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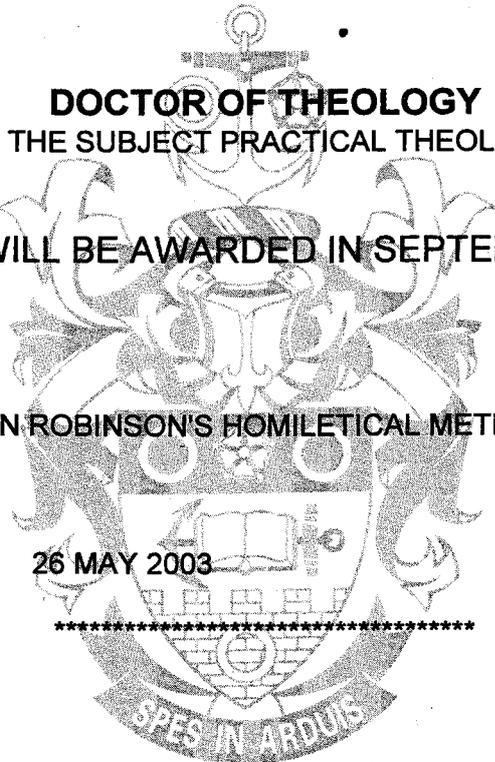
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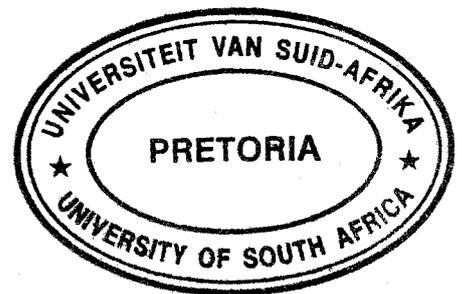
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AN EVALUATION OF HADDON ROBINSON'S HOMILETICAL METHOD:

AN EVANGELICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

JUDSON SHEPHERD LAKE

submitted in accordance with the requirements
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PROMOTER: DR A G VAN WYK

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SUMMARY

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SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

For the last two decades Haddon Robinson's homiletic text *Biblical Preaching* has been a significant influence in evangelical homiletics. In an endeavor to evaluate the homiletic method within it, this study asked the following questions: What is Robinson's theological methodology and how does it affect his homiletical method? What is his hermeneutical methodology and how does it affect his homiletical method? These two questions lead into the main issue of this study expressed in two other questions: Is Robinson consistent with his theological and hermeneutical methodology in his homiletical method? What are the strengths and weaknesses of his ten-stage method?

Based on these issues, the purpose of this study was to investigate Robinson's theological and hermeneutical methodology, evaluate his ten-stage method in light of this investigation, and based on any problematic areas, suggest pointers toward new theory and procedure for the enhancement of expository pedagogy.

To provide a framework for this study, four homiletical paradigms in contemporary American homiletics were identified and explained. Robinson's method was found to be in one of these paradigms. With this framework in mind, Robinson's theological and hermeneutical methodology was investigated. Following this, his definition of expository preaching with its five components was set forth and investigated.

It was found that Robinson's expository methodology as expressed in his view of Scripture, hermeneutics, and definition of expository preaching, is a consistent foundation for his ten-stage method. Nevertheless, several problematic issues were noted.

Having investigated Robinson's expository methodology, this study formally evaluated his ten-stage method and found its center of gravity to be on the two center stages dealing

with the homiletical idea and purpose statement. Furthermore, this evaluation found the ten stages to be consistent with Robinson's definition of expository preaching in its movement from interpretation to application. In seven of the stages, however, this study found deficiencies due to procedural weaknesses and a lack of theoretical focus.

The study concluded with ten pointers based on the problem areas addressed throughout the investigation and evaluation. These pointers suggested a new theory and procedure to enhance expository pedagogy and practice.

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Soli Deo Gloria.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1980 Baker Book House published Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Sermons*.¹ In this text, considered by the editors of *Preaching* to be "one of the most influential homiletics texts ever published,"² Robinson describes a "method" of sermon preparation for "those learning to preach or to experienced people who want to brush up on the basics."³ This method and its underlying methodology will be the subject of this study.

1.1 Who is Haddon Robinson?

Haddon Robinson is, at the time of this writing, Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts,⁴ co-host and teacher of *Discover The Word* daily radio program,⁵ and senior editor of *PreachingToday.com*.⁶ After teaching preaching for forty-plus years at three different North American seminaries, he is considered "one of the nation's outstanding preachers and teachers of preaching."⁷ In a 1996 poll conducted by Baylor University,

¹Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

²Michael Duduit, "1999 Book of the Year," *Preaching* (January/February 2000): 6.

³Robinson, 10.

⁴"Faculty Profile of Haddon W. Robinson," <http://www.gcts.edu/fac1/robinson.html> (17 March 2001).

⁵*Discover The Word*, <http://www.gospelcom.net/rbc/radio/daily/bio/hwr.html> (9 January 2001).

⁶Craig Brian Larson, "Inaugural Issue, October 1, 1999," <http://www.preachingtoday.com/ss/index.ta...nal &res=PTJO%"E1&class=pfarticle> (9 January 2001).

⁷*Ibid.*

Robinson was named one of the twelve most effective preachers in the English-speaking world.⁸

In 1998, Robinson was honored with a Festschrift, *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*,⁹ edited by two preaching scholars, Keith Willhite, a former student of Robinson's at Dallas Theological Seminary, and Scott M Gibson, a present colleague at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The volume advances Robinson's "big-idea" approach to expository preaching, first articulated in *Biblical Preaching*. Each of the contributors builds on this concept and offers insights into constructing sermons with one main idea.

In 1999, another volume was compiled in honor of Haddon Robinson. Edited by Scott Gibson, *Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Biblical Preaching*¹⁰ consists of thirteen essays and articles written by Robinson himself from 1974 to 1999. In the forward, Keith Willhite says "this volume unites under one cover the intuitive and scholarly perceptions of Haddon Robinson, collected from a life devoted to biblical preaching."¹¹ Both of these volumes shared the "1999 Book of the Year" honor in the professional journal for preachers, *Preaching*, which stated concerning the two books:

For the first time in *Preaching's* 15-year publishing history, our "Book of the Year" is actually two books. But they are united by a single factor: Haddon Robinson. . . . Together, these books offer a welcome addition to the contribution of one of our generation's great preachers and teachers. As a pair, they are a worthy member of that

⁸See Robinson, "The Heresy of Application: An Interview with Haddon Robinson," *Leadership* (Fall 1997): 21.

⁹Keith Willhite and Scott M. Gibson, *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

¹⁰Scott M. Gibson, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

¹¹*Ibid.*, 9.

distinguished series of volumes which have been recognized as *Preaching Book of the Year*.¹²

Haddon Robinson and his preaching philosophy has thus been a significant presence in the field of American evangelical homiletics.¹³ He remains, at the time of this writing, one of the most notable homileticians of the day.¹⁴ Yet, surprisingly, no doctoral dissertation to date has engaged his entire homiletical method and its methodology.¹⁵ This study will attempt such a task and evaluate this method for the teaching of preaching in the context of twenty-first century American evangelicalism.

¹²Duduit, 6.

¹³Keith Willhite and Scott M. Gibson provide a succinct summary of Robinson's career from 1979 to the present: "In 1979, Haddon Robinson became president of Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary. His strong desire to teach preaching persevered and so Robinson also taught homiletics at Denver Seminary, integrating exegesis courses with communication and preaching. As students learned how to exegete the Bible in interpretation courses, they continued the process through to preparing a sermon. New courses emphasized how to preach from various parts of the Bible and how to apply what is taught to life. As both professor and president, Robinson was committed to teaching future leaders to become relevant, biblical preachers. In 1980, Baker Book House published *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* by Haddon W. Robinson. For eighteen years, numerous seminaries and Bible colleges have used the book as their primary preaching textbook. In 1991, Haddon Robinson resigned the presidency of Denver Seminary to assume the Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professorship of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Through preaching, leading, teaching, and writing, Haddon Robinson has led the field of evangelical homiletics" (9).

¹⁴James W. Cox has also been "a leading authority on preaching and one of the most influential teachers in the field of homiletics" (see his *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985], front jacket). In recent years, Bryan Chapell has become a significant evangelical "influence in the training of future preachers" (Michael Duduit, "What is Expository Preaching? An interview with Bryan Chapell," *Preaching* 16/5 [March/April 2001]: 6). Beyond the evangelical circle, preaching scholars Fred Craddock and David Buttrick have significantly influenced the field of homiletics (Gail R. O'Day and Thomas G. Long, eds., *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred Craddock* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1993]; Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley, eds., *Preaching as a Theological Task: World, Gospel, Scripture in Honor of David Buttrick* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996]).

¹⁵Robinson's significant contributions to the field of preaching merit more attention than they have received from scholars (Willhite and Gibson's *The Big Idea of Preaching* comes to mind as a rare example).

1.2 Robinson's Theological Training

Robinson's undergraduate training was at Bob Jones University where he was exposed to the conservative preaching of many leading pastors of the day.¹⁶ His postgraduate work was at Dallas Theological Seminary, where he received the Master of Theology degree in 1955.¹⁷ After pastoring a few years, he went back to Dallas Theological Seminary and taught in the homiletics department for 19 years, during which time he completed the M.A. in sociology and speech from Southern Methodist University (1960) and the Ph.D. in communication from the University of Illinois (1964).¹⁸ He then presided as president at Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary for 12 years, and since 1991, has taught at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.¹⁹ Thus, Robinson's background is thoroughly evangelical in the American context and these influences have contributed to his homiletical methodology.

1.3 The Evangelical Context of Robinson's Teaching

Haddon Robinson is an evangelical leader who has devoted his life's work to training church leaders and preachers.²⁰ All he has written on preaching reflects evangelicalism's

¹⁶Leslie R. Keylock, "Evangelical Leaders You Should Know: Meet Haddon Robinson," *Moody* (December 1986): 72.

¹⁷*Ibid.*; both Bob Jones University and Dallas Theological Seminary had their beginnings as significant centers for branches of the Fundamentalist movement (George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1880-1925* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980], 194; and Joel A. Carpenter, "Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism, 1929-1942," *Church History* 49 [March 1980], 62-75).

¹⁸Keylock, 73.

¹⁹Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary is a major evangelical institution (see note 53 below). Robinson is responsible for a specialized doctoral program in teaching preaching (D.Min.) at the seminary (see website at www.gcts.edu).

²⁰Keylock, 71f.

spiritual and theological heritage. Therefore, to thoroughly understand any aspect of Robinson's homiletical thought, one needs to remember this context. As we engage Robinson's method of sermon preparation throughout this study, such knowledge of this evangelical context will prove helpful. What follows, then, is a concise description of the historical and contemporary context of American Evangelicalism.

Contemporary North American Evangelicalism²¹ is a theologically conservative, English-language movement²² within Protestantism which, according to Alister McGrath, "has now become a *trend within the mainstream denominations*."²³ It is characterized by a

²¹For helpful overviews of the Evangelical movement, see the following articles in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister McGrath (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993): Alister McGrath, "Evangelicalism," 183-184; D. W. Bebbington, "Evangelicalism: Britain," 184-187; and Millard J. Erickson, "Evangelicalism: USA," 187-192. Also see R. V. Pierard and W. A. Elwell, "Evangelicalism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* 2^d ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 405-410; David L. Smith, "Evangelicalism," *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1992), 58-71; and Donald G. Bloesch, "Evangelicalism," *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, eds. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 168-173. For an especially helpful historical overview, see Bruce L. Shelly, "Evangelicalism," *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, eds. Daniel G. Reid, Robert D. Linder, Bruce L. Shelly, and Harry S. Stout (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1990), 413-416.

For discussions on the identity of evangelicalism, see Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995); idem., *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996); Edith L. Blumhofer and Joel A. Carpenter, *Twentieth Century Evangelicalism: A Guide to the Sources* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990); George Marsden, "The Evangelical Denomination," in *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), vii-xix; C. F. H. Henry, *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 27-38; D. F. Wells and J. D. Woodbridge, eds., *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975); Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Mind and Heart* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 13-14; Derek J. Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals?: Tracing the Roots of the Modern Movements* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994).

²²This is due to the major roles played in its development and consolidation by writers in Britain and the USA (McGrath, "Evangelicalism," 183). "Evangelicalism has been of major importance in the USA" (Erickson, "Evangelicalism: USA," 187). See also George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll, *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

²³McGrath, "Evangelicalism," 183.

surprising diversity of thought²⁴ and generally maintains that the Bible is the “once-for-all or normative revelation by God,” and that “the teachings of the Bible must therefore be preserved from any erosion of modern thinking.”²⁵ Evangelicalism tends to center its theology upon a cluster of four assumptions: (1) the full authority and sufficiency of Scripture, (2) the uniqueness of redemption through the death of Christ on the Cross, often concomitant with the substitutionary theory of atonement, (3) emphasis on personal conversion, and (4) the necessity and urgency of evangelism.²⁶

Historically, Evangelicalism has been shaped by three distinct periods of modern

²⁴Based on an unpublished paper by Kevin Offner, Peter Toon provides a typology of twelve forms of modern American evangelicalism: Reformed, Anabaptist, Neo-orthodox, Charismatic, Theonomist, Fundamentalist, Dispensationalist, Pro-American pietist, Anti-American anti-pietist, Therapeutic, Social-action, and Liturgical-sacramental (Peter Toon, *The End of Liberal Theology: Contemporary Challenges To Evangelical Orthodoxy* [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1995], 213-215). See also the contributions in Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, eds., *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1991). Note the insightful discussions on evangelical variety in Marsden, vii-xvii; and Mark Ellingsen, *The Evangelical Movement: Growth, Impact, Controversy, Dialog* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988); and David Wells, “On Being Evangelical: Some Theological Differences and Similarities,” in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles, and Beyond, 1700 - 1990*, eds., Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 389-410.

²⁵Erickson, “Evangelicalism: USA,” 188. Leading evangelical theologian Donald Carson, however, laments that “a great deal of contemporary evangelicalism does not burn with zeal to be submissive to Scripture” (*The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 480f).

²⁶McGrath, “Evangelicalism,” 183; idem., *A Passion for Truth*, 22. After suggesting a similar “conceptual unity,” Marsden remarks, “Evangelicals will differ, sometimes sharply, over the details of these doctrines; and some persons or groups may emphasize one or more of these points at the expense of the others. But a definition such as this can identify a distinct religious grouping. Because evangelicalism in this sense is basically an abstract concept, the diversities of the grouping may be more apparent than is the organic unity” (ix-x). For discussion of evangelicalism’s struggle with maintaining its theological values, see chapter 11 in Carson, “Fraying, Fragmented, Frustrated: The Changing Face of Western Evangelicalism,” 443-489; David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); idem., *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); and Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

Christianity.²⁷ the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century,²⁸ the Evangelical revivals of the eighteenth century,²⁹ and most specifically, the controversy between Fundamentalists and Modernists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁰ It was from the fallout of this third period that contemporary American Evangelicalism emerged.³¹

²⁷Shelly, 413-416, discusses at length how these three significant periods of modern Christianity have shaped Evangelicalism in a brief article format.

²⁸On the theological underpinnings of the Reformation, see, for example, Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988); Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, Volume Four: Reformation of Church and Dogma, 1300-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988). Two indispensable primary resources are Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. By Henry Cole (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976); and John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2 vols., trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); on the Evangelical connection with Reformation theology, see especially Bernard Ramm, *The Evangelical Heritage* (Waco: Word, 1973), chapter 2, "Evangelical Theology Belongs to Reformation Theology," 23-40.

²⁹On the eighteenth-century revivals, see William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Perry Miller and Alan Heimert, eds., *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and its Consequences* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967); Edwin S. Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957); Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards, A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987); Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth Century Revival*, 2 vols. (Westchester, Ill.: Cornerstone, 1980); and especially Harry S. Stout, Nathan O. Hatch, and Mark A. Noll, eds., *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). For primary resources, see for example, Jonathan Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative" (1737), "Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God" (1741), and "Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival" (1742) in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957).

³⁰For two very helpful overviews of this controversy, see Timothy P. Weber, "Fundamentalism," *Dictionary of Christianity*, 461-465; and Ray S. Anderson, "Fundamentalism," in *Modern Christian Thought*, 229-233; see especially the definitive study by Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1880-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); also see Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970); Ramm, 75-102; and William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). For primary sources, see, for example, Reuben A. Torrey, ed. *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* 2d. ed., 4 vols., (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), from which Fundamentalism derived its name; and Gresham J. Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1923), which was his classic response to liberal Protestantism; and Shailer Mathews' *The Faith of Modernism* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1924), which was his response to Machen.

³¹For the uneasiness of many Fundamentalists with the separatism and anti-intellectual stance that pervaded during the years of controversy with the modernists, see Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 91-121; for

Alister McGrath considers Evangelicalism one of the following important theological movements during the Modern period—1700 to the present:³² the Enlightenment,³³

coverage of the branch-off from Fundamentalism and formation of contemporary American Evangelicalism, see, for example, Douglas W. Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); Ronald Nash, *Evangelicals in America: Who They Are, What They Believe* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987); Richard Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals: The Story of the Emergence of a New Generation of Evangelicals* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1974); George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); Idem., *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); and Leonard I. Sweet, ed., *The Evangelical Tradition in America* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984); two primary sources, concerning Carl F. H. Henry's distancing himself from Fundamentalism, are Carl F. H. Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948); and idem., *Evangelical Responsibility in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

³²*Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 76-113. On his choosing the parameters of this period, "1700 to the present day," see p. 4.

³³This term embraces a cluster of ideas and attitudes which characterized the period 1720-1780. Its defining characteristic is "an emphasis upon the ability of human reason to penetrate the mysteries of the world" (Alister E. McGrath, "Enlightenment," in *Modern Christian Thought*, 150-156). McGrath mentions six major areas of traditional Christian theology which conflicted with the rational religion of the Enlightenment: miracles, revelation, original sin, the problem of evil, the status and interpretation of Scripture, and the identity and significance of Jesus Christ (154-155). See also W. L. Pitts, "Enlightenment Protestantism," in *Dictionary of Christianity*, 393-395; Colin Brown, "Enlightenment," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 377-380; Crane Brinton, "Enlightenment," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1967), 3:522-525; Robert Wokler, "Continental Enlightenment," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (New York: Routledge, 1998), 3:315-320; Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, an Interpretation*, 2 vols., (London: Wildwood House, 1973); and Immanuel Kant, *What Is Enlightenment?*, trans. and ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959). For evangelical interaction with the Enlightenment, see Bernard Ramm, *The Evangelical Heritage*, 70-74; Idem., "Evangelicals and the Enlightenment: Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism," *TSF Bulletin* 6/3 (January-February 1983), 2-5.

Romanticism,³⁴ Marxism,³⁵ Liberal Protestantism,³⁶ Modernism,³⁷ Neo-

³⁴This difficult to define term is used in a broad sense that covers a certain attitude of mind: human feelings, intuition, and emotion. It usually refers to a movement or tendency of thought which characterized European literature, art, philosophy, and religion during the first half of the nineteenth century. It was essentially a reaction to the Enlightenment (Bernard M. G. Reardon, "Romanticism," in *Modern Christian Thought*, 573-579; W. L. Pitts, "Protestant Romanticism," in *Dictionary of Christianity*, 1028-1030). See also, R. V. Pierard, "Romanticism," in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 1040-1042; C. Brinton, "Romanticism," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 7:206-209; Frederick Bieser, "German Romanticism," in *Routledge Encyclopedia*, 8:348-352. For one primary source, see Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 2 vols., trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Steward (New York: Harper and Row, 1963). For interactions between Romanticism and Christianity, see Steve Wilkens and Alan G. Padgett, "Romanticism Christianized/Christianity Romanticized," chapter 3 in *Christianity & Western Thought*, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), 39-61.

³⁵Essentially an intellectual and political movement which originated in the ideas of Karl Marx. Of the innumerable sources on Karl Marx and Marxism, see, for example, David McLellan, "Marxism," in *Modern Christian Thought*, 360-366; Neil McInner, "Marxist Philosophy," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 5:173-176; John Torrance, "Western Marxism," in *Routledge Encyclopedia*, 6:141-147; Michael Rosen, "Karl Marx," in *ibid.*, 118-133 (see bibliography here for primary sources). For interactions between Marxism and Christianity, see, for example, D. Lyon, "Marxism and Christianity," *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, J. I. Packer, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988), 413-415; David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times: The Religious Worldviews of Our Day and the Search for Truth* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1991).

³⁶A movement that reached particular significance in nineteenth-century Europe and North America, which was influenced by the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889). Essentially, liberal theology is a sympathetic response to the Enlightenment, which seeks to accommodate traditional Christianity to modern culture. Of the many sources, see Delwin Brown and Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Liberalism: USA," in *Modern Christian Thought*, 325-330; Michael Moxter and Ingolf U. Dalferth, "Protestant Theology: Germany," in *ibid.*, 489-510; James W. M. McClendon, Jr., "Protestant Theology: USA," in *ibid.*, 524-531; J. I. Packer, "Liberalism and Conservatism in Theology," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 384-386; H. Harris, "German Liberalism," in *ibid.*, 386-387; R. V. Pierard, "Theological Liberalism," in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 682-686; B. J. Longfield, "Protestant Liberalism/Modernism," in *Dictionary of Christianity*, 646-647; note also a longtime source, Kenneth Cauthen, *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1962); and especially William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*. Two primary sources are Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*; and Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900). For the fundamentalist/evangelical engagement with liberal Protestantism, see Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*; Alan P. F. Sell, *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986); Toon, *The End of Liberal Theology: Contemporary Challenges To Evangelical Orthodoxy*; and Ramm, *The Evangelical Heritage*, 75-102.

³⁷"Modernism" is a loose term which cannot be narrowed to a specific school of thought. It is characterized by rationalism and a search for absolute and objective truths, and finds its origin in the thought of scientists such as Copernicus (1473-1543), Kepler (1571-1630), Galileo (1564-1642), and in particular the philosopher Descartes (1596-1650), who advocated the primacy of reason (see Gerhard van Wyk, "Beyond Modernism: Scholarship and 'Servanthood,'" in *Andrews University Seminary Studies* [Spring 2000]: 83-

Orthodoxy,³⁸ Feminism,³⁹ Postmodernism,⁴⁰ Liberation theology,⁴¹ Black theology,⁴² and

88). The term “modernist” was first used to refer to a school of Roman Catholic theologians at the end of the nineteenth century who adopted a critical and skeptical attitude toward traditional Christian teaching and a positive attitude towards biblical criticism and ethical dimensions of faith over the theological dimensions. Modernism in the USA followed a similar pattern, which culminated in the fundamentalist/modernist controversy of the 1920's (Alister McGrath, “Modernism,” in *Modern Christian Thought*, 383-384). On this, see, for example, N. Sagovsky, “Catholic Modernism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 437-438; R. T. Beckwith, “English Modernism,” in *ibid.*, 438-439; B. J. Longfield, 646-647; Thomas Vargish, “Modernism,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia*, 6:447-449. See also B. M. G. Reardon, *Roman Catholic Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970); and especially Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*. For evangelical engagement with modernism, see, for example, Thomas C. Oden, *After Modernity . . . What? Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1990); *idem.*, *Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America and Russia* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992).

³⁸This movement became a force in America during the period 1930-1950, which followed the teachings of Europeans Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. It was known as “dialectical” theology in Europe. It originated as “a reaction against the liberal reaction against traditional orthodoxy” (David L. Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology*, 27-40). For overviews of the movement, see, for example, Langdon Gilkey, “Neo-Orthodoxy” in *A New Handbook*, 334-337; R. V. Schnucker, “Neo-orthodoxy” in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 819-821; Avery Dulles, “Model Four: Revelation as Dialectical Presence,” 84-97, in *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1992); on evangelical engagement with neo-orthodoxy, see, for example, Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 91-101; *idem.*, *The Evangelical Heritage*, 103-122; *idem.*, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983).

³⁹Feminism is a global movement working toward the emancipation of women in society and the churches, which has become a significant component of modern western culture (Anne Carr, “Feminist Theology,” *Modern Christian Thought*, 220-228). See also J. R. Hassey, “Christian Feminism,” in *Dictionary of Christianity*, 435-436; Rebecca S. Chopp, “Feminist and Womanist Theologies,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century* 2d. ed., ed. David F. Ford, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 389-403 (see bibliography here for primary sources); Susan James, “Feminism,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia*, 3:576-583; for evangelical engagement, see E. Margaret Howe, “The Positive Case for the Ordination of Women,” in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology: Papers from the Thirtieth Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society*, eds., Kenneth S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 267-276; and Robert L. Saucy, “The Negative Case Against the Ordination of Women,” in *ibid.*, 277-286.

⁴⁰As the prefix suggests, the term designates the era in western culture following modernism, which began with the Enlightenment and extended to the 1960s. “Much too varied and amorphous to count as an ‘ism,’ postmodern thought is difficult to define because it resists simple categories. . . . What unites postmodern thinkers—however loosely—is their reaction to modern (which is to say ‘Enlightenment’) thought, a reaction which often takes the form of a simultaneous continuation of the modern project and the calling of that project into question. Thus it is difficult to draw a clear line between postmodern and modern philosophy, for even ‘modern’ thinkers often have ‘postmodern’ aspects to their thought” (B. E. Benson, “Postmodernism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 940). Of the many sources on postmodernism, see, for example, *ibid.*, 939-945; R. Detweiler, “Postmodernism,” *Modern Christian Thought*, 456-461; Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, “Postmodernism,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia*, 7:587-590 (see bibliography here for primary sources); see also Merold Westphal, “Postmodern Theology,” in *ibid.*, 583-586; van Wyk, 88-105; Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); on evangelical engagement, see,

Postliberalism.⁴³ American Evangelicalism has distinguished itself from these historical

for example, the contributions in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1995); Millard Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith: Evangelical Responses to the Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); idem., *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 2001); and Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against The Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000); and Grenz, 161-174.

⁴¹“Liberation theology,” most commonly associated with Latin America, is “simultaneously a social movement within the Christian Church and a school of thought, both of which react against human suffering due to poverty and various forms of oppression” (Roger Haight, “Liberation Theology,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia*, 5:613-617). Of the many sources, see, for example, Samuel Escobar, “Liberation Theology,” *Modern Christian Thought*, 330-335; B. T. Adeney, “Liberation Theology,” in *Dictionary of Christianity*, 648-650; D. D. Webster, in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 686-688; and Rebecca S. Chopp, “Latin American Liberation Theology,” in *The Modern Theologians*, 409-425 (see bibliography here for primary sources); Kwame Bediako, “African Theology,” in *ibid.*, 426-444; John W. de Grunchy, “African Theology: South Africa,” in *ibid.*, 445-454; Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology*, 203-226; and Atilio Rene Dupertuis, *Liberation Theology: A Study in Its Soteriology*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 9 (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1982); on evangelical engagement, see, for example, Ronald J. Sider, “An Evangelical Theology of Liberation,” and Harold O. J. Brown, “True and False Liberation in the Light of Scripture,” in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*, eds. Kantzer and Gundry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 117-150.

⁴²As a combination of traditional African-American religion and the historical process of liberation, Black theology appeals to the notion that God is concerned for the black struggle for liberation. This movement was especially significant during the 1960’s and 1970’s in the USA. See, for example, Alister McGrath, *Modern Christian Thought*, 56-58; John B. Thomson, “Protestant Theology: South Africa,” in *ibid.*, 520-524; T. R. Peake, “Black Theology,” in *Dictionary of Christianity*, 161-164; V. Cruz, “Black Theology,” in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 171-174; M. Shawn Copeland, “Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American Theologies,” in *The Modern Theologians*, 359-366; for a key primary source, see James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970); on evangelical engagement, see Morris Inch, “Black Christology in Historical Perspective,” in Kantzer and Gundry, 151-162; and William H. Bently, “Bible Believers in the Black Community,” in Wells and Woodbridge, 108-121.

⁴³Postliberalism is a contemporary theological movement, which originated in the early 1980s at Yale Divinity School and Duke Divinity School, and “distinguishes itself from both the projects of the Enlightenment and Schleiermachian liberalism with its assumptions of an unmediated religious experience common to all humans” (Delwin Brown and Sheila Greeve Davaney, “Postliberalism,” in *Modern Christian Thought*, 453-456). Its primary architect is George A. Lindbeck of Yale; see his *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984). See also Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974); and especially Willaim C. Placher, “Postliberal Theology,” in *The Modern Theologians*, 343-356, for a comprehensive overview; see also T. R. Phillips, “Postliberal Theology,” in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 937-939; J. P. Callahan, “George Lindbeck,” in *ibid.*, 693-694; idem., “Hans Wilhelm Frei,” in *ibid.*, 470; on evangelical engagement, see Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism*, 119-161; and idem., *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 14-34.

movements by its firm commitment to biblical authority.⁴⁴ Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson believe the “commitments of evangelicalism offer an orientation point for the laying of a firm foundation for theology in the twenty-first century.”⁴⁵

Currently, the state of American Evangelicalism is described by church historians as a “mosaic” or “kaleidoscope”⁴⁶ which includes the following participants:⁴⁷ Evangelical traditions,⁴⁸ parachurch organizations,⁴⁹ broadcasting organizations,⁵⁰ mission organizations,⁵¹

⁴⁴Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InverVarsity, 1992), 314.

⁴⁵Ibid., 314. Grenz and Olson believe that Bernard Ramm, an influential evangelical theologian, provided a foundation for future evangelical theology in his understanding of the positive contributions of the Enlightenment and his engagement with modern culture. Thus they write that in Ramm’s innovative thought, “evangelical theology had begun to come of age” (309).

⁴⁶See Timothy L. Smith, “The Evangelical Kaleidoscope and the Call to Christian Unity,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 15/2 (1986), 125-140. George Marsden writes: “Because Evangelicalism is name for a religious grouping—everyone has a tendency to talk about it at times as though it were a single, more or less unified phenomenon. The outstanding evangelical historian Timothy L. Smith has been most effective at pointing out the dangers of this usage. Smith and his students have repeatedly remarked on how misleading it is to speak of evangelicalism as a whole, especially when one prominent aspect of evangelicalism is then usually taken to typify the whole. Evangelicalism, says Smith, is more like a mosaic or, suggesting even less of an overall pattern, a kaleidoscope” (Marsden, “The Evangelical Denomination,” viii).

⁴⁷The following order of participants was suggested by James Emery White in *What Is Truth? A Comparative Study of the Positions of Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, Carl F. H. Henry, Donald Bloesch, and Millard Erickson* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 28-31, where he provides an overview of Evangelicalism’s current state.

⁴⁸Such as Reformed Evangelicals, Wesleyan Evangelicals, Pentecostal and charismatic Evangelicals, Black Evangelicals, Evangelical Quakers and Mennonites, Southern Baptist Evangelicals, and others (see Shelly, 416).

⁴⁹See, for example, Maurice Smith, “Parachurch Movements,” *Missions USA* (October-December 1984), 145-149.

⁵⁰For example, the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN); see Richard N. Ostling, “Evangelical Publishing and Broadcasting,” in Marsden, ed. *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, 46-55.

