

The Preaching and Teaching of Jesus: A Bibliographical Review

by

R. J. Gore, Jr.

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THE PREACHING AND TEACHING OF JESUS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature on the preaching and teaching of Jesus is quite extensive. These volumes can be divided into several subcategories. First, there are books which discuss the preaching of Jesus, directly. Such books examine the New Testament for evidence that describes “how Jesus preached” and then seek to translate their conclusions into useful guidelines for contemporary preachers. Second, there are books that assume the legitimacy of “inductive preaching” or some other particular expression of the “New Homiletic”¹ as representing the preaching method used by Jesus. They argue that preachers today need to move away from “deductive” sermons to “inductive” sermons or from propositional sermons to sermons that are more narrative or story-based in form.² Third, there are books that focus on the “teaching of Jesus”³ along with books by Christian Educators with sections on Jesus as teacher. Fourth, and finally, there are recent books on preaching that are “general” in scope. Some of these have chapters or sections that are relevant to this discussion. Others have only brief remarks about the preaching

¹ Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, Expanded ed. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 122-3 notes that while there are varieties of the “New Homiletic,” one of the key, common themes they share is “some kind of procedural *plotting* as sermonic *means*, generally involving a strategic delay in the arrival of the preacher’s meaning.”

² For the moment, deductive sermons are those which begin with a thesis or proposition and then proceed to elaborate that thesis by a series of supporting propositions. Inductive sermons are those which reserve the thesis until later in the sermon where the thesis often functions as the result of homiletic exploration conducted jointly by the preacher and the congregation.

³ The relationship between the preaching and teaching of Jesus will be discussed somewhat at this point in the essay.

and teaching of Jesus. Such volumes, recognized as the best in the evangelical or Reformed community, say much by their silence.⁴ The discussion that follows will be shaped by this four-fold taxonomy.

The Preaching of Jesus

In his second volume on preaching, Ralph Lewis (with his son, Gregg Lewis), explores *Learning to Preach Like Jesus*.⁵ Lewis was professor of preaching at Asbury Theological Seminary for many years. He wrote an earlier volume on inductive preaching which led, naturally, to this follow-on volume which focuses on the preaching of Jesus. Lewis begins with a confession. After years of preaching and teaching preaching to others, he realized that “everything I’d learned in a lifetime of practice and study, everything I’d gradually come to believe about preaching, all the practical insight I’d attained in half a century of trial and error experience has already been perfectly illustrated in one place, by one preacher. The place is the New Testament and that preacher is Jesus” (11, 12). In the first chapter, Lewis explores Jesus’ “people-centered” approach to preaching. He then turns to the actual elements of style in Jesus’ preaching: parables, questions, stories. “Jesus told stories. Must we be more rigid and abstract than He was?” (26).

Lewis also explores the role of left-brain/right-brain dynamics. He notes that “most of us have been taught to preach in Greek” (49). Of course, he speaks not of the

⁴ A few volumes will be referenced which were previously read and were not part of the reading portion of this course. They are reference for the sake of being comprehensive and will be noted as “previously read.”

language, but of the analytical style of the academy. Lewis argues that good sermons must address all three levels of the brain, the basic instinctive level, the level of emotions and feelings, and then the thinking level where abstract ideas are processed (58ff). Seminaries often follow the model of Athens, and not Jerusalem. Jesus, however, was a Hebrew who “preached in the language of commerce and farming, the language of common life and common people” (49). Lewis summarizes 14 points that describe the preaching of Jesus. The 14th point asserts that Jesus was not “a traditional expository preacher” but was “more balanced” (83). He ends his discussion of Jesus’ preaching by asking why we do not use more of the stories of the Bible in our preaching. “Is it because we feel more comfortable with homiletics than we are with the Bible? Because we are more committed to our habitual forms than we are to the Word itself?” (124).⁶

Another volume from the pen of a homiletics professor is Raymond Bailey’s *Jesus the Preacher*.⁷ Bailey was a professor of preaching at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY for sixteen years. His discussion revolves around “the four elements of preaching” (48): the preacher, the congregation, the message, and how that message was delivered. Bailey sets the tone for his work with the strong statement that “Jesus provides the perfect role-model for the pastor-preacher” (12). The significance of Jesus’ preaching is highlighted further by Bailey’s observation that there is “similarity between the climate of our day and Jesus’ day” (17). He suggests that one reason Jesus

⁵ Ralph L. Lewis with Gregg Lewis, *Learning to Preach Like Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1989), 159 pages. His earlier volume on inductive preaching will be discussed in the second section of this paper.

⁶ Appendix 1 includes four sample sermons that attempt to replicate the style of preaching used by Jesus.

⁷ Raymond Bailey, *Jesus the Preacher* (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 128 pages.

was a good preacher was his “knowledge of His culture and its effects on people” (25). Furthermore, Jesus did not hurl homiletical thunderbolts from a distance; rather, his “preaching was relational” (35). Bailey continues this line of thought, noting how Jesus was dealing with people who had been exposed to religion—and hurt by that exposure. “By moving among them he knew what troubled them” (37).

Looking at the message itself, Bailey says that “conversation is the primary mode of interpersonal communication and divine-human communication” (49). He notes that Jesus prepared carefully before speaking, describing the parables as “carefully wrought narratives” (49). This is important because the “electronic media have transformed modern America from a reading culture to a hearing one” (50).⁸ In a powerful summary, Bailey notes that images communicate to those in need much better than propositions. He says “Jesus spoke of rooms, banquets, music, dancing, trumpets, furnaces of fire, table crumbs, debts, lost sheep, camels and needle’s eyes, wages and work, hunger and nakedness” (54). Jesus used “the rhetoric of agitation (53), metaphor (55), hyperbole (56), simile (56), comparison and contrast (57), rhetorical questions (58), direct discourse (59), and story (63). In an enlightening contrast between the canonical gospels and the many stories which Jesus told, Bailey notes that the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas “contains 114 sayings and no stories.”

In the next two chapters, Bailey surveys the preaching of Jesus, which focused on the kingdom of God, and then the nature of the audience, respectively. He throws in a strong plug for inductive preaching (95, 115) and embraces the use of tension, or

⁸ Perhaps if Bailey wrote this section today he would be more impressed by the visual than the aural. Many authors have noted that the America of the 21st century is profoundly an image-based culture.

unresolved stress, at the end of a sermon (95, 97) to allow the listener to reach his or her own conclusion. In his last chapter, he encourages the preacher to embrace the dialogical nature of the sermon (112) and warns against shocking language as a technique unlikely to succeed (113). Bailey warns the narrative preacher against “giving too much away too soon” (116). In conclusion, Bailey offers some important insight into the preaching of Jesus. Sometimes those important insights are lost in the midst of more pedestrian concerns, however.

Francis Handy, a Methodist minister, wrote *Jesus the Preacher* shortly after the Second World War.⁹ Handy begins with the statement that “THE AIM OF THIS BOOK IS PRACTICAL RATHER THAN ACADEMIC” (7, capitalization his). And so it is not an academic work, but that does not mean there is an absence of the academy, for this little volume is jam-packed with warmed over 19th century Protestant liberalism, perhaps best captured by these statements: “The whole idea of sacrifice as a means of appeasing the wrath or securing the forgiveness of God was altogether alien to his teaching” (24), or, “Jesus told men that they were the sons of God, and they rose to the crest of their powers” (101) or, worse, “The essential message of Christianity is that the Spirit of God found fullest embodiment in the personality of Jesus” (125) or, worse yet, “When, therefore, we speak of the ‘divinity’ or the ‘deity’ of Jesus we refer to the fullness in his life of that love, moral perfection, and redeeming power which constitutes for man’s moral and spiritual life the essential qualities of God” (126).

With these rather unhelpful remarks, one might conclude that Handy has little to offer. That would be a mistake. He begins with chapter one, “Jesus Came Preaching,”

⁹ Francis J. Handy, *Jesus the Preacher* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1949), 137 pages.

that considers the preaching and teaching of Jesus, and he notes that these two activities, though stemming from different words in the Greek, are largely overlapping in the ministry of Jesus (11). Jesus was a prophet with a prophetic call (12), a teacher (15), and a scribe (16). He preached truth and he was truth (20). Handy sees Jesus as “a child of the synagogue” (22) who opposed the Temple and the sacrificial system (22-25). He “was a sacramental preacher” who “not only led people in the central act of synagogical worship” but also “mediated God to them” (26).

Following a chapter on Jesus’ preparation for preaching, which looks at his spiritual preparation, his education, personality, and life experiences, chapter three focuses on his use of language. Handy reminds us that Jesus spoke Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, and perhaps had some knowledge of Latin (54-55). More importantly, Handy talks about Jesus’ use of figurative language which he describes as “the result of his imaginative or poetic capacity” (58). He discusses the use of parallelism, rhythm, and rhyme (59-61) as ways of conveying truth with feeling and power. This leads to chapter four and the discussion of Jesus’ use of parables (67-69), illustrative material (69-74), dramatic elements, as in the prodigal son or the good Samaritan (75), and object lessons (76) such as the little child he set in the midst of his disciples.

Chapter five discusses expository preaching which Jesus probably did in the synagogue (78) and evangelical preaching which was tied to Jesus’ public preaching about the kingdom of God (82). Chapter six looks at topical preaching and suggests that Jesus did preach “doctrinal attitudes and viewpoints” (88) though he was much more interested in the “spiritual and ethical life” (87). In his conflict with religious leaders, Jesus preached sermons that were polemic (90-93), ethical (96-103) and eschatological

(103-111). He also mentions apologetic preaching, but does not really tie this to the preaching of Jesus (93-96), using, instead, examples from the early church.

