A Turn Toward the Listener (part 2)

Previously in part 1, the idea of "A Turn Toward the Listener" was explored by asking, "What is listener oriented preaching?" and "What is preaching's relationship to hearing?" The definition of preaching that guided my discussion was, **"Proclaiming the theology of a text in the contemporary context in order to transform the community of God into the image of Jesus."** I concluded with the question, "Can preaching be effective?" The question haunts preachers of every generation and reminds us all of Fosdick's classic lament.[1] Let me examine the question from a different angle, "Does effective preaching necessitate congregational response?"

In the larger theological world, tensions abound between those who desire to protect God's fundamental role in the preaching event and others who view the human contribution to preaching's effectiveness as significant. For example, a discussion between Paul Scott Wilson and Joseph Webb occurred during the annual meeting of the Academy of Homiletics in 2004.[2] When and by what means does the event of preaching happen? According to Wilson, inherent in the proclamation of God's word, by means of the Spirit, hearts are changed. God is in sovereign control of the process. Webb counters with an anthropology rooted in humans being created in God's image and called into divine partnership with God's ways in the world. As with most bi-

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[1] Harry Emerson Fosdick, "What's the Matter with Preaching?" *Harper's Magazine* (July 1928): 133-141. See also: Mike Graves, ed., *What's the Matter with Preaching Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004)

[2] Paul Scott Wilson, "Radical Postmodern: A Prophetic Ethics?" *The Academy of Homiletics: Papers of the Annual Meeting* (Memphis: Memphis Theological Seminary, 2004), 230-239, and Joseph M. Webb, "A Reply, both Academic and Personal, to Paul Scott Wilson's 'Radical Postmodern: A Prophetic Ethics?'" *The Academy of Homiletics: Papers of the Annual Meeting* (Memphis: Memphis Theological Seminary, 2004): 240-249. Thomas Long explores this debate through the lens of Barth and Brunner, "And How Shall They Hear? The Listener in Contemporary Preaching," in *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, ed. Gail R. O'Day & Thomas G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 167-188. Long's turn towards the listener is in the classic rhetorical sense and not parallel to Lischer's ecclesial move as described in the introduction of part 1 in this two-part series.

polar debates, neither party in practice maintains their extreme position. But the debate reminds us of the same tension that existed between the sophists and the classicists way back when. To what extent does the speaker consider the role of the audience when speaking?

My definition of preaching, **"Proclaiming the theology of a text in contemporary context in order to transform the community of God into the image of Jesus,"** is philosophically pragmatic[3] and functions to mediate the debate. The present tense nature of my definition rooted in a communal process of change over time in order to reach maturity in Christ is supported by my theological assertions stated in part 1 as well as my pragmatic underpinnings informed by the work of C. S. Peirce.

Charles Sanders Peirce's (1839-1914) career was dominated by the dual inquiry into science and the role of belief in systems of thought. C. S. Peirce is remembered as an American philosopher, symbolic logician, mathematician, originator of pragmatism, and the progenitor of semiotics. His broad interest in science, philosophy, philology, and mathematics was his belief in the nature of knowledge, the idea that underlying all systems is method. Logic was the king of method that connected all other particular inquiries together—the method of methods.

Many scholars attribute the origin of pragmatism to the Metaphysical Club (1872-1875). Modeled after other Saturday Clubs that gathered around Cambridge, this club included William James, Chauncy Wright, John Fiske, Nicholas St. John Green, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., and

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[3] Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). West, 42, cites C. I. Lewis saying, "Pragmatism could be characterized as the doctrine that all problems are at bottom problems of conduct, that all judgments are, implicitly, judgments of value, and that, as there can be ultimately no valid distinction of theoretical and practical, so there can be no final separation of questions of truth of any kind from questions of the justifiable ends of actions." Or as John Dewey, "The Pragmatism of Peirce," in *Chance, Love and Logic: Philosophical Essays,* ed. M. R. Cohen. International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1923), 301-302, one of Peirce's most famous intellectual heirs succinctly says, "[Peirce] framed the theory that a conception, that is, the rational purport of a word or other expression, lies exclusively in its bearing upon the conduct of life."

Charles Peirce. Alexander Bain's (1859) definition of belief, "that upon which a [person] is prepared to act," fashioned their preliminary understandings of pragmatism.[4]

William James regarded the ideas in Peirce's two famous essays that first appeared in *Popular Science Monthly* 12—*The Fixation of Belief* (Nov 1877) and *How to Make Our Ideas Clear* (Jan. 1878)—as the origin of pragmatism. In *The Fixation of Belief,* Peirce describes a method to ascertain the meaning of words and concepts. The purpose of investigation is to settle opinions, to move from a state of doubt to belief. Belief, he notes, functions as a "habit" which determines our conduct. Doubt leads to inquiry that leads to belief culminating in habit. "We see, then, what is to be our rule for making clear the meaning of belief. 'To develop its meanings we have, therefore, simply to determine what habits it involves'" (*How to Make Our Ideas Clear*, CP 5.396-98, 400).

Such a definition of belief is expounded in Peirce's famous Pragmatic Maxim, "Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (*How to Make Our Ideas Clear,* EP 1.132). Knowledge does not exist prior to action but instead is constructed through action. His definition of truth rejects a correspondence model where truths simply agree with realities. Instead, true ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify by experience and practice in community over time. In other words, does an object or idea make any practical difference? Later in his career Peirce clarifies,

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[4] Peirce cites Nicholas St. John Green as the one who pressed Alexander Bain's definition of belief among the rest of the club (*Pragmatism*, EP 2.399). In accordance with the customs of Peirce scholarship, I will refer to Peirce's texts using abbreviations. CP refers to *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce.* EP refers to *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*. SS refers to *Semiotics and Significs: The Correspondence between Charles S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby*. W refers to *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition.* SW refers to *Charles S. Peirce: Selected Writings*.

