

A Turn Toward the Listener (part 1)

Richard Lischer's, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*,¹ advocates that the nature of the gospel compels preachers to make “a turn towards the church,” an ecclesial turn that takes being in community seriously. Such a turn entails 1) abandoning the existential and individualistic language event of the New Hermeneutic and embracing community formation, 2) leaving behind illustration and welcoming narrative, and 3) discarding the hermeneutical metaphor of translation and recovering the performance nature of Scripture enacted in worship and witness.² The biblical witness, likewise, prompts church-oriented questions like, “Is the Word of God ‘living and active, like a double edged sword?’ Is the gospel ‘the power of God that brings salvation’ and does ‘faith come from hearing the message?’” Lischer's proposal accords with the Second Helvetic Confession, “the preached word of God is the Word of God”³ for the people of God. Such bold professions stimulate necessary questions like, “Does preaching elicit the very power of God in the lives of the church where you attend?” Or, “Does the sermon affect what anyone does or says on Monday when folks return to the marketplace of everyday life?”

On the one hand, Lischer's “turn towards the church” seems odd. Do not preachers always face the church when preaching? Where else would a preacher look if not at the

¹ Richard Lischer's, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1992) 5, 14.

² See Tim Sensing, “Wearing Trifocals: Re-appropriating the Ancient Pulpit for the Twenty-first Century Pew,” *Restoration Quarterly* 48.1 (2006): 43-54, for an example of my hermeneutical appropriation of Lischer's turn towards the listener. Instead of metaphors like “translation” or “bridge,” I see the process as critical correlation or a triological contextualization. Additionally, see David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999); George A. Lindbeck, “Scripture, Consensus and Community,” in *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, ed. James J. Buckley. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Stephen E. Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture & Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); and Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

³ “The Second Helvetic Confession,” *The Book of Confessions, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Part I* (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 1996), 5.004, 55.

audience? Analyzing the audience with a view of how the performance of words transforms people into the image of Jesus in concrete ways often eludes even veteran preachers.

Consequently, Lischer's proposal kindles a passion in preachers to seek out and implement tangible practices that will make a difference in the way people live in God's kingdom.

On the other hand, every generation seems to "turn towards the preacher" by reminiscing about some golden age of preaching while grieving the current state of affairs. From Moses' abdicating his responsibility to Paul's ironic self-deprecation, generations of preachers have questioned the vitality of preaching. From Fosdick's classic lament⁴ to Pagitt's recent dismissal,⁵ preachers and listeners alike discern that preaching has fallen into disrepair. And it is not just the poorly prepared or presented sermons; even my own "fabulous" preaching is sometimes called into question. I remember a dear woman in my first pastorate who slept during every service. In the foyer, she apologized with the same weekly refrain, "I'm so sorry about falling asleep today. I don't know what happened. I've never fallen asleep at church before." Eutychus reminds us that pew sitters have toiled, squirmed, and yawned through the ministrations of even the most venerated heralds of the word. So when I glimpse someone snoozing during my sermons, I know I am among a great cloud of witnesses. Words like, "boring," "tedious," "obtrusive," and "harangue" fill the marketplace of public opinion. Sometimes these words are heard in the sacred foyer. The old quip, "preaching is the art of talking in someone else's sleep," still brings a snicker in a crowd, but it also stings in our souls. Is preaching just "empty rhetoric?"

Let us suppose that Main Street Chapel in Midtown, Indiana invites Rev. Jackson to accept a call to preach. Rev. Jackson arrives the same summer that Taylor Smith and family start

⁴ 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).

⁵ Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

attending. Taylor is eight. When Taylor's folks make the decision to attend the local church, they commit themselves fully to the work. They attend every service. Rev. Jackson preaches a children's sermon before every morning service and a sermon at both the 11:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. assemblies. Although Taylor sometimes naps or daydreams, over the years her attentiveness to the liturgy increases. Ten years later, as Taylor walks across the stage to receive her diploma, Rev. Jackson wonders, "How many sermons did Taylor hear me preach?"⁶

Rev. Jackson's question prompts a more significant and vital discussion. Her question is a turn towards the listener. To simplify the numbers, ten years times 100 sermons (taking into account sick days, vacations, and holidays) is one thousand sermons. Although everyone recognizes that Taylor's spiritual development is due to a variety of factors (faithful parents, mission trips, service projects, Sunday School teachers, spiritual disciplines, etc.), a thousand sermons will inevitably have had an affect on her faith. Rev. Jackson, for good or ill, has had a profound influence molding Taylor's faith.

Just as Rev. Jackson considers one congregant, a turn towards the listener is an ecclesial act by ministers who take pastoral leadership seriously. Since practical theology is concerned with a critical and theological reflection on the practices of the church, pastoral leadership must engage the correlation between the oral/aural events of preaching. Preaching cannot be discounted. Ordinarily, Christians spend more time during the liturgy listening to sermons than any other act. Therefore, a key question for all who preach is: "How does the practice of my preaching, over time, shape the faith of those who hear me?" And a vital question for all who listen is, "How does the practice of my listening to sermons, over time, transform my identity into the image of Christ?" Valid and reliable responses to these questions do not emerge from

⁶ The story of Rev. Jackson and Taylor Smith is but a micro look at the more significant macro concern of communal transformation. While individuals within a local congregation might digress in their faith walk, it is the overall process and direction of the ecclesial body that is at stake.

sentimental impressions or antidotal evidence. These questions ask for informed answers. While my response to these questions takes a long and winding road tracking through the history and philosophy of rhetoric, these key questions generate other prior key questions.

1. WHAT IS LISTENER ORIENTED PREACHING?

Ever since the ancient Greeks, the question of how to design and deliver a speech has been a subject of intense rhetorical inquiry.⁷ The Greeks were the first to name and define rhetorical devices in conceptual terms. Rhetoric (developed for pragmatic⁸ reasons) sought to solve problems in a democratic way. In ancient Greece culture, an orator needed to move three groups: the courts (forensic or judicial—seeking to persuade the audience to make a judgment about events; a question of truth); the city assembly (deliberative rhetoric—seeking to persuade the audience to take action in the future; a question of self interest or future benefit); and the ceremonial gathering (epideictic—seeking to persuade the audience to hold or to affirm some point of view in the present; a change of attitude or deepening of values).⁹

There developed four uses of rhetoric for the public in a democratic society: 1) to help society to perceive the difference between truth and falsehood; 2) to help citizens understand

⁷ Most of the following summation can be found in various common introductions, for example: P. Bizzell B. Herzberg (eds.), *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1990); G. A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); J. J. Murphy and R. Katula, *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric*, (Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press, 1994); J. Poulakos, "Toward a Sophistic Definition of Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 16 (1983): 35-48; and "Rhetoric, the Sophists, and the Possible," *Communication Monographs* 5 (1984): 215-226; and R. Reid, D. Fleer, and J. Bullock, "Preaching as the Creation of an Experience: The Not-So-Rational Revolution of the New Homiletic," *Journal of Communication and Religion*, 18 (1995): 1-9. I have detailed a more thorough analysis in "Pedagogies of Preaching," (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1998).