Herchel Sheets, Methodist minister and adjunct instructor at Candler School of Theology, offers a short volume that investigates Jesus' use of hyperbole, *When Jesus Exaggerated*.¹⁰ Sheets explains: "He [Jesus] exaggerated often, and he expected his hearers to understand that he was exaggerating, and that he was doing it purposely. He had an idea, a thought, a message which he wanted to convey to the minds of his listeners. So he used hyperboles, exaggerations for the sake of effect" (7-8). Further, he says "it can be safely assumed that his use of hyperboles contributed greatly to the communication of his message to them" (8).

Sheets considers ten statements of Jesus which he identifies as hyperbole: 1) the hairs of our heads being numbered (9; Matt. 10:30); 2) cutting off offending body parts (17; Matt. 18:8,9); 3) keeping the left hand ignorant of the right hand's activities (24; Matt. 6:3); 4) accounting for all idle words (32; Matt. 12:36); 5) specks and logs in the eye (39; Matt. 7:3); 6) camels and needle's eyes (47; Matt. 19:24); 7) the number of times one must forgive (55; Matt. 18:22); 8) gnats and camels (63; Matt. 23:24); 9) faith as a mustard seed (70; Matt. 17:20); and 10) stones that cry out (77; Luke 19:40). These are brief, interesting chapters that shed light on the meaning of the statements. However, except for the brief comments in the beginning in which he asserts that Jesus used exaggeration to communicate meaning more clearly, he offers little insight into the intentions of Jesus or the function of hyperbole in his preaching and teaching.

¹⁰ Herchel H. Sheets, *When Jesus Exaggerated* (Lima, OH: C.S.S. Publishing, 1977), 83.

Inductive Preaching

In addition to the volumes that address directly the preaching and teaching of Jesus, there are other volumes that capture key themes related to the preaching and teaching of Jesus, or spend a significant number of pages exploring related themes. Among these, one of the most-important volumes on inductive preaching is Fred Craddock's 1971 work, *As One Without Authority*, now in its 4th edition.¹¹ Craddock is a minister in the Christian Church (Disciples) and formerly a professor of preaching and New Testament at Candler School of Theology. In Part One, chapter one, "The Pulpit in the Shadows," Craddock notes that there is need to be concerned about preaching since critics have given the pulpit "poor reviews" since the first century (3). He wryly suggests that the reason for such criticism "may be simply that these critics have heard us preach" (3). Craddock complains that most seminaries educate students of preaching by using principles of Greek rhetoric (5). Further complicating today's task of preaching is the impact of television on "the human sensorium," shifting the focus from the oral to the visual (9-10). Most disturbing of all is the fact that as the culture around us has shifted, sermons have "with few exceptions, kept the same form" (13). As Craddock pointedly observes, "either preachers have access to a world that is neat, orderly, and unified, which gives their sermons their form, or they are out of date and out of touch with the way it is. In either case, they do not communicate" (13).

In chapter two, "The Pulpit in the Spotlight," Craddock argues that the shift from a print culture an "oral-aural world" undermines the effectiveness of the traditional, logical form or preaching (26). Moreover, the preacher does not live and preach in some

¹¹ Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, rev. 4th ed. (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 156 pages.

ideal world but instead must communicate in view of the “concrete, lived experiences of individuals and societies” (29). Craddock’s suggested response in Part Two is to make a Copernican shift in the way sermons are constructed, from deductive to inductive (48). This shift is not set in concrete, as though every sermon must follow his suggested method. Rather, he says “forms of preaching should be as varied as the forms of rhetoric in the New Testament, or as the purposes of preaching or as the situations of those who listen” (45).

Craddock does maintain, however, that the changes in culture and the shift in ways of communicating undermine the formerly “authoritative foundation of traditional preaching” (46). Why should the preacher consider inductive preaching? “If the time comes, and it has, when people are either uninterested in those major premises of universal and general truth (i.e., ‘all people are unrighteous’) or they question the authority of their source (i.e., church or scripture), those whose mission it is to convince others they must go into the marketplace prepared to reason inductively” (60). Instead of delivering unassailable truths and expecting listeners simply to embrace those truths, the preacher needs to lead those listeners to reach their own conclusions so that “the implication for their own situations is not only clear but personally inescapable” (49). As Craddock says later in the book, “the sole purpose is to engage the hearer in the pursuit of an issue or an idea so that he will think his own thoughts and experience his own feelings in the presence of Christ and in the light of the gospel” (124).

Inductive preaching may appear to be less serious than traditional, deductive preaching (73), but it is not an excuse for laziness and may indeed require more work (79). And, inductive preaching is not a justification for wandering all over the rhetorical

playing field. Rather, “no preacher has the right to look for points until he has the point” (85). Furthermore, Craddock does not believe “‘points,’ announced or otherwise made obvious” are helpful (115). Indeed, the journey from initial concern to “Aha!” moment would be jeopardized by the prominence of the traditional outline with points and sub points. Instead of a controlling outline, “which has enjoyed too much prominence in the history of preaching” (121), “the structure must be subordinate to movement” (115). Movement, which may involve drama, story, conversation (117), poem, essay, or parable (119) has two functions: it “sustains interest and preserves the anticipation necessary . . . to hold attention,” and it is “integral to content,” or the flow of words. In the inductive sermon, movement accomplishes what the outline does for the deductive sermon, but without the outline’s abruptness or prominence. The Bible itself contains many oral and written forms, with their own internal movement, which may inform our efforts to frame the sermon (121).

Craddock offers a few, final points that are worth considering. First, he reminds his reader that the preacher can no longer assume a privileged position as an authority figure who must be heard (122). Second, preaching is an oral activity and so should be prepared as an oral communication, not written (122). Third, inductive preaching may take on many shapes (122); it may “move in a circle” (123), or “have two transition poles rather than the usual two points” (124). However the sermon is structured, it should be arranged “to engage the hearer in the pursuit of an issue or an idea so that he will think his own thoughts and experience his own feelings in the presence of Christ and in the light of the gospel” (124). Craddock believes that “the primary concern” must be “to communicate with people who after the sermon is over will have to continue thinking

their own thoughts, dealing with their own situations, and being responsible for their own faith” (124).

A companion volume is his 1978, *Overhearing the Gospel*, revised and expanded in its 2002 edition.¹² Using a quotation from Soren Kierkegaard as his text, “There is no lack of information in a Christian land; something else is lacking, and this is something which the one cannot directly communicate to the other,”¹³ Craddock explores the question: “How does one person communicate the Christian faith to another?” (4). *Overhearing the Gospel* consists of three parts, Part I: The Illusion, Part II: An Attack upon the Illusion, and Part III: Sermons, and affirms narrative preaching as an important means of “indirect communication.” Part I has four chapters on Method, the Listener, the Teller, and the Story.

In chapter one, Craddock laments the failure of theological education to teach “methods” for ministry tasks (5) and indicts an ecclesiastical culture that has accepted boredom as the price of doing business in the pulpit (6-8). “Boredom,” he says, “is a preview of death, if not itself a form of death” (6). He complains about those who believe that “truth is its own evangelist” (9) and contend there is no place for questions of style in communicating the gospel (10). Instead, Craddock says communication is hard work and those who are successful make us ask “how” they made their connection (13).

Not only is there a failure in understanding method, but the listener, himself, makes communicating the gospel difficult. In chapter two, Craddock asks, How does one

¹² Fred Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, rev. and expanded ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), 142 pages.

¹³ Hence, the need for “indirect communication,” which Craddock explains in some detail throughout the book.

communicate effectively with those who already know what is coming (17)? Or, at least *think* they know what is coming (18-19). Using Kierkegaard's Denmark and state church as example, Craddock explains the deadly illusion Kierkegaard identified in his day, namely, that the church convinced itself all is well in Christendom (19-20). "Theological discussions became intramural games" and took place "under the illusion that if the discussion is religious or theological in content, the occasion is Christian" (20). Craddock, echoing Kierkegaard, complains that such religious discussions ought to be for the spiritual benefit of the participants, instead of being "yet another way of avoiding life" (20).

Our culture, at least in the Bible Belt, bears some resemblance to the Denmark of Kierkegaard. Consider this description and ask how many churches of (fill in the blank) denomination fit perfectly: "But so often the church has had little room for inquiring, struggling seekers after God, making those so engaged feel guilty for so little faith. And in many places the church has given the impression that the distance from God can be negotiated, not by faith's wrestling, but by increments of information that the church can supply" (25). Thus the problem: "How can we speak or write for those of whom Kierkegaard said they already know too much?" (28).

In chapter three, Craddock looks at the "teller" (or, preacher) and says that "appropriation of the gospel is the minimum condition for approaching pulpit or podium" (33). One who knows nothing of grace cannot speak of grace. And one who knows of grace will spend the necessary time to study the things of God in order more effectively to communicate them (35). Such study/devotion is an act of worship, and whatever flows from that worship, whatever "we say or write, we offer to God" (36). And herein lies an

important truth that underlies Craddock's thesis: in communicating the Christian faith, "it is not the case that God is overhearing what we say to those before us; it is rather the case that those before us are overhearing what we say to God" (36).

