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THE USE OF IMAGINATION FOR EXPOSITORY
HERMENEUTICS AND HOMILETICS

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THE USE OF IMAGINATION FOR EXPOSITORY
HERMENEUTICS AND HOMILETICS

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To

Pung Eun Kim and Eun Soo Park,

who show me sacred love,

and

Thijs and Lia Van Daalen,

who show me sacrificial love,

and

Lydia Kim-van Daalen,

who shows me splendid love,

and

Jubilee Yaebit, Joella Yaena, and JoshuaYaehim,

who show me special love

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
PREFACE	ix
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Necessity of the Study	6
Hermeneutical Necessity	7
Homiletical Necessity	8
The Challenging Nature of the Study of Imagination in Expository Preaching	11
Thesis	13
Methodology and Direction	14
2. ELEMENTS OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING AND DEFINITION OF IMAGINATION	17
Introduction	17
Definition of Expository Preaching	17
Author-Centered Hermeneutics	21
A Brief History of Author-Centered Hermeneutics.	22
Three Major Components of Interpretation	31
Author-Centered Hermeneutics and Expository Preaching	35
Audience-Focused Homiletics	40
Receptivity to the Holy Spirit	43
Exegeting the Audience	45
Logical Appeal (Logos)	45

Chapter	page
Emotional Appeal (Pathos)	47
Ethical Appeal (Ethos)	50
Definition and Description of Imagination	52
A Brief History of Imagination	53
Negative Attitudes toward Imagination	57
Two Aspects of Imagination	61
The Use of Imagination in Expository Preaching	64
Imagination in Expository Preaching Further Explored	66
Conclusion	69
3. SURVEY AND EVALUATION OF THE NEW HOMILETIC METHODOLOGY OF IMAGINATION	71
Introduction	71
Imagination in New Homiletic Preaching	72
Paul Scott Wilson and Imagination	77
Wilson's Imagination in Preaching	77
The Methodology of Wilson's Imagination in Preaching	82
Critical Evaluation of Wilson in Light of Expository Preaching	93
Imagination and Exegesis	94
Imagination and the Meaning of a Text	97
Imagination through Juxtaposition	98
Imagination and Hermeneutical Movements	99
Summary of Wilson's Use of Imagination	102
Thomas H. Troeger and Imagination	103
Troeger's Imagination in Preaching	104
The Methodology of Troeger's Imagination in Preaching	105

Chapter	page
Critical Evaluation of Troeger in Light of Expository Preaching	112
Imagination through the Senses	116
Imagination through Bodily Imitation	114
Imagination through Story Telling	115
Imagination to Inform Theology	116
Imagination as Function of the Spirit	118
Summary	119
Conclusion	121
4. IMAGINATION FOR AUTHOR- CENTERED HERMENEUTICS	123
Introduction	123
Hermeneutics and Exegesis	125
Imagination for the Process of Expository Preaching	126
Spirit: Imagination Informed by the Holy Spirit	127
Setting: Imagination in Historical-Cultural Analysis	131
Syntax: Imagination in Lexical and Syntactical Analysis	134
Structure: Imagination in Literary Analysis	135
Significance: Imagination in the Implicit Sense of Meaning.	141
Boundaries of Imagination for Author-Centered Hermeneutics	143
Subject to Grammatical and Historical Exegesis	144
Subject to Author-Intended Meaning	147
Subject to Evangelical Theology	147
Subject to Historical Fact	149
Conclusion	150
5. IMAGINATION FOR AUDIENCE- FOCUSED HOMILETICS	152

Chapter	page
Introduction	152
Imagination for the Process of Expository Homiletics	154
Imagination in Proposition	154
Imagination in Form	157
Imagination in Explanation	162
Imagination in Application	164
Imagination in Writing	167
Imagination in Presentation	170
Boundaries of Imagination for Audience-Focused Homiletics	172
Subject to Biblical Logos	172
Subject to Biblical Ethos.	174
Subject to Biblical Pathos.	176
Conclusion	177
6. CONCLUSION	180
Introduction	180
Suggestions for Further Research	190
Conclusion	191
BIBLIOGRAPHY	192

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Transposition from text to sermon concerns	86
2. Law and gospel concerns.....	88

PREFACE

One important memory of my youth is my parents' prayers. For as long as I can remember they have been attending the Early Morning Prayer Meetings. And they continue to do so. I still do not know how they can pray such a long time every morning. I am sure one of their prayers was for my dissertation, and it has been answered. I give full honor to my parents, Pung Eun Kim and Eun Soo Park. I would describe my parent-in-law, Thijs and Lia Van Daalen, as a brave couple, because they let me marry their precious beautiful first daughter. When I asked for her hand in marriage, I was a returning missionary without a certain future. I am not sure if I could do the same were a strange guy to ask permission to marry my precious daughter. Not only are they brave, they have also sincerely and generously supported our Ph.D. journey. On many occasions they made "mission trips" to us, gave us enormous joy, and fixed what was broken in our house. Thank you, Papa and Mama; your mission is now done. Furthermore, I am indebted to my brother, Yonghan Kim, my sister-in-law, Sungha Kim, and my niece, SongB. For the fifteen years of my journey outside of Korea as missionary and student, they took care of our parents and supported us greatly. I also want to thank my brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, Rik and Mathea Bikker, and Dirk and Lubbine van Daalen. I so much appreciate their sincere support and cheers along the way. Thank you to my five nieces and two nephews for praying for us.

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I have served two churches during time of study. For two years I had the thrilling experience to be the interim pastor of Hanmaeum Korean Baptist Church. I had the privilege to work with a great staff, deacons, and saints. Special thanks to you, my staff: Sung Keun Bang, Jeungmo Yoo, Sangmin Park, Suenghwan Oh, Yohan Kye, Joongeun Lee, Junkyung Kim, Gan Jung, Junghyun Choi. They are not only partners in ministry, but dear brothers as well. I would also like to give thanks to Immanuel Korean Assembly of God Church, all church members, and especially all youth group members, most of whom have now become young adults. I also thank St. Matthews Baptist Church and Jeja Church pastor Eum Dea Sung for their support and prayer.

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Thank you to our precious children, whom I love dearly. They are part of my

Ph.D. Jubilee was born when I entered the Ph.D. program. Joella was born when I started writing my dissertation, Joshua was born when I had hoped to have finished my studies. And we are expecting our fourth gift from God two months after graduation, Lord willing. I will never forget Jubilee's first prayer, when she was just two years old: "I pray for Papa's dissertation."

I love my wife, who has been on this adventure with me as a missionary, student, and minister. Without her love, sacrifice, encouragement, and joyful heart I would not be who I am or where I am right now. I love her so much.

Finally, I give all glory, honor, and power to my Lord, Jesus Christ, who died for me. Jesus Christ, I love you, Lord. You are my God, Father, and Glory.

Barnabas Youn Soo Kim

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

John A. Broadus's *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* served as a standard preaching text book for more than a century.¹ In this book, Broadus, the well-known biblical expositor and homiletician, claims that the use of imagination is an essential element of preaching:

This noble faculty is possessed in a high degree by every true orator. Without it, a man may be instructive and convincing, may influence others by his practical energy, his resolution and determination, but he can never exert the peculiar power of eloquence. A preacher, without imagination, may be respected for his sound sense, may be loved for his homely goodness, but he will not move a congregation, he will not be a power in the community.²

In short, Broadus contended that preachers who do not have the power of imagination are deficient in their task of proclaiming God's Word. Henry Ward Beecher, the founder of the influential Lyman Beecher Lecture series, argued even more urgently that imagination is "the most important of all the elements that go to make the preacher."³

¹Thomas R. McKibbens Jr., *The Forgotten Heritage: A Lineage of Great Baptist Preaching* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 188. Broadus is widely respected. See, for example, Guerric DeBona, *Fulfilled in Our Hearing: History and Method of Christian Preaching* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 14. See also the homiletician McClure, who interprets preaching through Derrida's theory of deconstruction and who admits Broadus's book is "the most widely-read preaching text of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* [St. Louis: Chalice, 2001], 69).

²John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, ed. Edwin Charles Dargan (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1903), 421.

³Henry Ward Beecher, *Yale Lectures on Preaching*, vol. 1, *The Personal Elements which Bear an Important Relation to Preaching* (New York: J. B. Ford & Company, 1872; repr., Boston: The Pilgrim, 1902), 109 (page references are to the reprint edition). See also the following authors of the Lyman Beecher Lectures for an emphasis on imagination in preaching: Batsell Barrett Baxter, *The Heart of the Yale Lectures*

Imagination continues to be considered an important facet of preaching. In 1972, the influential evangelical preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones stated that of all aspects of preaching, imagination is “most important and most helpful.”⁴ In addition, John Stott asserted that “the power of imagination is one of God’s best and most distinctive gifts to mankind.”⁵ Haddon Robinson, a well-known proponent of expository preaching, designated imagination the “half-brother to interpretation because both relate to the text. In interpretation, we determine what the passage means from what the passage says. In the same way, imagination goes one step beyond the biblical facts and yet stays tied to them.”⁶

Imagination thus seems to take a prominent place in expository preaching. However, what exactly is imagination? Many theologians, authors, and philosophers have attempted to define the broad and multifaceted concept of imagination. Suffice it to say that this is not an easy task, but a brief introduction to the concept is in order here.

(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1947), 76-81; George A. Buttrick, *Jesus Came Preaching: Christian Preaching in the New Age* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), 155-56; Jowett John H, *The Preacher: His Life and Work* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), 122-25; Robert William Dale, *Nine Lectures on Preaching* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1878), 44-58; James Edward Freeman, *The Ambassador* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), 199-205; Nathaniel J. Burton, and Richard Burton, *In Pulpit and Parish: Yale Lectures on Preaching* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), 51-87; Charles Reynolds Brown, *The Art of Preaching: The Forty-Eighth Series of Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching in Yale University* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 142-54; John Kelman, *The War and Preaching: The Forty-Fifth Series of the Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching, Yale University* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1919), 166-69; Walter Russell Bowie, *The Renewing Gospel: The Yale Lectures on Preaching* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 9-10.

⁴D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 235.

⁵John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 238.

⁶Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 151.

Though many different definitions could be given,⁷ in ordinary discourse imagination is commonly defined as the “capacity for seeing things in one’s head . . . ‘the mind’s eye’.”⁸ Components of imagination include mental imagery, counterfactual thinking, symbolic representation, novelty, and creative output.⁹ Leland Ryken adds, “[Imagination is] the

⁷Beaney, for example, explains how Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant view imagination; “For Aristotle, the imagination—or *phantasia*—was a kind of bridge between sensation and thought, supplying the images or ‘phantasms’ without which thought could not occur. Descartes argued that the imagination was not an essential part of the mind, since it dealt with images in the brain whose existence—unlike that of the mind—could be doubted. Kant, on the other hand, held that the imagination was fundamental to the human mind, not only bringing together our sensory and intellectual faculties but also acting in creative ways, a conception that was to blossom in Romanticism and find poetic expression in the works of Coleridge and Wordsworth” (Michael Beaney, *Imagination and Creativity* [Milton Keynes, UK: The Open University, 2005], 1). Stevenson describes imagination in conceptions according to the functions and character of imagination: (1) the ability to think of something not presently perceived, but spatio-temporally real. (2) the ability to think of whatever one acknowledges as possible in the spatio-temporal world. (3) the liability to think of something that the subject believes to be real, but which is not. (4) the ability to think of things that one conceives of as fictional. (5) the ability to entertain mental images. (6) the ability to think of anything at all. (7) the non-rational operations of the mind, that is, those explicable in terms of causes rather than reasons. (8) The ability to form perceptual beliefs about public objects in space and time. (9) the ability to sensuously appreciate works of art or objects of natural beauty without classifying them under concepts or thinking of them as useful. (10) the ability to create works of art that encourage such sensuous appreciation. (11) the ability to appreciate things that are expressive or revelatory of the meaning of human life. (12) the ability to create works of art that express something deep about the meaning of life (Leslie Stevenson, "Twelve Conceptions of Imagination," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 [July 2003]: 238).

⁸In addition to this general definition, Brann also provides a philosophical and psychological definition: “In philosophy, the core-definition of the imagination is that it is a power mediating between the senses and the reason by virtue of representing perceptual objects without their presence. In psychology, the preference is for defining the class of representations, that is, the mental imagery, rather than the faculty. Mental imagery is a quasi-sensory or quasi-perceptual experience with occurs in the absence of the usual external stimuli and which may be expected to have behavioral consequences different from those attendant on their sensory counterpart” (Eva T. H. Brann, *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance* [Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991], 24).

⁹Ilona Roth, "Imagination," in *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). 443-44.

human faculty that allows us to create something new, to see or feel something familiar in a fresh way, to express an old truth in a new manner, to make a new application of truth to life . . . its goal . . . is to create a stir and growth everywhere.”¹⁰

Sadly, despite the fact that imagination seems to take a prominent place, relatively few evangelical preachers and authors have endeavored to provide an extensive theory and methodology for the use of imagination in expository preaching.¹¹ Warren Wiersbe serves as an exception to this unfortunate situation. His book *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination*¹² is a helpful resource; however, he does not provide scholarly arguments, theories, and methods for the use of imagination.¹³

Scholars and preachers of the New Homiletic, on the other hand, have written

¹⁰Leland Ryken, *The Christian Imagination: Essays on Literature and the Arts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 37. Ryken quotes the term “a stir and growth everywhere,” from Matthew Arnold. See Matthew Arnold, *Essays Literary and Critical* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1866; repr., Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2007), 4 (page references are to the reprint edition).

¹¹Admittedly, several evangelical preachers and theologians have written on imagination, but with a different emphasis. Leland Ryken, professor of English at Wheaton College, provides insight regarding the use of imagination for the field of Christian literature and art. See Leland Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination: Thinking Christianly about the Arts* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1989); Leland Ryken, *Windows to the World: Literature in Christian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000); and Leland Ryken, "The Bible as Literature Part 4, 'With Many Parables': The Imagination as Means of Grace," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147, no 588 (1990): 387-98. Systematic theologian Scorgie argues for a baptized imagination for the use of hermeneutics and the meditative reading Scripture. See Glen A. Scorgie, "Hermeneutics and the Meditative Use of Scripture: The Case for a Baptized Imagination," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001): 271-84. Marcus Leeds wrote a dissertation regarding the evangelical use of imagination. See Marcus Robert Leeds, "Imagination as a Handmaiden to Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal of the Role of Imagination in Theological Methodology" (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005).

¹²Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1994).

¹³*Ibid.*, 9.

extensively on this subject and have developed both theory and method with regard to imagination in the hermeneutical and homiletical process.¹⁴ In particular, Charles Rice's *Interpretation and Imagination*¹⁵ advanced the development of thought regarding imagination in preaching. Two homileticians in particular have contributed valuable insights in this area. The first is Paul Scott Wilson, professor of homiletics at Emmanuel College. Arguing that imagination is "inspired by faith and faith is strengthened by imagination,"¹⁶ he elucidates the role of imagination in the areas of hermeneutics and homiletics. He is apparently a pioneer in writing a book fully devoted to the concept of imagination in preaching. The second important figure is Thomas H. Troeger, professor of Christian communication at Yale Divinity School. Troeger focuses mainly on the importance of imagination for the creation of a sermon, and offers seven helpful steps concerning this process.¹⁷

These authors, however, have moved away from the traditional use of propositional logic¹⁸ and argumentation in preaching, instead emphasizing the creation of

¹⁴See, for example, Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 77-97; David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 113-26; Eugene L. Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 100-106; Richard L. Eslinger, *Narrative Imagination: Preaching the Worlds that Shape Us* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

¹⁵Charles L. Rice, *Interpretation and Imagination: The Preacher and Contemporary Literature*, The Preacher's Paperback Library, ed. Edmund A. Steimle (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970).

¹⁶Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 17.

¹⁷Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990); Thomas H. Troeger, *Creating Fresh Images for Preaching: New Rungs for Jacob's Ladder*, More Effective Preaching Series (Valley Forge: Judson, 1982).

¹⁸Discovering the central proposition of the biblical text is one of the essential elements of expository preaching. This dissertation suggests that one of the boundaries for the evangelical use of imagination is to submit imagination to the central proposition.

an affective experience for the audience of a sermon;¹⁹ thus, their theory and method cannot simply be implemented by those who hold to an expository, author-oriented approach. The field of contemporary expository preaching, therefore, is in need of advancement in this area. Consequently, the aim of this dissertation is to contribute to the field of expository preaching by evaluating current methods and developing a methodology for the use of imagination in expository hermeneutics and homiletics.

Necessity of the Study of Imagination for Expository Preaching

Expository preaching is based upon the belief that God's Word is best understood and applied by discerning the author's intention in any given passage and consequently conveying that intention through the preached message. A proper understanding of hermeneutical and homiletical principles is essential in this process. Though evangelical preachers acknowledge the value of imagination, they tend to see its worth merely at the end of the process of sermon preparation, especially in connection with illustrations; they seem to ignore it in most other facets of expository preaching.²⁰ Wiersbe criticizes this tendency:

Because many preachers (and some who teach preachers) have forgotten that basic fact [that imagination is a vital aspect of life], hermeneutics has become analyzing, homiletics has become organizing, and preaching has become catechizing. The sermon is a logical outline, a lecture buttressed with theology, that majors on explanation and application but ignores visualization. *We have forgotten that the bridge between the mind and the will is the imagination, and that truth isn't really*

¹⁹Robert S. Reid, "Postmodernism and the Function of the New Homiletic in Post-Christendom Congregations," *Homiletic* 20, no. 2 (1995): 7.

²⁰For example, the expository homiletician McDill claims that "creativity in the preparation of expository sermons is a special challenge due to the high regard for the place of the text. An examination of three phases of the preparation process indicates that creative expression is only appropriate in the final stage when the design of the sermon is being planned." See Wayne McDill, "Creativity in Expository Sermon Preparation," *The Website of Wayne McDill*, <http://www.waynemcdill.net/?article=16/> (accessed November 7, 2010).

*learned until it's internalized.*²¹

We may have even forgotten that theology itself, the study of God, necessarily encourages the study of imagination, since God is both its origin and its creator. For this reason Ryken argues that “the Bible and the Christian faith . . . sanction the imagination as a valid form of knowing and expressing truth. God Himself is an imaginer. . . . Christians who believe that God created the world need no apology for the imagination other than the character and work of God.”²² Accordingly, Abraham Kuyper argued: “As image-bearer of God, man possesses the possibility both to create something beautiful, and to delight in it.”²³ God reveals himself thus as a God with magnificent imagination to the people he created so that they can image God as they use their imaginative faculty to understand, apply and effectively pass on his word. These statements seem to suggest that a study of imagination is important for both hermeneutics and homiletics.

Hermeneutical Necessity

First, imagination is essential for the hermeneutical process. Scripture abounds with imagination. Clyde S. Kilby, the late English professor at Wheaton College, claims that “the Bible is, in the finest sense, the most imaginative book ever written.”²⁴ The Bible’s authors were inspired to write this way in order to help people understand God’s truth in a way that would impress it on their hearts.²⁵ As Ryken points out, “Truth does

²¹Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination*, 24-25.

²²Ryken, *Windows to the World*, 57.

²³Abraham Kuyper, *Lecture on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 142.

²⁴Clyde S. Kilby, *Christianity and Aesthetics* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1961), 19.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 25. Kilby writes, “The Bible comes to us in an artistic form which is often sublime, rather than as a document of practical, expository prose, strict in outline like a textbook, and carefully unfigurative and unsymbolic. . . . Is it not equally wrong to handle the Scripture unaesthetically as to handle it untruthfully?” (*ibid.*, 19-21).

not come to us solely through our reason and intellect. It comes to us both ways in the Bible, which in some places is factual and abstract and theological in its approach to truth, and sometimes is imaginary and concrete in its approach.”²⁶ So in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, imagination is used in abundance: metaphors, imagery, symbolism, and parables are spread throughout the different biblical genres. Given that hermeneutics endeavors to understand the meaning of God’s word as the authors intended it, preachers have the grand responsibility to understand the various types and meanings of imagination. Furthermore, the different genres need to be read and interpreted with proper imagination in order to get a picture of the original context, so that the text may be understood as richly and fully as possible. The warning of the eminent British congregational preacher Robert William Dale needs to be heeded:

If the imaginative faculty is too sluggish to make the facts which are the vehicles of a large part of Divine revelation real and alive to us, we shall read two-thirds of the Old Testament and a third of the New with very languid interest; we shall fail to discover the truths and laws which the facts illustrate, and our hearts will remain untouched by the story. Even the epistles—and the epistles which are most exclusively doctrinal—will fail to convey to us their true meaning, unless we are able, by an effort of the imagination, to reproduce to ourselves the circumstances, the habits of thought, the moral and spiritual perils of the people to whom they were written, and the personal character and idiosyncrasies of the apostolic writers. . . . There is hardly a page of Holy Scripture which will not become more intelligible to us if we read it with an active imagination.²⁷

Studying and using imagination, therefore, will increase effective hermeneutics.

Homiletical Necessity

Second, imagination is vitally important for homiletics. Russell D. Moore correctly points out the importance of the relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics:

Sometimes preachers bore because they don’t understand the nature of Scripture. The Bible, after all, captures not only the intellect, but the affections, the

²⁶Ryken, *Windows to the World*, 61.

²⁷Dale, *Nine Lectures on Preaching*, 51-52.

conscience, the imagination. That's why the canon includes stories and parables, poetry and proverbs, letters and visions. Dull preaching often translates the imagination-gripping variety of Scripture into the boring tedium of an academic discourse or the boring banality of a "how-to" manual.²⁸

Moore's criticism addresses the fact that though preachers may be able to communicate the theological message correctly, often they fall significantly short of transmitting the vibrant and rich exposition of the original text which greatly decreases homiletical effectiveness. In the first place imagination is important in the preparation of a message. As homileticians prepare their sermons, they need to be faithful not only to the meaning of the text, but also to the beauty and richness of the words of Scripture. Second, the use of imagination is important in the actual delivery of a message. The words chosen to convey the meaning of the text need to appeal to the audience's imagination, in ways similar to those of Paul.²⁹ Furthermore, understanding of the imaginative faculty of the audience is important, to comprehend and make use of the ways in which listeners, through the use of their own imagination, seek to apply the message to their lives.³⁰

In short, there is a homiletical gap that exists between the preacher's understanding of a text and his audience.³¹ Reformed systematic theologian Sinclair Ferguson argues that imaginative creativity "bridges the distance between the truth of the

²⁸Russell D. Moore, "The Devil Is a Boring Preacher: The High Stakes of Dull Sermons," *Moore to the Point*, April 14, 2009, <http://www.russellmoore.com/2009/04/14/the-devil-is-a-boring-preacher-the-high-stakes-of-dull-sermons/> (accessed August 10, 2010).

²⁹Leland Ryken, "Epistle," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Tremper Longman, Leland Ryken, and Jim Wilhoit, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 243-44.

³⁰J. Duvall, Terry G. Carter, and J. Hays, *Preaching God's Word: A Hands-on Approach to Preparing, Developing, and Delivering the Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 144-45.

³¹O. Wesley Allen Jr., *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach to Proclamation and Preaching* (Louisville: WJK, 2005), 12.

Word of God and the lives of those to whom they speak,”³² which is crucial to ensure the audience will personalize and internalize the message so that their lives can be changed.³³ This creativity is all the more important in the light of a generation that is flooded by and participates in virtual worlds.³⁴ Fresh and contemporary use of imagination in the preparation and delivery of the message may be needed to help today’s audience apply the truths of Scripture to their own lives. The homiletical necessity of using imagination is, therefore, also an evangelistic one. In order to preach the gospel it is important to know how to access the minds of those listening so that they will come to know the truth.

In short, evangelicals have the important and urgent task to discover and demonstrate how imagination can be used in the service of the proclamation of God’s Word. Expository preachers will be more effective in the delivery of their sermons when

³²Sinclair Ferguson, "Preaching to the Heart," in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002), 209. Furthermore, though their philosophical foundations for preaching are different, the expository preacher Stott and the New Homiletician Craddock point to a gap between the biblical text and contemporary life. Stott perceives the preacher as the metaphorical bridge-builder who can bridge this gap. See Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 137-38. Craddock argues that the preacher should preach inductively in order to fill the geographical, linguistic, psychological, cosmological and chronological gap between the Ancient Near East and life today. See Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 117.

³³Bonhoeffer says, “Do not ask ‘How shall I pass this on?’ but, ‘What does it say to me?’ Then ponder this Word long in your heart until it has gone right into you and taken possession of you” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Way to Freedom*, vol. 2, *Letters, Lectures and Notes 1935-1939: From the Collected Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden [New York: Harper & Row, 1966], 59). See also, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978), 83.

³⁴William A. Dyrness, professor of theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, poignantly expresses, “The contemporary generation has been raised and nourished by images; it has an increasingly visual imagination. Regardless of whether one considers this good or bad, for this generation, aesthetics counts more than epistemology,” and he continues to say that “it is possible that we might actually win the battle of words but lose the battle of images. And losing that battle could well cost us this generation (William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001], 20-21).

they utilize the different aspects of imagination in the various facets of the homiletical process.³⁵

The Challenging Nature of the Study of Imagination in Expository Preaching

As mentioned before, most expository preachers value imagination. However, whereas New Homiletic scholars and preachers have developed their thinking about the subject, only a few evangelical scholars have addressed the topic in detail. The most likely reason for this fact is that imagination is an evasive concept, which could lead to subjective interpretation of the text.³⁶ This is especially problematic to evangelical Christianity, whose hallmark is belief in the Bible as the Word of God. This Word, being the absolute truth, ought not to be tampered with. However, the apparent problem of imagination is that it does not describe the truth in a straightforward manner; it tries to get at this truth through the subjective thoughts and experiences of people. The very nature of imagination supposes a world without limitations. In one's imagination anything is possible. This seemingly contradicts the expository principle that each text has one fixed and author-intended meaning. Understandably, using such a tool as imagination, that not only passes through but is transformed by the finite human mind, leads to a potentially subjective understanding and application of God's Word. Evangelicals caution against

³⁵Vines and Shaddix argue that the possession of imagination divides between a good and average preacher. See Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 295.

³⁶Kearny explains that "the most compelling reason for the censure of imagination in the mainstream tradition of Western philosophy was the suspicion that it threatened the natural order of being. Many classical and medieval thinkers considered imagination an unreliable, unpredictable and irreverent faculty which could juggle impiously with the accredited distinctions between beings and non-being, turning things into their opposites, making absent things present, impossibilities possible. Or, as Thomas Aquinas observed in a resonant phrase, imagination makes 'everything other than it is'" (Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-modern* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998], 3).

subjectivism.³⁷ Without boundaries and a plumb line, imagination can be used for the wrong purposes that deviate from the truth of God's word, such as the creation of new facts, allegorical use, or the denial of the historicity of actual facts. Lloyd-Jones astutely points out this danger:

The danger is that imagination tends to run away with us and one can easily cross the line from which it has been helpful, to that point, once more, where it draws attention to itself and you have lost contact with the Truth which gave origin to it. In the end it is the imagination, and your statement of what you have seen with your imagination, that influences the people rather than the Truth.³⁸

However, as Bonhoeffer correctly argued, no matter how you look at it, "the objective truth of God's word can only be heard through the subjectivity of our words."³⁹ This does not mean that human subjectivity becomes predominantly important in the process of interpreting the Bible, nor does it mean that the historical-grammatical methodology of interpretation should be ignored. Rather, it emphasizes the fact that it is important to take into account that each person uniquely receives and interprets that what he hears.

Despite the subjective nature and the consequent potential misuses of imagination, ignoring or not using imagination is not just unfortunate; it has a negative

³⁷In his article "Hermeneutics and the Meditative Use of Scripture," 272, Scorgie presents two examples of evangelicals defending against subjectivism. J. I. Packer responds to the challenge of Neo-Orthodoxy. See J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken*, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979), 80-82. Kevin J. Vanhoozer answers the challenge of Deconstructionism. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

³⁸Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 236.

³⁹This is Wilson's paraphrase of Bonhoeffer in Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 28: Bonhoeffer says, "Two things must be said here with equal emphasis: 'I could not preach if I did not know that I were speaking the *Word of God*'; and: 'I could not preach did I not know that *I* were not speaking the Word of God.' Human impossibility and God's promise are one and the same" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, trans. Edwin H. Robinson [London: Collins, 1966]), 53).

effect on the preaching of God's Word that seeks to save people. Kilby points out this danger. He says,

Evangelical Christians have had one of the purest of motives and one of the worst of outcomes. The motive is never to mislead by the smallest fraction of an iota in the precise nature of salvation, to live it and state it in its utter purity. But the unhappy outcome has too often been to elevate the cliché. The motive is that the gospel shall not be misunderstood, not sullied, not changed in jot or tittle. The outcome has often been merely the reactionary, static and hackneyed.⁴⁰

Finding a remedy to the potential subjectivistic misuse of imagination is, therefore, imperative so that this tool can once again be used in preaching for God's glory. This remedy is found in defining and limiting imagination in such a way as to enhance expository hermeneutics and homiletics while simultaneously doing justice to both the fixed author-intended meaning of the text and the boundlessness of imagination.

Thesis

The purpose of this dissertation is to discover and define the value of imagination for expository preaching by describing essential elements of expository preaching and evaluating two examples of a New Homiletic methodology in light of evangelical convictions. Consequently, a methodology is proposed for the use of imagination in expository homiletics and hermeneutics. Expository preachers have acknowledged the importance of imagination for their practice; however, generally, they have fallen short of developing a clear theological and theoretical foundation as well as a method for the use of imagination in expository preaching. Hence, the thesis of this dissertation is that a rightly developed evangelical theory for the use of imagination will improve the practice of expository hermeneutics and homiletics.

The improvements will be noticed in the areas of both hermeneutics and homiletics. Imagination is a powerful tool that biblical authors used to convey their

⁴⁰Clyde S. Kilby, "Christian Imagination," in *The Christian Imagination: Essays on Literature and the Arts*, ed. Leland Ryken (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 41.

inspired message to their audience. Therefore, preachers, who have the important task of faithfully interpreting God's Word, need to comprehend the concept and types of imagination contained in Scripture. More specifically, they need to understand how and why biblical authors used imagination, in order to discover the author's intention, which is a primary purpose in evangelical hermeneutics.

Furthermore, the way biblical authors used imagination can provide insightful information for preachers regarding their own use of imagination as they seek to deliver the meaning of a text in a manner faithful to the intention of the author. Through the use of imagination preachers can better fulfill two primary purposes in evangelical homiletics: designing the sermon and helping the audience more effectively internalize the message and to apply it to their lives.

Methodology and Direction

The methodology used in this dissertation is theoretical. Several writings are consulted and evaluated in order to come to a well-informed method for the use of imagination in expository preaching. To that end, first, imagination is explained and essential elements of expository preaching are provided to ensure the method matches the context. Second, two major contributions of the New Homiletics regarding the use of imagination are described. Paul Scott Wilson and Thomas H. Troeger are chosen because they are the only two homileticians to have authored a book on the subject. Since they do not subscribe to expository principles, their methodology is assessed and reformulated in light of the commitments of expository preaching. Finally, a theory and methodology are presented regarding the use of imagination in expository homiletics and hermeneutics.

The main aim of the second chapter is to provide a foundational study of imagination in order to present a clear understanding of imagination for expository preaching. Essential elements of expository preaching are provided to form the backdrop against which imagination is examined. The components described serve as the

foundation and the boundaries within which the evangelical use of imagination in the areas of expository hermeneutics and homiletics can be rightly developed. Second, imagination is defined and analyzed. Attention is paid to some of the philosophical and psychological aspects of imagination. This brief investigation results in a definition of imagination suitable for expository homiletics.

The purpose of chapter 3 is to present the New Homiletic methodology regarding imagination for preaching. Following an introduction to the basic philosophy of the New Homiletic, this chapter features the methodology of imagination as described by two new homileticians, Paul Scott Wilson⁴¹ and Thomas H. Troeger.⁴² This chapter concludes with a critical evaluation of their methods in light of the commitments of evangelical expository preaching.

Based on the research in the previous chapters, chapter 4 presents a methodology, including boundaries, for the use of imagination in expository hermeneutics. While imagination is important in all stages of expository hermeneutics, to avoid subjectivism, limits on the use of imagination are proposed.⁴³ The main aim of this

⁴¹Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*; Paul Scott Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992); Paul Scott Wilson, "Beyond Narrative: Imagination in the Sermon," in *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, ed. Gail R. O'Day and Thomas G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997); Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999); Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004).

⁴²Troeger, *Creating Fresh Images for Preaching*; Thomas H. Troeger, "Homiletics as Imaginative Theology," *Homiletic* 12, no. 2 (1987): 27-31; Thomas H. Troeger, "Imaginative Theology: The Shape of Postmodern Homiletics," *Homiletic* 13, no. 1 (1988); Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*; Thomas H. Troeger, "Can You Imagine This? The Future Role of Imagination in Preaching," in *Preaching on the Brink: the Future of Homiletics*, ed. Martha J. Simmons, 135-44 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); Thomas H. Troeger, *Preaching and Worship* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003).

⁴³Boundaries serve to protect as well as to increase the richest possible use of imagination. Allmen insightfully mentions that "the text protects us from our imagination by setting its limits, and from lack of imagination by stimulating what we have" (Jean-

chapter is to provide a paradigm for the use of imagination in homiletics.

Committed to a hermeneutic that is faithful to the text and the author's intention, preachers can find in imagination a rich resource to convey God's truth to people. After discussing the role of imagination in the process of homiletics, suggestions are given regarding the use of imagination for the preparation of a sermon and for engaging the audience. In addition boundaries are provided to ensure that the use of imagination conforms to evangelical expository tenets.

Jacques von Allmen, *Preaching and Congregation*, trans. B. L. Nicholas [Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1962], 26), quoted in Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 124.

CHAPTER 2
ELEMENTS OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING
AND DEFINITION OF IMAGINATION

Introduction

The argument in this dissertation is that correct usage of imagination is an essential element for biblical expository hermeneutics and homiletics. Many preachers and theologians who advocate expository preaching support the use of biblical imagination. However, due to the nature of imagination, boundary-less and subjective, its use requires specific delineations to guide the evangelical preacher in sound application. Building a theory for the use of imagination in hermeneutics and homiletics based on the solid foundation of expository preaching would significantly decrease potential misuse. Misuse could happen, for example, in appealing to feelings or experience, rather than the Scriptures, as a guide to imagination.¹

This chapter, therefore, analyzes expository preaching, defining it and describing its essential elements. The nature of imagination is examined in greater detail, in order to conclude with some initial guidelines as to the utilization of imagination in expository preaching.

Definition of Expository Preaching

Many have argued that defining expository preaching is not an easy task. Bryson, for example, says “No homiletical term has received as many definitions as

¹Hodge argues that “we cannot appeal to our own feelings or inward experience, as a ground or guide, unless we can show that it agrees with the experience of holy men as recorded in the Scriptures” (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* [New York: Scribner, 1873; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 1:16).

expository preaching. Each definition seems to be correct. Because of the variety of definitions, ambiguity abounds about a clear, authoritative, workable definition of expository preaching.”² Deciding on a definition is complicated, because expository preaching, as Robinson explains, is “a living interaction involving God, the preacher, and the congregation, and no definition can pretend to capture that dynamic.”³ Furthermore, Greidanus argues that expository preaching is a commitment rather than a method; a commitment to be faithful to the meaning of Scripture.⁴ Unger points to the fact that being faithful to the biblical meaning involves discovering the intent of the original author in writing the passage. When it comes to expository preaching, the manner in

²Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching through a Book of the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 15, quoted in Joel Breidenbaugh, *Preaching for Bodybuilding: Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBook, 2010), 43. See the following for definitions of expository preaching: Broadus, John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, ed. Edwin Charles Dargan (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1903), 322; Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 21; John Stott, "A Definition of Biblical Preaching," in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 24; Merrill F. Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955), 33; Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 128-29; Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermon* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 29; Ramesh Richard, *Scripture Sculpture: A Do-It-Yourself Manual for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 17; Wayne McDill, *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 8; Walter L. Liefeld, *New Testament Exposition: From Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 6; Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 10; Richard L. Mayhue, "Rediscovering Expository Preaching," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 3.

³Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 21.

⁴Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 15.

which one treats the text is more important than is the length of the text.⁵ This discussion, thus far, has revealed the complexity involved in defining expository preaching as well as some of its essential elements. Acknowledging the fact that expository preaching is hard to capture in just a few words, a working definition would be helpful to the purpose of this dissertation.

Robinson's definition of expository preaching is used, simply because it is one of the most well-known and widely-accepted in the field: "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."⁶ Robinson highlights five aspects of this definition: the passage governs the sermon, the expositor communicates a concept, the concept comes from the text, the concept is applied to the expositor, and the concept is applied to the hearers.⁷ These five emphases could be divided into two parts: first, discovering the biblical author's intention in the text through historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage; and, second, applying this concept to the life of the audience, including the preacher himself. Stott states something similar when he says that "to expound Scripture is to open up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and his people obey him."⁸ To this end, he argues that preachers need both be faithful to the ancient world and sensitive to the modern world.⁹ In expository preaching

⁵Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching*, 33.

⁶Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 21.

⁷Ibid., 21-30.

⁸Stott, "A Definition of Biblical Preaching," 24.

⁹Ibid., 27.

two aspects are, therefore, of crucial importance. First is the analysis of the meaning of the passage as the author intended it. Second is the communication and application of this meaning to the lives of those that are confronted with the text, so that, even today, lives are being affected by the Word of God.

Calvin's preaching ministry can be said to be an example of expository preaching *in vivo*. Calvin's first work was a book, *The Institutes*; his second was a city, Geneva.¹⁰ The first was an exposition of the Scriptures formulated in doctrines, the second was its application to the congregation he ministered to in Geneva.¹¹ Balancing these two aspects requires inspiration, skill, and practice. Conservative evangelical Christians may tend to focus on the first, while liberals would rather emphasize the latter.¹² Expository preaching, however, as the name itself suggests, has both of these aspects as goal: exposing the meaning of the original author (author-centered hermeneutics) and preaching this message to a contemporary audience (audience-focused homiletics).

Two other definitions highlight these elements. Unger writes,

No matter what the length of the portion explained may be, if it is handled in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of the particular Biblical writer and as it exists in the light of the over-all context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers, it may properly be

¹⁰Pierre Imbart de la Tour, *Les Origines de la Réforme* (Paris: Editeurs, 1905), 4:117, quoted in John H. Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Today in the Light of Recent Research," *Review and Expositor* 86 (1989): 29.