⁸ Philosophical pragmatism will be described in part 2 of this series.

⁹ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 1.3; 3.16. Various topics are described in detail for each category in 1.4-15.

how people are moved to action; 3) to help both sides of an issue comprehend the complexity of that issue; and 4) to help defend citizens against the arguments of others.¹⁰

In the fifth century BCE, Corax (Syracuse, Sicily) and Tisias introduced the rules of ancient rhetoric. Tisias came to Athens and taught the argument of probability: which one of two propositions is more likely to be truer than the other?¹¹ Other recognizable sophists include the anonymous *Dissoi Logoi*, Gorgias, Protagoras, Antiphon, Lysias, and Isocrates. They reacted against the natural philosophers (pre-Socratics: Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Parmenides, Empedocles, and Heraclitus) that were engaged in an attempt to discover the secrets of the natural world by using reason to reduce nature into a few manageable principles.

Sophists made an intentional move towards the listener by addressing everyday applications that made differences in people's lives. *Arete* (the praiseworthy life, excellence, or virtue) could be achieved through education. People became convinced education was the key to unlocking reality. In other words, education can change your fate. Through rhetoric, communities did change and were able to sustain new ways of being for generations to come. Although the Sophists were a diverse group, they commonly expressed concerns about considering the audience first. The speaker must know the context of the hearer. The very speech used to speak to the hearer changes the context. Isocrates, Dionysius, and Longinus wrote extensively on the importance of affective elements that influenced persuasion in a way that concentrating on content of an argument could not. Since there was no uniform thought among the Sophists, they were perceived in extremes: *display* versus *reasoned discourse*; *opportunists*

¹⁰ Richard A. Katula, "Greek Democracy and the Study of Rhetoric," in Katula and Murphy, 3.

¹¹ Richard A. Katula and James J. Murphy, "The Sophists and Rhetorical Consciousness," in Katula and Murphy, 19-20.

versus *the honest speaker*. However, most Sophists in ancient Greece were highly esteemed primarily because they made a difference in people's lives.

Plato opposed the Sophists accusing them of anti-logic and wrangling. He accused them of only being interested in winning arguments and not interested in truth. Plato and Aristotle both called this *flattery*. They argued rhetoric was for persuasion to the good, just, and honorable. The good is defined by what was best for society (the civic good). The credibility of the speaker and the speech was essential. Only a good person can be a good speaker.¹²

Aristotle is credited for developing rhetoric that most influenced Christian preaching (especially as it was filtered through Quintilian). Aristotle defined rhetoric as the discovery of all available means of persuasion. Artistic proofs (furnished by the speaker) and non-artistic proofs (external evidence) were essential means that the speaker used in persuasion. Argument was not just how to use words but how to think and how to move an audience. Although acknowledging the need for the aesthetic, Aristotle concentrated on the world of “actuality” or the substance of a thing as it is, thus giving primacy to “facts.”¹³ For the Sophists, there were no pure facts but only what was perceived, interpreted, and communicated. Facts were open, unfinished, recurring, and rooted in language rather than objective reality. Therefore, Aristotle sharply diverged from the Sophists in the way he viewed the world as phenomena to be discovered and reproduced in language.

Roman Rhetoric by 90 BCE was fairly standardized. Students learned rhetoric by a set of rules that provided a definite method; and by imitation, or the inspiration to attain the effectiveness of certain models; and by practice, or diligent exercise and experience in speaking.

¹² See Plato's dialogs *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus* as examples of Plato's attacks on the Sophists. Katula and Murphy, “Sophists,” 22-26.

¹³ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 1.2.

A standard work was *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. This anonymous work developed the idea of style (grand, middle, and plain). Style required taste, artistic composition, and distinction. Distinction primarily came through figures of speech and thought. The basis of a standardized rhetoric was in place.¹⁴

Cicero (106-45 BCE) did not create rhetoric's taxonomy but reported it in a convenient form.¹⁵ Oratory needed to be pragmatic. What one learned in theory only had meaning in practice before an audience. Oratory was the act of persuasion of listeners for the good of the state in order to create an orderly society. For Cicero, oratory was not an art (*techne*), but was based on the mixture of natural talent, training, and practice.¹⁶

Quintilian (35-100 CE) saw no fixed laws for rhetoric because rules change for each case. He divorced rhetoric from persuasion and did not see persuasion as the end of things. The purpose of rhetoric was to focus on how one spoke. Rhetoric was not a matter of whether one won or lost an argument but how one argued. He was convinced the rhetorician must speak that which was true whether he could convince the hearer or not. Quintilian distanced himself from the audience. A good speaker was one who spoke the truth in an effective way for those who heard. If they did not hear, then it was their fault. The audience's response was not the speaker's

¹⁴ *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, IV.11-16.

¹⁵ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Inventione*, 1.7. Invention (*inventio*) included exegesis, discovery, the planning of a discourse, and the arguments to be used in it. Invention involved developing an argument to make the case convincing. Arrangement (*dispositio*) was concerned with form, the composition of the various parts into an effective whole. Arrangement ordered and distributed the matter by making clear the place that a thing was assigned (the introduction, or *exordium*; the statement of the case, or *narratio*; the outline of the major points in the argument, or *divisio* (sometimes known as *partitio*); the proof of the case, or *confirmatio*; the refutation of possible opposing arguments, or *confutatio*; and the conclusion, or *peroratio*). Style (*elocutio*) involved both choice of words and the composition of words into sentences, including using figures. Adaptation of suitable words and sentences to the matter invented including presentation fell under the category of style. Memory (*memoria*) was most useful for preparation for delivery. The retention of the matter in the mind had to do with the words and arrangement. Delivery (*pronuncio, actio*) was concerned with the rules for control of the voice and the use of gestures. Included under delivery were the subjects of graceful regulation of the voice, countenance, and gesture.