In chapter four, Craddock moves to the nature of the Christian story—and its contribution to the communication problem. Kierkegaard complained that too much of the church of his day was concerned with, in Craddock's words, "the scaffolding of eighteen centuries of dogma, tradition, ecclesiastical machinery, and claims of authority" (50). Craddock says the need is to tell the "old, old story." "But, if we recite it as it is written, listeners say, 'Here we go again'" (51). Further complicating the telling of the story is the way the Bible has been handled in the academy, by Fundamentalists and liberal critics alike. Variations in narratives become battlegrounds over historical precision and textual transmission (53), or occasions to harmonize sharp edges of a text with all other related texts (54-55), or opportunities to reduce rich discussion across disciplines to "an intramural exercise" among specialists (57). So, what to do?

Part II provides the answer. Rather than speaking directly, which is appropriate for transferring information (70), though perhaps indicating, "an imperialism of the mind" (71), there is need to speak indirectly. This does not mean there is no place for direct communication, for the nature of Christian revelation as historical revelation "remains essential" (72). Rather, as practiced by Kierkegaard, the indirect comes first, "with its humor, irony, wit, and artistry, capturing the reader's attention in a kind of striptease to get them to come along; then the clear and simple word" (72). Craddock says that Jesus "lured his followers into listening and then caught them in a new vision" (74). He often communicated indirectly, most obviously with parables (74) which often

reversed field and provided “surprising grace” in unexpected places (75).¹⁴ Craddock suggests that something similar should happen in preaching. The best communication often is not taught in seminary classrooms but learned in “ordinary social exchange” (87-88). Moreover, as modeled by Kierkegaard, the most effective communication takes place when someone “overhears” a conversation (90), such as when adults listen in on a children’s sermon during the worship service (93-94).

For the preacher, there are wonderful “concrete examples of communication designed for overhearing, the narrative parables of Jesus. Recall or reread the prodigal son, the good Samaritan, the Pharisee and the publican, the workers in the vineyard, the talents, or any of the stories told with enough detail to have a narrative line. These parables are told in third person, in past tense, with anonymous characters acting and speaking in life situations distinct from the listener’s” (106). Narrative is not a substitute for “anti-intellectual, undisciplined” preaching (111) or intended to replace “rational argument in Christian discourse” (116). Craddock warns against reductionist tendencies and misunderstandings of narrative among those who use it to effect “overhearing” the gospel (116-117). Most importantly, he reminds us that “one reason people will overhear a story with more sustained attention than they will give to many lectures and sermons” is that “a narrative is of the nature of life itself” (118). Christianity, after all, is a story (119) and it is about a God whom we have only seen and heard indirectly (119-120).

¹⁴ Craddock notes that Paul “did not use parables to preach where no one had yet laid a foundation,” 77.

Ralph Lewis, along with his son, Gregg Lewis, wrote *Inductive Preaching* which became a prelude to their later work on the preaching of Jesus.¹⁵ In this first volume, Lewis is concerned about the lack of exploration, the lack of invitation that characterizes many “deductive sermons” (10-11). Preachers need to get their listeners involved (19), but they can only do so as they themselves are involved in living out the texts of Scripture (24, 46). Lewis laments that “deductive, propositional preaching” removes people from the experiences of life, while inductive preaching “begins with the particulars of life experience and points towards principles, concepts, conclusions” (32). Lewis explains the nature of induction (43), highlighting the cultural shift that makes inductive preaching so appealing (49ff) and, most importantly, asking “why is there so much narrative in the Bible and so little in our sermons?” (58).

Furthermore, he asks “why is Jesus so seldom listed in the index of preaching books?” (68). He examines the preaching style of Jesus, noting that “the incarnation itself is clearly an inductive idea” (73). He contends that Jesus only used a didactic, deductive approach “when speaking to his disciples and other believers” (75). Of course, this raises an important issue about the nature of preaching in the Christian assembly. Would that not be more like speaking to his disciples? The remainder of the book fleshes out the argument for induction, explaining the flow of inductive sermons and demonstrating how to construct them. He does make room for a deductive element in preaching (116) arguing that the preacher “must incorporate a combined approach . . . to achieve maximum effectiveness and involvement” (117). Perhaps the key to his approach is this:

¹⁵ Ralph L. Lewis with Gregg Lewis, *Inductive Preaching* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1983), 228 pages. *Learning to Preach Like Jesus* was discussed under the first category in this essay.

“One of the chief characteristics of inductive preaching is the attitude of honesty and transparency. It explores rather than exploits. Rather than being pushy, it allows interaction and involves the listener’s intellect at every step. It doesn’t ask listeners to buy assumptions for themselves without first displaying the evidence” (107).

Another important volume is the expanded edition of Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*.¹⁶ Lowry, Methodist minister and professor of preaching at St. Paul School of Theology, originally published this work in 1980 and recently reissued it, unchanged except for a lengthy Foreword by Fred Craddock and his own Afterword. In this Afterword, Lowry addresses a number of issues, not the least of which is discussing the place of *The Homiletical Plot* as a contributor to the “New Homiletic” along with the work of others, such as Craddock, Davis, Buttrick, and Rice.¹⁷

The major argument of *The Homiletical Plot* is that the sermon is a narrative that involves not so much the assembly of parts (11) but rather the discerning of process. He says “a sermon is a plot (premeditated by the preacher) which has as its key ingredient a sensed discrepancy, a homiletical bind. Something is ‘up in the air’—an issue not resolved. . . . Preaching is storytelling. A sermon is a narrative art form” (12). Lowry suggests every sermon would do well to focus on the homiletical bind, the tension that results from the discrepancy between text and life (14), or, specifically for sermons, the tension between the sermonic bind and the knowledge that Jesus is the answer (24). But how, exactly, is Jesus the answer? This question provides suspense and gains the audience’s attention.

¹⁶ Full citation on page one.

¹⁷ Lowry, 122.

For Lowry, the proper movement of a sermon (the homiletical plot!) goes through five stages: 1) upsetting the equilibrium (28-38); 2) analyzing the discrepancy (39-52); 3) disclosing the clue to resolution (of the discrepancy), or “the principle of reversal” that turns the problem on its head (53-73); 4) experiencing the gospel (74-79) in which the gospel is proclaimed effectively as the solution; and 5) anticipating the consequences (80-87), the climax of the sermon, or the call to commitment. He discusses a number of issues, including whether all sermons must have the same form. His answer? No, so long as you preserve the element of ambiguity (90). In the Afterword he also entertains the possibility that not all sermons will move through the five stages in the exact sequence (117-121) but allows for more flexibility in the sequencing of stages three, four, and five.

Of course, Lowry operates on the assumption that Jesus made use of some of the same principles and insights that he discusses in *The Homiletical Plot*. Jesus made use of plot in the story of the prodigal son (8). He made use of the homiletical bind in the story of the Pharisee and the Publican (52). Jesus often “‘laid the rug’ before he pulled it out” in the parables, especially in the story of the good Samaritan (66) or the righteous turned out of the kingdom (67). Pointedly, Lowry says “I believe it fair to characterize the parables of Jesus as noteworthy (among other reasons) in the fact of their inclusion of reversal” (69). In his section on “Other Considerations” (105-115), he points to additional features of Jesus preaching and teaching that are consistent with his thesis. In summary, Lowry assumes that Jesus made use of those features he has identified, and his assumptions appear to be grounded in fact. Perhaps one of the reasons Jesus was so successful was his ability to maintain a level of ambiguity and deliver the punch line at the end, not at the beginning.

A recent work that explores some of the themes mentioned above is Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition*.¹⁸ Miller is a Baptist minister and professor of preaching and practical ministry at Beeson Divinity School. His expressed purpose for writing this volume is “the realization that none of the books on preaching—even the great books—have done it exactly right” (10). For Miller, preaching must be “passionate” and “fascinating” (12). His concern is that “preaching remains too captive to 1950 to transform the third millennium” (16). While interested in the affective dimension of preaching (220), he does not want preaching merely to be “fluffy and vaporous” (17). He wants to help preachers in the third millennium adapt to the postmodern world, a world of dialogue and conversation, not lecture (17).

In setting forth his agenda, Miller objects to much of what passes as “expository preaching” which he describes as “sermons that employed linear reasoning, building arguments with highly propositional styles” (20). Concerning such preaching, he says

if preaching did not defy your ability to care about it, it was clearly not the Word of God. To be really good for you, sermons had to be dull. Exciting sermons were generally seen as heretical, or at least non-biblical. Many people secretly felt that this “expository” style of preaching was boring, but nobody would say so out loud for fear of being branded as a liberal. Many felt that liberals were more interesting than conservative expositors, but people generally opted to be bored, rather than heretical (19-20).

It is at this point that Miller appeals to Jesus, noting that our Lord “himself told lots of stories, and his sermons were full of images—image-driven, to be precise” (21). This is a theme to which he will return frequently, namely, that Jesus was a story-teller and master communicator (21, 53-4, 67, 149, 159, 170, 262), “the preacher’s best role model” (224).

¹⁸ Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 270 pages.

Miller divides his book into three major sections: Part 1 Analysis: The Exegesis of All Things; Part 2 Writing the Sermon; Part 3 Preaching the Sermon (7).

Miller's model begins in Part 1 with the exegesis of the preacher (chapter one) and argues for ethical, engaged, persuasive, knowledgeable preachers. Citing John Stott, Karl Barth, and C. H. Spurgeon as authorities (240-2), Miller contends the preacher must know the Word and the World of God, i.e., read the Bible and the newspaper (33). Preachers, he argues further, need to be mystics (34) and shepherds (35). He summarizes, saying, "to know who we are while seeking to learn who they are [parishioners] is a rock solid foundation for preaching" (38).