¹¹Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word," 34.

¹²Hershael W. York, "Communication Theory and Text-Driven Preaching," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 241. Furthermore, York writes, "I concur completely and argue further that a failure to preach the emotional content of the text is as much an abdication of expository responsibility as failure to preach the theological content" (ibid.).

said to be expository preaching.¹³

Chappell defines expository preaching as follows:

A sermon that explores any biblical concept is in the broadest sense “expository,” but the technical definition of an expository sermon requires that it expound Scripture by deriving from a specific text main points and subpoints that disclose the thought of the author, cover the scope of the passage, and are applied to the lives of the listeners.¹⁴

A closer look at these two essential elements will provide even more insight into the nature of expository preaching.

Author-Centered Hermeneutics

Vogel states that “the meaning of the text is fixed by the author in his setting.”¹⁵ Exegesis, therefore, must zero in on the meaning that the author intended to convey.¹⁶ According to Tate, a working definition of author-centered hermeneutics is to “seek to ascertain as much as possible about the mind and world of the author in order to determine what that mind communicates through the text.”¹⁷ In evangelical circles, author-centered hermeneutics is conceived of as the best way to interpret Scripture and one of the foundations for sound expository preaching,¹⁸ even though many other

¹³Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching*, 33. Stevenson makes a similar point in Dwight E. Stevenson, *In the Biblical Preacher's Workshop* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967), 61.

¹⁴Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 128-29.

¹⁵Robert Vogel, "Biblical Genres and the Text-Driven Sermon," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 188.

¹⁶Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 34.

¹⁷W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 175.

¹⁸Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 112. Kaiser argues that

interpretive methods have been suggested throughout Christian history. The following birds-eye view of the history of hermeneutic approaches will serve to explain relevant underlying aspects that give a certain hermeneutic paradigm direction. Subsequently, presuppositions of an author-centered approach can be discussed with greater understanding.

A Brief History of Author-Centered Hermeneutics

Though the term was not used as such, author-centered hermeneutics can be traced back to the New Testament authors. They quoted the Old Testament in order to explain that Jesus was their long awaited Messiah. During the apostolic period, Jesus is the focus of the Christian faith and hermeneutics.¹⁹ The major work of the earliest believers was to transform “the premessianic Torah into the messianic Torah.”²⁰ Though they were surrounded by other methods of interpretation such as allegory, Plummer argues that the New Testament authors respected the whole context and meaning of the

discovering the single intention of the author is the first basic step for all exegetes. Sunukjian claims that “to present the true and exact meaning of the biblical text means the sermon must unfold according to the natural flow of thought of the biblical author. . . . In this way the expositor, by being true to the meaning of the original author, is able to preach the real point of the passage” (Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007], 10-11). See also Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 69; and Robert L. Rosscup, "Exegesis and Expository Preaching," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

¹⁹Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 207.

²⁰Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*, trans. E. J. Sharpe (Lund, Sweden: Gleerup, 1961), 327, quoted in Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 207.

Old Testament and did not allegorize the Old Testament to support their arguments.²¹ However, this apostolic interpretation tradition did not last long. Allegorical interpretation was to take over for the next generation of the early church. Consequently, before the modern time, three major paradigms can be noted. The first of these, as mentioned, is the allegory paradigm. Allegory was nothing new; many Greeks interpreted writings this way.²² Allegorical biblical interpretation was especially dominant in the Alexandrian school.²³ Influenced by the Jewish scholar Philo²⁴ (d. c. 50), Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215), for example, used allegory in order to make the biblical Jewish

²¹Plummer argues that the only exception to Paul's disinclination toward allegory is a comparison between Hagar and Sarah: "Paul does not claim to be interpreting the relevant Old Testament texts but freely admits that he is offering a homiletical reflection that he explicitly labels as figurative" (Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 40 Questions Series, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010], 85-86).

²²Robert W. Bernard, "The Hermeneutics of the Early Church Fathers," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steven Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 92-93; David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 15-16.

²³Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 31.

²⁴Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 82-83. Believing that Moses directly influenced Plato, Philo sees Judaism and philosophy as two closely related fields. He uses allegory to explain the Old Testament. For a detailed study of Philo's understanding of allegory and philosophy, see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Structure and Growth of Philosophic Systems from Plato to Spinoza, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), 87-142. For examples of Philo's scriptural exegesis, see David Winston, *Philo of Alexandria: The Contemplative Life, the Giants, and Selections*, The Classics of Western Spirituality: A Library of the Great Spiritual Masters, ed. Richard J. Payne (New York: Paulist, 1981), 79-86. For an introductory study of Philo's allegorical method, see Samuel Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 17-28.

concepts understandable to the Hellenistic world of his time.²⁵ Allegory is “a work of literature in which some or all of the details have a corresponding other meaning and refer to either a concept or historical particular.”²⁶ The theologians²⁷ of that time had several reasons to use allegory, such as (1) understanding the full meaning of a text; (2) reconciling Jewish culture with the Hellenistic world; (3) demonstrating to the Gnostics that the Old Testament is valid and can be harmonized with the New Testament; (4) explaining confusing issues in the text (e.g., unflattering things said about God, inexplicable statements, etc.); and (5) believing that the Holy Spirit supervised the composition of the text, but also revealed a meaning that went beyond the literal

²⁵Clement believed that the true meaning of Scripture was hidden because it was not suitable for everyone. He distinguished five different levels in the text: historical, doctrinal, prophetic, philosophical, and mystical. He valued the mystical or spiritual sense most. See Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 58-59; and Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 95.

²⁶Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), 513. Sandmel also defines allegory as “the assertion that such texts are not saying what they are saying, but saying something different. Allegory is the direct opposite of the literal” (Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria*, 17). See also Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 94ff.

²⁷Another famous allegorical interpreter is Origen (c. 185-254). He believed three aspects were important in understanding Scripture: the literal, moral, and spiritual. Origen explains his methodology in *De Principiis*: “One must therefore portray the meaning of the sacred writings in a threefold way upon one’s own soul, so that the simple man may be edified by what we may call the flesh of the scripture, this name being given to the obvious interpretation; while the man who has made some progress may be edified by its soul, as it were; . . . For just as man consists of body, soul and spirit, so in the same way does the scripture, which has been prepared by God to be given for man’s salvation” (Origen, *Origen on First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth [London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1936], IV.ii.4), quoted in Bernard, “The Hermeneutics of the Early Church Fathers,” 97. See also Virkler, *Hermeneutics*, 60; and Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 84.

interpretation.²⁸ This method is easily subject to abuse in the sense that the author-intended meaning is quickly overlooked.²⁹ In response, another school of interpretation developed, the Syrian School of Antioch, which used a grammatical-historical hermeneutic. This is now the basic methodology of modern evangelical hermeneutics.³⁰ The Antiochian school sought to find a single meaning from the text, designated by Kaiser as the author's meaning.³¹ Nevertheless, allegorization took over the methodology of biblical scholars for a thousand years and influenced the rest of Europe's Catholic faith until the Reformation.³²

The second paradigm, resulting from the sixteenth-century Reformation, gave rise to "a hermeneutical revolution."³³ Against papal power and traditions, the first reformers fought for sound hermeneutics. This resulted in an intentional move away from

²⁸Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*, 45; Michael A. G. Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 81; Robert B. Sloan Jr. and Carey C. Newman, "Ancient Jewish Hermeneutics," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke, and Grant I. Lovejoy (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 61-63.

²⁹Sloan and Newman, "Ancient Jewish Hermeneutics," 63.

³⁰Virkler, *Hermeneutics*, 62.

³¹Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 112. Furthermore, Bernard claims that they also valued and sought to find spiritual truth. Nevertheless, they believed that this insight (*theoria*) came from the literal meaning of Scripture. Bernard summarizes that "Alexandria began with the divine reality expressed symbolically by Scripture, the truth 'from above'" (Bernard, "The Hermeneutics of the Early Church Fathers," 94). On the other hand, Antioch began with the literal sense of Scripture as a foundation "from below" to gain spiritual insight (*ibid.*).

³²Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 28-34.

³³Moises Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible: The History of Interpretation in the Light of Current Issues*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, ed. Moises Silva, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 77.

allegory as they insisted on the plain meaning of Scripture.³⁴ Though, again, the term author-centered hermeneutics was not used as such, the principle was valued.³⁵ For example, Calvin states, “It is not possible to understand what is being said or to make any discerning judgment on the terms, unless one keeps an eye on the intention of the author.”³⁶ Like Calvin, Luther, who preferred to interpret Scripture with his grammatical and historical method, rejected Origen’s allegorical interpretation.³⁷ He states that “the spiritual sense is unsafe, and the Scriptures exist without it, but they cannot exist without the literal sense.”³⁸ Luther firmly believed that all Christians are able to understand the meaning of the Scripture through the work of the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit is the plainest writer and speaker in heaven and earth, and therefore His words cannot have more than one, and that the very simplest, sense, which we call the literal, ordinary, natural, sense. That the things indicated by the simple sense of His simple words should signify something further and different, and therefore one thing should always signify another, is more than a question of words or of language.³⁹

³⁴Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible*, 78. See also Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 100.

³⁵W. Randolph Tate, "Author," in *Interpreting the Bible: A Handbook of Terms and Methods* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006).

³⁶John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. A. W. Morrison, ed. David W. Torrance, and Thomas F. Torrance, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 285, quoted in Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 24.

³⁷Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman, 1930), 351-52. Zuck claims that “a hallmark of the Reformation was a return to the historical, grammatical interpretation of Scripture” (Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* [Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1991], 98).

³⁸Luther, *Works of Martin Luther*, 3:350, quoted in John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 20.

³⁹Martin Luther, “The Letter and the Spirit,” in *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present*, ed. Richard Lischer (Grand Rapids:

The grammatical historical method of Luther and Calvin⁴⁰ entails analyzing both “the original language of the text and the historical context in which the text was written” in a careful manner.⁴¹ The core philosophy of the grammatical historical method was to seek objectivity in interpretation that was nevertheless Spirit-guided.⁴² This trend continued until, by the time of Enlightenment, it had transformed from a sincere desire to interpret the Scriptures objectively as well as spiritually, into a form of human rationalism that interpreted Scripture in a way that gave supremacy to what the enlightened reader thought was relevant.⁴³ The result, Henry claims, is that

this prejudicial approach to hermeneutics generated a historical understanding of Scripture that purged it of whatever seemed to offend the so-called scientifically informed mind; as a consequence, the Bible was allowed to convey only such truths as man might eventually attain by his own mental reflections. In brief, the revelatory element in Scripture was made synonymous with universal moral truth.⁴⁴

Eventually, this so-called historical-critical exegesis became a tool used by liberal

W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 191.

⁴⁰James T. Spivey Jr., "The Hermeneutics of the Medieval and Reformation Era," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant I. Lovejoy (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 114.

⁴¹W. Randolph Tate, "Grammatico-Historical Exegesis," in *Interpreting the Bible*. Grammatico-historical interpretation seeks to find “out of the text the meaning the writers intended to convey and which their readers were expected to gather from it” (F. F. Bruce and J. J. Scott Jr., "Interpretation of the Bible," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001], 611).

⁴²Robert L. Thomas, "The Evidence Summarized," in *Three Views on the Origins of the Synoptic Gospels*, ed. Robert L. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 377; Stephen J. Nichols and Eric T. Brandt, *Ancient Word, Changing World: The Doctrine of Scripture in a Modern Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 116.

⁴³Carl F. H. Henry, *God Who Speaks and Shows, God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 3 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 296.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 297.

theologians to attack orthodox faith.⁴⁵

The third paradigm began with the Enlightenment, which can be traced back to two different movements in the sixteenth century, both of which sought to go back to original sources and would change modern history intellectually and morally.⁴⁶ The Renaissance, rooted in Greek philosophy and culture, was characterized by going back to classic models in, for example, art, writing, and education. The reformers, on the other hand, were in pursuit of discovering the early church fathers. Though they were mutually influential, the Renaissance led to a humanistic worldview, and eventually began to influence Reformed theology. Webber argues that “the slow secularization of theological methodology ultimately changed the shape of theology.”⁴⁷ The Enlightenment was characterized by trust in human ability to solve all problems using the scientific method.⁴⁸ This method entailed careful observation of nature, systematic accumulation of data, drawing general conclusions from particulars, and repeated empirical testing of these conclusions. Old authorities, such as Scripture, were discarded as myths.⁴⁹ The replacement of Scriptural authority with the new scientific method forced a new practice

⁴⁵Robert E. Webber, *The Divine Embrace: Recovering the Passionate Spiritual Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 85; Curtis W. Freeman, "Toward A Sensus Fidelium for an Evangelical Church: Postconservatives & Postliberals on Reading Scripture," in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelical & Postliberals in Conversation*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 164ff.

⁴⁶Will Durant, *The Reformation: A History of European Civilization from Wycliffe to Calvin*, *The Story of Civilization*, vol. 6 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 935.

⁴⁷Robert Webber, "Biblical Authority: A Study in History," in *Interpreting the Word of God*, ed. Samuel J. Schultz and Morris A. Inch (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 200-01.

⁴⁸Margaret A. Andersen and Howard F. Taylor, *Sociology: Understanding a Diverse Society*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008), 14.

⁴⁹Marvin Perry, *To 1789*, 10th ed., *Western Civilization: A Brief History*, vol. 1 (Boston: Wadsworth, 2009), 243.

of interpretation as well.⁵⁰ The traditional grammatico-historical method, influenced by the Enlightenment, turned into modern biblical criticism.⁵¹ This new method of interpretation treated Scripture on par with other ancient works; the Bible was no longer considered divinely inspired, but was instead subject to the same critical analysis as any other document.⁵² Thus, adherents of this critical interpretation rejected the supernatural message⁵³ and came to see the Bible as an untrustworthy book, thereby rejecting its authority.⁵⁴

Schleiermacher, still valuing the author of the original text, rejected the principle of *sola scriptura*⁵⁵ and reinterpreted concepts such as ‘miracle’ and ‘inspiration’ to possess a rather naturalistic character.⁵⁶ In his hermeneutic approach, he added a

⁵⁰Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 61.

⁵¹John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 118.

⁵²Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 67-68.

⁵³Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 15.

⁵⁴John Hannah, "Interpreting the Bible: A Historical Overview," in *Understanding Scripture: An Overview of the Bible's Origin, Reliability, and Meaning*, ed. Wayne Grudem, John Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 25.

⁵⁵Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Problem of Language in Schleiermacher's Hermeneutic," in *Schleiermacher as Contemporary*, ed. Robert W. Funk (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 69, 83-84, quoted in Laurence W. Wood, *Theology as History and Hermeneutics: A Post-Critical Conversation with Contemporary Theology* (Lexington, KY: Emeth, 2005), 108.

⁵⁶Schleiermacher argues, "What is a miracle? What we call miracle is everywhere else called sign, indication. Our name, which means a wonder, refers purely to the mental condition of the observer. . . . Miracle is simply the religious name for event. Every event, even the most natural and usual, becomes a miracle, as soon as the religious

psychological component that sought, as Wood explains, to “re-enact the selfhood of the author to gain an understanding of the text.”⁵⁷ Osborne states that, consequently, “the interpreter’s task then is to reconstruct not only the text but the whole process of creating the thought on the part of the author.”⁵⁸ Consequently, the interpreter may come to know the text better than the original author, as he or she is the one who is able to speculate regarding the author’s mental acts.⁵⁹ This process opened the door to a subjective interpretation of the text, because there is generally no objective way to verify the author’s emotion and mental experience.⁶⁰ Goldsworthy, describing the modern liberalism that resulted from this approach, writes,

The relationship of subjectivity to objectivity is so distorted that the term ‘scientific’, as applied to biblical criticism and interpretation, is lost in a vicious circle of subjectivity that now determines the criteria for defining objectivity. Revelation, at best, can only be reflected on as what humans are pleased to name their religious ideas. It can never be equated with an objective and authoritative prophetic word. Consistently, liberalism has to domesticate God or eliminate him.⁶¹

And that is what happened with much of the liberal hermeneutics after Schleiermacher.⁶²

view of it can be the dominant. . . . What is revelation? It is simply the general expression for the feeling of true morality and freedom” (Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman [London: Kegan Paul, 1893], 88-89).

⁵⁷R. Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1964), 79, quoted in Wood, *Theology as History and Hermeneutics*, 108.

⁵⁸Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 468.

⁵⁹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 25.

⁶⁰Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 52-53.

⁶¹Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 129.

⁶²Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 542-46.

Three Major Components of Interpretation

Different interpretation paradigms are related to what one thinks about the role of three components in interpreting: the text, the reader, and the author. First, critique of traditional criticism as described above involved the fact that every reader thought himself an expert, with no way to verify who was right.⁶³ As a result, hermeneutics shifted from a search behind the text to one within.⁶⁴ This so-called text-centered hermeneutics is a method that places all authority in the text itself to disclose the probable intention of the author or editor and its meaning; it virtually ignores understanding the author and his context.⁶⁵ Two major text-centered approaches to hermeneutics are New Criticism and Structuralism.⁶⁶ New Criticism, which arose in the 1940s and derived from the work of Richards and Eliot, entailed careful text analysis, for example “the study of poetic ambiguity, tension, irony, and paradox.”⁶⁷ Structuralism,

⁶³Antonio Garcia Berrio, *A Theory of the Literary Text*, trans. Kenneth A. Horn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), 150.

⁶⁴Christopher D. Stanley, *The Hebrew Bible: A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 56; Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 61ff.; Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, ed. Moises Silva, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Apollos, 1987), 19; and Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell, "Introduction: Trajectories in Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 15.

⁶⁵Craig L. Blomberg, William W. Klein, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1993), 133; Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 237. Tate explains that the origin of the name “New Criticism” comes from the work of John Crowe Ransom’s new criticism in 1941. See John Crowe Ransom, *The New Criticism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979).

⁶⁶Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 208 and Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, 25. Whereas new criticism did not influence the whole field of biblical studies, structuralism was widely influential, especially in the genre of narrative text. See Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, 27-37.

⁶⁷Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, 25-27.

which became prominent in the 1960s, increasingly moved further away from the text⁶⁸ and the author.⁶⁹ The text was even more objectified by assuming the text was a code, rather than a form of communication,⁷⁰ and could thus be interpreted by understanding the use of the structures in the language system.⁷¹ It focused on the form of a text by looking at elements like voice, character, setting, and their combination.⁷²

The second component of interpretation involves the reader. Reader centered hermeneutics developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in reaction against the character of text-centered hermeneutics, especially the pursuit of objectivity and textual autonomy notable in New Criticism and Structuralism.⁷³ Reader centered hermeneutics highlights the importance of the reader's personal situation, emotions, experiences, attitudes, values, and beliefs in determining the meaning of the text.⁷⁴ Resseguie claims that "the reader-response critic is concerned not with what the text *says* or *shows*, but with what the text *does* to the reader."⁷⁵ The first and foremost assumption is that the

⁶⁸Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 472-76.

⁶⁹Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-48.

⁷⁰Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 65.

⁷¹W. H. Bellinger, *A Hermeneutic of Curiosity and Readings of Psalm 61* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 16-17. See also Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 26.

⁷²Pramod K. Nayar, *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralisms to Ecocriticism* (Dorling Kindersley, UK: Pearson, 2010), 3.

⁷³Reader-centered hermeneutics developed in different variants under names such as Transactive Criticism, Speech Act Theory, Subjective Criticism, and Affective Criticism. See W. Randolph Tate, "Reader-Response Criticism," in *Interpreting the Bible*.

⁷⁴Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 65.

⁷⁵James L. Resseguie, "Reader-Response Criticism and the Synoptic Gospels," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52, no. 2 (1984): 307.

reader controls and provides the meaning of the text. For this reason, Iser distinguishes between the text, that is, the ancient document, and the work, that is, the contemporary reader's active interpretation. Thus, the original author created the text, the interpreter creates the meaning.⁷⁶ This approach significantly heightened subjectivity in scriptural interpretation. Though the focus on the reader's situation and experience in interpreting is to be valued to some degree as it helps to contextualize the present meaning,⁷⁷ serious potential exists that the meaning of the text will be distorted, just as was the case with the church fathers' allegorical interpretation.⁷⁸ Hence, it became possible for extreme forms of ideological theology, such as liberation and feminist theology, to be developed.⁷⁹ Text and reader centered hermeneutics may have been the prevalent hermeneutic approaches

⁷⁶Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 275-76, quoted in Resseguie, "Reader-Response Criticism and the Synoptic Gospels," 308.

⁷⁷Brown quotes Heidegger, saying, "Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us" (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [New York: Taylor Carman, 2008], 191-92, quoted in Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 74).

⁷⁸J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 188. Whitman argues that "to many, allegory no longer seems so peculiar a form of 'imposition' when a range of critical movements from contemporary 'hermeneutics' to 'reader response' criticism argue that readers at large regularly 'intervene' in the texts they engage" (Jon Whitman, "A Retrospective Forward: Interpretation, Allegory, and Historical Change," in *Interpretation & Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period*, ed. John Whitman [Leiden: Brill, 2000], 15).

⁷⁹Henry A. Virkler and Karelynn Gerber Ayayo, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 68; John P. Newport, "Contemporary Philosophical, Literary, and Sociological Hermeneutics," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke, and Grant I. Lovejoy (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 168-70.

of the modern and post-modern periods, yet author-centered hermeneutics continued to be practiced and enjoyed somewhat of a small revival.

The third hermeneutic component looks at the author. Hirsch contributed to the revitalization of author-centered hermeneutics, because he offered arguments against some of the common historicist and psychologistic objections to understanding the author's mind that had given rise to some of the previous hermeneutic paradigms. He claims that author's meaning is both "determinate and reproducible,"⁸⁰ and that the interpreter can pursue a certain kind of objectivity, because of language's shareability.⁸¹ He states, "Verbal meaning is whatever someone has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs and which can be conveyed (shared) by means of those linguistic signs."⁸² Reproducibility and determinacy are important aspects in this process. Hirsch believes that while reproducibility is "a quality of verbal meaning that makes interpretation possible," determinacy is "a quality of meaning required in order that there *be* something to reproduce."⁸³ Furthermore he argues that "the absolute form of historical skepticism should not be confused with this healthy consciousness of the limitations under which every interpreter sometimes works."⁸⁴ According to Hirsch, it is possible to reconstruct a determinate actual meaning, rather than a range of possible interpretations.⁸⁵ Consequently, several scholars within the Evangelical community have

⁸⁰E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 27.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 31.

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³*Ibid.*, 44.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 231.

written important works that argue for author-centered hermeneutics.⁸⁶

Author-Centered Hermeneutics and Expository Preaching

Vanhoozer argues that “authentic Christianity . . . depends on one’s ability to recover the author’s intention—say, the minds of Malachi, Matthew, or Mark—and perhaps through them, the mind of God.”⁸⁷ This concern is the result of several presuppositions of Evangelical Christian faith. First, it is closely related to the belief that the Scriptures are inspired by God and are to be received as God’s words.⁸⁸ For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith declares, “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is

⁸⁶Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 25; Haddon W. Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 809; John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 127, 221; Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 33; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 51; and Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 69.

⁸⁷Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 46. Marshall explains that the goal of interpretation is to “discover what the text meant in the mind of its original author for his intended audience” (I. Howard Marshall, *Introduction to New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* [Cape Town: Paternoster, 1977], 15). Robinson, similarly, argues, “Preachers who honor the Bible will align the purposes of their sermons with the aims of the biblical writer” (Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 809). See also Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 26.

⁸⁸Robert H. Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 3 (2001): 456; Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 24. For more historical background, see Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 67-69.

to be received, because it is the Word of God.”⁸⁹ Author-centered hermeneutics assumes that the biblical authors were divinely inspired as they wrote down the words of Scripture. This inspiration came about while fully making use of the human authors’ unique background, skill, education, and life.⁹⁰ Packer points out the specifics of this are a mystery:

Evangelicals stress that Scripture is a *mystery* in a sense parallel to that in which the incarnation is a *mystery*—that is, that the identifying of the human and the divine words in the one case, like the taking of manhood into God in the other, was a unique creative divine act of which we cannot fully grasp either the nature or the mode or the dynamic implications. Scripture is as genuinely and fully human as it is divine. It is more than Jewish-Christian religious literature, but not less, just as Jesus was more than a Jewish rabbi, but not less. There is a true analogy between the written Word and the incarnate Word. In both cases, the divine coincides with the form of the human, and the absolute appears in the form of the relative.⁹¹

A second presupposition, closely related to the belief that the Bible is God’s word, is the fact that the spiritual message that is found in Scripture is unalterable. Though the author’s background, culture, class, race, and so on are important to better interpret the words, the true meaning of a passage does not depend on those aspects, because God’s message then and now remains the same.⁹² However, author-centered hermeneutics also recognizes that, even though there may only be one meaning—determined by God and not by the reader—multiple applications may result from making the meaning relevant to a contemporary audience.⁹³

⁸⁹The Westminster Confession of Faith, ch. 1, art. 4, quoted in Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, ed. Derek Carlsen (Arlington Heights, IL: Christian Liberty Press, 2003), 16.

⁹⁰John MacArthur, *MacArthur's Quick Reference Guide to the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 190.

⁹¹J. I. Packer, "Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics and Inerrancy," in *Jerusalem and Athens*, ed. E. R. Gehan (Nutley, NJ: P&R, 1971), 144-45.

⁹²Virkler and Ayayo, *Hermeneutics*, 76.

⁹³Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 8.

Another presupposition of this approach is that it is the most common sense approach among methodologies of communication. Stein argues that “communication between two people can only take place if both parties seek to understand what the other person means by their words.”⁹⁴ Author-centered hermeneutics, in an attempt to discover the unchangeable divine intention of the Scriptures, seeks to understand as much as possible of the mind and world of the author. In order to do so, several steps can be followed.⁹⁵

First, historical and cultural analysis seeks insight from internal textual study and external historical study, which provides as much as can be known of the author’s intention through the background at the time of writing.⁹⁶ Internal textual study includes both the immediate context of the passage, as well as the whole of Scriptural revelation, based upon the premise that the word of God is one unified book.⁹⁷ The proper study of history and culture fills the gap between the ancient text and contemporary society. Without proper understanding of history and culture, expository preaching would be in danger of misinterpreting the text as it was meant.⁹⁸ Second, lexical and syntactical analysis is “the study of the meaning of individual words (lexicology) and the way those

⁹⁴Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," 455.

⁹⁵For helpful steps to find the author’s intention, see Virkler, *Hermeneutics*, 76-77.

⁹⁶Ibid., 75-92; Wayne Grudem, "Right and Wrong Interpretation of the Bible: Some Suggestions for Pastors and Bible Teachers," in *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching: In Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, ed. Leland Ryken and Todd A. Wilson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 58-60.

⁹⁷Stephen F. Olford and David L. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 72-73.

⁹⁸Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 159-66. Greidanus presents four major improper ways to overcome the historical and cultural gap: allegorizing, spiritualizing, imitating Bible characters, and moralizing.

words are combined (syntax), in order to determine more accurately the author's intended meaning."⁹⁹ Lexical analysis focuses on word study and tries to discover the author-intended meaning of a specific word. Syntactical study highlights "the grammatical and semantic relationships between words," and this study deals with "tense, voice, mood, person, number, and case of individual words."¹⁰⁰

Third, theological analysis provides both the basic *framework* to build an author-intended message and the essential *boundary* to protect the author-intended meaning. Theology is an essential component of expository preaching.¹⁰¹ True expository preachers should know how to deal with both the word of God and the theology of the scripture.¹⁰² Virkler asks two major questions in theological analysis: (1) "How does this passage fit into the total pattern of God's revelation?" and (2) "What is the pattern of God's revelation?"¹⁰³

Lastly, literary analysis considers the different forms and genres of the biblical text. Osborne argues that meaning is dependent upon the genre in which it is written: "All writers couch their messages in a certain genre in order to give the reader sufficient rules

⁹⁹Virkler, *Hermeneutics*, 94.

¹⁰⁰David Alan Black, "Exegesis for the Text-Driven Sermon," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 144-46.

¹⁰¹Barth emphasizes that "theology as a church discipline ought in all its branches to be nothing other than sermon preparation in the broadest sense" (Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991], 17).

¹⁰²Ebeling describes this issue well: "Theology without proclamation is empty, proclamation without theology is blind" (Gerhard Ebeling, *Theology and Proclamation: a Discussion with Rudolf Bultmann* [London: Wm. Collins, 1966], 20).

¹⁰³Virkler, *Hermeneutics*, 117-18. Virkler presents four different models to understand the theological frame of Scripture: dispensational theory, Lutheran theory, covenantal theory, and Epigenetic model. *Ibid.*, 121-35.

by which to decode that message. These hints guide the reader (or hearer) and provide clues for interpretation.”¹⁰⁴ According to Osborne, interpreters have enough sources to determine the specific genre in which the original author conveyed his intended meaning. In addition, this meaning can be shared with the interpreter. The most significant reason for following the literary rules of a specific genre with regard to Bible interpretation is to “respect God’s choice of communicative strategy,” because God communicates his message through human language, “not just in content, but in method.”¹⁰⁵ For this reason Erickson calls language a “human vehicle for divine truth.”¹⁰⁶

Packer’s desire to “set the Bible in motion” emphasizes the power of the word of God itself. If the preacher correctly understands the word of God and vividly preaches it in accordance with the genre in which it was written, then the Bible will move listeners.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the task for preachers through this elaborate process, as Scharf argues, “is not to say whatever comes to mind when studying the Bible but to discern what God had in mind, what he intended, when inspiring the human author to write it. And to show how that intent is relevant for our hearers.”¹⁰⁸ The latter part of this statement leads to a

¹⁰⁴Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 26.

¹⁰⁵Grant Lovejoy, "Shaping Sermons by the Literary Form of the Text," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville: B&H, 2002), 399.

¹⁰⁶Millard J. Erickson, "Language: Human Vehicle for Divine Truth," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville: B&H, 2002), 208.

¹⁰⁷James I. Packer, "Preaching As Biblical Interpretation," in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, ed. Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 203.

¹⁰⁸Greg R. Scharf, "God's Letter of Intent: Six Questions that Reveal What God Meant to Say in a Text," in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 230.

discussion of the second important aspect of expository preaching, namely, audience-focused homiletics.

Audience-Focused Homiletics

The goal of preaching God’s Word is not just the exposition of the meaning of a passage, but its proclamation.¹⁰⁹ After discovering the divinely inspired meaning of a text through author-centered hermeneutics, preachers face the task of effectively delivering this meaning in a message that is relevant to their contemporary audience. All too often, expository preaching has received a bad reputation, because the preacher neglects to make the words, spoken millennia ago, understandable and applicable to today, as Spurgeon points out:

The great problems of sublapsarianism and supralapsarianism, the trenchant debates concerning eternal filiation, the earnest dispute concerning the double procession, and the pre—and post—millenarian schemes, however important some may deem them, are practically of very little concern to that godly widow woman, with seven children to support by her needle, who wants far more to hear of the loving-kindness of the God of providence than of these mysteries profound. . . . I know a minister who is great upon the ten toes of the beast, the four faces of the cherubim, the mystical meaning of badgers’s skins, and the typical bearings of the staves of the ark, and the windows of Solomon’s temple: but the sins of business men, the temptations of the times, and the needs of the age, he scarcely ever touches upon.¹¹⁰

If expository preachers neglect to focus on the life and experience of their audience, then Spurgeon’s criticism is correct. However, many evangelical expository preachers are aware of this significant aspect of preaching. Stott, for example, says that “preaching [which he metaphorically calls bridge-building] is not exposition only but communication, not just the exegesis of a text but the conveying of a God-given message

¹⁰⁹Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 29.

¹¹⁰C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: A Selection from Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Pastors' College* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1875), 78-79, quoted in Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 142-43.

to living people who need to hear it.”¹¹¹ Greidanus, in the same vein, mentions that “the challenge is to let the word of God address people today just as explicitly and concretely as it did in biblical times.”¹¹²

One way to do this is to make use of the tools of classical rhetoric. Many major figures of church history have actively used this approach to persuade their hearers and to defend the Christian faith.¹¹³ Augustine, for example, sought to influence Christian preaching with his book *On Christian Doctrine*¹¹⁴ in which he argues for the usage of classical rhetoric:

For since by means of the art of rhetoric both truth and falsehood are urged, who would dare to say that truth should stand in the person of its defenders unarmed against lying, so that they who wish to urge falsehoods may know how to make their listeners benevolent, or attentive, or docile in their presentation, while the defenders of truth are ignorant of that art? Should they speak briefly, clearly, and plausibly while the defenders of truth speak so that they tire their listeners, make themselves difficult to understand and what they have to say dubious? Should they oppose the truth with fallacious arguments and assert falsehoods, while the defenders of truth have no ability either to defend the truth or to oppose the false? Should they, urging the minds of their listeners into error, ardently exhort them, moving them by speech so that they terrify, sadden, and exhilarate them, while the defenders of truth are sluggish, cold, and somnolent? Who is so foolish as to think this to be wisdom?

¹¹¹Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 137.

¹¹²Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 159.

¹¹³Jaroslav Pelikan, *Divine Rhetoric: The Sermon on the Mount as Message and as Model in Augustine, Chrysostom, and Luther* (Crestwood, KY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 3. Kennedy argues that the inspired biblical authors made use of classical rhetoric. They combined it with Jewish traditions and modified it through Christian beliefs and values. He says “The books of the New Testament were written in Greek by and for speakers of Greek, many of whom were familiar with public address in Greek or had been educated in Greek schools. They thus employ some features of classical rhetoric combined with Jewish traditions and are modified by beliefs and values of Christianity” (George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* [Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999], 143).

¹¹⁴Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 68; and Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958).

While the faculty of eloquence which is of great value in urging either evil or justice, is in itself indifferent, why should it not be obtained for the uses of the good in the service of truth if the evil usurp it for the winning of perverse and vain causes in defense of iniquity and error?¹¹⁵

However, after many years of using classical rhetoric, its use was seriously called into question.¹¹⁶ Buttrick points out that

nineteenth-century homiletics drew on rhetorical study. In the twentieth century, homiletic wisdom was reduced, while at the same time the connection between homiletics and rhetoric was severed. We decided to preach the Bible, to draw method from the Bible, and to turn away from the machinations of secular rhetoric. The result: We made biblical noises but in fact we did not preach very well. Of course, the black pulpit continued to speak with force, the force of a highly sophisticated black rhetorical tradition. But note, as theology moves toward philosophy and as biblical criticism connects with literary criticism, homiletics must shyly make up and relate to rhetoric once again.¹¹⁷

Chapell is convinced that rhetorical tools and devices can be a significant help in effective expository preaching. Some of these tools include the Aristotelian concepts of logical appeal (*logos*), emotional appeal (*pathos*), and credibility (*ethos*).¹¹⁸ Imagination has a certain role to play in these facets of rhetoric that aim to assist the delivery of the message with a focus on the audience. Imagination is also valuable to two other aspects of audience-focused homiletics: having a receptive attitude to the Holy Spirit's guidance and knowing and understanding the context of the audience. These five elements are briefly explained below, whereas the role of imagination has to play with regard to these, is elaborated upon in chapters 4 and 5. The following provides an explanation of the nature and application of these five tools, starting with the last two.

¹¹⁵Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), 4.3.

¹¹⁶Wayne C. Booth, "Rhetoric and Religion: Are They Essentially Wedded?" in *Radical Pluralism and Truth: David Tracy and the Hermeneutics of Religion*, ed. Werner G. Jeanrond and Jennifer L. Rike (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 62.

¹¹⁷David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster, 1994), 3.

¹¹⁸Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching*, 25-26.

Receptivity to the Holy Spirit

Ultimately, the Holy Spirit is the one who empowers the preacher to fulfill the task to which he has been called. There is no doubt that a preacher who does not rely on the Holy Spirit will have an empty ministry in expository preaching. Spurgeon stressed the significant role of the Holy Spirit in communication:

We might preach till our tongues rotted, till we should exhaust our lungs and die, but never would a soul be converted unless there were the mysterious power of the Holy Spirit going with it, changing the will of man. O my friends! we might as well preach to stone walls as preach to humanity unless the Holy Spirit is with the Word, to give it power to convert the soul.¹¹⁹

Furthermore, Gordon argues that the decline of pulpit power is mainly due to “ignoring the Holy Spirit as the supreme inspirer of preaching.”¹²⁰ Even though many may mention the work of the Holy Spirit as important for the delivery of a sermon, this significant aspect is not highlighted as much as is necessary in the field of expository preaching.¹²¹ Smith laments this fact: “The contemporary church suffers from the ache of memory that has resulted in pneumatological amputation and absence. In fact, the Holy Spirit has been demoted to the status of the stepchild of the Trinity, especially in preaching.”¹²² Heisler explains the facets of preaching in which the Holy Spirit is active:

1) The Spirit’s inspiration of the biblical text. 2) The conversion of the preacher to faith in Jesus Christ. 3) The call of the preacher to preach the Word. 4) The character of the preacher to live the Word. 5) The illumination of the preacher’s heart and mind in study. 6) The empowerment of the preacher in proclaiming the

¹¹⁹C. H. Spurgeon, "Election: Its Defenses and Evidences," *Bible Bulletin Board*, 1862, <http://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/2920.htm> (accessed July 31, 2012).

¹²⁰Adoniram Judson, *The Ministry of the Spirit* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1894), 150.

¹²¹Many, if not most, textbooks of expository preaching pay great attention to finding the author’s intention, but often leave out the value and work of the Holy Spirit. See Wylie Heisler, "A Case for a Spirit-Driven Methodology of Expository Preaching" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), 8.

¹²²Robert Smith Jr., foreword to *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*, by Greg Heisler (Nashville: B&H, 2007), xi.

Word. 7) The testimony to Jesus Christ as Lord and mediator. 8) The opening of the hearts of those who hear and receive the Word. 9) The application of the Word of God to the listeners' lives. 10) The production of lasting fruit displayed in the lives of Spirit-filled believers.¹²³

Rhetorical tools have a necessary place in expository homiletics. However, if the preacher himself is not filled with the Holy Spirit or open to his guidance in preparing and delivering the sermon, preaching may be successful, but it has become a secular enterprise, far removed from what preaching should be about. In order to help preachers submit to and be inspired by the Holy Spirit, Osborne suggests, "Passively, Christian leaders depend on the Spirit and must spend much time in prayer seeking divine guidance and empowering for the message. Actively they seek wisdom to choose the proper techniques that will provide a channel for the Spirit to do his work."¹²⁴

Only when preachers commit to praying, seeking to be filled with and guided by the Spirit in preparation for their message and its delivery, can they be true ambassadors of God. Without this aspect, preachers may be effective orators, but they are not the servants God desires. Preachers need to submit themselves to the sanctifying and transforming work of the Holy Spirit. As mentioned before, Robinson's definition of expository preaching includes, "which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher then through the preacher, applies to the hearers."¹²⁵ Furthermore, he says, "Ultimately God is more interested in developing messengers than messages, and because the Holy Spirit confronts us primarily through the Bible, we must learn to listen to God before speaking for God."¹²⁶ Effective preaching, thus, first of all depends on the receptivity of preacher toward the Holy Spirit.

