy, and presentation

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 44. If the idea that form accurately indicates theological foundations is true, it becomes an important evaluative tool by which judge a preacher’s hermeneutical claims.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 18.



that is captivating of the mind.<sup>34</sup>

Craddock states that there are basically two forms of rhetorical logic for accomplishing these three key elements: deductive forms and inductive forms. “Simply stated, deductive movement is from the general truth to the particular application or experience, while inductive is the reverse.”<sup>35</sup> The Old Homiletic, according to Craddock, focused on deductive reasoning as the primary means for preaching the Word of God. In his first and most influential book on preaching, *As One without Authority*, Craddock argues that this method will simply not work today. The best way to achieve the goal of preaching is an inductive method. He defines it as follows: “In induction, thought moves from the particulars of experience that has a familiar ring in the listener’s ear to a general truth or conclusion.”<sup>36</sup> He summarizes his arguments in favor of this method as follows:

Thus far the attempt has been made to say that inductive movement in preaching corresponds to the way people ordinarily experience reality and to the way life’s problem-solving activity goes on naturally and casually. It has been urged that this method respects rather than insults the hearers and that it leaves them the freedom and hence the obligation to respond. In addition, unfolding or unrolling the sermon in this fashion sustains interest by means of that anticipation built into all good narration.<sup>37</sup>

Focusing on these three elements, Craddock applied his own personality to the inductive task at hand. His success in the homiletical arena is a testimony to his resourcefulness in using his natural abilities.<sup>38</sup> That is not to say that he is an impressive

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>38</sup>For Craddock’s thoughts on the need to be yourself in preaching, see Fred B. Craddock, “The Tunes Of Preaching,” *Leadership* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 64-68.

orator. Although slight in stature, and self-proclaimed as unimpressive,<sup>39</sup> Craddock has the ability to capture and hold the attention of an audience. This feature of his preaching is the result of a deliberate and conscious effort. He accomplishes this task by applying three basic rules of communication. Good communication occurs when the preacher knows the community, is a personable preacher, and facilitates the active participation of the hearer. All three elements lend themselves to Craddock's inductive preaching methodology.

**Communication demands community knowledge.** Craddock's method demands community knowledge, not just knowledge of the community. He is considered by many to be a master at connecting with his audience. This connection is, at least in part, due to the fact that he seeks to know his audience. Knowing in this case has two parts. First, the preacher must know the biblical acumen of the community. Second, the preacher must know the concerns of the community. These two elements must work together.

First, knowing the level of the listener's biblical knowledge is important if the preacher is going to start where they are. Many preachers talk about knowing the situations and concerns facing their audiences. The level of biblical knowledge required for getting a biblical message heard is not as often talked about.<sup>40</sup> The preacher must seek to know the level of biblical knowledge represented in the community in order to know

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 67-68.

<sup>40</sup>This is important to this discussion of Craddock's methodology, since it fosters an attitude of less Bible teaching in the pulpit, while depending on a certain amount of familiarity with the biblical story. Calvin Miller calls this weakness in narrative forms of preaching, "the loss of *didache* (or teaching) in the church." Calvin Miller, "Narrative Preaching," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 108.

how to connect them with its message.

The application of this idea is simple. A message prepared for a biblically illiterate audience would not be the same as one prepared for fourth-year seminary students. Since hearers are encouraged to develop their own conclusions, preachers are not encouraged to lead their hearers down paths which they cannot imagine going down. Simply put, the audiences can be moved only if they make the connections. The goal of preaching is not to inform them of the message but to expose them to its power. He writes: “Does the sermon say and do what the biblical text says and does? This question functions as the canon for ascertaining if a sermon brings the text forward as a living voice in the church much better than the number of texts cited or biblical words repeated.”<sup>41</sup> True, but for Craddock’s inductive method to work, knowledge of the biblical ideas must already be present in the congregation. Therefore, knowing what the community knows about the Bible is also essential.

Second, knowing the communities concerns and needs will also help the preacher to connect with the listeners. Current events such as community struggles or celebrations, as well as individual concerns and needs impact a preacher’s starting and ending point in the message. These things are, however, always changing. Therefore, no two communities or sermon events within a single community are exactly the same. No sermon delivered a second time or in print will convey the same message that it did in another situation or at another time. “If a sermon happens to enjoy an afterlife in print, its

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<sup>41</sup>Craddock, *Preaching*, 28. In this section, Craddock rightly points out that a sermon can move through and contain a cadre of biblical texts without being biblical. From that assertion, however, he argues that “a sermon may appear to be walking alongside rather than through a text, or may seem to pause now and then to look up at the lofty peak of a text so extraordinary as to defy the skills of the most experienced preacher, and yet be quite ‘biblical’ in the sense of releasing that text to do its work among the listeners.” Ibid.

readers' experience is far different from its hearers' experience."<sup>42</sup>

For Craddock, preaching centers around *an event* and *a particular* audience. He writes: "It follows that more realistic and responsible biblical preaching means bearing the awesome burden of interpreting scripture *for the congregation to which one preaches*."<sup>43</sup> At this point Craddock warns against settling for *knowing* that is only general or basic: "The text is to be studied and shared not in dialogue with 'the human situation' in general but with the issues facing the particular congregation participating in the sermon experience."<sup>44</sup>

In spite of Craddock's stand on the importance of preparing and delivering particular sermons for particular audiences, he is one of the New Homiletics' favorite examples in print, on tape, and in person. His argument is not to be taken as a denial of the appropriateness of preaching to audiences with which the speaker is unacquainted. Furthermore, it should not be viewed as an argument against printed or recorded sermons. Instead, his goal is to emphasize the need to know the audience when preparing a sermon. By knowing the biblical acumen and life situation facing his audience, the preacher will be able to lead them from their current understandings toward life-affecting conclusions.<sup>45</sup> According to Craddock, the absence of such an outcome indicates that the preacher has failed, and his message is without authority in the lives of his hearers.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>43</sup>Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 102.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>45</sup>Craddock, *Preaching*, 86-90.

<sup>46</sup>Craddock states, for instance, in his concluding remarks on the need for a change in preaching at the conclusion of chapter 1 in *As One without Authority*, that "we will know power has returned to the pulpit when and where preaching effects

Craddock also stresses the need for a knowing community because good communication demands the use of both old and new ideas in the sermon. The preacher who does not know the community runs the risk of presenting all old or all new things. “The power and effectiveness in all public speaking, including preaching, lies in the mixture of the familiar and the new.”<sup>47</sup> Good communication is not found simply in giving new information or reminding people of old things. It is a mixture of the two which work together to influence hearers. He asserts: “Another way of expressing this characteristic of good preaching is to say that the *nod* of recognition precedes the *shock* of recognition.”<sup>48</sup>

Craddock believes that new *informational* material should rarely exceed ten percent of a message.<sup>49</sup> He does not include in this caution things such as specific stories which may be unfamiliar to the audience, but the specific lessons to which hearers are hopefully led by these stories. So when opponents of his method say that it will not work in an age when people are biblically ignorant, his response is that he does not expect complete or accurate recall, but a ring of familiarity with the names, events, and basic ideas. In defense of this principle he argues as follows: “Without question, some persons who passed with honors a curriculum in Bible three years ago would be embarrassed by their scores on a test of recall today. But that fact is unrelated to the point here. What is being urged is a way of preaching that assumes the listeners’ recognition of much of the

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transformation in the lives of people and in the structures of society.” Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 19-20.

<sup>47</sup>Craddock, *Preaching*, 160.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

material.”<sup>50</sup>

Craddock acknowledges the fact that some in the audience may be hearing the material for the first time. Although he does not believe that this is the norm, he spins the possibility in a positive direction and moves on: “If some present do not know the narrative at all, then they have learned, and that is no small benefit.”<sup>51</sup> The outcome of such a situation would be a growth in biblical knowledge. This would certainly be viewed as important but would not foster the fulfillment of his basic goal for preaching.

Again, his belief that the way a sermon is delivered is more important than the content fits with his basic foundation. He defines preaching “as making present and appropriate to the hearers the revelation of God. Here revelation is used not in the sense of content, although content is certainly there, but in the sense of mode.”<sup>52</sup> In accordance with this idea, the relationship between Scripture and the sermon is also viewed in the sense of mode. Scripture becomes a powerful element underlying the preaching event because it inspires the preacher and reinforces the personal message which is formed in the minds of the hearers.<sup>53</sup>

Craddock focuses his use of Scripture on *a* message that is carried along by the text rather than on *the* message presented in the text. In this way the homiletical focus separates the sermon message from the hermeneutical work of the study as it is used to carry along the message in a new setting: “What the listeners hear the text say in a fresh,

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 161.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 161-62.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>53</sup>Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 45. He is building this part of his methodology on the notion set forth in a quote by Kierkegaard: “There is no lack of information in a Christian land; something else is lacking.”

appropriate, and indigenous way to them: that is the message for the sermon.”<sup>54</sup> The more biblically astute a community is, the easier it will be for them to hear God speaking to them through a biblical message.

**Communication must be personable.** Craddock’s success in the area of inductive preaching is a testimony to his natural ability as an orator. By natural ability, I do not mean his huge voice, charismatic personality, or authoritative presence before an audience. Craddock is not well known for any of these. He himself speaks of his slightness of communicative presence, while describing the wisdom of using one’s God given talents and weaknesses to communicate. This is far more effective than trying to be something one is not. He notes: “There are many things I cannot do physically. I’m small; I weighed only 120 pounds when I entered the ministry. And I have a weak voice that doesn’t project well. . . . I had to accept my limited range and find some way I could use my weaknesses as well as my strengths.”<sup>55</sup>

Craddock’s success is a reflection of his deliberate and constant effort to communicate using his own personality. Communication as personable is not, however, personable just because of the individual speaking. It is personable because it involves others who have come with preconceptions leading to expectations. The preacher must not ignore the audience or their expectations. One such expectation is that of personal connection or rapport: “A group is never so large as to negate an audience’s expectation that a sermon both assume and create a personal relationship between speaker and

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<sup>54</sup>Craddock, *Preaching*, 85-86.

<sup>55</sup>Craddock, “The Tunes Of Preaching,” 67-68.

hearer.”<sup>56</sup> Craddock calls this relationship “intimacy.”<sup>57</sup> He states, in fact, that intimacy must not be neglected if the speaker is going to get a hearing: “The expectation is neither unreal nor out of order. The proverb makers remind us that part of the sound one hears in a seashell is created by the pulse and throb of the hand holding it. So one cannot totally separate what one hears in a sermon from the one who delivers it.”<sup>58</sup> Believing that “the goal” of the pulpit “is not to get something said but to get something heard,” Craddock prepares every sermon as a conversation with a particular audience.<sup>59</sup>

His goal is to deliver a biblical sermon which involves the hearers so that they can discover its message for themselves. That event is viewed as a conversation in which the biblical message, facilitated by the preacher is then formed into the Word of God. Leave out any part, and the communication of the Word of God breaks down.

Word, whether it be of God or of humanity is properly understood as communication, and it is rather meaningless to discuss word in terms of *one* person. Equally meaningless is a discussion of Word of God fixed at one pole, the Bible apart from the other, the church. Just as sound is vibration received, so word is a spoken-heard phenomenon. The Word of God, if it is to be located, is to be located in movement, in conversation, in communication between scripture and church. In the absence of that communication, definitions of the Word of God that say ‘Lo, here!’ and Lo, there!’ have to do only with potentiality, not actuality.<sup>60</sup>

In other words, if God speaks in a forest and there is no one there to hear His voice, did He really say anything? Based on Craddock’s definition, the answer is, no! This may be

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<sup>56</sup>Craddock, *Preaching*, 168.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 153-69. Developing and maintaining intimacy between the speaker and the hearer is one of six topics discussed under the chapter title “Qualities to Be Sought in the Sermon.”

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 168.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>60</sup>Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 106.



pushing the limits of Craddock's position. But it does accurately portray, in Craddock's methodology, the necessity for a personable relationship between the preacher and the hearer if the Word of God is going to be heard. Remove either part and God's Word has not been preached. Although many may disagree with Craddock's theology at this point, his homiletical methodology is certainly consistent with it in at least two ways. His messages are personable because he knows who he is and because he talks to his listeners where they are.

**Communication depends on the hearer.** According to Craddock, in order to communicate biblical truth the preacher must be aware of "two focuses and the distance between them."<sup>61</sup> He continues with the following explanation:

One focus is upon the listeners, including their context: personal, domestic, social, political, economic. The other is upon the biblical text, including its contexts: historical, theological, and literary. The distance between these two focuses is very real, consisting of factors of time, space, language, world view, and immediate circumstances. Through the processes of interpretation, or hermeneutics, the distance can be negotiated with some degree of confidence. What the listeners hear the text say is a fresh, appropriate, and indigenous way to them: that is the message for the sermon.<sup>62</sup>

Although he states that it does not matter whether you start with the text or the listener, since "the two will meet on down the road anyway, with neither one claiming to have had a head start,"<sup>63</sup> Craddock begins with the listener. For him, it makes sense to start with the hearer because *hearers are more than just recipients of truth*. Craddock states that there are at least three reasons why this is true.

First, *hearers are participants in creating truth*. Craddock holds that the

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>63</sup>Craddock, *Preaching*, 86.

hearer will be affected by the message in a way that evokes action only if they are the ones who complete it. This is not the same thing as saying that the sermon is completed as it works its way out in the lives of its hearers. He writes: “Now, it is customary to say that the congregation completes the sermon, but usually what is meant is that the preacher has told the people what has to be done and then they are to implement it.”<sup>64</sup> Instead, Craddock argues that the message of the sermon is completed during the event by the congregation as it discovers or creates its own conclusions. “What is here suggested, however, is that the participation of the hearer is *essential*, not just in the post-benediction implementation, but in the completion of the thoughts, movement and decision making within the sermon itself” (emphasis mine).<sup>65</sup>

Second, *hearers are more likely to apply what they create*. Craddock promotes the inductive model as the best method for helping the hearer apply meaning for two reasons. It fits the natural way in which we think, and we are more likely to do things which spring from our own ideas.

First, Craddock believes that this method is best because it fits best with the way human beings think. “The plain fact of the matter is that we are seeking to communicate with people whose experiences are concrete. Everyone lives inductively, not deductively.”<sup>66</sup> Craddock’s methodology is very one sided at this point. In fact, everyone uses both inductive and deductive reasoning to make decisions in life. Some parts of life are lived according to strict rules and standards that are set outside of an individual’s control, while other parts are lived by applying general rules to specific

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<sup>64</sup>Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 53.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 50.

situations. Nevertheless, Craddock contends that facts do not drive our lives. They simply provide the ingredients which we mix together into the complex conclusions which do.

Second, Craddock argues for inductive methods of preaching instead of deductive methods of preaching because deductive methods prompt actions due to the ideas of others rather than each individual. This argument flows from his definition of the deductive methods of preaching: "Homiletically, deduction means stating the thesis, breaking it down into points or subthesis, explaining these points, and applying them to the particular situations of the hearers."<sup>67</sup> This definition is recognized by "everyone . . . as the movement of sermons in the mainstream of traditional preaching," and dates back to Aristotle.<sup>68</sup> But he sees this method as weak because the preacher does all the work for the congregation.

Supporters of both the Old and New Homiletics would agree that sermons should be preached in such a manner that their hearers would take ownership of the truths taught. In Craddock's view, the best method for achieving this goal is the inductive method. Following this method, a "thought moves from the particulars of experience that have a familiar ring in the listener's ear to a general truth or conclusion."<sup>69</sup>

In light of these ideas, several questions beg to be answered. Is the inductive method capable of providing answers to the specific dilemmas of life? Is the cause of preaching best served by an open invitation that encourages the congregation to join the preacher in coming up with their own conclusions or messages for the day? Finding

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 47.

affirmation in the presupposition that the Word of God is by nature experiential, Craddock believes that the answer to these questions is yes.

Finally, *hearers hear the Word of God only as it becomes something within them*. Craddock's method is based on the presumption that the Bible is not the Word of God until it becomes the Word of God in them: "In other words, to say the scripture is the Word of God or that scripture *contains* the Word of God is to identify the Word of God too completely with only one partner in the dialogue. Word, whether it be of God or of humanity is properly understood as communication, and it is rather meaningless to discuss word in terms of *one* person."<sup>70</sup> So propositional statements that are not received by a hearer, whether given by the direct revelation of God in the biblical text, or expressed as thesis and sub-thesis during a sermon, cannot be considered in and of themselves the Word of God. Nevertheless, God does *use* both the Scripture and the preacher to speak to hearers: "Preaching brings the Scriptures forward as a living voice in the congregation. Biblical texts have a future as well as a past, and preaching seeks to fulfill that future by continuing the conversation of the text into the present."<sup>71</sup> In other words, Craddock's hermeneutical presupposition stresses the practical nature of Scripture, in which it becomes the Word of God to individuals as it applies to them.

In summary, Craddock's homiletical method is founded on the presupposition that the sermon is an event in time where God communicates His Word with open-minded hearers. His delivery is purposefully engaging, because there is no message without hearer participation, and it is biblical so that when it is received it is said to be the living voice of God.

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>71</sup>Craddock, *Preaching*, 27.

### Craddock's Continuing Influence

Craddock's method provided the broad foundation upon which many others have built. The outcome of Craddock's move in opening the homiletic door is a diverse range of methodologies. Eugene Lowry notes that there is diversity even within specific currents within the New Homiletic. He writes: "Indeed, we need to become clear as to what the elusive term *narrative preaching* really means. Does one mean story preaching, à la Jensen, or narratively shaped sermons (as I would hold)?"<sup>72</sup> In the end, however, the unifying foundation is the same. The message is not a message unless it does something in the hearer. Lowry's assessment ties his method to the same hope with which Craddock began his: "Craddock hopes the congregation will experience the shock of recognition [what he calls the eureka moment]. I hope the meaning of the sermon is encountered, not just reported."<sup>73</sup> The point is that much of the diversity in the New Homiletic is united in the end by a single beginning goal.

With such diversity in terms and methodologies, it may be hard at first glance to see the common link among the partners of the New Homiletic. However, the linchpin presupposition by which Craddock draws his load, a single element of commonality among advocates of the New Homiletic, becomes immediately evident. Craddock believes that preaching involves a two-way communicative act in which nothing is really accomplished unless the recipient gets a message from what is presented. Both the message and its authority are dependent on the hearer's personal discovery of the truth. Preaching is not getting something said, it is getting something heard. This single common thread manifest itself in at least three ways.

