

INTRODUCTION

The Pillars of the New Homiletic

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Whether familiar with the label or not, preachers today take for granted the paradigm shift that has been called the New Homiletic. Forty years after its inception, the inductive, narrative, experiential approaches to proclamation that the New Homiletic introduced are common pulpit fare. While it may not seem all that new now, especially to those of us who were formed in the faith by this type of preaching, we should not forget that the movement breathed new life into an ailing pulpit. Amidst a host of writers, thinkers, and practitioners, Charles Rice, Fred Craddock, Henry Mitchell, Eugene Lowry, and David Buttrick are considered the pillars of this movement. Indeed, these scholars were first placed side by side in 1987 in a book by Richard L. Eslinger entitled *A New Hearing: Living Options in*

Homiletical Method.¹ They gathered together again, this time in person, in 2007 (twenty years after the publication of *A New Hearing*) at Lexington Theological Seminary for a conference titled, like this book, *The Re(New) ed Homiletic*. As preachers and scholars struggle to imagine the most effective way to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century, it is important for us to hear again from these guides who helped us find a way through the homiletical wilderness in which the church found itself during the late twentieth century.

Each of the five scholar-preachers agreed to do three things in their presentations. First, he would rehearse the core contribution or perspective of his homiletical approach, focusing attention on what he thought was most important about his contribution. Second, he would describe his understanding of how the cultural, religious, theological, liturgical contexts have changed since he first developed that approach. And, third (and primarily), he would name how he would reshape or nuance his core contribution for the future given the shift(s) he had named. In addition to offering this lecture, engaging in question-and-answer time, and participating in a panel discussion with the other presenters, each scholar-preacher was asked to preach in a local congregation and offer a sermon that reflects their critique and reshaping of their early contribution to homiletics. This book offers to a wider public the lectures in essay form, two responses each from scholars indebted to their work that also look ahead to new trends in preaching, a closing essay by Eslinger, and videos of the sermons on the included DVD.

Before we turn to the re(new)ed thoughts of these scholar-preachers, an overview of the movement called the New Homiletic and an introduction to the work of these five pillars is in order. Their work, of course, did not occur in a vacuum. Thus, this introduction to the New Homiletic begins with some background work. I glance quickly at the dominant modes of preaching over against which the New Homiletic spoke and look at some (not all) of those whose work and thought served as a foundation for the New Homiletic to build on. I next offer an overview of the New Homiletic as a whole, followed by some comments on each scholar individually. Rather than an exhaustive or precise examination of either the history leading up to the New Homiletic or the work of these five pillars, what follows is an attempt to name key moments, figures, and concepts as a frame for entering the conversations that follow in this book.

Historical Background

In the later medieval period, the Franciscans and Dominicans developed a new form of preaching, usually referred to as the *university sermon*. One fifteenth-century preaching manuscript uses the metaphor of a tree to describe this new form.² From a very short trunk extends three major limbs, each of which bears three smaller branches. The approach is to take a central theme and break it into three points, each of which is then divided into three subsections. The university sermon was the beginning of the three-point, two-joke, and one-poem sermon. The approach is propositional: name the point or thesis at the beginning and break it into smaller didactic propositions for analysis. All jokes (and poems) aside, the endurance of this form shows that it has obviously served the church quite well for a long time.

Another sermonic form that has had lasting influence is the *Puritan Plain style* of preaching. Arising in late sixteenth-century Calvinism in England and New England, the form emphasizes less thematic preaching of three points and more exposition of Scripture. There are three major parts of the sermon—first, commentary on the ancient text in its ancient setting; second, eternal doctrinal points drawn from the exposition of the ancient text; and third, application of the doctrine to the current lives of those in the congregation—biblical exegesis, theological interpretation, moral exhortation. While the Puritan Plain form is different than the structure of the three-point sermon, the logic is the same. They are both deductive approaches to proclamation. They move from the general to the specific. In the Puritan Plain form, exegesis and theological reflection in the first parts of the sermon name general principles, which are then applied in specific ways at the end of the sermon.