¹²³Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 4.

¹²⁴Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 352-53.

¹²⁵Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 21.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 27.

Exegeting the Audience

A second aspect of effective expository homiletics involves the task of exegeting one's audience. Today's audience is heavily formed and influenced by postmodernism.¹²⁷ Since the core philosophy of postmodernism implies a rejection of objective truth,¹²⁸ a concept incompatible with Christian belief in propositional truth, many are hesitant to have this mindset influence anything at all in their preaching.¹²⁹ Whether expository preachers like the philosophy of postmodernism or not, they have to accept the reality of postmodernism's power. They need to seek to employ expository preaching while being aware of the context and values of a contemporary audience, yet without compromising biblical truth. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, the preacher needs to know his audience, the particular struggles they face, their stage in life, their socio-economic situation, and so on. Partly by means of imagination, empathic imagination in particular, the preacher will be able to exegete the audience. This will ensure that the message that is designed and delivered will be most effective.

Logical Appeal (*Logos*)

When a preacher submits himself to the Holy Spirit's guidance and has done

¹²⁷R. Albert Mohler Jr., "The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition and the Challenge of the Postmodern Paradigm," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 54.

¹²⁸Ronald J. Allen, "Preaching and Postmodernism," *Interpretation* 55, no. 1 (2001): 35; Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004), 136. Griffin argues that, consequently, postmodernism produced two major forms of theological approaches: deconstructionism (e.g., Michael Foucault and Jacques Derrida), which denies any form of truth and is against any form of authority, thus practicing radical relativism and the other form is constructive postmodern theology, which is a form of postliberal theology represented by people like Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, William Placher, Stanley Hauerwas, and William Willimon. See David Ray Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World: Essays in Postmodern Theology*, Suny Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), x.

¹²⁹Breidenbaugh, *Preaching for Bodybuilding*, 31.

the hard work of understanding his audience, other aspects of rhetoric can be applied most effectively. Logical appeal, first, is based on belief in human reasoning; rationality is one of the most basic characteristics of human beings.¹³⁰ *Logos*, originally a Greek philosophical word that referred to the principle of rational order in the universe, was later used to point to rhetoric persuasive appeals to rationality, structure, and form.¹³¹ The idea is that the rhetorician knows how to appeal to his audience through the formation of his speech.¹³² Thus, *logos* refers to the content or message of the text and its various methods to appeal to the listeners. In the development of logical appeal, attention is paid to choice of words, genres of speech, formal logical arguments, inductive or deductive reasoning, and the use of illustrations and imagination.¹³³

Logical appeal is important to expository preaching, because once the meaning of the text is determined through author-centered hermeneutics, the preacher then needs to construct his message in such a way that his audience can follow, and more importantly, is persuaded as to the truth of the message through the logic of the argument. Several authors offer tips on how to develop the main body of the sermon according to the principle of logical appeal. MacArthur suggests raising several questions and finding answers from the text to construct a message.¹³⁴ Questions that can be asked to write a

¹³⁰Edward P. J. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 39.

¹³¹John S. McClure, *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 79.

¹³²Ronald J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon: Relationship, Content, Feeling* (Danvers, MA: Chalice, 2004), 43.

¹³³*Ibid.* See also Ronald J. Allen, John S. McClure, Ronald J. Allen, L. Susan Bond, Dan P. Mosely, G. Lee Ramsey, Jr., ed., *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* (Danvers, MA: Chalice, 2004), 11.

¹³⁴John MacArthur, "Moving from Exegesis to Exposition," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, 237.

good message include the following:

What am I going to say? What will my sermon be about? (subject) What will I say about what I'm going to say? (predicate) How will I order the elements of the sermon? What comes first? What follows? How will I begin and end? What explanation, arguments, warrants, or proofs are required in order to convince listeners? What similar lines of reasoning can I use that will be recognized by listeners? How can I appeal to common-sense thinking?¹³⁵

One's imaginative capacity is needed to answer some of these questions. When these questions are answered, a second concern becomes structuring the sermon into a logical outline; this is the road map that supports the main idea and helps the audience to follow the logical flow.¹³⁶ This logical flow provides "a sense of expectancy and anticipation."¹³⁷ This outline then needs to be filled with words, illustrations, and arguments that provide a logical appeal to the preacher's audience.

Emotional Appeal (*Pathos*)

Aristotle believed that people in similar situations make decisions according to their varying states of emotion.¹³⁸ He says, "The emotions [*pathe*] are those things through which, by undergoing change, people come to differ in their judgments and

¹³⁵John S. McClure, *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 79.

¹³⁶Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 133; John MacArthur, "Moving from Exegesis to Exposition," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, 237; and Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 146.

¹³⁷Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 149.

¹³⁸DeSilva supports Aristotle's argument: "They are more likely to take action against a person, group or state when they feel anger than when they feel calm. They are more likely to take certain precautions or pursue a certain remedy when they are afraid than when they feel secure or complacent. They are more like to acquit a defendant when they feel more pity for than indignation against that defendant. Arousing emotions to move the hearers closer to taking the action or making the decision the speaker is promoting is always part of a strategy of persuasion" (deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 782).

which are accompanied by pain and pleasure, for example, anger, pity, fear, and other such things and their opposites.”¹³⁹ Not only this Greek philosopher, but also Christian thinkers support emotional appeal. Augustine, for example, argues for the use of pathos for the sake of “moving the minds of listeners, not that they may know what is done, but that they may do what they already know should be done.”¹⁴⁰

However, the importance of emotional appeal has often been ignored. Lloyd-Jones, one of Great Britain’s most influential preachers, laments the lack of pathos in Reformed preaching:

This element of pathos and of emotion is, to me, a very vital one. It is what has been so seriously lacking in the present century, and perhaps especially among Reformed people. We tend to lose our balance and to become over-intellectual, indeed almost to despise the element of feeling and emotion. We are such learned men, we have such a great grasp of the Truth, that we tend to despise feeling. The common herd, we feel, are emotional and sentimental, but they have no understanding!¹⁴¹

Christian preaching is not just the reading of a text or the announcement of some facts; preachers have the responsibility to move the hearts of their listeners as best as they can. Therefore, as Arthurs points out, “Pathos deserves a central place in homiletical theorizing and practice—a higher place than it currently receives.”¹⁴²

Emotional appeal is an essential homiletic part for expository preaching for two reasons. First, the Bible is written in emotional language. Robinson explains,

As there are dominant and supporting ideas in a passage so, especially in larger passages, major and minor moods occur. Yet, as there are controlling ideas so there

¹³⁹Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 2.1.8.

¹⁴⁰Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.27.

¹⁴¹D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 93.

¹⁴²Jeffrey Arthurs, "Pathos Needed: Why Reasonable Preachers Have Regard for Emotion," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 591.

are dominant moods. That dominant mood, at least, should mark the spirit of the sermon. While recreating the atmosphere requires thought, feeling, and skill, expository preachers need to be as true to the mood as to the message of the passage. The tasks of the poet, the playwright, the artist, the prophet, and the preacher overlap at this point – to make people feel and see.¹⁴³

Second, emotional appeal is an essential element to persuade the hearers with the truth of the message. Many people still believe that the truth alone is sufficient to change people. However, in many cases the bare truth is not enough to move people to action,¹⁴⁴ although the truth is certainly a crucial element of persuasion. Osborne points out that

many preachers simply assume that people will be persuaded when the truth is placed in front of them. However, this ignores the ability of human nature to rationalize away the truth. . . . While secular hermeneutics concludes with the impartation of meaning and significance, biblical hermeneutics is not finished until the hearer is persuaded of the relevance and truthfulness of the message and motivated to act accordingly.¹⁴⁵

Being motivated to act, then, finally, is the third reason for emotional appeal. Not only is emotional appeal important in becoming convinced of the truth, it is also an important tool to help people be moved in their hearts to godly action whenever and as soon as situations call for it. Priestly puts it this way: “The genuine and proper use of the passions undoubtedly is to rouse men to just and vigorous action upon every emergency, without the slow intervention of reason.”¹⁴⁶ How exactly imagination can be used with

¹⁴³Haddon W. Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Biblical Preaching*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 83.

¹⁴⁴John Ward, *A System of Oratory Delivered in a Course of Lectures Publicly Read at Gresham College, London to which is Prefixed an Inaugural Oration, Spoken in Latin, before the Commencement of the Lectures, according to the Usual Custom*. (London: Cornhill, 1759), 299-300, quoted in Lester Thonssen and A. Craid Baird, *Speech Criticism: The Development of Standards for Rhetorical Appraisal* (New York: Ronald, 1948), 357.

¹⁴⁵Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 352.

¹⁴⁶Joseph Priestley, *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (Menston, UK: Scholar, 1777), 80, quoted in Thonssen and Baird, *Speech Criticism*, 357.

regard to emotional appeal is elucidated in chapters four and five.

Ethical Appeal (*Ethos*)

Aristotle considers ethical appeal to be one of three major appeals used to persuade others:¹⁴⁷ “Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided.”¹⁴⁸

He believes that “character is almost, so to speak, the most authoritative form of persuasion.”¹⁴⁹ The Christian thinker Augustine supports Aristotle’s appeal for ethos: “the life of the speaker has greater weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any grandness of eloquence.”¹⁵⁰ The speaker’s ethos is also significant in modern preaching. Brooks, for example, argues, “Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. It has in it two essential elements, truth and personality. Neither of those can it spare and still be preaching. ... And preaching is the bringing of truth through personality.”¹⁵¹

Ethos has two aspects. First, the meaning of ethos in expository preaching is

¹⁴⁷Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 26.

¹⁴⁸Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1.2.4.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.27.59.

¹⁵¹Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1898), 5. Most of the early Yale lectures revealed the importance of the personal character of preachers. Another voice comes from Fuller, who considers Brooks’s statement to be dangerous. See Charles William Fuller, “An Evangelical Assessment and Reconstruction of Phillips Brooks’ Definition of Preaching” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009).

the self-application of the preacher's message.¹⁵² Robinson's famous definition of expository preaching explains that the prepared message applies first to "the personality and experience of the preacher then through the preacher, applies to the hearers." The importance for self-application is that "the audience does not hear a sermon, they hear a person— they hear you."¹⁵³ Others affirm this sentiment, including Chapell: "No truth more loudly calls for pastoral holiness than the linkage of a preacher's character and the sermon's reception. ... The people will not remember what I said, they will remember *me* and whether my life gave credence to the message of Scripture."¹⁵⁴

Second, ethos has to do with the motives of the preacher. Lloyd-Jones distinguishes between two different attitudes in ministry; namely, loving to preach and loving people who listen to preaching. He says, "The trouble with some of us is that we love preaching, but we are not always careful to make sure that we love the people to whom we are actually preaching. If you lack this element of compassion for the people you will also lack the pathos which is a very vital element in all true preaching."¹⁵⁵

Not only should they be able to sincerely love people, their lives need to be a reflection of what they preach and teach.¹⁵⁶ Their character should be characterized by integrity and sincerity. Stott says "he means what he says when in the pulpit, and he practices what he preaches when out of it."¹⁵⁷ Self-examination, seeking out supervision

¹⁵²Stott presents four specific personal characteristics that the preacher should seek in order to enhance his ethos: sincerity, earnestness, courage and humility. See Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 262-337.

¹⁵³Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 25-26.

¹⁵⁴Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 29.

¹⁵⁵Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 92.

¹⁵⁶Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 262. Stott claims, "Nothing is more nauseating to contemporary youth than hypocrisy, and nothing more attractive than sincerity" (ibid.).

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

or mentorship by wise Christians, and sincere use of the Christian disciplines may help the preacher enhance his ethos as part of his personal sanctification.

Definition and Description of Imagination

Having examined the concept of expository preaching, one may turn to understanding “imagination” with the goal of incorporating imagination effectively in the process of preaching.¹⁵⁸ According to Stevenson, defining “the extremely flexible notion of imagination would be a lifetime’s work.”¹⁵⁹ He, however, defined imagination as “the capacity to see old and familiar things in new associations from new perspectives, to combine things not previously put together.”¹⁶⁰ Other definitions include “the power of conceiving as definite the things which are invisible to the senses, of giving them distinct shape;”¹⁶¹ “the ability to organize sensory impressions, mental representations, and images into a meaningful, coherent whole;”¹⁶² and “the means by which we are able to represent anything not directly accessible, including *both* the world of the imaginary *and* recalcitrant aspects of the real world; is the medium of fiction as well as of fact.”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸I am indebted to Marcus Leeds’s dissertation for some direction regarding definition, negative attitudes, and historical figures concerning imagination. See Marcus Robert Leeds, “Imagination as a Handmaiden to Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal of the Role of Imagination in Theological Methodology” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005, 3-23).

¹⁵⁹Leslie Stevenson, "Twelve Conceptions of Imagination," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (July 2003): 238.

¹⁶⁰Stevenson, *In The Biblical Preacher's Workshop*, 86.

¹⁶¹Henry Ward Beecher, *The Personal Elements which Bear an Important Relation to Preaching*, Yale Lectures on Preaching, vol. 1 (New York: J. B. Ford & Company, 1872; repr., Boston: The Pilgrim, 1902), 110.

¹⁶²Bonnie Howe, "Imagination," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*.

¹⁶³Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and Religious Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 66.

Moreover, the word imagination has many related terms. Strawson compared terms such as ‘image,’ ‘imagine,’ ‘imagination,’ and ‘imaginative,’ to a variety of related family members, whose roles and relationships would be hard to describe.¹⁶⁴ Defining imagination is further complicated by its susceptibility to the subjective interpretation of both laypeople and scholars who create their own conceptions of imagination through definitions.¹⁶⁵

Thus, without assuming that this dissertation can provide a comprehensive theory and definition, the following sections regarding imagination offer some basic ideas of this complex yet important concept. First, a birds-eye view of the history of imagination is provided. Second, Christians’ frequently negative attitude towards the use of imagination—which is the reason for it being ignored for much of Christian history—is examined. Then, two major ways of defining imagination are explored. These two aspects prove helpful to developing the use of imagination for both biblical hermeneutics and homiletics.

A Brief History of Imagination

The history of the theory of imagination goes back to Plato and Aristotle.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴P. F. Strawson, "Imagination and Perception," in *Experience & Theory*, ed. Lawrence Foster and J. W. Swanson (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 31.

¹⁶⁵Augustine had a similar struggle in defining time, about which he said, “If no one ask of me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not” (Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, trans. J. G. Pilkington [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1876], 301, quoted in Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-modern* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998], 1).

¹⁶⁶For a brief history of the theory of imagination, see Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Harold Osborne, *Aesthetics and Art Theory* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970), 208-24; Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 139-72; and Eva T. H. Brann, *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance*

Kearney argues that Plato is the first person who uses a systematic metaphysical system to develop a theory of imagination.¹⁶⁷ Plato defines imagination as “the union of sense and opinion.”¹⁶⁸ Generally, Plato is suspicious of using imagination, because it is an imitation of truth. Therefore, the products of human creative, artistic, and rhetorical efforts are false to a certain degree.¹⁶⁹ Plato believes the human mind can be divided into more important intelligible parts and less valuable visible parts that include the imagination.¹⁷⁰ Soccio explains this categorization in terms of the relationship between knowledge and opinion. Knowledge includes reasoning and understanding and is the form of being; opinion includes perception and imagination and is the form of becoming.¹⁷¹

(Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), 29-205.

¹⁶⁷Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 87. Kearney also provides information regarding pre-Socratic thinkers who deal with the metaphysical concept of imagination, *ibid.*, 416. See also, Murray Wright Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought*, Illinois University Studies in Language and Literature, vol. 12 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1927), 13-18; Francis Macdonald Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (London: Harvester, 1980), 109, 158, 250-51; and John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908), 228-32. For a detailed study of Plato’s view of imagination, see Murray W. Bundy, "Plato's View of the Imagination," *Studies in Philology* 19, no. 4 (1922): 362-403.

¹⁶⁸Plato, *Sophist* 264, in *The Dialogue of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Great Books of the Western World, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, vol. 7 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 577.

¹⁶⁹Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 90. Kearney demonstrates that Plato’s negative view of imagination is a result of the myth that describes Prometheus stealing fire from Zeus for humans. *Ibid.*, 88-90.

¹⁷⁰Plato, *Republic VI*, 509-510, in *The Dialogue of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Great Books of the Western World, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, vol. 7 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 386-87.

¹⁷¹Douglas J. Soccio, *Archetypes of Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy*, 8th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth, 2012), 136-37.

While Plato mainly views imagination as “external imitation” within a metaphysical system, Aristotle understands imagination as “mental representation” in the soul’s make-up.¹⁷² Aristotle describes imagination as being “different from either perceiving or discursive thinking, though it is not found without sensation, or judgment without it.”¹⁷³ Hughes explains this statement: “Aristotle situates the imagination between sense perception and discursive thinking. On the one hand, imagination is not found without sensation, since we are unable to produce images without prior sensory experience; on the other, the imagination produces images by which we think.”¹⁷⁴

Thus, imagination (or *phantasia*) is a bridge between sensation and human thinking.¹⁷⁵ In line with Aristotle’s thought, Beaney views imagination as a powerful tool that provides people with unlimited conceptual ability, yet it is also part of much of daily life. Kearney explains that for both Plato and Aristotle “imagination remains largely a reproductive rather than a productive activity, a servant rather than a master of meaning, imitation rather than origin.”¹⁷⁶

Augustine uses the terms *phantasma* and *phantasia*, which seem to overlap with the reproductive and productive, or creative, quality of imagination.¹⁷⁷ He believes

¹⁷²Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 106.

¹⁷³Aristotle, *On the Soul*, in *The Works of Aristotle*, trans. J. A. Smith, Great Books of the Western World, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, vol. 8 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 660, quoted in Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 107.

¹⁷⁴Aaron W. Hughes, *The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 88.

¹⁷⁵Nathan L. Tierney, *Imagination and Ethical Ideals: Prospects for a Unified Philosophical and Psychological Understanding* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 134.

¹⁷⁶Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 113.

¹⁷⁷Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, vol. 5 (New York: New City,

that the latter is the internal capacity which rearranges the material sensations or impressions, which the external capacity had received, in the form of mental representations. This process aids the reasoning ability of human beings.¹⁷⁸

Aquinas, similar to Aristotle, defines imagination as “a meditational faculty between mind and body.”¹⁷⁹ He understands imagination to be different than sense-perception, because the mind can produce an image of something that is absent.¹⁸⁰ He uses the metaphor of a storehouse to explain imagination’s character; imagination is “a storehouse of forms received through the senses. Furthermore, for the apprehension of intentions which are not received through the senses, the estimative power is appointed: and for the preservation thereof, the memorative power, which is a storehouse of such-like intention.”¹⁸¹ In contrast to previous philosophers, Aquinas is more positive towards the use of imagination.

Thus far, imagination is viewed as an imitation of the truth. But this changes drastically with Kant, who argues that imagination is a source that produces truth.¹⁸² Kearney states that “Kant rescued imagination from its servile role as an intermediary faculty between our sensible and intelligible experience, declaring it to be the primary

1991), 8.9, 9.10; and Gerard O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 106.

¹⁷⁸Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 420.

¹⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁸⁰Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Great Books of the Western World, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, vol. 19 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 1.85.3, quoted in Leslie Stevenson, “Twelve Conceptions of Imagination,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (July 2003): 238.

¹⁸¹Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, 1.78.4.

¹⁸²Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 155.

and indispensable precondition of all knowledge.”¹⁸³ Kant defines imagination as “the power of presenting an object in intuition *even without the object’s being present*.”¹⁸⁴ As a result of his influence, imagination received a prominent place in epistemology, aesthetics and ontology.¹⁸⁵

Negative Attitudes toward Imagination

The greatest obstacle to defining and using imagination in Christian preaching has been the negative attitude towards the concept. Evangelical Christians have long looked at imagination with suspicion, for several reasons. First, although imagination is, in fact, an essential part of human thinking, many have confused the concept with fancy. Whereas imagination is a creative, vital, and controlled mental act to produce something new, fancy merely combines certain aspects and is, therefore, less creative.¹⁸⁶ Or, in other words, “Whereas imagination sunders and re-creates, fancy re-arranges experienced givens in novel patterns; thus the centaur, a conjoining of man and horse, is a fanciful image. The imagination has deep symbolizing power, while fancy can achieve only a skillful piece of photographic editing.”¹⁸⁷ The result may be that imagination penetrates to the heart and essence, but fancy plays on the mere surface. Imagination is under

¹⁸³Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 156-57.

¹⁸⁴Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, abridged ed., trans. Werners Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub, 1999), 70.

¹⁸⁵Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 157.

¹⁸⁶Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Fackson Bate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 69-89, quoted in M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Fancy and Imagination," in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 9th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009).

¹⁸⁷Ray L. Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 201.

control of reason, whereas fancy often loses the connection with reality and is, therefore, generally not wanted in Christian preaching.¹⁸⁸

Scruton distinguishes between imagination and fantasy in the following way: “The nature of the fantasy object is dictated by the passion that seeks it. (Pornography, therefore, is a prime instance of fantasy.) By contrast, the truly imaginative object produces and controls our response to it, and thereby educates and renews our passions, so as to redirect them toward the actual world.”¹⁸⁹ Thus, whereas fantasy may lead one to follow sinful passions, imagination may be a tool to fuel new affections.

Second, a distinction can be made between using imagination in imaginative or imaginary fashion. Chapman describes ‘imaginary’ as being “primarily used in reference to that which is unreal and insubstantial, even delusional,” while the term ‘imaginative’ is “something which is not untrue but not necessarily true in the obvious sense either.” When imagination is incorrectly seen or used as imaginary, it is often seen in a negative light.¹⁹⁰

A third reason for the negative attitude towards imagination has to do with Bible translation.¹⁹¹ According to McIntyre, the 1611 King James Version translated

¹⁸⁸Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 422; and Mary Proudfoot, "Day by Day with Nature: For the Kindergarten and Primary Grades," *The Kindergarten-Primary Magazine*, June 1908, 12.

¹⁸⁹Roger Scruton, "Imagination," in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Stephen Davies et al. (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 349.

¹⁹⁰Stephen B. Chapman, "Imaginative Readings of Scripture and Theological Interpretation," in *Out of Egypt*, ed. Craig Bartholomew et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 414.

¹⁹¹Thomas Altizer, "The Apocalyptic Identity of the Modern Imagination," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48, no. 2 (1981): 19. Altizer claims that “there are no words in the Bible which can properly be translated as ‘imagination,’ and those words closest to it all bear a purely negative meaning, as can most clearly be seen in Genesis, Jeremiah, and Paul” (ibid.).

certain Hebrew and Greek words with the word imagination: יָצַר *yetsar* (Gen 6:5; 8:21; Deut 31:21), שְׂרִירֻת *sheriruth* (Deut 29:19; Jer 3:17; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17), מַחֲשֶׁבֶת *machashebeth* (Prov 6:18; Lam 3:6) and διαλογισμος *dialogismos* (Rom 1:21), διανοια *dianoia* (Luke 1:51), and λογισμος *logismos* (2 Cor 10:5). In the original language these words have negative connotations in that they refer to acts contrary to God and his ways. The fact that, for the last three and a half centuries, these words have been rendered ‘imagination’ has caused many to distrust imagination, even though most modern English Versions now use other words, such as intention, stubbornness, and inclination, to translate the original.¹⁹²

Fourth, Calvin, an influential theologian for much of Western Christianity, wrote that God “rejects, without exception, all shapes and pictures, and other symbols by which the superstitious imagine they can bring him near to them.”¹⁹³ McIntyre argues that, even though Calvin did not reject all usage of images—rather, he used images and symbols to explain his theology of Christology and communion—this heavily influenced the way Reformed Christians viewed imagination.¹⁹⁴

Fifth, McIntyre argues that several significant modern philosophers have falsely accused Christianity of having been developed in large part through human imagination, thereby creating objective truths from imaginary events and stories. For example, Hegel’s notion of Theism states that “theism in all its forms is an imaginative

¹⁹²John McIntyre, *Faith, Theology, and Imagination* (Edinburgh: The Handsel, 1987), 5.

¹⁹³Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.1.

¹⁹⁴McIntyre, *Faith, Theology, and Imagination*, 6-8. McIntyre uses Rake’s Progress (more explanation needed) to explain how this happened. He argues the disgust for images results from an emotional development of four stages: iconolatry, iconoclasm, iconophobia, and neologism.

distortion of final truth.”¹⁹⁵ Feuerbach writes that “Christ is the blending in one of feeling and imagination.”¹⁹⁶ McIntyre claims that this “inter-penetration of imagination and religion yields a result which is totally unacceptable to the philosophical mind.”¹⁹⁷

Finally, McIntyre argues that imagination, as an activity on the part of the human mind, has generally received little attention because of the theological conviction that “there was either no participation by the believer beyond passive reception of a subject immediately given; or, if the situation was thought to require participation, it was described as faith, given by the Spirit, and allowing for no contribution from the human side.”¹⁹⁸

Taking all this into consideration, it seems that human beings, and not necessarily imagination, are the culprit in avoiding imagination in preaching. Barth astutely states, “Imagination, too, belongs no less legitimately in this way to the human possibility of knowing. A man without an imagination is more of an invalid than one who lacks a leg. But fortunately each of us is gifted somewhere and somehow with

¹⁹⁵John Niemeyer Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), 143, quoted in McIntyre, *Faith, Theology, and Imagination*, 9 and based on G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 750-85.

¹⁹⁶Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. Marian Evans (New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1855), 197. Furthermore, Feuerbach writes that “all religious cosmogonies are products of the imagination” (115) and “the Son is the reflected splendor of the imagination, the image dearest to the heart; but for the very reason that he is only an object of the imagination, he is only the nature of the imagination made objective” (108) and that “according to reason, the things distinguished are only distinctions; according to imagination, the distinctions are things distinguished which therefore do away with the unity of the divine being. To the reason, the divine persons are phantoms, to the imagination realities” (295-96).

¹⁹⁷McIntyre, *Faith, Theology, and Imagination*, 9.

¹⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 10.

imagination, however starved this gift may be in some or misused by others.”¹⁹⁹

And, thus, even though the above considerations are important matters for reflection, dismissing imagination as dangerous for Christianity would be an error. Imagination is an essential tool for expository preaching for the two major reasons already introduced in the previous chapter.

First, imagination is necessary for biblically sound hermeneutics, since the original authors, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit, expected their readers to use imagination to understand and interpret the given messages. This is reflected in biblical linguistics. All biblical authors actively used imagination devices such as metaphors, imagery, symbolism, and narrative stories and wove them into the genre they employed to write down their message.

Second, imagination is an essential aspect for evangelical homiletics. Human beings were created to be persuaded not only through logical appeal and propositional statements, but also through imaginative appeals that can come in emotional, visual, narrative, and symbolic form. Expository preachers should actively use this tool so that their messages will have effective and lasting impact. In short, imagination ought to be used in order to correctly understand the original author’s intention and to deliver the message in a life-transforming manner.

Two Aspects of Imagination

As mentioned before, consensus regarding a definition about imagination does not exist. In order to define and understand imagination in a way helpful to expository preaching, this dissertation focuses on two aspects that are often mentioned when talking about imagination: passive and active imagination. Passive imagination is a simple impression of objects that occurs naturally according to the senses. Voltaire, for example,

¹⁹⁹Karl Barth, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, Pt. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 19), 3.1.91.

says that “it paints, independently of ourselves, what our eyes have seen, it hears what our ears have heard, and touches what we have touched.”²⁰⁰ One’s will is not really involved, and it is a result of one’s memory. Hamerton describes passive imagination as that “condition of mind in which we are capable of following without effort the active imagination of others, but do not create anything by an imaginative effort ourselves. . . . The state of passive imagination is idle, assuredly, in this sense, that for the moment it produces nothing, but it may be receptive.”²⁰¹ The passive imagination is a result of what Scruton calls “the capacity to experience mental images;”²⁰² mental images are similar to sensory impressions and can come upon people when thinking, dreaming, perceiving, remembering, and imagining.²⁰³

Active imagination, on the other hand, is joining “combination and reflection to memory.”²⁰⁴ This type of imagination is an essential starting point in the field of arts and in inventing anything new. Rather than being mere memory, active imagination uses memory to create something novel. Roth uses the term ‘counterfactual thinking’ to denote the active imagination: “the capacity to disengage from reality in order to think about events and experiences which have not actually occurred and might never occur.”²⁰⁵ In contrast to literal thinking, this capacity is characterized by an open and

²⁰⁰M. De Voltaire, *A Philosophical Dictionary* (London: John and Henry L. Hunt, 1824), 118-19.

²⁰¹Philip Gilbert Hamerton, *Imagination in Landscape Painting* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1887), 56.

²⁰²Roger Scruton, "Imagination," in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, 346.

²⁰³*Ibid.*

²⁰⁴Voltaire, *A Philosophical Dictionary*, 120.

²⁰⁵Ilona Roth, "Imagination," in *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 443.

creative mind.²⁰⁶

Much earlier, Plato distinguished between two forms of imagination, one of “likeness-making” and the other “phantastic.”²⁰⁷ The first is the imitating of the original object through the senses. The second is the creating of a new object as result of combining sense with opinion.²⁰⁸ Aquinas also describes two ways: “There are two operations in the sensitive part. One, in regard of impression only, and thus the operation of the senses takes place by the senses being impressed by the sensible. The other is formation, inasmuch as the imagination forms for itself an image of an absent thing, or even of something never seen.”²⁰⁹ Kant would call these two aspects the productive and the reproductive forms of imagination:

The power of imagination (*facultas imaginandi*), as a faculty of intuition without the presence of the object, is either *productive*, that is, a faculty of the original presentation of the object (*exhibition originaria*), which thus precedes

²⁰⁶Scruton, "Imagination." For this reason, Stevenson explains that imagination is to be distinguished from simple sensory perception: “Perception is thus understood as a causal relation in which the perceived object affects the perceiver’s sense-organ(s), whereas imagination involves no such presently active modification of the perceiver.” Thus, the one who uses imagination is active and in control of what is happening. Stevenson follows Aquinas’ division of the sensory parts of the soul into two: “There are two operations in the sensitive part. One, in regard of impression only, and thus the operation of the senses takes place by the senses being impressed by the sensible. The other is formation, inasmuch as the imagination forms for itself an image of an absent thing, or even of something never seen” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province [Raleigh, NC: Hayes Barton, 2006], 796). Kant makes a similar distinction: “Sensibility in the cognitive faculty (the faculty of intuitive representation) contains two parts: sense and the power of imagination. The first is the faculty of intuition in the presence of an object, the second is intuition even without the presence of an object” (Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Robert B. Loudon [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 45). See Stevenson, “Twelve Conceptions of Imagination,” 239.

²⁰⁷Plato, *The Dialogue of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett, Great Books of the Western World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892), 401.

²⁰⁸Ibid., 400.

²⁰⁹Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.85.2.

experience; or *reproductive*, a faculty of the derivative presentation of the object (*exhibition derivative*), which brings back to the mind an empirical intuition that it had previously. . . . The power of imagination (in other words) is either *inventive* (productive) or merely *recollective* (reproductive).²¹⁰

Though much more can be said about the imagination, for example, its neurological basis²¹¹ and its psychological development in human beings,²¹² this focus on just these two aspects of imagination will prove sufficiently helpful in discerning how to use imagination in preaching.

The Use of Imagination in Expository Preaching

With this rather simple and straightforward explanation of passive and active imagination, it becomes clear why expository preachers should make active use of this tool. It seems that a logical connection can be made between passive imagination and hermeneutics on the one hand and active imagination and homiletics on the other. When the author's intention is being discovered in expository hermeneutics, employing the passive imagination may help to create a fuller picture of that intention.

Thus, imagining the context in which the original message was written can help to bridge, to some degree, the chronological, spatial, and psychological gaps between the world of the text and that of the interpreter. Also, certain theological realities are rather invisible to normal human senses. Imagining them can help the preacher as well as the audience to understand these better as an actual reality, and to arrange their lives accordingly. Pickett says,

Scientists must imagine both those existing elements of matter that are too small or too large to be seen directly through their instruments. What is not temporally

²¹⁰Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, 60-61.

²¹¹Ashton Acton, *Issues in Neurology and Neuroscience* (Atlanta: Scholarly Editions, 2012).

²¹²James Sully, *The Teacher's Handbook of Psychology* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910), 253-88.

accessible because it is past or future (the beginning of the universe, the impact of global warming) must also be imagined. And what is not *logically* visible, like the soul or the kingdom of God, must similarly be imagined. . . . The kingdom of God is that which, according to the Scriptures, truly exists but needs to be imagined and made manifest.²¹³

In the area of homiletics, then, the active imagination can be employed to make the meaning of the text relevant to people today. According to Lewis, imagination has the power to “connect abstract principles to everyday life.”²¹⁴ As such, active imagination can, first, help the preacher to recreate the emotional atmosphere of the original author and his audience in the writing of his sermon. Robinson believes that “every passage has a mood,” and that “the mood involves the feelings of the writer and also the emotions his writings evoke in the reader.”²¹⁵ Second, preachers can use active imagination to exegete the audience and their context. Imagining what their lives might be like, their challenges and struggles, and their hopes and desires, is a necessary step in working towards an appropriate and relevant application based on the meaning of the text.²¹⁶ Third, preachers may imagine the future situation of the transformed audience. The final goal of expository preaching is to facilitate a transformation in the lives of those who hear the message. Hendricks compares sound interpretation of the text without application to abortion, and emphasizes the fact that the word of God is written to transform people’s

²¹³Brian D. Ingrassia and Todd E. Pickett, "Reviving the Power of Biblical Language," in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Moller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 249.

²¹⁴Peter J. Schakel, "Irrigating Deserts with Moral Imagination," *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics* 11 (2004): 21.

²¹⁵Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching*, 82. See also Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 35. York argues that preachers are often able to “capture the emotion of an author” through reading the text several times and in various translations (*ibid.*).

²¹⁶Timothy S. Warren, "A Paradigm for Preaching," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991), 463-86. Warren develops Stott’s bridge metaphor into a detailed homiletical process from the ancient text to a contemporary audience.

lives.²¹⁷ God’s word, applied by the Holy Spirit, has the power to do so. Consequently, helping the audience imagine their transformation as a result of applying the message may greatly enhance their motivation to live by faith.

Imagination in Expository Preaching Further Explored

There are two more reasons that can be mentioned that highlight the necessity of the use of imagination. First, in the Enlightenment and down through modernity the preacher’s calling was understood that to be of a teacher.²¹⁸ According to Johnson, it was all about “extracting particular verifiable *ideas* from the text that could be distilled into propositional statements in a sermon” and about “the transmission of information and the persuasion of the hearer to some action or ascent.”²¹⁹ This view lacks an understanding of creativity and non-rationalistic ways of engaging this world.²²⁰ Subsequently, the preacher was also seen as Herald, the one who proclaims the message of the gospel and thus serves as instrument through which the Word is revealed to people.²²¹ Rational arguments were not considered important; it was all about faith and the work of the Holy Spirit.²²² Johnson suggests that today the preacher could be seen as liturgical artist, a concept that embraces the preacher as teacher and herald, but, additionally, also includes

²¹⁷Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 22.

²¹⁸Trygve David Johnson, *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist: Metaphor, Identity, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 68.

²¹⁹*Ibid.*, 68, 73.

²²⁰*Ibid.*, 80.

²²¹*Ibid.*, 91, 96.

²²²*Ibid.*, 96.

more creativity.²²³ Even though Johnson focuses on the liturgy as a whole, of which the sermon is part, this still emphasizes an important aspect of being a preacher, namely that, in a sense, he is an artist as well. Johnson states,

Preachers are artists that have a role in God's drama of salvation as they are called to faithfully and creatively reiterate the gospel. They are called to speak the truth beautifully as they witness to the person of Jesus and the work of His Father. Their work is enlivened by the Holy Spirit to invite God's people to participate in the continuing creativity of the Word.²²⁴

This metaphor of the preacher as artist highlights how pastors employ their imaginative capacity to bring home the truth of God to their hearers.²²⁵

Bauckham and Hart point to a second aspect that demonstrates the significance of using the imagination in preaching. With the turning of the millennium this world seems to have lost hope; the modern secular myth of progress was indeed a myth, a utopia.²²⁶ In a time where hope for a good future or a good ending has severely diminished, imaginative resources of Christian eschatology need to be explored.²²⁷ The imagination can play an important role in this aspect. Bauckham and Hart explain the reason, namely that "hope . . . is a vital function of imagination lying at the heart of

²²³Johnson says that "The Preacher as Liturgical Artist calls preachers to work within the symbiotic relationship between preaching and the whole liturgy for the ultimate end of protecting the art of preaching so it can always be freed to glorify the triune God. This means working with other liturgical artist like readers, musicians, visual artists, architects, and the artistic mob that is the congregation. Working in this school of art, the preacher must integrate the sermon into a kaleidoscopic range of forms and events that together honor God and lead the people into his presence." Johnson, *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist*, 176.

²²⁴Ibid., 134.

²²⁵Johnson does not give adequate appreciation to the biblical precedents and character of expository preaching, but his views can be instructive for strengthening the impact of expository preaching.

²²⁶Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 9.

²²⁷Ibid., 65.

humanity. Specifically it is the capacity to imagine otherwise, to transcend the boundaries of the present in a quest for something more, something better, than the present affords.”²²⁸ And so it is that “through the captivity of our imagination, God’s Spirit draws us forward into the reality of his own future, a future the openness of which is no longer a threat, therefore, but a source of that joyful energy under the influence of which God calls us, for now, to live and labour in the world.”²²⁹

One important concept that leads to the stimulation and use of imagination is that of metaphor; a concept that is mentioned at several points in this dissertation. In fact, imagination can often be understood in terms of metaphors. According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors are ingrained not only in our everyday language, but also in our thoughts and actions.²³⁰ Johnson states that metaphors may “shape how we see, experience, and perform life.”²³¹ They have the power to shape and create perceptions of reality²³² and they impact our affective experience, because words carry emotional meaning.²³³ Metaphors are an aspect of the active imagination, because “*the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.*”²³⁴ There are conventional metaphors, which “structure the ordinary conceptual system of our culture, which is reflected in our everyday language,”²³⁵ as well as metaphors outside

²²⁸Bauckham and Hart, *Hope against Hope*, 72.