⁵¹On Evangelicals and missions, see Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk, eds., *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelical and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

publishing companies,⁵² and educational institutions.⁵³ While organizational unity has been difficult due to the diverse landscape of this mosaic, steps toward theological unity have been taken, such as “The Chicago Call” in May, 1977,⁵⁴ “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” which first met in October of 1978,⁵⁵ the “consultation on Evangelical Affirmations” in May 1989,⁵⁶ and most recently, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical

⁵²Examples of Evangelical publishers include Zondervan, Word, Tyndale, Baker, and InterVarsity. Major periodicals include *Christianity Today* and *Moody Monthly*. See Ostling, 46-55.

⁵³Denominational Evangelical colleges and seminaries include Calvin College (The Christian Reformed Church), Trinity College and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (The Evangelical Free Church), and Bethel College and Seminary (Baptist General Conference); Reformed Theological Seminary (Orthodox Presbyterian Church); non-denominational evangelical colleges and seminaries include Wheaton College, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary, and Liberty University (White, 31, note 98).

⁵⁴The “Chicago Call” represented eight themes in its final form and was the result of a gathering in Chicago, Illinois, of forty-five Evangelicals. It can be found in Robert E. Webber and Donald G. Bloesch, *The Orthodox Evangelicals: Who They Are and What They Are Saying* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 12-13.

⁵⁵This significant statement was produced by the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI). According to Norman L. Geisler, “The ICBI is a coalition of Christian scholars who believe that the reaffirmation and defense of biblical inerrancy is crucial to the life and vitality of the Christian Church.” The council has produced two significant statements: “The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy” in 1978—Summit I and “The Chicago Statement on Hermeneutics” in 1982—Summit II. “These two documents represent a consensus of evangelical scholarship on these fundamental topics,” says Geisler (“General Editor’s Introduction,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, eds., Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1984], x). It should be noted that the ICBI produced a third statement on biblical application in 1986 (Kenneth S. Kantzer, ed., *Applying the Scriptures: Papers From ICBI Summit III* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987]), and has now disbanded. On the history of the ICBI, see J. I. Packer, *Truth & Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), 81-82. A copy of the complete statement of the “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” can be found in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21/4 (December 1978): 289-296; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1205-1207; the complete statement with its “Exposition” can also be found in Carl Henry’s, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 4 (Waco: Word, 1979), 211-219. Grudem included it in his text because he believes it “represented a broad variety of evangelical traditions, and because it has gained widespread acceptance as a valuable doctrinal standard concerning an issue of recent and current controversy in the church” (Grudem, 1168).

⁵⁶The statement of “Affirmations” and the papers presented during the conference can be found in *Evangelical Affirmations*, eds. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); the six hundred fifty registered participants, representing a broad range of evangelical denominations and theological persuasions, intended for this document to “be a confession of what it means to be an evangelical” (14).

Celebration” in June 1999, which is a contemporary articulation of the Gospel endorsed by several hundred evangelical leaders.⁵⁷ This is the theological and spiritual milieu in which Haddon Robinson has engaged in his career as a homiletics professor.

1.4 Two Editions of *Biblical Preaching*

Robinson put into print his ten-stage method in the first edition of *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (1980). He wrote this book after teaching preaching for two decades and evaluating “nearly six thousand student sermons.”⁵⁸ Nine years later Robinson published *Biblical Sermons: How Twelve Preachers Apply the Principles of Biblical Preaching*. Its purpose was “to demonstrate how the approach to homiletics in *Biblical Preaching* is worked out in sermons of several experienced communicators.”⁵⁹ Recently, Robinson updated *Biblical Preaching* in the second edition published again by Baker.⁶⁰ While retaining the original ten-stage process of sermon development, this new edition includes some significant changes: illustrations and arguments have been updated, the language has come gender-inclusive, and the discussions of narrative,

⁵⁷Those who drafted this statement hoped that it “would not only foster unity among evangelical believers but also help us all to understand the Gospel better, including one of its central components, the doctrine of justification by faith alone” (John N. Akers, John H. Armstrong, and John D. Woodbridge, eds. *This We Believe: The Good News of Jesus Christ* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 19). The drafting committee was composed of 15 evangelical leaders including theologians such as D. A. Carson, J. I. Packer, Thomas C. Oden, R. C. Sproul, John D. Woodbridge, and Timothy George; other signatories include several hundred leaders from across the evangelical denominational landscape (249-252). The statement can be found in *ibid.*, 239-248.

⁵⁸*Biblical Preaching*, 10.

⁵⁹*Biblical Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 9.

⁶⁰*Biblical Preaching*, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

inductive preaching, and sermon purpose have been expanded.⁶¹ Robinson explains the reason for the revision:

Well, I have changed. I am older now and perhaps a bit wiser. I see some matters more clearly now than I did two decades ago. I haven't changed my basic procedure: sermons must deal with ideas or they deal with nothing. As I have reread these pages, however, I have realized I possess an uncanny ability to make clear things dim. Some sections of the book, therefore, have been largely rewritten to take another run at what I wanted to say.⁶²

Because the concepts and procedures in the first edition (1980) remain basically unchanged in the second edition (2001), this study is based on the latter. Any differences in the two editions relevant to this study will, however, be incorporated into the discussion. Hence, most citation of *Biblical Preaching* will be from the second edition (2001), unless the first edition (1980) is specified.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

Reviewers hailed the 1980 edition of *Biblical Preaching* as “a very helpful contribution to the teaching of the art of expository preaching,”⁶³ a “sermonic method . . . remarkably complete,”⁶⁴ a “sound homiletical primer,”⁶⁵ and a “valuable resource and

⁶¹Ibid., 10.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Carl G. Kromminga, “Biblical Preaching,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 16 (1981): 288; for the entire review, see 285-288.

⁶⁴Kent Hughes, “Getting the Idea Across,” *Christianity Today* (April 10, 1981): 90.

⁶⁵Eduard R. Riegert, “Biblical Preaching,” *Consensus* 14/2 (1988): 129; for the entire review, see 129-130.

constructive text for students of homiletics.”⁶⁶ These reviewers and others⁶⁷ thus acknowledged that Robinson’s text made a significant contribution to the field of evangelical homiletics.

Nevertheless, a close scrutiny of Robinson’s method reveals some methodological and procedural deficiencies that merit discussion. Thus, two questions should be raised: First, Why has Robinson’s method been so well received and remained viable for the last twenty years in evangelical circles? Second, What are the methodological and procedural deficiencies within this method? To answer these questions, several questions must be addressed in this study: What is Robinson’s theological methodology and how does it affect his homiletical method? What is his hermeneutical methodology and how does it affect his homiletical method? These questions lead into the main issue of this study: Is Robinson consistent with his theological and hermeneutical methodology? and What are the strengths and weaknesses of his ten-stage homiletical method?

1.6 Purpose of the Study

Based on the above questions, the purpose of this study is to investigate Robinson’s theological and hermeneutical methodology, to evaluate his ten-stage method in light of this investigation, and then to provide pointers in the areas where Robinson is deficient which suggest new theory and procedure for the enhancement of expository pedagogy.

⁶⁶Ralph E. Partelow, “Biblical Preaching,” *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 7/1 (1988): 67; for entire review, see 66-67.

⁶⁷See also the following reviews: P. E. Engle, “Biblical Preaching,” *Trinity Journal* 2 (Spring 1981): 109-112; J. Robert Hjelm, “Biblical Preaching,” *Covenant Quarterly* 39 (May 1981): 32-34; W. Lugakingira, “Biblical Preaching,” *Africa Theological Journal* 10/3 (1981): 71-72; Paul R. Fink, “Biblical Preaching,” *Grace Theological Journal* 3/1 (1982): 149-150; Francis C. Rossow, “Biblical Preaching,” *Concordia Journal* 8 (1982): 161.

1.7 Research Design

The primary literature for this research will be from the writings of Robinson. His homiletic text, *Biblical Preaching*, will be the main source; an interview conducted by the researcher and Robinson's other writings will provide sources for investigation as well. The secondary literature will involve a number of scholarly theological and homiletical sources.

The methodology employed in this dissertation consists of analysis and evaluation. The analysis aspect will help determine the nature of Robinson's methodology and his consistency with it. The evaluation attempts to assess the procedural strengths and weaknesses in his ten-stage method.

The chapter layout will proceed as follows. At the outset, chapter two will provide the historical background and framework for the study. It will begin with a brief history of homiletical theory in the twentieth century and, out of this context, describe an evangelical following which formed around Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*. Then four contemporary homiletical paradigms will be identified and Robinson's method placed in one of them. The chapter will then culminate with the identification of an evangelical expository homiletic within one of the major four paradigms, which is the specific paradigm Robinson's method fits in.

Chapters three and four focus on Robinson's theological and hermeneutical methodology. As such, chapter three investigates Robinson's view of Scripture. It seeks to answer the question: What is Robinson's theological methodology and how does it affect his homiletical method? Accordingly, this chapter is organized around four theological concepts in the classical evangelical prolegomena: revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, and authority.

Under each concept, the views of contemporary evangelical theologians will be summarized and then Robinson's understanding will be set forth and examined in that context. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on the implications of Robinson's theological methodology for his homiletical method.

Chapter four investigates Robinson's hermeneutical methodology and his definition of expository preaching. It deals with the question: What is Robinson's hermeneutical methodology and how does it affect his homiletical method? As such, his hermeneutical approach will be identified in the context of the contemporary hermeneutical scene and three of his hermeneutical presuppositions examined. This will provide the perspective for examination of his definition which will reveal his main homiletical presuppositions.

Chapter five builds upon the methodological investigation of the previous chapters by attempting to evaluate Robinson's ten-stage method for its methodological consistency and procedural effectiveness. It addresses the questions: Is Robinson consistent with his theological and hermeneutical methodology? and What are the strengths and weaknesses of his ten-stage homiletical method? This chapter, therefore, evaluates the stages individually as well as collectively to determine their strengths and weaknesses.

Chapter six addresses ten issues of deficiency in Robinson's method emerging from this study. Each issue sets forth the problem and then the pointer which suggest new theory and procedure for the teaching of expository preaching. The final chapter summarizes the findings and places them in the context of evangelical homiletics.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The main limitation in this study is its focus on the US scene. More specifically, it is

limited to American homiletics in the evangelical context. Our author, as noted above, comes out of the evangelical milieu and is thus discussed from that perspective.

1.9 The Perspective of the Researcher

The researcher considers himself a conservative evangelical Christian in the Adventist tradition.⁶⁸ As such, he finds many theological issues upon which he and Robinson agree as well as disagree. This is the perspective from which this study will proceed.

⁶⁸See Russell L. Staples, "Adventism," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, 57-71.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONTEMPORARY HOMILETICAL SCENE AND HADDON ROBINSON

2.1 Introduction

Contemporary homiletical theory is in a time of transition.¹ Ronald J. Allen suggests that over the “next generation, pastors will likely explore a plurality of ways of voicing the gospel in and out of the church.”² Nevertheless, distinct paradigms can be found in the literature of preaching. Understanding this homiletical context will provide an important background for this study. Accordingly, the issues addressed in this chapter are these: What are the contemporary homiletical paradigms? Where does Robinson’s method fit within these paradigms? What is the evangelical expository homiletic? With these questions answered, this study can better evaluate Robinson’s homiletical method in its evangelical context.

2.2 The Contemporary Scene

2.2.1 Historical Roots of the Contemporary Scene

The historical roots³ of the contemporary homiletical scene can be traced to two

¹David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 100-113.

²Ronald J. Allen, “Why Preach from Passages in the Bible?” in *Preaching as a Theological Task*, 185.

³The focus here is more on homiletical theorists and their textbooks, such as that found in Lucy Atkinson Rose’s “Preaching in the Round-Table Church,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University), 8-11, rather than the history of preaching in general, which tends to focus more on preachers throughout history. For various histories of preaching, see, for example, Charles Silvester Horne, *The Romance of Preaching* (New York: Revell, 1914); Edgar D. Jones, *The Royalty of the Pulpit*, Yale Lectures (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1951); William Warren Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture* (New York: Scribner, 1952); F. R. Webber, *A History of Preaching in Britain and America*, 3 vols. (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1952-1957); Yngve Brilioth, *A Brief History of Preaching* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Fortress, 1965); Clyde E. Fant and William M. Pinson, *20 Centuries of Great Preaching*, 13 vols. (Waco: Word Books, 1971); Edwin C. Dargan, *A History of Preaching*, 2 vols., reprint (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968); Ralph G. A. Turnbull, *History of Preaching*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Walking with the*

classic homiletic texts. The first is John A. Broadus's *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, published in 1870,⁴ which became the authoritative homiletic textbook in American colleges and seminaries for some eighty years.⁵ The "genius" of this book lies in the way Broadus blended the principles of classical rhetoric⁶ to the practice of preaching,⁷ thus

Giants (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976); idem., *Listening to the Giants* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979); DeWitt T. Holland, *The Preaching Tradition: A Brief History* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1980); Lloyd M. Perry and Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching and Preachers* (Chicago: Moody, 1984); Paul Scott Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1992); O. C. Edwards, Jr., "History of Preaching," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, eds. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 184-227; David L. Larsen, *The Company of the Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998); Ronald E. Osborn, *A History of Preaching*, vol. 1, *Folly of God: The Rise of Christian Preaching* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1999); to name some of the more prominent ones.

⁴The 1870 edition, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: Armstrong, 1870), went through numerous editions and was revised three times: first revision by Edwin Charles Dargan (New York: Armstrong, 1897); second revision by J. B. Weatherspoon, new and revised ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944); and the third revision by Vernon L. Stanfield, 4th ed., (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). The first two revisions remain closer to the original text, the third makes significant changes but continues the Broadus tradition for the contemporary generation. James F. Stitzinger believes the "revisions of this book have reduced its original thrust and value" ("The History of Expository Preaching," in John MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* [Dallas: Word, 1992], 54). On Broadus, see Al Fasol, "John Albert Broadus," in *Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 45-56; and A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John Albert Broadus*, rev. ed. (Harrisonburg, Va.: Gano, 1987).

⁵Don M. Wardlaw, "Homiletics and Preaching in North America," in *Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 245; and Craig Loscalzo, "The Literature of Preaching," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1992), 53.

⁶That Broadus drew from the classical rhetoricians such as Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and others is evident throughout the text (Broadus and Weatherspoon, 8-10, 115, 119, 159, 224, 226, 240, 241, 379, 380). On classic rhetorical culture, see, for example, Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet (New York: Oxford, 1939-1944); George A. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1963); idem., *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World, 300 B. C. to A. D. 300* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1972); for selected readings from the rhetorical writings of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and others, see Lester Thonssen, *Selected Readings in Rhetoric and Public Speaking* (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1942); on classical rhetoric and oratory as background and context for early Christian preaching, see Ronald E. Osborn, *Folly of God: The Rise of Christian Preaching*, 3-74; and Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

⁷Broadus defined homiletics as "simply the adaptation of rhetoric to the particular ends and demands of Christian preaching" (Broadus and Weatherspoon, 10). For discussion on the place of rhetoric in preaching during the late nineteenth century (1865-1900), see Harry C. Massa, "Toward a Contemporary Theology of Preaching: A Historical Study of the Nature and Purpose of Preaching," (Th.D. dissertation,

regarding preaching as “sacred rhetoric.”⁸ The text advocated the formal and functional rhetorical elements for preaching—such as an introduction, a proposition, a carefully organized structure (including explanation, argument, illustration, and application), and a conclusion.⁹ In 1897, E. C. Dargan hailed the first edition (1870) as “the most popular and widely-read textbook on Homiletics in this country.”¹⁰ Some fifty years later (1944), J. B. Weatherspoon declared that “the book has been in constant and increasing use since its first appearance and after three quarters of a century remains the outstanding textbook of Homiletics. . . .”¹¹ Thus, Lucy Atkinson Rose observes in her dissertation, “Preaching in the Round-Table Church”: “Roughly, the first half of this century could be designated the Broadus era.”¹²

A second era began in 1958, according to Rose, with the publication of H. Grady Davis’ *Design for Preaching*,¹³ the second classic homiletical text. Rose explains: “Between

Princeton Theological Seminary, 1960), 214-229.

⁸Fasol, 46. The classical application of rhetoric to Christian preaching is Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*, Book 4, trans. J. F. Shaw, *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 18 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952); note James J. Murphy, “Saint Augustine and the Christianization of Rhetoric,” *Western Speech* 22 (1958): 24-29; see also a contemporary of Broadus, R. L. Dabney, who employed the term, “sacred rhetoric,” *R. L. Dabney on Preaching: Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1870, 1979). For contemporary discussions on rhetoric and its relation and application to Christian preaching, see Lester De Koster, “The Preacher as Rhetorician,” in *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Samuel T. Logan, Jr. (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 303-330; and Craig A. Loscalzo, “Rhetoric,” in *Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 409-416.

⁹See Broadus and Weatherspoon.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, vii.

¹¹*Ibid.*, v.

¹²Rose, 9.

¹³H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958). On Davis, see Morris J. Niedenthal, “Henry Grady Davis,” in *Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 97-98.

1958 and 1974 the earlier consensus that had looked to Broadus to define the task of preaching had dissolved and a new consensus had formed around Davis.”¹⁴ The basis of this claim comes from a 1974 study conducted by Donald F. Chatfield on textbooks used by teachers of preaching. Chatfield found that “over half of the respondents named Grady Davis’s *Design for Preaching* as their textbook of choice.”¹⁵

Davis broke with the traditional terminology and approach of Broadus by describing a sermon as something that “grows” rather than something that is constructed.¹⁶ He abandoned the standard terminology such as structure and outline, replacing them with “design” and “sketch.”¹⁷ A central conviction and motivation for his homiletic proposals was that content and form were inseparable,¹⁸ thus a sermon grows and develops out of an idea.¹⁹ Davis anticipated and charted the course for many contemporary discussions on issues related to preaching, such as narrative, poetic language, creative form, movement of thought, and particularly inductive preaching.²⁰ Thus Thomas Long likens *Design for Preaching* to a

¹⁴Rose, 9.

¹⁵Donald F. Chatfield, “Textbooks used by teachers of preaching,” *Homiletic* 9/2 (1984): 2. He conducted the same study both in 1974 and 1984. His questionnaire contained two items: 1) “What basic textbooks do you use, if any (rank in order of usage)?” and 2) “What kind of book[s]—basic or advanced—would you most like to see published now?”

¹⁶This is best illustrated in Davis’s image of the sermon as a “tree” (15-16), which provides the organization and development for the entire book.

¹⁷Davis, 21-22.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, vi, 19-20.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 15-16, 29.

²⁰That Davis’s text inaugurated the beginning of new homiletical paradigms is affirmed by a number of contemporary homiletic scholars. See, for example, Eugene L. Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing on the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1997), 12; Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 117-118; Niedenthal,

“bridge” which spanned “the gap between the traditional approach to form and those developments yet to come.”²¹

According to a second study Chatfield conducted in 1984, only five of forty-six respondents (12%) listed *Design for Preaching* as their textbook of choice. In answer to his question—“What basic textbooks do you use, if any?”—respondents listed a total of 115 preaching books. According to Chatfield “the highest number of mentions for any one book was only 7.”²² Thus, “the dominance of Davis had waned and concurrently the dominance of any single textbook.”²³

Rose states that “into this disarray, between 1985 and 1989 came ten textbooks²⁴ that attempted to consolidate the best of the field.” Nevertheless, “no new consensus emerged.”²⁵

Rose then summarizes her survey of homiletic history over the twentieth century:

97-98; Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1995), 199-200, 204; and Rose, 6.

²¹Thomas Long, “Form,” in *Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 147.

²²Chatfield, 1. In this 1984 study, Chatfield surveyed the “131 names on the mailing list of the Academy of Homiletics.” Sixty-one were returned and forty-six answered the first question (2).

²³Rose, 9.

²⁴On page 295, note 3, Rose lists the ten textbooks in the chronological order of their appearance: James W. Cox, *Preaching*; Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1985); Deane A. Kemper, *Effective Preaching: A Manual for Students and Pastors* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985); John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Ian Pitt-Watson, *A Primer for Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986); Ronald E. Sleeth, *Proclaiming the Word* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1986); David G. Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Clyde E. Fant, *Preaching for Today*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987); Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989); Don. M. Wardlaw, ed., *Learning Preaching: Understanding and Participating in the Process* (Lincoln, Ill.: The Academy of Homiletics, Lincoln Christian College and Seminary Press, 1989).

²⁵Rose, 10.

This story of homiletics claims that for roughly three quarters of the twentieth century there was general agreement about correct homiletical theory. Broadus represents the earlier state of the art and Davis the later. Then between 1974 and 1984 consensus disappeared. The 1980s became an era in which homiletical scholarship tried at times to reclaim an earlier consensus and at other times to articulate a new position around which to rally a new consensus. Consensus, however, remained an elusive goal.²⁶

With the publishing of Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* in 1980, however, a consensus began to develop in evangelical circles. In Chatfield's 1984 study, of the four books which got seven mentions, Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* was listed as one.²⁷ In 1986, Leslie R. Keylock, writing in the evangelical *Moody*, said concerning Robinson's 1980 text: "Many seminaries and Bible schools now use it as the text in preaching courses."²⁸ In 1999, the editors of the professional journal, *Preaching*, declared that *Biblical Preaching* "has been one of the most influential homiletics texts ever published, and continues to be used in many colleges and seminaries."²⁹ The Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary faculty website for Robinson asserts: "*Biblical Preaching* is currently being used as a text for preaching in 120

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷The other three texts mentioned seven times in the study (Chatfield, 1) were: Clyde Fant, *Preaching for Today*, first edition, 1977; John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); and George E. Sweazey, *Preaching the Good News* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976). Chatfield suggested "that the teachers of preaching at the more 'conservative' seminaries are closer to a consensus on homiletical textbooks than the teachers at other seminaries. Robinson, Stott, and Sweazey especially seem to be filling the bill for the preaching departments in some conservative seminaries" (3).

²⁸Keylock, 73. For example, it was the textbook for the M.Div. class, "Biblical Preaching," which the researcher took in the spring of 1984 at Andrews University Theological Seminary, Berried Springs, Michigan.

²⁹Duduit, "1999 Book of the Year," *Preaching* [January/February 2000]: 6. In *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*, the editors Willhite and Gibson, make the following claim about *Biblical Preaching*: "For eighteen years, numerous seminaries and Bible colleges have used the book as their primary preaching textbook" (9).

seminaries and Bible colleges throughout the world.”³⁰ Keylock, the editors of *Preaching*, and Robinson’s faculty website are referring mainly to evangelical colleges and seminaries. This seems to represent a consensus around a homiletics textbook, albeit evangelical.

This is not to suggest that Robinson’s textbook represents an “era” like Broadus and Davis, as Rose asserts above. Other homiletic textbooks outside as well as inside the evangelical circle have been influential in preaching classrooms.³¹ But between 1980 and 2001, an evangelical consensus seemed to form around Robinson’s *Biblical Preaching* as a primary textbook for courses in preaching.

2.2.2 Four Contemporary Homiletical Paradigms

Building upon the above “story of homiletical theory”³² during the twentieth century, four paradigms can be found in contemporary homiletical literature:³³ the traditional

³⁰See Haddon Robinson’s faculty website at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary where he currently teaches (“Faculty: Haddon W. Robinson, Ph.D,” <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/fac/robinson.html> (5 June 2001). The researcher conducted his own informal e-mail survey and found that of the twelve Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities in North America, three currently use Robinson’s *Biblical Preaching* as a primary text in their undergraduate homiletics classes (Based on an e-mail survey by the researcher, sent on July 3, 2001; only four responded to the questionnaire, which contained the following question: “What is your primary text for your class in Homiletics and why?”).

³¹For specific texts, see discussion below.

³²Rose, 10.

³³Rose suggests four major contemporary homiletic theories of preaching in her dissertation. The first is the “traditional homiletic theory” which is rooted in rhetoric and “often acknowledges its indebtedness to Broadus” (Rose, 14; 23-70). It is no longer the reigning theory today, but does continue as “an important voice in the homiletical conversation” (15). Second is the “kerygmatic homiletical theory” which “essentially adds to traditional theory the active presence of the Word that transcends the particular preacher” (15, 72-118). This theory was prevalent in the 1960’s and 1970’s and continued to influence homiletical thought during the 1980’s. The third contemporary homiletic theory, according to Rose, is what she calls “transformational.” This term represents her “attempt to collect a number of scholars under a single umbrella without reducing them to a fixed position.” These scholars “have built on the innovations of kerygmatic homiletical theory and, for the most part, shift homiletical thinking further away from traditional theory” (Rose, 15, 120-182). Others have called Rose’s transformational theory “the new homiletic” (Lowry, 31). The fourth contemporary homiletic theory is Rose’s proposal of her own theory. She “proposes an understanding of what happens in preaching that builds on transformational views of preaching and seeks to push homiletical thinking in new

homiletic, the Kerygmatic homiletic, the new homiletic, and the postliberal homiletic.³⁴ These four homiletical paradigms will be described briefly in order to better situate Robinson's ten-stage method in the contemporary homiletical context.

2.2.2.1 *The Traditional Homiletic*

As noted above, traditional homiletic theory is embodied in the legacy of John A. Broadus, "whose 1870 textbook defined preaching for the first half of the twentieth century."³⁵ Its roots extend farther back to Augustine of Hippo (354-430),³⁶ who joined Christian preaching to classical rhetoric in Book Four of *On Christian Doctrine*.³⁷ Since that

directions. Rose calls this "a conversational understanding of preaching" which "aims to describe a non-hierarchical form of preaching that assumes a relationship of connectedness and mutuality between the preacher and the worshipers." Rose proposes this new theory as "an additional understanding of preaching" (15-16, 185-250). Eugene Lowry suggest that Rose's "conversational" theory of preaching should not be in a category of its own, but better fits under the umbrella of the "new homiletic." (Lowry, 31-32).

³⁴In his article, "Faithful Preaching: Preaching Epistemes, Faith Stages, and Rhetorical Practice," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 21 (1998), 164-199, Robert Stephen Reid locates four contemporary epistemes of preaching theory and practice in relation to the fourfold division of rhetoric from antiquity and then correlates these four approaches to James Fowler's typology of the stages of faith. He follows Rose in the first three of the four major approaches to preaching: the "traditional" approach (168), the "kerygmatic" approach (168-169), and the transformational approach (169-170). In contrast to Rose's fourth approach, "whose analysis serves to preface the proposal of her Conversational approach as a new paradigm," Reid "operates with the assumption that the approach to preaching informed by postliberal theology represents the clearest case for a new, coherent paradigm of preaching" (ibid., 173-174). Recognizing the feminist presuppositions of Rose's proposal, Reid suggest that her model should "be more accurately described as a significantly feminist, Practical Postmodern homiletic that rejects all forms of hierarchical discourse strategies in favor of expressing inclusivity in communal conversation" (ibid., 196, note 4). On Feminism, see above, 10, note, 39. Reid calls the postliberal homiletic, a "Thoroughly Postmodern" approach and calls the transformational approach "Practical Postmodern" (170ff). Instead of using the term "postmodern," we follow Lowry in naming the third paradigm the "New Homiletic" (Lowry, 32), and name the fourth paradigm "postliberal," because of its roots in George Lindbeck and Hans Frei's postliberal theology. This is not meant to deny the postmodern orientation of the these two homiletical paradigms; see discussion below.

³⁵Rose, 24.

³⁶On Augustine, see, for example, George Lawless, "Augustine of Hippo," in *Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 19-21; Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California, 1967); and Larsen, *Company of the Committed*, 86-94.

³⁷Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* is considered to be the first book on homiletics (Larsen, 93; Loscalzo, "Rhetoric," in *Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 411). Augustine was significantly influenced by Cicero

time, the traditional theory has, according to Lucy Rose, “shifted its boundaries and its emphases” but remained essentially the same.³⁸

The characteristics of traditional homiletic theory include the following: ideational focus and unity (each of the points grows out of the main idea and serves to support it); order and proportion (the points are fairly equal in terms of length and importance); movement and climax (logical development from point to point culminating in an impact upon the hearers); and didactic purpose (to teach the truth of Scripture).³⁹

The contemporary expression of the traditional homiletic is found in James W. Cox’s *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons*, published in 1985.⁴⁰ In the Preface, Cox admits his heavy indebtedness to Broadus.⁴¹ Two major

(*On Christian Doctrine: Book 4*, 683-684 [12.27]; Loscalzo, 410) and sought to show the value of rhetorical skill for Christian preaching (*On Christian Doctrine: Book 4*, 675-676 [2.3-3.4-5]).

³⁸Rose, 24.

³⁹See Long, “Form,” 146-147; and Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 62-65. For classic examples of traditional homiletic theory applied to Scripture, see for example, the contributors in H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary*, 23 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1963); and the contributors in *The Preacher’s Homiletic Commentary*, 31 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, reprint 1986); for traditional theory applied in an expository context, see Alexander MacLaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, 17 vols. (Grand Rapids, Baker, reprint 1977), who shaped his outlines according to the shape of the text; more recently, see Joel C. Gregory, *Gregory’s Sermon Synopses: 200 Expanded Summaries* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1991), who applies parallel points that closely follow the text; and Stephen Olford and David Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1998), who closely follow the text and apply parallel points with alliteration. Stephen Olford is known for his frequent use of alliteration to heighten the impact of his parallel points based on his structural analysis of a passage (John Phillips, *Only One Life: The Biography of Stephen F. Olford* [Neptune, N. J.: Loizeaux, 1995], 220-221).

⁴⁰According to Rose, “in the homiletical literature between 1958 and 1990, a primary advocate of traditional homiletics is James W. Cox” (Rose, 29); see James W. Cox, *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons*; idem., *A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1976). For other traditional approaches during this time period, see, for example John E. Baird, *Preparing for Platform and Pulpit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976); Richard Carl Hoefler, *Creative Preaching and Oral Writing* (Lima, Ohio: C.S.S. Publishing Company, 1978); the fourth edition of Broadus’ *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (1979), revised by Vernon L. Stanfield; Jay E. Adams, *Pulpit Speech* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971); Daniel J. Baumann, *An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching* (Grand

principles characterize Cox's teaching. The first is interpreting the text of the Bible. It "is there to be understood, believed, and applied to personal and social need."⁴² Thus, the text should be correctly interpreted according to its "syntactical context" and historical setting.⁴³ The second is the "central idea of the sermon," which "is a statement of the truth that emerges from a study of the text and that determines the content of the sermon."⁴⁴ The central idea does several things for the preacher and sermon: "it stimulates the preacher's creativity," provides "portability and direction to the sermon; and "gives unity to the sermon."⁴⁵ These characteristics, according to Rose, embody the traditional theory as it was articulated in Broadus.⁴⁶

Several characteristics of the traditional theory's contemporary exponents should be noted. First, they practice a variety of sermon forms. Lucy Rose has correctly pointed out that

Rapids: Baker, 1972); Craig Skinner, *The Teaching Ministry of the Pulpit: Its History, Theology, Psychology, and Practice for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973); James Braga, *How to Prepare Bible Messages*, rev. ed. (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1981); Kemper, *Effective Preaching*; Ian Pitt-Watson, *A Primer for Preachers*; Harry Farra, *The Sermon Doctor: Prescriptions for Successful Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); and beyond 1990, John Killinger, *Fundamentals of Preaching*, 2d. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). It should be noted that while these books advocate biblically oriented preaching, they lack the focus on expository methodology found in another set of books within the Traditional Homiletic. Following the publishing of Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* in 1980, there was a resurgence of books exclusively devoted to expository preaching and its methodology which constitute a separate category within the Traditional Homiletic. These books will be discussed below.