These two homiletical forms together have dominated most of preaching in the West for the last four or five centuries. Even when the forms have not been held on to rigidly, the deductive logic and propositional approach to preaching they represent have been maintained. An example of this dominance is found in John A. Broadus's 1870 textbook *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. Revised by E. C. Dargan in 1897, by J. B. Weatherspoon in 1943, and again by Vernon L. Stanfield in 1979, some form of this book has been in print and in use for over a century. Indeed, it was *the*

primary homiletical textbook used in seminaries from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, especially the Weatherspoon edition. The influence of this textbook on American preaching is difficult to exaggerate. According to this text, a sermon should have a guiding subject that is named in the opening, often in the title itself. This subject should be argued persuasively, illustrated to make the abstract concrete and understandable, and applied so that the truth unpacked is given explicit relevance for life. In other words, Broadus, along with his revisers, taught students well how to preach deductive, propositional sermons.

Foundation

This traditional approach to preaching sat comfortably on its throne until the 1970s when the New Homiletic effected a *coup d'état*. But while this was a radical dethronement, it was not as sudden as it often seems in hindsight. Throughout the twentieth century, there were some dissident voices among preachers that helped pave the way for the homiletical revolution of the 1970s and '80s. These voices, stacked upon one another, form the foundation upon which the pillars of the New Homiletic stand.

The first such voice I will mention is Harry Emerson Fosdick. Considered one of the greatest American preachers ever, this pastor of Riverside Church in New York City wrote an article for *Harper's Magazine* in 1928 entitled, "What Is the Matter with Preaching?"³ Basically, he answered the question by saying the problem with most preaching is that it is boring. He rejected both expository and topical preaching for falling into this problem. One of his long-remembered lines from the article is, "Only the preacher proceeds upon the idea that folk come to church desperately anxious to discover what happened to the Jebusites." Fosdick argued instead that sermons should solve problems of the hearers—some social, moral, psychological, theological, existential problem of importance. If preaching truly touches hearers' lives, it will be anything but boring. By starting with people's needs, sermons will be relevant and transforming. While the New Homiletic did not necessarily embrace Fosdick's psychological emphasis, it did make a turn to the hearer that has similar dynamics.

Another homiletical voice that foreshadowed elements of the New Homiletic was that of R. E. C. Browne. In 1958, Browne published *Ministry of the*

Word, in which he argues that the gospel should not be reduced to formulae, by which he means predetermined propositions and structures of sermons (such as three-point or expository forms).⁴ Instead, the sermon must authentically and artistically grow out of the character of the person preaching and relate to the form of revelation represented in the biblical text being preached. Preaching should be more artistic poetry than philosophical prose.

1958 was a good year for homiletics as H. Grady Davis's even more influential *Design for Preaching* appeared alongside Browne's work.⁵ Davis's opening words of the book are, "Life appears in the union of substance and form."⁶ Davis could not understand why preachers took every aspect of the gospel and forced it to conform to a single rhetorical form such as the three-point sermon. Instead, he argued, "there is a right form for each sermon, namely, the form that is right for this particular sermon."⁷ Sermonic form and content should be organically related. "A sermon should be like a tree," he says; but this is a different sort of tree than the medieval preaching tree we considered earlier. A sermon should have one sturdy idea like the trunk, deep roots of research and reflection that are never seen, branches that thrust out from the central trunk that bear fruit and blossoms appropriate to that tree alone.⁸ So, the sermon's content determines the appropriate form, rather than the form determining how the content must be presented.

Fosdick, Browne, and Davis foreshadowed the New Homiletic by raising significant questions about the overall effectiveness of the dominant homiletical paradigm. They are some of the homileticians upon whose shoulders Buttrick, Craddock, Lowry, Mitchell and Rice stood.