²²⁹*Ibid.*, 71.

²³⁰George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3.

²³¹Johnson, *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist*, 28.

²³²*Ibid.*, 35.

²³³*Ibid.*, 43.

²³⁴Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 5. Italics theirs.

²³⁵*Ibid.*, 139.

of our conventional conceptual system, which are “capable of giving us a new understanding of our experience. Thus, they can give new meaning to our pasts, to our daily activity, and to what we know and believe.”²³⁶ It seems that both conventional and non-conventional metaphors are important aspects of the active imagination and carry a lot of promise in the process of hermeneutics and homiletics.

Regarding hermeneutics, the art of understanding what a text was meant to say, preachers need to discern whether metaphors were used to make a certain truth understood. In order to do so, they need to understand the nature of the specific metaphor which requires a thorough study of the language and culture of that time. In homiletics, the use of metaphor can be extremely powerful as well. Old truths can be phrased in conventional or non-conventional metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson argue that “what we experience with such a metaphor [one that is coherent] is a kind of reverberation down through the network of entailments [i.e., related (metaphorical) concepts²³⁷] that awakens and connects our memories of our past . . . experiences and serves as a possible guide for future ones.”²³⁸ The proper use of imagination, therefore, carries great promise for both the understanding of the original message and the potential transformation a particular text can bring about in the lives of those who hear the Word.

Conclusion

Understanding the concepts of imagination and expository preaching is essential to identifying the need for imagination in expository preaching. This chapter explained in detail expository hermeneutics and homiletics. The first is characterized by a focus on authorial intent. Author-centered hermeneutics seeks to determine the point of a

²³⁶Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 139.

²³⁷*Ibid.*, 9.

²³⁸*Ibid.*, 140.

certain message as the original author intended it. The point of the message may translate itself in various applications for the audience. Expository homiletics focuses on helping the audience incorporate the message in and apply it to their own lives.

Subsequently, a brief section in this chapter focused on the complicated task of defining imagination. Imagination is often seen as involving both a passive and an active component. The passive imagination depends on memory and does not produce anything new, whereas the active imagination combines several existing aspects in order to create new ideas, visions, or concepts. These two aspects of imagination may prove to be helpful tools in expository preaching. Passive imagination can be used to understand the context in which the original author wrote his message and, thus, to determine the author's intention. In facilitating the use of the active imagination, the preacher can help the audience make new bridges so that the implications of the message can be applied to the audience's personal lives and move them to action. The importance of these two aspects is examined in even greater detail in chapters four and five where explicit applications, guidelines, and boundaries are provided in relation to expository hermeneutics and homiletics. This is done after examining, in the next chapter, how two non-expository preachers, Wilson and Troeger, use imagination in their hermeneutics and homiletics. Their work is used to elucidate proper and improper ways of employing imagination in expository preaching.

CHAPTER 3
SURVEY AND EVALUATION OF THE
NEW HOMILETIC METHODOLOGY
OF IMAGINATION

Introduction

Although imagination has received little attention in general among expository preachers, several New Homiletic scholars have dealt extensively with the use of imagination in preaching. The New Homiletic movement developed in part as a result of a perceived crisis in preaching in which traditional methods, described as “discursive, deductive, and propositional,” ceased being effective in reaching the audience.¹ Rather than the traditional method of communicating information, the New Homiletic seeks to make preaching an experience that touches the audience.²

The beginnings of the New Homiletics movement can be found with the publication of *Design for Preaching*, in which Henry Davis argues that the old homiletical method has lost its power to affect people, and that sermons need to be living “organisms.”³ The movement grew stronger with Fred Craddock’s inductive methodology and his book *As One without Authority*.⁴ Several scholars started publishing

¹David L. Allen, "A Tale of Two Roads: The New Homiletic and Biblical Authority," *Preaching* 18 (2002): 32.

²Richard L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing: Living Options in Homiletic Method* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 11-12. Allen, "A Tale of Two Roads," 31.

³Henry Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1958), 21-23.

⁴Allen, "A Tale of Two Roads," 31.

and giving shape to the New Homiletic.⁵

This chapter provides a brief overview of the development of the New Homiletic, focusing on the key contributions of Paul Wilson and Thomas Troeger, for each of them have written a whole book on imagination. Although the hermeneutics and theology employed by new homileticians may differ from those who adhere to expository preaching, their work may provide helpful insights. Accordingly, this chapter analyzes their work, provides a critique in light of evangelical expository preaching, and makes an assessment as to the potential their work has to offer.

Imagination in New Homiletic Preaching

Several developments and rationales explain why imagination began to take on a central role in new homiletic preaching.⁶ First, the research of non-evangelical biblical theologians contributed to a renewed focus on imagination.⁷ This is especially evident in their interpretation of Jesus' parables.⁸ Because of their lively character, the parables are

⁵Eslinger presents five representatives of the New Homiletics: Preaching as story by Charles Rice; narrative in the black tradition by Henry Mitchell; narrative and the sermonic plot by Eugene Lowry; the inductive method by Fred Craddock; and a phenomenological method by David Buttrick. See Eslinger, *A New Hearing*, 13.

⁶Wilson equates New Homiletics with contemporary and postmodern homiletics. Characteristically these homiletics “1) Engage the experience of the hearers, 2) seek to confirm rather than to prove, 3) value concrete experience over abstraction, 4) conceive of form as an extension and expression of content, 5) are often inductive and employ narrative, and 6) allow for participation and disagreement” (Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, Preaching and Its Partners, ed. Paul Scott Wilson [St. Louis: Chalice, 2004], 136-37).

⁷Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 22. David Buttrick, *Preaching the New and the Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 54-55. David Buttrick, *Speaking Parables: A Homiletic Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 20-21, 82, 100-01.

⁸See, for example, John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); John Dominic Crossan, "Parable and

better understood when imagination is employed to experience the full story.⁹

Second, New Homiletic preachers began focusing on imagination in their preaching, because it aided them in their favored approach of narrative over against propositional preaching,¹⁰ which made homilies more effective in appealing to the contemporary audience.¹¹ Wilson states, “Current thought is also suggesting that the biblical sermon or homily not be structured primarily on the basis of logical argument and persuasion. Instead, it argues for plot or narrative direction, and, as in any good

Example in the Teaching of Jesus," *Semeia* 1 (1974); Robert W. Funk, *Parables and Presence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); Robert W. Funk, "Structure in the Narrative Parables of Jesus," *Semeia* 2 (1974); Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

⁹Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 139. Hultgren says that “it is typical of Jesus’ parables to portray grandeur for the imagination” (J. Ian H. McDonald, "Alien Grace," in *Jesus and His Parables: Interpreting the Parables of Jesus Today*, ed. V. George Shillington [Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1997], 47).

¹⁰Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980). Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979). Robert A. Jensen, *Telling the Story: Variety and Imagination in Preaching* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980). Henry H. Mitchell, *The Recovery of Preaching* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977). Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles L. Rice, *Preaching the Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). Achtemeier says, "The Bible does not push a dogma upon us; it lets us enter into events by imagination, until the story becomes our story and we are transformed by it. ... Why turn God’s love into a proposition, when in reality it is it is made up of two thousand years of actions? And why preach moralisms about how we “should” and “must” and “ought” to love our neighbors, when we cannot have power to do that unless our selfish hearts are changed? Propositional and moralistic sermons both have one fault in common: They fail to mediate the actions of a saving Lord, because they fail to allow us to experience those actions for ourselves. They tell us *about* them; they never let us enter into them in the imaginations of our hearts” (Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Creative Preaching: Finding the Words* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1980], quoted in Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 84).

¹¹Calvin Miller, "Narrative Preaching," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 105. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 129-30.

drama, character and emotion in addition to its rational appeal.”¹² Bausch, also seeking to overcome the growing dissatisfaction with the traditional logical approach to preaching, explains how imagination may be the solution.¹³ Bausch states,

Systematic theology engages the intellect; storytelling engages the heart and indeed the whole person. Systematic theology is a later reflection on the Christ story; the story is the first expression of Christ. Logic is one avenue of truth, however limited. Imagination as myth and story is another avenue, but one that involves, disturbs and challenges us and as such is to be preferred.¹⁴

Imagination is, thus, an avenue to engaging people’s hearts, which leads to a third reason for the use of imagination. New homileticians emphasize the role of the audience in preaching. Listeners are no longer merely passively receiving the message, but actively accept and react to the sermon. Preacher and audience are no longer considered to be in a sender-receiver relationship; rather they become “co-participants.”¹⁵ Due to the focus on the audience, imagination, with its power to move the human heart, becomes essential. Craddock helps to see why.¹⁶ He is convinced that “imagination is fundamental to all thinking, from the levels of critical reasoning to reverie and daydreaming.”¹⁷ Also, he says that imagination is the “hope of life,” and argues that preachers must see imagination “as essential to the form and inseparable from the content

¹²Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 23.

¹³William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third, 1989), 17.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁵Jeffery Bullock, Robert Reid 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* 21, no. 2, (1998): 1.

¹⁶Craddock considers imagination to be one of the most important elements of his inductive approach to preaching. He believes that, generally, “biblical studies are suffering from a lack of imagination” (Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1978], 70).

¹⁷Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 77.

of the entire sermon.”¹⁸ Most importantly, however, with regard to a focus on the audience, he connects imagination with pastoral care. Imagination is crucial to understanding individuals in the congregation and overcoming stereotypical characterizations. The pastor needs to be involved in the lives of his church members, and using imagination is one way to perceive what they are going through.¹⁹ Connecting with the audience requires imagining their situation, but it also requires using words that connect the past with the present. According to Rice, the preacher becomes an imaginative translator connecting the doctrinal and theological identity of biblical language with the community of Christ in the world, thus providing continuity. Imagination, he says, is “the apt and artful presentation of the gospel in contemporary idiom. The saving grace of Christian communication today is imagination, that habit of mind which can move from one’s own situation into a new frame of reference.”²⁰

A fourth reason for the use of imagination in new homiletic preaching is that imagination supports analogical thinking. Buttrick argues that “preaching is a work of metaphor.”²¹ He explains, “Preaching reaches for metaphorical language because God is a mysterious Presence-in-Absence. God is not an object in view. Therefore, preaching

¹⁸Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 79-80.

¹⁹Ibid., 83.

²⁰Charles L. Rice, *Interpretation and Imagination: The Preacher and Contemporary Literature*, The Preacher's Paperback Library, ed. Edmund A. Steimle (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), xi.

²¹David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 113. In fact, many new homileticians use a metaphor to explain what preaching is, Lowry mentions some of these metaphors: *tree* (Grady Davis), *trip* (Fred Craddock), *gesture* (R. W. C. Browne), *music of speech* (Tom Troeger), *move* (David Buttrick), *celebration* (Henry Mitchell), *conversation* (Lucy Rose), *play* (David Schlafer), *spark of imagination* and *plot* (Paul Scott Wilson). See Eugene L. Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 15.

must resort to analogy, saying, ‘God is like . . .’²² The imagination, as part of human consciousness, is what enables people to create any kind of analogy. Through imagination an individual can depict time, people, situations, and places that he has never encountered before.²³

Fifth, imagination is essential in the process of sermon preparation. Lowry criticizes twentieth century liberal preachers who know *how* to say something, but not *what* to say. He also finds fault with Barthian preachers who know *what* to say but do not know *how* to say it. Naturally, he locates himself between these two traditions, with his approach that is “inductively in good liberal tradition form” and “deductively ordered in good Barthian fashion.”²⁴ For Lowry, preaching is storytelling. A sermon is a “narrative art form.”²⁵ A sermon moves “by logic movement, or by the shifting impact of image or images, or by the process of a story line.”²⁶ Lowry uses imagination throughout most of his sermon preparation.²⁷

The potential benefits of using imagination (e.g., understanding stories in the Bible better, bridging the time and culture gap, and connecting with the audience in a

²²Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 116.

²³*Ibid.*, 117.

²⁴Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 61. Lowry quotes Scherer and develops his idea. See Paul Scherer, *The Word God Sent* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 3-21.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 15.

²⁶Lowry, *The Sermon*, 108.

²⁷Lowry suggests three stages of sermon preparation: first, attending, which includes immersing oneself in the text; looking for trouble; and positioning oneself to be surprised. Second, imagining, which is naming important issues, images, and incidents; ruminating potential connections; and engaging and consulting as scholar in residence. Third, shaping, which is naming sermon focus and strategy; recognizing the sudden shift and positioning the good news; planning the sermon process; and naming the aim. See Lowry, *The Sermon*, 90-117.

more effective way) led to sophisticated discussions regarding imagination in preaching among new homileticians. Wilson and Troeger are important representatives of this development, each devoting at least one book to the subject in which he explains his theory and practice. The work of these two scholars is now explained and consequently evaluated from the standpoint of an expository approach to preaching.

Paul Scott Wilson and Imagination

Wilson is professor of Homiletics at Emmanuel College in the Toronto School of Theology. His views on the use of imagination in Christian preaching are presented in *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching*, in which he explains its essential role.²⁸ He is the first person to devote an entire book to the theory and method of imagination with regard to biblical preaching.²⁹

Wilson's Imagination in Preaching

Purpose of imagination. Wilson believes that preaching is intended to be the proclamation of the Word of God, rather than merely conveying human words and theories.³⁰ Preachers participate in God's salvation history as they "break open the biblical text and allow God's Word to move out into today's world with the same transforming power and freshness as it held for the original hearers."³¹ Their preaching

²⁸Although he has developed new understandings of preaching, he does not present his method as the one and only. Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 13.

²⁹After his volume was published in 1988, other books came out entirely focusing on using imagination in preaching, such as Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990); and Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1994).

³⁰Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 7.

³¹Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 27-28.

provides the opportunity for people to hear the will of God.³² The preacher's sermon and his delivery, thus, become the voice of God. Preachers, therefore, have a very significant role to play, and imagination is crucial in this endeavor.³³ Imagination, according to Wilson, serves the important purpose of helping people to see an essential invisible reality of this world.³⁴ Through imagination people are able to recognize the presence of Christ in a broken and sinful world. For many, Christ may seem absent, but through imagination people's eyes are opened to the new order that has been established and to the transformation Christ brings. Wilson says, "It gives us the ability both to see this world as it is, with Christ in the midst of our brokenness, and to imagine a world different from our own, a world already transfigured by Christ's love, already penetrated by the new order."³⁵

Imagination and faith, according to Wilson, are closely related in this process: "Like the relationship between head and heart, imagination is inspired by faith and faith is strengthened by imagination."³⁶ People can learn to use their imagination in much the

³²Wilson uses Bonhoeffer's lectures on preaching to support the claim that human preaching equals the Word of God. Wilson. See *Imagination of the Heart*, 28. Bonhoeffer argues that "the subjectivity – not the identification – with reference to the Word must be equally asserted along with its objectivity" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Clyde E. Fant, *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1975], 26).

³³Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 28. Wilson uses Achtemeier to support the significance of preaching, "The eternal life or death of our people may depend on their knowing what we mean" (Achtemeier, *Creative Preaching*, 31).

³⁴Ryken, similarly, says that "the imagination transforms the materials of real life in such a way that, although not literal or factual, it allows us to see the truth" (Leland Ryken, *Windows to the World: Literature in Christian Perspective* [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000], 35).

³⁵Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 16.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 17.

same way as learning to play an instrument.³⁷ Yet at the same time, imagination is a tool of the Holy Spirit, who is also its source. Therefore, as we learn to employ our imagination, we are responsible, says Wilson, “to put our imagination at the total service of the Spirit.”³⁸

Process of imagination. Wilson has a clear understanding of how imagination works. He is influenced by Coleridge, who understands imagination to be a reconciliation of opposites.³⁹ Wilson explains that reconciliation does not imply neutralization or negation; rather it aims to create a totally new meaning through logical opposites, and, thus, a “juxtaposition of opposites or tension between opposites” results.⁴⁰

In a very practical manner he seeks to help homileticians develop this practice. He uses an example from the field of physics to explain what happens when imagination is correctly utilized. When a negative and positive pole are brought together, not too far and yet not too close, a spark is created.⁴¹ And, thus, imagination is “two ideas brought together, each with its own identity, to create a third new identity by their union.”⁴² Two conditions need to be present, says Wilson: “(1) some connection between the ideas must

³⁷Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 16. Wiersbe, too, believes preachers can develop the ability of imagination. See Wiersbe, *Preaching & Teaching with Imagination*, 309.

³⁸Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 19.

³⁹Coleridge says, “This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control (*laxis effertur habenis*) reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities” (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* [New York: Byleavitt, Lord & Co, 1934], 179-80. Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 34).

⁴⁰Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 34-35.

⁴¹Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 93.

⁴²Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 33.

be possible and (2) the ideas chosen must not be almost identical, for then they would function like the touching wires that had no visible spark.”⁴³ The spark that is desired is one between the biblical text and the situation of the contemporary audience.⁴⁴ Utilizing this thought, Wilson explains that language is relational.⁴⁵ Through imagination new relations can be formed that spark new meanings to those who listen to the message. Thus, language is the vehicle by which this process can take place.

Words, however, can lose their meaning. When preachers use vocabulary that has become meaningless to the audience, a message will be ineffective. Markquart, quoted by Wilson, says,

Most of the laity do not have “gut associations” with such words as salvation, redemption, incarnation, gospel, and theology of the cross. Ninety eight percent of our laity don’t use these words in their everyday lives. This becomes a problem for many of us clergy because we all have our favorite words. . . . [Someone] said to Reuel Howe, “If I used that much jargon with my customers, I would lose them.”⁴⁶

Rather than terminating the use of certain words, however, Wilson believes the solution has to do with language renewal. He even takes this farther and claims that if language is not renewed, then faith will not be renewed either.⁴⁷ Wilson argues that the

⁴³Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 34.

⁴⁴Ibid., 57. The idea of reconciling two opposites is further clarified by Peirce’s complex philosophy regarding Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. Peirce says that “Firstness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else. Secondness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third. Thirdness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other” (Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Arthur W. Burks [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958], 8.228).

⁴⁵Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 36.

⁴⁶Edward F. Markquart, *Quest for Better Preaching: Resources for Renewal in the Pulpit* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 32, quoted in Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 40-41.

⁴⁷Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 42.

aim of homiletics is to find imaginative new metaphors that bring language back to life again. He builds on theories of semiotics to explain what language renewal entails. The foundational task is to take a word and then to find its “opposite.” This implies finding a word that is different enough to spark curiosity because at first sight the two do not seem to be related. Yet the word should not be so far removed that connection is impossible. Sometimes the “opposite” can be found in the origin of a word; for example, the word “communion” is a combination of the words “to share” and “in common.”⁴⁸ Sometimes the “opposition” is found by looking outside of the word itself and combining it, through free association, with a fresh idea.⁴⁹ Whenever the opposition is properly worked out, a third identity is produced. This third identity is “the spark of imagination of the heart” as well as “the essential meaning of the sermon or homily.”⁵⁰

Polarities and problems of imagination. Wilson summarizes his thought by saying that “imagination exists because of the juxtaposition of opposites. If our preaching is to demonstrate imagination our approach must be to build in certain polarities or opposites.”⁵¹ Though there are many polarities that can be thought of in preaching, he presents four that provide a solution to what he considers “specific and chronic problems in preaching today.”⁵² These problems include (1) the difficulty of making preaching both biblical and relevant; (2) finding the balance between bringing good news and setting rules; (3) ensuring that everyone can experientially relate to the doctrine implicit in the message; and (4) balancing the tasks of both nurturing people and initiating

⁴⁸Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 38.

⁴⁹Ibid., 44.

⁵⁰Ibid., 52.

⁵¹Ibid., 46.

⁵²Ibid., 47.

transformation.⁵³ He addresses these problems in the remainder of his book by working out how imagination can reconcile the polarities of (1) the biblical text and our situation, (2) law and gospel (or judgment and grace), (3) story and doctrine, and (4) pastor and prophet.⁵⁴

The Methodology of Wilson's Imagination in Preaching

Regarding the homiletical process, Wilson argues that the biblical text is the starting point.⁵⁵ Any text can be chosen as long as it is first understood in context.⁵⁶ No message should be imposed on the text, and any connection with the audience needs to be postponed at first.⁵⁷ He believes, since God's Word is alive, that "when we bring an exegeted text into relationship with our situation, sparks are going to happen."⁵⁸

⁵³Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 47.

⁵⁴Ibid., 46.

⁵⁵Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 7. Wilson confirms that "the starting point generally is with the biblical text and with the biblical text alone" (Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 51). Many expositors may suppose that imagination and creativity are incompatible with thoroughly biblical sermons. However, good preaching requires high levels of creativity and the use of imagination. Larsen confirms that "preaching is an intensely creative event. This is not to say that we "make up" the sermon. We've got to be clear that the Bible is our source" (David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching: Identifying the Issues in Preaching Today* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989], 107).

⁵⁶Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 56. Wilson does not advocate the use of several biblical texts at once, because generally time is too short to work this out. In addition one text will address any situation, "Think of the text as being like a diamond with many facets; through any one of them you can see the center. There are many ways of looking at a text. Choose one way that interests, excites, or even bothers you and let that be your starting place. If we are bored by the text, we may bore with our sermon" (Paul Scott Wilson, "Beyond Narrative: Imagination in the Sermon," in *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, ed. Gail R. O'Day and Thomas G. Long [Nashville: Abingdon, 1993], 140).

⁵⁷Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 52.

⁵⁸Ibid., 54-55.

The second step in the process is to imagine the story of the biblical text.⁵⁹ Rather than immediately consulting commentaries and the like, imagination should be given room.⁶⁰ Using all of one's senses, allowing any kind of question about even the smallest of details to surface, identifying how one feels about elements or characters in the story, telling and retelling the story, using the story to look at events one encounters, are examples of how through imagination the text may become strangely fresh and alive and its meaning more evident.⁶¹ Wilson argues, "We want to hear the text laughing and angry, we want to see where it pauses and where it rushes, we want to smell and taste the air it breathes, we want to touch what it touches. More than this, we want to respond to it, resist it, question it, enjoy it, be bothered by it."⁶² When imagination has been given free rein in this step, the preacher can make a guess as to the meaning of the text.⁶³ This is considered something like the pre-understanding of the text, while the theme or central idea still needs to be discovered.

Fourth, in order to verify that meanings authentically belong to the text, the

⁵⁹Key to imaginative interpretation is the curiosity of the interpreter. See Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 30.

⁶⁰Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 58-59.

⁶¹Ibid., 67-68

⁶²Ibid., 61-62. For Wilson, feeling is an important source for imagining the text. See Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 66-67. Lowry argues, similarly, that exegesis should not come too early in the process: "it is important at this point of preparation *not* to consult the exegetical experts, as they will impose their uncreative mental ruts on the preacher, who at this point in preparation time is attempting to get loose, not be tied down!" Thus, Lowry concludes that "the preacher should work, not until something is solved but until something clearly is most *unsolved*" (Eugene L. Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit: The Relationship between Narrative and Preaching* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1985], 99, quoted in Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 60).

⁶³Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 69.

next step involves exegesis.⁶⁴ Exegesis only comes after having given imagination room to do its work, so that exegesis assists the imagination.⁶⁵ Although, according to Wilson, a whole “arena of authentic interpretation” exists—in contrast with what he knows others believe about there being just one meaning—some interpretations will fall outside this circle, which can be discerned through exegesis.⁶⁶ Exegesis includes consulting commentaries to ensure one is on the right path of interpretation, seeking the Holy Spirit through prayer as he is the source of divine creativity, writing a thumbnail exegesis that includes “the most useful related exegetical material, using suspicion when reading the text and commentaries, and recognizing that texts have many layers.”⁶⁷

The core of the hermeneutic process is, consequently, found in identifying on the one hand core concerns of the text, and on the other hand concerns of the sermon or homily. Juxtaposing these two poles leads to creative sparking. Concerns of the text are short sentences that represent facts or logical interpretations arising out of the text.⁶⁸

⁶⁴Wilson defines exegesis as “a process of questioning a biblical text in a manner that helps the interpreter encounter it afresh and think it through, which culminates in an informed reading” (Paul Scott Wilson, *God Sense: Reading the Bible for Preaching* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2001], 30-31).

⁶⁵Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 77. Word, grammar, and syntactical studies are not mentioned as part of the process. For a full overview of Wilson’s exegetical method, see Wilson, *God Sense*, 30-33.

⁶⁶Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 78.

⁶⁷Ibid., 79-82. Wilson’s method of suspicion in the Bible comes from Gonzalez’s hermeneutic of suspicion. In *Liberation Preaching* Gonzalez argues to get rid of traditional theology’s burden and to “listen anew to the biblical text” (Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1980], 29).

⁶⁸Wilson defines concerns of the text as “the facets of a many-sided diamond, each allowing the passage of light through the whole. Most importantly, they help the student to begin to experience the fullness of the text, to understand what is happening, to see the images, to hear the tones of voice, to feel the morning air—in short, to be there” (Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 12).

Identifying the concerns is another way to hear the text anew. The guess as to the meaning of the text is one of those concerns.⁶⁹ Wilson provides an example list of concerns with regard to the story of Zacchaeus:

He [Zacchaeus] welcomes Jesus with joy.
The crowd is surprised.
Zacchaeus is a sinner.
Jesus makes no demands.
Zacchaeus responds in repentance.
Zacchaeus' restitution for defrauding exceeds the OT law (Lev. 6:5; Num. 5:7)⁷⁰

The process that follows next is where sparks begin to be ignited. The homiletician takes all the concerns of the text and transposes each of them to a concern for the sermon. This is done by identifying the main words in the sentence that represent the concern of the text and, subsequently, through free association, finding synonyms for these words that transpose them into words relevant to our situation today.⁷¹ According to Wilson, "A concern of the sermon (concern of the homily) may be defined as a transposed version of a concern of the text, generalizing the textual details in order to speak to our situation. The concern of the text deals with the text in its time; the concern of the sermon/homily deals with our situation."⁷² Keeping the concern of the text separate (close, yet far enough) from that of the sermon ensures the sermon will be true the original text.⁷³ It is in this process that the spark—the juxtaposed relationship—is ignited. Wilson explains, "The preaching will to some extent be the sum of the sparks that span

⁶⁹Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 70-74.

⁷⁰Ibid., 76.

⁷¹Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 94.

⁷²Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 85-86.

⁷³Ibid., 88-89.

the gaps between the concerns of the text and the concerns of the sermon/homily.”⁷⁴

According to this concept, the list with text concerns from the Zacchaeus story could be transposed into sermon concerns (see figure 1).⁷⁵ With the main elements of the homiletical method in place, Wilson uses several polarities to demonstrate how this basic methodology can be used to release imagination in both preacher and audience.

Text concerns	Sermon concerns
1. Zacchaeus welcomes Jesus with joy. 2. The crowd is surprised. 3. Jesus makes no demands. 4. Zacchaeus responds to love with repentance.	1. We welcome Jesus with joy; or, the sinner knows how to welcome Jesus. 2. The righteous are surprised by Jesus 3. Jesus’ love is a gift 4. Grace precedes repentance

Figure 1. Transposition from text to sermon concerns

Imagination in Law and Gospel. The first example of a well-known polarity is that of law and gospel, or judgment and grace.⁷⁶ Agreeing with many others, Wilson believes that good sermons include both, because only then do they bear their full

⁷⁴Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 90.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 87.

⁷⁶For a review of some history regarding the law and gospel relation, see Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 74-86. Greidanus presents Luther’s view of the relationship between law and grace in Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 116-23.

weight.⁷⁷ This dynamic is important to help people move through an important aspect of faith, “from expulsion from Eden to the New Jerusalem, from the exodus to the promised land, from the crucifixion to the resurrection, from Good Friday to Easter.”⁷⁸ After a brief explanation of the meaning of these words—law meaning that people carry a burden to do something in relationship to God, and grace meaning that God carries this burden through Jesus Christ—Wilson provides practical advice as to how to incorporate these concepts in a sermon.⁷⁹ He believes both law and grace are always present in any biblical text.⁸⁰ After the process of writing down a thumbnail exegesis (essentially a list of the concerns of the text), the homiletician freely uses his imagination to divide these concerns into law and gospel concerns.⁸¹ Using the same process as above these concerns are then transposed into concerns for the homily. For the wedding at Cana, this may look as follows:⁸²

⁷⁷Wilson quotes Barth, who says the following about the law-gospel tension: “The preacher . . . comes before [the] congregation . . . pierced by the Word of God and has been led to repentance in the face of divine judgment; but also as a [person] who has received with thankfulness the Gospel of forgiveness and is able to rejoice in it. Only in this progression through judgment and grace can preaching become genuinely original” (Karl Barth, *Prayer and Preaching*, trans. B. E. Hooke [London: S.C.M, 1964], 95), quoted in Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 108-09.

⁷⁸Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 93.

⁷⁹Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 99, 107. Wilson argues that “law and gospel function in a sermon as two poles of a metaphor” (Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 92).

⁸⁰Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 109.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 115.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 113-17.

Text concerns	Sermon concerns
1. The wine ran out	1. Our wine runs out / our good times end / good times have ended for the unemployed.
2. Jesus turns water into wine	2. Jesus turns our sorrows into joy / Jesus turns the pain of the world into the cup of his suffering.

Figure 2. Law and gospel concerns

In certain cases it may be hard to find a solid gospel concern. Wilson suggests several principles to find a good gospel transposition.⁸³ First, substitution of specific words in the concern of the text can reveal new directions for the message (Jesus was at the wedding becomes Jesus is present at our celebrations). Inversion, second, is to take an apparent law concern and invert it to have this concern stated as a gospel concern (Jesus appears indifferent becomes Jesus was not indifferent). Third, amplification involves using simple words and making the context wider by substituting with theological/doctrinal terms and ideas (more guests came than expected becomes God’s blessings are more than we expect). And, finally, using a resurrection hermeneutic implies developing how Christ’s resurrection changes law concerns into gospel ones (Jesus’ second coming is “like the coming of a kidnapper or a thief, but the thief is Christ who will steal our hearts away”).⁸⁴ These principles can also be used to find good law concerns.

In seeking to more fully develop the sermon, a central idea needs to be chosen.⁸⁵ Wilson argues that “the central idea actually consists of two ideas, one arising

⁸³Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 136-42.

⁸⁴Ibid., 141.

⁸⁵Buttrick does not support the necessity of the central idea. He claims that “the purpose of any particular sermon, however, *cannot* be stated in some clear single sentence as older homiletic texts suggested. Rather, the intending of a sermon is a line of

from the biblical text. We will call this the major concern of the text. Its transposed good news concern of the sermon/homily we will call the major concern of the sermon/homily.”⁸⁶ The central idea could be any one concern (or sometimes several) chosen from the thumbnail exegesis list. It is a simple, short, and clear sentence which relates to the biblical text and involves good news. To make sure it involves a good news message, the central idea should mention Jesus or God as the focus of an action.⁸⁷ Wilson views the relationship between law and grace in the sermon as a circular movement. At the top of the circle going down clockwise, the sermon’s focus is on law/judgment until at the bottom the depth of awareness of sin is reached. The bottom is the reversal point symbolic of how the gospel or grace reverses everything.⁸⁸ The spark is produced where law and grace meet.⁸⁹ This reversal point is where the central idea, both the concern of the text and that of the sermon, is most explicitly developed, even though the concerns may have already (and should have, especially at the beginning) been mentioned several times.⁹⁰ The upward movement towards the beginning of the circle reflects the development of the gospel.

Imagination in story and doctrine. The biblical text-situation polarity addressed how a text can be made relevant to people today. The law-gospel polarity addressed how these essential aspects can be juxtaposed in a balanced way. The next

strategy drawn between an intending *of* and an intending *toward*’ (Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 301).

⁸⁶Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 130.

⁸⁷Ibid., 130, 132; Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 12.

⁸⁸Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 95; Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 123.

⁸⁹Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 122-23.

⁹⁰Ibid., 134.

polarity deals more or less with the form of the sermon to ensure that people can relate experientially. The story-doctrine polarity helps to “not only conceive the truth as thought, but perceive it as life.”⁹¹ A spark flashes when “an experience suddenly is understood as being the issue to which a particular Christian doctrine is addressed.”⁹² Wilson defines narrative “as a sequence of events or images that employs plot, character, and emotion. Plot gives it direction; character gives it humanity; and emotion gives it people in relationship.”⁹³ Doctrine is defined as “the statements, assertions, or teachings of the church about particular aspects of Christian faith.”⁹⁴

Having both story and doctrine present in the sermon is necessary for faith and imagination to be nourished.⁹⁵ Traditionally, story might have been used to prepare people to receive a doctrinal message, or to illustrate it.⁹⁶ Wilson, however, argues that “the story is the point.” Nonetheless, he insists that story and doctrine should have equal status, meaning that story should not be considered more important than doctrine.⁹⁷ In order to identify doctrines that can be preached from the text, the key words of the text concerns can be circled and explored for their doctrinal potential.⁹⁸ The amount of

⁹¹Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 144.

⁹²Ibid., 145.

⁹³Ibid., 147.

⁹⁴Ibid., 147-48. Many preachers see imaginative preaching as employing a narrative and inductive style of preaching, whereas propositional preaching is an abstract doctrinal and deductive way of preaching. See Paul Scott Wilson, "Beyond Narrative: Imagination in the Sermon," in *Listening to the Word*, 136.

⁹⁵Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 149.

⁹⁶Ibid., 151.

⁹⁷This was the case until the third century, and then doctrine became the focus. Ibid., 153-55.

⁹⁸Ibid., 167.

doctrine vis-à-vis story should be equal.⁹⁹ Stories are found through highlighting the key words of the sermon concerns and allowing the imagination to form a story. Wilson encourages preachers to see stories in everything people do, to recognize how just one word may be pregnant with story, to be concrete, and to pay attention to detail in developing the story.¹⁰⁰ Using free association gives creativity and imagination a chance to let stories evolve. The sermon story is thought to develop in flowing form rather than through a structured sermon outline.¹⁰¹ Wilson develops the image of a circle as one involving any number of loops, each representing a small development of a text-situational concern, while continuing the development of the central idea along the bigger circle line.¹⁰² “Outlining” this process is invaluable for sermon writing. Wilson offers ten guidelines to give shape to the form of the sermon. Of most importance is that the smaller loops, even if self-contained, serve the central idea, and are linked clearly to the next loop in the circle. Thus, through both story and doctrine people can relate the text to their own lives.¹⁰³

Imagination in pastor and prophet. The last polarity is that of the roles of the preacher as both pastor—“nurturing people in whatever conditions they are found”—

⁹⁹Larsen does not agree with this statement. He argues that “when the story is primary and the parables paradigmatic we have, in effect, a new canon” (David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching*, 146). Smith believes “Doctrine is the protector of preaching. Without it preaching would fall into heresy” (Robert Smith, *Doctrine that Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* [Nashville: B & H, 2008], 18).

¹⁰⁰Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 160-65.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 171-72.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 174-76.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 181-87.

and prophet—“initiating change in accordance with God’s will.”¹⁰⁴ Many preachers may find it hard to reconcile these two aspects, but Wilson believes they are interrelated.¹⁰⁵ He argues that when “pastor and prophet are treated as equal and are in relationship, imagination of the heart is set free.”¹⁰⁶ A pastor will only be able to raise difficult and challenging issues when people know that he genuinely cares for them.¹⁰⁷ In addition, paying attention to finding the right manner (e.g., poetically) and form (first and foremost story) enhances the possibility that addressing certain social issues will be well-received.¹⁰⁸ Wilson analyzes Jesus’ communication, and discerns three ways that Jesus raised difficult issues: he made direct use of doctrine; he made direct use of stories; and he made indirect use of stories.¹⁰⁹ Using imagination, preachers can easily come up with stories.¹¹⁰ Wilson then explains that bringing out the pastoral and prophetic tasks of the

¹⁰⁴Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 189.

¹⁰⁵Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 119.

¹⁰⁶Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 192.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 199-200.

¹⁰⁸To learn how to tell stories Wilson looks at Jesus’ parables, and argues that parables have both a *story* and a religious *idea*. In the other stories Jesus tells, he just uses ordinary events to make a certain point. In Jesus’ parables the story is about what the Kingdom (or “Realm” as Wilson likes to call it) of God is like, which is then linked with an idea, such as love, peace, prayer, and so on. He states that “between these there is a spark that is the meaning of the parable for its context” (*ibid.*, 206-12).

¹⁰⁹Indirect use of stories can be done in two ways. First, stories are created for which the link to the meaning is at first unknown, thus engaging listeners at a *conscious* level; they listen because they want to discover what the story is about. This is how the parables function; by taking an issue and telling a story that is adjacent (similar, but not identical) to the issue. Second, *subliminal* issues can be raised in stories. These are not what the story is about, but may be secondary and implicit concerns that become part of the story as well. *Ibid.*, 218-21.

¹¹⁰Wilson provides guidelines that help preachers create stories, (1) be concise, (2) only two people acting or speaking are present at one time, (3) stories are told from a single perspective, (4) characters are portrayed by their actions or a particular attribute, (5)

pastor is accomplished by transposing the concern of the text to raise the issues that needs to be raised, thus re-stating his belief that any text can speak to any situation. The prophetic issues that are brought out should be delivered in such a way that the gospel remains good news and the call to action is given by way of invitation. This is in accord with Wilson's philosophy of preaching, the primary aim of which is to invite "people to faith and to live out that faith in action."¹¹¹ In preaching Wilson desires to invite people through imagination to live by faith and to see the kingdom of God break into their lives today.

Critical Evaluation of Wilson in Light of Expository Preaching

Before diving into an in-depth evaluation of Wilson's work, it is helpful to sum up the major areas in which Wilson sees an active role for imagination. Wilson makes intentional use of imagination in both the hermeneutic and homiletic processes. Regarding hermeneutics, Wilson employs imagination to discern possible meanings of the text. The preacher reads the text and then uses imagination to write down ideas that pop up in his mind that may become the focal point of the text. Homiletically, Wilson uses imaginative free association to change the text concerns into concerns for the homily. Finding polarities between the text and the contemporary situation ensures that imagination becomes an effective tool. The goal in sermon writing becomes "the bringing

no conclusion is necessary if it is self-evident or irrelevant, (6) direct speech and soliloquy are used where possible, (7) use threefold repetition and leave the most important thing to the end, (8) pick stories that are different from the text's story, (9) pick difficult issues and stories that put pressure on the text, (10) select stories from a wide variety of life experiences, (11) use personal stories, (12) prefer stories of ordinary people in non-trivial situations, (13) stay with stories that are or sound real, (14) find ways to name your own feelings (not just your thoughts) about the issues you raise and about raising them now, (15) get the facts of issues in our situation straight, and (16) make use of humor, but in authentic and proper ways. See Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 223-31.