¹⁶ Cicero, *De Oratore*, 1.113. Isocrates represents the Sophists and is an example of someone who saw rhetoric as an art, not a science.

responsibility.¹⁷ Additionally, Quintillion defined rhetoric as “the art of speaking well.” He interpreted “well” in two senses: (1) effectively and (2) virtuously. A key to effective speaking is found in the speaker’s ability to craft the oration and the excellent character of the presenter (the speaker’s ethos). It was this second sense that influenced Christian preaching.

So far, I have attempted to point out a division that was occurring in the field of rhetoric. On one side of the debate were those who took the listener seriously. They emphasized the pragmatic effects of their rhetorical acts. Alternatively, others argued for a “pure” theory of rhetoric that maintained its internal integrity as a discipline. While a complete divorce between these two camps may have never occurred even in our present day, they were often not on speaking terms. The arc of the pendulum often swung off course, but the debate is ever present.

The first systematic exposition of Christian preaching did not appear until the fifth century in Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*.¹⁸ Augustine (354-430 CE) lived in a time where Christians were rejecting the standard rhetoric and all forms of pagan culture and literature. Christians understood “absolute truth” in such a way that the sophistic foundations that rested on the context of the hearer and the occasion of the speech seemed untenable. Augustine enabled preachers to use Cicero without guilt. By attacking sophistry and using the Bible for examples, Augustine united meaning and expression.

Augustine’s Books I-III described hermeneutics, a way to discover those things that were to be understood. Augustine’s hermeneutical foundation correlated with his purpose of preaching, namely, the moving of the hearer by way of the interpretation of Scripture. Book IV attacked the idea that the one who knew content also had the ability to communicate effectively.

¹⁷ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 12.1.

¹⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, The Library of Liberal Arts (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

Augustine's turn toward the hearer argued the need for the speaker to communicate effectively. The "ecclesiastical orator" is entrusted with the responsibility of persuading the listeners to act. He stated, "that which is taught must be put into practice" (4.13.29). Rhetoric as a tool was considered morally neutral and can be employed for the service of the truth. His position was:

While the proponents of error know the art of winning an audience to good will, attention, and open mind, shall the proponents of truth remain ignorant? While the [sophists] state facts concisely, clearly, plausibly, shall the preacher state them so that they are tedious to hear, hard to understand, hard to believe? While one attacks truth and insinuates falsehood by fallacious argument, shall the other have too little skill either to defend the true or refute the false? (4.2)

Augustine (from Cicero) spoke about style. The primary virtue of style was clarity. High Style (to move people to take action); Medium Style (to delight, praising good behavior and blaming bad behavior in order to hold the attention of the audience); Low Style (to teach instruction of key doctrines). The speaker should not use the same style throughout the whole sermon. Augustine gave examples tied to rhythm, cadence, line length, situations, and passion. Style was connected to purpose. The pastoral, priestly, or teaching purpose in the sermon became a key question. Augustine suggested that an orator speak:

in a subdued manner when he teaches, ... in a moderate manner when he condemns or praises. But when something is to be done and he is speaking to those who ought to do it but do not wish to do it, then those great things should be spoken in the grand manner in a way appropriate to the persuasion of their minds. (4.19.38)

Augustine applied the devices of classical rhetoric to preaching not for the goal of eloquence, but to enable those who hear "to be moved rather than taught, so that they may not be sluggish in putting what they know into practice and so that they may fully accept those things which they acknowledge to be true" (4.10.24). His influence governed homiletics throughout the Middle Ages and continues to influence the field in remarkable ways.

While diverse rhetorical philosophers through the centuries could also be cited,¹⁹ the foundation laid by the Greeks established the platform for modern practice. Cotton Mather's *Manuductio ad Ministerium*, written in 1726, was the first book on preaching written by an American. He primarily concerned himself with foundational matters from a variety of disciplines needed to prepare preachers for their task. Although many texts were published between 1870 and 1978, John Broadus' text, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (1870), became the most popular, and few veered from his logical method.²⁰

Dwight Nelson demonstrates how the post-New Testament era in homiletics patterns itself after the rhetoric of Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine. He summarizes much of the literature, concluding that the deductive method dominated the pulpit until recent years.²¹ Don Wardlaw agrees:

Recent theological changes have made it possible to see how preaching since the second century has been clothed mostly in prosaic dress. ... Church Fathers from Origen to Chrysostom, while endued with the mind of Christ, exegeted and preached with the mind of Plato and Aristotle. ... The Fathers preached ... with a rhetoric that Greeks over the centuries had developed into a science of persuasion.²²

However, a renewed interest in the listener emerged in the often labeled "New Homiletic." It began when Amos Wilder and James Muilenburg inaugurated rhetorical criticism for biblical studies in the late 60s. Wilder argued that form is inseparable from content, yet he observed that the history of biblical studies and preaching has been primarily a history of that

¹⁹ Sensing, "Pedagogies of Preaching," 58-72.

²⁰ Exceptions include: J. Fort Newton, *The New Preaching: A Little Book about Great Art* (Cokesbury, 1930); Ozora Davis, *The Principles of Preaching* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924); and Grady Davis, *The Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958). For example, Grady Davis sorted out the general categories of sermons from the standpoint of functional forms and organic shapes. The fifth (and last) of the organic types of sermon falls under the classification of "A Story Told." He believed that not more than 10 percent of sermons being preached in the middle and late 1950s could be listed in this category.

²¹ D. K. Nelson, *A Comparison of Receptivity to the Deductive and Inductive Methods of Preaching in the Pioneer Memorial Church* (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1995), 77.

²² D. M. Wardlaw, ed., *Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 11-12.

divorce.²³ Wilder claimed, “The character of the early Christian speech-forms should have much to say to us with regard to our understanding of Christianity and its communication today.... We can learn much from our observations as to the appropriate strategies and vehicles of Christian speech and then adapt them to our situation.”²⁴

Similarly, in his 1968 Society of Biblical Literature presidential address, Muilenberg challenged scholars to move beyond form criticism by noting the aesthetic dimensions of literary style and structural patterns. He labeled this new discipline for biblical studies “rhetorical criticism.”²⁵ Subsequently, many articles and books followed exploring stylistic and poetic dimensions of biblical literature.²⁶ In short, the return to the rhetoric of the Bible sought to recover how the language and argument of texts worked to effect the listener.