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<sup>72</sup>Lowry, "The Revolution of Sermonic Shape," 94.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 99.

## Preaching Is an Event

First, defining preaching as a two-way communicative act, further defines it as an event. Lowry writes: “Perhaps the issue finding the central place in all the various models or understandings of narrative preaching is the goal of sermonic event. One can feel this thread moving through every volume of Fred Craddock’s writing on preaching.”<sup>74</sup> For Craddock, the idea of sermon as a particular event is crucial. With a hermeneutic based on personal experience the context of the sermon is essential for defining its message. He notes: “A sermon to be properly understood and to have its purpose fulfilled, has to be experienced in its context, or rather in its several contexts.”<sup>75</sup> With this idea stated in general terms, Craddock continues by noting the importance of both the speaker and the audience in determining these contexts: “A sermon is a communication and therefore is to be located as much among a particular group of listeners as with a particular speaker.”<sup>76</sup> This is not to say that those who hear a recorded sermon or read it in a book cannot receive a message from it. His point is that readers must remember that they are only overhearing a story meant for someone else. If it is to have meaning for the one who overhears it, then it must be turned into a personal event by re-forming it in their own context. Craddock notes that this task is easier when the original context is also known: “A knowledge of those to whom it is addressed would contribute as much or more to its understanding as would knowing the person who delivered it.”<sup>77</sup> In this way preaching as an event describes the participation of the

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>75</sup>Craddock, *Preaching*, 31.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

speaker and hearer in a give and take relationship where the two find and form a message together.

Craddock contends, as do others who follow in his footsteps, that the best way for a preacher to foster such an event is to use a method of preaching which moves along with the hearer rather than “in a downward movement of the sermon with an implicit view of the hearers that is not acceptable to them.”<sup>78</sup> An acceptable form means the message will get a hearing and is therefore potentially powerful. He writes: “Without question preaching increases in power when it is dialogical, when speaker and listener share in the proclamation of the Word.”<sup>79</sup>

### **Authority Is Located within the Hearer**

Another area of commonality among those who find shelter under the umbrella of the New Homiletic is the location of authority. Building on the theological presuppositions espoused in Craddock’s works, advocates of narrative preaching emphasize the hearer’s role in determining God’s authoritative Word for their lives.<sup>80</sup> Preachers must not exert undue authority over the congregation. “The process calls for an incompleteness, a lack of exhaustiveness in the sermon. It requires of the preacher that

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<sup>78</sup>Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 17.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>80</sup>Some, like Campbell, believe that Craddock softened his position on the issue of the authority of Scripture for a time. See, for instance, Campbell’s section on Craddock’s preaching in *Preaching Jesus*, 125-35. This, they claim, is evidenced by a lack of emphasis on this topic in his second major work on preaching, *Overhearing the Gospel*. I believe that Craddock is not as outspoken on the subject in this book simply because communication theory, and not biblical authority, is his main topic. His emphasis on the importance of the hearer in determining and responding to the message is still the main focus. So by implication his understanding on issues of authority are the same too.

she resist the temptation to tyranny of ideas rather than democratic sharing.”<sup>81</sup> It is up to the congregation to decide whether the message is for them as individuals.

Therefore, Scripture does not become authoritative until the hearer makes it authoritative. Following this line of thinking, Gene M. Tucker closes his essay on “Reading and Preaching the Old Testament” with the following summation of the first eight verses of Nehemiah chapter eight: “That ‘book of the law’ was not the word of God until it was brought out into the middle of the city, read, interpreted, and evoked a response by the people. That is the Old Testament’s model for reading and preaching the Old Testament.”<sup>82</sup> There is no inherent authority in Scripture. It has authority over individuals only as it is received and applied by its hearers.

### **Sermons Begin with the Audience**

Third, defining preaching as a two-way communicative act, emphasizes the audience as a beginning point for the message. Craddock’s method separates the task of hermeneutics and homiletics in order to place due emphasis on both: “To insist that studying to have a message and framing that message into a sermon are separate tasks is an invitation to discipline and a promise of realistic returns at the close of each process.”<sup>83</sup> The problem is that Craddock’s effort to keep these components of the preaching task separated has caused a realignment of some of the elements specific to each.

For Craddock, contemporary relevance during biblical exegesis is necessary for contemporary presentation. Being heard means involving, through the exegete’s

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<sup>81</sup>Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 54.

<sup>82</sup>Gene M. Tucker, “Reading and Preaching the Old Testament,” in *Listening to the Word*, 51.

<sup>83</sup>Craddock, *Preaching*, 154.



imagination, the mind of the present day audience in the interpretation process. Only then can the preacher be sure that they will receive a message. Craddock asserts: “It is vital to our task that we be aware that the experience of listening is not a secondary consideration after we have done our exegesis of the text and theological exploration. The listener is present from the beginning.”<sup>84</sup> This makes sense because the message and its authority reside in the acceptance of the hearer.

The challenge for narrative preaching is the discovery of a current and culturally relevant message from the biblical text. Since the audience is in a constant state of flux, the interpretation of biblical text and the presentation of the message must also be in a constant state of change. For this reason, even though the task of interpreting the listener and interpreting the text are separate enterprises, it does not matter which one the preacher starts with.

In “How Shall They Hear,” Thomas G. Long says that the homiletical method set forth by Craddock is important for the future of preaching because it is continuing to move with the times. Long states: “Preachers who stand up to preach need to recognize that they are speaking in the middle of a conversation, the church’s conversation. Preachers need to learn how to speak as those who weave their speech into the fabric of what is there already spoken, sometimes extending the design, sometimes altering it, but always mindful of it.”<sup>85</sup> That is why Craddock begins every part of the sermon preparation process with the listener in mind. Although the processes of interpretation and presentation are to be kept separate, interpretation incorporates the audience into the

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<sup>84</sup>Craddock, *Overhearing*, 104.

<sup>85</sup>Thomas G. Long, “And How Shall They Hear? The Listener in Contemporary Preaching,” in *Listening to the Word*, 187.

process of exegesis. As the preacher reads the text, he focuses on it through the lens of personal reflection just as will the people he knows will be sitting in the pews during the coming preaching event.

With this line of thinking intact, it is evident that the homiletical concern for relevance becomes an important element of the hermeneutical process. Craddock insists: “It is vital to our task that we be aware that the experience of listening is not a secondary consideration after we have done our exegesis of the texts and theological exploration. The listener is present from the beginning.”<sup>86</sup> With this in mind, the New Homiletic teaches that if one wants to be heard, preparation must begin by interpreting the audience. Then the interpretation of the Scripture will be relevant to them.<sup>87</sup>

### **Narrative By Nature**

Narrative is the form which has been most often applied to Craddock’s foundation. Narrative preaching is well suited to Craddock’s inductive homiletical method for many reasons. These reasons are all related to Craddock’s primary hermeneutical presupposition: The Word of God is by nature experiential and has not been presented until it is heard. Craddock summarizes his conviction for using an inductive method in the following ways. As elsewhere stated, proponents of the New Homiletic believe that inductive movement corresponds to the ways people experience life. Furthermore, they believe that narrative, as a theological, hermeneutical, and

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<sup>86</sup>Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 104.

<sup>87</sup>For essays emphasizing this aspect of Craddock’s methodological foundation, see Richard Lischer, “Preaching as the Church’s Language”; Thomas G. Long, “And How Shall They Hear? The Listener in Contemporary Preaching”; David Buttrick, “Who Is Listening?”; Barbara Brown Taylor, “Preaching the Body”; and Henry Michell, “The Hearer’s Experience of the Word,” in *Listening to the Word*.

homiletical philosophy for understanding, offers the best vehicle for experience.<sup>88</sup>

### **Narrative Preaching Is a Natural Form of Communication**

Narrative preaching fits with Craddock's inductive methodology in that human beings are naturally responsive to narratives. In an article on narrative preaching, Calvin Miller describes the power of narrative to engage listeners, and presents an excellent summary of the strengths and weaknesses associated with narrative forms of preaching.<sup>89</sup>

I have summarized the strengths, according to Miller, in the following five statements:

(1) Narrative sermons are consistent with past and present communication preferences; (2) They are captivating for congregants with short attention spans; (3) They tend to be less imposing; (4) Narrative sermons are more memorable; and (5) They can be life changing.<sup>90</sup> These statements of Miller's characterize narrative sermons, and correspond to Craddock's reasons for following an inductive method.

The primary point of contact between the two is found in the attention paid to listeners. In fact, Scripture is mentioned only during the explanation of the first item of Miller's list: "The first and most notable strength of the narrative sermon is that it speaks in a natural way to the story of both Scripture and contemporary culture."<sup>91</sup> His reference to the term "story" of Scripture is explained as the genre used in the first telling of the gospel: "The Bible is largely narrative, therefore, it follows that, if we are going to

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<sup>88</sup>See elsewhere the discussions on defining narrative preaching.

<sup>89</sup>Miller, "Narrative Preaching," 103-16.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 104-06.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 104.

preach the Book, we need to remember that the Book is a ‘story book.’”<sup>92</sup>

The next point of contact with the listeners is that of church tradition. He notes that tradition, such as that expressed in the creeds of church, is also written within a narrative context. Finally, he states that “our own culture—more than any other that has ever been—is a story-oriented culture.”<sup>93</sup>

Although narrative preaching is tied to the biblical text as a kindred form of expression, Miller never presents a case for how narrative preaching can aid in speaking the story of Scripture. This may be because the goal of narrative preaching is not to get something said but to get something heard. His argument is simply that narrative forms of communication are readily accepted by hearers. Therefore, narrative preaching is the natural choice of the New Homiletic because it focuses its attention on hearers.

### **Narrative Preaching Recognizes the Authority of the Hearer**

Narrative preaching fits with the methodology of the New Homiletic because it emphasizes the part played by individuals in authorizing a message. In Craddock’s words, yielding authority in this manner “respects rather than insults the hearers and . . . leaves them the freedom and hence the obligation to respond.”<sup>94</sup> Followers of the New Homiletic claim that a primary reason for the demise of preaching can be traced to its

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid. His explanation for this state of affairs is as follows. “Typical congregations nourished on years of television dramas and popular video releases have been groomed to relate to the narrative sermon.” Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 55.

unacceptable presentation of authority.<sup>95</sup> The issue is, however, more than a rebellion against a particular style. This is again a reflection of their hermeneutical presupposition. By locating meaning in meaningfulness, or experiential understanding, these narrative homileticians subject the sermon to a test of relevance in order to determine whether or not it is the Word of God. Authority is no longer found in the biblical text or message proclaimed from it. Authority belongs to the hearer, and is yielded by them when they deem a particular message relevant for their lives.

### **Narrative Preaching Sustains Interest**

Finally, narrative is the natural sermon form for building on Craddock's foundation because "unrolling the sermon in this fashion sustains interest by means of that anticipation built into all good narration."<sup>96</sup> Craddock argues that the Bible presents a pattern for preaching that captivates its audience by presenting a story in which hearers can imagine themselves playing the different roles. Narrative preaching is a natural fit in this area because it mimics the inductive presentation of the gospel message presented in the biblical story. Although this reason is related to the first, it is often given as the single most convincing reason for preaching in narrative form. The argument goes something like this: It would seem reasonable to preach a passage of Scripture in the form in which it was first delivered. After all, it has certainly proven effective for the biblical writers. Some have said that the gospels are nine-tenths narrative.<sup>97</sup> So it would also seem

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<sup>95</sup>Thomas Long captures this idea as he describes the movement from Craddock's foundation to the New Homiletical in "And How Shall They Hear? The Listener in Contemporary Preaching," in *Listening to the Word*.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Miller, "Narrative Preaching," 103. Miller cites H. Grady Davis as the source for these statistics, but others have also made similar claims.

reasonable for nine out of ten of our sermons from the gospels to be presented in a narrative form.

### **Preaching Is Dependent on Hearers**

Although properly described as narrative by nature, the single most important concern driving the New Homiletic is its concern for the human element in preaching. According to the basic foundational principle of the New Homiletic, God has not spoken until a person has been moved to understanding. Standing behind such a view is a denial of the existence of objective, propositional truth, and absolute authority. David Allen rightly describes the New Homiletic as postmodern at this point.<sup>98</sup> The Word of God is as individual as its hearers. Furthermore, it has authority only when it is recognized by a community, has contemporary relevance, and is propositional only as a past tense description of what it might have been. Preaching the Word of God is, therefore, dependent on hearers in their own communities, in their own situations, and in their own present reception. This does not mean that hearers are not accountable for hearing the Word of God. Hearers are responsible for listening to the Word of God in several ways. They are responsible for seeking to know what is the current truth. They are responsible for discovering and understanding truth for themselves. Finally, they are responsible for implementing truth in their own lives. These three elements of personal responsibility flow not from the presentation of a divinely authoritative Word, but from the belief that the Word of God is personal and created in them.

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<sup>98</sup>Allen, "Preaching and Postmodernism: An Evangelical Comes to the Dance," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (2001): 62-78.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, four observations should be made. First, the foundation upon which the New Homiletic is built is not the same as the foundation of the Old Homiletic. Proponents of both agree that God has chosen to speak to His people, but they disagree on how His Word is presented. The Old Homiletic believes that God continues to speak through the biblical message as it is presented in the biblical text. The New Homiletic believes that God continues to speak through experience, just as He spoke to and through the biblical writers.

The second observation is that the movement of the New Homiletic toward narrative forms of preaching fits with its foundational presuppositions. Those who build on the hermeneutical foundation of the New Homiletic should not feel a necessity for including the presentation of a biblical text in the sermon event. Like Craddock, they may believe that Scripture should and can be read with profit both privately and in corporate worship. However, the task of the preacher is to get a currently relevant message heard. Therefore, the preacher may leave the Bible in the study, re-form its message in contemporary terms using a contemporary story, and then seek to lead hearers to a new and personal experience of God's Word for them. When accomplished, these homileticians have successfully implemented a methodology which is securely anchored and in alignment with their neo-orthodox hermeneutical foundation.

A third observation is that proponents of the New Homiletic genuinely believe that their postmodern audiences prefer such a method. They believe that hearers will feel oppressed or talked down to if preachers preach the Word of God by explaining a text of Scripture, illustrating its meaning, giving relevant application, and then challenging listeners to conform to its truth. This method is viewed as presenting past trivia and old

demands when current events and challenges are more relevant. Responding to cries for change, advocates of the New Homiletic are committed to building a homiletical method to which they believe people will listen and therefore respond.

A final observation is that the methodologies of the New Homiletic, and that of the Old, are not compatible. That is not to say that they do not have anything in common, nor that they are not good conversation partners. In the end, the New Homiletic is faithful to its hermeneutical presupposition. The Bible becomes the Word of God when it is experienced by the reader or hearer. Since the preacher's job is, as Craddock says, "not to get something said but heard," preaching the Word of God means being a facilitator of an event so that God can speak His Word to those who are present.

In all of these final observations, hearers are the key. With such an emphasis on hearers, it is not surprising that theological and hermeneutic endeavors are engaged from a homiletical perspective. Theologies are shaped by the church to fit every generation, and hermeneutics are focused on finding listener-centered, and therefore relevant, interpretations. Theology, hermeneutics, and homiletics must all seek to accomplish their goals in an ever-changing world. The question is, upon what foundation does one begin.



## CHAPTER 5

### APPLYING NARRATIVE HOMILETICS TODAY

Narrative homiletics is found within a broad spectrum of preaching today. The term is widely used, and yet there is some confusion over its specific definition. In order to describe its present use and evaluate its effects, a basic definition must be determined. This chapter takes on the task of defining narrative preaching from three different points of view.<sup>1</sup> The most accurate definition of this homiletical methodology comes from those who promote and use narrative preaching. There are, however, distinct differences even among those who actively call for more narrative preaching.

We live in an age when there is an abundance of literature available on preaching. In order to make the best use of these resources, it is important to identify them according to both their homiletical and hermeneutical distinctions. By identifying these differences, preachers may be better able to evaluate and apply the many different offerings of advice. This is especially true for narrative preaching, since it is being presented from vastly different theological foundations.

#### **Confusion over Narrative Preaching**

There seems to be some confusion over the definition of narrative preaching.

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<sup>1</sup>These three represent major streams of influence in current preaching trends. In all three, a common homiletic thread is displayed, even though they begin with diverse hermeneutic approaches.

This confusion is certainly not indicative of a new phenomenon. As human culture has developed during different eras, homileticians have continued to introduce new kinds of sermons in order to present their messages with accuracy and effect. Only over time are new approaches established with clarity.

As the number of distinctive sermon forms grew, descriptive names were assigned to them in order to identify them with the philosophy behind them. These classifications were helpful in the academy and for individual preachers. As a practical matter, preachers needed new ways to classify their own sermons in order to evaluate and improve their methods. Because the focus of homiletics seems often to shift with the times, nailing down these classifications has proven difficult.

W. E. Sangster was a noted homiletician who sought to deal with the issue of sermon classification. In *The Craft of the Sermon*, Sangster lays out a new perspective for classifying sermons because he recognized the need for a classification system that was in tune with the homiletical conversation of his day.<sup>2</sup> Older classification systems simply did not address the issues that were shaping and changing the structure of sermons.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>W. E. Sangster, *The Craft of the Sermon* (London: Epworth Press, 1956).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 22. I found Sangster's classification system helpful because it offered insight into the importance of using a broad classification system in order to better define the classification of a particular genre of sermon. It seems to me that at least three criteria are currently being used to define narrative sermons: the text from which they are preached; the form of the sermons themselves; and the preaching event viewed from the sense of communicating with a particular audience. However, the consistent use of all three criteria at once for the classification of narrative sermons does not appear to be in vogue at the present time. E. Eugene Hall and James L. Heflin, for instance, incorporate elements of all three as they classify sermons according to the structural basis of the sermon. But they deal with narrative sermons only as it relates to biblical literary genre. E. Eugene Hall and James L. Heflin, *Proclaim the Word!* (Nashville: Broadman, 1985), 148-70.

A more recent discussion on sermon classification, and one related specifically to defining narrative preaching, is found in an article written by John McClure entitled, “Narrative and Preaching: Sorting it all Out.”<sup>4</sup> McClure begins the article with the following observation: “It is nearly twenty-five years since the ‘narrative and preaching’ movement began and, in my estimation, there is still a tremendous amount of confusion about what is meant when the two words ‘narrative’ and ‘preaching’ are juxtaposed.”<sup>5</sup> It has, in fact, been nearly fifteen years since McClure’s article appeared, and there still seems to be some confusion.