But, actually, there were some stronger forces of change occurring in other academic disciplines that would undergird the rise of the New Homiletic. A beginning point in the first half of the twentieth century has been labeled the linguistic turn. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, and others began to assert in different ways that language does not simply name reality; language *constructs* reality. The power of this insight for preaching is easily imagined in Heidegger's famous line, "Language is the house of Being."⁹

In the mid-twentieth century, New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann applied Heidegger's existentialist philosophy to biblical hermeneutics.¹⁰ He used existentialism to translate the myths of the ancient biblical worldview into relevant theological discourse in a modern, scientific

worldview. Two of Bultmann's students, Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling, extended both his ideas and Heidegger's later work on the power of language into a school of thought referred to as the New Hermeneutic in the 1960s.¹¹ Instead of approaching Scripture as history or as a collection of eternal truths or even as myths to be demythologized, they viewed Scripture as *word event*. Language does not simply refer; it acts, it does, it is an event that creates meaning and meaningfulness. Over against the approach of earlier historical critics who tried to study Scripture in a scientific, objective, distant manner, the New Hermeneutic argues that proper interpretation of Scripture requires that one be existentially invested to allow the Word to act upon you. Not only do interpreters ask questions of the text, the text asks questions of the interpreter. To read Scripture as a depository of content misses the point. To read Scripture truly is to have an experience of, an encounter with, the Word of God which demands that the reader make a decision for authentic existence. Moreover, because Scripture is at root *kerygma* (proclamation), preaching should do what Scripture does. That is, instead of simply passing on the content of the faith persuasively, preaching should be an *event* that leads the hearer into an encounter with the Word of God which calls for transformative decisions.

At the same time that the New Hermeneutic was taking hold in New Testament theology in North America, biblical scholars and theologians moved out of the history department and instead began sharing office space with the English department. That is not to say that a complete either-or was set up—either the Bible is read as history or as literature—but it was a major shift nevertheless. In the 1960s and '70s, literary-critical readings of the Bible began to surpass historical-critical readings. Biblical scholars like Amos Wilder, brother of playwright and novelist Thornton Wilder, led the charge in analyzing Scripture as narrative.¹² A growing appreciation of the literary-narrative quality of Scripture led those in the New Homiletic to a new appreciation of the essential role of narrative and literary art in preaching.

One final, related yet distinct movement that played a role in the shaping of the New Homiletic was the arena of cultural studies distinguishing between oral and print cultures. Two of the most influential voices of the day were Marshal McLuhan and Walter Ong.¹³ One of the central things they argued is that logic works differently in different media. Knowledge

is shaped by how it is conveyed—or, to use McLuhan’s famous line, “The medium is the message.” The implications for preaching are obvious. We should not preach using the same kind of argumentation we use when writing. The dominant deductive, propositional approach to preaching was shaped by print logic. Different approaches are called for in oral discourse.

These different homiletical and scholarly voices came together in the 1960s and ’70s when cultural forces were leading many people to challenge the authority of the church and the relevancy of preaching. The result was a homiletical tipping point. The time was ripe for a change in the way North American preachers went about the task of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. This came about in the 1970s and ’80s in the New Homiletic. But we need to be careful not to exaggerate this claim concerning a tipping point in a way that diminishes the innovation of the pillars of the New Homiletic. These scholar-preachers did not simply ride the wave of the time. They did not simply summarize what had already been said in a new way. Instead, they stood up, stood out, and spoke out—a right word at the right time.

The New Homiletic

So we turn now to that paradigm shift called the New Homiletic. Before we look specifically at Rice, Craddock, Mitchell, Lowry, and Buttrick, there are some things we can say about the movement as a whole, that is, by the way, broader than just the proposal of these five men.