Miller moves from the exegesis of the preacher to the exegesis of the audience (chapter two). He begins with the startling observation that "half of those who enter the church and take their seat before the pulpit are moving in a privatized fog of their own ills" (41). He calls upon the preacher to know the make-up of the congregation (43), to know what THEY believe (44) and what they know about God (45) in order to help them address THEIR issues (45-7). Miller contends they are not interested in abstractions or generalizations, but in finding significance (52-54),¹⁹ "coping with pain" (54), and hearing words of reconciliation and hope (58-60).

Chapter three, "Exegeting the Sermon," and four, "Exegeting the Call of the Sermon," move, finally, to the sermon itself and the application of the sermon. Each sermon must answer three questions: Is it about Christ? Is it about the Bible? Is it about the listeners? He specifically addresses three forms of propositional preaching based on

¹⁹ Miller notes, "there are only two kinds of neurotics: those who admit to it and those who live all their lives in the pinch of cover-up." *Ibid.*, 52.

types of Scripture texts: precepts (66), narrative (67), and poetic (68). He insists it is a mistake to claim that narrative preaching cannot be expository. He cites Jesus as the key example of one who did narrative exposition (67), for “he often followed a precept with an expository story that exposed the truth of his precepts” (67).

The next two sections, Parts 2 and 3, take the reader through the traditional homiletic movement, from preparation, to exegesis, to sermon formation, and finally to delivery. Much of this is familiar ground, but with Miller’s unique insights. For example, concerning the sermon thesis statement, he says it should be “kindergarten in its clarity and Harvard in its force” (107). He reminds his readers that “sermons are oral events” (111) and this should affect the way we “write” them. In mining the text for sermonic gems, the preacher must remember “that more than half of any pastor’s congregation come to church broken and in the grip of some life issue that is eating at their well-being” (127). In addressing the question, how does your model differ from traditional models, he responds that “it differs not at all from great preaching as it has always been done, with this exception: the emphasis on story is far stronger than that traditionally put on the sermon” (151).

At the end of it all, Miller reminds us that “every sermon is a trip—a movement from where we are to where we ought to be” (202). In order to facilitate this, he gives five guidelines: 1) “Keep the audience together as you travel” (204) and this includes the old, the young; the right-brained and left-brained; 2) “Read the feedback” (206) throughout the sermon to see if you are connecting with the listeners; 3) “Learn to pace the delivery” (209) to maintain the conversational style; 4) “Live with the ups and downs of week-to-week preaching” (210) and recognize that everyone “preaches a ‘dawg’ or

two” (210) occasionally; 5) “Preach over the long haul to create community” (212). An Afterword addresses some concluding, random remarks (215-227) and a helpful Appendix evaluates a number of the most important contemporary works on preaching (229-248). An excellent work, Miller sustains his challenge to the traditional expository sermon and encourages all preachers to aim higher.

The Teaching of Jesus

The question of the relationship between the preaching of Jesus and the teaching of Jesus is a significant question, but one that provides no simple answer. On the one hand, it is possible to distinguish between the kerygmatic function of the preacher and the didactic function of the teacher. This is the position espoused by C.H. Dodd in his classic work, *The Apostolic Preaching*.²⁰ For Dodd, there is a “clear distinction between preaching and teaching.” Robert Mounce, New Testament scholar and President Emeritus of Whitworth College, in *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching*,²¹ summarizes Dodd in these words: “Professor Dodd has drawn a rather definite line of demarcation between the *kerygma*, which he calls ‘the public proclamation of Christianity to the non-Christian world,’ and the *didache*, ‘ethical instruction.’ Those responding to the *kerygma* are said to have then been instructed in the *didache*.”²²

²⁰ C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936, reprint; New York: Harper and Row, 1964). Read, but not as part of this course.

²¹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (reprint; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1960), 159 pages. Note that pages 52-159 focus on apostolic preaching, not dominical preaching.

²² Mounce, 40-41.

Mounce provides a devastating critique of Dodd's view. He examines the function of the herald in the ancient world (12-14), the meaning of *kerussein* (and related forms) in the LXX (14-18), and then examines the heralding of John the Baptist (19-27), concluding that there is continuity between *kerussein* as used in the LXX and in reference to John. (27). At this point, Mounce turns his attention to the preaching of Jesus, noting that the Synoptic Gospels use "the verb *kerussein* more than twenty times" (28) and most frequently use the term as "a resume of His ministry over a period of time rather than describing what happened in any particular instance" (28). Mounce discusses the content of Jesus' preaching which focused on the kingdom of God (30-40), embracing the (now) commonplace understanding that the kingdom of God "is God's eternal sovereignty, dynamically conceived, which invaded the realm of evil powers and won the decisive victory in and through Jesus Christ, which victory will be eventually complete and fully acknowledged by all mankind" (40).

Perhaps Mounce's most helpful contribution is his discussion of the relationship between Jesus' preaching and teaching, which he asserts "are continuous and to some degree overlapping" (41). Mounce notes that a number of terms are used interchangeably: preaching in Mark 1:38, 6:12 and "evangelizing" in Luke 4:43, 9:6; teaching in Matt. 4:23 and preaching in Mark 1:39, Luke 4:44. Mounce concludes "that since the activity generally associated with the synagogue was 'teaching,' the synagogue 'preaching' recorded by Mark and Luke seems rather out of place unless the two have a good deal in common" (41). Commenting on the language used in Luke 4:15ff, Mounce further explains the relationship between preaching and teaching: "Thus teaching is the expounding in detail of that which is proclaimed. . . . Or, to change the figure, *kerygma* is

foundation and *didache* is superstructure; . . . All *didache* is based on *kerygma*, and it may be seriously doubted whether any *kerygma* ever stands without some measure of explanatory *didache*” (42-43).

Among the volumes dedicated to the teaching of Jesus, one of the most useful is Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus’ Teachings*.²³ In chapter one, Stein, Baptist minister and professor of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, notes that there are many titles conferred on Jesus (over 40, he says). Within the four Gospels one of the titles most frequently used to describe Jesus is ‘Teacher’” (1), while the “more original Aramaic title of ‘Rabbi’ is used of Jesus some fourteen times” (1). Stein notes that Jesus taught in open air settings as well as in synagogues (2) and had followers who were different from the average pupils of rabbis. Such followers of rabbis were disciples of a rabbinic tradition, while the Twelve were disciples of Jesus (2). Jesus taught as a sage (2) in continuity with Old Testament wise men and prophets (3). Stein says he taught in Aramaic, though he would have been fully fluent in Hebrew and probably had some competence in spoken Greek (5-6).

In chapter two, Stein looks at the form of Jesus’ teaching. He discusses Jesus’ use of overstatement (8-11), hyperbole (11-12),²⁴ pun (12-14), simile (14-15), metaphor (15-17), proverb (17-18), riddle (18), paradox (19-20), a fortiori (20-21), and irony (21-22). He also addresses Jesus’ use of questions (23-25), figurative actions (25-26), and poetry, especially the various forms of parallelism (26-31). He summarizes the “impressionistic”

²³ Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus’ Teachings*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 184 pages.

²⁴ He says that hyperbole is a “gross exaggeration” in which literal fulfillment is impossible, 11. I am not sure this fine distinction is helpful.

language Jesus used: “The form or vehicle that Jesus used to convey his message is clearly not the language of twentieth-century science but rather the metaphorical, exaggerating, impressionistic language of a culture that loved to tell stories” (32).

Chapter three looks at the parables, which constitute “not less than 35% of his teaching in the Synoptic Gospels” (33). Stein discusses the relationship between parable and *marshal* (34) and then looks at the various kinds of parables: metaphor (35), similitude (35), story parable (36), example parable (36), and allegory (37). Disagreement over the exact definition of parables results in varied estimates of their number, “between fifty-five and seventy-five” (38). In answer to the question, Why parables?, Stein suggests the popular answer, to illustrate (38,41), needs to reckon with Mark 4:10-12 which says that parables are given for the confusion of those outside the kingdom (38-41). Also, Jesus may have used parables “to disarm his listeners” (41). The parables of Jesus no doubt came from the stock of everyday life in first-century Judea (41).

Stein considers the parables to be authentic, without parallel in the New Testament or early church (42-43). He traces the interpretation of the parables through church history (44-51) and then devotes a number of pages to the contributions of key interpreters: Julicher, Dodd, Conzelmann, and Marxsen, (50-55).²⁵ He summarizes the four principles of interpreting parables: 1) determine the one main point of the parable, 2) understand what Jesus meant in the original life setting of the parable, 3) understand the meaning of the parable in the evangelist’s life setting, and 4) ask what is God teaching us today through this parable. The remainder of the book is an introduction to key content in the teaching of Jesus: chapter four, The Kingdom of God (60-81); chapter five, The

²⁵ Joachim Jeremias is conspicuous by his absence.

Fatherhood of God (82-89); chapter six, The Ethics of the Kingdom (90-114), and chapter seven, Christology (115-151). The rest of the book consists of copious and helpful endnotes with many valuable references. All of these sections provide enjoyable discussions, generally representing the consensus found among evangelical New Testament scholars.

One of the most important contributions Stein makes is to demonstrate that the teaching of Jesus, closely linked to his proclamation, included some very clear doctrinal teaching. Of clear importance to this project is the fact that little of Jesus' teaching looks like a lecture. Instead, his teaching made abundant use of parable, figures of speech, and ordinary experiences rich with image and employed to convey the most important truths. Though this was not his intent, Stein has demonstrated the legitimacy of Mounce's thesis that there is continuity between the *kerygma* and *didache*. Jesus taught, but not as the lecturer on a platform; rather, as a wise man, as a prophet, and as a shepherd, Jesus taught his disciples according to the biblical pattern, "when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deut. 6:7).

