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THE HOMILETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF JAMES W. COX
WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS UPON HIS WRITINGS
AND METHODOLOGY

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

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

by
Todd Alan Linn
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THE HOMILETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF JAMES W. COX
WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS UPON HIS WRITINGS
AND METHODOLOGY

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To Michele,
my loving wife and best friend

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PREFACE

The first time I met James W. Cox, ironically, was not until I had finished my Master of Divinity degree in 1999 and was applying for entrance to the research doctoral studies program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Concerned about whether I would be admitted as a Ph.D. candidate in preaching, I arranged to see Dr. Cox and was immediately impressed by his warm, pastoral presence. I would later discover that Dr. Cox was consistent in this regard, always “looking out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil 2:4).

When I began doctoral studies the following spring, my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Daniel Akin, stated that he and Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. had recently discussed the possibility of a dissertation project on the contributions of Dr. Cox. The idea appealed to me for a number of reasons, many of which are stated in the introduction of this work. One of the main reasons, however, was the personal benefit I knew that I would receive from being in the presence of this godly man who has given his life to teaching students how to preach the Bible. The consistency of his character is captured in a statement I well remember Dr. Akin making during my first preaching seminar: “If there’s one thing we can learn from Dr. Cox, it’s how to be a Christian.”

I wish to gratefully acknowledge the number of persons who have made this work possible. First and foremost, I thank my family; my wife, Michele, and my two boys, Matthew and Nicholas. Without their patient love and consistent encouragement

this work would not have been possible. I am also grateful for the two churches I have been blessed to pastor during my doctoral work, the congregation of Brookview Baptist Church in Louisville and the dear, praying folks at my present pastorate of First Baptist Church, Henderson.

Finally, I am grateful for The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The faculty, students, and resources of this grand institution have been a blessing to me beyond measure. In particular, I am grateful to Dr. Cox for his willingness to participate in this research project, giving hours of his time to personal interviews. I also wish to express my gratitude for my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Daniel Akin, whose teaching and preaching have blessed me tremendously. I shall forever be grateful to God for the opportunity to have studied at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary during a time that history will likely regard as “the Akin years.”

Todd A. Linn

Henderson, Kentucky

March 2004

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Project

James W. Cox has been teaching preaching at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary since 1959. His academic and professional experience is extensive. After obtaining the Doctor of Theology degree from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Cox went on to study at a number of respected institutions including the University of Zurich, Goethe Institute, Union Theological Seminary, Harvard University and Princeton Theological Seminary where he also served as a visiting lecturer in homiletics. Cox served as visiting lecturer at other schools as well, including the Baptist Theological Seminary in Singapore, Emmanuel School of Religion, Protestant Episcopal Seminary, and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary.

Cox has also served as pastor of three churches; Central Baptist Church in Johnson City, Tennessee; Memorial Baptist Church in Frankfort, Kentucky; and Nance's Grove Baptist Church in New Market, Tennessee. In addition, Cox has served a number of interim and extended supply pastorates in several churches across Kentucky, Georgia, Virginia, and New York.

Throughout his career Cox has authored and edited an extensive number of books and articles in the field of Christian preaching. Including Korean and Chinese

translations of his edited works, Cox has authored or edited close to sixty books. The overwhelming majority of these writings pertain directly to the field of homiletics. Two textbooks in particular present Cox's homiletical method that he has taught and modeled for nearly forty five years as a professor of Christian preaching at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

While Cox has written and taught extensively in the field of homiletics, however, no one has brought all of his major contributions together, providing a scholarly treatment of Cox's academic influence upon the field of homiletics. The purpose of this paper is to present the homiletical contributions of James W. Cox with particular emphasis upon his writings and methodology.

Significance of the Study

No scholar has written on Cox as the sole subject of research, making this work the first of its kind. Cox is a significant figure for research for a number of reasons. For one, the fact that Cox has taught homiletics at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for over four decades speaks volumes about his influence upon the scores of students who have sat in his classes over the years. Furthermore, his academic writings have been circulated throughout the major universities and seminaries where students gather to study the science of sermon preparation and delivery. Cox has influenced not only Southern Baptists, but also students and scholars of preaching across denominational lines. For this reason, one may reasonably anticipate other studies of Cox where his writings and methodology are tangential to future homiletical subjects of interest. This paper, then, serves to advance the scholarly resources available in homiletics by being the first of its kind to present a

comprehensive treatment of this key figure in the field. The bibliography alone should be of great assistance to future studies. A final reason for the significance of this particular study has to do with the person himself. Cox is a man who possesses rare qualities of exceptional Christian virtues. It is unfortunate that a scholar's capacity for exuding the fruit of the Spirit is often overlooked, underrated, or simply unreported in much academic research and writing. Because the author believes that the quality of Cox's character is inextricably united to the quality of Cox's homiletical contributions, this paper highlights Cox's personality for the benefit of scholars who likewise endeavor to emulate the virtues expected in followers of Jesus Christ.

History of Previous Studies

As stated above, the fact that no one has offered a comprehensive work on the contributions of Cox makes this research project the first of its kind. Of course, what is not new is the idea of writing on one particular individual as the primary subject of a dissertation. A random survey of theses and dissertations reveals that this kind of project has been done many times before. James Roland Barron, for example, has provided a fine dissertation entitled "The Contributions of John A. Broadus to Southern Baptists,"¹ and Gerald Thomas has written a dissertation entitled "African American Preaching: The Contributions of Gardner C. Taylor."² After a two-part overview of

¹James Roland Barron, "The Contributions of John A. Broadus to Southern Baptists" (Th.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1972).

²Gerald Lamont Thomas, "African American Preaching: The Contributions of Garner C. Taylor" (Ph.D., diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993).

African American preaching and preachers, Thomas offers one section on the life and ministry of Taylor and another section on Taylor's sermon methodology.

While no one has written a dissertation solely on the homiletical contributions of Cox, the author did locate one dissertation wherein reference is made to Cox's homiletical methodology. Joseph Kendall Byrd has written a dissertation entitled, "Formulation of a Classical Pentecostal Homiletic in Dialogue with Contemporary Protestant Homiletics."³ In chapter 4 of Byrd's dissertation, a chapter examining four homiletical models—traditional deductive, phenomenological, inductive-narrative, and literary—Byrd presents Cox's homiletical methodology as representative of the traditional deductive approach. Byrd's treatment, however, is restricted to about fifteen pages and is obtained solely from sections of Cox's book *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design & Delivery of Sermons*. Byrd merely restates the main thrust of Cox's model and then argues that the traditional deductive model is "weak" in light of other contemporary models.⁴

Due to the manifest lack of previous studies treating this key figure in the homiletical field, the present study seeks to offer a comprehensive treatment of Cox's homiletical contributions, particularly with regard to his writings and methodology. The author hopes that this first systematic presentation of Cox's academic contributions

³Joseph Kendall Byrd, "Formulation of a Classical Pentecostal Homiletic in Dialogue with Contemporary Protestant Homiletics" (Ph.D., diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990).

⁴*Ibid.*, 145.

will benefit scholarship by providing a storehouse of useful information for future research.

Sources of Data and Method of Procedure

Most of the sources for this study are available in the library of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In the library, one may locate all of Cox's published books and articles that are overviewed in this paper, including the book reviews that pertain to Cox's books. In addition, any reference to an audiotape or videotape is likewise available through the media library of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Some sources, however, have been obtained directly from Cox himself. Five sermons analyzed in this paper were obtained from Cox and remain in his possession. Other notes and papers, such as Cox's weekly "Meditation" articles and a few pages of Cox's family history also remain in his possession. In addition, a total of six interviews with Cox were conducted by the author over the four year period of January 25, 2000 to February 24, 2004. Five of those interviews were later transcribed to written notes, four of them having been previously recorded on audiotape. The audiotapes and written transcripts remain in the author's possession. Finally, chapter seven of this paper contains comments from five colleagues that were obtained by the author from telephone or internet interviews. The written notes likewise remain in the author's possession.

The goal of this work is to present a comprehensive treatment of the homiletical contributions of Cox with particular emphasis upon his writings and homiletical method. The nature of the work is primarily descriptive in its approach. It

is not the purpose of this study to provide an extensive critical examination of the writings and methodology with a view toward arguing a particular position. Rather, the primary purpose of the study is to systematize and overview Cox's contributions.

At the same time, however, a section of the paper provides the critical comments of other scholars who interact with Cox's published homiletical books. The work also, at times, engages and interacts with other homileticians and homiletical models where there is significant congruence or divergence concerning the subject. For example, when treating the historical-critical tools of scholarship, the author suggests that Cox's use of the historical-critical method seems more along the lines of what Sidney Greidanus terms "a holistic historical-critical method."⁵ That is, while Cox does not share the philosophical naturalistic worldview that underlies the historical-critical method, he nevertheless finds it valuable insofar as it helps to locate the meaning of biblical texts.

Similarly, when discussing one of Cox's "Questions to Aid in the Interpretation of a Text," the author points out Cox's belief that the text must be interpreted in light of its history of redemption. Cox states: "Moreover, the ethical teachings of Jesus and the apostles have to be seen as *a part of* and not *apart from* the movement of God's grace toward us and toward all the people in the Christ event. Christian preaching is always within the context of God's purpose revealed in Jesus

⁵Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 36-37.

Christ.”⁶ The author then notes that this hermeneutical principle is very similar to the main theme of Bryan Chapell’s recent book, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, wherein Chapell bemoans the lack of a “redemption” theme in much contemporary preaching.⁷ In the main, however, the paper is offered as a systematization of Cox’s homiletical contributions and a treatment of his homiletical methodology.

Preview of Remainder of Dissertation

This study consists of eight chapters including this first introductory chapter. The second chapter is biographical, covering Cox’s early life and background. Cox’s family background is traced as far back as possible and then proceeds forward chronologically, leading up to the beginning of his teaching career at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Attention is given to areas such as Cox’s conversion experience, call to ministry, education, family, and occasions for pastorates. In the third chapter the author gives an overview of Cox’s written homiletical contributions. The emphasis of this chapter is upon Cox’s major homiletical books and articles. In the fourth chapter, the author treats Cox’s hermeneutics for preaching. The focus of this section concerns Cox’s convictions about Scripture and the location of meaning in a text. The fifth chapter treats Cox’s homiletical method, examining his teaching about the preparation and delivery of sermons. This section is naturally followed by an

⁶James W. Cox, “Biblical Preaching Is—” (lecture given at the Continuing Theological Education Conference, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary March 1985), audiocassette.

⁷Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), see particularly Part 3, “A Theology of Christ-Centered Messages,” 263-311.

analysis of Cox's sermons (Chapter 6). In the seventh chapter, the author provides critical comments regarding Cox's published books as obtained from book reviews in scholarly journals. This chapter also contains comments from five of Cox's colleagues, including both former students and teachers from the faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In the final chapter, the author summarizes Cox's homiletical contributions. Six appendices appear at the conclusion of the paper. The first appendix is a "Time-Line" of significant events in Cox's life. Some of the material not covered in the biographical chapter is covered here such as the dates and occasions for sabbaticals and lectures occurring during Cox's teaching career. The second appendix, "Examples of Sermon Preliminaries," includes matters such as Cox's teaching about the "central idea" of the text. The third appendix provides Cox's "Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible" as accepted by the Ecumenical Study Conference held at Wadham College, Oxford, 1949. The fourth appendix contains a reproduction of one of Cox's "Meditation" articles written when he was 19 years old. The fifth appendix is a listing of Cox's major preaching engagements. The sixth appendix provides "Miscellaneous Anecdotes and Information," information such as Cox's favorite preaching texts, hobbies, and statements about preaching.

CHAPTER 2

EARLY LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Family History

Cox was born in Roane County in Eastern Tennessee. His family roots are traced at least as far back as William Y. Dryskill who was born in 1818 and married Martha Patsy Johnson January 24, 1836.¹ Their son, Richard Driskill, was born January 18, 1840 at Poplar Springs Valley in Roane County.² Richard Driskill married Mary Rayburn on March 29, 1866 and moved to a farm in the Third District of Roane County where Cox's maternal grandfather, William Newton Driskill, was born on April 12, 1867. William Newton, the first of thirteen children born to Richard and Mary Driskill, married Eliza Jane Fritts (Cox's maternal grandmother) in Roane County on October 17, 1887.

Cox's maternal grandfather, William Newton Driskill, grew up on the family's small farm in Poplar Springs. Adjacent to his parents' home was the farm land occupied by the Joseph Anderson Fritts family. Eliza Jane, Joseph's daughter, was the

¹Unless otherwise noted, most of the information concerning Cox's maternal family history was obtained by the author from Cox himself. The author made photocopies of material assimilated by a Cox family member, Jeepie C. Driskill, of Nashville, TN. Ms. Driskill conducted the research and mailed copies to interested families. Cox retains the originals of this family research.

²The family name changed, at some point, from "Dryskill" to "Driskill."

same age as William and was known to him and others as Janie. She was born March 4, 1867 in the Bradbury community of Roane County. By virtue of their adjacent farmlands, William and Janie saw each other frequently so that by the time they were both twenty years of age, Janie literally married "the boy next door."

The lineage of Janie's parents is traced as far back as Hans Ulrich Fritz, born in 1708, who came to America from Germany aboard the ship, Elizabeth, in 1738. Hans Fritz is believed to have come from the Rhine-Palatine of Germany (German-French border area), having migrated to Holland and then England before coming to America. Hans came to America with his seven year old son, Wooldrich (who used the name Frederick at various times). Wooldrich later married Janet (maiden name unknown) in 1758 or 1759 and established a family in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Three children were born to Wooldrich and Janet before they moved sometime after 1763 to present day Davidson County, North Carolina where they attended the Pilgrim Reformed Church and raised two more children, one of whom was Henry Fritts, born in either 1770 or 1771.

Henry Fritts married in 1791 or 1792. His first wife, whose name is unknown, gave birth to ten children, one of whom was Jacob Fritts, born on January 20, 1800. Jacob married Sarah "Sally" Sexton December 23, 1818 in Roane County, Tennessee. The two had eleven children, the last of whom was Joseph Anderson Fritts, born January 10, 1846.

Joseph Anderson Fritts married Eliza Ann Sturgess November 8, 1863 in Roane County, Tennessee. The two had a total of fourteen children, the third of whom was Eliza Jane (Janie) Fritts, born March 4, 1867. Interestingly, after Eliza Ann

Sturgess' death in 1888, Joseph remarried to Mary C. Rayburn in 1891 in Roane County. Mary was the daughter of Esau Rayburn, a relative of the famous United States Senator Samuel Rayburn of Texas.³

William and Janie (Fritts) Driskill built a home on the farm land between their parents' homes and started a family, eventually raising nine children. Their firstborn, Carrie Eva Driskill (Cox's mother) was born on February 9, 1889. The Driskill family moved in 1913 to the Wheat community near what is presently Oak Ridge Tennessee and Carrie Eva graduated the following year from Wheat High School.

William Newton Driskill (Cox's maternal grandfather) supported his family through the farm, working at a saw mill, and various other trades. He gained a reputation for being a terrific sportsman; an avid hunter of the quail and partridge indigenous to the Wheat community. He also gained a reputation for being a good man, a Christian man who was remembered by his family for frequently walking around on the porch, hands folded behind his back, singing gospel songs.

Janie was also an inspiration to many. An invalid for the last twelve years of her life, she quietly suffered from severe Rheumatoid Arthritis, doing her best to not complain about her plight. Many community persons visited Janie at the Driskill home, hoping to bring comfort and cheer to her and leaving the more uplifted because of her inspiring positive outlook. Local ministers illustrated many of their sermons with stories about Janie Fritts' perseverance through affliction.

³Samuel Rayburn was born near the Clinch River in Roane County, Tennessee, in 1882. In 1887 the family moved from Tennessee to Texas.

Education figured prominently in the Driskill home. Not only did Janie teach school for a short time, but eight of the nine children born to her and William, including Cox's mother, Carrie Eva, graduated from Wheat High School and taught at some point in their lives.

Little is known about Cox's father's side of the family. Isham Cox was born January 27, 1893 in Paint Rock, Tennessee, and he died on March 4, 1972 in Kingston. Isham's father, James Carpenter Cox, ran a country store near London Tennessee and Isham's mother operated a mill. James Carpenter Cox died at the age of sixty in Roane County in 1921, just two years before Cox was born.

Cox does not know any information about his family prior to his grandfather, James Carpenter Cox. Internet research reveals the existence of an "Isham Cox" who is identified with other names as "among the first to settle" in Roane County.⁴ The name is also listed as a "commissioned Justice" who was present when Roane County's first court was organized in 1801 at the house of Alexander Carmichael.⁵ Cox recalls hearing about an "Isham Cox" who served as the first Trustee of Roane County, but does not know the relation to his family.

Cox's father, Isham Monroe Cox, Sr., was a veteran of ten months overseas duty with a QMC (Quartermaster Corps) outfit in World War I. He met Carrie Eva

⁴Pat McDonald, *Historical Highlights of Roane County, TN* [on-line]; accessed 15 January 2004; available from <http://www.tngennet.org/roane/files/misc/history.html>; Internet.

⁵Snyder E. Roberts, *Roots of Roane County* (n.p., n.d.) [on-line]; accessed 15 January 2004; available from <http://www.roanetn.com/firstct.html>; Internet.

Driskill in Roane County and the two were married on June 27, 1920. Cox was born in Kingston (Roane County) on January 18, 1923. His brother, Isham Monroe Cox, Jr., was born in Kingston on October 1, 1924.

Early Childhood

Cox's childhood was a pleasant one, growing up in the tranquil city of Kingston, Tennessee.⁶ Kingston, the county seat of Roane County, is located in Eastern Tennessee about 40 miles West of Knoxville at the junction of the Tennessee and Clinch Rivers. Cox's family lived on Race Street in Kingston, where Cox's father owned his own grocery store, I. M. Cox Grocery.⁷ The family lived in a home right across the street from the store until about 1927 when the house was moved to the back end of the lot to make room for a new building his father had built. Business was good during these years and Isham Cox built the new building in order to expand his interests, providing the possibility for both residential and commercial space to interested renters.

⁶Most of the biographical content in the remainder of this chapter was obtained by the author from personal interviews with Cox. At least six interviews took place between February 10, 2000 and February 24, 2004. All but the first interview were recorded on audiotape and transcribed into written form. Each interview is documented in the bibliography of this paper. Much of the content in these interviews overlaps, making categorical documentation impractical. For this reason, only direct quotations of Cox will be documented by footnote.

⁷An interesting sidebar concerning Isham Cox is his once dating a woman who was later married to Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr. The woman also later posed for cigarette advertisements. Isham, like most store clerks, had big advertisement posters in the glass windows of his store front. One poster had a picture of this woman on it, smoking a particular brand of cigarette. When Cox's mother saw it, she had the poster taken down, not because it was a picture of this woman whom Isham had once dated,

Cox has fond memories of spending time with his father at the grocery store and driving his small pedal car around the local businesses. The first Christmas Cox remembers is the year he received this new “Cadillac pedal car.” Even today, Cox takes great pleasure in telling people that his first car was a Cadillac. He remembers one occasion when he was about five years of age, pedaling the car right into his uncle and a deputy sheriff. Cox recalls driving up behind his uncle, who ran the local First National Bank, while his uncle was walking with the deputy. Cox cranked the horn on the car for the two to get out of the way but they were oblivious to his presence. Cox remembers driving the car right into both of them, overturning the car, and hitting his head on the concrete. For quite some time after this incident, when the deputy sheriff came into Isham Cox’s store, young James would quickly run and hide.

When the Great Depression swept the country in the 1930s, Kingston Tennessee was hit as hard as any other small town. Because Isham Cox’s grocery store and new building had been “mortgaged to the hilt,” he lost everything and found himself without means of gainful employment.⁸ In fact, Isham moved his family into a rented apartment for awhile in the very building he had once owned, the new building he had constructed for the purpose of expanding his business interests.

Cox’s father supported his family by working a number of different jobs. Cox explains, “Since he was a very strong Republican he did not want to get one of

but because it was a picture of a woman smoking a cigarette, something Cox’s mother frowned upon as an elementary school teacher.

⁸James W. Cox, interview by author, tape recording, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 13 January 2004. Hereafter referred to as Interview 4.

those ‘New Deal’ jobs.”⁹ Isham stayed busy for several years working odd jobs before going to work in 1944 as a guard at Oak Ridge Guard Department in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He worked fourteen years for the company before retiring in 1958. The family moved around Roane County a number of times over the years before settling down at 606 Kentucky Street in Kingston.

Isham Cox was a devout man, serving as both deacon and chairman of the trustees at First Baptist Kingston. He saw that the family was regularly involved in church and served the family as the spiritual leader of the home. Isham regularly led the family in the blessing every evening before supper and read the Bible to the family every night before bed. Cox recalls that the only inconsistency with his father’s regular Bible reading was that he picked a rather arbitrary number of verses to read each night. It did not seem to matter whether the verses he read began right in the middle of a story or whether they stopped just short of the point of a parable. Once the prescribed number of verses was read, Isham was done. The faithful sincerity and regularity of his father’s reading, nevertheless, meant much to young Cox and made his father’s unusual methodology all the more forgiving.

Not only did Cox hear his father read the Bible each evening, but he also observed his mother’s love for the Scriptures as well. In his *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, Cox explains his mother’s high regard for the Bible: “My mother, who was a public school teacher, read it privately, and at Christmas she gave each of her pupils,

⁹ James W. Cox, interview by author, tape recording, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 21 February 2003. Hereafter referred to as Interview 3.

including me, a copy of the New Testament (when that used to be permitted!) inscribed with the words, “May the teachings of this book be your guide through life.”¹⁰

Cox’s mother taught school for a total of fifty years. She began teaching at the age of sixteen while still in high school at Wheat in Roane County. In 1915, after completing high school, she obtained a license from the State of Tennessee Department of Public Education certifying her ability to teach in any high school in the state.

While teaching at Wheat High School, Cox’s mother often ghost-wrote valedictory and salutatorian addresses for honor students and taught many who later achieved some measure of prominence. She taught, for example, Bowden Wyatt, who later became the famous football captain of the 1938 Tennessee Volunteers and later coach at the University of Tennessee. When Cox was serving later as pastor of Central Baptist Church in Johnson City in the 1950s, he met Wyatt who said to him, “You know, your mother was my teacher and she taught me everything I knew.”¹¹ Cox’s mother also taught Senator Howard Baker’s mother. Baker, who served as chief of staff for President Ronald Reagan from 1987-1988 and as a Tennessee Republican senator from 1967 to 1985, is Cox’s third cousin, once removed.

Once Cox started school, Cox’s mother taught only on the elementary level, teaching at Kingston Elementary School. Cox himself attended school at Kingston Elementary and was taught by his mother in the fifth grade. He recalls what it was like having his mother teach at the same school that he attended: “When I was in the second

¹⁰ James W. Cox, *A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981, 1976), preface.

¹¹Cox, Interview 3.

grade my second grade teacher said to me, ‘Now James, if you do not stop that I am going to send you to your mother,’ and that would not have been a difficult job because she was in the same building—but I was never sent to my mother from one of my other classrooms.”¹²

Cox was very close to his younger brother, Isham Monroe (“Roe”) Jr. Cox’s brother graduated from medical school at the University of Tennessee and practiced medicine for a number of years before dying of a heart attack on January 3, 1978. Throughout his life, he possessed a keen sense of humor and kept things light at the Cox home, even during the difficult days of the depression. In his book *A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons*, Cox illustrates the homiletical technique of “reversal” by recalling a humorous incident involving his younger brother. He writes:

When my brother was in his teens, my mother once said to him as we were finishing a meal, “You haven’t eaten any turnip greens!” He answered, “I don’t like them.” Mother said, “I don’t like them either, but I’m eating them anyway.” Then he said, “Well, you just don’t have enough willpower.”¹³

On another occasion, Cox reflected upon his younger brother’s wit in an exchange with the family doctor: “I recall that once when our family physician examined him (he was then a thirteen year old boy), Dr. Zirkle laid out some pills for his fever and said, ‘I want you to take one of these every two hours.’ Roe answered,

¹²James W. Cox, Interview 3.

¹³James W. Cox, *A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons* (Nashville: Seminary Extension, n. d.), 203.

‘Can I wait two hours before I take the first one?’”¹⁴

In a sermon preached in chapel at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Cox relays another humorous incident that occurred while his brother was studying at the University of Tennessee Medical School.¹⁵ Cox’s brother was studying one Sunday evening in a room located directly above the “house mother” of the apartment building. Cox explains that the house mother “was determined to edify all of the students who were in that house, who had skipped church that night.” To accomplish this, the house mother “turned up the volume on her radio so that everybody in the house could hear ‘The Old Fashioned Revival Hour.’” Because the loud preaching of Dr. Charles Fuller on the radio made it impossible for students to study, Cox explains that his brother retaliated with “a brilliant idea.” His brother moved the switch on his gooseneck lamp back and forth in rapid succession, creating a loud static over the radio. Hearing the static, the house mother was forced to turn down the radio. The next morning, when Cox’s brother walked downstairs, the house mother met him and said, “Mr. Cox, these are dark days that we’re living in.” When Cox’s brother asked what she meant, she replied, “Well just last night when I was listening to ‘The Old Fashioned Revival Hour,’ every time Brother Fuller mentioned the blood of Christ, the Devil made static come on the radio.”

¹⁴This statement was excerpted from an unpublished sermon manuscript obtained from James W. Cox. The manuscript is a sermon Cox preached at the funeral of Isham Monroe Cox, Jr. on January 5, 1978. The manuscript remains in Cox’s possession.

¹⁵James W. Cox, “Famine in the Land of Promise,” sermon preached at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 1980.

Even during his later professional career, Cox's brother maintained his youthful sense of humor. Cox recalls a time when The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary required incoming students to take physical medical examinations. A seminary student once told Cox of getting a physical examination done by Cox's brother. The student described how Cox's brother had come into the examination room acting scatterbrained and fumbling around for his glasses, as though he were blind.

Cox preached his brother's funeral on January 5, 1978. During the service, Cox spoke of his love for his brother and referred to his wonderful display of humor. "His personality," Cox said, "was a breath of fresh air in our home during years of economic struggle and in times of anxiety and illness."¹⁶

Conversion

One of Cox's best friends at Kingston Elementary School was his fifth grade seatmate, Bobby Roberts. The two would often shoot basketball in Bobby's backyard and ride bikes together. Cox recalls one particular day when he was riding his bicycle around the courthouse square. He happened to see Bobby and he stopped to talk with him. During the course of their conversation, Bobby pointedly asked Cox, "James, have you ever joined the church?" Bobby was a Methodist who had recently joined the church and been baptized. Cox, who attended the First Baptist Church in Kingston, told Bobby that he had not joined the church but planned on doing so at the next revival meeting. Professions of faith were not made at Cox's church except during revival meetings.

¹⁶Ibid.

The next revival at First Baptist Kingston was held in 1933. Dr. A. F. Mahan, pastor of a church in Fountain City, Tennessee, conducted the services. On the first night of the meetings, Cox responded to Dr. Mahan's invitation and went forward to make his profession of faith. Sometime during the revival meetings, Cox's younger brother, Isham Monroe ("Roe") Jr., made a profession of faith one evening at the family home. Shortly thereafter, Reverend George S. Jarman, pastor of First Baptist Church, baptized both Cox and his brother together. Reverend Jarman would later lend Cox a book with which he would eventually become very familiar, John Albert Broadus' *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*.

Call to Ministry

Given the spiritual influence of his parents, there is little wonder why Cox would begin to sense from an early age that he might aspire to become a preacher. Cox recalls a rather humorous incident when he was only about thirteen years of age. Some of his cousins and other family relations were visiting the Cox home one day. As is frequently the case during such visits, the adults gathered together in one room while the children found themselves off in another. Young 13-year-old James, regarding this fortuitous assembly of children as a divine stroke of providence, seized upon the opportunity by preaching his first sermon to the youthful, captive congregants—complete with invitation. Cox recalls, "I think I had them raise their hands. It was . . . something that was really on my heart, but in another sense . . . it was kind of a game, but it was the most serious game that I had ever played up to that point."¹⁷

¹⁷Cox, Interview 3.

Cox's call into ministry was a gradual calling. There was never any sort of "crisis event" that precipitated his aspiring to become a preacher. He simply sensed from an early age that this was what the Lord wanted him to do. "It was more of a smooth transition," Cox recalls, "It was just something I felt I needed to do, and wanted to do, and with God's help I could do."¹⁸

There were, however, other interests that consumed much of his early childhood and teenage energies. Cox recalls being fascinated by the study of chemistry and was particularly impressed with the inventions of Thomas Edison. He describes some of his own early scientific endeavors:

I had my own little private chemistry laboratory and I fiddled around with some things and so I figured something out, [how] to make a kind of paste cleaner and so I worked that out and I made a mixture of soap and diatomaceous earth and stirred that up and put it in cans and my uncle, who was a teacher at the high school, had a duplicating machine and he made labels for this: "Cox's Creamy Clean Bright Cleanser." I sold a lot of that stuff around.¹⁹

Cox also made a window cleaner similar to Windex and even dyed the solution the color blue. Other interests were equally productive. Cox drew some cartoons, for example, a few of which, such as a picture of some Indians, appeared in Knoxville's *News Sentinel* in 1938.

Through these early years, however, Cox's call into ministry continued to grow and become more of a consuming interest. He remembers a humorous occasion

¹⁸Cox, Interview 3.

¹⁹Ibid.

when a woman who worked in the family home asked about his hopes for the future.²⁰

The woman, Ms. Emma Howell, said to Cox one day, “James, did you know that doctors and lawyers will not go to heaven?” Cox replied that he did not and asked where that was taught in the Bible. Ms. Howell replied, “It says ‘woe to the doctors and lawyers.’” The next day Ms. Howell and Cox were talking again and she said to him, “James, what are you going to do when you get out of school?” Cox replied that he hoped to be a preacher. Ms. Howell replied, “Well, I had you all figured out to be a lawyer.”

While his calling into the ministry was gradual, Cox had an experience when he was about fifteen years old that he later described as being “formative” concerning his aspirations for ministry. He had left school one day feeling very sick. The family physician, Dr. G. P. Zirkle, diagnosed Cox with rheumatic fever and apparently detected a “heart murmur.” Cox explains, however, that his brother Isham Monroe Jr., later a medical doctor himself, used to say that “Dr. Zirkle’s favorite disease was heart trouble.” Nevertheless, Cox was instructed by Dr. Zirkle to lie flat on his bed for a period of one entire year. Cox explains the benefits from this one year of bed rest: “That was quite an interesting experience because I heard a lot of radio sermons from preachers out of Chattanooga and Knoxville and so forth, and I had a lot of meditation, pondering, questioning about things religious during that time.”²¹

²⁰James W. Cox, “Famine in the Land of Promise,” sermon preached at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 1980.

²¹Cox, Interview 3.

Cox also became more familiar with books and sermons that would later shape his call into ministry. As previously mentioned, Cox's pastor at First Baptist, Reverend Jarman, loaned him John Albert Broadus' *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, a book that would become one of Cox's favorites. Reverend Jarman also loaned him a volume of Charles Haddon Spurgeon's *Metropolitan Tabernacle* sermons, and Cox read the biographies of men such as Spurgeon and George W. Truett. On Sunday evenings, Cox could tune-in to a 500,000 watt radio station on which he could hear a recent sermon preached by Truett from First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas.

Cox recalls when he was about seventeen years of age that he had the opportunity to meet the famous Texas pastor when Truett was in Knoxville for a preaching campaign held at the University of Tennessee auditorium. Cox got in line to shake Truett's hand, hoping to speak briefly with him, telling him of his aspirations for ministry. Cox recalls how the busy pastor shook his hand and, simultaneously, hurriedly moved him along so that he could meet the next person. Cox remembers the anticlimactic experience of meeting Truett: "I thought I was very proud of myself, he pushed me right on . . . and to heighten my embarrassment . . . the next one he spent time with [was] a baby in somebody's arms!"²²

While Cox was still in high school his pastor, Reverend Jarman, also loaned him E.Y. Mullins' *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression*. This book helped Cox discover "a contemporary synthesis of the basic biblical ideas" in his study

²²Cox, Interview 4.

of the Bible.²³ Cox also had a high school science teacher, “a devout churchman,” who took an interest in Cox and recommended that he visit the Roane County Library. Interestingly, this high school teacher was Philip Albright, brother of the famous archaeologist, William Foxwell Albright. Cox took Albright’s advice and visited the local library where he located and read Harry Emerson Fosdick’s *Guide to Understanding the Bible*. This book, Cox explains, provided him “with a statement of the development of the leading biblical ideas as they wound their way through the Old Testament and the New.”²⁴ Cox describes reading books such as these as “a wonderful experience—exciting, disturbing, challenging, and enriching.”²⁵ He later understood why his pastor, who lent him many books, was no doubt “inclined theologically to rate [some of them] ‘X’ for [his] young eyes.”²⁶

After Cox missed a full year of school because of Dr. Zirkle’s diagnosis, the family obtained the professional opinion of another physician. This doctor believed the best thing for Cox would be to have him return to school. Consequently, Cox returned to high school but would often rest after lunch on a cot that was set up for him in the boiler room of the school. This arrangement in the boiler room led to Cox’s meeting and evangelizing his first convert.

Joe Griffith was a gregarious African-American janitor at the high school

²³Cox, *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, 20.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*

who spoke often with Cox in the boiler room about spiritual matters. Cox shared with Griffith on numerous occasions how he could receive Christ and have peace with God. Griffith felt he did not have enough faith to be saved, believing that he had “choked out” the presence of the Lord years ago when he refused to become a Christian. Despite Cox’s numerous attempts to lead Griffith to salvation, the janitor simply could not accept Christ’s forgiveness.

One day, Cox shared with Griffith the biblical story about the four men who let the paralytic down through the roof to see Jesus (Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:18-26). Cox told Griffith that Jesus saw the faith of the men who brought the paralytic and, consequently, healed the paralytic of his sins. Cox then said to Griffith, “I believe the Lord will see my faith. I believe the Lord will save you.”²⁷ Cox then prayed with Griffith and urged him to trust Christ for forgiveness. Two to three weeks later, Griffith fully embraced Christ and received a measure of peace and comfort that he had not previously known. Cox recalls, “It was a great experience for me.”²⁸

Cox’s discussions with this janitor in the boiler room also led to Cox’s first preaching engagement. To this point, Cox had never actually preached a sermon in church. He had taught the Juniors Sunday School class at First Baptist and had even taught some of the workers at the nearby Civilian Conservation Corps Camp on Sunday mornings, but he had never actually preached.

One day, Joe Griffith, who attended the African Methodist Episcopal Zion

²⁷Cox, Interview 4.

²⁸Ibid.

church in Kingston, told Cox that he had spoken with his pastor about having Cox come out to the church to preach. Cox, sixteen years old at the time, agreed to come and had his uncle drive him to the church one Sunday afternoon. Cox preached a sermon from 1 Corinthians 13. He doesn't remember the title of the sermon, but recalls the warm reception of the congregants at the church: "I am sure that I did not preach more than ten or fifteen minutes."²⁹ He adds, "There were people there that I knew and they were very kind and gracious . . . I was the only white person there. They were very kind."³⁰

While Cox was a student at Roane County High School, the editor of the local newspaper *The Roane County Banner* came by one day and spoke with the students. The editor explained that the paper was looking for students to submit poetry and other writings that were suitable for printing. Cox recalls, "This was good news to me!"³¹ Cox enjoyed writing and relished the opportunity to see his submissions published in the newspaper. Thus began Cox's three year writing stint for the newspaper. He wrote a weekly "Meditation" that was based upon a biblical text and contained between 1,000 and 1,200 words. Cox continued writing the article into his first year and a half of college.

These weekly submissions reveal Cox's early proficiency in English

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹James W. Cox, interview by author, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 10 February 2000. Hereafter referred to as Interview 1.

grammar and composition.³² They also reveal Cox's wide range of vocabulary usage at an early age. As a teenager, Cox freely used words such as "enigmatic" and "esoteric." He also used phrases such as "unstable emulsion" and "full-orbed splendor of individuality." Of course, having an educator for a mother helped Cox a great deal. Cox recalls that his mother would pore over his article submissions, checking for style and spelling errors. When the demands of her teaching schedule became too time consuming, she urged Cox to buy himself an English grammar and composition text. Cox retains a booklet from his early teens in which he wrote several vocabulary words and definitions which he was learning at the time and committing to memory.

The "Meditation" articles demonstrate Cox's wide reading and his early familiarity with persons such as D. L. Moody, Charles Spurgeon, and Jonathan Edwards. They also reveal Cox's early love for the Bible and bear witness to his strong, spiritual heritage. Consider, for example, the following excerpt:

What does the Bible mean to you? Not much? If you do not care much for the Bible you come under one of the following classifications: you are a backslider, you are a worldling, or you are unsaved. It would be rather mean of a young man to refuse to open the letters of his avowed love, after he has professed to love her so much. Yet God in His providence has given us a message far more important which most people today treat with an unpardonable insolence. Possibly you who read the Bible think rather well of yourself; but why do you read the

³²While the *Roane County Banner* is no longer in publication, Cox has retained many of the carbon copies of his submissions. The author has read through many of these articles and has also traveled to the Tennessee archives building in Nashville in hope of locating the articles as they originally appeared in the newspaper. Unfortunately, only a handful of articles were located on microfilm. The articles were not in good condition and, consequently, did not copy well. The content of one of the articles, however, has been reproduced in its entirety and is included in Appendix 4.

Bible? Is it that your soul may be fed, or that you may enjoy it for its superb quality? We should all do well to do some serious thinking along this line.³³

There is little question that these early writing efforts in Cox's teenage years were particularly formative with respect to his later written contributions to the field of homiletics.

Continuing Education and Early Occasions for Pastorates

After Cox graduated from high school he entered Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tennessee. Because the demands of college became increasingly burdensome, Cox gave up the writing of his weekly "Meditation" after his first one and a half years at Carson-Newman. There was also something else vying for his time while mid-way through his college studies—a call to serve as pastor of a small church near the campus.

The president of Carson-Newman, Dr. James T. Warren, wanted to recommend Cox to a larger church, but Cox didn't want to travel far from the school, so he accepted a call to pastor the Nance's Grove Baptist Church, a small church located near the town of New Market, just six miles from the school. Cox was ordained to the Gospel Ministry at the First Baptist Church in Jefferson City. His hometown pastor, the Reverend George Jarman of First Baptist in Kingston, preached Cox's ordination sermon. Cox does not recall any particular difficulties that occurred during his pastorate at Nance's Grove. His duties were split evenly between finishing his degree

³³James W. Cox, "A Meditation: The Christian and God's Word," *Roane County Banner* (Roane County, Tennessee, February 19, 1942), n. p. This article is reproduced in its entirety in Appendix 4.

at Carson-Newman and pastoring the small church. Cox served the church for about a year and a half from 1943 to 1944.

After graduating from Carson-Newman College in 1944, Cox moved to Louisville, Kentucky and enrolled at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary³⁴ to pursue a Master of Divinity degree. While at Southern Seminary, Cox met Elroy Lamb, mission pastor of a church supported by the First Baptist Church in Frankfort. Lamb asked Cox if he would come down to Frankfort and preach for him at the mission. Cox agreed and traveled to Frankfort for what he would later regard as a providential moment in his life.