Belief is not a momentary mode of consciousness; it is a habit of mind essentially enduring for some time, and mostly (at least) unconscious; and like other habits, it is (until it meets with some surprise that begins in dissolution) perfectly self-satisfied. Doubt is of an altogether contrary genus. It is not a habit, but the privation of habit. Now a privation of habit, in order to be anything at all, must be a condition of erratic acting that in someway must get superseded by a habit. (*What Pragmatism Is*, EP 2.336-337)

To Peirce, habits are general structures of intelligibility that form human behavior and are sustainable over time. Subsequently, habits form rules and maxims that facilitate harmony with nature while sustaining human beliefs and stability in the world. Belief moves towards a deepening sense of the possibilities of self controlled conduct and intentional action[5] (*Issues of Pragmaticism*, EP 2.347). Elsewhere he states, "Readiness to act in a certain way under given circumstances and when actuated by a given motive is a habit; and a deliberate, or self-controlled habit is precisely belief" (*Pragmatism*, S 480). Peirce provocatively concluded one of his many lectures saying, "The elements of every concept enter into logical thought at the gate of perception and make their exit at the gate of purposive action; and whatever cannot show its passport at both those two gates is to be arrested as unauthorized by reason" (*Pragmatism as the Logic of Abduction*, EP 2.241).

A pragmatic understanding of language insists that meaning is integrally connected to purpose. Transmission is not equal to communication if it lacks teleological and social purposes. Although true communication may fail (because humans are fallible), the ongoing process of the semiotic system instills hope for the "ideal" situation to exist. People strive to understand each other. Even if people fall short of the ideal, communication can be understood as being

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[5] The notion of "possibility" connects to Peirce's sign system that evolves towards the future. Now the past is closed/fixed. The past cannot be altered and does not belong to the realm of possibility. He qualifies that by saying, "whenever we set out to do anything, we 'go upon,' we base our conduct on facts already known, and for these we can only draw upon our memory." However, the future does contain genuine possibility and is intimately tied to human conduct. The future can be changed by self-control (*Issues of Pragmaticism*, EP 2.358-359). The present is a blending of the two modalities of past and future. The present is where "reality becomes actualized and moves toward a determined state of the past."

accomplished if the interaction establishes habits and changes that enable people to function socially or to cooperate in the pursuit of some common goal within a common universe of action.

Although beyond the scope of this introduction, Peirce merely recapitulates Paul's understanding of sanctification. Because Christians believe the Gospel, we continue to "walk" in the obedience of faith (Eph. 4:1; Col. 2:6-7; Rom. 1:5). We journey on the road of faith "from one degree of glory to another" as a community (2 Cor. 3:18). To forsake obedience, habits, and practices is to deny faith. A pragmatic or "peircist"[6] homiletic would conclude that listener feedback is best determined by their actions.

Does effective preaching necessitate congregational response? To act otherwise is to deny our belief in a God who speaks and calls people to repent. Inherent in the definition, **"Proclaiming the theology of a text in contemporary context in order to transform the community of God into the image of Jesus,"** is the transformation of the community over time in concrete ways. Changing how the preacher designs or delivers the sermon will have positive influences on how people hear. The qualities of "teaching" and "delighting" will function, with help of the Holy Spirit, to move congregations into the will of God.

Pragmatic preachers aspire that sermons accomplish certain ends, realize particular consequences. Preachers intend to persuade hearers to become and consequently to act. Jana Childers collected several essays asking the question of purpose. To summarize the discussion on purpose the chart below summarizes the eclectic but representative view of the academy.[7]

Purposes of Preaching

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[6] Umberto Eco, *Peirce's Notion of Interpretant,* Paper presented to the C. S. Peirce Symposium at Johns Hopkins University, 1975. Eco distinguished between "peircian" from "peircist" scholarship by noting that the former seeks the "authentic" Peirce, while the latter apply his insights to new situations.

[7] Jana Childers, ed., *Purposes of Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004).

1. *The purpose of the preacher is to help the congregation move toward a Christian interpretation of the world.* Ron Allen, "Preaching as Mutual Critical Correlation through Conversation," 1.

2. *The ultimate purpose of our preaching; that is the goal toward which our proclamation leads: the building up of the community of faith as a people who practice the ways of God, as embodied in Jesus Christ, in and for the world.* Charles Campbell, "Resisting the Powers," 24.

3. *Among the many purposes of preaching is this one: to speak what cannot be spoken. Positively, this means we proclaim that there is a holy and righteous God; that this God loves the entire world; that God has redeemed the world through the dying and rising again of Jesus Christ; and that we can live each day delighting in both torah and gospel as we look forward to the future establishment of God's reign of justice, steadfast love, faithfulness, and shalom.* John McClure, "Preaching and the Redemption of Language," 83.

4. Preaching as hospitality, de-centering, re-membering, and right relationship. Christine Smith, "Hospitality, De-Centering, Re-Membering, and Right Relations," 104ff.

5. *The purpose of preaching is to illuminate this essential paradox of human existence: our simultaneously being in touch and out of touch with the source and sustainer of ourselves and everything that is. ... to present the reality of God in ways that are so gripping people can pray…even when they feel God has lost touch with them.* Thomas Troeger, "Keeping in Touch with God," 114, 126.

6. From Luke 4:18-19 – *To proclaim for the captives release and for the blind sight; to send forth the oppressed in release; and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.* To disrupt a ruptured world through release. Mary Donovan Turner, "Disrupting a Ruptured World," 131, 139. [Note the verbs]

   - To point beyond ourselves to God
   - To participate in articulating God's alternative vision
   - To illuminate truth
   - To encourage and affirm

   - To lead people to the love of their own wisdom
   - To mend our alienation from God
   - To incarnate and embody the grace of God
   - To unwrap the gift of the gospel

   - To move people from where they are to where they can be

   - To persuade
   - To give God a voice
   - To remind
   - To make present the living Spirit
   - To connect the truth of God's word to the hearer
   - To instruct
   - To escort others to live in the way and day of God
   - To proclaim the greatness of God
   - To point toward the holy

• To comfort and challenge	• To invoke the empowering Word and presence of God in the hearer
• To speak for those who cannot	• To respond faithfully to God
• To offer hope	• To "speak the truth in love"
• To hold up a memory	• To be the prism through which the light of God can shine
• To create community	• To birth the movement of God in the life of the community of faith

7. *Preaching is to communicate faith. It is to present the word of God in such a way that the people experience the sustenance God offers, and are thereby equipped "for the work of ministry."* To effect transformation in people's lives. Paul Scott Wilson, "Preaching as a Theological Venture," 144.