David James Randolph was teaching homiletics at Drew School of Theology in 1965 when he delivered a paper at the first meeting of the Academy of Homiletics and coined the term “New Homiletic.” He saw this nascent, new preaching as an outgrowth of the New Hermeneutic (thus the linguistic echo), but not that alone. He wrote,

A new preaching is coming to birth in the travail of our times. In the civil rights movement, in the engagement with communism, in the “secular city,” in the ecumenical enterprise, in the theological school, in the parish church, in the liturgical movement, and elsewhere, preaching is being rejected as a habit and affirmed as a happening. The definition of preaching which is dawning on these horizons may

be stated in this way: Preaching is the event in which the biblical text is interpreted in order that its meaning will come to expression in the concrete situation of the hearers.¹⁴

Randolph's use of the label "New Homiletic" was proleptic. What would come over the horizon was not quite clear yet. But now looking back over the past thirty-five to forty years we can list some common elements of the shift in preaching that occurred in the 1970s and '80s. The characteristics I am going to list are common denominators, if you will, and are meant to be illustrative more than exhaustive. Moreover, they overlap in a messy sort of way. For the pure irony of it, I offer this description using three points!

First, the New Homiletic represented a turn to the hearer. Earlier homiletical works usually focused on how the preacher builds an argument. The New Homiletic focused instead on how people in the pew listen, how they experience spoken language. Instead of constructing language simply to serve the content, you play with language to invite hearers to *experience* something specific. In classical rhetorical terms, there is shift in emphasis from *logos* to *pathos*. We must be careful not to hear this shift as saying preachers should have no concern for content. The question is not whether or not a sermon should be theological or biblical, but *how* a theologically, biblically informed worldview should be offered so that it creates a transformative, authentic experience for the hearers.

Indeed, this approach assumes the hearer is a partner in the sermonic event. What preachers offer is only the start of the sermon. Those in the pew must finish the work. To draw every sermon up nice and neat is to refuse the hearers their due. They must have the freedom to assent or disagree with what is proclaimed, or it is not good news. They must be able to "apply" the word spoken to their own lives in their own ways without it being dictated or there is no freedom.

Second, to enable hearers to do their sermonic work appropriately, there must be a shift in how sermons are offered. It is not overly dramatic to call this paradigm shift a homiletical revolution. After four to five hundred years of deductive sermons, the New Homiletic said, "No more." In their place were offered inductive, narrative-type sermons. Whereas deductive sermons move from general claims to specific applications for the lives of those in the congregation, sermons in the new mode move from the specifics

of lived experience to general claims. As we are experientially moved along with the plot of a great short story or movie, so must sermons move us. There must be suspense or tension in the early part of the sermon that leads the hearer to seek resolution, both in the sermon and in existence. After all, as we just noted, this is the hearers' work.

This means, then, that sermons in the vein of the New Homiletic are expressed in the indicative instead of the imperative. Deductive sermons generally move from exposition of Scripture or doctrine to moral application. Preachers authoritatively tell you how to live as a Christian. Inductive or narrative sermons empower and authorize the hearer to do the work of application. The tools the preacher gives to those in the pew to hear God's call is an evocative declaration of God's good news. The preacher speaks of what is so that hearers are moved to decide what will be.

Third, in the wake of the linguistic turn in philosophy and the New Hermeneutic, preachers view sermonic language differently from their predecessors. Propositional sermons work on the assumption that language is a clear, precise tool to convey truth. Thus, the main elements of the sermon are the abstract, theological, moral points. Imagery is used to "illustrate" these main points, to make them more concrete, more palatable. Illustrations are add-ons that are helpful to "bring home" the message, but the message itself would not change if they were omitted. For the New Homiletic, however, the imagery *is* the message. For this movement, sermonic content is not propositional truth but a true, existential, transformative experience of the good news. The sermon, like Scripture itself, is a word *event*. The language shapes not simply human beliefs (which is the orientation of propositional sermons) but human perception and experience—in a nutshell, human reality. So figurative language, metaphors, and stories are not rhetorical flourishes in sermons; they are what bring into being a new consciousness of the hearers. They do not simply show hearers reality; they initiate the congregation into the really real, the ultimately real.

So the shift represented by the New Homiletic can be summarized in terms of a focus on the hearer, the use of inductive, narrative sermonic forms, and the centrality of imagistic, storied language to create an experience of the gospel. But lest we be reductionistic, we need to recognize that different scholars grouped under the umbrella of the New Homiletic approach the core values in different ways. They are influenced by different

strands of the background described above and each has a variety of other influences as well. So while their homiletic journeys brought them all into the same neighborhood, they came by different roads and settled down on different streets. Let's examine them in the order they appeared in the neighborhood.