¹¹¹Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 232-33.

together of two ideas that might not otherwise be connected and developing the creative energy they generate.”¹¹² Wilson presents four important examples that exemplify the reconciliation of two poles that are highly relevant to preaching today: the biblical text and our situation, law and gospel, story and doctrine, and pastor and prophet.

In the evaluation that follows, expository preaching will be employed as the standard to evaluate and critique Wilson’s use of imagination. Wilson’s ideas will be compared with two essential elements of expository preaching: author-centered hermeneutics and audience-focused homiletics.

Imagination and Exegesis

The first element of expository preaching is author-centered hermeneutics, which values the unique role of the word of God and the original author’s intention in any given text.¹¹³ Wilson believes the Scripture is the word of God and, thus, considers the biblical text foundational, because it belongs to God and is relevant for today: “the starting point generally is with the biblical text and with the biblical text alone.”¹¹⁴ Expository preachers like Greidanus affirm the essential role of the Scripture: “it alone provides the normative proclamation of God’s acts of redemption and the response he requires.”¹¹⁵ Wilson’s desire to stay close to the biblical text is admirable.¹¹⁶ However, in

¹¹²Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 32.

¹¹³Thomas claims that “the expositor must teach his audience the meaning of the text intended by its author and understood by its original recipients” (Robert L. Thomas, “Exegesis and Expository Preaching,” in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005] 107).

¹¹⁴Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 7. Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 51.

¹¹⁵Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 13. Goldsworthy defines an evangelical person as “one who maintains adherence to the conviction of the final authority of the Bible as God’s word written” (Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the*

practice, his approach has several issues that reveal incompatibilities with an expository view of Scripture.

First, Wilson believes imagination to be one of the first undertakings in the hermeneutic process. After reading the text, the preacher uses his imagination through free association, to discern meanings of the text. Though he believes that the Scriptures speak directly to people today, he disregards cultural, linguistic, and historical differences between how the text was written and how it may be received today. Wilson ultimately assigns too small a role to exegesis as a verification of the preacher's imagination later on in the process.¹¹⁷ Though one's imagination may certainly be a helpful guide in figuring out what the text means—the original readers/listeners did not first do exegesis, but let their hearts do the work—it cannot be the sole or foundational basis on which to discover the meaning of a text. Robinson warns preachers they should not “sacrifice hermeneutics for homiletics,”¹¹⁸ and, using this approach, Wilson may be in danger of doing so. Exegesis cannot simply be used, as Wilson sees it, to ensure that our own imagination does not stray too much from what the text may be saying.¹¹⁹ Exegesis does not put restraints on one's imagination as Wilson believes, but rather forms the starting point so

Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 11).

¹¹⁶Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 27-29.

¹¹⁷Expository preachers view the process of exegesis as essential practice for sermon preparation. Broadus argues, “We may say, in general, that no man will succeed in expository preaching unless he delights in exegetical study of the bible, unless he loves to search out the exact meaning of its sentences, phrases, words” (John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, ed. Edwin Charles Dargan [New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1903], 326).

¹¹⁸Haddon W. Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 74.

¹¹⁹Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 52.

that the imagination can be used with proper guiding and stimulating boundaries.¹²⁰ An evangelical view of imagination in the hermeneutic process will include a literary analysis of the text in an early stage of hermeneutics.¹²¹ Reading the text first and letting oneself be affected by the Word of God is certainly a good start, but in discerning the meaning of the text, more guidance is needed than merely using one's imagination. What can be learned from Wilson's approach, however, is that at several points in the beginning phase of hermeneutics, the preacher stops and lets his mind use both the literary analysis and the initial receptive reading of the text in order to get a full picture of the text as it was meant to be. This would be the safest way to ensure that God's Word is read as it was intended. Wilson's advice to be sensitive to the author's ways of using imagination is helpful in this process, because "The biblical writers used imagination: they juxtaposed certain words with others, certain images and sounds with other images and sounds. We seek to recover what sparks there were for the original writers."¹²²

Imagination and the Meaning of a Text

Although Wilson recognizes preaching as the delivery of God's Word, his hermeneutic is very different than that of expository preachers.¹²³ Many expository preachers hold to the view that the original authors intended to say something specific in a given passage. Expository preaching seeks to discover this author-intended meaning through exegesis and careful textual and contextual analysis. The author's original intention becomes the basis for the proposition of the sermon, also known, for example as

¹²⁰Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 62.

¹²¹Wayne McDill, "Creativity in Expository Sermon Preparation," *Waynemcdill.net*, <http://www.waynemcdill.net/?article=16/> (accessed December 1, 2012).

¹²²Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 63.

¹²³Wilson claims that "good preachers understand that their role is to proclaim God's Word, not their own" (Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 7).

the “Big Idea,”¹²⁴ “the essence of a text in a sentence (ETS),”¹²⁵ “a fallen condition focus (FCF),”¹²⁶ “focus statement,”¹²⁷ or “the central idea of the text (CIT).”¹²⁸ Although Wilson agrees that the central message should be “clear, simple and short,”¹²⁹ he differs in his belief that not one but multiple meanings are possible.¹³⁰ Imagination is the key to finding these meanings as well as to picking one of those to serve as basis for the sermon. Though Wilson’s desire is to be spiritually sensitive, this approach may be too subjective. Wilson’s view that many meanings are possible should be rejected in order to be truly faithful to the biblical text. However, his sophisticated method to use imagination to transpose the concern of the text into a concern for the sermon is valuable for expository preachers as well. Once the author-intended meaning is found, preachers, remaining faithful to the author’s intention, can play with this idea in the ways that Wilson suggests, utilizing substitution, inversion, or amplification in order to find a big idea that serves to hold the sermon together.

¹²⁴Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 33-50. Robinson’s idea is heavily influenced by Davis (ibid, 14, 77). Davis calls it “the central idea” (Davis, *Design for Preaching*, 20-21).

¹²⁵Harold T. Bryson and James C. Taylor, *Building Sermons to Meet People's Needs* (Nashville: Broadman, 1980), 57-61.

¹²⁶Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 41-42.

¹²⁷Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 86.

¹²⁸Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 130.

¹²⁹Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 129.

¹³⁰Wilson, "Beyond Narrative," 139. Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 12-13, 130.

Imagination through Juxtaposition

Wilson presents imagination as “communication process” or a function of language and not as mystical experience, although at times imagination may appear to be mystical.¹³¹ Most people understand imagination to work only in the form of producing certain images or casting a particular vision. Though that may be the result, Wilson explains how with simple language tools imagination can be put into practice as “the product of juxtaposition of opposites.”¹³² By connecting two seemingly opposed characteristic ideas synergy is produced that equals imagination: “it is two ideas brought together, each with its own identity, to create a third new identity by their union.” Thus, imagination becomes “an ability to use polarities in language to create fresh ideas.”¹³³ Juxtaposition may provide a helpful tool in using the imagination, especially in the area of homiletics. The idea of taking two ideas, one from the biblical text and one as a central concern for the sermon, can help build creativity into a sermon and raise interest on the part of the audience.

However, there are also some risks involved in using this method. First of all, Wilson’s juxtaposition theory is similar to Hegel’s theory of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Wilson argues that when through the process of imagination an original thought from the biblical text is placed side by side with an opposing concept relating to the audience’s situation, a new, third concept is produced.¹³⁴ Besides the fact that Wilson

¹³¹Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 32.

¹³²*Ibid.*, 50.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 32-33. Fry Brown analyzes various sermon forms, and considers sermons that use the juxtaposition part of the dialectical genre. She defines dialectical as “thesis (what God is doing in the text), antithesis (counterpoint of real-life issue), synthesis (juxtaposition of thesis and antithesis)” (Teresa L. Fry Brown, *Delivering the Sermon: Voice, Body, and Animation in Proclamation*, Elements of Preaching, ed. O. Wesley Allen [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008], 66).

¹³⁴Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 33. Though similar, Wilson argues that

is rather abstract in describing the nature of this third entity, another problem is more serious. In expository preaching the text, God's word, remains central throughout the sermon. Even when an application is constructed, the audience is still able to connect it to the original meaning of the passage. With Wilson, a danger exists that the contemporary situation redefines the meaning of the text rather than vice versa. The idea that any text can speak to any situation when the imagination is given free rein¹³⁵ demonstrates that the text is considered less important than it is in expository preaching, where the meaning of the text dictates how it may be related to the contemporary situation.

Imagination and Hermeneutical Movements

In doing hermeneutics and homiletics Wilson works with the concept of a circle, favoring Schleiermacher's formulation of the hermeneutical circle.¹³⁶ He says,

Complete knowledge always involves an apparent circle, that each part can be understood only out of the whole to which it belongs, and vice versa. All knowledge which is scientific must be constructed in this way. To put oneself in the position of an author means to follow through with this relationship between the whole and the part.¹³⁷

Homiletical movements have been developed by others as well.¹³⁸ Wilson critiques some

his juxtaposition theory is slightly different than Hegel's thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, because his third party is not a compromise or reconciliation of opposites, but rather a totally new production. See Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 92.

¹³⁵Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 56.

¹³⁶Ibid., 122.

¹³⁷Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, trans. James Duke and Jack Forstman (Atlanta: Scholars, 1977), 113.

¹³⁸Wilson gives four examples of homiletical movements in Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 125-26. Crum's "Dynamic Factors" include "situation, complication, and resolution. The situation is the calm story line. The complication introduces a struggle, which is resolved through the gospel story" (Milton Crum, *Manual on Preaching* [Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1988], 93). Lowry is well known for his five stages. In preparation for writing the sermon he collects all related information through imagination during a process he calls "wandering thoughtfulness," which is

of these approaches. Examples of potential dangers he recognizes are simplicity and subjectivity. Seeing everything through the lens of a particular movement may narrow one's view.¹³⁹ The Word of God consists of a variety of genres, and, therefore, interpreters cannot use a one-for-all method. In addition, the movements Wilson criticizes are in danger of being very subjective in order to market the Bible. Wilson points out that "sometimes the categories advocated for homiletical method seem more related to psychology or marketing than they do to the faith."¹⁴⁰ The biblical text should be understood by using biblical and theological tools as Wilson argues.

Wilson's homiletical movement, however, presents the same issues—simplicity and subjectivity—though perhaps not as severely. First, Wilson argues that sermons should be based on a circle that juxtaposes law and gospel. These are challenging concepts that are either left out or presented in unbalanced ways and, thus, there is much value in this approach. However, the danger lies in the fact that he reduces all biblical text to these two categories. Not every biblical text requires this kind of interpretation.

Second, although Wilson desires to be "biblical and theological,"¹⁴¹ his

followed by a decision as to the main message. A plot is essential to both sermon preparation and presentation. This plot progresses through five stages: upsetting the equilibrium, analyzing the discrepancy, disclosing the clue to resolution, experiencing the gospel, and anticipating the consequences. He likes to refer to these stages as oops, ugh, aha, whee, and yeah. See Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 28-73. Waznak suggests three stages that entail the stories of the listener, the preacher, and God. The first two stages are void of hope, but the story of God reverses these two previous stories into "new hope" (Robert P. Waznak, *Sunday after Sunday: Preaching the Homily as Story* [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1983], 108-109). Kemper divides the sermon into question (introduction), assertion (body), and invitation (conclusion). See Deane A. Kemper, *Effective Preaching: A Manual for Students and Pastors* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 58ff.

¹³⁹Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 125.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 126-27.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 126.

sermons are still rather subjective, because imagination is given free rein in discerning the meaning(s) of a passage. The danger of the hermeneutical circle is that the author-intended meaning may not be preserved, because the meaning of a text is deeply influenced by the interpreters' circumstances. While an interpreter keeps going back and forth between the text and the situation, the original author's meaning in the text is mixed with various situations. Though expository preachers also use homiletical movements,¹⁴² the main difference between them and Wilson is that they focus on the author's intention. For this reason evangelicals suggest the use of a hermeneutical spiral, where the text is the unchanging starting point, but where the circle spirals upward in order to obtain a contextualized meaning.¹⁴³ Osborne understands the hermeneutical spiral to work in various ways during sermon preparation:

¹⁴²For example, Sunukjian suggests three stages: (1) flow into the passage (happened), (2) truth (happens), and (3) sermon (happening). See Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance*, Invitation to Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 27-31. See for another homiletical movement, Timothy S. Warren, "A Paradigm for Preaching," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991).

¹⁴³Thiselton mentions that "although it has now become a fixed and unalterable technical term in hermeneutics, the phrase 'hermeneutical circle' is in one respect an unfortunate one. For although the center of gravity moves back and forth between the two poles of the interpreter and the text, there is also an ongoing movement and progressive understanding which might have been better conveyed by some such image as that of the spiral." Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 104, quoted in Larry D. Pettegrew, "Liberation Theology and Hermeneutical Preunderstandings," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991): 283. Carson also explains that "in more conservative thought, this is seen rather as a hermeneutical spiral than a circle: it is argued that it is possible in substantial measure to fuse the horizon of understanding of the interpreter with the horizon of understanding of the text so that true communication across the ages or from text to interpreter is possible." D. A. Carson, "A Sketch of the Factors Determining Current Hermeneutical Debate in Cross-Cultural Contexts," in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context*, ed. D. A. Carson (Exeter: The Paternoster, 1984), 16, quoted in Larry D. Pettegrew, "Liberation Theology and Hermeneutical Preunderstandings," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991): 283-84.

The “hermeneutical spiral” takes place not only at the level of original intended meaning, as our understanding spirals upward (via the interaction of inductive and deductive research) to the intended meaning of the passage, but also at the level of contextualization, as our application spirals upward (via the movement from biblical to systematic to homiletical theology) to a proper understanding of the significance of the passage for Christian life today.¹⁴⁴

Though Wilson suggests combining a circle and a spiral, with little circles (supporting messages including concerns of the text and concerns of the homily) spiraling in and out the main circle (the main concerns of the text and homily), his explanation makes it hard to understand whether he identifies his method more with that of a circle or a spiral in the sense expository preachers use this.¹⁴⁵

Summary of Wilson’s Use of Imagination

Through this evaluation, several of Wilson’s valuable contributions can be acknowledged with regard to the use of imagination in expository hermeneutics and homiletics. First, Wilson’s work demonstrates the need to be intentional in letting imagination do significant work. Many expository preachers are focused on the text and its meaning, so much so that they forget to let the text make an impression on their hearts. Intentionally using imagination to be both personally impacted by the text and to get closer to the meaning of the text is sound advice.

Second, Wilson’s method of juxtaposing ideas to create a certain tension that stirs interest and captures people’s minds is helpful. In expository preaching the application, the point of connection with the audience, is often made late in the sermon or interspersed throughout, but only after a certain point is made. Using the imagination to discover juxtapositions may capture the audience’s attention in an attempt to resolve the apparent tension.

¹⁴⁴Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 32.

¹⁴⁵Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 173-74.

However, Wilson's work cannot be simply incorporated, primarily due to his denial that there is one author-intended meaning. In this regard, Wilson is unwittingly helpful in pointing towards several necessary boundaries for the use of imagination in expository preaching. First, though imagination may need to be called upon earlier in the hermeneutical process, exegesis should provide boundaries within which imagination can be used to discern the author's meaning, rather than merely being a tool to verify one's imagination. Second, and closely related, imagination cannot be used to conjure up just any or many meanings, but needs to be employed to discover what the original author intended to say. Third, the method of juxtaposing ideas to produce sparks that feed the imagination and make messages come alive needs to have the text as the starting point. Looking for possible juxtapositions the text provides, rather than imposing certain opposing ideas upon the text, is an asset in expository preaching. Last, using a spiral to describe and prescribe the hermeneutical and homiletical movements is a surer way to protect the author-intended meaning as the imagination is used both to understand the text more deeply and to connect with the audience more effectively.

Thomas H. Troeger and Imagination

Troeger is professor of Christian communication at Yale Divinity School. He has published more than twenty books in the field of preaching, poetry, hymnody, and worship. Troeger laments the fact that there is no full length work of imagination theory in the fields of public speech and homiletics: "I think of all the poetry, music, painting, sculpture, and architecture that the imagination of artists has created over the centuries to the glory of God. Why was there not 'a fully worked out theory of imagination' to match the brilliant conceptualizations of rhetoric?"¹⁴⁶ Troeger believes this is in part the

¹⁴⁶Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 101-02.

consequence of imagination being a complex concept¹⁴⁷ and in part because imagination has not received independent status and “has been subsumed under theology.”¹⁴⁸ He believes that the gifts of imagination and faith in Jesus should cooperate without violating one another. Troeger argues that matters of revelation, transcendent truth of God, and objectivity of the Word of God are all given to human beings through “the constructive work of imagination.”¹⁴⁹ Many aspects of faith cannot be known through reasoning, but only through imaginative perception.¹⁵⁰ He explains the use of imagination in Christian preaching in his book *Imagining a Sermon*.

Troeger’s Imagination in Preaching

Like other new homileticians, Troeger claims that the traditional model of preaching and classical rhetoric have undergone a shift.¹⁵¹ The older models were attractive, because the method always seemed to yield results whether one was inspired or not.¹⁵² Though imaginative preaching seems to be much more elusive, Troeger is

¹⁴⁷Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 102.

¹⁴⁸Thomas H. Troeger, "Homiletics as Imaginative Theology," *Homiletic* 12 (1987): 29.

¹⁴⁹Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 107-08.

¹⁵⁰San H. Lee, "Imagination and the Increasing Reality in Jonathan Edwards," in *Philosophy of Religion and Theology: 1973 Pre-Printed Papers for the Section on Philosophy of Religion and Theology*, ed. David Griffin (Tallahassee: American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, 1973), 39, quoted in Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 109.

¹⁵¹Thomas H. Troeger, "Emerging New Standards in the Evaluation of Effective Preaching," in *A Reader on Preaching: Making Connections*, ed. David Day, Jeff Astley, and Leslie J. Francis (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 116. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 29.

¹⁵²Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 13-14. Troeger quotes a summary of Cicero’s rhetorical process which was written by Kennedy. Kennedy summarizes “*Inventio* is the reasoning out of truth, or that which is like the truth, to make a case probable.

convinced that the process can nevertheless be spelled out. This process explains how preachers can open themselves to the Spirit and to God's revelations.¹⁵³ Troeger practices "imaginative theology," which employs "the visionary and integrative capacities of the mind to create theological understanding. It uses the powers of observation to become receptive to the Holy Spirit, who works upon our consciousness through patterns of association and juxtaposition."¹⁵⁴ Troeger defines imagination as "the ability to create and hold before the mind's eye an image of something that is not actually present. By the power of the imagination we can see a world renewed, liberated and transformed."¹⁵⁵ He has formulated seven principles that help preachers put imaginative theology into practice, so that, in turn, listeners will be able to use their own imagination to understand what faith in God means for them in their everyday life.

The Methodology of Troeger's Imagination in Preaching

The seven principles Troeger uses to inspire imagination in preaching are: (1) alert the eye to keener sight, (2) feel the bodily weight of truth, (3) listen to the music of speech, (4) draw parables from life, (5) use the God-power in your soul,¹⁵⁶ (6) dream of

Arrangement (*dispositio*) is the orderly distribution of what has been found. Style (*elocutio*) is the fitting of suitable words to what has been found. *Memoria* is a firm grasp in the mind of subjects and words. Delivery (*pronuntiatio*) is the control of voice and body suitable to the subject and the words." George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 102.

¹⁵³Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 15.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁵⁵Thomas H. Troeger, "Positive Theology of Imagination for Preaching Renewal, Liberation and Transformation," *The Academy of Homiletics* (2006): 136.

¹⁵⁶This principle is actually called "Understand the church's resistance to imagination." The chapter forms an attempt to understand why the church has been resistant (due to the subjective nature of imagination) and includes a plea for the use of imagination. The focus of this dissertation is on Wilson's argument in this chapter that all

new worlds, (7) return to the Source.

Imagination in seeing: Alert the eye to keener sight. The primary question here is a matter of engaging: “Can the listener see your sermon?”¹⁵⁷ In traditional sermons images are used to illustrate principles, in imaginative sermons the images themselves bear meaning.¹⁵⁸ Ours is an age in which people are accustomed to seeing stories unfold.¹⁵⁹ In order to capture their attention, preaching should involve a similar dynamic. Much of this happens when sermons are not written and delivered in traditional rhetorical form but rather delivered as an unfolding narrative through which listeners can envision the hope and faith they need.¹⁶⁰ Unfortunately, this is typically not part of ministerial training, which, according to Troeger “is a major distortion of the Christian tradition that leaves ministers ill-prepared to respond to a contemporary culture in which images are once again one of the primary means by which people think.”¹⁶¹ Because of biblical illiteracy and the “immediacy, vividness, and fast-paced plots” in the media, contemporary listeners are no longer captured by traditional rhetorical sermons.¹⁶²

have this power in their soul and need to allow this power to work so effective preaching can ensue.

¹⁵⁷Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 35.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁵⁹Also, according to Dixon, the human mind is better described as “a picture gallery than a debating chamber.” MacNeille Dixon, “Imagination in Preaching,” in *Baker's Dictionary of Practical Theology*.

¹⁶⁰Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 52.

¹⁶¹Thomas H. Troeger, *Preaching and Worship*, Preaching and Its Partners, ed. Paul Scott Wilson (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003), 38. Wilson explains “Unfortunately most of a preacher’s education for ministry is focused on the page, not on composing for oral delivery. One means of imagining of this shift to language for auditory comprehension is to conceive of sermon composition not as writing an essay but as making a movie.” Wilson, *God Sense*, 36.

¹⁶²Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 40-42. Sunukjian supports Troeger’s point,

Imagination in feeling: Feel the bodily weight of truth. Truth is not only received through mental processes. Troeger argues that truths bear a physical quality. Words of joy release energy, words of anger may make fists clench.¹⁶³ He desires for people to have a material experience when they listen to the sermon, that is, they have undergone some kind of physical understanding of the words spoken.¹⁶⁴ The use of logosomatic language can unleash these feelings.¹⁶⁵ Words, such as bow, grab, kiss, can exemplify physical aspects of reality that are necessary for people to make the message their own rather than hide behind more abstract words.¹⁶⁶ Troeger says, “I will not simply report the final essence of my thought. I will employ language that helps the listeners to feel the bodily weight of the truth, to experience bowing and standing, leaning on God and being the self-responsible people they are called to be.”¹⁶⁷ Likewise, Troeger argues that a preacher’s mental meditation on a biblical text in sermon preparation is not

“Unless the listeners get a mental picture of some real-life situation, the biblical truth remains an abstraction. Unless they see a video running in their minds, the biblical concept remains vague and unhelpful. The message has no apparent bearing on their lives until they visualize some person, event, or circumstance in their everyday world” (Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching*, 106).

¹⁶³Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 53.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁶⁵Anderson recognizes nonverbal aspects of language, such as physicality (attire, body type, hair and clothing), oculosics (eye contact and usage), kinesthetic (body movement, gestures, and posture), vocalic (speech tempo, rhythm, resonance, control), chronemics (structure and use of time), haptics (physical contact with listeners), and proxemics (space, distance between preacher and listener). Peter A. Anderson, "Nonverbal Communication in the Small Group," in *Small Group communication*, ed. Robert Cathcart and Larry Samavor (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown, 1984), 258-70, quoted in Teresa Fry Brown, "The Use of Language," in *Teaching and Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy*, ed. Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 112-13.

¹⁶⁶Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 55-56.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 55.

complete until the preacher has physically gone through, as closely as possible, what the characters in the text went through. For example if they preach about blind men, they should close their eyes and feel the darkness. If the sermon is about a paralyzed man, in preparation, preachers should lie down and feel the desperate emotion. Holding those postures for a while will contribute valuable elements to sermon preparation and delivery.¹⁶⁸

Imagination in listening: Listen to the music of speech. Troeger calls preachers, third, to use musical language. This begins in the process of hermeneutics. He says “a preacher who reads the Bible only for meaning will ... miss the power of the cadences and the imagery, which are as important as the exposition to many listeners.”¹⁶⁹ Discovering the author’s original voice is a vehicle to conveying the meaning of the text.¹⁷⁰ Then, in sermon delivery, rhythm, pitch, volume, and inflection are employed to make the message come alive and to draw people beyond mere words.¹⁷¹ Dooley and Vines would agree with Troeger, “The preacher should govern the volume of his voice by the content of his message. ... Depending upon the emotive structures of a biblical text, both the faint whisper and the loud exclamation can be extremely effective and reflective in representing the original author’s mood.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 58.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁷⁰Robinson says an expositor should feel the mood of text. Haddon Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Biblical Preaching*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 82.

¹⁷¹Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 70-71.

¹⁷²Adam B. Dooley and Jerry Vines, "Delivering a Text-Driven Sermon," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 266. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 53.

Troeger argues that “effective sermonic speech will have the vivacity and drama that mark our everyday conversation and that make talking and listening to people fascinating.”¹⁷³ Although a major part of sermon preparation is writing, the product will be an oral delivery.¹⁷⁴ For that to happen the tone of voice in which the words are spoken, as well as the non-verbal language that accompanies them, should match the content of the words.¹⁷⁵ The aural qualities of the preacher’s speech invite the congregation to a new reality.¹⁷⁶ The preacher becomes an aural symbol of the presence of God.¹⁷⁷ However, aural speech goes even deeper; it requires “a spiritual, theological process of finding that place in the heart where the gospel has touched the preacher’s own life. Nothing can replace speaking out of that spiritual center.”¹⁷⁸

Imagination in parables: Draw parables from life. The attentive use of seeing, feeling, and listening ensures that one’s imagination is more reliable. This type of imagination can be used in forming narratives that people can relate to. Another effective way of storytelling is the creation of parables. Parables have the power both to confirm what people have already experienced and to give direction to the ambiguity they face in

¹⁷³Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 72.

¹⁷⁴Davis, *Design for Preaching*, 266-67.

¹⁷⁵Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 76.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 71. Similarly, Sunukjian says that “the Bible is God’s voice, spanning the ages. The role of the biblical preacher is to echo that voice in this generation” (Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching*, 9). Bonhoeffer claims that “for the sake of the proclaimed word the world exists with all of its words. In the sermon the foundation for a new world is laid. Here the original word becomes audible” (Fant, *Bonhoeffer*, 130).

¹⁷⁸Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 75.

life.¹⁷⁹ Preachers can use stories from their own lives that have “parabolic resonance,” that is, they provide an experiential analogy for the listener.¹⁸⁰ In this manner people can discover the “continuous thread of revelation” that reveals purpose in life.¹⁸¹ Jesus’ parables provide inspiration for the creation of parables.¹⁸² Jesus used common and often strikingly secular experiences.¹⁸³ The preacher’s own parables, in turn, can serve the function of helping listeners become more attentive to their own stories and to God’s presence in their lives.

Imagination in the God-power: The God-power in the soul. Though the church has been resistant to imagination, Troeger has traced some theologians who have affirmed imagination. Augustine, affirming memory, implicitly affirmed imagination as his definition of memory bears resemblance to that of imagination.¹⁸⁴ Edwards

¹⁷⁹Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 90.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 91. Long explains the relevance of using the preachers’ own stories, because “the preacher does not stand outside the community of hearers but in the middle of it—indeed, as a member of it” (Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 43).

¹⁸¹Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 90.

¹⁸²Most New Homileticians argue that stories should be a major source of contemporary preaching and they frequently refer to Jesus’ parables as an example. See Buttrick, *Speaking Parables*, and Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*.

¹⁸³Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 92.

¹⁸⁴Augustine claims that “these acts I perform within myself in the vast court of my memory. Within it are present to me sky, earth, and sea... There too I encounter myself and recall myself, and what, and when, and where I did some deed, and how I was affected when I did it... From that same abundant stock, also, I combine one and another of the likenesses of things... and from them I meditate upon future actions, events, and hopes, and all these again as though they were actually present” (Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan [New York: Doubleday, 1960], 237-38), quoted in Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 104.

recognized that God's character may be known through our "imaginative perception."¹⁸⁵ Beecher called imagination "the God-power in the soul."¹⁸⁶ Following these and others, Troeger implicitly encourages preachers to turn to this power, rely on God to use it, and let it find expression in one's soul and in the sermon. This imaginative theology is one that is created by the mind through a process of associating and juxtaposing ideas that enter through the senses.¹⁸⁷

Imagination in dreaming: Dream of new worlds. Troeger recognizes the shift that has taken place regarding what people consider to be authoritative. In a postmodern world neither Scripture nor other sources are considered authoritative; but experience is.¹⁸⁸ Therefore, Troeger argues that "if we do not ground our sermons in the actuality of experience, the authority of what we say will be suspect."¹⁸⁹ Listeners are raised with imaginative conventions, with an understanding of the world as taught by the community they grew up in.¹⁹⁰ In order to help people see their world with new eyes, preachers need to understand what type of theological framework they were raised in, because these frameworks can become "regions of constricted imaginations [with] . . . limitations."¹⁹¹ Preachers are to demonstrate to their audience that faith can correct

¹⁸⁵Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 109.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁸⁸John Koessler et al., "Sermon Application in a Post-Christian Culture," in *Interpretation and Application*, ed. Craig Brian Larson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 149-51.

¹⁸⁹Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 122.

¹⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁹¹*Ibid.*, 130.

theological distortions.¹⁹² The correct process involves pondering things that come to mind (through TV, seeing, feeling, and hearing), so that preachers grow in faith and simultaneously correct their idiosyncratic theological understanding of the world. Thus, through imagination they can connect with the audience and cast a vision for listeners to help them dream of a new world through new theological formulations.¹⁹³

Imagination in the Holy Spirit: Return to the source. Troeger reminds his readers that for a sermon to come alive, the mere practice of techniques and principles does not suffice. Preachers need to be in tune with the Spirit who helps them “return to the Source, to God who made you and Christ who redeemed you.”¹⁹⁴ Attending to the Spirit ensures that one’s imagination has a “heavenly” quality to it and that listeners are awakened to the Spirit within them.¹⁹⁵ Practically this means that preachers follow the sighs of their hearts— that is, the deep longings and hurts that they experience when they encounter things in the world that are not right—and use these to inform their sermons.

Critical Evaluation of Troeger in Light of Expository Preaching

Summarizing Troeger’s homiletical strategy reveals that the use of imagination plays a vital role in sermon development. Imagination is used to (1) create verbal pictures that help preacher and audience visualize the message, (2) physically image actions and emotions, (3) find the author’s “voice” and convey this in preaching, (4) bring the

¹⁹²Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 131.

¹⁹³*Ibid.*, 133-34. See also Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 4; or Baxter who says “all our work must be done spiritually, as by men possessed of the Holy Ghost” (Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* repr. [Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989], 120, page references are to the reprint edition).

¹⁹⁴Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 138.

¹⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 139.

message in narrative form, (5) listen to the expression of this God-power in one's soul, and (6) tell stories that are grounded in actual experience. This approach has both strengths and weaknesses for expository preaching.

Imagination through the Senses

First, the value Troeger places on the use of one's senses seems to be essential for an expository approach to preaching that seeks to make use of imagination.¹⁹⁶ Though some expository preachers have written about the need to incorporate sense-imagination in one's preaching, this is still an area that deserves intentional attention.¹⁹⁷ Many expositors correctly treasure the text as God's word, yet miss the dynamic of the Bible as a living scene.¹⁹⁸ Allen mentions that "good expository preaching seeks to turn the ear into an eye. Paint the picture with words so people can see it in their minds and feel it with their emotions."¹⁹⁹ Adams clarifies that "to experience an event in preaching is to enter into that event so fully that the emotions appropriate to that event are felt, just as if

¹⁹⁶Troeger argues that in order to engage the senses well preachers need to analyze their church culture, which includes a particular sensorium. See Troeger, *Preaching and Worship*, 5 ff.

¹⁹⁷Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: A Comprehensive Textbook on Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 86-96. Jay E. Adams, "Sense Appeal and Storytelling," in *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel T. Logan Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1986), 350-66.

¹⁹⁸This results in a boring kind of preaching. Adams, for example, asks, "Why do you think it is that the average modern congregation is so unaffected and undemonstrative? Could it be—at least in part—because contemporary preachers by dull, lifeless, abstract preaching fail to appeal to their senses?" (Jay E. Adams, *Sense Appeal in the Sermons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975], 32).

¹⁹⁹David L. Allen, "Preparing a Text-Driven Sermon," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 132.

one were actually going through it.”²⁰⁰ Troeger convincingly argues that appealing to the senses will help the audience have fresh emotional experiences. In order to do that, preachers need to use their own senses first.²⁰¹ An experiential encounter with the scriptural message is desirable in expository preaching as well.

Imagination through Bodily Imitation

Troeger argues that preachers should identify themselves with the biblical characters, particularly through bodily imitation. This idea may be helpful in better understanding the circumstances about which the authors wrote and in which they lived, thus helping to get closer to the author-intended meaning. When this approach is used in homiletics it may contribute to a more vivid sermon delivery. Adams makes a similar point when he says,

There is a great difference between merely thinking about something and experiencing it. Thinking *about* it means there is a significant emotional distance *from* it; experiencing it means there is a cold chill that runs up your spine when it comes to mind. Of course thinking is necessary to experiencing and may lead to it (a person can think himself into a panic). But, in a preaching context, many listeners *on their own never* experience anything unless the preacher helps them.²⁰²

In addition, Troeger’s emphasis on the use of logosomatic language is valuable when considering how to deliver the message with greater impact.

At the same time, one should be careful not to go so far as limiting the whole hermeneutics and homiletics process to merely imitating biblical characters. Turning

²⁰⁰Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 86.

²⁰¹Troeger gives the following advice, “Go through the notes with your nose. Do you smell anything? Go through the notes with your body. Do you feel anything? Go through the notes with your eyes. Do you see anything? Go through the notes with your mouth. Do you taste anything? Go through the notes with your ears. Do you hear anything?” (Thomas H. Troeger, *Creating Fresh Images for Preaching: New Rungs for Jacob's Ladder* [Valley Forge: Judson, 1982], 65-66). See also Troeger, *Preaching and Worship*, 5.

²⁰²Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 86.

sermons into biographical portrayals has some dangers. Greidanus criticizes this practice, “Imitating Bible characters, though popular and superficially easy, is a dead-end road for true biblical preaching. It is a homiletical shortcut that results in a hermeneutical short circuit.”²⁰³ According to him, this way of preaching can easily become subjective and the author’s intention may be missed. He wonders whether the author intended his original hearers to identify with a certain character.²⁰⁴ Though Greidanus overstates the problem, his criticism may be used as a safe-guard when choosing this potentially effective use of the imagination: 1) the forward movement of history and revelation ought not to be ignored, the literary context should not be disregarded, and the uniqueness of each of the Bible characters, their actions and attitudes, not be overlooked; 2) The biblical author’s description should not be transformed into prescription for today; 3) sermons need to remain theocentric, rather than become anthropocentric.²⁰⁵

Imagination through Story Telling

Troeger argues for the use of personal stories that are parabolic in nature.²⁰⁶ He believes this is important because with all the ambiguity in life that people experience, they need to know that their lives have meaning and that God reveals himself in their lives. Troeger says it like this,

When we think about the parabolic nature of our lives in the light of God’s Word, we find patterns of meaning larger than ourselves. We locate the thread of revelation that pulls us into the circle of the whole human family. And when we draw that thread of revelation into our sermons, then listeners begin to consider the parables of their own lives, and they become more attentive to where and how God

²⁰³Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 163.

²⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 179.

²⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 162-63.

²⁰⁶Troeger says “preachers cannot illumine the parabolic character of their listeners’ lives if they have not understood the parabolic character of their own” (Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 90).

is addressing them.²⁰⁷

Parabolic stories are indeed valuable to preaching. Preaching is meant to help people see their own lives in light of God's revelation. An important part of preaching and training expository preachers is developing the ability to tell stories, not just illustrations, that help people look at their own lives with different eyes. In expository preaching the text is so important that stories are often relocated to the end of the sermon as an illustration for the application. In contemporary context, stories may require a more prominent place in preaching. Troeger's suggestions as to how to draw parables from life may be a helpful corrective to expository preaching.

However, an exaggerated focus on storytelling denies the essential centrality of the biblical text, which is God's word. Adams is enlightening:

The mistake that some preachers make when they discover the evocative power of a story is to tell stories and do little else. Their sermons become a string of pearls, in which a string of stories are suspended on a theme. Now each of these stories may be a natural pearl, but Christ sent us to preach His Word, not to string necklaces.²⁰⁸

It is hard to discover an immediate link to a biblical message in the parables that Troeger creates. Jesus' parables, on the other hand, often quite obviously teach kingdom principles. In telling stories biblical preachers should not lose sight of the Story.

Imagination to Inform Theology

Troeger's view of theology differs greatly from that of expository preachers. He defines his imaginative theology as "the visionary and integrative capacities of the mind to create theological understanding."²⁰⁹ Troeger believes people are constricted by theological barriers, that is, certain views of theology that they were taught in the past:

The word "imaginative" reminds us that what engages our listener's

²⁰⁷Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 97.

²⁰⁸Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 91.

²⁰⁹Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 26.

imagination is what carries authority for them. Asserting the authority of the Bible, the church or tradition does not in itself win a hearing for our message. The authority of effective preaching lies in the imaginative presentation of the gospel as a compelling alternative vision to the myths of the media.²¹⁰

Thus, traditional theology is not helpful in sermon preparation but rather an obstacle to be overcome.²¹¹ According to Troeger, the past is not to be used to teach age-old principles, but rather as a guide that informs how those principles should be understood and applied today, which for Troeger seems to be equated with fighting oppression in all its forms. Thus, Troeger uses imagination to correct old dogmatic views and to produce new theological understanding through association and juxtaposition. "Imaginative theology in the pulpit utilizes those patterns to evoke similar reflections in the listeners."²¹² This theological understanding is not to be imposed upon the audience; rather, the audience is to be taught this process. He argues that "too many sermons hide the preacher's imaginative work so that listeners receive the impression that when God's word comes it arrives in a hermeneutically sealed tube."²¹³

Troeger is correct to say that people can be theologically bound by their past. Some of the theology, or rather religious conventions that they were raised with, is distorted by means of the times and culture people were part of. Imagination may be a tool that helps people learn to see other possibilities. Yet, imagination is not the only guide and norm to discern what theological principles should be followed. It is true that the truth of faith can correct the distortions of faith through the Spirit of faith.²¹⁴ However,

²¹⁰Thomas H. Troeger, "Imaginative Theology: The Shape of Post-Modern Homiletics," *Homiletic* 13 (1998): 31.