The next year David Randolph²⁷ applied this new rhetorical emphasis to homiletics by calling for a renewal in preaching. He argued that the “intentionality” of the text and biblical forms should influence sermon design. Fred Craddock’s, *As One Without Authority*,²⁸ popularized these thoughts opening the floodgates of a “new homiletic.” He stated, “The time has arrived for critical review of sermon form as well as content.”²⁹ Craddock argued, “The separation of form and content is fatal for preaching, for it fails to recognize the theology

²³ Amos Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric* (Harvard University Press, 1964), 9-47.

²⁴ Ibid., 11-12.

²⁵ James Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 1-18.

²⁶ Lucy Lind Hogan and Robert Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation: Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), Clifton, C. Black’s, *The Rhetoric of the Gospel: Theological Artistry in the Gospels and Acts* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), and James Thompson’s, *Preaching Like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) represent outstanding models of the integration of biblical studies, homiletics, and rhetoric that enhance the field.

²⁷ David Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969).

²⁸ Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971).

²⁹ Ibid., 153.

implicit in the method of communication.”³⁰ Therefore, to avoid unintentionally distorting the message of the text, the variety of biblical forms should engender a greater array of sermonic forms.

Craddock’s “inductive” approach emerged in the 1980s as a reaction to the monological character of traditional preaching. Craddock recognized a crisis in preaching that had lost its power due to the loss of the meaning and effect of words. Craddock offered an indirect approach for hearing the gospel that would bring renewal. He advocated writing sermons intentionally constructed so as to correspond to the way people ordinarily experience reality and to the way life’s problem-solving activity occurs naturally and casually. Therefore, preachers should use the same methods in the sermon they use interpreting the text, allowing the audience to take the same inductive trip of discovery. Craddock’s turn towards the listener was less ecclesial in orientation and more hermeneutical and rhetorical by nature.³¹ Craddock’s concern for the listener changed the way preacher’s prepared and delivered sermons to shape hearing, but did not overtly involve listeners.

Overhearing the Gospel resulted from Craddock’s 1978 Lyman Beecher Lectures, which were an exposition of Kierkegaard’s statement, “There is no lack of information in a Christian land; something else is lacking, and this is something which one [person] cannot directly communicate to the other.”³² Craddock answered the question, “How to preach the gospel to people who can no longer hear it directly?” Congregations were so familiar with basic Bible content that they became bored, for they seemingly had heard it all before. They needed to hear

³⁰ Ibid., 128.

³¹ Before Craddock, others who advocated seeing the listener as part of the homiletic process included Reuel L. Howe, *Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue* (New York: Seabury, 1967), and Dietrich Ritschl, *A Theology of Proclamation* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960).

³² Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978).

the gospel in such a way that they would overcome the familiar. Craddock commented on Kierkegaard's concept of indirect communication and "that people live in images rather than ideas and that human transformation occurs when images carrying deep symbolic force are modified or replaced by others."³³

Craddock proposes using story as the primary vehicle to communicate the gospel so that the listener can eavesdrop on the gospel. His turn towards the listener, he claimed, would increase listener identification in the biblical narrative and thus participation in the sermon. Narratives reproduce and recreate events. This re-experiencing is the source of the emotive and imaginative power in the telling. There are two elements involved in overhearing the gospel: (1) distance that preserves objectivity by allowing the listener to maintain freedom; and (2) participation that frees the listener to overcome the distance to participate by identifying with the message.³⁴

The debate about how the New Homiletic differs from the older model usually revolves around the question of sermon form. However, Robert Reid, David Fler, and Jeffery Bullock propose that the creation of an experience in which speaker and audience participate together is the central element that unifies the paradigm shift.³⁵ Preachers of the New Homiletic desire to propose an affective stylistics in order to create an existential experience during the preaching event. For example, Thomas Long speaks about regenerating the impact of the biblical text so that the ancient Word of God lives again in a new setting.³⁶ Henry Mitchell describes Black

³³ Ibid., 97.

³⁴ Craddock exemplifies Lischer's concern about the New Hermeneutic's connection to hearing. The "language event" approach of Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebling emphasizes individualistic understandings of human existence, an existential interpretation of the text. Craddock's turn to the listener was a turn to the individual.

³⁵ Reid, Fler, and Bullock, 18, 1-9.

³⁶ Thomas Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Westminster John Knox, 1989).

preaching as a vicarious reinterpretation or re-appropriation of the text for the present audience.³⁷

The emphasis on narrative preaching assumes that identity is primarily a narrative identity thus providing the primary set of signs and symbols that give rise to the meaning of existence.

Christine Smith develops the theme of weaving as a metaphor for feminist preaching, as weaving requires constant balance between technical skill and personal creativity.³⁸ Interwoven strands of the sermon form a holistic perspective that make the finished tapestry. Smith does not want to idolize female experiences but advocates that all personal stories should be seen with equal value. Women are not called to overthrow the dominant culture but transform it by weaving in their experiences into the fabric of the sermon.

Similarly, Justo L. and Catherine G. Gonzalez's represent preaching in the Latin American community.³⁹ Gonzalez and Gonzalez begin with an explanation of Liberation Theology. They claim that preaching must represent the oppressed in society. Human need is rooted in human liberation, equality, and justice. They desire to restore a lost perspective due to the "powerful" in society that has controlled biblical interpretation for their advantage. They advocate a change in "self-image" that will lead to new understandings of text. The Bible was written by and for the oppressed in society bringing freedom from captivity. Gonzalez and Gonzalez identify difficulties and offer examples that allow interpreters to see the text with new eyes.

The New Homiletic cultivated a culture where textbooks on how to preach in ways that takes the listener seriously flourished. For example, David Buttrick writes about the organization

³⁷ Henry Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (Abingdon, 1990).

³⁸ Christine Smith, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective* (Westminster John Knox, 1989).

³⁹ Justo L. and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed*. Abingdon Preacher's Library, (Abingdon, 1980).

of language so it makes an impact on human consciousness.⁴⁰ Buttrick's phenomenological approach begins with the event of what is heard and understood by the congregation. If “faith comes by hearing,” the question of what congregations actually hear and experience when a sermon is preached is crucial. A sermon needs to be formed to function in consciousness much as thoughts themselves form in the mind. The preacher plots the movement of sermon language so certain patterns of understanding form in the consciousness of the hearers.