### **Narrative According to Popular Consent**

When settling on a definition, it is probably a good idea to choose the definition which has received the most press. The New Homiletic is, by far, the loudest voice crying out for more narrative preaching. Following the work of Fred B. Craddock, a number of homileticians proposed narrative methods as the preferred choice for reviving an ailing institution. Edwards states that the rise of narrative methods occurred in the late twentieth century: “All of a sudden in 1980, at least three proposals of this sort were made, suggesting that the time had come for the homiletical community to reappraise the role of narrative in sermons.”<sup>6</sup>

Edmund A. Steimle and two of his former graduate students wrote *Preaching*

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<sup>4</sup>John S. McClure, “Narrative and Preaching: Sorting it all Out,” *Journal for Preachers* 15, no. 1 (1991): 24-29.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>6</sup>Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 1:811.

*the Story*.<sup>7</sup> Eugene L. Lowry published *The Homiletical Plot*,<sup>8</sup> and Richard A. Jensen wrote *Telling the Story: Variety and Imagination in Preaching*.<sup>9</sup> Although many refinements and revisions have followed the seminal work of these early pioneers, continuing contributions are best understood as building upon them, rather than starting from scratch.

In recent years, practitioners of narrative homiletics have become increasingly diverse. Don Chatfield provides an excellent example of one extreme as he presents a pure form of narrative preaching in *Dinner with Jesus and Other Left-handed Story-sermons: Meeting God Through the Imagination*.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Bruce C. Salmon does not seek to promote a pure form of narrative preaching as a whole, but wants to improve preaching by refining the art of using narrative in *Storytelling in Preaching: A Guide to the Theory and Practice*, and Calvin Miller promotes narrative preaching as an emotive form of communication in *Spirit, Word, and Story: A Philosophy of Preaching*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles L. Rice, *Preaching the Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

<sup>8</sup>Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon As Narrative Art Form* rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

<sup>9</sup>Richard A. Jensen, *Telling the Story: Variety and Imagination in Preaching* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980).

<sup>10</sup>Don Chatfield, *Dinner with Jesus and Other Left-Handed Story-Sermons: Meeting God through the Imagination*, Ministry Resources Library (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988). "Pure" is a reference to Chatfield's deliberate effort to begin and end the sermons in a narrative form which creates and maintains a world of its own during the sermon event. Edwards is impressed enough with the pure narrative form of Chatfield's sermons to include one of them in *A History of Preaching*. Don Chatfield, "Dinner with Jesus," in *A History of Preaching* (CD-ROM) (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 2.627-34.

<sup>11</sup>Although these two homileticians are not considered by Edwards to be proponents of the New Homiletic, they have continued to call for narrative preaching. Bruce C. Salmon, *Storytelling in Preaching: A Guide to the Theory and Practice* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988); and Calvin Miller, *Spirit, Word, and Story: A Philosophy*

Edwards mentions these three in order to show the diverse nature of narrative.<sup>12</sup>

In order to further emphasize the point that narrative preaching is still an important topic of discussion, I add three recent works.<sup>13</sup> Roger Standing follows Lowry's basic methodology in *Finding the Plot: Preaching in a Narrative Style*.<sup>14</sup> Mark Miller highlights a continuing need for reaching audiences through experience in *Experiential Storytelling: (Re) Discovering Narrative to Communicate God's Message*.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Richard Eslinger applies lessons from several diverse narrative homiletic methods in what he calls *The Web of Preaching: New Options in Homiletic Method*.<sup>16</sup>

Although the books highlighted above represent a wide range of methods, most define narrative preaching in a way that is congruent with the New Homiletic. These homileticians believe that getting something heard is the preacher's chief priority, and see the role of the preacher as a facilitator rather than as a spokesman or herald.

It is true that the term "narrative" is applied to preaching in many different

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*of Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1989), as cited in Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:826.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., n. 50.

<sup>13</sup>Some, like Bryan Chapell, believe that narrative homiletics is waning. It is evident to the contrary, however, that it is still a popular subject of books and that its influence is widespread. See Bryan Chapell, "The Future of Expository Preaching," *Preaching* 20, no.2 (2004): 9.

<sup>14</sup>Roger Standing, *Finding the Plot: Preaching in a Narrative Style* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004).

<sup>15</sup>Mark Miller, *Experiential Storytelling: (Re) Discovering Narrative to Communicate God's Message* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

<sup>16</sup>Richard Eslinger, *The Web of Preaching: New Options in Homiletic Method* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002). It should be noted that these methods are not simple recapitulations of the methods first introduced by the pioneers of the New Homiletic, but are all evidence of its continuing effects.

ways. However, the loudest voice is still the one that promoted its use in the 1980s.<sup>17</sup> In summary, narrative preaching, according to the New Homiletic, is defined as follows: A *narrative sermon* is a sermon that is formed in such a way that it follows the logic of induction by withholding its main idea until the end, and does not declare a specific or single message so that hearers are empowered to discover and apply a message for themselves.<sup>18</sup>

### Three Calls for More Narrative Preaching

What follows is an evaluation of three competing voices calling for more narrative preaching. These three represent major streams of narrative homiletics. The first stream is still the strongest in terms of its influence. It is represented by Fred B. Craddock. Although he has not written any new books lately,<sup>19</sup> he is still preaching and speaking at conferences,<sup>20</sup> and is quoted with admiration by many in the homiletic world. The second stream is represented by Haddon Robinson. His voice has represented

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<sup>17</sup>Richard Eslinger speaks of the connection in almost nostalgic terms. "To speak of the 'narrative center' of biblical preaching, then, is to bear testimony, first, to the surprising ways in which story has become recovered as a preferred mode for interpreting self and world. The preaching-as-storytelling movement of the 1970s and 1980s comes most immediately to mind for many of us who are called to preach." Ibid., 57.

<sup>18</sup>See the article by Eugene L. Lowry for an excellent explanation of the New Homiletic's view of narrative preaching. Eugene L. Lowry, "Narrative Preaching," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 342-44.

<sup>19</sup>All three of his major works on preaching have been reprinted and are currently being used in colleges and seminaries. Two of his books, as elsewhere indicated, are listed by major book retailers in the top fifteen all-time best sellers lists under the topic preaching.

<sup>20</sup>He was, for instance, the keynote speaker at the "Congress on Evangelism" in Atlanta, 5 January 2005. Information accessed 20 July 2005; available from <http://www.gbod.org/congress05/schedule.html>; Internet.

conservative homiletics for many years.<sup>21</sup> The final voice comes from one who is known more as a biblical scholar than homiletics. Joel Green is a professor of New Testament and co-editor of the Two Horizons Commentary on the New Testament.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the other two examples, Green is not widely known for his homiletical work. He is, however, recognized as a prolific writer and editor in the field of hermeneutics, and has been vocal over the last ten years or so in calling for the reunification of academic studies and practical theology. The stream he represents comes at the homiletical process from a perspective that is best defined in terms of its theological perspective.

### **Fred B. Craddock: Originator and Active Practitioner/Model**

Fred B. Craddock is known as the godfather of the New Homiletic, and is

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<sup>21</sup>Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), is currently being used in “120 seminaries and Bible colleges throughout the world.” Information accessed 20 July 2005; available from <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/faculty/robinson.php>; Internet. The front cover of the book states that more than 200,000 copies are in print. He has recently written a book on narrative preaching which is certain to be read by many conservative preachers.

<sup>22</sup>“Green (B.S., M.Th., Ph.D.) is dean of academic affairs, dean of the School of Theology and professor of New Testament interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. Prior to his appointment at Asbury in 1997, he was associate professor of New Testament at the American Baptist Seminary of the West/Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. His recent titles include *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (coauthored with Paul Achtemeier and Marianne Meye Thompson, 2001), *Beginning with Jesus: Christ in Scripture, the Church and Discipleship* (2000), *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (coauthored with Mark Baker, 2000), *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (coedited with Max Turner, 2000) and *The Gospel of Luke* in the New International Commentary on the New Testament (1997). Green has for more than twenty years been editor of *Catalyst*, a journal providing evangelical resources and perspectives to some 5,000 United Methodist seminarians.” This biographical information taken directly from InterVarsity Press, “Joel B. Green,” [on-line]; accessed 14 September 2005; available from [http://ivpress.gospelcom.net/cgi-ivpress/author.pl/author\\_id=387](http://ivpress.gospelcom.net/cgi-ivpress/author.pl/author_id=387); Internet.

therefore its greatest influence toward a narrative style of preaching. Known as a great storyteller himself, Craddock saw narrative or storytelling as a great opportunity to get the message of God's Word heard.<sup>23</sup>

Since the relationship between Craddock's hermeneutical presupposition and his homiletic methodology was the subject of much of the last chapter, the following section surveys some of his sermons in order to see how his method is expressed in his preaching. It shows that Craddock faithfully builds his sermons on his hermeneutical foundation, and it highlights three key elements in his preaching, which are also evident in the methods of others.

Sources for a study of Craddock's preaching are available and abundant. *The Cherry Log Sermons* is a collection of twenty sermons preached at The Cherry Log Christian Church in Cherry Log, Georgia.<sup>24</sup> Many of his sermons and lectures on preaching are available on audio and video tape. These tapes and many sermon manuscripts may be found in journals or downloaded off the Internet.<sup>25</sup>

According to Craddock, there are three key elements for effective

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<sup>23</sup>For a better understanding of Craddock's influence, see Gail R. O'Day and Thomas G. Long, eds., *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

<sup>24</sup>Fred B. Craddock, *The Cherry Log Sermons* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). The sermons found in *The Cherry Log Sermons* are not dated. However, since the church was planted in August of 1996 and the publication of the book occurred in 2001, it is safe to say that they were preached during that period.

<sup>25</sup>Over the course of this study I have viewed, listened to, or read over thirty sermons by Craddock, and seen others. These sermons are easy to find. There are, for instance, twenty in *The Cherry Log Sermons*, and many available in *Christian Century*, which carried a series of his sermons in 2003.



communication in the preaching event.<sup>26</sup> Communication is most effective when there is a knowing community, a personable preacher, and a responsive community. All three emphasize the use of sermon form as a tool of sermon function, which fits well with the prevailing definition of narrative preaching.

**A knowing community.** As he preaches, Craddock seeks to form a point of contact between the message and his audience by using familiar Bible stories and phrases in the sermon. This type of narrative preaching is most effective in a biblically literate audience. In performing this task, Craddock often summarizes, reflects on, or mentions in passing, familiar Bible stories. These familiar sounding stories are used to feed or support a basic idea which is important to forming the message. In “God Is with Us,” a message from Matthew 1:18-25, Craddock’s main point seems to be that God’s blessing in coming is for all people. He makes his point by contrasting the statement of indifference shown women by the biblical authors in the account of the feeding of the 5,000 with God’s inclusion of women in Matthew’s genealogy.

There is no marker there for Sarah, his [Abraham’s] wife; no marker for Rebekah, his daughter-in-law; no marker for Rachel, his granddaughter-in-law. I regret that very much, but you know how they felt about women back in those days. They were just sort of ‘also’ people. You know what the Bible says about the crowd that Jesus fed, that there were five thousand men present, not counting the women and children. But there are women in this cemetery of Jesus’s family. There is Tamar. . . . Then there is Rahab. . . . Also, there is Ruth.<sup>27</sup>

Two observations are pertinent here. First, it is possible that many in the audience that day would know the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand. I doubt, however, that many of them would have made a natural connection between the phrase in

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<sup>26</sup>See the previous chapter for a more in-depth look at these elements as they relate to hermeneutics and the New Homiletic.

<sup>27</sup>Fred B. Craddock, “God Is with Us,” in *The Cherry Log Sermons*, 2-3.

that story, “not counting the women and children,” and a patriarchal attitude that would leave Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel out of Matthew’s record of Jesus’ genealogy. Second, since there are other women in the genealogy, why is it that Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel were left out? The point is that neither issue is explained. They are only pointed out as familiar points of biblical reference.

Another example of Craddock’s communicative practice involving a knowing audience, is found in “Speak Up and Be Quiet.” This is a sermon from Matthew 16:13-20, the passage in which Peter confesses belief that Jesus is the Christ. The point of the sermon seems to be that there is a time to step forward and proclaim what you believe about God. In the sermon, Craddock wants the hearers to formulate their own understanding of God. So he leads them toward an answer following the question: “What is God like? Here’s the answer: Jesus.”<sup>28</sup>

Do you remember the time when there was a crowd gathered to hear Jesus and they were a long way from home and hungry, and Jesus fed them? *That* is what God is like. Do you remember when he took those little children on his lap and blessed them and talked to them and talked to their parents? *That* is what God is like. Do you remember when the leper came up to Jesus and said, “Please help me,” and he was made clean and healed? *That* is what God is like.

I do not want you to think that to be a Christian you have to believe in God and then you add Jesus. You do not add anything; it is Jesus Christ who tells us who God is. This is the kind of God in whom we believe. Do you remember the time when Jesus was with the disciples and they were arguing about who was the chairman and who was the greatest? Jesus took a towel and a bowl of water, knelt down in front of them, and washed their feet. Do you remember that? *That* is what God is like.

Do you remember when he took that old cross on his shoulder and started up the hill to Golgotha? *That* is what God is like.<sup>29</sup>

Craddock’s goal is to string enough pearls, which are statements made up of familiar

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<sup>28</sup>Fred B. Craddock, “Speak Up and Be Quiet,” in *The Cherry Log Sermons*, 40.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 40-41.

biblical references, to form a chain of reference for biblical understanding. His hope is that the audience will know that the things he is saying are biblical, even if they do not know the specific reference or story.

In a sense, this part of Craddock's methodology is becoming less and less effective as people become less and less knowledgeable about the Bible. Richard Lischer notes this as one of the limits of story: "What story lifted from its background still *works* on any but the moralistic or universalizing levels? In a time when the 'background' of most congregations is deficient, is it the preacher's task to jettison the remains of it?"<sup>30</sup> Craddock acknowledges the fact that biblical illiteracy is a problem, and that some have raised it as a criticism of his method: "But here we are thinking recognition, not recall."<sup>31</sup> In other words, familiarity with biblical ideas is not the same thing as recall of biblical facts. In fact, using biblical ideas as references in sermons is to be cultivated: "What is being urged is a way of preaching that assumes the listeners' recognition of much of the material."<sup>32</sup> According to Craddock, two things happen when this suggestion is followed. First, important details are not left out. Through this process, those who do not recognize the stories will eventually, after sitting under this kind of "biblical preaching," become more biblically literate: "If some present do not know the narrative at all, then they have learned, and that is no small benefit."<sup>33</sup> Second, "assuming listener recognition means presenting the familiar with interest and enthusiasm."<sup>34</sup> Both are important if the sermon

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<sup>30</sup>Richard Lischer, "The Limits of Story," *Interpretation* 38, no. 1 (1984): 27.

<sup>31</sup>Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 161.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 161-62.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 162.

is going to intersect the lives of listeners.

**A personable preacher.** Craddock's second principle of communication is that good preaching depends on a personable preacher. This element is accomplished most effectively through the use of personal illustration. His method of illustration promotes narrative preaching by forming the entire sermon around a particular illustration or a set of related illustrations. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then painting word pictures that relate personally to people is a way to get a lot said.<sup>35</sup> Because his illustrations are personal, they have a ring of honesty and familiarity. They carry, in their presentation, the energy of personal experience and recollection. His illustrations are also personable, since they are for a specific audience. Craddock thinks about the specific audience to whom he is preaching, and his illustrations take into account local events, colloquialisms, and attitudes. The following, from "Speak Up and Be Quiet," is an example of preaching to a rural community in North Georgia as fall moves toward winter.

I love this country up here. I love the mountains; I love the streams, the birds, the flowers, the bushes. There is a rooster that comes over in my yard every morning and crows. Man, I like that! If somebody kills my rooster, they are in trouble! I love that rooster crowing every morning really early. The blackbirds gathered this morning out back. You know what the blackbirds do when it turns cool? They all get together and say, "When do you think we ought to leave?" "Well, it's still August," I heard one of them say, "So we're not leaving." The other day the geese flew over this building on their way down to the lake and I heard them discussing who was going to be the leader when they headed south. The one they asked did not want to do it. "I'll do it later," he said, "when we're somewhere down over Florida." I enjoyed that. The mocking bird, the robin, the trout, the turtle, the azalea, the crape myrtle, the flowering cherry—but you know what? You could have five thousand flowering cherry trees in your yard, have the birds fly over your house

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<sup>35</sup>Craddock believes that illustrations connect hearers with concrete rather than abstract ideas. "The plain fact of the matter is that we are seeking to communicate with people whose experiences are concrete. Everyone lives inductively, not deductively. No farmer deals with the problem of calfhood, only with the calf. The woman in the kitchen is not occupied with the culinary arts in general but with a particular roast or cake." Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 50-51.

every day, have the rooster crow every morning, be surrounded by daffodils and irises and buttercups and azaleas, spend your life in that marvelous splendor and still not know exactly what God is like.<sup>36</sup>

Whether one likes or dislikes Craddock's theology, this paragraph grabs and holds the attention of country folk like me. Craddock believes that a preacher communicates best when he knows the people to whom he speaks, and then speaks to them in ways that are familiar.

**A responsive community.** Craddock's final principle of communication is the most difficult to judge using an objective standard. This difficulty stems primarily from the fact that it is hard to judge the response of an audience, especially from a typed manuscript. Yet this part of the evaluation is critical since narrative preaching is founded on the understanding that preaching is charged with getting something heard. In order to judge this element of his preaching, two questions are asked: First, do Craddock's messages explicitly elicit a response? Second, can responses be observed (albeit through subjective observance) in Craddock's audiences?

The first question is the simplest to answer. Craddock's messages do not explicitly call for action. This fits well, however, with his methodological foundation. Only conclusions formed by the hearers themselves evoke a true response. He states that some believe that a response is what happens when hearers accept or refuse what they have been told to do by a preacher. "What is here suggested, however, is that the participation of the hearer is essential, not just in the post-benediction implementation, but in the completion of the thought, movement and decision making within the sermon

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<sup>36</sup>Craddock, "Speak Up and Be Quiet," 40.

itself.”<sup>37</sup> In fact, it is a notable trademark characteristic of his preaching not to end with a specific challenge. The following is the last paragraph and concluding sentence from a sermon entitled, “Why the Cross?”

