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IMPROVING EXPOSITORY PREACHING THROUGH GREATER
VARIETY IN SERMON STRUCTURE AND DELIVERY
AT WHITE ROCK BAPTIST CHURCH,
BRITISH COLUMBIA

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PREFACE

While many authors have contributed indirectly to this work, there are several people without whose direct contributions I could not have completed the task. I am grateful to the Board of the White Rock Baptist Church for allowing me the time to study and, in particular, to the church members who participated in the various surveys conducted over the duration of the program. My wife, Ruth, supported me and did all she could to lighten my load so that I could devote time to assignments and to the project. I am more grateful to her than I can say. I wish to express my gratitude to the professors who conducted the seminars that were foundational to the program. I valued their distinctive contributions and received enrichment from each of them. As a “South African-Canadian,” I appreciated the warm acceptance of the members of my cohort. I valued their collegial spirit and benefitted greatly through interaction with them. Kenton Anderson kindly agreed to chair a post-series debriefing seminar. His openness and his expertise contributed significantly to the exercise. I owe a special debt of gratitude to my faculty supervisor, Brian Vickers, for his insightful and gracious guidance. He steered me and corrected me where necessary but also allowed me latitude to express my own ideas.

Conscious of the danger posed by a preoccupation with structural and methodological considerations, I have constantly reminded myself of the indispensability of the guidance, enlightenment and empowerment of the Holy

Spirit. To me there is no greater privilege than proclaiming God's Word, but this also constitutes a daunting responsibility. To rely upon one's own hopelessly inadequate resources would be the height of folly. The Spirit's illumination in the study and his empowerment in the pulpit do more than anything else to ensure appropriate variety in preaching.

I am supremely grateful to the Father for his undeserved favor, to our Lord for furnishing such a glorious theme on which to preach, and to the Holy Spirit, without whom effective proclamation of the Word of Life would be impossible.

Ellis Fletcher André

Surrey, British Columbia

December 2011

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project was to improve the preaching at White Rock Baptist Church, British Columbia, through the intentional use of variety in sermon structure and delivery.

Goals

In the project, I sought to accomplish four related goals. First, I expected to enrich *my* preaching by identifying and employing a variety of approaches in the presentation of biblical truth. It is not surprising that expository preaching has acquired an unfortunate reputation in the minds of many Christians. Haddon Robinson concedes that “expository preaching has suffered severely in the hands of those claiming to be its friends.”¹ Some expository preachers spend a disproportionate amount of time on background study and exegesis to the detriment of the preparation of the sermon in the form in which it will be delivered. One consequence of this imbalance is the unconscious drift towards a stereotypical form of sermon arrangement and delivery. I recognized this tendency in my own preaching ministry and wished to address it without compromising the message of the passage under consideration or resorting to gimmickry.

¹Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 21.

If the selected passage is determinative of the message to be delivered, it should also influence the structure of the sermon and the mode of its delivery. Homileticians such as Kenton Anderson, Jeffrey Arthurs, Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry, Thomas Long, and Michael Quicke have drawn attention to the possibility of preaching with a variety that is appropriate to the genre of the biblical text being expounded.² These authors and others have advocated and demonstrated exciting possibilities that could provide freshness in the presentation of biblical truth. Yet, to merely multiply the number of structural options does not adequately address the perceived problem. The project sought to identify factors that would assist in communication, enhancing rather than compromising the expository nature of the preaching.

A second goal was to provide clarity regarding the nature of expository preaching. In a previous survey undertaken in the White Rock Baptist Church, almost all of those surveyed were unsure of what is meant by the term “expository.”³ A majority of respondents indicated their preference for preaching in which the passage under consideration is determinative of the message. For some, expository preaching denoted a running commentary with an emphasis on the passage’s meaning to the original readers, but with little or no application to the present. In consequence, several respondents assumed that one might need to choose between preaching that is legitimate and

²Kenton C. Anderson, *Choosing to Preach: A Comprehensive Introduction to Sermon Options and Structures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety: How to Recreate the Dynamics of Biblical Genres* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2007); Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, rev. ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001); Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*, exp. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989); Michael J. Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching: Hearing, Speaking and Living the Word* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

³The “Survey on the Value, Importance and Nature of Expository Preaching” was undertaken in February 2007.

wholesome on the one hand, and preaching that is engaging and relevant on the other. It was therefore necessary to help dispel the false antithesis between *wholesome* preaching and *relevant* preaching before considering the matter of variety in preaching.

A third goal was to consider the demands of post-modernity upon sermon arrangement and delivery. While many of the inferences drawn from the postmodern climate are unwarranted, no preacher can afford to ignore currents of thought that have become increasingly prevalent in recent decades. I have therefore attempted to ascertain the extent to which the intellectual climate ought to influence sermon arrangement and presentation. Even if one remains critical toward the philosophical underpinning and the major tenets of postmodernism, its influence upon contemporary thought is pervasive. If the church wishes to proclaim the gospel faithfully, it needs to declare and explain the unchanging message in terms that are intelligible to the receptor culture. As John Stott has pointed out, an important part of the preacher's task is to bridge the gulf between the biblical world and the contemporary world.⁴ Bridging the chasm calls for faithfulness to the biblical message *and* sensitivity to the situation of the hearers.

A fourth goal of the project was to train the other pastors and lay preachers in the church to be imaginative, expository preachers. It was hoped that their participation in the project would, in itself, contribute to this end.

Context

The White Rock Baptist Church is located in Metro-Vancouver in the southernmost peninsula of the lower mainland of British Columbia. Together, the small

⁴John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 137-50.

municipality of White Rock and the larger area of South Surrey form a well-demarcated region bounded by the ocean, arterial roads, and agricultural reserve land.

The Community

The region is experiencing rapid growth. The total population of South Surrey in the 2006 census was 66,455, an increase of 12.6 percent from the 2001 census. The growth since 2006 has been exponential; it is estimated that the population had grown to 75,600 by June 2010, an increase of nearly 14 percent.⁵ The population of the City of White Rock in the 2006 census was 18,775, an increase of less than 3 percent from the 2001 figures.⁶ Since there is next to no undeveloped land in the municipal area, it is reasonable to assume that the current growth of the population is lower than that of burgeoning South Surrey. The total combined population of White Rock and South Surrey is in excess of 94,878.

The Semiahmoo Peninsula is one of the more expensive areas in Metro-Vancouver. The proximity of White Rock to Vancouver and its mild micro-climate have made it a popular retirement center. The average price of an apartment is \$341,094, that of a townhouse, \$522,457, and that of a detached house, \$960,856.⁷ In consequence, most of the residents are relatively affluent and well educated. Historically, younger families have found it difficult to own property in the area, but there has been a perceptible change in recent years.

⁵Statistics obtained from the City of Surrey; accessed 6 April 2011; available from <http://www.surrey.ca/for-business/1418.aspx>; Internet.

⁶Statistics obtained from the government of British Columbia; accessed 6 April 2011; available from <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/dd/facsheet/CF191.pdf> ; Internet.

⁷Statistics obtained from the Fraser Valley Real Estate Board; accessed 6 April 2011; available from www.fvreb.bc.ca/statistics/Package%20201103.pdf ; Internet.

The demographic shift has both cultural and age implications. Although there is an increase in the number of immigrants moving into the area, mainly from the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea, English remains the dominant mother tongue. Historically, White Rock's population growth has occurred in the forty-five and older age group. During the period 2001 to 2006, the fastest growing age group was fifteen to twenty-four and the sixty-five-and-older age group decreased by 9.2 percent. The existence of four secondary and twenty-one elementary schools in the area takes cognizance of the growing number of families with young children or teenagers.

The area is served by thirty-two churches. There are seven Baptist churches and several strong evangelical churches with a commitment to the proclamation of biblical truth. A progressive, evangelically-oriented ministerial arranges combined services on Good Friday as well as periodic, combined Sunday evening services.

The Church

On June 23, 1954, fifteen members of Baptist churches residing in the White Rock area decided to organize a Baptist church in the town. Most of them had recently moved to the area. The charter members wished to establish a spiritual home for themselves in their new community, but they were also motivated by a strong desire to reach out to retirees who were moving to the town in increasing numbers. The 1950s saw rapid growth in the area, and the residents of the town sought and obtained municipal status by special provincial warrant on April 15, 1957.

Some three years before, on September 12, 1954, the church had been established under the leadership of its first pastor, J. L. Sloat. The leaders of the fledgling church were intent on establishing a strong Baptist witness in the area. A sanctuary was

dedicated as early as April, 1955. The forward-looking members acquired a two-and-a-half acre site less than half a kilometre from the original site and moved the small sanctuary to the new site in the fall of 1960. An enlarged and renovated sanctuary and a Christian education annex were dedicated in October, 1963. In 1983, the church resolved to build a new church complex as part of a “Baptist Village,” and extra land was purchased. The village comprises two blocks of condominiums, with a total of sixty-seven units, a well-equipped care home and a spacious church complex. The new sanctuary was dedicated on October 15, 1989.

The church is in membership with the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada, which is associated with Canadian Baptist Ministries. It subscribes to a classic Baptist statement of faith, which is brief but thoroughly evangelical. The property is debt free. At its Annual General Meeting, the church approved budget of \$773,000.00 for 2011. In a recent strategic planning exercise, the church’s long-standing mission statement was reaffirmed: “The church shall advance the kingdom of God in the power of the Holy Spirit, making disciples for the Lord Jesus Christ through worship, fellowship and evangelism.” The soundness of the statement was not in question, but the felt need for a more dynamic outreach to the community was encapsulated in a vision statement: “We will be known by our dynamic commitment to the Lord and our no-strings-attached love for the community.” Church stationery contains the simple maxim: “. . . seeking to honour God as we love our neighbour and touch the world.”

During its fifty-six year history, the church has been served by nine pastors or senior pastors, four interim pastors, and a number of associate pastors. Each of the pastors has held a high view of Scripture and this has been reflected in a commitment to

biblical preaching. In consequence, the preaching of God's Word has occupied an important place in the services of worship. The church now has what it regards as a full staff complement: a senior pastor, three associate pastors, a youth pastor, a ministry coordinator, an administrator and two administrative assistants.

Sermons from pastors who served the church prior to 1975 are not available, but members who recall their ministries attest that their preaching consisted of a clear explanation and application of biblical doctrine. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which their preaching could be described as *expository*. Records of sermons preached are available from 1975. The three senior pastors who occupied the pulpit from 1975 to 2000 were competent communicators and their preaching remained within the general parameters of biblical doctrine. While the church has expected its senior pastors to be committed evangelicals and "good" preachers, there has been no specification that the preaching ought to be expository. It is probably fair to say that at least some of the preaching pastors of the church could not be described as "expository" preachers in terms of the definitions of many of today's homileticians.⁸

Preaching as the Senior Pastor's Primary Responsibility

On December 31, 2000, after a ministry of almost five years, Reid Fowler resigned from his position as senior pastor of the church. There was little or no complaint about his preaching ministry. The pain of this parting no doubt colored the search process for a new senior pastor. In a protracted search that lasted over two years, the committee identified several criteria to be applied in the search for a new senior pastor.

⁸For example, Haddon Robinson's definition; Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 21.

As is often the case, some of the criteria were dictated by recent events. The committee emphasized that the new senior pastor would need to be, first and foremost, a leader.

On October 25, 2002, the Search Committee entered into negotiations with me. Most of the discussion was conducted by means of email, since I was then serving a church in Johannesburg, South Africa. As the discussion progressed, it appeared that the church was, above all, seeking a pastor who would provide spiritual leadership for the church as a whole and give clear direction to the other members of the pastoral team. The term “chief executive officer” was used more than once. As part of an informative document describing the church and the area, the chair of the Search Committee posed and answered the question: “What are we looking for in a senior pastor?” His brief summary placed the accent on the leadership ability of the candidate.

We are looking for someone of good Christian character who has a heart for God, has a positive attitude and fosters good relationships. He should be a leader with experience in leading and nurturing staff and a congregation. He should have good pastoral skills, with a desire to encourage both the believer and non-believer. We are looking for a person who is a good preacher, of course, and who has a desire to continue to learn.⁹

On the surface, “good” preaching was desirable but did not appear to be the main requirement.

During the course of the negotiation, my declared preference for systematic, expository preaching and teaching was warmly received. Contrary to my initial impression, it became clear upon reflection that the committee regarded biblical preaching as a *sine qua non* for its senior pastor. On a visit in January 2003, prior to a congregational vote, I was requested to preach two sermons. Significantly, the position

⁹A letter addressed to me by R. H. Humphries, chair of the Search Committee, 23 November 2002.

description is explicit on the senior pastor's role as "the primary preaching pastor of the church."¹⁰ The first of seventeen stipulations under the caption, "Duties and Responsibilities," is "Responsible for pulpit ministry." One of six specified qualifications is that the Senior Pastor "must have demonstrated competence in pulpit ministry." The first of seven required skills stipulated in the document confirms the impression that the church regarded the exposition of Scripture as of the utmost importance. Notwithstanding the apparent priority accorded to leadership, it is fair to conclude that the faithful ministry of the Word is essential to the church's ethos and comprises the foundational requirement in the appointment of a senior pastor.

This commitment has important implications for church ministry in general and for the preaching ministry in particular. The church has exercised a strong ministry to senior citizens, who delight in sermons that are well-structured and rich in biblical content. Many request sermon manuscripts. When, on occasion, the "regular sermon" has been omitted in favor of a children's presentation or program, some have complained that their primary reason for attending the church is the preaching of the Word of God.

The church is taking active steps to broaden its demographic base by ministering to more young families. It wishes to do so without compromising its strong commitment to biblical preaching. Younger members of the church do tend to appreciate down-to-earth application and a more inductive approach. They seem less impressed by deductive sermons, especially if the structure is obtrusive. It would, however, be wrong to generalize or to imply that they are resistant to appropriately-presented, deductive sermons. Members of all age groups have resisted the suggestion of separate

¹⁰"Position Description: Senior Pastor, White Rock Baptist Church," revised 11 January 2003.

“traditional” and “contemporary” services to cater to different tastes. Indeed, it appears that fitting variety can make sermons more accessible to people of all ages and inclinations.

Rationale

A congregation is spiritually enriched by systematic expository preaching. This not only means that each sermon ought to constitute the exposition and application of a biblical passage or passages, but also that the congregation ought to be exposed to intentional, consecutive preaching of books of Scripture and biblical themes. Systematic exposition is usually best achieved through the consistent, though not exclusive, ministry of a single preacher. A potential disadvantage of a regular, sustained ministry of this nature is that the preacher is likely to have developed a preference for a particular sermon structure. Under the pressure of congregational demands, pastors tend to gravitate towards a stereotyped construction. The similarity of sermon arrangement is likely to blunt the effectiveness of the communication. Harold Freeman identifies a major disadvantage of a set sermon structure.

[Our hearers] have invisible earmuffs they put on when they hear the same sound coming their way. . . . We need to include in our reservoir of sermonic devices enough variation to interject the element of surprise into our preaching ministry. This will often enable us to put in the point and strike home when the hearers are not expecting it and where they have never heard it before.¹¹

While Freeman identified one of the reasons for variety in preaching, there is a more fundamental reason for such variety. Faithful exposition of the passage itself requires that the form and the mood of a sermon should be determined largely by the

¹¹Harold Freeman, *Variety in Biblical Preaching: Innovative Techniques and Fresh Forms* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing, Inc., 1987), 22.

genre and intent of the passage under consideration. It is arguable that the content of many a sermon is *currently* pressed into a particular structure that does not serve the passage well, sometimes making the sermon seem contrived and unnatural. It would be equally incorrect to force sermons into particular structures simply for the sake of variety.

The intended focus of this project is not on variety for its own sake or even on variety in order to keep the listeners attentive, but rather on the selection of a structure that enables the preacher to do greater justice to the exposition of the passage at hand. Fred Craddock cautions that “the taste for variety should not lead the minister to adopt structures for his material that violate not only the content but also his understanding of what the preaching experience is.”¹²

Part, at least, of the solution is for preachers to be more aware of structural variations that are available to them. Although one may not be entirely comfortable with the approach adopted by W. E. Sangster in *The Craft of the Sermon*, his classification of sermons according to subject matter, structural type, and psychological approach indicates the value of a typology that helps the preacher to expound and apply the passage with optimal effectiveness.¹³ A multi-dimensional approach of this nature can certainly create greater flexibility within the main sermon types. It helps to indicate some important elements that need to be taken into account when constructing and delivering sermons. Yet, on its own, this does not assure *appropriate* variety in expository preaching. If preaching with variety is pursued for its own sake or because it is considered trendy, the resultant artistry may even become a distraction.

¹²Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 114.

¹³W. E. Sangster, *The Craft of the Sermon* (London: Epworth Press, 1954).

Jeffrey Arthurs is on solid ground when he points to the variety encountered in Scripture itself.

Ample warrant for preaching with variety can be found in both the literature of the Bible and in the preaching of Jesus. . . . Suffice it here to say that the Bible is a cornucopia of genres and forms and so was Jesus' preaching. The Bible offers the careful reader more clues for the forms of heralding than most of us will ever be able to employ. . . . God has poured out a profusion of rhetorical forms. When we borrow some of those forms to recommunicate the text, we are faithful heralds.¹⁴

We are in healthier territory if variety in preaching is the natural result of thorough exegesis than if it is merely a device to create or retain interest in the hearers.

Definition and Limitation/Delimitation

In selecting a definition for expository preaching, one has to distinguish between those elements without which a sermon could not be called an expository sermon at all, and those that may be common and even desirable, but are not essential to it. Clearly, the most important feature of *expository* preaching is the attitude of the preacher to Scripture as a whole and to the portion of Scripture which is being expounded. Haddon Robinson explains that “expository preaching at its core is more a philosophy than a method.”¹⁵ He then poses the pertinent question: “Do you, as a preacher, endeavor to bend your thought to the Scriptures, or do you use the Scriptures to support your thought?”¹⁶

John Stott is even more pointed in his comments:

The size of the text is immaterial, so long as it is biblical. What matters is what we do with it. Whether it is long or short, our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly,

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 22.

¹⁶Ibid.

without addition, subtraction or falsification. In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of miscellaneous thoughts, but a master which dictates and controls what is said.¹⁷

This is the single most important criterion. The points a preacher makes may well be theologically true and psychologically or even spiritually relevant, but may not arise out of the passage. The preacher is then, perhaps unwittingly, adopting a stance towards Scripture that is at best disrespectful and at worst presumptuous. Every part of the preparation and delivery of the sermon will be impacted by this attitude.

For the purposes of this project, Haddon Robinson's working definition serves as a helpful guideline:

Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.¹⁸

The variations in structure and presentation proposed in this project fall within the ambit of Robinson's explanation of his definition. Its possible weakness is the assumption that the sermon is the exposition of a single passage. He does not make this a stipulation since the single dominant idea may "be drawn from one passage *or several passages* of Scripture."¹⁹ While the definition does not make explicit reference to the influence of the form of the passage on the structure and delivery of the sermon, it is reasonable to infer that the holistic study of the passage will influence the sermon's form.

¹⁷Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 126.

¹⁸Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 21.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 35, emphasis added..

The project was limited in respect of its length. It was fifteen weeks in duration. Central to it was a twelve-week series of sermons on the Acts of the Apostles. In addition there were three three-hour seminars, two prior to the commencement of the series to orientate the participants to the subject of variety in expository preaching, and one to debrief after the conclusion of the series.

The project's delimitation was in respect of the participants. Two focus groups were invited to participate in the project. The first comprised associate pastors and ministry staff of the church (six people), and the second comprised a representative group of forty-eight church members.

Research Methodology

Prior to the commencement of the project I revised my approach to variety in preaching as a result of exposure to the writings of a number of homiletics, who confirmed some of my longstanding concerns about my preaching. In the project, I tested my modified approach by following a practical theological model advocated by Rolf Zerfass. Zerfass' model depicts "a method of facilitating and promoting the traffic between theory and praxis."²⁰ The value of this model is that it guards against sterility on the one hand and pragmatic, ill-considered change on the other. The analysis of existing praxis, using whatever tools are available, is considered in the light of the prevailing theological tradition. The new theory is implemented after careful consideration and is itself submitted to examination. The process is an ongoing one since the amended praxis is itself analyzed. A diagram depicting the model is contained in Appendix 1.

²⁰L. M Heyns and H. J. C. Pieterse, *A Primer in Practical Theology* (Pretoria, South Africa: Gnosis, 1990), 35.

In the project, the situation analysis was undertaken by means of the two related surveys and weekly discussions with ministry staff. The three seminars could be regarded as a statement of the theological tradition, but they already contained tentative proposals of an amended practice. While models such as this one provide helpful guidelines, the process followed is fluid. It is important that there is traffic between theory and praxis; too rigid an adherence to the categories “situation analysis” and “theological tradition” may hinder rather than facilitate the process.

The Book of Acts lent itself to the project because of the way in which it combines important statements that call for exposition and extensive narrative material. Although the series was brief and necessarily selective, it was possible to retain a sense of continuity by expounding specific texts within their narrative framework.

The first of the pre-series seminars was on the *nature* of expository preaching. Haddon Robinson’s definition formed the basis of our consideration. The perspectives of several other homileticians raised important issues and enabled me to state my own position with clarity. The main objective of the seminar was to acquaint the participants with those factors that distinguish expository preaching from other forms of preaching. In so doing, I hoped to identify the essentials of expository preaching and dispel restrictive notions that tend to place it within a methodological straightjacket.

The second seminar constituted an exploration of several approaches to *variety* in expository preaching and posed questions regarding the extent to which the postmodern climate of thought should influence our approach to preaching. I identified insights from authors such as Kenton Anderson, Jeffrey Arthurs, Fred Craddock, Graham Johnston, Darrell Johnson, Thomas Long, Michael Quicke, Robert Reid, and W. E.

Sangster. This alerted participants to the wide range of possibilities under the umbrella of expository preaching, and acquainted them with my own approach.

At the conclusion of the series I requested Kenton Anderson, Associate Professor of Homiletics at Northwest Baptist Seminary in Langley, British Columbia, to chair a three-hour debriefing seminar. We were able to review the series and discuss some of the insights I and others had gained from the project. Anderson's perspective was helpful in placing the subject of variety in preaching into perspective. He was also requested to introduce his book, *Choosing to Preach*, and explain his own approach to variety in preaching.²¹ His participation brought the project to a fitting conclusion. Several of those in attendance claimed that this seminar had enabled them to gain a deeper appreciation for the entire project and, indeed, for preaching in general.

Summary of the Chapters

Chapter 1 indicates the purpose, goals and scope of the project. Although the primary goal of the project was the enrichment of *my* preaching by the intentional employment of variety in sermon structure and delivery, I expected the White Rock Baptist Church to benefit both immediately and in the long term. A brief sketch of the community and a survey of the church's fifty-six year history help to indicate the premium that the church places upon preaching. Expository preaching is defined and the thesis of the project is stated, namely, that variety should be the inevitable outcome of a commitment to expository preaching. The rationale for variety in expository preaching is identified and the research methodology is outlined.

²¹Anderson, *Choosing to Preach*.

Chapter 2 examines biblical and theological indicators regarding sermon structure and delivery. The Gospels record the discourses of Jesus as well as his parables. While no serious examination of biblical preaching can afford to lose sight of the preaching of Jesus, the focus of this examination is on six sermons recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. I examine Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41), Stephen's sermon before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:1-60), Peter's sermon to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:34-48), and Paul's sermons at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-48), on the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-43), and after his arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1-22). Even in the summarized forms in which we have them, these sermons cover over a hundred and seventy verses of Scripture. In keeping with the purpose of the project, the emphasis falls upon the methods employed in addressing different audiences and the appropriateness of the forms adopted both to the audience and to the occasion. The purpose of the examination is to derive principles that serve as guidelines rather than to discover patterns to be imposed or to establish prescriptive boundaries.

The examination includes a brief consideration of Paul's exhortation to Timothy to "preach the word" (2 Tim 3:10-4:5). This is too important to ignore, especially since he indicates the related activities that are involved in such preaching. Although the focus is on the six passages selected from the Acts of the Apostles, we are able to draw some inferences from Paul's charge.

Chapter 3 considers some of the recent proposals associated with the "New Homiletic," as well as the need to take serious cognizance of postmodern thought. I contend that the structure and the means of communication should be determined both by the genre of the Scripture passage being expounded, and by the nature of the audience.

The conclusion to which the chapter leads us is that an organic approach to variety is better suited to *expository* preaching than a mechanical one. Instead of developing a table of structural options and permutations, I propose an approach that is more appropriate to expository preaching.

Chapter 4 describes the components of the project and records the main results of the surveys undertaken by the church's ministry staff and a sample of church members. The chapter contains a brief description of three seminars undertaken in connection with the project and considers the responses of the participants to the twelve sermons that comprised the series. It includes some initial observations and constitutes the first step in the situation analysis advocated by Rolf Zerfass.

Chapter 5 evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the project as a whole. It considers the extent to which the goals identified at the outset of the project were realized. In addition to personal and theological reflection, ideas for further research are identified. I conclude the project convinced that expository preaching does not merely permit variety in sermon structure and delivery, but requires it.

Conclusion

At the outset of the project, I assumed that a commitment to expository preaching would impose a necessary limitation on the extent to which variety could be employed in sermon structure and delivery. During the course of the project, I became convinced that true expository preaching does not reluctantly tolerate a measure of variety but actually elicits rich diversity. Befitting variety ought to emerge naturally, provided that one seriously inquires how best a particular passage can be expounded and refuses to be bound by stereotypical structures. Haddon Robinson's simple dictum

reminds us of the importance of such flexibility, “The shoe must not tell the foot how to grow; therefore ideas and purposes should be allowed to take their own shape in your mind.”²² Indeed, the tendency to extract ideational matter from a passage and repackage it in a predetermined sermon structure runs counter to the very notion of expository preaching. It is *because* preaching is expository that it ought to be characterized by appropriate diversity.

²²Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 131.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CASE FOR VARIETY IN EXPOSITORY PREACHING

In seeking a scriptural warrant for variety in expository preaching, it is necessary to consider both biblical statements regarding the nature of preaching and examples of preaching that are recorded in Scripture. This chapter takes account of the preaching and teaching ministry of Jesus and also of six sermons recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. In terms of variety, Jesus' ministry is relevant for two related reasons: (1) his preaching and teaching ministry was noticeably different from that of the teachers of the law (Matt 7:28-29), and (2) he employed more than one method of teaching (Matt 13:10-34). The six sermons selected from the Acts are Peter's sermons on the Day of Pentecost and to the household of Cornelius (Acts 2:14-41; 10:34-48), Stephen's sermon before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:1-53), and Paul's sermons at Pisidian Antioch (13:16-43), to the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-34), and to his compatriots in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1-21). It is understandable that these sermons would contain similarities since they represent the early church's proclamation of the gospel. They, nevertheless, contain significant differences that underscore the importance of variety in preaching.