When Cox arrived in Frankfort on Sunday afternoon, he was given the responsibility of transporting persons who would assist at the mission station. Among them was a young woman from First Baptist Church who volunteered her time to play the piano and sponsor a training union for the mission. Cox picked up the young woman, Patricia Parrent, and drove her that Sunday to the small mission. As it turned out, nobody showed up that day for her training union class. Consequently, Cox and Parrent spent the time sitting in the room, getting better acquainted with one another. Cox recalls his immediate impressions of Parrent that fateful day, "I said to myself right then, 'Well I hope that I get located somewhere close around here so I can see more of her.'"³⁵

³⁴Hereafter referred to as Southern Seminary.

³⁵James W. Cox, interview by author, tape recording, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 24 February 2004. Hereafter referred to as Interview 5.

Cox would see more of Parrent. Elroy Lamb later recommended Cox to serve as pastor of another mission of First Baptist Frankfort, a mission that would eventually become Memorial Baptist Church. This made it possible to see more of Parrent. The two saw each other often and, eventually, were married in 1951 while Cox was still working on his Doctor of Theology degree at Southern Seminary. Because they met at the mission in the economically downtrodden area of Frankfort, Patricia likes to say that Cox “met her in the slums.”³⁶

The second mission of First Baptist, Frankfort, was initially located in a former restaurant on Holmes Street in Frankfort. In 1945 it was organized into a church with one hundred charter members, The Memorial Baptist Church of Frankfort.³⁷ Cox served as the first pastor of the church from 1945-1954, while a student at Southern Seminary. As in his former pastorate at Nance’s Grove, there were no particular difficulties Cox faced while pastoring in Frankfort. He equally balanced his time pastoring at Memorial and studying at Southern Seminary.

After obtaining his Master of Divinity from Southern Seminary in 1947 Cox enrolled in doctoral studies, pursuing a Doctor of Theology degree in Old Testament studies. While in graduate studies, Cox became interested in researching the biblical teaching about “the Word of God” found in the Old Testament. He explains how his

³⁶Cox, Interview 5.

³⁷In 1995 Cox was invited back to Memorial Baptist Church to preach for the 50-year anniversary of the church. The sermon that Cox preached is analyzed in Chapter 6 of this paper, “Sermonic Analysis.”

growing interest in this topic led to the writing of his dissertation, “The Word of God in the Old Testament”:

The conviction that there is a God who speaks is the basis of mortal hope in a purposive, transcendent goal for humanity and of an experiential knowledge of the nature of the Deity. It was the aim of the present study to delineate this conviction insofar as it is illustrated in the Old Testament. The fascination of this subject transpired as Dr. Dale Moody enthusiastically guided a seminar group on excursions into various areas of Old Testament thought. Personal discussion with Dr. Moody led to a growing conviction of the possible fruitfulness of the subject in further study and to an intensified desire to delve into the pages of the Old Testament in order that the subject might yield its fruit.³⁸

Cox’s dissertation, 131 pages long, breaks down into five sections: (1) The Problem and the Development of the Thesis, (2) The Prophetic Word, (3) The Written Word, (4) The Creative Word, and (5) The Hypostatized Word. In his dissertation, Cox aims to demonstrate how the God of the Old Testament reveals himself to his creation.

God reveals Himself, Cox argues, by speaking through three types of persons: the *seer*, who often received God’s word without any kind of emotional struggle, such as in a dream or vision; the *nabi*, who often spoke for God in connection to a heightened, emotional experience with Him, such as the Prophet Elijah’s experiences; and the *writing prophet*, such as Isaiah, who announced the coming judgment of God upon a disobedient nation.

In time, the word of God culminates into a written form that is transferred from one generation to the next. This written word of God is inevitable as preceding generations sought to preserve the spoken utterances and inspirations of God. The

³⁸James W. Cox, “The Doctrine of the Word of God in the Old Testament” (Th.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1953), preface.

written word also becomes authoritative and serves as a canon against which are measured other persons who claim to speak for God.

Whether coming to humankind as the living word or the written word, however, God's word is creative in history and nature. God's word achieves a specific, creative purpose. The universe, for example, is created by the word of God, the God who continues to preserve creation for the purposes of His will. Unlike extra-biblical accounts of God's relation to nature, God's word in the Bible is both consistently moral and redemptive in purpose.

Finally, the word of God, Cox argues, is regarded in the Bible as a form of hypostasis. That is, there is a sense in which the form of God's word is personified in the Old Testament, serving as a "living extension" of the personality of God. This revelation of God is meant to comfort His creation, providing a means by which humankind may be encouraged by the unfolding revelation of God's purposes for them.

Marriage and Children

As previously mentioned, Cox married the former Patricia Parrent on August 4, 1951.³⁹ Patricia was born in Frankfort on November 15, 1927. She and her family were members of the First Baptist Church in Frankfort when Cox first met her while the two worked together at the aforementioned mission. Patricia obtained the Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Kentucky. Her brother, Allan Parrent, grew to

³⁹Patricia Parrent has no middle name.

become a professor for a number of years at the Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia.⁴⁰

Cox would later dedicate volume 2 of his *The Twentieth Century Pulpit* to Patricia's parents, Lillian Mitchell Parrent and Overton Crockett Parrent. Interestingly, Patricia's father, Overton Crockett Parrent, was a direct descendant of Colonel Anthony Crockett of Revolutionary War fame. Crockett was an ancestor of the legendary Davy Crockett.

Cox and Patricia would eventually raise two sons, David Allan, born April 29, 1957 and Kenneth Mitchell, born February 23, 1961. David would go on to obtain the Bachelor of Arts degree from Harvard University and graduate from medical school at Duke University. He would eventually marry the former Emily Norman, whose father, Ralph Norman, served as editor of the journal, *Soundings*, for a number of years.⁴¹ Kenneth Mitchell would obtain the Bachelor of Arts degree from Duke University and study law at Vanderbilt University, obtaining the J. D. degree. He would marry the former Christy York in Louisville, Kentucky.⁴²

Cox would later include his family on some of his writing projects. Patricia would help him do some editing for *The Twentieth Century Pulpit*, Vol. II and his son

⁴⁰Dr. Allan Parrent presently serves as Interim Dean of the School of Theology at The University of the South in Sewanne, Tennessee.

⁴¹David Allan Cox is currently a practicing cardiologist in Knoxville.

⁴²Kenneth Mitchell Cox is currently employed as Corporate Counsel for Papa John's Pizza International, Inc.

Kenneth would assist Cox with several editions of *The Minister's Manual*. Kenneth would help by compiling information for the section treating historical, cultural, and religious anniversaries.

Last Pastorate and Beginning of Teaching Career

After Cox obtained his Doctor of Theology degree in 1953, he became aware of a few churches in East Tennessee that were without pastors. One particular church, Central Baptist, was located in Johnson City, Tennessee. Cox had never been to Johnson City, but remembered his mother telling him about attending a school there while furthering her education as a high school teacher.

Upon the recommendation of Charles Trentham, pastor of Knoxville's First Baptist Church, Cox traveled to Johnson City and eventually accepted a call to become the pastor of Central Baptist Church. He served as pastor of the church from 1954-1959.⁴³ A worship bulletin from January 22, 1956 lists total Sunday School attendance at the church at 908 and total Training Union attendance at 234.⁴⁴

Cox's predecessor at the church, W. R. Rigell, left Central Baptist to teach at East Tennessee State University. Over the years, Rigell became a good friend of Cox's, supporting his ministry and providing wise counsel when asked. Cox gratefully states,

⁴³Four sermons Cox preached at Central Baptist Church are analyzed in Chapter 6 of this paper, "Sermonic Analysis."

⁴⁴This worship bulletin was obtained by the author from Cox for the purpose of research. It remains in Cox's possession.

“I couldn’t have had a better predecessor than I had in Dr. W. R. Rigell.”⁴⁵ While Cox had no outstanding difficulties at the church, he remembers one particular instance when Rigell and his wife graciously helped him deal with a disgruntled church secretary by taking her out and calmly reasoning with her.

While at Central Baptist, Cox recalls the opportunity he had one day to meet Ralph Cargille. Cargille’s father was one of the founders of Central Baptist Church and his sister was a member during Cox’s pastorate. Cargille had worked for Thomas Edison, a fact which fascinated Cox given his youthful interests in chemical science.⁴⁶ Cargille went on to found R. P. Cargill Laboratories in New Jersey. Though Cox met him just once, Cargille made quite an impression on him: “He kind of made me feel that old nostalgia about my early scientific chemistry interests,” Cox recalls.⁴⁷

Cox enjoyed pastoring at Central Baptist, but some events happened in 1958 that would result in his eventual change of careers. After preaching a revival for a friend at Kingsport Tennessee, his friend wrote to Southern Seminary and recommended that Cox be considered for the faculty. In addition, Eric Rust, who was lecturing at East Tennessee State University preached once for Cox at Central Baptist Church. Rust was impressed with Cox’s pastoral library at the church and also recommended Cox to the faculty of Southern Seminary.

⁴⁵Cox, Interview 5.

⁴⁶Coincidentally, one of Cargille’s daughters married eminent Old Testament theologian James Alvin Sanders.

⁴⁷Cox, Interview 3.

Cox was not looking to leave the pastorate. In fact, 1958 was not considered by many to be a very good year to begin teaching at Southern Seminary. An ongoing power struggle between the faculty and the administration of the seminary had recently culminated in the resignations of thirteen professors from the school of theology.⁴⁸

In time, however, Cox sensed that the Lord was calling him to begin a teaching career at the school. Patricia, on the other hand, was not so sure. Cox recalls, “My wife loved the pastorate. If you left it up to her, she would have said, ‘Let’s stay right here.’”⁴⁹ The two eventually trusted that the Lord was leading them to move to Louisville, Kentucky where Cox would begin teaching in August 1959 as Associate Professor of Preaching.

Shortly after agreeing to teach at Southern Seminary, Cox discovered that two persons in the homiletics department would be leaving. Jesse Burton Weatherspoon would be going to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Vernon Latrelle Stanfield was leaving for New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.⁵⁰ Cox was particularly disheartened to learn that Stanfield would be leaving. He recalls, “I suppose if I had known that Dr. Stanfield was not going to be here . . . I might not have come.”⁵¹ Cox’s reasoning was twofold. For one, he did not want anyone to think

⁴⁸See Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 56-57.

⁴⁹Cox, Interview 5.

⁵⁰Neither Weatherspoon nor Stanfield, however, was among the thirteen professors who resigned during the aforementioned controversy in 1958.

⁵¹Cox, Interview 4.

that he was “replacing” Stanfield.⁵² Secondly, Cox was not prepared for the deluge of work created by the outgoing professors. While Nolan Patrick Howington had taught in the preaching department, Howington’s area of specialty was Christian ethics. Consequently, the only other help to Cox that first year was a PhD student who taught Cox’s methodology of preaching. Nevertheless, Cox busily began a teaching career at Southern Seminary that would eventually span over four decades and result in the publications or translations of close to sixty books.⁵³

Conclusion

Cox’s early life is a fascinating demonstration of the providential hand of God, working through the events of time to bring Cox to a position of influence among preachers and preaching. From an early age, Cox learned from his parents both the importance of pursuing academic excellence and the virtue of Christian deportment. Early writings such as his weekly “Meditation” undoubtedly prepared Cox for the rigorous demands and deadlines that would accompany his future contributions to the field of homiletics. His experience of three pastorates also shaped the counsel he would give in his preaching texts and in his classroom lectures.

⁵²While Stanfield was not among the thirteen professors who resigned, Cox believes that Stanfield may have sympathized with the thirteen. Consequently, Cox feared others might wrongly perceive that he had come to replace Stanfield. He recalls joining Crescent Hill Baptist Church in 1959 (Stanfield’s former church) and sensing this feeling among some of the membership.

⁵³The reader is referred to the appendices for more information concerning the biography of Cox’s academic career. See the “Time Line” where the author provides a chronological account of significant events of Cox’s life from birth to the present, and “Preaching Engagements” where the author has listed significant occasions for Cox’s pulpit supply.

One can hardly think of Cox without wondering how he has been able to teach in one school for such a long period of time, especially given the inevitable periods of stifling bureaucracy and the academic tension that faces any institution of higher learning. Perhaps the context of the seminary in 1958-1959 strengthened Cox by equipping him with a firm resolve to avoid future academic strife and remain forever focused upon the more important task of training students to preach. Remarks about his “staying power” are instructive:

Well I am grateful for the opportunity for staying here and teaching. I have not gotten into the politics of the situation and there are people that I pray for every day that I do not agree with. When I look at the history of Christianity, it is a mixed bag; something to think about. You look at Luther. We owe so much to Luther, but Luther was not a perfect man and there were some aspects to what he did that could have been done better, but he made his contribution. I think of what God did with the cross. It is the same God. There are things on both sides—or on all three or four sides—of so many issues that have faults, but I think that the grace and power of God and God’s ultimate working out of things should give us great hope.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Cox, Interview 4.

CHAPTER 3

WRITTEN HOMILETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Introduction

This chapter offers an overview Cox's major homiletical writings. As Cox has written prolifically, not all published contributions will be surveyed. Books and major homiletical articles are the focus of this chapter. Lesser or repetitive articles are included in the bibliography at the conclusion of this chapter where the reader will find this writer's attempt to construct a comprehensive index of Cox's writings. Because the chapter is meant to survey Cox's publications, the chapter is descriptive in nature. For critical comments concerning Cox's major homiletical books, the reader is referred to chapter seven of this paper "Cox Among His Colleagues."

Learning to Speak Effectively

Cox's first book is a short text on communication. *Learning to Speak Effectively* was first published in London by Hodder & Stoughton in 1966 and then republished by Baker in 1974.¹ To write this book, Cox located a small cell on the third floor of the library at Southern Seminary and disciplined himself to write for a certain

¹James W. Cox, *Learning to Speak Effectively* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966).

period of time each day.² On the cover of the book is a picture of Cox seated at a desk, holding his glasses in one hand. The picture was taken by Douglas McCall, son of then Seminary President Duke McCall. Cox said that he had simply forwarded the picture to Hodder & Stoughton, thinking they may want to use it, but had no idea they would put it on the cover of the book.³

The editors write on the back of the book: "This book is invaluable for all who are called upon to speak in public, and especially for clergy and ministers."⁴ Also on the back of the book is an endorsement from D. W. Cleverley Ford, Director of the College of Preachers. He writes: "Having taught preaching to over a thousand clergy in the last six years, I do not hesitate to say that I should be happy to see my students go away from the training course with this book in their bag. It is first class."

Stephen F. Winward, with whom Cox would later compile selections for the *Minister's Worship Manual*,⁵ writes the foreword for the book. Noting that communicators of various professions will find the book helpful, Winward writes:

²James W. Cox, interview by author, tape recording, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 10 February 2000. Hereafter referred to as Interview 1.

³Ibid.

⁴Due to the nature of this particular chapter, the writer will footnote only those citations that are not clearly documented in the body of the text. References to statements made on book jackets, for example, will not be footnoted as the reader can infer the location of such references from the text. Neither will general content from Cox's writings be footnoted as such documentation would become burdensome and obviously extraneous. Direct quotations from the writings, however, will continue to be documented by footnote.

⁵ Ernest A. Payne, Stephen F. Winward, and James W. Cox, eds., *Minister's Worship Manual* (New York: World, 1969).

“[Cox’s] book can be of help to all who speak in public, for he has no one type of speech in mind. The rules he expounds apply to the teacher in class, the preacher in church, the politician in his constituency, the executive in the boardroom, the bridegroom at his wedding reception, the chairman at the annual business meeting.”⁶

The book is very short; 62 pages in all, including three appendices. It breaks down into ten “rules” for effective speaking, each rule representing what amounts to a chapter each, though the word “chapter” is not used. The rules are as follows: (1) Have Something to Say, (2) Talk about the Wants and Needs of Your Audience, (3) Organize Your Thoughts, (4) Start in an Interesting Way, (5) Use a Variety of Supporting Material, (6) Make a Pointed Conclusion, (7) Simplify Your Sentences and Your Language, (8) Identify with Your Audience, (9) Know what You will Say, and (10) Be Alive when You Speak.

Cox writes that these ten rules cover all kinds of public speech. He adds: “I am convinced that if you follow these rules you will be liberated and soon on your way towards success as a speaker, whether you make a political speech, address a club meeting, talk to a group of salesmen, give a devotional talk, teach a Sunday school class, or preach a sermon.”⁷

Much of the advice offered in this text is indicative of Cox’s homiletical philosophy and method. For example, Cox stresses the importance of having unity and order in speeches, characteristic of his deductive approach to preaching. With respect

⁶Cox, *Learning to Speak Effectively*, “Foreword,” n. p.

⁷Ibid., 13-14.

to conclusions, he writes: “Plan your speech so that it will both conclude and seem to conclude at the right moment,” and, “Do not sit down before you have told your listeners what you want them to do.”⁸

In the section entitled, “Rule Eight: Identify with Your Audience,” Cox recounts an interesting discussion he had with Karl Barth’s son, Markus Barth, at Union Theological Seminary. Cox asked Markus about his father’s use of first person pronouns in his sermons to prisoners in Basle, Switzerland. Cox was struck by the theologian’s frequent use of the words “we” and “our” in his sermons as well as the fact that each sermon began with the phrase “My dear brothers and sisters.” The approach helped Barth identify with his audience. Markus told Cox that when Barth was done preaching, the prisoners often wanted to see him and talk with him further.⁹

The book concludes with three appendices. Appendix A is entitled “A Check-List for Speeches,” which includes questions to ask of the finished speech. Questions include “Have you eliminated all traces of arrogance or of ‘holier-than-thou’ attitudes?” and “Does the introduction lead logically into the main discussion?”¹⁰ The second appendix is entitled “Suggestions for Special Types of Speech.” Here Cox provides counsel for speeches ranging anywhere from simple introductions to acceptance speeches, to dinner speeches, and to sermons.

Concerning the category of sermons, Cox offers advice such as “Twenty to

⁸Ibid., 33.

⁹Ibid., 39. See also 61 n. 2.

¹⁰Ibid., 50.

thirty minutes is a tolerable length for most sermons” and “Avoid the ‘ministerial tone.’”¹¹ He also refers the reader to a number of books containing “helpful definitions and distinctions” to discover how sermons are different from other forms of public address. These books include P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*; John Knox, *The Integrity of Preaching*; Dietrich Ritschl, *A Theology of Proclamation*; Ronald Sleeth, *The Proclamation of the Word*. Cox adds that the reader should “especially” consider Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I, pt. 2 and will find “unusual value” in James D. Smart, *The Interpretation of Scripture* and Paul Scherer, *The Word God Sent*.

The book concludes with Appendix C which is entitled “The Speaker’s Voice.” Cox believes that speakers may speak adequately with their natural voices and recommends ways by which they may improve. These ways include diaphragmatic breathing, clear diction, and proper inflection. Cox also recommends the use of a tape recorder that the speaker may discover his strengths and weaknesses.

Preaching Texts and Book of Sermons

Cox has written two main preaching texts. The first, *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, was published in 1976 by Abingdon. The second, *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons*, was published in 1985 by Harper & Row. It was revised in 1993 by Harper Collins and has been published and used by Seminary Extension of the Southern Baptist Seminaries. This section provides an overview of these two main homiletical textbooks. After a brief

¹¹Ibid., 54.

analysis of the structure and content of each chapter, some attention will be given to the various persons cited, quoted, or recommended as worthy of consideration.¹² Cox also authored a study guide on preaching entitled *Contemporary Christian Preaching: Study Guide*. This guide was published in 1988 by The Seminary External Education Division of the Southern Baptist Seminaries. Finally, this section includes an overview of a book of original sermons by Cox. The book is entitled *Surprised by God, Interpreting God's Gifts of Life and Courage for Living*. It was published in 1979 by Broadman.

A Guide to Biblical Preaching

This textbook continues to be utilized by homiletical students across the country.¹³ Cox would like to believe that the book's popularity is owing to its succinct presentation of homiletical essentials, but admits that it is more likely the book's brevity that draws the attraction of teachers and students.¹⁴ The text *is* rather small; 142 pages of very readable print bound together in a book closer in size to an issue of *Reader's Digest* than the size of most homiletical textbooks. To be sure, however, the text is

¹²This writer presupposes that Cox's favorable mention of particular names provides the reader with helpful insights into Cox's own homiletical contributions by considering those who have shaped or influenced his philosophy and method. For this reason, this chapter will include the mention of certain names cited, referenced, or quoted by Cox. For an in-depth treatment of Cox's hermeneutics and homiletical method as informed from the writings overviewed in this section, see chapters 4 and 5 of this paper.

¹³James W. Cox, *A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975).

¹⁴Cox, Interview 1.

merely a “Guide” to biblical preaching, certainly not intended to be the final word on homiletics.

The back of the book boasts several endorsements by different periodicals. *The Clergy Journal* writes: “James W. Cox has superbly displayed the art of sermon writing and preaching One assumes that seminarians will be required to read Cox’s book. Experienced preachers somehow ought to be required to read it, too.” The *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* writes that Cox’s book is one of “exceptional quality and usefulness.” *Christianity Today* refers to it as “both comprehensive and concise . . . packed with specific helps.” A reviewer for *Review and Expositor* asserts: “The distinguishing marks of this work are maturity, brevity, and practicality . . . if I could have only one book on the subject, this would be my choice.” Finally, *Christian Ministry* writes: “An extremely practical ‘how-to’ book and one that every preacher ought to read through non-stop A worthwhile addition to your professional library.”

In the “Preface and Acknowledgments” section of the book, Cox acknowledges his professional indebtedness to a number of persons who influenced his thought in this text. While mentioning no one in particular, Cox states that several “respected mentors” helped shape his views. Among these, of course, are the persons he favorably footnotes throughout his text. In addition, Cox writes that these mentors include “professors and colleagues in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, first of all, and also those in Union Seminary, Princeton Seminary, the University of Zurich,

and the Baptist Seminary of Rüslikon-Zurich, Switzerland.”¹⁵

The book breaks down into five chapters with an average of about twenty pages per chapter. The brief introduction, “How to Use This Book,” suggests practical ways that the reader may gain the most from his reading. Cox recommends at least two readings; the first to discover how the book resonates with the way the reader is currently preaching and the second with a view toward a more in-depth analysis of sections of the book that appeal to the reader.

Chapter 1, “What is Biblical Preaching,” contains material found in an article bearing the same title that Cox wrote two years earlier for an issue of *Proclaim* magazine.¹⁶ The chapter contains two main divisions: (1) Why Preach from the Bible, and (2) How to Preach from the Bible. A thoughtful scan of this chapter reveals those who have influenced Cox and those whom he favorably cites. He writes, for example, how he was influenced in his youth by E. Y. Mullins’ *Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* and Harry Emerson Fosdick’s *Guide to Understanding the Bible*. Cox also favorably cites a considerable amount of material from one of James T. Cleland’s sermons and recommends that the reader look at the sermons of Eduard Schweizer in *God’s Inescapable Nearness* and Karl Barth in *Deliverance to the Captives*. From these last two, Cox believes the reader will learn “how to let the transforming spirit of God come to expression through the text from the very beginning.”¹⁷

¹⁵Cox, *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, “Preface and Acknowledgments,” no page number.

¹⁶James W. Cox, “What is Biblical Preaching?” *Proclaim* (July 1975): 35-39.

¹⁷Cox, *A Guide*, 26.

Chapter 2, "Using Texts," is the shortest chapter in the book. In just eight pages, Cox treats the following four areas: (1) The Purpose of a Text, (2) Types of Texts, (3) Objections to Texts, and (4) Defense of Texts. Cox makes reference to a "breathtaking homiletical performance" by Rev. D. J. McDowell in a printed sermon that used the entire Bible as the text for a sermon on Jesus Christ.¹⁸ As "excellent examples" of biblical character preaching, Cox recommends the reader consider Alexander Whyte's *Bible Characters* as well as volumes by Clarence E. Macartney and Clovis Chappell.¹⁹ Furthermore, Cox recommends that the reader consider the sermons of Helmut Thielicke and Walter Lüthi in order to discover messages that are "filled with drama and vitality."²⁰

Like the first chapter, Chapter 3, "Mining the Scriptural Treasures," contains information previously published by Cox in the earlier *Proclaim* article.²¹ The chapter is comprised of two sections: (1) "Preparing for the Future," where Cox suggests ways in which the preacher may prepare his sermons as far ahead as possible, and (2) "Excavating the Text," where Cox treats the matter of biblical interpretation. In this second section, Cox suggests fourteen questions to ask when interpreting a passage of Scripture.²² "Some of these questions," Cox writes later in *Preaching*, "were suggested

¹⁸Ibid., 32.

¹⁹Ibid., 33.

²⁰Ibid., 37.

²¹See above.

²²See chapter 4 of this paper, "Hermeneutics," where each of these questions is examined in some detail.

in classroom lectures of Professor Paul Scherer, by James Black in his *Mystery of Preaching*, by Harry Emerson Fosdick in a symposium led by Charles McGlon, “How I Prepare My Sermons,” and by Halford Luccock in his *In the Minister’s Workshop*.”²³

Chapter 4, “The Anatomy of the Sermon,” is the longest chapter of the text. This chapter treats how the sermon is composed and is divided into three logical sections: (1) The Beginning, (2) The Middle, and (3) The End. Concerning introductions, Cox suggests thoughtful opening sentences to engage the hearer. Examples are provided by James S. Stewart, Ralph W. Sockman, Robert W. McCracken, Halford E. Luccock, John S. Bonnell, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Ernest T. Campbell, and Eduard Schweizer. In the second section of this chapter, Cox favorably cites H. Grady Davis to support his belief that the sermon must have a main idea or controlling purpose, an idea that Cox usually refers to as the “Central Idea.” Many sermon outlines are provided throughout the chapter; some by Cox and others by Barth, Broadus, Fosdick, Stewart, W.E. Sangster, C. Roy Angell, George A. Buttrick, Merrill R. Abbey, and James Cleland. Cox also cites from Andrew Blackwood’s text, *The Preparation of Sermons*.

The last chapter is entitled “Style and Illustration.” Here Cox treats three main areas: (1) Points and Paragraphs, (2) Sentences, and (3) Words. Cox refers to the “remarkable” ability of George W. Truett to use the rhetorical device of repetition and

²³James W. Cox, *Preaching, A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons* (Nashville: Seminary Extension, n. d.), 296 n. 9. Hereafter referred to as *Preaching*.

also cites a portion of a sermon by Phillips Brooks as an example.²⁴ Cox also regards the use of simile by Fulton J. Sheen as “impressive.”²⁵ Concerning the use of sentences in the sermon, Cox discusses three “targets” to keep in mind: Clarity, Interest, and Impressiveness. Cox also treats word usage and transitions. At the conclusion of this chapter, Cox provides an “Epilogue,” wherein he suggests five actions the reader should take that “will give the contents of this book its maximum value:”²⁶ (1) Read widely, (2) Analyze what you read, (3) Imitate, (4) Practice, and (5) Go public. In this last action, Cox quotes “an old saying.” He writes: “The only way to learn to preach is by preaching.”²⁷

The text concludes with three appendices. The first, Appendix A, is entitled, “Examples of Sermon Preliminaries.”²⁸ Here Cox provides four examples of sermons broken down by title, lesson, text, central idea, general end, and specific intent. For some of this content, Cox acknowledges his indebtedness to James Cleland, Dean of the Chapel and Professor of Homiletics at Duke Divinity School. In the preface of the text, Cox writes: “His [Cleland’s] sermon adaptations of the concepts of General End and Specific Intent put forth by Alan Monroe in his *Principles and Types of Speech* are

²⁴Cox, *A Guide*, 93.

²⁵Ibid., 97.

²⁶Ibid., 113.

²⁷Ibid., 115.

²⁸See Appendix 2 of this paper for a reproduction.

reflected” in Appendix A.²⁹

Appendix B, “Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of The Bible,” contains findings of the Ecumenical Study Conference held at Wadham College, Oxford, June-July, 1949. Cox recommends these principles as “helpful for review.”³⁰ Members of the conference include C.H. Dodd, W. Eichrodt, and W. Schweitzer.³¹

Appendix C is entitled, “Lectionary for the Christian Year.” It includes a three year lectionary Cox obtained from *The Worship Book—Services and Hymns*. Cox recommends the option of using a lectionary as a way of regularly preaching through the Bible. In his first pastorate after seminary, Cox “discovered the value of a lectionary.”³² He explains: “Partly to take the pain out of getting a text for at least one sermon each Sunday and partly as a discipline to compel myself to come to grips with certain scripture that I might otherwise unconsciously avoid, I turned to the lectionaries for help.”³³ He adds: “This did not become my exclusive method, yet I used it often enough and long enough to prove its value.”³⁴

²⁹Cox, *A Guide*, “Preface and Acknowledgements,” no page number.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 12.

³¹*Ibid.*, 127-28. See also Appendix 3 of this paper for a reproduction.

³²Cox, *A Guide*, 43.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Ibid.*

Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons

As the title suggests, this text is meant to be a more in-depth treatment of the preparation and delivery of sermons than Cox's former text. With a sum total of 329 pages, the text is more than twice the size of *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*. The book divides into five main sections: 1) The Importance of Preaching, 2) The Context of Preaching, 3) The Content of Sermons, 4) The Making of Sermons, and 5) The Delivery of Sermons.

The book jacket from the 1993 Harper Collins publication promises that the text "is remarkable for its comprehensiveness, covering not only the sermons from the central idea (the statement of emergent truth) to presentation, but also different homiletic styles." The book, originally published in 1985, made *Preaching* magazine's "Ten Recent Books Every Preacher Should Read."³⁵

Cox dedicates the book to his family. He writes: "To my sons, David Allan Cox and Kenneth Mitchell Cox, whose genuine interest, unfailing encouragement, and sound advice have added to my joy in writing this book . . . And to my wife, Patricia Parrent Cox, who has lovingly contributed her special affirmation and inspiration to this project and to every aspect of my ministry."³⁶

In the preface, Cox explains that two particular individuals urged him to write the book, namely Charles L. Wallis, former editor of *Pulpit Digest* and *The Ministers*

³⁵Michael Dudit, ed., "Ten Recent Books Every Preacher Should Read," *Preaching* (January-February, 1987): 6.

³⁶Cox, *Preaching*, Dedication Page.

Manual, and John Shopp, editor at Harper Publishers in San Francisco. Cox explains that the text “would have no doubt appeared earlier, except for the unexpected death of Mr. Wallis, whose editorial duties [with *Pulpit Digest*] I took over and added to my already full schedule.”³⁷ Cox also acknowledges his indebtedness to the influence of former homileticians and texts, noting in particular John A. Broadus, Arthur E. Phillips, and James T. Cleland.

The first section of the book, “The Importance of Preaching,” consists of just two chapters: 1) The Nature of Preaching, and 2) The Preacher’s Authority. These two chapters are foundational to Cox’s homiletical philosophy and methodology. The first chapter treats what Cox believes are four elements that define the nature of preaching. These elements are proclamation, witness, teaching, and prophesying.³⁸ In the second chapter, Cox treats the matter of the preacher’s authority. Cox believes that the preacher’s sources of authority include a divine call, ordination, education, experience, character, and the biblical text. The Holy Spirit is set apart as a “special authority.” Additional remarks include Cox’s beliefs that authority may be conferred or imposed, authority may be earned, and authority can be lost. Throughout the first section of the book, Cox quotes or cites from a wide array of scholars. Among them are Walter Eichrodt, H. H. Rowley, Phillips Brooks, Charles Spurgeon, Karl Barth, Helmut Thielicke, John Baillie and Dale Moody.

³⁷Ibid., ix-x.

³⁸See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for a fuller discussion of these four elements.

The second section, “The Context of Preaching,” includes the following three chapters: The Cultural Context, The Worship Context, and The Sharing of Meaning. These three chapters, also foundational to Cox’s homiletical method, treat matters such as the culture’s expectations of ministers and how the public worship service provides the occasion for preaching. In chapter four of this section, “The Sharing of Meaning,” Cox enjoins the reader to preach in such a way as to engage hearers in the message. While preaching is strictly defined as *monologue* in nature, the preacher should, nevertheless, strive for *dialogue* through what Cox terms “mutual respect.” By this Cox means that the preacher should strive for ways he may identify with the hearer.³⁹ This second section contains quotations or citations from scholars including Paul Tillich, William Temple, Yngve Brilioth, Karl Barth, Paul Scherer, P. T. Forsyth, Karl Rahner, Eduard Schweizer, John Killinger, and Don Aycock.

The third section, “The Content of Sermons,” introduces the more practical material of the book. This section is divided into the following three chapters: The Text, The Emergent Truth, and The Aim.

In chapter 6, “The Text,” Cox treats the matters of text selection and interpretation. He offers several recommendations concerning the selection of particular texts. These recommendations include: avoid spurious texts, do not misunderstand the text, do not be bound by authorized interpretations, avoid allegorical interpretations, and use typological interpretation very carefully. Cox stresses the importance of what he calls “executing the text.” By this he means the application of

³⁹Cox, *Preaching*, 56.

the text once the preacher has explained its meaning. He writes: “It is not nearly so important that the text should get explained as that it should get carried out.”⁴⁰ He explains:

I recall a conversation with Professor Gerhard Ebeling at the Hermeneutical Institute in Zurich. We talked about his play on two German words—*auslegung* (“exposition”) and *ausführung* (“execution”)—as a most important distinction for preaching. In one of his essays he uses the analogy of the judge and the accused. What matters to the person standing before the judge is how the judge applies the law in his case, not the judge’s explanation of it, though, in fact, the judge may deem it wise and necessary to explain the law before pronouncing the sentence. The most important thing that could happen when I speak about a text or read or hear a discussion of one is this: God may be speaking to me or to those who hear me through the text.⁴¹

Cox also provides in this chapter the fourteen questions to aid text interpretation that he provides in *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*.⁴²

In chapter 7, “The Emergent Truth,” Cox introduces his concept of the “central idea.” The central idea is the “theologically shaped statement” which most homileticians refer to as the proposition. This idea consists of both a subject and a predicate. The subject is the main topic of the message and the predicate elaborates upon the subject, demonstrating the relevance of the topic. Cox writes about sources, themes, and forms of the central idea, providing examples derived from the text in Joshua 24:16-34. Also included in this chapter are several examples of central ideas as provided by various preachers of different backgrounds and time periods. In addition to

⁴⁰Ibid., 69.

⁴¹Ibid., 69-70.

⁴²*A Guide*, 49-58. See also chapter 4 of this paper, “Hermeneutics,” where each of these questions is examined in fuller detail.

their clarity, Cox adds that these statements “are promising of interesting or significant discussion to follow.”⁴³ Cox then provides examples from the following preachers: Robert South, F. V. Reinhard, Austin Phelps, Thomas Chalmers, Horace Bushnell, Nathaniel Emmons, D. M. Baillie, Harry Emerson Fosdick, G. Earl Guinn, J. Wallace Hamilton, Wayne E. Oates, Norman Vincent Peale, John A. T. Robinson, Robert Schuller, Paul Tillich, and John Claypool.

Chapter 8, “The Aim,” concerns the purpose of preaching. Cox delineates six different “aims” of preaching and discusses each one in some detail. These six aims are imbedded in the following types of preaching: evangelistic, expository, doctrinal, ethical, pastoral, and devotional. Through each one of these aims, the hearer will discover the relevance of the text as demonstrated by the preacher. The preacher, then, has “something definite to aim at: a person to be saved, a text to be explained, a doctrine to be taught, a conscience to be guided, a heart to be comforted, or a worshiper to be met with God.”⁴⁴

In addition to the names already mentioned above, Cox quotes or cites a number of other scholars in this section. Among these scholars are included Claus Westermann, Krister Stendahl, James Sanders, Paul W. Hoon, Charles Reynolds Brown, William James, Dietrich Ritschl, Leander Keck, Fred Craddock, Donald G. Miller, James Stewart, John Dewey, Peter Brunner, Robert J. McCracken, Horton Davies, and Richard Baxter.

⁴³Cox, *Preaching*, 89.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 94.

Section four, "The Making of Sermons," is predictably the largest and most practical section of material in the book. Here Cox provides nine chapters treating the crafting of the sermon. These chapters, nine through seventeen, cover topics such as the preparation of sermons, sermon structure, introductions and conclusions, motivation, illustration, and style.

For general sermon preparation, Cox recommends wide reading, keeping abreast of changes in culture, continuing education, and the study of other sermons. Suggestions are also made concerning specific sermon preparation. Preachers, however, will best find their own methods of preparations by way of experimentation.

Concerning sermon structure, Cox recommends the following rules: (1) Let your structure grow out of the text or the central idea, (2) Let your sermon have unity, and (3) Let your sermon achieve suitable climax. Cox also recommends some "Suggestions for Structuring a Sermon." These principles are: (1) Do not always state your points or leading ideas before you discuss them, (2) Do not discuss too many points, (3) Avoid wordy statement of your points, (4) Do not overlap the points, (5) Do not make a main point of a sub-point, (6) Do not fail to group ideas that can be discussed under one head, (7) Avoid putting ideas under the wrong heading, and (8) Avoid artificial or strained alliteration. Cox then recommends four different ways of sermon outlining: the word outline, the phrase outline, the complete sentence outline, and a "directional sentence" outline as used by Clyde Fant.

In chapter 11, "Structural Options," Cox argues that the preacher will be better prepared to present his sermon once he determines which structural form the sermon should take. Cox believes sermons fall into main structural categories. In fact,

he notes that the sermons he compiled for his two volumes of *The Twentieth Century Pulpit* fall into such main categories. In this chapter, Cox discusses the following structural options: explaining—as in the explanation of a text or doctrine, affirming, reasoning, applying, questing, storytelling, and combining.

The structural option of “explaining” represents the kind of sermon most homileticsians refer to as expository sermons. Cox believes that expository sermons are differentiated from other types of messages primarily in that “expository sermons heavily emphasize the explaining of scripture.”⁴⁵ Cox explains that verse-by-verse expositional preaching has traditionally been termed a “homily,” though he notes that the word has come to take on a more general meaning. Cox believes that the sermons of Martin Luther, Karl Barth, and Eduard Schweizer “often demonstrate the best features of the homily.”⁴⁶

The other structural options are provided as equally viable ways to preach. The “affirming” sermon is that which proclaims assumed biblical truths without making any attempt to argue their validity. The “reasoning” sermon, on the other hand, attempts to argue the validity of the biblical truths presented in the message. “Applying” sermons are those which set forth a main principle derived from the text and then seek to demonstrate the relevance of the principle throughout the remainder of the message. The structural option of “question” is that which raises questions and then seeks to answer those questions throughout the sermon. “Storytelling” as its name

⁴⁵Ibid., 151.

⁴⁶Ibid., 152.

suggests is the sermon that is presented in narrative fashion. It may be either a biblical story or a contemporary story, but it must be contextually grounded in the biblical text. The “combining” sermon combines different modes of structural development. Cox writes about what James Cleland terms the “old expository” sermon. Aside from the introduction and conclusion, this approach consists of three main divisions: (1) exegesis—the “then” of the text, (2) exposition—the “always” of the text, and (3) application—the “now” of the text.