⁴¹Cox, *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach*, x. Broadus is mentioned first in a list of three persons. The other two are Arthur E. Phillips and James T. Cleland.

⁴²Ibid., 61.

⁴³Ibid., 67.

⁴⁴Ibid., 77.

⁴⁵Ibid., 76-79.

⁴⁶Rose, 28-31, 35-36. For Rose's critique of the traditional view, see Rose, 43-69.

to equate traditional homiletics exclusively with “three points and a poem” is an “unfair caricature.”⁴⁷ To the contrary, “the traditional approach yields an impressive variety of sermon configurations,” according to Thomas Long.⁴⁸ Second, they are mostly evangelical.⁴⁹ It is not uncommon to see contemporary evangelical homileticians endorsing Augustine’s approach of blending Christian preaching and classical rhetoric.⁵⁰ They believe that this is an effective way to proclaim the message of the Bible with clarity and power.⁵¹

And third, for the most part they practice expository preaching.⁵² The root of this practice can be traced to Broadus, who was considered the “prince of expositors” in the nineteenth century.⁵³ His *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* is considered by evangelical homiletic scholar Bryan Chapell to be “the seminal volume for the codification and popularization of the expository method as we now know it.” He remarks: “The erosion of scriptural commitments that would soon sweep this culture after the initial publication of

⁴⁷Ibid., 34.

⁴⁸Long, “Form,” 146.

⁴⁹While not all homiletical traditionalist are evangelical (John Killinger, for example), all evangelical homileticians espouse, according to this researcher’s knowledge, the traditional approach.

⁵⁰See, for example, David Larsen, *The Company of the Preachers*, 92; William H. Kooienga, *Elements of Style for Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 15-30; Lester De Koster, “The Preacher as Rhetorician,” 316-319; and Craig Loscalzo, “The Literature of Preaching,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 52.

⁵¹Larsen, 92; and De Koster, 319.

⁵²See the footnotes in Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching Through a Book of the Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1995), chapter 1, “A Definition among Definitions of Expository Preaching,” 11-39, which provides numerous examples of evangelical preaching texts exclusively devoted to expository preaching.

⁵³Nolan Howington, “Expository Preaching,” *Review and Expositor* 56 (January 1959): 60. See also Turnbull, 106-110.

Broadus's work indicates how critical was the timing of his methodology and why it was so widely adopted by evangelicals."⁵⁴

At this juncture it is appropriate to note that Robinson's homiletical approach fits into the traditional homiletic, although his *Biblical Preaching* "owes its source and much of its substance to Henry Grady Davis,"⁵⁵ rather than to Broadus. More specifically, Robinson's method fits in an evangelical expository homiletic, which will be discussed below.

2.2.2.2 *The Kerygmatic Homiletic*

Kerygmatic homiletical theory overlaps with traditional theory and breaks new ground, according to Rose, by adding a "new emphasis on the *kerygma* as the primitive and essential core of the gospel, the Word of God as an active presence in preaching, and the sermon as an event in which God speaks a saving word."⁵⁶ It is most prevalent in the homiletical literature during the 1960s and 1970s, and continued its influence throughout the 1980s.

This theory derives its substance from New Testament scholar C. H. Dodd in his influential *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, first published in 1936. Dodd sharply distinguished between teaching (*didache*), which is "ethical instruction," and proclamation (*kerygma*), which is "public proclamation of Christianity." He believed that one essential message underlaid all of the Christian scriptures and it was the *kerygma*: "the proclamation of the facts of the death and resurrection of Christ in an eschatological

⁵⁴Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 129, note 6.

⁵⁵Riegert, 129.

⁵⁶Rose, 72.

setting.”⁵⁷ Thus, preaching should transmit the *kerygma*: the prophecies regarding the coming of Christ, his death, burial, resurrection, exaltation, and coming again as judge and savior of men, and a call to repentance and faith.⁵⁸ Kerygmatic homiletics continually acknowledge their indebtedness to Dodd and “build their understanding of preaching on the key concept of the *kerygma* as the essential content of the earliest Christian preaching and thus of all Christian preaching.”⁵⁹

Kerygmatic scholars also draw from theologian Karl Barth, who taught that “preaching is the Word of God.”⁶⁰ The preacher is a “herald” who announces “that God is about to speak.”⁶¹ Thus, preaching is an event of God speaking. Robert H. Mounce, a principle proponent of kerygmatic preaching, says that when the preacher “mounts the pulpit steps he does so under obligation to mediate the presence of Almighty God.” The goal is to let God speak. The preacher’s “voice must be God’s voice.” The preacher “stands before a group of people whose one great need is to be ushered into the presence of God.”⁶²

Contemporary proponents of kerygmatic preaching include Henry Mitchell, who in

⁵⁷C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co., 1936; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 7, 13. For a concise summary of the criticisms concerning Dodd’s thesis, see David Buttrick, “Proclamation,” in *Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 385.

⁵⁸Dodd, 17; see also G. M. Styler, “Charles Harold Dodd,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation: A-J*, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1999), 304-305; and Buttrick, 384-385.

⁵⁹Rose, 80.

⁶⁰Barth, *Homiletics*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 44.

⁶¹Idem., *The Preaching of the Gospel*, trans. B. E. Hooke (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 10, 16.

⁶²Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 158.

his *Black Preaching* (1979) indicates that “black preaching” is kerygmatic,⁶³ and Edward F. Markquart, who in *Quest for Better Preaching: Resources for Renewal in the Pulpit* (1985) contrasts “moralistic preaching” with “indicative preaching” or *kerygma*.⁶⁴ Robert S. Reid sums up the contemporary form of the Kerygmatic homiletic:

In its contemporary form, preachers who adopt the Kerygmatic approach tend to view the function of preaching as providing an opportunity for the listener to have an encounter with God and the demands of the Gospel. In this approach, greater attention is given to the exposition and application of a theme derived from a specific text in the belief that it can provide the opportunity for the individual to have an encounter with God’s active, redemptive presence. The authority of the preacher in this approach resides with his or her credibility in providing an interpretive, existentially relevant application of a particular text. In the Kerygmatic approach, the preacher emphasizes the individual’s ability to have an encounter with God in the context of a community of faith. The primary difference between Traditional preaching and Kerygmatic preaching is that the latter is concerned with identifying truth through the experience of facilitating an *encounter* with God and God’s Word.⁶⁵

Robinson shares with the kerygmatic homiletic a lofty view of preaching when he writes that through “the preaching of the Scriptures, God encounters men and women to bring them to salvation (2 Tim. 3:15) and to richness and ripeness of Christian character (vv. 16-17).” He states that “when God confronts individuals through preaching and seizes them by the soul,” something “fills us with awe.”⁶⁶ But Robinson also places stress on the role of instruction and exhortation in preaching. Preaching involves, therefore, both teaching

⁶³Henry Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (New York: Harper and Row, reprint 1979), 28, 114, 197, 201. See also Mitchell’s *The Recovery of Preaching* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); and his *Celebration & Experience in Preaching* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1990), where his kerygmatic understanding of preaching overlaps with the New Homiletic.

⁶⁴Edward F. Markquart, *Quest for Better Preaching: Resources for Renewal in the Pulpit* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 40-43.

⁶⁵Reid, 169.

⁶⁶Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

(*didache*) and proclamation (*kerygma*).⁶⁷ Thus, Robinson would fit more in the Traditional Homiletic than in the Kerygmatic homiletic.

2.2.2.3 *The New Homiletic*

The New Homiletic “is not a single, well-articulated theory but consists of a variety of claims that share common convictions, emphasis, and presuppositions.” It is best viewed as “a large umbrella under which stand a number of homiletical scholars whose views of preaching are not reducible to a unified theory,” but “evidence certain similarities that represent extensions of and shifts away from traditional and kerygmatic understandings of preaching.”⁶⁸

While recognizing Davis’s influence as significant,⁶⁹ most contemporary homileticians believe the birth of the New Homiletic occurred in the 1971 publication of Fred Craddock’s *As One Without Authority: Essays on Inductive Preaching*.⁷⁰ In this book Craddock

⁶⁷Ibid., 77-98, 108.

⁶⁸Rose, 120.

⁶⁹As noted above, 23, note 20, Davis anticipated and charted the course for the innovations in homiletics. These innovations have been influential in the development of the New Homiletic. Another text, R. E. C. Browne’s *The Ministry of the Word* (London: SCM Press, 1958), has also been influential in the New Homiletic (Rose, 6). Craddock feels that Brown’s book should be reread “every three to four years” by the preacher (*Preaching*, 223).

⁷⁰3d. ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1979). Robert Reid, Jeffrey Bullock, and David Fleer attribute the birth of the New Homiletic to Craddock (“Preaching as the Creation of an Experience: The Not-So-Rational Revolution of the New Homiletic,” *Journal of Communication and Religion* 21/2 [1998]: 2); Campbell considers this formative work as “undoubtedly the most important homiletics text in the past twenty-five years” (118-119); see also idem., “Fred Craddock,” in *Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 93-95; Lowry, 11; David L. Barlett, “Texts Shaping Sermons,” in *Listening to the Word: Essays in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, eds. Gail R. O’Day and Thomas G. Long (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1993), 147; and David M. Greenhaw, “As One With Authority: Rehabilitating Concepts for Preaching,” in *Intersections: Post-Critical Studies in Preaching*, ed. Richard L. Eslinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 106-107.

developed the ideas of H. Grady Davis in advocating the inductive approach⁷¹ to engage the hearers in such a way that they will think their own thoughts and experience their own feelings in light of the Gospel during the sermon.⁷² Thus, Craddock initiated a move away from the traditional deductive, pedagogical, propositional approach of preaching to a “more inductive conception of the task,”⁷³ which focuses on the listeners in the sermon experience.⁷⁴

What Craddock began in 1971 exploded into what homiletic scholar Richard Eslinger called “the Copernican Revolution in homiletics.”⁷⁵ This revolution, today called the New Homiletic,⁷⁶ is best described as a move away from the informational and persuasive

⁷¹See Davis’ discussion of “inductive continuity” as an “organizing principle,” 177-180.

⁷²Craddock, 157

⁷³Reid, Bullock, and Fleer, 2.

⁷⁴Craddock, 60-64.

⁷⁵Richard L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing: Living Options in Homiletic Method* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1987), 65. Eslinger has been an outspoken critic of the “old orthodoxy of a discursive homiletic method” (11). He believes “the development of new expressions of homiletical form and method is an urgent agenda of reform” (14). The traditional homiletic theory in which the preacher focuses on the text’s main idea and “builds” or “crafts” the sermon around that theme, for Eslinger and others, is “no longer tenable” (Eslinger, ed., *Intersections*, xi). Preachers should thus wean themselves “from thinking in terms of points, propositions, and main ideas” (idem., *Pitfalls in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], xiv; see also his recent *Web of Preaching: New Options in Homiletic Method* [Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2002], 9-14). Robert Reid described this “revolution” as a paradigm shift in Protestant homiletics that “has been developing during the past two decades . . . and represents a radical shift away from the rationalistic and propositional logics of argumentation as the basis for sermon invention and arrangement” (“Postmodernism and the Function of the New Homiletic in Post-Christian Congregations,” *Homiletic* 20 [Winter 1995]: 7). Thomas G. Long, however, suggest that, “Ironically, the future may hold a renaissance of traditional sermon form as the pulpit increasingly faces a church unaware of its tradition and woefully lacking in knowledge of the basic content of the faith” (“Form,” in *Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 151).

⁷⁶David James Randolph first used this term in *The Renewal of Preaching: A New Homiletic Based on the New Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), thus indicating its roots in the New Hermeneutic. More on this below.

orientation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* to the imaginative orientation of Aristotle's *Poetics*.⁷⁷ Its focus is more on the evocation of an experience in the Gospel, rather than impartation of knowledge about the Gospel.⁷⁸ Its essence was best captured in 1969 by David James Randolph: "Preaching is understood not as the packaging of a product but as the evocation of an event."⁷⁹ Thus, the New Homiletic is a "move away from questions of Truth framed as

⁷⁷Jeffrey F. Bullock claims that a "review of the New Homiletic literature demonstrates that what has been characterized as the Old Homiletic is more closely associated with Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, while theorists of the New Homiletic more closely align themselves with Aristotle's *Poetics*" (*Preaching with a Cupped Ear: Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics as Postmodern World*, Berkley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics, vol. 34, ed. Irmengard Rauch [New York: Peter Lang, 1999], 6); cf. Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, 197-198; Lowry, "Narrative Preaching," in *Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 344; and idem, "The Revolution of Sermon Shape," in *Listening to the Word*, 111-112.

For discussion on the difference between Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, see Charles Sears Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic: Interpreted from Representative Works* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959), 1-5, 134-135. Baldwin explains the understanding of the ancients in general was that "rhetoric and poetic connoted two fields of composition, two habits of conceiving and ordering, two typical movements. The movement of the one the ancients saw as primarily intellectual, a progress from idea to idea determined logically; that of the other, as primarily imaginative, a progress from image to image determined emotionally" (3).

⁷⁸Charles Campbell writes, after explaining the different understandings of various New Homiletic theorists on narrative preaching, that all of them, "in reaction against cognitive-propositional preaching, give a central place to human experience in preaching; at the heart of narrative preaching in its various forms is the 'experiential event' evoked by the sermon" (120). Similarly, Jeffrey F. Bullock explains: "During the last quarter century, theorists of what is coming to be known as the New Homiletic have been engaged in a radical re-appraisal of preaching. . . . Although each theorist appears to have a different technique for making this move, it appears that this new homiletical model is more focused on what a sermon may do and even undo in the *experience* of the receiving audience, than on pointedly conveying content. This renewed emphasis on the *experience* of the listener appears to be the most productive aspect of this emerging paradigm shift in homiletic method." Concerning the sermon, Bullock explains: "More than imparting knowledge, this kind of sermon seeks to bring about an experience by cultivating the surprise of the gospel through the preacher's ability to embed that experience in the 'local soil' of the congregation's world" (48; italics his).

⁷⁹Randolph, 19. Randolph was one of the first homileticians to advocate the New Hermeneutic as a framework for developing a new preaching theory. Thus, behind this statement lies the existential, language-event focus of the New Hermeneutic luminaries Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling. For background on these two men and their application of Martin Heidegger's and Rudolf Bultmann's existential, linguistic concepts, see Robert W. Kirkland, "An Investigation of the Influence of the New Hermeneutic on Recent Preaching Theory," (Ph.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), 11-87; Anthony C. Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays On Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 308-333; idem., "The Later Heidegger, Gadamer, and the New Hermeneutic," chapter 12 in *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 327-356. According to Fuchs, who used the term, "language-event" (idem., *Studies of the*

propositions” to “questions of meaning” which orient the listener “to the experience of temporality and personal identity.”⁸⁰

Reid, who calls the New Homiletic the “Practical Postmodern approach,”⁸¹ says it views “the function of preaching as an opportunity for the listener to experience an event of meaning in which the individual discovers a way of being-in-the world transformed by Gospel.” He says the “authority of the preacher in this approach resides with his or her credibility in communicating a ‘wrestling with the text’ as a way of discovering the gospel’s transforming possibilities of being-in-the-world.” In this homiletical paradigm, “the preacher

Historical Jesus, [London: SCM, 1964], 196-212), and Ebeling, who used the term, “word-event” (idem, *Word and Faith* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964], 325-332, and *Theology of Proclamation: Dialogue with Bultmann* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966], 28-31), language actually conveys reality; it makes something happen (see Thiselton, “The New Hermeneutic,” 312f).

Building on this linguistic approach, Randolph defines preaching as “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” (Randolph, 1). This approach, he explains, replaces the “mechanistic” preaching of traditional homiletics with “dynamic preaching,” which “understands the sermon as a series of forces interacting with one another” rather than a “construct of parts” (19). So for Randolph, this new homiletic, in line with the New Hermeneutic, “would understand the uniqueness of the homily to lie in its character as *event*” (24; italics his). Richard A. Jenson, who also drew heavily from Fuchs and Ebeling, writes: “The aim of proclamatory preaching is to create an event, to make something happen for the hearer. Through our words of proclamation forgiveness happens, justification happens, redemption happens for those who hear and believe” (*Telling the Story: Variety and Imagination in Preaching* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980], 80). If the preacher uses the right words, then, he or she can actually evoke the event of forgiveness in the listeners (see Jenson’s discussion on the New Hermeneutic and preaching, *ibid.*, 58-91). Thiselton says this has been described as “word-magic” (“The New Hermeneutic,” 325-326).

This concept of an existential “evocation of event,” “word-event,” or “happening,” with its roots in the New Hermeneutic, has continued as a foundational theme in the developing New Homiletic. Campbell (*Preaching Jesus*, 122-141), traces this influence in New Homiletic homileticians such as Charles Rice, Fred Craddock, and Eugene Lowry. Lucy Rose points out that although the new hermeneutic had a short life in American theology, “it has had a long and fruitful life in homiletics” (Rose, 294, note 12). For critical evaluation of the New Hermeneutic as a theological movement, see Thiselton, “The New Hermeneutic,” 323-329; Hendrik Krabbendam, “The New Hermeneutic,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Presu (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 535-558; and responses by J. I. Packer and Royce E. Gruenler, in *ibid.*, 561-589.

⁸⁰Bullock, 7.

⁸¹Reid calls it “practical postmodern” because its approaches “stand in contrast with the through-going postmodernism of the postliberal approach” (“Faithful Preaching,” 170).

uses language to provide the means for an individual to have an *experience of meaning* that centers or re-centers the life of faith.”⁸²

Eugene Lowry identifies five sermon types in the New Homiletic:⁸³ the inductive sermon,⁸⁴ the story sermon,⁸⁵ the narrative sermon,⁸⁶ the transconscious African-American

⁸²Ibid., 170; italics his.

⁸³Lowry, *The Sermon*, 21-28. See also Eslinger, *A New Hearing*, 11-15, who singles out, discusses, and critiques five new “living options” in homiletics: preaching as story, narrative in the Black tradition, narrative and sermonic plot, inductive method, and phenomenological method; see his more recent *Web of Preaching*, which updates and continues his discussion in *A New Hearing*.

⁸⁴Craddock has been the founding advocate of this sermon type. Seven years after *As One Without Authority*, Craddock published *Overhearing the Gospel* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1978), which functioned as the apologetic for his inductive approach. There he built upon Soren Kierkegaard’s concept of communication by indirection and continued his emphasis on audience participation and experience in the sermon event. For discussion on the continuity and discontinuity between these two books, see Campbell’s analysis, in *Preaching Jesus*, 125-135, and Bullock, 48-49; for discussion on Craddock’s use of Kierkegaard, see Bullock, 55-56, 71, notes 33-34; for further analysis of Kierkegaard in relationship to the New Homiletic, see *ibid.*, 59-65. In 1985 Craddock’s third major homiletical work, *Preaching*, appeared where he furthered his thinking on the relationship between the audience and the sermon. Campbell correctly notes that the earlier two texts “do not represent a final statement of Craddock’s understanding of preaching.” Consequently, the later, more comprehensive homiletics text, *Preaching*, differs “in some important respects from the earlier books” (Campbell, 125, note 32). In particular, Craddock placed more emphasis on the form of the text influencing the form of the sermon, thus providing a more balanced approach between text and listener than in the two previous books (Craddock, *Preaching*, 25-29, 122-124, 176-182).

⁸⁵Several theorists advocate the story sermon such as Richard Jensen in his *Telling the Story*, and Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles L. Rice, in their *Preaching the Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). Of these, Rice has been the most influential in the New Homiletic through his *Interpretation and Imagination: The Preacher and Contemporary Literature* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970); see also his later *The Embodied Word: Preaching as Art and Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

⁸⁶Lowry is the primary advocate of this sermon type. He has authored several influential preaching texts: *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*, expanded ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), first edition, 1980; *Doing Time in the Pulpit: The Relationship Between Narrative and Preaching* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1985); *How to Preach a Parable: Designs for Narrative Sermons* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1989); and the more recent *The Sermon: Dancing on the Edge of Mystery*, where Lowry places his work in the larger context of the New Homiletic; it also represents the continued refinement and development of his homiletical plot. See also Richard Eslinger, *Narrative Imagination: Preaching the Worlds that Shape Us* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), who proposes the integration of narrative hermeneutics and imagination theory in preaching.

sermon,⁸⁷ the phenomenological move sermon,⁸⁸ and the conversational-episodal sermon.⁸⁹

Robinson recognizes the importance of induction, story, and narrative in preaching along with the New Homiletic homileticians.⁹⁰ He also recognizes the importance of preaching effectively to the postmodern generation.⁹¹ But his presuppositions regarding expository

⁸⁷Henry Mitchell is the primary advocate of this sermon type. See his *Black Preaching; The Recovery of Preaching*; and *Celebration & Experience in Preaching*. As noted above, 31, note 63, Mitchell's Kerygmatic understanding of preaching overlaps with the New Homiletic.

⁸⁸This sermon type is exclusively the work of David Buttrick, Professor of Homiletics and Liturgics at the Divinity School, Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. He has authored several significant homiletic texts: *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); *Preaching Jesus Christ: An Exercise in Homiletical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching; Preaching the New and the Now* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); and *Speaking Parables: A Homiletic Guide* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000). His major textbook, *Homiletic* is considered "the most significant book of the 20th century on the theory of homiletics" (Donald McKim, "Tears of Gladness," review of *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*, by David Buttrick in *Reformed Journal* 38 [January 1988], 18).

⁸⁹Lowry admits that this type of sermon is actually two types that often seem to be found together. He says the term "conversational" involves "relational factors between preacher and congregation," and language style. The latter term, "episodal," relates to sermon shape. The episodal sermon generally consists of several vignettes (episodes) presented in sequence, apparently unrelated until the conclusion of the final vignette. According to Lowry, Tex Sample and Fred Craddock are examples of the episodal sermon. (Lowry, *The Sermon*, 26-27). Lucy Rose is the primary advocate of "conversational preaching." See the proposal of her theory in her dissertation (Rose, 185-250); and a concise summary of her proposal in "Conversational Preaching: A Proposal," *Journal for Preachers* 19/1 (Advent 1995), 26-30. Rose's dissertation has been published in popular form, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997). See also John S. McClure, "Conversation and Proclamation: Resources and Issues," *Homiletic* 22/1 (Summer 1997), 1-13, for discussion of the philosophical and theological presuppositions undergirding the conception of "conversation" in preaching and suggestions toward a "conversational homiletic."

⁹⁰Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 126-131.

⁹¹Robinson recently endorsed two evangelical books on preaching to the postmodern mind by writing the Foreword: David W. Henderson, *Culture Shift: Communicating God's Truth to Our Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); and Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-First Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001). Thus, he has an interest in how to effectively communicate the message of the Bible to the postmodern generation. See also a book on the same issue from a New Homiletic perspective, Ronald J. Allen, Barbara Shires Blaisdell, and Scott Black Johnston, *Theology For Preaching: Authority, Truth, and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1997).

preaching are in direct contrast to the presuppositions of the New Homiletic homileticians.⁹² His ideational approach, understanding of language, and view of Scripture move him away from the New Homiletic and place him squarely in the Traditional Homiletic. As noted above, however, Robinson was significantly influenced by the work of Davis, who charted the path for the New Homiletic.

2.2.2.4 *The Postliberal Homiletic*

This approach to preaching breaks from the previous three approaches. It “views the function of preaching as an engagement of the faithful in an expression of the solidarity already present between preacher and worshipers as they seek to accomplish the tasks of defining, maintaining, and reforming corporate identity and ordering social life in the storied identity of God revealed in scripture.” Thus, the preacher “explores Christian claims as they are expressed in scripture and tradition and engages the community in a conversation about the implications for faith.”⁹³

This postliberal approach to homiletics, which Reid calls “Thoroughly Postmodern,”⁹⁴

⁹²Chapters 3 and 4 below will address Robinson’s theological and hermeneutical presuppositions.

⁹³Reid, “Faithful Preaching,” 172.

⁹⁴Reid says this approach “is decidedly postmodern, because its proponents view foundationalist rationality as ‘in ruins.’ Though postliberals would have differences of opinion about how to assess truth claims in the Bible, there would be common affirmation that scripture offers the narrative of God’s storied identity and that the purpose of preaching is to assist congregations in forming their own identity out of that revelation” (Reid, “Faithful Preaching,” 171). Reid goes on to say that as a “Thoroughly Postmodern approach, postliberal preaching breaks with the Practical Postmodern approach in its assumptions about the nature of truth, the role of persuasion, and the importance of sermon form” (174). Graham Ward, in “Postmodern Theology,” 585-599, explains that there is not one postmodern theology, but many. He divides his discussion into “liberal postmodern theologies” and “conservative postmodern theologies,” and lists Lindbeck’s postliberalism as one of the conservative postmodern theologies.

draws its substance from George Lindbeck, Hans Frei, and William Placher.⁹⁵ Lindbeck, considered the architect of postliberalism, proposes three models of how doctrines work in his influential *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. First is the “cognitive-propositionalist” model, which “emphasizes the cognitive aspects of religion and stresses the ways in which church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth-claims about objective realities.” Second is the “experiential-expressivist” model, which “interprets doctrines as noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations.” And third is Lindbeck’s own “cultural-linguistic” or “rule” model, in which “the function of church doctrines that becomes most prominent . . . is their use, not as expressive symbols or as truth-claims, but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action.”⁹⁶ Lindbeck critiques and rejects the first two and proposes the third as the best approach. Thus, the cultural-linguistic model is at the heart of postliberal theology and homiletical practice.

Significant exponents of postliberalism’s shape as homiletic practice include Stanley

⁹⁵On Lindbeck and Frei, see above, 11 note 43. On Placher, see *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking About God Went Wrong* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); see also Placher’s essay, “Postliberal Theology,” in *The Modern Theologians*, 343-355; see bibliography there for primary and secondary sources, 355-356.

⁹⁶George Lindbeck, 16-18.

Hauerwas and William H. Willimon,⁹⁷ Richard Lischer,⁹⁸ Charles Campbell,⁹⁹ and William H. Shepherd, Jr.¹⁰⁰ Homiletically, the cognitive-propositionalist model fits into the Traditional Homiletic, with its emphasis on communicating propositional truth from the Bible during the sermon.¹⁰¹ The experiential-expressivist model fits into the New Homiletic with its emphasis on the evocation of an experience during the sermon.¹⁰² And the cultural-linguistic model stands as a foundation for the new emerging postliberal homiletic paradigm.¹⁰³

Campbell summarizes the role of preaching in the Postliberal Homiletic:

⁹⁷Stanley Hauerwas, considered the most widely read advocate of postliberal theology in church circles and among ethicists (Placher, "Postliberal Theology, 348), and homiletician William Willimon both teach at Duke University and have teamed up in writing several key texts on the postliberal vision: Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1989); idem., *Where Resident Aliens Live: Exercises for Christian Practice* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1996); and a text on preaching; Idem., *Preaching to Strangers* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992). See also Willimon, *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

⁹⁸See Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*, rev. ed. (Durham, N. C.: Labyrinth Press, 1992); see especially, 83-91, where he suggests that contemporary preaching move from event to formation, from illustration to narrative, and from translation to performance.

⁹⁹Charles Campbell's *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology*, follows Hans Frei's articulation of postliberal theology and develops its implications for the theory and practice of preaching. He offers a serious critique of narrative homiletics and proposes the communal approach to preaching from the perspective of Frei's cultural-linguistic theology. Campbell believes Frei's theological position is the means for enriching the Christian pulpit and renewing the church. Campbell's appropriation of Frei for preaching has generated considerable discussion and critique, see, for example, David J. Lose, "Narrative Proclamation in a Postliberal Homiletic," *Homiletic* 23/1 (Summer 1998), 1-14.

¹⁰⁰See Shepherd's *No Deed Greater Than a Word: A New Approach to Preaching* (Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing Company, 1998), where he follows Lindbeck's articulation of postmodern theology, and advocates the cultural-linguistic view of preaching.

¹⁰¹See Shepherd's critique of "propositionalism," *ibid.*, 67-69.

¹⁰²Campbell (117-165), significantly critiques the narrative homiletics with its experiential emphasis in the New Homiletic.

¹⁰³Lindbeck's postliberal theology and its homiletical offspring are not without critics, see Placher, "Postliberal Theology," 350-352, for a summary of criticisms on postliberal theology; and Reid, 173f, for discussion of the possible dangers of postliberal homiletics; Reid discusses the possible dangers of the other three paradigms as well.

The crucial role of preaching in a cultural-linguistic model is thus not that of offering cognitive-propositional information, nor that of creating private, affective experiential events for individual hearers. Rather, the crucial role of preaching is the use of Christian speech so that the community may learn to use its language, which is not simply a series of discrete existential “events,” but a long, slow process of use and growth. In a time when the church is struggling with its identity within a secular society, this postliberal, cultural-linguistic model is a crucial one for the contemporary pulpit to take seriously.¹⁰⁴

A key concept in this view of preaching is “performance.”¹⁰⁵ Instead of “viewing preaching as one person attempting to persuade listeners, this approach offers the preacher as model, performing the Christian story before a community whose members then enact that story as their own performance.” Thus, in the Postliberal Homiletic, “preaching is a function of Christian formation in which the preacher uses language to *engage* the faithful community with an understanding of the implications of their redemption in Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁶

While Robinson would see merit in systematic preaching week after week to engage the faithful community in dialogue,¹⁰⁷ the elimination of the cognitive-propositional element in preaching distances him from this paradigm of preaching.¹⁰⁸ Again, Robinson’s approach fits best in the traditional paradigm.

In sum, four foci present themselves for each of the four contemporary homiletical paradigms: for the traditional homiletic—explanation of truth; for the kerygmatic

¹⁰⁴Campbell, 237.

¹⁰⁵See Lischer, 90-92; and Shepherd, Jr., 18-32.

¹⁰⁶Reid, “Faithful Preaching,” 172.

¹⁰⁷Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 73-75.

¹⁰⁸A central pillar in Robinson’s method of preaching is his “big idea” approach, which has been described as “propositional preaching” (Keith Willhite, “A Bullet versus Buckshot: What Makes the Big Idea Work?,” in *The Big Idea of Preaching*), 16.

homiletic—encounter with God and His Word; for the new homiletic—experience of meaning; and for the postliberal homiletic—engagement with the particular cultural-linguistic community.¹⁰⁹

This is the contemporary homiletical scene in which the second edition of Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* (2001) finds itself. While Robinson's homiletical approach fits in the traditional paradigm, he does identify with some aspects of the other three. Nevertheless, as this study will show, his presuppositions reflect more the evangelical expository homiletic, a developing category within the Traditional Homiletic.

2.3 The Evangelical Expository Homiletic

As noted above, those in the Traditional Homiletic are mostly evangelical and practice expository preaching. Mark A. Howell, in his dissertation, "Hermeneutical Bridges and Homiletical Methods: A Comparative Analysis of the New Homiletic and Expository Preaching Theory 1970-1995,"¹¹⁰ demonstrates that during the period, 1980-1995, there was a resurgence of interest in expository preaching. This resurgence began with Robinson's 1980 *Biblical Preaching* and continued with evangelical homileticians, all in the traditional homiletic, publishing volumes exclusively devoted to expository preaching.¹¹¹ These volumes

¹⁰⁹See Reid, "Faithful Preaching," 173, 176, who suggests these outcomes. It should be mentioned that Edward Farley has suggested a "postbiblicist paradigm of preaching" that does away with preaching from isolated passages of Scripture. Instead, Farley suggest the "what-is-preached" come from the "world of the gospel" which involves the "mysteries" that attend the redemptive processes. Farley admits the "unfinished and programmatic character of this exploration of a new paradigm" ("Toward a New Paradigm for Preaching," in *Preaching as A Theological Task*, 174, see 165-175). Farley, Buttrick, and Ronald Allen acknowledge that preaching is in a time of transition and future paradigms are not yet fully developed (Ronald J. Allen, "Why Preach from Passages in the Bible?" in *ibid.*, 185).