Since these sermons were addressed to audiences comprised of non-believers, they do not provide us with an indication of the variety that would have been evident when believers gathered for worship and instruction. To offset this potential imbalance, it is necessary to briefly examine some of the terms used by Paul in his final exhortation

to Timothy (2 Tim 3:10-4:5). These depict the varied nature of the ministry of the Word of God.

Preaching in the Ministry of Jesus

The Evangelists record Jesus' teaching, citing relatively brief statements, extended discourses, and a variety of parables. They also remark on the impact of his teaching on the crowds (Matt 7:29; 22:33; Mark 1:22, 27; Luke 4:15, 32; John 7:46). It is arguable that the biblical comments refer not only to the *authority* with which Jesus spoke, but also to a perceptible difference in his *manner of communication*. One gains some insight into this difference in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew, in particular, records Jesus' discourses (Matt 5-7; 10, 13, 18, 23, 24, 25). While it is part of his editorial practice to gather together into a collection some of the related teachings of Jesus, W. D. Davies comments that the Sermon on the Mount is certainly presented as more than "merely a collection of unrelated sayings of diverse origins."¹ It is probable that elements of the sermon were repeated on different occasions at various locations. John Stott notes that Matthew presents his material as "a sermon of Christ" and intends his readers to understand it as such.² This observation does not necessarily mean that Matthew attempts to give us the *ipsissima verba* of the entire sermon. It is no doubt a summary and it displays both symmetry and an observable

¹W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 5.

²John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), 23.

progression of thought. Although scholars have accounted for this in ways consistent with their assumptions and have come to different conclusions in respect of the structure of the sermon, it is common cause that the structure is intentional.³ In arguing that “we should probably take the structure of the sermon at its face value,” John Blanchard observes that the three chapters (Matt 5-7) certainly “have the shape of a sermon.”⁴ He notes that there is an overall theme, an attention-grabbing introduction, several distinct but clearly related points, and a powerful and dramatic climax, and cites John MacArthur’s description of the sermon as “a great illustration of homiletics.”⁵

The fact that the sermon’s structure has been analyzed in a number of different ways cautions us against inappropriately dogmatic assertions.⁶ While the subject matter relates to a common theme and there is sequential development, the sermon does not fit neatly into overly-prescriptive homiletic paradigms. Undoubtedly, its arrangement and contributes significantly to its effectiveness. It is rich in imagery and important truth is forcefully stated and illustrated, but its structure defies simplistic categorization. Even Blanchard’s identification of introduction, distinct points, and a dramatic climax seems anachronistic and somewhat contrived. The fact that one-dimensional abstractions cannot do complete justice to this sermon cautions one against absolutizing particular structural paradigms and encourages one to adopt a creative approach to sermon structure and delivery.

³Warren Carter, *What Are They Saying about Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 35-55.

⁴John Blanchard, *The Beatitudes for Today* (Epsom, Surrey: Day One Publications, 1966), 15.

⁵*Ibid.*, 18.

⁶Carter, *Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount*, 35.

The Parables

In addition to proclamation and teaching by precept, Jesus employed graphic analogies and parables. Craig Blomberg explains that “Jesus intended his parables both to conceal and to reveal.”⁷ While some of Jesus’ parables needed explanation (Mark 4:10-12), Arland Hultgren cautions us against seeing this text as “a programmatic statement that provides a pattern regarding the telling of parables in the Gospel of Mark.”⁸ The fact that parables teach by analogy gives them particular potency. Indeed, Roy Clements draws attention to the utility of parables as a technique for imparting truth to less-than-receptive hearers.

On the surface, such stories seem innocuous; charming little narratives full of familiar images that easily capture your attention. In reality they’re a kind of Stealth bomber, specially designed to evade our psychological defences, insinuating themselves inside our mind in spite of every barricade we may seek to erect, and then dropping a highly explosive charge targeted at the most vulnerable point in our spiritual complacency.⁹

Truth that would remain incomprehensible to the hearer, either because of hardness of heart or because of preconceived ideas about the nature of the kingdom, is presented in such a way that it is not permanently lost.

While the substance of the parables is beyond the scope of this examination, it is important to note not only their difference from Jesus’ teaching by precept, but also their difference from one another. Klyne Snodgrass contends that “any definition that is

⁷Craig L. Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables: From Responsible Interpretation to Powerful Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 24.

⁸Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 455-56.

⁹Roy Clements, *A Sting in the Tale* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 7-8.

broad enough to cover all the forms is so imprecise that it is almost useless.”¹⁰ The skillful use of suspense as the main point is withheld till the end of the story, the shock effect caused by an inversion of accepted categories, and the deliberate use of contrast and hyperbole combine to convey truth in ways that propositional teaching cannot.

Whether in answer to a sincere inquiry by a disciple (Matt 18:21), a trick question by an expert in the law (Luke 10:25-29), or as part of his general instruction (Matt 13:1-52), Jesus was able to enunciate overlooked truth with freshness and to introduce the hitherto unknown “secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (Mark 4:11).

Of course, Jesus’ ministry was unique and ill-considered attempts at emulation would be inappropriate. Nevertheless, Snodgrass encourages us “to clothe the abstract in concrete experience and story, just as Jesus did.”¹¹ The freshness, inventiveness, and originality that characterized his ministry should surely be evident in the ministry of the Word today. Dull predictability is likely to blunt the impact of truth, and the imposition of an alien form may obscure and possibly even distort its meaning.

Preaching in the Acts of the Apostles

In the preaching of the early church, one observes the same freedom to adapt the form of the sermon in the service of the truth. In order to effectively assess the six sermons under consideration, one needs to take cognizance of the several factors. In keeping with his design, Luke records sermons that are addressed to non-believers in settings very different from that of the average Sunday morning congregation. In the

¹⁰Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 7.

¹¹Ibid., 2.

nature of the case, the preachers did not first read a passage, nor did they limit their attention to an exposition of a single pericope. This practice does not disqualify them as expository sermons unless we adopt a restrictive approach to expository preaching. Clearly the sermons are summaries, but they should be regarded as accurate summaries, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Despite the contention of some scholars that they are free compositions of Luke, devoid of historical basis, Robert Mounce adduces strong internal evidence that they are both primitive and authentic.¹² He concludes, “While the early speeches in Acts are not verbatim reports, they nevertheless are faithful summaries of what was actually said. Since they are condensed accounts that reliably give us the gist of the original speeches, we may with confidence use them in the reconstruction of the original apostolic *kerygma*.”¹³

The six sermons that have been selected for consideration in this project contain significant differences as well as similarities. They can certainly be classified as sermons, notwithstanding the differences in structure and presentation. These sermons offer some helpful guidelines but ought not to be regarded as providing normative patterns. Observing both their similarities and their differences cautions us against an over-prescriptive understanding of sermon structure and delivery.

Peter’s Sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41)

Luke’s précis of Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost not only captures the essence of the sermon but also conveys its important movements. Both the occasion (the

¹²Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1960), 65-73.

¹³*Ibid.*, 73.

manifestations associated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit) and the nature of the hearers (Jews and proselytes gathered for the feast) would naturally have influenced the sermon's content and the manner in which it was presented. Its purpose was to present the crucified Jesus as the risen and exalted Lord and Messiah, calling upon the hearers to repent and be baptized and assuring them that they too would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:36, 38-39).

The sermon can be regarded as expository for several reasons. It was an apostolic proclamation of the New Testament *kerygma*. F. F. Bruce identifies four elements regularly associated with the early apostolic proclamation, all four of which are present in Peter's proclamation here.¹⁴ The announcement of the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus is explained in terms of four passages from the Hebrew Scriptures (Joel 2:28-32; Pss 16:8-11; 132:11; 110:1). Although these passages apparently were not explained in detail as might be done in an expository sermon today, each is cited to explain the resurrection and exaltation of the crucified Messiah and the extraordinary phenomena of Pentecost. The application of Psalms 16, 110 and 132 to the Messiah, rather than to David, requires an explanation and some logical argumentation. It is as though the essential idea of the sermon had been submitted to Haddon Robinson's three developmental questions.¹⁵

¹⁴F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 63. The four elements specified by Bruce as forming the basis of the *kerygma* are (1) the announcement that the age of fulfillment has arrived; (2) an account of the ministry, death, and triumph of Jesus; (3) citation of Old Testament scriptures; and (4) a call to repentance. Bruce's identification of these elements is preferable to C. H. Dodd's "recovery" of the *kerygma* from the Pauline epistles. C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964), 17.

¹⁵Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 80-86. The three developmental questions are: "What does this mean?" "Is this true?" and, "What difference does it make?"

Since the announcement of the resurrection comes early in the presentation, some might classify this sermon as deductive, but the limited utility of this broad categorization is evident when one considers that the key assertion (while implicit) is delayed till the climax of the sermon (Acts 2:36). The fact that the gathered crowd asked Peter what they should do does not necessarily signal that the sermon had been concluded. One may take Peter's response to this question as an integral part of the sermon. Bruce comments, "If Jesus of Nazareth was indeed their appointed Messiah, then no guilt could be greater than the guilt of treating him as he had been treated."¹⁶ On account of the seriousness of the accusation, the assurance of forgiveness and the promise of the Spirit upon repentance and baptism were "unspeakably reassuring."¹⁷

Peter Adam observes that "the New Testament uses thirty-three verbs to describe a great variety of forms of the ministry of the Word."¹⁸ Significantly, the usage of such verbs in the New Testament itself cautions us against the tendency to be over-specific in identifying which mode of communication is operative when a sermon is being preached. Although Peter was undoubtedly acting as a herald (κῆρυξ), and proclaiming the good news (εὐαγγέλιον), Luke specifically says that he "solemnly testified (διεμαρτύρατο)" and "kept on exhorting (παρεκάλει)" them (Acts 2:40).¹⁹ Darrell Johnson argues convincingly that a "variety of modes of communicating is unavoidable

¹⁶Bruce, *Acts*, 69.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1996), 75.

¹⁹It is preferable to understand "teaching" as developing the *implications* of the gospel in terms of understanding and behavior, rather than to limit the term, as does C. H. Dodd, to "ethical instruction." Dodd, *Apostolic Preaching*, 7.

given the huge scope of the gospel and given the dynamics of the communicating moment.”²⁰

Stephen’s Sermon before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:1-60)

While Stephen’s sermon is best understood in the light of the charges leveled against him, David Peterson argues that it is an *apologia* for the gospel rather than a “reasoned argument designed to win his acquittal” (Acts 6:11, 14).²¹ The sermon has come in for imperceptive criticism. Stott counters some of the more outspoken critics by drawing attention to the spiritual dynamics of Stephen’s address. Far from being “a tedious sketch of the history of Israel,” the sermon is a necessarily selective and masterful retelling of the dealings of the God of glory with his often rebellious people.²² It emphasizes God’s freedom to go where he pleases, describing four major epochs in the history of Israel dominated by four major Old Testament characters. Stephen recounts the nation’s history from Abraham to Solomon in such a way as to demonstrate that God’s presence cannot be limited to any particular place. Since God called Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, and Moses in the desert of Midian, and gave the law to his people at Sinai, it is clear that “no place on earth possesses an innate sanctity of its own.”²³

²⁰Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God’s Transformation of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 78.

²¹David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 244.

²²John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 129-30. Stott cites the negative comments of both George Barnard Shaw and Martin Dibelius before identifying the major themes of the sermon.

²³Bruce, *Acts*, 141.

Stephen's emphatic reference to the initial rejection of Joseph and Moses, both of whom subsequently played salvific roles in the history of the nation, prepared the way for his assertion that his hearers had become the "betrayers and murderers" of the Righteous One (Acts 7:52). Indeed, Stephen's citation of Moses' prediction that "God [would] raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren" indicated the direction in which the sermon was heading (Acts 7:37).

In addition, Stephen developed the theme of the nation's hardness of heart. At first, this was hinted at in the patriarchs' jealousy of Joseph (Acts 7:9). Moses supposed that his brethren would understand that God was granting them deliverance by him, but they did not understand and repudiated him (Acts 7:24-27). If the reference to Joseph was oblique, Stephen did not rely on the imagination of his hearers in referring to Moses. "This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer" (Acts 7:35). They further repudiated him in the wilderness. While on the subject of the wilderness, Stephen was able to transition naturally to the tabernacle. Although he was not derogatory towards the tabernacle or the temple, since both were constructed according to God's will, Stephen was able to declare that "the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands," citing Isaiah and possibly alluding to Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple (2 Chr 6:18; Isa 66:1-2; Acts 7:48-50). His case was made. He certainly turned the tables on his accusers by demonstrating his respect for Moses and the law, but, as John Stott remarked, "Stephen's speech was not so much a self-defense as a testimony to Christ."²⁴

²⁴Stott, *Acts*, 141.

Stephen moved from a third person description and first person identification to a second person application. Having identified with his hearers throughout, by referring to “our father Abraham,” and by the repeated use of “our fathers” (Acts 7:2, 12, 15, 19, 38, 39, 44 and 45), he turned to direct denunciation, accusing them of being stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears and of always resisting the Holy Spirit just as *their* fathers had done. His accusation was pointed: as their fathers had killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, they had betrayed and murdered the Righteous One himself.

Stephen was able to show that his accusers are the ones who have disrespected both Moses and the law. David Peterson observes,

The final irony that Stephen manages to express is that those who killed the Messiah ‘received the law that was given through angels (*eis diatagas angelôn*; NKJV ‘by the direction of angels’; NRSV ‘as ordained by angels’) *but have not obeyed it*. Far from speaking against the law (6:13), he affirms its divine authority, by stressing that it was delivered by angels. His accusers are actually the ones who have dishonored and disobeyed God’s law, particularly by putting to death the Righteous One.²⁵

From a homiletical point of view, this sermon is narrative preaching at its best. Instead of making a series of points in a propositional manner, Stephen recounted the story itself in such a way as to allow *it* to make the salient points. Exercising his right of defense, he seized the opportunity to place the Sanhedrin’s rejection of Jesus in its historical context (cf. Matt 21:33-46).²⁶ The address does not explicitly contain all the features of the *kerygma*, but Stephen certainly proclaimed Jesus as the one whose coming

²⁵Peterson, *Acts*, 265.

²⁶Bruce, *Acts*, 129.

had been previously announced by the prophets (Acts 7:52).²⁷ While there is no explicit mention of his resurrection and exaltation, these elements are implicit in his proclamation. Notably absent is the summons to repent and receive forgiveness of sins. It could be conjectured that Stephen was prevented from making such an appeal when the members of the Sanhedrin “cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse” (Acts 7:57), but it appears that Stephen expected his sermon to end as it did. It bears the marks of a watershed indictment that he knew would be rejected. Nevertheless he was a faithful witness (μάρτυς) in the truest sense of the word. Both the sermon and its sequel exerted a profound influence on the future of the Christian mission (Acts 8:1-4; 22:20).

As different as it is from those of Peter and Paul, Stephen’s sermon certainly qualifies as an *expository* sermon. It is rooted in Scripture. Peterson notes not only “the way the text of the LXX is used in direct quotations, but also in snippets as part of the construction of the discourse and as an interpretive key to the unfolding story.”²⁸ The movement of the sermon is inductive. Had Stephen stated his homiletical idea shortly after his introduction, his sermon would almost certainly have been terminated sooner. If the key idea of the sermon was that through their own hardness of heart his hearers had not only misunderstood the emphasis of God’s revelation but also murdered the Messiah, this could hardly have been stated at the outset. It is reasonable to infer that even in less hostile settings preachers ought at times to delay the enunciation of their key idea.

²⁷Mounce, *New Testament Preaching*, 77. Mounce identifies the essentials of the *kerygma*: (1) “A proclamation of the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, seen as the fulfillment of prophecy and involving man’s responsibility; (2) the resultant evaluation of Jesus as both Lord and Christ; and (3) the summons to repent and receive forgiveness of sins.”

²⁸Peterson, *Acts*, 271.

Peter's Sermon to the Household of Cornelius (Acts 10:38-48)

In terms of the key features identified by Robert Mounce, Peter's sermon to those gathered at the home of Cornelius may be seen as a quintessential presentation of the *kerygma*. It contains a clear proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 10:39-41) as well as his exaltation (he is "Lord of all"; Acts 10:36). While it recalls previous messages to Jewish audiences, it is the first sermon to make explicit mention that Jesus has been appointed "judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42). In keeping with the occasion, Peter emphasized the prophetic witness that "through his name *everyone* who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43, emphasis added).²⁹ He also made explicit mention of Jesus' earthly ministry (Acts 10:37-39). Citing Graham Stanton against Bultmann's insistence that the early church was concerned only about the risen Lord and not the historical Jesus, Stott notes that "some kind of an account of the life and character of Jesus formed an integral part of the early church's preaching, especially its initial evangelism."³⁰ The sermon has long been regarded as a précis of the gospel as preached by Peter and later recorded more fully in Mark's Gospel. Dodd suggests that "the speech before Cornelius represents the form of the *kerygma* used by the primitive church in its earliest approaches to a wider preaching."³¹ Some contend that, on this occasion, Peter spoke Aramaic through an interpreter. Bruce notes that while "the Greek of verses 36-38 in particular reads

²⁹Ibid., 338-39. Peterson cites Isa 33:24, Jer 31:34, and Ezek 36:25 as examples of passages promising a definitive forgiveness of sins in the last days.

³⁰Stott, *Acts*, 190-91.

³¹Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching*, 28.

somewhat awkwardly . . . it can be turned back word for word into idiomatic and intelligible Aramaic.”³²

If Stephen’s sermon was addressed to one of the most antagonistic audiences in history, this sermon was addressed to one of the most receptive. Those who gathered had been prepared by visions and an angelic visitation and were eager to receive Peter’s message as God’s word to them. There was no need to delay the announcement of the theme. After a brief but appropriate introduction, involving a personal confession in which Peter acknowledged the recency of his insight that God welcomes people of every nation (ἐπ’ ἀληθείας καταλαμβάνομαι), he presented Jesus as Savior and Lord of all. He was able to assume some familiarity with Jesus’ life and ministry on account of his hearers’ geographical proximity to the locale of Jesus’ ministry, and possibly also through the ministry of Philip (Acts 8:40; 21:8). The sermon is a straightforward presentation of the facts concerning Jesus. Peter spoke as a witness both of his life and of his resurrection.³³

Although Peter was still speaking when “the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message,” we may regard the message as complete since the Spirit’s descent would not have eliminated essential elements from the message he had inspired Peter to proclaim. The appropriateness of the apparent interruption is clear in view of the exceptional nature of the entire occurrence. Peterson identifies “a programmatic pattern that is found in 2:38 and implied also in 3:19-20,” and includes the

³²Bruce, *Acts*, 213.

³³The recurrence of the word *μάρτυρες* and its cognates in Acts 10:39, 41, 42 and 43 seems intentional.

promise of the Spirit.³⁴ He concludes that “in the normal course of events, Peter would probably have mentioned the gift of the Spirit in connection with the offer of forgiveness in Christ.”³⁵

Although there is no scriptural citation in this sermon, it is replete with scriptural allusions.³⁶ It is not impossible that Peter would have quoted specific passages in support of his claim that “of him all the prophets bear witness” (Acts 10:43). Given the composition and receptivity of the audience, a more general statement concerning the witness of the prophets may have sufficed. What we have here is an uncomplicated proclamation of the *kerygma*. The presentation is straightforward. The arrangement is deductive. The preacher serves as a herald and witness of the good news. The essential message that peace (salvation) through the universal Lord is open to those of all nations is announced early and then explained in terms of the life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus.

Paul’s Sermon at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-23)

We are struck initially by the similarities between Paul’s sermon in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch and that of Peter on the Day of Pentecost. Instead of regarding both as Lucan compositions, we should attribute the similarity to “the common outline of the primitive *kerygma*” and “a common stock of *testimonia* . . . used by all the early preachers of the gospel.”³⁷ Ben Witherington refers to Paul’s hand gesture and “the

³⁴Peterson, *Acts*, 339.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Ibid.*, 338.

³⁷Bruce, *Acts*, 261; see also Dodd, *Apostolic Preaching*, 30.

deliberative and masterful form of the piece of rhetoric that follows” as evidences that “Luke intends to portray Paul in his first major discourse in Acts as a great orator.”³⁸ He detects a formal introduction (Acts 13:16), the presentation of facts in support of his thesis (Acts 3:17-25), a clear proposition (Acts 13:26), a convincing argument (Acts 13:27-37), and a climactic appeal (Acts 13:38-41), which is introduced by a direct address to the audience. Paul’s familiarity with the rhetorical conventions of his day would no doubt have contributed to his composure and flexibility before divergent audiences and high-ranking Roman officials. While he warns against the danger of reliance on mere rhetoric, Mark Galli observes perceptively that “the very passage that seems to castigate rhetoric (1 Cor 2:1-5) is itself a model of rhetoric,” and concludes that “Paul is no plain speaker.”³⁹

In addition to the customary introduction, Paul’s sermon consists of a relatively brief recapitulation of the history of Israel from the patriarchs to King David, a transition to the sermon’s focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus, and an appeal to the hearers, which contains both an invitation and a warning.⁴⁰ The main divisions of the sermon are clear from the way in which Paul addresses the audience at the commencement of his narration (Acts 13:16), in the statement of his proposition at the commencement of the argument (Acts 13:26), and as he is about to commence the concluding appeal (Acts 13:38).

³⁸Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 407.

³⁹Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson, *Preaching that Connects: Using Journalistic Techniques to Add Impact* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 21-22.

⁴⁰Although the full sermon, preserved here in summary form, may have contained more detail, the length of this section relative to the other parts of the sermon indicate that Paul wished to proceed to his proclamation of Christ as soon as possible.

The historical overview corresponds to an ancient confessional summary, to which was added God's choice of David as king over Israel (Deut 26:5-10). Bruce sees these events as "an Old Testament *kerygma* which is summarized in Paul's address as a prelude to the New Testament *kerygma*."⁴¹ Paul's emphasis on God's gracious initiative is evident from the fact that God is the subject of nearly all the verbs.⁴² It is significant, in contradistinction from Stephen, that he made no direct reference to Moses. This omission, no doubt, was on account of the different intent and setting of the sermon. He moved, as soon as possible, to the sermon's focus, having cited the role of John the Baptist, who preached "repentance and baptism to *all the people of Israel*" (emphasis added), and spoke of one coming after him whose sandals he was not worthy to untie (Acts 13:24-25).

In proclaiming the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul emphasized that the failure of the people of Jerusalem and their rulers to recognize him, and indeed, their complicity in his execution, was a fulfillment of "the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath." It is possible that in referring to the cross (ξύλον), Paul was drawing attention to "both the shameful nature of Jesus' death and its penal character" (Deut 21:22-23; Acts 13:29).⁴³ Writing to the Christians in the region, "only a few months or so later," he made it clear that he had preached Jesus to them in these terms (Gal 3:1, 10-14).⁴⁴ Referring to the witness of "those who came up with him from Galilee," he and

⁴¹Bruce, *Acts*, 254.

⁴²Stott, *Acts*, 223.

⁴³Peterson, *Acts*, 391.

⁴⁴Stott, *Acts*, 225. There is much to commend Stott's early dating of Galatians.

Barnabas proclaimed the good news (*ἡμεῖς ὑμᾶς εὐαγγελιζόμεθα*) of the resurrection, substantiating it by citations from the Scriptures (Pss 2:7; 16:10; Isa 55:3).

While “application to the audience and appeal for their response is not reserved for the end of the speech but is interspersed with the narration and scriptural argument,” the conclusion does contain a more pointed application.⁴⁵ Paul placed a stark choice before his hearers. He proclaimed forgiveness of sins through Jesus and freedom “from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39). This was coupled with a warning, based on Habakkuk 1:5, of dire consequences upon those who reject the message (Acts 13:40-41).

While Paul’s *kerygma* contains the same elements as that of Peter, follows essentially the same sequence, and draws from the same *testimonia*, one is able to detect a different style, occasioned no doubt by the audience (Jews, proselytes and God-fearers in the Diaspora), and differences in personality and training. Although Luke’s summaries may have concealed differences that would be apparent had one heard the sermons in their entirety, it is significant that messages containing the same essential elements were arranged and presented with an originality befitting the occasion and the audience.

Paul’s Sermon to the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-34)

Paul’s sermon to an assembly of the Areopagus, which probably met in the Stoa Basileios just off the agora, is a masterful *apologia*. Luke portrays him “as being able to stand on equal footing with the intellectuals of his day, even in Athens.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵Peterson, *Acts*, 390.

⁴⁶Witherington, *Acts*, 514.

Although this hearing should not be seen as a trial, the philosophers who were disputing with Paul in the marketplace “took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus” (Acts 17:19).⁴⁷ It is difficult to imagine an audience less likely to be receptive to the gospel. Witherington contends that the setting and the occasion made it imperative for Paul to “resort to forensic rhetoric, for . . . he must present an argument for his teaching at a hearing before the officials of the Areopagus, officials charged with maintaining the religious order of Athenian society.”⁴⁸ In his introduction he sought to secure the goodwill of his hearers (Acts 17:22-23) before stating his proposition (Acts 17:23b), presenting his supporting argument (Acts 17:24-29), and appealing for appropriate action (Acts 17:30-31). Witherington observes that “the speech is very carefully crafted with considerable alliteration, assonance, and paronomasia.”⁴⁹

In the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, Paul had given a brief summary of the nation’s history from the patriarchs to David, had declared that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and had substantiated his proclamation of the resurrection by citing Scripture. It is reasonable to assume that he would have done much the same in the Athenian *synagogue*. In the marketplace, he was “preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18). In his address to the Areopagus, he also proclaimed Jesus and the resurrection, this time in terms similar to his address to the crowd at Lystra (Acts 14:15-17).

⁴⁷Stott, *Acts*, 283. While this need not be seen as a formal arrest, it was a function of the Areopagus to consider religious innovations.