Sometimes a child falls down and skins a knee or an elbow, then runs crying to his mother. The mother picks up the child and says—in what is the oldest myth in the world—“Let me kiss it and make it well,” as if mother has magic saliva or something. She picks up the child, kisses the skinned place, holds the child in her lap, and all is well. Did her kiss make it well? No, no. It was that ten minutes in her lap. Just sit in the lap of love and see the mother crying. “Mother, why are you crying? I’m the one who hurt my elbow.” “Because you hurt,” the mother says, “I hurt.” That does more for a child than all the bandages and all the medicine in the world, just sitting on the lap. What is the cross? Can I say it this way? It is to sit for a few minutes on the lap of God, who hurts because you hurt.

Paul said, “I have to preach that.” So do I.<sup>38</sup>

The goal of this sermon is to get hearers to tell others about the cross because they have experienced its effects in their lives. This is certainly a good idea if they rightly understand the purpose of the cross and have truly received its benefits.<sup>39</sup> Nowhere in the sermon, however, is the purpose of the cross related to the atoning work of Christ. In fact, the sermon presents the purpose of the cross simply as a reminder of God’s love for human beings.

Often Craddock ends with a simple question, as he does in a sermon entitled “While the Minister Is in Jail.” The message of this sermon seems to be that the church should focus its attention on Jesus and the work He has called them to do. Here is how it ends: “Paul said, ‘You have Christ and you have all these human needs. Get your mind off me.’ Now I know I haven’t been preaching to you today. I’ve just been telling you

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<sup>37</sup>Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 53-54.

<sup>38</sup>Fred B. Craddock, “Why the Cross,” in *The Cherry Log Sermons*, 82-83.

<sup>39</sup>In the sermon, Craddock says “I don’t know” why Paul preached the cross. Then he continues saying, “I think that the cross is a reminder.” Ibid., 80.

about Paul. But it makes a lot of sense, I think. Don't you?"<sup>40</sup> At other times, he ends with a simple statement of his opinion.

There are times when we should not say, 'I believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.' But there will come a time where it is the most fitting thing of all to say. There is a lot in the Bible I don't understand. A lot of people say things about God and the Trinity and all, and I do not know about all that. But I do believe that Jesus is God's messiah, the Son of God. And I think today is a very good time to say it.<sup>41</sup>

In other sermons, he simply stops in the middle of a sentence and walks quietly away in order for the congregation to finish the thought. That is how he concludes his 2003 Palm Sunday sermon, "Palm Sunday examined."<sup>42</sup>

It is important for the reader to remember that we know the end of the story and view the whole through an empty tomb. This realization checks our impatience with those who walked with him from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. But this realization is also a burden of knowing. How solemn and heavy is the joy of being admitted into the circle of those who now understand, at least in part. 'To whom much is given. . . .'<sup>43</sup>

As evident from the examples above, Craddock does not call for a specific response. In the end, however, his goal is to move hearers to do something in their minds, and generally speaking, he leaves his listeners with a lot to think about.

The second criterion for judging a *notable response* is based on personal observation.<sup>44</sup> In the following paragraphs, I offer two examples. On 7 May 2004, two

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<sup>40</sup>Fred B. Craddock, "While the Minister Is in Jail," in *The Cherry Log Sermons*, 88.

<sup>41</sup>Fred B. Craddock, "Speak Up and Be Quiet," 41.

<sup>42</sup>Fred B. Craddock, "Palm Sunday Examined" (sermon delivered on Palm Sunday, April 13, 2003) [on-line]; accessed 2 August 2004; available from <http://www.findarticles.com>; Internet.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>44</sup>These observations are personal reflections. They were not conducted with a stringent set of criteria, such as solicited responses from those who were present. Their weight is limited. Nevertheless, they are offered here as the personal findings of one who

friends and I attended one night of a revival, preached by Craddock at Mt. Zion Christian Church near Redhouse, Kentucky. The message for the evening was based loosely on John 14:1-9. The title of the message was, "Who is the God in Whom You Believe?" The narrative that evening was patterned on the changing of the four seasons. My friends and I discussed the merits of the sermon at a restaurant later that evening, and all agreed that it was intended to be an encouraging plea to trust in God because He is good no matter the season of your life.<sup>45</sup>

A young family of four went forward at the end of the service to join.<sup>46</sup> Afterwards, people were laughing and smiling as they headed to the punch and cookie social that followed. As I waited to speak to Dr. Craddock, I overheard people talking about how much they had enjoyed the message. Thinking back on the service, I recall only one minor distraction during the sermon. A young child got loud for a moment. But even that distraction passed quickly. I sat in the back, and I noticed that everyone appeared to be listening intently to what was said. In the end, however, I am not certain of the message they received. There was no exposition of the biblical text, and the only reference to the Bible during the message itself was not from the passage read at its beginning. The immediate response to the message that night was one of enjoyment and fellowship. People talked of how much they enjoyed listening to Craddock speak. They

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has a personal desire to learn from and assess the preaching of one of the most influential homiletics of the last fourth-five years.

<sup>45</sup>In each sermon evaluated, an effort has been made to determine the message or purpose of the sermon. I have then stated what I believe to be the main point. I cannot, however, state them with certainty since the author/presenter does not state them in certain or absolute terms.

<sup>46</sup>Comments from the pastor indicated that the church had been reaching out to the family for some time, encouraging them to join. So their decision did not seem to be linked solely with the message.



enjoyed the stories, and scenes he painted in word pictures. But I do not recall anyone talking about what the message meant, or how it might impact them in the future.

The second example comes from a videotaped message which was delivered at the Beargrass Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. The sermon was taped on Christmas in 1996 and was titled “Awakening the Quest.”<sup>47</sup> One of the things that caught my attention when I viewed this message was the significant amount of time the cameras were aimed at the congregation. Usually when I view preaching tapes, I see someone in the audience sleeping, looking at her watch, or fighting to keep his eyes open. During this message, however, the people in the center of the camera’s eye are intensely interested, and so are those around and behind them. As funny statements are made the people laugh, as one would expect. But during other times they seem to be just as expressive, showing concern, thoughtfulness, and personal reflection.

The message was forged around a personal encounter with a reporter who was covering a conference in which Craddock had participated. The conversation took place off the record. That is, it was not a part of the man’s assigned purpose for attending the conference. Instead, the man wanted some personal advice. He knew something was missing in his life, but could not put his finger on it. At the end of the message, Craddock recounted that he told the man in the story, “what you are searching for is God.” But he did not in the story explain to the man what it meant to find God, or how to go about knowing Him, and he did not explain to the congregation how they could either. In fact, he said that the Christmas story tells us that we do not need to go looking for God, because God has already come to us. That was as close as he got in the sermon to

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<sup>47</sup>Fred B. Craddock, “Awakening the Quest” (message delivered at Beargrass Christian Church, Louisville, KY, Christmas 1996), videocassette.

presenting the gospel. He ends the message with these words: “Because, you see, life does not consist really in knowing, but in being known; not in seeking but in being sought; not in finding, but in being found. Thomas [the main character in his narrative sermon], the one you are looking for is here, [pause] is here.”<sup>48</sup> With these last words, Craddock simply turns and walks away.

Craddock’s use of narrative in preaching may be defined as follows: *Narrative preaching* speaks through concrete examples the general biblical themes that are already known to the community. This use of narrative strengthens a congregation’s understanding of these themes because it works from the familiar. Narrative preaching connects the Word of God with the congregation as shared experiences build relational bonds between the preacher, biblical concepts, and listeners. Finally, narrative preaching emphasizes listeners’ rights and responsibilities by allowing them to discover and apply messages to their own individual lives.

### **Haddon Robinson: Conservative Use of Narrative Communication Techniques**

Not nearly as strongly as the proponents of the New Homiletic, conservative homiletical theorists are also calling for more narrative preaching. Although it is a call for more narrative preaching, this call for narrative preaching is of a different kind.<sup>49</sup> The

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Donald L. Hamilton, Stephen F. Olford Chair of Biblical Preaching at Columbia Biblical Seminary, writes in an article that it is possible to “Preach Inductively As One with Authority,” *Preaching* 16, no. 2 (2000): 48-55. In fact, he suggests that it may be a good idea to “recycle deductive sermons” using one of four “full inductive approaches.” One of the four is “the narrative/inductive approach. This type of sermon tells a biblical story, or series of stories, and then concludes with a clearly stated propositional truth.” Ibid., 54. This is also the basic approach espoused by Millard J. Erickson and James L. Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins: Doctrinal Preaching in a Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997) 200-19.

addition of these voices to the conversation is not simply relevant because of their added volume, however. These voices are important because they speak to a different audience, and influence the future of a different stream of homiletics. Haddon Robinson is one such voice. His book on expository preaching is arguably the most influential conservative work on preaching in the last twenty-five years.<sup>50</sup> Now in its second edition, *Biblical Preaching* may be found among the top fifteen bestsellers under the topic of preaching at both Amazon, and Barnes and Noble book stores on-line.<sup>51</sup>

Robinson's overall views on preachers, Scripture, and communication, were made more accessible in 1999 with the compilation of important and memorable elements of his writings over the years. In *Making a Difference in Preaching*, Scott M. Gibson gathered together many of Robinson's articles along with portions of his other writings, and placed them into a threefold format under the following headings: the preacher, the preacher and preaching, and the preacher and people.<sup>52</sup>

After a brief survey of Robinson's homiletical foundation, as represented in *Making a Difference in Preaching*, and his primary work, *Biblical Preaching*, recent developments in his homiletical method are discussed. These developments are evident in his latest work, which is a joint effort with his son Torrey, entitled *It's All in How You*

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<sup>50</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*. It should be noted that the first edition of *Biblical Preaching* came out in 1980. That is the same year that the three seminal works on narrative preaching (mentioned above) were published.

<sup>51</sup>*Biblical Preaching* was number five on the bestseller list at Amazon, and was number eleven on the Barnes and Noble list. "Preaching" [on-line]; accessed 2 August 2005; available from <http://www.amazon.com>; and <http://www.barnesandnoble.com>.

<sup>52</sup>Haddon Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999). The ensuing discussion will rely heavily on the materials gathered by Gibson, but will also add a few things not found in this nearly comprehensive work.

**The preacher's task.** Gibson begins with Robinson's 1984 presidential address to the Evangelical Theological Society. In the address, Robinson states that the church needs to reunite theology and evangelism. Using examples such as John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards, he states that "the people of God need scholars who can think God's thoughts after him and evangelists who can proclaim that message clearly. . . . We need a band of men and women who are theological evangelists and evangelistic theologians."<sup>54</sup> In this address, the term "evangelist" is used by Robinson to describe the preaching of the evangel or good news. In fact, he goes on to state that evangelistic preachers have two aims or purposes: "The first aim of an evangelist is to proclaim to the world the good news about Jesus Christ."<sup>55</sup> This, he argues, cannot be done without the evangelist's personal study of the Bible in order to understand the gospel. "A second purpose [aim] of the evangelist is to help converts develop into mature Christians."<sup>56</sup> Once again, his argument is that preachers must study the Word of God. In this case, study implies both cognitive and experiential elements. Preachers are to study in such a way that they partake of the "meat" of the Word of God before feeding it to others.

The two elements of evangelistic preaching above, outreach and discipleship, define the call of preaching in terms of the preacher's responsibilities. Preachers are commanded to proclaim the gospel of salvation to lost persons, and they are to teach the

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<sup>53</sup>Haddon W. Robinson and Torrey W. Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It: Preaching First-Person Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

<sup>54</sup>Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching*, 23.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

Word of God to children of God in such a way that they continue to grow. Both must be done with proficiency, which can only come through diligent study of the Word of God.

Robinson's understanding of the preacher's responsibility also flows from the simple conclusion that preachers must preach because they cannot be silent. "If theology is basic to evangelism, evangelism is vital to theology. God's truth demands proclamation as well as study."<sup>57</sup> Preachers have an obligation to preach even when they do not want to, and it also implies that they have something specific to preach. He says that when preachers are in pain they may not "want to prepare sermons or get 'up' for preaching. . . . When we go through extended pain, we will often have to preach about things we don't resonate with at the time. . . . At those times, we need to fulfill the calling to preach the Bible. We preach what the Bible says, not what we feel."<sup>58</sup>

At the very least, Robinson believes that preachers are called by God and commissioned as heralds to proclaim something in particular. They are to proclaim the Word of God.

**The preacher's source.** Just as a preacher's task is defined in terms of preaching the Word of God, the source of his message and its authority comes from the Bible. Robinson argues that it is not enough for homileticians to deal only with the construction and communication of sermons. Since the homiletician "handles religious content, he must also involve himself with hermeneutics. A homiletician, therefore, cannot merely ask, 'How do I get the message across?' He must also ask, 'How do I get

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 54-55.

the message?’”<sup>59</sup> The answer for Robinson is simple. “Men and women who believe the Bible is the Word of God without error insist, ‘You find your message in the Scriptures.’”<sup>60</sup>

Robinson further presses this point in *Biblical Preaching* when he defines the word *preach*, used by Paul in his admonition to “preach the word.”<sup>61</sup> “Preach means to ‘cry out, herald, or exhort.’ Preachers should pour out the message with passion and fervor in order to stir souls.”<sup>62</sup> As he further explains his statements, it is evident that his theological and rhetorical convictions are different from those of the New Homiletic.

His theological conviction is different from that of the New Homiletic in that he believes that the Bible declares, rather than becomes, the Word of God.

If we regard the Bible as God’s tool of communication through which He addresses people in history, then it follows that preaching must be based on it. Expository preaching, therefore, emerges not merely as a type of sermon—one among many—but as the theological outgrowth of a high view of inspiration. Expository preaching then originates as a philosophy rather than a method. It reflects a preacher’s honest efforts to submit his thought to the Bible rather than to subject the Bible to his thought.<sup>63</sup>

As shown elsewhere, advocates of the New Homiletic seek to help their hearers experience the Word of God for themselves just as biblical writers had experienced it for themselves. So they seek to lead their hearers to the message behind the text. Robinson, on the other hand, seeks to make the message of the Bible known to his hearers. This is the same message made known to the original hearers and it is still relevant today through

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>2 Tim 4:2.

<sup>62</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

<sup>63</sup>Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching*, 69-70.

proper application.<sup>64</sup>

Robinson also argues that the message must be biblical because that is where the preacher's source of authority lies. He does this by reminding his readers that heralds "preach" with authority because they represent another. When, however, they speak their own words, they speak without authority: "Ministers can proclaim anything in a stained-glass voice at 11:30 on Sunday morning following the singing of hymns. Yet when they fail to preach the Scriptures, they abandon their authority."<sup>65</sup>

His rhetorical conviction is also different from that expressed in the New Homiletic in this regard. The message preached must be given with authority rather than simply giving it with opportunity. Again as elsewhere described, proponents of the New Homiletic believe that the most effective communication occurs when listeners are allowed to discover a message for themselves. In this way they are given the right to express authority over themselves rather than submitting to an authoritarian preacher. Robinson counters this idea as he speaks directly about authority: "Preaching with authority means you've done your homework. You know your people's struggles and hurts. But you also know the Bible and theology. You can explain the Bible clearly. Preachers aren't being authoritarian when they point people to the Bible."<sup>66</sup> In this statement, Robinson rightly differentiates between preaching with authority and preaching with an offensive authoritarian style. In today's world, however, this is a thin line.

The prevailing postmodern view, that there is no such thing as authoritative

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<sup>64</sup>For insight into Robinson's belief on the proper application of Scripture, see Haddon Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," *Leadership* 18, no. 4 (1997): 21-27.

<sup>65</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

<sup>66</sup>Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching*, 35.

truth, makes almost any declarative truth statement offensive to someone. Therefore, in order to gain and keep a hearing, preachers should make their sermons as non-offensive as possible. Although not postmodern, Robinson recognizes that authoritarian preaching can sometimes disrupt communication. In order to meet the challenge, preachers must distinguish between authoritative and non-authoritative issues: “The authoritarian . . . is someone who speaks about biblical and nonbiblical things in the same tone of voice. . . . An authoritative tone without genuine biblical authority is sound and fury signifying nothing.”<sup>67</sup>

As far as Robinson is concerned, the source of the message and its authority belong to God. Preachers are to access both from the Bible, which is the Word of God. How they preach His message, with His authority, is the final step.

**The preacher’s responsibility toward hearers.** Robinson’s homiletical method is again set apart from the method of the New Homiletic because his hermeneutic emphasizes the biblical text as the location of a sermon’s message and its authority. Yet Robinson, like Craddock, also recognizes the preacher’s need to communicate in a way that is understood by the hearer. It is this desire to get something heard that draws Robinson and other conservative homileticians into the conversation with narrative homileticians. Preachers of all theological persuasions have a genuine desire to communicate the Word of God to those who hear them preach, and that has led them to consider narrative methods. Therefore, when proponents of either speak about subjects related to communication methods, they may sound very similar in their approaches.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Edwards notes the connection when he states that “narrative concerns have also influenced the homiletical thought of conservative evangelicals, as may be seen in



The difference between these methods, however, is a matter of hermeneutical presupposition. What they believe about the Word of God and how it may be heard is reflected in homiletical theory and practice.

Robinson believes that the Bible is the source of the sermon's content and its authority. Therefore, the preacher's first responsibility to hearers is to preach from the Bible. In line with the New Hermeneutic, Craddock believes that the Bible is a vehicle through which the Word of God may be experienced, and authorized within an individual. These two views are very different, and yet both state that the Bible is important for preaching.<sup>69</sup>

These homiletical methods also have some similarities in the way they talk about the importance an audience plays in the preaching event. Robinson recognizes that at least some level of authority is derived from the audience. He states, for instance, that pastors need to earn the respect of their congregations if they are going to exert pastoral authority: "Authority also comes from a track record of being truthful and not distorting the facts. . . . Accuracy builds credibility."<sup>70</sup> This kind of authority is not, however, related to the authority of God's message. It relates to the credibility of the speaker, which affects a hearer's openness to hear what a speaker has to say. Proponents of the New Homiletic would agree that a speaker's credibility is important. When, however,

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Bruce C. Salmon, *Storytelling in Preaching: A Guide to the Theory and Practice* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988); and Calvin Miller, *Spirit, Word, and Story: A Philosophy of Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1989)." Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 1:826 n. 50.