²¹¹Evangelicals do not agree with Troeger's negative view toward theology. See Thomas R. Schreiner, "Preaching and Biblical Theology," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10 (2006): 20-29.

²¹²Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 26.

²¹³*Ibid.*, 27.

²¹⁴*Ibid.*, 131.

the Spirit of faith speaks through and within the principles of the Word of God—rather than merely through one’s imagination—and theology is, therefore, more objective and less constructible than Troeger’s postmodern understanding of it allows.

Imagination as Function of the Spirit

Troeger argues that preaching preparation cannot be captured in a method; rather he believes inspired preaching requires the work of the Holy Spirit.²¹⁵ The Spirit is the criterion to distinguish between living and dead preaching:

Preaching depends on the Spirit, and I make that point clear in my sermon. ... You may have perfected every method and technique, but without the Spirit the music is dead. And that is true for preachers as well. Their outline, their biblical interpretation, their use of language, their mastery of every homiletical rule and norm may all be polished, but only ‘If [the] Spirit send the word on high’ will the sermon sing and soar. I say this to all preachers: Follow the pull of the Spirit to return to the Source, to God who made you and Christ who redeemed you.²¹⁶

Troeger’s advice should be heeded. Many expository preachers realize that the Holy Spirit is ignored in sermon preparation and preaching. Smith laments the fact that “the contemporary church suffers from the ache of memory that has resulted in pneumatological amputation and absence. In fact, the Holy Spirit has been demoted to the status of the stepchild of the Trinity, especially in preaching.”²¹⁷ Expository preachers need to be trained to go beyond merely using their cognitive abilities in order to both be in tune and in step with the Spirit and to let the outcome of this experiential process become a dynamic part of the sermon. Troeger, however, may be going too far with his

²¹⁵Wilson similarly says that “the Holy Spirit is the true communicator in preaching. Preachers might be tempted to conclude that preaching is a gift that one either has or does not have and that there is little one can do to be a better preacher. However, through such attitudes, excessive work commitments, or procrastination, the preacher can fail to offer the Holy Spirit enough assistance” (Paul Scott Wilson, *Broken Words: Reflections on the Craft of Preaching* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2004], 114).

²¹⁶Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 137-38.

²¹⁷Robert Smith, foreword to *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*, by Greg Heisler (Nashville: B&H, 2007), xi.

approach. Even more so than Wilson, Troeger's method reveals postmodern subjectivity. A confrontation with the world as it comes to him (TV, a look into the neighborhood, something he reads) forms the lenses through which he sees Scripture. He ponders whatever enters his mind through his imagination and lets that lead a life of its own. He believes that this process is given shape by the Spirit who gives the preacher sighs (Rom. 8:26, 27), experiential signals that something in the world is not right. Consequently, he finds texts that resonate with the insights he has gained through this process. Besides the fact that the Romans text is not interpreted correctly,²¹⁸ the hermeneutic process Troeger uses here is totally reversed: rather than Scripture forming the starting point and imagination supporting, Troeger's imagination is the beginning and Scripture a helpful tool.

Summary

Considering the evaluation above, Troeger's work yields insights into the possible use of imagination in expository preaching, yet also provides cause for caution. Of potential benefit is his emphasis on preachers letting their minds wander, so to speak, and thus to make connections and associations between text, contemporary society, and audience. This process is possible because of the imaginative capacity given by God. In addition, Troeger stresses the importance of using one's senses both in hermeneutics and homiletics, because doing so will help facilitate a deeper and more relevant experiential encounter with God for the audience. Finally, the use of parabolic stories, rather than using stories as entertaining illustration, may be a helpful aid, or even corrective, to the sometimes overly rationalistic and logical nature of many expository sermons. These are

²¹⁸Douglas J. Moo, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon D. Fee, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 522-27. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Moises Silva, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 442-47.

some of the aspects that Troeger uses to interpret and deliver the word of God more dynamically and in order to help the audience connect with God.

On the other hand, there are several problems with Troeger's approach. First of all, Troeger himself is obviously a man of great creative insight himself and thus he is able write helpful insights regarding imagination. The work itself, however, is too poetic at the expense of being practical. After reading his work, most ordinary preachers, who are not the type of great artist Troeger is, may be impressed with Troeger's artistic imagination, stories, and writing, but would not really know what to do to improve their use of imagination for preaching.

Second, Troeger's suggestion to use imagination to identify with biblical characters in homiletics is a potential problem. This method can be used only within boundaries. The historic, revelatory, and literary contexts need to be considered and become part of the portrayal of a certain character. Second, the character's behavior should generally not be presented as being prescriptive, though it may certainly be used as example (see, for example, 1 Cor 10). Third, the author's intention of a certain passage needs to be safeguarded. And last, preachers should be careful to preserve a theocentric, rather than anthropocentric, focus.

Third, the helpful insight to use imagination to give sermons a narrative character needs to be developed and practiced in such a way that the biblical message of a certain text and the Story of the Bible are incorporated into the parabolic story in order to prevent the sermon from becoming a mere motivational story without a strong connection to God's specific word in the text. A sermon may take on the character of modern day parable to teach the truths of the Kingdom, as long as, in the imaginative process, the author's intention does not get lost. Furthermore, the audience should still be able to understand the connection to the biblical text and context.

Fourth, imagination cannot be employed apart from biblical theology and

traditional theological understanding and should, furthermore, not be considered a pure guide into reinterpretations of long-established doctrines. Because of human fallenness, conventional biblical dogmas may indeed prove to be wrong; however, because of that same human fallenness, subjective human imagination is not the only, and certainly not the most important, tool to provide a corrective.

Last, the renewed emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit to guide a preacher's imagination for expository preaching is a reality only as far as this process is grounded in the Bible. Thus, the prominence of God's Word in the biblical text-contemporary situation-audience triad is maintained.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an analysis of Wilson and Troeger's theories and methodologies for the use of imagination in preaching. These two new homileticians were pioneers in dedicating an entire work to the development of imagination in preaching. Both authors argue against a more traditional, rhetorical type of preaching.

Wilson's considers the text an important starting point for hermeneutics and homiletics and seeks to safeguard the text as the word of God. In essence, the process of imagination entails juxtaposing the ancient biblical text and the contemporary situation which results in a concern of the text (one of many) and of the sermon. The tension between these two poles creates a spark that brings the message in the form of a new identity. This method seeks to value both biblical text and contemporary situation equally and properly. In addition, it ensures that the audience is captivated, which facilitates an opportunity for people to incorporate the message of faith into their lives. Additional juxtapositions can be used in homiletics, such as law and grace, story and doctrine, and prophet and pastor. In homiletics, imagination is used to work through these juxtapositions, often in narrative form.

Troeger proclaims the end of traditional theology, and proposes instead his

imaginative theology, which uses the visionary and integrative abilities of the human senses. His imaginative theology—a theology that is formed through one’s imagination rather than through the transmission of ancient dogmas—employs imagination by using all of one’s senses (seeing, feeling, hearing, bodily action), creating parabolic stories, dreaming of future realities, and following one’s inner sense, that is, the soul’s God-power, while relying on the Holy Spirit to guide the hermeneutic and homiletic process.

Expository preaching can benefit from Wilson and Troeger’s work regarding imagination in several ways. To begin with, their writings imply the need to be intentional in using this God-given capacity. In addition, they offer potential practical ways of using imagination—e.g., discerning the meaning of a text for a specific sermon, connecting that meaning with a concern for the sermon, juxtaposing opposing poles to appeal to the audience, using all senses both in hermeneutics and homiletics, preaching in narrative form, and being guided by the Holy Spirit.

However, their practice is not totally compatible with expository preaching. Their denial of the existence of one author-intended meaning, the minimal role allocated to exegesis, an exaggerated trust in imagination to be truthful, and the use of stories that may be too subjective and far removed from the biblical text are examples of some of the potential issues that can result from simply incorporating these methods.

Based on a clear understanding of expository preaching and the need for a new focus on imagination as described in chapter 2 and the evaluation in this chapter of two approaches, the following chapter provides both theoretical and practical information regarding the use of imagination in hermeneutics. Chapter 5 consequently focuses on imagination for expository homiletics.

CHAPTER 4
IMAGINATION FOR AUTHOR-
CENTERED HERMENEUTICS

Introduction

In the fight against subjective liberalism, some evangelicals have argued that theology should be practiced in the same way as science. Hodge said,

The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his storehouse of facts; and his method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches, is the same as that which the natural philosopher adopts to ascertain what nature teaches.... The duty of the Christian theologian is to ascertain, collect, and combine all the facts which God has revealed concerning himself and our relation to him. These facts are all in the Bible.¹

On one hand, evangelicals would not argue with this statement; Hodge's intention seems reasonable in light of the rising liberalism of his time. On the other hand, however, it may be lacking an important acknowledgment with regard to hermeneutics and homiletics. In addition to the scientific method of studying Scripture, contemporary evangelical hermeneutics requires artistic input as well. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard point out that "interpretation is neither an art nor a science; it is both a science and an art."²

¹Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1872), 1: 10-11; quoted in Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 97-98. Also quoted in 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): 273.

²William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Kermit A. Ecklebarger (Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 1993), 5. Biblical hermeneutics and homiletics is both a science (principle) and an art (task). See also Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1991), 19-20. Kaiser also values art in preparing a text for proclamation. See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 159. See also Grant

Scorgie elaborates on the incompleteness of a scientific methodology for evangelical hermeneutics and concludes that baptized imagination— “stimulated by and tethered to the richness of Biblical narrative, doctrine, language, and symbol”—may be a needed corrective.³ In many cases hermeneutical art comes directly from Scripture, but requires more than a scientific approach; it calls for the interpreter’s imagination.⁴ One way imagination was defined in chapter 2 is “the means by which we are able to represent anything not directly accessible, including *both* the world of the imaginary *and* recalcitrant aspects of the real world; it is the medium of fiction as well as of fact.”⁵ This capacity can provide greater clarity and understanding to both the world and the ideas of the original author. Of the two main aspects of imagination, passive and active, passive imagination will be often employed in hermeneutics. Recalling Hamerton, passive imagination can be described as that “condition of mind in which we are capable of following without effort the active imagination of others, but do not create anything by an imaginative effort ourselves. . . . The state of passive imagination is idle, assuredly, in this sense, that for the moment it produces nothing, but it may be receptive.”⁶ This chapter explains how imagination can be used in such a way that it is faithful to Scripture and the author’s intention while simultaneously enhancing the process of discerning the

R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. and exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 21-22.

³Baptized imagination in Glen G. Scorgie, "Hermeneutics and the Meditative Use of Scripture," 282. In order to employ an active meditative use of Scripture, Scorgie points to the necessity of personal formation, practical application, and an encounter with God, *ibid.*, 273-74.

⁴Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 21-22.

⁵Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and Religious Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 66.

⁶Philip Gilbert Hamerton, *Imagination in Landscape Painting* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1887), 56.

meaning of the passage.

Hermeneutics and Exegesis

Hermeneutics and exegesis are terms that are often used interchangeably. Nevertheless, they are different in their meaning, history and practice.⁷ Generally, theologians understand hermeneutics to be the “theory of interpretation,” while exegesis is described as “the practice of interpretation.”⁸ Kaiser, for example, says “hermeneutics may be regarded as the *theory* that guides exegesis; exegesis may be understood in this work to be the *practice* of and the set of *procedures* for discovering the author’s intended meaning.”⁹ Hermeneutic principles are fixed, unchanging presuppositions that inform how one does exegesis.

The hermeneutic advocated in this dissertation is a grammatical-historical-theological author-centered hermeneutic. Batzig explains that the grammatical element deals with “the nouns, verbs, tenses, cases and all other pertinent exegetical aspects,” the

⁷For a detailed history of Christian hermeneutics, see Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 21-52. For a study that seeks to define hermeneutics, see Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 3-45. For information regarding the history and definition of exegesis, see Stanley E. Porter and Kent D. Clarke, “What is Exegesis? An Analysis of Various Definitions,” in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 3-21.

⁸Bruce Corley, “A Student’s Primer for Exegesis,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steven W. Lemke, and Grant I. Lovejoy (Nashville: B & H, 2002), 6. Holder similarly says “hermeneutics refers to principles while exegesis to interpretive practice” (R. Ward Holder, *John Calvin and the Grounding of Interpretation: Calvin’s First Commentaries*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions Series, vol. 127 [Leiden: Brill, 2006], 31). Along those lines, Zuck compares hermeneutics to a cook book and exegesis to cooking itself. See Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 22.

⁹Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 47.

historical elements cover “understanding the author’s context, audience, and the overall purpose of the book as a whole,” and the theological element deals with “the redemptive-historical (canonical) setting and the systematic-theological categories of Scripture.”¹⁰ Consequently, the use of imagination in the exegetical practice of expository interpretation must serve to obtain fuller understanding of the author-intended meaning of a passage.

Imagination for the Process of Expository Exegesis

Though often ignored, exegesis is the starting point in evangelical expository preaching, because good exegesis is essential to finding the author’s intended meaning.¹¹ The exegetical process can take on different forms depending on the interpreter’s exegetical theory. Biblical exegesis according to Hayes and Holladay, for example, means obtaining an “informed understanding of the text.”¹² Besides reading the text, putting it in historical context, placing it within the larger literary context, and identifying the form or genre, it would also include text-critical analysis, historical criticism,

¹⁰Nicholas T. Batzig, "Textual, Expository, Redemptive-historical, Applicatory Preaching?" *The Aquila Report*, August 19, 2013, <http://theaquilareport.com/textual-expository-redemptive-historical-applicatory-preaching/> (accessed October 10, 2013).

¹¹Haddon Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," in *Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Biblical Preaching*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 71. MacArthur points out the need for exegesis in expository preaching, see John MacArthur, "A Study Method for Expository Preaching," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 182. Black says the goal of exegesis is “to determine as exactly as possible just what the writer meant by the words he wrote” (David Alan Black, "Exegesis for the Text-Driven Sermon," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews [Nashville: B & H, 2010], 159. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 17-40).

¹²John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 21.

grammatical criticism, and/or tradition criticism.¹³ Most evangelical exegetes focus on discovering the meaning of the text by analyzing the text grammatically, historically, syntactically, and as literature.¹⁴ Chapter 2 already presented four basic steps to an author-centered exegetical process: historical-cultural analysis, lexical and syntactical analysis, literary analysis, and theological analysis,¹⁵ or setting, syntax, structure, and significance.¹⁶ This chapter provides suggestions for the use of imagination in each of these four aspects of the exegetical process. In addition, and first in order, the primacy of the Holy Spirit is discussed with regard to the role of imagination.

Spirit: Imagination Informed by the Holy Spirit

The practice of interpreting Scripture is a sacred work and, therefore, depends on the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guided the process of writing the Scriptures and he is the one who illumines readers of the word of God. Though the author's intention is available to all (including non-believers) who study according to grammatical and historical exegesis,¹⁷ the Holy Spirit illumines believers, so that they are

¹³Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, 180. Besides these forms of criticism, Hayes and Holladay suggest redaction, structuralist, and canonical exegesis. And they provide understanding of different perspectives in exegesis such as cultural, economic, ethnic, gender, and sexual perspectives. Biblical criticism is often associated with a subjective use of the biblical text. See Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 40 Questions Series, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 299.

¹⁴Compare, for example, Stuart, Douglas K., *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009); and Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

¹⁵Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 75-92.

¹⁶These terms come from Corley, "A Student's Primer for Exegesis," 9-13.

¹⁷Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the*

not only able to discern the meaning of a text, but understand the spiritual and theological context and depth of a passage, which ensures a more dynamic grasp of the meaning of the text. In other words, even though the Scriptures have external clarity, which means that anyone can understand the intention of the author, more is needed. Vanhoozer shows, as did Luther and Calvin, that internal clarity (which is a result of the Spirit's illumination) and the Spirit's internal witness are required. Internal clarity ensures that the interpreter rightly recognizes the Bible as a testimony to Christ, whereas the Spirit's internal witness convinces the interpreter that the Bible is God's word. Without the Spirit, interpreters are blinded by sin and their own (likely misguided) interpretive presuppositions, possibly leading to a faulty interpretation of the passage's meaning.¹⁸ And thus, as Luther rightly said, "The Spirit is needed for the understanding of all Scripture and every part of scripture."¹⁹

Stein, continuing in this tradition, argues that "the Spirit helps the reader understand the pattern of meaning that the author willed and convinces the reader as to the truth of that teaching."²⁰ Lewis and Demarest state that "illumination enables sinners to understand that the gospel is objectively true, to assent to its truth for themselves personally, and to commit themselves to the Savior."²¹ This understanding is especially important for preachers, when they seek to employ their imagination in interpretation. By *Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 67-68.

¹⁸Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 316.

¹⁹Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and Olaf Raymond Johnston (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1957), 74.

²⁰Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 65.

²¹Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 1:167. See for more, Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 1995), 22; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 644-45.

relying on the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of exegesis, the chance for subjective interpretation, which is possibly contra-scriptural, will be significantly reduced.²²

Both Troeger and Wilson emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in doing imaginative work. Troeger, for example, devotes a whole section to this topic, entitled “Opening the Imagination to the Spirit.”²³ Wilson writes, “Imagination should be understood as a vehicle used by the Holy Spirit. . . . Our goal is to put our imagination at the total service of the Spirit.”²⁴ Though their approach may lead to too much freedom in interpretation, preachers, nevertheless, should expect the Spirit to guide their passive imagination in the interpretive process. As will be clarified later in this chapter, boundaries need to be specified, to ensure imagination is subject to a grammatical historical hermeneutic. In other words, when the imagination is sanctified, the Holy Spirit may use it to provide preachers with an understanding that truly gets the author-intended meaning and can discern some of the mind of God. In order to sanctify the imagination, one’s life needs to be ever aligned with the truths and disciplines of the Christian faith Scripture, so that the products of the mind are a result of communion with God.

The Holy Spirit can use one’s imagination in conjunction with a more objective kind of study of the text to give an answer to the question, “What does God say

²²Roy B. Zuck, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (1984): 120-30. See also Kaiser, who states, “It is by *words* of the Holy Spirit only, that we are led to understand what we ought to think respecting *things*” (Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 26).

²³Carol Doran and Thomas H. Troeger, *Open to Glory: Renewing Worship in the Congregation* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1983), 77.

²⁴Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 19.

through this passage?” Lewis’s famous distinction between “looking at” and “looking along” explains this process.²⁵ Vanhoozer affirms Lewis’s insight by comparing looking at to “propositional knowledge” and looking along to “personal knowledge” of the Scripture in doing theology.²⁶ Imagination works in the looking along with the Scripture. Vanhoozer states,

The various ways of “looking at” the biblical texts (at the sources, the form, the redaction, the tradition history, the rhetoric, the grammar) are functions of critical reason. “Looking along,” on the other hand, is a feat and function of the imagination. It has to do with our ability to enter into different ways of seeing and experiencing and thinking. The imagination is our port of entry into other worlds. In particular, the imagination enables us to enter the world of the text, to read Scripture along its various textual grains. Genuine interpretation is less a matter of looking at Scripture than of looking along Scripture, thereby seeing God, the world and ourselves as biblical texts do. One can discern what God is saying and doing in Scripture only by such looking along.²⁷

The Holy Spirit is part of this dynamic. Sanctifying the mind’s imagination and, consequently, learning to look along the text also ensures that hermeneutics is transformed beyond a merely detached and scientific exercise into a spiritual discipline in which the preacher is experientially engaged with eyes of faith. As such, discerning authorial intent begins as an objective exercise, but is enhanced through the Spirit enabling the preacher to enter into the text and to look along to Christ, the Living Word, so as to engage in interpretation in the fullest sense.

²⁵C. S. Lewis, "Meditation in a Toolshed," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 212-15.

²⁶Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 37.

²⁷*Ibid.*

Setting: Imagination in Historical-Cultural Analysis

Analysis of the historical and cultural background is essential to expository hermeneutics. An intentional study of setting changes preaching “from a two-dimensional study to a three-dimensional cinematic event.”²⁸ The historical context consists of aspects like the “chronology, archaeology, geography, culture, literature, society, and political institutions”²⁹ of that time.

Passive imagination is helpful in this aspect of hermeneutics in that it helps people get closer to the historical context in which the text was written, which will enhance the weight of the meaning of the text. Passive imagination does not create anything new; rather it seeks to reproduce certain aspects of the original author’s context. “Historical imagination” is helpful in “reproducing the past” of a text in the Bible.³⁰

Hidden in the author’s written words is valuable information that can only be recaptured by actively using one’s senses.³¹ Stott helps to understand the purpose of this process:

To begin with, we have to transport ourselves back, by the use of both our knowledge and our imagination, into the biblical writer’s context, until we begin to think what he thought and feel what he felt. Our responsibility is not to assimilate his views to ours, by reading our opinions back into what he wrote, but to assimilate

²⁸Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 158.

²⁹Corley, "A Student's Primer for Exegesis," 10.

³⁰John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, ed. Edwin Charles Dargan (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1903), 425. Similarly, Ryken claims that “they [full-fledged stories] are full, circumstantial, and embellished with detail, and they allow the reader to recreate the story in his or her imagination” (Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984], 33.)

³¹Richard Lischer, "Imagining a Sermon," in *A Reader on Preaching: Making Connections*, ed. David Day, Jeff Astley, and Leslie J. Francis (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 181.

our views to his, by struggling to penetrate into his heart and mind.³²

Troeger's focus on the senses can be applied to uncovering this information during the hermeneutic process. First, expositors should *see* the text, using their eyes. Questions to ask are: What actual things can they see as they read the words? What visual descriptions does the author give of events, people, buildings, and so on? What visual information do commentaries contribute regarding clothes, places, food, or environment?³³

Second, interpreters need to *listen* to the text. Besides the fact that some parts of Scripture were meant to be sung, in all texts certain things can be heard. Imagining the characters' voices (pitch, volume, intonation, and so on) and surrounding noises can make the text come to life in a way that enhances understanding of the text's message and God's voice through it.

Third, touch, smell, and taste are important elements to pay attention to in interpreting the word of God. Imagination informs our conception of what it would be like to touch the skin of a leper, to smell the stench of a dark dungeon, or to taste honey in a specific context. This process helps to draw out more of the life situation in which the authors wrote and can help point in the direction of the author's intended meaning and give that meaning even more significance.

Last, Troeger raises awareness of the logosomatic quality of the text. At some point during the process, the exegete can allow some time and space to imitate the physical actions described in the passage. Similarly, Vines and Shaddix suggest imaginative reading of text, where you "put yourself into the passage and imagine you

³²John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 185.

³³Robinson calls the historical and geographical aspects of exegesis the text's "zip code." He argues that a detailed study of weather and climate, habits and customs, archaeology, social structure, city and rural life, government, flora and fauna, time, money, and weights and measures will improve "more accurate exegesis and more descriptive preaching" (Robinson, *It's All in How You Tell It*, 31-41).

are actually there. Role-play the different characters involved. Read the verses aloud and try to imagine the tone of voice and the inflection of each speaker.”³⁴ The bodily weight of the truth can thus be experienced and used as a tool in the interpretive process. Additionally, this exercise can stir a creative process that produces ideas for sermon preparation.³⁵

Syntax: Imagination in Lexical and Syntactical Analysis

Lexical and syntactical analysis is a foundational exercise in biblical exegesis. Lexical analysis is “the study of word meanings,”³⁶ and syntactical analysis is “the study of the arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses to form sentences.”³⁷ In lexical analysis interpreters distinguish between denotation and connotation. “The *denotation* of a word or phrase is its literal or obvious meaning or reference as specified in a dictionary; the *connotations* of a word or phrase are the secondary or associated significances that it commonly suggests or implies.”³⁸ In the process of exegesis, these two aspects should be analyzed differently. The denotation of a word is determined using the lexicon. The connotations of a word, on the other hand, are found in conjunction with creative insight. The latter is necessary because a world of meaning can hide behind the literal meaning, since words may be emotionally laden or symbolic in nature.³⁹ It is especially in the area

³⁴Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 103.

³⁵Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 55.

³⁶Corley, "A Student's Primer for Exegesis," 12.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 11.

³⁸Thomas Furniss, "Connotations and Denotation," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene, 4th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 298.

³⁹Virkler, *Hermeneutics*, 98-99.

of connotation that imagination may come into play. The authors' word choice was intentional, including the connotation of the word at that time. Certain passages cannot be interpreted correctly without understanding the emotion of the text.⁴⁰ In conjunction with a thorough study of the literal meaning and context of a word, the preacher may use his imagination to understand the emotions an author may have wished to evoke and convey. The mood of the passage may be helpful as well in determining the specific connotation of a word. Robinson argues,

While the emotion of a writer may be more difficult to pin down than ideas and their development, every passage has a mood. The mood involves the feelings of the writer and also the emotions his writings evoke in the reader. Some passages are alive with hope, some warn, some create a sense of joy, some flash with anger at injustice, others surge with triumph.⁴¹

Imagination can help the interpreter experience both the mood of the text and the emotions of the biblical author and characters. Though one's imagination is insufficient in retrieving the full depth and nuance of the emotion, it nevertheless can add valuable information for understanding the weight of the meaning of a passage.

Furthermore, on occasion, biblical authors used words as symbols and metaphors. Biblical authors describe God as Father, Christ as living water, the Holy Spirit as fire, and earthly life as a tent. Wiersbe argues that metaphors "weld together imagination and experience," so that abstract terms such as love, faith, and hope become

⁴⁰Osborne, for example, argues that emotions are crucial to the interpretation of Paul's letters. He argues that "the true meaning is lost without the portrayal of the emotions to guide the interpreter" (Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 120). The Bible's characters had a rich emotional life. The biblical authors expressed emotions to appeal to their audiences. Scripture records not only humans to be deeply emotional, but God as well. For example, God was filled grief (Gen 6:6), compassion (Hos 11:8), pity (Judg 2:18), anger (Deut 1:37), satisfaction (1 Kgs 3:10), and joy (Zephaniah 3:17). Jesus wept (John 11:35), was angry (John 2:15), grieved (Mat 23:37), and rejoiced (Luke 10:21). And the Holy Spirit was grieved (Eph 4:30, Isa 63:10), and rejoiced (Luke 10:21).

⁴¹Haddon W. Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Biblical Preaching*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 83.

more concrete and tangible.⁴² Since biblical authors used imagination to create biblical symbols and metaphors, they expected their readers to grasp the ideas behind the literal meaning of the word. Interpreters, therefore, also use their imagination to understand these symbols and metaphors in order to understand more fully the author's message.

Structure: Imagination in Literary Analysis

Literary analysis is the study of “the written form that the author chose to use.”⁴³ Ryken defines genre as “a type or kind of writing,”⁴⁴ or “the *form* in which a passage comes to us.”⁴⁵ It is the literary form through which the author communicated his message. Scripture demonstrates great literary diversity, which Vogel considers “one of the glorious features of the Scripture.”⁴⁶ Understanding genre is crucial to both discovering the author-intended meaning and engaging in proper exegesis and interpretation.⁴⁷ As such, genre study is an important aid in author-centered

⁴²Wiersbe quotes Brooks' statement, “The truth must conquer, but it must first embody itself in goodness” (Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* [New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1902], 50), quoted in Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1994), 82. Wiersbe defines biblical metaphors as “a kind of “verbal incarnation” that enables us to make concrete in the minds of our listeners that which would otherwise be abstract and unreal” (ibid., 81-82).

⁴³Corley, "A Student's Primer for Exegesis," 11.

⁴⁴Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 14.

⁴⁵James C. Wilhoit and Leland Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 60.

⁴⁶Robert Vogel, "Biblical Genres and the Text-Driven Sermon," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 163. See also Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 24.

⁴⁷J. I. Packer, "Exposition on Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics*,

hermeneutics.⁴⁸ Gerhart, summarizing Hirsch, concludes that “there is no meaning without genre; that is, verbal meaning is always “genre-bound.”⁴⁹ The original authors expected their readers to use their imagination within the contours of the particular genre they used to write their message. Genre can be explained as a contract⁵⁰ or game⁵¹ between author and reader. Vanhoozer says “Just as authors implicitly accept the validity conditions of

Inerrancy, and the Bible, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 911. See also, International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics" (ibid., 884). In addition, Vogel says “Literary perspective is not endemically antithetic to grammatical-historical interpretive methods. Rather, it is a necessary complement in order to assure that the composition is understood as the author intended it to be, both in fullness of effect and with a rightful understanding of the way in which he used words. Moreover, literary genre study does not diminish the truth character of biblical texts” (Vogel, "Biblical Genres and the Text-Driven Sermon," 169-70). Furthermore, Osborne considers genre study one of the most basic aspects of study for evangelical hermeneutics and homiletics. He argues “we must determine the genre or type of literature before interpretation can begin” (Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 452). He also argues that genre study plays a significant role in finding the author’s intention. He says “we must study and proclaim each biblical genre differently, according to its own purposes and rules, lest we proclaim a message alien to the divine intention in the text” (ibid.). Kaiser also supports the necessity of literary form study and argues that “the literary form suggests a certain range of purposes, audiences, or effects and responses that were desired by the original author” (Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 95).

⁴⁸Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 181. Osborne argues that genre study provides exegetical principles and helps in discerning the author’s intended meaning, Ibid., 183.

⁴⁹Mary Gerhart, "Generic Studies: Their Renewed Importance in Religious and Literary Interpretation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45, no. 3 (1977): 312. Gerhart analyzes four scholars (Hirsch, Gadamer, Todorov, and Ricoeur) and their views and use of genre. She writes that Hirsch claims that “the author has an idea of what he wants to convey-not an abstract concept, of course, but an idea equivalent to what we called an intrinsic genre” (E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967], 76, 101).

⁵⁰Heather Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982), 31.

⁵¹Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 70. Hirsch quotes and develops Wittgenstein’s metaphor for language as playing a game. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Blackwell, 1953), 26.

communicative rationality when they begin to write, so readers implicitly accept the validity conditions of understanding when they begin to read.”⁵² Imagination is to be used within these constraints. For example, because hearers and readers recognize the songs that David composed as a song, the imagination may be employed in proper fashion. When interpreting Psalm 23, for instance, one can imagine sheep, a shepherd, pastures, and enemies, and yet understand these as rich metaphors that are part of this particular genre and not in the sense that one literally is a sheep him or herself.

Therefore, interpreters should read between the lines by means of their imagination to understand the author’s meaning within the context of the genre.⁵³ Interpreters, however, should ensure that they do not fall prey to subjective creativity, dismissing the conventions of a particular genre. Imagination must be limited by the “convention, expectation, and corresponding rules of interpretation” involved with the genre of a particular text.⁵⁴

First, passive imagination, which depends on one’s memories and senses, can

⁵²Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 346-47. On the same pages Vanhoozer says, in other words, that through the use of a particular genre, “an author intends a particular set of generic rules and intends the reader to recognize them.”

⁵³The use of a certain genre, furthermore, is a literary tool that enables one to have an experience and to be moved in one’s heart, rather than merely to gain knowledge. Ryken explains, “The Bible appeals to our imagination and emotions as well as to our reason and intellect. It conveys more than abstract ideas because its aim is to express the whole of *reality*. The Bible recognizes that a person’s world view consists of images and symbols as well as ideas and propositions” (Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 21). Literary tools, such as genre aid in this process. Blomberg says that literary tools “sharpen our reason so we can uncover its ideas; they tune our imagination so its truth can grip us emotionally” (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 259). Stein describes these rules and literary devices in light of the various biblical genres. See Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*.

⁵⁴Leland Ryken, “Literature, the Bible As,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce Manning Metzger and Michael David Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 461.

be employed to allow the original author to leave an impact on the reader through the genre-specific language he used. Stein distinguishes between two types of language in biblical texts:

When we use referential language, the main goal is to pass on information. This form of language seeks to describe. It seeks to be nonemotional in nature. It seeks to pass on facts. . . . Commissive language, on the other hand, has as its main goal evoking decisions, conveying emotions, eliciting feelings, and arousing the emotions. . . . Whereas referential language appeals to the “mind,” commissive language appeals to the “heart.”⁵⁵

Just as the connotations of a word are broader and more emotional in nature than the denotation,⁵⁶ so the commissive language of a passage includes more than just the referential meaning and seeks to engage the reader in a more heart-engaging manner. A study of genre will illuminate one’s imagination in light of the commissive language used, so that the interpreter’s mind is opened to a fuller understanding and experience of the text.

Second, Troeger believes that since the written word of God was originally orally delivered, each word carried a certain “rhythm, pitch, volume, and inflection.”⁵⁷ Though Troeger’s focus is on creative imagination in sermon delivery, he nevertheless brings out an important feature for hermeneutics as well. When preachers *listen* to the text with their ears instead of their eyes, they may come to a fuller realization of the meaning of the text in its context. This requires a certain understanding of the biblical languages, as the inherent tonality of the original text is often lost in translation. Though translations are, generally, good enough to discern the author’s intention, exegetical ability with Hebrew or Greek would be very beneficial, because many of the nuances in

⁵⁵Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 73.

⁵⁶Rudolph F. Verderber, Kathleen S. Verderber, and Deanna D. Sellnow, *Essential Speech* (Mason, OH: South Western Cengage Learning, 2011), 285.

⁵⁷Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 67.

the original language can often not be picked up in the translation. Knowing the original languages provides a fuller understanding of the text and context.⁵⁸

Third, each genre is unique in its use of imagination. Two examples will illumine how to use the imagination in genre-appropriate fashion. Biblical poets, first, should be read and interpreted according to the rules of poetry.⁵⁹ Poetry often makes use of imagery, such as “agriculture, warfare, nature, geography, the temple, meteorology, and a variety of vocations.”⁶⁰ Imagining the world of the author and the metaphoric pictures he would have had in mind when writing contributes to a clearer understanding of the setting of the text.⁶¹

Biblical narratives, however, should be read in a different way. Their character

⁵⁸Even if one is not a speaker of the original language, but has ability to read it, some of the significance of tonality can be recovered, for example by reading commentaries that explain the tonality of terms used. But speaking the language, or learning from those who speak the language is beneficial. For example in Psalm 30, verse 10 the words דָּם (dam, blood) and יְדוֹם (yidom, unceasingly) are used. These are similar in sound and meant to heighten the contrast that listeners could imagine through this sound pun. See Benjamin J. Segal, "Psalm 30: Choosing to Praise," *Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies*, September 14, 2010, http://psalms.schechter.edu/2010/09/psalm-30-choosing-to-praise-text-hebrew_14.html. (accessed November 3, 2013).

⁵⁹C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (San Diego: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1964), 3. A very good definition of the relationship between the poetic genre and imagination is provided by Johnson. He defines poetry as “the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason.” Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets with Critical Observations on their Works and Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons* (London: John Sharpe, 1831), 50.

⁶⁰Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination*, 122.

⁶¹Arthurs says that “the curtain rises, though, only for those who yield to the literature. If the psalmist tries to carry us up the slopes of Zion or down to the sea, we have to go with him. We have to bring the right assumptions and skills to the text, and the chief skill is to read slowly. We must allow the images to form in our imagination” (Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety: How to Re-create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007], 46. In the same way, Ryken argues readers would “imaginatively participate” (Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], 15).

is both “historically accurate and artistically sophisticated.”⁶² This means that the Bible is more than a history book. Stein explains, “The purpose of biblical narrative is not merely to tell what took place in the past. Rather, it is to relate these past events to biblical faith.”⁶³ Imagination plays an important role in this process. Through imagination, readers can more fully picture and understand the setting and background of the biblical narrative, even though they have never actually seen a Jerusalem street, Jericho’s gate, or Peter’s boat in Galilee.⁶⁴ Imagination further enables interpreters to get closer to the character and motivation of the players in the narrative.⁶⁵ Longman argues,

Such characterization has significant consequences for interpretation. It means that we generally have only indirect description of characters and motivations for their actions. The interpreter must sometimes read between the lines to round out the picture. . . . Without indulging in wholesale speculation and eisegesis, the reader must make inferences from the text about characters and in fact is encouraged to do so by the text.⁶⁶

If the interpreter bounds these imagination influences by the rules of a grammatical-historical-theological hermeneutic, the problem of speculative eisegesis can be avoided to

⁶²Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 65. Arthurs uses Lewis’s terms, and says that “biblical narrative is both *logos* (something said) and *poiema* (something made)” (C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1961], 82-83).

⁶³Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 157.

⁶⁴Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 77. Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 53, 55.

⁶⁵Van Doren argues “one of the great merits of these stories of the Bible is that they have no psychology in them, no discussion of motivation” (Mark Van Doren and Maurice Samuel, *In the Beginning, Love: Dialogues on the Bible*, ed. Edith Samuel [New York: John Day, 1973], 66).

⁶⁶Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, ed. Moises Silva, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Apollos, 1987), 90. Longman calls the information that is missing in the text “the omission gap,” which is “an unstated piece of information that is essential to the understanding of a story” and these gaps raise “curiosity, suspense, and surprise” (ibid., 97).

a great extent. This kind of interpretation will also bring out enough clues in the text that help to make inferences. In reading the story of Joseph's reunion with his brothers, for example, Joseph's motivation or heart may be understood as gentle and caring for his brothers, even though his outward actions at certain points seems to indicate the opposite. This interpretation of motive can be inferred from the fact that Joseph's memories do not go back to his brothers' cruelty but to his dream and that there are many references throughout this passage that reveal the gentleness rather than the revenge of his heart.⁶⁷ Thus, studying the text and putting textual clues together through the imagination help the interpreter understand more about the biblical characters. Staying within the bounds of proper exegesis, imagination can be used to fill in some of the information that is missing.

Significance: Imagination in the Implicit Sense of the Meaning

The author-intended meaning of the text was fixed at the moment it was written. As demonstrated above, the passive imagination has a certain role in rediscovering the author's intention. In addition, however, the author's original meaning may point to some additional, implicit meaning that is revealed through biblical theology since any text is part of the cohesive whole of Scripture.⁶⁸ This implicit or consequent meaning can be recovered through a combination of thorough knowledge of the Bible and the baptized imagination. Kaiser demonstrates this using the example of Peter who chose the wording "killed by hanging him on a tree" (Acts 5:30), rather than using the word "crucified." Hearing those words would guide the passive imagination to

⁶⁷Maren Niehoff, *The Figure of Joseph in Post Biblical Jewish Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 38.