Sermon introductions should be related to life, anticipatory, and brief. The very first sentence of the sermon should be “promising.”⁴⁷ That is, the preacher should begin the message in an engaging manner by creating an interest in the sermon. The preacher will also be benefited by using a variety of different introductions in his sermons.

Conclusions are the place “where the hearer renders a verdict.”⁴⁸ Like introductions, conclusions should generally be brief. Furthermore, the preacher should “never introduce new material” in the conclusion.⁴⁹ Rather, he may summarize the main points, provide an illustration or story that encapsulates the whole of the message, or call for a decision of some sort.

While sermons need not have a title, Cox recommends that, “for the sake of the congregation that needs a peg on which to hang the preacher’s message, the effort to

⁴⁷Ibid., 182.

⁴⁸Ibid., 185.

⁴⁹Ibid., 187.

formulate a memorable title is time well spent.”⁵⁰ Sermon titles may focus on a need, create curiosity, raise a question, make a statement, focus on the text, or suggest a theme.

In chapter 14, “The Factors of Attention and Interest,” Cox explains how the preacher may effectively engage hearers in the preached sermon. The preacher accomplishes this working the following themes into his messages: matters of vital interest, the familiar, the unusual, mystery, suspense, conflict, humor, and the concrete.

Concerning the ethics of motivation, Cox writes that one may assume the following statements: (1) God uses us to communicate with others like us, (2) God uses the messengers’ humanity in the communication process, (3) God uses persons called and dedicated to the preaching task to speak for Him, and (4) God-called persons may make their efforts to communicate God’s message more effectively by their manner of communication. Cox warns that the preacher will be judged for whatever motives he may have for preaching, but then issues a “needed caveat.” He asserts: “Don’t permit your fear of doing the wrong thing cause you to do nothing to bring people to faith and obedience.”⁵¹ The preacher is expected to make “lawful and responsible” persuasion.⁵²

Cox next writes about sermon development and support. By development, Cox means the development of *thought*. There are four main methods of development: definition, explanation, restatement, and argument. By support Cox means the support

⁵⁰Ibid., 190.

⁵¹Ibid., 214.

⁵²Ibid., 215.

of *ideas* or what is more generally categorized as “illustration.” Support of ideas may take the form of *examples*—including general, specific, and hypothetical. They may also take the form of *illustrations*—such as simile, analogy, metaphor, or allegory. Illustrations may also include stories, such as anecdotes, parables, or fables. Finally, support of ideas may take the form of *testimony*. By testimony, Cox has in mind the use of particular individuals whose testimony “lends authority to the preacher’s word.”⁵³

Chapter 17, “Style,” has to do primarily with the preacher’s word choice. Cox urges clarity and simplicity. Effective style includes speaking in the first person singular, tailoring messages to the audience, honesty, use of the indicative mood over the imperative, skillful repetition, and economic use of words. In order to improve one’s style, Cox recommends wide reading, writing, studying other preachers, and critiquing one’s own sermons.

This lengthy section contains a number of quotations and citations. Several scholars have already been mentioned in the previous three sections. In addition to those names, Cox references persons such as Fulton Sheen, Robert J. McCracken, George W. Webber, John Watson (Ian Maclaren), Emil Brunner, St. Augustine, R. C. H. Lenski, Joseph Fort Newton, Harry A. Overstreet, Henry Ward Beecher, D. W. Cleverly Ford, George A. Buttrick, Andrew Blackwood, G. Paul Butler, Frederick Buechner, Arthur Edward Phillips, Clement Rogers, Rudolf Flesch, and Theodore Parker Ferris.

⁵³Ibid., 233.

The last section focuses upon the delivery of sermons. The section is comprised of the following chapter topics: the mastery of the message, the use of voice and body, and the preacher's personality.

Cox notes that there are at least four ways in which preachers may deliver their sermons: preaching without notes, preaching with notes, verbatim memorization, and reading from a manuscript. He then discusses the various strengths and weaknesses of each method. No one method is presented as the best method. In fact, the preacher is encouraged to experiment. Cox writes: "No preacher should quickly settle into a pattern of sermon delivery without exploring the different possibilities, so as to determine which method of delivery will maximize one's effectiveness."⁵⁴

As the title promises, chapter 19, "The Use of Voice and Body," explores various concepts about which the preacher should be aware in sermon delivery. Cox discusses the importance of good vocal pitch, quality, articulation, pronunciation, rate, phrasing, and volume. Bodily gestures should be natural, graceful, and varied.

The final chapter, "The Preacher's Personality," concerns the matter of the preacher's *ethos*. Cox discusses the importance of Bible reading and prayer. In addition, the preacher's character should develop as he grows in the disciplines of caring, working, believing, and obeying.

Like the previous sections of material, this last section contains references to several different scholars. Including references to scholars already made in previous

⁵⁴Ibid., 266.

sections, Cox references persons such as Virgil A. Anderson, Raymond W. Albright, Markus Barth, Henri J. M. Nouwen, Paul Tournier, and John Bunyan.

The book contains a helpful nine page bibliographic section entitled, "For Further Reading and Reference." The "Introduction" of this material is divided into books recommended in the areas of both rhetoric and homiletics. Among those listed, Cox notes with asterisks works that are "especially recommended." For rhetoric, Cox especially recommends Lane Cooper, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*. For homiletics, he especially recommends Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*; John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed., revised by Vernon L. Stanfield; James Cox, *The Twentieth Century Pulpit*, 2 vols.; H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching*; Clyde E. Fant and William M. Pinson, Jr., eds., *Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching*; H.H. Farmer, *The Servant of the Word*; P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*; and John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching*.

The remaining material of the bibliographic suggestions is divided into sections corresponding to the divisions of the book. Thus, Part I is entitled, "The Importance of Preaching." These works, then, correspond to what Cox wrote in chapters one and two. Here Cox especially recommends Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. Vol. I., and C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching*.

From Part II, "The Context of Preaching," Cox especially recommends David K. Berlo, *The Process of Communication*; George M. Gibson, *The Story of the Christian Year*; Wayne E. Oates, *The Psychology of Religion*; Eric C. Rust, *Science and Faith*; and Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life: A Systematic Theology*.

In Part III, “The Content of Sermons,” Cox especially recommends his edited collection, *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor’s Treasury*; Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching*; and James S. Stewart, *A Faith to Proclaim*.

Part IV, “The Making of Sermons,” contains the following special recommendations: Rudolf F. Flesch, *How to Write, Speak and Think More Effectively*; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Sermon: Its Homiletical Construction*; Alan H. Monroe, *Principles and Types of Speech*; A. E. Phillips, *Effective Speaking*; and Eduard Schweizer, *God’s Inescapable Nearness*.

The final section, Part V, “The Delivery of Sermons,” contains the following special recommendations by Cox: Virgil A. Anderson, *Training the Speaking Voice*; John Baillie, *A Diary of Private Prayer*; Daniel T. Niles, *The Preacher’s Calling to Be Servant*; and Dwight E. Stevenson and Charles F. Diehl, *Reaching People from the Pulpit*.

Contemporary Christian Preaching: Study Guide

This 81-page guide was written by Cox in connection with a course offered in the Seminary Extension Diploma Curriculum Series of the six Southern Baptist Seminaries.⁵⁵ Such courses are taught by way of correspondence or by classroom through a seminary extension center. The study guide is to be used alongside Cox’s

⁵⁵James W. Cox, *Contemporary Christian Preaching: Study Guide* (Nashville: Seminary Extension Department, 1988).

Preaching text. Consequently, students are instructed to read both the guide and Cox's *Preaching* in their entirety.

After a brief "Course Overview," the remainder of the guide divides into four units: (1) The Importance of Preaching, (2) The Context and Content of Sermons, (3) The Construction of Sermons, and (4) The Delivery of Sermons. These units are further divided into seventeen different lessons which roughly correspond to the chapter divisions in *Preaching*. Following each lesson are learning exercises and questions for discussion and personal reflection.

In the beginning pages of the guide, Cox discusses his approach. He writes, "I want to challenge you to find your own best way of preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ. An effective sermon does not have to be shouted, written out, loaded down with stories, memorized, read off, preached without notes, narrated—or done in any other specific way."⁵⁶ He add, "I have tried to draw the limits broadly, so preachers with varying talents can find room to preach with increasing competence, skill, and success."⁵⁷

The guide also contains a helpful five-page bibliography as well as recommended parallel readings in addition to Cox's *Preaching*. These parallel readings include: Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching*; H. Stephen Shoemaker, *Retelling the Biblical Story*; Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*; Ilion T. Jones, *The Principles and Practice of Preaching*; and Daniel T. Niles, *The Preacher's Calling to Be Servant*.

⁵⁶Ibid., 2.

⁵⁷Ibid.

Surprised by God, Interpreting God's Gifts of Life and Courage for Living

This book is a collection of seventeen sermons written by Cox, sermons that focus upon God's grace that are meant to encourage.⁵⁸ Cox writes: "The messages in this book were born of the faith that God is love and that this love, which we meet most meaningfully in Jesus Christ, will never let us go."⁵⁹

All of the sermons were actually preached before being published in book form. Some of the sermons were preached during chapel at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. One of the benefits of this book to students of Cox's homiletical contributions is that it reflects the various ways in which Cox believes sermons may be preached. The sermons also reflect Cox's high regard for the Bible in preaching. He writes: "I hope they reflect the seriousness with which I regard the written Word; they also reflect, I am sure, my shifting moods and what was uppermost in my mind when they were preached."⁶⁰

The book is 131 pages long and is dedicated to the memory of Cox's parents, Carrie Driskill Cox and Isham Monroe Cox, as well as Cox's brother, Isham Monroe Cox, Jr. Four of these sermons are analyzed in Chapter 5 of this paper where the writer treats Cox's homiletical method. Two others are treated more critically in Chapter 6 of this paper, "Sermon Analysis."

⁵⁸James W. Cox, *Surprised by God, Interpreting God's Gifts of Life and Courage for Living* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979). Hereafter referred to as *Surprised by God*.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, Preface.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

Edited and Translated Publications

In addition to the books he has authored, Cox has edited or translated a number of different works. This section overviews the most significant contributions. In some instances, special attention will be given to comments made by Cox as the editor of these works. The publications will be examined in chronological fashion.

The Spirit-Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel

This short book is part of a biblical series edited in 1968⁶¹ by John Reumann.⁶² It is a collection of two essays, originally written in German by Hans Windisch (1881-1935), Professor of New Testament at Leiden, Kiel, and Halle, Germany. The first essay, “The Five Johannine Paraclete Sayings” is a translation of “Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche,” first published in *Festgabe für Adolf Jülicher* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1927). The second essay, “Jesus and the Spirit in the Gospel of John” is a translation of “Jesus und der Geist im Johannesevangelium,” first published in *Amicitiae Corolla* (University of London Press, 1933). Cox suggested that these two essays be included in the series edited by Reumann and served as the translator for them.

The first essay treats the five “Paraclete Sayings” that occur in the Gospel of John (John 14:15-17; 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:5-11; and 16:12-15). In this essay

⁶¹Hans Windisch, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel*, trans. by James W. Cox (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968).

⁶²At the time of publication, Reumann was a professor at the Luthern Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and also the New Testament book review editor of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

Windisch argues that the Paraclete sayings are to be detached from their present context and understood first as pre-Christian references to a late Judaism angelic figure. The Apostle John, according to Windisch, later appropriates these Paraclete Sayings to the Holy Spirit.

In the second essay Windisch examines the Paraclete Sayings and the Synoptic gospel accounts of significant events in Jesus' life such as his baptism and his "breathing" the Holy Spirit on his disciples. Windisch then offers a presentation of Jesus as the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

Minister's Worship Manual

Not to be confused with Cox's later editions of *The Minister's Manual*, the *Minister's Worship Manual* was published in 1969 as a compilation of orders and prayers for worship.⁶³ Cox served as a compiler along with Ernest A. Payne and Stephen F. Winward. The manual was originally published in Great Britain in 1960 by The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland under the title *Orders and Prayers for Church Worship*. This 1969 publication, simultaneously published in Canada by Nelson, Foster & Scott Ltd., represents the first printing of an American edition of the manual.

The manual is comprised of eight sections: (1) Preparation for Worship, (2) The Order of Public Worship, (3) Material for Public Worship, (4) Sentences and Prayers for the Christian Year, (5) Sentences and Prayers for Special Occasions, (6)

⁶³Ernest A. Payne, Stephen F. Winward, and James W. Cox, eds., *Minister's Worship Manual* (New York: World, 1969).

Ordinances of the Church, (7) The Ministry of Visitation, and (8) Lectionary. As the title suggests, Cox, Payne, and Winward seek to provide worship leaders with helpful material for use in both public worship as well as related pastoral functions.

God's Inescapable Nearness

This book, edited in 1971, is largely the result of Cox's work during the summer of 1965 while on sabbatical leave from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.⁶⁴ Cox attended lectures at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, where he had the occasion to meet with Eduard Schweizer, Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Theology. In the Introduction of this book, Cox writes that Schweizer "regularly invited students into his home for fellowship and discussion, and he and his family were unusually kind to visiting scholars."⁶⁵ He adds: "On one occasion, I asked Dr. Schweizer if any of his sermons were in print. 'I have stacks of them,' he said. 'You may go up to my study and help yourself if you would like.' That evening I left with more than thirty different sermons. Later, other sermons were added as they were printed."⁶⁶

This book is a collection of thirteen different sermons by Eduard Schweizer which Cox has translated from German into English. As the title implies, these sermons emphasize the closeness of God in the lives of everyday people. Furthermore, each of these sermons was preached following an earlier ninety minute discussion between

⁶⁴James W. Cox, *God's Inescapable Nearness* (Waco: Word, 1971).

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

Schweizer and members of his congregation over the biblical text. This practice, referred to by Cox as a “Sermon Seminar” and recommended in his preaching texts,⁶⁷ took place regularly each week. Cox explains: “Schweizer holds a ‘Vorbereitung,’ a preparation period before the sermon is written for preaching. A group of laymen meets with him to discuss his text. This has been an unvarying rule both in his own parish ministry and in his supply preaching since going to teach at the University.”⁶⁸

In the book, Cox writes a 25-page introduction entitled, “Better Expository Preaching.” This introductory article represents the fruit of Cox’s study of Schweizer’s sermons. After studying the sermons, Cox concluded that Schweizer faithfully applied the biblical text to the contemporary world and wrote this introduction to help the reader understand Schweizer’s expository method. In the introduction, Cox laments the fact that Schweizer’s style of biblical preaching is far too sparse in many pulpits. For this reason, Cox believes that Schweizer’s method is worthy of serious study and emulation. He writes: “I would be pleased if such study would help some preacher, young or old, to use the Bible in sermons more responsibly and to deal with human needs more effectively.”⁶⁹

Cox offers his introductory article to the book as a survey of the homiletical principles he has discovered in Schweizer’s sermons. Cox cautions that his “own philosophy will, understandably, vary from Schweizer’s at certain points,” but adds that

⁶⁷See *A Guide*, 21, and *Preaching*, 82-83.

⁶⁸*God’s Inescapable Nearness*, 16.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 9.

his intention is “to proceed more descriptively than critically.”⁷⁰ Thus, while the article primarily contains information concerning Schweizer’s homiletical method, the study of the article will also assist the reader in gaining helpful insights as to Cox’s own homiletical philosophy.⁷¹ Cox writes of Schweizer’s faithfulness in always using, and preaching through, a biblical text. Furthermore, Cox notes that Schweizer makes good use of the historical-critical method, locating both the original intent of the author and how the text applies today. Homiletically, Schweizer employs good rhetorical devices such as restatement, example, and testimony. Finally, Schweizer preaches with a clear style and successfully achieves rapport with his hearers.

The Twentieth Century Pulpit

Edited in 1978, this publication is a collection of thirty-seven sermons from men of various faith backgrounds.⁷² While the book is patterned after Andrew Blackwood’s earlier *The Protestant Pulpit*,⁷³ Cox’s collection differs in that it includes Roman Catholic contributions and focuses solely on the twentieth century. Acknowledging that some readers may encounter persons with whom they disagree, Cox assures: “No matter! The book could hardly be representative of the preaching of

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹For an in-depth treatment of Cox’s own homiletical method, see chapter 5 of this dissertation.

⁷²James W. Cox, ed., *The Twentieth Century Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978).

⁷³Andrew Blackwood, *The Protestant Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1947).

this century and at the same time be uniform in expression. Each preacher bears his own witness to truth as he sees it. The reader will judge for himself or herself what is helpful.”⁷⁴

Cox adds that one criterion used to determine whether a sermon would be included was his own “knowledge and tastes.”⁷⁵ The wide array of contributors includes men such as D. M. Baillie, Karl Barth, Fredrick Buechner, George A. Buttrick, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Billy Graham, Martin Luther King, Jr., Peter Marshall, Wayne E. Oates, Wolfhart Pannenburg, Norman Vincent Peale, Eduard Schweizer, Fulton J. Sheen, John R. W. Stott, Helmut Thielicke, George W. Truett, and Gerhard von Rad (Cox translates von Rad’s sermon from German). Cox includes a seventeen page section entitled “Biographical Notes” which gives a short biography on each contributor. Also included is a two page appendix entitled “Guidelines for Studying a Sermon.” These brief guidelines suggest that readers consider several factors as they study and analyze sermons. These guidelines include matters such as sermon structure, title, central idea, introduction, body, conclusion, supportive material, transitions, unity, style, and general observations.

The Twentieth Century Pulpit, Vol. 2.

Edited in 1981 as a follow-up to the first volume of *The Twentieth Century*

⁷⁴Cox, *The Twentieth Century Pulpit*, 7.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 8.

Pulpit, Cox compiles sermons that are equally worthy of study.⁷⁶ He explains: “When I compiled Volume I of *The Twentieth Century Pulpit* a few years ago, I left out a number of sermons that I had wanted to include.”⁷⁷ Cox also became aware of other sermons that he wished to include and offered this volume as a new collection of commendable sermons.

The contributors consist of twenty-seven persons, mostly of “a younger generation” whose sermons deal primarily with social and ethical issues. As in the first volume, Cox warns that readers “will disagree at points with some of the preachers—with their beliefs and with their approaches. Yet they may find dialogue with these preachers stimulating in many ways.”⁷⁸ The contributors include Elizabeth Achtemeier, William Sloane Coffin, Jr., Fred B. Craddock, D. W. Cleverley Ford, William E. Hull, James Earl Massey, Jürgen Moltmann, Jean Myers, Robert H. Schuller, Paul Tillich, and William P. Tuck. The volume includes a sermon by Cox entitled “God’s Way into Our Lives” that also appears in *Surprised by God*.

As in the first volume, this publication also contains the helpful biographical entries and the appendix, “Guidelines for Studying a Sermon.” Cox’s wife, Patricia Parrent Cox, assisted him in this publication and consequently is listed as an editor of the book. Cox dedicates the book to Patricia’s parents, Lillian Mitchell Parrent and Overton Crockett Parrent.

⁷⁶James W. Cox, ed. *The Twentieth Century Pulpit*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981).

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

**Biblical Preaching:
An Expositor's Treasury**

The book jacket of this publication promises: "A comprehensive guide for biblical exposition—from every part of the Scriptures—including over 200 sermon outlines."⁷⁹ Edited in 1983, *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury* is a work comprised of the following eighteen contributors: Elizabeth Achtemeier, George R. Beasley-Murray, Ronald E. Clements, James W. Cox, Clyde T. Francisco (to whom the book is dedicated), Reginald H. Fuller, William E. Hull, Donald Macleod, James Earl Massey, Henry H. Mitchell, Eric C. Rust, Leo R. Sands, Eduard Schweizer, Frank Stagg, Krister Stendhal, Dwight E. Stevenson, William P. Tuck, and John D. W. Watts.

The book is intended to appeal to any Christian denomination and provides interpretive helps for every literary form in the Bible. Each chapter is written by a contributor who deals with a particular part of the Bible. In addition, each chapter "can be divided roughly into two parts: (1) general exegetical/hermeneutical matters related to the biblical writer's themes(s) and (2) homiletical studies of pivotal texts."⁸⁰ One of the "assumptions" made by each contributor is that "the historical-critical method is essential to a thorough understanding of the text in its present significance."⁸¹

Cox expresses his gratitude for "two esteemed colleagues" who assisted in the editorial work, namely Eric Rust, who edited the Old Testament writings, and Frank

⁷⁹James W. Cox, ed., *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983).

⁸⁰Ibid., 13-14.

⁸¹Ibid., 13.

Stagg, who edited the New Testament writings. Cox and Rust are co-contributors to Chapter 3, "Preaching from the History of the Exodus Wanderings." Cox writes the section of this chapter entitled "Sermon Studies" where he provides the following brief expositions: Exodus 20:1-17, "God and His Covenant;" Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18, "How to Be Holy;" Deuteronomy 12:1-12, "The Place for Worship;" and Joshua 24:14-28, "Religion as Personal Choice."

The Minister's Manual

Cox has been editing *The Minister's Manual* every year since 1984.⁸² The first printing of this series occurred in 1926. For a time, the manual was titled *Doran's Ministers Manual*. Cox's predecessor was editor Charles L. Wallis, former professor at Keuka College in Keuka Park, NY whose death in 1981 resulted in Cox's being asked to assume editorial duties of the annual publication. Cox had been writing for Wallis since 1973, providing submissions for *The Minister's Manual* as well *Pulpit Digest* (mentioned below), also edited by Wallis. Sometime before his death Wallis had told the publisher that if he (Wallis) had to give up editing *The Minister's Manual* and *Pulpit Digest* that the publishers should get in touch with Cox.⁸³ The manual has also been published in Korea since 1985.

In the preface to the 1984 edition, Cox describes the benefit of this manual. He writes: "Throughout the past fifty-eight years, *The Ministers Manual* has performed

⁸²James W. Cox, ed., *The Minister's Manual* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Harper Collins, 1984). See the bibliography of this paper for various publications of this book.

⁸³Cox, Interview 1.

a valuable service to the Church. Pastors, Sunday School teachers, group leaders, chaplains, missionaries, and laypeople have used this volume for sermon suggestions, illustrations, church programs, and devotional enrichment.”⁸⁴

The manual is divided into fifty two Sundays and contains brief sermons with illustrations and “General Aids and Resources” such as quotes, questions, and the anniversaries of hymns, hymn writers, and composers during the year. The “index of contributors” contains an extensive number of preachers and scholars from a wide variety of eras and denominational backgrounds. Cox himself contributes to this first volume, including, among other things, a few of his own quotes. His son, Kenneth M. Cox, assists in several editions by compiling information for the section treating historical, cultural, and religious anniversaries occurring throughout the year.

The succeeding volumes of *The Ministers Manual* are similar to the 1984 volume though the content and format have changed a bit over the years. The 1990 edition, for example, “rearranged and combined some features, while omitting a few others,”⁸⁵ and the 1998 edition began to include, among other things, “Hymn Suggestions.”⁸⁶ Cox has written the preface for every edition and has kept his own contributions to each volume at a minimum.

⁸⁴Cox, *The Minister's Manual for 1984*, v.

⁸⁵Cox, *The Ministers Manual for 1990*, vii.

⁸⁶Cox, *The Ministers Manual for 1998*, ix.

Best Sermons 1-7

Cox edited seven volumes of sermons from a wide variety of contributors.⁸⁷ His son, Kenneth M. Cox, appears alongside his father as an associate editor as he assisted Cox with some of the work. The series began in 1988 and ceased in 1994 at the decision of the publisher. Cox explains the purpose of the series in the first book, *Best Sermons 1*. His purpose is to collect a number of the most effective messages from a wide variety of sources. He writes: "A remarkable variety is here—sermons from women and men; Protestant, Catholic, and Jew; seasoned pastor and student; professor; sermons preached in churches large and small and in university chapels."⁸⁸

The first volume contains a total of fifty-two sermons, twenty-four of which were deemed "best" of over 2,000 sermon entries from all around the world. The process included an advertised campaign for interested parties to submit sermons that would be judged for originality, scriptural and/or Christian basis, relevance, clarity, and interest. In the sermon evaluation process, Cox led the following team of judges: Walter J. Burghardt, S. J., David Allan Hubbard, John Killinger, James Earl Massey, Carolyn Weatherford, and William H. Willimon. The sermons were then categorized as evangelistic, expository, doctrinal/theological, ethical, pastoral, or devotional.⁸⁹

⁸⁷James W. Cox, ed., *Best Sermons 1* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988); idem, *Best Sermons 2* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989); idem, *Best Sermons 3* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990); idem, *Best Sermons 4* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991); idem, *Best Sermons 5* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992); idem, *Best Sermons 6* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993); idem, *Best Sermons 7* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994).

⁸⁸Cox, *Best Sermons 1*, Preface.

⁸⁹These categories occur in Cox's *Preaching*, 93-122.

Also included in the first volume are twenty-eight sermons by preachers commissioned by Cox to augment the book. These other preachers were selected based upon their “considerable visibility.”⁹⁰ They include preachers such as John Killinger, David Buttrick, Haddon Robinson, Carl F. H. Henry, Allan M. Parrent (Cox’s brother-in-law), James Earl Massey, Eduard Schweizer, Leonard Griffith, and Fred Craddock.

Cox admits that the selection process for “winners” is not an easy one. He writes: “As with any competition of this nature, selecting the best of many fine entries is not easy. The evaluation of a sermon, whether that sermon is heard or read, is an inherently subjective undertaking, and certainly none of the judges could claim to have applied only objective standards.”⁹¹

The first volume was widely popular. *Preaching* magazine cited it as the top book of 1988 and hailed the book as “a collection of sermons exhibiting excellence and recognizable quality.”⁹² Cox was also featured in the January-February 1989 issue and interviewed by then associate editor R. Albert Mohler.

The succeeding volumes, 2-7, are similar to volume one insofar as they contain sermons judged by the same criteria and include sermons of other preachers whom Cox selected to include in each volume. The number of sermons, however, varies as does the makeup of the panel of judges. The final volume, published in 1994, contains a sermon by Cox, “A Word for All Seasons” that was suggested for publication

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid., x.

⁹²R. Albert Mohler, “Best Sermons Cited as Top Book of 1988,” *Preaching* 4 (January-February, 1989): 1.

by a fellow church member after hearing it preached by Cox in his church, Crescent Hill Baptist, in Louisville, Kentucky. Cox writes that his sermon appears at the very end of the book “like Alfred Hitchcock’s fleeting image in his films.”⁹³

Handbook of Themes for Preaching

As the title suggests, Cox endeavors to bring together a number of different themes from which preachers may find useful information for biblical preaching.⁹⁴

There are more than one hundred themes including topics such as abortion, addiction, death, Eucharist, mystery, providence, sexuality, and women’s issues. Cox writes that each topic is written by “a specialist in the subject” who “offers his or her most current thinking for your use in bringing God’s message to your congregation.”⁹⁵ Each topic begins with a definition and includes an analysis, biblical instances of the theme, and options for preaching.

The contributors to this volume are varied. Cox attests to their different backgrounds: “They represent a wide ecumenical range of religious traditions, from Quaker, to Anglican and Roman Catholic, as well as Presbyterian, Southern Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, and a rich variety of other traditions.”⁹⁶ A number of the contributors were on the faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1991

⁹³Cox, *Best Sermons* 7, Preface.

⁹⁴James W. Cox, *Handbook of Themes for Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

when the book was published. These contributors include James L. Blevins, Gerald L. Borchert, Hugo H. Culpepper, R. Alan Culpepper, Richard B. Cunningham, Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., William L. Hendricks, E. Glenn Hinson, J. Estill Jones, Bill J. Leonard, Larry L. McSwain, Molly Marshall-Green, Wayne E. Oates, Dan R. Stiver, and Wayne E. Ward.

Journal Editing

In addition to the number of books Cox has edited, he also has served as both contributor and editor for two prominent journals: *Pulpit Digest* and *Review and Expositor*. This section will briefly treat these two journals, highlighting a few of the more significant articles written by Cox.

Pulpit Digest

This bi-monthly periodical was also referred to as *New Pulpit Digest* from the years 1972-1977. Cox served as Contributing Editor from 1973-1982 and Editor from 1983-1985. He succeeded Editor Charles Wallis, mentioned above as also the former editor for *The Minister's Manual*. Cox continued to serve as an Advisory Editor for the journal and has published a number of articles over the years. The articles tend to be very brief, generally just a few pages. Due to the both the brevity of these articles and the fact that several of the articles are referenced in chapters four and five of this paper, they will not be examined here. The reader is referred, however, to the bibliography where the writer has attempted to list all known published articles for the journal.

Review and Expositor

The *Review and Expositor* is a quarterly Baptist theological journal that began in 1904 under the title of *Baptist Review and Expositor*. It was founded and published by the faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary until 1996 when the journal's editorial board reorganized and voted to have the journal removed from the jurisdiction of the seminary. Cox served as Editor of the journal from 1992-1993 and Consulting Editor in 1993. In addition, Cox published a total of nine articles for the journal from 1965-1997. The articles pertaining to Cox's homiletical contributions are surveyed here.

“The Uniqueness of Preaching.” This article is a reprint of a faculty address given by Cox at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on February 8, 1967.⁹⁷ Cox's main purpose is to demonstrate that Christian preaching is unlike any other form of public address. He makes three points to demonstrate the uniqueness of preaching: (1) Preaching is different because the man who preaches is different (the preacher); (2) Preaching is different because the message is different (the gospel); and (3) Preaching is different because the objective is different (a relationship with God).

The preacher, argues Cox, is both *herald* and *witness*. As herald, the preacher is God's spokesman proclaiming the divine message given him in the Scriptures. He is witness in the sense that his own personality and experience shape the delivery of the message.

⁹⁷James W. Cox, “The Uniqueness of Preaching,” *Review and Expositor* 64 (Fall 1967): 523-33.

Cox also argues that the sermon must be bound by the biblical text. He argues: “When the preacher takes the object of the text seriously, he cannot practice homiletical karate on the text. The text will bind him to the truth it holds for him.”⁹⁸ He also notes that reading the biblical text before the sermon will help ensure that the preacher stay on course, adding that this was apparently the practice of Jesus as he preached in the synagogue in Luke 4:16ff.

Cox advocates preaching from a wide spectrum of biblical texts. One can accomplish this by either using the lectionary or by systematically preaching through biblical books. Doing so ensures that the preacher avoids his own biases and that his hearers get a balanced diet of truth.

“The Southern Baptist Pulpit, 1845-1970.” Cox wrote this article in 1970 for the purpose of surveying the pulpit of Southern Baptists over the preceding 125 years.⁹⁹ The article is a succinct, historical account of some of the more prominent Southern Baptist preachers and their respective contributions to American society.

Cox notes that Southern Baptist preachers have been generally strong proponents of preaching biblical sermons. Their messages are those that find their genesis in a biblical text whether the preacher treats the text in a verse-by-verse fashion or whether he merely bases his sermon upon a text. Cox mentions several notable

⁹⁸Ibid., 528.

⁹⁹James W. Cox, “The Southern Baptist Pulpit, 1845-1970,” *Review and Expositor* 67 (Spring 1970): 195-202.

expositors such as John A. Broadus, W. A. Criswell, Herschel H. Hobbs, and John L. Hill.

As doctrinal and theological controversies dominated the period of 1830-1865, Cox observes that Southern Baptists preached polemical sermons against the teachings of Alexander Campbell and against Roman Catholicism. J. R. Graves preached messages sometimes as long as three hours, holding the attention of his hearers like no other Baptist of his time.

Cox also writes about the issue of slavery among Southern Baptists. Most preachers avoided the issue, preferring rather to speak out against less controversial sins. “Gambling, dancing, theatres, circuses, horse-racing, and card-playing aroused more ethical concerns,” writes Cox, “than did the institution of slavery.”¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, some Southern Baptists spoke against the practice of slavery. Included among them is Richard Fuller, one of the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention. Though a slaveholder himself, Fuller called for a gradual renunciation of the institution over time.

Concerning the matter of religious liberty and political duty, Cox notes the significant impact of George W. Truett, mentioning a particularly stirring message preached by Truett in 1920 on the steps of the nation’s capitol in Washington D.C. On that day, some ten to fifteen thousand persons—including prominent political office holders—heard Truett encourage them to take an active role in securing religious liberty for all people.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 199.

“Eloquent—Mighty in the Scriptures: Biblical Preachers from Chrysostom to Thielicke.” In this article, Cox provides short biographical information on five preachers of note: John Chrysostom, Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, Karl Barth, and Helmut Thielicke.¹⁰¹ These five preachers are viewed favorably by Cox for their eloquence as well as for their use of the biblical text.

Cox believes Chrysostom to be “the greatest preacher of antiquity.”¹⁰² He writes of Chrysostom’s great oratorical skills and of his being kidnapped to fill the Constantinople see. He also praises his exegetical method which one will discover when he peruses the some six hundred extant messages of Chrysostom. Cox notes that Chrysostom rejected the allegorical method of interpretation and labored to interpret the biblical text in a literal fashion.

Luther is recognized by Cox as seeing the concept of justification by faith as the key to biblical interpretation. The two testaments combined to make for one unified message. Luther viewed the Old Testament as “the swaddling cloths in which Christ is wrapped and the manger in which the precious treasure is laid.”¹⁰³ Cox notes that some 2300 messages of Luther are extant, providing the reader with the opportunity to view the varying methods by which he preached.

¹⁰¹James W. Cox, “Eloquent—Mighty in the Scriptures: Biblical Preachers from Chrysostom to Thielicke,” *Review and Expositor* 72 (Spring 1975): 189-201.

¹⁰²Ibid., 189.

¹⁰³Ibid., 192.

Cox describes Charles Haddon Spurgeon as “a clerical phenomenon.”¹⁰⁴

Despite his lack of formal education, Spurgeon was a brilliant preacher. He read and studied on his own and was able to hold the attention of some 10,000 persons while only in his twenties. Cox describes Spurgeon’s sermon preparation habits, how he typically worked out his Sunday morning message on Saturday evening and his Sunday evening message on Sunday afternoon. While this procedure may sound peculiar, Cox notes that Spurgeon was always studying the Bible, always thinking of biblical texts, such that when he preached his messages, he connected with his hearers. “Those who came to hear him hungry,” Cox writes, “went away filled.”¹⁰⁵

In Cox’s judgment, Karl Barth influenced the preaching of “modern times” more than any other person. Cox writes of Barth’s strong beliefs about preaching the biblical text. Because of his theology, Barth did not believe preachers could engender a favorable disposition among their hearers for the preaching event. Consequently, Barth disregarded introductions and conclusions and chose rather to begin the sermon with the biblical text and end the sermon where the text ended. Furthermore, Barth’s preaching was always centered in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Cox recommends the sermons in Barth’s book *Deliverance to the Captives* as worthy of careful study and emulation.

Finally, Cox describes Helmut Thielicke as “one preacher who has created

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 193.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 195.

genuine excitement in recent years.”¹⁰⁶ He writes about Thielicke’s studies at Marburg, Erlangen, and Bonn, before becoming Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Hamburg, Germany. Cox commends Thielicke’s ability to combine serious biblical scholarship with sermons that engage the contemporary hearers by demonstrating to them the relevance of the biblical text.

“The Pulpit and Southern.” In this article, Cox briefly surveys the major professors of homiletics since the founding of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1859.¹⁰⁷ He breaks the time period down into three sections: The first half-century, the second half-century, and the last quarter-century.

From the first-half century, Cox discusses the contributions of John Albert Broadus, John Richard Sampey, Archibald Thomas Robertson, William Owen Carver, and Edwin Charles Dargan. Each of these men is noted for his respective emphasis and impact upon the field of homiletics. Broadus, for example, is noted for his timeless book *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. Sampey is recognized for his book *Practical Hints on Preaching*, from which Cox excerpts five elements necessary for good sermon delivery. These five are an earnest manner, self-control, naturalness, distinct enunciation, and a well-modulated voice.

From the second half-century, Cox overviews the homiletical contributions of just three men: Charles Spurgeon Gardner, Jesse Burton Weatherspoon, and Vernon

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 199.

¹⁰⁷James W. Cox, “The Pulpit and Southern,” *Review and Expositor* 82 (Winter 1985): 77-88.

Latrelle Stanfield. Gardner emphasized the importance of relating the field of psychology to preaching while Weatherspoon and Stanfield stressed the need for evangelistic preaching.

In the last section of the article, Cox surveys the time period from 1957 to what was then the present: 1985. He notes the various contributions of Nolan Patrick Howington, John W. Carlton, George Earl Guinn, William Powell Tuck, Raymond Bailey, and himself. Howington and Guinn are both recognized for their preference for expository preaching while Tuck is noted for his stress on “life situation” preaching. Concerning his own homiletical philosophy, he writes: “Cox would resist a reductionist methodology for the design and delivery of sermons . . . there is value in individuality: the Bible, the history of the Church, and current practice suggest a variety of methods of communication.”¹⁰⁸

Article Series in *Preaching Magazine*

In the January-February 1987 issue of *Preaching* magazine—the same issue that listed his book *Preaching* as one of the “Ten Recent Books Every Preacher Should Read”—Cox wrote the first article of a five-part series on preaching evaluation. The remaining articles, parts four through five, occur in the succeeding issues of the magazine with the last one appearing in the September-October 1987 issue. This section chronologically overviews each of these five articles.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 85.

“Evaluating the Content of Your Preaching”

In this first article, Cox provides preachers with several questions to ask of their preaching, questions focusing upon the *content* of their sermons.¹⁰⁹ The questions cover a wide array of areas dealing with sermon preparation, questions such as whether the sermon is biblical, concrete, and whether it makes proper use of illustrations.

Whether the preacher proceeds deductively or inductively is not as important to Cox as whether the preacher is faithful to preaching a biblical text. Cox notes the strengths of the inductive approach, citing for example, Fred Craddock’s recent work, but states that the deductive approach remains a powerful way to preach, as evidenced by deductive preachers such as Spurgeon and Fosdick.

Cox recommends that the preacher ask whether his sermons properly treat the one-sided nature of texts. By this Cox means that preachers should be careful not to overly qualify their messages. The preacher treating James’ remarks on faith, for example, will no doubt attempt to reconcile those remarks with Paul’s. Nevertheless, the preacher must come back to James and spend time adequately teaching his main thrust. Too much qualification of one text against another may drain the text of its intended power for its intended audience.

The preacher’s sermons should also make ample use of the concrete elements of the text. He should avoid preaching in abstract language and must anticipate his hearers’ questions, answering them in clear ways. On this note, Cox commends

¹⁰⁹James W. Cox, “Evaluating the Content of Your Preaching,” *Preaching* (January-February 1987): 14-17.

preachers such as John Killinger and David H. C. Read for their ability to “bring theology out of the clouds and put it where the people live.”¹¹⁰

Cox argues for the use of biblical and contemporary illustrations. Cox believes that some of the best illustrations a preacher can use are biblical illustrations. The preacher does well to scan the many books of the Bible, searching for good, illustrative material for preaching texts. At the same time, however, the preacher may not need to go outside of the text at hand. If he is preaching on the Prodigal Son, for example, he may find all of the illustration necessary in the story itself.

Cox believes sermons occasionally need a penetrating word of judgment from God. There are times when the hearer needs to be jarred from his complacency, compelled to consider conformity to the ethical norms of Scripture. At the same time, however, the preacher must take care to preach in the context of God’s grace.

Finally, Cox calls for sermons that have a personal touch to them as well as sermons that address the heart as well as the head. Sermons are meant to do more than give facts and information. They must move the heart and will, evoking the emotions of the hearer.