⁴⁸Witherington, *Acts*, 518.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

Stott effectively repudiates the “gratuitous theory,” popularized by William Ramsay, that Paul was disappointed by the negligible response to his preaching in Athens and decided henceforth to adopt a simpler approach and preach nothing but “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:1-5).⁵⁰ Stott’s assessment is consistent with Luke’s summation (Acts 17:32-33). Paul’s approach before the Areopagus was eminently suitable to the occasion. In a context in which of a physical resurrection was regarded as absurd, he wisely reserved his proclamation of Jesus and the resurrection till the end of the address. By referring to the anonymous altar he was able not only to establish an important point of contact, but also to address the gathering with courtesy. He did not accuse them of ignorance, but referred subtly to the admission contained in the inscription, “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD,” in order to declare essential truth about God to them. His quotations of Greek poets helped to substantiate his proclamation of truth without endorsing their philosophy. Indeed, the thought of the sermon is derived from Scripture. Bruce observes that Paul’s “argument is firmly based on biblical revelation; it echoes throughout the thought, and at times the very language, of the Old Testament. Like the biblical revelation itself, his argument begins with God the creator and ends with God the judge of all.”⁵¹

Paul certainly did take issue with their idolatry, but he did so at an appropriate point in his address, and his tone was respectful rather than condemnatory (Acts 17:29). He presented God in such a way as to leave no room for any other deity. As the creator of everything and “Lord of heaven and earth, he cannot be confined “in temples made

⁵⁰Stott, *Acts*, 289.

⁵¹Bruce, *Acts*, 335.

with hands” (Acts 17:24). It was of crucial importance in this presentation of the gospel that the unity of the human race be emphasized. God gives “to all people” life and breath; he made from one man every nation of mankind,” and he now declares that “all people everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:25, 26, 30). In his call for repentance, Paul returns to the theme of ignorance introduced at the outset. Since we only have a précis of the sermon, it is impossible to know how much detail regarding the resurrection was actually included in his proclamation. Darrell Bock believes that Paul did not complete his discourse, and certainly the mention of the resurrection brought proceedings to a conclusion.⁵² Yet the sermon, as Luke recorded it, seems to have reached a fitting climax. Bruce maintains, “There is no need to suppose that the speech was seriously curtailed by the ridicule with which some members of the audience received his reference to Jesus’ rising from the dead. The speech as it stands admirably summarizes an introductory lesson in Christianity for cultured pagans.”⁵³

The fact that critics have expressed diametrically opposite views on the Pauline nature of the sermon is a testimony to his ability to contextualize and vary his presentation without compromising the gospel. Albert Mohler has emphasized the need for apologetic preaching as part of a preacher’s repertoire in the twenty-first century.⁵⁴ The current situation requires preachers to emulate Paul’s example by structuring apologetic sermons inductively and presenting their material in a loving, respectful, but uncompromising manner.

⁵²Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 558.

⁵³Bruce, *Acts*, 341.

⁵⁴R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 123, 128-31.

Paul's Sermon to his Compatriots in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1-21)

Paul's *apologia*, addressed to an intensely hostile Jewish audience from the steps of the Fortress Antonia, differs from his other sermons in several respects. It consists only of an introduction and narration of the events of his conversion.⁵⁵ The abrupt termination of the speech by the incensed mob may account for the absence of a reasoned argument and a concluding appeal, but it is arguable that this sermon, like Stephen's, was to all intents and purposes complete.⁵⁶ One cannot help but wonder to what extent the repeated predictions about his arrest and imprisonment influenced both the content and the form of Paul's address (Acts 20:22-24; 21:10-14). Peterson hints at this element of inevitability: "If he was concerned to win over his audience and escape from captivity, he might have devised a more persuasive conclusion to his speech."⁵⁷

Bock's identification of the stages of a three-part argument in the speech is simple, but encapsulates the progression of the sermon: "I was where you were" (vv. 3-5), "I was called by God" (vv. 6-14), and "I was called to be a witness to the nations" (vv. 15-21).⁵⁸ One is better able to understand the finer points of this sermon when one compares the three accounts of Paul's conversion, commissioning, and first visit to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-30; 22:1-21; 26:12-23). The inclusions, omissions, and the particular choice of terms are significant, especially in view of the incendiary climate and the fact that this speech was interrupted.

⁵⁵Witherington, *Acts*, 668.

⁵⁶Certainly, Paul was interrupted, but he may well have realized that a specific reference to his call to the Gentiles was likely to provoke an angry reaction (cf. Acts 13:46-48; 18:6).

⁵⁷Peterson, *Acts*, 606.

⁵⁸Bock, *Acts*, 659.

Until this explicit reference to the Gentiles, Paul's speech is a model in apologetic diplomacy. Addressing the crowd in Aramaic, he presented himself as a patriotic and devout Jew, educated in Jerusalem under the tutelage of the highly-respected Gamaliel. He identified with the zeal of the crowd who had been restrained by the Roman tribune from beating and possibly murdering him. His role as a persecutor and his acquaintance with the members of the Sanhedrin were further points of identification.

By portraying Ananias as “a man who was devout by the standard of the law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived (in Damascus),” and mentioning the fact that it was while Paul was praying *in the temple* that the Lord spoke to him about leaving Jerusalem, he underlined the legitimacy of his calling from a Jewish point of view (Acts 22: 12, 17). Although there are no direct citations of Scripture, the possible allusions are significant. He referred to the glory of the very bright light (τῆς δόξης τοῦ φωτὸς ἐκείνου) from heaven that he saw at midday (Acts 22:6, 11). By identifying Jesus the Nazarene as “the Righteous One,” he was undoubtedly making a messianic claim for him (Acts 22:14; Jer 23:5-6; 33:15; Zech 9:9). There is also a possible echo in his commissioning in the temple to the call of Isaiah, “who likewise has a vision in the temple and learns that God's people would resist his message” (Isa 6:1-10).⁵⁹ An explicit proclamation of the resurrection may well have been superfluous here; it was, after all, *the risen Lord* who had addressed Paul on the Damascus Road and in the Temple.

The sermon is eminently suited to the occasion both in terms of the terminology used and its flow. As Paul had previously discovered, his background as a zealous persecutor of the church made his present alignment even more odious to the

⁵⁹Witherington, *Acts*, 674.

Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-30; 22:18). Under the circumstances, he could not do better than present the facts of his conversion and commissioning. It is the decidedly Jewish flavor of his presentation that gives it potency. Paul's witness is presented in such a way as to depict submission to Jesus as the appropriate course of action for Jews who are "zealous for God" (22:3). As recounted, the events themselves constituted a proclamation of the gospel.

Insight from Paul's Charge to Timothy (2 Tim 3:10-4:5)

An obvious limitation in selecting examples of preaching from the Acts is that the recorded sermons are evangelistic addresses. We do not have a single New Testament example of the kind of sermon that would have been preached to a gathering of believers.⁶⁰ There can be little doubt that "the teaching (*διδασχῆ*) of the apostles" would have contained the essential features of the *kerygma*. Jesus' own interpretation of the things concerning himself in "all the Scriptures" would surely have provided the perspective for all instruction (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). Nevertheless, Jesus had instructed the apostles to teach disciples to obey everything he had commanded them (Matt 28:20). Bruce maintains that this "was the teaching of the Lord communicated through the apostles in the power of the Spirit," and that "the New Testament Scriptures form the written deposit of the apostolic teaching."⁶¹ While one can look to the books of the New Testament to indicate the substance of such teaching, no passage is more helpful in

⁶⁰Peter's address to those gathered before the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:15-22), Peter's and James' addresses to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:7-11, 13-21), and Paul's address to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:18-35) are too specific to be examples of congregational preaching and teaching.

⁶¹Bruce, *Acts*, 73.

determining the method of the teaching than the one contained in Paul's final exhortation to Timothy (2 Tim 3:10-4:5).

In urging Timothy to remain faithful to his teaching and example, Paul made specific reference to the Hebrew Scriptures, which are God-breathed (2 Tim 3: 15-17). Stott argues for the legitimacy of applying the designation to the writings of the New Testament as well, especially in view of passages such as 1 Timothy 5:18 and 2 Peter 3:16.⁶² Of particular significance is the fact that all Scripture "is profitable for teaching (διδασκαλίαν), reproof (ἐλεγμὸν), correction (ἐπανόρθωσιν), and instruction in righteousness (παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ)" (2 Tim 3:16). George Knight establishes the meaning of these nouns as "instruction . . . by means of its content" (cf. Rom 15:4), "refuting error" (cf. NEB paraphrase), "correcting . . . most likely with reference to conduct," and training . . . designed to produce conduct whereby righteousness is actualized."⁶³ The profitability of Scripture relates firstly to Timothy himself, especially since the reference to "the man of God" who will be "equipped for every good work" is in the singular, but it extends naturally to all who receive its message.⁶⁴

Paul's solemn charge to Timothy contains five imperatives (2 Tim 4: 2). The first of these, "Preach the word (κῆρυξον τὸν λόγον)," undoubtedly plays a dominant role and is modified by the prepositional phrase, "with great patience and teaching

⁶²John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 101.

⁶³George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; Bletchley, England: The Paternoster Press, 1992), 449.

⁶⁴Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 280.

(διδαχῆ).”⁶⁵ The pericope concludes with Paul’s exhortation to Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist (εὐαγγελιστής),” and to fulfill his ministry (2 Tim 4:5). The use of these related but distinguishable aspects of the ministry of the word leads one to expect differences in the arrangement and presentation of sermons. In discussing the various modes in which preachers communicate, Johnson draws attention to the different rhetorical styles and different outcomes for the listener implicit in the verbs employed to describe the ministry of the word. He nevertheless cautions us against drawing too sharp a distinction between the various modes of address.⁶⁶ In similar vein, Robert Reid speaks of the “voices” employed by preachers in communicating God’s Word. Using the metaphor of taking a trip, he contends that “in any sermon, all four voices may be along for the ride, but only one of the voices should be behind the wheel.”⁶⁷ If Scripture comes to us in a variety of genres and is profitable for a number of different functions, then there should be diversity in biblical sermons, precisely because they are expository.

Observations Regarding the Sermonic Forms Employed in the Above Instances

Even a cursory examination of the discourses and the parables of Jesus is sufficient to demonstrate that the variety in his preaching was intentional, and that this variety contributed towards its effectiveness. This impression is enhanced by an examination of six recorded sermons in the Acts of the Apostles. While the intention of the respective preachers was always to proclaim Jesus as the crucified and resurrected

⁶⁵Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 453.

⁶⁶Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching*, 77-9.

⁶⁷Robert Stephen Reid, *The Four Voices of Preaching: Connecting Purpose and Identity behind the Pulpit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 32.

Lord, the sermons were arranged and presented with the particular audiences in mind. Both inductive and deductive movement is clearly discernable in the sermons. The common commitment to the proclamation of the *kerygma* makes the divergences in presentation particularly noteworthy.

If Phillips Brooks is correct in describing preaching as “the bringing of truth through personality,” we may add this to factors such as the genre of the pericope, the particular mode(s) of address in a given sermon, the nature of the audience, and the goal of the sermon.⁶⁸ It appears that when the Word of God is allowed to dictate both the content and the form of sermons, diversity is inevitable, rhetorical conventions notwithstanding. To impose an extraneous structure on a sermon is to do an injustice to passage that is being expounded.

This impression is further enhanced by an examination of the terms contained in Paul’s final exhortation to Timothy. While the list is not exhaustive, it is indicative of a variety of modes of address that can be employed in the exposition of Scripture. Although the New Testament does not contain examples of typical sermons preached to assembled groups of believers, it is reasonable to infer from the multiplicity of words used to characterize the ministry of the Word that there was considerable variety both in the form and in the delivery of sermons.

⁶⁸Phillips Brooks, *The Joy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1989; originally published as *Lectures on Preaching* [London: H. R. Allenson, 1895]), 25.

CHAPTER 3

THE SCOPE OF VARIETY IN EXPOSITORY PREACHING

In order to propose a procedure to facilitate greater variety in expository preaching, it is necessary to determine more precisely the sense in which the term *expository* is being used. An appropriate understanding of the nature of expository preaching not only establishes the parameters of the envisaged variety, but also encourages one to adopt a creative approach in the design and presentation of sermons.

Since preaching is the *communication* of a biblical message, audience analysis plays an important role in the sermonic choices that a preacher makes. This entails a consideration of the influence of postmodernism and the effect this ought to have on the manner in which sermons are arranged and presented. Since the New Homiletic is, in part, an attempt to come to terms with attitudes prevalent among postmoderns, it is necessary to identify and take critical account of some of the proposals of its exponents. I shall also consider ways in which the characteristics of the particular audience being addressed can be assessed.

Expository Preaching with a Lower Case e

In chapter one, I recognized the most important feature of expository preaching as the attitude of the preacher to Scripture as a whole and to the particular portion of Scripture being expounded. I identified with the approaches of Haddon Robinson and

John Stott. While both insist that the text under consideration should determine the message and content of the sermon, neither is prescriptive in respect of precise sermonic structure.¹

Donald Hamilton conducts a helpful discussion on the subject. Like Robinson, he does not see the term expository as describing a particular category of sermon.² He distinguishes between four approaches to expository preaching, namely, (1) a verse-by-verse commentary; (2) essentially the same as textual preaching, except that a longer text is used; (3) all the main points and subpoints are based on specific parts of the text, and the entire text is covered in the sermon's content; and (4) treating the entire text as a thematic entity with main points and some or most of the subpoints based on the text, but without the necessity of covering the entire text in detail.³ Hamilton expresses his own preference for the fourth option and cites New Testament scholar James Stewart as exemplifying this approach. Stewart believed that a sermon must permit the text to make its own statement: "The point is that it is imperative to allow the Scripture to speak its own message. Build your sermons on a solid foundation of accurate exegesis. Be honest with the Word of God."⁴

¹Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 22; John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 126.

²Donald L. Hamilton, *Preaching with Balance: Achieving and Maintaining Biblical Priorities in Preaching* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 230.

³Donald L. Hamilton, "Preaching Inductively as One with Authority," *Preaching* 16, no. 2 (2000): 48-55.

⁴James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946 reprint, Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2001), 156, 57.

Others are more prescriptive. Bryan Chapell and Walter Kaiser insist that the passage needs to determine the points of the sermon. Chapell contends that “the sermon must [derive], from a specific text, main points and subpoints that disclose the thought of the author, cover the thought of the passage, and are applied to the lives of the listeners.”⁵ This contention, of course, begs the question that the sermon *has* “points.” Kaiser advocates a principlizing procedure to ensure that the sermon outline corresponds to the content and sequence of the passage.⁶ He believes that the text must supply not only the content of the message but also its shape or outline. He does provide a useful method that enables us to move “from analyzing the text over to constructing a sermon that accurately reflects the same analysis and is directly dependent on it.”⁷ His method is, however, limiting. This approach virtually dictates that we adopt a deductive outline with clearly articulated points.

The difficulty with this insistence is, ironically, that it lacks *biblical* warrant.⁸ The sermons recorded in Scripture cannot all be said to follow these rules. The burden of proof rests with those who lay down such strict criteria and declare that sermons that do not meet these criteria are not “expository.” It certainly is beneficial to follow the text as closely as possible, but following the order of the text, incorporating the exact terms of the text, and presenting these in point form cannot be regarded as obligatory.

⁵Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 129.

⁶Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981) 149-63.

⁷*Ibid.*, 8.

⁸Michael Duduit “Purpose-Driven Preaching: An Interview with Rick Warren,” *Preaching* 17, no. 2 (2001): 6-17.

Kenton Anderson prefers to speak of expository preaching with a lower case e and comments perceptively,

Unfortunately . . . expository preaching has taken on a capital *E* sense in which Expository not only implies faithfulness to the biblical text but also requires certain formal elements. . . . I prefer to use the term *expository* to describe preaching that is faithful to the message, intent, impact, and perhaps even the form of the text. In other words, an expository sermon doesn't require a specific form but rather can take a number of shapes depending on the genre of the text and the needs of the listeners.⁹

One must, of course, recognize the possibility of the degeneration of the sermon into a topical sermon, with all the attendant dangers. One can certainly acknowledge the advantages of an intentionally close correspondence between the teaching of the passage and the content of the sermon. It is imperative that one faithfully conveys the message of the passage at hand, but there should be freedom to structure and deliver the sermon with a creativity that serves the passage at hand and makes its message clear to contemporary hearers.

Approaches to Variety in Preaching

If the primary reason for variety in sermons is to eliminate monotony, variety could well be introduced in a number of ways without affecting the essential structure of the sermon.

Superficial Variety

One could commence a sermon with an arresting statement, a quotation, or a provocative question one week and an illustration the next week. Conclusions could also be varied. Points could be articulated differently and the homiletical idea could be used

⁹⁹Kenton C. Anderson, *Choosing to Preach: A Comprehensive Introduction to Sermon Options and Structures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 35.

once or as a refrain. Such tweaking could well produce an element of freshness but may be superficial or, in some instances, even “cosmetic.” Worse still, it may actually defeat the object of variety in expository preaching or even degenerate into gimmickry.

Homileticians and preachers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century did present a number of different options. Although John Broadus classified sermons into only four structural types (textual, topical, textual-topical, and expository), he also classified them by subject matter and pattern.¹⁰ In terms of subject matter or content, he identified the theological sermon, the ethical sermon, and the church program sermon. His classification by pattern is more elaborate. He identified no fewer than sixteen patterns and then commented,

The listing of patterns is not intended to be a complete listing. There have been many, many types of outlines. There are many yet to be discovered. The preacher must always work for variety in sermon plans. A congregation should never be able to predict the sermonic method the preacher will use Sunday by Sunday. Variety heightens anticipation and interest.¹¹

Along similar lines, W. E. Sangster classified sermons according to subject matter, structural type and psychological method.¹² His classification according to subject matter is six-fold: (1) biblical interpretation; (2) ethical and devotional; (3) doctrinal; (4) philosophic and apologetic; (5) Social; and (6) evangelistic. He distinguished five main structural types of sermon: (1) exposition; (2) argument; (3)

¹⁰John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed., rev. Vernon Stanfield (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1979), 53-74.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 74. The following patterns are specifically identified: (1) the diamond outline; (2) the ladder outline; (3) the label outline; (4) the contrast outline; (5) the question and answer outline; (6) the chase outline; (7) the diagnosis-remedy outline; (8) the “Hegelian” outline; (9) the analogy outline; (10) the proof outline; (11) the rebuttal outline; (12) the refrain outline; (13) the series of statements outline; (14) the “dog-fight” outline; (15) the interpretation-application outline; and (16) the subversive outline.

¹²W. E. Sangster, *The Craft of the Sermon* (London: Epworth Press, 1954), 20-110.

faceting; (4) categorizing; and (5) analogy. The third element in his arsenal of diversification is psychological method. Here he identified four approaches: (1) authoritative; (2) persuasive; (3) co-operative; and (4) subversive. Sangster's classification seems arbitrary and was no doubt suited to his own ministry preferences. Nevertheless, by setting out some of the many possible permutations, both he and Broadus introduce us to the kind of variations that are available to us.

As commendable as this categorizing is, it may have more to do with pulpit artistry than with faithfulness to the text of Scripture or the particular needs of an assembled congregation (other than the avoidance of boredom). Variety should be *because* of a commitment to expository preaching, not *in spite of* it. It should be an indication of one's faithfulness to the exposition and application of the passage at hand. Clearly a more holistic approach is needed.

More Radical Approaches

Writing toward the end of the twentieth century, homileticians such as Eugene Lowry and Fred Craddock were convinced that traditional preaching had become outmoded and proposed a thoroughgoing revision. This staleness, in their view, was due to the way students were being taught to preach deductively. They attributed the perceived lack to the imposition of Greek rhetoric rather than the pursuance of a biblical model. Both encourage us to move away from deductive preaching and embrace an inductive approach. The contribution of these two homileticians has been characterized as "a 'Copernican revolution' in preaching theory."¹³ It is nevertheless true that many

¹³Mike Graves and David J. Schlafer, eds., *What's the Shape of Narrative Preaching? Essays in Honor of Eugene Lowry* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 1.

evangelical preachers (probably the vast majority) continued to follow the more traditional approach they had been taught in seminary, and many in the pews preferred deductive sermons with clearly articulated points to the proposed innovations.

Craddock and Lowry are not entirely fair in their depiction of deductive preaching. The methods they espouse are presented as alternatives to the worst possible examples of deductive preaching. Both make valid points, but, despite protestations to the contrary, each tends to absolutize his own method.

Lowry notes that “any method utilized Sunday by Sunday in precisely the same fashion will wear thin.”¹⁴ Having said this, he tends to substitute his own structure for the one he dismisses. “Why not conceive *every* sermon as narrative?” he asks. For him, “a sermon *is* a narrative plot.”¹⁵ He depicts this plot with a simple but imaginative diagram (the so-called “Lowry loop”). The total substitution of his more narrative, horizontal approach could eventually have a similar somnolating effect to the unvarying use of an alliterated three-point sermon.¹⁶ Surely there are portions of Scripture that are better served if they are presented using a vertical, deductive arrangement. To insist on squeezing every sermon into Lowry’s pattern, even if it seems less static than a deductive model with clearly articulated points, is as restrictive and as arbitrary as insisting on a vertical arrangement.

¹⁴Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*, exp. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 90.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 13, 14, 25, 31; my emphasis.

¹⁶Admittedly Lowry recounts a story in such a way as to make important theological points. His approach is more arresting than the approach employed in the average deductive sermon largely because the elements of suspense and anticipation are built into the homiletical plot.

In similar vein, Fred Craddock complains that deductive preaching tends to start with a statement of the preacher's conclusion and then organizes and analyzes the implications under a set number of points. He rightly maintains that "the gospel should [not] always be impaled upon the frame of Aristotelian logic."¹⁷ While he disavows any method that purports to be *the* method and insists that "forms of preaching ought to be as varied as the forms of rhetoric in the New Testament," his disdain for deductive preaching effectively eliminates it from the preacher's repertoire.¹⁸ One has to question, even when applying "lower case e" criteria, whether some of his sermons can be regarded as expository sermons.¹⁹ The passage is alluded to and perceptive comments are made about its theme, but one can hardly say that the text is "a master which dictates and controls what is said."²⁰

Some have suggested an even more radical revision of preaching. Brian McLaren advocates a shift from propositional to narrative preaching and from a highly analytical to a conversational approach.²¹ Dan Kimball declares his preference for "theotopical" preaching. He describes this as "a mix of both expository and topical preaching."²² Both McLaren and Kimball are committed to the proclamation of God's Word, albeit in a more dialogical and less authoritarian manner. Some in the Emerging

¹⁷Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 2nd ed. (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 38.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 131-56. In addition to four transcripts included in the appendices, many of Craddock's sermons are accessible in other works on preaching.

²⁰Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 126.

²¹Michael Duduit, "Preaching to Postmoderns: An Interview with Brian McLaren," *Preaching* 16, no. 6 (2001), 4-17.

²²Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 188.

Church Movement are more extreme and advocate practices that run counter to a biblical understanding of preaching. Doug Pagitt, for example, caricatures preaching as “speaching,” and substitutes “progressional dialogue.”²³ His proposal moves beyond criticism of the abuses of preaching to the act of preaching itself when he refers to “the ways in which our speaching damages our people and creates a sense of powerlessness in them,” and uses terms such as “repetitive stress disorder” and “relational violence.”²⁴ In Pagitt, the locus of authority shifts from the Word of God to the consensus of opinion of believers in conversation. It therefore falls beyond the pale of expository preaching as defined in this project.

The term “abduction” has been used to depict “a synthetic form of reasoning that constructs hypotheses to invent new ways of seeing the world.”²⁵ Leonard Sweet claims that “abduction occurs when old ideas are combined in new ways; when relationships between things are reconfigured; when metaphors are mixed to yield moments of insight.”²⁶ The essential idea of “abduction” is to “seize people by the imagination and transport them from their current world to another world, where they gain a new perspective.”²⁷ This attempt entails “disorientation, astonishment, amazement, surprise--all these things stimulate the abductive process. A speaker abducts

²³Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 11.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 22, 25-26.

²⁵Charles Sanders Pierce quoted in Anderson, *Choosing to Preach*, 236.

²⁶Leonard Sweet quoted in Anderson, *Choosing to Preach*, 237.

²⁷Leonard Sweet, Brian D, McLaren, and Jerry Haselmayer, *A is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 31.

hearers . . . and beams them up into the spaceship of an unexpected experience.”²⁸ One has to question whether “abduction,” described in these terms, is compatible with expository preaching.

The Question of Authority

The question of authority is germane to this discussion. As homileticians take note of postmodernism’s repudiation of authority, there is a tendency to decry the authority of the pulpit in favor of the authority of the pew. Craddock makes the valid point that “authority” derived from the personality, office, or learning of the preacher is likely to be counter-productive to spiritual health and is demeaning to the congregation.²⁹ He is, of course, correct in pointing out that authority does not reside in the person of the preacher, but he certainly seems to be saying more than that. In a deductive sermon structure, he argues, “There is no democracy . . . no dialogue, no listening by the speaker, no contributing by the hearer. If the congregation is on the team, it is as a javelin catcher.”³⁰ He objects to the preacher foisting the conclusion of his exegetical work on the congregation at the beginning of the sermon and then proceeding to defend and apply it. He sees it as far more important that the listeners themselves undertake the journey and arrive at their conclusion. Nevertheless, one cannot credibly pretend that a prepared preacher and an “unprepared” audience (in respect of a particular sermon) are making the discovery together. Surely one needs to distinguish between an *authoritative* proclamation of revealed truth (inductive or deductive) and an *authoritarian* bearing. Is

²⁸Ibid., 33.

²⁹Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 46.

³⁰Ibid.

there not a place for us to preach with *derived* authority, declaring the Word of God, and does the nature of some passages not require an authoritative tone?

It would indeed be presumptuous for preachers to stand before people and pontificate about how they should live if the source of their message is merely their own opinion. If, however, sermons do not consist merely of telling people how to live, and if they are based upon an authority to which the preachers submit themselves, then an authoritative attitude, as distinct from an authoritarian posture, is appropriate. Is not the real problem here that many have adopted a reductionist view of preaching? If preaching is reduced to the outrageously arrogant act of individuals who, on account of their innate wisdom or presumed authority, foist their opinions on others, then it needs to be repudiated, no matter what shape the sermon takes. If, on the other hand, preachers are heralds rather than the originators of the message, if they convey the message faithfully, and if the authority lies in the ultimate Source of the message, then, whether they preach deductively or inductively, they speak with appropriate authority.

Factors Determining Variety in Preaching

An expansive understanding of expository preaching does not give the preacher *carte blanche* in the study or in the pulpit. Several factors are essential to biblical exposition. Rightly understood, these factors not only determine the parameters of variety; they actually provide a motivation for it.