And let me add Helmut Thielicke's word on the subject, Real preaching involves helping hearers *meet the decisive, active Word," that "strikes us as an effectual Word . . . [which] breaks off the old existence and starts a new one, bringing sins to light and forgiving them, changing God's rejection into an acceptance which gives me a new future and makes me a new creature in the miracle of the Spirit.*[8] The academy may differ theologically, but all agree that the sermon is designed to accomplish something in the lives of the hearers.

Is that all there is? What would concrete practices in preaching look like if the preacher took a more overt "turn towards the church?" A review of Peirce's pragmatic philosophy may prompt us to consider how a pragmatic homiletic might function. Pragmatism asks, "What concrete effects will our concepts and words have?" The following questions might shape that conversation: "What congregational habits and practices might be formulated by a preacher who believed in the principles of pragmatism? Or, as a turn toward the listener dictates, "By what habits or practices might identify a congregation if it believed?"

A Reticent Pragmatic Proposal

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[8] Quoted by James Earl Massey, *Designing the Sermon,* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 16.

My unscientific inquiry, my impression, is that on the one hand, the signs[9] of preaching are not effecting communal habits, practices, and behaviors. On the other hand, pragmatic sermons would effect the purposes, plans, and ideals of the present and future behaviors of the audience. Since habits are controllable, congregations can change their minds and exercise choices that embody the image of Christ.

Some preliminary trajectories of the habits practiced by a pragmatic homilectic include the following common homiletical categories: focus, function, form, plot, illustrations, and conclusions. I offer these tentative suggestions as ways to modify current homiletical practice that effect concrete congregational response.
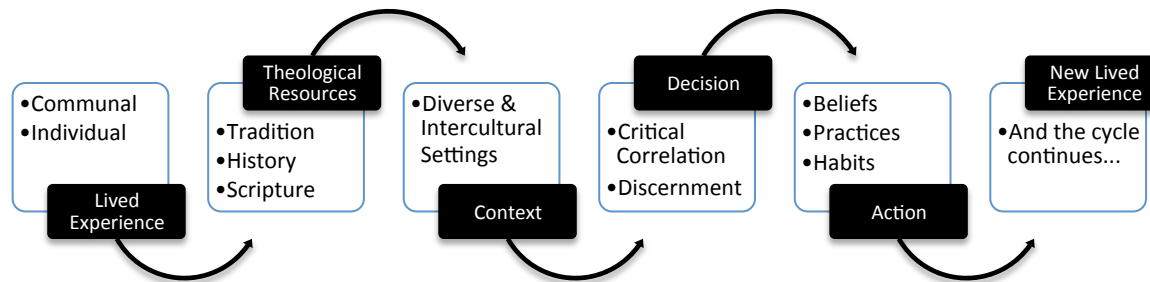
1. Focus: A proleptic view of God's intended future.

Through my years of considering the question of method for homiletics and practical theology, I have arrived at a hermeneutical model of theological reflection[10] that reflects Peirce's

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[9] Pierce understands formal rhetoric (later called speculative rhetoric or methodeutic) as the force of symbols in appealing to the mind. Peirce defined rhetoric as "the general secret of rendering signs effective" (*Ideas, Stray or Stolen, about Scientific Writing*, EP 2.326). He proposed that the various specialties of the art of rhetoric be divided according to 1) the nature of whatever is to be conceived, 2) the special class of signs used, and 3) the classes of signs into which interpretation is to take place (purposes). The third classification was divided between rhetoric of signs to be translated into human thought and processes whereby an idea can be conveyed to a human mind and become embedded in habits. He does not limit rhetoric to speech but includes all signs (mathematic, gestures, natural purposes and feelings. Peirce's list is quite exhaustive.) Symbols do not relate to things, but to our comprehension of things. He states, "Whether there can be such a universal art or not, there ought, at any rate to be … a science to which should be referable the fundamental principles of everything like rhetoric … bring about a physical result. Yes, a physical result; for though we often speak with just contempt of 'mere' words, inasmuch as signs by themselves can exert no brute force, nevertheless it has always been agreed, by nominalist and realist alike, that general ideas are … signs. … If it be objected that it is not the general ideas, but the men who believe in them, that cause the physical events, the answer is that it is the ideas that prompt men to champion them… One ought to know just what the processes are whereby an idea can be conveyed to a human mind and become embedded in its habits; and according to this doctrine, all the rules of ordinary rhetoric ought to be hinged upon such considerations" (*Ideas, Stray or Stolen, about Scientific Writing,* EP 2.326, 330). For example, a speech can trigger a revolution. And if the sign fails to bring about effect, then it fails in its attempt to be a sign.

[10] Elaine Heather Walton Graham, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods, v.1* (SCM Press, 2005), and the companion volume, *Theological Reflection: Sources, v. 2* (SCM Press, 2007); Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980); Patricia O'Connell Killen, and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad, 1995); Robert L. Kinast, *What are They Saying about Theological Reflection?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000); John Patton, *From Ministry to Theology: Pastoral Action & Reflection* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990); John E. Paver, *Theological*

triadic semeiotics.[11]

Lived Experience
- Communal
- Individual

Theological Resources
- Tradition
- History
- Scripture

Context
- Diverse & Intercultural Settings

Decision
- Critical Correlation
- Discernment

Action
- Beliefs
- Practices
- Habits

New Lived Experience
- And the cycle continues...

While this hermeneutical process leads to a focus statement, it will also inform the design of the sermon's script or form discussed below. What is a focus statement? I define the focus as the theological intent of the sermon that envisions what God is calling the church to embody in the

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Reflection and Education for Ministry, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology (Hamshire, Eng: Ashgate, 2006); Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 1995); Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 2nd ed (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006); Max Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990); James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Kansas City, KA: Sheed & Ward, 1995); Charles M. Wood, *Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Study* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1985).