“Evaluating the Form of Your Preaching”

This article strives at helping the preacher evaluate his sermons based upon the sermonic form of each message.¹¹¹ Here Cox focuses on interests such as whether

¹¹⁰Ibid., 15.

¹¹¹James W. Cox, “Evaluating the Form of Your Preaching,” *Preaching* (March-April 1987): 19-22.

the sermon is logically organized, has a good central idea and whether the sermon has one unified message.

Cox believes the preacher should consider the wide variety of literary forms as suggestive of the varying ways sermons may be preached. The preacher need not always preach his messages in one particular fashion. He is encouraged to try differing ways to present the truths of the text.

Every sermon, in Cox's judgment, will attempt to explain, convince, revitalize, or actuate. Furthermore, every sermon should be about one, unified message. The main points of the sermon should be interrelated to the main thrust, or central idea. At the same time, however, the preacher must avoid being "too perfect" in following the rules of preaching, remaining open to those times when it may be necessary to bend the "normal homiletical canons" in the interest of meeting a particular spiritual need.

Cox argues that sermons should have a sustaining sense of forward movement. They should take the hearer to a specific place and the hearer should feel engaged along the way. To accomplish this, the preacher should make certain that he has allotted adequate time to cover each point, weighing the material as necessary. He also should use smooth transitions and see that his central idea and main points are "stated in a clear, striking, and memorable form."¹¹²

The preacher should aim for simplicity in the structure of his sermons, remembering that the main purpose of preaching is to get into the minds of the hearers those things the preacher is trying to communicate. Simple sermon structure aids this

¹¹²Ibid., 21.

purpose. Furthermore, the preacher does well to study various sermon forms in his attempt to find the form that best drives home the message.

“Evaluating the Interest Factor in Your Preaching”

The third article in this series focuses on ways in which the preacher may keep his listeners engaged and interested in his sermons.¹¹³ Cox treats matters here such as the use of humor and tension in sermons. Much of the material is similar to chapter 14 of his book *Preaching* entitled “The Factors of Attention and Interest.”

Cox argues that one of the best ways for preachers to engage their hearers is for themselves to be engaged in what they are preaching. The preacher must have a passion for the things he is saying if he expects his hearers to continue listening to him. This passion is often cultivated by repeatedly reading through the text until its truth claims take hold of the preacher.

The preacher should strive to make use of tension in his preaching. Because tension is a part of normal human experience, argues Cox, it should be found in the preacher’s sermons. Whether used in narrative texts, or didactic texts, the preacher engages his hearers best by preaching sermons that make use of antagonism and suspense.

Cox urges the preacher to preach through various literary forms. Such preaching is accomplished by use of the lectionary or by preaching through books of the

¹¹³James W. Cox, “Evaluating the Interest Factor in Your Preaching,” *Preaching* (May-June 1987): 23-26.

Bible. Whichever method the preacher chooses, his attempts will ensure that he does not neglect the rich possibilities of “kaleidoscopic variety” in the Bible.¹¹⁴

Humor is another way by which the preacher can maintain the interest of his hearers. This is no call for being what Cox calls the “funny man in the pulpit,”¹¹⁵ but rather a call for being a keen observer of human nature, allowing humor to serve the message in a natural manner.

“Evaluating the Delivery of Your Sermon”

As the title of this article suggests, Cox aims at providing the preacher with some questions to ask of his sermons relating to their adherence to good principles of sermon delivery.¹¹⁶ Cox treats various matters here such as verbal language, rate of speech, and use of grammar.

The preacher should work to overcome “vocal faults” such as a harshness of voice due to improper use of the vocal chords. Diaphragmatic breathing ensures that he speaks in a natural and pleasing manner. His rate should be varied, speaking quickly at times and more slowly at others. The phrasing of his sentences should be smooth and natural, avoiding the choppy pattern of pausing regularly after saying just a few words. Furthermore, grammatical errors should be avoided as preachers aim to use simple

¹¹⁴Ibid., 24.

¹¹⁵Ibid, 26.

¹¹⁶James W. Cox, “Evaluating the Delivery of Your Sermon,” *Preaching* (July-August 1987): 16-20.

words rather than the impressive, esoteric words that draw more attention to the messenger than to the message.

Cox urges the preacher to experiment with various ways to deliver his messages. Some occasions seem to call for use of a sermon manuscript while others may call for no use of notes at all. The preacher does well, in Cox's judgment, "to work toward homiletical liberation."¹¹⁷ That is, the preacher preaches best when he is less dependent upon notes in the pulpit.

Bodily gestures should be natural, varied, and well-timed. Preaching is best, argues Cox, when it involves the whole body. Cox favorably quotes Spurgeon who advises, "Let the gestures tally with the words, and be a sort of running commentary and practical exegesis upon what you are saying."¹¹⁸

"Evaluating the Style of Your Preaching"

In this last article of the series, Cox underscores some of the points made in the preceding article with respect to the words used in sermon construction.¹¹⁹ He calls again for attention to good grammar and simple word choice. He also calls for other aims such as the preacher's use of inclusive language, the sparing use of quotations, and the favoring of the indicative mood over the imperative.

On this last point, use of the indicative mood, Cox means that the preacher

¹¹⁷Ibid., 19.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹James W. Cox, "Evaluating the Style of Your Preaching," *Preaching* (September-October 1987): 11-13.

should avoid imperative statements such as “Do this” or “We must” where such statements are not grounded in theological indicatives. For example, the imperatives found in the Ten Commandments are grounded in the theological indicatives of God’s having chosen and redeemed His people. Understood in this light, the commandments suggest a “We *want* to” rather than a “We *have* to.” Imperative statements are theologically appropriate, then, only when they are grounded in the indicatives of God’s grace. Anything less may result in a call—intentional or unintentional—for slavish, legalistic, obedience.

Cox also urges the preacher to make generous use of questions in his sermons. Asking natural questions throughout the message enables the preacher to better engage his hearers by drawing them into the sermon. The preacher anticipates questions and seeks to answer them. He may say, for example, “I imagine there is someone here who is asking” Such preaching gives the message a natural, dialogical feel and demonstrates sympathy with the listeners.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide an overview of Cox’s major homiletical writings. While Cox’s major books have been surveyed as well as his major homiletical articles, there are other articles that have not been treated here. Some of the articles are very brief, such as those published in *Pulpit Digest*. Many of these articles and others like them, however, are referenced in other places of this paper such as in the chapters treating Cox’s hermeneutics and homiletical method.

Other articles or contributions are so similar in content to the writings treated in this chapter that an overview of them is unnecessary. For example, Cox wrote an

article in *Proclaim* magazine entitled “What is Biblical Preaching?”¹²⁰ This article is reproduced in its entirety in Chapter One of Cox’s book *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*. Consequently, this writer treated the content of the article in the overview of Cox’s book *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*.

Other instances of this overlap occur in books where Cox contributes a chapter or an article. In *Heralds to a New Age*, for example, Cox contributes a chapter entitled, “Seven Questions about Sermon Structure and Content.”¹²¹ The information in this chapter is very similar in content to the above information in Cox’s five-part article series in *Preaching* magazine. Similarly, Cox’s contribution to the *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* entitled “Evaluating the Sermon” is also nearly identical in content to the series in *Preaching* magazine and therefore was not overviewed.¹²² The reader is referred, however, to the bibliography at the conclusion of this paper where an attempt has been made to provide a comprehensive index of Cox’s writings.

There is no question that Cox has written prolifically over the past thirty-five years. Altogether he has published, edited, or translated some sixty books directly or indirectly related to Christian preaching. In addition, his articles have stimulated countless persons to work on improving their preaching. Cox’s love for writing and editing is obvious and his motivation is clear. In 1983, when asked why a full-time

¹²⁰James W. Cox, “What is Biblical Preaching?,” *Proclaim* (July 1974): 35-39.

¹²¹James W. Cox, “Seven Questions about Sermon Structure and Content,” in *Heralds to a New Age*, ed. Don M. Aycock (Elgin, IL: Brethren, 1985), 233-38.

¹²²James W. Cox, “Evaluating the Sermon,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 225-35.

professor of preaching would take on the added editorial duties for *Pulpit Digest* and *The Minister's Manual*, he responded simply: "I hope it's a contribution to the cause of preaching."¹²³

¹²³"Editor Cox Scales Paper Mountain," *The Tie* (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) (May 1983): 6.

CHAPTER 4

HERMENEUTICS

Introduction

This chapter will examine the contributions Cox has made to both his students and the readers of his many books in the field of hermeneutics. Some consideration will be given to whether his own sermons reflect the hermeneutical method he teaches. In the main, however, the chapter will provide the reader with a succinct, descriptive account of the hermeneutical method of James W. Cox.

The Bible: Its Inspiration and Authority

Arguably, one's *view* of Scripture necessarily influences one's *interpretation* of Scripture. There is no doubt that Cox argues for *biblical* preaching. He has asserted on more than one occasion that the Bible is the preacher's "homiletical home."¹ In poetic imagery, he argues:

The Bible is the native port from which we sail on the high seas of modern thought and living. We may sail far into the mysteries of modern depth psychology, along the uncertain shores of modern philosophy, into the towering waves of world crises, or upon the more serene ebb and flow of the arts; yet the Bible is our home. A text is the reminder of who we are, where we are going, and

¹James W. Cox, "Biblical Preaching Is—" (lecture given at the Continuing Theological Education Conference, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary [SBTS] March 1985), audiocassette.

what we ought to be doing.²

But what does this “homiletical home” of the Bible look like? Cox takes care to speak of the Bible in terms of its inspiration and authority. In a sermon on 2 Timothy 3:10-17, he declares, “Whatever you may say then about this book, you have to say that this book is inspired. That is to say it is God-breathed.”³ He continues, “What we have here is not a setting down simply of personal opinions and observations, so much as it is the setting down of what the Spirit of God led [the writers of Scripture] . . . to set down.”⁴

In this particular sermon, Cox distinguishes between *biblical* inspiration and what one might term *literary*⁵ inspiration. That is, the Bible is not only “inspired” in the sense that one understands the works of Shakespeare or Browning to be “inspirational.” The Bible is more than an “inspiring” book to read. It is also *more* than merely a book “written by men.” Cox states:

The inspiration of the Bible is of an altogether different quality. It is what God does as God works on the hearts and minds of people [whom] He has chosen to record His mighty acts among His people and in the world; people He has chosen to look in faith to the future *believing*—and in their hearts, and in their sanctified imagination—*knowing* what God will do in the days, and years, and eons to come.⁶

²James W. Cox, *A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon: 1976), 31.

³James W. Cox, “The Bible: What It Is and What It Is Not,” sermon preached at Sand Spring Baptist Church, Lawrenceburg, KY, 1995.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵This writer’s terminology.

⁶Cox, “The Bible.”

Thus, the Bible is inspired in the sense that it is “God-breathed.” It is God at work “in the hearts and minds” of those whom He has chosen to record his acts and deeds. And because the Bible is God-breathed it may also be considered reliable and trustworthy.

But the Bible is also understood as authoritative. In chapter two of his book *Preaching*; in a chapter entitled, “The Preacher’s Authority,” Cox delineates several sources of authority concerning the preacher himself; authority granted him through means such as ordination, education, and experience. Among these and other sources of authority, the Bible is designated as that which “lends authority to the preacher.”⁷ Indeed, the Bible is the most important source of authority insofar as it bears upon understanding and practicing the essentials of the Christian faith. As Cox reasons elsewhere: “Other sources may be important for understanding our faith, but the Bible is more important. We test all other sources of faith, inspiration, and information by [the Bible’s] fundamental, as well as, enduring standard.”⁸

Cox finds Emil Brunner’s distinction between *formal* and *instrumental* authority as particularly helpful. Formal authority is that aspect of authority which is recognized primarily by Western Civilization, regardless of one’s religious beliefs. Thus, when one places his hand upon the Bible in order to take an oath, he is demonstrating the formal authority that the Bible has had throughout the ages. As Cox illustrates, “When a teacher, a philosopher, a statesman, or a theologian, a preacher,

⁷James W. Cox, *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design & Delivery of Sermons* (Nashville: Seminary Extension, n.d.), 19.

⁸Cox, *A Guide*, 17.

appeals to the Bible, the hearers, or at least some of them, give special attention to the one who is speaking.”⁹

But this is altogether different from *instrumental* authority. Cox asserts, “Instrumental authority is the authority that it has working *in you* and *in society*.”¹⁰ To further illustrate the differences between the two terms, he states, “There is a tipping of the hat to it, that’s one thing, another is *embracing* it, *wholly*, in your heart.”¹¹ Thus, Cox asks elsewhere, “When do we feel that the authority of the Bible in preaching is most definitely present? Isn’t it when the Bible is preached? When the Bible is preached it becomes a catalyst of profound religious experience.”¹²

Cox frequently quotes the Swiss Reformer Johann Heinrich Bullinger, from the Second Helvetic Confession: “The preaching of the word of God *is* the word of God.”¹³ However, two clarifications are in order. First, by quoting Bullinger, Cox does *not* mean that the hearer must be “tuned in” to the preaching in order for the Bible to be considered the word of God. As he states, “You wonder, don’t you, suppose he is *not*

⁹Cox, “Biblical Preaching is—.”

¹⁰James W. Cox, interview by author, tape recording, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 4 May 2000. Hereafter, referred to as Interview 2.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Cox, “Biblical Preaching is—.”

¹³See *La Confession Helvetique Posterieure* (Texte Francais de 1566, Neuchatel: Delachaux & Niestle, 1944), 42.

tuned in, it *could* be the word of God for him if he *were* listening. *It's the word of God anyway.*"¹⁴

Secondly, to conclude that the *act* of preaching the word of God is a *necessary* contingent to its authoritative and ontological nature would be to misunderstand Cox and to commit the fallacy of denying the antecedent. That is, for Cox, it does not follow that *without* the act of preaching, the Bible is *not* the word of God. The Bible, in and of itself, apart from the act of preaching, *is* the word of God. But for Cox, this understanding of the phrase "word of God," goes beyond a term for the Bible itself. As Cox maintains in an article in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*: "Although the Bible may be correctly regarded as the Word of God, the Bible itself uses the expression in a richer, more comprehensive way."¹⁵ Indeed, in Cox's doctoral dissertation, he traces the expression—"word of God"—throughout the Old Testament, revealing concepts such as the living, written, and creative nature of "the word of God."¹⁶

Consequently, and particularly in light of the New Testament, Cox likes to say that the Bible is "derivatively" the word of God. As he states, "Jesus Christ was called the Word of God. But we speak also of the Bible as the Word of God, for it is derivatively God's Word, and we say that because it is the vehicle in which Jesus Christ

¹⁴Cox, Interview 2 (This writer's emphasis on last phrase).

¹⁵James W. Cox, "Word of God," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*. ed. Southern Baptist Convention (Nashville: Broadman, 1958) 2:1545.

¹⁶James W. Cox, "The Doctrine of the Word of God in the Old Testament" (Th.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1953).

came to us.”¹⁷ Discussions concerning the “word of God” must find their ultimate expression in Jesus Christ, who is, “the supreme and final revelation of God.”¹⁸

At this point, one may find Cox’s view of the Scriptures to be relatively similar to the popular views of German theologian Karl Barth, yet with some obvious qualifications. Paul Enns provides a helpful summation of the threefold manner in which Barth regarded the Scriptures as “the word of God.” He writes:

Barth categorized the Word of God into three realms. (1) The “Revealed Word” is God revealing Himself by speaking to the apostles and the prophets. (2) The “Written Word” is the deposit of revelation made by man. Because man wrote the Bible it cannot be equated with the Word of God. (3) The “Preached Word” is the proclamation of the Word, and when the grace of God breaks through to the individual, then the Bible becomes the Word of God.¹⁹

Thus, for Barth, the Bible may not be regarded as the “word of God” in an *ontological* sense, but only in a *functional* sense. The Bible only “becomes” the word of God through divine, existential encounter. Barth asserts: “The Bible is God’s Word so far as God lets it be His Word, so far as God speaks through it.”²⁰ Elsewhere, Barth states, “For me the Word of God is a *happening*, not a thing. Therefore, the Bible must *become* the Word of God, and it does this through the work of the Spirit.”²¹

¹⁷Cox, “The Bible.”

¹⁸Cox, “Word of God,” 2: 1546.

¹⁹Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 562. This threefold summary is explained in detail in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), vol. 1, pt. 1:137.

²⁰Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1, pt. 1:123.

²¹John D. Godsey, ed., *Karl Barth’s Table Talk* (Richmond: John Knox, 1963), 26.

Cox, on the other hand, does not believe that “the Bible must *become* the Word of God,” but rather that the Bible *already is* the word of God.²² Furthermore, Barth regards the Bible as only, “a human document like any other,” which “can lay no *a priori* dogmatic claim to special attention and consideration.”²³ For this reason, Barth takes an explicit position on the implications of stressing the “humanness” of the Bible. He argues: “The prophets and apostles as such, even in their office, even in their function as witnesses, even in the act of writing down their witness were real, historical men as we are, and therefore sinful in their action, and capable and actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word.”²⁴

Cox, however, prefers to speak of the Bible in terms of its “authoritative,” “trustworthy” and “reliable” nature. The Bible’s primary purpose is to reveal to mankind the availability of redemption through Jesus Christ. Thus, while the Bible is not to be understood as an “exact” or comprehensive authority on matters outside the realm of Christian faith and practice, the authors of Scripture—as primary witnesses—have handed down to mankind those things which God has purposed in order to reconcile Himself with His creation. Cox argues:

We attach unusual importance to what has been handed down to us by the primary witnesses, that is to say, by those who were first to hear the word of God or to see God’s revelation in action. We take seriously the first hand testimony of, let us say, Jeremiah, Amos, Mark and Paul. They were there. And they told us what it was like and what it is. And we have to take notice.

²² See discussion above, especially n. 14.

²³ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 60.

²⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1, pt. 2:529.

Now to say these things, however, doesn't require us to subscribe to the exaggerated claims sometimes made for the Bible in other respects. It's wrong to turn the Bible into a law book. Jesus challenged that view with such words: "It was said by them of old time, but I say unto you." It's wrong to turn the Bible into a science book, though it does have things to say to science. Its purpose is not to give exact scientific data, but to affirm God as the ultimate source and sustainer of the universe. It's wrong to turn the Bible into a history book. Its purpose is not to give us a comprehensive account of world events, but to declare God's activity among a special people with a world mission.²⁵

Thus, while Cox can hold the Bible in his hand and sincerely proclaim: "This is the word of God," he resists an over-focusing upon the ontological nature of the Bible, preferring rather to focus upon the Bible's derivative nature; the Bible as the vehicle in which is revealed "the ultimate Word of God . . . Jesus Christ."²⁶

This focus on the derivative nature of the Bible is where Cox adopts what may be termed a "modified Barthian" position. Barth writes of the Bible's witness to the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ. He explains, "When we have to do with the Bible, we have to do primarily with this means, with these words, with the witness which as such is not itself revelation, but only—and this is the limitation—the witness to it."²⁷ He continues, "In this limitation the Bible is not distinguished from revelation. It is simply revelation as it comes to us, mediating and therefore accommodating itself to us—to us who are not ourselves prophets and apostles, and therefore not the immediate and direct recipients of the one revelation, witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ."²⁸

²⁵Cox, "The Bible."

²⁶Cox, Interview 2.

²⁷Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1, pt. 2:463.

²⁸Ibid.

Similarly, Cox explains why the Bible may be regarded as authoritative. He writes: “It [the Bible] witnesses to the revelation of God through a special history.”²⁹ He adds, “It is the testimony of those who were closest to what God was revealing; and, by its fruits, it bears the stamp of divine inspiration. A man may find it hard to accept what is to be believed in the Bible, but he should have no trouble in determining—in the main—what was believed by those who wrote it.”³⁰

Both Cox and Barth agree that the Bible “witnesses to” the revelation of God. Where they differ is in their usage of the phrase “word of God.” Barth’s dialectical theology requires that he synthesize the holy “otherness” of God with the “humanness” of the Scriptures. An existential encounter is necessary in order for the Bible to “become” the word of God. Cox, on the other hand, while agreeing that the Bible “witnesses to” the revelation of God, is equally comfortable asserting that the Bible itself may be regarded as “the word of God.” When using this phrase, however, Cox has in mind the “derivative” nature of the word of God. As previously examined in his sermon on 2 Timothy 3:10-17: “Jesus Christ was called the Word of God. But we speak also of the Bible as the Word of God, for it is derivatively God’s Word, and we say that because it is the vehicle in which Jesus Christ came to us.”³¹

²⁹Cox, *A Guide*, 17.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Cox, “The Bible.”

Location of Meaning in a Text

In his *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, Cox makes an interesting biographical remark with respect to early shapers of his hermeneutical method. He writes:

When I was still in high school, I was blessed to have a pastor who was interested in me and lent me his books, some of which I am sure he was inclined theologically to rate “X” for my young eyes. My science teacher in high school was a devout churchman and introduced me to the treasures in the county library. So, while still young, I read E. Y. Mullins’, *Christian Religion in It’s Doctrinal Expression* and Harry Emerson Fosdick’s, *Guide to Understanding the Bible*. The first work confronted me with a contemporary synthesis of the basic biblical ideas; the second, with a statement of the development of leading biblical ideas as they wound their way through the Old Testament and the New. It was a wonderful experience—exciting, disturbing, challenging, and enriching.³²

Cox explains the impact these two authors made upon his hermeneutics. He states, “Since then I have tried to look at every text from two viewpoints: (1) what it meant in the particular time and circumstance in which it arose and (2) what it means in our present life situation.”³³

Of course, the above statement takes for granted that the preacher will *have* a biblical text as the subject of his sermon. This is the norm. Cox explains:

Of course, some emergency might arise when you would *not* use a biblical text but you would address yourself to some need of the congregation apart from a text, but that would be an aberration, an exception. Having said that, it must be confessed that much that passes for “the normal” in preaching is anything *but* normal. Text becomes pretext. Scripture is twisted and betrayed. Preachers wrest the Scriptures sometimes to their own—and their hearers’—destruction. And it’s no wonder that James warned that not many of us should become teachers

³²Cox, *A Guide*, 20.

³³Ibid.

knowing that we would be the more heavily judged.³⁴

Once a biblical text has been selected for preaching, the meaning of the text must be discovered. A quick glance at a section of Cox's chapter six in *Preaching*, "The Text," could lead a hasty reader to mistakenly believe that for Cox the location of meaning is found solely within the text itself (i.e., and not the author). Cox writes, "Know what the Bible meant. Krister Stendahl has rightly asserted that the task of the pulpit can be carried out only if we know what the text meant."³⁵ But this is no Ricoeurian hermeneutic where the reader places himself, "in front of the text rather than behind it, to allow the textual world to control the hermeneutical process."³⁶ Rather, it is clear from the rest of this chapter that Cox believes the meaning of a text is bound up with the intended meaning of the *author* of the text. He asserts, "It will not do to read our own way of thinking back into the text. Not until we have let the text speak its own language are we prepared to translate it into our contemporary tongue."³⁷

In *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, Cox mentions two viewpoints he utilizes when examining a text: "1) what it meant in the particular time and circumstances in

³⁴Cox, "Biblical Preaching Is—."

³⁵Cox, *Preaching*, 67.

³⁶Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1991), 388. Here Osborne explains the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, namely that the text itself—rather than the author's intended meaning—drives the hermeneutical method.

³⁷Cox, *Preaching*, 67.

which it arose and 2) what it means in our present life situation.”³⁸ Further, he supplies an appendix in this book entitled, “Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible.”³⁹ While Cox did not author these principles, he recommends them as “helpful to review.”⁴⁰ With respect to interpreting a specific passage of Scripture, the guidelines state that, among other things, the interpreter must seek “the meaning which the words had for the original author and hearer or reader.”⁴¹ Cox would add to Stendahl’s statement: “You need to know what the text meant when it was written and what the author intended to say.”⁴²

Cox seems to agree with a Hirschian understanding of *one* specific and fixed meaning within a text, yet a *varied* significance for the interpreter.⁴³ That is, every text has but one meaning, yet a number of possible implications or applications that arise from that one meaning. But how does the interpreter determine that one fixed meaning of the text? The next section of this chapter will address this topic.

³⁸Cox, *A Guide*, 20.

³⁹*Ibid.*, “Appendix B,” 123-28. See also Appendix 3 of this paper for a reproduction.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 12.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 125.

⁴²Cox, Interview 2.

⁴³Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 393-95. Here Osborne explains the hermeneutics of E.D. Hirsch. See also, however, the later section of this chapter where the matter of *sensus plenior* is treated.

Historical-Critical Method

Cox recommends using the historical-critical tools of scholarship in getting at the meaning of a text. Indeed, his *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury*, was edited with the assumption that there is significant value to the historical-critical method. Cox writes: "The historical-critical method is essential to a thorough understanding of the text in its present significance."⁴⁴ However, Cox's use of the historical-critical method seems more along the lines of what Sidney Greidanus terms a "holistic historical-critical method."⁴⁵ That is, while Cox does not share the philosophical naturalistic worldview that underlies the historical-critical method, he nevertheless finds it valuable insofar as it helps to locate the meaning of biblical texts. Thus, when he quotes Walter Wink's striking statement that, "Historical biblical criticism is bankrupt," he explains: "He didn't mean there is no good in it. Rather that in itself it is powerless to accomplish what should be the primary purpose of biblical study: personal and social transformation."⁴⁶ He adds, "The historical critical is only a place to *begin*."⁴⁷

⁴⁴James W. Cox, *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 13.

⁴⁵Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 36-47 (emphasis added).

⁴⁶Cox, "Biblical Preaching is—"

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

Consequently, the preacher employs the historical-critical method only as an aid to determine the meaning of the biblical text. Cox states:

Historical and critical research can sometimes go behind these texts as we have them and discern an earlier form, and that may be useful in our interpretation. Whatever historical study of the Scriptures has to offer of value we should welcome. However, the text as it stands before us will inevitably have the greater claim upon us.⁴⁸

Delivering a faculty address at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary years ago, Cox compares the biblical interpreter's critical work to that of a scientific scholar. "But," he states, "once this work is done, there often comes a parting of the ways. The scientific scholar goes one way, and the preacher another. This parting is not necessary, yet it happens. Preaching is concerned about the object of the text."⁴⁹ Cox's view certainly has been consistent over the years. Speaking recently of the historical-critical method, he acknowledges its failure where it has been misapplied: "Some of it went to seed . . . so that it became a consuming passion that obscured what was profound in continuing significance in what was the concern of the various biblical writers."⁵⁰ And again, "One doesn't get bogged down in the historical details as a consuming passion as if the answers to those questions, all of them, would result in a right relationship with God."⁵¹

⁴⁸Cox, *Preaching*, 67.

⁴⁹James W. Cox, "The Uniqueness of Preaching" (faculty address in Alumni Memorial Chapel, SBTS, February 8, 1967, *Review and Expositor* 64 (Fall 1967): 523-33.

⁵⁰Cox, Interview 2.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

General Hermeneutical Principles

In *Preaching*, Cox provides the reader with four preliminary considerations concerning the interpretation of texts.⁵² First, he recommends that the interpreter “avoid spurious texts.” Cox has in mind here texts that “are not supported by the best biblical scholarship.”⁵³ A good grasp of textual criticism would aid the interpreter here, as would the careful comparison between English translations. This also aids the interpreter in following Cox’s second principle: “Be careful not to misunderstand the text.”

Thirdly, Cox recommends that the interpreter “avoid allegorical interpretation.” This third principle touches on several related aspects of hermeneutics and requires a more extensive treatment at this point. Many are familiar with the rather fanciful interpretations of the parables by early church fathers such as Origen and Augustine. Of the latter, Cox states: “No less a theologian than Augustine asserted that church doctrine must be founded on the clear teaching of Scripture, though he believed that a spiritualized understanding of some texts could be supportive of those clear teachings.”⁵⁴ And others would agree. Spurgeon, for example, clearly disagreed with those who condemned the practice of spiritualizing.⁵⁵ But Cox issues a helpful caveat:

In practice, however, this method does not come off too well. The line between the literal and the spiritual meaning becomes blurred. It appears, however, that

⁵²Cox, *Preaching*, 63-65.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁵Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “On Spiritualizing,” in *Lectures to My Students*, (reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 97-109.

such a story as the stilling of the storm (Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25) was meant to have an extended application to such storms as those of persecution and so on, in addition to its literal meaning. With these texts we have to proceed with caution.⁵⁶

Spiritualizing remains a debatable topic. Greidanus considers it inappropriate to take a text such as the above-mentioned Mark 4:35-41 and use it in such a way as to conclude that “if Christ is on the ship . . . there can come calm instead of storm.”⁵⁷ He argues that such spiritualizing “fails to do justice to the text, and its use undermines the authority of the sermon.”⁵⁸ But Cox would demur. He argues:

Karl Barth pointed out, and I agree with him, that there are biblical texts that make history, that they are historical, but they have something in addition to that particular historical setting, an implication there. Barth said some of the old time interpreters were better with the text than some more recent ones, and he was talking about those [recent ones] that would focus simply on some of those historical critical details . . . and forget that there was also an historical miracle, a parabolic meaning, in addition. He wasn’t saying just treat these miracles as parables. But you might look for—in addition to the historical situation—a parabolic significance . . . when it makes history, it makes history and parable at the same time.⁵⁹

Cox’s expository sermon on Matthew 8:18-27, entitled “Ship of Fools,” illustrates this understanding. Consider a few phrases from this sermon:

To follow Jesus Christ means to go with him into the very teeth of the storm For us, the storm may be the critical illness of a child, the embarrassing loss of a job, conflict in the home, temptation to some kind of wrongdoing, or a collapse of religious faith. It may also be a nation in crisis or a world on the verge of war. . . . If he can tame the wild storm, he can raise up the sick, he can give you a better job than the one you lost, he can bring peace to a troubled family or world, he can

⁵⁶Cox, *Preaching*, 64.

⁵⁷Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 165, n. 27. See also Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 160-61.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 161.

⁵⁹Cox, Interview 2.

break the back of temptation, and he can bring strength and radiance once more to a jaded faith When Christ has dealt with us, and the winds and the sea are at rest, we find ourselves saying with the first disciples, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”⁶⁰

This discussion is tangential to another debatable topic. Can the interpreter justifiably interpret a text in such a way that he preaches solely from the viewpoint of one particular character in a narrative? For instance, can he preach a sermon on Zacchaeus from the viewpoint of the crowd, or from the viewpoint of the Pharisees? Can he take the text of the Prodigal Son and preach a sermon merely from the view of the elder son, or the father? This method is recommended by homileticians such as Charles Koller.⁶¹ However, scholars like Greidanus would disagree with both “character” and “biographical” preaching, calling this method more “anthropocentric,” rather than “theocentric.”⁶² Indeed, Greidanus even argues against the claim that an interpreter could justifiably do *both* in interpretation, that is, preach on a particular character, and at the same time, maintain a theocentric emphasis. He states:

Sometimes preachers, sensing the deficiency of straight anthropocentric preaching, will try to do justice to both God and human characters as two distinct factors in the text. This procedure often leads to a curious split in the sermon between a theocentric explication and an anthropocentric application.⁶³

But Cox finds it perfectly legitimate to interpret the text in such a manner, so long as

⁶⁰James W. Cox, “Ship of Fools,” in *Surprised by God: Interpreting God’s Gifts of Life and Courage for Living* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 39-44.

⁶¹Charles W. Koller, *How to Preach without Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 59-60.

⁶²Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, passim.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 217.

one is careful to not “ignore, and be disciplined by, the larger meaning.”⁶⁴ Furthermore, Cox finds validity in the imaginative insertion of other characters in the sermon so long as no violence is done to the meaning of the biblical text. For example, he sees legitimacy in sermons such as “Faces around the Cross,” where the viewpoints of various personalities are examined as they witness Jesus’ crucifixion. But again, he cautions that no violence be done to the historical scene. Furthermore, one must first deal with the meaning of the text: “You could deal with it in a sentence . . . and then go on to what you want to say.”⁶⁵

Imagination in interpretation requires the use of qualifying words and phrases. Cox stresses that the preacher must be clear when using this homiletical device: “You could say, ‘It seems to me,’ or, ‘Could it be,’ . . . because after all, as we read one of those parables, or historical situations, we furnish our own imagination with questions, possibilities.”⁶⁶ His sermon on Zacchaeus, entitled “The Conversion of an Unpromising Prospect,” illustrates the use of these qualifying phrases. Consider a few examples:

“Even some of his disdainful contemporaries could have said . . .”

“Could it be that . . . ?”

“Had Zacchaeus heard . . . ?”

“Can you visualize it?”

⁶⁴Cox, Interview 2. See also Cox, *A Guide*, 32-33, where the preaching of biblical characters is suggested.

⁶⁵Cox, Interview 2.

⁶⁶Ibid.

“You can imagine the kind of things they said.”

“Picture these people as they climbed . . .”

“Think of the explanations, the defenses . . .”

“Did he finally give up . . .?”

“I imagine that . . .”⁶⁷

As a fourth general hermeneutical principle, Cox recommends one “should use typological interpretation very carefully.”⁶⁸ While he notes that scholars such as Gerhard von Rad find validity in an infinite number of Old Testament types, he recommends a more conservative approach: “The safer course for the preacher, however, would be to leave typology to the biblical writers and use only their types in preaching.”⁶⁹

Responsible Interpretation

Having mentioned the importance of the historical-critical method in determining the meaning of a text, there are other principles which must be applied to the hermeneutical process.⁷⁰ Cox stresses the importance of a syntactical and theological study of the text as well. He advocates the study of the original languages, so that the interpreter might understand the meaning of individual words. Therefore,

⁶⁷Cox, *Surprised by God*, 17-23.

⁶⁸Cox, *Preaching*, 64.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 65.

⁷⁰The heading “Responsible Interpretation” is taken from Cox, “Toward Responsible Interpretation,” in *Preaching*, 65-74.

works such as A.T. Robertson's *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* and Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* are recommended. However, Cox reminds the interpreter that *context* is the key to careful interpretation rather than the specific meanings of isolated words. He states:

Interpretation, however, does not proceed so much on atomistic meanings found in individual words and metaphors as on related meanings in a syntactical context. The problem is usually not what this or that word means. Often the meaning of the individual word derives as much, perhaps more, from the immediate context as from the original root from which it sprang or from other contexts in which the word has been used.⁷¹

Thus, while Cox advocates the study of biblical languages, he would concede that proper interpretation could be accomplished by using good English translations and by paying close attention to the context of the passage. Furthermore, the biblical languages should seldom find their way into the pulpit. In fact, he says that, "to import gratuitously, the Greek or Hebrew into the sermon is counter-productive."⁷² He adds, "I think there may be a real strong reason occasionally to do it, when a matter is in dispute, or controversy. But I don't think that will happen every Sunday."⁷³

Cox also insists that the interpreter must take into account what some have termed "progressive revelation." The use of both Testaments is crucial to determining the meaning of a particular text. Indeed, a "fuller revelation" is discovered when the

⁷¹Cox, *Preaching*, 68.

⁷²Cox, Interview 2.

⁷³*Ibid.*

Old Testament is read in light of the New.⁷⁴ Here Cox is in agreement with the previously mentioned “Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible” listed in the appendix of his *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*.⁷⁵ Part I (c) states:

It is agreed that the unity of the Old and the New Testaments is not to be found in any naturalistic development, or in any static identity, but in the ongoing redemptive activity of God in the history of one people, reaching its fulfillment in Christ. Accordingly it is of decisive importance for hermeneutical method to interpret the Old Testament in the light of the total revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, from which arises the full Trinitarian faith of the Church.⁷⁶

Furthermore, comparison between the two Testaments is a crucial step in order to determine the bearing of the text upon the theme of “salvation history,” or *Heilsgeschichte*.⁷⁷

New Testament usage of the Old brings up the idea of *sensus plenior*. The “Guiding Principles” state that an Old Testament passage, “may also disclose in the light of the New Testament a new and more profound significance, unknown to the original writer.”⁷⁸ For Cox, an example of this would be the “servant passages” in the last section of the book of Isaiah. Cox maintains that while Israel was called the

⁷⁴Cox, *Preaching*, 67.

⁷⁵Cox, “Appendix B,” in *A Guide*, 123-28. Again, see Appendix 3 of this paper for a reproduction.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 124.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 125.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

“servant” in these passages, “Jesus Christ was the fulfillment *par excellence* of Israel, so [the text] would have that fuller [or] . . . ideal meaning.”⁷⁹

However, the ultimate, or ideal meaning in prophetic passages may have been either known or unknown to the original writer. Cox believes that while it is possible that the original writer may *not* have known about the “fuller” meaning of a certain text, at the same time, it is possible that he *did* know. As he states, “He might have had, as it were, a prophetic vision, and visions were very important to those ancient prophets.”⁸⁰

The *form* of the text as it appears in the Scriptures also plays an important role in determining the meaning of the passage. Further, Cox suggests that the closer one adheres to the biblical form, the more likely the message may be received by the hearers. He argues that the wide variety of literary forms “are waiting to be used in their special forms to make your sermons easier to listen to.”⁸¹ Rather than forcing the text into a preformed homiletical grid, Cox suggests getting “as much of the form of the sermon as you can from the form of the text.”⁸² While Cox concedes that it is not always possible to preach every text in the form in which it appears, he maintains that “the sermon does look and sound more biblical when it *is* possible.”⁸³

With regard to text selection, Cox suggests that a preacher’s use of the

⁷⁹Cox, Interview 2.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Cox, *A Guide*, 15.

⁸²Ibid., 22.

⁸³Cox, “Biblical Preaching Is—”

lectionary will enable him to preach a wide variety of biblical material as well as prevent the preaching of merely his favorite texts. He also recommends the method of preaching through biblical books as a way to accomplish a balance of biblical exposure. Nevertheless, he cautions, “Of course, we can import our prejudices into any text . . .”⁸⁴ Consequently, the interpreter must constantly guard against the practice of *eisegesis* in the place of *exegesis*.

Cox also recommends the practice of choosing a biblical text based upon a perceived need of the congregation. While this idea often generates a lot of discussion from its objectors, one wonders how *any* text may be selected *without* giving at least some thought to the perceived needs of the hearers. Certainly the preaching expositor of biblical books gives some thought to the perceived needs of his congregation before selecting a particular book for a preaching series. For Cox, it seems more important that the preacher *have* a text. As he writes elsewhere, in response to the question of whether a preacher should begin with a text or a theme, “It doesn’t really matter where the sermon begins, whether with a text or with a theme; a preacher who is committed to preaching biblically will preach biblically in either case.”⁸⁵

Questions to Aid Text Interpretation

The remainder of this chapter consists of fourteen questions that Cox lists in

⁸⁴Cox, *Preaching*, 63.

⁸⁵James W. Cox, ed., *Handbook of Themes for Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 5.

both of his preaching texts as an aid to interpreting biblical texts.⁸⁶ The questions are meant by Cox neither to be exhaustive, nor necessarily to be asked of every text.

Rather, the list, “offers a place to begin.”⁸⁷ The questions are those raised by both Cox’s mentors and by himself. He notes:

Some of these questions were suggested in classroom lectures of Professor Paul Scherer, by James Black in his *Mystery of Preaching*, by Harry Emerson Fosdick in a symposium by Charles McGlon, “How I prepare My Sermons,” and by Halford Luccock in his *In the Minister’s Workshop*.⁸⁸

What is the Text About?