¹¹⁰Ph.D. dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999.

¹¹¹Notice the evangelical homiletic texts exclusively devoted to expository preaching over the last two decades, in order of date published: John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth*

suggest a consensus¹¹² around expository preaching methodology within the parameters of the Traditional Homiletic. Accordingly, we suggest a separate category within the Traditional Homiletic: the Evangelical Expository Homiletic.

In his study of contemporary preaching theory,¹¹³ Howell focuses on five expository preaching theorists, which span the years 1970-1995. During the decade of the 1970's, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' volume, *Preaching and Preachers*¹¹⁴ (1971) represents the "most

Century (1982); Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Walter L. Liefeld, *New Testament Exposition: From Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); Samuel T. Logan, ed. *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986); Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); Al Fasol, *Essentials for Biblical Preaching: An Introduction to Basic Sermon Preparation* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1989); Lloyd M. Perry, *Biblical Preaching for Today's World*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1990); Donald L. Hamilton, *Homiletical Handbook* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1992); John MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992); Reg Grant and John Reed, *The Power Sermon: Countdown to Quality Messages for Maximum Impact* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); Wayne McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1994); Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (1994); Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching Through a Book of the Bible* (1995); beyond 1995, see Stephen and David Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (1998); Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody, 1999); S. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995, 2001); of course, Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* (1980, 2001); Keith Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, (2001); and Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); to name some of the more prominent ones. One will notice that in many of these texts, Broadus's *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* is referenced (Chapell, 129, note 6).

¹¹²The term "consensus" here does not mean that all the homileticians in the previous note have identical theories of expository preaching. There are many differences (see Bryson, 11-39). Our point is that these homileticians share a mutual agreement that the most valid way to preach is expository, although they differ on many details of how to go about it.

¹¹³In his dissertation, Howell compares the expository preaching theories of Lloyd-Jones, Robinson, Stott, Chapell, and McDill with the theories of New Homiletic homileticians: Charles L. Rice, Fred B. Craddock, Henry H. Mitchell, Eugene L. Lowry, and David Buttrick.

¹¹⁴Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971.

influential treatment of the subject during this time.”¹¹⁵ The decade of the 1980’s began with the publishing of Robinson’s *Biblical Preaching* (1980) and John R.W. Stott’s *Between Two Worlds* (1982). Howell rightly asserts these two volumes “have proven to be two of the most influential volumes in contemporary expository preaching theory.”¹¹⁶ As noted above, by the mid-1980’s Robinson’s text was frequently used as the primary text for preaching classes in evangelical seminaries.¹¹⁷ During the first half of the 1990’s, according to Howell, two other significant expository preaching volumes were published: Bryan Chapell’s *Christ-Centered Preaching* (1994) and Wayne McDill’s *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (1994). Thus, the period 1970-1995 “witnessed the formulation of several new theories of expository preaching with each homiletician arguing for the primacy of the expository sermon.” Each of these homileticians believes “that the expository method presents the most effective means by which the preacher can relate the unchanging gospel to a rapidly changing culture.”¹¹⁸ During the period 1995-2002, other expository preaching theorists published books on the subject.¹¹⁹

The distinguishing feature that sets these texts apart from others in the Traditional Homiletic is the emphasis they put on expository methodology: describing expository

¹¹⁵Howell, 108, note 16.

¹¹⁶Ibid. Chatfield’s 1984 study on textbooks used by teachers of preaching showed that the texts by Robinson and Stott were highly favored by homiletics teachers.

¹¹⁷See above, 25-26.

¹¹⁸Howell, 105. For other important volumes published during this period devoted exclusively to expository preaching, see above, note 111.

¹¹⁹See above, note 111.

preaching, its assumptions about Scripture, the role of hermeneutics and exegesis in the process, application philosophy, etc. Other traditionalists, such as Cox, Hoefler, and Kemper,¹²⁰ advocate preaching from the biblical text, but lack this emphasis on expository methodology.

Thus, over the last two decades, since the first edition of Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* in 1980, there has been an outpouring of evangelical homiletics texts devoted to expository preaching and its methodology. This significant body of homiletic literature suggests the existence of the Evangelical Expository Homiletic.

There is not unanimity among this group in all things. Harold T. Bryson, for example, explains in his study of the definitions of expository preaching that there "is no generally accepted definition" of the term. "One person's usage of the term expository preaching may mean one thing, and another person's usage of the term may presuppose an entirely different definition."¹²¹ Thus, one will not always find this group agreeing exactly on how to describe expository preaching or on how to do it.

¹²⁰See above, 28, note 40 for full reference on the texts by these and other homileticians.

¹²¹Bryson, 12, 13. Bryson's discussion is the most thorough discussion to date on the different definitions of expository preaching (chapter 1, "A Definition among Definitions of Expository Preaching," 11-39). He summarizes four possible options available today: "First is the elimination option which entirely discards the adjective *expository* and substitutes the word *biblical*. Second is the elevation option which discards the adjectives *topical* and *textual* and retains only *expository*. Such an option calls for all sermons to explore a biblical truth and advocates calling all preaching *expository*. Third is the continuance option which perpetuates the classical concept that an expository sermon is one based on a text longer than two or three consecutive verses with the points and subpoints coming directly from the text. The fourth choice is the eclectic option which means to choose ideas from various sources and use them" (33; italics his). Bryson chooses the fourth option: "The eclectic option for defining expository preaching seems to be the best way to make the term understandable and practical for today. Using ideas from etymological, morphological, and substantive meanings leads to a general definition that expository preaching involves the art of preaching a series of sermons either consecutively or selectively from a Bible book. Each sermon within the series needs to expose a biblical truth, and each sermon may also have different homiletical forms and any amount of Scripture for a text" (34).

Nevertheless, expository preaching theorists share a common belief articulated by David M. Bast in his article, "Why Preach?" He writes: "There are not strictly speaking several kinds of preaching (topical, expository, textual) or many kinds of sermons (doctrinal, lectionary, life situation, relational); there is only one, expositional." Only this kind of preaching is worthy of the name preaching because in it "the truth of a Scripture text is explained and applied to the lives of the hearers."¹²² The Evangelical Homiletics Society, established by those who fit in the Evangelical Expository Homiletic, would affirm this statement.¹²³

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has produced several significant findings. First, between 1980 and 2001 evangelical homiletics professors used Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* as a primary preaching textbook for their college and seminary homiletics classes. Second, of the four contemporary homiletical paradigms—the Traditional Homiletic, the Kerygmatic Homiletic, the New Homiletic, and the Postliberal Homiletic—Robinson fits in the Traditional Homiletic. Third, within the Traditional Homiletic we find a consensus around expository preaching identified as the Evangelical Expository Homiletic. This is the specific homiletical paradigm into which

¹²²David M. Bast, "Why Preach?" *The Reformed Review* 39/3 (Spring 1986), 175-176. Homiletics from the other three preaching paradigms (Kerygma, New Homiletic and Postliberal) would take issue with this view of preaching. Many New Homiletic theoreticians, for example, consider the expository method to be obsolete. See, for example, Eslinger, *A New Hearing*, 11-14; and Buttrick, *A Captive Voice*, 5-32.

¹²³The focus of the Evangelical Expository Homiletic finds expression in the "Evangelical Homiletics Society," whose "membership consists primarily of homiletics professors from North American seminaries and Bible Colleges who hold to evangelical theology, and thus treat preaching as the preaching of God's inspired Word" (<http://www.evangelicalhomiletics.com/what.html>: [5 June 2001]). The society, established in 1997, adopts the "Statement of Faith" affirmed by the National Association of Evangelicals (<http://www.evangelicalhomiletics.com/statement.html>: [5 June 2001]). On the National Association of Evangelicals, see James DeForest Murch, *Cooperation Without Compromise: A History of the National Association of Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956).

Robinson's method fits.

Now that we have situated Robinson's homiletical method in the contemporary scene, we are in a better position to engage in this study. Understanding Robinson's homiletical approach as an expression of the evangelical expository homiletic helps to provide the evangelical perspective for investigating his view of Scripture, approach to hermeneutics, and definition of expository preaching—all which undergird his ten-stage method. Furthermore, this understanding provides the evangelical perspective necessary for evaluating the ten-stage method. The next chapter therefore will focus on Robinson's view of Scripture, which will provide the theological perspective for this study.

CHAPTER 3

ROBINSON'S VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate Robinson's view of Scripture in its larger evangelical context. Robinson states that his homiletical genre, expository preaching, emerges "as the theological outgrowth of a high view of inspiration."¹ What is this "high view" of Scripture and how does it influence his homiletical method? Answering this question will help to provide the evangelical perspective necessary for evaluating his expository approach to homiletics.

3.2 Robinson's View of Scripture

Robinson's view of Scripture is best understood in light of the evangelical context from which it emerges: the classical evangelical prolegomena. This prolegomena generally involves four theological concepts: revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, and authority,² and these

¹Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, 1984, 803.

²Illumination is sometimes considered a part of this prolegomena. The organization is not always this defined, but these four concepts are generally discussed, sometimes with different terminology, sometimes in a different sequence. See, for example, the treatment of the doctrine of Scripture by evangelical scholarship in the following systematic theologies: Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*; Charles W. Carter, ed., *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1986); Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1986); Paul Enns, *The Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1989); Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987); Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); idem., *The Christian Story: A Pastoral Systematics*, vol. 2, *Authority: Scripture in the Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); James Leo Garret, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988-1992); Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation, & Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1993); Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, & Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity 1994); Wayne A. Grudem,

four concepts will provide the four main divisions of this chapter. Under each concept, the views of evangelical scholarship will be summarized in order to provide the theological context. Then Robinson's particular view will be investigated.

It should be noted that Robinson never formally discusses the doctrine of Scripture in his homiletical writings. On a few occasions he makes a reference to aspects of the evangelical prolegomena, but his focus is primarily on the construction of expository sermons. Even so, his view of revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, and authority form the basis of his homiletical method. Note also that the researcher questioned Robinson on these four concepts recently during an interview which will be referenced throughout this chapter and the rest of this study.³

3.2.1 Revelation

3.2.1.1 *The Evangelical Context of Robinson's View of Revelation*

Several issues that evangelicals have addressed concerning the concept of revelation can be set forth as questions. Are the words of Scripture ontologically revelation and thus, the "Word of God?" Or, rather, is there a distinction between revelation and the words of

Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine; Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1994); John Stott, *Authentic Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995); Richard Rice, *The Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective*, 2d. ed. (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1997); Peter M. van Bemmelen, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, ed., Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 22-57; Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, unpublished manuscript, Southern Adventist University; and Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), who discusses these four concepts in the above sequence; see his table of contents, 7.

³Haddon Robinson, interview by author, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001. Hereafter cited as Interview.

Scripture?⁴ Is revelation personal or propositional?⁵ Evangelical historian Mark Noll

⁴This distinction between the words of the Bible and revelation was articulated in neo-orthodoxy, also called “dialectical theology” or “theology of crisis” (see James M. Robinson, ed., *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Louis De Grazia [Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1968]). Neo-orthodoxy is sometimes called Barthianism because of its fountainhead, Karl Barth. Barth distinguished the Bible from revelation in his *Church Dogmatics*, 13 vols., ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969); see, for example, I/1, 88-120 and I/2, 463, where he declares that the Bible was “not itself revelation,” but only a witness to the revelation, which is Jesus Christ.

For studies on Barth and Scripture, see, for example, Klaas Runia, *Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962); Gordon H. Clark, *Barth's Theological Method* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1963); Arnold B. Come, *An Introduction to Barth's Dogmatics for Preachers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 168-198; David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 39-50; Thomas Edward Provenca, “The Hermeneutics of Karl Barth” (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1980); Paul Charles McGlasson, “Karl Barth and the Scriptures: A Study of the Biblical Exegesis in *Church Dogmatics* I and II” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1986); Christina A. Baxter, “The Nature and Place of Scripture in the Church Dogmatics,” in *Theology Beyond Christendom: Essays on the Centenary of the Birth of Karl Barth May 10, 1886*, ed. John Thompson (Allison Park, Penn.: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 33-62; idem., “Barth—a Truly Biblical Theologian?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 38 (1987): 3-27; David L. Mueller, “The Contributions and Weaknesses of Karl Barth's View of the Bible,” in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1987), 423-447; Werner G. Jeanron, “Karl Barth's Hermeneutics,” in *Reckoning with Barth: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth's Birth*, ed. Nigel Biggar (London: Mowbray, 1988), 80-97; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “The Authority of Scripture in Karl Barth,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, EDS., D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker 1986, 1995), 271-294.

After interacting with Barth and carefully investigating the Biblical material, Runia comes to a conclusion about the biblical writers that many evangelicals would be comfortable with: “There is, therefore, but one conclusion possible: These witnesses are *revelatory witnesses*. They are not only witnesses to revelation, in a limiting and distinct way, but they themselves *belong to the revelation*. Their speaking and writing *is* revelation” (35; italics his). Henry, who agrees with the above statement by Runia, repeatedly critiques Barth's views in his six-volume *God, Revelation, and Authority* (1:188-192; 2:127-128, 143-148, 157-160; 3:224-228, 284-290, 466-469; 4:196-200, 256-271, 419-425, 427-430; 5:129, 316-319; 6:90-105). Some evangelical attitudes toward Barth, however, “have slowly moved away from outright suspicion . . . toward a more appreciative awareness of Barth's dissatisfaction with liberalism and its intellectual moorings in the Enlightenment” (J. P. Callahan, “Karl Barth,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 142); notice, for example, the note below on Bernard Ramm.

⁵This issue has been a major debate among Protestant theologians of the middle and latter twentieth century. Advocates of propositional revelation, such as Carl Henry (3:248-487), defend revelation as mental, cognitive, meaningful, and propositional or sentential (sentence). Advocates of personal revelation, such as Barth (I/1, 124-135, 141-212; I/2, 457-537) and Emil Brunner (*Revelation and Reason*, trans. Olive Wyon [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946], 20-42; and *Truth as Encounter*, trans. Amandus Loos and David Cairns [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964]), argue that revelation is a personal disclosure of God to the inner consciousness of the prophet devoid of information. For critique of non-propositional revelation, see Paul Helm, *The Divine Revelation* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1982), 21ff; Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and The Mind of Man* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1982), 43-54. For discussion and evaluation of Brunner's concept of revelation and authority, see Paul King Jewett, *Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation* (London: James Clarke, 1954); idem., “Emil Brunner's Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. John W. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 210-

identifies the position of traditional evangelical scholarship on these issues in *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*: “When examining the evangelical study of Scripture, everything hinges upon a recognition that the evangelical community considers the Bible the very Word of God.” He asserts further that most evangelicals emphasize the Bible as the Word of God “in a cognitive, propositional, factual sense.” Thus, although they “typically give some attention to the human character of the Bible, they believe that Scripture itself teaches that where the Bible speaks, God speaks.” To forget this central conviction is “fatal in a study of evangelical biblical scholarship.”⁶ On those espousing this view names such as B. B. Warfield,⁷ Gordon H. Clark,⁸ Cornelius Van Til,⁹

238; and James L. Leavenworth, “The Use of the Scriptures in the Works of Emil Brunner” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1950). See also Henry’s critique of Brunner (3:48-49, 261-262, 298-299, 406-407, 430-431, 434, 436, 472).

Erickson believes that revelation “is not *either* personal *or* propositional; it is *both/and*. What God primarily does is to reveal himself, but he does so at least in part by telling us something *about* himself” (*Christian Theology*, 221). See also Garrett, who sees truth in “both sides” and feels “these truths need to be correlated” (*Systematic Theology*, 101).

⁶Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, 6. The view expressed by Noll is the view taken by this researcher.

⁷On Warfield, see Mark A. Noll, “B. B. Warfield,” *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 26-39; and idem., “Benjamin B. Warfield,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 1257-1258; see especially Warfield’s *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), where he argues, among other things, that Scripture is “itself part of the redemptive revelation of God” (161).

⁸On Clark, see Ronald H. Nash, “Gordon H. Clark,” *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 182-192; and W. A. Elwell, “Gordon Haddon Clark,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 270-271; see, for example, Clark’s *Religion, Reason and Revelation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1961), for his defense of propositional revelation through human language.

⁹On Van Til, see John M. Frame, “Cornelius Van Til,” *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 156-167; and W. A. Elwell, “Cornelius Van Til,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 1237; see, for example, Van Til’s introduction to B. B. Warfield’s *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 3-68, where he critiques Brunner and sets Warfield’s view of Scripture as the Protestant orthodox view; for analysis and critique of Van Til’s concept of truth, see White, 36-61.

Francis Schaeffer,¹⁰ Carl F. H. Henry,¹¹ James I. Packer,¹² and Millard Erickson¹³ come to mind. These scholars represent the more conservative or traditional side of evangelical scholarship concerning the nature of revelation and Scripture. This is the theological tradition Robinson personally espouses.¹⁴

In *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology*,

Millard Erickson identifies a group of evangelical scholars he terms “postconservative

¹⁰On Schaeffer, see Colin Duriez, “Francis Schaeffer,” *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 245-259; and W. A. Elwell, “Francis Schaeffer,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 1060-1061; see, for example, his *He is There and He is Not Silent* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, vol. 1: *A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture* (Westchester: Crossway, 1982), for his discussion of propositional revelation, among other things; see also *Complete Works*, vol 2: *A Christian View of the Bible As Truth*; for analysis and critique of Schaeffer’s concept of truth, see White, 62-84.

¹¹On Henry, see Richard A. Purdy, “Carl F. H. Henry,” *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 269-275; and W. A. Elwell, “Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 550. Henry is considered by Grenz and Olson in *20th Century Theology*, to be the “most prominent evangelical theologian of the second half of the twentieth century (288). Bob E. Patterson in *Makers of the Modern Theological Mind: Carl F. H. Henry* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), hails Henry as “the prime interpreter of evangelical theology, one of its leading theoreticians, and . . . the unofficial spokesman for the entire tradition” (9). Henry champions propositional revelation in his magnum opus, the six-volume *God, Revelation, and Authority*; see especially volume 3, where Henry states and expounds his tenth thesis: “God’s revelation is rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words, that is, in conceptual-verbal form” (3:248ff). For analysis and critique of Henry’s concept of truth, see White, 85-111.

¹²On Packer, see Roger Nicole, “J. I. Packer,” *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 379-387; J. Mitchell, Jr., “James Innell Packer,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 881; and Alister McGrath, *J. I. Packer: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997). Packer argues that the words of Scripture are revelation and revelation is both propositional and personal; see his “*Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958); and *God Has Spoken: Revelation and The Bible*, 3d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993). For a substantial study on Packer’s view of Scripture and illumination, see Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Interpretation: A Study in the Writings of James I. Packer” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1998).

¹³On Erickson, see L. Arnold Hustad, “Millard J. Erickson,” *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 412-426; and W. A. Elwell, “Millard J. Erickson,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 384-385. Erickson argues, like Packer, that the words of Scripture are equal to revelation and revelation is both propositional and personal; see his magnum opus, *Christian Theology*, 200-223; for analysis and critique of Erickson’s concept of truth, see White, 112-139.

¹⁴Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001.

evangelicals,” who take issue with the traditional evangelical view of Scripture.¹⁵ Erickson discusses names such as Bernard Ramm,¹⁶ Clark Pinnock,¹⁷ Donald Bloesch,¹⁸ and Stanley

¹⁵Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 30, 61-86. R. V. Pierard and W. A. Elwell also discuss this group, variously called “postconservative,” “reformist,” “progressive,” “the evangelical left,” or even “liberal evangelicalism.” They write: “This is not a particularly large group, but they are articulate, highly placed academics whose word carries significant weight, men such as Roger Olsen, Clark Pinnock, and Stanley Grenz. They are counterbalanced by defenders of a more traditional evangelicalism, such as David Wells, Millard Erickson, and Timothy George. At the present moment the vast majority of evangelicals are more traditionally inclined and are alarmed at what they perceive to be a defection from the faith. In some instances they are justified in their concern; in others they act as alarmists” (“Evangelicalism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 409). See also the following dissertations: Robert McNair Price, “The Crisis of Biblical Authority: The Setting and Range of the Current Evangelical Crisis” (Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1981); Richard Albert Mohler, Jr., “Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth: Representative Models or Response” (Ph.D. dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989).

¹⁶On Ramm, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Bernard Ramm,” *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 290-306, who states that Ramm “must be considered one of the foremost American evangelical theologians of the twentieth century. Only Carl F. H. Henry’s works are comparable in quantity and quality” (*ibid.*, 292); see also W. A. Elwell, “Bernard Ramm,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 980-981. Ramm is known for his trilogy of books: *The Pattern of Religious Authority*, where he criticized Barth’s encounter theology, 96-98; *The Witness of the Spirit: An Essay on the Contemporary Relevance of the Internal Witness of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); and *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), where he expressed the more traditional evangelical view of revelation. Over the years as Ramm studied Barth, he embraced more aspects of his theology (Vanhoozer, 303). In the publication of *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), Ramm is found recommending Barth to Evangelicals. While Ramm has not completely capitulated to Barth’s position, his view of Scripture, according to Erickson, represents a “shift toward a more ambiguous relationship between revelation and the words of Scripture” (Erickson, 78).

¹⁷On Pinnock, see Robert K. Johnston, “Clark H. Pinnock,” *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 427-444 and J. R. Lincoln, “Clark H. Pinnock,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 926-927. In his *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), Pinnock taught that Scripture was the “capstone of God’s revealing activity” (20-21). Years later in *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), he was not as unequivocal on the words of Scripture being identical with revelation. For discussion on the “celebrated” change of Pinnock’s views, see White, 170; and especially, Roennfeldt, Ray C. W., *Clark H. Pinnock on Biblical Authority: An Evolving Position*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 16 (Berrien Springs Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1993); note also Edwin E. Scott, “The Nature and Use of Scripture in the Writings of Clark H. Pinnock and James Barr,” (Th.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989).

¹⁸On Bloesch, see Donald K. McKim, “Donald G. Bloesch,” in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 388-400; and J. P. Callahan, “Donald G. Bloesch,” in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 175. Bloesch is best known for his two-volume set: *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 1, *God, Authority, and Salvation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978); and vol. 2, *Life, Ministry, and Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978). In *Holy Scripture*, the second volume in a projected seven-volume systematic theology, Bloesch emphasizes that the Bible “is not in and of itself the revelation of God but the divinely appointed means and channel of this revelation” (57). In his thinking, Scripture “is one step removed from revelation” (*ibid.*, 68).

Grenz.¹⁹ These scholars represent the more “progressive” evangelical scholarship regarding the nature of revelation and Scripture.²⁰

3.2.1.2 *Robinson and Revelation*

In a recent interview with the researcher, Robinson placed himself on the conservative side of evangelical scholarship concerning revelation and the Bible. When asked about his view of Scripture, he stated unequivocally: “I believe that the Bible is indeed the Word of God. . . . Augustine said that when the Bible speaks God speaks.” In this sense, “the Bible is God’s word written.”²¹

For a thorough study and evaluation of Bloesch’s view of Scripture, see Frank Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D. G. Bloesch: An Investigation and Assessment of its Origin, Nature and Use* (European University Studies—23 Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 159-262; for analysis and critique of Bloesch’s concept of truth, see White, 140-163; see also the recent *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Dialogue with Donald Bloesch* ed., Elmer M. Colyer (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999), where various theologians, including Erickson, interact with aspects of Bloesch’s theology and he responds.

¹⁹Stanley Grenz believes linking Scripture with revelation as evangelicals have traditionally done, and linking revelation with personal encounter as neo-orthodoxy theologians have done, is unsatisfying. Instead, he proposes revelation as “an event that has occurred in the community within which the believing individual stands” (*Revising Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993], 76). Our Bible, according to Grenz, is, therefore, “the product of the community of faith that cradled it,” rather than a direct revelation of God (*ibid.*, 121). In his systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God*, he specifically states: “We cannot simply equate the revelation of God with the Bible” (*ibid.*, 514). Grenz affirms Ramm for “raising Barth’s banner within evangelicalism” (*ibid.*, 511, note 37), and offers a threefold “connection between Scripture and revelation” using Barthian terms. First, the Bible is “derivative revelation,” in the sense of being a witness. Second, it is “functional revelation,” in that it facilitates an encounter with God. Third, the Bible is “mediate revelation,” in the sense of mediating an understanding of God’s essence. Thus, in this threefold sense the Bible is “God’s word to us,” says Grenz (*ibid.*, 516-517). But it is not “ontologically revelation” (see David Allen’s critique of Grenz on this point, “A Tale of Two Roads: Homiletics and Biblical Authority,” *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 43/3 [September 2000]: 494). For evangelical critique of Grenz’s view of Scripture, see R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition and the Challenge of the Postmodern Paradigm,” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, 78-81; D. A. Carson remarks, after an analysis of Grenz’s position on Scripture: “With the best will in the world, I cannot see how Grenz’s approach to Scripture can be called ‘evangelical’ in any useful sense” (*The Gagging of God*, 481).

²⁰See Pierard and Elwell, 409.

²¹Robinson, Interview; Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001; see also, *idem.*, “The Heresy of Application,” *Leadership* (Fall 1997): 21, where he again cites Augustine as saying: “What the Bible says,

These statements (“I believe the Bible is. . .”) and the ones he makes below about inspiration (3.2.2.2), inerrancy (3.2.3.2), and authority (3.2.4.2), fall into the category of non-scientific faith statements. That is, they are Robinson’s confessional statements which are not based on empirical evidence nor philosophical reasoning. Accordingly, he does not attempt to explain the theological theory behind these statements.²² The evangelical theological theory behind his statements, however, is discussed in the sections preceding his statements (3.2.1.1, 3.2.2.1, 3.2.3.1, 3.2.4.1) in this study. The view here is that Robinson’s text, *Biblical Preaching*, would have been stronger had he incorporated more discussion of this theological methodology.²³

The above statements contain three conservative evangelical presuppositions which have significant implications for Robinson’s homiletical method: the words of Scripture as revelation, revelation as propositional and personal, and human language conveying truth about God. In the following sections, each of these will be discussed.

3.2.1.2.1 The Words of Scripture As Revelation

Robinson’s statements from the above-mentioned interview are essentially identical with the more conservative/traditional evangelical view described by Noll that the Bible is

God says”; Robinson does not provide the reference for this statement; it is, however, found in Augustine’s *Confessions*, xiii, 29, trans. Edward Bouverie Pusey, Great Books of the Western World, vol. 18 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 122, where he puts into God’s mouth the words: “O man, that which My Scripture saith, I say.” Thus, Robinson is paraphrasing Augustine; J. I. Packer refers to this statement by Augustine as the “historic Christian understanding of the nature of Scripture” (*God Has Spoken*, 27).

²²For an evangelical systematic theology that reflects a more philosophical approach to theology, see Erickson’s *Christian Theology*.

²³As will be shown below, however, he does assume much of it.

“the very Word of God,” and that “where the Bible speaks, God speaks.”²⁴ Avery Dulles, in his noted work, *Models of Revelation*, calls this view “Revelation As Doctrine” and describes one of its distinguishing features as equating revelation with the words of the Bible.²⁵ Thus, because they believe the words of the Scripture text offer a revelatory disclosure of God’s truth, conservative evangelicals consider them the Word of God—“God speaking.”²⁶

It is from this understanding that Robinson makes the above statements and writes in *Biblical Preaching*: “God speaks through the Bible. It is the major tool of communication by which He addresses individuals today.”²⁷ In the context of this statement,²⁸ Robinson explains

²⁴Noll, 6; see above discussion, 51. Benjamin B. Warfield, whose views, according to Noll, still continue to influence evangelical convictions about the Bible, argues in his article, “It Says: Scripture Says: God Says,” in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 299-348, that there are two sets of biblical passages: “In one of these classes of passages the Scriptures are spoken of as if they were God; in the other, God is spoken of as if He were the Scriptures: in the two together, God and the Scriptures are brought into such conjunction as to show that in point of directness of authority no distinction was made between them” (299).

²⁵Dulles, 39. Dulles’ study provides a typology of five different models of revelation in contemporary theology with their representative theologians: revelation as doctrine (i.e., Carl Henry, James Packer), revelation as history (i.e., Wolfhart Pannenberg, Oscar Cullmann), revelation as inner experience (i.e., Wilhelm Herrmann, Auguste Sabatier, Evelyn Underhill), revelation as dialectical presence (i.e., Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann) and revelation as new awareness (i.e., Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner). He summarizes these five positions as follows: “Each of these five typical positions situates the crucial moment of revelation at a different point. For the doctrinal type, the pivotal moment is the formulation of teaching in clear conceptual form. For the historical type, the decisive point is the occurrence of a historical event through which God signifies his intentions. For the experiential type (i.e., the type emphasizing inner experience), the crux is an immediate, interior perception of the divine presence. For the dialectical type, the key element is God’s utterance of a word charged with divine power. For the awareness type, the decisive moment is the stimulation of the human imagination to restructure experience in a new framework” (28). Hence, the meaning of Robinson’s statement, “the Bible is the Word of God,” carries different meanings depending on one’s theological and philosophical orientation. Dulles also provides succinct summaries of the merits and demerits of each model. For other studies on different views of revelation and Scripture, see, for example, David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*; and Donald K. McKim, *The Bible in Theology and Preaching: How Preachers Use Scripture* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994).

²⁶For a classic example of conservative evangelical argument on this point, see Warfield; and Henry’s explanation of his tenth thesis in *God, Revelation, and Authority* (3:248-487).

²⁷Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

²⁸While Robinson does not address it, behind this statement is the evangelical understanding of the distinction between general revelation and special revelation. In general revelation, God in principle makes

that since the Bible itself is the foremost means or tool through which God addresses people today, preaching the biblical text becomes a secondary means through which God “encounters men and women to bring them to salvation and to richness and ripeness of Christian character.”²⁹ Hence, the text of Scripture—its words—are the locus of revelation³⁰ for Robinson. Which is why a careful exposition of the text is so important to him.

This view of revelation is, therefore, motivated by a desire to take the text of Scripture with utmost seriousness as the Word of God.³¹ For Robinson, this translates into expository preaching: “If we regard the Bible as God’s tool of communication through which He

Himself known through nature, “so that one may speak in a certain sense of natural (or ‘general’ revelation), available always and everywhere. But because of the transcendence of God and the devastating effects of original sin, human beings do not in fact succeed in attaining a sure and saving knowledge of God by natural revelation or natural theology” (Dulles, 37). In special revelation God revealed himself “to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with him,” and these encounters and events were recorded which eventuated in the Bible” (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 201ff). Hence, Robinson can call the special revelation in the Bible the major tool of God’s communication and general revelation would be understood as a lesser tool of his communication.

²⁹Robinson, 20.