Charles L. Rice

Charles L. Rice began life as a Southern Baptist, migrated through the United Church of Christ, and settled down in the Episcopal Church. He spent thirty years teaching at Drew School of Theology in Madison, New Jersey, where he taught both M.Div. and Ph.D. students.

In 1970, Rice published *Interpretation and Imagination: The Preacher and Contemporary Literature*.¹⁵ Here he begins with Paul Tillich's dictum that religion is the substance of culture, and culture is the form of religion. Thus, biblical preaching consists of translating the faith from an ancient language system into a contemporary cultural language system.

To capture the essence of the faith in terms of contemporary cultural experience, one must first bring contemporary human experience to bear on biblical interpretation. Rice argues, in similar fashion to Tillich, that the best expression of contemporary culture is found in contemporary art. Artists have always both caught the essence of human experience and redefined human experience. Thus, preachers are well served by colliding contemporary literature with ancient biblical literature. This is more than simply drawing illustrations from literature, as preachers have always done. The preacher seeks a sort of resonance between the experience found in the ancient text and in the contemporary text; by letting the texts rub together, the hearers are offered that same-type experience in their own cultural terms while affirming the historic tradition of the faith.

In 1980 Rice coauthored a textbook with Edmund Steimle and Morris Neidenthal entitled *Preaching the Story*.¹⁶ In the long run, this book was more influential than *Interpretation and Imagination*, but it is clearly an extension of Rice's earlier argument. In this book, the authors assert that the task of the preacher is to bring together in the sermon—in a way that is meaningful to the hearers and faithful to the tradition—the biblical story, the congregation's story, the preacher's personal story, and the world's story.

A key exegetical and homiletical principle for this approach is that *story interprets story*. In this sense, preaching itself is storytelling. It is not, however, just stringing together entertaining illustrations. It is the laying bare of these four stories side by side, overlapping their edges, so that at times they sing together in harmony and at other times they enter into a shouting match filled with dissonance, but they always interpret each other and those gathered for worship.

Henry H. Mitchell

Henry H. Mitchell stands in a long line of vibrant African American preachers. Both of his grandfathers were preachers, but when he looks backward his vision stretches all the way to Africa. While he is a child of black preaching, he is the father of African American homiletics. Published in 1970—and thus developed at the same time Rice was composing his work—*Black Preaching* was a groundbreaking study.¹⁷ Some (white) scholars disparaged black preaching as uneducated or filled with emotionalism and others tried to deny that there was anything really unique about black preaching when compared with Euro-American preaching. But Mitchell lifted up this preaching style, which had its origin in the African griot and took shape during the struggle to survive in slavery, as something for the African American preacher to be proud of and something for all preachers to learn from. Indeed, in 1977 he published a book that grew out of his 1974 Lyman Beecher lectures, entitled *The Recovery of Preaching*.¹⁸ This book shifts from description to prescription, while continuing to use elements from black preaching as its basis. Like Rice and Craddock, he argues that preachers must speak to the culture in which the congregation resides and speak out of their own personal lives. But a unique theme of his work is that good preaching involves celebration. Rejecting the Western dualism of intellect and emotion that results in rational, propositional sermons, he argues that preachers must engage the whole person. If we are commanded to love God with our whole heart, soul, strength, and mind, preachers cannot only address the mind. African Americans, he asserts, had spent centuries having tapes recorded in their heads telling them they are inferior, subhuman, and loved less by God than whites. Preaching must erase such tapes and record new messages on hearers' souls. You do not do this with

argumentation. You must move hearers emotionally to embrace new images of God and self through storytelling, folk language, and evocative imagery.