<sup>69</sup>Craddock states, for instance, that "preaching brings the Scriptures forward as a living voice in the congregation." Craddock, *Preaching*, 27. Robinson states that "when preachers speak as heralds, they must cry out 'the Word.' Anything less cannot legitimately pass for Christian preaching." Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

<sup>70</sup>Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching*, 36.

they discuss the subject of authority and the congregation, they are generally speaking about listeners as the authorizing agents of the message.<sup>71</sup>

In Robinson's view, the preacher is a translator of the biblical message for the people: "It's the pastor's job to translate. While raw exegesis doesn't belong in a Sunday morning sermon, what does belong there is exposition. Exposition is drawing from your exegesis to give the people what they need to understand the passage."<sup>72</sup> Craddock sees the preacher more as a conduit or facilitator through which the Word of God makes itself known.

In the final analysis, Robinson holds that the Bible is the source and authority upon which all Christian sermons must be preached, but this preaching must seek to present the message in a palatable way. The struggle for Robinson and other conservative homiletics comes in the fact that biblical truth is not always easy, from a human perspective, to swallow.

**Robinson and narrative homiletics.** There are many differences between the methods espoused by adherents of the New Homiletic and those of the Old Homiletic. Nevertheless, Robinson represents a group of conservative homiletics who are seeking to employ some of the communicative elements advanced by the founders and followers of the New Homiletic. As rightly argued by Robinson and advocates of the New Homiletic, the use of narrative in sermons is not new.<sup>73</sup> Homiletical methodologies in

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<sup>71</sup>See Craddock's discussion on "whether this method [inductive preaching] makes the Word of God dependent on the listener," *As One without Authority*, 57-60.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>73</sup>Many followers of the Old Homiletic agree with Fred Craddock, David Buttrick, Edmund Steimle, Eugene Lowry, and so on, that narrative elements have always been an important part of preaching. The question is whether or not a narrative approach

which messages are comprised wholly of stories are relatively new, however.<sup>74</sup>

Robinson's 2003 work, *It's All in How You Tell It*, seems to be a move in the direction of preaching as story telling. As already seen, the foundation from which he begins is very different from the one on which the New Homiletic is built, but the method is discussed in similar terms and ways. Therefore, it would be prudent to examine Robinson's homiletical move in light of his hermeneutical presuppositions and current conversations on narrative preaching. At first glance, it appears that several of the elements of his hermeneutical foundation are being affected by a narrative homiletical shift. This section examines Robinson's narrative homiletical method as it relates to the preacher's purpose, authority, and use of Scripture. The question to be asked is whether or not they are being reshaped by the desire to get something heard.

An apparent shift in Robinson's view of the preacher and his authority is evident from the beginning of *It's All in How You Tell It*. For instance, he states clearly in *Biblical Preaching* that "when they [preachers] fail to preach the Scriptures, they abandon their authority."<sup>75</sup> Preaching the Scripture is explained in *Biblical Preaching* as exposing the biblical idea or concept of the text in the pulpit: "Then in the pulpit they present enough of their study to the congregation so that their listeners may check the interpretation for themselves. Ultimately the authority behind expository preaching

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by itself is enough to accomplish the call issued by God to preacher the Word.

<sup>74</sup>Steimle, Niedenthal, and Rice, *Preaching the Story*. The idea of preachers as story tellers became a major part of homiletical conversations through the work of Steimle, Niedenthal, and Rice. The goal of such a method is to speak to congregants from the prospective which they like to hear, and thereby gain and maintain a hearing. This work, like Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* was published in 1980, but promoted very different views of preaching.

<sup>75</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

resides not in the preacher but in the biblical text.”<sup>76</sup> When dealing with the issue of authority as it relates to getting a hearing in *It’s All in How You Tell It*, however, he states that “today’s culture rarely grants them [preachers] authority, except perhaps what it grants to a justice of the peace to officiate at weddings. Preachers have only the authority they can win for their message.”<sup>77</sup> Which is it? Does a preacher’s authority come from the Word of God or the congregation? In fairness to Robinson, he continues the thought by stating that “for those who believe that the Bible is self-authenticating and possesses its own power, this form can have great advantages today. The dynamic for the sermon lies less with the preacher and more with the Scriptures themselves.”<sup>78</sup> Regardless of this caveat offered by Robinson, his prior statement describes the overall message underlying the title of the book, *It’s All in How You Tell It*. The job of the preacher is to get something heard.

In order to further illustrate the apparent shift in Robinson’s methodology, it is helpful to look at a couple of the key terms used in the book. He defines a number of them on pages seven and eight. First-person expository sermons are defined as follows:

First-Person Expository Sermon: An expository sermon preached from a first-person perspective. In other words, this preaching form is based on an accurate interpretation of the Scripture and applies its meaning to the hearers. It does this through the retelling of the scriptural account from the vantage point of a character who was part of the story.<sup>79</sup>

In light of the first statement in the definition, it would seem reasonable to apply Robinson’s own well-known definition for expository preaching as the underlying

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>77</sup>Robinson and Robinson, *It’s All in How You Tell It*, 11.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 7.

foundation upon which the rest is built.<sup>80</sup> This assumption is, however, proven incorrect. The definition used by Robinson in this work does not state that the message of the text is exposed through the exposition of the text during the sermon. Instead, “an accurate interpretation of the Scripture” is given in the message, which then “applies its meaning.”<sup>81</sup> Unlike the exposition defined in *Biblical Preaching*, this definition does not include exposition of the biblical text during the sermon. The importance of such a distinction should not be overlooked, and is made by Robinson himself, as quoted above. The preacher’s authority resides in the biblical text.<sup>82</sup>

Robinson’s shift away from the exposition of the biblical text in the pulpit is further emphasized by his use of Harold Freeman’s definition of *exposition*. *Exposition*, according to Freeman, is preaching which “confronts the hearers with an accurate

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<sup>80</sup>“Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.” Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 21.

<sup>81</sup>Robinson and Robinson, *It’s All in How You Tell It*, 7.

<sup>82</sup>If Robinson believes that this qualification may be met through first-person exposition, exposition of the biblical text should still be stated as a criterion. It may be argued that the example of first-person exposition given by Haddon Robinson in Appendix 4 meets this qualification. However, even this sermon does not demonstrate the exposition of the text in the pulpit, and would require hearers to study the biblical text outside the sermon in order to discover what parts of the message are taken directly from the biblical text, and what parts are inferred from the preacher’s imagination. Even then, since the preacher does not show the listeners where the connections between his sermon thrust and the text meet, the listener would be forced to assume some of the connections. My criticism of the sermon at this point is not a matter of determining what God can use to herald His message. He may use the stars to proclaim His greatness, as Psalm 19:1 declares. But what preachers are commanded to do is preach His Word. As indicated elsewhere, preaching the Word cannot be separated from the biblical text upon which it is based. The link between preaching and exposing the biblical text (not just the message of the biblical text) is crucial to fulfilling the call to preach the Word.

interpretation of the biblical revelation and its present meaning for their lives.”<sup>83</sup> Unlike Robinson’s definition in *Biblical Preaching*, Freeman’s definition does not mention the use of the biblical text in the pulpit. Because of a lack of precision at this point, Robinson’s method is not distinguishable from that of many of the New Homiletic. They might say that if the preacher has correctly interpreted the biblical text in preparation for the sermon, there is no real need to directly expose it in the pulpit.

The notion of correct interpretation brings up a final point that needs to be discussed. Robinson’s desire to get something heard seems to have softened his earlier position that when preachers “fail to preach the Scriptures, they abandon their authority.”<sup>84</sup> He maintains his belief that sermons must be based on a biblical text. He states that as a preacher “you must mine the gold before you can mint it into spendable currency. Without a clear understanding of the central idea of a biblical text, you have nothing to say.”<sup>85</sup> There seems, however, to be a difference in his conviction related to the tools used for “mining” or interpreting the Word of God in preparation for a narrative sermon: “Crafting a first-person sermon uses all the analytical skills you have mastered in studying the biblical material, but it requires more. It calls on you to use your imagination as an *interpretative tool*” (emphasis mine).<sup>86</sup> This seems contrary to the advice given in *Biblical Preaching* in a section advocating caution when doing topical exposition: “Those who want to address the felt needs of their people are to be

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<sup>83</sup>Harold Freeman, *Variety in Biblical Preaching* (Waco: Word, 1987), 26.

<sup>84</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

<sup>85</sup>Robinson and Robinson, *It’s All in How You Tell It*, 27.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 13. The thing that originally caught my attention in this statement was that seems to say that interpretation for a narrative sermon requires something that other sermons do not. That additional element, according to this statement, is the imagination.

commended for their desire to be relevant. At the same time, there is no greater betrayal of our calling than putting words in God's mouth."<sup>87</sup> It seems to me that truths discovered through imagination are more likely to be the words of the preacher, and not the Word God.<sup>88</sup> If one believes that the sermon's authority is based on the biblical text, then it would stand to reason that truths have little or no authority when they are discovered by imagining what the text is saying from the unstated point of view of a particular character in a story.

Robinson's view regarding the use of imagination in hermeneutics may not be as radical as that held by adherents of the New Homiletic, but his view is much more influential than their view in conservative circles. By describing the use of imagination as an interpretative tool, he is legitimizing the work of non-conservatives in the eyes of those who have respected and applied his work over the years.

In summary, Robinson's marriage of exposition and narrative is based on his love for God and those who need to hear the gospel. He seems, however, to have shifted away from his past emphasis on biblical preaching as the exposition of the biblical text to hearers. He once stated that "through expository preaching a minister speaks with authority beyond his own and those who sit before him have a better chance of hearing God address them directly. An expositor possesses confidence that his message is not 'the word of men,' but that 'It really is the Word of God, which also performs its work in

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<sup>87</sup>Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 57.

<sup>88</sup>This is not so for Craddock who believes that "imagination is fundamental to all thinking, from the levels of critical reasoning to reverie and daydreaming." Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 63. Robinson's words have a similar ring to them as he states that "you simply have to be willing to use both your right brain and your left brain in your study and then let the biblical characters speak for themselves." Robinson and Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It*, 14.

you who believe' (1 Thess 2:13)."<sup>89</sup> Now he believes that a sermon can be defined as expository so long as it "confronts the hearers with an accurate interpretation of the biblical revelation and its present meaning for their lives."<sup>90</sup> Commendable on two points, that messages must be accurate to the biblical text and applicable to today, this definition fails to include exposure of the biblical text during the sermon.

Furthermore, while the term narrative is defined by Robinson in relationship to homiletical form, the term expository is now focused on the hermeneutical task. In this way, Robinson's implementation of narrative homiletics is more in line with the definition of narrative preaching set forth by the New Homiletic: "Because a first-person sermon tells a story, you don't want to give away your preaching idea in the introduction. Stories are inductive. The idea of your sermon, therefore, should usually emerge toward the end rather than the beginning of your message."<sup>91</sup> This definition is very similar to Lowry's definition of narrative preaching: "A *narrative sermon* is any sermon in which the arrangement of ideas takes the form of a plot involving a strategic delay of the preacher's meaning."<sup>92</sup>

Based on the comparisons highlighted, it is difficult to see how the two methodologies set out by Robinson can both be built on the theology of inspiration and its corresponding hermeneutic that are set forth in *Biblical Preaching*. His methodology has been affected by prevalent conversations proclaiming the benefits of narrative homiletics,

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<sup>89</sup>Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching*, 70.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 7. See also p. 20 for his brief explanation of the term.

<sup>91</sup>Robinson and Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It*, 56.

<sup>92</sup>Eugene L. Lowry, "Narrative Preaching," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon, and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 342.



and his call for others to follow his lead will be felt among conservative preachers everywhere.<sup>93</sup>

### **Joel B. Green: Narrative Preaching from a Theological Hermeneutic**

Joel B. Green represents a third group that is calling for more narrative preaching. These interpreters and preachers may be considered evangelical in their theology.<sup>94</sup> Their view of hermeneutics leads, however, to a very different definition of narrative preaching than that put forth by either the traditional or New Homiletic.

**Theological hermeneutics.** In order to understand their use of narrative as the source and form for preaching, a brief explanation of *theological hermeneutics* is required. Green and others in this group are proponents of a new kind of hermeneutic. This new hermeneutic was needed because, in their world, a huge chasm dividing theology and biblical studies had developed due to the failure of older forms of both. “The church, of course, has always maintained that Bible and theology belong together. But driven by developments within the academy, following Gabler’s programmatic distinction between the tasks of biblical theology and those of dogmatics, the two became separated, if not divorced.”<sup>95</sup> They agree with Brevard Childs, who “wrote of the ‘iron

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<sup>93</sup>See the testimonies at the end of chapter 1 of *It’s All in How You Tell It*, 14-18.

<sup>94</sup>See, for instance, the lists of contributors in Joel B. Green and Max Turner, eds., *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), vii; and Joel B. Green and Michael Pasquarello, eds., *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 7-8.

<sup>95</sup>Max Turner and Joel B. Green, “New Testament Commentary and Systematic Theology: Strangers or Friends,” in *Between Two Horizons*, 4.

curtain' separating the two disciplines, biblical studies and systematic theology."<sup>96</sup>

According to Green, the problem was a misunderstanding of the relationship between the two brought on by the overall failure of modernity upon which the older hermeneutic had been built.

According to Green, the older hermeneutic had been built on Enlightenment principles. Most notably, meaning could be objectively stated and was historically couched. Postmodern theologians held that the misunderstanding between biblical studies and theology was the result of trying to read the Scripture from a historical distance. By employing such Enlightenment methods, biblical studies had become a historical exercise wrapped in higher critical issues of interpretation, and theology had taken on a contemporary philosophical bent.<sup>97</sup>

To further complicate the separation of biblical studies and theology, hermeneutics had taken on a *linear* form following the work of Johann Philipp Gabler. Green states that Krister Stendal and Peter Stuhlmacher later picked up this linear form of hermeneutics and developed it further.<sup>98</sup> As advanced by Stendal, it became a threefold hermeneutical method, which sought to distinguish between two tenses of meaning. "“What *did* it mean?’ and ‘what *does* it mean?’”<sup>99</sup> Green explains the threefold nature of the move between these two horizons as follows: “Many today imagine that the

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<sup>96</sup>Joel B. Green, “Scripture and Theology: Uniting the Two So Long Divided,” in *Between Two Horizons*, 23.

<sup>97</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

<sup>98</sup>Joel B. Green, “Scripture and Theology: Failed Experiments, Fresh Perspectives,” *Interpretation* 56, no. 1 (2002): 5-20.

<sup>99</sup>Green, “Scripture and Theology,” 33.

movement from Bible to theology is a three-stage process, from exegesis to (descriptive) biblical theology to (prescriptive) systematic theology. At more popular levels, the same hermeneutic is prescribed in three steps: observation, interpretation, application.”<sup>100</sup>

In the postmodern world, both historical biblical studies and philosophical theology began to lose favor. To make matters worse, they no longer had each other for support.<sup>101</sup> The solution for many was to try to reunite the two under the guidance of one.<sup>102</sup> For some this new approach became theological hermeneutics, which seeks to interpret scripture from a culturally shaped theological perspective.<sup>103</sup> In particular, advocates of this method state that reading from a theological perspective means reading from the perspective of the church.

I take the claim, the Bible as Scripture, to refer to a theological stance whereby we recognize that *we* are the people of God to whom these texts are addressed. This leads us to the realization that the fundamental transformation that must take place is not the transformation of an ancient message into a contemporary meaning but rather the transformation of our lives by means of God’s Word. This means that reading

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid. See also, Joel B. Green, “The (Re) Turn to Narrative,” *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 19-22.

<sup>101</sup>One belonged to the realm of the material and the other to the realm of the immaterial. “In the Enlightenment/modernist view, critical historical inquiry dealt with ‘objective facts’ (and so was worth pursuing), while ‘theology’ belonged to the more subjective realm of ‘values’ and ‘beliefs’ (and so could be ignored by the academy).” Turner and Green, “New Testament Commentary and Systematic Theology,” 7.

<sup>102</sup>There are several recent efforts from diverse theological perspectives. In addition to the efforts of Green and other Narrative Readers, see Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*; Michael S. Horton, ed., *A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000); and Jens Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational–Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2004).

<sup>103</sup>“According to this proposal, the gap between biblical and theological studies is negotiated by borrowing the insights and/or categories of one discipline for use in another. In this instance the biblical scholar does not actually participate in theological studies but imports what has already been analyzed from one disciplinary system into another.” Green, “Scripture and Theology,” 37.

the Bible as Scripture has less to do with what tools we bring to the task, however important they may be, and more to do with our own dispositions as we come to our engagement with Scripture.<sup>104</sup>

Green argues that the separation between biblical studies and theology has also been felt beyond the academy. This failure has occurred as preaching reflected the hermeneutical methodology of Stendal and others.<sup>105</sup> Faulting modern, especially historical-critical methods of biblical study, which he refers to “linear hermeneutics,”<sup>106</sup> Green argues “that a particular vision of how biblical texts ‘mean’ has had the effect of diminishing the status of biblical studies as a theological discipline and of segregating biblical studies from theological reflection on the practices of faith communities for which the Bible is scripture.”<sup>107</sup> In other words, when preaching describes meaning in historical rather than current terms, it is committing the same fallacy which has separated biblical studies and theology in the academy. In such cases, biblical studies often take on an empirical dimension and theological studies become philosophical. Theological hermeneutics seeks to rectify this division by joining the two under one responsibility, the reading of Scripture through the eyes of the church.

**Preaching as a part of the narrative.** Theological hermeneutics is defined above in terms of the church’s responsibility as it approaches the Scripture with its theological eyes open. Green argues that this is so because the Bible is a record of the only true narrative: “Embracing the Bible as scripture, we do not accept it as one

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<sup>104</sup>Green, “The (Re) Turn to Narrative,” 23.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid. See also, Green, “Scripture and Theology,” 33-34.

<sup>106</sup>Green, “Scripture and Theology,” 7.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 6.

narrative among others, but accord it a privilege above all others, and allow ourselves to be shaped by it.”<sup>108</sup> The process begins with the recognition that the biblical text is something special. For these interpreters and preachers, the Bible is the Word of God. This orthodox theological presupposition sets them apart from the New Homiletic.<sup>109</sup> The thing that sets these interpreters apart from conservative, orthodox homileticians is their use of a narrative hermeneutic for reading the biblical text.