The conventional wisdom today addresses: 1) what does the sermon say? The referential nature of language suggests that the preacher, in a clear and concise way, tell people the theological claim of the sermon. Preaching texts call the central theme of the sermon the thesis or focus statement. And 2) what does the sermon do? The performance nature of language urges the preacher, in a concrete way, to persuade the listeners to submit to the theological call of the sermon. Homileticians use the terminology of aim, purpose, or function statement to describe the intent of the sermon. The statement, “Jesus is God’s son” functions both as a referent and as a performative. If Jesus is not God’s son, then all preaching is vain. The stories told in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John make a clear claim about the identity of Jesus. Furthermore, the declaration “Jesus is God’s son” becomes a performative on the part of the hearer. The NT writers were not merely striving to prove their claims; they wanted people to yield their lives to the implications of their claims. Subsequently, preachers embrace the duality of the referential and performative nature of language.

The New Homiletic has likewise influenced my concern for the listener. My definition of preaching is: **“Proclaiming the theology of a text in contemporary context in order to**

⁴⁰ David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Fortress, 1987).

transform the community of God into the image of Jesus.” Although each of these phrases may engender debate, let me simply unpack my particular perspective.

Proclaiming: Metaphors abound that describe the preaching event. The Bible allows for a rich diversity of options, such as herald, witness, watchman, ambassador, vessel, or aroma. To be bound by one metaphor delimits preaching in ways that exclude rather than include. Of all the words in my definition, this is the most difficult to choose. I am attracted to the word “witness.” I desire to share with the congregation my personal experience with God and God’s Good News. I want to tell anyone who will listen what I have seen and heard in the text and in my Christian experience with God. But I want to do more than just offer evidence. I want to announce, profess, and proclaim in order to persuade. As a believer, I have a stake in the game; a vested interest. The thin line between words like *persuade* and *sell*, *testify* and *manipulate*, and *convince* and *indoctrinate*, has been easily and frequently crossed. But in the marketplace of ideas, I do not want a timid voice that merely offers the Gospel as one viable option among a host of other selections. If the ship has been lost for days at sea, the lookout cries out, “I see land!” If my neighbor attended the inauguration of the President, I want to see her pictures and hear her say, “You should have been there! It was the best day of my life.” When my doctor comes with his diagnosis, I want him to confidently state the prognosis. Preachers should speak with confidence and boldness about what they have seen and heard. The preacher’s proclamation focuses the eyes and ears of the audience so that they too can behold, witness, and declare.⁴¹

The Theology of a Text: Some definitions in the literature narrow the conversation so tightly that they stifle the variety needed in congregations. For instance, Augustine’s desire to

⁴¹ While theologies of preaching are numerous, I am impressed with David Lose’s *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2003) and Anna Carter Florence’s *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007). In both books, the concept of witness is expanded to include a more nuanced understanding of professing the faith.

use the Great Commandments as a lens for interpretation and homiletics will enhance preaching. If I applied the litmus test of loving God and loving neighbor to my sermons, my preaching would improve. What if every sermon in the land submitted itself to the scrutiny of Augustine's assessment? The world would certainly be different. Likewise, the word "gospel" has been suggested as the screening tool for sermons. It is suggested that every sermon be a "gospel" sermon. Every sermon must be deemed "good" news. Again, I am convinced that the profession of preaching and the influence of the church would inherently boost the credibility and the efficacy of preaching if "good news" was adopted as the judicating criteria. Yet, although not necessarily so, some topics and texts might be diluted of their meaning and power if the vice of definitions squeezed too much of their life from their veins. For example, the imprecatory psalms might not only be watered down but also excised altogether. Some narratives that have troubled lectionary compilers for centuries and exegetes even longer will certainly be deleted from the canon if they could only be discussed as "good news" or through the lens of the Great Commandments. Consequently, I use the word theology. Theology is the big word. Theology allows for the range of options needed by congregations for the whole word of God.

In the Contemporary Context:⁴² What other option do I have? So much of the preaching I hear as a teacher of preaching and as I travel around the country falls into the category of "history." Preachers are explaining what happened and what was said in the past.

⁴² See Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006); Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000); Duane K. Friesen, *Artists, Citizens, Philosophers Seeking the Peace of the City: An Anabaptist Theology of Culture* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000); Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith & Culture* (Paulist Press, 2003); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford, 2010); Stephen D. Long, *Theology and Culture: A Guide to the Discussion* (Cascade Companions. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008); James R. Nieman, *Knowing the Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); James R. Nieman, *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001); Angie Pears, *Doing Contextual Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006); Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Guides to Theological Inquiry. Fortress, 1997).

Somehow, the misconception has emerged that declares that all churches need is to understand the facts of archaeology, history, exegesis, etc. and the bridge to the contemporary world will be easily traversed. My seminary training concentrated on how to unpack and explain the Bible. Once the “truth” was uncovered, my earliest lessons in preaching taught me to explain it, apply it, and illustrate it. The ancient debate between Plato and the Sophists, that recurred between the “Old” and “New” Homiletic, was one-sided. For me, this generated a host of past tense sermons that downloaded data. It took a while for me to figure out that I did not live back then nor had anyone sitting in front of me. I live in the here and now. I choose to live today. The folks coming to worship God on any given Sunday, come full of joys, sorrows, pains, anxieties, hopes, dreams, and fears. They have forces that are tearing up their days in awful and gut wrenching ways. They have blessings that are enriching their lives bountifully. They come with expectations to hear a word from God that speaks to them in their context. This is why it is important to make a turn towards the listener and to take their context seriously.