Genre Sensitivity

If a serious consideration of genre is important for exegesis, it should also have a vital bearing on how the sermon is constructed and delivered. Commenting on the

relationship between genre and sermon structure, Dennis Cahill argues that “the form of the sermon needs the same kind of intense and careful planning as the exegetical and theological aspects of the preaching task.”³¹ He insists that “the form of the sermon should be suitable to the form of the text,” but has the good sense to allow flexibility, since the sermon is not simply a repetition of the text.³² Nevertheless, “the form of the text is part of the meaning of the text,” and “we attempt to carry across the homiletical bridge . . . something of the form of the text as well.”³³ So the content, the genre, and the tenor of the passage itself should exert a powerful influence on the structure and delivery of the sermon.

Thomas Long laments the tendency of preachers to view texts as “inert containers for theological concepts.”³⁴ This tendency would limit the preacher’s task to “throwing the text into an exegetical winepress, squeezing out the ideational matter, and then figuring out homiletical ways to make those ideas attractive to contemporary listeners.”³⁵ He suggests that one interrogate the text, asking the following questions: (1) what is the genre of the text; (2) what is the rhetorical function of this genre; (3) what literary devices does this genre employ to achieve its rhetorical effect; (4) how in particular does the text under consideration, in its own literary setting, embody the

³¹Dennis M. Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching: Theory and Practice in Sermon Design* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 20.

³²*Ibid.*, 33, 66.

³³*Ibid.*, 59, 62.

³⁴Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 12.

³⁵*Ibid.*

characteristics and dynamics described in the previous questions; and (5) how may the sermon in a new setting say and do what the text says and does in its setting?³⁶

The last of these five questions is a crucial one for homiletics. It is easier to ascertain and repackage principles than to “say and do in a new setting what the text says and does in its setting.” The attempt to carry the form as well as the content of the text across the homiletical bridge calls for a more deliberate approach in which preachers attempt to reproduce the impact and effect of the passage rather than simply principlizing or extracting and repackaging its theological loci. In this connection, Robert Vogel identifies the value for expository preaching of crafting sermons “aimed at balanced, holistic transformation.”³⁷ Such transformation is most likely to occur when the rhetorical impact of the literary features of the passage are projected into the sermon. Vogel offers some practical pointers by referring to the rhetoric of Hebrews 11 and the account of King Amaziah in 2 Chronicles 25.³⁸

Like Long and Vogel, Jeffrey Arthurs stresses the importance of paying attention to the form of the text, but adds immediately, “I’m not a ‘form fundamentalist.’ I do not assert that we must slavishly and minutely copy the exact genre of the text The key to genre sensitive preaching is to replicate the impact of the text, not its exact techniques, although technique is the best place to start.”³⁹ He sums up his book on re-

³⁶Ibid., 23-34.

³⁷Robert Vogel, “Biblical Genres and the Text-Driven Sermon,” *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Matthews, (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 176.

³⁸Ibid., 173, 177-83.

³⁹Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety: How to Re-create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2007), 27-28.

creating the dynamics of biblical genres, “Expository preachers pay attention to form. We consider not only *what* God has communicated but also *how* he has communicated. And because there is no such thing as *the* sermon form, we have freedom to use various communication methods to unleash the rhetorical force of the text.”⁴⁰

In asking serious questions about the genre of a passage, one is asking not only what the passage *says* but also what it *does*. One attempts to ascertain its intended effect on its original readers and, as far as is possible, to replicate this in the sermon.

Deductive and Inductive Movement

The broadest and most consequential structural distinction is between deductive and inductive sermons. One needs to define the terms clearly since the term inductive is used in at least three homiletical senses.

Central to Haddon Robinson’s explanation of inductive sermon arrangement is the notion that “only when all of your points have been developed will the idea of your sermon be stated.”⁴¹ In an inductive sermon, the sermon moves from particulars to a more general statement. The broad theme may be set early but the precise proposition or homiletical idea is delayed until the climax, toward the conclusion of the sermon.

The term “inductive” is sometimes employed in a less precise way. Hamilton observes that it is sometimes loosely used “to describe sermonic elements such as narrative, analogies, examples, figures of speech, questions, drama and dialogue.”⁴² This

⁴⁰Ibid., 201.

⁴¹Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 127.

⁴²Donald L. Hamilton, “Preaching Inductively as One with Authority,” *Preaching* 16, no. 2 (2000): 48.

broad characterization simply applies a label to components of sermons which may be present in either deductive or inductive sermons.

Some, however, use the term “inductive” to signify that the sermon moves from the life situation of the listener towards the truth enunciated in the Bible. Craddock, for example, includes movement from the particulars of the hearers’ experience to a general biblical truth under the rubric of induction. In his preaching, Rick Warren usually moves from the experience of the hearer in the direction of a statement of biblical truth.⁴³ No matter how effective this approach is, it has added an element to induction that is not essential to it.

An approach should be regarded as inductive, not because a preacher begins with the hearer’s situation, but because a preacher chooses to work from particular instances to a general statement. It is the conceptual flow, not the point at which the Bible is introduced, that determines whether or not a sermon is inductive.

Ralph Lewis captures the essence of induction when he says, “Inductive preaching . . . lays out the evidence, the examples, the illustrations, and postpones the declarations and assertions until the listeners have a chance to weigh the evidence, think through the implications and then come to the conclusion with the preacher at the end of the sermon.”⁴⁴ Lewis, too, tends to favor commencing in the listener’s world and moving towards biblical truth. He does, however, acknowledge that “inductive preaching can’t

⁴³Anderson, *Choosing to Preach*, 177-79.

⁴⁴Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1983), 43.

promise to be a total substitute for our existing sermons; it might better serve as a supplement for existing strengths and skills.”⁴⁵

Naturally there are “hybrid” sermon structures. One may, for example, follow an inductive approach for the first half of a sermon, at which point one states the homiletical idea, and then adopts a more deductive approach for the remainder of the sermon. In doing so, one faces the obvious danger of anticlimax, but this can be overcome. Once one has grasped the *essential* nature of deductive and inductive movement, one is free to do what is best for a particular sermon. These categories exist to assist us, not to imprison us. Having made a strong case for inductive preaching, Lewis attests to the complementary nature of inductive and deductive movement.

Induction and deduction are two equally valid parts of one process--a process we could call full-orbed induction. . . .

So it is with induction and deduction in the overall sermon process. The two methods dovetail. The one complements and prepares for the other. Where induction ceases, deduction commences. Induction discovers new knowledge; deduction clarifies it. Induction accumulates the particular facts; deduction asserts the resultant general concepts.⁴⁶

Lewis illustrates the movement of an inductive sermon by means of a “web and flow” spiral. Within this overall design, he envisages a variety of different permutations.

It can be argued that inductive sermon arrangement removes the important element of authority from the declaration of God’s Word. To assert a truth in authoritative fashion and then explain it, argue for it, develop its implications, and call for an obedient response certainly seems more authoritative. This oversimplification does, however, confuse genuine authority with a particular style of presentation. Surely the

⁴⁵Ibid., 32.

⁴⁶Ibid., 111-12.

truth carries its own authority. Such authority is not necessarily dependent on the arrangement of the sermon. In any event, induction does not preclude the clear and unequivocal declaration of the core truth of a sermon; it merely postpones it.

Audience Analysis

Audience analysis is necessary not in order to adapt the truth of the gospel but in order to remain faithful to it. Since the audience will inevitably interpret a sermon in terms of its own frame of reference, a failure to take this into account could result in inadvertent distortion. Audience evaluation is therefore essential. At the commencement of the twenty-first century one needs to take two related factors into account. The first of these is the change in the way information is processed, and the second is the influence of postmodernism. In addition to the general social milieu, it is also important to consider the characteristics of the particular audience that is being addressed.

The visual media. Before the invention of the printing press, the human mind was conditioned to learn through the ear. As a result of its invention, the emphasis gradually shifted from the ear to the eye. The visual had replaced the aural, but the visual consisted largely of words conceived of as abstract marks on a page. Those born prior to the mid-twentieth century were raised in a world in which the printed page dominated the learning process. Another shift has taken place. The emphasis is still on the visual, but now pictures have taken over from abstract marks. Arthurs cites some significant statistics to demonstrate the shift. The year 1985 was the first year when more videos were checked out of public libraries than books. Today, television and other visual media play a dominant role in our society. It is estimated that in the United States the average

child spends nine hundred hours a year in school but 1,023 hours a year watching television.⁴⁷ Arthurs advocates constructive engagement rather than a defensive response to this dramatic shift.

[One] response is to raise the drawbridge, hunker down for siege, fling firebrands and millstones over the fortress walls, and pray that the pagan hordes will not break in. People who choose this option sometimes sneer at the shorter attention spans of the electronic world, but their observation needs to be qualified. People today are quite capable of sustained attention--observe the crowd at a movie--but they no longer easily give their attention to, as Hamlet would say, "words, words, words."⁴⁸

To the impact of the visual media, we must add the information overload of the electronic revolution and the fact that listeners have been socialized to participate in their own education. These changes mean, at the very least, that we should reevaluate traditional preaching conventions.

The postmodern context. At the commencement of the twenty-first century, meaningful audience analysis calls for a perceptive evaluation of postmodernism. Albert Mohler sees postmodernism as "perhaps the most important intellectual and cultural movement of the late twentieth century."⁴⁹ He nevertheless observes that "postmodernism may not be a movement or a methodology at all."⁵⁰ It is better understood as a pervasive mood rather than a cohesive philosophy. It would, however, be a mistake to imply that it does not make consequential assertions, albeit as a reaction to modernism.

⁴⁷Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety*, 31.

⁴⁸Ibid., 32.

⁴⁹R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 115.

⁵⁰Ibid., 116.

By distinguishing between “hard” and “soft” postmodernism, Millard Erickson helps us not only to recognize the mood but also to distinguish between a legitimate rejection of the more arrogant claims of the Enlightenment and a repudiation of the notions of objective knowledge and absolute truth.⁵¹ If “soft” postmodernism rejects the extremes of modernism, “hard” postmodernism goes further in rejecting objectivity and rationality. Perhaps the most significant fact about this difficult-to-define phenomenon is that the mood has to a large extent influenced many who have no knowledge of its philosophical underpinnings.⁵² Their aversion to universally-valid truth claims and suspicion of metanarratives are more a result of attitudinal osmosis than of careful consideration.

Some have hailed postmodernism’s critique of modernism and the greater openness to the spiritual as positive developments for the proclamation of the gospel. In *A Primer on Postmodernism*, Stanley Grenz identifies the antecedents to the emergence of postmodernism and depicts it essentially as a reaction to the Foundationalism of an overblown modernism.⁵³ The tone of the book is generally positive towards the changed outlook, but he firmly repudiates its rejection of the metanarrative and its implicit validation of religious pluralism.

We simply cannot allow Christianity to be relegated to the status of one more faith among others. The gospel is inherently an expansive missionary message. We believe not only that the biblical message makes sense for us but is also good

⁵¹Millard J. Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 19.

⁵²Richard Rorty’s assertion that truth is *made* rather than *found*, Michel Foucault’s assertion that the act of knowing is always an act of violence, Jacques Derrida’s literary deconstructionism, and Jean Francois Lyotard’s incredulity towards metanarratives.

⁵³Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996).

news for all. It provides the fulfillment of the longings and aspirations of all peoples. It embodies the truth--the truth of and for all humankind.⁵⁴

Others are not as cautious. In an attempt to communicate meaningfully with postmoderns, they attempt to frame the Christian message in terms that are conducive to the mood. The intention is laudable, but the execution is sometimes naïve and imperceptive. Welcoming its repudiation of modernism's noeticentrism and ignoring or ameliorating the underlying assertions of postmodernism, they remove elements that are essential to the gospel. Not least of these is the notion of the *proclamation* of the truth. While many have ignored the philosophical foundations of postmodernism, James Smith has attempted to reinterpret the architects of its epistemology.⁵⁵ He believes that their critique of the assumptions of modernism assist the church to return to the proclamation of the gospel and suggests that one "abandon not only foundationalist epistemology but also forms of religion that have hitched their wagon to the Cartesian train."⁵⁶

One's evaluation of the current situation needs to be clear-headed.

Postmodernism is not as pervasive as some have assumed. D. A. Carson notes (ironically) that "while 'postmodernism' is virulently healthy in North America . . . as a category in France it is largely dead."⁵⁷ In his book *The Glory of Preaching*, Darrell Johnson draws attention to his failure to refer to postmodernity "in any serious way."⁵⁸

⁵⁴Ibid., 165.

⁵⁵James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

⁵⁶Ibid., 118.

⁵⁷D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 87.

⁵⁸Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God's Transformation of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 224.

He then explains his reticence. As one who teaches and preaches in what he terms a “post everything Vancouver,” he is acutely aware of the postmodern climate. In spite of this awareness, or perhaps because of it, he contends that the postmodern construct is an interim construct, and concludes, “We need not give in to the pressure of having to jerk our whole understanding of preaching around to accommodate what cannot finally sustain itself.”⁵⁹ He also notes, in the same vein as Carson, that postmodernism is not as pervasive as some imagine.⁶⁰ Johnson takes note of James Turner’s insightful analysis of the way in which modernity’s “defenders of God slowly strangled him” and warns of the danger of a similar accommodation to postmodernism.⁶¹

In dialoging with any ideology that questions or challenges the gospel there is the very real possibility that we may “fall in” to that ideology. . . . In trying to make Jesus and his gospel make sense to worldviews out of sync with Jesus and his gospel, it is possible to subtly undermine the gospel. I fear that this is happening more than we care to know in the present rush to make the gospel comprehensible to the postmodern frame of reference.⁶²

It is nevertheless essential to the nature of preaching that the message be addressed to people in the context in which they live their lives. This homiletical necessity has several implications for those who wish to remain faithful to the gospel. In order to faithfully *communicate* the gospel, one needs to be sensitive to the predispositions of one’s hearers. Grenz not only welcomed the postmodern critique of modernism, but also expressed the need to “embody and articulate the never-changing good news of available salvation in a manner that the emerging generation can

⁵⁹Ibid., 225.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., 227-30; James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

⁶²Ibid., 226-27.

understand.”⁶³ He argued that in order to resonate with the longings and concerns of the emerging generation, the gospel ought to be articulated in post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic, and post-noeticentric terms. He saw this restatement more as a rediscovery of essential gospel emphases than as an abandonment of biblical truth.

Graham Johnston, who is no admirer of postmodernism, also calls for appropriate involvement which includes “entering into the listener’s sphere of postmodern understanding.”⁶⁴ While basic human needs have not changed, perceptions have been “recalibrated.” He observes that the question of truth is no longer uppermost in the postmodern’s mind and we can no longer presume the Bible’s relevancy. Since postmodernity has leveled all authorities, it is important that preachers involve listeners by showing more of their process. He advocates a more inductive structure, narration, and a more dialogical approach.⁶⁵ Like Grenz, Johnston does not wish to compromise the message itself. He emphasizes “the difference in breaking down a message to make it clear and accessible and watering down a message to make it palatable.”⁶⁶

One nevertheless has to take seriously the fact that the methods that are employed in proclaiming the gospel are, in large measure, determined by the gospel itself. The gospel is addressed, in the first place, to the trans-generational constants in the human condition. If it is true that the claims of the gospel conflict with the main assumptions of postmodernism, then the faithful proclamation of the gospel will, sooner

⁶³Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 174.

⁶⁴Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-First Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 67.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 73-75.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 122.

or later, be in conflict with the ideas on which postmodernism is postulated. This incongruence means that “at this crucial time of cultural and intellectual transition, the task of preaching must be understood as an apologetic calling.”⁶⁷ Having made this point, Mohler is quick to point out that “a proper Christian apologetic begins in spiritual concern, not in intellectual snobbery or scorn.”⁶⁸

Alister McGrath sees the importance of timing, especially in relation to the presentation of truth claims. He points out that “Christianity is profoundly *attractive*,” and suggests that one ought first to establish the attractiveness and relevance of God before addressing the question of truth. Of course, by doing so, one is presenting important aspects of truth.

This is an instance of a situation in which the apologist must adopt a tactical approach, in order to gain a strategic advantage. No Christian will wish to abandon a passionate commitment to the truth; nevertheless, the postmodern situation demands that Christian truth claims be, for purely tactical reasons, relegated to the background temporarily, in order to commend the claims of Christianity on grounds more acceptable within the postmodern world-view. Once the thin edge of this apologetic wedge has penetrated the postmodern citadel, the truth-claims inherent within Christian faith may begin to make their presence felt, and their validity obvious.⁶⁹

Like Mohler, McGrath is more interested in winning people to Christ than in winning arguments. This motivation will not allow either to compromise his commitment to the gospel. It would be counter-productive to engage the stereotypical postmodern person, whose knowledge of Jesus is sketchy, in a quasi-philosophical debate on the nature of truth and absolutes. In the words of Johnston, this approach allows “*the*

⁶⁷Mohler, *He Is Not Silent*, 123.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 124.

⁶⁹Alister E. McGrath, *Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 225-26.

listener to reserve judgment upon the Bible in order to give the biblical message a hearing.”⁷⁰

Was this not what Paul did when he addressed the meeting of the Areopagus? He occupied as much neutral ground as he possibly could. Yet at no point did he present himself as a religious pluralist or as syncretist. The God whom he proclaimed was “God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” His was clearly a “tactical” approach, but he did not withhold the essential message of the resurrection, even in a situation where this was likely to occasion opposition and derision (Acts 17:22-31).

While this approach would not necessarily rule out deductive preaching, inductive preaching certainly lends itself to communication with postmoderns. Sermons should be structured, but the structure ought not to protrude. Clarity remains imperative, but this ought not to be confused with seemingly contrived alliterative points. The need to prove every statement in terms of deductive logic may have been more conducive to modernity than to postmodernity, but even then it may have given the sermon too rationalistic a quality.

The particular audience. Consideration of the general social milieu needs to be complemented by one’s knowledge of the particular audience that is being addressed. Demographic differences will mean that there could be considerable dissimilarities between two congregations within the same city or, for that matter, the same suburb. Even in the most socially homogeneous of audiences, people are at different stages spiritually.

⁷⁰Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 88.

Audience analysis should commence with broad questions regarding the locale, the occasion, and the audience’s knowledge of the gospel. Darrell Johnson identifies four basic contexts in which gospel proclamation might occur.⁷¹ By means of a simple table, he juxtaposes the setting of the preaching event and the extent of the audience’s familiarity with the gospel. Every sermon is preached either in a “sacred space” or a more secular setting. Similarly, every sermon is preached to people who have some gospel knowledge or to those who have no gospel knowledge. His simple but helpful classification is contained in Table 1.

Table 1. The different contexts in which the communication of the gospel might occur

| | | | |
|-----|---|------|---|
| I. | In an intentionally sacred space Some gospel knowledge | III. | Not in an intentionally sacred space Some gospel knowledge |
| II. | In an intentionally sacred space No gospel knowledge | IV. | Not in an intentionally sacred space No gospel knowledge |

Reality is more nuanced than is depicted in this table, but Johnson’s distinctions are the correct place to start. Within the category of believer, one may attempt to ascertain the receptivity level to the truth in general and to the particular truth being taught. One could also inquire about the extent to which a believing community is influenced by the worldview of the community at large. One may ask similar questions concerning non-believers to whom one preaches. What are their underlying assumptions? How familiar are they with the gospel? How amenable are they to the

⁷¹Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching*, 78.

Christian message? Once these questions have been considered, one is in a position to proceed to a more detailed investigation.

To assist in understanding the particular audience whom one is addressing, Keith Willhite advocates general, local, and particular analyses.⁷² He asserts the importance of viewing the sermon from the pew's perspective. He reminds us, "We are not making God's Word relevant, for it already *is* relevant. . . . We seek to *demonstrate* that it is relevant."⁷³ The Word of God is relevant, but it is the listeners who determine whether or not *a sermon* is relevant. Various polls and sociological studies can help one to understand the general climate. Each area has its own idiosyncrasies. Surveys can assist one to understand the particular audience one addresses Sunday by Sunday, but nothing is more important than associating with and talking to the people among whom one ministers. He suggests the use of application grids containing people's names.⁷⁴

Willhite's approach is taken a step further by Craig Smith, who advocates "collaborative preaching" as a means of addressing one's congregation with greater relevance.⁷⁵ Instead of simply imagining people sitting around him as he prepared his sermons, he established a focus group as a sounding board for his own ideas. Since visual learners, oral learners, and contemplative learners perceive differently, he ensures that the group is representative. The cohort helps him to understand how people might experience a text, to hear the language of their respective communities, and even to

⁷²Keith Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 24-25.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 26.

⁷⁵Craig A. Smith, "Collaborative Preaching: Gathering Other Voices in Sermon Preparation," *Preaching* 26, no. 1 (2010): 20-22.

provide illustrations. He attributes the success of this method largely to the firsthand insight it provides *before* the sermon. Smith does not engage in collaborative preaching every week and would not recommend it. Nevertheless, our preaching is bound to benefit by some form of collaboration with those to whom it is addressed.

Modes of Communicating

The fact that over thirty verbs are used to describe forms of the ministry of the word implies that preaching will take different forms, depending largely on the occasion, the purpose, and the particular giftedness of the preacher.⁷⁶ No doubt certain of these words are virtually synonymous, but they do connote nuances in the mode of communicating. Although there may well be an element of explanation or argument in gospel proclamation, one expects to hear the overt declaration associated with the *kerygma* when a passage with an evangelistic thrust is being expounded. On the other hand, “proclamation” is hardly the right mode to expound a passage in which Paul is making a personal appeal to the Galatian or the Corinthian Christians. We would expect the mode of exhortation and appeal.

One ought not to be too specific in our determination of the meaning of these verbs. Each of the words, as used in the New Testament, has a range of meaning. While they describe discernibly different modes of communicating, several modes may be present in a single sermon. Since any one sermon is likely to contain a number of modes of address, over-analysis would be difficult and seems pointless. The combination of these verbs to describe the preaching event in the New Testament itself cautions one

⁷⁶Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1996), 75.

against the tendency to be over-specific in identifying which mode of communication is operative when a sermon is being preached (Acts 2:40; 17:2, 3; Col 1:28; 2 Tim 4:1-5). It may nevertheless be helpful to identify a *dominant* mode of communicating for a particular sermon.

Giftedness

Proposing that preachers employ a variety of sermon structures and styles of delivery does not suggest that they should move beyond the areas of their giftedness. If God distributes gifts among the members of the body of Christ, it is better to recognize and employ these gifts than to expect preachers to engage in forms of ministry to which they are unsuited (1 Cor 12:4-6, 28-30; Eph 4: 11-13). Adam sees preaching as only one form of the ministry of the Word and warns us against forcing preaching to “carry a load which it cannot bear; that is the burden of doing all that the Bible expects of every form of ministry of the Word.”⁷⁷ By recognizing and employing the gifts that God has placed within his church, we are able to deploy ministers of the Word in the areas of their giftedness. The variety envisaged within a single ministry involves the development and maximization of our gifts rather than the attempted appropriation of ministries to which God has not called us.

Proposal: An Organic Rather than a Mechanical Approach

If the sole purpose of variety in the structure and delivery of sermons is to create interest or to relieve boredom, a table of options and permutations might help to achieve this purpose. An elaborate system could be devised taking account of such

⁷⁷Ibid., 59.

matters as type of content, mode of communicating, directional flow, structural type, and psychological approach. Preachers could then select what they deemed to be the most suitable structure in which to package the factual material quarried during the exegetical phase of sermon preparation.

At the outset of the project, I anticipated that I might develop a matrix that would serve to identify a number of options from which one could select the most appropriate structure for a particular sermon. In agreement with John Broadus, I accepted that no listing could be complete and that many types of sermon outlines have yet to be discovered.⁷⁸ Upon reflection, it became clear that such a system might succeed in creating a superficial variety while preserving an essential similarity. The desired kind of variety needs to be organic rather than mechanical. As different as a dramatic monologue is from a deductively-developed sermon outline, variation of form alone does not obviate monotony, nor does it necessarily serve the proclamation of the truth.

Such an approach presents four major dangers. First, the procedure seems contrived and mechanical. Producing a grid of stylistic options and permutations is to Homiletics what casuistry is to ethics. Second, one could easily fall prey to the same disadvantages as the practice of squeezing ideational matter into a standard mold. Even with a multiplicity of molds, one could perpetuate the disjunction between the genre of the passage and the structure of the sermon. Third, an overemphasis on sermonic form could develop into a rhetorical obsession and a preoccupation with sermonic artistry. A focus on contrived forms could well place an unhealthy emphasis on the skill of the preacher as a rhetorician. One must heed James Denney's warning: "No man can bear

⁷⁸Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 74.

witness to Christ and himself at the same time. No man can at once give the impression that he is clever and that Christ is mighty to save.”⁷⁹ The role of form is to make truth more accessible rather than to draw attention to itself. Fourth, the sermon’s design could be something of an afterthought. Thomas Long identifies the disadvantage of predetermining a number of sermon categories, whatever the precise shape of the matrix.

The prevailing notion was that the preacher possessed an arsenal of sermon structure options (often designated by catchy labels such as “The Jewel” or “The Ladder”) into which the content of almost any sermon could be poured, like gelatin into a mold. There was encouragement, of course, to match the sermon content to the most amenable prefabricated shape, but this could never quite hide the fact that content and design were developed independently and according to differing criteria: biblical-theological vs. rhetorical.⁸⁰

Long’s interest is that “content and structure in a sermon *combine* to produce a communication effect greater than their sum.” He advocates “a lively interaction between form and content to the point that it becomes no longer meaningful to speak of ‘form’ and ‘content’ as independent realities; rather, the whole sermon can be considered as ‘the form of the content.’”⁸¹

The adoption of an organic approach has implications for the process of preparation. In particular, three areas need to be accorded more intentional consideration. It is helpful to incorporate audience analysis as a conscious step and not merely as a subconscious orientation. The purpose statement, which is usually conceptual, can be expanded to take account of affective, behavioral, and visionary perspectives. Instead of regarding structural determination as a secondary matter, it ought to receive serious

⁷⁹Quoted in Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson, *Preaching that Connects: Using Journalistic Techniques to Add Impact* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 20.

⁸⁰Thomas G. Long, “Shaping Sermons by Plotting the Text’s Claim Upon Us,” in *Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 84.

⁸¹Ibid.

consideration with appropriate regard for the genre and intent of the passage. These adjustments have been incorporated in my process of preparation and are depicted in Appendix 2.