Cox recommends first to try to ascertain what particular theme comes through in the text. Here, he has primarily in mind doctrinal themes, such as eschatology or soteriology.

What does the Text mean to You?

Cox acknowledges that the order of this question may seem alarming. He anticipates the argument, “Should we not do careful exegesis and look at the history of the interpretation of the text first?”⁸⁹ He answers, “Not necessarily. Your first impression is likely to be the understanding of the average reader of the text. So it is a

⁸⁶Cox, *A Guide*, 49-58, and *Preaching*, 74-77.

⁸⁷Cox, *Preaching*, 74.

⁸⁸Ibid., 296 n. 9.

⁸⁹Ibid., 74.

good place to begin.”⁹⁰ Indeed, the very next question ensures that the proper meaning has been ascertained in light of exegetical study.

This question reveals the importance Cox feels in thinking about the hearers early on in the interpretive process. Elsewhere, he recommends a procedure practiced by Eduard Schweizer, called, “the sermon seminar.” Here, in the early stages of sermon preparation, the preacher meets with a small number of people who will be the hearers of his message. For a period of about 90 minutes, the preacher listens while the various individuals discuss their interpretations and perceptions of the biblical text. The preacher himself does little talking, except perhaps to aid in the answering of a technical question. He is spending the majority of the time listening to his future audience as they discuss the text he will soon preach. Cox, who practiced this method himself and recommends its usage, relays its benefits. He states: “A text whose relevance may not be superficially obvious, may have its relevance uncovered, unpacked, when a group of people begin to share their experience with it, their questions about it, their insights into it, and the possible meaning it could have for them and their times.”⁹¹

What Crucial Exegetical Issues in the Text might bear on a Correct Interpretation?

Here, the interpreter studies areas covered earlier in this chapter, areas such as historical-critical research, context, syntactical and grammatical study, etc.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Cox, “Biblical Preaching Is—”

What is the Significance of the Text in Relation to Jesus Christ and the History of Redemption?

Cox elaborates upon the need to interpret the text in light of its history of redemption. He states: “Moreover, the ethical teachings of Jesus and the apostles have to be seen as *a part of* and not *apart from* the movement of God’s grace toward us and toward all people in the Christ event. Christian preaching is always within the context of God’s purpose revealed in Jesus Christ.”⁹²

This hermeneutical principle is similar to the main theme of Bryan Chapell’s preaching text wherein he bemoans the lack of a “redemption” theme in much contemporary preaching.⁹³ Indeed, preaching ethical imperatives from texts such as the Sermon on the Mount *apart from* the redemptive theme of grace, would likely result in nothing less than Pharisaical legalism.

What has the Text Meant to Other Interpreters?

Cox recommends the study of a variety of scholars, early church fathers as well as modern theologians. Such a study “enriches” the interpreter’s own understanding of the text.

What is the Point of Immediacy? Where does the Text Strike Closest to Home in your Life?

Cox states: “The point of immediacy could be at one place one time and at

⁹²Cox, *Preaching*, 75.

⁹³Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); see particularly Part 3, “A Theology of Christ-Centered Messages,” 263-311.

another place another time.”⁹⁴

**What is There in the Text
That would make it Difficult to Communicate?**

Homileticians have long spoken of the need for the preacher to “exegete his audience.” This idea is what Cox has in mind by this question. The interpreter must try to place himself in the shoes of his hearers, so as to anticipate their perspective of the preached message.

**Can the Truth in the Text Stand Alone,
or Does it Need to be Seen in Relation
to a Counterbalancing Truth?**

At times, the preacher must reconcile certain biblical truths with other truths in order to present a more accurate understanding of the text at hand. For instance, a sermon on faith from Romans may need the teaching of James to bring a more balanced understanding of “faith” and “works.” But Cox cautions: “A too well-balanced sermon does not really convey its message.”⁹⁵

**What are Some of the Causes of the Condition
or Situation Discussed or Suggested in the Text?**

The goal here is to consider how the situation in the text may be relevantly applied to the hearers.

⁹⁴Cox, *Preaching*, 75.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 76.

**What are the Theological Implications
or Practical Duties that Grow Out of the Text?**

Again, this question considers the necessary application that arises from the theological principles found in the text.

**What Objections may be Raised to Your Conclusions
about the Implications and Applications
of the Truth of the Text?**

Cox states: "It should be noted that the ancient rhetoricians made a place in a discourse for 'answers to objections.'"⁹⁶ A bit like question seven, the interpreter must constantly think of his audience as he handles the text.

**What would be the Results of Knowing
or Failing to Know, Believing or Failing to Believe,
or Doing or Failing to do what the Text Suggests?**

The preacher must consider the consequences of the text's demands upon its hearers. This thinking prepares him to warn or encourage his hearers accordingly.

**What Must you do to Make the Message of the Text
Real and True in Your Own Life?**

Here, something of Phillips Brooks's "truth through personality"⁹⁷ is in view. Cox asserts: "The gospel becomes incarnate and is revealed through our own experience of it in the dimensions and shape of our own need."⁹⁸ The message of the text can

⁹⁶Ibid., 77.

⁹⁷Phillips Brooks, *The Joy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 25-26.

⁹⁸Ibid.

hardly become real in the lives of the preacher's hearers if it has not first touched his own heart.

What is there in General Literature, in Biblical Resources, in Personal Counseling, and in Personal Observation and Experience that will Exemplify or Illustrate the Truth of the Text?

Cox believes the need for the interpreter to consider illustrative material is crucial to his task of relaying biblical truth to his hearers. As he states, "The finest argument pales beside the strength of an actual instance of truth. Moreover, human interest stories are endlessly fascinating."⁹⁹

Conclusion

The hermeneutical method of James W. Cox is a balanced approach to interpreting the Bible that takes critical scholarship seriously. The tools of critical research, however, are helpful only to the extent that they aid the process of determining the author's intended meaning of a text. For Cox, the location of meaning is found in the fixed intent of the author as deposited in the text. At the same time, however, biblical texts have numerous applications of meaning that cross cultural and historical boundaries. The interpreter, then, must labor to elucidate the relevancy of the biblical text for any given situation. Cox's passion for proper biblical interpretation is clear: "The text is there to be understood, believed, and applied to personal and social need.

⁹⁹Ibid.

The approach to interpretation, therefore, must be clarifying, convincing, and practical.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 61.

CHAPTER 5

HOMILETICAL METHOD

Introduction

Central to Cox's homiletical method is the place and priority of the Bible and its integral use in Christian preaching. His statement that "the Bible is our homiletical home"¹ serves as a succinct summary of his homiletical method. While he allows that there may be special circumstances in which the preacher may not use a particular biblical text for his sermon, he maintains that such circumstances would be very rare. Indeed, as Cox states, "Pity the preacher who appears with only personal opinions!"² Thus, Cox greatly stresses the priority of the Bible's place in the field of homiletics. Perhaps this seems obvious to conservative evangelicals committed to the Bible's authority in preaching. But it may be that even the staunchest defender of the Bible could possibly fall prey to the temptation to place himself in a position above the authority of Scripture. As Cox states:

The problem of some preachers with the Bible is not that they feel more or less helpless before the vastness and the uncertainties of the terrain that the Bible marks out. Nor is it a misuse of the Bible by ignorance or prejudice. The problem

¹James W. Cox, "Biblical Preaching Is—," lecture given at the Continuing Theological Education Conference, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS). March 1985, audiocassette.

²James W. Cox, *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design & Delivery of Sermons* (Nashville: Seminary Extension, n.d.), 19.

is emancipation from the Bible. The preacher, wise in his own conceits, stands above the Bible in judgment. He imagines that he's too intelligent or too modern for it. He has come of age and so he can put away the things that belonged to the childhood of faith.³

Furthermore, Cox is very passionate about the primacy of biblical preaching. Consider, for example, his introductory remarks under the "Course Overview" section of his study guide for *Contemporary Christian Preaching*. He writes: "Let me welcome you to what may be the single most valuable course for your ministry. I say "most valuable" because—for the preacher—biblical, theological, and other studies count for nothing if the preacher cannot deliver the goods."⁴ Cox's homiletical method is an approach unmistakably rooted in the Holy Scriptures. In fact, the preacher, "never actually begins to preach until he begins to give account of the bearing of the Bible on the matter."⁵

The Nature of Preaching

In the first chapter of his book *Preaching*, Cox identifies four elements that comprise the nature of Christian preaching.⁶ These four elements are proclamation, witness, teaching and prophesying. A brief examination of each of these elements reveals Cox's philosophical basis for his homiletical method.

³Cox, "Biblical Preaching Is—."

⁴James W. Cox, *Contemporary Christian Preaching PM 0257 Study Guide* (Nashville: Seminary Extension Department, 1988), 1.

⁵James W. Cox, "The Uniqueness of Preaching," faculty address in Alumni Memorial Chapel, SBTS, February 8, 1967, as printed in *Review and Expositor* 64 (Fall 1967): 528.

⁶Cox, *Preaching*, 3-15.

Proclamation

Christian preaching is the proclamation of good news. The preacher is the “messenger” (*keryx*) who proclaims the “message” (*kerygma*). The nature of the message is the “good news” (*evangelion*). The preacher heralds the good news that Jesus Christ is the victor over Satan and that He brings salvation to all who will believe. Proclamation finds its fullest expression, then, in the presentation of Jesus Christ as the One who died for our sins and saves us from our sin if we will accept the truth claims made by the herald.

Witness

The preacher who proclaims the message of good news bears witness to the message. That is, he himself accentuates the message by virtue of his specific personality and experiences. Cox illustrates: “The *kerygma* is like the metal of which a coin is made; witness is that metal with the image and superscription of the messenger upon it. What the gospel does to the messenger, therefore, becomes a part of what is preached.”⁷ As messenger of the *kerygma*, the preacher is affected by the content of the message. The message, then, finds expression through the personality and experience of the preacher. The result is not that the message has changed, but rather that it is refined, shaped, and informed as it passes through the messenger. Cox cites Philips Brooks’ comments as helpful to the discussion of witness:

The truth must come really through the person, not merely over his lips, not merely into his understanding and out through his pen. It must come through his character, his affections, his whole intellectual and moral being. It must come

⁷Ibid., 7.

genuinely through him. I think that, granting equal intelligence and study, here is the great difference between two preachers of the Word. The Gospel has come *over* one of them and reaches us tinged and flavored with his superficial characteristics, belittled with his littleness. The Gospel has come *through* the other, and we receive it impressed and winged with all the earnestness and strength that there is in him. In the first case the man has been but a printing machine or a trumpet. In the other case he has been a true man and a real messenger of God.⁸

Teaching

The preacher is also a teacher. In fact, he is the principal teacher of the local congregation. Teaching is accomplished through both heralding the good news to the lost (*kerygma*) and teaching Christian doctrine to believers (*didache*). Cox believes, however that one “cannot draw a sharp line between *kerygma* and *didache*.”⁹ Evangelistic sermons, for example, may contain a great deal of doctrinal teaching. Likewise, sermons preached for the purpose of edifying the church may contain enough gospel content to point the way of salvation for the unconverted.

Teaching, then, is inseparable from proclaiming the good news. Of course, teaching is most readily thought of in relation to discipleship. Cox believes the preacher’s primary task is to teach his church members. He favorably cites Elton Trueblood who said that “every church ought to be a little seminary.”¹⁰ Cox also believes that the reference in Ephesians 4:11 to “pastors and teachers” is most likely a reference to just one office, the office of pastor-teacher.

⁸Cox cites from Phillips Brooks, *On Preaching* (New York: Seabury, 1964), 8. The quote may also be found in Phillips Brooks, *The Joy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 27.

⁹Cox, *Preaching*, 12-13.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

Prophesying

By prophesying, Cox means “giving a message perceived to meet a present need.”¹¹ He also refers to this kind of preaching as “heart-to-heart.” That is, the preacher proclaims the truth of God’s word in such a way that the hearer perceives that a real need may be met. This dialogical aspect occurs best in the pastoral context where the pastor is preaching to his familiar flock. Cox explains:

An “I-thou” relationship between preacher and hearer prevails. We hear not only what God, the Bible, Christian tradition, and our own hearts may say; we hear also what the people to whom we preach are saying, as we know the temptations, the guilt, the sorrows, the sufferings, and the doubts of these people. We read the lives of these people from what we see of their everyday living, their casual conversation, their requests for counsel, and even their demeanor during the act of preaching. Thus the message comes alive with reality.¹²

In light of this last element, Cox believes there are many valid ways to proclaim the message of the good news. The preacher may preach expository sermons, devotional sermons, or evangelistic sermons. There is no *one* way to preach. In fact, Cox believes a number of “structural options” exists for forming the sermon.¹³ The reader will note later in this chapter that Cox’s own method demonstrates a variety of ways in which the preacher may preach his messages.

Not all contemporary homileticians are comfortable with classifying sermons by various sermon categories. John Stott, for example, arguing for the supremacy of expository preaching, resists the classification of sermons by various types. Referring

¹¹Ibid., 14.

¹²Ibid., 14-15.

¹³See Cox, *Preaching*, 150-72. Cox provides seven sermon structures: explaining, affirming, reasoning, applying, questing, storytelling, and combining.

to W. E. Sangster's *The Craft of the Sermon*, in which Sangster identifies three major categories of sermons, Stott writes:

Other writers, less thorough than Sangster, have been content with simpler classifications. There are topical sermons and textual sermons, they say. Some are evangelistic or apologetic or prophetic, others doctrinal or devotional or ethical or hortatory, while somewhere down the line 'exegetical' or 'expository' sermons are included. I cannot myself acquiesce in this relegation (sometimes even grudging) of expository preaching to one alternative among many. It is my contention that all true Christian preaching is expository preaching.¹⁴

Stott clarifies, however, that by "expository preaching" he means the exposing of a text—regardless of size—so that the sermon is thoroughly biblical. Similarly, John MacArthur, Jr. strongly argues for the supremacy of expository preaching, going so far as to conclude that such preaching is "mandated" for anyone holding to biblical inerrancy.¹⁵ Like Stott, however, MacArthur understands "biblical preaching" as "exposition." By exposition he means "preaching in such a way that the meaning of the Bible passage is presented entirely and exactly as it was intended by God."¹⁶ Given this definition, many different sermon "types" arguably could be classified as "expository" so long as the sermons remain thoroughly biblical.

The issue, then, may be largely one of semantics. Cox uses the term "expository" primarily in the sense of "explanation" which is the way in which he understands John Broadus to use the term. Broadus, to whom Cox acknowledges his

¹⁴John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 125.

¹⁵John MacArthur, Jr., "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, ed. Richard L. Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas (Dallas: Word, 1992), 22-35.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 23-24.

“indebtedness” in the preface of his book *Preaching*, treats three “different species” of sermons in his classic *A Treatise on the Preparation and the Delivery of Sermons*.¹⁷ Distinguishing the expositional form from its counterparts is not always an easy task. Broadus writes: “We at once perceive that there is no broad line of division between expository preaching and the common methods, but that one may pass by almost insensible gradations from textual to expository sermons. We see, too, that men often preach expository sermons which they would not call by that name.”¹⁸

In any case, Cox clearly calls for *biblical* sermons. The *form* of the sermon is not nearly as important as whether the sermon is thoroughly grounded in the Bible. He writes: “Good, scripturally grounded preaching does not have to be ‘expository,’ as I use the word, to be soundly biblical. Biblical preaching is the *sine qua non* of the Christian preacher.”¹⁹ For Cox, whether the preacher begins his message with a text or whether he begins with a topic, he certainly must *have* a biblical text and treat the text with integrity.

The Central Idea

Homileticians often refer to a main theme or purpose of the sermon that shapes the arrangement of the material. H. Grady Davis refers to this main theme or

¹⁷John Albert Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 30th ed., ed. Edwin Charles Dargan (New York: University Press, 1898), 306-38. Here Broadus discusses “subject sermons,” “text sermons,” and “expository sermons.”

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 322.

¹⁹Cox, *Preaching*, 99.

purpose as the “Anatomy of the Idea.”²⁰ Haddon Robinson calls it the “Big Idea.”²¹ Ramesh Richard refers to it as the “Central Proposition of the Sermon” or CPS.²² Cox prefers to use the phrase “Central Idea.” He writes: “The central idea of the sermon is a statement of the truth that emerges from a study of the text and that determines the content of the sermon.”²³ While many homileticians prefer to use the term “proposition,” Cox uses the term central idea because it “can include ideas that are not argumentation, as would be suggested by the term *proposition*, as well as subjects, which do not carry a complete thought, and thus do not merit the term *proposition*.”²⁴

The central idea is comprised of a subject and predicate. The subject is the main thrust or theme of the sermon as found in the biblical text. The predicate, then, is that which the preacher is saying about the subject. It is an elaboration of the subject as the preacher intends to explain or prove it. Taken together, the subject and the predicate represent “the sermon in a nutshell—the central idea.”²⁵ The central idea, then,

²⁰H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958), 24-39.

²¹Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 31-48.

²²Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 85-93.

²³Cox, *Preaching*, 78.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*, 80.

represents the essence of the sermon. It provides the necessary limitations to the message and gives the message a unified sense of direction.

The central idea should be worded in such a way as its truth transcends time. The contemporary hearer should not feel that the truth is limited to the ancient world, but that it also rings with authority in his own world. Cox explains: "It is historically correct to say, 'When Simon Peter denied his Lord, he dishonored Jesus and brought remorse upon himself,' but it is homiletically better to say, 'When we deny our Lord, we dishonor Jesus and bring remorse upon ourselves.'"²⁶ Richard agrees with the idea of putting the central idea in universal language. Treating the central proposition of the sermon (CPS), he states: "You are not speaking to the Ephesians or to Moses' audience. You are speaking to your own congregation."²⁷ Putting the central idea in universal language draws the hearer of the contemporary world into the world of the Bible and aids in keeping him engaged throughout the message.

From Text to Sermon

In an article written for *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Cox provides the reader with some basic rules for developing a homiletical outline from the Biblical text. He challenges the preacher first to take his collected ideas from the text and consider the needs of his congregation, thereby arriving at one main purpose for the sermon. He favorably quotes Phillips Brooks: "In all your desire to create good sermons you should

²⁶Ibid., 88.

²⁷Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 90.

think no sermon good that does not do its work. Let the end for which you preach play freely in and modify your form of preaching."²⁸

Secondly, Cox discusses the arrangement of sermon material. The preacher's outline should be an extension of the central idea. All of the main points are informed, qualified, and restricted by the central idea. As Cox notes elsewhere, the "controlling purpose" of the sermon will shape the development of the outline.²⁹ If material works its way into the sermon that is not an extension of the central idea, there is a good chance that the sermon may lack a sense of order in its final form.

Cox further argues for the importance of unity in the sermon by making favorable mention of the Aristotelian method of "beginning, middle, and end."³⁰ This is followed by an appeal for a "suitable climax" in the sermon. Cox encourages the preacher to consider a variety of ways to accomplish this, whether by moving from general to particular, or *vice versa*.

Cox provides a number of cautionary statements concerning sermon construction. For example, he does not believe it is always wise for the preacher to state his sermon points up front. The intentional and deliberate announcement of points

²⁸James W. Cox, "Forming the Pattern of the Sermon," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 58 (June 1965), 32.

²⁹James W. Cox, *A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 61. Note Appendix 2 of this paper, which provides examples of the "controlling purpose." See the headings, "General End" and "Specific Intent."

³⁰See also chapter 4 of Cox's *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, "The Anatomy of the Sermon," where Cox divides the chapter into these three sections of beginning, middle, and end.

may cause the preacher to fall into a predictable pattern of delivery that loses something of the “fetching quality” that makes preaching so exciting.³¹

Cox also suggests that the preacher not have too many points in his sermon. He believes that most hearers find about three main points, tersely worded, to be as much as they can handle in a message. At the same time, however, Cox allows for the possibility of more points if such points are necessary to deliver the message. The preacher must, however, avoid the overlapping of points. He must take care to see that material covered under one point is easily distinguishable from material covered under another point.

Finally, the preacher should avoid “artificial or strained alliteration” of points.³² Cox is not *against* alliteration. In fact, he calls attention to those who have used it well, preachers such as James S. Stewart and Arthur E. Dalton. At the same time, however, Cox believes the preacher should exercise great care in word choice. “Otherwise,” he cautions, “while the words chime, the ideas will clash.”³³

Sermon Types

No *one* predominant form characterizes Cox’s own sermons. In fact, one finds great homiletical variety in the types of sermons Cox preaches. He believes that preachers should become adept at recognizing different sermon forms and should also experiment with different methods in their pulpits. Cox’s collection of sermons in

³¹Ibid., 34.

³²Ibid., 36.

³³Ibid.

*Surprised by God*³⁴ demonstrates the number of varying ways biblical texts may be preached. Consider how the following four examples reveal differences concerning structure, the enumeration of points, use of transitional statements, and application.³⁵

Expository Sermon of Didactic Text

Cox's "Hope Unashamed," is a sermon based on Romans 5:1-5.³⁶ This message best represents what most homileticians refer to as an expository sermon. Cox treats the text (with the exception of the first verse) in an expositional manner in the following way: (1) Hope is Ours (v.2); (2) Hope is Hard-won (vv.3-4); (3) Hope is Reliable (v.5).

The introduction builds the case for our need of hope. Cox mentions "occasional crises," which arise in our everyday lives, crises such as, "illness, persecution, failure, marital difficulty, and bereavement."³⁷ Following this introduction, Cox's proposition becomes clear when he states: "Let us examine this shining word that God has thrust among us in the midst of darkness, defeat, and death."³⁸ He then clearly

³⁴James W. Cox, *Surprised by God, Interpreting God's Gifts of Life and Courage for Living* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979).

³⁵The following classifications (Expository Sermon of Didactic Text, etc.) are this writer's categorizations based upon popular sermon designations.

³⁶Cox, *Surprised by God*, 87-93.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 87.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 88.

states the form the sermon will take: "I want to say three simple things. First, hope is ours. Second, hope is hard-won. And third, hope is reliable."³⁹

Cox utilizes clear, transitional statements between the various parts of the message: "first of all . . . now let's go a step further . . . and now a final step."⁴⁰ He reads each verse as it supports each main point. In the first point, he distinguishes biblical hope from secular definitions. Biblical hope is "confident assurance" an assurance that is "ours for the taking."⁴¹ In the next point, Cox points out that it is not unusual for the Christian to go through trials. His exposition closely follows the text: suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. Finally (point three), Cox interprets the RSV text, "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts . . ." as, "hope is reliable."⁴² Thus, he states: "The hope of which the apostle speaks is reliable because it rests on God alone."⁴³

Cox concludes by challenging his hearers to confidently lay claim to the hope they have as Christians in the midst of suffering. He exhorts: "Accept the suffering of the present moment."⁴⁴ Then, following a quotation of Hebrews 12:6, he concludes

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., 88-89.

⁴¹Ibid., 89.

⁴²Ibid., 91.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., 93.

with a quote from Karl Barth: “The gate at which all hope seems lost is the place at which it is continually renewed.”⁴⁵

Textual Sermon

Cox’s “A Savior for You!”⁴⁶ is a message from John 1:1-12. This sermon represents what most homileticians would characterize as a textual sermon, though some may label it as “topical.” Here the biblical text, John’s prologue, suggests for Cox an evangelistic message built upon the idea of receiving or rejecting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The prologue itself is not the basis for the message, nor does Cox necessarily intend to teach systematic doctrinal truths such as the pre-existence of the Son. Rather, the message is largely based upon verses 11 and 12.

After a paraphrase and then a quote of verse 11, the introduction proceeds with three illustrations of the rejection of Christ: the rich young ruler, the high priest, and the crowd at Jesus’ trial. Cox then raises the question regarding how modern day hearers have responded to Christ and states that his message will take the form of three questions to consider.

The first question (Point I) is, “Can you handle the past?”⁴⁷ By this, Cox means for the hearer to consider particular sinful thoughts and actions which have occurred in the past. This challenge is summarized by a restatement of the question as a

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., 9-16.

⁴⁷Ibid., 11.

transition to the next point. Cox states: “So I ask the question, Can you handle the past—your past, with its sins, its guilt, its failures—without Jesus Christ, the Savior?”⁴⁸

Secondly, Cox asks, “Can you—on your own—overcome the sin in your heart?”⁴⁹ Of course, as with the first point, Cox intends for the hearer to examine his own heart and note his shortcomings.

Cox concludes the message with a third question: “Can you be fully satisfied with an earthbound view of life?”⁵⁰ After telling the story of Nicodemus, Cox encourages his hearers to trust in the Lord, who promises to, “forgive your sins, to give you better things to live for, to help you do what is right, and to give you everlasting life.”⁵¹ Cox concludes with: “There is a Savior for you! Receive him today, and enter into all the riches of the blessings of God!”⁵²

Expositional Sermon of Narrative Text (Without Explicit Points)

The sermon “The Conversion of an Unpromising Prospect” is a message based upon Luke 19:1-10. It is a narrative sermon about the familiar character of Zacchaeus.⁵³ Unlike any other sermon in Cox’s book, this particular one does not

⁴⁸Ibid., 12.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., 14.

⁵¹Ibid., 16.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., 17-23.

contain explicit “sermon points” to support the central idea. Rather, Cox takes the narrative form of the biblical text and preaches it in narrative-expositional fashion, finding no structured points necessarily emerging from the text.

His introductory statement reveals what he sees as the main thrust of the narrative. Cox states: “Zacchaeus was not the kind of man most people would go out of their way to save.”⁵⁴ Thus, the emphasis of the sermon is upon our following the evangelistic example of Jesus. This emphasis is stressed again by the last words of the sermon: “Jesus declared that the ‘Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.’ As those who represent him today, we have no greater task ourselves.”⁵⁵

Cox strives for immediate application in this message. After a brief description of Zacchaeus in his opening words, Cox states, “We do not have an exact equivalent of Zacchaeus in our society. But don’t we treat many people as the Jews treated Zacchaeus?”⁵⁶

In narrative fashion, Cox treats every verse of the text in one way or another. He uses a great deal of imagination in accomplishing the free flowing style of the message. Reading between the lines of the biblical text, Cox suggests possible statements made by the biblical characters. The crowd gathered around Zacchaeus, for example, may have said: “There are a hundred places in Jericho Jesus could have stayed

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid., 23.

⁵⁶Ibid., 17.

without having to stay with him [Zacchaeus]. There's the Inn of the Good Samaritan only a little way off."⁵⁷

Cox also weaves a tremendous amount of historical and geographical research into the narrative. Consequently, the hearer visualizes the landscape of Jericho and hears about the winter palaces built by Herod and his son Archelaus.

Expositional Sermon of Narrative Text (*With Explicit Points*)

In this final example, Cox takes a narrative text and preaches it in a verse-by-verse expositional manner. Unlike the previous narrative example with Zacchaeus, however, Cox locates explicit sermon points to support a proposition. The sermon is entitled "Ship of Fools"⁵⁸ and is based upon Matthew 8:18-27. The introduction references both a contemporary and classical work, which suggests the title of the sermon. Cox's central idea is that believers are "fools for Christ's sake" and his succeeding points explain how.

First, Cox states, "If we take our discipleship seriously we have to renounce the usual securities."⁵⁹ Following the sequence of the biblical narrative, Cox illustrates the refusal to renounce such securities by the two men in verses 18-22. Cox immediately weaves application into this point by statements such as "our Lord made it

⁵⁷Ibid., 20.

⁵⁸Ibid., 39-44.

⁵⁹Ibid., 39.

crystal clear that the future holds no guarantee of comfort for anyone who follows him.”⁶⁰

Secondly, following Jesus means “to go with him into the very teeth of the storm.”⁶¹ Cox takes his hearers through the ensuing verses: 23-24. He notes that when the disciples first began to follow Jesus all was well, but they suddenly entered a storm. Again, application is immediate: “For us, the storm may be the critical illness of a child, the embarrassing loss of a job, conflict in the home . . . (etc.)”⁶² Cox then relates the disciples’ cry to the Lord (v.25) to our own cry in times of crises.

Thirdly, Cox asserts that when we find ourselves in a storm that, “[it is] then we discover true security.”⁶³ As Jesus was in the boat with the disciples, so He is with us. Cox assures: “If he can tame the wild storm, he can raise up the sick, he can give you a better job than the one you lost . . . (etc.)”⁶⁴ The hearer is enjoined to express faith in Christ and share something of the disciples’ wonder as they pose their question in verse 27: “Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?” Cox’s last words are a recapitulation of his third point: “. . . God is there with us. And that makes the difference!”⁶⁵

⁶⁰Ibid., 40.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., 41.

⁶³Ibid., 42.

⁶⁴Ibid., 43.

⁶⁵Ibid., 44.

These four sermons illustrate the homiletical variety Cox believes is possible in the preaching of biblical texts. The central idea, coupled with the preacher's own thoughts, guides the development of each outline. Cox reasons:

This means that there is no standard outline that will provide the model for every sermon you need to preach. Some preachers bore their audiences to rebellion with the sameness of approach. The hearers can always count on three points and a poem, and once the text is announced, they can predict with accuracy both outline and treatment before the preacher is through the introduction.⁶⁶

Sermon Delivery

Having examined Cox's movement from text to sermon, this chapter will now address matters more directly related to the matter of sermon delivery.

Consequently, while there still will be some overlapping between sermon "preparation" and "delivery," the remainder of this chapter will concern the preached message and its impact upon the hearers.

As discussed above, Cox defines the preacher's task as both "herald" and "witness." He is a herald in the sense that he is God's messenger announcing "essentially one message: 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself' (2 Cor. 5:19)."⁶⁷ The preacher is a witness in the sense that he preaches the message as it finds expression through his own personal experience.

Taken together, the two roles of herald and witness are somewhat akin to

⁶⁶Cox, *A Guide*, 66.

⁶⁷Cox, "The Uniqueness of Preaching," 525.

Phillips Brooks' often-quoted, "truth through personality."⁶⁸ As Cox asserts, "Truth, even the truth of the gospel and particularly the truth of the gospel, ought to be digested and become a part of the preacher's own life, so that, in a real sense, by delivering himself he *does* deliver the gospel."⁶⁹

Keeping the Listeners Listening

In Chapter 14 of Cox's, *Preaching*, Cox discusses, "The Factors of Attention and Interest."⁷⁰ Here Cox addresses the challenge of maintaining the hearer's interest throughout the duration of the sermon. Recognizing that most hearers are not likely to maintain an active interest while a preacher delivers merely a strict and pure exposition of Scripture, Cox offers several ways to keep the listener engaged throughout the message.

Matters of vital interest. Cox believes that the preacher should consider those matters of concern that most people encounter at one point or another. "Stated negatively as problems, they could include guilt, fear, disappointment, loneliness, anger, failure, frustration, discouragement, inferiority feelings, compulsions, and so on."⁷¹ The preacher who recognizes these often universally shared problems will seek to address

⁶⁸Phillips Brooks, *The Joy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989; originally published as *Lectures on Preaching*, 1895), 25-28.

⁶⁹"The Uniqueness of Preaching," 526.

⁷⁰Cox, *Preaching*, 193-207.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 194.

them in his sermons. Doing so ensures that many of the hearers will listen attentively, seeking resolution to their problems.

The familiar. Cox challenges the preacher to establish “common ground” with the hearer before delving into an unfamiliar area. This engages the hearer and prepares him for the “uncommon ground.” The preacher should work hard in his attempt to draw his hearers into the biblical text by considering the familiar things with which they can identify. Often a short story or personalized question will accomplish this. Once the hearer is engaged with the *familiar* he is more likely to listen to what is new and *unfamiliar*.

Cox recommends a strategy that aids the preacher in accomplishing the previous two areas just addressed. In a method called the “Sermon Seminar,” the preacher—*before* preaching his sermon—meets with individuals who will be his future hearers. This is done in order to identify with their understanding of the text. Cox explains: “Get together a group of the people who will hear your sermon. Present the text to them, and then sit back and be quiet and attentive while they discuss the text for an hour and a half.”⁷² Listening to their discussion enables the preacher to discover matters of vital interest as well as establish common ground. Those who have discussed the biblical text beforehand are also more inclined to listen attentively to the preacher’s message as they have had a hand in the early preparation process.

⁷²Cox, *A Guide*, 21. (See also “Biblical Preaching Is—.” Here, Cox discusses Eduard Schweizer’s use of the “Sermon Seminar.”)

The unusual. This idea concerns the treatment of a familiar text in an unfamiliar way. As Cox says, “Biblical texts are the coin of the homiletical realm, but some of them are worn so smooth by repeated use that the people can hardly see God’s image and superscription upon them.”⁷³ The preacher may occasionally preach a text in a unique and unexpected manner. This method, however, should be practiced sparingly lest the unfamiliar become all too familiar to the hearers.

Humor. Cox believes that humor is one of the best ways to keep listeners engaged in the message. He laments that it is unfortunate that some have concluded that “the pulpit is not the place for humor.”⁷⁴ While acknowledging that humor has sometimes been misused, Cox heartily recommends the use of devices such as exaggeration, reversal, fractured quotations, witty definitions, understatement, humorous asides, and puns, as a few ways to keep hearers engaged throughout the message. But the preacher should use humor wisely. He is not called to be a comedian. Too much emphasis upon humor itself draws away from the seriousness of the message at hand. Cox recommends the following rule: “When humor is germane to the discussion, when the preacher does not have to go out of his way and drag it in, then it is one of the most useful tools of persuasion.”⁷⁵

The concrete. Here, Cox has in mind the preacher’s use of descriptive words

⁷³Ibid., 197.

⁷⁴Ibid., 202.

⁷⁵Ibid.

and imagery that serve to bring the truth as near as possible to the hearers. This can be accomplished by appealing to the senses. An example from one of his sermons illustrates this. Noting the various appeals to the senses, consider the following excerpts from the previously mentioned sermon on Zacchaeus entitled “The Conversion of an Unlikely Prospect”:

Visual appeal: “You could look to the south and see the dreadful but beautiful Dead Sea, and to the east, the Jordan River.”

Auditory appeal: “The sound of carefree laughter, the haunting refrain of a song heard in childhood . . .”

Motor appeal: “He ran on ahead of the crowd and scrambled up a sycamore tree.”

Tactual appeal: “The tired, hungry travelers bathe hands and face and feet with cold water.”

Gustatory appeal: “Perhaps the others were too busy eating the delightfully seasoned food—mouth-watering enough for a king—and talking among themselves . . .”

Olfactory appeal: “Zacchaeus awoke every morning to smell the fragrance of the balsam trees.”

Thermic appeal: “. . . high, windswept, often-cold Jerusalem.”⁷⁶

Persuasion

Cox acknowledges the abuse of persuasion in preaching. “All of us,” he says, “have seen or heard of enough high-pressure gospel huckstering to make us want to avoid it like the plague.”⁷⁷ But the abuses of persuasion should not result in the

⁷⁶Cox, *Preaching*, 206-07. (This sermon appears in *Surprised by God*, 17-23).

⁷⁷James W. Cox, “Is Persuasion Allowable in Preaching?” *New Pulpit Digest* (January-February 1977): 10.

preacher's abandonment of it as a helpful rhetorical device. Persuasion is necessary because proclamation of the gospel implies the invitation to receive it. Proclamation calls for action on the behalf of the listener.

Therefore, Cox issues a "needed caveat." He states, "Don't permit your fear of doing the wrong thing cause you to do nothing to bring people to faith and obedience."⁷⁸ Cox warns that many preachers, having obtained a good education which results in their being more "open-minded," often fail to move their hearers to action for fear of insulting them by being perceived as too pushy and inconsiderate. This fear is unwarranted. Cox argues "The surest way of avoiding crass manipulation and exploitation would be to say nothing that would make an evil way unattractive or a good way appealing. But then we would fail God who has entrusted to us the unsearchable riches of Christ [and] we would fail those who could be blessed with a little nudge of friendly help."⁷⁹

Illustrative Supporting Material

This heading encompasses a wide array of material used to support the central idea of the preacher's message. In Chapter 16 of *Preaching*, Cox discusses the following several methods.⁸⁰

Definition. Ensuring that the hearer understands the correct referent of a

⁷⁸Cox, *Preaching*, 214.

⁷⁹Cox, "Is Persuasion Allowable?," 10.

⁸⁰Cox, *Preaching*, 218-34.

particular term means that the preacher uses synonyms, or defines the word in a logical or rhetorical manner. Cox states, “We may put a word in its proper classification and compare it to other words in the same classification; or we may use examples, comparisons, contrasts, and so on to make clear what we want to be understood.”⁸¹

Explanation. Cox helps one understand this term by noting its difference with the preceding term. He writes: “A definition can tell us what sanctification is, but that is not enough. Definition often makes explanation possible, for we can go on from the definition to a fuller understanding of the term through the process of explanation.”⁸² Explanation is the necessary step that follows definition. The preacher must never assume that his hearers will always be satisfied with merely a simple definition of terms, but must be willing to further elucidate the meaning, drawing from other methods such as restatement, or examples.

Restatement. Restatement repeats the meaning of a truth often by using synonyms and antonyms. Like explanation, restatement helps bring clarity to the proper meaning of a term, but also “brings conviction by the intensity of repetition” and “engages the emotions” or “moves to action by the persistence of its repeated challenge.”⁸³

⁸¹Ibid., 218.

⁸²Ibid., 219.

⁸³Ibid.

Argument. Bringing evidence to bear upon the assertion of truth claims is the role of argument. While preachers would like to think that their hearers' regeneration and faith would be enough to bring them into agreement with the preacher's claims, such is not the case. Persuasive argumentation is essential. The preacher must wrestle with how the text will be perceived by his hearers. He anticipates honest questions and objections and seeks to answer those during the preaching event.

Examples. By examples Cox has in mind what most homileticians would refer to as illustrations. Cox means that the preacher provides, "an actual instance of what [he is] talking about."⁸⁴ Examples may be general, specific, or hypothetical. Often, examples take the form of a brief narrative, such as a reference to church history or to a particular happening in someone's life.

Illustrations. By this term Cox means the "comparison of one thing with another."⁸⁵ Illustrations may take several forms. There are *explicit comparisons* like simile and analogy and *implied comparisons* like metaphor and allegory. Illustrations also take the form of *story* such as anecdotes, parables, and fables.

Testimony. The use of testimony may include the preacher's *own* testimony, but more frequently it involves the testimony of *others*. Testimony lends authority to the preacher's claims and may also serve to corroborate and illustrate the preacher's claims. In determining the use of testimonials Cox recommends that the preacher ask

⁸⁴Ibid., 223.

⁸⁵Ibid., 227.

himself questions such as “Does this person put the matter any better than I can do it?” and “Is the quotation terse enough to add vigor, or is it beautiful enough to add feeling?”⁸⁶

Application Throughout

The place for application in the sermon begins with the central idea. As discussed earlier, the central idea should be worded in such a way that it transcends time. Its truth should engage the contemporary hearer by being stated in timeless language, a language not restricted to the biblical world. Furthermore, once the central idea has been discovered the preacher must “ask the question of relevance: So what? What are the practical applications of this theologically shaped statement? If it does not tie in with life today,” Cox argues, “we should ask if this is an idea worth discussing.”⁸⁷ This language is remarkably similar to that of a later homiletician, Bryan Chapell, of Covenant Theological Seminary. In his popular preaching text, Chapell writes: “Preachers who cannot answer a ‘So what?’ will preach a ‘Who cares?’ Only when we can demonstrate that the truths of Scripture were recorded for a purpose and have practical application to the lives of God’s people do our sermons warrant a hearing.”⁸⁸

Furthermore, application of the message is best when it occurs *throughout* the sermon. Many preachers believe in the necessity of application, but far too many place

⁸⁶Ibid., 233.