[11] Semiotics is the study of those complexes known as signs and has its origin to ancient Greek thought and continued through the medieval period. Continental semiotics is primarily seen in the structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure who privileges language and the arbitrary cultural codes within which signs function. Robert S. Corrington, *An Introduction to C. S. Peirce: Philosopher, Semiotician, and Ecstatic Naturalist* (Boston: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993), 3-4. Although it can be considered as a synonym of Semiotics, the term Semeiotic(s) is often used to refer more narrowly to Peirce's theory of signs. A sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect thus transcending Saussure's "reference theory" of meaning. Peirce states, "I define a sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the latter is thereby mediately determined by the former" (*Excerpts from Lacy Welby*, EP 2.478). Signs are qualities, relations, features, items, events, states, regularities, habits, and laws that have significances, meanings, and interpretations. For instance, a sign could be a written word or utterance, but also be something like smoke as a sign for fire to people who are conditioned by prior semiotic encounters to find signification in such phenomena.

world. It describes God's activity in the process. In the definition of preaching, **"Proclaiming the theology of a text in contemporary context in order to transform the community of God into the image of Jesus,"** the focus emerges from the various theological resources that interact with Scripture in contemporary contexts.

The model begins at the point we all first encounter God, in the incarnation of Immanuel dwelling among us in our context. As preachers, we follow that example by dwelling in the communal lived experiences of the congregation.[12] Pastoral ministry spends time with people. Life is filled with births, schools, leagues, clubs, jobs, baptisms, chores, illnesses, graduations, marriages, anniversaries, promotions, meals, tragedies, projects, laundry, missions, retirements, vacations, and funerals. Through prayer requests and friendships, the most important interchanges occur that relate to transcendent realities, significant communities, and meaningful existence. The listening preacher knows the stories of the people that come week after week to hear a good word. The phenomena of their lives become the raw data that the preacher brings into critical correlation with theological resources.

Peirce's understanding of abduction, or retroduction, currently functions as the foundation for modern scientific inquiry. Abduction is closely tied to the classical notion of

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[12] The world is understood in the phenomena that "appear" in human experiences. Subsequently, the world consists entirely of "signs." Peirce did not privilege human language but locates sign activity within the self and its communities, which is located within an evolving universe and itself full of signs. He also considered thoughts as signs.

Peirce's concept of "vagueness" (*Issues of Pragmaticism,* EP 2.351-352) encourages the preacher to be diligent by exegeting the congregation; listening to the congregational story (a form of ethnography) and to know parishioners pastoral concerns. Not only will the preacher more aptly connect the concerns of the text with the concerns of the congregation, but also grow in awareness of the semiotic world of the audience. The range of signs that will connect to people will be more appropriately chosen. Since no one's experiences are the same, listening becomes a primary tool for speaking. Because of the differences in knowledge, experience, and beliefs, what might be relatively determined for the speaker may be vague for the hearer thus frustrating the communicative intent.

"invention"[13] and requires both reasoning and argument. Simply, abduction calls for stating a hypothesis, citing actual instances, and synthesizing the patterns. As a method of retrospection, the preacher would correlate experience, context, and theological resources to arrive at a hypothesis that would be synthesized into an argument.[14]

Therefore, the abductive process will create a trialogical conversation in the preacher's mind that involves the congregations lived experiences with the theological resources of the Christian faith and diverse intercultural contexts of their particular location. The conversation involves a critical correlation of the various voices that through discernment a theological field of understanding emerges.[15] The exegetical process of the chosen text will contribute in significant ways at this point in the process. When the preacher can articulate that conversation in one clear and concise statement of God's participation in the lives of people, a theme or focus statement abductively emerges. Subsequently, the preacher connects the focus of the sermon with congregational beliefs, practices, and habits that are concretely related.

2. Function: Changing the function of the function.

Again, my definition controls how I understand function statements. My definition for preaching has a clearly stated objective, **"…transformation of the community into the image of Jesus."** In homiletics, the terms "aim," "purpose," and "function" are often been used to describe what the preacher intends the sermon "to do." Preachers intend that sermons accomplish certain ends; realize particular consequences. Preachers intend to persuade hearers to become

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[13] See footnote 15, part 1.

[14] Since Peirce advocates that abduction is the only one of the three logical inferences, deduction and induction being the other two, that ever generates new beliefs, an abductive sermon form might serve preaching well and be a substantial modification to the literature on inductive preaching.

[15] See David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Fortress, 1987), 268-274, 293-297 for a discussion of a theological field of vision that intends towards meaning.

and consequently to act. The most oft used definition of a function statement comes from Tom Long, *Witness of Preaching*. Quoting David Kelsey: "Part of what it means to call a text 'Christian scripture,' is that it functions to shape persons' identities so decisively as to transform them … when it is used in the context of the common life of Christian community."[16] Advocating that biblical texts say things that do things, and the sermon is to say and do those things too. Content and intention are bound together (focus and function), and no expression of proclamation is complete without them. Long writes, "A *function statement* is a description of what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen for the hearers. Sermons make demands upon the hearers, which is another way of saying that they provoke change in the hearers. … The function statement names the hoped-for change."[17] Function statements raise the question of how the preacher's words will be taken up, acted on, or become embedded in the practices of the congregation.

For a pragmatic sermon, let me propose that all function statements only use behavioral or affective verbs. I'm not against cognitive acts. Let's assume that what we are doing makes sense. We are using clear and meaningful language. Let's assume that our words communicate content in clear and logical ways that increase congregational understanding. Let's assume that our words will "remind," "clarify," "teach," "analyze," "enlighten," "illuminate," "investigate," "examine," and a host of other words that are appropriate for thinking people. And for Peirce, understanding a concept is the same as belief that will lead to practice. After the congregation understands, then what? Select a strong verb that reflects the answer to the question, "So what?"

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[16] In: Thomas Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Westminster John Knox, 1989), 106.

[17] Ibid., 108-109.