Throughout the entire process, the leading of the Holy Spirit is crucial in the selection of material, the shape of the sermon and the mood of the preacher. A passage can be expounded in many different ways and the preacher's tone can either enhance or detract from the message. The influence of the Spirit and the personality and giftedness of a preacher are important co-determinants in the rich variety that is available when God's Word is faithfully proclaimed. Heeding his prompting will, on occasion, mean that one breaks with personal preference and normal convention. Variety can only be a means to an end, never an end in itself, and it can only be meaningful if it serves to draw the hearers into the world of the passage. After all, the variety envisaged in this project is variety in *expository* preaching.

CHAPTER 4

TESTING THE THEORETICAL PROPOSAL

In the series of sermons preached from 7 February to 2 May 2010, I attempted to implement the organic approach identified in chapter 3. The matrix I had used prior to the project set out various options and helped to monitor sermons, but did little to actually *facilitate* meaningful variety in preaching. Usually it was used retrospectively for sermon analysis. During the project I sought to relate sermon structure more directly to the biblical passages themselves. The intention was for the sermon to achieve in the Sunday service what the passage achieved in its biblical setting.

The Project

The project comprised a series of twelve sermons preached to Sunday morning congregations, two pre-series seminars, and a debriefing seminar presided over by Kenton Anderson, Associate Professor of Homiletics at Northwest Baptist Seminary in Langley, British Columbia.

The Evaluators

The sermons were evaluated at two levels. The first level involved a group of six people who comprise the ministry staff of the church (five pastors and a children's ministry coordinator). Staff members were requested to evaluate all twelve of the sermons. In addition to the completion of questionnaires, each of the sermons was

discussed at the weekly staff meeting. The discussions covered not only the content and design of the sermon, but also the perceived response of the audience. These weekly debriefing sessions included suggestions on factors that could have made the sermon more accessible to people of different age groups and levels of spiritual maturity. We routinely considered the relationship between the form of the passage and that of the sermon.

A wider circle of forty-eight members, representative of the congregation as a whole, was consulted to ascertain whether the greater variety in sermon structure and delivery made the truth of the text more accessible to them. The sermons were apportioned among the participants in such a way as to ensure that each respondent evaluated three sermons. This meant that each sermon in the series was assessed by at least sixteen persons (six staff members and a minimum of ten congregants).

The attendance at the seminars was encouraging. In addition to the ministry staff, thirty-two other participants attended the first seminar, thirty-four attended the second seminar, and thirty-three attended the post-series debriefing seminar.

The Seminar on the Nature of Expository Preaching

Not surprisingly, sermon evaluations undertaken in connection with Applied Ministry Experience courses revealed uncertainty regarding the nature of expository preaching. In the first of the two pre-series seminars, expository preaching was defined and discussed. An outline indicating the contents of the seminar is contained in Appendix 3. In addition to the definition, particular attention was paid to two chasms that need to be bridged in preaching: (1) the chasm that exists between the exegesis of the

passage and the exposition of that passage in a sermon; and (2) the chasm that exists between the biblical world and the contemporary world. In particular, the approaches of Haddon Robinson, John Stott, and Walter Kaiser were considered. The path from the study to the pulpit was outlined, with emphasis on the identification of exegetical and homiletical ideas and a purpose statement. Consideration was also given to some key questions, namely: the locus of authority, the employment of applicational language, the use and abuse of rhetoric, and the importance of Christocentric preaching. By identifying the major theses of Graeme Goldsworthy, Sidney Greidanus and Bryan Chapell, it was possible to emphasize the importance of relating every sermon to the theme of redemption.

I employed PowerPoint presentations in order to assist participants to visualize the bridging of gaps and the process from the study to the pulpit. The seminar was designed primarily for the ministry staff and may have contained too much information for lay participants. Nevertheless, several claimed to have found it interesting and helpful and believed that the information provided would assist them in their responses to the questionnaires.

The Seminar on the Importance of Variety in Expository Preaching

In the second seminar, participants considered the need for variety in expository preaching. An outline indicating the contents of the seminar is contained in Appendix 4. A distinction was drawn between superficial or “cosmetic” variety and more essential variety. This entailed a discussion of sermon structure in general and the consideration of some of the proposals associated with the New Homiletic. We

recognized the importance of matters such as genre, inductive and deductive movement, possible patterns, modes of communicating, and the psychological approach adopted in the presentation. In addition, we paid attention to audience analysis. This entailed a consideration of shifts in the way we assimilate knowledge and the impact of postmodernism on sermon structure and delivery. We audited and critiqued one of Eugene Lowry's sermons.¹ Finally, we juxtaposed the permutations proposed by a number of preachers and homileticians to indicate the kind of variation that is possible, acknowledging the limitations of any such matrix. We recognized the importance of sensitivity to the Holy Spirit throughout the process of preparation and delivery. There was a general consensus that variety that is appropriate to expository preaching is best achieved when the *form* of the passage is taken into account as well as its content, and there is intentional sensitivity to the nature and the needs of the audience. It is at the conjunction of these factors that appropriate sermon structure arises.

The Post-Series Debriefing Seminar

Thirty-three of the evaluators attended the debriefing seminar facilitated by Kenton Anderson. Anderson had been requested to place the subject of variety in preaching into perspective and to introduce his book, *Choosing to Preach*.² First, we were able to review the series and discuss some of the insights I and others had gained from the project. This led naturally to Anderson's explanation of his use of David Kolb's

¹Lowry's sermon, entitled "Down the Up Staircase" (Matt 18:22-35), is an example of narrative exposition.

²Kenton C. Anderson, *Choosing to Preach: A Comprehensive Introduction to Sermon Options and Structures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

experiential learning model in the formation of his own methodology.³ Those in attendance appreciated his frankness and openness. It was particularly gratifying to witness the interaction and to hear the perceptive questions and comments of the laypersons who had participated in the project. The seminar was a fitting conclusion to a three-month commitment on the part of the evaluators. One of the most useful aspects of the seminar was its practical emphasis. Anderson was the guest preacher at the service on the following Sunday morning. He explained at the seminar what he proposed to do in the sermon, making it possible for participants to observe and experience the practical outworking of his proposals.⁴

Variety in the Twelve Sermons

Considered together, the sermons depict the early church's effective witness to the gospel. A brief synopsis of the sermons, with emphasis on their structural features, is contained in Appendix 5. One of the major aims of the series was to enable the hearers to feel a sense of excitement at what God did, by his Spirit, through the church. By virtue of the subject matter, it was possible to reaffirm the essentials of the gospel and the missionary nature of the church. The twelve-sermon series was preceded by a general introduction to the Acts. In order to make this accessible to a Sunday morning congregation, I attempted to weave introductory material into the account of Gamaliel's advice to the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:27-42). Despite the largely narrative nature of the Acts,

³Ibid., 48, 235-60.

⁴The sermon Anderson preached was entitled "We Love Justice; Jesus Just Loves." It was an exposition of 1 Pet 2:18-25 and exemplified his integrative approach.

it was possible, in several of the sermons, to follow deductive outlines with clearly enunciated points.⁵

Although I have occasionally employed first person narrative sermons, I am not entirely comfortable with this approach. It certainly provides a fresh perspective on events and, correctly used, can be a valid means of expounding a passage. It can, however, seem unnatural and is generally more suited to the stage than the pulpit. It is possible to narrate a story from the perspective of one of the characters in an account (for example, the lame man at the temple gate [Acts 3:1-10]) without actually resorting to first person narrative. In one of the sermons, I was able to employ two of my colleagues in a dramatic scene to depict the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas and then to draw important inferences from the event and its sequel (Acts 15:26-31).

The Survey

Two distinct questionnaires were developed, one for the ministry staff and the other for representatives of the congregation. These are contained in Appendixes 6 and 7 respectively. Both were simple and sought to ascertain (1) whether the sermon explained the meaning of the passage under consideration, (2) whether the arrangement of the material in the sermon was appropriate to the exposition of the passage, (3) whether the presentation of the sermon helped to hold the hearers' interest and engaged them, (4) whether the sermon enabled the hearers to understand the relevance of the passage for life today, and (5) whether the tone of the presentation was appropriate to the sermon's message.

⁵A textual sermon preached on Acts 1:8, a sermon on the characteristics of the primitive church (Acts 2:42-47), an apologetic sermon on Acts 4:12, and a sermon on the missional approach of the church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3).

The major points of difference between the questionnaires were determined largely by the greater familiarity of the ministry staff with homiletical concepts. It seemed unnecessary to acquire demographic information from the small group of pastors. It was appropriate to ask them questions about exegetical work, purpose, deductive and inductive movement, tone (or psychological approach), the sermon's suitability to a postmodern audience, and its accessibility to those who are young in the faith. Pastors were also asked to comment on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each sermon's structure and its delivery.

It was necessary, in the questionnaire submitted to the sample of church members, to seek to ascertain general impressions without assuming the participants' familiarity with concepts like deductive and inductive movement or the homiletical process followed in preaching. I sought to determine whether the sermon was *experienced* as an inductive or deductive sermon without employing the terms. Although no comment was requested from the group of congregational representatives, several volunteered helpful observations.

Evaluation by the Staff Members

The results shown here are averages derived from the responses to all twelve sermons. Despite the limitations in a report as general as this one, the overall response to all twelve sermons does provide a means of ascertaining whether, on the whole, the sermons were regarded as expository and whether appropriate variety was employed. In the nature of the case, the percentages recorded here reflect responses rather than respondents.

Exposition and variety. The first two questions sought to establish whether the sermon was, in fact, derived from the passage being expounded and whether thorough exegetical work had been done. Seventy-one percent indicated strong agreement, and 26 percent indicated agreement that the sermons were derived directly from the passages being expounded, but 3 percent expressed uncertainty. Seventy-four percent of the responses indicated strong agreement and 26 percent indicated agreement that it was evident that thorough exegetical work had been done in the preparation of the sermons.

Questions 3 to 6 probed homiletical issues such as the purposes of the sermons and whether their structures and the tone of their presentation were appropriate to their perceived purposes. Seventy-one percent indicated strong agreement, and 22 percent agreement, that it was possible to identify the purposes of the sermons, while 7 percent indicated uncertainty. Question 4 attempted to ascertain whether a sermon was considered to be inductive or deductive. Since each sermon is arranged differently, reporting an average for all twelve sermons is of limited value. It is nevertheless possible to derive a general impression. The ministry staff considered most of the sermons (63 percent) to be inductive. Thirty-four percent were considered deductive. Only 3 percent of the responses indicated uncertainty.

The response to the inquiry about the correlation of the sermon's structure and its purpose is of particular significance. Fifty percent of the responses indicated strong agreement and 43 percent indicated agreement that the structures of the sermons were appropriate to the purposes of the sermons. Seven percent were uncertain. Most of the responses indicated that the tone of the presentations was appropriate to the purposes of the sermons (53 percent strongly agreed and 46 percent agreed, and 1 percent disagreed).

Questions 7 and 8 inquired whether the way in which the sermons were structured and delivered made them suitable to postmodern audiences and to those who are young in the faith. The questions are relevant for two main reasons. First, I spent my formative years and received my schooling and undergraduate education in an environment shaped largely by the assumptions of modernity. Second, I tend to include material in my sermons that may place them beyond the reach of some who are new to the faith. This inclination is a shortcoming which I am attempting to correct. The goal is not to eliminate “solid food” from the messages, but to ensure that it is accessible to those who are young in the faith. The evaluators included a youth pastor, a children’s ministry coordinator, and a pastor to young families. All three were educated in Western Canada and serve constituencies that have been affected by a postmodern climate of thought.

In the second pre-series seminar, we identified factors such as an inductive structure, avoiding the impression of dogmatism, and a more dialogical approach as generally suitable to postmodern audiences. Seventy percent of the responses indicated that in terms of structure and delivery, the sermons were accessible to postmodern audiences, but 24 percent believed that they were more suited to modern audiences, and 6 percent expressed uncertainty. Over 80 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that the sermons were comprehensible to the young in faith (21 percent strongly agreed and 61 percent agreed). Only 1 percent expressed disagreement, but 17 percent expressed uncertainty. While I cannot second-guess the respondents, it seems reasonable to deduce, in view of the straightforward nature of the statement, that a declaration of uncertainty may well have been a tactful way of indicating that some of the sermons were considered inaccessible to the young in faith.

Strengths and weaknesses. The most fundamental difference between the two sets of questionnaires was the requirement in the staff questionnaire to specify each sermon's main strength and weakness, both in terms of structure and of delivery (questions 9-12).

In respect of the structure of the first sermon, "The Kingdom Agenda" (Acts 1:8), most of the respondents believed that the introduction captured attention and created a sense of anticipation. The structural weaknesses noted were that the momentum of the sermon slowed and that the points were not articulated clearly enough to enable hearers who may have lost attention to rejoin the sermon. Respondents commented positively on the change of tone, using words such as "gravitas," "gentle," "strong," "empathetic," and "engaging." Two noted that the illustrations contained non-essential details.

The second sermon, "When the Spirit Takes Charge" (Acts 2:1-41), consisted largely of the narration of the events of Pentecost but included several inferences drawn from the Spirit's sovereignty. Most respondents appreciated the way in which the events were recounted. They valued both the explanation of the events and the momentum towards a main point with some implications for the congregation. It was noted by two of the respondents that the first implication was announced and developed but that the remaining implications were not as clear or as fully covered. One respondent believed that I had assumed that "each hearer believed already the Scripture is truth" and that they knew "who the Holy Spirit is." Several commented that the delivery helped create a sense of excitement and that the inclusion of a personal illustration established rapport between preacher and audience. There was a perceived change from an authoritative to a more intimate and conversational tone. Comments relative to the conclusion differed but

indicate a weakness. One believed it was sudden and another that there could have been a greater sense of urgency or passion.

The passage on which the third sermon was based (Acts 2:42-47) lent itself to a deductive sermon arrangement with clearly-articulated points. Entitled “The DNA of a Vibrant Church,” it highlighted the commendable attributes of the Jerusalem church. In terms of structure, several commented that the points and sub-points were clear and well illustrated. Two thought there was too much content and one that the transitions could have been stronger. As regards delivery, the common thread running through the responses was that there was enthusiasm and passion. One respondent commented that this was a “conversational, relaxed delivery that brought the message to the people--not like a lecture, more like a chat.” It seemed significant that “enthusiasm,” “passion,” “yearning,” and “urgency” were deemed to be compatible with a “relaxed and conversational” delivery. Comments from the two youngest members of the team combined to form a pertinent observation. One commented, “I found your greatest weakness to also to be a strength: there was a passiveness in your exhortation which I found to be a gentle nudge towards ‘Christian community’ as well as a missed opportunity to passionately implore the church towards it.” The other commented, “I liked how the points were stated: ‘We can . . . ,’ rather than, ‘We should. . . .’ since this indicated opportunity rather than obligation.” These observations were significant since I had purposely decided to let the depiction of the Jerusalem church’s devotion constitute the challenge rather than attempt to drive the point home. I believed that a strongly imperative tone *in this sermon* could have weakened the challenge of the text itself.

In the fourth sermon, based upon the healing of the congenital cripple at the temple gate and its immediate sequel (Acts 3:1-4:4), I returned to a more narrative approach. The respondents saw the inductive movement of the sermon as a structural strength. No structural weakness was noted, but there was a comment on the abruptness of the conclusion. One respondent saw this as an “abbreviated finish.” The delivery was perceived to be engaging, involving the audience in the event. Our children’s ministry coordinator suggested that I could have connected more casually with the congregation and there was a general impression that the sermon was rushed in parts, perhaps due to time constraints.

The strongly apologetic tone of the fifth sermon on Acts 4:12 helped to determine its structure. The title “No Other Name: What about Tolerance?” served notice that the sermon would be intentionally provocative. There was favorable comment on the deliberate repetition of the verse as the homiletical idea of the sermon. One pastor expressed the view that “the tone overall created the space for the hearer to grapple with the material as opposed to being told,” but another believed that the sermon “answered the questions that automatically come when reading a passage like this.” Two of the respondents commented on an apparent disjunction in the sermon, one stating, “You seemed to leave the story behind in the second half of the message. In some ways it felt almost like two sermons.” The general consensus was that the delivery balanced openness with conviction.

A “subversive” approach can, of course, be dangerous but it is probably more dangerous to ignore such issues in the time and place in which we live. I was careful to leave hearers in no doubt about the reasons for the exclusivity of salvation through Jesus.

Our youth pastor commented that the “postmodern element” *may* have caused difficulty for the modern thinkers. To the contrary, many “modern” thinkers expressed appreciation for the way in which the sermon was structured and delivered.

The sixth sermon in the series focused on the forthright refusal of the apostles to heed the Sanhedrin’s command “not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). The intention was to show that silence was not considered an option for the apostles, nor can it be considered an option for us, since we are entrusted with the same gospel. There was a consensus that the sermon was clear and uncomplicated. There was also a favorable comment on the movement in the sermon from “silence is golden” to “silence is not an option,” and the repetition of the main idea towards the end of the sermon. Yet the same respondent noted that while there was progression in the sermon, it was difficult to relate the parts to the whole. Another made the observation, “If it was a sermon with one main idea, great job; if there were more points, they were lost on me.” In different ways, both of these critical comments identified accurately what I had intended in the sermon. There was agreement that the tone was gracious and constructive, encouraging witness rather than creating a sense of guilt for our lack of witness. One respondent appreciated the dialogical technique of advising Peter to adopt a more cautious approach and then countering that advice.

The seventh sermon in the series, entitled “The Impossibility of Confining the God of Glory,” was included for two main reasons. First, it marks a significant turning point in the forward march of the church. Second, Stephen recounts portions of Old Testament history in such a way as to present a picture of the “God of glory” that contrasts strongly with restrictive picture of God current among the members of the

Sanhedrin. Although this was a narrative sermon, the evaluators all found the articulation of specific points to be helpful and expressed appreciation for the “balance of retelling the story *and* bringing out key points.” One of the pastors believed that a fuller introduction, in which I explained the purpose of the sermon, would have been beneficial. Another believed that too much time had been spent on the concept of “the God of glory.” Significantly, I had come to the same conclusion before reading their comments. Four of the six respondents remarked either on the passion or the sincerity with which the sermon was delivered. One of my colleagues commented on the helpfulness of the gestures and the use of the voice in conveying the meaning of the sermon. This seemed significant since I never pre-plan factors such as volume, pitch, or gestures.

The eighth sermon combined inductive and deductive movement as it described the entire account leading to Peter’s proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles gathered in Cornelius’ house (Acts 10:1-11:18). The projection of a single PowerPoint slide to illustrate the power of a paradigm was deemed helpful.⁶ There was also consensus that it was easy to listen to the sermon. A reservation expressed was that a stranger may have deduced from the early reference to Stephen Covey that this was to be a “self-help” sermon, but that “as the sermon progressed it was very clear that it was exegetically based.” In respect of the delivery, there was a general sense that the descriptions were graphic and brought the hearers into the story. One of the pastors noted that the use of humor had contributed to the effectiveness of the sermon. Another felt the introduction was weak and was uncertain about the value of recounting the story.

⁶Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 26. The illustration is a single sketch in which can be seen either an elegant young woman or a grotesque old witch, depending on the visual perspective of the viewer.

Perhaps the most pertinent observation was that I sometimes apologize for needing to take a “theological” interlude thereby inadvertently “creating an impression [I am] trying to avoid.”

The ninth sermon identified the magnanimous spirit that characterized the church at Antioch (Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3). Although there was some narrative material, the fact that one was identifying exemplary characteristics required a deductive arrangement. All of the pastors identified this as a deductive sermon and believed that the structure suited the sermon well and provided a roadmap for the listeners. One observed that there was a “simple progression of points with exposition of Scripture, explanation, some illustration and application within each point.” He did, however, feel that repetition of the main points would have added to the clarity of the sermon. There were comments on the “visionary” nature of the sermon and its value for the church. The freedom from notes received favorable mention. A comment that the illustrations were “woven into the fabric of the sermon without the realization that an illustration was coming” was significant since this integration was intentional. Interestingly, the oldest of the pastors believed that there was a strong challenge but appreciated the positive, uncritical delivery, while the youngest believed that a more corrective, rebuking tone would have been appropriate.

The purpose in the tenth sermon was not so much to tell the story of the Jerusalem Council as to highlight the relevance of the issues that were resolved at the meeting (Acts 15:1-21). I attempted to do so by embedding the important issues in the dramatic events before and during the Council. There was general agreement that the structure helped make the issues accessible to the congregation. In particular, the

evaluators noted that the sermon moved towards an important climax: “For salvation, it’s Jesus . . . *plus nothing!*” The only structural weakness observed was that too much time may have been “spent directly within the text.” The sermon was, in fact, applied at several points, but the respondent was apparently referring to the lack of direct prescription. In terms of delivery, some commented favorably on its directness and the appropriate body language. One of the pastors suggested that the sermon could have been strengthened by more illustrations and modern analogies, and another that one of the illustrations would have been well served by a PowerPoint presentation.

Two of my colleagues assisted me with the eleventh sermon, which depicted the breach between Paul and Barnabas over Mark (Acts 15:36-41). To increase the surprise element in the sermon, I emphasized the exceptionally good relationship between the two apostolic partners prior to the event. I prepared a brief script, in which I attempted to present the personalities and a rationale for both positions. There were a number of enthusiastic comments from members of the congregation, who claimed not only to have grasped the issues, but also to have understood how conflict can arise even between those who are committed to the Lord and his work. The arrangement had the effect of creating interest in the subsequent rapprochement between the apostles. Showing the intensity of the disagreement and then highlighting Paul’s subsequent commendatory comments regarding both Barnabas and Mark had the effect of encouraging believers, where necessary, to reconcile.

There was general agreement among the assessors that the progression within the sermon from a shocking conflict to an implicit reconciliation was most effective. One of the pastors appreciated that there was less history and background and more

application. In reality, there was probably more background information in this sermon than in most, but it was not identified as such on account of the unusual approach. In terms of delivery, my two colleagues were exceptional in conveying the conflict between Paul and Barnabas. There were comments about the appropriateness of the introduction and the “creativity in experiencing the Scriptures.” One of the pastors suggested that a contemporary illustration of a resolved conflict would have strengthened the message.

The final sermon, “Is conversion still necessary,” contrasted the conversion of Lydia with those of the fortune-telling slave-girl (implied), and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:1-40). In the nature of the case, this was a narrative sermon, but contained a strong doctrinal element and an evangelistic application. The assessors commented on the clarity provided by a “well laid out” structure and the strong application. One commented that some of the detail was not relevant to the thrust of the sermon and another that more time could have been spent on the application at the end of the sermon. As regards the delivery, there were favorable comments on the authenticity, humility, the conversational style, and the helpfulness of the stories. A pastor, who is usually critical of the conclusions, remarked that this conclusion was exceptional, “bringing everything together.”

When taken together, the responses affirmed the expository nature of the sermons and the general suitability of the structure and delivery to the content of the passage at hand. There were recurrent statements about enthusiasm, variety, and conviction. The main weaknesses identified both in the survey and in the weekly discussions were the inclusion of unnecessary content, the fact that the enthusiasm was not always sustained, and the perception that the conclusion was sometimes rushed.

The perusal of the comments of my colleagues led to an unexpected outcome. It was not difficult to ascertain their personal preferences on account of recurring statements over the course of the series. Since I know them, it is possible to relate these, in some measure, to their respective dispositions. When one realizes that the average congregation consists of people who process information in different ways and have their own preferences, the need for creativity becomes evident. By virtue of training, if not disposition, the average pastor is probably more cerebral than many in the congregation. This easily leads to an inclination towards a logical, “left brain” approach that may make sermons inaccessible to many in the congregation. While preachers have to be true to their own calling and giftedness, an overly cerebral inclination may need to be moderated by a more intentionally affective approach.

Evaluation by a Representative Sample of Church Members

The questionnaire completed by the sample of church members served three related purposes. First, I wished to ascertain whether it was clear to the respondents that the sermon was an accurate exposition of the passage under consideration. Second, I wished to determine whether the sermon’s structure and delivery helped to convey its message. Third, by correlating demographic information with responses, I attempted to establish the extent to which the responses were influenced by age, duration as a committed Christian, and education. It is best to ascertain the general response of the forty-eight respondents to all twelve of the sermons before attempting more specific analyses.

The responses in general. The first three questions related to age, period of time as a committed Christian, and education. In keeping with the demographic of the congregation, 57 percent of the participants were in the 60 and over age category, 31 percent were in the 40-59 age category, 8 percent were in the 30-40 age category, and 4 percent were in the 20-29 age category. The majority of the participants were long-standing Christians. Eighty-three percent had been committed Christians for more than 20 years, 8 percent for 11-19 years, 3 percent for 6-10 years, and 6 percent for a period of 1 to 5 years. Eight percent indicated that their highest educational qualification was a high school diploma, 33 percent had some post-secondary education, 32 percent held bachelor's degrees, and 27 percent held graduate degrees.

Questions 4 and 5 sought to ascertain whether it was clear that the sermon explained the meaning of the passage. Eighty-four percent strongly agreed and 15 percent agreed that the preacher had obviously spent time studying the passage. The remaining 1 percent expressed uncertainty. Sixty percent strongly agreed and 38 percent agreed that the sermon explained the meaning of the passage in its original context. Two percent were uncertain.

Without using the terms, questions 6 and 7 attempted to determine whether the evaluators experienced the sermons as deductive or inductive. An average assessment for all twelve sermons is of no value since it is only as particular sermons are considered that responses are meaningful.

Question 8 asked whether the arrangement of the material in the sermon helped to make it interesting. Sixty-four percent strongly agreed and 32 percent agreed that the arrangement of the material helped to make the sermon interesting. Three percent were undecided and 1 percent disagreed.

In question 9, I sought to determine whether the sermon succeeded in showing the relevance of the passage for life today. A concern that I have about my preaching is that I so enjoy portraying biblical situations that I may fail to bridge the chasm between the biblical world and the contemporary world. It is an area I sought to address in the series. Sixty-four percent strongly agreed and 33 percent agreed that they were able to understand the relevance of the passage for today. Three percent were uncertain.

Questions 10 and 11 were about audience contact. I attempted to ascertain in question 10 whether the sermons were presented in such a way that the hearers became involved. Fifty-two percent strongly agreed and 41 percent agreed that the sermon was presented in such a way as to involve them. Six percent were uncertain and 1 percent disagreed. In question 11, I sought to discover whether the delivery was experienced as a subject-centered oration or as an audience-related communication. Forty-seven percent strongly agreed and 41 percent agreed that they were drawn into a conversation and felt they were being “spoken to rather than preached at.” Nine percent were uncertain, 2 percent disagreed and 1 percent strongly disagreed. When compared with the responses to other questions, the response indicates that at least some of the sermons were not perceived as conversational.