Green grounds his approach to the tasks of narrative reading, narrative preaching in three observations setting this method apart from the currently reigning definition of narrative preaching as set forth by the New Homiletic.<sup>110</sup>

His first observation is that narrative preaching should be redefined. He states that it should be viewed “as a theological category, as a way of grasping the making sense of the whole of history as this is interpretively presented in Christian Scripture.”<sup>111</sup> So the Bible gives an interpretation of history as a pattern through which to view life.

In the methods employed by Craddock and Robinson, the term narrative is used to describe the form the sermon. This usually means that the sermon employs story in some fashion, and seeks to function as a vessel through which the Word of God is delivered or speaks as hearers discover the “big idea,” which is generally delayed until the end. Green’s method emphasizes narrative as the theological grid from which Scripture is

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>109</sup>It has been shown elsewhere that the New Homiletic is built primarily on a neo-orthodox position.

<sup>110</sup>Joel B. Green offers these observations because he says that the use of “narrative” in current conversations is suffering due to “a semantic problem of great significance.” Green, “The (Re-) Turn to Narrative,” 17.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 18.

read and delivered. Because these definitions are not closely related, conversations on the subject of narrative preaching must be conducted with care or they will result in confusion.

Reading and preaching as a theological category grows naturally out of Green's theological hermeneutic. Because Scripture is the church's book, Green emphasizes the importance of "an ecclesially located reading of Scripture" on two fronts.<sup>112</sup> First, the best interpreters of the Bible are found in the church. This is only natural since "the books of the Bible have their genesis and formation within the community of God's people."<sup>113</sup> Second, readers are protected from "self-deception" by reading the Bible with other believers.<sup>114</sup> "Other people set on the same purpose can take us to task so that we might hear more faithfully God's voice at those moments when we are tempted to substitute our word for God's."<sup>115</sup>

Green's second observation is that this form of narrative homiletics seeks to emphasize "the performance of Scripture," instead of focusing "on the stylistics and communication theory."<sup>116</sup> Whether reading from the Old or New Testaments, all Scripture and its message must be understood in light of the "grand narrative of God's purposes."<sup>117</sup> Therefore, sermons on a particular passage of Scripture should seek to accomplish the same purpose for which the text was originally given. Narrative sermons

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 24.

should seek to continue the purpose regardless of the presentation form chosen. Green does not indicate that sermon form should be neglected, but that it should not supersede content: “Although not wishing to marginalize the importance of rhetoric in its classical sense of persuasive speech, I nevertheless want to observe that concern with style or form has generally come at the expense of content.”<sup>118</sup>

The final observation made by Green is that this method seeks to reunite biblical studies and preaching which “have grown distant from one another as a result of the shift from an ecclesial context to a scientific framework within which to engage the biblical materials.”<sup>119</sup> The gap which Green speaks of is not present in conservative evangelical schools where higher-critical methods of biblical studies are not practiced, but is reflected widely in other institutions of higher learning.<sup>120</sup> As biblical studies in the academy became separated from theology, preaching performed as historical biblical studies within the church opened “wider and wider the chasm between ‘the world of the Bible’ and ‘the world of the congregation.’”<sup>121</sup>

Green’s efforts are a reflection of his past efforts to reunite biblical studies and theology in the academy. In like manner, he believes that biblical interpretation and preaching can and must be reunited.

Our joining of that which has been divided in the modern period, exegesis and homiletics, is intentional. Our hope is that this emphasis on a return to narrative will promote renewed conversation between two mutually informing practices that draw

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>121</sup>Green, “The (Re-) Turn to Narrative,” 18.

their life from the use of Scripture for the pastoral ministry of the church.<sup>122</sup>

In fact, his works on both are very similar. “One of the more noticeable features of the landscape of theological studies, broadly conceived, is the troublesome relationship between biblical studies and systematic or constructive theology.”<sup>123</sup> He believes that the failure in the relationship between biblical studies and constructive theology occurred over the last two centuries, and may have abated some. Concerning the relationship between interpretation and theology within the academy, however, he states that “it remains true today that, in many theological schools, departments of theological and biblical studies exist in a relationship of antipathy.”<sup>124</sup> This separation may be seen “in the seminary curriculum, or at least in the experiences of many seminarians,” where “the problem is typically felt at a deeply existential level when moving from courses in biblical studies to one’s first course in preaching.”<sup>125</sup>

The primary difference between Green’s work in the past and his present work seems to be one of practical application. He appears to be applying his past research and writing to the practical theology of preaching. For him, narrative preaching focuses attention on the church as the best interpreters of the Bible, and the ones who can rightly apply its message preached. “The books of the Bible have their genesis and formation

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<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>123</sup>Joel B. Green, “Modernity, History and the Theological Interpretation of the Bible,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54, no. 3 (2001): 308.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, 309. This element of Green’s understanding serves to highlight the fact that scholars recognize the existing division between the many fields of theological and biblical studies. It also calls attention to the development of new efforts to reunite some of these fields of study. In fact, it is this desire to reunite hermeneutics and homiletics that caused him to co-edit *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching*.

<sup>125</sup>Green, “Scripture and Theology,” 18-19.



within the community of God's people. They speak most clearly and effectively from within and to communities of believers."<sup>126</sup>

The belief that theological interpretation is best carried out within the church takes into account its past, present, and future. As far as the past goes, tradition in the form of "doctrine serves as our 'rule of faith,' guiding our reading of Scripture in authentically Christian ways."<sup>127</sup> In the present, the church reads the Scripture as a part of its continuing story. In this way, "'meaning' would be located at the intersection of readerly interests (remembering that those interests are ecclesially located and theologically formed) and textual interests."<sup>128</sup> Since the church is living in a part of God's continuing narrative that has not been given to it in written form, it is to live in light of the parts that have been.

The story of God is still being written. . . . With so many chapters having already been written, and with the final chapter already firmly in place, the options for intervening material are limited, if we are to continue *this* story. Accordingly, our task is to align ourselves with these landmarks on the biblical terrain—or, better, to write ourselves, to inscribe ourselves, into the biblical narrative, so that our sense of past, present, and future is congruous with the story of the universe found in Scripture.<sup>129</sup>

Following Green's method, verifiable, valid interpretation is the result of reading the biblical text as the church, theologically informed, and critically engaged.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>130</sup>For greater perspective on Green's emphasis on these three ideas, see the corresponding sections on ecclesially located, theologically formed, and critically engaged. Ibid., 23-28. Green states that there are "multiple possibilities for construing the sense" of a text within a community. "Moreover, such interpretation would recognize (and, indeed, welcome) the polysemy of this text." Ibid., 27.

**Narrative reading applied to preaching.** The final question related to the method set forth in *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching* has to do with how narrative reading becomes narrative preaching.<sup>131</sup> As stated elsewhere, narrative preaching is not, according to this method, related to the sermon's source (narrative genre) or form (sermon genre). Narrative sermons are: those preached by participants of God's continuing narrative; in the current context of others who are seeking to live within the narrative; in a way that make sense of life. These three parts are easily seen in the work of the three preachers called on in *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching* to describe narrative preaching, which is based on a narrative reading of the biblical text.

In the process of moving from narrative reading to narrative preaching, a preacher seeks to continue the narrative as a participant. Michael Pasquarello provides a clear example of this point. "If our first task as interpreters of Acts is to remember whose narrative it is that we are reading, our task as preachers is to remember that we who tell the story are committed participants rather than detached observers."<sup>132</sup>

William Willimon begins his chapter with an emphasis on putting the narrative

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<sup>131</sup>There are several weakness in the work done by Green and Pasquarello. Two are mentioned because of their impact on this section. First, the book begins with an explanation of narrative reading, which is followed by examples of narrative reading and narrative preaching. But narrative preaching, as a deliberate endeavor, is not discussed until the last chapter. So the only guidance given during the process is couched in different types of narrative preaching each related to different New Testament genres. Then when the chapter on narrative preaching does arrive, it simply reiterates the claim that narrative is the insoluble connection that binds together interpretation and preaching. "Our theological and pastoral task is to continue a narrative that possesses dramatic coherence; a story of humankind called from nowhere, *ex nihilo*, toward its proper place, a promised *polis*, the new Jerusalem." Ibid., 191. Second, by pairing interpreters with preachers, rather than having one person do both tasks, they undermine their efforts to reunite hermeneutics and homiletics.

<sup>132</sup>Michael Pasquarello, "Whose Story? Preaching the Gospels and Acts," in *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching*, 70.

story into the current language of the hearers so that it performs as it did in the original setting. “In order to preach a letter, every preacher, even non-narrative preachers, must construct, reconstruct, and imaginatively re-create the story and deliver it in some sort of dynamic equivalent to the biblical text in order to do what the text does.”<sup>133</sup> He emphasizes his point by stating it in two ways in the sentence above. First, he uses the term “dynamic equivalent,” which is used in hermeneutics to describe thought-for-thought translations. This kind of translation process is used “to produce the same effect on readers today that the original produced on its readers.”<sup>134</sup> Second, he states clearly that the purpose of this kind of sermon is to do what the text does.

Finally, Charles Campbell describes narrative sermons as powerful tools in which hearers are connected with the narrative. His chapter follows the narrative reading of the book of Revelation. In that reading, Revelation is interpreted to be about the church’s resistance to the world. “When performed orally in the worshiping community [that is preached], the testimony of Revelation enables the participants, through story and ritual, to experience and begin living into the new creation that invades the world in Jesus Christ.”<sup>135</sup> In other words, interpretation and preaching complement each other. As the text is read narratively it reveals the pattern of the church’s narrative which is applied to the church in the present.

In conclusion, this method is far more hermeneutic than homiletic. The only

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<sup>133</sup>William H. Willimon, “Preaching the Letters as Narrative,” in *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching*, 107.

<sup>134</sup>William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 74.

<sup>135</sup>Charles L. Campbell, “Apocalypse Now: Preaching Revelation as Narrative,” in *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching*, 151.

real homiletical guideline given is that narrative preaching must be true to the principles of narrative reading. For Pasquarello, these include a strong biblical tie.

Sermons are preached from biblical texts. Real sermons do not expound an idea or theme chosen by the preacher or demanded by the people, nor do they tell any story other than the story embodied in or around the biblical text. Rather, all our pastoral discourse . . . [communicates] the gospel as we try to say the same things that Scripture says.<sup>136</sup>

Although not bad in themselves, Pasquarello's statements do not help in the debate over the definition of narrative preaching. In fact, according to his statement the story to be told may be found "in" or come "from around the biblical text."<sup>137</sup> So even the definition of "narrative" is complicated.

## Conclusion

All three streams play an important part in contemporary discussions of narrative preaching. The diversity of theology and methodology represented by these three streams is a testimony to the pervasive influence of narrative homiletics in the disciplines of interpretation and preaching.

In the hermeneutical process of Fred Craddock and the New Homiletic, interpretation is achieved when an overheard conversation (the biblical text) intersects with the lives of the preacher and hearers and is experienced. Narrative preaching then seeks to facilitate that intersection and experience through shared story.

Robinson's method begins with an orthodox theology, and its accompanying hermeneutic, but also seeks to involve hearers throughout the process. The goal of interpretation is to determine what the biblical author was trying to convey and then to

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<sup>136</sup>Michael Pasquarello, "Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching: Inhabiting the Story," in *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching*, 181.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

restate it in terms that will communicate that message to the audience. Two elements of Robinson's method should be clarified before it is adopted within conservative methods. A clearer statement of the role of the imagination in the interpretation process, which seeks to protect the exegetical process from eisegesis, is needed. His latest work also falls short in stating the importance of making the message and its application clear through propositional statements. Robinson's method is insightful for discussing narrative preaching, but does not fit within the prevalent definition of narrative preaching articulated in the world of homiletics in general. The voice of the New Homiletic is still the strongest in terms of the number of theoretical methodologies being presented in recent books and articles.

The last stream discussed operates from a theologically shaped hermeneutic. They seek to interpret the biblical text as a particular community of believers who are a part of the continuing narrative. Unlike the other two streams, to them narrative is not a matter of sermon form. Their concern is with a living theology in the church that is shaped in light of the ongoing narrative, which was given as a pattern in the biblical text. In this way they intend to reunite the study of the Bible with its application in the church. The need to reunite these two proceeds from the perception that biblical studies and practical theologies have been separated. Although true in many places, this division is not felt where traditional methods of hermeneutics and homiletics have been maintained. Therefore, although their call to reunite is a move in the right direction, it has limited value for conservative homileticians.

The discussion of narrative preaching in the larger homiletical world is much bigger than any single methodology. In order to alleviate confusion in future discussions, a clearly stated definition like the one offered here should be clearly stated and defended

or refuted in light of one's hermeneutical and homiletical presuppositions.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Narrative homiletics plays an important part in discussions of interpretation and preaching in the church today. Its impact is felt in a wide range of methodologies, and is evident in orthodox and neo-orthodox homiletical streams. In the conclusion, a summary of the impact of narrative homiletics on interpretation, preaching, and the church is given.

#### **Narrative Homiletics and Interpretation**

Narrative homiletics has impacted biblical interpretation in at least two ways.<sup>1</sup> First, it has popularized methods of interpretation which focus the process on hearers. Second, it has led to a softening of the distinctions between hermeneutics and homiletics. Evidence for these influences may be evaluated in light of the three streams of narrative preaching discussed in chapter five.

The first impact is easily seen in the work of Craddock and the New Homiletic. Their hermeneutical and homiletical foundations share a common cornerstone. The goal of preaching is to get something heard, which means getting something experienced.<sup>2</sup> In order to accomplish this goal two elements needed to come together. To insure that its

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<sup>1</sup>It is not the intention of this analysis to address the field of hermeneutics in general, but as it applies specifically to the homiletical methodology.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Reid, Jeffrey Bullock, and David Fleer, "Preaching as the Creation of an Experience: The Not-So-Rational Revolution of the New Homiletic," *The Journal of Communication and Religion* 18, no. 1 (1995): 1-9.

message was heard, the New Homiletic needed methods of interpretation and communication that focused on the hearer. As proponents began their search, they found both ready and available in the rise of postmodernism.<sup>3</sup>

When adherents of the New Homiletic interpret the biblical text, they do not seek the author's intended meaning. They seek, instead, the interpretation of a living text by a living community. In their view, experiencing the Word of God is possible because the Bible belongs to the church.<sup>4</sup> In *Preaching*, Craddock reminds his readers that since the biblical texts "constitute the community's canon of Scripture. . . . they are living documents, addressing believers in every age and place with a word that is fresh and appropriate as well as authoritative."<sup>5</sup>

The New Homiletic is not postmodern in every sense. But as David Allen points out, it focuses on the contemporary element of interpretation enough to warrant a connection.<sup>6</sup> For instance, although Craddock does not believe that the canon of Scripture is open to new literary additions, "as long as interpretation continues, the canon remains theologically open because new hearings of the Word are possible."<sup>7</sup> This "theological

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<sup>3</sup>David L. Allen, "Preaching and Postmodernism: An Evangelical Comes to the Dance," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (2001): 62-78.

<sup>4</sup>John McClure states, for instance, "For them (a new generation of ministers), the truth of the gospel is, in the first place, paradigm/community/context-dependent. It can only be known by discussing, living, and practicing the Christian faith within a particular tradition, in a particular place, at a particular time." John S. McClure, "Conversation and Proclamation: Resources and Issues," *Homiletic* 22, no. 1 (1997): 1.

<sup>5</sup>Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 128. Authority is not inherent in the text, however. It belongs to the community. See David Allen, "A Tale of Two Roads: Homiletics and Biblical Authority," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 3 (2000): 508-13.

<sup>6</sup>Allen, "Preaching and Postmodernism," 62-78.

<sup>7</sup>Craddock, *Preaching*, 128.



openness” is not simply the hermeneutic conviction that the Bible is still relevant. It is the extension of the New Homiletic’s goal of preaching. As Robert Reid, Jeffrey Bullock and David Fler rightly summarize Craddock’s position, “the goal of such a sermon is to create an experience of ‘the word of God’ in the listeners in order to effect a hearing of the Gospel.”<sup>8</sup> Craddock speaks about the openness of the text in order to show that a hearer centered interpretation is necessary because a currently relevant message demands it. In the end, narrative homiletics has promoted listener centered hermeneutical approaches under the call for a contemporary homiletic.

The notion that interpretation should be shifted toward a reader-response approach is not a new idea. By 1972, Stanley Fish had already defined and developed reader-response criticism as an “analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words” of a text.<sup>9</sup> So the impact of the New Homiletic on interpretation is not that it created reader-response hermeneutics. It did, however, find a willing partner for its promotion in the development of the New Homiletic.

In the work of Paul Ricoeur, a second element of what became the New Homiletic emerges.<sup>10</sup> Allen writes, “Ricoeur concludes that the way human beings conceive of their identity is primarily through narrative. Furthermore, it is narrative which provides the primary signs and symbols through which meaning is appropriated in

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<sup>8</sup>Reid, Bullock, and Fler, “Preaching as the Creation of an Experience,” 2.

<sup>9</sup>Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 387-88.

<sup>10</sup>Allen connected Craddock’s work with the swelling influence of narrative philosophies in two way. First, he notes the timeliness of a publication on the necessity of narrative for understanding life by Stephen Crites. Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism,” 64. Second, he notes the connection of the New Homiletic to the influence of Ricoeur, which is felt over a wide range of theological issues. Allen, “A Tale of Two Roads,” 501-05.

human experience.”<sup>11</sup> Ricoeur’s work reflected a change in a wide range of theological philosophies. Allen states that the direct result of his work was narrative theology.<sup>12</sup> The application of these same philosophies in homiletics is narrative preaching.

The narrative preaching of the New Homiletic is the natural result of combining these two elements. Speaking of the relationship between Ricoeur’s narrative philosophy and the New Homiletic, Allen states that “one finds this hermeneutical philosophy played out in virtually all the books on narrative preaching in the past two decades.”<sup>13</sup> The fact that these elements were being discussed at the same time, and in diverse fields of study, is an indication of a larger shift that was taking place. Postmodern thought was being experienced everywhere.<sup>14</sup>

The real impact of Craddock’s work is not in the formulation of these ideas, but in their dissemination. Eugene Lowry rightly credits Craddock as being uniquely suited for the task of changing paradigms related to interpretation and preaching. He was “someone firmly placed within a well-established, ‘foundational’ discipline, . . .” had an “analytical and analogical mind, . . .” and brought to the task a regard for “pastoral sensitivity.”<sup>15</sup> As elsewhere cited, Craddock received permission from the homiletical world to radically shift the focus of preaching from getting something said to getting

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 501.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 504.