Christian Educators have also been interested in the teaching of Jesus and often have included discussions of his methodology in their larger, more general works on Christian Education. Lois E. Lebar,²⁶ for years professor of Christian Education at Wheaton College, has long been recognized as a leading voice in this community. Her classic work, *Education That is Christian*, includes a section on "The Teacher Come

²⁶ Lebar was Professor of Christian Education at Wheaton College from 1945-1975. She died in 1998, but remains a powerful voice in the field of Christian Education.

from God.”²⁷ She introduces her discussion of Jesus in these words: “Christ Jesus was the Master Teacher par excellence because He Himself perfectly embodied the truth, He perfectly understood His pupils, and He used perfect methods in order to change people” (65). Lebar embraces the sharp distinction between preaching and teaching (26), probably a function of chronology since she published the first edition of her book in 1958, prior to the work of Mounce and others who have overturned this thesis.

For Lebar, the pressing question is this: Why was Jesus so successful as a teacher? She summarizes the lessons learned from the Master Teacher near the conclusion of this section and provides an answer to the question. “If then we want Jesus to teach in His own way through us, what will our general pattern look like? We’ll start where our pupils are, with their current needs, help them find God’s answer in Scripture, and begin to practice the truth this week” (99). This conclusion is based on earlier analysis of teaching moments from the life of Jesus. For example, in her discussion of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman, she says “since her mind was on water, He spoke to her about water” (67). The lesson was not a lecture (68) but an exchange in which Jesus used her questions to lead her from “daily routine to eternal life” (68). Lebar’s subheadings indicate what she believes to be the important dynamics of this encounter: Making Contact with the Pupil (66), Getting the Pupil Actively Involved (67), Meeting the Real Spiritual Need (69), and Putting the Truth to Work (71). She summarizes the encounter: “Because the Teacher followed her lead and got her actively involved in the process, He had led her from the physical to the spiritual, from her felt need to her real need” (69).

²⁷ Lois E. Lebar, *Education That is Christian* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1995), 63-101.

Lebar discusses Jesus use of parables and the “educational reasons for his extensive use of them” (81). She notes that “their vivid imagery transported the hearers back into the common activities of their everyday lives” (81). As they were drawn into the stories, the listeners participated vicariously in the stories and “wouldn’t soon forget them” (81). Lebar notes that propositions are not remembered as easily as stories (81). Of great significance for evangelicals, who often want to tie together all the loose ends, is the fact that parables often were open-ended. Jesus “made His audience actively analyze their own problems and learn by their own self-activity. They themselves had to make the application” (81). Parables are “remarkably adaptable to people of all stages of spiritual development” and can be understood “by each according to his spiritual capacity” (81). Jesus used parables to teach his disciples, gradually, and often used additional parables to clarify previous parables that his disciples had not understood (83).

Using many examples, such as the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus, the four stories of blind men, and others, Lebar reaches a number of important conclusions about the teaching of Jesus, and its relevance for our teaching. “Just about half of the teaching incidents in the Gospels were initiated by the learners themselves” (92). In the remainder, which Jesus initiated, “He usually started on a personal level” (93, 97, 99). Jesus knew that teaching is more effective when “pupils connected His eternal truth with their own lives” (93). Failure in teaching often occurs “because we teach a lesson that is wholly unrelated to what the pupils are doing and thinking” (71, 93). Often, the way to success lies not through a momentary burst of information, but through a process (78, 83) that involves “personal contact” (78). Different situations—and different people—require different responses (80, 93, 95).

Further, Lebar notes that first exposure to truth does not always result in comprehension, but often must be followed by further explanation and illustration (83). Difficult concepts must be introduced slowly and prefaced by other teaching that is more easily grasped (86). Jesus encouraged pupils to explore and because he “often used questions Himself, a problem-solving spirit pervades the Gospels” (94). Jesus did not equate cognitive apprehension with learning, but “relied a great deal more upon deeds than we do” (95). Jesus did not always achieve “immediate results” from his teaching, “but people weren’t indifferent or bored in His presence.” Additional comments in this section move away from the teaching of Jesus to make application to various educational ministries of the church.

Richard Robert Osmer, *Teaching for Faith*,²⁸ offers a guide for teachers of adult classes. Osmer is a minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and professor of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary. There is no chapter that deals directly with the teaching of Jesus, but there is one small section that references Jesus’ teaching. Chapter six, “Teaching for Mystery: The Role of Paradox in Teaching,” has a section on Jesus’ use of the parables. Osmer says a “parable attempts to make strange what is normally taken for granted” (152). Here Osmer focuses on the element of reversal in Jesus’ teaching, using the Prodigal Son as his example. His point is to illustrate the role of paradox in biblical teaching. I am less inclined to apply the term paradox to this parable, though I can appreciate his emphasis on the startling nature of the reversal of fortunes.²⁹

²⁸ Richard Robert Osmer, *Teaching for Faith* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992).

²⁹ Stein, 19-20, does not list Luke 15:11-32 as an example in his section on paradox.

Another work by a Christian Educator is *Story Journey* by Thomas E. Boomershine, a United Methodist minister and retired professor of Christianity and Communication at United Theological Seminary.³⁰ This book examines a number of Scripture stories from the perspective of the storyteller in order “to recover the gospel as storytelling” (17). These stories include the birth of Jesus, his baptism, the healing of the paralytic, the prodigal son, Jesus walking on the water, the Syro-Phoenician woman, blind Bartimaeus, the last supper, and the crucifixion. While all of these stories involve Jesus, only the prodigal son is a story told by Jesus. Boomershine observes some of the techniques employed by Jesus and comments, particularly, on his use of “an inside view.” That is, as he tells the story, Jesus gives a glimpse of the prodigal’s internal, existential struggle as he reflects on his lowly estate (cf. Luke 12:17; 16:3). Boomershine says there is “a present problem followed by an action decision” and the “inside view creates greater sympathy” (80) among those hearing the story.

Boomershine notes that Jesus’ intent is to challenge his listeners, whom he assumes “are smart” enough to answer this question: “In the light of the coming kingdom of God, what is in your best interest?” (81). He expands this to demonstrate the relevance of the parable for today’s reader or listener. “My hypothesis is that the elements of exaggeration (hyperbole) or total reversal of expectations are those points in the parables at which the story ceases to be about something that could have happened in a Galilean village in A.D. 30-33 and becomes a metaphor of the kingdom of God” (84). He offers a number of additional, helpful comments on teaching this passage of Scripture, but not any additional insights into the teaching of Jesus.

³⁰ Thomas E. Boomershine, *Story Journey* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), especially pages 69-92.

General Works on Preaching

There are many excellent volumes on preaching, in general, that have sections relevant to the concerns of this project. One of the older, late twentieth-century works is Fred Craddock's *Preaching*.³¹ There are three major sections in the book. Part I is Preaching: An Overview; Part II, Preaching: Having Something to Say; and Part III, Shaping the Message into a Sermon. Part I, An Overview, consists of three sections: Introduction, The Sermon in Context, and A Theology of Preaching. In the Introduction, Craddock makes a number of general remarks that frame the rest of his discussion. He states that his audience is two-fold: to provide a text for seminarians and to provide a refresher for the "practicing preacher" (14). Further, "the structure of this book is an attempt to answer the question, How do I prepare and deliver a sermon?" (15).

Perhaps the most important single observation Craddock makes is this: "preaching should be nourished, informed, disciplined, and authorized by Scripture, and the experience of being taught by Scripture that there is no single form of speech which qualifies as a sermon" (16). The fact that God's Word is wrapped in many human forms of communication (27, 171-73) is vitally significant not only to the question of the content of preaching, but to the form of preaching as well. For Craddock, traditional designations of sermons such as "exegetical, textual, expository" and the like, are not important to his project. Rather, it is most important that the text provide not only sermon content but "say and do what the biblical text says and does" (28).

It is possible that a sermon that buries itself in the text, moves through it phrase by phrase, and never comes up for air may prove to be 'unbiblical' in the sense that it fails to achieve what the text achieves. On the other hand, a sermon may appear to be

³¹ Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 222 pages.

walking alongside rather than through a text, or may seem to pause now and then to look up at the lofty peak of a text so extraordinary as to defy the skills of the most experienced preacher, and yet be quite ‘biblical’ in the sense of releasing that text to do its work among the listeners. (28)

For those who are familiar with the refrain from Reformed preachers that the only correct sermon is an expository sermon, Craddock offers an alternative, and potentially helpful, way to frame the discussion.

Much of the book covers ground familiar to any student of homiletics. In the rest of the overview, Craddock looks at the various contexts of preaching (31, historical, pastoral, liturgical, and theological) and then constructs a theology of preaching (51) which says “preaching is understood as making present and appropriate to the hearers the revelation of God” (51). Part II looks at the “nuts and bolts” of preaching, including the minister and his study (69), the listeners (84), the interpretation of the text (99), and the preacher as interpreter between text and listener (125). Part III moves from the text to the formation of the sermon, identifying the qualities sought in the sermon (153), the formation of the sermon (170), enriching the form (194), and the delivery of the sermon (210). Throughout these discussions, Craddock continually works his thesis that “there is no [single] form that can be identified as ‘sermon’” (170).