Affective and behavioral functions go beyond feelings and reactions and become a way of being for people. Let's use active verbs like "affirm," "exhort," "warn," "challenge," "encourage," "delight," "inspire," "support," "promote," "hearten," "stir," "motivate," "arouse," "provoke," "aggravate," and a host of other words that prompt the hoped for change in people's lives.[18] Only then does the message have "meaning" in a peircian sense. Subsequently, the function of sermons will be judged by their transformative effect "over time" in the life cycle of a church.

People can have bad habits that they sustain for a surprisingly long time. These habits are funded by "inadequate definitions, misleading theories, and other bad interpretations."[19] Since bad habits die hard, our function statements must activate intentional and concrete practices. If our aim is to "fix" belief so that people are prepared to act, then our functions must be effective and affective from the outset and our teaching must become proclamation.

3. Form: Practicing the shape of belief

Now we have a focus statement that is abductively determined through a critical correlation of partners. Also, we have a function statement that intends change. Let's next explore homiletics' favorite topic, form. Will believing in a pragmatic homiletic effect sermon form? So far, the script of the sermon contains a focus and function statement. The conclusion should be written next.[20] However, since I want to conclude this essay with the conclusion, I will

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[18] Verbs for function statements are plentiful. See the following link.

[19] Lyne, 87.

[20] While the arrangement of this article is focus, function, form, and conclusion following the typical homiletical formulations, the chronological process of sermon development is different. The critical correlation of lived experience, theological resources, and context give rise to focus and function statements. The conclusion should be written next. Powerful conclusions evoke strong sermons. Finally, after the sermon is constructed, an introduction can be written. Introductions introduce. Introductions point to the whole sermon but primarily function to transition the audience to the first act of the sermon script.

talk about form here. Once you know the denouement of the sermon that resolves the climax of the plot, you will need various episodes that will bring the congregation along.[21]

Recall, the abductive process that generated the focus and function statements. That process also produced valuable data necessary for the development of several episodes. You have the data of lived experiences of the congregation, the raw materials of the theological resources that were brought into the conversation, and the analysis of the local context. From these sources will emerge stories, images, and arguments that can be scripted into episodes that are plotted with narratival logic unto the sermon's denouement. These episodes can also be scripted using associational logic. This is not new material in the homiletical literature. However, Pierce has much to say about whether or not these stories, images, and arguments are efficacious in producing a belief that effects action, or audience response.

Sermons often succeed or fail by the preacher's lack of attention of how words, images, metaphors, arguments, and stories function as icons, indices, or symbols in the thought world of the congregation. Peirce's sign typologies differentiate between "icon," "index," and "symbol" (*On a New List of Categories*, EP 1.7). An icon is a sign that denotes its objects by virtue of its essence or quality that it shares with them. Icons are also called likeness. Examples include a map, a diagram, or a portrait. An index is a sign that denotes its objects by virtue of an existential connection or causal relation with them. An index corresponds with facts. Examples include a weather vane, raising a hand to answer a question, smoke, a fever, or murder and victim. A symbol is a sign that denotes its objects solely by virtue of the fact that it is interpreted to do so

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[21] I am a firm believer in using Buttrick's plots, *Homiletic*, 285-318. The students appreciate the explanation of Buttrick's plots in David L. Barnhart and L. Susan Bond's "Homiletix: Using Comics to Teach Buttrick's Model," *The Academy of Homiletics: Papers of the Annual Meeting* (St. Louis: Eden Theological Seminary, 2001): 214-224. See also Aristotle's *Poetics* at http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html, and Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 31-90.

intelligibly. Symbols ascribe character or conventional connection. Examples include traffic

signs, religious symbols, or a flag. He elaborated by saying that a single sign may display a

combination of all three instances of icon, index, and symbol (*On the Algebra of Logic: A*

Contribution to the Philosophy of Notation, EP 1.225).[22] A pragmatic homiletic will not only

attend to how sermonic logic is developed but also the sermon's denouement. The weight of

icons, indices, and symbols to effect response cannot be underestimated.

An abductive sermon would also include an understanding of how Peirce differentiates

between "arguments" and "exhortations." Arguments create beliefs while exhortations awaken

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[22] Peirce continually classified and sub-classified the central features of sign vehicles. Since Peirce understood the precise function of signs and interpretants with such detail, further description of the importance of his typology must come in a latter essay. Qualisigns are based on the qualities of the object. For example the color chip used to buy paint. Only the color is essential and not the material. Sinsign relies on the existential connection between the sign and the object as seen in the causal relation between smoke and fire, mole hill and mole, temperature, fever, and infection. Finally, the legisigns relies on convention, habit, or law like a traffic light.

Lyne, 60, offers an informative table. He states, "Every sign involves a type from each column … a category cannot be combined with another category that is farther down the list in a column to its right. The categories have been numbered in the table … so that the ten valid tracheotomies can be described by these numerical combinations: 369, 368, 367, 358, 357, 347, 258, 257, 247, 147."

	sign in itself (representamen)	sign in relation to object/ground	sign interpreted to represent
first:	qualisign (1)	icon (4)	term (7)
second:	sinsign (2)	index (5)	proposition (8)
third:	legisign (3)	symbol (6)	argument (9)

Central features of the interpretant also received greater classification. Qualities or rheme involves "unsaturated predicates." Existential or dicent interpretants have "saturated predicates" or propositions. Propositions must always involve two signs, one iconic (by means of predicates) and the other indexical (by means of subjects). Finally, the conventional interpretant or delome is an argument or a rule from inference. People's ability to place a sign in a rational argument or pattern of thinking (inductive, deductive, abductive) shows a more complex use of the sign. Although in theory, Peirce saw twenty-seven (3x3x3) possible sign relations, due to phenomenological restrictions, he found only ten. Throughout his life, Peirce made further clarifications and nuances and often changed his terminology. But he did not see an infinite chain of signs. There was the immediate object (an unanalyzed impression which the sign might be expected to produce prior to any critical reflection, somewhere within the process) and the dynamic object (the end of the process; or at least the actual interpretation we which at some point in the process). Subsequently, there would then be three interpretants called "intentional", "effectual", and "communicational." (*Letters to Lady Welby*, SW 380)

beliefs already held.[23] Arguments persuade by relying on the support of beliefs already held. The move from reasoning to arguing is a move from "finding meaning to transmitting meaning."[24] Arguments are designed to secure a conclusion in the mind of the audience.[25] When a preacher speaks publicly in order to fix belief, what Peirce would call an "assertion"; the audience assumes responsibility for that belief. Preaching is a social act. Once the sermon is uttered, the words are no longer under the preacher's exclusive control, but belong to the congregation. The preacher should expect the audience to be accountable and take responsibility for their listening.