In Order to Transform:⁴³ Texts accomplish a variety of functions. They teach, affirm, remind, warn, urge, comfort, exhort, encourage, call, claim, challenge, correct, delight, rebuke—the list is endless. But the primary purpose of God in the world is to call people to be in relationship. God’s story begins in the fellowship of a trinitarian relationship. The eschaton begins a new chapter of God’s story where all who are reconciled are called to live continuously in fellowship with God. In between the prologue and the epilogue is an amazing story of God’s love reuniting humanity to God’s creative intent. Nowhere is that articulated better than by Paul

⁴³ See James Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry according to Paul: A Biblical Witness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006) for a complete description of how Paul saw transformation as the heart of his ministerial practices. Also see Thompson’s book on virtue formation in *Moral Formation according to Paul: The Context and Coherence of Pauline Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), Samuel M. Powell and Michael E. Lodahl, eds., *Embodied Holiness: Toward a Corporate Theology of Spiritual Growth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), and Benjamin W. Farley, *In Praise of Virtue: An Exploration of the Biblical Virtues in a Christian Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

in 2 Cor. 3:18 when he says, “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”

In my definition of preaching, the phrase “in order to transform,” addresses intent. More specifically, “What is the purpose of preaching?” In my preaching classes, I press students to write clear and concise function statements that have strong active verbs that call for affective and behavioral changes. The Bible does inform. But the authors of the biblical texts do not write in order to download truths to their audiences. On the contrary, the authors write because the occasion demands a word from God that addresses problems and issues that are tearing up their days. Through the eternal truths of God’s identity and God’s story, God desires us to respond, to be transformed, so that we can be in fellowship with God’s Self.

The Community of God: We live between the times; between the advents of Jesus’ incarnation into our world and Jesus’ inauguration of a new age to come. The life God gives us between these advents has meaning. God is not just doing time. In between the times, God calls humanity to participate in God’s life through the process of continuing the reconciling work of Jesus. Preaching addresses the present tense because God desires to bless humanity in the life provided now. Preaching addresses the future tense because God’s story is heading somewhere. And God’s primary vehicle in history has been and still is community. Beginning with Abraham, God called Israel to be a people set apart from others so that all might have hope. In Jesus, God continues to set apart a community so that all peoples of the earth could be blessed. (So often preaching addresses the individual in ways that makes church a self-help therapy club rather than the life giving fellowship of Jesus.) Most of scripture addresses community. Preaching must restore that emphasis.

Into the Image of Jesus: In Jesus, God displays the fullness of divinity. Jesus demonstrates the intent God desired for all humanity in creation. Through recreation, all receive the fullness of God (Col. 2:9-10). The Gospels tell the story of Jesus so that we can not only behold his identity but also follow in his steps. Luke writes Acts to record the witness of the people continuing Jesus' work as a community. The letters call churches back to the "mind of Christ" so that they will continue faithfully their life of imitation.

The key question, "What is listener-oriented preaching?" has a rich ancestry. But if preaching takes a turn towards the listener, then the definition "**Proclaiming the theology of a text in contemporary context in order to transform the community of God into the image of Jesus**" will serve to accomplish that end. And that key question leads to others. How would we know if the hearers heard? Can hearing be analyzed or evaluated?

2. WHAT IS PREACHING'S RELATIONSHIP TO HEARING?

The homiletical terrain is treacherous. Traveling through the forest of libraries, bibliographies, and textbooks can leave a traveler in despair of ever finding their way.⁴⁴ Explorers often find streams and rivers to follow to help them traverse vast territories. Following a stream of listener feedback studies in the social sciences while simultaneously tracking a stream of the homiletical literature will lead to a convergence of thought that will provide a helpful mapping of the land. And on that map, we can locate homiletical practices that take the communal transformation of congregations seriously.

Acquiring feedback from listeners has a long and diverse history covering the fields of Speech, Psychology, Education, Political Science, and Management.⁴⁵ Howard Gilkinson and

⁴⁴ Tim Sensing, "After the Craddock Revolution: A Bibliographic Essay," *Leaven* 11 (Fourth Quarter 2003): 211-219.

⁴⁵ For a fuller description of feedback, see Tim Sensing, "Testing the Validity of Buttrick's Homiletic: Preaching from Matthew 13" (DMin Thesis, Harding Graduate School of Religion, 1992), 10-16. In the DMin

Donald Smith have summarized this research for the field of Speech discussing eleven different categories of measuring options.⁴⁶ The first tool of note was Howard Woodward's Shift-Of-Opinion Ballot.⁴⁷ William Millson tested this ballot and found it useful in measuring change of opinion in audiences.⁴⁸

Wilmer Stevens proposed a rating scale with some limited testing as to its validity and reliability in 1928.⁴⁹ This statement accompanied the article: “[The Editor is so prejudiced against rating scales and ‘scientific’ tests for effective speaking that he has no faith in their value. This article is printed in the hope that it will call forth a general discussion.]”⁵⁰ Franklin Knower responded forcefully the next year.⁵¹ He stated that the scientific method was the only course to follow to bring about advancement and respectability to the field. He too offered a scale by

project, I developed a listening tool that was determined to be valid and reliable. Subsequently, other researchers in their research projects have implemented the tool. My interest then was “listener participation.” My interest now is “listener transformation.”

⁴⁶Howard Gilkinson and Donald K. Smith, “Measurement in Speech,” in *An Introduction to Graduate Study in Speech and Theatre*, ed., Clyde W. Dow (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1961): 276-311. Also summarizing the field of speech measurement is Howard Gilkinson, “Experimental and Statistical Research in General Speech: II. Speakers, Speeches, and Audiences,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 30 (1944): 180-86 and “Indexes of Change in Attitude Behavior Among Students Enrolled in General Speech Courses,” *Speech Monographs* 8 (1941): 23-33; Theodore Clevenger, Jr., “Retest Reliabilities of Ten Scales of Public Speaking Performance,” *Central States Speech Journal* 14 (Nov. 1963): 285-91 and “Retest Reliability of Judgments of General Effectiveness in Public Speaking,” *Western Speech* 26 (Fall 1962): 216-219; Wayne N. Thompson, “An Experimental Study of the Accuracy of Typical Speech Rating Techniques,” *Speech Monographs* 11 (1944): 65-79; and Keith Brooks, “Some Basic Considerations in Rating Scale Development: A Descriptive Bibliography,” *Central States Speech Journal* 9 (Dec. 1952): 27-31.

⁴⁷Howard S. Woodward, “Measurement and Analysis of Audience Opinion,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 14 (Feb. 1928): 94-111. This ballot is an adaptation of a ballot proposed by W. E. Utterback, “Measuring the Reaction of an Audience to an Argumentative Speech,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech Education* 8 (April 1922): 180-83.

⁴⁸William A. D. Millson, “Problems in Measuring Audience Reaction,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 18 (Nov. 1932): 621-37; and “Experimental Work in Audience Reaction,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 18 (Feb. 1932): 24-25.

⁴⁹Wilmer E. Stevens, “A Rating Scale for Public Speakers,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 14 (April 1928): 223-32.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 223.