³⁰Because Robinson does not attempt to explain the theology behind this conservative evangelical understanding himself, we will cite Dulles who provides a concise explanation of this evangelical understanding: “We today no longer receive revelation through the prophets, through Jesus Christ, or through the apostles as living mediators, but we are not left without revelation. The prophetic and apostolic teaching has been gathered up for us in the Scripture.” Drawing from Warfield, he says the Bible “contains the whole of revelation and is itself the final revelation of God” (Dulles, 38). This is the understanding of conservative evangelicals toward revelation and the Bible, of which Robinson is a part. For further explanation of this issue by evangelical theologians, see Warfield, 71-101; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 200-223.

³¹Paul J. Achtemeier emphasizes this point in his critique of the “conservative view” (*The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980], 57-58). Donald Bloesch, who is a “progressive” evangelical, affirms that the Bible is the “written Word of God.” But his meaning is different from Robinson. For Bloesch, the text of Scripture is “one step removed from revelation.” Thus, the pages of Scripture are not “to be identified with the very word of God.” But, he says, Scripture embodies this Word. The Word of God is through and under the words of the Bible. It “is the inspired witness to revelation,” and in that sense “the written word of God” (*Holy Scripture*, 70-71). This view is rejected by conservative evangelicals who, according to Bloesch, “restrict the Word of God to the Bible” (72).

addresses people in history,” he writes, “then it follows that preaching must be based on it.”³² Thus, for Robinson and those in the evangelical expository homiletic,³³ expository preachers approach the text of Scripture as a direct word from God and consequently build the sermon upon it.

Critics have advanced several challenges to this view of revelation and the Bible. First, too much emphasis on the words of Scripture being equal to revelation could lead to elevating the text above God, thus rendering the charge of “bibliolatry” justified.³⁴ Like most conservative evangelicals, Robinson would deny the charge of worshiping a book instead of God.³⁵ The Bible in Robinson’s approach is “a book about God” which leads to God.³⁶ Thus, when the expositor studies the Bible the focus should not be merely on the text, but on what the text says about God.³⁷

³²Robinson, “Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” 803.

³³See above, 43, note 111.

³⁴Steve Lemke, “The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, 2d. ed., eds. Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke, and Grant I. Lovejoy (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 179; for summary of Bloesch’s concern on this issue, see White, 153. Conservative evangelicals in general reject “bibliolatry” and seek to approach the text of Scripture with scholarship and care (on this, see the discussion in Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 142-161). They also seek to avoid extremes such as the “dictation theory” (Erickson, 233).

³⁵Evangelical Ronald Nash, for example, writes: “The orthodox view does not lead to ‘bibliolatry’—the veneration of the Bible with a reverence appropriate only to God. It is difficult to see how even the most crude, unimaginative theory of mechanical dictation would justify the charge of bibliolatry. Perhaps the critic means to suggest that because Evangelicals regard the Bible as the Word of God, they are in danger of diverting from God the reverence and honor due to Him. . . . True revelation of God’s nature, character, and will enables us to know the difference between worshiping Almighty God and worshiping a book” (*The Word of God and the Mind of Man*, 50-51).

³⁶*Biblical Preaching*, 94; see also *Trusting the Shepherd: Insights from Psalm 23*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2002), 11-12, where he explains that the 23rd Psalm “reveals a personal God who relates to us as individuals.”

³⁷Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 89-92.

Second, too much focus on the words of the Bible lessens the finality of revelation—defined as the appearance of Jesus Christ. The significance of that divine epiphany transcends the words of the biblical text. Jesus Christ, as Barth insisted, Himself is “the revelation of God.”³⁸ Conservative evangelicals have consistently responded to this challenge by saying that while Christ is the pinnacle of God’s revelation, His life, acts, and words have been recorded in Scripture, and thus this record is the complete revelation of Christ to the world for all time.³⁹

Robinson does not respond to this challenge in his homiletical writings. More importantly, he does not discuss the relationship of Christ to expository preaching in *Biblical Preaching*. At the end of chapter one in the section, “For Further Reading and Reflection,” he does write, however, that the expositor will “sometime or other” have to respond to the question, “How does the centrality of Jesus Christ affect the way that I handle the biblical text?” Robinson’s only reply to this question is to refer the reader to two homiletic texts by fellow evangelical scholars: Sidney Greidanus and Graeme Goldsworthy.⁴⁰ But Robinson himself does not address the issue of preparing expository sermons that are consistently Christ-centered.⁴¹ In fact, in reading through his textbook, *Biblical Preaching*, one will not

³⁸Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4/3, 97; see also Dulles, 85-87, and McKim, 83, for concise descriptions of this position.

³⁹For more discussion on this issue by evangelicals, see Henry, 3:75-98; and Erickson, 215-223.

⁴⁰Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 32; see Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From the Old Testament*; and Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*.

⁴¹Greidanus, for example, describes Christ-centered preaching or preaching Christ as “preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God’s revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament” (*Preaching Christ From the Old Testament*, 10).

find any discussion on incorporating Christ into the sermon. He assumes that expositors will incorporate Christ into the sermon,⁴² and even provides examples of Christ-centered sermons to illustrate various sermon structures,⁴³ but that is essentially all he says about Christ and the expository sermon.

Traditional evangelical theology champions the intimate connection between the Bible and Christ.⁴⁴ To leave out a discussion on the centrality of Christ in a preaching method claiming to carefully expound the text, then, is no small inconsistency. Robinson's method would be greatly strengthened if specifics on how to preach Christ from Scripture were integrated into the ten stages.⁴⁵

The third objection comes in the form of a question. How does one know if his or her interpretation of the text is the Word of God? Robinson's response to this issue is his hermeneutical procedure which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.⁴⁶

Fourth, because each word in the text is considered to be the Word of God, the advocate of this view must explain all "Bible difficulties," including cosmology, parallel accounts, and inconsistencies.⁴⁷ This issue has been addressed by evangelicals more in the

⁴²See Robinson's popular exposition of Jesus' sermon on the mount, *What Jesus Said About Successful Living: Principles from the Sermon on the Mount for Today* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1991).

⁴³Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 118-122.

⁴⁴Henry, 3:9-163; from a homiletical perspective, see Chapell, 263-310.

⁴⁵Chapell and Goldsworthy provide methodology and a method on preparing expository sermons that reflect a Christ-centered approach.

⁴⁶See below, 4.2.3.2.2.

⁴⁷Lemke, 181.

context of discussions on errancy. Robinson responds indirectly to this issue when he counsels expositors to wrestle with listeners' questions such as, "Is that true?" and "Can I really believe that?" In light of this generation's skepticism, he writes:

We do well, therefore, to adopt the attitude that a statement is not true because it is in the Bible; it is in the Bible because it is true. The fact that an assertion is in the pages of a leather-covered book does not necessarily make it valid. Instead, the Bible states reality as it exists in the universe, as God has made it and as He governs it. We would expect, therefore, the affirmation of Scripture to be demonstrated in the world around us. That is not to say that we establish biblical truth by studying sociology, astronomy, or archaeology, but the valid data from these sciences second the truth taught in Scripture.⁴⁸

He fails to deal with the issue of scientific data which seems to contradict the truth in Scripture.

Fifth, this view can lead an interpreter to place too much emphasis on individual words instead of on textual units. Robinson does respond to this fifth challenge and suggests that expositors carefully study the literary context of a word because "words and phrases should never become ends in themselves." He then says that words "are stupid things until linked with other words to convey meaning."⁴⁹ This is a curious statement. If the words of the Bible are revelation and thus God's words, how can they be stupid, even in isolation from other words? This inconsistency will be discussed in greater detail below under Robinson's view of inspiration.⁵⁰

3.2.1.2.2 Revelation as Propositional and Personal

⁴⁸Robinson, 82.

⁴⁹Ibid., 23.

⁵⁰See below, 82.

For conservative evangelicals, of which Robinson is a part, revelation is equated with the Bible and “taken as a set of propositional statements, each expressing a divine affirmation, valid always and everywhere.”⁵¹ Henry describes propositional revelation thus: “God supernaturally communicated his revelation to chosen spokesman in the express form of cognitive truths, and . . . the inspired prophetic-apostolic proclamation reliably articulates these truths in sentences that are not internally contradictory.”⁵²

Robinson expresses his understanding of propositional revelation through the use of the term, “idea.” He believes that “each paragraph, section, or subsection of Scripture contains an idea,” which is the basis of his “big idea” approach to preaching.⁵³ Thus he writes: “Ideally each sermon is the explanation, interpretation, or application of a single dominant idea supported by other ideas, all drawn from one passage or several passages of Scripture.”⁵⁴ Homiletic scholar Keith Willhite, a former student of Robinson’s, calls this ideational approach, “propositional preaching.”⁵⁵ Thus, Robinson’s two diagnostic questions, “What precisely is the author talking about?” (the text’s subject) and “What is the author saying about what he is talking about?” (the text’s complements),⁵⁶ result in extracting complete ideas or

⁵¹Dulles, 39.

⁵²As Henry defines it, 3:457.

⁵³Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 42.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 35. The issue of how a text contains a single idea or multiple ideas will be discussed in the next chapter which deals with Robinson’s hermeneutical approach.

⁵⁵Willhite, “A Bullet versus Buckshot,” in *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*, 1998, 16.

⁵⁶Robinson, 42-43.

propositions from the Bible.⁵⁷

Eugene Lowry, writing in his *Doing Time in the Pulpit: The Relationship Between Narrative and Preaching*, strongly urges preachers not to preach with propositions because he believes the biblical revelation is “largely nonpropositional.”⁵⁸ Lowry emphasizes that only a small portion of the Bible is propositional in form and states that “Christian revelation . . . simply cannot be contained in propositional form.”⁵⁹ Robinson recognizes that the Bible is polymorphous in its revelation (narratives, parables, poetry, prayers, etc.), but he insists that these different literary genres still yield ideas. “To find the idea in any of them, we must be aware of the kind of literature we are reading and the conventions unique to it.”⁶⁰ For Robinson, then, ideas or propositions are a vital dimension of God’s revelation in the Bible and the foundation of expository preaching.⁶¹

While Robinson does not respond to the many critics of propositional revelation,⁶² evangelical scholars have devoted considerable efforts to defending it.⁶³ Robinson’s focus is

⁵⁷For discussion on the centrality of these two diagnostic questions to Robinson’s homiletical paradigm, see *idem*, 33-50; and below.

⁵⁸Lowry, 79.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 68-70.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 23-24, 33-46.

⁶²For a concise summary of criticisms of the evangelical view of propositional revelation, see White, *What is Truth?*, 177-179; and Dulles, 48-52. Paul Tillich, for example, declared there are “no revealed doctrines.” He contended: “Propositions about a past revelation give theoretical information; they have no revelatory power” (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951], 125, 127).

⁶³See, for example, Henry’s lengthy defense, 3: 248-487; Nash, 35-54; and Helm, *The Divine Revelation*.

more on propositional preaching rather than propositional revelation itself.

Concerning the issue of personal versus propositional revelation,⁶⁴ Richard J. Coleman contends that a major tenet of evangelical theology is the interrelationship between the two.⁶⁵ Robinson reflects this interrelationship in his homiletical approach. While he emphasizes finding ideas in Scripture, he also believes that “God reveals Himself in the Scriptures.”⁶⁶ In a book written for the general Christian audience, *Trusting the Shepherd: Insights from Psalm 23*, Robinson reflects his understanding of the personal aspect of God’s revelation in Scripture when he writes:

The Twenty-third Psalm affirms a profound personal faith in God; David’s faith was that kind. It demonstrates theology at work in the life of someone like me, someone like you. And it reveals a personal God who relates to us as individuals.⁶⁷

⁶⁴See above, 50, note 5.

⁶⁵Coleman explains: “Revelation is personal insofar as God reveals himself through a direct and personal relationship. Revelation is propositional insofar as God reveals objective truths about himself. The Christian faith receives its necessary balance only when revelation is both objective and direct, personal and propositional. If the nature of God’s revelation did not include the personal aspect, faith would become mere assent to a set of cold, impersonal facts. On the other hand, if it did not include the conceptual, faith would become merely an unverifiable, subjective experience. The objective norms which form the content of faith make it possible to distinguish a valid encounter with God from an encounter with the devil or with one’s inner self. So the validity of our experience of Christ’s is dependent upon our objective knowledge of God, and our personal relationship with Christ. The two are inseparable” (*Issues of Theological Warfare: Evangelicals and Liberals* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 78-79). Bernard Ramm argued in *Special Revelation and the Word of God*: “Real encounter in life between persons is always within the context of mutual knowledge. This mutual knowledge is not opposed to the encounter, but it is its indispensable instrument. The richness of love between a happily married couple cannot be exhaustively reduced to a set of propositions; but that such a rich love could come into being independently of mutual knowledge is absolutely impossible. Therefore to speak of revelation of a Person and not of truths is to speak—at least from the analogy of human encounter—nonsense. God is given in revelation as a Person, but along with truths of God. Encounter with God is meaningful because it is not ineffable; by virtue of the conceptual element of special revelation it is also a knowledge of God. Revelation is event and interpretation, encounter and truth, a Person and knowledge” (159-160). Such is the traditional evangelical understanding of personal and propositional revelation.

⁶⁶Robinson, 94.

⁶⁷*Trusting the Shepherd*, 11-12.

Thus, Robinson affirms the evangelical understanding of the interrelationship between personal and propositional revelation in the Bible.

His homiletical emphasis, however, is more on ideas or propositions drawn from the Bible about God. These ideas are the basis of his preaching paradigm. This is what distinguishes Robinson's approach from the Kerygmatic approach.⁶⁸ Kerygmatic preaching focuses more on bringing the congregation into an encounter with God⁶⁹ whereas Robinson's approach focuses more on bringing the congregation into an understanding of truth about God.⁷⁰ This approach, Robinson believes, will facilitate an encounter with God in his Word.⁷¹

3.2.1.2.3 Human Language Conveys Truth About God

The view of propositional revelation carries with it the assumption that human language is an adequate vehicle to convey truth about God. Noll explains in his study of evangelical biblical scholarship that a presupposition evangelicals carry concerning the truthfulness of the Bible is "belief in the reliability of language." He states: "Although few evangelicals spend much time considering the question directly, they assume that language is a fit vehicle for communicating real information about real states of affairs."⁷² Several

⁶⁸See above, 2.2.2.2.

⁶⁹The Kerygmatic approach does utilize propositions, but stresses the dynamic presence-of-God aspect of the preaching experience (Rose, 81-83).

⁷⁰Robinson, 23-24. As noted in 2.2.2.1, Robinson is part of the traditional homiletical paradigm which emphasizes preaching the divine truth in the Bible (Rose, 31).

⁷¹Robinson, 20.

⁷²Noll, 148.

evangelical scholars, such as John Frame,⁷³ James Packer,⁷⁴ Jack Barentsen,⁷⁵ and Carl Henry,⁷⁶ have recently addressed this issue directly. Robinson, like most evangelicals referred to by Noll, does not spend time considering this issue because he simply assumes it. Two evangelical assumptions concerning language thus emerge in his homiletical writings: human language is capable of conveying divine truth; and because words correspond with objective reality, the language of preaching must be clear and precise.

3.2.1.2.3.1 First assumption: Human language is capable of conveying divine truth.

Robinson never questions whether or not the language of the Bible can convey theological truth about God. He simply assumes that it does and focuses on the mechanics of expository sermon preparation. For example, in numerous places throughout *Biblical Preaching*, he admonishes the expositor to study the language of the text. Expositors, he says, “search for the objective meaning⁷⁷ of a passage through their understanding of the language, backgrounds, and setting of the text.”⁷⁸ Moreover, they should study the text in the various English translations⁷⁹ (for those who speak English) as well as in the original Hebrew

⁷³John M. Frame, “God and Biblical Language: Transcendence and Immanence,” in *God’s Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 159-177.

⁷⁴James. I. Packer, “The Adequacy of Human Language,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 197-226.

⁷⁵Jack Barentsen, “The Validity of Human Language: A Vehicle for Divine Truth,” *Grace Theological Journal* 9/1 (1988): 21-43.

⁷⁶Henry, 3: 248-487; 4:103-128.

⁷⁷The issues surrounding this term will be discussed below in the next chapter.

⁷⁸Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 24.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 59-60.

and Greek texts.⁸⁰ He thus encourages expositors to gain a working knowledge of the biblical languages. “Accuracy, as well as integrity,” he writes, “demands that we develop every possible skill to keep us from declaring in the name of God what the Holy Spirit never intended to convey.”⁸¹ Robinson therefore believes that by studying English translations and the original languages of the Bible, and by utilizing the “available linguistic tools,”⁸² the expositor can come to an accurate understanding of what the Holy Spirit intended to convey in the biblical text.

Two major objections to this view have been presented. The first objection, a theological one, originates with Karl Barth. Barth argued that “the words with which we can define” God are “themselves unfitted to this object and thus inappropriate to express and affirm the knowledge of Him.”⁸³ Barth’s argument runs thus: Because God is transcendent and the creator, redeemer, and Lord of all, How can any human language ever be fit to convey his word? Human language, like everything human and finite, can only be a servant, confessing its own unfitness, its own inadequacy. Thus, the Bible cannot be revelation, but only serve revelation. “To claim anything more for human language, for the Bible, is to dishonor God, to elevate something finite and human to divine status.”⁸⁴ Donald Bloesch,

⁸⁰Ibid., 61-62.

⁸¹Ibid., 62.

⁸²See *ibid.*, 62-65, where he lists study tools such as lexicons, concordances, grammars, word-study books, Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and CD-ROM Bible study programs.

⁸³Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2/1, “The Doctrine of God,” 188. Paul D. Feinberg points out that for Barth the inadequacy of human language is related to his view of God’s radical transcendence (“A Response to Adequacy of Language and Accommodation,” in *Hermeneutic, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, 385-386).

⁸⁴Frame, 164-165.

who follows Barth, also stresses that the language of the Bible “is not exempt from the crisis of the limitation of all human language in conveying real knowledge of God.”⁸⁵ Thus, the language of the Bible, like all human language, is inadequate to convey true knowledge about God.

Although Robinson does not address this theological objection directly as fellow evangelicals Frame,⁸⁶ Barentsen,⁸⁷ Packer,⁸⁸ and Henry have done,⁸⁹ he does insist that if the expository preacher seeks through proper exegetical study to understand the language of the text in its literary context, then he or she can understand its divine truth or message.⁹⁰ Consequently, “God speaks through the Bible.”⁹¹

The second objection is more philosophical: Language in general is incapable of talking about non-physical entities, especially the infinite.⁹² Again, Robinson doesn’t address

⁸⁵Bloesch, *Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 69. Here Bloesch is following, although not completely, his “theological mentor” Karl Barth (Hasel, 220, note 2; see White, 159, on Bloesch’s “Barthian theological orientation”).

⁸⁶See Frame’s engagement with Barth, 164-165, 173-175.

⁸⁷See Barentsen’s engagement with Barth, 25-27, 29-43.

⁸⁸See Packer’s discussion of Barth and his reflection of Kant’s thought, 214-216.

⁸⁹See Henry’s engagement with Barth, 1:188-192; 2:127-128, 143-148, 157-160; 3:224-228, 284-290, 466-469; 4:196-200, 256-271, 419-425, 427-430; 5:129, 316-319; 6:90-105; he also engages five arguments against the ability of theological language to tell the truth about God: 1) human language “is anthropomorphic, it is said, and hence incapable of providing information about God as he is in himself”; 2) “all language and knowledge are culturally conditioned and are therefore relative”; 3) “finite language is too limited to depict the Infinite”; 4) champions of analogical knowledge” also object to the possibility of literal truth about God; 5) some “neo-Protestant writers reject the literal truth of Scripture on the ground that religious language is by nature metaphorical or figurative” (Henry, 4:110-128).

⁹⁰Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001.

⁹¹Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

⁹²This view is affirmed in the philosophy of logical positivism. See for example, Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM, 1955); A. J. Ayer, *Language*,

this objection directly,⁹³ but instead assumes that the language of the Bible can convey literal truth about non-physical, spiritual concepts, especially God. For example, he counsels expositors in *Biblical Preaching* to look for the different ways God is revealed in the Bible:

God is always there. Look for Him. At different times He is the Creator, a good Father, the Redeemer, a rejected Lover, a Husband, a King, a Savior, a Warrior, a Judge, a Reaper, a vineyard Keeper, a banquet Host, a Fire, a Hen protecting her chicks, and so on.⁹⁴

These pictures of God in the Bible, he writes, are “always in the specific words” of the text.⁹⁵

Thus, Robinson assumes the evangelical position that truth and understanding about God are

Truth, and Logic (New York: Dover, 1946); idem, *Logical Positivism* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959); for evangelical engagement with logical positivism on the issue of language and God, see Frame, 166-175; Henry, 3: 347-361, 367-368; and Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 143-153. See also the linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans., C. K. Ogden (London: Kegan Paul, 1922); for evangelical engagement with Wittgenstein and a creative application of his approach to biblical studies, see Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 357-427.

⁹³Linguist scholar Robert E. Longacre provides a response to this view by arguing that “language is tooled to express more than the here and now.” He writes: “We can discourse effortlessly of events or persons far removed in time and space. We talk not only of the physical but of the psychical, i.e., of the interior life. We use verbs of motion and locomotion to express movement not only through physical space but also through logical space. Even in its central and primary usages, language is a flexible tool for expressing many non-physical concerns. . . . Language is set up, therefore, to discuss both the physical and the non-physical and has built-in resources of paraphrase, simile, and exemplification to further facilitate discourse. The literatures of the world are eloquent witness to these resources.” Thus, according to Longacre, language can discuss non-physical entities such as “God,” “love,” “holiness,” “goodness,” and “justice.” He acknowledges, however, that much of God’s “being—His infinity, eternity, omnipotence, exhaustive knowledge of the past, and control of the future—ultimately eludes us and outruns our conception and expression” (idem., *The Grammar of Discourse* [New York: Plenum, 1983], 353). Evangelicals thus acknowledge that while language should be put forth as a reliable and sufficient vehicle for conveying truth about God, language cannot be exhaustive about him. According to James E. White, “What Evangelical propositionalists maintain is that there is ontological faithfulness, not ontological exhaustiveness” (190; see also Frame, 160).

⁹⁴Ibid., 94. Bernard Ramm describes images such as these as part of the “anthropic character” of special revelation in Scripture. He writes: “By anthropic we mean that it is marked by human characteristics throughout. It speaks of the supersensible world (II Cor. 4:18) in the terms and analogies of our sensible world. The knowledge of God is framed in the language, concepts, metaphors, and analogies of men.” These “pictures,” he says, “are not man’s struggle to imagine deity, but they are one of the means whereby God ‘pictures’ himself to man” (*Special Revelation and the Word of God*, 36-37, 38). Robinson shares this same understanding (*Biblical Preaching*, 94).

⁹⁵Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 94.

conveyed in the biblical text.⁹⁶

3.2.1.2.3.2. Second assumption: Because words correspond with objective reality, the language of preaching must be clear and precise.

Robinson connects his view of Scripture with the language used in the pulpit. “An expository preacher professing a high view of inspiration should respect the power of words.” He contends: “To affirm that the individual words of Scripture must be God-breathed, but then to ignore our own choice of language smacks of gross inconsistency.”⁹⁷ Because he thus relates his view of Scripture to his view of pulpit language, a discussion on the language of preaching is appropriate at this juncture.

Lucy Rose has pointed out that the traditional homiletic’s “understanding of the purpose and content of preaching are inextricably linked with presuppositions about language.”⁹⁸ She thus argues that the traditional homiletic⁹⁹ presupposes a “bond between

⁹⁶Noll, 148. Besides the studies of Frame, Packer, Barentsen, and Henry, see the following studies which also seek to defend the ability of language to convey divine truth: Vern S. Poythress, “Adequacy of Language and Accommodation,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, 351-376; Feinberg, “A Response to Adequacy of Language and Accommodation,” in *ibid.*, 379-390; Kurt E. Marquart, “A Response to Adequacy of Language and Accommodation,” in *ibid.*, 393-405; Millard Erickson, “Language: Human Vehicle for Divine Truth,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, 2d. ed., eds. Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 208-216; *idem.*, *Christian Theology*, 135-157; William J. Larkin, Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying and Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 242-251; Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, 2d. ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2002), 19-32; and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁹⁷Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 184.

⁹⁸Rose, 31.

⁹⁹On the traditional homiletic, see above, 2.2.2.1.

language and objective reality,” that “words grasp and convey reality.”¹⁰⁰ This translates into an attitude of confidence: “confidence that preachers can choose words so that ‘the expression and the idea exactly correspond,’ confidence that words can convey truth, and confidence that the communication process is trustworthy if language is clear.”¹⁰¹ This view of language is shared by homiletics scholars in the evangelical expository homiletic,¹⁰² which is part of the traditional homiletic. As Noll pointed out, a fundamental conviction of evangelical scholarship is “that language is a fit vehicle for communicating information about real states of affairs.”¹⁰³

Robinson, who belongs to the evangelical expository hermeneutic, espouses the evangelical view that words correspond with objective reality, and consequently the language of preaching must be clear and precise to portray this reality. For instance, in chapter nine,

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 66, 67. Rose explains how each of the four homiletic paradigms view language. Summarizing the Kerygmatic homiletic’s view of language, she says: “Whereas in traditional homiletical theory the assumption is that all words are capable of conveying the reality to which they point, in kerygmatic homiletical theory words convey divine reality because of the activity of God’s word in the kerygma” (87). Concerning the New homiletic’s view of language, she writes that language under the transformational umbrella tends “to focus not on the unchanging reality behind the words,” but “on the change in the human situation created by the words.” Four convictions are present in this view, she says. One, language can bring about “changes in perception, values, or world views.” Second, words are events which can “both say things and do things” as in speech act theory and the new hermeneutic. Third, poetic language is important because it demands language which is “imaginative, evocative, even ambiguous.” Fourth, the relationship between language, sermonic experience, and human experience is important (140). Her own paradigm of conversational preaching “recognizes that language is inevitably confessional, both constructing and expressing the life experiences of communities and individuals. And conversational preaching values language capable of generating a variety of meanings in the congregation” (215-216). Her critique of the traditional homiletic, kerygmatic homiletic, and new homiletic and their views of language is found in 66-67, 116-118, 173-179, 207-216.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 34. She cites as representative, Broadus and Weatherspoon, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*; and Cox, *Preaching*.

¹⁰²See above, 2.3.

¹⁰³Noll, 148.

“The Dress of Thought,”¹⁰⁴ he presents his view of pulpit language and asserts that “ideas and words cannot be separated,” that “concepts assume the mold of the words into which they are poured,” and that “words capture and color the preacher’s thought.”¹⁰⁵ In an earlier chapter, while discussing the importance of “explanation” in the sermon, he writes:

You must not assume that your listeners immediately understand what you are talking about. You owe them a clear explanation of exactly what you mean. It is obvious that we should not use jargon or language that is unnecessarily abstract. If you must use theological language, you should define every important term in language the audience understands. Certainly it is better to define too many terms than too few. In explaining the relationships and implications of ideas, you should know the explanation yourself so clearly that no vagueness exists in your mind. Then you should work through the steps of the explanation so that they come in logical or psychological order. A mist in the pulpit can easily become a fog in the pew.¹⁰⁶

Thus, for Robinson, precision and clarity in language is very important. He even goes as far as to assert in chapter nine: “For preachers, clarity is a moral matter.” It is “not merely a question of rhetoric, but a matter of life and death.” He explains:

Imagine a physician who prescribes a drug but fails to give clear instruction as to how and when the drug is to be used. The physician puts the patient’s life at risk. It is a moral matter for a doctor to be clear. So, too, when we proclaim God’s truth, we must be clear. If we believe that what we preach either draws people to God or keeps them away from Him, then for God’s sake and the people’s sake, we must be clear.¹⁰⁷

Rose points out that this heavy emphasis on the sermon’s words being clear is a dominant feature of the traditional homiletic.¹⁰⁸ Robinson, for example, discusses the

¹⁰⁴Robinson, 183-199; this chapter comes after the presentation of the ten stages.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 184.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 143.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 188.

¹⁰⁸Rose, 32-34.

importance of “clear transitions for clear communication.”¹⁰⁹ He says a “clear style” will include “short sentences,” “simple sentence structure,” and “simple words.”¹¹⁰ Thus for him, clarity in preaching is of utmost importance.

Robinson also discusses vividness as a characteristic of effective style in preaching, which Rose also identifies as a feature of the traditional homiletic.¹¹¹ He says this vividness involves carefully crafting sentences with nouns and verbs that carry the meaning. He counsels expositors to use precise verbs, which “wake up the imagination.” Vividness also increases when metaphors and similes are employed to “produce sensations in listeners and cause them to recall images of past experiences.”¹¹² Yet, while imagination in the use of words is important for Robinson, clarity of expression is the most important.

A number of homiletic scholars do not share Robinson’s confidence that language conveys truth, clarity, and reality in the sermon. Robert E. C. Brown believes the “statements made by a minister of the Word are . . . ambiguous,” that “all his doctrinal statements are approximate and untidy descriptions of reality.”¹¹³ Joseph Settler goes further and questions the possibility of correspondence between language and reality.¹¹⁴ Thor Hall concludes that theological language expresses more the convictions of religious communities than the

¹⁰⁹Robinson, 186-187.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 187-192; he provides discussion on each of these elements.

¹¹¹Rose, 32-33.

¹¹²Robinson, 193-195.

¹¹³Robert E. C. Brown, *The Ministry of the Word*, 70.

¹¹⁴Joseph Sittler, *The Anguish of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 48, 51.

actuality of God.¹¹⁵ Lucy Rose follows Brown and “embraces the conviction that language is a construct that always ambiguously reflects that to which it points and always unavoidably reflects the limitations and sinful distortions of its users.”¹¹⁶

Robinson does not respond to any of these challenges¹¹⁷ for two reasons. First, the purpose of all his homiletical writings is to explicate the mechanics of expository preaching, not discuss theological or philosophical issues related to preaching. Second, the reliability of language in the Bible and preaching is not the issue for him like it is for the above homileticians. He writes for the evangelical reader and thus assumes, like his colleagues in the evangelical expository homiletic,¹¹⁸ that the language of the Bible and the language of the pulpit can point to realities.

One language issue should have been addressed by Robinson yet was not—the metaphysical limitations of language. Evangelical scholar James E. White states that while “language should be put forth as a reliable and sufficient vehicle for the communication of information about reality,” this view should be “clearly distanced” from “the assertion that language exhausts what it attempts to convey, especially in the area of metaphysics.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵Thor Hall, *The Future Shape of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 86-87.

¹¹⁶Rose, 214. See her discussion on Brown, Sittler, Hall, and others on language and preaching, 175-179, 207-214.

¹¹⁷See above, 72, note 96, for evangelicals who do respond to these challenges of language reliability.

¹¹⁸These homileticians like Robinson do not attempt to address the problems of language in preaching (see 43, note 111, for a list of the texts in the evangelical expository homiletic). See, for example, the discussions on clarity and style in Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 325-326; Olford and Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 170-171; Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 132-133; and Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 229-246. These discussions are very similar to Robinson's.

¹¹⁹White, 190.

Language, therefore, cannot provide absolute comprehensiveness in explaining God. This is a language issue of which evangelical preachers should be aware. James Packer suggests that evangelical preachers and theologians deal with this issue by learning to shape their own speech in a way that reproduces the substance of biblical teaching.¹²⁰

In concluding his discussion on style in preaching, Robinson provides three steps for the expositor to improve his or her use of language in the pulpit. First: “Pay attention to your own use of language,” which helps the preacher to improve personal style outside of the pulpit. Second: “Study how others use language,” which involves learning from effective models. And third: “Read aloud,” which will increase the preacher’s vocabulary and etch new patterns of speech and creative wording into his or her mind.¹²¹ Thus for Robinson, the preacher should work diligently towards clarity and vividness in preaching.