The preacher will begin with sign systems that the congregation understands. Peirce would not support the move from "orientation" to "disorientation" to "reorientation." If the speaker uses signs in a way that confuses the audience or disrupts the audience's conceptions of being yet connects to other plausible structures in such a way that the audience may reach conflicting interpretations, the process is not left open but chaotic. Certainly, this is not solved by inductive logic (or more precisely indirect communication) for how the conflicted sign systems are interpreted would be uncontrollable. Instead, Peirce would take the time to move gradually from one sign system to the next and evolve orientation over time. That is why listening and understanding the sign system of a congregation comes prior to speaking (see the theological reflection model again and how it starts with lived experience).

How is it possible to preach if the same signs may not elicit the same understandings within the congregation or intended by the preacher? The focus of the sermon cannot be

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[23] Lyne, 115, suggests that exhortations may weaken beliefs by making the hearer conscious of the belief thus exposing it to the threat of doubt.

[24] Ibid., 217.

[25] Peirce defines three audiences, namely, the self, a public audience, and the larger community. Peirce defines reason as thoughts as signs that occur in self dialogue.

communicated with new and unfamiliar signs. Congregational analysis will reveal a range of

possible signs of shared lived experiences available to the preacher.[26] Signs do not appear out of

nowhere. All signs are part of a continuing semiotic process. Only by utilizing prior experiences,

can an argument introduce new meanings. New meanings involve extending, engaging, and

transforming old and familiar meanings. Sometimes signs will need to take small steps to make

connections, but at other times the gap can be jumped more easily.[27]

The sermon as sign may bring to mind various understandings among the congregation.

The sign may signify generalities while the audience interprets in particulars. The preacher

points to "deskness" for example, and the congregation hears various particular "desks." One

sees the grand roll top desk of his father, while another sees a cheap computer desk sold at a

thrift store. In this sense, the audience determines the final meaning. The responsibility of the

witness that evolves from the semiotic process presses us to be precise in the use of signs in

sermons. The speaker must know the congregation well in order to narrow the range of possible

particulars to increase the success of the sermon. Simply stated, create the image of the dusty,

oak-stained study carrel in the dark corner of the library stacks rather than a desk. The line,

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[26] Here he anticipates Dewey's constructivist theories and Piaget's theories of adaptation. Piaget described adaptation in terms of "accommodation and assimilation." Adaptation refers to the process of adjusting thinking and actions to the environment. All biological systems adapt. As changes occur, our minds continually organize thoughts into new structures and patterns. Assimilation is the use of currently available knowledge to make sense out of incoming information. I understand new things based upon previous knowledge and experiences. New information is sometimes distorted because we force-fit it into our present knowledge base. Accommodation involves changing our thoughts to make better approximations of new information and experiences so these distortions will not occur.

Peirce would recognize that signs could seem novel and become shocking to an audience when the sign apparently contradicts the audience's beliefs. When a sign is presented, the audience will determine if it is "contrary or compatible." In a sense, then, the sign carries meaning even if it is in this contrary mode (*Ideas, Stray or Stolen, about Scientific Writing,* EP 2.330).

[27] Lyne, 239-240 states, "When one goes public to make an argument, the reasoning sequence that affirmed his private judgment may have proceeded by steps "too wide" for his audience to follow. One problem, then, is that of properly segmenting a continuous reasoning process into units that will be comprehensible to the audience, and which, as an argumentative structure, will employ only those leading principles that the audience is capable of supplying at the appropriate time."

"From the mangled steel that crossed the center line emerged three new orphans," communicates volumes. "Death" is no longer an abstract idea.

In *Ideas, Stray or Stolen, about Scientific Writing*, Peirce uses the example of a color blind man who knows more about color than most because of the associations he makes to other sensations he has experienced.[28] By elaborating on signs already available to a congregation, the gap between speaker and audience is reduced. Communication does not reside in "specific sensory experiences, but in relationships. And understanding is possible when we bring unnoticed relationships to light and make them efficacious."[29] Though precision might be allusive, measuring how folks respond, (change, act, and mature "over time") can gauge how well the movement from sign to congregational response communicates the sermon's intent.

To summarize, imagine that the document on your computer screen entitled "Sunday's Sermon." It addresses a particular people, time, and location. The abductive process has produced discrete concepts that become the raw materials of a sermon. Conversation partner one (lived experience) has identified a concern common to the congregation. Conversation partner two articulates a clear and concise theological field of meaning that is captured in the focus statement. Conversation partner three lists several concrete actions that congregations could take in response. The material from each conversation partner becomes the talking points for three episodes. Each episode is developed as signs by the use of images, arguments, and stories. One of the three (images, arguments, or stories) will set the context of a single episode, or serve as a point of orientation. And yet, each of these particular modes of discourse functions most effectively when the other two dimensions of language and experience are implied or employed

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[28] EP 2.330.

[29] Lyne, 236.

in secondary, supporting roles. Determine the primary stance by use of an image, argument, or story, and then intentionally supplement it with the other two in such a way that the primary thrust is not hindered. As the episodes attain shape, the form of the sermon takes structure.

Episodes are connected by the internal logic of the plot and cohere by the overall intention of the sermon. The denouement is always kept in mind. If you lose track of where you are going, you will not get there. Metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche are ways to think about connecting the episodes together that provide forward movement. Often a central image for the whole sermon will provide the unity the plot line needs to unfold. How the episodes will be plotted into a script depends on the overall argument or plotline of the sermon. Once you know where you are going, the conclusion (discussed below), then you can plot the episodes in a way that will facilitate the congregation arriving at the destination.