⁸⁷Cox, *Preaching*, 80.

⁸⁸Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching, Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 48.

it at only the very end of their messages. While this method may have been the acceptable practice of preachers as little as a century ago, it is not well received today. Today's audience yearns for immediate relevancy. "The place for the application to begin," argues Cox, "is in the introduction."⁸⁹ The preacher should then carry this element of application all the way through the message. Once again Cox demonstrates his influence from Broadus.⁹⁰ In his chapter on application Broadus writes: "The application in a sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion, or a subordinate part of it, but is the main thing to be done."⁹¹

Should application, however, always be explicit or are there occasions when application should be more subtle? Cox agrees with David Larsen's advice: "We need both direct and indirect application."⁹² He writes: "Suggestion or allusion may be enough. If the preacher relates a story, the hearer may make personal application by identification with someone in the story."⁹³ Application, then, need not always be carefully spelled-out. The preacher may indirectly suggest some areas of application which at least some hearers will understand.

⁸⁹Cox, *Preaching*, 105.

⁹⁰In the preface of *Preaching*, Cox writes, "It will be clear that I am heavily indebted to specific persons, such as John A. Broadus, Arthur E. Phillips, and James T. Cleland, whose influence on my own thought is unmistakable" (x).

⁹¹Broadus, *A Treatise*, 245.

⁹²David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching: Identifying the Issues in Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 100.

⁹³Cox, *Preaching*, 105.

The matter of sermon application raises the question of inductive preaching. Cox's colleague, Fred Craddock, is one of several homileticians who has strongly recommended a narrative, inductive approach to preaching.⁹⁴ In the same year in which Craddock's book *Preaching* was published, Cox addressed students at the Continuing Theological Education Conference at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. One student, raising concerns over Craddock's approach, asked Cox for his opinion about inductive preaching. Cox responded:

Well first of all, let me say, Fred Craddock is a very good friend. I have great appreciation [for] him. And I will say that he has presented his case for inductive preaching in a strongly deductive manner, which would be a parable to me of the fact that he is not, in a reductionist way, one hundred percent committed to induction as the only way [of] presenting the truth of the gospel. I think Fred Craddock has stated an important truth. There are many people today who will listen to us a lot more gladly if we will credit them with some intelligence, with some sense of responsibility, and with at least a modicum of Christianity to deal with these important matters, so that if we can think *with* them, instead of seeing ourselves in a kind of adversary relationship to them, maybe we will both come out at the same place.⁹⁵

At the same time, however, Cox believes that true induction is not really possible because the speaker knows exactly where he is going. Nevertheless, the preacher may adopt an "inductive style" whereby he engages the hearers by taking them with him to a predetermined conclusion, yet remaining open to adjusting the message where necessary to keep them actively involved.⁹⁶ The reader is referred to Cox's

⁹⁴See Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985).

⁹⁵Cox, "Biblical Preaching is—."

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

sermon on Zacchaeus addressed earlier in this chapter as an example of a narrative sermon preached with at least some sense of inductive style.

Style

The element of style involves, among other things, choosing the right words for the right audience. Cox notes the difference between Latin-based words and Anglo-Saxon-based words. Latin-based words are typically more academic, while Anglo-Saxon words are the more plain and simple kind. The preacher must carefully consider word choice, particularly in light of his unique audience. Cox notes a frequent problem:

Suppose a preacher writes a sermon manuscript in the style most natural to him. What will it look like? If he has spent four years in college and three years in seminary, his sermon will look like so many pages of the textbooks he read in school or the serious books and essays he reads now. Long, abstract words; long, involved sentences; compact, dehydrated paragraphs—that is what he is most inclined to write. The sermon will be scholarly, so beautiful, but so unpreachable! As he writes, it is possible for a preacher to be aware of himself, of his favorite seminary professor, or of some other remote judge of his intellectual attainments—and totally unaware of the persons it is his duty to communicate with at a particular time and place.⁹⁷

The preacher may impress people with his grasp of the English language but his goal should never be to impress. He has a message to deliver and he must be understood.

Cox summarizes the matter rather succinctly: “If you want to be praised for your erudition, speak in latinized expressions. But if you want to be understood, lean heavily on the Anglo-Saxon.”⁹⁸

⁹⁷James W. Cox, “What is Your Style?,” *New Pulpit Digest* (January-February 1974): 60.

⁹⁸James W. Cox, *Learning to Speak Effectively* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966), 36.

Another area of importance with regard to style is the preacher's need to identify with his audience. Cox notes Karl Barth's ability to achieve rapport by beginning each of his sermons to prisoners in Basel, Switzerland with the words, "My dear brothers and sisters."⁹⁹ He adds that Barth also frequently used the terms "we" and "our" in these sermons.¹⁰⁰ Such identification with the audience clearly makes the message more dialogical.

Elsewhere, Cox explains that identification is what Broadus refers to as "sympathy."¹⁰¹ Broadus believes that identification with the hearer is one of the most crucial goals of preaching. He writes: "Everybody who can speak effectively knows that the power of speaking depends very largely upon the way it is heard, upon sympathy which one succeeds in gaining from those he addresses. If I were asked what is the first thing in effective preaching, I should say sympathy; and what is the second thing, I should say sympathy; and what is the third thing, I should say sympathy."¹⁰² Cox agrees. The preacher should continually strive for a dialogical style with his hearers by demonstrating his familiarity with their personalities, backgrounds, and experiences.

⁹⁹Ibid., 39.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Cox, *Preaching*, 246.

¹⁰²John Albert Broadus, *Sermons and Addresses* (Baltimore: H.L. Wharton, 1886), 39. By "sympathy" Broadus has in mind what would be referred to today as "empathy," the idea of identifying with another person.

Cox also believes that effective homiletical style “favors the indicative mode.”¹⁰³ While most sermons are recognized for their hortatorical nature, Cox argues that the superfluous use of imperatives is unfortunately too frequently used without the indicative. He notes for example that “the entire ethical structure of Judeo-Christian faith rests upon bedrock indicatives concerning what God has done, is doing, and will do.”¹⁰⁴ He adds, for example that “the Ten Commandments are prefaced by the words, ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage’ (Exodus 20:2).”¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the careful grounding of imperatives in their proper theological indicatives ensures that the gospel does not degenerate into mere legalism.

To improve one’s style Cox recommends disciplines such as wide reading and writing. The more the preacher reads the more adept he becomes in using the English language. His vocabulary grows and he therefore has a much greater source of words from which to choose in delivering his sermons. Writing likewise helps the preacher to strengthen his sermon preparation and delivery by forcing him to give careful thought to word choice and style. Furthermore, the preacher should consider studying and emulating “the most effective preachers” which will help him learn elements of style that cannot be taught in textbooks.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³Cox, *Preaching*, 248.

¹⁰⁴Ibid..

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

Approaches to Delivery

Cox discusses four main approaches to sermon delivery: preaching without notes, preaching with notes, verbatim memorization, and reading from a manuscript. Because many gifted preachers have used any one of these approaches with great success, Cox does not argue for one particular approach over another. In fact, he encourages the preacher to experiment with various approaches, determining his own particular talents and giftedness and finding his level of comfort and ease with the various methods. What follows is Cox's explanation of these four main approaches.

Preaching Without Notes

Cox states that in his judgment "this is the kind of preaching that the people who listen like best."¹⁰⁷ If done well, the preacher succeeds in appearing very natural and engaging. He is able to look his hearers in the eyes and speak *with* them rather than *at* them. At the same time if the preacher notices someone becoming disengaged during the message, then he may tailor his words or vocal inflections in such a way as to recapture the hearer's interest. A disadvantage to this approach is the possibility that the preacher may, in the excitement of the preaching moment, say something unintentional, words spoken without the benefit of prior thoughtful consideration. While such an occurrence may be harmless, it may also result in the preacher's saying something he will later regret.

Cox notes that many preachers have found preaching without notes to be most beneficial. Ralph W. Sockman, for example, wrote out a full and complete

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 258.

manuscript, but then preached without it. John Broadus, rather than writing out a manuscript, carefully wrote down only his main ideas and notes on a few pieces of paper, preferring to spend the majority of his time on the careful development of his thoughts rather than on precise word construction. At the time of delivery, however, Broadus stood in the pulpit and preached without use of any notes. Cox himself practiced this method from time to time, such as a ten week span while serving an interim pastorate, but his usual method was to preach with some notes in the pulpit.

Preaching With Notes

While preaching *without* notes is deemed by Cox as the most effective way to preach, preaching *with* notes may also be done well. Cox recommends that the preacher write out a full outline, perhaps with full sentences for each point and sub-point. The preacher then may edit his full outline down to a smaller version that he takes into the pulpit. Underlining or highlighting key words serves to jog the preacher's memory while he is preaching. As stated above, this was Cox's usual practice. He usually took into the pulpit a few pages of either handwritten or typed notes from which he preached his sermons. Later he would have his secretary type out a full transcript of his messages.

Cox notes that the benefits of this approach are much like the benefits of preaching without notes. The preacher is not confined to a manuscript from which he may be tempted to read word-for-word but is free to make frequent eye contact with his hearers. At the same time, however, there remains the possibility that the preacher may become too attached to even a few pieces of paper in the pulpit. Therefore, while this

approach has much to commend, the preacher must take care not to slip into the unfortunate habit of looking down at his notes for prolonged periods of time.

Verbatim Memorization

This method is not to be confused with the previously discussed approach of preaching without notes. In the case of preaching without notes, the preacher has taken time to get very familiar with his outline or manuscript, reading through the manuscript frequently and expending a great deal of mental energy on absorbing the overall structure, theme, and content of the message. He is not so much interested in preaching exact words and phrases as he is in preaching the gist of the content from his manuscript or outline. In the case of verbatim memorization, however, the preacher commits his entire sermon manuscript to memory, word-for-word. He later stands in the pulpit and recites that content so that what he says is a precise facsimile of the written manuscript.

While some preachers may be able to memorize their messages verbatim and deliver them with success, they are the rare exceptions. In fact, the method “does not command much approval among public speakers.”¹⁰⁸ Memorizing with exactness takes time and the preacher may find his time better spent in other aspects of homiletical studies or pastoral duties. Furthermore, the preacher may forget his place in the manuscript and have great difficulty finding his way back into the precise wording he has committed to memory. Finally, the preacher may become so intent on reciting his sermon manuscript that he loses engagement with the hearers, becoming “glassy-eyed

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

and detached from the congregation while 'reading the sermon off the back of his mind.'"¹⁰⁹

Reading From Manuscript

While the disadvantages of this method seem obvious, use of a manuscript in pulpit need not necessarily be avoided. Cox notes that no less a speaker than Sir Winston Churchill prepared a full manuscript for his speeches but then presented his material in such a way that his delivery "sounded more like extemporaneous speech than like reading."¹¹⁰

A major benefit of this approach is that the preacher need not be anxious about "forgetting" his sermon. Should he lose his place, he can find it again rather quickly. This benefit serves to reduce the stress that many preachers feel when delivering their sermons. The drawbacks of this approach, nevertheless, seem to outweigh the benefits. Cox observes that most preachers read their manuscripts rather poorly. Too often, preachers fail to make adequate eye contact and tend to read their manuscripts with little emotion or vocal inflection. For this reason, Cox recommends that those who use this approach "do everything possible to gain and maintain rapport" with those who hear the message.¹¹¹ To accomplish rapport, Cox suggests the marking of key words and phrases on the manuscript which serve to enable the preacher to look

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 265-66.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 264.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

down and quickly recall the main points of the message. Cox also recommends the preacher write out his manuscript in such a way as it aids the preacher in finding his place, beginning each new thought flush with the left-hand margin, for example. These suggestions assist the preacher in attaining a greater sense of continuity in his sermon delivery.

Voice and Body

The voice is critical to the preacher's sermon delivery. Without the voice the preacher is unable to fulfill his obligation as herald of the pulpit. For this reason, the preacher should not only care for his voice should also become familiar with the various ways in which he may use his voice to the best of his ability.

The preacher should be aware, for example, of his vocal pitch. Cox believes it is not nearly as important that the preacher know his *natural* pitch—be it high or low—as it is for him to *vary* his pitch during the preaching of his messages. While one may have an unusually high or low natural voice, frequent intentional pitch changes serve to keep hearers engaged.

Cox also recommends that the preacher learn to use good articulation. He must take care to neither slur his words nor mispronounce them. At the same time, however, his attempts to articulate clearly must sound natural. Pleasant articulation that keeps the hearer focused on the message is the goal. The preacher, therefore, must avoid anything that draws away from this goal. He should not only take care to avoid poor articulation, but he should also avoid overly precise articulation that “calls

attention to the speaker's lingual, dental, and labial dexterity" rather than the content of the message.¹¹²

Another area stressed by Cox is the preacher's proper use of volume. In light of the above discussion on articulation, Cox observes that less volume is required for preachers who articulate well. The general rule for volume is that the preacher should speak only as loud as necessary for everyone present to hear him. Anything more or less is either too loud or too soft. Like pitch, however, the preacher should vary his volume between loud and soft, keeping the hearers engaged with the content of the message as such volume changes may require.

To help preachers challenged in the area of voice, Cox recommends that they consider the enlistment of a "vocal coach" who can help them point out problems in their vocal delivery and suggest ways to surmount them.¹¹³ Cox adds that this was the practice of Phillips Brooks when his preaching had taken a particular downturn. For years Brooks sought the help of a vocal coach who assisted in his overcoming some bad vocal habits and resulted in his being heard clearly by all present, whether he was speaking in Boston or at Westminster Abbey.

"Body language," writes Cox, "reveals the soul."¹¹⁴ Proper use of the body is arguably as important as proper use of the voice. Cox notes that there are two types of

¹¹²Ibid., 269.

¹¹³Ibid., 271.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 272.

gestures, those which are spontaneous and those which are descriptive. The spontaneous gesture comes naturally during delivery. The preacher's body reacts in concert with the spoken word, evincing the preacher's pathos. Descriptive gestures are more deliberate. They are gestures used by the body to describe size, shape, and so forth.

Cox recommends that preachers strive to gesture in a natural manner. Body movement must either "slightly anticipate" the spoken word or "appear simultaneously" with it.¹¹⁵ The preacher must also take care to avoid using too many gestures which would result in drawing more attention to the preacher than to the content of the sermon. Furthermore, gestures should be graceful and varied. To improve one's use of gestures, Cox recommends that preachers practice before a mirror, reciting poetry or reading some kind of literature that calls for the natural use of gestures.

Conclusion

Perhaps the greatest advantage of Cox's homiletical method is its remarkable simplicity. The Bible is the preacher's "homiletical home" as he puts it. While the preacher has liberty to cover a vast array of oratorical territory, his message must be grounded in Scripture. The preacher studies the text, locates the "central idea" and then delivers it to his hearers in a way that reflects unity of theme and purpose. He may accomplish this in any one of several ways. Indeed, variety is encouraged, as Cox's own sermons illustrate. And while creativity is always encouraged, Cox reminds the

¹¹⁵Ibid., 273.

preacher that his most important task is to effectively communicate what the Bible teaches. Thus, plain words and careful explanation and illustration are stressed.

Cox encourages preachers to remain steadfast, remembering how their role is different from any other form of public address. He reminds them:

An old saying goes, "The only way to learn to preach is by preaching." Do not let your first humiliating blunders discourage you; let them teach you. Remember: if you are a biblical preacher in the truest sense, it is not your own opinions that you preach. You are preaching the word of God. He has a stake in what you do, and you can expect his patience, his forgiveness, and his help.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶Cox, *A Guide*, 115.

CHAPTER 6
SERMONIC ANALYSIS

Introduction

The following sermons are largely analyzed by criteria Cox himself sets forth in an article contributed to the *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*.¹ Cox contributes to Chapter 20 of the *Handbook*, submitting an article entitled “Evaluating the Sermon.” In this article Cox provides 19 questions to assist the preacher in evaluating his sermons. Most of those questions are applied to the following sermons. A few of them, particularly those dealing with sermon delivery, are not applied here as these sermons are analyzed in their printed form. At the same time, however, the author has both watched video of Cox and listened to audiotape of his preaching.² Consequently, the first section of this chapter addresses general remarks concerning Cox’s delivery. Following these general remarks is an analysis of eight of Cox’s sermons.

¹James W. Cox, “Evaluating the Sermon,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 225-35.

²See James W. Cox, “Famine in the Land of Promise,” sermon preached in chapel at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, September 30, 1980, and idem, “The Bible: What It Is and What It Is Not,” sermon preached at Sand Spring Baptist Church, Lawrenceburg, KY, 1995.

General Remarks Regarding Sermon Delivery

As noted above in Chapter 5, Cox's usual manner of preaching is to take just a few pages of sermon notes into the pulpit. The reason for this is two-fold. First, Cox likes the freedom of being able to look at his hearers as often as possible throughout the message. Having only a few notes in the pulpit naturally encourages this style of preaching. The other reason Cox typically preaches with just a few pages of notes has to do with the time he spends in the latter steps of sermon preparation. Once the outline has been written, Cox prefers to spend the remainder of his preparation time giving careful thought to the movements of the sermon, using his mental energy to gain familiarity with the message rather than using that time to write out a sermon manuscript.

Cox has delivered his sermons, however, in a variety of ways. There have been times when he has preached without use of any notes at all and there have been times when he has preached with a full manuscript. His usual practice, however, has been to preach with just a few notes and to later have his secretary type out a full transcript for future use.

The length of Cox's sermons is nearly always within twenty to twenty-five minutes. This is predictable, given Cox's earlier comments in his book *Learning to Speak Effectively*. In one of the appendices of that book he writes, "Twenty to thirty minutes is a tolerable length for most sermons."³

³James W. Cox, *Learning to Speak Effectively* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966), 54.

Cox's vocal delivery is also remarkably consistent with what he teaches in his preaching texts. His voice is clear and his diction nearly flawless. Furthermore, one is hard-pressed to detect any hint of regional accent in his delivery. If Cox ever possessed an accent that "gave away" his being from Roane County, Tennessee, he has successfully eradicated any evidence of it.

Not only is Cox's speech clear, but his voice is pleasant to the ear. He possesses no distracting vocal mannerisms and speaks with a natural rate of speed. The tone of his voice falls somewhere within the lower to mid-register and is full and well-rounded. Cox makes good use of pitch change where such change enhances the content of the sermon.

Cox's gestures are natural. He often uses his hands while speaking and makes good use of facial gestures, wrinkling the brow at times while stressing a particularly thoughtful point or raising a difficult question. He typically remains behind the pulpit, occasionally holding onto either side, but not in a distracting way.

Sermonic Analysis

This section analyzes eight sermons. Two of the sermons are from Cox's book *God's Inescapable Nearness*, five are from Cox's former pastorate at Central Baptist Church in Johnson City Tennessee (1954-1959), and one is a special sermon preached at Memorial Baptist Church (Cox's former pastorate from 1945-1954) during the church's fiftieth anniversary in 1995.

For other instances of sermonic analysis, the reader is referred to the preceding chapter of this paper, "Homiletical Method," where four of Cox's sermons are briefly treated in order to demonstrate the homiletical variety of sermon types that

Cox believes is possible. At least one of those four sermons is referenced again later where the writer illustrates Cox's use of concrete language. Furthermore, in chapter four of this paper, "Hermeneutics," the writer briefly treats two of Cox's sermons in the section entitled "General Hermeneutical Principles." These two sermons are cited for their demonstration of Cox's use of spiritualizing and imagination. To avoid redundancy, none of Cox's previously treated sermons are analyzed in this section.

"The Gift of Courage" (Joshua 1:1-9)

This sermon occurs in Cox's book *Surprised by God*.⁴ In Joshua 1:1-9, God speaks to Joshua, telling him that Moses is dead and that Joshua will take the Israelites into the Promised Land. Three times in this text God instructs Joshua to be strong and to take courage (vv. 6, 7, 9). Cox finds in this text the theme of courage and then structures a thematic sermon based upon the text.

The sermon structure is modeled after a form recommended by Cox in his book *Preaching*.⁵ Alan Monroe, the originator of this form, calls the structure the "Motivated Sequence."⁶ This psychologically-based form is used by the speaker to take his hearers through the following five steps: (1) Attention Step—where the speaker compels his hearers to listen; (2) Need Step—where the speaker identifies his hearers' specific needs, (3) Satisfaction Step—where the speaker identifies how the needs may

⁴James W. Cox, *Surprised by God* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 109-16.

⁵Cox, *Preaching*, 167-69.

⁶Alan H. Monroe and Douglas Ehninger, eds., *Principles and Types of Speech*, 6th (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1967), 264-89.

be met, (4) Visualization Step—where the speaker helps the hearer see the possibilities of meeting the needs, and (5) Action Step—where the speaker enjoins the hearer to take specific steps of action to meet the needs.

From Joshua 1:1-9, Cox addresses these five steps as follows: (1) Attention Step—Cox gives an opening example of courage as illustrated in a speech by Dr. Viktor Frankl, (2) Need Step—Cox demonstrates the need for courage in the lives of his hearers, (3) Satisfaction Step—Cox provides three main sermon points, showing his hearers where they may find courage, (4) Visualization Step—Cox helps his hearers imagine how their lives might differ if they will find courage, and (5) Action Step—Cox encourages his hearers to heed the word of God to be strong and take courage.

The Central Idea of Cox's sermon is clear: the hearer is instructed to take courage by availing himself of three sources. These sources are identified as three main points in the sermon: (1) Courage is found within, (2) Courage is found in others, and (3) Courage is found in God. Cox has deliberately structured these three points in increasingly widening concentric circles.⁷ Point one represents the smallest source where courage may be found—ourselves; point two represents a larger source of courage—others; point three is the largest source of courage—God.

Cox believes each sermon must have a definite aim, or general end. Sermons can inform, explain, prove, edify, and / or move the hearers to action. This particular

⁷This is explained in Cox's unpublished *Analytical Notes*, a handout he has used in his preaching classes since 1993. The thirteen-page handout analyzes six of the thirteen sermons published in Cox's book *Surprised by God* and is used by Cox to teach

sermon in Joshua is clearly meant to edify the hearers. As his hearers find themselves in life's various challenges, Cox hopes to move them to embrace the available sources of courage, particularly finding courage in God.

Cox uses a variety of illustrative material throughout the sermon. There are four examples of biblical illustration or supporting Scriptures and at least ten contemporary persons are quoted or cited by Cox as examples throughout the message. One particularly evident rhetorical device is the repetitive use of the recurring biblical quotation "be strong and of a good courage," which occurs at least three times throughout the sermon.

Cox also makes use of a variety of sentence types. Believing that the placement of questions throughout the sermon makes the sermon more like authentic conversation,⁸ Cox intersperses as many as half a dozen questions throughout the message. The sentences are varied in length and clear in style. The average hearer would have little difficulty following Cox in this message.

Cox makes little use of explanation in the chosen biblical text. While a few words are given to provide the biblical background of the text, the sermon seems to assume that most hearers are familiar enough with the history of Moses and the subsequent monumental task facing Joshua. The sermon also does not treat God's admonition concerning Joshua's use of the "Book of the Law" in verses 7 and 8. The sermon is, however, thoroughly biblical and is an example of Cox's textually-thematic

his students to locate the various homiletical elements set forth in his lectures and books.

⁸Cox, "Evaluating the Sermon," 231

reaching. Were Cox preaching an expository sermon on this text, we would expect him to explain each of the verses more fully.

One final critique is in order. Cox's last question in his article on sermon evaluation asks whether the sermon exalts Jesus Christ. There is one small place in the sermon where Cox quotes Martin Luther's encouragement to "believe in the forgiveness of Christ."⁹ Other than this one instance, the name of Jesus Christ is not explicitly mentioned. This is not to say that the message is sub-Christian, but rather that the sermon either assumes the hearers have already experienced redemption or that they will ground their "being strong" and "taking courage" in their positional relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

**"God's Way into Our Lives"
(Acts 17:16-34)**

Like the preceding sermon, this message is published in *Surprised by God*.¹⁰ The sermon was originally entitled "The Gospel for Modern Man" and was preached during Cox's six-month interim pastorate at Manhattan Baptist Church in New York City from 1964-1965. Cox preached the sermon in response to a perceived need in the church for embracing new ways of sharing Christ with the community.¹¹ The sermon is best categorized as a textual sermon and is based upon the

⁹Cox, *Surprised by God*, 115.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 24-30.

¹¹Cox explains this in his *Analytical Notes* handout. He adds that the church was comprised of intellectual and professional persons including a number of seminary and university students.

Apostle Paul's evangelistic address at the Areopagus in Athens as reported in Acts 17. The Central Idea is that Christians need to sympathetically reach out to the lost and lead them to faith in Christ. The specific aim of the message is to instruct or inform the hearers as to the need for relevant sharing of the gospel. At the same time, however, the message bears an indirect word of edification. The sympathetic hearer is revitalized by the sermon, particularly as he hears the conclusion.

In the introduction of the sermon Cox provides a sort of summary / paraphrase of the subject passage, pointing up the need for hearers, like the Apostle Paul, to share the gospel with the culture around us. No specific sermon points are explicitly enumerated, but Cox clearly has in view three main points: (1) Christians are entrusted with the duty of sharing Christ, (2) Christians should share Christ in relevant ways, and (3) Christians are encouraged that the Holy Spirit will do the necessary work while they share Christ.

A distinguishing feature of this message is Cox's frequent use of poetic imagery in his sentences. Cox speaks, for example, about how the lost world "has moved next door to every one of us"¹² and how Christ is "God's response to man's groping hand that fingers the brooding mystery of the heavens."¹³ These sentences are both clear and picturesque in form, engaging the hearer to see how the biblical text applies by virtue of Cox's simple yet descriptive word choice.

Cox also makes good use of identification in this sermon. While the text

¹²Cox, *Surprised by God*, 24.

¹³*Ibid.*, 29.

itself helps accomplish this desired effect, Cox also demonstrates his own identification with his hearers by frequently using the pronoun “we” and by drawing them into a shared sympathy for the lost. He says for example: “We hear modern man saying such things as ‘Life doesn’t add up to anything. I don’t really mean anything to anybody—I’m just a statistic. I wish I could be sure of something.’”¹⁴

The sermon exalts the Lord Jesus Christ insofar as it is intended to move hearers to share Christ with others. Hearers are encouraged to find real points of contact with the lost that go beyond the surface, common points such as the inward yearning for meaning and significance that is equally shared by all persons.

Hearers are also reminded that God is working His way into the lives of the hearers by way of the Holy Spirit. Because of this work on God’s behalf, hearers are encouraged that they do not share Christ alone. The Christian is reminded, therefore, that his evangelistic work is largely immeasurable. Paul’s discourse at the Areopagus resulted in only a few conversions. Tradition has it, however, that one of his converts, Dionysius the Areopagite, later became a respected bishop of Athens. Christians today, Cox implies, can take courage that their attempts at sharing Christ may do more future good than they can presently imagine.

“The Heart of It” (John 3:16)

This sermon was preached by Cox on November 13, 1955 in the Sunday

¹⁴Cox, *Surprised by God*, 28.

morning service at Central Baptist Church in Johnson City, Tennessee.¹⁵ Perhaps the sermon is best categorized as an evangelistic, expository sermon based upon just one verse. It is considered expository in the sense that Cox explains this one verse of Scripture during the course of the sermon and all of his main points are derived from the verse itself.

The Central Idea of the sermon is identified in Cox's stated purpose. In his introduction he states that he wants his hearers to examine with him "the vital elements of a true religious experience." From this point Cox proceeds in a deductive manner, teaching his hearers "four outstanding facts" related to having a true religious experience with God, four facts that naturally emerge from John 3:16. The aim of the message is to move the hearers to action, encouraging them to accept Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior.

Cox opens the sermon with a humorous remark about his being a little hoarse that morning. He adds that this hoarseness will likely result in an abbreviated sermon, a result that he acknowledges "will no doubt delight" his hearers. Cox then proceeds to tell a joke about a little boy who feared the guest preacher in his home would pray the blessing for the meal as long as he prayed during the worship services. After the preacher's brief prayer of blessing, the little boy said to his mother, "Mother, the preacher doesn't pray as long when he's hungry, does he?"

After these humorous introductory remarks, Cox launches right into his

¹⁵This unpublished sermon manuscript was obtained from James W. Cox for the purpose of sermonic analysis. It is actually a typed transcript of a sermon originally preached from a few pages of notes. The sermon remains in Cox's possession.

sermon, stating the aforementioned purpose. He immediately acknowledges the familiarity of this text, supposing that while many persons may have memorized this verse, they also may have become so familiar with it that they have failed to appreciate some of its teachings.

Cox's sermon points break down as follows: (1) The Love of God, (2) The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ, (3) The Experience of Eternal Life, and (4) Eternal Life is Available to All. As indicated above, one may find each of these points substantiated by the subject verse. Cox's transitions vary. For example, after the first point he says, "That brings us to the second important fact." After the second point he says, "But these two things . . . coalesce in . . . (the third point)." His fourth point begins, "Then there is the fourth thing . . ."

With each point Cox repeats that part of the verse that substantiates the point. When preaching on the last point, for example, he states, "Whosoever believeth in him should not perish . . . Whosoever includes all nations, all races, all stratifications of society." In this fashion Cox uses the rhetorical devices of repetition, definition, explanation and application.

While the word "hell" is absent from this sermon, Cox does preach about the wrath of God which remains upon those who refuse Christ. To illustrate, Cox uses a powerful analogy: "As fire burning can cook our food and preserve us from the cold, fire also can burn and destroy, depending on the use that is made of it." The person, then, who refuses Christ is choosing to reject the love of God and thereby remains "dead in trespasses and sins."

Another powerful illustration Cox uses in this sermon is his referring to Jesus Christ as the “vaccine” that saves us from death. He states that “if there were a disease, always fatal—and sin is a fatal disease—and if there is only one vaccine that would kill that germ and save the life, then only those who avail themselves of that vaccine would be those that survive.” Jesus Christ, argues Cox, is that vaccine.

A major strength of this sermon is Cox’s frequent use of theology. He deals a bit with theodicy in the first point, acknowledging the tension between God’s love for the world and the presence of “the rough treatment” some receive in life. In treating the uniqueness of Christ, he refers to Jesus as the “God-Man—God manifested, God revealed in human flesh.” He notes, too, that one does not receive eternal life by the doing of “good deeds” here on earth. Rather, Cox preaches the exclusivity of Christ as man’s only hope for eternal life, referring to Christ as “the only door” through which persons may hope to enter into eternal life. The sermon ends with Cox’s question, “Will you accept this life in Christ today?” and one final reading of the text.

**“The Church at Satan’s Throne”
(Revelation 2:12-17)**

This sermon was preached on September 11, 1955 in the morning service at Central Baptist Church in Johnson City, Tennessee and later printed by request. The printed message appears in tractate form with Cox’s picture on the front.¹⁶ The sermon is best identified as a textual sermon. After explaining the historical situation of the church at Pergamum, Cox lifts the phrase “Satan’s throne” from verse 13 and identifies

¹⁶This printed sermon was obtained from James W. Cox for the purpose of sermon analysis and remains in his possession.

four “lengthening shadows” of Satan’s throne that are visible in the lives of the contemporary hearers. He does not state up front that he will find four points in this text, but he rather reveals each “shadow” one at a time, grounding each contemporary “shadow” in the corresponding biblical situation.

The Central Idea of this sermon is not clearly stated at any point in the message but is implied throughout: The Christian must both be aware of and avoid the tempting snares of Satan. The aim or general end of the message is both to instruct and to warn by teaching the hearers about the various ways in which Satan seeks to undermine Christian life and witness.

The first shadow cast by the throne of Satan is “worship of the state.” Cox draws upon supporting Scripture found in Revelation 13, interpreting John’s vision of the beast and the dragon as symbolic of the political power of the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor. Explaining that the state “received its power and its authority from the religious structure,” Cox states, “The government was just as rotten as the religion on which it was founded.” Cox warns that contemporary hearers must avoid the temptation “to worship the political order” and remember that their true home is found in the Kingdom of God.

Cox’s next point is that Satan’s throne casts a shadow of materialism. Cox warns against greed, explaining Balaam’s lust for money in the subject passage and illustrating “reckless” materialism from the popular 1938 movie “You Can’t Take it With You.” Cox also gives an historical illustration of greed as found in the story of ten businessmen who lost their fortunes during the Great Depression. Cox explains, “Mammon was their god. Their souls were wedded to material wealth.”

With no transition Cox introduces his third point: “A third shadow lengthens across our life today . . . the prevalence of the view that one religion is just as good as another.” Cox explains the historical situation at Pergamum, teaching how the city was engulfed in a number of different pagan religions. The situation, Cox explains, is no different today. Cox illustrates the absurdity of contemporary persons who make otherwise discriminating choices—such as in choosing one suit of clothes over another—but conclude with little reflection that one religion is just as good as another.

Cox’s fourth point is the most compelling one as he brings the sermon to a moving climax. This fourth “shadow” is the church’s “cavalier attitude toward morals.” Cox quotes the Roman philosopher Seneca as evidence of the church’s immorality during the biblical days of Pergamum. He also describes the immoral beliefs of the Nicolaitans who infected the church with their libertine philosophy. Reminiscent of the nineteenth century evangelist D. L. Moody, Cox uses graphically poetic imagery to drive home the need for purity in the church:

Today people laugh at the laws as they buy bootlegged beverages. But some of them are laughing themselves straight into hell—a hell of vicious habit and destroyed influence. Some of them are laughing their children into alcoholism. Some people mock the ethical teachings of purity and chastity, but they laugh themselves into disease and self reproach, into illegitimacy and numerous snares and terrors for the soul. No, this haughty attitude that some moderns have toward morals just will not work! It’s senseless—leads to shame and suffering and condemnation. Let some who have tried it testify. The giddy gigglers who are just standing on the threshold saying, “Come on let’s go,” don’t know what it is. But if they could listen to the stories that we preachers have to hear, sad stories of what followed in the wake of the first drink, or the (at first) occasional social drink, if they could see the tears and feel the heartache, they would stifle their giggles and gasp with fright.

The sermon concludes with equally graphic and pointed imagery as Cox applies “Satan’s throne” to the many sinful opportunities lurking near the contemporary

hearers. He warns that the Christian must avoid Satan's throne and look toward a far better throne:

Satan's throne is nearby. It may be as close as the place of business down the street. It may be as close as some of your friends in the country club. It may be as close as your neighbor next door. It may be as close as some of the political groups that meet covertly in cells to plan to ensnare the minds and lives of our youth. Satan's throne is near the church, and let's face it! Let's look at it. But let us fix our gaze on another throne rising high and above the throne of Satan, an enduring throne that will last when the throne of Satan has been cast down and destroyed. And let's ally ourselves with that which is lasting. Let's get on the side of God and those who are seeking the right. Let's renounce the weaknesses and the views of those who would destroy our souls. Let's stay close to God and the throne that is above all, and power and usefulness will be ours.

Given the above language used by Cox in this sermon, there is little wonder why he was asked to put the message into a printed format for his congregants. This sermon is one of Cox's finest examples of using both "concrete" language and "language that achieves the desired emotional effect."¹⁷

"To The Uttermost" (Heb 7:25)

Cox preached this sermon on January 22, 1956 in the evening service at Central Baptist Church in Johnson City, Tennessee.¹⁸ This sermon, while based upon Hebrews 7:25, is perhaps best described as a topical sermon. Cox eventually explains the meaning of the phrase "to the uttermost," but incorporates other meanings not necessarily taught in the subject text but supported from a vast array of other scriptural passages.

¹⁷See Cox, "Evaluating the Sermon" in *Handbook*, 232-33.

¹⁸This sermon was obtained from James W. Cox for the purpose of sermonic analysis and remains in his possession.

Cox begins the sermon by stressing the need to trust God in spite of the presence of evil in the world. Of all the choices persons must make, they should choose to follow God, trusting in Him and His perfect plan. From this introduction, Cox speaks of things about which the phrase “to the uttermost” reminds him. The first point is that this phrase reminds the Christian that Christ is to be proclaimed to the uttermost parts of the earth. This commission, Cox says, was first given to the Israelites as set forth in the book of Deuteronomy. It was later underscored by the prophets such as in Isaiah 60:1-3 and Isaiah 49:5-6. Cox further supports this point from Psalm 117, John 10, and Matthew 28:19.

The second point is that the phrase “to the uttermost” may also remind the Christian of Christ’s ability to save *from* the uttermost. The emphasis here is upon the fact that the gospel is for everyone. God wishes to save all persons whether they are among the “morally elite” or whether they are like the prodigal son who equally needed the “all-embracing, compassionate love of God.” Cox concludes this point with an illustration often told by George Truett, an illustration about a man who was saved during a revival. Like this man, Cox says, God can save all “from the uttermost depths of sin.”

The third and final point of this message is that the phrase in Hebrews 7:25 teaches about a high priest who is able to save *to* the uttermost. Here Cox explains the actual meaning of the phrase in the immediate context. Christ will “completely” and “entirely” save all those who come to Him. Further, because Christ “ever liveth to make intercession” for those who come to Him, the Christian may receive the ongoing benefits of Christ’s work upon the cross.

In the conclusion of this message Cox quotes a number of scriptural passages to demonstrate Christ's ability to save to the uttermost and the Christian's resultant security in Him: John 5:24; John 10:27-30; Romans 8:38-39; and Jude 24-25. Cox concludes the sermon by repeating the three points and stating, "Our God is able and we trust him."

Like the preceding sermon, the Central Idea is nowhere explicitly stated but is implied in the title and throughout the sermon points: Jesus Christ is able to save all persons to the uttermost. The general end of this sermon is perhaps dual in nature. Cox aims at both informing and revitalizing the hearer.

While the sermon is rich in scriptural support, it seems to lack some of the concrete language that Cox generally uses in his sermons. The language, nevertheless, is clear and understandable as typified in Cox's other sermons. The message follows a logical and psychological progression of movement leading to a restatement of the main points of the message.

"May I Help You?" (Gal 6:1-5)

This sermon was preached by Cox for the evening service at Central Baptist Church in Johnson City, Tennessee on August 3, 1958.¹⁹ The message is a textual sermon based primarily upon verses one, two and five. The Central Idea of the sermon may be described as "Christians are to reach out and help one another." The aim of the

¹⁹This sermon was obtained from James W. Cox for the purpose of sermonic analysis and remains in his possession.

message, then, is to actuate. Cox hopes to lead the congregation to see their need for sharing the burdens of their fellow Christians.

Cox begins the message by treating first the Christian's need to bear his *own* burden. By this Cox means that Christians must assume personal responsibility for their actions. They must neither blame their family nor their environment. They must also be willing to rise above whatever factors may have influenced their behavior.

Secondly, the Christian has a moral responsibility to bear not only his own burden, but the burdens of *others*. Cox addresses the burdens of guilt and shame that many Christians carry by themselves, never forgiving themselves in spite of the fact that God has already forgiven them. To illustrate, Cox shares about the great hymn writer William Cowper. While Cowper provided the church with theologically rich hymns teaching the forgiveness and blessings of God, "he spent so much time ruminating over the past that his usefulness in the Lord's service was tremendously curbed."