Key to this transformation is the climax of the African American sermon. For Mitchell, the climax must be celebratory.¹⁹ The preacher must celebrate and lead the congregation in celebration of God's sovereignty. For the black church to celebrate God's eschatological goodness in worship in the face of slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and continued economic discrimination is an amazing Christian witness. And it is transforming for those who join in the celebration. Worshipers cannot celebrate God's sovereignty and at the same despair that evil will have the last word in their lives or in the world. Thus, celebration leads to new faith, which leads to new action.

Fred B. Craddock

Fred B. Craddock actually wrote and published locally at Philips University *As One Without Authority* before Charles Rice published *Interpretation and Imagination*. But it was a year later before it was published nationally.²⁰ In other words, Craddock's, Rice's, and Mitchell's thoughts were developed simultaneously. In terms of public influence, Rice's book started a nice fall shower and Craddock's book grew that shower into a thunderous spring storm. Indeed, many consider *As One Without Authority* to be the most influential book on preaching in the last half century.

In 1978, Craddock published the Lyman Beecher lectures he gave at Yale under the title *Overhearing the Gospel: Preaching and Teaching the Faith to Those Who Have Already Heard*.²¹ In this book he applies the argument in *As One Without Authority* to the task of preaching to those for whom the gospel has grown dull through familiarity. As he draws on Søren Kierkegaard indirectly in the first volume, he does so explicitly in the second.

In *As One Without Authority* Craddock argues, If deductive preaching is not really working anymore, why not try an inductive approach? In 1971 this was a radical proposal. Preachers were so used to moving from a general truth claim to particular applications that many assumed it was essential to proclamation. You state a proposition drawn from the gospel and then you tell people what it means for their lives. But drawing on the New Hermeneutic and the literary study of Jesus' parables, Craddock asserts

that preaching should instead move from the particulars of experience to general truth. Notice that the language of application is dropped. Craddock pulls back the authority of the preacher from exhorting the hearers how to live their lives. If, he argues, the inductive process is done well, hearers will be led to finish the sermon by drawing the conclusion for themselves and determining how it should be applied to their particular lives. Hearers are participants in the sermon event, not simply recipients of it. The hearers are able to do their part in finishing the sermon because the preacher has provided a range of concrete experiential images with which they can relate and draw analogies to their own existence. You show them their lives in light of the gospel and they will do something with it.

In the study, the preacher works with a text and through the encounter with the biblical text gains new insight into God, self, and the world. This is not simply an intellectual process; it is emotional, experiential. The preacher's task is to recreate that experience for the hearers. But the preacher cannot do this by reporting what she has found anymore than showing someone pictures of a vacation is equal to taking them on vacation. But that is what deductive sermons try to do. Rather, the preacher must lead the congregation in a process of discovery appropriate to the oral setting of worship. So, through study of the text the preacher decides where she wants the congregation to be at the end of the sermon. Through study of the congregation, she determines where the hearers are at the moment. Sermons then take the listeners on a journey from where they exist to a vision and experience of something new.

The vehicle that takes them on the journey is imagery. Inductive preachers drive the congregation through the familiar roads of their lives in a way that they can see and experience the landscape anew through the lens of the gospel. To change people you do not tell them the images stuck in their heads are wrong; you offer them new images. So sermonic imagery is not simply illustrations of things said more directly in propositional form. Imagination is the way to a new reality.

Eugene L. Lowry

Eugene L. Lowry's work is in some way an extension of the trajectories that began with Charles Rice and Fred Craddock. In his 1980 book, *The*

Homiletical Plot, Lowry takes inductive movement and storytelling and shapes it into a concrete sermonic form.²² He argues that all sermons should take on a narrative structure. This is not to say that every sermon should be a story, but that, like all narratives, the sermon must move from conflict to resolution, or from itch to scratch. The specific construct he uses to unpack this narrative structure has become known as the Lowry Loop.

The narrative movement has five stages. The first move is to create the itch for the hearers the way a narrative does—to get them engaged by developing some ambiguity that will need to be resolved. Lowry calls this upsetting the equilibrium.

The second stage involves digging deeper into ambiguity to determine all that is really at stake. Here the preacher and congregation analyze the discrepancy between what is and what can or ought to be. This stage asks a slow, thoughtful *Why?* in the face of the itch created at the beginning of the sermon.