In sum, according to Robinson, the words of Scripture are “the Word of God written,” and convey cognitive truth about God. And because the expository preacher seeks to accurately communicate the message of the text during the sermon, his or her words must be clear, exact, and vivid.¹²² Such is the influence of the traditional evangelical view of revelation on Robinson’s approach to the Bible and preaching.

¹²⁰Packer, 224.

¹²¹Robinson, 197-198.

¹²²Ibid., 185, 193.

3.2.2 Inspiration¹²³

3.2.2.1 The Evangelical Context of Robinson's View of Inspiration

In recent years evangelical theologians have endeavored to classify the different theories of inspiration.¹²⁴ Millard Erickson, for example, describes five theories of inspiration in his *Christian Theology*: the intuition theory, the illumination theory, the dynamic theory, the verbal theory, and the dictation theory.¹²⁵ Of these five theories of inspiration, the verbal theory is the one generally espoused by evangelicals.¹²⁶ I. S. Rennie suggests, however, that with the recent rise of liberal evangelicalism, this "consensus is being questioned and newer, more open theories of inspiration are being broached within the broadly evangelical camp,

¹²³Explaining the relationship between revelation and inspiration is important to evangelicals. Note, for example, Erickson, who writes: "While revelation is the communication of truth from God to humans, inspiration relates more to the relaying of that truth from the first recipient(s) of it to other persons, whether then or later. Thus, revelation might be thought of as a vertical action, and inspiration as a horizontal matter" (*Christian Theology*, 226). Bernard Rams writes: "Inspiration derives its life and substance from revelation. . . . While it is the function of revelation to bring the sinner a soteric knowledge of God, it is the function of inspiration to preserve that revelation in the form of tradition and then in the form of a *graphe*. That is to say, the specific function of inspiration is to preserve revelation in a trustworthy and sufficient form" (Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God*, 175-176; italics his).

¹²⁴See, for example, David S. Dockery, who in *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority and Interpretation* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), employs the following terms in his classification: the "Dictation View," "Illumination View," "Encounter View," "Dynamic View," and "Plenary View" (50-55); Gerhard Maier in *Biblical Hermeneutics*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994), uses the following terms: "Personal Inspiration," "Inspiration of Ideas," "Verbal Inspiration," and "Entire Inspiration," (108-124); Garrett uses the following classification: "Verbal Inspiration with Inerrancy," "Dynamic or Limited Verbal Inspiration View," "Different Levels or Degrees of Inspiration," "Partial Inspiration," and "Universal Christian Inspiration," (116-119); see also Rene Pache, *The Inspiration & Authority of Scripture*, trans. Helen I. Needham (Salem, Wisc.: Sheffield Publishing Company, 1992), 57-70; Lewis and Demarest, 132-138; Thiessen, 63-65; Enns, 160-162; and Lemke, 177-184.

¹²⁵Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 231-233.

¹²⁶It should be pointed out that a number of evangelical theologians favor instead the dynamic theory of inspiration, sometimes called limited inspiration, which puts the focus on the thoughts and concepts of the biblical writer rather than his words (Erickson, 232). See, for example, G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*; Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals*; and the contributors in *The Authoritative Word: Essays on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

causing disturbances within the Evangelical Theological Society and the Institute for Biblical Research.”¹²⁷

The verbal theory, often called “verbal inspiration,” “insists that the Holy Spirit’s influence extends beyond the direction of thoughts to the selection of words used to convey the message.”¹²⁸ This view is usually expressed by the terms “verbal” and “plenary.” The term “verbal” places the focus of inspiration on the text of Scripture with all the words and all the verbal relationships.¹²⁹ The adjective plenary, from the Latin term meaning full, emphasizes that all portions of Scripture, text as well as authors, are inspired.¹³⁰ Some evangelicals hold this view to be in contrast to “partial inspiration.”¹³¹

Evangelical advocates of verbal inspiration are careful in pointing out that it is not the same as dictation inspiration. The dictation theory, in the past called the “typewriter theory,” is described as the suspension of the mental activity of the biblical writers “for the mechanical transcription of words supernaturally introduced into their consciousness.”¹³² Evangelicals

¹²⁷I. S. Rennie, “Verbal Inspiration,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 1244.

¹²⁸Erickson, 232.

¹²⁹Rennie, 1242. Evangelicals advocating verbal inspiration would endorse the following statement by John Barton: “So long as we are talking about the inspiration of scripture, it is hard to see how we can avoid calling the inspiration verbal, since the Bible, being a book or collection of books, is composed of words. There is considerable paradox in saying that a book is divinely inspired while denying that the inspiration extends to the words which comprise it” (“Verbal Inspiration,” *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden [London: SCM Press, 1990], 721).

¹³⁰Dockery, 55, 243; see also I. S. Rennie, “Plenary Inspiration,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 929; Pache combines the terms, verbal and plenary, to describe inspiration (71-79).

¹³¹See, for example, John Jefferson Davis, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 175.

¹³²J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (London: InterVarsity, 1958), 78-79.

endeavor to distance themselves from this theory by emphasizing the “concurvive theory.”¹³³

B. B. Warfield provides the classic explanation of this theory:

The Spirit is not to be conceived as standing outside of the human powers employed for the effect in view, ready to supplement any inadequacies they may show and to supply any defects they may manifest, but as working confluentlly in, with and by them, elevating them, directing them, controlling them, energizing them, so that, as His instruments, they rise above themselves and under His inspiration to do His work and reach His aim.¹³⁴

Thus, for Warfield, there is no suspension of mental activity because the divine and human aspects “are inseparable and coextensive, so that the Bible is completely divine and human at the same time.”¹³⁵ Hence, any association with the dictation theory is avoided.

Louis Igou Hodges critiques eight proposed evangelical definitions of inspiration and then proposes his own definition which he believes best captures the evangelical concurvive view of inspiration. His definition reads:

Graphic (written) inspiration is the activity by which that portion intended by God of his special revelation was put into permanent, authoritative, written form by the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit, who normally worked concurrently and confluentlly through the spontaneous thought processes, literary styles, and personalities of certain divinely-selected men in such a way that the product of their special labors (in its entirety) is the very Word of God (both the ideas and the specific vocabulary), complete, infallible, and inerrant in the original manuscripts.¹³⁶

¹³³“It is safe to say,” writes D. A. Carson, “that the central line of evangelical thought on the truthfulness of the Scriptures has entailed the adoption of the concurvive theory” (“Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 45).

¹³⁴B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 95; see also Packer, *God Has Spoken*, 94-95, for further conservative evangelical description of how this process works.

¹³⁵Peter Maarten van Bemmelen, *Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sunday and Warfield*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 13 (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1988), 361ff.

¹³⁶Louis Igou Hodges, “Evangelical Definitions of Inspiration: Critiques and A Suggested Definition,” *Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society* 37/1 (March 1994): 109; see entire article for various evangelical definitions of inspiration, 99-114.

In sum, according to David Dockery, the evangelical view of inspiration recognizes the human authorship as well as the divine character of Scripture. It never “divorces God’s deeds from his words” or “creates dichotomies between thoughts and words, processes and product, writers and written word, God’s initiating impulse and His complete superintending work.”¹³⁷ Biblical inspiration,¹³⁸ for the conservative evangelical, is thus inclusive, comprehensive, and total.¹³⁹

¹³⁷Dockery, 68.

¹³⁸James Barr, in his significant critique of Fundamentalism/Evangelicalism (he views the two as overlapping (*Fundamentalism*, 2d. ed. [London: SCM Press, 1981], 6), challenges the “conservative arguments” that the Bible itself “claims” to be divinely inspired. “All this is nonsense,” he declares, “there is no ‘the Bible’ claims to be divinely inspired, there is no ‘it’ that has a ‘view of itself.’ There is only this or that source, like II Timothy or II Peter, which make statements about certain other writings, these rather undefined. There is no such thing as ‘the Bible’s view of itself’ from which a fully authoritative answer to these questions can be obtained. This whole side of the traditional conservative apologetic, though loudly vociferated, just does not exist; there is no case to answer” (78; see also idem., *Beyond Fundamentalism* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984], 124ff). For evangelical responses to this challenge see Henry, 4:134ff; and Dockery, “A People of the Book and the Crisis of Biblical Authority,” in *Beyond the Impasse? Scripture, Interpretation & Theology in Baptist Life*, ed. Robinson B. James and David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1992), 19ff. See also the evangelical studies on Scripture’s self-testimony: John Frame, “Scripture Speaks for Itself,” in *God’s Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, 178-200; Sinclair B. Ferguson, “How Does the Bible Look at Itself?” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 47-66; and Wayne A. Grudem, “Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 19-59. For a more general evangelical critique of Barr’s views on the Bible see Paul Ronald Wells, *James Barr and the Bible: Critique of the New Liberalism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980).

¹³⁹The verbal theory in the context of concursus is similar to the view espoused by the writer of this thesis. Instead of the term verbal, however, we prefer the term suggested by Gerhard Maier in his *Biblical Hermeneutics*: “entire inspiration” (120). Maier gives four reasons why he prefers this term over the other. First, the term “entire inspiration is taken directly from the Bible-2 Timothy 3:16. Second, applying “an overtly biblical term like *entire inspiration* is preferable to resorting to some other conceptual formation” such as thought inspiration or verbal inspiration. Third, this term reflects influential traditions of history. Fourth, this term avoids the “misunderstandings and blunders associated with the traditional doctrine of ‘verbal inspiration.’” Maier is quick to point out, however, that he shares “one aspect of the hotly disputed doctrine of verbal inspiration”; that “God’s Spirit brought forth and permeates absolutely no less or other than the *entire* Scripture (120-121, italics his). The writer concurs.

3.2.2.2 Robinson's View of Inspiration

When asked in the interview to explain his view of inspiration, Robinson replied: "I believe in the full inspiration of the Bible and I believe it is inspired to its words." When questioned if he meant verbal inspiration, Robinson indicated to the researcher that his personal view was verbal, plenary inspiration.¹⁴⁰ Thus, Robinson espouses the verbal theory in Erickson's classification of inspiration theories referred to above. Robinson writes:

God speaks through the Scriptures to all men in all time. The Bible is not merely "the old, old story" of what God did in some other time and place, nor is it only a statement of ideas about God-inspired and inerrant. The Bible is God's tool of communication through which He addresses men today.¹⁴¹

Thus, verbal inspiration is the "high view of inspiration,"¹⁴² Robinson espouses.

In the interview as well as in his homiletical writings, Robinson is more concerned with how verbal inspiration is used in preaching than the doctrine itself. For example, he sounds a warning about applying verbal inspiration—the inspiration of individual words—to the interpretation of Scripture too strictly. He writes:

In the battle for the inspiration of individual words of Scripture we sometimes forget that words are merely "semantic markers for a field of meaning." Particular statements must be understood within the broader thought of which they are a part or what we teach may not be God's Word at all.¹⁴³

He goes on to say that "an emphasis on verbal inspiration sometimes lures a preacher

¹⁴⁰Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001.

¹⁴¹Robinson, "What is Expository Preaching?" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 131/521 (January-March, 1974), 57.

¹⁴²Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 803. It should be noted that Robinson accepts the evangelical "concurrent theory" of inspiration over the mechanical dictation theory (*idem.*, Interview); see above, 3.2.2.1, on the difference.

¹⁴³Robinson, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 805.

into eisegesis and error.”¹⁴⁴ His concern is that a preacher might focus so much on the meaning of an individual word, because he believes it is verbally inspired, that the word’s context might be ignored and distorted.¹⁴⁵ In explaining this concern to the researcher, he warned:

The tendency is for people to believe if every word is guarded by God then every word has a significance all by itself. And I don’t believe that. I think the Bible was written in language, and then grammar, and that words are simply a semantic marker for a field of meaning and a word written really doesn’t mean anything until it is put into its context. So the danger of that doctrine (verbal inspiration) when it comes to preaching is that people go through the text verse by verse, word by word. At that point, the doctrine gets in the way of what the Bible really is—literature.¹⁴⁶

Words and phrases thus “should never become ends in themselves,” he emphasizes. “Words are stupid things until linked with other words to convey meaning.” He explains:

In our approach to the Bible, therefore, we are primarily concerned not with what individual words mean, but with what the biblical writers mean through their use of words. Putting this another way, we do not understand the concepts of a passage merely by analyzing its separate words. A word-by-word grammatical analysis can be as pointless and boring as reading a dictionary. If we desire to understand the Bible in order to communicate its message, we must grapple with it on the level of ideas.¹⁴⁷

So, in Robinson’s thinking, while the verbal theory is his preferred view of Scriptural inspiration, too much emphasis on it during the process of sermon study could be harmful.

Robinson’s statement about words being “stupid things until linked with other words

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵See *ibid.*, 805-806, where he provides examples of how preachers ignore biblical context. Robinson also sounds the same warning in *Biblical Preaching*, 23.

¹⁴⁶Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001.

¹⁴⁷Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 23.

to convey meaning,”¹⁴⁸ suggests an inconsistency with the verbal theory of inspiration. If he believes in verbal, plenary inspiration, which emphasizes the authority of every word, then how can he view a single word as stupid? Do not words make up sentences and paragraphs which “convey meaning?” Robinson affirms that words do convey meaning by asserting “that ideas and words cannot be separated.”¹⁴⁹ If this is the case, and words are “stupid things,” then will they not produce stupid ideas? Robinson would deny this by contending that his point, as noted above, is to emphasize the importance of studying words in their context. But calling words in the biblical text “stupid things” while at the same time espousing verbal inspiration is methodologically inconsistent.¹⁵⁰

The implication of Robinson’s view of verbal inspiration for his approach to expository preaching is noteworthy. He writes that expository preaching “emerges not merely as a type of sermon—one among many—but as the theological outgrowth of a high view of inspiration.” It thus “reflects a preacher’s honest effort to submit his thought to the Bible rather than to submit the Bible to his thought.”¹⁵¹ Thus, the “high view” of verbal inspiration which Robinson espouses produces preaching that “finds its source in the Bible.”¹⁵² His approach to study for this type of preaching manifests itself in a detailed attention to the text

¹⁴⁸Ibid, 23; see also 63.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 184.

¹⁵⁰A better way to express his point would be: “A word, unless it constitutes a sentence by itself, does not say anything; it is only a building block used to construct a sentence that says something. Words by themselves simply imply potential fields of concepts, which are made specific by the sentences in which they occur” (McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 122).

¹⁵¹Idem., “Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” 803. For further discussion on this statement, see below, 4.3.1.

¹⁵²Ibid.

during sermon preparation.¹⁵³

3.2.3 Inerrancy¹⁵⁴

3.2.3.1 The Evangelical Context of Robinson's View of Inerrancy

Like the classification for inspiration theories, evangelicals have endeavored to classify the different views of inerrancy.¹⁵⁵ Erickson proposes a seven-fold classification: absolute inerrancy, full inerrancy, limited inerrancy, inerrancy of purpose, accommodated revelation, nonpropositional revelation, and irrelevance of inerrancy.¹⁵⁶

After discussing the theological, historical, and epistemological importance of inerrancy¹⁵⁷ and its relationship to biblical phenomena,¹⁵⁸ Erickson provides his own definition

¹⁵³See Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 59-60.

¹⁵⁴Donald Carson has pointed out that "until fairly recently [1975], the infallibility or inerrancy of Scripture was one of the self-identifying flags of Evangelicalism, recognized by friend and foe alike" ("Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," 10; see also Ellingsen, *The Evangelical Movement*, 207). According to Donald Bloesch, however, the issue of inerrancy has been incorrectly identified as the distinctive characteristic of Evangelicalism (*The Future of Evangelical Christianity: A Call for Unity Amid Diversity* [Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1988], 11, 13).

¹⁵⁵See for example, Robert Johnston, who uses the following terms: "Detailed Inerrancy," "Partial Infallibility," "Irenic Inerrancy," and "Complete Infallibility" (*Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979], 19-35); and Steve Lemke, who employs the following terms: "Propositional Inerrancy," "Pietistic Inerrancy" (or "Simple Biblicism," this is the only non-scholarly view, according to Lemke, 185), "Nuanced Inerrancy," "Critical Inerrancy," and "Functional Inerrancy" ("The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 176-193); Gabriel Fackre has classified the views into three major types with sub-types: first, the "Oracular View" with no sub-types; second, the "Inerrancy View," in which he distinguishes "Transmissive Inerrancy," "Trajectory Inerrancy," and "Intentional Inerrancy"; and third, the "Infallibilist View," in which he distinguishes "Unitive Infallibility," "Essentialist Infallibility," and "Christocentric Infallibility" (*Authority: Scripture in the Church for the World*, 62-73; see also idem., "Evangelical Hermeneutics: Commonality and Diversity," *Interpretation* 43/2 [April 1989]: 120-127).

¹⁵⁶Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 248-250. The last three views reject the term.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 250-254.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 255-259. Here Erickson provides an overview of the different ways phenomena is handled by scholars. It should be noted that several evangelicals have written substantial, scholarly books dealing with biblical phenomena such as apparent discrepancies, chronological problems, and other difficulties. See, for

of inerrancy: "The Bible, when correctly interpreted in light of the level to which culture and the means of communication has developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms." He says that "this definition reflects the position earlier termed full inerrancy."¹⁵⁹ Paul D. Feinberg, in his article on the meaning of inerrancy, also provides a definition highly valued by conservative evangelicals: "Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences."¹⁶⁰

example, Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1992); Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Edwin Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977); John W. Halley, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977); David R. Hall, *The Seven Pillories of Wisdom* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1990); Eta Linnemann, *Is There A Synoptic Problem? Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels*, trans., Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992). Some evangelicals believe that these kinds of polemical works have a tendency towards "forced harmonization in light of an allegiance to biblical inerrancy" (White, 191). For an important evangelical discussion of harmonization, see Craig L. Blomberg, "The Legitimacy and Limits of Harmonization," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 139-174.

¹⁵⁹Erickson, 259. Erickson's view of inerrancy is not without its evangelical critics. James E. White provides a summary of evangelical concerns about Erickson's view of inerrancy and truth (133-135); see also *ibid.*, 179, for a concise summary of non-evangelical critiques of full or absolute inerrancy. One of the most persistent critics of the evangelical view of inerrancy has been James Barr; see, for example, Barr's *Fundamentalism; Beyond Fundamentalism; Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983); and *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (London: SCM, 1980); for a concise summary of evangelical responses to the many arguments advanced against inerrancy, see White, 191-192.

¹⁶⁰"The Meaning of Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, 294. See the entire article, 267-304, for a thorough discussion of inerrancy. D. A. Carson suggests that "it would be a great help to clarity of thought if no one would comment on the appropriateness or otherwise of the term 'inerrancy' without reading" this essay by Feineberg ("Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," 7); see also Henry's lengthy discussion of inerrancy and infallibility, 3: 162-255. It should be noted that not all evangelicals concur with Feineberg's view of inerrancy on historical and scientific matters in the Bible. For a discussion of two different groups of evangelical scholars on these matters, see Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 155-160. The first group, he terms "critical anti-critics" who believe "that the infallibility, or inerrancy, of the Bible is the epistemological keystone of Christianity itself" (156f). The other group he terms "believing criticism" who "affirm that historical, textual, literary, and other forms of research (if they are not predicated on the denial of the

These understandings of inerrancy are different from the view of “limited inerrancy,” an understanding held by a number of evangelicals. “Limited inerrancy” regards the Bible as inerrant in its salvific doctrinal references, but fallible in some of its scientific and historical references. The existing errors are considered no great consequence since the Bible only purports to teach on matters of salvation, not science and history.¹⁶¹ As can be seen, evangelicals do not all hold the same views on inerrancy.¹⁶²

3.2.3.2 Robinson’s View of Inerrancy

When asked which view of inerrancy he espoused, whether absolute, full, or limited, Robinson told the researcher his view was “full inerrancy” as Erickson articulated it.¹⁶³

supernatural) may legitimately produce conclusions that overturn traditional evangelical beliefs about the Bible” (ibid., 158f).

¹⁶¹Erickson, 248-249.

¹⁶²See the discussion in Noll, 155-160. Conservative evangelical leader John Stott expresses discomfort with the term “inerrancy.” He believes that “God’s self-revelation in Scripture is so rich—both in content and form—that it cannot be reduced to a string of propositions which invite the label ‘truth’ or ‘error.’” Furthermore, he feels the word “inerrancy” is a “double negative,” and “sends out the wrong signals and develops the wrong attitudes.” He also believes that “it is unwise and unfair to use ‘inerrancy’ as a shibboleth by which to identify who is evangelical and who is not.” Submission to the teaching of the Bible is more important than subscription to “an impeccable formula about the Bible.” Finally, Stott believes “it is impossible to prove that the Bible contains no errors. When faced with an apparent discrepancy, the most Christian response is neither to make a premature negative judgement nor to resort to a contrived harmonization, but rather to suspend judgement, waiting patiently for further light to be given us. Many former problems have been solved this way.” Thus, instead of the term “inerrancy,” he prefers “true and trustworthy” (*Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity & Faithfulness* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999], 61-62). This researcher also prefers the terms “true and trustworthy” over inerrancy to describe the nature of Scripture.

¹⁶³Erickson explains the view of “full inerrancy” by comparing and contrasting it with the view of “absolute inerrancy” which “holds that the Bible, which includes a rather detailed treatment of matters both scientific and historical, is fully true.” Thus, “apparent discrepancies” in scientific and historical data “can and must be explained.” Full inerrancy, Erickson writes, “also holds that the Bible is completely true. While the Bible does not primarily aim to give scientific and historical data, such scientific and historical assertions as it does make are fully true. There is no essential difference between this position and absolute inerrancy in terms of their view of the religious/theological/spiritual message. The understanding of the scientific and historical references is quite different, however. Full inerrancy regards these references as phenomenal; that is, they are reported the way they appear to the human eye. They are not necessarily exact; rather, they are

Moreover, Robinson participated in Summit II of the ICBI in 1982, in which Norman Geisler stated that all of the participants “are in agreement with the ICBI stand on inerrancy.”¹⁶⁴ Robinson openly acknowledges that he agrees with the entire Summit I document, “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” which embraces the full view of inerrancy.¹⁶⁵

In explaining his view of full inerrancy to the researcher, Robinson said:

I believe the Bible is without error in all that it affirms. I think when we talk about error, we also need to talk about accuracy. And we often want to impose upon the biblical writers norms and standards which are true of the twenty-first century, but are not necessarily true of the people in the ancient world. I don't think you can hold the biblical writers to our same standards of historical and scientific accuracy. We have no right to make up the standards for anybody else. So you have got to take them on their own terms. And in that sense, I believe the Bible is inerrant.¹⁶⁶

Thus, as in revelation and inspiration, Robinson espouses the traditional, more conservative evangelical view of inerrancy.

popular descriptions, often involving general references or approximations. Yet they are correct. What they teach is essentially correct in the way they teach it” (248).

¹⁶⁴See Geisler, “General Editor’s Introduction,” *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*, x. The ICBI council produced the two statements: “The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy” in 1978—Summit I, and “The Chicago Statement on Hermeneutics” in 1982—Summit II. Robinson contributed to Summit II the paper entitled, “Homiletics and Hermeneutics” (*ibid.*, 803-837). For more on the work of the ICBI see above, 13, note 55.

¹⁶⁵Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001. It should be noted that D. A. Carson thinks the ICBI is somewhat unrepresentative of evangelicalism because “many Evangelicals in America and abroad have contributed” to the debate on inerrancy “without any organizational connection to ICBI” (“Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture, 7); Gerald Bray remarks: “To what extent can the two Chicago declarations be regarded as representative of current evangelical thinking about biblical interpretation? Many evangelical biblical scholars, and probably almost all those outside the USA, would hesitate to accept them *in toto*, either because they disagree with specific points, or because they do not believe that statements of this kind are necessary or even helpful” (*Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996], 560).

¹⁶⁶Robinson, Interview; here Robinson is essentially expressing the view of “full inerrancy” as articulated by Erickson, see above, 87, note 163.

In his paper presented at Summit II of the ICBI, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*,¹⁶⁷ Robinson was originally assigned the topic, “The Relationship of Inerrancy To Preaching.”¹⁶⁸ Instead, he chose to deal “with the related issues of hermeneutics and homiletics.”¹⁶⁹ In his response paper, John F. MacArthur, Jr., points out that Robinson “only assumes matters which link inerrancy to expository preaching and does not adequately define any of these terms.” Furthermore, MacArthur maintains that Robinson does not “show the relationship of the interpretive process to exegetical theology and to expositional preaching.” He says that Robinson only “assumes rather than presents the subject assigned for this paper, i.e., the relationship between inerrancy, exegesis and exposition.”¹⁷⁰

As noted in the above discussions on revelation and inspiration, Robinson is consistent in only assuming his view of Scripture in his homiletic writings. He leaves the exposition of the evangelical prolegomena of Scripture to theologians and, instead, addresses the practical issue of constructing expository sermons. He explained the reason for this practical focus while discussing the second edition of *Biblical Preaching* with the researcher:

The thing I had to guard against in redoing my book was adding material. It has been valuable to people just starting out, to those who did not have a grasp of homiletics and gave them a way of pursuing it. I have watched people who teach homiletics. One of the difficulties is they, I think, try to cover too much. And in covering too much,

¹⁶⁷This paper is printed in the volume, *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, edited by Radmacher and Preus, 803-815, which is a “record of the ICBI Summit II proceedings” (vii). Each presenter contributed a paper and two respondents presented their reaction (see “Contents,” v-vi.). Robinson’s two respondents were John F. MacArthur, Jr., *A Response to Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, in *ibid.*, 819-830; and Erwin W. Lutzer, *A Response to Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, in *ibid.*, 833-837.

¹⁶⁸So said MacArthur in his *Response*, 819.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*

in covering everything, they cover nothing. Jerry Vine just finished a book. As a basic text, it is worthless. They cover everything! Anything and everything! But if you think you are going to give that to a first-year preaching student, you are going to throw him. A basic text in homiletics should be one that is usable and clear. So I found myself on several occasions putting too much in the second edition of *Biblical Preaching*. The temptation in writing a book like this is to write it for the professor rather than the fellow out there who doesn't have a lot of time.¹⁷¹

It is noteworthy that the book Robinson refers to by Vine spends several pages discussing the evangelical prolegomena and its relationship to expository preaching.¹⁷² Robinson, therefore, focuses his homiletical teaching on the practical mechanics of preparing expository sermons and only makes a few references to the "orthodox" view of inspiration and inerrancy.¹⁷³ Thus MacArthur is correct when he says Robinson only "assumes" the link of inerrancy to expository preaching. Robinson's purpose in this paper was specifically to "show that the work of exegesis, hermeneutics, and homiletics are linked together as supporting disciplines."¹⁷⁴

In his response to Robinson, MacArthur proceeds to present "some precise thinking on the originally assigned subject"¹⁷⁵ of inerrancy's relationship to expository preaching. Reflecting on the "assigned subject" in the context of all the papers presented at Summit II of the ICBI, he asserts that "it is the link between affirming truth and confirming people in truth through proclamation" and "is in a real sense the confluence of all previous papers and

¹⁷¹Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001.

¹⁷²Vine and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 48-56.

¹⁷³Robinson *Biblical Preaching*, 23; "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 805.

¹⁷⁴According to Gibson, who edited *Making A Difference in Preaching*, which contains this paper by Robinson, 14.

¹⁷⁵MacArthur, 819.

the capstone to the careful handling of God's Word."¹⁷⁶ He argues that expository preaching "is the declarative genre in which inerrancy finds its logical expression and the church its life and power."¹⁷⁷ Thus, "inerrancy demands exposition as the only method of preaching which preserves the purity of God's Word and accomplishes the purpose for which God gave it."¹⁷⁸

The core of MacArthur's view is summed up in the following propositions he invites the reader to consider:

1. God gave his true Word to be communicated *entirely* as He gave it, that is, the whole counsel of God is to be preached (Matt. 28:20; Acts 5:20, 20:27). Correspondingly, every portion of the Word of God needs to be considered in the light of its whole.
2. God gave His true Word to be communicated *exactly* as He gave it. It is to be dispensed precisely as it was delivered without the message being altered.
3. Only the exegetical process which yields expository proclamation will accomplish propositions 1 and 2 (*italics his*).¹⁷⁹

Because Robinson also affirms inerrancy and argues along the same lines as MacArthur that expository preaching is the best method for inerrant Scripture,¹⁸⁰ he is close to MacArthur's "precise thinking." The difference between the two is that Robinson does not think it necessary to focus so much on the doctrine of inerrancy in order to make the point that expository preaching is the best way to preach the Bible.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 820-821.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 821.

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 805, 809, 815.

¹⁸¹One recent evangelical study affirms MacArthur's view that inerrancy cannot be separated from the discussion of expository preaching: Jerry Vinson Welch, "The Homiletical Implications of Inerrancy: A Case for Expository Preaching," (Ph.D. dissertation, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999).

3.2.4 Authority

3.2.4.1 The Evangelical Context of Robinson's View of Authority

While evangelicals may quibble about the nature of revelation, inspiration, and inerrancy, they are in basic agreement on the idea that the Bible is authoritative for Christian life and theology. "The most characteristic feature of evangelicalism," writes Derek Tidball, "is the place it gives to the Bible." The Bible, he goes on to say, is for evangelicals the "supreme authority for all matters concerning life and faith; what they are to believe and how they are to behave."¹⁸² Kenneth Kantzer declares that evangelical theology seeks to construct theology "on the teaching of the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible;¹⁸³ and this formative principle represents a basic unifying factor throughout the whole of contemporary evangelicalism."¹⁸⁴

The authority of Scripture¹⁸⁵ for evangelicals has been expressed in the fourth

¹⁸²Derek Tidball, *Who Are the Evangelicals?* 80.

¹⁸³A number of Evangelicals, who favor the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral," prefer *prima scriptura* rather than *sola Scriptura* (see Woodrow W. Whidden, "Sola Scriptura, Inerrantist Fundamentalism, and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Is 'No Creed but the Bible' a Workable Solution?" *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 35/2 [Autumn 1997]: 211-226). The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a fourfold complex of authorities which John Wesley used as the authorities to guide him: Holy Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. On this, see, for example, the following studies: *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1985); Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); and Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 55-99.

¹⁸⁴Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Unity and Diversity in Evangelical Faith," in Wells and Woodbridge, 52. See also Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 6-7.

¹⁸⁵According to the Gerhard F. Hasel, the authority of the Bible is in a crisis ("The Crisis of the Authority of the Bible as the Word of God," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 1/1 [Spring 1990]: 16-38). Alister McGrath, however, thinks that to speak of a modern "crisis in biblical authority" is "misleading" (*A Passion for Truth*, 57). He suggest "the number of Christians who regard Scripture as authoritative is increasing; those who, in sympathy with more liberal trends, have moved away from biblically centered forms of Christianity are in decline." Several evangelical scholars tend to agree more with Hasel that

affirmation of the consultation on “Evangelical Affirmations,” which met on the campus of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in May of 1989. The first two paragraphs of affirmation 4, “Holy Scripture,” read:

We affirm the complete truthfulness and the full and final authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures as the Word of God written. The appropriate response to it is humble assent and obedience.