Question 12 was about the perceived tone of the sermon. Five options were specified (authoritative, authoritarian, cooperative, persuasive, and other), and respondents were requested to specify if they had checked the block designated “other.” Forty-one percent indicated that the approach was persuasive, 26 percent that it was authoritative, 23 percent that it was cooperative, and 1 percent that it was authoritarian. Eight percent opted for combinations such as “authoritative and persuasive,” and 1

percent described the approach as “explanatory.” The responses give an indication of a general inclination towards a persuasive approach that seeks to procure agreement rather than to pontificate.

The general response to questions 4 to 11 for all twelve sermons is contained in Table 2. These figures relate only to the second questionnaire. There were 139 completed questionnaires. The abbreviations: N, SD, D, U, A, and SA represent the number of responses and the options contained in the questionnaire, namely, strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree, and strongly agree.

Table 2. General response to all twelve sermons

| Questions | N | SD (%) | D (%) | U (%) | A (%) | SA (%) |
|--|-----|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| The preacher had obviously spent time studying the passage. | 139 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 15 | 84 |
| The sermon explained the meaning of the passage in its original context. | 139 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 38 | 60 |
| The main point of the sermon was clear very early on in the sermon. | 139 | 0 | 6 | 14 | 37 | 43 |
| The preacher moved progressively towards the main point of his sermon. | 139 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 38 | 57 |
| The arrangement of the material in the sermon helped to make it interesting. | 139 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 32 | 64 |
| I understood the relevance of the passage for my life today. | 139 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 34 | 64 |
| The sermon was presented in such a way that I became “involved.” | 139 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 41 | 52 |
| I was being drawn into a conversation, spoken to rather than preached at. | 139 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 41 | 47 |

The particular sermons. The response to the inquiry whether the sermons were based on the passages being expounded (questions 4 and 5) was so conclusive that

there is no need to document the replies to these questions in respect of each sermon. Ninety-eight percent of the responses affirmed that the sermons were based on the passages being expounded and 2 percent were uncertain.

In questions 6 and 7, I sought to ascertain whether a particular sermon was perceived to be deductive or inductive. Since most of the respondents are not familiar with the homiletical use of these terms, I attempted to embody the concepts in brief explanatory statements. It is clear, when the responses to both questions are considered, that the respondents did not experience the categories as mutually exclusive. This can probably be attributed partly to the element of ambiguity in the questions and partly to the fact that there were deductive and inductive elements in all of the sermons. In addition, an idea is present from the beginning of an inductive sermon, even if it is not articulated as the homiletical idea in the introduction of the sermon. In advocating inductive preaching, Ralph Lewis concedes that a deductive dimension is often present in sermons that are essentially inductive.⁷ I also attempted to place propositional truth in its context and this involved narration, which in turn entailed an element of suspense.

The assessments of two of the sermons invite particular comment. The apologetic sermon on Acts 4:12 received favorable comment from many members of the congregation and also from my colleagues. It did, however, receive the lowest “strongly agree” rating and 8 percent of the respondents disagreed that the arrangement of the material contributed to the sermon’s interest. My intention was to articulate the objections that are common in our society and to adduce cogent reasons for Peter’s and our insistence that salvation is found only in Christ. In order to do this, I adopted a

⁷Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1983), 111.

“subversive” approach, temporarily taking the side of those who object to the exclusivist stand of Christians. The sermon was punctuated by the repeated citation of the text; I wanted every member of the audience to have it ringing in their ears as they left the building. The comparison of the evaluation of this sermon with those of the other sermons leads me to conclude that some adaptation may be needed. When preaching similar sermons in the future, I intend to elicit comments from a cross-section of the congregation *before* delivering them.

The sermon in which the altercation between Paul and Barnabas was portrayed in a short drama elicited the strongest affirmation. No doubt some appreciated the entertainment value of such a presentation, but it seems fair to conclude that many found the sermon both challenging and encouraging. It was clear that the general structure succeeded in arousing and maintaining interest. One is aware that many Christians have been involved in conflict situations and that this has sometimes led to entrenched antagonism. In such situations, rebuke may simply intensify a sense of guilt or of self-justification. After portraying Paul and Barnabas in a positive light and explaining the closeness of their relationship, their “paroxysm” comes as a shock, but the sequel shows how they were able to rise above it. Albeit in a limited and less profound way, the sermon may have emulated the method employed in the parables of Jesus.

In keeping with the emphasis on expository preaching, question 9 was phrased in such a way as to focus on the relevance of *the passage*, not merely of the sermon. Ninety-eight percent affirmed that they were able to understand the relevance of the passage for life today. Responses in respect of each of the sermons are contained in Table 3.

Table 3. The effectiveness of the sermon in conveying the relevance of the passage

| Question 9. I understood the relevance of the passage for my life today. | N | SD (%) | D (%) | U (%) | A (%) | SA (%) |
|--|----|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| The Kingdom Agenda (Acts 1:8) | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25 | 75 |
| When the Spirit Takes Charge (Acts 2:1-41) | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25 | 75 |
| The DNA of a Vibrant Church (Acts 2:42-47) | 12 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 8 | 83 |
| When We Are Available (Acts 3:1-4:4) | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 33 | 67 |
| “No Other Name!” What About Tolerance? (Acts 4:12) | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 69 | 31 |
| When Silence Is Not an Option (Acts 4:18-31; 5:17-32) | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 21 | 79 |
| The Sheer Impossibility of Confining the God of Glory (Acts 6:8-7:54) | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 60 | 40 |
| Doing Church Outside the Box (Acts 10:1-11:1-18) | 11 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 46 | 45 |
| A Church Worthy of the Name (Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3) | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 50 | 50 |
| The Most Momentous Church Meeting Ever (Acts 15:1-21) | 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 36 | 64 |
| When Church Leaders Cannot Agree (Acts 15:36-41) | 10 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 10 | 80 |
| Is Conversion Still necessary? (Acts 16:11-34) | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 80 |

Taken as a whole, the response was encouraging. The question about relevance was, in part, a question about application. This has been a matter of some concern to me since I have long questioned the need for the kind of application that is added to a sermon in an attempt to make it relevant. In my determination to avoid such “add-on” applications, I may well have erred at the opposite extreme.

I have taken serious cognizance of the widespread emphasis on application among eminent homileticians. Haddon Robinson makes the valid observation that

“expository preachers confront people about themselves from the Bible instead of lecturing to them about the Bible’s history or archaeology.”⁸ Peter Adam specifically *adds* the element of exhortation to exegesis and application. He contends that the preacher should not only show the relevance of the passage for today by applying it, but also passionately urge the hearers to act upon it.⁹ Hershael York and Bert Decker make a strong case for stating the main points of the sermon in applicational language.¹⁰ This is good advice indeed, but one must question whether it can or ought to be applied to every sermon.

Darrell Johnson objects, on theological grounds, to the current emphasis on application. He prefers the word *implication* since “our task as preachers . . . is to open the text in such a way that the text itself does what only the text can do.”¹¹ His contention flows out of his view that the preacher’s task not to get “a message out of the text; it is about inviting people into the text.”¹² In reality, Johnson appears to be objecting not to application as such but to the kind of application that is added to the exposition rather than derived from it. By expounding the passage in such a way as to make its relevance obvious, we are already in applicational territory. Moreover, there may be times when simply allowing the passage to speak is the strongest form of

⁸Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 28.

⁹Peter Adam, *Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1996), 131-37.

¹⁰Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003), 92, 142.

¹¹Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God’s Transformation of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 165.

¹²*Ibid.*, 58.

application. On such occasions, a preacher's additional word, sincere though it may be, could actually detract from the work of the Spirit in wielding his sharp, two-edged sword.

Some respondents expressed uncertainty in regard to three of the sermons (9 percent, 9 percent, and 10 percent). It is reasonable to infer that those who declared themselves to be uncertain could *not* see the relevance of the passage for their lives today. Since the passage in each of the sermons is conducive to a contemporary application, these expressions of uncertainty could well be indicative of an applicational weakness in my preaching.

Demographic factors. It was difficult to decipher clear differences related to age, education, and length of time as a committed Christian. There was no marked difference between the responses of the sample of younger people and those of the older respondents. There could be several reasons for this. First, the sample of younger people may have been too small to come to any firm conclusions. Second, although they live in a society that is engrossed in postmodern modes of thought, it is likely that their faith has preserved them from capitulation to the culture. Third, the questions themselves related to sermon structure and movement, and age differences do not have a marked effect in respect of these factors.

Apart from a single comment, there was no discernable difference between the responses of long-established Christians and those who are young in the faith. I continue to have a concern that my sermons are less accessible than they should be to young Christians.

It was clear, particularly from relatively detailed comments volunteered by some of the respondents, that sermons that contain a significant amount of cognitive

material are more accessible to those with a higher educational level. Yet their remarks revealed an appreciation for narrative structure, especially if this is utilized to teach truth and not merely as entertainment or as relief from the more propositional parts of the sermon. If there was an observable difference, it was that those with higher education seemed equally at home in primarily deductive and inductive sermons, and responded warmly to fresh insights or new perspectives.

Unsolicited comments. Although no comment was requested from the sample of church members, many volunteered their observations. The vast majority of the comments indicated that participants had approached the task thoughtfully. The diversity of the remarks was both interesting and instructive. The comments ranged from warm commendation to perceptive criticism. Several expressed appreciation for the narrative content in the sermons, personal anecdotes, and the sense of being present at the event. One respondent commented: “I could almost feel myself in the crowd asking, ‘What does this mean and what must we do?’” A young respondent expressed appreciation that “we were working things out in this passage as a church rather than just being forced or ‘highly encouraged’ to do something.”

For the most part, the more corrective comments confirmed my own suspicions. Two respondents advocated greater succinctness, particularly in the conclusion. One relatively new Christian, who is well-educated, commented: “Keep it simple. Sometimes your talk is too academic and over my head. Remember your audience. We are just simple people looking to follow a simple message.” Another remarked, “I find the series generally unhelpful in the light of the situations in which I find myself at home and at work. Good preaching, but I go home saying to myself, ‘Is

this all there is?” A longstanding believer commented, “There were moments when I thought, ‘Oh no, here comes another anecdote,’ but [you] followed quickly on its heels with a relational comment that struck a chord in my understanding and hit home.”

Reading the comments, critical as well as commendatory, was enjoyable, sometimes amusing, and almost always instructive.

Preliminary Evaluation

The main purpose of the project was to test the principles derived from the study of biblical passages (chapter 2) and homiletical reflection (chapter 3). Despite limitations, the components of the project combined effectively to achieve this objective.

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which attendance at the pre-series seminars influenced the participants. My colleagues claim to have found the entire project thought-provoking and beneficial. Almost all of the congregants who participated in the project approached the survey with enthusiasm but also with a measure of trepidation. There is good reason to believe that their strong commitment to biblical preaching was confirmed and strengthened. The general response to the questionnaires confirms this, and I am grateful to the Lord and to my predecessors for having instilled a love for God’s Word in their hearts. In addition, their responses introduced some fresh insights, amended some of my ideas, and contributed to an improvement in my preaching.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Although my understanding of expository preaching has not changed substantially, the project resulted in the revision of a number of previously held ideas and an amended approach to variety in preaching. In consequence I have made significant changes in both the preparation and the delivery of sermons.

Evaluation of the Data

Information was gathered through two surveys, three related seminars, and weekly discussions with my colleagues. The corroborating effect of these instruments helped to offset limitations in the data.

Limitations

The most obvious limitations related to some shortcomings in the questionnaire addressed to the sample of church members, demographics, the unfamiliarity of most of the respondents with homiletical concepts, and the understandable tendency of some participants to be complimentary. While the ministry staff evaluated all twelve sermons, each participant in the congregational survey was requested to evaluate only three of the twelve sermons. Evaluating twelve consecutive sermons would have proved unduly demanding for most of the respondents. I therefore deemed it preferable to engage a relatively large number of participants and make their commitment to the project less

onerous. It was nevertheless possible to obtain general reactions and come to well-founded conclusions. The fact that the pastors were asked to evaluate all twelve sermons complemented the response of the other participants so that each sermon in the series was evaluated by at least sixteen persons (six staff members and a minimum of ten congregants).

Although there is a gradual demographic shift as more young families are attracted to the church, the congregation consists predominantly of senior citizens. In retrospect, the small number of young adults under the age of thirty limited the representative value of their contribution. Responses indicated that age, education, and length of time as a committed Christian do not exert a marked influence in respect of the questions posed. Admittedly, the result may well have been different had there been a larger sample in the twenty to twenty-nine age category.

The unfamiliarity of the majority of the respondents with homiletical concepts constituted an unavoidable limitation. Acquaintance with homiletical theory would likely have produced greater precision. Nevertheless, the responses in general and the comments volunteered by the respondents indicated the capacity of ordinary members to evaluate sermons in a perceptive way.

The responses to two of the questions produced unexpected results. Questions six and seven were designed to distinguish between deductive and inductive arrangement in sermons without actually using and defining the terms. Since I had drawn a sharp distinction between deductive and inductive sermon arrangement in the pre-series seminars and in the structures I employed, I expected the respondents to identify the difference. Some respondents were able to affirm *both* that “the main point of the sermon

was unmistakably clear very early on in the sermon” *and* that “the preacher involved the hearers as he moved progressively towards the main point of the sermon.” At first, this seemed disconcerting. Upon reflection, I realized that sermons almost inevitably contain deductive and inductive elements and that the two statements are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The apparent ambiguity in the responses may in fact indicate that it is inappropriate to draw too rigid a distinction between deductive and inductive sermon arrangement.

Although I explained to participants that frank responses would serve the project better than the understandable tendency to be encouraging, it is probably inevitable that some would be reluctant to criticize their pastor’s sermons. To second-guess respondents would be to nullify the value of the survey, but one has, at least, to be aware of the inclination among some members to view any form of criticism as undesirable.

The questionnaire utilized by the pastors could certainly have been more comprehensive. It nevertheless helped to ascertain whether the variety in sermon structure and delivery was appropriate to the particular passage being expounded and to the nature and needs of the congregation. The completion of the questionnaire also helped to facilitate our weekly discussions of the sermons.

Utility

The usefulness of the data gathered rests largely on the fact that evaluation took place at two levels. While the instruments employed were far from perfect, they did provide a clear indication of strengths and weaknesses, areas for development, and some need for correction. The weekly discussions with pastors and the three seminars provided

balance and helped to confirm the perceptions obtained from an analysis of the responses to the questionnaires.

Although I have referred to a demographic imbalance, the sample of members was indeed representative of the congregation as a whole. Those approached were at different levels of spiritual maturity and represented the spectrum of theological opinion in the church. The questionnaires helped to ascertain whether the sermons were expository and whether the structure and delivery served the respective passages well. Although these were not specifically solicited in the questionnaire, the comments made were perceptive and helpful.

Arguably the most valuable aspect of the process was the involvement of my colleagues. The sense of collegiality within the pastoral team enabled them to contribute constructively in the seminars, to respond honestly to the questionnaires, and to participate candidly in our weekly discussions. Since I am aware of their very different personalities and approaches, consensus among them was a strong indicator of both strengths and shortcomings in my preaching. Their commitment and participation made it possible to moderate and to substantiate the indicators derived from the congregational survey.

A measure of subjectivity is unavoidable in responses to sermons, but this was counterbalanced by the relatively large number of participants and the corroborating effect of the instruments employed. It seemed reasonable to assume that both strengths and weaknesses would emerge, not from the idiosyncratic responses of a few, but from the general perceptions of the entire sample.

Evaluation of the Goals

Four related goals were identified in chapter 1. These goals were, to a large extent, attained.

Improvement in My Preaching

Since the required concentration on method in a project of this nature can have a temporary inhibiting effect, my expectation was that major benefit would be derived only in the long term. Nevertheless, some immediate improvements have been noticed. Many in the congregation claim to have received fresh insight into familiar passages and to have been moved to action by the sermons. It is part of the thesis of this project that such insight is likely to occur when structure and delivery are appropriate to the passage being expounded and to the occasion of the sermon.

Clarity Regarding the Nature of Expository Preaching

A second goal of the project was to provide clarity regarding the nature of expository preaching. At the outset of the project, many of the participants regarded expository preaching as a verse-by-verse commentary on a relatively lengthy passage. It *therefore precluded variety*. It was essential to define the term for those who participated directly in the project. This was done at the first of the two pre-series seminars. Pointing to the general consensus among a number of respected preachers and homileticians, it was possible to identify with Haddon Robinson's assertion that "expository preaching at its core is more a philosophy than a method."¹

¹Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 22.

We were able to draw the inference that variety in preaching is a natural outcome of faithfulness to the text, rather than a deviation from it. Although it was necessary to define the term for the purposes of this project, it is probably better to refer to expository preaching simply as *biblical* preaching, emphasizing that preaching is genuinely biblical only when the portion of Scripture under consideration determines the content, the form, and the thrust of the sermon. This goal has, in large measure, been achieved. Many in the church now regard the terms “expository preaching” and “biblical preaching” as synonymous.

Adaptations on Account of the Postmodern Context

The serious consideration of the postmodern context constituted an important part of the project. While I remain essentially critical of the epistemological foundation of postmodernism, ignoring the climate would be detrimental to preaching *as communication*. I identify with the balanced approach towards postmodernism of Albert Mohler, Darrell Johnson, Alister McGrath and D. A. Carson, and share many of their sentiments. For this reason, the adaptations to my preaching on account of the changed intellectual climate do not constitute a major shift in method. The main adjustments are in the areas of general tone, argument, and the approach to apologetic sermons.

Authenticity is valued by postmoderns, but it would be ironic indeed if preachers had to try to *appear* authentic! It is, and has always been, essential that we emulate Paul’s attitude enunciated in 2 Corinthians 4:2, “We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the Word of God. On the

contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

Since the predisposition of an audience may incline them to reject a position without giving it a fair hearing, a sensitive approach is imperative. The fact that postmodern hearers may not be able to confute a preacher's argument does not prevent them from rejecting it. Apologetic sermons continue to be important, but the "gentleness and respect" enjoined by Peter are more necessary now than ever (1 Pet 3:16). In consequence, I more intentionally avert the impression of dogmatism and readily admit personal fallibility. Here one has to seek the balance of speaking both with sensitivity to one's audience *and* with conviction on the basis of biblical authority. While sensitivity and conviction are by no means incompatible, conviction can so easily be mistaken for opinionated intolerance. For me, preaching to postmoderns is a work in progress. The serious consideration of the challenge of addressing postmoderns poses fundamental questions to preaching as such. It would be inappropriate to depart from a biblical and theological approach to preaching in an attempt to accommodate to postmoderns. Yet the consideration of how best to preach the gospel with both sensitivity and authority places our preaching conventions under scrutiny. The resultant modifications may be good for preaching even when some of the errors and excesses of the postmodern mood have passed.

The Training of Pastors

The training of my younger colleagues in both the theory and the practice of expository preaching was an important motivation for the choice of this particular topic. Each of them has a preaching gift, but each is in the formative stage of developing a

ministry that can be sustained Sunday by Sunday. I expect that at least two of them will serve as senior or solo pastors in the not-too-distant future. What has been particularly gratifying is the reaction of the congregation to the perceived improvement in *their* preaching since the commencement of the project. Their week-by-week involvement led to greater collaboration as we shared exegetical insights and suggested possible approaches to sermon structure. The cooperative approach has enabled us to correct unconscious shortcomings and to counter the individualism that so easily develops among preachers. Most importantly, there has been perceptible growth in respect both of exposition and of creativity.

Evaluation of the Process

While it lasted only fifteen weeks, the process has had significant consequences for the church and will continue to have a far-reaching effect on my preaching.

The Effect of the Project on the Church

In addition to the direct involvement of almost sixty people, the congregation as a whole has been aware of my participation in the project. It was never the intention to create a church of preaching connoisseurs, but rather to sharpen discernment so that sermons would be appreciated for their biblical content instead of their oratory. In consequence, preachers are less likely to be regarded as “good” if they do not expound the passage, no matter how catchy their stories or how eloquent their speech. There has been a subtle but significant shift in the primary stipulation for a senior pastor. Instead of requiring a leader who can also preach biblically, the church is more likely to seek a

biblical preacher who can also lead. The sub-conscious preference for biblical preaching has been raised to the level of a firm commitment.

The Effect of the Project on My Expository Preaching

During the course of the project, I became progressively uncomfortable with the idea of a matrix of sermon types as a means of facilitating variety. Variety in sermon structure and delivery ought never to be an end in itself. Plotting sermon types on a grid is mechanical, can be restrictive, and does not serve expository preaching well. Although I had previously developed such a matrix, I found it difficult to use. In reality, I employed it mainly in retrospect for structural analysis. A template setting out a number of structural options may indeed help to facilitate variety, but this could easily be *at the expense of* expository preaching. I have found the adoption of a more organic approach to be personally liberating and homiletically beneficial.

I was able to identify a number of weaknesses in my preaching. Generally my sermons have been appreciated by mature Christians whose inclination and education have made them amenable to abstract thought. Some others have found them “too academic.” While not every sermon (or every part of any sermon) can be equally accessible to all, it is incumbent upon preaching pastors to feed the entire flock. Without resorting to reflex action, I have given particular attention to six matters.

First, the realization that my sermons tended to be too cognitive led to the adoption of a more holistic purpose statement. Instead of framing the purpose statement in purely cognitive terms, I included affective, behavioral and visionary dimensions. Robert Reid identifies the insufficiency of a purely conceptual purpose statement: “Too

often preachers are unsure of what they want to happen as a result of people listening to their sermons.”² The accent in my preaching has shifted from what the sermon is intended to *say* to what it is intended to *do*. Since life-transformation involves the emotions and the will as well as the intellect, this has hopefully resulted in sermons reaching deeper into the personality of the hearers.

Second, I am more comfortable with application than I used to be. Here, I have been assisted by Hershael York and Darrell Johnson. On the surface, York and Johnson seem to be at opposite ends of the applicational spectrum. Yet I have found their approaches to be complementary. York advocates applicational language for the main points of the sermon.³ This helps to ensure that the entire sermon, while text-based, is audience-sensitive and does not degenerate into a lecture. Johnson’s rejects the kind of application that is added on to the sermon rather than integral to it.⁴ While I cannot unreservedly endorse the approach of either York or Johnson, I have appreciated their respective emphases. Provided that the audience is in mind throughout the process of preparation and delivery, we are able to avoid jerky and obtrusive transitions from an indicative to an imperative mood.

Third, one of the surprise consequences of the project was the rediscovery of the value of repetition. What may seem redundant to the preacher, who has spent hours in the world of the text, may be extremely helpful to many in the audience who are

²Robert Stephen Reid, *The Four Voices of Preaching: Connecting Purpose and Identity behind the Pulpit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 30.

³Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003), 142-43.

⁴Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God’s Transformation of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 158-71.

encountering it for the first time in the sermon. As I considered sermon structure, I rediscovered the value of the judicious repetition of key phrases. Used intentionally and creatively, such repetition can facilitate understanding, serve as a road-map, and be an imaginative means of application.

Fourth, both the comments of my colleagues and the response of the congregation have inclined me to adopt a more conversational approach. My commitment to be faithful to the message has, at times, inclined me to focus on the content of the sermon to the detriment of communication with the audience. The audience senses that they are listening to the delivery of a paper rather than being addressed, and the preacher feels the distance. While it may not be possible to define the difference in terms of deportment, the mental posture of the preacher determines whether the hearers sense that they are listening in on an address or participating in a conversation. Without becoming too informal, I have consciously endeavored to adopt a more conversational approach. This has been facilitated by greater familiarity with the sermon outline and by a more deliberate focus on the audience as a particular gathering in a specific setting.

Fifth, my preaching has become more intentionally Christocentric. Although they may overstate the case, Sidney Greidanus, Graeme Goldsworthy, and Bryan Chapell provide valuable guidelines for Christocentric preaching from all portions of Scripture.⁵ Preaching from Acts, it was not difficult to proclaim the good news concerning salvation

⁵Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000); Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994).

in Jesus. Nevertheless, it is possible to preach kerygmatic passages legalistically and to convey truths without relating them to God's salvific purpose. The more intentional determination to preach Christ has meant that even biological sermons and sermons that discuss practical matters in church life are intentionally rooted in the gospel.

Sixth, I have rediscovered the value of deductive preaching. Prior to undertaking the project, I preached more inductive than deductive sermons. Although I never questioned the need for deductive sermons, I tended to neglect them in my own ministry, partly as a result of exposure to the New Homiletic. I have become more convinced of their validity and importance. The answer to dull deductive preaching should be sought, not in an exclusive commitment to inductive preaching, but in better deductive preaching. Contributing to a book that celebrates the contribution of Eugene Lowry to narrative preaching, Ronald Allen cautions us against a preoccupation with inductive preaching to the exclusion of deductive sermons. He observes that "occasions sometimes arise in the life of the congregation or the wider culture that call for a more direct approach than is sometimes typical of . . . narrative preaching."⁶ Although most of my sermons could be described as primarily inductive, I now preach more deductive sermons. If variety in preaching arises at the conjunction of sensitivity to the form of a specific passage and to the needs of a particular audience, some sermons ought to be essentially deductive.

There is an important corollary to this recalibration in my preaching practice. Reflection on the sermon structure and delivery has helped me to realize why I

⁶Ronald J. Allen, "Theology Undergirding Narrative Preaching," *What's the Shape of Narrative Preaching? Essays in Honor of Eugene L. Lowry*, ed. Mike Graves and David J. Schlafer (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 38.

sometimes lose a portion of my audience, and to take corrective action. Since most of my sermons are inductive, they are inherently logical. While *I* know where the sermon will conclude, many in the audience do not. Inevitably some are distracted or do not grasp an observation early in the sermon. It is more difficult for them to rejoin the sermon because the matter being discussed at any stage is predicated on a previous comment. Yet the logical nature of most of the sermons can be a distinct advantage and is appreciated by many. I have therefore been more intentional in laying the foundation upon which I will build. Where possible, a brief recapitulation enables those whose thoughts have drifted to rejoin the sermon. Provided that it is brief and well-stated, it is a helpful reminder rather than an annoyance, to those who have been attentive throughout the sermon. When preaching sermons that are less sequential, I have found it helpful to articulate the relationship of each point to the homiletical idea.

Strengths of the Project

One of the major strengths of the project was the extent to which it involved both my colleagues and members of the congregation. Instead of seeing preaching as the exclusive domain of the preaching pastors, to which they make little or no contribution, participants came to realize that the preaching of the Word of God is a shared responsibility. The enthusiasm with which they approached the project allayed my initial concern that they would view their engagement as part of a homiletical experiment.