⁶⁸Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 218.

Deuteronomy 21: 22-23, bringing to mind that this kind of punishment signified one being cursed by God⁶⁹ and, so, heightened the meaning of the words. Thus, additional information may come to light when a text is understood in light of the whole canon. The author had one meaning in mind when he wrote, yet, in redemptive history the canon may reveal additional implications of this meaning.⁷⁰

Discovering the implications would imply the use of passive imagination in that one brings to mind various concepts of Scripture to inform the interpreter's understanding of a text. No new meaning is created, because these implications fall within the "pattern of meaning the author willed to convey by the words (shareable symbols) he or she used."⁷¹ Kaiser provides an example: Moses' writing about the bronze snake, in essence, reveals the same message as John (Jn. 3:14) later sought to share, namely that without looking to God's provision one will die.⁷² Through John, however, Moses' writings become more meaningful.

In addition, the implication(s) of a text can, through the use of the passive imagination, come to include even aspects of today's life, yet still fall within the author's willed pattern of meaning.⁷³ From the implications of a text one can take a step towards

⁶⁹Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 42.

⁷⁰ Kaiser refers to the "additional implications" as "more significance." See Kaiser, *Recovering the Unity of the Bible*, 216. Unfortunately, terms such as implications, significance, and applications are used with various meanings. Stein uses the term "implication" to refer to "those meanings in a text of which the author was unaware but which nevertheless legitimately fall within the pattern (type) of meaning he or she willed" (Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 203).

⁷¹Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 204.

⁷²Kaiser, *Recovering the Unity of the Bible*, 218.

⁷³Stein says, "If we visualize Paul's pattern of meaning in Galatians 5:2 as a large square, then only those possible submeanings that are also square in nature are legitimate. . . . Thus, whereas alcoholic and narcotic substances fit within the meaning of

the formulation of application or significance of a text.

Boundaries of Imagination for Author-Centered Hermeneutics

A key argument of this dissertation is that imagination is an essential part of expository hermeneutics. However, it has also become clear that many expository preachers hesitate to use imagination due to its subjective nature and the consequent danger of dismissing or distorting the author's intention. The work of Wilson and Troeger, while valuable in certain areas, has nonetheless demonstrated that the danger of using imagination to distort rather than to clarify is very real. As discussed in the previous chapter, Wilson, for example, expresses the desire to stay faithful to biblical truth. However, because he does not use a grammatical-historical-theological hermeneutic, he can read into the text any meaning that seems plausible through imaginative association. His use of imagination early in the hermeneutic process, before exegesis, leads to a revelation of his own mind rather than that of the biblical author.

Troeger's work, too, demonstrates that imagination without boundaries can lead to subjective interpretation. Troeger's artistic imagination seemingly leads even further away from the meaning of the text. Through association and observation of any daily event or object, Troeger's emphasis is more on revelation gleaned from any type of extra-biblical truth than on revelation coming from God through his Word. Whereas Wilson still uses the text to discern meaning (albeit multiple meanings), Troeger uses a word, a thought, or anything else that fires his imagination and gives him inspiration to create a message that in his opinion would be meaningful to his audience. Furthermore, Troeger does not want to be bound by traditional theological concepts, but rather lets his imagination guide him in transforming theology so that it becomes relevant for today.

Ephesians 5:18 in that they cause people to become "intoxicated," to lose control of their behavior, overeating or overworking do not" (Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 43).

The result could lead to a humanistic spirituality, rather than to biblical faith.

Due to the potential for subjectivism, a theory of imagination in expository preaching—while promoting its active use in hermeneutics and homiletics—requires the formulation of certain boundaries that serve to protect the objective meaning of the text and the larger scriptural and theological principles.

Subject to Grammatical and Historical Exegesis

In order to keep imagination from taking on a life of its own, it must be guided by the results of grammatical and historical exegesis.⁷⁴ This method, according to Packer, “has been the historic evangelical method of exegesis, followed with more or less consistency and success since the Reformers’ time.”⁷⁵ As Ryken argues, interpreters “must begin with the literal meaning of the words of the Bible as determined by the historical setting in which the authors wrote.”⁷⁶

A firm submission to the grammatical and historical results of exegesis will inspire the interpreter to use imagination in the process of hermeneutics in order to fill in the details of the text as vividly and colorfully as possible within the exegetical givens. The story of Rahab (Joshua 2, 6) can be taken as an example. Some interpreters have wrongly suggested that Rahab was not a harlot, but that the word referring to her meant

⁷⁴Article XVIII, “Articles of Affirmation and Denial, The Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy,” International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (Chicago, 1978); Article XV, “Articles of Affirmation and Denial, The Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy,” International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (Chicago, 1982), quoted in Dennis A Hutchison, “Impact of Historical Criticism on Preaching,” in *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship*, ed. Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 341.

⁷⁵J. I. Packer, “Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics and Inerrancy,” in *Jerusalem and Athens*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1971), 146.

⁷⁶Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 12-13.

inn keeper. Motivated by their conviction that Jesus must have had a rather sinless genealogy, they imagined that the words used in Scripture could be exegeted in a different way. Thus, they changed the meaning of grammatical-historical facts⁷⁷ and, consequently, used their imagination to envision the house as an inn, rather than both inn and brothel.⁷⁸ Thus, without good historical exegesis, the interpreter's imagination may get carried away and paint a picture of the situation at that time that is more colored by personal convictions or experiences, than by a study of what life was like at that time, thus decreasing accurate knowledge of the Scriptures.

Improper use of imagination in the grammatical arena can be demonstrated from a text like, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Hos 6:6). An interpreter who relies more on his imagination than on proper exegesis may remember that God is love and that he is merciful, and imagine and interpret this text, therefore, as God abolishing the sacrificial system with a new law for people to be merciful with one another. As Carson points out, this text is not meant to teach this and a grammatical study of the text could have revealed this idea, since Hebrew poetry tends to use formal disjunctions, like the one used in this text, merely stylistically.⁷⁹

Grammatical-historical exegesis helps the interpreter to stay as faithful as possible to the biblical (con)text. At the same time, he may use his imagination to fill in details that are in line with the details of the text and time, such as what the environment may have looked like, what people might have worn or eaten, what smells people would smell if they were there, and so on.

⁷⁷Deana Copeland Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish Text in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007), 45.

⁷⁸Leland Ryken, Tremper Longman, and Jim Wilhoit, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 423.

⁷⁹D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 91.

Subject to Author-Intended Meaning

Jowett claims, “The true use of interpretation is to get rid of interpretation and to leave us alone in company with the author.”⁸⁰ The objective meaning of the text can be discovered through the public nature of language, which also includes “emotional and attitudinal meanings.”⁸¹ According to Hirsch, the intention of the original author is “determinate and reproducible,” and “re-cognitive interpretation” possible.⁸² Accordingly, one of the claims of this dissertation is that discerning the author’s intention is a possible and necessary goal of the expository hermeneutics process. Imagination, therefore, should not be used to produce just any plausible meaning through imaginative association and apart from sound exegesis.

Looking at the story of Rahab again, the author-intended meaning was to show God’s salvation for his people.⁸³ When one uses imagination without boundaries, many other messages could be produced. Anderson, for example, uses this story to talk about the topic of lying and to give suggestions as to how to lie or not speak the truth.⁸⁴ This was clearly not the author’s intention. This story was not written as a text book on ethics; rather the intention was to show the love of God toward his chosen people. The original author used the element of lying to emphasize that Rahab chose belief in God over against other authorities.

Though limited, imagination may, nevertheless, contribute to discovering the

⁸⁰Benjamin Jowett, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Essays and Reviews*, (London: Parker, 1860), 384.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 31.

⁸²Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 27.

⁸³Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 340-41.

⁸⁴Darrell Anderson, "Rahab the Harlot," *Simpleliberty*, 2005, http://www.simpleliberty.org/giaa/rahab_the_harlot.htm (accessed October 11, 2013).

meaning. It supports in completing knowledge of the historical and cultural background. And, as explained earlier in this chapter, using aspects of passive imagination, such as using one's senses and feeling the mood through imagination, helps to more fully grasp the weight and import of the author's message and its implicit sense.

Subject to Evangelical Theology

Although the Bible consists of writings by a variety of human authors who lived at different times and in different situations, it is nonetheless the product of one unchangeable original Author. Theology focuses on the God who has revealed himself through Scripture; Scripture, accordingly, presents a unified theme from Genesis to Revelation.⁸⁵ Sparks explains the nature of this metanarrative:

A metanarrative is an attempt to explain the significance and destiny of human history by telling a story. It purports to be the grand story by which all other stories and claims about reality are to be judged. Of course, every culture, society, and religion has its metanarrative or metanarratives, but Christians believe that the Bible, as an account of God's project in history, is the true story that reveals where these others stories get things right or wrong.⁸⁶

Imagination should be subject to this metanarrative.⁸⁷ Virkler identifies aspects of this overarching story:

⁸⁵Evangelical theologians use imagination in their theology. See Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999); Vanhoozer, *First Theology*. Non-evangelical theologians also use imagination in their theology. See Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965); Ray L. Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968); Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981); Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981).

⁸⁶Kenton L. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 302.

⁸⁷See for various models of metanarrative among evangelical scholars, Gary T. Gundry, *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology*, Counterpoints, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

(1) *God's principles*, manifested through His laws; (2) *God's grace*, manifested in His response to a humanity that repeatedly breaks His principles; (3) *God's salvation*, manifested in His provision of a means of reconciliation between humanity and Himself; and (4) *God's work* in individuals, manifested through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁸

Virkler demonstrates how the Bible as a whole contributes to the overall theme of God's salvation. More specifically, the story line of Scripture can be summarized by the concepts of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation/restoration.⁸⁹ Although each book of the Bible has its own historical background, writing style, and characteristic genre, each book, nevertheless, on its own, contributes to this overarching theme. Additionally, as Stuart states, "How a passage fits within the whole Christian belief system deserves careful attention."⁹⁰ This Christian belief system, or evangelical theology, arises out of Scripture. One's imagination can help to see how everything is connected, yet also needs to be subservient to this theme.

Troeger, however, has it backwards in several ways at this point. He claims that people can use their imagination in such a way that they can receive the Holy Spirit.⁹¹ However, evangelicals would say exactly the opposite; namely, that through the reception of the Holy Spirit, people receive sanctified imagination.

Furthermore, though Troeger is correct that imagination can help in creating theological understanding,⁹² he seems to leave too much room for one's experiences to dictate the content of theology as long as it inspires faith in God. Though, to a certain degree, theology is shaped by people that were and are part of their time, Scripture, as the

⁸⁸Virkler, *Hermeneutics*, 135-36.

⁸⁹Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 98.

⁹⁰Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis*, 58.

⁹¹Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 15.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 26.

primary and foundational instrument, should be seen as the lens through which theology is given shape, rather than one's experience and opinions. The story of the Exodus, for example, is by many read as a story of seeking to rescue people from oppression in all its existing forms. Even Jesus' death is separated from its place in traditional salvation history and is in Scripture merely to symbolize the suffering in this world.⁹³ Since the beginning of the formation of Scripture people have come up with new theologies, but evangelical theology seeks to be as faithful as possible to the truth once for all given to the saints. Within the bounds of evangelical theology imagination may be applied to new areas, since times and cultures have changed. Thus, the application of those theological principles may be changeable, but the truth is not.

Subject to Historical Fact

Historical facts are both starting points and stop signs for imagination. Expository hermeneutics affirms the historicity of Scripture. Goldsworthy confirms the importance of historical facts for evangelical Christianity: "Christianity is an historical faith; it is based upon the belief that God has acted in history for our salvation."⁹⁴ If the historicity of the biblical texts is denied, then Scripture loses its claim to providing objective truths.

One's imagination is properly used only if it is faithful to historical facts and data. Again, many interpreters throughout the past have sought to alter the picture of Rahab as a harlot, because they could not imagine that God would use such a sinful lady and save her or that she is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.⁹⁵ Without the

⁹³D. D. Webster, "Liberation Theology," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 688.

⁹⁴Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 139.

⁹⁵William L. Lyons, "Rahab through the Ages: A Study of Christian

constraint of their historical character, narrative texts may, for example, be unduly psychologized or spiritualized.⁹⁶ As Newman explains, Philo would interpret the crossing of the Red Sea to symbolize spiritual salvation, Abraham and Sarah as representing “the mind and virtue,” and Jacob resting on the stone as “the self-disciplined soul.”⁹⁷ The historical context is simply dismissed and imagination is used to discover new things in the text.

Troeger often pays too little attention to the historical context of a text as well. He is sensitive to the fact that many people are biblical illiterates, but his solution leads further into that illiteracy rather than solving the issue by engaging the audience in an interesting picture of the facts.

Conclusion

The goal of expository hermeneutics is to discern the author’s intention in a certain passage. Tools used for achieving this aim are part of grammatical and historical exegesis. Though exegesis is seemingly an objective and scientific exercise, imagination can nevertheless contribute at specific points in this process. First, as interpreters seek to be guided by the Holy Spirit, they open themselves to the sanctification of their imagination. Furthermore, receptivity to the Holy Spirit ensures that preachers do not approach the passage as a technical exercise, but with the expectation that they themselves will be experientially impacted by the message.

Second, interpreters use imagination to aid in the reproduction of historical

Interpretation of Rahab," *Society of Biblical Literature*, July, 2008, <http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?ArticleId=786/> (accessed November 5).

⁹⁶Richard Lischer, "Imagining a Sermon," in *A Reader on Preaching: Making Connections*, ed. David Day, Jeff Astley, and Leslie J. Francis (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 181.

⁹⁷Willis C. Newman, *How to Understand the Bible: A Study Manual* (Tonga: Taulua, 1994), 14.

facts. Utilizing passive imagination, they use their senses to see, listen, touch, smell, taste, and physically imitate the word of God, so that the written text would produce more dynamic and colorful messages. Third, lexical and syntactical studies analyze the meaning of the word and arrangement of words in a sentence. Biblical symbols and metaphors require the use of interpreters' imagination. Furthermore, imagination helps to discern the connotation, rather than merely the denotation of words, because it enables the interpreter to get a better grasp of the words' inherent emotionality. Fourth, imagination can be actively used in the process of literary analysis. Particular genres, for example poetry or narrative, stimulate specific use of imagination. And last, imagination supports the discovery of the "implications that fit within the pattern or type"⁹⁸ of meaning the author had in mind.

Because of the seemingly unlimited powers of imagination, certain boundaries are necessary for the use of imagination in expository hermeneutics. These can be described in terms of the author's intention, grammatical and historical exegesis, evangelical theology, and historical facts. Expository preachers who use their imagination in these and similar ways will see their hermeneutics become an enlivening process that moves towards a fuller understanding of the point a particular biblical author intended to make.

⁹⁸Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 43.

CHAPTER 5
IMAGINATION FOR AUDIENCE-
FOCUSED HOMILETICS

Introduction

Having described imagination for expository hermeneutics in the previous chapter, it is necessary now to explain the use of imagination for audience-focused homiletics, which is the second element of expository preaching. Again, sound hermeneutics and sound homiletics are both crucial, as Carson emphasizes: “Words are among the preacher’s primary tools—both the words he studies and the words with which he explain his studies.”¹ However, quite often tension exists between hermeneutics and homiletics, which is exemplified by two fields of vocation. Pease points out,

A regrettable tension often exists between biblical scholars and preachers. The scholars think that preachers are superficial in their handling of the Scriptures, that they sacrifice accuracy and content for “inspiration.” The preachers, in turn, think that scholars are so technical and philosophical that the average person cannot understand what they are saying. Unfortunately, both sides can produce ample evidence to substantiate their concerns.²

Kaiser also laments the separation between hermeneutics and homiletics, and points to the fact that, in evangelical hermeneutics, debates often revolve around the movement from “‘what the text *meant* in its historical context’ to ‘what that same text *means* to me.’”³ Robinson highlights the necessity of both disciplines for expository preaching:

¹D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 27.

²Norval F. Pease, "Preaching and Biblical Interpretation," in *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, DC: The Review and Herald, 1974), 251.

³Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 23.

Homiletics deals with the construction and communication of sermons. As a communicator, the preacher borrows from rhetoric, the social sciences, and communication theories. Yet because he handles religious content, he must also involve himself with hermeneutics.⁴

The thesis of this dissertation is that rightly developed evangelical theory and use of imagination will improve the practice of both expository hermeneutics and homiletics. To reiterate, “[Imagination is] the human faculty that allows us to create something new, to see or feel something familiar in a fresh way, to express an old truth in a new manner, to make a new application of truth.”⁵

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, imagination ought to play an important role in hermeneutics, albeit with clear boundaries in place. Though boundaries are necessary for homiletics as well, this chapter demonstrates that imagination can even more richly be employed in the homiletic process. To that end, the use of active imagination is appropriate. Active imagination “takes the raw material . . . , breaks it down, and then reshapes it into new and vital forms.”⁶

Given the promise imagination holds for homiletics and, thus, to the fulfillment of the God-given task of Christian preaching, this chapter will elaborate on applications of imagination in expository homiletics.

⁴Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 25. See also Haddon W. Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 803.

⁵Leland Ryken, *The Christian Imagination: Essays on Literature and the Arts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 37. Ryken quotes the phrase “a stir and growth everywhere,” from Matthew Arnold. See Matthew Arnold, *Essays Literary and Critical* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1866; repr., Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2007), 4 (page references are to the reprint edition).

⁶Louis Markos, *Literature: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 113.

Imagination for the Process of Expository Homiletics

The process of homiletics can be outlined in various ways. Though different texts propose various strategies, this chapter will focus on six components that generally are part of homiletics: proposition, form, explanation, application, writing, and presentation.⁷

Imagination in Proposition

As mentioned in the previous chapter, finding the author-intended meaning is one of the main purposes of expository preaching. In the process of homiletics, the original central idea of the text needs to be transposed so that it becomes a relevant message to today's hearers. Robinson states, "First of all, the exegetical idea is what the biblical writer was saying to the biblical reader.... The homiletical idea is the idea from Scripture as I phrase it and shape it for a twenty first century audience."⁸ Similarly, Wilson argues, "A concern of the sermon (concern of the homily) may be defined as a transposed version of a concern of the text, generalizing the textual details in order to speak to our situation. The concern of the text deals with the text in its time; the concern of the sermon/homily deals with our situation."⁹

⁷See Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*. Bill Curtis, Daniel L. Akin, and Stephen Rummage, *Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B & H, 2011); Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermon* (Chicago: Moody, 1999); David L. Allen, "Preparing a Text-Driven Sermon," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B & H, 2010); Ramesh Richard, *Scripture Sculpture: A Do-It-Yourself Manual for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 1995); Wayne McDill, *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2006); and Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: B&H, 2009).

⁸Haddon W. Robinson, "Better Big Ideas: Five Qualities of the Strongest Preaching Ideas," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 355.

⁹Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in*

The homiletical idea should appeal to the contemporary audience. Cahill argues that the homiletical idea, therefore, should be imaginative:

It should be expressed clearly and use imaginative language. This idea should sparkle. With the exegetical idea, we strive for precision. With the homiletical idea, we work for creativity in expression. A well-written homiletical idea gives us something worth saying—indeed, something we have to say. The homiletical idea should capture the imagination.¹⁰

For example, the exegetical idea of Matthew 5:20 is “our righteousness should exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.” The homiletical idea could be captured with the sentence “Make no mistake; you must be perfect.” This phrase may draw people’s attention in two ways. “Make no mistake” is an expression to not be “deceived into thinking otherwise,”¹¹ but in this case it is also meant as an imperative to not make any mistakes. Furthermore, because many struggle with perfectionism, they will start thinking about what this strong sentence means and may be motivated to listen to what the sermon has to say about this.

Another example can be taken from 2 Peter 1:18-21. The precise exegetical idea here can be said to be, “Slaves should submit to their masters, even to harsh ones, because it’s their calling to follow in the steps of Christ’s suffering.” The homiletical idea could be, “Listen to your boss, for the sake of the cross.” The little rhyme was the result of imagination, so that the sentence would be more memorable. Furthermore, this sparks listeners’ imagination because most people have some complaint about their bosses. To be told to listen to their bosses may cause them to wonder why and how.

One can utilize imagination in various ways when searching for the homiletical

Preaching (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 85-86.

¹⁰Dennis M. Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching: Theory and Practice in Sermon Design* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 99.

¹¹Oxford Dictionaries, “Mistake,” in *Oxford Dictionaries Language Matters*, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/mistake (accessed July 16, 2014).

idea. For example, Wilson uses juxtaposition to build the concern of the sermon from the concern of the text. He encourages preachers to “allow imagination the time to explore the tensions between concerns of the text and concerns of the sermon/homily.”¹² As described in chapter 3, these juxtapositions may revolve around polarities, such as law and gospel, story and doctrine, and pastor and prophet. Language is an important part of juxtaposing ideas. In order to build tension, Wilson also suggests that Christian theological language should be renewed in contemporary language, because “language renewal is faith renewal.”¹³

Thus, preachers could use their active imagination to identify contemporary questions that parallel the questions the biblical author sought to address, and to provide answers that are along the lines of the biblical answer, yet addressing issues the audience faces today. For example, the overall message of Galatians is that people are saved by faith and not by abiding by certain rules and regulations. The implicit question of the text is, what rules must one follow in order to be called a Christian. In many churches, people judge the spiritual status of others based on their obedience to unspoken rules. Using one’s imagination to see what unspoken rules exist could help formulate a contemporary proposition: “Disciplines, diets, and duties are no requirements for salvation.”

Richard states,

Expository preaching is about the Bible and your people. . . . Expository preaching is the contemporization of the central proposition of a biblical text that is derived from proper methods of interpretation and declared through effective means of communication to inform minds, instruct hearts, and influence behavior toward godliness.¹⁴

Contemporizing, making the central proposition relevant and appealing to today’s audience, can be done through imagination. Preachers creatively open their minds to

¹²Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 89.

¹³Ibid., 42.

¹⁴Richard, *Scripture Sculpture*, 17.

connect daily events, trends, and issues with the central idea of the text.

This use of the active imagination can also serve as a source of inspiration in the formulation of a title that is contemporary and appealing. For example, “Jesus Shoves Me, This I Know”¹⁵ or “The Blood Spattered Welcome Mat”¹⁶ are titles that catch the imagination of the listener. In the first case the choice of the word “shoves” is a wordplay on “loves” and a twist on a familiar Christian song. The two words rhyme, but seem to contradict each other. This choice of words may startle the audience, thus stirring their imagination, and so engage them with the topic. The second example has come about by using active imagination to use a welcoming image, that of a doormat, with a disconcerting image, i.e. blood spattered in a violent act, thus drawing the audience in to discover how these disparate images are reconciled.

In summary, in the hermeneutical process, the expository preacher has sought to stay faithful to the original intention of the author. Even though the central idea of the text remains the same in the homiletical process, the preacher now finds more freedom to use imagination to transpose this intention into ideas and titles that appeal to the contemporary audience.

Imagination in Form

One’s imagination can be richly employed in the choice of the type of sermon form. Form includes structure and genre.¹⁷ The structure of a sermon is “an

¹⁵Russell D. Moore, "Jesus Shoves Me, This I Know: Why the Spirit of Christ Ought to Upset You," *Moore to the Point*, November 30, 2008, <http://www.russellmoore.com/2008/11/30/jesus-shoves-me-this-i-know-why-the-spirit-of-christ-ought-to-upset-you-matt-231-39/> (accessed November 1, 2013).

¹⁶Russell D. Moore, "The Blood-splattered Welcome Mat: Finding Belonging with the Pass Over," *Moore to the Point*, March 22, 2009, <http://www.russellmoore.com/2009/03/22/the-blood-splattered-welcome-mat-finding-belonging-with-the-passed-over/> (accessed November 1, 2013).

¹⁷Christina Myers Shaffer, *How to Prepare for SAT II: Literature* (Hauppauge:

organizational plan for deciding what kinds of things will be said and done in a sermon and in what sequence.”¹⁸ According to Cahill, this is a creative endeavor and an important one, because it influences the response of the audience.¹⁹ Imagination can come into play by discerning what form may best convey the proposition of the sermon and evoke the desired response of the audience. Traditionally, expository preachers used the structure of classic rhetoric, but many other forms may be utilized. For example, Wilson suggests using a circle with one or more loops as the structure of one’s sermon. Troeger, in *A Sermon Workbook*, suggests several structures,²⁰ such as story form, a form based on problem/solution or on thesis-antithesis-synthesis.²¹

To begin using imagination in this process, Cahill suggests a brainstorming phase right at the beginning to get ideas about “what needs to be said and done to fulfill the focus of this sermon.”²² Craddock encourages reflecting on what you want to do in your sermon: encourage, challenge, inspire, persuade, correct, or clear up.²³ Imagination may lead one to choose from a great variety of structures. According to Craddock, however, “The sermon form should be congenial to the text, to the message of the sermon,

Barron’s Educational Series, 2000), 71.

¹⁸Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 118.

¹⁹Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching*, 104-06.

²⁰Troeger calls these ‘forms’, but they are, in fact, guides as to the structure of the sermon.

²¹Thomas H. Troeger and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *A Sermon Workbook: Exercises in the Art and Craft of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2013), 71-83.

²²Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching*, 111.

²³Fred Craddock, "Say and Do: How to Choose a Sermon Form that Helps Hearers Experience the Truth," in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 327.

and to the experience to be created.”²⁴ If one chooses not to follow the structure of the text, then at least it should be congenial to the last two of these three points: the message and the experience of the text;²⁵ whatever form the preacher’s imagination leads him to choose, the sermon needs to be faithful to the message of the text, i.e. the central idea, and the experience the text seeks to evoke needs to be reflected in the sermon that is preached. In addition, Greidanus says “respect for the text demands that priority be given to its structure and order and that changes in that structure and order be introduced only for good reason.”²⁶ Even in seeking to stay very close to the structure of a text, a sermon is never a literal repetition of the text. Therefore, much room is available for the active imagination, for now the mind needs to bring together all the aspects of the hermeneutical study and shape them into a form that is conducive to delivering the message accurately and effectively to the audience.

In addition and closely related to the sermon structure is the genre of the text. According to Vogel, “Genre, well presented, fires the imagination of the listener and increases the likelihood of active, rather than passive, listening.”²⁷ Ryken argues that the Bible is not “a theological outline with proof texts attached.” Instead of direct propositional statements, many biblical authors use “the literary principle of indirection.”²⁸ He uses Psalm 23 to exemplify this principle:

²⁴Craddock, *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 237.

²⁵Ibid., 328. See also Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching*, 120.

²⁶Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 154.

²⁷Robert Vogel, "Biblical Genres and the Text-Driven Sermon," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 172.

²⁸Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), 11. Osborne says about the tension between directness and indirectness, “if we become too indirect, the intended message becomes

Psalm 23 takes God's *providence* as its subject. But the psalmist does not use the word providence and does not give us a theological definition of the concept. ... It turns the idea of God's providence into a metaphor in which God is pictured as a shepherd in the daily routine of caring for his sheep. The literary approach of Psalm 23 is indirect: first we must picture what the shepherd does for his sheep, and then we must transfer that picture to the human level. Instead of using abstract, theological terminology, Psalm 23 consistently keeps us in a world of concrete images: green pastures, water, pathways, rod and staff, table, oil, cup, and sheepfold (metaphorically called a house).²⁹

A sermon is, in a sense, its own genre. A reformed view of a sermon, according to Van Eijnatten, is reflected in Luther, who saw a sermon as "a speech that reached into the life of its audience. A sermon can become *verbum efficax*, an efficacious word, which moves, realigns and reconstitutes men."³⁰ Sermons, themselves, can be preached following a variety of forms.³¹ They can be similar to or incorporate characteristics of a story, a didactic discourse, a letter, or a poem.³² Imagination can be used to discern which genre may best accomplish the purpose of the text and the sermon. For example, a message that potentially touches the sorrow and pain of people may be preached in more poetic form as that may be more soothing in nature than the more prosaic language of teaching, and may be especially conducive to presenting emotional

lost in a sea of subjectivity" (Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006], 220).

²⁹Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 16-17.

³⁰Martin Luther, *Eyn Kleyn Unterricht, Was Man Ynn Den Euangelijs Suchen Und Gewartten Soll* (1522) (Weimarer Ausgabe 10.I.1) (Weimar 1910), pp. 8-18, at pp. 11-12; Martin Luther, *Eine Predigt, dass Man Kinder zur Schulen Halten Solle* (1530) (Bonner Ausgabe 4) (Bonn 1922), pp. 144-178, p. 150, quoted in Joris Van Eijnatten, *Preaching, Sermon and Cultural Change in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 59.

³¹Michelle De Groot, "The Literary Qualities of Sermons," Harvard College Library, http://hcl.harvard.edu/libraries/houghton/collections/ea_rly_manuscript/preaching/degroot_qualities.cfm (accessed May 26, 2014).

³²Fred Craddock, "Say and Do: How to Choose a Sermon Form that Helps Hearers Experience the Truth," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 328.

content.³³

Staying close to the genre of the text, if possible, ensures greatest textual fidelity. Greidanus explains that if “the text is a narrative, then the sermon ought to exhibit the characteristics of a narrative; if the text is a lament, then the sermon ought to set the tone and mood conveyed by a lament.”³⁴ However, this may not always be possible, and sometimes a different genre may be desirable, depending on the nature of the text, the giftedness of the preacher and the character of the audience.³⁵ For example, proverbs found in the Bible are conclusions. Preaching just a conclusion, however, makes for very short sermons. What the proverb seeks to teach may be conveyed in a variety of structures and genres. One could imagine that the proverb is taught using the form of a lesson as a didactic genre with a structure that provides an explanation of the context of that time, a proof for the validity of the proverb, and practical ideas for application of this proverb today. However, one could also choose to tell a story that very poignantly brings home the message of the proverb and inspires the audience to live out what it says.

Ryken says, “Because literature *presents* an experience instead of telling us *about* that experience, it constantly appeals to our imagination (the image-making and image-perceiving capacity within us). Literature *images forth* some aspect of reality.”³⁶ When preachers design their sermons, they attempt to appeal to the imagination of the audience as much as the original text did. When guided by their sanctified imagination,

³³See, for example, John Sitter, *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth Century Poetry* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 206; John Piper, “Let the River Run Deep,” *crosswalk.com*, <http://www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/desiringgod/desiring-god-week-of-3-or-26.html> (accessed May 26, 2014).

³⁴Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 153.

³⁵See also Craddock, “Say and Do: How to Choose a Sermon Form that Helps Hearers Experience the Truth,” 328. Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching*, 62.

³⁶Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 14.

preachers can choose a structure or genre that effectively conveys the message of the text. In this way the sermon may be most original, fresh, and experiential. Thus, the preacher has created optimal opportunity to evoke the desired response to the text.

Imagination in Explanation

Explaining the text is an essential part of expository preaching. Without an explanation of the text, the author's intention cannot properly be understood by the audience. For this reason, explanation can be called "the heart of Bible exposition."³⁷ Vines and Shaddix define explanation as "the process of making something clear or plain and therefore more understandable."³⁸ Imagination can contribute greatly to the explanation of a certain text. "Imagination . . . permits us to fathom the human depths of Scripture's own world; to resonate with or react against the experiences, actions, and motivations of characters in the stories that the text tells; to indwell vicariously the joys and complaints crystallized in the Psalms; and so on."³⁹

Explanation of the passage may begin with a presentation of imaginative reading of the text, that is, reading the text in such a way that imagination takes "a familiar truth, bring[s] it to life, and give[s] a new sense of impact and excitement."⁴⁰ Its purpose is for the preacher and his audience to be touched at a deeper and more subjective level. Imaginative reading provides actualization of the living Scripture, through which preacher and audience can feel the presence of God and hear the voice of

³⁷Robert L. Thomas, "Exegesis and Expository Preaching," in *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 107.

³⁸Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 176.

³⁹Trevor A. Hart, "Imagination," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

⁴⁰Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 103.

the living God personally.⁴¹ Imaginative reading helps to see the content of Scripture no longer as mere history, but rather as a present reality. For example, a preacher can bring the text alive by helping the audience before and during the reading to visualize “oneself in the midst of a Gospel narrative and imagining how the Sea of Galilee might smell in the early dawn.”⁴² Before or afterwards he can picture the scene, suggest the reader identifies with one of the characters in the story, use objects, gestures, and so on, to make an impact. As he reads, he can emphasize words, use silence, volume, intonation, etc. in order to enliven the experience.

Using scriptural material combined with aspects of today’s experience to highlight something specific about the text is a form of the active imagination. Thus, the preacher could help the audience understand that “the OT counterpart of the American dream of a car in every garage and a chicken in every pot is inviting a neighbor to sit under one’s own vine and fig tree (Zech 3:10).”⁴³ Imagination thus used, enables the hearer to understand the text in familiar terms. When a preacher is able to make the word of God come to life in today’s world, especially after he has studied the passage for its authorial intent, the imagination that is unleashed will contribute to a fresh, faithful, and

⁴¹Tozer said it is important that the preacher knows “that God is here and that He is speaking— these truths are back of all other Bible truths; without them there could be no revelation at all. God did not write a book and send it by messenger to be read at a distance by unaided minds. He spoke a Book and lives in His spoken words, constantly speaking His words and causing the power of them to persist across the years” (A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* [Harrisburg: Christian Publications, 1948], 75. Bonhoeffer argues, “These words should be read as if they were completely new, sent personally to us. They do not approach us at an objective distance, but rather as words which come to us from the person of Jesus and are therefore burning issues for us” (Clyde E. Fant, *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1975], 146).

⁴²Glen A. Scorgie, "Hermeneutics and the Meditative Use of Scripture: The Case for a Baptized Imagination," *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 44, no. 2 (2001): 279.

⁴³Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, “Abundance,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1998).

powerful rendering of God's word.

To further explain the passage, the preacher—after his own hermeneutical study of the text, context, culture, and so on, of the passage—can use his imagination to explain the text in such a way that the cultural and chronological gaps between the world then and now are minimized. For example, to elucidate the story of the Good Samaritan, the preacher can use his active imagination to discern contemporary stories that evoke similar elements of cultural shock as those evoked when Jesus told the story. Another example would be 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 where Paul talks about him becoming a Jew to Jews or to those without the law as without the law. A preacher may seek examples of what it would mean to become like a metalhead to metalheads or an emo to emos in order to win people for Christ.⁴⁴ Active imagination may thus help people understand the depth and meaning of a text to the greatest extent possible.

Imagination in Application

“Expository preaching consists in the explanation and application of a passage of Scripture. Without explanation it is not expository; without application it is not preaching.”⁴⁵ The most practical part of expository preaching is the application. In order to make a difference, the word of God must be applied to the real life of the audience.

Hendricks highlights the urgent necessity of application:

Observation plus interpretation without application equals abortion. That is, every time you observe and interpret but fail to apply, you perform an abortion on the Scriptures in terms of their purpose. The Bible was not written to satisfy your curiosity; it was written to transform your life. The ultimate goal of Bible study, then, is not to do something to the Bible, but to allow the Bible to do something to

⁴⁴Alexis Petridis, “Youth Subcultures: What are They Now?” *theguardian.com*, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2014/mar/20/youth-subcultures-where-have-they-gone> (accessed June 3, 2014).

⁴⁵T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 79.

you, so truth becomes tangent to life.⁴⁶

Application, along with explanation of the passage, is a pillar of true expository preaching.⁴⁷ Imagination can be employed in the preacher's personal application of the text, in empathically connecting with the audience, in providing relevant and real-life examples, and in offering a tangible vision of desired outcomes.

Robinson's definition of expository preaching talks about the application of the text: "Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept . . . which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher then through the preacher, applies to the hearers."⁴⁸ The first step of application is to apply the preached message to the preacher himself. Bonhoeffer exhorts the homiletician not to "ask how you should tell it to others, but ask what it tells you! Then ponder this word in your heart at length, until it is entirely within you and has taken possession of you."⁴⁹ Without the preacher's self-application, his preaching of the word of God may lose much power with an audience. Imagination can be used to think of the different areas in the preacher's life where the message may apply, especially if it is not evident at first sight. Imagination can also be used to see the outcomes when the message is personally applied: How would the preacher's life be different in that case?

After the text has been applied to the preacher himself, he needs to make a transition and apply the text to his audience. Through the use of imagination, assisted by the things learned in the hermeneutical process, the homiletician can begin to ask a new

⁴⁶Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 290.

⁴⁷Walter L. Liefeld, *New Testament Exposition: From Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 6.

⁴⁸Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 21.

⁴⁹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, trans. Gracie David Mel (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 24-25.

question: “What does God want the audience to do with this specific part of Scripture?” To answer this question, the preacher needs to know the contemporary audience. In order to contemporize, the preacher needs to know three things. The first is to know what is going on in the lives of his audience. Preachers can engage in this kind of pastoral involvement partly through what Craddock calls empathetic imagination, which is “the capacity to achieve a large measure of understanding of another person without having had that person’s experiences.”⁵⁰ This kind of active imagination seems to be a crucial requirement of being a good pastor. Very practically, Craddock suggests that empathetic imagining is asking, “What’s it like to be?” By imagining what it is like having to face surgery, live alone, graduate, be extremely poor, or be fourteen years old, preachers can come to a better understanding of the human condition, be more specific in the aim of their preaching, and relate better to an audience.⁵¹

Consequently, the preacher needs to imagine how his hearers may understand the message and how they could *actually* apply it. Knowing what issues the audience is facing helps the preacher craft applications that specifically address relevant and real-life issues. Sunukjian says,

Unless the listeners get a mental picture of some real-life situation, the biblical truth remains an abstraction. Unless they see a video running their minds, the biblical concept remains vague and unhelpful. The message has no apparent bearing on their lives until they visualize some person, event, or circumstance in their everyday world.⁵²

For example, if the message is to love one another, the preacher may use both his memory (remembering pastoral conversations) and active imagination and see his audience struggling with loving an abuser, a hurtful spouse, a dishonest coworker, and so on. For each of these he can imagine the struggles they face in loving the other, and spell

⁵⁰Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 95.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 97-98.

⁵²Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching*, 106.

out ideas and steps to help the audience live out this truth.