All narratives to some degree move toward an ending that resolves the conflict created earlier in the story. The third stage of a narrative sermon, therefore, discloses the clue to that resolution without giving it away all at once. To be effective, the preacher must offer the congregation an experience of reversal at this point. There must be an “Oh, I get it.”

This revelatory moment in the sermon leads the hearers to an experience in which the radical discontinuity between the world’s way of thinking and the gospel is seen and felt. So in the fourth stage of the narrative sermon, Lowry moves us from diagnosis to treatment. Here listeners hear the good news proclaimed explicitly and find that the gospel is continuous with human experience as long as human experience has been turned upside down.

The final stage of the narrative sermon that flows out of experiencing the gospel in the sermon is the anticipation of the consequences of embracing the gospel in the future—once the speaking of the sermon is done. In the sermon itself, treatment has only begun, it has only made health a possibility. The hearers must decide for themselves what difference the gospel will make in their lives. In this final stage the preacher does not exhort the congregation to live out the gospel in a specific way, but invites authentic response.

These are the five stages of the Lowry Loop, but the language is a little cumbersome, so Lowry gives us shorthand terms: Oops!, Ugh!, Aha!, Wheel!, and Yeah!

David Buttrick

While David Buttrick clearly fits within the New Homiletic in terms of the common characteristics named earlier, he often comes at those concerns from quite different angles than these other four scholars. He is as different from the other four as he is similar. Buttrick had been developing and discussing his ideas in short works in the early 1980s and then published *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* as his magnum opus in 1987 (after Eslinger had already included his approach alongside that of the other four).²³ To give you a sense of the scope of the work by way of comparison, in its original format, Lowry's *Homiletical Plot* was one hundred pages long, while Buttrick's *Homiletic* is 498 pages. Whereas the other works we have been discussing present a singular theoretical perspective, Buttrick presents two key theoretical pieces mixed in with a plethora of theological observations and homiletical advice.

Buttrick's starting point is the same as all the others: he rejects the dominant homiletical approach of distilling propositions from Scripture regardless of the form of the text. He desires a homiletical method that better reflects the literary study of the Bible, especially the recognition that biblical narratives are movements of episodic thought. By plotting the underlying structure of thought in a biblical passage (in a fashion similar to but not quite the same as structuralism), a preacher can see the way the text intends to function in the reader's consciousness and develop a sermon that functions in the same way in the congregation's consciousness. The connective logic of the sermon should reflect the function of the movement of the biblical text on which the sermon is focused.

Indeed, coupled with this hermeneutical concern is one that a homiletical approach must fit the way people listen today. At the center of Buttrick's homiletical approach is an empirical, phenomenological examination of the manner in which language forms in communal consciousness. While all of the scholars we have examined make a turn toward the individual hearer, Buttrick, based on insights drawn from communication studies, focuses on how a *community* of listeners can be moved along to hear the same sermon in the same basic way. The complex details of Buttrick's argument can be controversial and difficult to follow, but his basic method is straightforward: determine the way thought forms in a

community's mind and develop a sermonic structure that flows in that same manner.

The subtitle of the book names the two primary ways the preacher can create such a communal hearing. The two parts are not unrelated, but they are separate. The first part focuses on sermonic "moves." Buttrick rejects the use of "points" but is very much interested in the way sermons offer the congregation a number of ideas, or language modules. These ideas are not static but are movements of thought similar to the way different ideas move through a conversation. A conversation between two people moves with a rapid exchange of shifting ideas. But a sermonic conversation with a community of hearers must move much more slowly and deliberately and shift between ideas more carefully. Modern attention span is limited to three to four minutes, but it takes three to four minutes to embed a movement of thought in a whole community's consciousness. So the preacher must shape a move very carefully. The move should open with a statement of the idea. Actually, the idea should be stated three times, but the repetition is formed differently each time so that the community is not aware of the repetition even as it begins to embed the idea in the community's consciousness. Then the idea is developed through association or dissociation through the use of a central image. Finally, closure is brought to the move through the restatement of the idea. This sandwich structure allows the hearers to understand, assimilate, and remember the move as the preacher shifts to the next move.