The Word of God becomes effective by the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through it. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit¹⁸⁶ creates faith and provides a sufficient doctrinal and moral guide for the church. Just as God’s self-giving love to us in the gospel provides the supreme motive for the Christian life, so the teaching of Holy Scripture informs us of what are truly acts of love.¹⁸⁷

3.2.4.2 Robinson’s View of Authority

Reflecting the above “Evangelical Affirmation,” Robinson states in *Biblical Preaching*, “Ultimately, the authority behind preaching resides not in the preacher, but in the biblical text.”¹⁸⁸ In saying this, he is not denying the personal authority the preacher must have in the pulpit. He believes the preacher must present the message in such a way as to

the authority of Scripture is in crisis, such as David Dockery (*Christian Scripture*, 1-13), Donald Carson (“Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture,” 5-48), and Mark A. Noll (“Evangelicals and the Study of the Bible,” in Marsden, *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, 103-121, especially 198, note 39). For coverage of various issues relating to Scripture and authority, see Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story: A Pastoral Systematics*, vol. 2, *Authority*.

¹⁸⁶In his discussion on authority, Erickson writes about the objective word in Scripture and the subjective word in the inner illumination and conviction of the Holy Spirit, which together, constitute the authority for the Christian (*Christian Theology*, 273-279). For a comprehensive study on illumination, see Koranteng-Pipim’s dissertation.

¹⁸⁷Kantzer and Henry, 32-33. For further discussions on the authority of Scripture by evangelicals, see, for example, Henry, 4: 7-128; James D. G. Dunn, who differs with Henry in several areas, “The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture,” *Churchman* 95/2 (1982): 104-122; idem., “The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture Continued,” *Churchman*, 95/3 (1982): 201-225; and R. L. Hatchett, “The Authority of the Bible,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 194-207.

¹⁸⁸Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 24.

command the attention of the audience. But his point in this statement is that “in expository preaching,” the “authority of the message lies in the authority of the Word of God.”¹⁸⁹ He clarifies the relationship between biblical authority and personal authority:

The effectiveness of our sermons depends on two factors: what we say and how we say it. Both are important. Apart from life-related, biblical content, we have nothing worth communicating; but without skillful delivery, we will not get that content across to a congregation. In order of significance, the ingredients making up the sermon are thought, arrangement, language, voice, and gesture. In priority of impressions, however, the order is reversed. Gestures and voice emerge as the most obvious and determinative part of preaching. Every empirical study of delivery and its effect on the outcome of a speech or sermon arrives at an identical conclusion: your delivery matters a great deal.¹⁹⁰

He also emphasizes that a preacher’s character or lifestyle can strengthen or weaken the authority of the expository sermon. The preacher, therefore, “cannot be separated from the message.” He explains:

Who has not heard some devout brother or sister pray in anticipation of a sermon, “Hide our pastor behind the cross so that we may see not him but Jesus only”? We commend the spirit of such a prayer. . . . Yet no place exists where a preacher may hide. Even a large pulpit cannot conceal us from view. Phillips Brooks was on to something when he described preaching as “truth through personality.” We affect our message. We may be mouthing a scriptural idea, yet we can remain as impersonal as a telephone recording, as superficial as a radio commercial, or as manipulative as a con man. The audience does not hear a sermon, they hear a person—they hear you.¹⁹¹

Thus, sermon delivery and the preacher’s character are, for Robinson, important elements of personal authority in expository preaching.¹⁹² But he insists the message of the

¹⁸⁹Idem., Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001.

¹⁹⁰Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 201-202.

¹⁹¹Ibid., 25-26; cf. Chapell’s discussion on the same issue in *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 25-30.

¹⁹²See also Robinson, “What Authority do We Have Anymore?” *Leadership* 13/2 (Spring 1992): 24-29; reprinted in Gibson, 29-39, where he suggest six guidelines to help the preacher regain and maintain

biblical text is the fundamental element of authority for the expositor.

Even in a discussion of sermon form, Robinson teaches that the message of the biblical passage takes precedence over sermon form. “Expository sermons,” he says, “are not identified by the form they take, whether it is a ‘verse by verse’ analysis of a text, a didactic explanation of a doctrine, or a key word that holds the points together. Any form that communicates the message of a passage clearly so that the listeners understand it, accept it, and know what to do about it is adequate.”¹⁹³ Thus, there is no “glass slipper” form which fits all sermons. “An expository preacher is free to work the biblical material in any manner that will tellingly communicate the message of a text to the listener.” The key issue is whether a particular sermon form “opens up the text to reflect the meaning and emphasis of a biblical author.”¹⁹⁴ Hence, Robinson reflects his high view of biblical authority in discussing sermon form.

The essential way to express Scriptural authority in the pulpit, then, is through expository preaching, which “is derived from and transmitted through a study of a passage (or passages) in context.”¹⁹⁵ This approach, Robinson believes, “best carries the force of divine authority.”¹⁹⁶ When preachers “fail to preach the Scriptures, they abandon their

legitimate authority. These guidelines involve relating to the listeners as well as the Bible during the sermon and beyond the sermon.

¹⁹³Robinson, *Biblical Sermons*, 194; cf. *idem*, *Biblical Preaching*, 131.

¹⁹⁴*Idem.*, *Biblical Sermons*, 193, 257.

¹⁹⁵*Idem.*, “Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” 804.

¹⁹⁶*Idem.*, *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

authority.”¹⁹⁷ Accordingly, expository preaching approaches the Bible in a spirit of humility and yields to its ultimate authority,” he asserts.¹⁹⁸ A high view of Scriptural authority, therefore, is an important presupposition in Robinson’s philosophy of expository preaching.

Homiletic scholar David Buttrick takes issue with Robinson on the authority of the Bible for preaching.¹⁹⁹ He argues that preaching should not be focused on a book, the Bible, but on the gospel.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, he says, “people will no longer think in bookish/rational

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 21-22; idem., *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 803. For other evangelical homileticians, who agree with Robinson on the importance of biblical authority in preaching, see, for example, J. I. Packer, “Introduction: Why Preach?” in *The Preacher and Preaching*, 11-14; Chapell, 18-25; David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching*, 34; R. Albert Mohler, “A Theology of Preaching,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1992), 14-16; Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 12-15. The typical view of authority in the evangelical expository homiletic is expressed by Wayne Grudem: “Throughout the history of the church the greatest preachers have been those who have recognized that they have no authority in themselves and have seen their task as being to explain the words of Scripture and apply them clearly to the lives of their hearers. Their preaching has drawn its power not from the proclamation of their own Christian experiences or the experiences of others, nor from their own opinions, creative ideas, or rhetorical skills, but from God’s powerful words. Essentially they stood in the pulpit, pointed to the biblical text, and said in effect to the congregation, ‘This is what this verse means. Do you see that meaning here as well? Then you must believe it and obey it with all your heart, for God himself, your Creator and your Lord, is saying this to you today!’ Only the written words of Scripture can give this kind of authority to preaching” (Grudem, 82; cf. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20-21). Grudem adds a footnote to this statement: “I am not denying that good speaking ability or creativity or telling of personal experiences have a place in preaching, for good preaching will include all of these. I am saying that the power to change lives must come from the Word itself, and it will be evident to the hearers when a preacher really believes this” (82, note 12).

¹⁹⁹In his latest book, *Speaking Parables: A Homiletic Guide*, Buttrick elaborates on Scripture as “gift” and suggest that this is a much better term than “authority.” He writes: “While I delight in scripture and enjoy studying and restudying the Bible, and while I read scripture with excitement, finding more and more insight into the mystery of God, I do not bother with the notion of ‘authority.’ We revere the Bible because it brings us good news of God and not because it is super perfect. The Bible is *not* an inerrant ‘Word of God.’ The idea is silly” (xii; italics his). His view of the non-authority of the Bible is translated into the way he approaches the parables. For example, he suggest that Matthew has misinterpreted several of Jesus’ parables. He goes as far as to say that “Matthew has handed us dreadful theology. . . . Do I suspect that the Gospel writers sometimes have misunderstood the parables of Jesus? Yes I do” (ix). He does concede, however, that his criticism of Matthew is “as prone to error as anyone” (xii). See also, idem., “The Use of the Bible in Preaching,” 188-199.

²⁰⁰Idem., “The Use of the Bible in Preaching,” 190.

patterns of thought, but rather will think in ways that are formed by the electronic devices that they use and that use them.” Thus, “it will be almost impossible to retain a book-authority mentality in the forthcoming twenty-first century.” Hence, the Protestant understanding of the phrase, “Word of God,” will have to be “revised in an oral direction.”²⁰¹ The “oral direction” Buttrick has in mind is elevating preaching as “Word of God” above the evangelical understanding of the Bible as the Word of God.²⁰²

In response to the possibility of preaching itself being elevated above the written Word of God in the Bible, Robinson would respond that when the Scriptures are not preached or expounded, the preacher abandons his or her authority. “God is not in it,” he contends. Only when the Scriptures themselves are preached does something happen in the lives of the listeners.²⁰³

Thus, Robinson and Buttrick differ on the level of presuppositions. On one hand, Buttrick completely discards the notion of Biblical authority.²⁰⁴ On the other hand, Robinson embraces the Bible as verbally inspired and inerrant, and therefore, the ultimate authority for

²⁰¹Idem., *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching*, 31.

²⁰²Donald L. Hamilton, responds to Buttrick’s view of books in the twenty-first century: “It is interesting to note that many Christians of the first century were ‘bicultural’ in terms of communicating skills. Greco-Roman culture was very much oriented toward reasoned thinking, while Jewish culture was oriented toward the visual and emotional. Yet, Christians were able to function in both ‘worlds.’ Paul, of course, is the prime example in this regard. Likewise, even if our present age is geared toward more visual aspects of communication . . . this does not mean that persons today are incapable of critical thinking or linear logic. Human beings are wonderfully complex creatures whose thinking abilities should not be underestimated” (102-103, note 2).

²⁰³Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20; for further discussion, see below, 4.3.1.

²⁰⁴Buttrick stated in an interview with Harold Nathan Cothen “I throw out the whole notion that scripture has authority of any kind” (see Cothen’s study, “An Examination of Recent Homiletical Criticisms of Deductive Methodology According to Selected Inductive, Narrative, and Phenomenological Homileticians,” [Ph.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990], 105, note 79).

Christian life and preaching.

3.3 Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, we conclude that Haddon Robinson takes the traditional evangelical view towards Scripture. As a result, he espouses the following: Scripture as God's written revelation, verbal-plenary inspiration, full inerrancy, and the complete authority of Scripture for Christian life, theology, and preaching.

Two issues emerge concerning this view of Scripture. First, this understanding of Scripture is foundational to evangelical methodology in general and to Robinson's evangelical expository methodology and procedure in particular. James Packer explains: "When you encounter the evangelical view of Holy Scripture, you are encountering the source, criterion, and control of all evangelical theology and religion." He contends that evangelical theology is characterized methodologically by its insistence "that Scripture is both clear and sufficient; that the God-given Scriptures are the self-interpreting, self-contained rule of Christian faith and life in every age" and "that the proper task of the teaching and preaching office that God has set in the church is to explain and apply the Scriptures." This "rigorous biblical methodology" is what, he believes, distinctively characterizes the evangelical position on Scripture.²⁰⁵ As such, Robinson's view of Scripture is the source, criterion, and control of his homiletical approach.

Thus, Duane Litfin, in his study of evangelical theological presuppositions and preaching concludes that "the expository method is a natural and logical deductive outgrowth

²⁰⁵James I. Packer, "Encountering Present-day Views of Scripture," in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 63-65.

or ‘aftereffect’ of the evangelical’s high view of Scripture.”²⁰⁶ Robinson himself similarly states that expository preaching “emerges not merely as a type of sermon—one among many—but as the theological outgrowth of a high view of inspiration.”²⁰⁷ Thus, consistent with the evangelical biblical methodology, Robinson’s chosen genre of preaching—expository—treats the text of Scripture as a revelation from God: inspired, inerrant, and fully authoritative for the evangelical Christian preacher.

The second issue concerning this view of Scripture is the specific ways it influences Robinson’s homiletical method. The most distinctive way in which this view manifests its influence is in the text-centered focus of his method. Accordingly, the first three stages of his ten-stage method focus the expositor on the text and emphasize careful principles of biblical interpretation.²⁰⁸ Of utmost importance is discerning the message of the text by discovering

²⁰⁶Litfin, “Theological Presuppositions and Preaching: An Evangelical Perspective,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, 1973), 106f. Thus, Peter Adam observed that there is “often a direct link between a theology of Scripture and a theology of preaching” (*Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Expository Preaching* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996], 92). Put differently, one’s view of Scripture shapes and forms one’s approach to homiletics, as David Buttrick has indicated. “Thus, for example, if Scripture is viewed as an inerrant Word of God, sermons are apt to come tumbling down from high pulpits like tablets of stone from Sinai. If, in a Barthian scheme, Scripture is understood as a God-ordained witness to the Word of God, Jesus Christ, then preaching is regarded as a witness to the witness of Scripture, and a reiteration of the Word of God. On the other hand, if preaching is vested in an episcopate within the being-saved community, preaching will be defined as an extension of the preaching of bishops. In Pietist communities, preaching may be viewed as an expression of the awareness of being saved undergirded by the authority of primal religious experience” (Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 249). Elizabeth Achtemeier also affirms that behind “every sermon lies an understanding of the nature of the Bible, of what kind of literature it is, of how it came into being, of how it can be understood and appropriated by a modern congregation” (“The Artful Dialogue: Some Thoughts on the Relation of Biblical Studies and Homiletics,” *Interpretation* 35/1 [January 1981]: 20).

²⁰⁷Robinson, “Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” 803. To Buttrick’s view of evangelical preaching as “tumbling down from high pulpits” (see previous note), Robinson would respond that evangelical preachers seek to preach to people on their level and avoid speaking “*ex cathedra*” (Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 24).

²⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 53-96; see also chapter 5 below.

its idea and development.²⁰⁹ “If God superintended the writing of Scripture and protected its details, then biblical preaching must reflect God’s thought both in theme and development.”²¹⁰ The sermon should be centered, therefore, on the biblical text because it is “God’s Word written” and thus “God’s tool of communication through which he addressed people in history.”²¹¹

Robinson’s view of Scripture also manifests itself in helping the expositor maintain a focus on the audience in sermon preparation. Stages four through ten deal with principles of how to effectively communicate the biblical message to a contemporary audience. From structuring the sermon according to the pattern of the text to finding the right illustration for the main idea of the text, and from understanding the contemporary audience to applying the message to them, the focus of these stages is to help the audience understand and receive the message from the text.²¹² The burden is thus to effectively communicate the message of the text to the audience of today.

As such, Robinson’s view of Scripture has influenced him to help expositors construct sermons that are both text-centered and audience-focused, that honor the biblical message and make it relevant for today’s audience.²¹³ Thus, Robinson’s high view of Scripture undergirds and influences the ten stages. Just how well the ten stages do this will be the subject of

²⁰⁹Ibid., 66-70.

²¹⁰Idem., “Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” 808.

²¹¹Idem., Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001; idem., “Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” 803.

²¹²Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 103-182.

²¹³Ibid., 245.

chapter 5.

Another way that Robinson's view of Scripture affects his approach to expository preaching is in his teaching on "style," or a preacher's "choice of words."²¹⁴ With the message of the inspired text being a message from God, a "power comes through the preached word" during delivery, according to Robinson.²¹⁵ Thus, he discusses three components of style: clarity, direct and personal address, and vividness. Clarity involves a clear outline, short sentences, simple sentence structure, and simple words because the words point to realities and must be communicated clearly. Direct and personal address involves use of the personal pronoun "you," and "speech appropriate in lively conversation," which helps the audience better receive the biblical message. Vividness, the final characteristic of effective style, focuses on carefully crafted nouns, verbs, metaphors, and similes to enhance the impact of the message on the audience.²¹⁶ Hence, because Robinson believes that the biblical text is inspired and carries a message from God, and that the preachers words can point to realities, sermon delivery must have an effective style that is clear, direct, personal, and vivid.²¹⁷

Another way that Robinson's view of Scripture reveals its influence is in his discussion on desires and delivery. He writes:

In the preacher, technical knowledge and training in the art of public address cannot take the place of conviction and responsibility. Having something to say to a congregation that you want them to understand and live by provides an essential stimulus for effective delivery. It produces the emotional "set" for speaking. We are

²¹⁴Ibid., 185.

²¹⁵Ibid., 19.

²¹⁶Ibid., 187-197.

²¹⁷See discussion above, 3.2.1.2.3.2.

not merely reciting a script. We are communicating ideas that matter to us.²¹⁸

When the preacher thus has an idea from the Bible, according to Robinson, and desires to help listeners understand and accept it, “strong delivery comes naturally.” Dynamic delivery, therefore, comes not from “slavishly following a set of rules”²¹⁹ but from “sincerity, enthusiasm, and deep earnestness” over delivering a message weighted with the authority of the sacred, inspired text.²²⁰ Thus, Robinson’s view of Scripture also affects his approach to delivery.

On the whole, this chapter has provided the evangelical theological perspective for Robinson’s entire approach to preaching. As noted above, his ten-stage method, style of preaching, and sermon delivery are influenced by his devotion to the Bible as the inspired Word of God. This “high view of Scripture” is, therefore, the methodological framework for his definition of expository preaching, hermeneutical approach, and the ten stages. The next chapter will devote itself to investigating Robinson’s definition of expository preaching and hermeneutical approach, which forms an important platform for his homiletical method.

²¹⁸Ibid., 204.

²¹⁹Ibid.

²²⁰Ibid., 204-205.

CHAPTER 4

ROBINSON'S HERMENEUTIC AND HIS DEFINITION OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter endeavored to provide an understanding of Robinson's view of Scripture and thus to furnish the theological methodology for his approach to hermeneutics and expository preaching. For this chapter, it is important to note that Robinson's definition of expository preaching grows out of his hermeneutic. Because of this relationship, the two are discussed together here. This chapter thus seeks first to identify Robinson's hermeneutical approach in the evangelical context with its main presuppositions, and then to investigate his definition of expository preaching in light of its relationship to his hermeneutic. As such, this chapter provides criteria for an evaluation of the ten stages in the next chapter.

4.2 Robinson's Approach to Hermeneutics

This section sets out a brief overview of the contemporary hermeneutical scene as a background for the discussion. Then a description of the grammatical-historical method in contemporary evangelicalism will situate Robinson's hermeneutical approach. Finally, Robinson's approach will be identified and its presuppositions investigated.

4.2.1 The Contemporary Hermeneutical Scene

According to Gerhard Hasel, from the second century until the middle of the twentieth century, three major methods of biblical interpretation have dominated the hermeneutical scene: (1) the allegorical method of the pre-Reformation times, which was replaced by (2) the "grammatical-historical method" of the Reformers, and the (3) "historical-critical method,"

which began during the age of rationalism in the eighteenth century. The latter two continue today, he says, “locked in a life-and-death struggle with each other regarding the proper handling of Scripture,” with the grammatical-historical method espoused by conservative evangelical scholarship and the historical-critical method espoused by general Protestant scholarship.¹

Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, a number of new approaches have emerged on the hermeneutical scene, such as canonical criticism,² the new literary criticism,³ reader-response criticism,⁴ the New Hermeneutic,⁵ Structuralism,⁶ and Deconstructionism,⁷

¹Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today: An Analysis of Modern Methods of Biblical Interpretation and Proposals for the Interpretation of the Bible as the Word of God* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1985), 1-5.

²On this see, for example, Alastair G. Hunter, “Canonical Criticism,” *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 105-107; G. T. Sheppard, “Canonical Criticism,” *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation: A-J*, ed. John H. Hays (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1999), 164-167; Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970); idem., *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); and idem., “The Search for Biblical Authority Today,” *Andover Newton Quarterly* 16 (1976): 199-206.

³On this, see, for example, Leland Ryken, “The Bible as Literature: A Brief History,” in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 60-65; Margaret Davis, “Literary Criticism,” *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 402-405; T. K. Beal, K. A. Keefer, and T. Linafelt, “Literary Theory, Literary Criticism, and the Bible,” *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation: K-Z*, ed. John H. Hays (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1999), 79-84. It should be noted that reader-response criticism, structuralism, and deconstructionism are considered to be areas of literary criticism (William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* [Dallas: Word, 1993], 428ff).

⁴On this see, for example, Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), who has been influential in this field; also Edgar V. McKnight, *Postmodern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1988); and “Anthony C. Thiselton, “Reader Response Hermeneutics, Action Models, and the Parables of Jesus,” in *The Responsibility of Hermeneutics* by Roger Lundin, Anthony C. Thiselton, and Clarence Walhout (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 79-113.

⁵On this see, for example, James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr., eds. *The New Hermeneutic* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d. rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1990); idem., *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1977); P. J. Achtemeier, *An Introduction to the New Hermeneutic* (New York: Harper, 1969); and Anthony C. Thiselton, “The New Hermeneutic,” in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, 308-333; Ernst

to name a few.⁸ In the recent *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (1999), A. K. M. Adam

Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*; and Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch; and idem., *Theology of Proclamation: Dialogue with Bultmann*. It should be noted that although the New Hermeneutic was short-lived in American Theology (John MacQuarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought*, 4th. ed. [Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1988], 391), it continues in contemporary homiletics (Lucy Atkinson Rose, "Preaching in the Round-Table Church," 294, note 12).

⁶This movement began with the linguistic theories of Ferdinand De Saussure who distinguished sharply between the underlying structure of a language and its expression in conventional words (Bray, 486ff); on this, see, for example, Mark W. G. Stibbe, "Structuralism," *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 650-655; D. Jobling, "Structuralism and Deconstruction," *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation: K-Z*, 509-14; and Daniel Patte, *What is Structural Exegesis?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); idem., *Structural Exegesis: From Theory to Practice* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); see especially the pioneer work in this field, Ferdinand De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966). McCartney and Clayton explain a change of structuralism into post-structuralism: "Skepticism about history that led to the linguistic turn now has its counterpart in skepticism about language, and . . . structuralism discovered that on its own principles even the most basic of structures were linguistically relativized. The result was a transformation of structuralism into a postmodern form, which embraced the inability to 'get to the bottom' as a good thing. The new approach to language, then, is not to try to isolate the deep structures that touch over very essence, but to disrupt the cultural binaries that keep us thinking in old ways. This enterprise of disruption is called post-structuralism or deconstruction" (McCartney and Clayton, 115); see next note on deconstructionism.

⁷This postmodern movement is mostly associated with Jacques Derrida who questions the act of literary communication and seeks to overthrow the idea of an absolute, determinate meaning in a text and, instead, focuses on its dynamic character; see, for example, his *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); idem., *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); idem., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: Conversations with Jacques Derrida*, ed. J. D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997); *Derrida and Biblical Studies*, *Semeia* 23 (Missoula: Scholars, 1982); Hugh J. Silverman and Don Ihde, *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1985); and Jobling, 512-514; for a more complete bibliography on deconstruction, see William Ray, *Literary Meaning: From Phenomenology to Deconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁸For a historical overview of contemporary hermeneutics and its luminaries, see, for example, Bray, 461-583; and Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, Jr, 49-51. For analysis of the contemporary hermeneutical scene, see *ibid.*, 427-457; the significant studies by Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*; and idem., *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); see also John P. Newport, "Contemporary Philosophical, Literary, and Sociological Hermeneutics," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 163-174; Royce Gordon Gruenler, *Meaning and Understanding: The Philosophical Framework for Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), especially 73-109; Josef Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1969); John B. Thompson, *Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981); Bernard C. Latagan, "Hermeneutics," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 149-154; Moises Silva, "Contemporary Theories of Biblical Interpretation," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994), 107-124; and Carl R. Holladay, "Contemporary Methods of Reading the Bible," *ibid.*, 125-149.

attempts to describe biblical interpretation in the present-day post-modern context.⁹ He contends that there “is no singular method that can be called ‘post-modern biblical interpretation,’ no singular approach, no singular paradigm.” But if, “under duress,” he writes, “one were obliged to approximate a definition for ‘post-modern biblical criticism,’ one would have to characterize it as the practice of resisting and recentering the assumptions and norms of modern biblical interpretation.”¹⁰ Thus, the multifaceted post-modern approaches to biblical interpretation gravitate away from the modernistic, objective-reading-of-the-text approach in both the historical-critical and grammatical-historical methods.¹¹ As to the future of post-modern biblical interpretation, he predicts that as “generations of scholars who are accustomed to post-modern sensibilities enter the field of biblical criticism, the field should change from a hegemony of modern authority to a networked, post-modern polyphony of interpreters whose interest and works emphasize different interpretive practices—an appropriately post-modern development.”¹²

Nevertheless, the historical-critical method¹³ and the grammatical-historical method¹⁴

⁹On postmodernism, 10, note, 40.

¹⁰A. K. M. Adam, “Post-Modern Biblical Interpretation,” *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation: K-Z*, 305. See “Bibliography,” at the end of this article for sources dealing with post-modern hermeneutics, *ibid.*, 307-309.

¹¹See van Wyk, 88; F. F. Bruce and J. J. Scott, Jr., “Interpretation of the Bible,” *Evangelical Dictionary*, 615.

¹²Adam, 307.

¹³By the nineteenth century, the historical-critical method, according to Robert M. Grant and David Tracy, “had its own theological axes to grind.” Emerging from eighteenth-century Enlightenment rationalism, it reflected the theological outlook of liberalism (Grant and Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, 2d. rev. ed. [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984] 117-118; see also Bray, 221-460). It can thus be considered a modernistic scientific way of studying the Bible which emphasizes “man’s contemporary experience of reality” as the “objective criteria” to determine “what could or could not have happened in the

continue to exert a significant influence in the present hermeneutical environment. The historical-critical method, for example, "has certainly not disappeared," according to Gerald Bray, and "in spite of prophecies of its demise, it remains the standard form of biblical interpretation in all major universities and in most textbooks and commentaries." He says it "has not ceased to grow and develop, and the student of the contemporary scene cannot ignore it."¹⁵ Nor has the grammatical-historical method lost its influence in scholarly

past." N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976], 78; cf. F. Gerald Downing, "Historical-Critical Method," *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 284-285; J. W. Rogerson, "Biblical Criticism," *ibid.*, 83-86; and van Wyk, 79-86). Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), the German theologian and historian, is the one "credited with the classical formulation of modern historical-critical methodology as originated during the Enlightenment" (F. Hasel, 73). According to Troeltsch, the historical-critical method operates according to three cardinal principles: (1) The principle of *criticism* (or the principle of methodological doubt), which states that an interpreter's judgement of the past cannot claim absolute knowledge of the truth but only a greater or lesser degree of probability, which must always be open to revision. (2) The principle of *analogy* (or the principle of uniformitarianism), which maintains that the knowledge and facticity of past events can be upheld only if there are present occurrences of such events. (3) The principle of *correlation* (or the principle of cause and effect), according to which every effect must have a natural cause. This third principle effectively rules out miracles or the supernatural (Koranteng-Pipim, 89; see also Robert Morgan, Introduction to *Ernst Troeltsch: Writings on Theology and Religion*, trans. and ed. Robert Morgan and Michael Pye [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977], 10; cf. Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984], 55; G. Hasel, 73-77; and F. Hasel, 73). These three principles have spawned a number of critical approaches to Scripture such as textual criticism, historical criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism, structuralist criticism, and comparative-religions criticism (for discussion on these approaches, see, for example, John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, 2d. ed., *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987]; Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 85-114; and G. Hasel, 7-72).

This method has been controversial over the years and the reasons are not hard to detect according to Peter Maarten van Bemmelen: "Many scholars who pursued higher critical studies reached conclusions concerning the composition, authorship, and date of certain Biblical books which were in conflict with the testimony of the Scriptures to their own origin and which also questioned or denied the historicity of many Biblical narratives. Such scholars approached their critical study with the presupposition that the Bible should be read and studied in the same way as any other book, with the same methods of literary and historical criticism used for the study of other literature, and they often applied these methods on the premise that no a priori assumption in regard to the infallibility or divine inspiration of the Scriptures should in any way influence such criticism or its results" (59-60).

¹⁴See William B. Tolar, "The Grammatical-Historical Method," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 21-38.

¹⁵Bray, 462; see his discussion of the changes in historical criticism since the mid-1970's and alternatives to it (476-480); see also William J. Larkin, Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics*, 50-63, who discusses hermeneutical supplements to the historical-critical method since the 1970's (i.e., the church as

evangelical circles, as the next subdivision will show.

4.2.2 The Grammatical-Historical Method: Context of Robinson's

Hermeneutical Approach

Evangelicals have traditionally favored the grammatical-historical method. Paul Jewett, for instance, declares that the “evangelical hermeneutic is simply the hermeneutic of the Reformers,” which was the “grammatical-historical method.”¹⁶ Carl F. H. Henry also asserts that “evangelical Christianity espouses grammatical-historical interpretation rather than alternatives that attach to the Bible passages exotic meanings that depend upon reader decision.” This approach, he says, was the approach of the Reformers, who “strenuously resisted allegorical exegesis.”¹⁷ Gerhard Hasel explains the development of this method in relationship to the Reformation *sola scriptura* principle:

The grammatical-historical (also called the historical-grammatical) method of the Reformation was developed within the context of the *sola Scriptura principle*, for it sought to take seriously the divine-human nature of the Bible, that is, the fact that its message originated through divine inspiration and that the inspired writers of the Bible communicated the message through the limited means of human languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The historical-grammatical method was concerned with issues such as authorship, date of composition, historical background and language as these

confessional interpreter, the Bible as canon, the phenomenological approach to the philosophy of language, and process philosophy). For recent applications of the historical-critical method in textbooks, see, for example, Otto Kaiser and Werner G. Kummel, *Exegetical Method: A Students Handbook*, rev. ed. (New York: Seabury, 1981); Hays and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*; Ronald J. Allen, *Contemporary Biblical Interpretation for Preaching* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson Press, 1984); Odil Hannes Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodology*, 2d. ed. (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998); Hans Conzelmann and Andreas Lindemann, *Interpreting the New Testament: An Introduction to the Principles and Methods of N. T. Exegesis*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988); and Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001), who admits only to a limited use of the method.

¹⁶Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation*, 150-153; on the Reformers and this method, see G. Hasel, 3-4.

¹⁷Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:104.

relate to the meaning of the text and finally to the meaning of the Bible as a whole. At each step in interpretation, the controlling principle was the Bible as its own interpreter. The method accepted at face value the divine-human origin of the Bible, which rendered it the Word of God in the language of men.¹⁸

This method, sometimes called the grammatical-historical-theological method, finds its classic expression in Milton S. Terry's *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments*,¹⁹ which explains that the method's "fundamental principle is to gather from the Scriptures themselves the precise meaning which the writers intended to convey."²⁰ In contrast to the allegorical, mystical, naturalistic, mythical, or other methods, Terry says, the "grammatico-historical sense of a writer is such an interpretation of his language as is required by the laws of grammar and the facts of history." Thus, "we speak of the literal sense, by which we mean the most simple, direct, and ordinary meaning of phrases and sentences."²¹

A number of contemporary evangelical scholars follow Terry's explanation. One is Carl Henry, who states: "The rule among evangelicals is to follow the natural meaning of a Scripture text."²² The 1982 "Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics," in article XV, also affirms the necessity of interpreting the Bible according to its literal, or normal, sense. The literal sense is described as the "grammatical-historical sense, that is, the meaning which

¹⁸G. Hasel, 4.