At both conscious and subconscious levels, my colleagues were exposed to the theory and practice of expository preaching. Some vague notions were clarified and the general standard of preaching in the church has shown a marked improvement. The fact that my colleagues were invited to comment critically on my sermons has created an

eagerness to expose *their* sermons to evaluation. Collaboration and evaluation are now natural components of the pulpit ministry in our church.

The seminars, in particular, exposed members of the congregation to the rationale for expository preaching. These were well attended and the level of participation was high. In view of the limited time at our disposal, I utilized PowerPoint presentations and provided a comprehensive set of notes (sixty-seven pages in all). The participation of Kenton Anderson in the post-series debriefing seminar helped to bring the project to a fitting conclusion.

The project certainly effected a change in my own approach to sermon preparation. The essential sequence in the progression from the exegesis of the passage to the delivery of the sermon remains unaltered. Thorough exegesis culminates in the articulation of the exegetical idea and precedes specific work on sermon structure. The exegetical-homiletical continuum has been enriched in several ways. The genre of the passage now plays a more important role in determining sermon structure. An intentionally holistic purpose statement helps to ensure that the sermon does not degenerate into a theoretical lecture. I have adopted a more natural approach to application. The application of truth is in mind even in the recounting of facts or the narration of a story. Audience analysis commences at the outset of the process and continues right into the delivery of the sermon. Preaching *as communication* has been enhanced by a measure of collaboration both before and after the sermon is preached.

Weaknesses of the Project

Since the genre of a passage ought to influence the arrangement and presentation of the sermon, it may well have been easier to illustrate variety in preaching

if I had selected a number of diverse passages loosely related to a general theme. It was, nevertheless, possible to select passages from the Acts of the Apostles that required variety in sermon structure and presentation. This enabled me to retain the sense of cohesion and continuity that is experienced when one preaches through a book of the Bible. To have imposed different structures in an overt attempt to demonstrate variety would have seemed artificial and contrived.

The fact that one of the important contributing factors to variety in preaching was absent imposed an unavoidable limitation on the project. Since the composition of the audience ought to have a marked effect on the sermon's structure and delivery, it would certainly have been advantageous to the project if the sermons had been preached in several different settings. All the sermons were delivered to Sunday morning congregations in a stable, suburban church. It would have been inappropriate to preach to an imaginary audience rather than to the assembled audience. It therefore seemed preferable to forego the element of variety that would have been natural if one was addressing a different kind of audience.

The data derived from the survey could have been more demographically representative. It is nevertheless true that the process ran smoothly and the data gathered presented a coherent picture from which clear inferences could be drawn. Despite these weaknesses, the project facilitated reflection on practice and resulted in a smooth transition to an amended practice.

Theological Reflection

Questions of theological import are inevitably raised in the course of serious reflection on preaching. Are the preaching conventions present in a community helpful?

More importantly, are they biblical? Do we make claims for a particular approach to preaching that exceed the claims of Scripture itself? Can sermons that are not intentionally related to the gospel be regarded as “preaching” in the New Testament sense of the word? To what extent is preaching dependent on a high view of Scripture?

Rick Warren observes that an examination of the sermons recorded in Scripture itself does not provide warrant for an insistence on a particular form of preaching.⁷ It is nevertheless possible to advocate expository preaching, *as an approach*, on biblical and theological grounds. In a chapter on the history of text-driven preaching, Jim Shaddix makes a strong case for text-driven (expository) preaching, both from Scripture and from church history.⁸ This helps to mitigate Warren’s assertion. Similarly, it is possible to advocate *variety* in preaching on biblical-theological grounds. The fact that there are noticeable differences in the sermons recorded in Scripture is not the sole ground for advocating variety in preaching. One should expect expository preaching to be varied in the light of the nature of the gospel itself, the variety of literary forms encountered in the Bible, and the fact that God’s people are nurtured through a diversity of word-related ministries.⁹

Inevitably, one is faced with the indispensability to expository preaching of an appropriate view of Scripture. My personal background has rendered this particularly

⁷Michael Dudoit, “Purpose-Driven Preaching: An Interview with Rick Warren,” *Preaching* 17, no. 2 (2001): 14.

⁸Jim Shaddix, “A History of Text-Driven Preaching,” *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Matthews (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 37-54.

⁹Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God’s Transformation of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 78. Johnson draws attention to “the variety of modes of communicating . . . given the huge scope of the gospel and given the dynamics of the communicating moment.”

important. Exposure to liberal and neo-orthodox theology caused me to wonder whether Karl Barth's doctrine of the Word of God enabled one to affirm the importance of Scripture without necessarily affirming its plenary inspiration. Barth's high regard for preaching is undeniable, and his emphasis on the dynamic nature of a living encounter in which the Author of Scripture is active holds strong appeal. In our emphasis on the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible, we may have espoused a static and somewhat "deistic" view of Scripture. I am, however, as uncomfortable with the unsubstantial tendency of Barth's doctrine of inspiration as I am with Craddock's rhetorical question, "Does the Word of God occur at the lips, at the ear or at the sharing of it?"¹⁰ As appealing as Barth's three-fold understanding of the Word of God is, some of his elucidations reveal disrespect for Scripture in the only form in which we have it. He could state, for example, "The vulnerability of the Bible, i.e. its capacity for error, also extends to its religious or theological content."¹¹ One has to ask: Does such a view of Scripture not inevitably lead to a more detached relationship between preacher and text? Why should a preacher take *the text* of the Bible seriously if much of it is unreliable, and if God, in his sovereignty, nevertheless enables it to *become* the Word of God as it is proclaimed?

In a sense, the crucial point in this discussion about the inspiration of Scripture relates to the Holy Spirit's present role in relation to Scripture. Is his current role necessary to constitute the Bible the Word of God, or does he take that which is already the Word of God (by virtue of his inspiration), enliven its proclamation, and apply it to

¹⁰Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, rev. ed. (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 18.

¹¹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley, and T. F. Torrance, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pt. 1, trans. G. T. Thomson, and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 509.

the hearers? Surely it is safer, and more in line with Scripture's evaluation of itself to say that the Spirit interprets and applies that which he has *already* inspired and constituted the Word of God.

Sidney Greidanus and Peter Adam give clear expression to this principle. Greidanus insists that "if preachers wish to preach with divine authority, they must submit themselves, their thoughts and their opinions, to the Scriptures and echo the Word of God."¹² Adam will not allow us to draw an unacceptable distinction between God's revelation and the record of that revelation. He observes that "revelation that is presence or act or sign, without verbal interpretation, is incomplete."¹³ He can therefore insist that "personal illumination is no substitute for verbal inspiration. The words are the revelation, not just a witness to the revelation; the Bible's words are not 'one step removed' from revelation; they are the revelation."¹⁴

Personal Reflection

While the parameters of one's pulpit practice are determined by one's entire theology, this theology is never developed in an antiseptic laboratory. As a sub-discipline of Practical Theology, Homiletics ought to follow a considered methodology and not be treated as a mere supplement to disciplines that are genuinely "theological." The reciprocal interaction of theory and praxis helps to guard against the sterility of untested hypotheses on the one hand, and a "whatever-seems-to-work" pragmatism on the other.

¹²Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 12-3.

¹³Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1996), 22.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 96.

The process followed in the project facilitated this interaction and led to some meaningful adaptations in approach.

Participation in the program was demanding while pastoring a busy church. The advantage of the constant interaction between theoretical insight and practical research was, however, invaluable. A highly theoretical approach may, in some respects, have been simpler, but the resultant unidirectional flow from theory to practice would have been less likely to facilitate the required changes. A prescriptive, “hints-and-helps” approach lacks academic rigor and is unlikely to facilitate on-going development. The need to develop and test concepts in the context of the life of the church sharpened my thinking and helped to correct previously untested assumptions.

Ironically, a serious challenge was posed to the place of preaching in the church service during my period of study. Questions regarding the prominent place of the sermon in the worship service led to a personal reappraisal. Although the church was unaware of the theological dynamics underlying the challenge, its commitment to an evangelical understanding of the Word of God was confirmed, enlarged and made explicit.

Conclusion

I conclude the project convinced that expository preaching does not merely permit variety in sermon structure and delivery, but requires it. In *expository* preaching, preachers are not at liberty to distill the concepts of a passage and arbitrarily present them in a form of their choosing. While it is impossible to do full justice to any passage of Scripture, one comes far closer to doing so when sermon structure and delivery arise out

of the genre, as well as the content, of the passage and take serious cognizance of the nature and needs of the audience.

Benefits Derived from the Project

In terms of the regular preaching of God's Word, the project has led to my own personal enrichment, the development of my colleagues, and a greater sense of congregational participation in the church's preaching and teaching ministry. Participation in the project not only confirmed my commitment to expository preaching, but also enlarged my understanding of it and helped move my preaching in a more holistic direction. At the base of the most essential change in approach is the realization that expository preaching and variety are allies rather than contestants. I realized that variety could not be an afterthought, imposed, for its own sake, upon the passage. Instead, it needed to be occasioned by a meaningful exegesis of both the passage and the audience.

I believe that the church, as a whole, has benefitted from the project. Largely as a consequence of the project, my colleagues and I adopt a more collaborative approach, and this benefits both us and the congregation. In addition, the church's participation in the project is likely to have an effect on the call of future preaching pastors. Scintillating speakers with some attention-grabbing illustrations and impressive turns of phrase are not likely to be appreciated by the majority in the church, *unless* they expound the passages at hand. In seeking to call a senior pastor, commitment to expository preaching will be the most important consideration irrespective of the other felt needs of the church.

Ideas for Further Research

Thomas Long's suggestion that one ask, "How may the sermon, in a new setting, say and do what the text says and does in its setting?" invites further investigation.¹⁵ Without simply producing a list of possible forms, one could attempt to ascertain what kind of structure and what mode of delivery most faithfully recreates the effect that the genre and tenor of the passage created in the biblical account. Analysis of sermons that have proved effective could stimulate the imagination of preachers seeking to replicate the effect of the passage. Reflection upon sermons that have actually been preached seems preferable to the identification of a set number of sermon types or structures. It invites an examination of praxis and potentially exposes the researcher to many different styles and approaches to preaching. It involves a theological methodology rather than a prescriptive and potentially mindless approach. It also means that the available data is virtually limitless and that the preacher can continue to learn and develop.

Much can be gained from collaboration. In addition to teamwork among pastors, members of the congregation could be requested to participate. Such cooperation is an advance on unilateral audience analysis and recognizes that, in one sense, the sermon is the property of the entire community and not only of the preacher. It would be interesting to discover whether there has been a perceptible difference in the richness and relevance of the sermons in churches where collaborative preaching is practiced.

Although all preaching should be dialogical in the manner in which it engages the audience, there can be no fundamental objection to modes of communication that

¹⁵Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 24.

actually employ dialogue. The preaching of both Peter and Paul elicited questions and generated discussion (Acts 2: 37, 40; 17:1-3, 10-11). Some may wish to downgrade preaching to an open-ended exchange of ideas. I am not advocating that kind of reductionism or endorsing the disingenuous comments that sometimes accompany such proposals. One may nevertheless ask, “How can dialogue be employed in such a way as to facilitate proclamation?” Discussion could follow a sermon or even precede it. On occasion, discussion could occur after a provocative introduction and be followed by the exposition of a passage and a summation. The envisaged dialogue would complement proclamation; it would not replace it.

Long may be exaggerating when he avers that “homiletics goes through a nervous breakdown every half century or so.”¹⁶ His observation does, however, caution us against the bandwagon effect. Referring to Galen Strawson’s classification of people into Diachronics and Episodics, he remarks pertinently,

No single homiletical formula will do; no one way of structuring sermons, however compelling, will accomplish the task; no solitary rhetorical strategy will open all the doors of the faithful imaginations of our hearers. . . . We must use every gift of language, every responsible strategy of communication, to help people see, in practical and concrete ways, the shape of life when one builds a nest in the wide and embracing branches of the gospel story¹⁷

There could well be scope for fresh research into the ways in which rejuvenated deductive preaching can address the limited attention span of a culture accustomed to fragmented information. If one accepts the validity of these categories, it may be argued

¹⁶Thomas G. Long, “Out of the Loop: The Changing Practice of Preaching,” in *What’s the Shape of Narrative Preaching? Essays in Honor of Eugene L. Lowry*, ed. Mike Graves and David J. Schlafer (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 117-18.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 130.

that while inductive preaching may be particularly suited to Diachronics, deductive preaching is better suited to Episodics.

The “All-surpassing Power”

Conscious of the danger posed by a preoccupation with structural and methodological considerations, I have reminded myself, throughout the project, of the indispensability of the guidance, enlightenment, and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. To rely on one’s hopelessly inadequate resources would be foolish in the extreme. “We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (2 Cor 4:7). The Spirit’s illumination in the study and his empowerment in the pulpit do more than anything else to ensure appropriate variety in expository preaching.

APPENDIX 1

THE PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL MODEL
OF ROLF ZERFASS

Rolf Zerfass formulated a model to depict and facilitate orderly movement from the church's current practice to an amended practice.

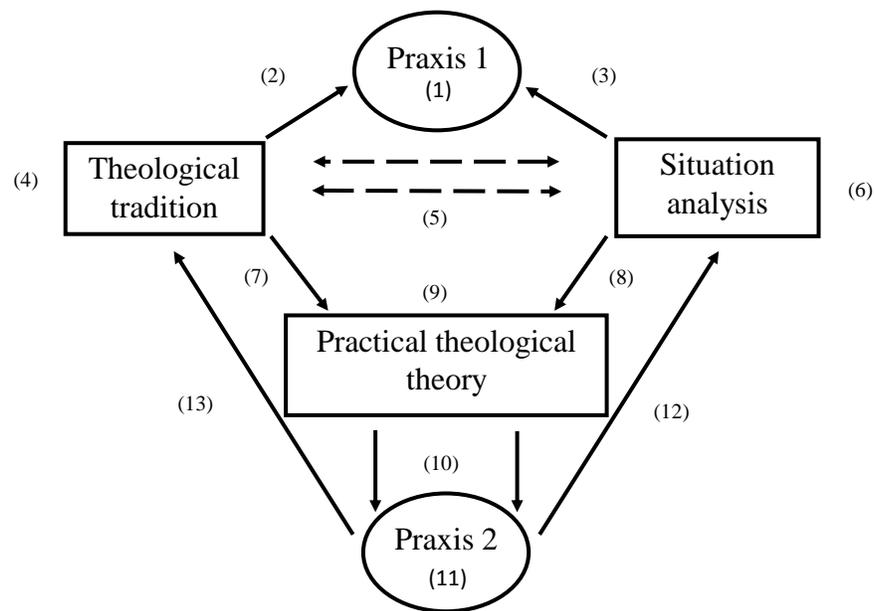


Figure A1. The practical theological model of Rolf Zerfass

The movement from the current “praxis 1” to the new, amended “praxis 2” takes place by means of an intentional process. Praxis 1 (1) is subjected to a rigorous

situation analysis (6). This may entail surveys and employ insights derived from the behavioral sciences. Praxis 1 arose largely, but not exclusively, as an expression of the theological tradition (4). Before the development of a practical theological theory (9), the situation analysis and the theological tradition enter into a “dialogue” in which they ask serious questions of one another (5). If the process is thorough and honest, the proposed theory is both theologically acceptable and practically feasible. It is applied in praxis 2 (11).

One of the values of this methodology is that it helps us to distinguish what is germane to the theological tradition from what is incidental to it. We are encouraged to ask whether biblical and theological truth *requires* a particular practice and whether an envisaged new practice is consistent with a church’s theological tradition. At an even deeper level, the situation analysis may well pose searching questions to the theological tradition itself. If, like the wise man’s house in the Lord’s parable, the theological tradition is built upon a rock, it has nothing to fear from the questions posed by an honest situation analysis (Matt 7:24-27).

L. M. Heyns is uncertain why Zerfass used “quite so many arrows,” and suggests that this may be “to indicate the urgent need for theory to lead to new praxis.”¹ It seems that the arrows were his way of indicating the importance of the reciprocal relationship of theory and praxis and the ongoing nature of the process. In this way, it is possible to depict, in a single diagram, that praxis 2 becomes the new praxis 1.

¹L. M. Heyns, and H. J. C. Pieterse, *A Primer in Practical Theology* (Pretoria, South Africa: Gnosis, 1990), 36.

APPENDIX 2

ADJUSTMENTS IN SERMON PREPARATION

Engagement in the project led to several adjustments to the process I follow in sermon preparation. Although the procedure remains essentially the same, three areas were accorded more intentional consideration, namely: (1) audience analysis; (2) the purpose statement; and (3) structural determination. Audience analysis is incorporated as a conscious step and not only a subconscious orientation. The purpose statement is expanded to include affective, behavioral, and visionary dimensions. The structure is determined with appropriate regard for the genre and intent of the passage being expounded and the needs of the audience. These elements are indicated in the following diagram.

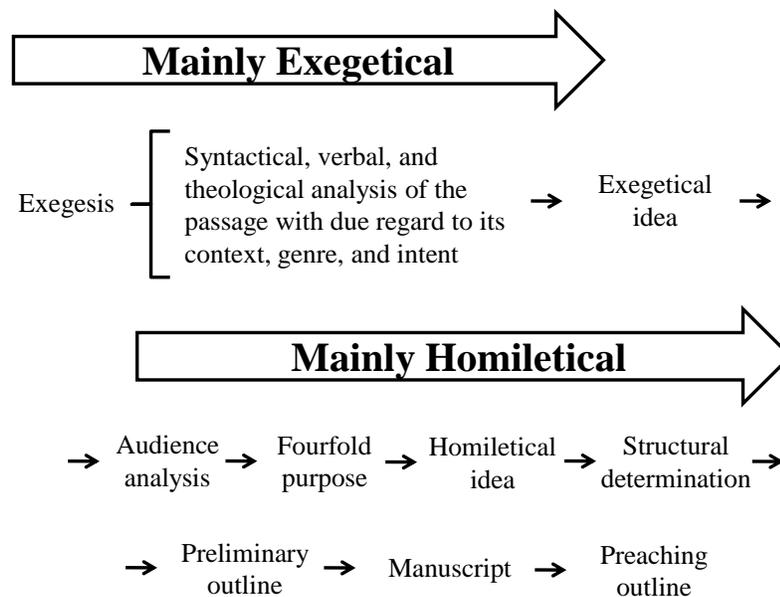


Figure A2. Adjustments in sermon preparation

The phases (mainly exegetical and mainly homiletical) are part of a continuum rather than self-contained silos. In keeping with my past practice, passage selection and exegesis culminates in the statement of an exegetical idea. Once this has been formulated, the emphasis shifts to the homiletical phase of the preparation.

Audience Analysis

Exegetical work is being undertaken for a sermon that is to be preached to a particular audience. For that reason, audience analysis is present from the outset of the sermon preparation. It does, however, need to receive focused consideration at some point in the preparation. The ideal juncture for this is at the transition from the exegetical to the homiletical phase of the preparation, since it is at this point that the preacher turns from the interpretation of the passage to the preparation of the sermon as it will be preached.

In addition to general questions about the composition of the audience as a whole, I have become more intentional in ascertaining the situation of individuals who comprise the congregation. This entails a consideration of factors such as spiritual status, worldview, education, and life situation. Here, meaningful contact with members of the church plays an important role. The project has coincided with the alignment of small group studies with the Sunday series of sermons. Attendance at some of the midweek studies and the referral of questions by small group leaders has acquainted me with several of the questions that congregants are facing, both in their study of Scripture and in their workaday lives. Collaboration with members of the pastoral team and of the congregation has also helped me to earth sermons more effectively.

A Fourfold Purpose Statement

Prior to the project, the articulation of a single purpose statement formed an important stage in my sermon preparation. In effect, I asked, “In view of the message of the pericope, what truth(s) do I wish to convey through the sermon?” This meant that the purpose statement was framed mainly in cognitive terms. I have now adopted a more holistic approach. The inclusion of affective, behavioral and visionary dimensions with the conceptual dimension has redefined the fundamental question. The question is no longer, “What does the sermon intend to say?” but, “what does it intend to do?”

Sermons should affect our emotions as well as our understanding; they should have behavioral implications, and engender expectation at both personal and corporate levels. The conscious consideration of the affective dimension is not a concession to emotionalism, but a recognition of the inspirational nature of the gospel. In addition, sermons ought to motivate us towards behavioral change. This is not a concession to moralism, but a recognition of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Since the gospel facilitates both personal and corporate growth and envisages a glorious future, sermons should inspire both penultimate and ultimate hope. This is not a concession to positive thinking, but a recognition that it is God’s intention to lead redeemed sinners to a better future. The matter need not be forced, nor should it be seen as a prescription for every preacher to follow. All four of these aspects are not present in every sermon, but deliberately considering these dimensions helps to promote a healthy balance.

Structural Determination

In a more intentional consideration of appropriate structure, I attempt to determine the most appropriate form, largely on the basis of the rhetorical function of the

genre of the passage. If it is inappropriate to force ideational matter into a single, stereotyped structure, it is also less than ideal to select one of a number of predetermined sermon shapes. I identify with Thomas Long's contention that the sermon should "say and do, in a new setting, what the text says and does in its setting."¹ This does not imply that one is at liberty to violate established principles of communication or to adopt a disjointed, abductive approach in an overreaction to stylized sermons. It means that one attempts to ascertain creative ways to replicate, in the sermon, the effect as well as the content of the passage. This includes a consideration of matters such as inductive and deductive movement and the tone adopted in the pulpit. Immersion in the passage should affect the shape as well as the content of the sermon, and should also influence the mood of the preacher.

¹Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 24.

APPENDIX 3

OUTLINE OF THE FIRST PRE-SERIES SEMINAR

The Nature of Expository Preaching

The seminar was divided into three sessions of approximately forty-five minutes each. A PowerPoint presentation was employed and a comprehensive set of notes provided because of the volume of the material being presented.

First Session: Expository Preaching with a Lower Case e

1. Caricatures and misunderstanding
 - 1.1 Not a particular sermon type alongside “topical” and “textual”
 - 1.2 Not a deluxe kind of preaching for the super-spiritual
 - 1.3 Not a running commentary
 - 1.4 Corrective quotations: Martyn Lloyd Jones and John Stott
2. More a philosophy than a method
 - 2.1 Haddon Robinson’s definition of expository preaching
 - 2.2 The big idea
3. How prescriptive ought one to be? Several approaches:
 - 3.1 Close adherence to the text (Walter Kaiser)
 - 3.2 Treating the entire text as a thematic entity (Donald Hamilton)
 - 3.3 Expository preaching with a lower case e (Kenton Anderson)

Second Session: From the Study to the Pulpit

1. Two chasms that need to be crossed
 - 1.1 From the exegeted text to the prepared sermon (Walter Kaiser)
 - 1.2 From the biblical world to the contemporary world (John Stott)

2. The Process (the usual but not the invariable sequence)
 - 2.1 Passage selection
 - 2.2 Serious exegesis
 - 2.3 A clear exegetical idea
 - 2.4 Audience analysis
 - 2.5 Purpose of the sermon
 - 2.6 Homiletical idea
 - 2.7 Structural determination
 - 2.8 Manuscript or “oral manuscript”
 - 2.9 Preaching outline

Third Session: Some Key Questions for Expository Preaching

1. The question of authority
 - 1.1 Legitimate word-based authority as opposed to ex-officio authoritarianism
 - 1.2 The perspectives of Fred Craddock, Doug Pagitt and Donald Hamilton
2. “We” and “You”
 - 2.1 First person plural or second person (singular and plural)
 - 2.2 Usually “we,” sometimes “you,” but always in the spirit of “we”
3. Applicational language
 - 3.1 Haddon Robinson’s distinction between a lecture and a sermon
 - 3.2 Hershael York’s advocacy of applicational language for the main points
4. Correspondence between the points of the passage and those of the sermon
 - 4.1 The principlizing proposal of Walter Kaiser
 - 4.2 The “looser” approaches of James Stewart and Donald Hamilton
5. Scholarship, rhetoric, and gestures
 - 5.1 Scholarship ought not to be paraded (citing James Denney)
 - 5.2 Rhetoric ought not to be pompous (citing Richard Neuhaus)
 - 5.3 Gestures ought not to be contrived (citing Phillips Brooks)
6. Christo-centricity and the role of biblical theology
 - 6.1 Respect the historical context of the passage (Walter Kaiser)
 - 6.2 The importance of biblical theology (Graeme Goldsworthy)
 - 6.3 Six roads to Christ (Sidney Greidanus)

- 6.4 The fallen condition focus (Bryan Chapell)
- 6.5 Both/and (Jeffrey Arthurs)

APPENDIX 4

OUTLINE OF THE SECOND PRE-SERIES SEMINAR

Variety in Expository Preaching

The seminar was divided into three sessions of approximately forty-five minutes each. A PowerPoint presentation was employed and a comprehensive set of notes provided because of the volume of the material being presented.

First Session: Breaking Out of the Mold

1. The need for variety
 - 1.1 Making preaching more interesting and accessible (Harold Freeman)
 - 1.2 Inviting audience participation (Fred Craddock)
 - 1.3 Allowing genre to influence form (Thomas Long and Jeffrey Arthurs)
2. Superficial or “cosmetic” variety
 - 2.1 Developing a matrix
 - 2.2 Classifications (John Broadus and William Sangster)
3. A more appropriate starting point: deductive and inductive movement
 - 3.1 The different uses of the term “inductive”
 - 3.1.1 Working from concrete particulars to a general truth
 - 3.1.2 A catchall term to describe a variety of sermonic elements
 - 3.1.3 Starting from the life-situation of the hearer
 - 3.2 Insights from Haddon Robinson, Ralph Lewis, and Kent Anderson
4. The New Homiletic
 - 4.1 Fred Craddock and Eugene Lowry
 - 4.1.1 Valid observations

4.1.2 Overstated case

4.2 Towards a more balanced approach

4.2.1 Inductive *and* deductive (Ronald Allen)

4.2.2 Genre, audience analysis, mode of communication and “voice”

4.2.3 Insights from Darrell Johnson, Robert Reid, Michael Quicke and Thomas Long

Second Session: Preaching in a Postmodern World

1. Shifts in the way knowledge is assimilated (Jeffrey Arthurs)
2. Identifying the key features of postmodernism (Stanley Grenz, Millard Erickson, Albert Mohler and James Smith)
3. Assessing the place of postmodernism (Albert Mohler, Donald Carson and Darrell Johnson)
4. The implications of postmodernism for preaching (Graham Johnston, Darrell Johnson, Albert Mohler and Alister McGrath)

Third Session: Structuring the Sermon

1. Key factors
 - 1.1 Genre (Brent Sandy and Ronald Giese, Thomas Long, and Dennis Cahill)
 - 1.2 Audience analysis (Keith Willhite)
 - 1.3 Mode of communication (Peter Adam, Robert Mounce, Darrell Johnson)
 - 1.4 The deductive--inductive continuum
 - 1.5 Tone, “voice,” and psychological approach (Robert Reid, Michael Quicke)
2. More precise patterns
 - 2.1 Proposals by John Broadus, W. E Sangster, Ralph Lewis and Kent Anderson
 - 2.2 The options are only illustrative
 - 2.3 Jeffrey Arthurs comments:

Expository preachers pay attention to form. We consider not only what God has communicated but also how he has communicated. And because there is no such thing as the sermon form, we have freedom to use various communication methods to unleash the rhetorical force of the text.¹

¹Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety: How to Re-create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2007), 201.