Tom Long offers a helpful suggestion about emplotment taken from Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*.[30] MIMESIS$_1$ is a prefiguration of the practical field of prefigured time. It includes the meaningful structures, symbolic resources, and temporal character of the world in action. MIMESIS$_3$ is the refiguration of the future. MIMESIS$_2$ is the pivot point between the two, it opens up the world through plot, an emplotment of configuration. If the episodes of the sermons are represented (imitated) by the moves of emplotment of transfiguring MIMESIS$_1$ into MIMESIS$_3$ by way of configuration, then the following sermon form takes shape:

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[30] Thomas Long, *Preaching From Memory to Hope* (Westminster John Knox, 2009).
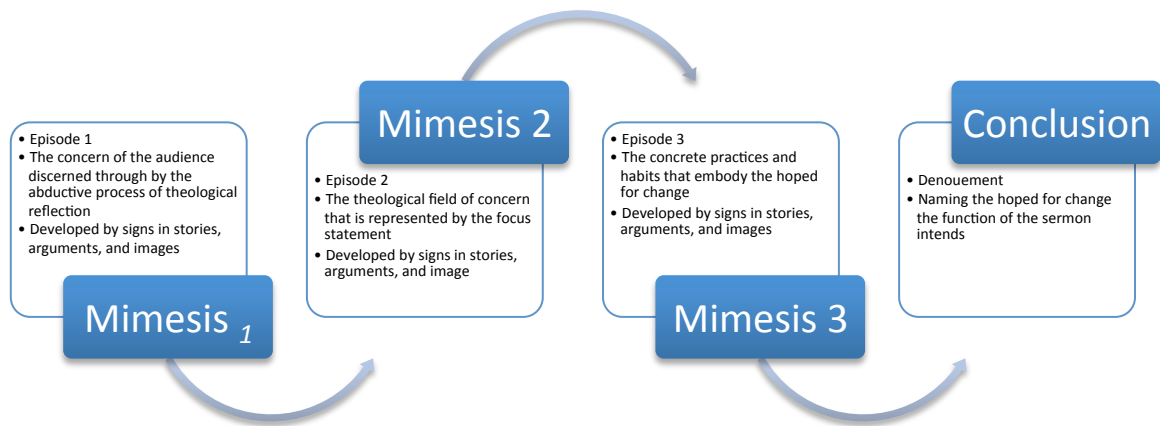
The diagram above resembles a storyboard, a device used to visualize the plot of the unfolding episodes of a script.[31] MIMESIS$_1$, MIMESIS$_2$, or MIMESIS$_3$ might take more than one episode to fix the thought in the congregation's consciousness. When this happens, the storyboard expands. The storyboard gives the preacher the flexibility to play with sequence, point of view, and alternate plots. The rhetorical shape and literary genre of the text will influence the plotline in significant ways at this point in the process.[32] The number and sequence of episodes depends on the particular sermon being preached on that Sunday.

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[31] The plot described above is only one option. If you know where you are going (the conclusion), there are many paths to get there. I can start at my house to get to the store, but I could also start at my office. The above plot resembles Buttrick's mode of reflection and the mode of praxis, *Homiletic*, 365-448. But Buttrick reminds preachers, plots can be replotted depending on what the preacher intends to do, 291-303.

[32] My own writings have explored the relationship between sermon form of rhetorical and literary analysis of texts. "Preaching to Colossians," *Restoration Quarterly* 54 (Fourth Quarter 2010): 207-222; "From Exegesis to Sermon in Romans 12:9-21," *Restoration Quarterly* 40 (Third Quarter 1998): 171-187; "A Strategy for Preaching Paraenesis," *Restoration Quarterly* 38 (Fourth Quarter 1996): 207-218; "Toward a Definition of Paraenesis," *Restoration Quarterly* 38 (Third Quarter 1996): 145-158; "Imitating the Genre of Parable in Today's Pulpit," *Restoration Quarterly* 33 (Fourth Quarter 1991): 193-208.

4. Illustration: Eliminating the illusion of the illustration.

I should not write a separate section on illustrations. There are no elements of my definition for preaching that point towards this topic. The idea of signs described earlier replaces all the traditional notions folks have about illustrations. Yet, a contrapuntal is necessary. The art of illustrations dominates sermons because they work. Illustrations work so well, they compete against the intent of the sermon. The illustration will take on its own life that battles for the attention of the audience. The sermon often loses the struggle. And since illustrations are cognitive functions by definition (they bring light to complex ideas), they do not accomplish behavioral or affective ends. For fourteen years I have asked the same question in homiletic classes and seminars. I have received the same answer every time with only one anomaly. I ask, "How would you illustrate the concept 'transformation'?" Someone will quickly say, "butterfly." Once, someone talked of "tadpoles." I press, "How does understanding about butterflies help anyone to live a better life on Tuesday?" And that is the problem with illustrations. They may clarify a complex concept, but they do not intentionally effect change or produce habits of Christian practice. Illustrations have their place, but as a collective, we preachers are wholly too dependent upon illustrations to carry the freight of the gospel. Frankly, some illustrations can't. So I ask my classes, "How can you make the concept of transformation 'real' in the lives of people on Tuesdays?" The subsequent conversation is worth the tuition.

Illustrations are vehicles of a dyadic homiletic that depends solely on information. Illustrations function more on the iconic and indexical level than on the symbolic level. If a triadic homiletic promotes action, then socializing the congregation with concrete practices of the Christian faith will promote an evolution towards the sacrificial love described in Peirce's eschatology, and, coincidentally, the gospel. The object of faith, the gospel, is communicated to

the congregation by signs (both the incarnate word and the words of revelation). Subsequently, we become the embodied sermons (fallible as though looking in a mirror darkly) that are signs in the streams of the evolving traditions of faithful witnesses on course for places where faith, hope, and love abides.