<sup>14</sup>The pervasive nature of postmodernism in many areas of culture is the subject of Gene E. Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994).

<sup>15</sup>Eugene L. Lowry, “The Revolution of Sermonic Shape,” in *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 95.

something heard. The popularity of the methods which have grown from this foundation have impacted interpretation for preaching by focusing its attention on listeners.

Conservative narrative homileticians have also encouraged a change in the way they interpret Scripture. This encouragement is not based on a neo-orthodox view of the biblical text. Nevertheless, it encourages listener-focused hermeneutics, that is, thinking about the hearer during the exegetical process. It is important to keep hearers in mind when performing the homiletical task, but interpreters must guard against eisegesis from the perspective of the preacher or the congregation during the hermeneutic process. John Stott recognizes and promotes this truth with an unerring desire to say what God says.<sup>16</sup> Like Stott, Haddon Robinson continues to state his conviction that the Bible is the Word of God, and that the preacher must “allow the text to speak for itself before crafting” the sermon.<sup>17</sup> Yet his use of certain narrative homiletical terms and ideas in the process of interpretation gives the appearance of a change in his hermeneutic. Specifically, he recommends interpreting for a particular homiletical purpose (preaching from a specific character), and using imagination in relation to interpretation.

As an example of these ideas, Robinson states that “somewhere in the exegetical process, you must decide which person to portray.”<sup>18</sup> If one of the goals during the exegetical process is to select the character “who most effectively conveys the substance of the text,”<sup>19</sup> why not wait until the exegetical work of discovering the “big

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<sup>16</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

<sup>17</sup>Haddon W. Robinson and Torrey W. Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It: Preaching First-Person Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 29.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

idea” is completed?<sup>20</sup> His answer to this question seems to have been given earlier when he states that narrative preaching “calls on you to use your imagination as an interpretative tool.”<sup>21</sup> Using his method, one could wait until the exegesis is accomplished. Yet Robinson recommends not waiting.

In the beginning, it is difficult to know for sure what Robinson has in mind. He says, for instance, that by using your imagination “the characters in the Bible cease being cardboard characters and jump from the page with life and power.”<sup>22</sup> Later, however, he states that the exegetical process centers on accurately listening to each of the characters in the story. In the chapter entitled, “Study! Study! Study!” he states the following: “Especially when searching for the main idea in narrative literature, a study of a story’s different characters often provides an important piece for solving the story’s puzzle.”<sup>23</sup> After reading the whole book, it does not appear that Robinson seeks to change the exegetical principles used.<sup>24</sup> Instead, the impact of his narrative homiletic is that it adds a homiletical element to the interpretative process.

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<sup>20</sup>Selection of the narrative character through whom the story will be retold is not the same as studying all the characters in the story. The first is a homiletical idea, the second is a hermeneutical one.

<sup>21</sup>Robinson and Robinson, *It’s All in How You Tell It*, 13.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid. The use of the imagination in interpretation is recognized by some as legitimate and at times essential. See, for instance, Glen A. Scorgie, “Hermeneutics and the Meditative Use of Scripture: The Case for a Baptized Imagination,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 2 (2001): 271-84. Others seem to promote the use of imagination only during the homiletical process. Warren Wiersbe, *Developing a Christian Imagination: An Interpretative Anthology* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1995).

<sup>23</sup>Robinson and Robinson, *It’s All in How You Tell It*, 29.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 140-41. Robinson delineates the exegetical steps for handling narrative passages in e.n. 8. It is worth noting that the last element of this process is stating the exegetical idea (big idea) in the form of its subject and complement.

In fairness to Robinson, he states that “a good expository first-person sermon is built upon solid exegesis.”<sup>25</sup> However, the addition of a particular homiletical thrust during the hermeneutical process makes the “solid exegesis” of any biblical text less likely.<sup>26</sup> Whether one agrees or disagrees with the assessment of the direction of Robinson’s hermeneutical move, there is no denying the fact that Robinson’s statements regarding the interpretation of Scripture for preaching narrative sermons raise important hermeneutical questions. As stated elsewhere, it is important to scrutinize his work because he has a great deal of influence among conservative preachers. I do not believe that Robinson is advocating a new paradigm for biblical interpretation. I do, however, believe that he has led trusting conservatives very close to a slippery slope. By introducing interpretative tools based on the projected sermon form, rather than interpreting the passage regardless of one’s homiletical bent, Robinson’s narrative homiletic has impacted interpretation.

The impact of narrative preaching on interpretation is also evident in the model put forward by Joel B. Green. In fact, he states that interpretation should seek to understand itself in light of the purpose of preaching. In his essay, “The (Re) Turn to Narrative,” he begins with the following rhetorical questions: “Need homiletical theory follow in the footsteps of biblical studies, as it often has? Can it not issue a prophetic call

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 42-43. To complicate the matter further, Robinson suggests that the character may be imaginary. Since Bultmann, few interpreters argue that it is possible to do interpretation without presuppositions. Choosing an angle for presenting a message during the exegetical process may, however, predispose the text to an unnecessary goal. Robinson insists that in selecting a character, “you don’t change the text, but the angle.” Ibid., 13. However, if one focuses exegesis on a single character in the story (or imaginary one), *the* meaning of the text and the purpose for which it was given may be altered.

for a needed transformation in the way the Bible is engaged as Scripture for the Church?”<sup>27</sup> His answer to these questions is simple. The narrative proclaimed by the Bible is still being lived out by the church, and its interpretation must be by and for the church. In this case, the impact of narrative homiletics on interpretation is related to a specific definition for narrative. Narrative preaching is defined as preaching which is done *by* members of the ongoing narrative, *for* members of the ongoing narrative. Since the purpose of interpretation is to determine the message preached, these interpreters seek to interpret the Bible from the perspective of current participants in God’s story.<sup>28</sup> Green states that this interpretation takes “the claim, the Bible as Scripture, to refer to a theological stance whereby we recognize that *we* are the people of God to whom these texts are addressed. . . . Accordingly, our reading must be ecclesially located, theologically fashioned, and critically engaged.”<sup>29</sup> As explained by Green, each of these elements presupposes a discerning community for the hermeneutical process.

As in the methods of Craddock and Robinson, the historical grammatical study of the biblical text is important to Green’s approach. In the end, however, the focus of interpretation is not the historical meaning of the text, but the meaning to a current community. The impact of narrative homiletics on interpretation is clear. Rather than seeking to bridge the gap between the historic and contemporary meanings, interpreters

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<sup>27</sup>Joel B. Green, “The (Re) Turn to Narrative,” in *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching: Reuniting New Testament Interpretation and Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 18.

<sup>28</sup>In judging the relationship between preaching and postmodernism, David Allen notes that in a postmodern world, “narrative is everything but no narrative is a metanarrative.” Allen “Preaching and Postmodernism,” 69. Based on this assessment, Green’s method seems to be postmodern without accepting all the tenets of postmodernism.

<sup>29</sup>Green, “The (Re) Turn to Narrative,” 23.

are to seek meaning in the current application of Scripture.

In summary, all three streams of narrative homiletics focus interpretation on hearers. The extent and nature of this focus varies, but in the end all seek to involve the expected audience in the interpretative process. Robinson's method remains the closest to a traditional relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics, but may have lessened the distance between it and the New Homiletic. The methods represented by Green and Pasquarello focus on postmodern approaches which center on current readings for current messages.<sup>30</sup>

### **Narrative Homiletics and Preaching**

The impact of narrative homiletics on preaching is also diverse. As a viable option, narrative preaching is advocated by orthodox and neo-orthodox homileticians alike. The purposes undergirding these narrative homiletical methods and the definitions applied to narrative within the different streams vary, but the impact of narrative homiletics on all three streams is similar. All narrative preaching models emphasize the response of hearers as the justification for their use.

For advocates of the New Homiletic, narrative preaching is a way to get something heard, which means experienced by the hearers. These homileticians promote narrative preaching because they believe that it is the best way to achieve their goal of preaching. Lowry states that "the issue finding the central place in all the various models or understandings of narrative preaching is the goal of sermon event."<sup>31</sup> He describes

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<sup>30</sup>Although not within the scope of this study, the relationship between this stream and the emergent church is warranted. This statement is based on a recent work by D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

<sup>31</sup>Lowry, "The Revolution of Sermonic Shape," 110.

the idea of sermonic event in terms of the hearers as follows: “Craddock hopes the congregation will experience the shock of recognition. I hope the meaning of the sermon is encountered, not just reported.”<sup>32</sup> The impact extending from this goal is a form that is listener centered. Unlike deductive methods, Craddock states that a sermon based on this foundation is one that “respects rather than insults the hearers.”<sup>33</sup> Respect in this instance is explained as one which places the hearers first in every aspect of the preaching process, and this is nowhere more important than in hearing the “gospel for us.”<sup>34</sup>

The impact of Craddock’s inductive method on the New Homiletic and beyond has been to promote inductive and narrative methods which seek to remove authoritative elements. This removal includes the removal of propositional truth statements. Furthermore, as it has moved toward pure forms of narrative presentation it has moved away from teaching the Bible in the pulpit.<sup>35</sup> This movement is to be expected since it is commensurate with other narrative theological disciplines. Ricoeur’s hermeneutical method depreciates the historical, propositional nature of the biblical text in favor of experience. Allen states that “unfortunately, in many cases Ricoeur’s lack of interest (clarity) regarding the fiction/history issue in narrative is also played out in much of the homiletical literature concerning narrative preaching.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 55. Lowry highlights this aspect in a section on “authoritarian/democratic” elements of sermon shape. Lowry, “The Revolution of Sermonic Shape,” 102.

<sup>34</sup>Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 59.

<sup>35</sup>Richard Lischer, “The Limits of Story,” *Interpretations* 38, no. 1 (1984): 26-38.

<sup>36</sup>Allen, “A Tale of Two Roads,” 504.



Narrative homiletics has impacted preaching by moving it away from traditional homiletical methods where the Bible is the source of the message, and it is presented through exposition as the authority for the message. Both the Old Homiletic and the New Homiletic include the Bible as a source for biblical preaching. They do not, however, agree on the nature or extent of that source. The Old Homiletic holds to the belief that the Bible is truth. It believes that it can be interpreted for today's audience, and that its truth can be presented in propositional statements. The New Homiletic builds its methodology on the presumption that propositionally stated truth is temporal and contextual. Therefore, it may become obsolete or irrelevant as soon as the situation and/or the community changes. Walter Brueggemann, for example, teaches that interpretations are contextual, local and pluralistic.<sup>37</sup> If the Word of God is defined as the message which is communicated personally to individual hearers by God during the preaching event, then the biblical text has no greater authority in the sermon than an accurate recounting of the preacher's personal experience with the Word.

Fred Craddock places an emphasis on the Bible, but comes short of calling the biblical text the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God. Like Buttrick, Lowry, and others, he believes that the Bible is an accurate recounting of the biblical writer's understanding of the Word of God for them.<sup>38</sup> The biblical writers, preachers themselves,

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<sup>37</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 8-10. See also, Walter Brueggemann, "Biblical Authority: A Personal Reflection," *Christian Century* 118, no. 1 (2001): 14-20. Buttrick states that preaching the Word of God is not dependent on the Bible but on its liberating power. David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

<sup>38</sup>Buttrick, *A Captive Voice*; Eugene Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997). Joseph Webb shows the connection between this foundational idea and the natural direction toward which it points preaching in *Preaching and the Challenge of Pluralism* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1998).

simply recorded their interpretations of God's message for those to whom they ministered. The preacher today is fortunate to have these examples which the early church canonized because they were an accurate reflection of what God wanted people to hear. Following their pattern, preachers are to conduct themselves in the same way today as they seek to preach. The message given in the biblical text was given to effect change in the lives of its hearers. Preachers should use the best communication methods to do the same. By removing authoritative language and restating the message in contemporary ways, preachers can be used by God as the source through which He can deliver His Word.

The method promoted by Haddon Robinson also centers on getting something heard. He argues that in recent years there has been a loss of respect for authority in general, and that loss has been felt in preaching specifically.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, preachers need to use different methods for communicating. One way to better insure a hearing is to use an inductive method that allows hearers to participate and therefore offers an important opportunity for the preacher to gain a hearing among them.<sup>40</sup> He believes that this method is especially suited to narrative passages, but may be applied to any genre of Scripture.<sup>41</sup> Like advocates of the New Homiletic, Robinson believes that a story method of preaching offers an excellent way of achieving the inductive goal.<sup>42</sup> After arguing for the use narrative sermons, he makes this final appeal to those who are thinking about using

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<sup>39</sup>Robinson and Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It*, 11.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 26. "With careful exegesis poetry, prophecy, wisdom literature, parables, and epistles may all be preached effectively from a first-person perspective."

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

narrative methods: “Try it once. You have nothing to lose but your boredom, and you have much to gain in presenting biblical truth in a fresh new way.”<sup>43</sup> His reference to the belief that there is much to gain is related to gaining a hearing.

Robinson’s method, like that of the New Homiletic, provides a needed reminder that preachers must keep their audiences in mind. The danger presented in his method is also the same. Methodologies for preaching that center on getting something heard, especially through a story or narrative method, may not connect the hearers with the biblical text. As Lowry rightly cautions, both deductive and inductive methods need to be careful. He states that “the danger of deductive preaching lies at the end of the continuum where a sermon becomes mere report. The danger of inductive preaching is at the other end of the continuum where matters are so open ended that people do not know what to do with the message.”<sup>44</sup> I would add that the danger extends beyond the application of the message to the fact that purely inductive methods do not insure that any specific message is heard.<sup>45</sup>

The impact of the final stream of narrative homiletics on preaching is the most difficult to ascertain. This difficulty is created by the fact that narrative is defined by its theological presuppositions rather than its homiletical structure. Nevertheless, its impact on preaching is similar to the other two. It centers on getting something done in, or experienced by, current hearers. Like the two methods above, there is an emphasis on the current reading or interpretation of Scripture for a particular community rather than on an

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>44</sup>Lowry, “The Revolution of Sermonic Shape,” 110-11.

<sup>45</sup>This statement refers to inductive methods which have as their goal the discovery of a message by participating audiences.

authoritative and unchanging message to be applied.

Since the church is still living out the biblical narrative, narrative styles of preaching are also the preferred method of getting the message heard. William Willimon joins the task of narrative preaching to narrative reading as follows: “Our great challenge, as epistolary preachers, is to renarrate Paul’s letters.”<sup>46</sup> The term “renarrate” is not used to indicate the translation of the story into a language for today, although Willimon states that “every preacher, . . . must construct, reconstruct, and imaginatively re-create the story and deliver it in some sort of dynamic equivalent.”<sup>47</sup> Instead, the goal is to translate the current situation into the ideas of the biblical narrative. One difficulty facing such a move is the fact that the Bible does not explicitly deal in detail with many of the historical issues faced by the church during the time in which the narrative was written. This difficulty does not go unnoticed by Willimon, who states that “the trouble is, only rarely, tantalizingly does Paul turn from the letter at hand to grant us a glimpse of the story behind the letter.”<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, this form of narrative preaching is reliant on the theological narrative represented in the text.

The distinction between times when the biblical narrative does explain the story of the church and when it does not is not evident in Michael Pasquarello’s presentation as he deals with preaching the narrative of Acts. He connects the present story of the church with that of the early church as a seamless continuation of the

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<sup>46</sup>William Willimon, “Preaching the Letters as Narrative,” in *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching*, 107.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

metanarrative presented through the entire Bible.<sup>49</sup> The difference between these two approaches serves as an example of the dominating desire to connect the current narrative with that of the past. In the end, however, much of that narrative connection must be imagined by the preacher. The impact is a homiletical process which recognizes the authoritative message of the biblical text only when our narrative intersects with its narrative.

Elements of these ideas are evident in the Emergent Church movement which also seeks to continue the narrative of the church in diverse settings. Although not necessarily committed to narrative homiletical structures, the Emergent Church movement is committed to a theologically narrative mindset. Michael Moynagh captures the mission and mode of the Emergent Church: “We’ll get a group of Christians together, express church in a way that we enjoy and invite others to come along.”<sup>50</sup> D. A. Carson summarizes Brian McLaren’s position as one that believes that the biblical narrative is rightly interpreted by those who are living in the narrative. The problem is “McLaren remains deeply suspicious of any appeal to ‘metanarrative,’ even the Bible’s metanarrative.”<sup>51</sup> In fact, Carson states that McLaren paints seven “pen portraits” of Jesus, each of which is the result of a particular reading of the biblical narrative.<sup>52</sup> This group appears to be growing rapidly. If this trend continues, those who read and preach

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<sup>49</sup>Michael Pasquarello, “Whose Story?” in *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching*.

<sup>50</sup>Michael Moynagh, *Emergingchurch.intro* (Grand Rapids: Monarch, 2004), 20.

<sup>51</sup>D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 165.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 159-62.

from this narrative theological perspective may become the loudest voice in defining narrative preaching. If this happens, it will still be identifiable by its focus on hearers as the starting point for reading and applying the biblical narrative.

### **Narrative Homiletics and the Church**

Narrative homiletics has impacted interpretation and preaching by emphasizing the role of hearers throughout the entire sermonic process. There is one final element of the impact of narrative homiletics that needs to be stated before suggestions for using narrative elements are made. Through narrative homiletical practices the church has been separated further from the biblical text as the Word of God.

This broad statement is qualified by the application of the definition of narrative preaching which is set forth in chapter 5: “A *narrative sermon* is a sermon that is formed in such a way that it follows the logic of induction by withholding its main idea until the end, and does not declare that main idea or a specific application of it so that hearers are empowered to discover and apply a message for themselves.” Methods for achieving such goals are limited. Since deductive methods present a proposition up front, the first goal of this definition is disrupted. Therefore, inductive approaches are encouraged. Craddock argued that this was indeed the best method for getting and maintaining a hearing. But he also saw it as the best method for removing authority from the preacher’s message. Some homileticians disagreed with Craddock. They argued that induction can indeed be an effective method, and locate authority in the Word of God preached.