Cox suggests that when a person finds himself in a situation similar to Cowper's that he may be greatly encouraged to receive from others the loving compassion of a sympathetic ear. Drawing upon James 5:16 Cox says, "Someone else may be able to help you carry that load of guilt for sins past, and you will find it easier to bear." Furthermore, Christians must be proactive in their willingness to quickly forgive those who have repented of past deeds. Cox illustrates this truth by telling a moving story about a certain college student who, after having confessed to stealing something, genuinely repented but was not forgiven by certain other students. Sadly, the young man left the college much to the dismay of those students who later regretted their actions and often wondered about his plight.

Christians also need help and support from one another as they face their fears of the future, whether it is economic or social uncertainty, or whether it is the inevitable certainty of death. Cox provides the example of participants in Alcoholics Anonymous as illustrative of the kind of encouragement needed in the church. Members of this organization “know that in their times of stress there will always be help: the Higher Power upon which they have come to depend and the members of their organization who can be called in to see them through a crucial hour of testing will not fail them.”

Cox’s final point is the point of explicit application in the message. He asks, “Now if these things are true, what can we do for one another? How can we be most helpful? How can we do good instead of harm?” In answer to these questions Cox states that the helpful Christian must first be someone who is *willing* to help, someone who “radiates a spirit of goodwill and helpfulness,” not a judgmental person who thinks he is better than others. Secondly, drawing upon verse one, Cox says that it is those who are “spiritual” who should reach out to help those who are weak. Those who have achieved some sense of spiritual victory are the only ones in a position to help others with similar problems. Finally and apparently drawing upon verse one, Cox calls for humility and gentleness while helping one another. Cox uses a helpful analogy of a dislocated arm to illustrate the need for gentle restoration: “What is needed to get the unjointed right again is not the clubbing of a baseball bat or the thumps of the blackjack, but gentle, wise, though perhaps painful, ministration of loving hands.”

This sermon is a clear, simple message that demonstrates the need for Christians “to help one another.” The sermon is structured very logically in a sort of

problem-solution form. Understood this way, Cox describes two problems: (1) the Christian's need to bear his own burden, and (2) the Christian's need to bear the burdens of others. These two problems are met with the concluding solution: Christians must bear the burdens of others by being available, compassionate, mature, gentle, and humble.

“God’s Thoughts and Ways” (Isa 55:8-9)

Cox preached this sermon on February 10, 1957 during the Sunday morning service at Central Baptist Church in Johnson City, Tennessee.²⁰ The message is best described as topical. While it is based upon Isaiah's statement that God's ways and thoughts are higher than man's, Cox demonstrates this truth philosophically and experientially, as well as using other Scriptures to support his message.

The Central Idea of the message is that God's ways and thoughts are higher than man's ways and thoughts. The purpose of the message seems to be multifaceted. Cox instructs, revitalizes, and actuates in this sermon. He intends to teach the congregation to appreciate the supremacy of God's ways and thoughts over man's ways and thoughts and to lead them to align themselves under His providential purposes.

While the message contains no explicitly clear sermon points, Cox takes his hearers through various movements of thought. He begins the message by calling for the need to trust God in the midst of what appear to be unanswerable questions regarding the workings of His providence. Here Cox does well to demonstrate his

²⁰This sermon was obtained from James W. Cox for the purpose of sermonic analysis and it remains in his possession.

understanding of the present needs of the hearers by using examples with which they identify.²¹ Illustrating the presence of evil, he refers to the “floods, for example, that people have experienced in recent days” and “the evil of war which has scourged our people—people in this congregation within their knowledge and lifetime.” Calling attention to the presence of evil demonstrates both Cox’s use of tension as well as the use of interrogatives in the message. Cox asks, for example, “If God really loves and cares . . . how can he permit such things as this to happen?” and “If man’s purposes are not achieved, what of the purposes of God?”

Cox makes good use of illustration in this sermon. For example, he illustrates man’s inability to understand the ways of God by using the analogy of an unborn child who is incapable of understanding the world in which he is born and by quoting Paul Scherer who says it is as impossible for man to understand the ways of God “as it is for a spaniel in a living room to discern the mysterious movements of his master’s thoughts.”

Cox next raises a philosophical argument, encouraging his hearers to seriously consider the reasoning behind the fact that God cannot fail to accomplish what He pleases. While unfortunate circumstances may cause persons to stumble, they must remember that God spoke the very creation into existence and will certainly continue to sustain His creation in keeping with His perfect plans.

God “achieves his purpose,” Cox reasons, “even through a cross.” Here Cox teaches that Christ’s work upon the cross was part of God’s eternal plan to redeem

²¹Cox, “Evaluating the Sermon,” in *Handbook*, 226.

mankind. In teaching this truth, Cox makes impressive use of the rhetorical device of repetition. Note the frequent use of the phrase “that cross” in the following paragraph:

His enemies thought that by nailing him to the cross they were getting rid of him once and for all. But it was *that cross* that spelled the defeat of the enemies of God, that achieved a victory for those who had faith. It was *that cross*, which has gone into our world, to burn the Christian message into the hearts of men everywhere; *that cross*, which has raised individuals from despair to hope; *that cross*, which has given life to those who were in the land of the dying, love to those who had lived in the midst of raging hate, freedom to those who were shackled in slavery and bondage. It was *that cross* which has been offered over and over again to crushing civilizations, to bring them a new day and a victory.

The final movement of this message calls for the hearer to consider “the higher ways of God’s commands.” By this Cox means that the ethical commands of the Bible raise the Christian to a higher level of obedience. These commands are given by God in order to protect humankind from making wrong choices. Because human beings reason with fallen minds they do not always consider the ultimate consequences of their natural actions. The God who knows all things, therefore, gives commands that—if followed—will steer human beings in the right direction. It is owing to man’s sinful disposition that many of the commands often seem to go against his natural understanding. Cox illustrates some of these apparent incongruities such as where Jesus commands that one love his enemies or that one should focus on giving rather than on getting. Cox then reads through and applies the Beatitudes of Jesus in Matthew 5:3-11, a section of teaching, he says, that Friedrich Nietzsche called, “a slave revolt in morals.”

The sermon concludes with the acknowledgment that “it isn’t practical, according to some, to be a Christian.” But, Cox adds, one day it *will* be practical. The time will come when persons will stand before God and give an account for how they lived their lives and they will understand then things that are presently unclear. Cox

ends the message with an implicit plea for persons to enter into the safety of this “narrow way,” quoting the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:14.

One final noteworthy feature of this sermon is Cox’s frequent use of concrete language. He uses several words and phrases that add visual weight to the truths he is speaking. He says, for example, that Christians should not rush into the presence of God “with our feet shod and with an arrogant head.” Instead, Cox says, Christians should enter into God’s presence “heart first.” In another place, Cox says that the prophet Isaiah had seen Israel “tossed as a derelict ship at sea.” This concrete use of language is frequently found in Cox’s sermons and demonstrates his consistency in practicing what he teaches in the classroom and in his writings.

“God’s Good Work” (Phil 1:3-11)

This final sermon was preached by Cox in 1995 at the 50th anniversary of the founding of Memorial Baptist Church in Frankfort, Kentucky.²² Cox served the church fifty years earlier as pastor from 1945-1954 while studying at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This message demonstrates his use of the Bible for “special occasion” sermons.

This sermon is a textual message based upon Philippians 1:3-11, but it also draws upon other verses in the book of Philippians. While the Central Idea of the sermon is not explicitly stated, the main emphasis of the message centers upon the fact that the congregants of Memorial Baptist Church may be grateful for the evidence of

²²This sermon was obtained by James W. Cox for the purpose of sermonic analysis and it remains in his possession.

God's sustaining blessing upon the church. The aim of the message, then, is to revitalize the hearers.

Cox begins the sermon with an thought provoking question fitting for the occasion: "Who would have dreamed that the little mission that started on Holmes Street in a former restaurant would be organized into a church with a hundred charter members and would grow to nine hundred members?" He then relates the situation of Memorial Baptist Church to the situation of the church at Philippi, saying with the Apostle Paul, "I thank my God every time I remember you."

There is no specific enumeration of sermon points in this message, but there are three points Cox makes throughout the sermon. First, he speaks of the founding of the church as a "venture of faith." Quoting from Paul in Philippians 1:6, Cox shares his belief that God will continue to sustain the church throughout the future. To illustrate how faith often works "in spite of unspeakable odds," Cox tells the story of a man who asks a boy to get into a wheelbarrow as he pushes it across a steel cable across Niagra Falls. Cox ties this illustration to the founding members of the church who, fifty years earlier, had faith in God's direction as they began the church. Cox reasons, "When we link our lives with God, we begin with a wonderful promise that he will complete what he begins us."

In his second point Cox states that "sooner or later, things may happen that could make us doubt that God is still in business with us." Cox cites the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche (4:2) as evidence of the kinds of disagreements that can arise in the church. He also mentions the Apostle Paul's problems with Peter and Demas and the "painful difficulties" faced by Jesus who was perhaps "pained the most"

by His own disciples. Cox teaches, however, that in spite of all of the difficulties faced by Paul, he was able to see that what had happened to him had “actually helped to spread the gospel.” Cox further illustrates this truth by speaking of how God used William Randolph Hearst to accomplish the salvation of many souls through Hearst’s instruction to the press to “puff” evangelist Billy Graham in the newspapers.

Cox’s final point is an implicit truth based upon Paul’s instruction for the church to “work out” their own salvation (2:12). Cox gives the example of Christian love as evidence that a person is working out what God has worked in his heart. This point, then, is a call for the sustaining practice of love among the believers. Cox illustrates the need for love in the church by telling a story that originated with Garrison Keillor about two church leaders who were at odds with each other and later saw the need to reconcile. Cox then draws upon Philippians 1:27 and 2:3 to support the belief that Christians should regularly practice love regardless of how they may “feel” about the situation. He also references Philippians 4:4 to support the truth that the Christian may rejoice in the Lord even in the midst of trial and suffering.

Cox concludes the sermon by again relating the church at Philippi with the Memorial Baptist Church. While the church at Philippi eventually became uninhabited with the passage of time, the church’s members spread out and carried the gospel message to others. God’s greater purposes will always prevail. Just as God continued the work through the membership of the church at Philippi, so he will continue the work He began at Memorial Baptist.

While this sermon draws from many other passages, Cox never quotes the book, chapter, or verse. As noted above, however, Cox does mention specific scriptural

locations in other sermons. In addition, the sermon points in this message are not as clearly evident as in other sermons. The sermon is well illustrated, however, and possesses a logical sense of order.

Conclusion

This sermonic analysis has revealed Cox's remarkably consistent style of preaching. While he believes there are many ways to preach biblical texts, Cox's sermons are unmistakably biblical in content and possess a clear sense of order and unity. One can nearly always locate his sermon points or at least the movements of thought in his messages.

Cox is particularly gifted in the use of concrete language that serves to "paint a face" on the things he wishes to say. Occasionally this is discovered in a simple phrase, at other times it is found in a larger, descriptive passage of the message. Furthermore, Cox's language is always clear and easy to understand. He never uses words that cannot be understood by the average congregation.

Cox uses a variety of developmental and supportive material, sometimes using biblical illustrations, other times using contemporary examples. He also makes consistent use of good rhetorical devices such as restatements and comparisons. He consistently strives to provide his hearers with explanation, illustration, and application of his main points.

No singularly predominant "favorite theme" is discovered in his sermons except for perhaps Cox's frequent call for faith and trust in God in spite of the adversities common to all persons. This theme, along with encouragement to be strong and hope in God, seems to surface frequently in his book of sermons *Surprised by God*.

One will have great difficulty, however, finding a “hobby horse” that Cox seems to work into every sermon. The messages are as varied as the sermonic forms in which they are spoken and written.

CHAPTER 7

COX AMONG HIS COLLEAGUES

Introduction

This final section of the paper treats two main areas: (1) Scholarly reviews of Cox's published, written homiletical contributions and (2) Statements from former students or teaching colleagues regarding Cox's contributions, character, and influence. As reviews of Cox's published writings were researched, common strands of criticism emerged from the scholars, both positive and negative. These strands of thought are treated in this first section. In the second section, the author has attempted to provide feedback from five of Cox's colleagues. Three of the five are persons who studied directly under Cox. Four of the five taught along with Cox on the preaching faculty at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The final colleague is a homiletics professor and author of considerable influence.

Scholarly Reviews of Published Books

This section of the chapter presents an overview of critical comments made concerning Cox's published works. The comments are gleaned from book reviews printed in a variety of scholarly journals. The author has attempted to present both positive and negative statements in an effort to give the reader a balanced understanding of the way homiletical scholarship has regarded Cox's contributions. The books are presented in the order they appear in chapter 3 of this paper.

A Guide to Biblical Preaching

Despite the small size of this publication, most reviewers are struck by Cox's number of scholarly references in the book and the evidence of his wide reading. At the same time, however, Cox's book is regarded as a clear presentation of his own homiletical methodology. G. Earl Guinn, for example, notes that while Cox's "wide reading in homiletics and related fields is reflected in quotations, annotations, and bibliography," Cox's "independent judgment is always exercised."¹ G. Gerald Harrop is also impressed with the number of preachers Cox cites, counting a total of seventy persons who are either preachers or teachers of preaching.² An equally recurring theme, as found in other reviews, is the appreciation for Cox's belief in homiletical variety. Guinn states, for example, that Cox's book "dispels the notion that biblical preaching precluded variation."³ Reviewers also found the book to be clearly written, and therefore very readable.

There are, at the same, some critical concerns raised in reviews of Cox's first preaching text. Harrop believes the book would have been better had Cox made some suggestions concerning use of commentaries and other reference works in sermon

¹G. Earl Guinn, review of *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, by James W. Cox, *Review and Expositor* 74 (1977): 93.

²G. Gerald Harrop, review of *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, by James W. Cox, *Religion in Life* 46 (1977): 245. Harrop adds that Harry Emerson Fosdick is cited the most.

³Guinn, review of *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, 93.

preparation.⁴ Virgil P. Howard faults Cox for implying that the book is targeted to the male gender. “The impression created by the language that all preachers are male,” he writes, “is regrettable.”⁵

Of greater concern, however, is Howard’s charge that Cox never really answers the question he raises in chapter one about the definition of biblical preaching. He states, “It appears that the author is clear in his own mind about what it is and assumes that the reader shares this assumption.”⁶ Howard wishes Cox had spent more time dealing with the nature of the text’s authority and believes Cox is wrong to assume that all readers will agree on what is meant by the phrase “biblical preaching.”

Garret Wilterdink echoes Howard’s concerns regarding the nature of authority in the text.⁷ Allowing that Cox gives several “practical” reasons for preaching from the Bible, Wilterdink is concerned that Cox “seems to shy away from a clear identification of the Bible as the Word of God.”⁸ Wilterdink adds that Cox fails to

⁴Harrop, review of *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, 245.

⁵Virgil P. Howard, review of *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, by James W. Cox, *Perkins Journal* 31 (1978): 34-35. Note in Cox’s second preaching text, *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons* (Nashville: Seminary Extension, n.d.), that Cox uses language to include female preachers. See, for example, p. 266 where Cox writes, “Each of us has to fulfill his or her calling in the preaching ministry according to the measure of those abilities and gifts.”

⁶Howard, review of *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, 35.

⁷Garret Wilterdink, review of *A Guide to Biblical Preaching* by James W. Cox, *Reformed Review* 31 (1978): 102.

⁸Ibid. The reader is referred to chapter 4 of this paper where the author treats Cox’s hermeneutics for preaching. Note in particular Cox’s comments regarding the Bible “as the word of God” and his parallels with Karl Barth’s bibliology.

stress what he himself views as “the ultimate consideration: that we must preach from the Bible because it is the Word of God and the only rule of faith and life.”⁹

Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons

As in reviews of Cox’s first preaching text, reviewers of *Preaching* are equally praiseworthy of Cox’s inclusion of a wide range of scholars and scholarly references. Consider the following quote as representative of the appreciation most reviewers show in this regard:

Cox’s approach is comprehensive in terms of the variety of resources he draws on for his homiletical principles. Cox is knowledgeable about classical rhetorical theory, quoting several times from Aristotle, Augustine, and Quintilian. He seems equally at home with contemporary oral and written communication theorists such as William Zinsser, Rudolph Flesch, John Ciardi and Alan Monroe. The book, too, is replete with references to theologians (Barth, Tillich, Brunner), preachers (Spurgeon, Beecher, Fosdick, Macartney), and homileticians (Broadus, Blackwood, Sangster, Miller). Cox rounds out the book with numerous references to poets, politicians, psychologists, evangelists, saints and mystics.¹⁰

Not all reviewers are as pleased, however, with Cox’s choice of preachers referenced in the book. Calvin Pearson, for example, bemoans Cox’s apparent preference for preachers of moderate theological orientation.¹¹ Counting twenty citations of Harry Emerson Fosdick, for example, Pearson concludes that Cox is “a homiletician with seeming little regard for the theology of preachers whom he cites”

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Harry E. Farra, review of *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons*, by James W. Cox, *Christian Scholar’s Review* 16 (1987): 423.

and argues, “Perhaps citing more conservative and more modern preachers would have made this book more useful.”¹² He adds, “One would expect a Southern Baptist Seminary professor to draw on the great Southern Baptist preachers of his day to illustrate his principles” and suggests preachers such as Adrian Rogers, Jimmy Draper, Joel Gregory, and Ken Chafin.¹³ Furthermore, because “very few modern preachers from any denomination are mentioned,” Pearson concludes, “it makes one ask for what decade of preachers this book is intended.”¹⁴ Ronald J. Allen echoes this concern when he writes that “a disproportionate number of . . . examples are from good but dated sources.”¹⁵

J. Robert Hjelm also criticizes Cox for presenting a text that favors the deductive manner of preaching.¹⁶ Acknowledging Cox’s written appreciation for variety in preaching, Hjelm concludes that all of Cox’s suggestions for handling the biblical text in chapter 11 are “basically propositional approaches to preaching.”¹⁷ He

¹¹Calvin Pearson, review of *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons*, by James W. Cox, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144 (1987): 118-19.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ronald J. Allen, review of *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons*, by James W. Cox, *Theology Today* 43 (1986): 123.

¹⁶J. Robert Hjelm, review of *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons*, by James W. Cox, *Covenant Quarterly* 45 (1987): 46.

¹⁷Ibid.

asks, "What of induction? What of combinations of induction and deduction? Cox offers options only within one approach."¹⁸

In the main, however, critical evaluation of Cox's second preaching text is favorable. Many reviewers write glowingly about Cox's "ecumenical" emphasis, appreciating the fact that he includes references from Catholics as well as Protestants of various ecclesiastical orientations. Michael Rogness, for example, writes, "This is not a 'Baptist' book, even though there are hints here and there of the author's background. It is a valuable book for the whole church."¹⁹

Interestingly, four reviewers make a connection between Cox and John Albert Broadus. In a rather colorful review that compares four newly released 1985 preaching texts to graduates being recognized for their respective accomplishments, Thomas R. McKibbens refers to Cox's text as "the most outstanding graduate this year."²⁰ He adds, "No other graduate competes with your fundamental grasp of the range of homiletical issues As your forefather John Broadus' *Preparation and*

¹⁸Ibid. While Cox does not explicitly treat the inductive manner of preaching, the reader is referred, however, to pp. 100-01 of *Preaching* as well as p. 163. Note in the last reference Cox's statement, "An inductive approach is possible."

¹⁹Michael Rogness, review of *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons*, by James W. Cox, *Word & World* 6 (1986): 363.

²⁰Thomas R. McKibbens, review of *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons*, by James W. Cox, *Faith and Mission* 3 (1986): 104-106. The other three texts are Deane A. Kemper, *Effective Preaching, A Manual for Students and Pastors* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985); John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); and Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985).

Delivery of Sermons became an indispensable standard in the field, so we expect you to be such a standard.”²¹

**The Twentieth Century Pulpit,
Vols. 1 and 2**

For the most part, scholarly reviews of these two works are positive.²² As with his preaching texts, Cox is appreciated for his ecumenical efforts at providing a wide spectrum of sermons in these two volumes. At the same time, however, no reviewer seems entirely pleased with the breakdown of the sermons across nationalities, denominations, and genders. Virgil P. Howard notes, for example, that “Presbyterians and Baptists predominate” the selections.²³ He also laments the fact that only one Roman Catholic, one black, and “not a single woman” is represented in volume one.²⁴ Other reviewers share Howard’s call for even more diversity. Consider, for example, Henry O. Thompson’s comments:

A future edition might pick up additional Roman Catholics In addition to Europeans and North Americans, one might wonder if there are not Latins and Africans and Indians and Far Easterners to be included. There are certainly more Black preachers who are “Pulpit Masters.” Out of the Methodist tradition and Episcopal schisms, one is aware that no women appear in the present volume.²⁵

²¹Ibid.

²²Because this author found only one review of vol. 2, the two volumes are treated here together.

²³Virgil P. Howard, review of *The Twentieth Century Pulpit*, ed. James W. Cox, *Perkins Journal* 31 (1978): 51.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Henry O. Thompson, review of *The Twentieth Century Pulpit*, ed. James W. Cox, *The Drew Gateway* 48 (1977): 57.

Cox apparently seeks to appease the calls for women contributors by including two women in his second volume.²⁶ Yet, even after publication of the second volume, one reviewer writes of his hopes that a third volume might be even more equally representative of world nationalities.²⁷

**Biblical Preaching:
An Expositor's Treasury**

As noted in chapter three of this paper, one of the assumptions made by the contributors to this volume is that “the historical-critical method is essential to a thorough understanding of the text in its present significance.”²⁸ While many reviewers appreciate this assumption, referring to the “primacy of the historical-critical method”²⁹ or regarding the book as “a cornucopia of scholarship,”³⁰ not all reviewers are equally as enthusiastic. Theologically conservative reviewers, for example, find the acceptance of the historical-critical method more than a little problematic. Consider, for example, the following criticisms by R. Larry Overstreet of Grace Theological Seminary:

²⁶Cox includes Elizabeth Achtemeier and Jean Myers in *The Twentieth Century Pulpit*, vol. 2.

²⁷See Donald Macleod, review of *The Twentieth Century Pulpit*, vol. 2, ed. James W. Cox, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, n. s. 5 (1984): 80. Macleod calls for “pulpit representatives from Scotland, Ireland, Canada, Australia, the Orient, and South America.”

²⁸James W. Cox, ed., *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 13.

²⁹Don M. Wardlaw, review of *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury*, ed. James W. Cox, *Review and Expositor* 81 (1984): 485-86.

³⁰John Killinger, review of *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury*, ed. James W. Cox, *Christian Century* 101 (1984): 22.

The higher critical views of the author are disconcerting to this conservative reviewer. Several examples of this are: "Genesis 1:1-2:4a is generally regarded as Priestly material" which "was completed by 500 B.C." (p. 18); "The Yahwist editor and later the Priestly editor wrote to teach . . ." (p. 39); "The JEP narrative begins in Genesis with the myths of the Garden of Eden and the Tower of Babel" (p. 55). The biblical section that includes "Ex. 25-31; Lev.; Num. 1-10" is said to have "little homiletical material" except for Lev. 19:18 which is quoted by Christ (p. 59). "Proto-Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah, and Trito-Isaiah" are seen on p. 119, along with "Deutero-Zechariah" on p. 140. "The Book of Daniel was written ca. 165 BC" (p. 152), and has "historical inaccuracies" (p. 153).³¹

While these criticisms are valid one must remember that Cox himself is not "the author" of the book as refers to him above. Cox is the editor of this work; the compiler of several authors whose "contributions reflect their personal convictions as to the nature and significance of the biblical text."³² Thomas G. Long, acknowledging the difficulties of compiling a book with such a wide array of theological orientations, regards the finished product as "a tribute to the diversity of people interested in serious biblical preaching and to the editor's laudable goal of comprehensiveness."³³

The Minister's Manual

For the most part, reviewers of several volumes of *The Minister's Manual*

³¹R. Larry Overstreet, review of *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury*, ed. James W. Cox, *Grace Theological Journal* 7 (1986): 157.

³²James W. Cox, ed., *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 13. See also chapter 4 of this paper where the author argues that Cox's view of the historical-critical method seems more in line with what Sidney Greidanus refers to as a "holistic historical-critical method."

³³Thomas G. Long, review of *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury*, ed. James W. Cox, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, n. s. 5 (1983): 81.

praise Cox's ability to edit a useful resource manual for busy pastors.³⁴ Many note the diversity of contributors and appreciate the plethora of useful material such as biblical illustrations and sermon abstracts. Luther Joe Thompson, for example, notes that the 1986 edition contains sermon ideas that will "stimulate your thinking and perhaps save you in a pinch when pastoral emergencies devastate your study time."³⁵ David H. C. Read, referring to the wide range of contributors, praises Cox for his "good taste" and "discriminating palate."³⁶

At the same time, however, many reviewers express concerns that the pastoral resource may be misused. At least six reviewers caution against the pastor's using the manual to "shortcut" his time spent in careful sermon preparation. Perhaps Sidney Greidanus most fairly expresses this concern when he writes:

Editor Cox probably shares my fears that a book like this may become a crutch that will eventually cripple preachers. To be authentic, sermons ought to communicate what the preacher, after much listening and study, has heard in the Word for the local congregation. Similarly, original illustrations that the preacher has seen or experienced are much more powerful than recycled ones. Although *The Ministers Manual* has been published since 1926 and may stimulate some creative ideas when the preacher is at wit's end, the book is not really required for preachers who have learned how to grow and design sermons. For others, it may help out in dry spells, but handle with care.³⁷

³⁴The author located reviews from the 1983 edition through the 1993 edition. Because of the relative scarcity of total reviews for total volumes, all reviews are treated here together.

³⁵Luther Joe Thompson, a review of *The Ministers Manual for 1986*, ed. James W. Cox, *Review and Expositor* 83 (1986): 289.

³⁶David H. C. Read, a review of *The Ministers Manual for 1991*, ed. James W. Cox, *Review and Expositor* 88 (1991): 448.

³⁷Sidney Greidanus, a review of *The Ministers Manual for 1992*, ed. James W. Cox, *Calvin Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 188.

Other reviewers feel that the sermons represented in the manuals are a bit inferior, at times more topical than textual, and more “example-oriented” and moralistic than theologically faithful expositions of Scripture.³⁸ In the main, however, most reviewers welcome the manuals as helpful reference works for busy persons engaged in regular, pastoral ministry.

Best Sermons

As stated above in chapter 3 of this paper, the first volume of *Best Sermons* was widely popular when it was published in 1988.³⁹ *Preaching* magazine lists the book first in its “Top Ten Books Every Preacher Should Read” and Associate Editor R. Albert Mohler, states that the book “delivers precisely what its title promises—a collection of sermons exhibiting excellence and recognizable quality” making the book “a must for the preaching minister.”⁴⁰ Other reviewers share these sentiments, referring to the book as “a wonderful help”⁴¹ or praising Cox for his collection of sermons from

³⁸See Wilbert M. Van Dyk, a review of *The Ministers Manual for 1989*, ed. James W. Cox, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989): 176; Wilbert M. Van Dyk, a review of *The Ministers Manual for 1991*, ed. James W. Cox, *Calvin Theological Journal* 26 (1991): 450; and James L. Brauer, a review of *The Ministers Manual for 1992*, ed. James W. Cox, *Concordia Journal* 19 (1993): 194.

³⁹While a total of seven volumes of *Best Sermons* were published from 1988-1994, the author located reviews for only vols. 1 through 5, the overwhelming majority of which reviewed vol. 1. Consequently, all reviews are treated here together.

⁴⁰R. Albert Mohler, associate ed., “Best Sermons Cited as Top Book of 1998,” *Preaching* 4 (January-February, 1989): 1-3.

⁴¹Ronald J. Allen, review of *Best Sermons 1*, ed. James W. Cox, *Encounter* 50 (1989): 304.

preachers who are “articulate, committed voices of help” for a turbulent world in need of encouragement.⁴²

Not all reviewers, however, find the book equally as useful. David J. Schlafer, for example, states that “if these sermons *are* among the ‘best,’ contemporary preaching is in serious trouble.”⁴³ Schlafer’s primary criticism is his opinion that many of the sermons are “lacking in effectiveness as mediators of transforming grace” and believes that most of the sermons serve only “to remind the converted of what they already know.”⁴⁴ Another reviewer finds the sermons to vary widely in their quality: “Some are excellent, and some are boring. A few are incomprehensible.”⁴⁵ Still another reviewer criticizes the lack of Old Testament sermons appearing in the first volume, concluding that “Marcion is alive and well, even among our supposedly finest preachers.”⁴⁶

Reviewers of succeeding volumes echo similar strengths and weaknesses. One reviewer doubts whether the second volume really contains “the best” sermons of preachers in North America and shares his reluctance to recommend the book to anyone

⁴²Don M. Wardlaw, review of *Best Sermons 1*, ed. James W. Cox, *Review and Expositor* 87 (1990): 125.

⁴³David J. Schlafer, review of *Best Sermons 1*, ed. James W. Cox, *Currents in Theology and Mission* 16 (1989): 386.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Lindsey Davis, review of *Best Sermons 1*, ed. James W. Cox, *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 24 (1989): 64.

⁴⁶John C. Holbert, review of *Best Sermons 1*, ed. James W. Cox, *Perkins Journal* 42 (1989): 39.

interested in understanding the truths of Christianity.⁴⁷ Others, however, praise Cox for his ability to edit a book demonstrating the various ways sermons may be preached and find the book a helpful resource for preachers and homileticians.⁴⁸

Handbook of Themes for Preaching

Only four brief reviews of this book were discovered. All four reviewers find the book helpful to the preacher by providing a systematic presentation of biblical themes for sermons.⁴⁹ Reviewers also appreciate the variety of ecclesiastical orientation among the contributors and the fact that each contributor writes with respect to his or her area of expertise.

Negative criticism is minimal. William J. Carl III believes the book should contain a bibliography.⁵⁰ Dwight E. Stevenson believes the introductory chapter should be longer.⁵¹ Finally, Grant Lovejoy acknowledges that given the controversial

⁴⁷Wayne Brouwer, review of *Best Sermons 2*, ed. James W. Cox, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989): 386-88.

⁴⁸See for example Grant Lovejoy, review of *Best Sermons 2*, ed. James W. Cox, *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 32 (1990): 73 and William J. Carl, review of *Best Sermons 3*, ed. James W. Cox, *Homiletic* 16 (1991): 17-18.

⁴⁹See for example, William J. Carl III, review of *Handbook of Themes for Preaching*, ed. James W. Cox, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, n. s. 14 (1993): 105. Carl writes of how the book parallels much of his own thought in his preaching text *Preaching Christian Doctrine*.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 106.

⁵¹Dwight E. Stevenson, review of *Handbook of Themes for Preaching*, ed. James W. Cox, *Mid-Stream* 31 (1992): 167.

nature of a few of the topics, “readers may find some articles disappointing.”⁵² Lovejoy admits his own disappointment, for example, that the material treating the theme “Inspiration” did not contain scriptural references from 2 Timothy 3:16 or 2 Peter 1:20-21, as he had expected.⁵³

Cox takes all of the above criticism well. He recognizes that negative reviews are part and parcel to scholarly contributions. In fact, Cox believes the negative feedback he has received to be minimal. “I probably ought to have more of it,” he admits, adding that “people have been pretty gracious.”⁵⁴

Statements from Colleagues

Five persons were contacted for the purpose of providing personal remarks concerning Cox’s contributions, character, and influence in the field of homiletics. Four of the five are former students of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, three of whom studied under Cox in the Master of Divinity and Doctor of Philosophy level. Two of these students also went on to teach with Cox on the faculty of the seminary. Another student, while not studying under Cox in the Master of Divinity level, had Cox on his doctoral Committee of Instruction and also later taught with Cox on the faculty of the seminary. The fifth person is a professional colleague who has

⁵²Grant Lovejoy, review of *Handbook of Themes for Preaching*, ed. James W. Cox, *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 35 (1992): 71.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴James W. Cox, interview by author, tape recording, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 24 February 2004.

known Cox a long period of time and is himself a person of considerable scholarly influence in the field of homiletics.

Raymond Bailey

Raymond Bailey has served as pastor of the Seventh and James Baptist Church in Waco, Texas since 1995. He has authored preaching books such as *Jesus the Preacher* and *Paul the Preacher*. Bailey is both a former student of Cox's as well as a former faculty member of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, having taught preaching along with Cox for sixteen years at the seminary.⁵⁵

Bailey believes one of Cox's greatest homiletical contributions to be his adoption and expansion of H. Grady Davis' textbook, *Design for Preaching*. "James was a pioneer," says Bailey, "in getting away from the three-point sermon most popular in Southern Baptist circles" and regarding the sermon as more of a "revelation, an unveiling of truth." Bailey also feels that Cox's stress upon the need for careful literary work in the sermon is a hallmark of Cox's homiletical methodology. "Some of his students turned out to be eloquent preachers because of this," he adds.

Cox's work in moving "Southern Baptists into the mainstream of the American Homiletic Community" is also regarded by Bailey to be a significant contribution. Cox has been a member of the Academy of Homiletics since the 1960s and served as its Vice President in 1975-1976 and President in 1976-1977. Cox's

⁵⁵Raymond Bailey, telephone interview by author, 1 March 2004. All subsequent information pertaining to Bailey is obtained from this interview.

participation in the Academy, according to Bailey, both introduced Cox to preachers across denominational lines and aided in his influencing those preachers as well.

His openness to the ideas of others—even when at great variance from his own ideas—is another commendable aspect of Cox’s personality that Bailey notes. He describes Cox as “irenic, a gentleman, kind, gracious,” and a person who “will make every effort to get along with everyone.” He adds, “Dr. Cox is a real Christian gentleman. It was always soothing, calming, encouraging to be in his presence. If anyone embodies the peace of Christ it would be Jim Cox.”

Craig Loscalzo

Craig Loscalzo has served as the senior pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington, Kentucky since 1996. He has written three books, *Apologetic Preaching: Proclaiming Jesus Christ to a Postmodern World*; *Evangelistic Preaching that Connects*; and *Preaching Sermons that Connect: Effective Communication through Identification*. Loscalzo is the former Victor and Louise Associate Professor of Christian Preaching at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where he taught on the preaching faculty with Cox for eight years from 1988-1996.⁵⁶

Loscalzo has known Cox since 1982 when he was a Master of Divinity student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Though Loscalzo did not study under Cox in the Master of Divinity level, Cox served on his Committee of Instruction in the Doctor of Philosophy level. As the Victor and Louise Associate Professor of

⁵⁶Craig Loscalzo, e-mail response to author, 12 February 2004. All subsequent information pertaining to Loscalzo is obtained from this correspondence.

Christian Preaching at the seminary, Loscalzo writes of his being “honored” to hold the endowed chair held by Cox for so many years.

Cox’s significant homiletical contributions, according to Loscalzo, include his “prolific editing” of the *Ministers Manual* and the preaching theory espoused in his homiletical textbooks. Loscalzo adds, “He was the ‘Go-To’ person on the preaching faculty that understood the sweep of the history of preaching as well as the liturgical aspects of homiletics. He offered major contributions in each of these areas.”

Loscalzo describes Cox as “the quintessential homiletician,” whose sermons “were always thoughtful and well-crafted.” Adding that Cox came from an “older model” of preaching that focused on the preacher as orator, Loscalzo concludes that Cox “certainly modeled the best of that tradition.”

In response to a question about Cox’s ability to teach in one institution for so many years in spite of the academic tensions that often accompany such an endeavor, Loscalzo’s comments are insightful. He writes, “Dr. Cox focused on the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its proclamation. He never entered the political fray of denominational politics viewing that, I believe, as a mere temporal distraction. To his merit, he kept the faith once delivered to the saints.”

Robert Smith, Jr.

Robert Smith, Jr. has served as Professor of Christian Preaching at Beeson Divinity School in Alabama since 1997. He was previously the Carl E. Bates Associate Professor of Christian Preaching for three years at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and served for twenty years as pastor of a church.

Smith is both a former student and former teaching colleague of Cox's at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.⁵⁷ Smith studied under Cox at both the Master of Divinity level as well as the Doctor of Philosophy level. He first studied under Cox in 1986 and was encouraged by Cox to apply for the doctoral program after graduating with his Master of Divinity in 1988. Smith began the Doctor of Philosophy program in 1990 with Cox as the supervisor of his Committee of Instruction. Smith also served as Cox's grader throughout the program.

Smith believes Cox's forte is probably the history of preaching. He adds that Cox has been to places such as The Old South Church in Boston and has first hand knowledge of some of the great preachers of the 20th century. At the same time, Smith regards Cox's call for "biblical preaching" as an integral aspect of his particular homiletical methodology. "His preaching," Smith says, "is always formed out of the crucible of biblical content, and for him that's what the sermon is, it's biblical content more than style."

Cox's openness to other ways of preaching is also something Smith favorably notes. While Cox emphasizes deductive preaching, Smith believes that "he's not so deductive to the point that he can't have an appreciation for other styles and approaches that treat the biblical text responsibly." As a former student, Smith was particularly grateful for this aspect of Cox's teaching method. "He did not try to force us into Cox's mold. He allowed us to find our own voice, to develop our own style, to gauge our rhythm, and do all that within the context of responsible exegesis."

⁵⁷Robert Smith, Jr., telephone interview by author, 3 March 2004. All subsequent information pertaining to Smith is obtained from this interview.

Smith also appreciates Cox's encouragement as a teacher. He recalls Cox's suggestion that he pursue doctoral studies: "I saw the MDiv degree as a terminating point, as a period. He saw it as the comma and he erased it and, just made an ellipsis really, and that encouraged me." Smith adds, "He then wrote letters of recommendation for me, stood for me, served as my chairperson of my committee and let me serve as his grader." There is no question that Smith regards Cox as a true friend who has positively influenced him in a number of ways. "He calls me his pastor," Smith says, "which is an incredible honor." In addition, Cox has influenced Smith as a teacher:

As a teacher I have adopted his philosophy: make the classroom the priority. Love your students. Be prepared. Never cheat your students because of lackluster performance due to very shoddy preparation. Be a professor in the classroom and be a pastor outside of it. Be available to your students so that you do as much teaching in the classroom, do as much teaching in the hallway, the lunchroom, and all the way to the parking lot when they talk with you as you do in the classroom. And he has modeled that. He was always available to me.

When asked about Cox's ability to remain at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for such an extended period of time, Smith attests to Cox's wise and congenial personality:

He is the personification of the *via media*, the middle way. He does not compromise, that's not it, but he's able to accommodate himself to any context so that he can adjust to the context without losing his soul, without losing who he is. So he is this tough-minded, tenderhearted individual who knows how to survive and thrive—not just survive, but thrive—under a Duke McCall administration, a Roy Honeycutt administration, an R. Albert Mohler administration—all three are different—and yet James Cox remains the same. And all he's done—without being a chameleon—all he's done is to adjust himself like a rubber band without losing his elasticity.