APPENDIX 5

STRUCTURAL FEATURES IN THE SERIES OF TWELVE SERMONS ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Sermon 1

The Kingdom Agenda

Passage: Acts 1:1-11

Text:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Synopsis

The sermon was an exposition of Acts 1:8 (as the Book of Acts in microcosm). It focused on the concept of witness as a privilege and a joy rather than an obligation, and emphasized the enabling role of the Holy Spirit.

Structure and Delivery

The sermon arrangement is essentially deductive. The text is expounded clause by clause under three main headings, stated in applicational language.

1. When we share the good news, we are not left to our own devices.
2. Sharing the good news can be a spontaneous pleasure, not an irksome duty.
3. In sharing the good news, we start right where we are.

Jesus’ statement was placed in the context of his post-resurrection appearances and instruction concerning the kingdom of God. Since the text can be regarded as the Book of Acts in microcosm, it was helpful to refer to instances in the Acts where disciples witnessed in the power of the Holy Spirit. Although the second main point does not arise directly from Acts 1:8, it does describe the witness of the church in the Acts.

The sermon was intentionally encouraging, depicting witness as “an explosion of joy” (citing Lesslie Newbigin).¹ Accordingly, the tone was positive. Both the introduction

¹Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 116.

and conclusion emphasized witness as a privilege undertaken under the guidance and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Illustrations were from contemporary experience.

Sermon 2

When the Spirit Takes Charge

Passage: Acts 2:1-41; (1-21, 36-41).

Synopsis

The sermon centered in a description of the events of the Day of Pentecost. It recounted the coming of the Spirit and the response of the bewildered onlookers. It also covered the content of Peter's sermon in full (quoting it verbatim), and described the response of the crowd to the sermon. Since Peter's address contains a clear declaration of the gospel, there was a strong evangelistic component in the sermon. Throughout the sermon, the sovereignty of the Spirit was emphasized in preparation for an explicit statement of this truth towards the end of the sermon.

Structure and Delivery

Although it was organized under five points, this was essentially a narrative sermon. While the following outline did not protrude, it marked the progression of the sermon.

1. We witness an amazing occurrence.
2. We hear a dynamic sermon.
3. We see a dramatic response.
4. We are able to draw some important inferences.
5. Why would we ever want less than this?

The major emphases were: (1) The Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost to take charge; and (2) When he takes charge, Jesus gets all the attention.

This sermon had "moves" rather than points, but in the process of describing events it was possible to teach important truths.

Sermon 3

The DNA of a Vibrant Church

Passage: Acts 2:42-47

Synopsis

In his brief description of the life of the Jerusalem church, Luke identifies five related features. While avoiding a false idealization of the early church, it was possible to recognize and commend these "strong points." The passage concludes with the

observation that “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). There are similar statements dotted throughout the Acts (4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:13; 19:10; 21:19-20). In examining the characteristics of the church, it was possible to emphasize the relationship between the quality of the church’s life and the effectiveness of its witness.

Structure and Delivery

The structure was deductive with clearly articulated points, repeated citation of the statements in the passage, and a strong application of each main point. The church’s “strong points” were considered under the following headings.

1. We need a healthy spiritual appetite (devotion to the apostles’ doctrine).
2. We can also experience an exceptional sense of community (the fellowship).
3. We can live in an atmosphere of genuine worship (the breaking of bread, prayer, meeting in the temple courts, praising God).
4. We ought to be known for our generosity (they had everything in common, sold property and possessions and gave to anyone who had need).
5. We will most certainly make our presence felt in the community (“Everyone was filled with awe” and they enjoyed the favor of all the people).

By recapping in the sermon’s transitions, it was possible to paint a coherent picture, showing the inter-connectedness of these characteristics. In the nature of the case, the appeal was to the church as a whole, with an emphasis on the homiletical idea: “When a church is spiritually healthy, it grows.”

Sermon 4

When we’re Available . . . Who Knows What Might Happen?

Passage: Acts 3:1-4:4

Synopsis

The healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple initiated an important series of events. Certainly, Peter and John had not planned this incident, but it is safe to assume that they lived in a state of availability. The sermon describes the healing, traces the sequel, and considers some of the implications of our availability to the Lord. It is fair to assume that the apostles would have wanted to witness to the Sanhedrin. The events provided them with the opportunity to do so.

Structure and Delivery

This was clearly a narrative sermon. There was no introduction as such (based in our contemporary situation). It was deemed preferable to plunge the audience straight into the fast-paced account by describing the events under a number of “scenes.”

1. Scene 1: Another day at the gate (the perspective of the lame beggar)
2. Scene 2: Ready for anything (the perspective of the apostles)
3. Scene 3: Something mind-blowing happens (the instantaneous healing)
4. Scene 4: Peter focuses attention on Jesus (rejected but raised from the dead)
5. Scene 5: The arrest (witness before the Sanhedrin)

Having described the events, it was possible to briefly consider three matters that suggested themselves from the incident and its sequel. First, a graphic description of an undeniable miracle raised the question of miracles in relation to God's sovereignty. Second, the essential characteristics of the gospel are easily identifiable in Peter's sermon. Third, the inference that the disciples were living in a state of availability has implications for us.

Although the homiletical idea was not enunciated till late in the sermon, it was present from the outset. It was easy to recount the events with enthusiasm and draw important inferences from the events themselves.

Sermon 5

“No Other Name!” What about Tolerance?

Passage: Acts 4:1-22

Text: “And in no one else, no one at all, is salvation to be found; for there is no other name under heaven, which has been given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Synopsis

The sermon commenced with an objection: Can we seriously believe such an assertion in an age of pluralism? “Look at it from the perspective of a decent, hard-working, good-neighborly, hockey-loving Canadian who happens to have been raised in another religion.” It considered a number of popular objections to the assertion and also attempted to explain the assertion of the verse away by limiting its application. The verse was placed in its context, partly because one ought always to do this in expository preaching, and partly to consider whether the assertion can justifiably be limited to this particular situation. Although I attempted to undermine these objections fairly early in the sermon, the more complete answer came only towards the end of the sermon.

Structure and Delivery

The approach adopted in this sermon was “subversive.” Its primarily apologetic purpose was served by a question and answer format and the repetition of the text as a homiletic idea. The progression of the argument is depicted in the outline. A fair amount of time was spent in the text, both describing the events and examining the categorical nature of Peter's statement. It was from this platform that the statement was interrogated.

1. To put it mildly, we Christians seem really opinionated
 - 1.1 Religious dinosaurs; even outright bigots
 - 1.2 Doesn't God honor sincerity?
 - 1.3 Isn't he more interested in a good heart than a good head?
 - 1.4 True *for me* perhaps, but not for everyone
 - 1.5 Isn't there a better, more tolerant, way to approach these things?
 - 1.6 Is it not better to say "Jesus is *my* Savior?"
 - 1.7 This means that we don't discount other people's ways.

2. Let's make sure we are not taking Peter's declaration out of context
 - 2.1 Peter made a seemingly outrageous statement
 - 2.2 Can we legitimately limit its scope?
 - 2.3 This only defers the matter. The statement is unequivocal.
 - 2.4 We never base important teachings on only one verse.
 - 2.5 This is the uniform teaching of the New Testament
 - 2.6 So, if we don't like it, we cannot simply excise this passage.

3. We need to address this cluster of fears and misgivings. To do so, I need to say something about *religion*, something about *Jesus*, something about *salvation*, and something about *tolerance*.
 - 3.1 Religion (Ill-considered syncretism)
 - 3.2 Jesus (Claims that are either true or blasphemous; poem by D. A. Carson)
 - 3.3 Salvation (Fundamental human need; far-reaching redemption)
 - 3.4 Tolerance (Distinction between "respectful" and "uncritical" tolerance)

Conclusion

When we think of the lengths to which God has gone, and when we think of who Jesus is, and what he has done, how could there be any other way? And why would we want it any other way? The approach adopted in the delivery was co-operative and persuasive and the tone was irenic rather than belligerent.

Sermon 6

When Silence is Not an Option

Passages: Acts 4:18-31; 5:27-32, 40-42.

Synopsis

After acknowledging the strategic wisdom of the maxims, "silence is golden" and "discretion is the better part of valor," the sermon considered the reasons for apostles' apparent lack of flexibility and their refusal to adopt a more tactical approach.

Structure and Delivery

In order to highlight the importance of uncompromising witness, I used the homiletical idea as a refrain and entered into a “dialogue” with Peter, suggesting that he adopt a more moderate approach and then dismissing my own suggestion. This was essentially a narrative sermon, but moved between induction and deduction. In each section of the sermon, I sought to work from the maxim, “silence is golden” to “silence is not an option.”

The outline depicts the sermon’s progression.

1. The Apostles before the Sanhedrin

- 1.1 The arrest and interrogation of the apostles
- 1.2 The unequivocal nature of their response
- 1.3 The Sanhedrin’s predicament and attempt at damage control
- 1.4 The apostles’ forthright reply
- 1.5 Polite suggestion to Peter to be more circumspect
- 1.6 Dismissal of the suggestion
- 1.7 Homiletical idea: *Such is the nature of this gospel that silence is not an option!*
We have to tell the story and we have to tell it like it is!
- 1.8 Further threats

2. The Believers’ Prayer Meeting

- 2.1 It never occurred to them to desist from witnessing.
- 2.2 They prayed that God would grant them boldness.
- 2.3 They asked God to continue healing and performing signs.
- 2.4 This is precisely what got them into trouble in the first place!
- 2.5 Why not adopt a more circumspect approach, consolidate the church and live to fight another day?
- 2.6 *But apparently, they never considered silence to be an option!*

3. Re-arrest and “Trial”

- 3.1 Interrogation and forthright response
- 3.2 Gamaliel’s advice
- 3.3 Flogging
- 3.4 Bleeding backs but a song in their hearts
- 3.5 Summary statement:

“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah” (Acts 5:42).
Such is the nature of the gospel that silence is simply not an option. It never has been!

4. A large army of men and women have chosen to die rather than keep quiet about the gospel.
 - 4.1 Correspondence between Trajan and Pliny the Younger
 - 4.2 A host of men and women who would not soft-pedal their faith; for them, *silence was not an option.*
 - 4.3 Polycarp's martyrdom
 - 4.4 "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)
 - 4.5 I am not advocating a reckless approach. It is not always time to speak.
 - 4.6 *But when it is, silence is not an option.*

The headings in the outline were to guide the narration. They were not articulated as headings or main points. This served to accentuate the refrain. The delivery itself was not intentionally persuasive in tone. I attempted rather to recount the story in such a way as to allow the passage to speak its own compelling message.

Sermon 7

"The Sheer Impossibility of Confining the God of Glory"

Passage: Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-8:1, 4

Synopsis

Stephen's address to the Sanhedrin was a watershed moment in the life of the early church. It is important for several reasons: (1) it presented a picture of "the God of glory" that was very different from that of the religious establishment; (2) it resulted in his martyrdom; (3) it unleashed a wave of persecution that resulted in the spreading of the gospel; and (4) it was instrumental in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. By setting the sermon in its context and highlighting its main points, it was possible to draw a sharp distinction between true and false religion, a contrast that involves far more than the orthodoxy of one's views.

Structure and Delivery

The sermon consisted largely of narration since the incident occurred at a crucial juncture in the story of the early church and Stephen's address was an intentionally selective overview of the history of Israel from Abraham to Solomon. *His* sermon is intentionally inductive. After setting the scene by describing Stephen's background and arrest, the content of his sermon was considered. Attention was paid to Stephen's expansive view of "the God of glory" and his inspired interpretation of the events of Israel's past. Some of the key events of revelation took place outside the Promised Land. His pertinent references to Joseph's and Moses' rejection at the hands of their brethren were noted, as well as the way he referred to the temple.

The events that frame his sermon (the circumstances of his arrest and his lynching by the Sanhedrin) were described. His address was presented under four main headings.

1. The God of glory manifests himself when and where he pleases.
2. He cannot be confined in any way.
3. He overrules human rejection to bring about his gracious purpose.
4. He is more interested in having a real relationship with us than in our practice of religion.

By analyzing the sermon's content and articulating it in point form, it was possible to help the audience to gain an insight into its thrust and significance. Clearly Stephen had to delay his indictment until the end of *his* sermon, but a "point-form" presentation of his address, embedded in a narrative, best served the purpose of *this* sermon. The concluding contrast between Stephen and Saul (relationship and religion) was a fitting embodiment of the contrast between the living faith of those who enjoy a relationship with God and those who merely practice religion.

Sermon 8

Doing Church outside the Box

Passage: Acts 10:1-23

Synopsis

The sermon traces the events and considers the issues that were raised when God summoned Peter to the home of Cornelius. It was not about paradigm shifts as such, but about a particular, theologically-significant paradigm shift. It shows God's sovereignty in orchestrating situations, but also our responsibility to be open to his leading.

Structure and Delivery

The concept of a paradigm shift was introduced by inviting the congregation to view a picture which contained concealed sketches of two women.² By doing this and referring to Thomas Kuhn's concept, it was possible to demonstrate the power of a paradigm and to prepare the audience for the key message of the sermon.

Since we have knowledge that the protagonists did not possess, it was important at the outset to attempt to move the audience to "ground level" so that we could see the events through the eyes of Cornelius and Peter. This was achieved by emphasizing Cornelius' ignorance of the events occurring at Joppa and Peter's ignorance of the events occurring at Caesarea, and by explaining the customs that would ordinarily have kept the two men apart.

This was a narrative sermon. The homiletical idea: *God sometimes does the unthinkable; all he requires of us is openness*, was repeated at key points in the sermon. The concept was described in such a way as to imply obedience. The sequence of the sermon is

²Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 26.

portrayed in the following moves. The headings were for the benefit of the preacher and were not articulated in the sermon.

1. At ground level (the circumstances of Cornelius and Peter prior to the events)
2. At the home of Cornelius
 - 2.1 The “introductions” and explanations
 - 2.2 The sermon (the quintessence of the kerygma)
 - 2.3 The unimaginable occurrence
 - 2.4 The understandable reaction
 - 2.5 The indisputable explanation
3. At White Rock Baptist Church
 - 3.1 Sometimes we too need a paradigm-shift of sorts.
 - 3.2 Any shift that God brings about is going to be positive and helpful.
 - 3.3 Many (perhaps most) of the breakthroughs in church life have occurred when God did something special and caused something akin to a paradigm shift.
 - 3.4 God can still do the unimaginable; all he requires is our openness!

Sermon 9

Punching Above Our Weight

Passage: Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3

Synopsis

A brief explanation of the strange caption led into a “visionary” statement about the church’s missional role and the suggestion that we should take our cue from the church at Antioch, which is arguably the most influential church of all time. After a brief explanation of the church’s origin and history, it was possible to identify some of the reasons for its effectiveness. The church demonstrated a largeness of spirit that manifested itself in a number of important ways. Some parallels between the church at Antioch and the White Rock Baptist Church served as the basis for an exhortation to emulate the Antioch church’s example in other respects.

Structure and Delivery

The sermon’s deductive arrangement served the exposition of the passage well, even though each of the features identified forms part of a progressive account. Early in the sermon, the church’s expansive mentality was emphasized. Once this had been done, it was possible to specify five key features that help to account for its profound influence.

Introduction

As a church, we desire to exert a powerful influence on our community. The church at Antioch was arguably the most influential church of all time. It was a large-spirited church with an expansive mentality. Let's take our cue from it.

1. The founders of the church refused to be boxed in by purely human strictures (Acts 11:19-21).
2. From the outset the church was inclusive and cosmopolitan (Acts 11:20; 13:1).
3. The leaders themselves were people who saw the big picture and placed the interests of the kingdom above their own interests (Acts 11:25-26).
4. So, it shouldn't surprise us that the church at Antioch was characterized by generosity (Acts 11:27-30).
5. But the church's greatest act of giving occurred when they fasted, placed their hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them off as missionaries (Acts 13:2-3).

Conclusion

There is a choice the church must keep on making. We shall always feel the restrictive pull towards parochialism and introversion. Let's choose to be a "big" church, a kingdom-oriented church, an outward-looking church!

Sermon 10

The Most Momentous Church Meeting Ever

Passage: Acts 15:1-21

Synopsis

The issue discussed at the Jerusalem Council had a crucial bearing on the church, but many in the average congregation have an aversion to church meetings. In addition, they would not see the relevance for today of a discussion about circumcision and kosher food. By describing the build-up to the meeting and identifying the issue at hand, the sermon sought to show the perennial relevance of the issue and to proclaim the gospel in unambiguous terms.

Structure and Delivery

By narrating the story in such a way as to highlight the issues, it was possible to emphasize the importance of salvation by faith alone. In keeping with the importance of the issue, the tone of the delivery was more authoritative than persuasive or co-operative. The fact that categorical assertions were embedded in a compelling narrative made the truth more accessible. The outline was for the preacher's guidance; from the perspective of the audience, the account was not punctuated by points and sub-points, except for the observations at the end of the sermon.

1. The build-up
 - 1.1 An ominous development at Antioch (Judaizers invade the church)
 - 1.2 A categorical claim (“Unless you are circumcised . . . you cannot be saved”)
 - 1.3 Vehement opposition (“sharp dispute and debate”)

2. The meeting
 - 2.1 The claim is repeated in the language of legalism (Acts 15:5)
 - 2.2 Intense discussion ensues (Acts 15: 6)
 - 2.3 Peter recounts the events at the home of Cornelius (Acts 15:7-11)
 - 2.4 Paul and Barnabas recount God’s work among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12)
 - 2.5 James recommends an appropriate course of action (Acts 15:13-21)
 - 2.6 The church communicates its decision (Acts 15:22-35).

3. The Issue
 - 3.1 The underlying issue is as relevant today as it ever was.
 - 3.2 The false teachers had said: For salvation you must have Jesus *plus something* (in this case circumcision). The church reaffirmed: “For salvation you *must* have Jesus plus . . . *nothing!*”
 - 3.3 It *seems* as though those who say, “To be saved, you need Jesus, and something” are promoting a more stringent standard, and surely that’s a good thing. It *seems* that those who are saying, “You need Jesus plus nothing,” are easygoing. It *seems* that they are watering down the gospel.
 - 3.4 In reality, the exact opposite is true. The moment we add something as a requirement, we do two things: we underrate the work of Christ and we distort the nature of faith. We deflect attention from what is essential. We dilute the gospel! *Believing means trusting unreservedly! It’s Jesus plus . . . nothing!*

Sermon 11

When Church Leaders Cannot Agree

Passages: Acts 12:25; 13: 5, 13; 15:36-41

Synopsis

The sharp dispute that resulted in Paul and Barnabas parting company raises the question of unity. At first sight, their dissension can be disconcerting, but a study of the event and the subsequent cordial relations helps us to consider the important matter of unity.

Structure and Delivery

The sermon commenced with an introduction of the main players in commendatory terms and a description of their warm relationship and productive partnership. This was followed by a brief drama that highlighted the issue that led to the dispute and envisaged

the kind of dispute that would have occurred. The portrayal enabled one to speak more generally about the factors that can place a strain on our unity

1. Introducing the main players

1.1 Paul

1.2 Barnabas

1.3 A great partnership

2. Apostolic “bust-up”

2.1 The “convulsion” (a brief drama acted by two colleagues)

2.2 Paul and Barnabas separate

2.3 If these two spiritual giants cannot resolve an issue like this, what hope is there for the likes of you and me?

3. “Bust-ups” in the church

3.1 Yes, some are caused by bad attitudes

3.2 There is the question of temperament: Remember, that which made Paul and Barnabas a great team could also pose a real threat to their relationship.

3.3 We do well to value the diversity God has placed within his church.

3.4 Honest differences of opinion ought not to lead to rifts, but often do.

3.5 There can be a happy ending (1 Cor 9:6; Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11; Phlm. 24).

3.6 Furthermore, Timothy would probably never have been drafted had Mark been around (Acts 16:1-3; cf. Phil 2:19-22).

4. An appeal for unity and reconciliation

Conclusion

Most importantly, disagreements among genuine Christians should never harden into resentment and stand-offs. The love that unites us “is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Cor 13:5).

Sermon 12

Is Conversion Still Necessary?

Passage: Acts 16:11-24

Synopsis

Paul’s early ministry at Philippi results in the conversion of Lydia, a slave-girl (implicit), and a Philippian jailer (among others). By noting the circumstantial differences in the experience of each of the three, it was possible to teach on the nature and necessity of conversion. The question of “conversion” was raised in the introduction by means of a

personal anecdote. This placed the question of conversion on the table and led naturally into a consideration of the passage. By distinguishing between the theological essentials and incidental factors, it was possible to emphasize the necessity of regeneration and consequential conversion.

Structure and Delivery

The sermon contained narrative material but it was not a narrative sermon as such. The main points were clearly articulated and there was a clear didactic intent. The sermon was inductive insofar as it progressed from a question about the appropriateness of the concept, through instances of conversion, towards a definition and an appeal.

Introduction

Some who claim to be Christians are confused by the use of the term conversion in relation to those who have “always believed.”

1. Some conversions are real but do not involve a dramatic experience (Lydia).
 - 1.1 Lydia listened to Paul with rapt attention. This probably went on for a few weeks.
 - 1.2 Her conversion was real. It *was* experiential, not just cerebral. But one would hardly call it dramatic.
 - 1.3 It is wonderful to see people whose hearts the Lord opens. And it happens in a variety of ways.
2. Other conversions do entail something sudden and dramatic (the slave-girl).
 - 2.1 Unwanted publicity
 - 2.2 Deliverance
 - 2.3 We are not explicitly told so. but it is highly likely that she became a believer herself. “The fact that her deliverance took place between the conversions of Lydia and the gaoler leads readers to infer that she too became a member of the Philippian church.”³
3. Still other conversions are occasioned by the most extraordinary set of circumstances (the jailer)
 - 3.1 An alleged “nest of improbabilities”; that is just the point
 - 3.2 The events from the perspective of a prisoner
 - 3.3 The jailer’s conversion
 - 3.4 The “dignified departure” of Paul and Silas.
4. Whatever the circumstances, each of us needs to experience conversion.
 - 4.1 Three different conversions
 - 4.2 Conversion in relation to regeneration

³John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the World and the Church* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 265.

4.3 A perennial need

4.4 *Circumstantially* different but *essentially* the same

Conclusion

There may be a long process of instruction before conversion and there will be an extended period of growth after it. But at some stage there is a turning from sin and a trusting in Jesus. We call *that* “conversion!”

APPENDIX 6

A QUESTIONNAIRE COMPLETED BY PASTORAL TEAM MEMBERS

Please mark the appropriate block to indicate your response to the following statements.

1. It is evident that thorough exegetical work was done in preparation for the sermon.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

2. The message of the sermon was derived directly from the passage(s) being expounded.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

3. It was possible to identify the purpose of the sermon.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

4. The sermon's arrangement was essentially inductive:

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

5. The structure of the sermon was appropriate to the purpose of the sermon.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

6. The tone (e.g. authoritative, persuasive) of the presentation was appropriate to the purpose of the sermon.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

7. In terms of structure and delivery, the sermon was suited to a postmodern audience:

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

8. The sermon was accessible to those who are young in the faith.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

9. In terms of *structure*, the sermon's main strength was: (Indicate this in one sentence)

10. In terms of *structure*, the sermon's main weakness was: (Indicate this in one sentence)

11. In terms of *delivery*, the sermon's main strength was: (Indicate this in one sentence)

12. In terms of *delivery*, the sermon's greatest weakness was: (Indicate this in one sentence)

APPENDIX 7

A QUESTIONNAIRE COMPLETED BY FORTY-EIGHT
MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION

Please mark the appropriate block to indicate your response to the following questions/statements.

1. Which age group describes you?

| | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| 20-29 | 30-39 | 40-59 | 60 and over |
|-------|-------|-------|-------------|

2. How many years has it been since you came to faith in Christ?

| | | | |
|-----|------|-------|-------------|
| 1-5 | 6-10 | 11-19 | 20 and over |
|-----|------|-------|-------------|

3. Indicate the highest educational qualification obtained. (Circle one)

| | | | |
|-------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| High School | Post Secondary | Bachelor's Degree | Graduate Degree |
|-------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|

4. The preacher had obviously spent time studying the passage.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

5. The sermon explained the meaning of the passage in its original context.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

6. The main point of the sermon was unmistakably clear very early on in the sermon.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

7. The preacher involved the hearers as he moved progressively towards the main point of the sermon.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

8. The arrangement of the material in the sermon helped to make it interesting.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

9. I understood the relevance of the passage for my life today.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

10. The sermon was presented in such a way that I became “involved.”

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

11. I felt I was being drawn into a conversation, spoken to rather than being preached at.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|

12. I would describe the preacher’s approach in this sermon as mainly:

| | | | | |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|------------|-------|
| Authoritative | Authoritarian | Cooperative | Persuasive | Other |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|------------|-------|

If “other,” please specify.

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ABSTRACT

IMPROVING EXPOSITORY PREACHING THROUGH GREATER VARIETY IN SERMON STRUCTURE AND DELIVERY AT WHITE ROCK BAPTIST CHURCH, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011
Supervisor: Brian J. Vickers

The purpose of this project was to improve the preaching at White Rock Baptist Church through the intentional use of variety in sermon structure and delivery. The project laid a biblical and theological foundation for variety in expository preaching by considering the Lord's use of different but complementary methods to proclaim truth and by examining six sermons from the Acts of the Apostles.

A study of the works of a number of homiletics corroborated the concept that true expository preaching actually elicits rich diversity. Such variety is best achieved by an organic rather than a mechanical approach.

This thesis was tested in a series of twelve sermons on the Acts of the Apostles by means of two related questionnaires. The survey confirmed that preaching is indeed improved by variety in sermon structure and delivery, provided that such variety derives from a creative exposition of the passage at hand.

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