⁵¹Franklin H. Knower, “A Suggestive Study of Public-Speaking Rating-Scale Values,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 15 (Feb. 1929): 30-41.

which speaker performance could be measured.⁵² Lee Norvelle developed a scale in 1924 that was tested at Indiana University for the next five years.⁵³ The conclusions of his research indicated the possibility of establishing a reliable and valid measure of the effectiveness of speaking by the use of a rating scale.

A. H. Monroe and H. H. Remmers' work became a foundation for the next several decades.⁵⁴ They emphasized that the audience is the critical factor in determining the effectiveness of a speech. "It is their reactions he is trying to influence: the listener is not only the observer and the critic; he is the scorekeeper and the score!"⁵⁵ Their thesis for developing a measuring device was, "Effectiveness must be measured in terms of the response secured from the audience spoken to By the statistical analysis of the judgments made by a fair sampling of the actual listeners, a reasonably objective and quantitative measure of the response of the audience should be secured."⁵⁶ They developed the "Purdue Speech Rating Chart" that became the standard for several decades.⁵⁷

In 1941, Alice Bryan and Walter Wilke published the "Bryan-Wilke Scale."⁵⁸ They described their tool as a "technique for securing directly from an audience an expression of

⁵²Ibid. He gives twelve reasons as to the value of rating scales and forcefully answers the objections one might have about using these instruments.

⁵³Lee Norvelle, "Development and Application of a Method for Measuring the Effectiveness of Instruction in a Basic Speech Course," *Speech Monographs* 1 (Sept. 1934): 41-65.

⁵⁴A. H. Monroe, H. H. Remmers and Elizabeth Venemann-Lyle, "Measuring the Effectiveness of Public Speech in a Beginning Course," *Studies in Higher Education* 29 (Sept. 1936): 5-29.

⁵⁵Ibid., 5.

⁵⁶Ibid., 7.

⁵⁷Ibid., 26-27. The coefficients of reliability for the average speech class (20 students) was of the order of 0.9 for the traits of "Attention," "Organization," "Enthusiasm," and "General Effectiveness."

⁵⁸Alice I. Bryan and Walter H. Wilke, "A Technique for Rating Public Speeches," *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 5 (Mar. 1941): 80-90 and "Audience Tendencies in Rating Public Speakers," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 26 (1942): 371-81. One method of its use was presented by Walter H. Wilke even before its publication in "A Speech Profile," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 26 (Dec. 1940): 625-30.

preference regarding various basic aspects of a speaker's performance."⁵⁹ The Semantic Differential, developed by Charles Osgood and associates at the University of Illinois, entered the world of scales with great promise. It measured the clusters of associational meanings that became attached to concepts and the words that evoked them. Raymond Smith tested the use of this scale to develop a semantic differential for speech.⁶⁰

Research on feedback of public speeches is limited to the first half of this century. Little has been done in recent years. The field of communications in the secular field has changed its focus. However, religious researchers kept alive this pursuit for a few more decades.⁶¹ Today, most assessments of preaching in seminaries utilize qualitative approaches more than quantitative ones. Most studies relate to the effect a sermon will have on the audience. There are also studies that reflect the effect the feedback has on the preacher.⁶² Some studies relate to the

⁵⁹Bryan, "Technique," 80.

⁶⁰Raymond G. Smith, "Development of a Semantic Differential for use with Speech Related Concepts," *Speech Monographs* 26 (Nov. 1959): 263-72; and "Validation of a Semantic Differential," *Speech Monographs* 30 (Mar. 1963): 50-55.

⁶¹K.I. Pargament and W. H. Silverman, "Exploring Some Correlates of Sermon Impact on Catholic Parishioners," *Review of Religious Research* 24 (1982): 33-39; K. I. Pargament and D. V. DeRosa, "What was that Sermon About? Predicting Memory for Religious Messages From Cognitive Psychology Theory," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24 (1985): 180-93; Dennis L. Price, Robert W. Terry and B. Conrad Johnston, "The Measurement of the Effect of Preaching and Preaching Plus Small Group Dialogue in One Baptist Church," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 19 (June 1980): 186-97; James Engel, *How Can I Get Them to Listen?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977); William M. Newman and Stuart A. Wright, "The Effects of Sermons Among Lay Catholics: An Exploratory Study," *Review of Religious Research* 22 (Sept. 1980): 54-59; William O. Avery and Roger A. Gobbel, "The Word of God and the Words of the Preacher," *Review of Religious Research* 22 (Sept. 1980): 41-53; Donald J. Ragsdale and Kenneth R. Durham, "Audience Response to Religious Fear Appeals," *Review of Religious Research* 28 (Sept. 1986): 40-50.

Recent articles which treat written classroom feedback and update my review substantially are André Resner, "No Preacher Left Behind: A New Prerequisite for the Introductory Preaching Course"; and Karyn L. Wiseman, "Best Practices for Teaching Preaching: How the Summer of Love Led Me to Using Rubrics for Evaluating Preaching," both in *Academy of Homiletics 2009 Annual Meeting* (Washington, D.C.: 2009), 38-55 and 59-68, respectively. Also see Charles B. Hardwick, "Listener Surveys and Theological Questions (or Lack Thereof)," *Academy of Homiletics 2010 Annual Meeting* (Atlanta: 2010), 124-133.

⁶²Richard Allen Bodey, "Graduated Sermon Critique Forms for use in the Preaching Labs at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School" (D.Min. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1984); Carl B. Rife, "The Understanding and Utilization of Feedback in the Preaching Situation" (D.Min. diss., Wesley Theological Seminary, 1973); Franklin R. Gillis, "The Role of Feedback in Preaching: Some Methods for Acquiring Feedback from the Congregation" (D.Min. diss., Lancaster Theological Seminary, 1983); Donald Edward Jackson, "Feedback in

content organization and style.⁶³ Nelson made this conclusion: “Homiletical evaluative forms usually include an evaluation of the sermon's content, the preacher's style and delivery and a host of technical variables important to evaluating the effectiveness of the preacher and his [/her] sermon.”⁶⁴

A new study funded by the Lilly Foundation and published by Chalice Press represent a convergence of the social science and homiletical streams. The four books are *Hearing the Sermon* (2004), *Listening to Listeners* (2004), *Believing in Preaching* (2005), and *Make the Word Come Alive* (2005). With such titles, the reader assumes that a turn towards the congregation would emerge. However, the application in these four volumes was, instead, preacher-centered and not focused on the communal transformation of the congregation. The series asked, “What would preachers hear if they listened to what people in the pew were saying?” In other words, “Teach us how you listen to sermons so that we can help ministers become more effective preachers.”