Donald L. Hamilton responded to Craddock’s methodology in an article

entitled, "Preaching Inductively as One with Authority."<sup>53</sup> He states that "the key issue is not deduction or induction, but rather, which method can most effectively communicate God's truth in a particular sermon."<sup>54</sup> His method fits the first half of the definition for narrative preaching given above. But the last part of his definition for narrative preaching does not. Hamilton describes the "narrative/inductive" approach as follows: "This type of sermon tells a biblical story, or series of stories, and then concludes with a clearly stated propositional truth."<sup>55</sup> According to his definition, a narrative sermon would follow an inductive narrative form throughout most of the sermon, but would propositionally state the truth(s) of a message and its application toward the end.<sup>56</sup> The result is an impasse between these two definitions. Whereas the Old Homiletic believes that the Word of God must be proclaimed, the New Homiletic is built on the belief that biblical truths are not propositionally passed on but are experientially grasped.

One thing that distinguishes Craddock's method from others of the New Homiletic is the fact that he does not equate the inductive method with storytelling.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Donald L. Hamilton, "Preaching Inductively as One with Authority," *Preaching* 16, no. 2 (2000): 48-55. This is also indicative of Robinson's work on the subject in *Biblical Preaching*, see especially chapter 6, 115-31.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>56</sup>This is in line with the method put forth in Millard J. Erickson and James L. Heflin, *Old Wine in New Wineskins: Doctrinal Preaching in a Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). Robinson's method is similar in that application is to be made at the end of the message. Whereas, however, Erickson and Heflin state the necessity of propositional application, Robinson implies it.

<sup>57</sup>Richard Lischer, "The Limits of Story," *Interpretation* 38, no. 1 (1984): 26. Lischer comments, "Unlike these three (Steimle, Niedenthal, and Rice), Fred Craddock does not equate preaching with storytelling. Without sacrificing clarity or biblical power, Craddock has introduced induction and indirection as correctives to the traditional deductive, propositional form of sermons."

Nevertheless, Craddock's method fits the definition of narrative preaching given elsewhere. A natural result of these methods is the removal of the biblical text from the pulpit. In "The Limits of Story," Richard Lischer picks up on the fact that when narrative is overused it has a tendency to displace biblical teaching.<sup>58</sup>

The limits of narrative homiletical methods are evident in several areas of the church. First, biblical authority is lost. All preaching which separates hearers from the biblical text also separates them from Scripture's self-attesting claim of authority. This is not a concern for those who build their homiletical methods on neo-orthodox theological ideas. In fact, it is an accurate reflection of what they believe. However, for those who believe that the biblical text *is* the Word of God, sermons which do not connect the message directly with the biblical text do not carry any more authority than is reflected in the acceptance of the audience.<sup>59</sup> In *As One without Authority*, and *Overhearing the Gospel*, Craddock acknowledges some dependence on community knowledge in order to garner support for the sermon's authority. That support is not, however, dependent on the propositional nature of the biblical text. It is, instead, based on the general respect for biblical ideas inherent in many communities.<sup>60</sup> For many of those who build on Craddock's foundation, this aspect of authority has become less important.<sup>61</sup> As the

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<sup>58</sup>In fact, he notes that narrative fails on at least four fronts, stating that story "has its limits of usefulness whose transgression involves both theology and preaching in a reduced or distorted reading of human life and divine revelation. Those limits, as I see them, are aesthetic, ontological, theological, and socio-political." Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>59</sup>This is a perceived weakness in trying to apply Robinson's new work, which needs to be addressed within traditional homiletics.

<sup>60</sup>See elsewhere the discussions on Craddock's dependence on a "knowing community."

<sup>61</sup>Buttrick argues that the notion that preaching derives its authority from its connection with the biblical text is a "groundless notion of biblical authority." Buttrick, *A*



biblical text is removed from the pulpit and biblical authority is lost, a second impact becomes evident.

The second impact is related to personal spiritual growth. If the biblical text is not authoritative, and it is not taught from the pulpit, then a void in biblical knowledge is created among the people. Since it is impossible to quantify the amount of narrative preaching done on any given Sunday, it is also impossible to calculate the extent to which it has affected biblical literacy in the church. However, it can be stated with certainty that whenever this form of narrative preaching is being practiced, biblical teaching is not occurring during that time.

The loss of biblical teaching in the pulpit has shown up in a number of places. A recent national report has added credibility to these concerns. Ken Camp summarizes the report as follows: "A significant number of American teenagers are 'clueless' when it comes to a working knowledge of the Bible."<sup>62</sup> In an introductory section of the report, the following conclusion is given: "The good news is that a majority of American teens have a rudimentary knowledge of the Bible. However, substantial minorities lack even the most basic working knowledge of the Bible. . . . Even the majority of born-again and Evangelical teens appear to lack in-depth Bible knowledge."<sup>63</sup> George Barna has also

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*Captive Voice*, 30.

<sup>62</sup>Ken Camp, "Biblical Literacy Needed but Lacking among American teens," *The Baptist Standard* [on-line]; accessed 10 May 2005, available from <http://www.baptiststandard.com>; Internet.

<sup>63</sup>Bible Literacy Project, Inc., "What Do American Teens Know About the Bible?" *The Bible Literacy Report: What Do American Teens Need to Know and What Do They Know?* (New York: Bible Literacy Project, 2005), 25 [on-line]; accessed 10 June 2005, available from <http://www.bibleliteracy.org/Site/index2.htm>; Internet.

documented a decline in biblical knowledge and consistency in applying it.<sup>64</sup>

The void in biblical knowledge has, in turn, led to several concerns. One is a loss of spiritual growth. Some have argued that basic Bible knowledge has an effect on Christian behavior. Brian Richardson states that “there is a significant and positive correlation between an individual’s factual Bible knowledge and his expressed attitudes.”<sup>65</sup> His article argues cogently that discipleship programs which teach Bible knowledge are necessary for spiritual growth. “Cognitive outcomes may not be the ultimate goal, but they are vital and necessary steps. . . . A program of Christian education that fails at the point of communicating basic biblical facts fails at the very beginning of the teaching-learning process.”<sup>66</sup>

A second concern is correlative to the first, and has to do with the application of biblical truth to changing situations. If application alone is taught, listeners to whom the application does not speak have no message. If a story alone is given, listeners with whom it does not intersect are left without a message. If no propositional truth is taught from the biblical text, there is nothing from which to produce new application and there is no standard by which to measure answers to life’s questions. People need abstract truth tied to a definite canon along with concrete examples if they are going to make new applications in new situations.

The third impact of narrative homiletics relates to its effectiveness in church growth. Much of the motive for the New Homiletic centers on what it perceives to be

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<sup>64</sup>The Barna Group, “The Bible” and “Beliefs: General Religious” [on-line]; accessed 14 March 2005, available from <http://www.barna.org>; Internet.

<sup>65</sup>Brian Richardson, “Do Bible Facts Change Attitudes?” *Bibliotheca sacra* 140 (1983): 168.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 172.

acceptable ways of communicating in a changing world.<sup>67</sup> The struggle is certainly an important one, but many of the assessments made are based on false assumptions. One of those false assumptions is that people respond better to openness or doctrinal pluralism. In *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*, Thom Rainer makes the observation that the clarification of doctrine is the number one reason that formerly unchurched individuals remain in church.<sup>68</sup> At least part of the appeal for these formerly unchurched individuals was the certitude they had concerning where the church stood on doctrinal issues, and therefore why its members acted the way they did. This kind of conviction does not develop from heart felt applications but from expository biblical teaching.<sup>69</sup>

The current state of homiletics in the church is being impacted by narrative approaches. Albert Mohler writes, “many evangelicals are seduced by the proponents of topical and narrative preaching. The declarative force of Scripture is blunted by a demand for story, and the textual shape of the Bible is supplanted by topical considerations.”<sup>70</sup> When implementing narrative preaching, preachers are encouraged to focus hermeneutical and homiletical elements of the sermonic process on listeners. In the end, its greatest impact is a loss of the Bible in the pulpit. For all who claim an orthodox position on Scripture, this is simply unacceptable.

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<sup>67</sup>Robert S. Read describes the flow of this debate within the mind of the preacher in “Postmodernism and the Function of the New Homiletic in Post-Christendom Congregations,” *Homiletic* 20, no. 2 (1995): 1-13.

<sup>68</sup>Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched: And Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 109, 130-37.

<sup>69</sup>Rainer also shows a strong connection between biblical exposition and doctrinal certitude. *Ibid.*, 214-22.

<sup>70</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Expository Preaching and the Recovery of Christian Worship (Part Two)” [on-line]; accessed 10 August 2005, <http://www.albertmohler.com; Internet>, 1.

Preachers should not forget the importance of listeners. However, their first responsibility is to fulfill God's command to preach the Word.<sup>71</sup> Mohler rightly describes the authentic preaching of the Word of God as expository preaching, which he defines as "the presentation and application of the text of the Bible."<sup>72</sup> Such commitments do not necessitate a loss of relevance. Rainer quotes a successful pastor on the subject of relevance as follows: "I've heard some of the debate between biblical and relevant or expositional and relevant, but I've never felt like it was an either/or situation. It's ludicrous to say that you can't have relevant preaching if you're giving a good exposition of the text."<sup>73</sup>

### **A Cautious Use of Narrative**

Advocates of narrative homiletics are correct when they say that narrative methods are unimposing and that they can often add an element of interest which captivates the attention of the listeners. However, narrative preaching cannot fulfill the traditional understanding of the preacher's call to preach the Word of God. Narrative preaching displaces authority, separates the congregation from the biblical text, and is less effective over the long-haul. Traditional methodologies do not fail in these areas. When the Bible is viewed as the Word of God, messages seek to connect congregations with the text, and are placed under its authority. These methods are consistent with the biblical mandate and proven methods of communication.

The limitations of narrative preaching methodologies must be acknowledged,

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<sup>71</sup>Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, provides an excellent balance of both.

<sup>72</sup>Mohler, "Expository Preaching and the Recovery of Christian Worship (Part Two)," 1.

<sup>73</sup>Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*, 218.

and cautions related to these limitations must be heeded if narrative elements are going to be used in any form of preaching which holds to a traditional view of Scripture. As Bryan Chapell rightly states, “narrative is not enough when it is the only communication tool preachers bring to the homiletic.”<sup>74</sup> These observations give rise to three simple criteria for using narrative elements within methods of the Old Homiletic.

First, homiletical concerns must not be allowed to guide the hermeneutical process. Rather, hermeneutical principles and practices must precede homiletic processes and govern them. To avoid problems in this area, the hermeneutical presuppositions upon which biblical messages are developed must be stated with clarity. According to the Old Homiletic, the Bible is the Word of God, and the preacher’s call is to preach the Word. Authorial intent, rather than reader or community-response, must govern the quest for biblical meaning. Ramesh Richard presents an excellent example by stating his hermeneutical presuppositions in his definition of expository preaching, and then laying out a method which follows them closely.<sup>75</sup> In Richard’s method, the preacher does the work of exegesis first, and then seeks to develop a relevant message which is tied directly to the text. Only after the preacher has finished the task of determining what the biblical text says, is it appropriate to consider the form in which it will be presented. At this point the main concern for the preacher shifts to the task of proclamation. To be acceptable in form, the sermon must declare or proclaim the Word of God as it is presented in the biblical text. Narrative elements of communication may be used, restricted to the area of homiletics, insofar as they reflect the authoritative message of the text they represent.

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<sup>74</sup>Brian Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, rev. ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 191.

<sup>75</sup>Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 19.

Second, no element of the sermon should be allowed to displace the exposition of the biblical text. In *Preaching: The Centrality of Scripture*, Mohler writes that “preaching is itself a Scripture-founded event and moreover, as John Piper has suggested, a Scripture saturated event. From its beginning to its end, we are to preach the Word. Preaching cannot be severed from Scripture, if it is to be authentic Christian Preaching.”<sup>76</sup> Narrative elements that take up massive amounts of time or attention in a message without exposing a truth in the text or highlighting a truth already exposed in the text should be trimmed or removed. The goal is to preach the Word, and to preach it in a way that may be understood. For this task, both abstract and concrete elements are needed. Balance is a key concept in using propositional and narrative elements. Bryan Chapell states: “The theory that most closely corresponds to the Bible’s contours does not require an either/or choice between narrative and propositions, but rather recognizes the value of each to serve differing purposes in the communication process.”<sup>77</sup> Although it is important to maintain both abstract and concrete elements when communicating the truth, these elements are not equal in importance. Narrative preaching which does not employ propositional clarification may lead to confusion. What is said is more important in fulfilling the call to preach the Word than how it is said.<sup>78</sup>

This does not remove the preacher’s responsibility to engage the listeners. But it does place the use of propositional and narrative elements in a proper relationship with each other. Hershael York speaks of this balance when he states that the “goal of our

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<sup>76</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *Preaching: The Centrality of Scripture* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 11.

<sup>77</sup>Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, 190.

<sup>78</sup>See elsewhere the discussion of Augustine’s and Chrysostom’s comments on the use of rhetoric.

preaching should be *engaging exposition*. The preacher of the Word should not settle for being a commentator or a communicator. His passion must be to preach the Word in such a way that he accurately teaches the meaning of the text and leads his audience to discover its implications for their life situations.”<sup>79</sup>

Finally, the sermon must carry the authority of the Word of God within it. But to carry the authority of the Word of God within it, a sermon must also expose the biblical text. On the issue of authority, Mohler states that “in the final analysis, the ultimate authority for preaching is the authority of the Bible as the Word of God. Without this authority, the preacher stands naked and silent before the congregation and the watching world.”<sup>80</sup> In fact, the Bible is the only source of the preacher’s authority. On it, the preacher’s work stands or falls. Mohler’s comments are again accurate and to the point as he states, “If the Bible is not the word of God, the preacher is involved in an act of self-delusion or professional pretension.”<sup>81</sup>

It is clear from this study that there is still a great deal of confusion over the definition of the term narrative as it relates to homiletical methods. A definition has been offered in light of current conversations on narrative preaching. The greatest difference in narrative preaching methodologies has to do with the hermeneutical presuppositions undergirding the different methods. Proponents of the New Homiletic emphasize the experiential nature of narrative in keeping with a neo-orthodox understanding of the

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<sup>79</sup>Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 15.

<sup>80</sup>Mohler, “Expository Preaching and the Recovery of Christian Worship (Part Three), 2.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*

Word of God. Robinson emphasizes the structural advantages of narrative in gaining and keeping the interest of hearers during the exposition of a biblical message. The last group defines narrative according to theological conventions, and seeks to read and preach from the perspective of a community of believers who are a part of the ongoing narrative.

When all is said and done, none of the methods which are devoted to a comprehensive narrative homiletic methodology have shown that they are able to fulfill the role of preaching the Word of God as defined by the Old Homiletic. This may fit with their hermeneutical and homiletical presuppositions. However, it has been shown that these presuppositions do not fit with the historical or biblical mandate to preach the Word. Robinson's method is close, and may with further qualification accomplish the goal of preaching. His present work shows only how a message derived from a biblical text may be delivered rather than how the text itself may be exposed in an expository message.

Based on this study, I do not believe that narrative preaching as a complete or foundationally dominant part of any homiletical methodology can fulfill the role of preaching. It is, therefore, recommended that homiletical methods use narrative elements of communication only in conjunction with propositional expository elements. In so doing, the richness of narrative is helpful in gaining and maintaining a hearing without jeopardizing the hermeneutical process, and neglecting the exposition of the authoritative biblical text.

### **Using Narrative in the Future**

It has been shown that narrative preaching is not capable as a complete or foundationally dominant part of any homiletical methodology of fulfilling the command to preach the Word. Nevertheless, it is an important and useful element of



communication, and it has an important part to play in homiletics. Future homiletical methodologies, which are based on a biblically accurate and traditionally accepted hermeneutic, will seek to use both propositional and narrative elements of communication. By understanding their strengths and weaknesses, a properly balanced approach can be formed.

Propositional statements are a necessary element of biblical preaching which seeks to preach the Word of God. Using propositional elements requires careful study of the biblical text, and demands the careful expression of the truths discovered during the exegetical process. When propositional statements are demanded in the exegetical process, preachers are forced to pinpoint the truth discovered, and state it in a manner that can be passed on to others. These clearly stated propositional statements may then be utilized during the sermon to alleviate confusion for the hearers. The audience should be engaged in the process, but there should never be any doubt about the truth being taught. Finally, propositional statements must be tested against the biblical text, which is our only God-given standard for truth. Statements made must be clearly linked to the biblical text, or the audience cannot be expected to recognize them as the authoritative Word of God.

Narrative elements are also important in the communication process. They are not, however, absolutely necessary for achieving the goal of preaching. Unlike propositional statements, other forms of explanation, illustration, and motivation, such as poetry and hyperbole, may be used in their place. Their value is rightly recognized when they are connected with propositional statements. Narrative elements are helpful in clarifying the propositional truths presented, but cannot by themselves perform the task. God can and does use narrative elements to stimulate responses. But he calls preachers to preach the Word. Finally, they offer examples of real life issues and ideas that may help

in the personal application of propositional truths.

Whether or not a deductive method or inductive method is used, propositional elements must be present in biblical preaching. Inductive methods might encourage narrative approaches, but forms which use these elements must still proclaim, with clarity, the Word of God. Preaching the Word demands propositional statements. Narrative elements should be used in both deductive and inductive methods for clarification, encouragement, and to help with personalized application.

By using homiletical models based on these principles, biblical preaching will expose the truth of God from a particular text. It will explain and apply that truth using propositional statements, which are clarified and applied, using other elements such as narrative. When these messages are preached based on the accurate interpretation of the Word of God, then it can be said that the Word of God has been preached.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE HOMILETICS ON INTERPRETATION AND PREACHING THE BIBLE

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006  
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This dissertation examines the impact of contemporary narrative homiletics on interpretation and preaching. Chapter 1 provides the groundwork for the study by laying out the thesis and methodology to be followed.

Chapter 2 defines hermeneutics and homiletics from a traditional, historical perspective. The goal of this chapter is not an in-depth study of these fields but the basic presuppositions underlying each as they have historically worked together.

Chapter 3 builds on the historical relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics in traditional methods of preaching.

Chapter 4 examines the shift in homiletical methods which became known as the New Homiletic. Specifically, this chapter examines the foundational work of Fred B. Craddock in setting forth a predominant model for preaching in mainline preaching today.

Chapter 5 defines narrative homiletics according to three current narrative homiletical streams.

Chapter 6 offers a conclusion for the study, stating the impact of narrative homiletics on interpretation, preaching, and the church. Finally, suggestions for the future use of narrative elements in traditional homiletics are offered.

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