Different from Craddock's journey or Lowry's narrative plot, Buttrick does not think the preacher should develop smooth transitions between these moves so much as keeping them separate by placing them side by side in progression so that the logical connection between the ideas is clear. During twenty minutes, you can develop a five- or six-move sermon.

While the moves are set apart from each other in the way that they are opened and closed, they must work together. One of the ways they do this is through the interrelationship of the sermonic imagery. Instead of simply illustrating propositions, the central imagery of each of the conjoined moves should work together to form an "image grid" that reinforces the central claim of the sermon and embeds it in the hearers' consciousness. Because abstract, conceptual language no longer forms in group consciousness as it did in a pretechnology age, the use of story and metaphor becomes central to homiletical endeavor instead of an illustrative add-on. However,

the wrong image can split communal consciousness instead of forming in consciousness. For example, Buttrick absolutely rejects the use of personal stories in sermons because they draw the audience's attention away conceptual development intended and place it on the person of the preacher. The image grid constructed by the preacher stretches across the episodic plot of the sermon through the careful placement of moves to make a specific impression on the congregation.

The second half of *Homiletic* focuses on “structures,” by which Buttrick means overarching rhetorical strategies aimed at different sermonic intentions. This section of the book has been overshadowed by the influence of the moves section, so we need not give it the same level of attention, but at least a brief summary is needed.

Buttrick suggests that the connective logic of moves should aim toward one of three modes of impressions in congregational consciousness. These three modes are like different responses to a painting of city scene in a museum.

The first is the *immediacy mode*; it is like the first glance at the painting and the immediate impression it makes on you. Sermons in this mode might be structured to duplicate the structure of biblical narrative to offer an immediate experiential impression.

The second mode is the *reflection mode*; it is like returning to the painting later and sitting on the bench in the room and really studying the details of the city scene. Sermons in this mode back away from the immediate surface-level impression of a biblical passage and reflect on the more slowly developed meaning of a passage. This sermon would deal more explicitly with theology than the former.

And finally there is the *praxis mode*. This is like leaving the museum with the image of the painting in the back of your mind and seeing the city outside the museum in a new light. Sermons in this mode begin less with the biblical text and more with the situation facing the congregation. They analyze what congregations are doing and speak to what a congregation *should* do.

Conclusion

These are the early works of the five pillars of the New Homiletic—Charles Rice, Fred Craddock, Henry Mitchell, Eugene Lowry, and David Buttrick.

Their core contributions continue to be influential in preaching and the study of preaching today. There are few preachers whose approach has not been shaped directly or indirectly by them. There are no homileticians teaching in North America today who would not name this group as the shoulders upon which we stand.

But that said, the movement had its roots in the 1960s, sprouted in the 1970s, and matured in the 1980s. Given that the movement has been around for nearly forty years, given the rise of postmodernity, and given the decline of the mainline church, the New Homiletic is experiencing a midlife crisis of sorts. Many people are looking for the next major move in preaching. But if the current homiletical literature is an appropriate measure, it is not likely that such a move will be an abandonment of the New Homiletic so much as it will be an extension and adaptation of it. So it only makes sense that these five pillars have a chance to give voice to their vision for how that should happen alongside all of us young whippersnapper homileticians trying to find our way in the dark.

When one looks at this group of five scholars, one is likely immediately aware that they are all men and four of them are white. The homiletical guild has diversified significantly since the 1970s and '80s and the preaching landscape promises to change even more radically in the coming years. Thus, we have created an intergenerational dialogue of sorts in this volume by inviting a range of homileticians who are planting seeds here in the early part of the twenty-first century for harvest in the coming years to respond to the re(new)ed proposals of the New Homileticians. In addition, we offer an afterword from Richard Eslinger, who was the first to bring these pillars together in a single study.