Charles L. Rice

Charles Rice is Professor Emeritus of Homiletics at Drew Theological School, Drew University. He is the author of many scholarly books and articles on

preaching including *Interpretation and Imagination* and *The Embodied Word: Preaching as Art and Liturgy*. He is also a priest in The Episcopal Church. Most recently Rice served as Interim Rector at St. Dunstan's Church in Succasunna, New Jersey. Rice was one of Cox's earliest students, having been taught by him before graduating from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1962 with the Bachelor of Divinity.⁵⁸

Rice believes Cox's most significant contribution to the field of homiletics is his belief that the sermon must be grounded in Scripture. "He is predominantly a biblical person," Rice says. "He teaches biblical preaching" and has been a steady proponent of this emphasis. In addition, Rice appreciates Cox's "assiduous" work as a teacher of homiletics. "He really cares about teaching people to preach" Rice adds, and is "a kind of model in pedagogy."

What Rice personally remembers most about Cox's homiletical philosophy is the way Cox's method so closely paralleled the theology of Karl Barth. Rice qualifies that this insight may be more a reflection of his own thinking than that of Cox's, admitting that he "went to seminary deeply imbued in Karl Barth." Nevertheless, Rice found that what Cox was teaching was "right in line" with Barth's thinking. "He trusted the biblical word to carry God's message," Rice says, adding that Cox "exemplified in homiletics what Karl Barth articulates in his *The Doctrine of the Word*—the place of the centrality of Christ in Scripture." While Cox did not expressly teach Barthian theology in the classroom, Rice says, "I found myself nodding my head" a lot in the lectures.

⁵⁸Charles L. Rice, telephone interview by author, 3 March 2004. All subsequent information pertaining to Rice is obtained from this interview.

When asked about Cox's personality, especially his ability to remain at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for nearly forty-five years, Rice says, "It's amazing to me. He seems, to me, to be still without guile. He is singular in his focus on teaching preaching. God put him there and God has sustained him."

John Killinger

John Killinger is former Professor of Religion and Culture at Samford University. In addition, he has authored more than fifty books and is considered by many to be an authority on preaching. He is currently pastor of the historic Little Stone Church on Mackinac Island, Michigan. Although ordained in the Presbyterian Church, Killinger has served a variety of denominations, including Baptist, Presbyterian, and Congregational.

Killinger recalls being with Cox in 1963 at a dinner in Cox's home that included guests William Hull, Joachim Jeremias, and their wives.⁵⁹ At the time, Killinger was Dean of Kentucky Southern College in Louisville, Kentucky.⁶⁰ He later left the school to begin a teaching career at Vanderbilt.

Cox's most significant homiletical contribution, Killinger believes, is bibliographical. "James has provided collections of sermons not available other

⁵⁹John Killinger, telephone interview by author, 26 February 2004. All subsequent information pertaining to Killinger is obtained from this interview.

⁶⁰Kentucky Southern College, opened in 1960, closed in 1969 when it merged into the University of Louisville.

places,” Killinger says. He adds that Cox has proved “indefatigable in providing these” and “has done an A #1 Job in getting these things out.”⁶¹

Killinger also appreciates Cox’s ability to get along with a broad spectrum of people, believing that this is reflected in the variety of sermons collected by Cox in his books. “He has a great tolerance,” Killinger adds. “He doesn’t get excited about doctrinal differences.” Killinger believes that while some of Cox’s more passionate colleagues may have “provoked their administrators into firing them,” Cox himself has stayed consistently above the fray. “He amazes me,” Killinger says.

Cox’s near forty-five years of teaching at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, together with his many homiletical writings, ensures that Cox has had “an unfaltering influence” on generations of students. Killinger concludes by referencing an article from the current issue of *Harvard Business Review*. In an article entitled, “Success That Lasts,” the authors identify four categories of success: happiness, achievement, significance, and legacy.⁶² Concerning these four categories, Killinger states, “James has fulfilled success by those standards.”

Conclusion

The inevitability of negative criticism is expected from anyone seriously

⁶¹Killinger is consistent in this opinion of Cox. In a book review written over fifteen years earlier he writes that “through [Cox’s] indefatigable writing and editing, he has contributed more to the discussion of homiletical theory and values than anyone else in the past 25 years.” See John Killinger, review of *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons*, by James W. Cox, *Christian Ministry* 17 (1986): 33.

⁶²See Laura Nash and Howard Stevenson, “Success That Lasts,” *Harvard Business Review* (February 2004): 102-09.

engaged in the work of publishing. Cox has received his fair share of negative criticism, but he has also enjoyed a proportionately larger measure of positive criticism. Most reviewers appreciate the work Cox has done, particularly in the areas of bibliographic work and in his sustained call for “biblical” preaching. In addition, his colleagues speak glowingly about Cox’s irenic personality, his gentle manner, and his encouraging nature. Taken together, one can understand why Cox is so highly regarded among his colleagues.

Illustrative of the honor Cox’s colleagues desire to give him is his recently being awarded the “Distinguished Lifetime Service Award” at the Academy of Homiletics Meeting Banquet in December, 2003.⁶³ John S. McClure, President of the Academy of Homiletics and Professor of Homiletics at Vanderbilt Divinity School made the following remarks at Cox’s bestowal of the award:

I am told that Dr. Cox has a personal letter in a drawer in his office from Harry Emerson Fosdick that he pulls out from time to time to remind his students that preaching did not begin and end with them. Dr. Cox, your distinguished work reminds us that homiletics does not begin or end with us. We are deeply grateful for the many great years of service you have given our field and your faithful commitment to the Academy of Homiletics. We are privileged to give you this small token of our love, admiration, and thanksgiving for your life and ministry.⁶⁴

⁶³The banquet of the Academy of Homiletics Meeting was held December 6, 2003, at Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, California.

⁶⁴These remarks are excerpted from a paper obtained from Cox by the author. The paper remains in Cox’s possession.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

While a conclusion is provided at the end of each main chapter of this paper, the author believes it is necessary to provide a final summary of Cox's homiletical contributions in light of the overall research project. This section summarizes chapters two through seven, highlighting Cox's homiletical contributions as covered under each main area.

Contributions during Early Career

Cox's early life and background certainly shaped him for the contributions he would make in the future. One cannot help but see the hand of God guiding Cox from an early age to prepare him for a life of ministry. Cox's family heritage was a strong, spiritual foundation upon which he would continue to build. His father read to the family from the Bible every evening and his mother, a devoted educator of fifty years, taught Cox to apply himself academically, striving for excellence and mastery of the literary disciplines.

The incident of Cox's childhood "sermon" during a family gathering when he was thirteen years old should be regarded as more than just a humorous anecdote. While Cox saw the occasion as something of a "game," he was also very serious. The event illustrates the influence his Christian upbringing made upon him as a young

person and demonstrates Cox's love for preaching even before a "call" was more clearly manifested and thoughtfully considered.

Cox's three year writing experience for the *Roane County Banner* undoubtedly prepared him for his future prolific writing career. Cox was merely 16 to 19 years of age when he wrote his "Meditations" that occurred weekly in the local newspaper. The writings are both impressive and biblically sound. One can only imagine the number of persons who were touched by these early article submissions by the young teenager.

Three pastorates gave Cox the opportunity to propagate and build upon what would later become the cornerstone of his homiletical method: "biblical preaching." The occasions for pastorates also provided Cox with the reality of pastoral experience that aided him in the classroom and became an endearing quality enjoyed by his students. Thus by the time Cox went to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1959 he had already obtained a wealth of experience that would help in sustaining him during his future career.

Written Contributions

To say that Cox has authored a number of contributions to benefit the field of homiletics is to state the obvious. In his former role as Associate Editor of *Preaching* magazine, R. Albert Mohler Jr., now President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, once referred to Cox as "a veritable industry."¹ He explains, "Geoffrey W. Bromiley, the prolific theologian / translator of Kittel's *Theological Wordbook of the*

¹R. Albert Mohler, "Best Sermons Collection Offers Fresh, Interesting Homiletical Models," *Preaching* (November-December 1988): 48.

New Testament and much of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, is said to translate in his sleep. It must also be true that James W. Cox edits and writes as he slumbers—otherwise he would get no sleep!”²

Perhaps no homiletics scholar has contributed more in number of publications than has Cox. His twenty years of editing of *The Ministers Manual* alone demonstrates the significant impact he has made upon the field of homiletics. Ministers throughout North America have benefited yearly from this edited publication of helpful homiletical insights. The fact that the manual has also been available in Korean and Chinese translations demonstrates the far reach of Cox's written homiletical contributions. When one considers Cox's other edited works such as *Pulpit Digest* and the seven editions of *Best Sermons*, it becomes clearer just how great an impression Cox has made through his published books.

Cox's two main preaching texts, (1) *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*, and (2) *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons* continue to be used by students and teachers of preaching. In terms of influence, some reviewers have regarded Cox's latter preaching text as paralleling John Albert Broadus' immortal classic *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*.

The editing of books such as *Biblical Preaching* and *Handbook of Themes for Preaching* demonstrates Cox's openness to publishing authors who hold theological and homiletical opinions at variance with his own. While many would question the wisdom of providing “a voice” for those with whom one happens to disagree, Cox regards the

²Ibid.

matter rather as an advancement of scholarship; an opportunity to make a *contribution* that furthers homiletical thought.

Contributions to Hermeneutics

Cox regards the Bible as a God-inspired book that is both trustworthy, reliable, and authoritative in nature. The main purpose of the Scriptures is to point the reader to the redemption available through Jesus Christ. Consequently, Cox prefers to speak of the “derivative nature” of the Bible; the Bible is the vehicle in which is revealed the “ultimate Word of God, Jesus Christ.”

The location of meaning in a biblical text, Cox believes, is discovered when one determines the meaning intended by the original author. The preacher must guard against reading his *own* meanings into the text and must allow the author of the text to speak for himself. Once this meaning has been determined, the preacher must then determine how the text applies to the “present life situation.”

Cox embraces the historical-critical method only insofar as it serves as a tool to aid in understanding the original author’s intended meaning. He does not, however, share the anti-supernatural presuppositions of many who apply historical-critical principles of biblical interpretation. Cox’s views of biblical interpretation agree with Sidney Greidanus’ idea of a “holistic historical-critical method.” That is, Cox approaches the biblical text “with confidence in its reliability,” not “with an attitude of doubt as if it were a spurious document.”³

³Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 46-47.

Responsible interpretation includes the use of syntactical and theological tools of scholarship. In addition, the interpreter must pay careful attention to biblical context and have an appreciation for the progressive nature of revelation. Finally, Cox believes the interpreter must understand the text in light of the theme of “salvation history,” or *heilsgeschichte*. Cox’s “Questions to Aid Text Interpretation” provided in both of his preaching texts are a helpful contribution to preachers. Also helpful is the inclusion of “Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible” provided as an appendix in his *A Guide to Biblical Preaching*.

Contributions to Homiletics

One of Cox’s greatest contributions to the field of homiletics is his consistent call for using the Bible in Christian preaching. Cox even goes so far as to say that the preacher “never actually begins to preach until he begins to give account of the bearing of the Bible on the matter.”⁴ Christian preaching, Cox believes, is intricately interwoven with the biblical text. The preacher must forever guard against sharing his personal opinions and must remain faithful to the biblical text as the foundation for his message.

Cox believes, however, that there is not just one way to preach the biblical text. The fact that there are many different literary forms in the Bible suggests the multiplicity of ways in which the preacher may preach his sermons. A sermon may be topical, textual, expository, narrative, or some combination of forms. Furthermore,

⁴James W. Cox, “The Uniqueness of Preaching,” faculty address in Alumni Memorial Chapel, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, February 8, 1967, as printed in *Review and Expositor* 64 (Fall 1967): 528.

sermon “points” may come directly from the natural divisions of the text or may be built around psychological factors suggested in the text. One’s homiletical creativity is limited only by the necessity to use the biblical text as the foundation for the sermon. How the text is preached, however, is open to the inclinations and giftedness of the preacher.

The “Central Idea” is Cox’s language for the main thrust of the sermon. The central idea is a combination of the preacher’s subject and predicate and is to be worded in universal language so that its truth is understood to transcend time and culture. The very fact that Cox calls for a central idea demonstrates his preference for deductive, propositional preaching. Because the preacher always knows exactly where he is going, Cox believes he can never truly preach an “inductive sermon.” The preacher may, however, adopt an “inductive style,” bringing the central idea into the sermon in an implicit rather than explicit way.

As with the *preparation* of sermons, Cox believes there are a number of equally valid ways to *deliver* sermons. The preacher is encouraged, however, to adopt an approach that keeps his eyes focused upon the congregation as much as possible. Preaching without notes, or with few notes, does not mean that the preacher shortcuts his time spent in the preparation of his sermons. The preacher must carefully think through his message—writing out a manuscript if necessary—in order to ensure that his grammar is correct and his style is clear.

Cox’s own sermons reflect the consistency of his teaching. The sermons printed in his book *Surprised by God* reflect the various ways he believes texts may be preached. The sermons analyzed in the sixth chapter of this paper also reflect Cox’s

relative consistency with his teachings concerning sermon construction. Furthermore, his editing of several books of sermons contributed by others demonstrates his appreciation for variety in sermon preparation and delivery.

Contributions among Colleagues: Cox as “Bridge Builder”

Most scholars readily acknowledge the written contributions Cox has made through his many publications. Cox tends to be appreciated for his editing volumes that bring together a wealth of sermons and sermon helps for the benefit of busy ministers. He is also appreciated by many for his ability to cross denominational lines for the purpose of furthering homiletical scholarship. His books have been, for the most, reviewed favorably, though some have not appreciated his “editorial openness” to the inclusion of sermons whose authors hold diverse theological orientations. Nevertheless, through his editorial works, Cox has succeeded in “building a bridge” between persons of varying theological persuasions. He has joined together persons of conservative and moderate theological orientations and has himself carefully avoided denominational controversy where such controversy detracted from his goal of contributing to the field of homiletics. It is arguable that Cox’s success in this regard is directly proportional to his ability to contribute such a large number of homiletical works.

In over four decades Cox has influenced a great many students through his teaching at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and he has influenced scores of students elsewhere as a visiting lecturer on preaching. Many of Cox’s students have gone on to successful pastorates and some have pursued teaching and writing careers in the footsteps of their mentor. Their comments are insightful, some appreciating Cox’s

bibliographical contributions, others his grasp of the history of preaching, but all of them appreciating Cox's godly character, irenic personality, and easygoing nature.

Cox continues to maintain a consistent spirit of humility. One might expect someone who has taught for nearly forty-five years to project an air of intellectual superiority, if even unintentionally. Yet Cox does not regard himself as "having arrived" in any sense and, in fact, remains open to continuing to learn from others. Regarding a statement about his long teaching career at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Cox humbly admits, "I've learned a lot from my students over the years."⁵

It is unfortunate that one's capacity for exuding godly, Christian virtues is often ignored in the exalted realm of academia. Due to the nature of academic research, the fruit of one's scholarship is often viewed in a vacuum, thus eclipsing the benefits that might have come by learning from the scholar's personality. But what profit is there if a man "should gain the whole world" in terms of academic honor and recognition and "lose his own soul" for lack of consistent, Christian character and commitment? Cox's godly humility and loving forbearance have sustained him in years past and undoubtedly will serve to both protect and preserve his homiletical contributions for years to come.

⁵James W. Cox, Interview 2.

APPENDIX 1

TIME LINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN COX'S LIFE

1923:

Born January 18 in Kingston, Tennessee

1933:

Makes profession of faith in January at age 10

1939:

Preaches first sermon at age 16 at African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Kingston. Text: 1 Corinthians 13

1940:

Begins "A Meditation" for the *Roane County Banner* Newspaper

1941:

Graduates from Roane County High School in Kingston, TN
Favorite subject in school is English literature

1943-1944:

Pastor, Nance's Grove Baptist Church, New Market, TN

1944:

Obtains B. A. from Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, TN

1945-1954:

Pastor, Memorial Baptist Church, Frankfort, KY

1947:

Obtains MDiv from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS)

1951:

August 4th, marries Patricia Parrent of Frankfort, Kentucky

1953:

Obtains Th. D. from SBTS

1954-1959:

Pastor, Central Baptist Church, Johnson City, Tennessee
Board of Trustees, Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, TN (1954-1959)

1956:

Son David Allan Cox is born April 29

1958:

Contributes to *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*

1959:

Joins faculty in August as Associate Professor of Preaching at SBTS; joins along with six other faculty: Clyde Penrose St. Amant, G. Willis Bennett, Hugo H. Culpepper, James Leo Garrett, Page H. Kelley, Ray Summers.
First of three Interim/External Supply Pastorates, Memorial Baptist Church, Frankfort KY

1960:

Interim/External Supply Pastor, Evergreen Baptist Church, Frankfort, KY

1961:

Son Kenneth Mitchell born February 23

1963:

Advanced study at Union Theological Seminary
Interim/External Supply Pastor, Raritan Valley Baptist Church, Edison, NJ

1964:

Contributes to *Baptist Advance*

1964-1965:

September—begins sabbatical (1964-1965) to study at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ and the University of Zurich, Switzerland
Visiting Lecturer in Homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary (1964-1965)
Interim/External Supply Pastor, Manhattan Baptist Church, New York City, NY

1965:

Advanced study at University of Zurich; meets Eduard Schweizer
Becomes member of editorial board, Review and Expositor, (1965-1969)—first of three

1965-1966:

Second of three Int/ex.supp Pastor, Memorial Baptist Church, Frankfort KY

1966:

Writes *Learning to Speak Effectively*

1966, Summer:

Interim/External Supply Pastor, First Baptist Church, Columbus, Georgia

1967:

Faculty Address, "The Uniqueness of Preaching" (February 8, 1967)

Interim/External Supply Pastor, First Baptist Church, Columbus, Georgia (Summer)

Leads Preaching Workshop, Fort Knox, KY (first of two; see 1982) (Summer)

1968:

Translates *Spirit-Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel*

Language study at Goethe Institute, Germany

Preacher, Spring Rally of Protestant Men of the Chapel, Bremerhaven and Wuerzburg, Germany

Preacher, Protestant Chaplains Retreat, Fort Knox, KY

1969:

Edits *Minister's Worship Manual*

Edits spring issue of *Review and Expositor*

1970:

Interim/External Supply Pastor, First Baptist Church, Alexandria, VA

1971:

Edits *God's Inescapable Nearness*

Contributes to *What Did the Bible Mean?*

1971-1972:

Awarded study grant by ATS for sabbatical in Europe (1971-1972)

Advanced study at International Baptist Seminary

Another advanced study at University of Zurich

1972:

Second time becomes member of editorial board, *Review and Expositor* (1972-1975)

Father, Isham Cox, dies March 4

1973:

Contributes to *Should Preachers Play God?*

Interim/External Supply Pastor, Cedar Creek Baptist Church, Louisville, KY

Contributing Editor, *Pulpit Digest*, (1973-1982)

Lecturer, Chaplains Professional Conference, SBTS

1974:

Contributes to *Preaching About Death*

Contributes to *Timely and Timeless*

Preaches revival at First Baptist Church Henderson, KY (April)

Mother, Carrie Cox, dies May 10

1974-1975:

First of three Interim/External Supply Pastorates at Sand Spring Baptist Church,

Lawrenceburg KY

1975:

Edits spring issue of *Review and Expositor*

Vice-President, Academy of Homiletics (1975-1976)

1976:

Writes *A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Price: \$6.50)

Third of three Interim/External Supply Pastorates, Memorial Baptist Church, Frankfort
KY

President, Academy of Homiletics (December 1976-December 1977)

1977:

Interim/External Supply Pastor, Melbourne Heights Baptist Church, Louisville, KY

Visiting Professor of Theology and Preaching at Protestant Episcopal Seminary,
Alexandria, Virginia (for four weeks)

1978:

Writes *The Twentieth Century Pulpit*

Interim/External Supply Pastor, Central Baptist Church, Johnson City, TN

Gives prayers in Graduation Exercises, Advanced Management Program, Harvard
Business School (December)

Lecturer and Preacher, National Preaching Clinic, Dayton, Ohio

Brother, Isham Monroe ("Roe") Cox Jr., dies January 3

1978-1979:

Advanced study at Harvard University

1979:

Writes *Surprised by God*

Receives Distinguished Alumnus Award, Carson-Newman College

Seminar Speaker, Boston University School of Theology

1980:

Interim/External Supply Pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Scottsburg, IN

1981:

Writes *The Twentieth Century Pulpit, Vol. II*

Becomes first occupant of Victor and Louise Lester Chair of Christian Preaching

1982:

Preacher at the Colloquy on the Hallowing of Life, University of Notre Dame

Leads Preaching Workshop, Fort Campbell, KY (second of two; see 1967)

1983:

Writes *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury*

Editor, *Pulpit Digest* (1983-1985)

Edits winter issue of *Review and Expositor*

Second of three Interim/External Supply Pastorates at Sand Spring Baptist Church,

Lawrenceburg KY

1983-1984:

Lecturer, Alumni-Welshimer Lectures on Preaching, Emmanuel School of Religion,
Johnson City, TN

Lecturer, Lectures on Preaching, Annual Pastor's Conference (the fourth annual),
Wake-Forest University

1984:

Begins editing *The Minister's Manual*

Third time becomes member of editorial board, *Review and Expositor*

1985:

Writes *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons*

Contributes to *Heralds to a New Age*

Visiting Lecturer at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary

1986:

Again Visiting Lecturer at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary

Another advanced study at Princeton Theological Seminary

1987:

Writes article series in *Preaching* magazine

Lecturer, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia (July)

1988:

Edits *Best Sermons I*

Writes *Contemporary Christian Preaching: Study Guide*

Lecturer, Pastor's Continuing Education Event, Indiana-Kentucky Conference, United
Church of Christ (January)

Lecturer, Florida Conference Institute of Preaching, United Methodist Church
(February)

1989:

Edits *Best Sermons 2*

Lecturer, Preaching Workshop at Milligan College

1990:

Edits *Best Sermons 3*

Lecturer, Preaching Workshop at Cincinnati Bible College

1991:

Edits *Best Sermons 4*

Edits *A Handbook of Themes for Preaching*

1992:

Edits *Best Sermons 5*

Contributes to *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*

Preaches at Duke University Chapel

1992-1993:

Editor, *Review and Expositor*

1993:

Edits *Best Sermons 6*

Becomes Senior Professor, SBTS

Again Visiting Lecturer at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary

Lecturer, The First Annual Marion Alberta Sharp Lectureship in Preaching, First United Church of Christ, Schuylkill Haven, PA

Serves as Consulting Editor, *Review and Expositor*

1994:

Edits *Best Sermons 7*

Visiting Lecturer at Emmanuel School of Religion, Johnson City, Tennessee

Speaker for the Chicago Sunday Evening Club on their TV program, 30 Good Minutes

1995:

Contributes to *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*

Lecturer, Preaching Workshop, Campbellsville College, KY

1995-1996:

Third of three Interim/External Supply Pastorates at Sand Spring Baptist Church, Lawrenceburg KY

1995:

Again Visiting Lecturer at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary

Contributes to Fellowship Paper No. 98, published by The College of Preachers, Bourne, Lincolnshire, England, (January 1995)

1996:

Visiting Lecturer at Baptist Theological Seminary, Singapore

1998:

Speaker for the Chicago Sunday Evening Club TV program "30 Good Minutes"

2003:

Receives the "Distinguished Lifetime Service Award," Academy of Homiletics Meeting Banquet at Claremont School of Theology, Claremont California, December 6

APPENDIX 2

EXAMPLES OF SERMON PRELIMINARIES¹

Title:
"Your Best Friend"

Lesson:
Luke 4:14-19, 31-44

Text:
Luke 4:18-19

Central Idea:
Jesus Christ has come to help all kinds of people.

General End:
To explain.

Specific Intent:
To help this congregation to understand that Jesus Christ has come to help all kinds of people.

Title:
"Where Is Jesus Christ Now?"

Lesson:
Acts 1:1-5

Text:
Acts 1:3

Central Idea:
Jesus Christ is our living Lord.

General End:
To convince.

Specific Intent:
To help this congregation to believe that Jesus Christ is our living Lord.

Title:
"A Different Kind of King"

Lesson:
Matthew 1:18-25

Text:
Same.

Central Idea:
The true meaning of Christmas may be known only in its inner and spiritual qualities.

General End:
To revitalize.

Specific Intent:
To lead this congregation to experience anew the true meaning of Christmas.

Title:
"The Right Time for God"

Lesson:
Isaiah 55:6-13

Text:
Isaiah 55:6-7

Central Idea:
There is a supremely appropriate time to be converted.

General End:
To actuate.

Specific Intent:
To help the uncommitted in this congregation to decide to seek the Lord now.

¹This appendix appears in James W. Cox, *A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon: 1976), 121.

APPENDIX 3

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
FOR THE INTERPRETATION
OF THE BIBLE

as accepted by the Ecumenical Study Conference,
held at Wadham College, Oxford, from June 29th to July 5th, 1949.

Our conference has endeavored, on the basis of the work of earlier conferences, to develop specific principles of interpretation, for the use of the Bible in relation to social and political questions. The Christian's authority lies in the will of God. It is agreed that the Bible stands in a unique position in mediating that will to us. In our study together we have used Jer. 7:1-15 as a test case for discovering the extent of agreement in the application of hermeneutical principles. We have found a measure of agreement that surprised us all. We submit the following statements as a general consensus:

- I. The necessary theological presuppositions of Biblical interpretation
 - (a) It is agreed that the Bible is our common starting point, for there God's Word confronts us, a Word which humbles the hearers so that they are more ready to listen and to discuss than they are to assert their own opinions.
 - (b) It is agreed that the primary message of the Bible concerns God's gracious and redemptive activity for the saving of sinful man that he might create in Jesus Christ a people for himself. In this, the Bible's central concern, an authoritative claim is placed upon man and he is called upon to respond in faith and obedience throughout the whole of his life and work. The law of love has always a binding and compelling hold upon us, and in it we encounter the inescapable will of God. On the other hand, in the more specific laws provided for the detailed organisation (sic) of the social life of a people who lived under conditions different from our own, we should through reverent and serious study seek to distinguish in the light of God's revelation in Christ the permanently binding from that of purely local and temporal significance.
 - (c) It is agreed that the starting point of the Christian interpreter lies within the redeemed community of which by faith he is a member.
 - (d) It is agreed that the centre (sic) and goal of the whole Bible is Jesus Christ. This gives the two Testaments a perspective in which Jesus Christ is seen both as the fulfillment and the end of the Law.

- (e) It is agreed that the unity of the Old and the New Testaments is not to be found in any naturalistic development, or in any static identity, but in the ongoing redemptive activity of God in the history of one people, reaching its fulfillment in Christ. Accordingly it is of decisive importance for hermeneutical method to interpret the Old Testament in the light of the total revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, from which arises the full Trinitarian faith of the Church.
- (f) It is agreed that allegorical interpretations which were not intended by the Biblical authors are arbitrary and their use may be a disservice to the proper recognition of Biblical authority. But Christian exegesis has been justified in recognising (sic) as divinely established correspondence between some events and teachings of the Old and of the New Testament.
- (g) It is agreed that, although we may differ in the manner in which tradition, reason and natural law may be used in the interpretation of Scripture, any teaching that clearly contradicts the Biblical position cannot be accepted as Christian.

II. The interpretation of a specific passage

- (a) It is agreed that one must start with an historical and critical examination of the passage. This includes:
 1. The determination of the text;
 2. The literary form of the passage;
 3. The historical situation, the *Sitz im Leben*;
 4. The meaning which the words had for the original author and hearer or reader;
 5. The understanding of the passage in the light of its total context and the background out of which it emerged.
- (b) It is agreed that in the case of an Old Testament passage, one must examine and expound it in relation to the revelation of God to Israel both before and after its own period. Then the interpreter should turn to the New Testament in order to view the passage in that perspective. In this procedure the Old Testament passage may receive limitation and correction, and may also disclose in the light of the New Testament a new and more profound significance, unknown to the original writer.
- (c) It is agreed that in the case of a New Testament passage one should examine it in the light of its setting and context; then turn to the Old Testament to discover its background in God's former revelation. Returning again to the New Testament one is able to see and expound the passage in the light of the whole scope of *Heilsgeschichte*. Here our understanding of a New Testament passage may be deepened through our apprehension of the Old.

III. The discovery of the Biblical teaching on a specific social or political issue

- (a) It is agreed that one must begin with a direct study of the Biblical text in response to a given problem; otherwise the general principles which we establish will reflect more the presuppositions of our own time than the message

of the Bible. Only then may we safely deduce applications for our own situation.

- (b) It is agreed that in examining a particular problem we should begin with the New Testament teaching. In the light of this we should consider the Old Testament evidence as well, in order to view the problem in the light of God's total revelation. In following this procedure, historical differences in the various parts of Scripture must not be overlooked; otherwise amassing of various texts may be done in too facile a manner and the Bible made to present a united witness on a topic which in fact it does not do. Furthermore, care should be used to see the correct proportions so that too much emphasis may not be placed on a single passage and the correct Biblical perspective be lost.
- (c) It is agreed that the Biblical teaching on social and political issues must be viewed in the light of the tension between life in the kingdoms of this world and participation in the Kingdom of God. While there has not been time in this conference to explore our understanding of the relation of ethics to eschatology {Note: See on this problem the report of two previous ecumenical study conferences (London, 1946, and Bossey, 1947), *From the Bible to the Modern World* (published by the Study Department of the World Council of Churches, Geneva)}, we are agreed that the scriptural teaching of the two ages has an important bearing upon the way in which a specific social or political issue is to be interpreted.

IV. The application of the Biblical message to the modern world

- (a) It is agreed that if we are to receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures, we must discover the degree to which our particular situation is similar to that which the Bible represents. It must be remembered that absolute identity of situation is never found, and therefore the problem of adaptation becomes acute. Nevertheless, in each new situation we must allow ourselves to be guided by the Bible to a knowledge of the will of God.
- (b) It is agreed that the Bible speaks primarily to the Church, but it also speaks through the Church to the world inasmuch as the whole world is claimed by the Church's Lord. The Church can best speak to the world by becoming the Church remade by the Word of God.
- (c) It is agreed that in applying the Biblical message to our day, interpreters diverge because of differing doctrinal and ecclesiastical traditions, differing ethical, political, and cultural outlooks, differing geographical and sociological situations, differing temperaments and gifts. It is, however, an actual experience within the Ecumenical Movement, that when we meet together, with presuppositions to the judgment of Scripture, some of the very difficulties are removed which prevent the Gospel from being heard. Thus, the Bible itself leads us back to the living Word of God.

MEMBERS OF THE CONFERENCE

Professor C. T. Craig, Madison, N. J., U.S.A.

Professor V. E. Devadutt, Serampore, Bengal, India
 Professor C. H. Dodd, Cambridge, England
 Professor W. Eichrodt, Basel, Switzerland
 Professor G. Florovsky, New York, U.S.A.
 Professor J. Marsh, Oxford, England
 Dr. G. Mayeda, Japan
 D. L. Munby, Oxford, England
 Professor N. W. Porteous, Edingburgh, Scotland
 Canon A. Richardson, Durham, England (Chairman)
 Professor E. Schlink, Heidelberg, Germany
 Dr. W. Schweitzer, Geneva, Switzerland (Secretary)
 Rev. O. S. Tomkins, London, England
 Dr. T. F. Torrance, Aberdeen, Scotland
 Professor L. T. Trinterud, Chicago, U.S.A.
 Professor G. E. Wright, Chicago, U.S.A.

PRESENT ONLY ON THE LAST DAYS

Bishop A. Nygren, Lund, Sweden
 Professor G. Staehlin, Erlangen, Germany

YOUTH DELEGATES

A. Adegbola, Nigeria
 J. A. Atger, Saint-Martin-le-Vinoux par Grenoble, France
 N. S. Booth, Boston, U.S.A.
 J. Gibbs, Preston, England

APPENDIX 4

A MEDITATION BY JAMES COX

“The Christian and God's Word”

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word" (Authorized Version).
"As newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile" (American Standard Version) 1 Peter 2:2¹

What does the Bible mean to you? Not much? If you do not care much for the Bible you come under one of the following classifications: you are a backslider, you are a worldling, or you are unsaved. It would be rather mean of a young man to refuse to open the letters of his avowed love, after he has professed to love her so much. Yet God in His providence has given us a message far more important which most people treat with unpardonable insolence. Possibly you who read your Bible think rather well of yourself; but why do you read the Bible? Is it that your soul may be fed, or that you may enjoy it for its superb literary quality? We should all do well to do some serious thinking along this line.

Considering all the new desires that should have been planted in the newborn Christian, I think the above assertions are not too dogmatic. The babe born into the physical world needs food, and cries for it. It is hard to understand how a babe in Christ would not yearn for the Word of the Lord.

But in case there are some true Christians who have not sensed the full value of God's Word, and some unbelievers who are on the brink of deciding to read the Bible, I should like to point out some of the signal values of the Blessed Book.

Now the Bible approaches man on the ground of common experiences. In the lives of others our own lives are seen, and we can profit by the outcome of their lives. In time of distress or melancholy we may go to Elijah and find comfort. Amid our wretched backslidings we may go to Simon Peter and have our faith in our Saviour strengthened. When the candle of our faith is almost extinguished by fierce winds of doubt we may go to Thomas and come away strengthened in the faith.

¹James Cox, "A Meditation: The Christian and God's Word," *Roane County Banner* (Roane County, Tennessee, February 19, 1942), n. p.

We may go, when the sanguine vigor of youth surges through us to Paul and in him find a model of heroism. We may go, in the hour of fiery trial to Stephen and see in him the glory of faithfulness. We may go, in our zeal for God's will to Abraham and see obedience from faith as its best.

During an evil hour of sensuous temptation we should go to David and see the awful consequences of uncontrolled urges. When tempted to doubt God's wisdom we should go to Adam and Eve and take a lesson. In a season of anger we should go to Cain and be guarded from the heinous sin of murder. If we are given to greed we should go to Judas and be warned by his treachery.

Moreover the Bible is a guide to the perplexed. From One who is all-wise we receive promises which will lead us in the path of truth. Many a struggling pilgrim has been sustained by the promises of God, and shown the right way by them. When Christian and Hopeful, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, got off the right road and landed in Doubting Castle they got out of their predicament by using the Key of Promise with which they opened the iron gate. How valuable are the promises of God! God's promises light a lamp in the darkness, open a spring in the desert, send a rain in the drought.

The Bible is the instrument of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is everywhere, as near to every person as the very thoughts which race through his mind. But when one reads or hears the Word of God, the blessings of the Holy Spirit are precipitated and shed abroad in his heart. Furthermore, if Bible passages are committed to memory we, when we are in perplexity, can hear a voice speak to us as if to say, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

And, finally, the Bible reveals to us the central truths of the universe. The Word of God reveals the fact of sin. Paul said, "I had not known sin, except through the law." It showed very clearly to him what he was by nature. It showed him how wretched he really was. The Word was a schoolmaster to bring him to Christ. At this point we find one of the reasons why some people will not read the Bible: it tells them what they really are and they don't want to know. They had rather sail their merry way to hell than to know where they are going. Nevertheless, spiritual birth, like physical birth, comes through travail. Great decisions are made after a struggle of conviction.

But the Bible is not such a heartless book as to stop there. It reveals a Saviour who can deliver from the guilt and power of sin. And the testimony concerning Jesus is not dead assertion. Every word, when in the soul, pulsates with divine power and truth. Every word breathes the very breath of a higher life. Just a few words expressing a great truth can be the means of the salvation of the soul. A wounded Persian was found dying by a missionary. The good man bent over the Persian and asked him if he had any hope for the future, and the dying one replied, "Yes," and quoted the verse of Scripture, "The blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." This verse he had found on a fragment of paper, and he put his faith in its truth. A few words but they meant salvation.

The Bible is a book of guidance both for life and for death. But if you do not use it in the days of strength and health it will not mean much to you in life's last hours.

APPENDIX 5

PREACHING ENGAGEMENTS

Golden Gate Baptist Seminary, Mill Valley, California

Tiburon Baptist Church, Tiburon, California

Tunnel Hill Christian Church, Georgetown, Indiana

First Baptist Church, Fisherville, Kentucky

Florence Baptist Church, Florence, Kentucky

Memorial Baptist Church, Frankfort, Kentucky

First Baptist Church, Henderson, Kentucky

Broadway Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky

Crescent Hill Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky

First Lutheran Church, Louisville, Kentucky

St. Matthews Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky

Walnut Street Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky

Valley Baptist Church, Lutherville, Maryland

The Old South Church, Boston, Massachusetts

New Mission Baptist Church, Cincinnati, Ohio

Central Baptist Church, Johnson City, Tennessee

First Baptist Church, Knoxville, Tennessee

Nance's Grove Baptist Church, New Market, Tennessee

Gospel Baptist Church, Singapore

APPENDIX 6

MISCELLANEOUS ANECDOTES AND INFORMATION¹

Favorite Bible Book: John

Favorite Scripture: John 3:16

Favorite Music: Classical

Hobbies: Writing, Flower Gardening

Favorite Vacation Spot: Mountains of East Tennessee

Favorite Subject in School: English

Three Favorite Books on Preaching: John Albert Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*; H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching*; and R. E. C. Browne, *The Ministry of the Word*.

Why I like Teaching Preaching: “It’s a way of proliferating my Christian witness. I enjoy interacting with others who share my excitement about preaching. It provides a laboratory for testing my ideas and the ideas of others on preaching.”

¹This information is derived from the following two sources: “Profile: James W. Cox,” *The Tie* (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) (November-December 1979), 7, and “Southern Preaching Professors’ Profiles,” *The Tie* (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) (Spring 1991), 11.

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ABSTRACT

THE HOMILETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF JAMES W. COX WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS UPON HIS WRITINGS AND METHODOLOGY

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This dissertation is a survey of the homiletical contributions of James W. Cox with particular emphasis upon his writings and methodology. Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter that explains the significance of this study. Heretofore no scholar has written on Cox as the sole subject of research.

Chapter 2 is biographical, tracing Cox's background as far back as possible, then moving forward chronologically, leading up to the beginning of his teaching career at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Attention is given to areas such as Cox's conversion experience, call to ministry, education, family, and occasions for pastorates.

Chapter 3 is an overview of Cox's written homiletical contributions. The emphasis of this chapter is upon Cox's major homiletical books and articles. Interaction with other homileticians is provided where appropriate.

Chapter 4 surveys Cox's hermeneutics for preaching. The focus of this section concerns Cox's convictions about Scripture and the location of meaning in a text.

Chapter 5 examines Cox's homiletical method. The chapter surveys Cox's teaching and methodology concerning the preparation and delivery of sermons.

Chapter 6 analyzes Cox's sermons. Eight sermons are critiqued according to guidelines Cox himself sets forth in his writings.

Chapter 7 is an overview of how Cox is perceived by his colleagues. The author has excerpted critical comments from scholars who have reviewed Cox's published homiletical writings and has provided comments from five of Cox's colleagues who were interviewed for this chapter.

Chapter 8 is a summary and conclusion. The significant homiletical contributions are summarized from each section of the dissertation.

The dissertation includes six appendices: (1) Time-Line of Significant Events in Cox's Life; (2) Examples of Sermon Preliminaries; (3) Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible; (4) "A Meditation" (reproduction of weekly article written when Cox was a teenager); (5) Preaching Engagements; and (6) Miscellaneous Anecdotes and Information.

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