The question of form is vital to Craddock’s understanding of preaching. “Form is not simply a rack, a hanger, a line over which to drape one’s presentation, but the form itself is active, contributing to what the speaker wishes to say and do, sometimes no less persuasive than the content itself” (172). Indeed, “form shapes the listener’s faith” (173). He gives a number of examples, showing how the form of preaching impacts the audience and shapes the faith of the listener. For example, “ministers who, week after week, frame their sermons as arguments, syllogisms armed for debate, tend to give that

form to the faith perspective of regular listeners. Being a Christian is proving you are right” (173). For Craddock there are several guidelines that shape the selection of a sermon form: first, a given text might be preached in “several different forms” (174); second, there is a variety of forms available to the preacher (176-77); third, “no form is so good that it does not eventually become wearisome to both listener and speaker” (177); fourth, the preacher must determine what the text achieves and then frame the sermon to achieve the same end (178); and, fifth, the preacher may create a new form (182-189) if the text so requires, or make use of an existing form—if that is where the text leads (189).

While Craddock does not directly address the question, How did Jesus preach?, he does make a number of references to the preaching of Jesus. He says that Jesus “interpreted” the Scriptures (Luke 4:16-30) in his sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth (26) and made use of stories (46). He describes Jesus as a preacher of judgment, but also one who was full of compassion (38). Jesus “taught primarily in parables” which are filled with ambiguity and implicit meaning (57), yet in Luke 4:16-30 Jesus interpreted the text in order to clarify its meaning to the congregation (149). On the road to Emmaus, Jesus opened up the familiar Scriptures to his disciples (160). While the evidence is indirect and sketchy, Craddock’s references to the preaching of Jesus lend credibility to his views.

To summarise, the form of the sermon ought to arise from the text, providing a rich variety of sermonic forms that will nourish the congregation. As Craddock says in the introduction

the Scriptures continually remind pulpit and pew not only what but how to preach. The rich variety of its passages constantly objects to the boredom of imported outlines that ill fit the contours of the text and creates a stir among preachers and listeners who had settled for monotony as somehow the way it is. Just like grandmother’s view

of medicine, “If it doesn’t taste bad it won’t help you,” so it has been supposed that if it is not dull it is not a sermon. A stirring text well read creates an expectation in listeners which sermon should not disappoint. (27)

To the end that sermons do not disappoint, Craddock’s *Preaching* does not disappoint, either.

In 1980, Haddon Robinson, Baptist minister and professor of preaching at Dallas Theological Seminary, Denver Seminary, and now Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary,³² published *Biblical Preaching*, now in its second edition.³³ In his preface to the second edition, Robinson talks about the change in American culture, how “television and the computer have influenced the ways we learn and think” (10). Today’s culture is a picture or image-based culture and so Robinson notes the importance of narrative preaching. He devotes more time in this second edition to the discussion of inductive preaching (10, 124, 126). Still, “this is a book about expository preaching” (17) and this means we can expect the focus to be on deductive, propositional preaching. Robinson does not disappoint such expectation.

“The type of preaching that best carries the force of divine authority is expository preaching” (20). Yet, having said that, Robinson is convinced that most preachers fail to understand and practice expository preaching (21). He defines expository preaching as “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 applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the

³² He was president of Denver Seminary and is now president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

³³ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 245 pages.

preacher, applies to the hearers” (21). Expository preaching, governed by the text (21-22), seeks to convey the thought of Scripture (23-25), with proper application (27-30).

Robinson provides an in-depth discussion of homiletical method, beginning with his focus on “the big idea” or “single dominant theme” (37) in chapter two. Too many sermons “fail because they deal with too many unrelated ideas” (35). In chapter three, Robinson discusses the nuts and bolts of sermon construction, suggesting various tools that enable the preacher to determine the subject (“What am I talking about,” 41, 66) and the complement (“What am I saying about what I am talking about,” 41, 67). Chapters four and five continue the discussion of sermon development, asking how to address the text to a particular audience in a particular time and space (74), asking three key questions about the text: 1) “What does this mean?” (77); 2) “Is it true?” (80); and, 3) “What difference does it make?” (84). Robinson says it is essential to know the purpose for preaching a particular sermon. He says “if we are not clear about where we are going, we will probably land someplace else” (109).

In chapter six he discusses the shapes of sermons, looking at the deductive (118), the semi-inductive (124), and the inductive (126). Deductive sermons are propositional, with the preacher convincing his hearers as though he is a debater (121), while inductive sermons are “closer to a conversation than to a lecture” (129) and “have special appeal to inhabitants of a culture dominated by television and motion pictures” (129). Robinson says there is “no such thing as ‘a sermon form’” (38, 116, 131), though it is clear that his work privileges the deductive or propositional form of preaching. Chapter seven addresses illustrations and other ways of “enlivening” the text, while chapter eight focuses on the introduction and conclusion. Chapter nine focuses on questions of

preaching style while chapter ten deals with the mechanics of delivery, such as movement and gestures (207-211), eye contact (211-212), and voice delivery (213-218).

Biblical Preaching is a classical, Protestant text on homiletics. From soup to nuts, Robinson covers the whole process of sermon development. The utility of this work is demonstrated by the fact that over 200,000 copies have been sold. For the reader who is interested in late twentieth-century methods of traditional Protestant expository preaching, *Biblical Preaching* is exemplary. However, the remarkable fact is that this volume, one of the pre-eminent works by an evangelical homiletician in the last few decades, has only two, oblique references to the preaching of Jesus. He notes that Jesus “came telling stories, and most of them have entered the world’s folklore” (130) and Jesus “demonstrated the impact of narration in the parables He told” (149). This is it. In what is one of the standard evangelical texts on preaching, the author makes two brief, undeveloped observations about the preaching and teaching of Jesus. That a volume that is called *Biblical Preaching* makes almost no reference to the greatest preacher in the Bible, indeed in world history, is passing strange.

A more recent work on general homiletics is Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*.³⁴ Long, Presbyterian (USA) minister and professor of preaching at Candler School of Theology, begins his work by locating the act of preaching “within the community of faith” (10); “ministers are made in and through the church” (13). Covering much the same ground as Robinson, though in quite a different way, Long offers the following chapter titles: 1) What Does It Mean to Preach?, 2) The Biblical Witness in

³⁴ Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 198 pages. This is now available in a second edition.

Preaching, 3) Biblical Exegesis for Preaching, 4) The Focus and Function of the Sermon, 5) The Basic Form of the Sermon, 6) Refining the Form, Beginnings, Connections and Endings, 8) Images and Experiences in Sermons, 9) From Desk to Pulpit, 10) Conversation Along the Pilgrim Way. The most interesting contribution is his discussion of preaching models in chapters one and two.

In chapter one, Long discusses the preacher under the “‘master’ metaphors” of “herald” (24), “pastor” (30), and “storyteller” (36). The herald metaphor expects the listener to hear another voice “beyond the preacher’s voice” (25). Herald preachers are not concerned about matters of style. As Long explains it, “Heralds do not aspire to be artists; they aspire to be servants of the Word” (25). For this reason, they are not interested in “communication strategies” (26) or drawing attention to the “personality of the preacher” (27). The gospel is its own source of power and does not need to be embellished (28-29). Long criticizes this model for failing to recognize the artistry of the Scripture itself (28) and notes that preaching does not occur “in thin air but always happens on a specific occasion and with particular people in a given cultural setting” (29).

The preacher as pastor is concerned with “the needs of the hearers” (31). If the herald is one who knows his message, the pastor is one who knows his people (31) and is concerned that “when the sermon is over, the hearers are different and better people than when the sermon began” (31). The pastor’s relationship to the congregation is paramount (32) and the preacher as pastor is concerned about the way the Bible portrays human conflicts and relates to human needs. Long critiques this model, noting that the church is not only a place for hurting people, but is also a community of faith (33). This model also

overly emphasizes the question of relevance (34) and “runs the risk of reducing theology to anthropology by presenting the gospel merely as a resource for human growth” (35).

Storytelling preachers make use of narrative “as the sermonic form of choice” (36), “the normative way” (39). “Theologically narrative is superior because, at its base, the Gospel itself is a narrative” (36). People will remember stories when all else is forgotten (37). There are many approaches to storytelling, from using stories in the sermon to casting entire sermons as stories (37-39). For the storyteller, the content of the sermon cannot be separated from the form of the sermon (38-39). Long also criticizes the preacher as storyteller, noting that this model “tends to underplay the non-narrative dimensions of scripture” (40) and might, if not careful, confuse “God’s story” and “our stories” (41).

Instead of these three models, Long offers the preacher as witness (41). This model provides authority, but an authority delegated on behalf of the congregation (44). The preacher as witness testifies to “the encounter between God and ourselves” (45). The preaching of the witness “will assume a variety of rhetorical styles . . . as governed by the truth to which they correspond” (46). The witness as part of the community is not a disinterested party but “stands in and with a community of faith” (46). Continuing this discussion in chapter two, Long states that the preaching of the biblical witness is patterned after preaching in the synagogue (49). Such preaching encounters Scripture critically (51-52), from a particular theological viewpoint (52-55), with an awareness of the congregation’s struggles and aspirations (55-57).

Throughout the book, Long makes a few references to the preaching and teaching of Jesus. He reminds the reader that Mark 4:34 says Jesus “did not speak to them

without a parable, ' a story" (37). Many of these parables are "metaphors in story form" (173). Later, in his discussion of "images and experiences," he says "Jesus came preaching in stories and parables, and when he spoke of the reign of God he often did so in familiar images drawn from ordinary experience" (156). For Long, this is an appropriate model for Christian preachers. While it may be unfair to criticize an author for what he doesn't say, it seems that Long missed a great opportunity in the first two chapters to reflect on the preaching and teaching of Jesus and how it might inform the "master metaphors" he discusses. Moreover, the failure to reflect on Jesus as "witness" and the implications of his preaching as the witness and model for our preaching suggest a great opportunity missed.