Instead of illustrations, let me advocate concretizations. Concretizations are stories that function as signs of the hoped for change the sermon intends to prompt in the lives of the hearers. Some may play the semantics game with me and argue that concretizations is a mere sub-classification of illustrations. However, I will take path of Peirce (the prince of neologisms) and counter, precision in terms is essential for clarity. The use of cases, stories, antidotes, and scenarios of real people and real churches that make abstract notions concrete will persuade people that they can go and do likewise.[33] I have much more to say against the traditional sermon illustration, but it has already taken too much space for a contrapuntal.

5. Conclusion: Altering the altar call.

My definition for preaching has a clearly stated objective, **"…transformation of the community into the image of Jesus."** A theological issue is at stake with the "conclusion" of a sermon. What right does the preacher have to call for action? Have we said anything of substance that makes any difference? This is the household "So What?" question. Once the "hypothesis," focus statement, or theological claim the preacher decides to proclaim is determined, and the correlating function statement is discerned, the conclusion will be written next, prior to the argument of the sermon. The design of the sermon will be based upon what arguments the conclusion evokes.

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[33] See Jeffrey F. Bullock, *Preaching with a Cupped Ear: Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics as Postmodern Wor(l)d* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 89, 93-95.

Conclusions must cohere with the function of the sermon. When I am grading student sermons, I read their conclusions first. I ask, "What is this sermon prompting the congregation to do?" And then I analyze if that conclusion coheres with the function statement written on the top of page one. If all is well at that point, I then examine the argument of the sermon. Does the plot of the sermon accomplish the function and move congregational consciousness to the intended denouement and consequent action. The sign system that controls the movement of the argument will be measured by its resultant effects on the congregation. Succinct clarity in the conclusion that calls the congregation to respond must be done with thoughtful precision. The subsequent understanding persuades the audience to become signs to the neighboring community.

Measuring the sermon's effects "over time" further correlates with Peirce's understanding of "process" and "evolution." Interpretants[34] can be grouped into three broad classes as "immediate," "dynamic," and "final." These correlate with firsts, seconds, and thirds,

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[34] A crucial characteristic of Peirce's theory of signs is the idea of the sign being in a "triadic" relation: the sign, the object, and the interpretant. An object, its represented meaning or interpretant, and its representation (sign) function together in perception. Peirce's triadic semiotic contradicts the more commonly held notion in communication theory involving a sender and receiver. Such a dyadic semiotic, espoused by F. Saussure, fails to address the issue of purpose, function, and intension. When sign is understood as a vehicle of content, a dyadic process (A→B + B→C), intent is left out of the equation. For example, Peirce describes setting up a line of bricks that when one is knocked over it knocks the next brick over. He asks, "Did someone knock over the brick in order to do something?" For Peirce, the sign holds the mediate position in the relation. Thirdness must be involved for true mediation subsequently identifying intention. The triadic relation of the interpretant is essential. The meaning of purpose is to bring ideas into the sphere of scrutiny and self-control where they may support positive beliefs and habits. The interpretant is not to be understood as an interpreter (person) but a function. The meaning emerges in the act of interpretation, in the dialogue between speaker and interpreter. The interpretant is the understanding of the relation between a sign and its object and leads to habits that guide our present and future actions and thoughts. So meaning is more realized than discovered. Distinguishing between "conceivable possible actions" and practical conduct,[34] he wanted to emphasize effects (a field of possibilities or implications) that could be far reaching even into the future from acts that have mere practical utility. So for the word "fast", it is the same word whether written or spoken. Yet the sign "fast" may represent different objects, for example, rapidity, immovable, immoral, or abstinence. The interpretant seeks to understand the meaning by asking how that particular sign signifies the object. If the interpretant does not successfully connect the sign with its object, it will be seen in false effects upon a person's actions. If rapid was intended, an immovable was perceived, a person would behave quite differently. He might stop rather than dodge. Or, if someone raises her hand, the effect of volunteering is quite different than asking a question.

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respectively.[35] The "immediate" interpretant comes from the basic understanding of the sign and most people would designate as the "meaning" of the sign. The "dynamic" interpretant is the specific effect the sign has on the audience. The audience does not remain a simple passive receptor of a message but takes responsibility for it. The response of the congregation to act due to a rousing sermon falls into this category. The "final" interpretant reflects the effect a sermon might have beyond the sacred hour on Sunday. The "final" interpretant looks to effects on people later in time, in other places, and other generations. Peirce would see the significance of preaching as an effect best measured at the least at the end of a preacher's tenure but ultimately assessed eschatologically.

As noted above, the "final," sometimes called the "logical" interpretant, effects the congregation after it has had time to incubate and come to fruition. Lyne uses the concept "justice" as an example.[36] If the interpretant understands justice as "treating all people the same," then it implies a "habit of mind and conduct." As the congregation bears witness to justice, various applications will develop over time. One might not make an immediate application, but when faced with new situations, the person will be "disposed by habit toward treating certain things in a certain way on a particular occasion."[37] When applied to new situations, the belief/habit deepens. There may be a host of unimagined situations that the belief could face in the future. The strength of the belief argued in the sermon is paramount for the congregation to witness effectively. "These matters clearly invite rhetorical influence."[38] If the person does not

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[35] John Russell Lyne, "Peirce on Rhetoric and Communication" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1978), 77-81.

[36] Ibid., 87.

[37] Ibid., 148.

[38] Ibid., 149.

act when faced with unjust situations, it will be because the person consciously or unconsciously has "rejected as untenable" the concept of justice.

Conclusion

How do we evaluate the effectiveness of the sermon? Tom Long suggests that Augustine's categories of *teach*, *delight*, and *persuade* are necessary. Persuade presses the listener to discipleship, an ethical response of the demands of the gospel. Long imagines a preacher standing at the door of Augustine's church shaking hands with congregants when parishioner says, "I learned something today. I was moved by what you said, and I intend to do something about it."[39] A sermon that fixes belief asks, "What difference does it make in the week ahead?" Or to modify Alexander Bain's definition, a pragmatic sermon signifies belief in such a way that a community is prepared to act.

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[39] Thomas Long, *Senses of Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 19, 25.