Using the three classical parts of the Aristotelian speech act, *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, the project assumes that each person in the congregation hears primarily through the lens of one particular rhetorical category. For example, some folks will make sense of a sermon because of a relationship with the preacher (*ethos*), whereas others will look principally for content (*logos*);

Preaching Communication” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 1988); and Joe McDaniel and Alan Watson, “A Study of Post-Sermon Discussion Groups: Group's Self Evaluation” (Guided Research, Harding Graduate School of Religion, 1977). General studies that summarize the research on feedback include: Daniel R. Ilgen, Cynthia D. Fisher and M. Susan Taylor, “Consequences of Individual Feedback on Behavior in Organizations,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 64 (Aug. 1979): 349-71; and R. B. Ammons, “Effects of Knowledge of Performance: A Survey and Tentative Theoretical Formulation,” *Journal of General Psychology* 54 (1956): 279-99.

⁶³Robert S. Cathcart, “An Experimental Study of the Relative Effectiveness of Four Methods of Presenting Evidence,” *Speech Monographs* (Aug. 1955): 227-33; Donald E. Sikkink, “An Experimental Study of the Effects on the Listener of Anticlimax Order and Authority in an Argumentative Speech,” *Southern Speech Journal* 22 (Winter 1956): 73-78; and James T. MaGuire, “A Scale on Preaching Style: Hortatory Vs. Interactive Preaching,” *Review of Religious Research* 22 (Sept. 1980): 60-65.

⁶⁴Nelson, “Comparison,” 82.

and yet others through an experience of emotion (*pathos*). Yet, the researchers also acknowledge that *logos, ethos, and pathos* intersect in various ways in the minds of listeners. Some of those who rely on a relationship with the preacher will also receive significant content from the sermon. Likewise, a listener who seeks content is often distrustful of feelings invoked by passion. Although preachers who hear what their congregations are saying may indirectly affect the congregation, concrete practices were delimited to the act of the sermon. Even in the most practical volume, *Make the Word Come Alive*, the lessons learned address content of the sermons more so than holistic practices of the larger preaching ministry.⁶⁵

The Lilly study asked what preachers are often afraid to ask. The research opened the conversation between pew and pulpit in significant and helpful ways. Preachers did not ask these questions before because they either did not know the right questions or because they were afraid they already knew what might be said. Thanks to the Lilly study, at least one set of helpful questions explored how listeners listen. Nevertheless, still lurking in the shadows is the fear of what preachers think listeners really think. We have heard people say it about other preachers. We have heard ourselves say it about other preachers. If we care, and we want to be able to sleep at night, then maybe we are best kept clueless.

“If we care...” Who dares to ask such a question? Care about what? To be honest, we care about what others think about us. We all have an ego. Most preachers want to be liked. And we want to be effective. But I am not talking about the minister’s ego, I am talking about the listener. We want to make a difference in the lives of congregants. We want to be good preachers

⁶⁵ Chapter titles include *Help Us Figure Out What God Wants, Walk the Walk, Speak for Your Own Experience, Make the Bible Come Alive, Show How the Gospel Helps Us, Keep It Short, Make It Plain, Talk about Everything, Don’t Oversimplify Complex Issues, Help Us Get It Right, Talk Loud Enough So We Can Hear, and Don’t Forget to Put in Your Teeth.*

because we believe good preaching works. Yes, we care. Not to care is dangerous and unhealthy. The church should be leery of uncaring preachers.

If we really care, then the spotlight needs to be aimed at the listener. For in reality, it is not so much what is said in the pulpit, but what is heard in the pew. Lischer's turn to the church demands a collaborative approach between the pulpit and the pew, an approach that sees the church as an active and respected participant.⁶⁶ A collaborative approach enables the congregation "to find voice in the pulpit. When used over time, collaborative preaching empowers members of the congregation to claim as their own the ideas, forms of religious experience, and theological vision articulated from the pulpit. Preaching, therefore, becomes a focal point for congregational self-leadership and mission."⁶⁷

Preachers often have the experience that what they talk about is not what is reported. Who among us is exempt from the foyer conversation that goes something like, "Oh, Reverend Frank. That was a mighty fine sermon today. You touched my heart. That point you made about Paul overcoming his personal demons is giving me the strength to face my fears at work. I know my Monday morning will be brighter. Thank you." On Monday, Reverend Frank reviews his manuscript looking for absent allusions to demons, fears, work related references, etc. Nevertheless, Sunday's advent sermon brought comfort in unexpected ways. On the one hand, in these disconnects, many bad preaching events are redeemed. On the other hand, many life-giving words empowered by the Spirit are avoided by folk who would rather the preacher be silent.

⁶⁶ See also John McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995): 59-72. Other collaborative approaches include Schlafer, *Surviving the Sermon* (Cambridge: Cowley, 1992), and Clyde Reid, *The Empty Pulpit: A Study in Preaching as Communication* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). Complete turns to the listener are seen in John McClure's *Other-wisePreaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001) and Christine Smith, "Preaching: Hospitality, De-Centering, Re-Membering, and Right Relations," in *Purposes of Preaching* ed. Jana Childers (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004): 91-112.

⁶⁷ McClure, *Roundtable*, 7.

Communication is the responsibility of both parties. Sometimes it is the fault of the preacher, for example, when a message becomes obtuse or overly simplified. Yet, as Craddock often says in various ways, it is not bad preaching people do not listen to, but very good preaching. The listeners often refuse to unstop their ears even for the best of sermons. The listener has responsibility, too. This task called preaching calls to those who have ears to hear. Throughout Scripture, God responds to humans who have “unstopped their ears.”⁶⁸

The turn towards the listener is asking, “Can preaching be effective?” Effective hearing is more than paying attention. Hearing calls people to change in concrete ways so that over time, the church can be transformed into the image of Christ. “If they have ears to hear, let them hear.” Part 2 will explore the question, “Can preaching be effective?” If the answer is yes, then what are the practices that enhance the efficacy of preaching?

⁶⁸ Isa 35:5. For a more complete theology of hearing see, Stephen H. Webb, *The Divine Voice: Christian Proclamation and the Theology of Sound* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004).