The last aspect in which the preacher can use imagination in application is in envisioning the results of an applied message. Using the active imagination to paint visions of what lives will look like when they are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, may serve as a powerful motivator to change. The preacher should, of course, be careful not to offer unattainable dreams; yet, keeping in mind the purposes of God and the journey towards biblical holiness, presenting the imagined desired outcomes to the audience will make preaching more persuasive and powerful. Robinson argues,

Visualization is a method that projects a congregation into the future and pictures a situation in which they might apply the truth that we have preached. Visualization takes on force if the situation it envisions is possible, or better still, probable. Listeners can imagine themselves in that situation or one like it before it takes place.⁵³

Building on the example used in the previous paragraph, the preacher may paint pictures of redeemed and transformed relationships. An application that helps the audience visualize new life may stir in the audience a thirst to hear and accept the message of God and receive the blessing of a transformed life.

Imagination in Writing

Sermon writing is sometimes compared to novel writing, insofar as both require the work of imagination.⁵⁴ Important to writing novels, for example, is the search for the exact words, making things new through language, and addressing the audience.⁵⁵ Imagination can help produce these features in sermon writing as well. Obviously, in

⁵³Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 180.

⁵⁴Alyce M. McKenzie, *Novel Preaching: Tips from Top Writers on Crafting Creative Sermons* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 12-13.

⁵⁵Bret Lott, "Preaching with Precision, Imagination, and Power," *Preaching Today*, 2013, <http://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/2013/october/preaching-with-precision-imagination-and-power.html> (accessed July 2014).

preparing the sermon, the choice of words is very important. With the guidance of all that the preacher has reflected on, the proposition, form, explanation, and application, he needs to write down more or less specifically what he wants to say. Some preachers have a great memory and can reflect on and remember what they want to say in a very specific way. Such individuals may not have to write down their creative ideas. Others, however, would do well to be very particular about writing down the results of their imaginative process, or they risk losing the treasures of their (imagination) work.

The benefits for imagination in writing out a manuscript are several.⁵⁶ First, one can read over the text and listen to it, to see if it appeals to the senses, thus sparking the audience's imagination. Second, one can double check to see whether the result of the work of imagination is faithful to the message of the text.⁵⁷ Imagination can lead to many great ideas, but the sermon still needs to form a comprehensible unity; by writing out the sermon this can be discerned better.⁵⁸ And lastly, writing helps one to focus on crucial sections, including those that are the result of imaginative work.⁵⁹

Words carefully chosen and written can enhance two particular aspects of imagination: historical engagement and experiential engagement. Words need to help people imagine the world that was and evoke experiential engagement during the sermon.

First, in taking time to write out the words of the sermon, the preacher can make certain aspects of a text become clearer to the audience. For example, in the explanation of the text, specific words can be chosen that stimulate historical

⁵⁶See for the benefits of writing out the sermon: Zan Holmes, "Enabling the Word to Happen," in *Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons*, ed. Cleophus James LaRue (Louisville: Westminster, 2002), 79-80; Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 202.

⁵⁷Zan Holmes, "Enabling the Word to Happen," 80.

⁵⁸Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 202.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 202.

imagination.⁶⁰ Eslinger defines historical imagination as “the imaginative ability to take hearers behind the biblical text into the world to which it refers and there elaborate details of character, setting, and tone. Preachers have been encouraged to exercise their historical imagination in order to portray the world behind the text in all its vividness and color.”⁶¹ Instead of stating that a text took place in a desert, one could use the imagination and use words such as dust, heat, thirst, danger, etc., to have people experience what it was like at that time. Carefully chosen words draw people into the biblical world.

Similarly, in order to facilitate experiential engagement with the sermon, Troeger encourages the use of imagination in helping the audience to *see* the sermon. He asks preachers: “can the listener see your sermon?”⁶² Sense appeal is an important aspect in this endeavor. Adams’ elaboration on sense appeal is helpful:

The immediate purpose of using sense appeal in preaching is to add the dimension of reality to truth by helping listeners to sense (experience) what you are teaching from the Scripture. Sense stimulation in preaching enables listeners to “live” or “relive” an event or experience. There is a great difference between merely thinking about something and experiencing it. Thinking *about* it means there is a significant emotional distance *from* it; experiencing it means there is a cold chill that runs up your spine when it comes to mind. . . . in a preaching context, many listeners *on their own never* experience anything unless the preacher helps them.⁶³

Imagination plays an important role in creating language that can engage people in such a vivid way. For instance, in preaching about God’s judgment (the textual idea in several biblical passages), using vivid words like “fire,” “destruction,” and “darkness,” and describing them in their fullness, may stir people’s imagination and make the message more real to them. Furthermore, imagination can be used to make things even more

⁶⁰Richard L. Eslinger, *Pitfalls in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 38.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 35.

⁶³Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: A Comprehensive Textbook on Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 86.

experientially real and tangible; a preacher can encourage the audience to look around and see the faces of those sitting next to them, to bring to mind those they love, to feel the chairs that they are sitting on, and then imagine that at Jesus' return all these things will change. By imagining actual people/objects the reality of the message becomes more tangible which is conducive to a sermon having greater impact.

Imagination in Presentation

In the previous sections, it became clear that in homiletics imagination knows far fewer boundaries than in hermeneutics. This applies to the actual presentation of the sermon as well. Aspects of the presentation where imagination can be a great source of inspiration for both preacher and audience include physical and verbal expression and use of non-traditional preaching methods.

Regarding physical and verbal expression Troeger suggests, "Adapt the posture and expression of the biblical figure you are describing."⁶⁴ Physical expression and vocal tonality help in this process. Troeger believes that since the written word of God was originally orally delivered, each word carried a certain "rhythm, pitch, volume, and inflection."⁶⁵ The preacher's attempt to enact this aspect may help the audience experience "the depths of divine personality through its tonal expressiveness."⁶⁶ Taking time to imagine what the spoken word may have sounded like, and imagining in what ways physical and vocal expression may enhance the delivery of the sermon, will greatly benefit the effectiveness of expository preaching.

Expository preachers may also consider non-traditional methods of preaching. Many may hesitate to use something other than their own words. And although it is true,

⁶⁴Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, 57.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 70.

as McDill argues that “twenty-first-century preachers would do well . . . to consider the power of simple oral communication before forsaking it for audiovisual aids,”⁶⁷ well prepared visual material can be an excellent tool to present the word of God. The use of pictures and language that are not directly biblical may open up people’s minds and imagination to see the ancient truths from a new perspective. The Chronicles of Narnia are a good example of this; both the book and the movie help people see the salvation story with new eyes.⁶⁸ As long as the non-traditional presentation does not distract from,⁶⁹ but contributes to a fresh understanding of the word of God and is conducive to personal appropriation,⁷⁰ imagination can offer varied means of enhancing the delivery of God’s word. All five senses can potentially be employed. For example, when the point of a sermon is for the audience to put their faith in God, the Rock, a preacher could have a rock crafted to put on display in front of the church, he could bring little rocks for all people in the audience, he could show a video about a rock, or he could let the worship team sing something that illustrates the strength and safety of the Rock. Jesus, after all, taught as he walked through Israel, and used everyday objects and moments to explain what the kingdom of God was like. These familiar things appealed to the listener’s active

⁶⁷McDill, *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*, 208.

⁶⁸C. S. Lewis and Pauline Baynes, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004). Wikipedia, “The Chronicles of Narnia: Film Series,” Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Chronicles_of_Narnia_\(film_series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Chronicles_of_Narnia_(film_series)) (accessed July 2014).

⁶⁹For example, when too many video clips are used during a sermon, the listener may be distracted in the shifting constantly from speaker to screen, see Marc T. Newman, “Video Clips,” in *The New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, ed. Paul Scott Wilson (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010). The “Video Clips” section in this book also gives ideas as to when and how to use video clips most effectively and when not to use them.

⁷⁰Michael Rogness, *Preaching to a TV Generation: The Sermon in the Electronic Age* (Lima, OH: CSS, 1994), 80.

imagination, so that by looking at what Jesus used as teaching tools, they could get a better idea of what he wanted to teach them about God's Kingdom. Preachers, following in his footsteps, may do the same. Their knowledge and imagination can guide them in choosing things that appeal to the audience's imagination.

Boundaries of Imagination for Audience-Focused Homiletics

Although the homiletical use of imagination knows more freedom as compared to the process of hermeneutics, it is nonetheless important for the expository preacher to define the boundaries of imagination in preaching. These boundaries can broadly be divided into three Aristotelian concepts: logos, ethos, and pathos. In order for arguments to be persuasive, Aristotle reasoned that the speaker needed to create these three forms of proof. In what follows, these three means are understood in light of Scripture and so adapted, form the boundaries for the use of imagination in preaching.

Subject to Biblical *Logos*

The use of logos, according to Aristotle, consists "in the thing itself, which is said, by reason of its proving, or appearing to prove the point."⁷¹ Understanding this in light of Scripture means that the use of imagination needs to support the biblical (con)text itself, that is, the literal text, the social, cultural and historical context, and the evangelical theological context. Imagination supports the audience in seeing and experiencing the word of God in ways faithful to its intended meaning. Accordingly, nothing new should be created in terms of teaching, which the Bible, as the foundational source, does not provide. Broadus says, "Imagination does not create thought; but it organizes thought into forms as new as the equestrian statue of bronze is unlike the metallic ores when they lay

⁷¹Aristotle, *Aristotle's Treatise on Rhetoric*, trans. Thomas Hobbes and Theodore Alois Buckley (London: London Bell, 1888), 12.

in the mine.”⁷² In the case of preaching, imagination must not change the meaning of a given text, but must bring it in a fresh, original, and appealing way so that the meaning of the text sparkles even brighter and can be delivered even more effectively.

At the textual level of biblical logos, imagination knows freedom so long as it contributes to the author-intended meaning of the text and does not lead to something different than the text expresses. Robinson wisely makes the point that “imagination can degenerate into fantasy and, in an effort to tell a good story, a preacher can scuttle or trivialize the biblical material. Imagination must be linked to the text just as interpretation must be tied to the text. Otherwise the preacher may misrepresent the Scriptures and say in the name of God what God did not say.”⁷³

Unbridled imagination can yield allegorical interpretations. For example, instead of seeing Jerusalem as a city, preachers may find it very attractive to portray Jerusalem as an image of the human soul.⁷⁴ Even though this certainly is imaginative work and sparks the imagination, the biblical authors did not intend this explanation. At the social, cultural and historical level, imagination in homiletics must be limited by a correct understanding of the culture of the society at the time of the biblical text. Richardson and O’Brien, for instance, point out how preachers may read texts with their own cultural glasses on and so may misrepresent the Bible in their sermons.⁷⁵ One

⁷²John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, ed. Edwin Charles Dargan (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1903), 423.

⁷³Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Sermons: How Twelve Preachers Apply the Principles of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 82-83.

⁷⁴Michael David Coogan, Marc Zvi Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and PHEME PERKINS, *The New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2217.

⁷⁵E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O’Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 114.

example they provide is the Western individualistic manner of reading, interpreting, and giving shape to Christianity.⁷⁶ Because of this individualistic reading, texts that talk about the body or the temple of Christ may be interpreted more individualistically than is appropriate. The preacher may imagine the special ways one is unique to God. And although there is certainly truth to this fact, the focus in the Bible is much more on the unity that the body and the temple of Christ form. As Richards and O'Brien state regarding this aspect, "Because, in some way we may not fully understand, the Spirit indwells the group in a way the Spirit does not indwell the individual."⁷⁷

At yet another level, homiletical imagination should fit within the larger edification framework of evangelical theology. For example, law and grace are two interconnected elements of evangelical theology.⁷⁸ When preachers think of making applications, a process which requires much active imagination, they may, unwittingly, become very moralistic (for example: go and reconcile your strained relationship), and so fail to convey the empowering news of the law and grace dynamic of the gospel (meditate on God's grace and let that empower you to reconcile your strained relationship). When imagination is appropriately subject to biblical logos, the preacher can use it freely to connect the message to his audience.

Subject to Biblical *Ethos*

Imagination, second, needs to be subject to biblical ethos. Ethos, according to Aristotle, "consists in the character of the speaker. . . . when the speech shall have been spoken in such a way as to render the speaker worthy confidence [sic]."⁷⁹ Biblical ethos

⁷⁶Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, 95-112.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 109.

⁷⁸McDill, *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*, 191.

⁷⁹Aristotle, *Aristotle's Treatise on Rhetoric*, 12.

means that the character of the speaker is sincere and marked by integrity according to the norms of Scripture.

Employing imagination can be dangerous for preachers, as it can give them the power to go to places, talk about experiences, and present spiritual truths that are, in actual fact, far removed from their own lives. Biblical ethos means, first, that the preacher submits his own life to the Holy Spirit to be transformed through the message as well.

For this reason, Lewis says,

Those, like myself, whose imagination far exceeds their obedience are subject to a just penalty; we easily imagine conditions far higher than we have actually reached. If we describe what we have imagined we may make others, and make ourselves, believe that we have actually been there-and so fool both them and ourselves.⁸⁰

They should not make others, or themselves for that matter, believe that they already are and do what they preach. Being a preacher with biblical integrity means being humble, confessing, and portraying oneself as a fellow saint and sinner on the spiritual journey, even when his use of imagination may paint pictures of something better. It also means that his use of imagination in the presentation of his sermon (his portrayal of emotions, the stories he uses, and so on) is in line with what the Bible teaches (e.g. in your anger do not sin).

Second, ethos means that the preacher's use of imagination does not lead people to believe something that is not true. For example, in the application the preacher may desire to paint a picture of what life may be like when the message is applied. Statements like "If you believe this message, you will see that tomorrow your life will immediately improve in this area" are typically untruthful uses of imagination that are employed to motivate people to believe and act, but with a promise that cannot be guaranteed. Alternatively, preachers may be tempted to use imagination to tell stories that

⁸⁰C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1960), 192, quoted in Kent Hughes, "The Anatomy of Exposition: Logos, Ethos, and Pathos," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no.2 (1999): 52.

are factually not true. Unless these are presented as fiction, rather than as a fact, this practice may damage the integrity of the preacher, the church, and God himself.⁸¹

Subject to Biblical *Pathos*

Aristotle says pathos consists “in the disposing the hearer a certain way. . . . when they shall have been brought to a state of excitement under the influence of speech.”⁸² The speaker is to speak in such a way as to arouse biblical emotions in the hearer. In an attempt to persuade the audience to believe and apply the message, the preacher can imagine ways and use means of imagination that are very powerful. The passion with which the preacher delivers his sermon in order to stir his hearer’s emotions needs to be subject biblical passion; it needs to evoke the same passion as the text does, it should not be used to manipulate, or to draw attention to the preacher rather than to God and his word.

The preacher needs to understand the passion that is evoked in the text.⁸³ To arouse an emotional response, a preacher can use his imagination to find ways to display the text’s passion. For example his body language can signal sadness, various characteristics of voice can be employed (such as “duration, loudness, pitch),⁸⁴ or he may use tools (symbols, imagery, colors, and compositional effects that are either verbalized or shown)⁸⁵ that create an emotional response. The goal should be to display and seek to

⁸¹Wayne Harvey, “Illustrating with Integrity and Sensitivity: Seven Questions for Staying above Reproach,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 522.

⁸²Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Treatise on Rhetoric*, 12.

⁸³Adam B. Dooley and Jerry Vines, “Delivering a Text-Driven Sermon,” in *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 257-64.

⁸⁴Virgil A. Anderson, *Training the Speaking Voice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 190.

⁸⁵Connie Malamed, *Visual Language for Designers: Principles for Creating*

arouse emotions in accordance with those which the passage seeks to evoke.

Furthermore, not using the imagination to find ways to evoke the emotions of the biblical text is a homiletic failure. Dooley and Vines argue that “a preacher is not free to decide for himself the emotions he should elicit, but neither is he free to determine the emotions he will ignore.”⁸⁶ In addition, the passion that the preacher seeks to stir in the audience should not be manipulative.⁸⁷ Imagination is powerful and can lead a preacher to find means that go beyond what is God-honoring. For example, when a preacher uses the imagination to conjure up emotions of fear when speaking to children, so that their emotions prompt them to respond out of fear, rather than from an informed mind and transformed heart, his imagination has manipulated his hearers.

Lastly, preachers can become so crafty in using emotional appeal as result of using the active imagination, that the emotions evoked are distracting from the message. Dooley and Vines warn, “Preachers must be careful, when seeking to evangelize others through preaching, not to be guilty of flashy techniques or discourses that distract from the message of salvation. When individuals make conclusions about a preacher’s eloquence rather than the glory of God in a text, they fail to see the power of the gospel.”⁸⁸ Using active imagination in order to stir up the emotions that God’s Word was meant to evoke will increase the effectiveness of expository preaching.

Conclusion

Imagination is essential for powerful expository preaching. Chapter 4 presented ideas regarding the use of imagination for author-centered hermeneutics and demonstrated that there are numerous boundaries in this process, because expository

Graphics that People Understand (Beverly, MA: Rockport Publishers, 2011), 210-13.

⁸⁶Dooley and Vines, "Delivering a Text-Driven Sermon," 262.

⁸⁷Ibid., 247.

⁸⁸Ibid., 264.

preachers desire to stay faithful to the author-intended meaning of the text. This chapter focused on imagination in the homiletical process, and provided ideas for its uses. Far fewer boundaries here give the preacher much freedom to employ imagination in different aspects of sermon preparation and delivery. Imagination can play important roles in six parts of audience-focused homiletics: proposition, form, explanation, application, writing, and presentation.

Active imagination helps transpose the concern of the text to the sermon. Imagining juxtapositions, questions, and statements that connect the author's intention with a relevant issue for the audience, for example, ensures that the homiletical idea engages a contemporary audience.

Imagination will also prove helpful in designing a form for the sermon that has impact. Active imagination can be used to find ways that convey the ancient message in a structure and genre that will appeal to the audience. Features of a genre that is particularly conducive to stimulating the response the central idea of the text is supposed to evoke, may be included in the sermon. For example, when a text's topic involves loneliness, one can imagine that the inclusion of poetry can elicit deeper emotional identification.⁸⁹ In explaining the (con)text of the Bible, active imagination can make bridges to today's culture and experience for understanding the text and context of the passage better. Describing the details of what the culture and environment looked like with contemporary words that speak to the listener's imagination helps facilitate a more experiential understanding of the text and greater engagement with the sermon.

Imagination, furthermore, stimulates more effective application of the biblical message. Preachers, in the first place, can imagine how their own lives compare to the biblical message, so that they are personally impacted by the text. In addition, empathic

⁸⁹Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poets and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2002), 110.

imagination can be used to discern for the audience examples of actual application in various circumstances of life and to offer vision for a transformed life. In addition, imagination can be used in writing to enhance sense appeal, thereby helping the audience truly experience the message. Finally, active imagination will help effective communication and presentation of the expository sermon. Many ways of presenting the message can be imagined, including the use of social media, art forms, sight and sound, and the use of the preacher's physical and vocal expression.

Though there are fewer boundaries than in the hermeneutic process, imagination is, nevertheless, subject to certain boundaries, namely, biblical logos, ethos, and pathos, which ensure that the message is delivered in a biblical and God-honoring way. Imagination should stay within the bounds of biblical logos, that is, it should be faithful to the author-intended meaning, the broader cultural and historical context, and evangelical theological teaching. Second, imagination is subject to biblical ethos. For the sake of integrity, preachers should submit their lives to the preached message as much as they desire their audience to do so, and their use of imagination should not lead them to present themselves as being better than they really are. In addition, whatever the pastor's imagination helps to create, it should be truthful. Furthermore, ideas and material that the preacher uses need to be referenced. Third, the emotions that the preacher seeks to evoke need to be in accordance with those that the text is meant to evoke. He should not stir emotions to manipulate decisions, or to draw attention to himself (as such a wonderful communicator) rather than to God and his word.

Imagination is a powerful tool for preachers in the process of homiletics. When imagination is used in correct ways, sermon preparation and delivery can greatly increase in effectiveness.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Introduction

By the power of the imagination we can see a world renewed, liberated and transformed. By the power of imagination we can see with the prophet Michah a world where every sword is beaten into a plowshare, and every spear into a pruning hook. (Micah 4:3) By the power of imagination we can see with Saint Luke a world where people come from north and south, and east and west and seat together at table in the reign of God. (Luke 13:29) by the power of imagination we can see with Saint John a world where God wipes away every tear and where “death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:4) We can see all of these things through the God-given capacity of the mind to generate images.¹

Imagination is powerful and can make the invisible visible and the not-yet tangible. This capacity is not a human product, but a gift from God.² For this reason, Ryken argues that “The Bible and the Christian faith based on it sanction the imagination as a valid form of knowing and expressing truth. God Himself is an imaginer.”³ However, the position and use of imagination in evangelical expository preaching has long been considered as rather precarious.⁴ Its association with fancy or imaginary fantasies has led many to believe it focuses away from the truth. The Reformers were wary of pictures and

¹Thomas H. Troeger, "Positive Theology of Imagination for Preaching Renewal, Liberation and Transformation," *The Academy of Homiletics* (2006): 136.

²D. Martyn Lloyd - Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 235.

³Leland Ryken, *Windows to the World: Literature in Christian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 57.

⁴Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-modern* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 3.

symbols and hardly any theologian treated the subject favorably, if they treated it at all.⁵ And thus, many fear imagination because of its potentially subjective and evasive nature, believing it will not be of much use for expository preaching.

Nevertheless, for all the good it can bring, imagination ought to be an essential part of biblical expository hermeneutics and homiletics. For author-centered hermeneutics, it is important to acknowledge that the original authors of the Bible used their reasoning and creative ability to produce their writings. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they did not only record facts; rather, they intentionally used specific genres and linguistic tools (literary devices such as metaphors, imagery, symbolism, and parables) that spoke to the imagination so as to convey their message and evoke a response.⁶

Ryken, for example, writes about the genre of story that

the story does not primarily require our minds to grasp an idea but instead gets us to respond with our imagination and emotions to a real-life experience. It puts us on the scene and makes us participants in the action. It gets us involved with characters about whose destiny we are made to care.⁷

God used the authors' uniqueness as his Word was being formed. Whenever the original

⁵For a few contemporary theologians who discuss the topic favorably, see D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 235; John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 238; Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 151; Leland Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination: Thinking Christianly about the Arts* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1989); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1994).

⁶Ryken argues that “the chief biblical commentary on literature is to be found in the literary nature of the Bible itself. The Bible is overwhelmingly (though not exclusively) a work of literature. The one thing that the Bible is not is what Christians so often picture it as being—a theological outline with proof texts attached. The characteristic way of expressing religious truth in the Bible is through story, poem, vision, and letter. By comparison, expository essays, theological discourses and sermons are a relative rarity” (Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination*, 41).

⁷Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 15.

authors used imagination, most likely, they expected their readers to be moved and transformed by the truth. Any expository preacher desiring to understand the meaning of a text needs to pay attention to the Bible's use of imagination.

Furthermore, imagination is necessary for audience focused homiletics. In order to effectively design and deliver the message to the audience, the preacher needs the kind of creative insight that is the result of imagining the situation and personality of the people listening. All throughout this process imagination plays an important role in creating, receiving, delivering, and applying the Christian message.

The thesis of this dissertation, therefore, is that a properly developed theory and practice of imagination will improve the hermeneutics and homiletics of expository preaching. In addition, the purpose is to formulate ideas for a sound and solid use of imagination in the two major elements of expository preaching, namely, author centered hermeneutics and audience focused homiletics. The following is a summary of how this dissertation has proven that the thesis is, indeed, valid and correct.

In order to understand how to use imagination in expository preaching, both imagination and expository preaching need to be defined. First, according to Blackburn imagination can be defined as “most directly, the faculty of reviving or especially creating images in the mind’s eye. But, more generally, the ability to create and rehearse possible situations, to combine knowledge in unusual ways, or to invent thought experiments.”⁸ As this definition shows, two elements are part of imagination: passive and active imagination. Passive imagination consists of mental images that can be activated as a result of sensory memories.⁹ These mental images can, without an act of

⁸Simon Blackburn, “Imagination,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁹M. De Voltaire, *A Philosophical Dictionary* (London: John and Henry L. Hunt, 1824), 118-20. Roger Scruton, "Imagination," in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Stephen Davies et al. (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

the will, come upon people when they are thinking, dreaming, remembering, and so on. Active imagination, on the other hand, is intentional, and can be described, using Roth's words, as "the capacity to disengage from reality in order to think about events and experiences which have not actually occurred and might never occur."¹⁰

Expository preaching, second, may be called "Word-centered, Word-driven, or Word-saturated preaching. More descriptively, expository preaching is the exegetical and Spirit-driven process of explaining and applying the meaning of a particular text or texts for the purpose of transforming people into the image of Christ."¹¹ Expository preaching involves author-centered hermeneutics and audience focused homiletics. The purpose of author-centered hermeneutics is to ascertain the author's intention in a certain passage. Grammatical-historical-theological study of the text is employed to discern the intended point of the biblical text. This process includes historical-cultural analysis, lexical and syntactical analysis, literary analysis, and theological analysis.

Audience focused homiletics is another pillar of expository preaching with the goal to effectively and precisely deliver the message in such a way that the audience's life is transformed by the Truth. Six major aspects of expository homiletics are the proposition, form, explanation, application, writing, and presentation of the message.

Since the New Homiletic has concerned itself with and has very open towards the use of imagination to a greater degree than proponents of expository preaching, chapter 3 sought to present what may be learned from their insights. Two dominant New Homileticians, Troeger and Wilson, use imagination in their preaching and have written about this process. Although Wilson's and Troeger's hermeneutical and homiletical practices differ from those of an Evangelical approach in many respects, their views and

¹⁰Ilona Roth, "Imagination," in *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹¹Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 10.

work are, nevertheless, helpful in understanding how to and how not to use imagination in expository preaching. Wilson believes that imagination facilitates a process in which people can see an essential invisible reality of this world,¹² namely, the presence of Christ in a broken and sinful world. He says of imagination: “It gives us the ability both to see this world as it is, with Christ in the midst of our brokenness, and to imagine a world different from our own, a world already transfigured by Christ’s love, already penetrated by the new order.”¹³

In short, Wilson employs imagination to discern manifold meanings of the text and to transpose those concerns into ideas for the sermon using juxtapositions, such as law and gospel, story and doctrine, and pastor and prophet. Wilson helps expository preachers see the need for intentional use of imagination early on in the process in order to be personally impacted by the text, get ideas as to the meaning of the text, and to connect with the audience.

However, his use of imagination should also be treated with caution as it may not be strongly enough tied to the values of expository preaching. For instance, Wilson seems to value imagination as of greater importance than exegesis. Imagination comes first in the process and exegesis may only later provide some guidance, not being the foundational source it should be if one wants to stay close to the author-intended meaning. Interpretation, thus, becomes a rather creative, subjective endeavor.

Furthermore, Wilson’s hermeneutic may be too creative. He believes that any text can speak to any situation today. Wilson uses imagination to assert meanings not intended by the author and potentially adds information through the juxtaposition of polarities that he superimposes on the text. His desire is to integrate the contemporary

¹²Ryken claims that “the imagination transforms the materials of real life in such a way that, although not literal or factual, it allows us to see the truth” (Ryken, *Windows to the World*, 35).

¹³Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart*, 16.

situation with the text in order to understand the text and deliver a message that ignites the imagination of the audience. However, in this process, the original text may get lost and the contemporary situation comes to define the meaning of the text, rather than the text the current situation. Thus, the text does not serve any longer as foundational source.

Troeger's work is of a very different nature. His description of the use of imagination is in and of itself more fanciful, making it harder to grasp his actual method. Troeger's methodology is to highlight aspects of imagination in seven ways. He emphasizes using imagination in order to (1) alert the eye to keener sight, so that sermons can be visualized; (2) feel the bodily weight of truth, so that the physical aspects can be envisioned; (3) listen to the music of speech, to help the audience hear; (4) bring in parables from today's life to connect with the hearers; (5) use the God-power, which means trusting the imaginative capacity in your soul;¹⁴ (6) dream of new worlds, which leads to breaking free of restricting theological frameworks and discovering/creating a theology that works for the individual; (7) return to the Source, which means that the preacher turns inward to follow his heart in imagining, as he believes that his heart can be followed as the trustworthy presence of the Holy Spirit.

Troeger's work is helpful in that he encourages paying special attention to and addressing the human senses as an essential part of preaching. Imagining how the senses can be involved in the sermon will facilitate the opportunity for the audience to be better engaged with the message. Using the imagination to create stories that come directly out of today's life in order to bring home the point of the message is another aspect that has the potential to engage the audience and to motivate them to change. Troeger's attention

¹⁴This principle is actually called "Understand the church's resistance to imagination." The chapter forms an attempt to understand why the church has been resistant (due to the subjective nature of imagination) and includes a plea for the use of imagination. The focus of this dissertation is on Wilson's argument in this chapter that all have this power in their soul and need to allow this power to work so effective preaching can ensue.

to the Spirit as the source of imagination is important to acknowledge as well.

However, also in Troeger's work it becomes clear that imagination severed from a dedication to discerning authorial intent through the exposition of the biblical text leads to subjective interpretation. For example, one of Troeger's tools is imitating biblical characters and preaching biographical sermons. Though not all bad, the risk for untruthful adding in of details and fanciful embellishment is very real and the performance may receive more attention than God's words that are meant to change one's heart. This same danger exists when storytelling becomes the goal, rather than conveying the original intention of the author. In these aspects, subjective interpretation may lead to the forming of one's own theological views, as is indeed the case with Troeger, who disregards the use of traditional theology and sees it as a potential obstacle in preaching.¹⁵ His imaginative theology is a postmodern theology, created by his own imagination, rather than by a thorough study of God's word.

With the information gleaned from the studies described in chapters two and three, valuable practical guidelines can be described to help expository preachers implement the use of imagination in their preaching. A condition for this work is that the preacher submits himself to the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who sanctifies the preacher's imagination, illumining him in the interpretative process.

The focus of chapter 4 is on the practical use of imagination for expository hermeneutics. Imagination, together with good exegesis according to the rules of a grammatical-historical-theological hermeneutic, can serve to reproduce in more detail the historical facts of a passage. One's passive imagination can be used in the process of recreating the biblical world and meaning of the text. Four specific parts of hermeneutics were addressed in which passive imagination plays a role, in addition to the traditional

¹⁵Thomas H. Troeger, "Silencing Theological Commands," in *Sermon Sparks: 122 Ideas to Ignite Your Preaching: tagged by Theme and Lectionary Passage* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011).

use of commentaries, lexicons, and so on.

First, in expository hermeneutics, the preacher can embrace the use of imagination in understanding more of the setting. Historical imagination can help in creating a video, as it were, of the cultural and historical context. Troeger, especially, encourages the use of all the senses in this process. Second, imagination may be used, along with lexical and syntactical analysis, to add valuable understanding of the emotionality inherent in the text. Furthermore, passive imagination can broaden one's understanding of imaginative symbols, metaphors, and concepts. Third, the various genres that are studied as part of literary analysis provide guidelines to the use of imagination. Within the context of the genre, imagination can be freely used to understand, in more detail, the meaning and richness (in terms of symbolism, motivation of characters, and nuances of the original languages) of a text. Last, passive imagination can help, in part, discover some of the implicit meaning of a text that is revealed through biblical theology. Readers and listeners of the original text would, in many instances, be reminded (passive imagination) of related passages and pictures in Scripture.

The study of the aspects mentioned above serves to discern the author-intended meaning of the text. The passive imagination supports discovery of the richness of the original author's intention. Since it is true, as many fear, that imagination has the potential to be subjective and evasive, boundaries will ensure that the preacher is not carried away by his imagination to the extent that he is not faithful to the text any longer.

The use of imagination, therefore, should be subject to grammatical and historical exegesis, which means a thorough study of the grammatical and historical aspects of the text and context. Furthermore, the use of imagination should be subject to the author-intended meaning of the text. Imagination may not be used, as Wilson for example does, to let the mind come up with anything that may be slightly related to the text, but, which is, in fact, not a faithful representation of the text's purpose.

In addition, imagination should stay within the bounds of general evangelical theology. When imagination falls outside of that which is generally considered evangelical theology, imagination, most likely, has become too subjective, serving the creativity of the preacher rather than the faithful interpretation of the text.

Finally, imagination should not go beyond the historical facts of the text. Imagination can go many places, and sometimes preachers may be tempted to add details that would make the text more dramatic, but would be unfaithful to the historicity of what is being described.

In good expository preaching hermeneutics and homiletics receive equal attention, because both are essential in the effective delivery and application of God's Word. The use of imagination is especially beneficial in the homiletic stage of expository preaching. Preachers are conductors of imagination. They take the composition and notes from Scripture and imagine in their minds ways that this music will touch the audience in such a manner that it transforms their lives and leaves a lasting impact. Green defines Christian proclamation as "an appeal to the imagination of the hearers through the images of scripture. The preacher's task is to mediate and facilitate that encounter by engaging his or her own imagination, which becomes the link between scripture and congregation."¹⁶

Six aspects of the homiletic process were discussed in relation to the use of active imagination. First, the author-intended message of the text needs to be transformed into a concern of the sermon. Active imagination can bring together the ancient truths in creative ways with questions and issues that today's audience may struggle with, so that the text becomes relevant to their lives today. Second, the preacher's imagination may help him create a structure and genre that shapes the ancient message into a form that

¹⁶Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 149.

appeals to the hearts and minds of the listeners through their imagination. Third, the explanation of the biblical text requires active imagination, to help the audience bridge the space, culture, time, and language gaps that exist between the biblical text and today's life. Through imagination the preacher can think of contemporary words, sense appealing descriptions, and related contemporary experiences that facilitate the audience's engagement with the sermon.

A fourth essential aspect of homiletics is the application. "The purpose of the sermon is not to impart knowledge but to influence behavior-not to inform but to transform. The goal is not to make listeners more educated but more Christlike."¹⁷ Preachers first use their imagination to discern how the message applies to their own lives, so they can speak from their hearts. Consequently, they use imaginative empathy to get a feel for what the audience may be struggling with and how they may need to apply the message. Active imagination can also help to create a vision for what a life transformed by the message of the sermon may look like, thus appealing to the audience's imagination to facilitate motivation to change. Longman says "The task of preaching is not merely to recover the text's original breaking of the surface but to express what happens when one of the ripples sent forth by that text crosses our spot in the pond."¹⁸

Fifth, in the process of writing out or choosing the words for the sermon, active imagination can be used to work out the details of the creative efforts that have gone into designing the sermon. Attention can be used to focus on the use of words and combination of sermon elements that facilitate experiential and lively engagement. Last, active imagination can add elements to the sermon presentation that enhance the chances

¹⁷Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 12.

¹⁸Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 127.

to deeply touch the audience. One can think of the creative use of body and voice, the inclusion of social media, art forms, and sight and sound.

As with hermeneutics, homiletical imagination cannot have free rein, but is to be subject to constraints ensuring that the message will be a faithful representation of what the text is meant to convey. Imagination, therefore, needs to be subordinate to the author-intended meaning, the broader cultural and historical context, and evangelical theological teaching. Furthermore, biblical ethos needs to determine the appropriate use of imagination in that the preacher should be characterized by integrity both in his surrender to God and his word and in his presentation of the sermon (truthful, transparent, honest). Last, the emotions the preacher seeks to portray and evoke in his sermon need to correspond with the biblical text. Biblical passion should rule the preacher and his preaching.

Suggestions for Further Research

After this study of the use of imagination in expository hermeneutics and homiletics, I propose two areas for further research. First, a detailed study of how the original authors used imagination in each of the Bible books would enhance understanding of the Scriptures. This kind of study would also serve as a source of ideas for how preachers can make use of imagination in their sermons. Most studies about imagination in Scripture focus on narrative and poetic genres. However, imagination is found in every Bible book. Analysis of imagination throughout Scripture would benefit expository preaching.

A second area of research concerns sermon structure. Traditional expository preaching seeks to stay faithful to the form and structure of the biblical text. However, this ideal may not always be reflected in actual preaching practice, nor is this goal always possible. Study of how imagination may be useful in designing the form of the sermon structure would benefit both pastors who always preach the same structure, and those

who seek to find innovative yet biblically faithful ways of structuring the sermon. Imagination could be employed either to effectively reflect the text's structure in the sermon or in designing forms that are faithful to the author-intended meaning and effective in delivery, yet differ from the form of the passage.

Conclusion

“At least they who believe that religion deals with unseen realities need not hesitate to avow their debt to imagination, that is, to acknowledge the importance of vividness of thought to soundness of thought on religious themes.”¹⁹ This dissertation has demonstrated that imagination rightly used can do many things to enhance the theory and practice of expository preaching. As mentioned in the beginning chapter, the reasons are hermeneutical and homiletical in nature. Both in the study of Scripture and the sermon design and delivery, imagination is a powerful and helpful tool that enables people to get a better grasp and a deeper understanding and appreciation for the literary beauty of Scripture, the intention of the authors, the greatness of the biblical events, the indicatives and imperatives of Scripture, and the glory of God.

¹⁹Elias Henry Johnson, *The Religious Use of Imagination* (New York: Silver, Burdett & Company, 1901), 42.

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ABSTRACT

THE USE OF IMAGINATION FOR EXPOSITORY HERMENEUTICS AND HOMILETICS

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The purpose of this dissertation is to discover the value of imagination for expository preaching. The thesis of this dissertation is that a rightly developed evangelical theory and use of imagination will improve the practice of expository hermeneutics and homiletics.

In the introductory chapter, the challenging nature of imagination is examined. Despite its subjective challenging nature, imagination is an important subject for expository preaching. Imagination is necessary in order to improve both hermeneutics and homiletics.

The second chapter provides an overview of expository preaching. Essential elements of expository preaching, author-centered hermeneutics and audience-focused homiletics, are discussed to form the backdrop against which imagination is to be examined. Second, the concept of imagination is introduced and explained.

Chapter 3 demonstrates how the New Homiletic methodology deals with imagination in preaching. After a brief introduction to the basic philosophy of the New Homiletic, the work of two new homileticians, Paul Scott Wilson and Thomas H.

Troeger, is discussed. They are important, because they were one of the first to devote an entire work to imagination and preaching. This chapter concludes with a critical evaluation of their methods in light of evangelical expository preaching.

Chapter 4 presents suggestions for the use of imagination in expository hermeneutics. In particular, the role of imagination in specific steps of the exegetical process is explained. Furthermore, boundaries are discussed that ensure imagination is used in way that is faithful to the biblical text and the author's intention.

Chapter 5 suggests how imagination can be used in homiletics. Committed to a hermeneutic that is faithful to the text and the author's intention, preachers can find in imagination a rich resource to convey God's truth to people.

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