For many evangelicals, the new standard in homiletics is Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching*.³⁵ Chapell, a Presbyterian minister (PCA), is president and professor of Practical Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary. Chapell declares the direction of his project in chapter one in a paean of praise to expository preaching. "The fact that the power for spiritual change resides in God's Word argues the case for *expository* preaching. Expository preaching attempts to present and apply the truths of a specific biblical passage. Other types of preaching that proclaim biblical truth are certainly valid and valuable, but for the beginning preacher and for a regular congregational diet no preaching type is more important" (22). Expository preaching seeks to determine "the precise meaning of the Word" (23). The word cannot be separated from the preacher and his life, because "the inside is always on view" (29).

³⁵ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 352 pages. This is now available in a 2nd edition, though I did not discover this in time to access it. An updated version of this paper will make use of the 2005 edition.

In chapter two Chapell looks more closely at the sermon, noting that “statements of truth, even biblical truth, do not automatically make a message for the pulpit. Well-constructed sermons require unity, purpose, and application” (36). Expository preaching requires a central theme (“the Bible’s theme”) which can be the organizing principle for the subordinate main points (38). With this background in mind, Chapell introduces his Fallen Condition Focus which becomes the “key concept” to the way he structures the sermon (40). He explains, “The corrupted state of our world and our being cry for God’s aid. He responds with his Word, focusing on some facet of our need in every portion. Our hope resides in the assurance that all Scripture has a Fallen Condition Focus (FCF). . . . *The FCF is the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or for whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage*” (41-42, emphasis his). There may be more than one FCF in a passage, but there should not be more than one for a particular sermon to a particular congregation (43). In light of the FCF, the sermon is intended to transform (44) as “biblical preaching moves from doctrinal exposition to life instruction” (45). It is through application that God is able “to restore his people with his Word” (48).

Chapter three discusses the selection of the text (51-64), tools for interpreting the text (64-69), and principles of interpretation (69-73). Chapter four looks at the “Components of Exposition.” Chapell finds a pattern for expository preaching embedded in the Scripture itself (80). He says, “though a normative order does not occur in Scripture, the features of exposition occur together with enough frequency to suggest a common approach to expounding God’s truth: present the Word; explain what it says; and exhort based on what it means. This is expository preaching” (82). Later in the

chapter he suggests that expository preaching consists of explanation, illustration, and application (85), though these may be proportioned differently depending on the sermon and the congregation (87).

Chapter five looks at the explanation of the text and notes that it is necessary to “exegete our listeners as well as the text to construct a sermon that most powerfully and accurately explains what a text means” (102-103). The process of explaining the text is foundational for the sermon, but “*the exegetical outline ordinarily is not the homiletical outline*” (112 emphasis his). The preacher needs to exhaust the text, though that does not mean addressing “all the truth the passage contains” (114). The propositional character of expository preaching is highlighted by the references in this chapter to proving one’s point (115, 117, 118, 123) and presenting one’s argument (121-123).

Chapter six advances the discussion, arguing for a classical outline structure for the expository sermon including topic, main points, and subpoints (128).³⁶ Chapell laments that “many contemporary preachers have turned away from this disciplined approach to the text” (129) and asserts that “such messages still communicate well if preachers understand the principles to which key features of the outline must adhere” (132). He briefly addresses the question of inductive preaching (“Jesus’ most typical approach”) and says it “has its place” (155).

Chapter seven, “The Pattern of Illustration,” is the most interesting chapter. He sees much value in illustrations for the “sensory and emotional descriptions . . . flesh out the illustration in such a way that the listener can vicariously enter the narrative world of

³⁶ Though, 139, he does say “there is not one right way of shaping expository sermons and there are always exceptions regarding general principles as well as specific features.”

the illustration” (164). Illustrations “are as essential to excellent preaching as propositional proofs” (166). Moreover, the “mind yearns for, and needs, the concrete in order to anchor the abstract” (166) and “make the Word accessible, understandable, and real in ways that mere propositional statements cannot” (166). Chapell notes that there is “widespread dissatisfaction with preaching” (168) and that we are in “the age of visual literacy,” an age that is “habituated to picture thinking” (169).

It is at this point that some important statements appear. “Listeners who experience concepts—even vicariously—actually learn more than those who must consider words and ideas in the abstract” (173). “Relating truth through illustrative narratives, parables, allegories, and images was Jesus’ method of communicating” and “illustrative materials pervaded his expressions” (175). Moreover, “the Scriptures are also replete with symbols, images, and narratives that are the regular instruments of the communication of religious truth” (175). Finally, Chapell cites an older homiletician approvingly: “this is not to say that propositional truths are not presented, but their proportion is diminutive compared to the experiential descriptions and narratives in the rest of the canon” (175).

Now, in light of the above, I am not sure how to take the statement that we must not “too hastily abandon our rich preaching heritage” (170). My analysis is that much of “our rich preaching heritage” does not communicate the same way Jesus communicated. This does not mean our heritage is wrong, but it certainly begs scrutiny. Furthermore, consider the appearance of the following two statements in the same chapter, though separated by some pages. Noting one author who suggests that approximately 75% of Jesus’ teaching was illustrative, Chapell concludes “that a hefty portion of the Gospel

material is illustrative, and . . . the Lord's own preaching methods and priorities leaned to the illustrative" (177).³⁷ Yet, elsewhere he asserts, "messages that are overloaded with illustrations damage the credibility of the preacher because hearers conclude, 'All this one does is tell stories'" (190). I can only conclude that this chapter indicates two fundamental problems with a significant portion of Reformed preaching. First, we see the value in illustrations and narrative materials, but are wedded to a deductive, propositional sermon form so that we find it difficult to entertain the thought that perhaps our macro structure needs re-tooling. Second, we acknowledge the prominent role that story, image, and figure of speech played in the preaching and teaching of Jesus—but fail to ask how that ought to affect the way we preach or the content of our sermons. At least, that is what the evidence in this project indicates.³⁸

Chapter nine is a discussion of "Introductions, Conclusions, and Transitions." The last two chapters include "A Redemptive Approach to Preaching," chapter ten, and "Developing Redemptive Sermons," chapter eleven, followed by a series of Appendixes. While this book has many excellent features, not the least of which is the Fallen Condition Focus as a way of orienting the text, the fact remains that this text, like so many others, is influenced heavily by classical and contemporary rhetorical theory. It is not clear that it is likewise influenced by the preaching and teaching of Jesus.

A more recent, and quite significant work, comes from the Dean of the Institute

³⁷ I would suggest that if the 75% figure is correct, "leaned" is not quite strong enough. The Leaning Tower of Pisa has less than a 4 degree lean, far less than 75% any way you figure it- but compelling enough!

³⁸ In the second edition, Chapell gives much more space to the role of narrative, inductive preaching and story. A later version of this paper will reflect that.

for Reformed Worship at Erskine Theological Seminary, Hughes Oliphant (“Scoti”) Old. Scoti Old’s first volume in the multi-volume work, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* is subtitled *The Biblical Period*.³⁹ In the “Introduction,” Old clarifies the focus of his ambitious undertaking. First, he explains that the purpose of his work is not preaching, per se, but preaching as worship, or how preaching “has been done as a sacred service” (7). Second, he notes the five genres of preaching that have “appeared and reappeared throughout the whole history of preaching” (8): Expository Preaching, Evangelistic Preaching, Catechetical Preaching, Festal Preaching, Prophetic Preaching. Third, in the remainder of the introduction, he defines the five genres of preaching and sets the framework for this and subsequent volumes.

The Biblical Period has three major divisions: 1) The Roots of the Christian Ministry of the Word in the Worship of Israel, 2) The Preaching of Christ and the Apostles, and 3) The Second and Third Centuries. The first division begins with chapters on the Torah, the “roots of the reading and preaching of the Word of God in Christian worship” (20-40) and the ministry of the prophets as preachers of the Word, from Samuel and Elijah through Isaiah and Jeremiah (41-83). Chapters three through five look at the ministry of the Word in the Wisdom School (84-93), in the synagogue (94-104), and in the Rabbinical schools (105-110). The third division has three chapters: the first examines historical documents from the sub-apostolic period (255-277); the second, analyses three Christian sermons from the early second century (278-305); and the third,

³⁹ Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 1, *The Biblical Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 396 pages.

considers the relatively expansive corpus of sermons from the third century Alexandrian father, Origen (306-352).

It is the second division, The Preaching of Christ and the Apostles, that is the primary focus of this review. This division has seven chapters, the first three being: “The Ministry of Preaching in the Synoptic Gospels,” “in the Gospel of John,” and “in the Acts of the Apostles.” Chapter four is “The Ministry of the Word as Understood by the Pauline Writings” and chapter five “The Teaching of the Word as the Teaching of Wisdom in the Epistle of James.” Chapter six is “The Service of the Word in First Peter.” Chapter seven examines “The Ministry of the Word as Didache in the New Testament.” The focus of this chapter is catechetical preaching in the canonical Scriptures.

Old begins his discussion on the preaching of Christ by noting that his ministry “was above all a preaching ministry” (111). Jesus preached in formal as well as informal settings and the focus of his preaching was the Kingdom of God (113). Per Mark’s Gospel, Jesus was a preacher according to the tradition of the prophets (114) and, per Matthew, the “culmination and fulfillment of the prophetic ministry.” Old discusses the meanings of *didaskein* and *keryssein* (126-7), noting that the preaching of Jesus had a strong teaching content (on linkage between preaching and teaching, see also 118, 121-3, 138, 141, 146, 164-5, 197-8, 204, 234-6, 245-7, 250) . He states repeatedly that Jesus was an expository preacher (119, 121, 132-3) and says Jesus was an example of how ministers ought to preach (123). His sermons were well-prepared (129) and often included dialog (132). His material was well-developed and used frequently in his teaching (139). He made consistent use of parables, similes, and illustrations (145), and “directed an important part of his preaching ministry toward the inner group of disciples” (141). John

presents “the ministry of the Word [as] central to our worship” (155) and presents Jesus as the Wisdom of God (157).⁴⁰

Shifting focus to apostolic preaching,⁴¹ Old notes that the central focus of the ministry of the Word was kerygmatic and included “daily study sessions like those held in the rabbinical schools” (165). The preaching of the Word was sometimes accompanied by “the prophetic sign,” as at Pentecost (167) and often involved the exposition of Scripture (169). Apostolic sermons included redemptive historical elements (173, 175), were evangelistic or missionary (172-3, 176), polemical (173, 177), and sometimes reflected elements of rabbinical sermons (174).⁴² Apostolic preaching often included “the recounting of the missionaries’ [apostles’] own conversion experience” (179).

Old discusses preaching as sacrifice, i.e., as “God ignites our hearts in sacrifice to himself” (189) and explains Paul’s preference for clear preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit to displays of eloquence and rhetorical flourish (189-95). He suggests that “prophecy” may include ecstatic elements, but is often used as a synonym (more or less) for preaching (197) and where ecstatic elements are present, it is because the regular reading and preaching of the Word have been compromised (199). Old also views the gift of tongues in a similar light: “It is when the priest and the prophet ‘err in vision’ and

⁴⁰The “wisdom” theme appears more fully in Old’s discussion of the Epistle of James which he describes as “a compendium of the preaching ministry of a man who understood profoundly what Jesus had to say.” See 220-6.

⁴¹ The discussion of apostolic preaching goes beyond the limitations of this study. However, some of the issues discussed in the sections on apostolic preaching further discussions begun in the sections on dominical preaching and for that reason have been included.

⁴²Old notes that while there was continuity between the preaching of the synagogue and that of the Church, there is discontinuity as well since Christian preaching includes the “Good News” of the Gospel, 185.

‘stumble in giving judgment’ (Isa. 28:7) that God uses strange tongues. If the legitimate ministry is unfaithful, God will still be heard” (199). He discusses the many questions related to Paul’s conversion and call to ministry (206-7). Old affirms the necessity of tradition but makes this important observation about irregular or charismatic elements in the Church: “The Church needs its exciting young charismatics and the Church needs solid elders and learned scholars” (208; see also 210). Paul’s preaching identified the gospel of Jesus Christ as the revelation of the mystery that had previously been hidden (217).

The Epistle of James gives a broad outline of Christian worship which shows its connection to the Jewish synagogue (223-4). James gives evidence that the words of Jesus were already recognized as God’s Word (225). Peter gives testimony to the life-giving power of the Word (227) and describes the spiritual nature of Christian worship, namely, “the sort of worship, maintained in the synagogue, that put the emphasis on prayer, the study of the Scriptures, and the service of praise” (233). The final chapter looks at passages in the canonical Scripture that indicate the beginning of “catechetical preaching” (234-6).

Anyone who reads this volume will be impressed with the depth of scholarship that underlies the discussion. Old ranges all over the theological curriculum, discussing text-critical issues, exegetical and hermeneutical questions, historical chronology and events, theological constructs, and liturgical disputes, all apparently with the same ease and facility. Moreover, his mastery of the literature extends beyond a comprehensive knowledge of English literature in all these fields. Old is equally comfortable in the biblical languages, as well as in Latin, French, and German.

Moreover, this volume provides foundation and direction for the programmatic study of the reading and preaching of the Scriptures in worship that will take another six volumes to complete. The foundation is firm, building, sequentially, on Old Testament preaching, Dominical preaching, apostolic preaching, and preaching in the early post-apostolic period. The direction is clear as Old develops the various genres of preaching and establishes certain themes that will occur frequently, such as the importance of Jesus' example for preaching and teaching, the essential connection between preaching and teaching, the necessity of expository preaching, and the importance of Scripture as a guide to preaching and worship.

Third, and finally, this volume raises some questions that need to be explored further: 1) If Jesus was an expository preacher, why does so much of the preaching and teaching of Jesus appear to be narrative or story-based, often without any apparent reference to Scripture? 2) If the genres of Scripture are multiple, and there is evidence of multiple genres of preaching in Scripture and in church history, on what basis is expository preaching privileged above all other types of preaching as listed on page eight of this work? 3) NT scholars have identified a number of rhetorical devices in Paul's epistles; how is this to be squared with the assertion that Paul opposed the use of oratorical/rhetorical flourish?⁴³ In conclusion, reading this volume is like drinking from a fire hose. Or, to phrase it differently, this book covers a great deal of ground in a relatively short number of pages. Other volumes are intriguing in their own way, but few address as many issues in as much detail in as interesting a fashion.

⁴³ This question is not immediately related to the focus of this project, but it is an intriguing question nonetheless.

Two additional volumes need to be mentioned, though they contribute very little to the conversation. John Killinger, Presbyterian minister (USA) and former professor of Preaching, Worship, and Literature at Vanderbilt Divinity School, offers a classic, mainline Protestant approach to preaching in *Fundamentals of Preaching*.⁴⁴ He embraces the traditional deductive, propositional style sermon and does not address the preaching or teaching of Jesus. David L. Larsen, emeritus professor of Preaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, published *The Anatomy of Preaching* in 1989.⁴⁵ This is a standard, evangelical homiletics text that embraces the traditional, deductive, propositional sermon structure, though he does have an excellent, but brief, section on narrative preaching (146-156). Larsen mentions the importance of Jesus' use of parables (148) and returns to this again in his discussion on narrative, saying "the parables of Jesus must not be given sole stress in our wrestling with these issues, but they furnish some key insights in the whole area of narrative" (154).

Conclusion

In conclusion, how does one make sense of the many voices that we have heard? Are these voices not Legion with so many competing perspectives that the prospect of agreement is remote? At first glance, this is the case. However, further reflection reveals the underlying agreement that exists among homileticians from different theological perspectives, generations, and theories of communication. First, any good sermon will be

⁴⁴ John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 206 pages. Previously read.

⁴⁵ David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 200 pages. Previously read.

based on some text of Scripture. There may be debate over the length of the text or the manner of selecting the text. However, all our sources agree that it is the Word that is to be preached. While other literature or media may be used in a supporting role, there is a solid consensus that sermons are based on texts of Scripture.

Second, all the sources consulted agree that the preacher must expend the effort required to understand the text fully. Such effort requires exegesis of the text and may involve the use of original language texts, comparative translations, word study tools, Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and the like. Before moving to the meaning of the sermon, the preacher must first understand the meaning of the text. Moreover, the meaning of the text does not exist in isolation. Rather, the text exists in the larger context of the particular book of the Bible, its location in the canonical text, and its role in the unfolding of redemptive history.

Third, each author maintains that the text cannot be understood apart from the preacher and the congregation. Phillips Brooks long ago said that preaching is “truth poured through personality.”⁴⁶ It is a living, thinking, seeking human being who incarnates the grace of God and who, in turn, tells of that grace to others. The preacher is one of the people of God who has been called by God and set aside by the church to proclaim God’s word to the church. Each particular church consists of individuals, couples, and families who experience the challenges of life. Health issues, relationship problems, family dysfunctions, employment concerns, financial hardships, vocational uncertainties are among the many possible problems that parishioners drag into the worship service each Sunday. Our authorities agree that the preacher must read the

⁴⁶ Chapell, 39.

biblical text in light of the congregational context. Good preaching involves a particular word from a particular preacher to a particular group of people with particular problems at a particular time and place.

Third, and with all due allowance for the various ways this is expressed, our sources all maintain that every sermon has a purpose statement, or a central theme; a single “big idea,” or a “fallen condition focus.” No good sermon says everything, though every sermon says something. It is that something, that one thing that the preacher must say to this congregation at this time that provides the unifying center for the sermon. Without some “glue” to hold the sermon together, the sermon fails to meet the standard of preaching, however such preaching is defined.

Fourth, the preacher must seek to do more in the sermon than inform the congregation or provide entertainment for an allotted time. Through the sermon, the preacher seeks to move the parishioner to believe, to be transformed, to step out in faith, to repent and to believe. Our authorities all agree that the preacher who simply sets forth information or tells a few good stories falls short of the biblical model of preaching.

In addition to the points of agreement noted above, there is at least one fundamental area of disagreement among our homileticians. Many of the proponents of the New Homiletic argue that traditional, deductive, propositional sermons are not the most effective sermons. Even as these charges have been made, many evangelical and Reformed scholars continue to argue for the primacy, if not exclusivity, of expository preaching. How does one cross the homiletical “No Man’s Land” to find the way of peace? Perhaps the answer lies somewhere along the lines set forth by Calvin Miller. It is essential that the Scriptures be taught and that God’s people understand his Word.

However, that is not to say that only a deductive, propositional sermon is capable of bearing truth. Other structures more appropriate to the text and to the congregational context might be the new wineskins we need. Perhaps Miller is on track when he invites us to walk between the New Homiletic and the Old Expositors (!) to do narrative exposition in a fresh way.

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