¹⁹(New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1890; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974). First published in 1833, revised twice, and spawning a series of conservative hermeneutic textbooks during the late 1800's and early 1900's, this text is considered by Elliott Johnson to be "the American textbook in the field" (*Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1990], 17, note 2).

²⁰Terry, 173.

²¹*Ibid.*, 203; see *ibid.*, 204-242, for extended discussion on the procedure.

²²Henry, 4:104.

the writer expressed.” In explaining this article, Norman L. Geisler said the “grammatical-historical sense” means that “the correct interpretation is the one which discovers the meaning of the text in its grammatical forms and in the historical, cultural context in which the text is expressed.”²³ Furthermore, J. I. Packer similarly states that the “grammatical-historical method” is “asking what is the linguistically natural way to understand the text in its historical setting.” He adds: “Textual, historical, literary, and theological study, aided by linguistic skills—philological, semantic, logical—is the way forward here.”²⁴ Terry thus provided an early articulation of the grammatical-historical method and one which continues today in contemporary evangelicalism.

Many evangelical scholars believe with F. F. Bruce that for “those who accept the Bible as a sacred text, the church’s book, the record of God’s unique self-revelation, its interpretation cannot be conducted on the grammatico-historical level alone.” While this “level is fundamental, there is a theological level.” In addition to the “forms of context of which grammatico-historical exegesis takes account, the whole canon provides a theological context within which each document may be viewed and its contribution to the record of divine revelation and of human response to that revelation may be assessed.” Thus, “theological exegesis presupposes that there is an overall unity in the light of which the diversity can be appreciated in its proper perspective.”²⁵ Evangelical exegete, Walter Kaiser,

²³See Norman L. Geisler, “Appendix B: Explaining Hermeneutics: A Commentary on The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics Articles of Affirmation and Denial,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, 898.

²⁴Packer, “Appendix C: Exposition on Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *ibid.*, 910.

²⁵Bruce and Scott, Jr., 612; see also, Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 159, who, while espousing the grammatical level, says, “Hermeneutics cannot be limited to the grammatical-historical techniques that help

who finds no fault with the grammatical-historical method, feels “that it fails to go far enough in describing the main job of exegesis.”²⁶ Building upon this method, therefore, Kaiser proposed his “syntactical-theological method,” which but for awkwardness and clumsiness “should be called grammatical-contextual-historical-syntactical-theological-cultural exegesis.”²⁷ Fred Klooster, also building upon the grammatical-historical approach, proposes the “grammatical-literary-historical-theological-canonical method,” which seeks like Kaiser’s proposal, to fully elucidate the theological meaning of a biblical passage within the canonical context.²⁸ Likewise, Elliott Johnson proposes “a system of evangelical hermeneutics” which is built upon five premises: literal, grammatical, historical, literary, and theological.²⁹ Thus, the grammatical-historical method, with this added theological level (grammatical-historical-theological), continues to influence evangelical scholars.

Not all evangelicals, however, agree that such an approach to hermeneutics is the only

the interpreter understand the original meaning of the text.” To understand the Scriptures theologically and “to obey its teaching,” he asserts, “we need to rely upon the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.” Cf., *idem.*, “A Historical Model,” in *Hermeneutics for Preaching: Approaches to Contemporary Interpretations of Scripture*, ed. Raymond Baily (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1992), 27-52.

²⁶Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], 89; see his discussion (*ibid.*, 87-88) on the meaning of the term, “grammatico,” which he derives from Terry’s discussion of Karl A. G. Keil; for debate within the evangelical community on problem areas in the application of the historical-grammatical method, see Bruce K. Waltke, “Historical Grammatical Problems,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, 71-129; Kenneth L. Barker, *A Response to Historical Grammatical Problems*, in *ibid.*, 133-141; and Allan A. MacRae, *A Response to Historical Grammatical Problems*, 145-162.

²⁷Kaiser, 89-90.

²⁸Klooster, “How Reformed Theologians ‘Do Theology’ in Today’s World,” in *Doing Theology in Today’s World*, eds. John Woodbridge and Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991); see also McCartney and Clayton, *Let The Reader Understand*, 159-174, for elucidation on the evangelical approach to going beyond the established grammatical-historical meaning of a biblical passage to the fuller meaning in the larger canonical context.

²⁹Johnson, 21-22, 31-53.

evangelical approach. Evangelical scholar, Donald Bloesch, for example, calls “grammatical-historical exegesis”³⁰ the “rational-biblicistic view,”³¹ and proposes instead his “historical-pneumatic hermeneutics in which,” he claims, “Word and Spirit are joined together in dynamic unity.”³² Grant Osborn suggest that the grammatical-historical method be supplemented by modern hermeneutical theory such as Anthony Thiselton’s “action theory” and a positive view toward the interpreter’s “pre-understanding.”³³ Other evangelical scholars, such as Robert H. Stein, espouse a nuanced use of the historical-critical method.³⁴ Thus, Robert K. Johnston

³⁰Bloesch, “A Christological Hermeneutic: Crisis and Conflict in Hermeneutics,” in *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options*, ed. Robert K. Johnston (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985; reprint, Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 78.

³¹Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*, 196.

³²*Ibid.*, 200. Earlier in the same volume, he describes this approach as “the postcritical, pneumatic approach of a catholic evangelicalism” which, he believes avoids the “literalistic approach of fundamentalism and the historical-critical approach of liberalism” (*ibid.*, 181). Frank Hasel believes Bloesch’s “pneumatic use of Scripture at times appears to come dangerously close to an allegorical use of Scripture” (F. Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D. G. Bloesch*, 198-199; see his investigation of Bloesch’s use of Scripture, 191-202).

³³Grant Osborn, “Evangelical Biblical Interpretation,” *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation: A-J*, 360-361; see also *idem.*, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1991); Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 437f.

³⁴Robert H. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 139-143; see also, for example, George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), who proposes “evangelical biblical criticism” (12-13); David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, eds. *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991); and Harold Freeman, “Biblical Criticism and Biblical Preaching,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 387-397; for the debate on the use of the historical-critical method by evangelical scholars, see, for example, Henry, “The Uses and Abuses of Historical Criticism,” 4:385-404; Alan F. Johnson, “The Historical-Critical Method: Egyptian Gold or Pagan Precipice,” *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 26/1 (March 1983): 3-15; Paige Patterson, “The Historical-Critical Study of the Bible: Dangerous or Helpful?” *The Theological Educator* 37 (1988): 45-61; Grant R. Osborne, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical,” *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 42/2 (June 1999): 193-210; Robert K. McIver, “The Historical-Critical Method: The Adventist Debate,” *Ministry* 69/3 (March 1996): 14-17; Roy Gane, “An Approach to the Historical-Critical Method,” *Ministry* 72/3 (March 1999): 5-9; Robert M. Johnston, “The Case for a Balanced Hermeneutic,” *ibid.*, 10-12.

For critical evaluation of the historical-critical method, see, for example, Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, trans. Edwin W. Leverenz and Rudolph F. Norden (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977); *idem.*, *Biblical Hermeneutics*; Gerhard Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today*; Richard Davidson, “The Authority of Scripture: A Personal Pilgrimage,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological*

correctly asserts that those “who interact with evangelical theologians will not encounter simply a conservative, theological monolith,” but many hermeneutical options.³⁵ Nevertheless, conservative evangelical scholars seem to favor the grammatical-historical-theological method.³⁶

4.2.3 Robinson’s Approach to Hermeneutics

4.2.3.1 Robinson’s Hermeneutical Approach Identified

That Robinson espouses traditional evangelical grammatical-historical interpretation is evidenced in *Biblical Preaching* where he advocates expositors finding the “objective meaning” of the text.³⁷ This “objective meaning” comes through an “understanding of the language, backgrounds, and setting of the text,”³⁸ and involves “accurate exegesis” which is

Society 1/1 (Spring 1990): 39-56; Garrett, 136-154; Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology? Reflections of a Bultmannian turned Evangelical*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990); idem., “Historical-Critical and Evangelical Theology,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 5/2 (Autumn 1994): 19-36; and Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, eds. *The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998).

For proposed evangelical alternatives to the historical-critical method, see, for example, Maier’s “Biblical-Historical” approach in *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 375-174, which completely rejects the historical-critical method; the “grammatico-historical method” as explained by Milton Terry (173-174), which is advocated by the contributors in *The Jesus Crisis* as the alternative to the historical-critical method (Thomas and Farnell, 185, 217, 319, 327, 339-342); see also Kaiser’s “syntactical-theological method of exegesis,” in *Towards an Exegetical Theology*, 87-90; Gerhard Hasel’s “Biblical Approach” in *Biblical Interpretation Today*, 73-111; note also Davidson’s comparison between the historical-critical method and what he calls “historical-biblical interpretation,” (42-45, 55, note 1).

³⁵Robert K. Johnston, “Introduction,” in *The Use of the Bible*, 5; see the various essays in this volume for a cross section of evangelical hermeneutical approaches.

³⁶See, for example, Henry, 4:104; Geisler, “Appendix B,” 898; Johnson, 21-22; McCartney and Clayton, 119-174; Tolar, 21.

³⁷Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 24.

³⁸*Ibid.* He also participated in Summit II of the ICBI which focused on hermeneutics and espoused the “grammatical-historical sense” of interpreting Scripture (“Chicago Statement on Hermeneutics, in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, 884-885). Robinson told the researcher that he was in harmony with the ICBI statements at Summits I and II (Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001).

sitting down before the biblical writer and trying “to understand what he wanted to convey to his original readers,” what “he meant in his own terms and to his own times.”³⁹ In more popular language, he explains how expositors are to find this meaning:

We try to pull up our chairs to where the biblical authors sat. We attempt to work our way back into the world of the Scriptures to understand the original message. Through we may not master the languages, history, and literary forms of the biblical writers, we should appreciate the contribution of each of these disciplines. We should also become aware of the wide assortment of interpretive aids available to us for use in our study.⁴⁰ As much as possible, expositors seek a firsthand acquaintance with the biblical writers and their ideas in context.⁴¹

Robinson also shares Kaiser, Klooster, and Johnson’s concern for the wider theological-canonical context of each passage. He thus writes:

Because the Bible stands entire and complete, no passage should be interpreted or applied in isolation from all that God has spoken. Each text should be interpreted within the book in which it appears. But each of the books of the Bible makes up a part of the entire revelation. Sometimes what we may overlook in the beginning of the Scriptures becomes a clue to a fuller revelation.⁴²

Thus, Robinson’s approach to hermeneutics is based on the grammatical-historical-theological method as described above in the previous subdivision (4.2.2).

It is important to point out that Robinson’s espousal of the grammatical-historical-theological approach is the natural outgrowth of his high view of inspiration discussed in the

³⁹*Biblical Preaching*, 87.

⁴⁰After this sentence, Robinson adds a footnote referring the reader to his discussion of study tools for exegesis, 62-66.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 25.

⁴²*Idem.*, *Biblical Preaching*, 92.

previous chapter.⁴³ The outcome of one's goal in the hermeneutical enterprise depends, therefore, on how Scripture is viewed. As Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard point out: "If the Bible owes its origin to a divine all-powerful being who has revealed his message via human writers, then the objective of interpretation will be to discover the meaning located in the divinely inspired document."⁴⁴ Such is Robinson's approach to hermeneutics.⁴⁵

4.2.3.2 Robinson's Hermeneutical Presuppositions

Now that we have identified Robinson's hermeneutical approach, it is appropriate to look at three of his important hermeneutical presuppositions. Robinson specifically addressed the issue of hermeneutics and exegesis in a paper he submitted to Summit II of the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy, "Hermeneutics and Homiletics."⁴⁶ In this paper, his main hermeneutical presuppositions emerge in their relationship to expository preaching.

4.2.3.2.1 First Hermeneutical Presupposition: The Basis of the Message

First, for Robinson, the practice of exegesis and hermeneutics is essential to effective

⁴³Dennis A. Hutchinson points out in connection with Robinson: "Traditionally, a philosophy that views the Bible as God's inspired and inerrant Word has gone hand-in-hand with grammatical-historical exegesis" ("Impact of Historical Criticism on Preaching," in *The Jesus Crisis*, 341).

⁴⁴Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 88. They also point out that if "the interpreter adopts an alternative explanation of the Bible's origin, then he or she will prescribe other goals in interpreting the text" (88). For example, if "the Bible records the religiously inspired thinking of pious Jews and Christians but is not divine revelation itself, then interpreters may feel free to handle it precisely and only as they do other ancient religious books" (88, note, 12).

⁴⁵Steve W. Lemke describes the hermeneutical stance Robinson takes: "*A high view of biblical inspiration presupposes a confessional stance. Since they presuppose the truth of Scripture, those with a high view of inspiration are predisposed to approach Scripture with a hermeneutic of affirmation rather than a hermeneutic of suspicion. Belief in the divine inspiration of Scripture and reliance on the illumination of the Holy Spirit are necessary prerequisites to understand Scripture at its deepest levels*" ("The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture," 190; italics his).

⁴⁶Robinson, in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, 803-815; it can also be found in Gibson, *Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Biblical Preaching*, 69-84.

expository preaching.⁴⁷ A homiletician cannot merely ask, “How do I get the message across?” but, “How do I get the message? Thus, the preacher must “involve himself with hermeneutics,” because the message comes directly from the Scriptures.⁴⁸ “Since effective expository preaching deals largely with the explanation and application of Scripture,” he declares, “it reflects exegesis and hermeneutics on every hand.”⁴⁹ He explains:

Expository sermons are derived from and transmitted through a study of a passage (or passages) in context. Not only should an expositor find the substance of his sermon in the Bible, but he communicates it to his hearers on the basis by which he received it. As he studies, therefore, the preacher wrestles with exegesis and hermeneutics—the materials of grammar, history, literary forms, the thought and cultural settings of his text.⁵⁰

Thus, “the preaching idea, the development, and the purpose of the sermon must proceed from proper exegesis and hermeneutics and then be directed to the church.”⁵¹ By “directed to the church,” Robinson refers to application:

The minister must exegete the passage and the people. He must recognize what the people to whom he ministers have in common, and what they do not share, with God’s men and women in the first century and the centuries beyond.”⁵²

He says more about application in *Biblical Preaching*, and this issue will be addressed below in the discussion of his definition of expository preaching, and in the next chapter in a formal evaluation of his view of application.

⁴⁷This statement is a synthesis of Robinson, “Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” 803-805.

⁴⁸Ibid., 803.

⁴⁹Ibid., 805.

⁵⁰Ibid., 804.

⁵¹Ibid., 813; see 807-812.

⁵²Ibid., 813.

An issue that should be addressed is Robinson's understanding of the meaning hermeneutics and exegesis. He links "explanation and application" with "exegesis and hermeneutics"⁵³ in this article, but does not elucidate the difference. In *Biblical Preaching*, however, his first four stages of sermon preparation deal with formulating the exegetical idea—the first three stages relate to the process of discovering the idea through exegesis,⁵⁴ and the fourth stage continues the focus on exegesis but expands it to include relating the exegetical idea to the contemporary audience.⁵⁵ This fourth stage thus builds on exegesis but focuses on contemporary relevance and meaning. Does Robinson then view hermeneutics as the process of discovering the contemporary meaning of the passage as well, or only its historical meaning? Does he view hermeneutics as involving both exegesis and the contemporary meaning?

Robinson reflects the confusion in contemporary evangelicalism concerning the meaning of the terms exegesis and hermeneutics.⁵⁶ One group of evangelical scholars defines exegesis as the process of discovering what the text originally meant and hermeneutics as the process of discovering what the text means in the context of today.⁵⁷ Another group follows

⁵³Ibid., 805.

⁵⁴Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 53-70.

⁵⁵Ibid., 75-96.

⁵⁶Scott A. Blue describes this confusion in "The Hermeneutics of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and its Impact on Expository Preaching: Friend or Foe?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44/2 (June 2001): 264-265.

⁵⁷See, for example, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 11, who take this position.

the traditional usage⁵⁸ of the two terms: hermeneutics is the theory of general and special principles and rules of approaching the biblical text which guides exegesis, and exegesis is the set of procedures for discovering the biblical author's intended meaning.⁵⁹ A third group views exegesis and application or contextualization as the two major aspects of the larger task of hermeneutics.⁶⁰ At the heart of this debate is the place of application in the process of discovering meaning.⁶¹

In the article, "Blending Bible Content and Life Application,"⁶² Robinson distinguishes between exegesis, exposition, and application. Exegesis, he says, "is the process of getting meaning from the text," which involves historical and grammatical analysis. Exposition "is drawing from your exegesis to give the people what they need to understand the passage," which involves helping them see the framework and flow of the passage. Once the expositor has given "as much biblical information as the people need to understand the passage, and no more," then he or she should move on to application.⁶³ In Robinson's thinking, then, exegesis and exposition deal with explanation of the text's historical meaning, and application deals with its contemporary meaning. He does not attempt to formally define exegesis and

⁵⁸See Terry, 17-22.

⁵⁹See, for example, Walter Kaiser, *Toward An Exegetical Theology*, 47; Bernard Ramm, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics*, ed. Bernard Ramm (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), 11, who take this position.

⁶⁰See, for example, Harold Freeman, "Biblical Criticism and Biblical Preaching," in *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 387; and Osborn, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 5, 410.

⁶¹Blue, 264-266.

⁶²First published in Bill Hybels, Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson, eds., *Mastering Contemporary Preaching* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1989), 55-65; reprinted in Gibson, 85-95.

⁶³Gibson, 87-88.

hermeneutics, but from his approach we deduce that he follows the more traditional usage of these terms. He associates them more with “the materials of grammar, history, literary forms, the thought and cultural settings” of the text,⁶⁴ and then associates application more with the homiletical process, which directs the results of exegesis and hermeneutics to the contemporary church.⁶⁵ Thus, application is separate from but subsequent to interpretation. It is in this sense that he argues in his paper, “Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” that in expository preaching exegesis, hermeneutics, and homiletics “link together as supporting disciplines.”⁶⁶

In recent years there has been a proliferation of evangelical texts devoted to the hermeneutical enterprise, which reveals the emphasis evangelical scholars place on proper hermeneutical procedure for the preaching and teaching of the Bible.⁶⁷ They join Robinson

⁶⁴Idem., “Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” 804.

⁶⁵Ibid., 813; cf. Vines and Shaddix who explain in their *Power in the Pulpit*: exegesis is pulling out of the text what the author was trying to say, hermeneutics involves exposing “the meaning of a text” and applying “its meaning to a given audience.” Homiletics “is the art and science of saying the same thing that the text of Scripture says.” Exposition is adding delivery to the process of exegesis, hermeneutics, and homiletics (27-28); Osborn views the hermeneutical process in three levels: “We begin with a third-person approach, asking ‘what it meant,’ (exegesis), then passing to a first-person approach, querying ‘what it means for me’ (devotional) and finally taking a second-person approach, seeking ‘how to share with you what it means to me (sermonic)’” (*The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 6).

⁶⁶Ibid., 815.

⁶⁷See, for example, Terry S. Milton, *Biblical Hermeneutics*; Gordon M. Hyde, ed., *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics* (Washington, D.C.: The Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1974); Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1980); Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*; Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Primer for Students and Pastors*, 2d. ed., rev. and enl. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1989); Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, rev. ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993); Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, 2d. ed.; Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics, Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics*; Richard L Pratt, Jr., *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990); Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide To Discovering Biblical Truth*

in stressing the importance of exegesis and hermeneutics for preaching and teaching. These hermeneuts stress exegetical analysis in the following contexts: historical, literary, grammatical/syntactical, semantic, and theological. Robinson's formal exegetical procedure is found in *Biblical Preaching*⁶⁸ and will be evaluated in relationship to the approach of these evangelical hermeneuts as well as expository homiletic scholars in the next chapter.

4.2.3.2.2 Second Hermeneutical Presupposition: The Result of Applying Biblical Interpretation to the Sermon

Second, applying correct principles of biblical interpretation to the text during sermon preparation and delivery give the preacher an authority beyond himself.⁶⁹ Stated differently, because expository sermons "are derived from and transmitted through a study of a passage

(Colorado Springs, Colo.: Chariot Books, 1991); Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1992); Grant R. Osborn, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*; William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *An Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*; Corley, Lemke, and Lovejoy, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*; Walter C. Kaiser and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search For Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing By the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*; Lee J. Gugliotto, *Handbook for Bible Study* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1995); Moises Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); idem., ed. *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible*; D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996); Craig C. Broyles, ed., *Interpreting the Old Testament: A Guide for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002); see also the article by Richard M. Davidson, "Interpreting Scripture: An Hermeneutical Decalogue," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 4/2 (1993): 95-114.

⁶⁸Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 58-70.

⁶⁹Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 804.

(or passages) in context,” an expositor “speaks with authority beyond his own⁷⁰ and those who sit before him have a better chance of hearing God address them directly.”⁷¹ Robinson believes, therefore, that the expository sermon can convey the Word of God because “the concepts set forth in the sermon” have their “source in the Scriptures,” which are the Word of God written.⁷² Since the biblical text is the Word of God, applying correct principles of interpretation to it during sermon preparation help insure that the congregation will hear a message from the Word of God when the sermon is preached.⁷³ Accordingly, in the sermon the expositor “deals with enough of the language, background and context of his passage so that an attentive listener can follow the message from the Bible.” The listeners also have the “responsibility to match the sermon to the biblical text” and “decide for themselves if what they are hearing is indeed what the Bible says.” If the sermon says what the Bible says, then it carries the authority of God; if not then it carries the authority of only the preacher.⁷⁴ He writes:

Preaching with authority means you’ve done your homework. You know your people’s struggles and hurts. But you also know the Bible and theology. You can explain the Bible clearly. Preachers aren’t being authoritarian when they point people to the Bible. When Billy Graham explains, “The Bible says . . .” he’s relying not on his own authority but on another—God’s Word—and he shows how that authority makes sense. We help our credibility when we practice biblical preaching.⁷⁵

⁷⁰By this, he means the text of Scripture, see discussion above (3.2.4.2).

⁷¹Robinson, “Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” 804.

⁷²Ibid., See the discussion of Robinson’s view of Scripture in the previous chapter.

⁷³Ibid., 803-804.

⁷⁴Ibid., 804-805.

⁷⁵Idem., “What Authority Do We Have Anymore?” in Gibson, *Making A Difference in Preaching*, 35.

The main authority of the sermon for Robinson, then, centers in the message derived from applying the principles of hermeneutics and exegesis to the text.

A hermeneutical issue which Robinson does not address, however, and which evangelicals connect with biblical interpretation and authority, is illumination from the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶ While Robinson spends a great deal of time on biblical interpretation, he spends essentially no time discussing in any detail this topic considered so important by fellow evangelicals.⁷⁷ As noted above, he speaks of an authority beyond the preacher during the sermon, which comes from the affinity of the sermon with the biblical text. But he says nothing about the importance and nature of the illuminating Holy Spirit,⁷⁸ without which the sermon would have no authority, according to fellow evangelicals.⁷⁹

The subject of illumination has received significant attention by evangelical

⁷⁶Two representative evangelicals define it thus: C. C. Ryrie: "Specifically, the doctrine of illumination relates to that ministry of the Holy Spirit that helps the believer understand the truth of Scripture. In relation to the Bible, the doctrine of revelation relates to the unveiling of truth in the material of the Scriptures; inspiration concerns the method by which the Holy Spirit superintended the writing of Scripture; and illumination refers to the ministry of the Spirit by which the meaning of Scripture is made clear to the believer" ("Illumination," *Evangelical Dictionary*); J. I. Packer: "The work of the Spirit in imparting this knowledge is called 'illumination,' or enlightening. It is not a giving of new revelation, but a work within us that enables us to grasp and to live the revelation that is there before us in the biblical text as heard and read, and as explained by teachers and writers" (*Concise Theology*, 155; for analysis of Packer's definition, see Koranteng-Pipim's study on Packer, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Interpretation," 194-223); see also Fred H. Klooster, "Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit," in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 610-611; and Bernard Ramm, *The Witness of the Spirit*, discusses the broader scope of the Holy Spirit's activity with believers, salvation, and Scripture; for two classic studies on this subject highly valued by evangelicals, see John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7-9; cf. 2.1-4, 6; 3.1-3; and John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, ed. William H. Goold (reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), 121-173.

⁷⁷Robinson refers to the Holy Spirit several times in *Biblical Preaching*, but never discusses in any detail the Holy Spirit in relation to illumination (21, 27, 53, 62, 90, 93, 223). In "What is Expository Preaching?" 59, he does refer to the Holy Spirit changing people's lives and destinies during expository preaching. But again, no discussion on this subject.

⁷⁸See "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 803-815, where he also does not refer to or discuss the work of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation.

⁷⁹See next note for what evangelicals say about illumination and authority.

theologians in recent years.⁸⁰ Erickson provides a summary of evangelical thinking on illumination in relationship to authority: “The written word, correctly interpreted, is the objective basis of authority” and the “inward illuminating and persuading work of the Holy Spirit is the subjective dimension.” The “combination of these two factors,” he explains, “constitutes authority.”⁸¹ Thus authority in evangelical thought resides in correctly interpreting Scripture through “grammatical-literary-historical-theological-canonical exegesis”⁸² and the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in giving the interpreter understanding of the true meaning in the biblical text.⁸³ Both are considered indispensable to hearing and understanding the Word of God in the biblical text during personal study as well as during the expository sermon.⁸⁴

⁸⁰See, for example, Henry, 4: 272-295; Fred H. Klooster, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Hermeneutic Process: The Relationship of the Spirit’s Illumination to Biblical Interpretation,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, 451-472; Wilbur T. Dayton, “A Response to The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Hermeneutics Process,” in *ibid.*, 475-484; Art Lindsley, “A Response to the Role of the Holy Spirit in the Hermeneutics Process,” in *ibid.*, 487-492; especially the discussions of J. I. Packer on this issue in *Koranteng-Pipim*, 162-349; Erickson, 277-283; and John Frame, “The Spirit and the Scriptures,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 217-235; *idem.*, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987), 156-158; for evangelical engagement with non-evangelical views on this subject, such as neo-orthodoxy, see Frame, “The Spirit and the Scriptures,” 222-224; Erickson, 278-279; and Ramm, *The Witness of the Spirit*, 109-130, who discusses the *testimonium* and Romanism, religious liberalism, fundamentalism, Kierkegaard and Pascal.

⁸¹Erickson, 278; see also Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority*, 28-40.

⁸²Klooster, 470.

⁸³John MacArthur, “The Spirit of God and Expository Preaching,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 103.

⁸⁴Peter Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 145. Hermeneuts Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard write: “This illuminating work of the Spirit does not circumvent nor allow us to dispense with the principles of hermeneutics and the techniques of exegesis. It does mean that a dynamic comprehension of the significance of Scripture and its application to life belongs uniquely to those indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Through scholars possess an arsenal of methods and techniques with which to decipher the meaning of the biblical texts, interpretation falls short of its true potential without the illumination of the Spirit” (84). As such, the doctrine of illumination is very important to those in the evangelical expository homiletic such as MacArthur, 102-115, Olford and Olford, 241-250, Adam, 143-145, and Richard, 145-150, who provide significant discussion on

In explaining his definition of expository preaching, Robinson does say that “truth must be applied to the personality and experience of the preacher” and that “God’s dealing with the preacher” is at the “center of the process.” Furthermore, before the preacher proclaims the message, he or she “should live with that message.”⁸⁵ But that is the extent of what he says—no discussion on how to live with the message or how to experience illumination from the Holy Spirit during study of the text.⁸⁶ A subject as important as this to evangelicals should have received more attention in our author’s evangelical preaching text, *Biblical Preaching*.

Why does Robinson seemingly ignore this subject when it is so important for his approach to Scripture and authority⁸⁷ in preaching? Robinson’s response would be that an introductory preaching text cannot cover everything; many issues must be left out.⁸⁸ But due to the inseparable nature of interpretation and illumination or Word and Spirit in evangelical

it. Richard, for example, provides a discussion on the ways in which the Holy Spirit can be present during the pre-sermon stage, sermon-delivery stage, and post-sermon stage (148-150). Adam reminds expositors “that we cannot receive the words of God unless God acts within us by his Holy Spirit.” Consequently, “he or she will plead for a right understanding of Scripture in preparation for the sermon, pray for the congregation as they hear it, and urge the congregation to pray to God and appreciate their dependance on him” (145). MacArthur warns expositors: “We dare not neglect the illuminating work of the Spirit in our own lives as we study the Scriptures in preparation for our messages.” He adds: “And we must realize that our sermons will accomplish nothing apart from the Spirit’s work of illuminating our congregations” (115).

⁸⁵Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 25-26.

⁸⁶This is not to suggest that Robinson or any homiletician should teach an expositor how to program this encounter between the text of Scripture and the illuminating Spirit; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard state: “Certainly, we cannot ‘program’ this creative encounter; it requires a stance of faith and humility before the Lord of the universe who has revealed his truth on the pages of Scripture. Yet in seeking to hear his voice, the interpreter becomes open to true understanding” (85).

⁸⁷The evangelical understanding of illumination is closely associated with the evangelical understanding of Scripture (Ryrie, 590-591; Frame, 217-219; Erickson, 278-279, 282-283).

⁸⁸Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001.

thought, one cannot not be discussed without the other.⁸⁹ Robinson's homiletical teaching consequently falls short in this area. How a discussion on illumination by the Holy Spirit could strengthen Robinson's method will be addressed in the concluding chapter as part of the proposal.

4.2.3.2.3 Third Hermeneutical Presupposition: Author-Oriented Hermeneutics

Third, an author-oriented view of hermeneutics is essential to expository preaching. Robinson's big idea approach is thoroughly author centered. He speaks repeatedly of the expositor's task as finding the meaning of the "biblical writer" or "biblical author."⁹⁰ He also refers to the "author's meaning" in the context of the narrative passages.⁹¹ Moreover, the two fundamental questions that help an expositor understand the meaning of a biblical writer are: "What precisely is the author talking about?" and "What is the author saying about what he is talking about?" These two questions help the expositor discover the exegetical idea of the passage.⁹²

This ideational approach is based on the assumption that the biblical writers had an idea or intention in what they wrote.⁹³ Authorial intention has been criticized in recent

⁸⁹Ramm, 38-40; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 84-85; and Sargent, 232-237.

⁹⁰See, for example, Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 23, 25, 27, 43, 66, 70.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 68.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 43.

⁹³Elliot Johnson explains the evangelical understanding of the dual authorship of Scripture: "The Bible adds a factor that no human literature contains: God spoke through human prophets and through the words written by human authors. These human authors were responsible for the form of the text. Yet the Author [God], not the authors [human], ultimately determined what was to be communicated." Thus, "'intended meaning' is that meaning which the Author/author has expressed in the written text" (26).

years,⁹⁴ but Robinson and others in the evangelical expository homiletic have found support for it in the work of E. D. Hirsch,⁹⁵ literary scholar and professor of English at the University of Virginia, who argues that the author's intent is the most appropriate norm for interpretation.⁹⁶ Hirsch's work has been specifically mentioned and applied by homiletics

⁹⁴See above in this chapter, notes, 6, 7, and 8.

⁹⁵E. D. Hirsch is well known in evangelical circles for advocating authorial intention. See especially his *Validity in Interpretation* (Hew Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967); and *Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1976), where he defends the original author as the determiner of meaning and distinguishes between "meaning," which is what the author meant by his particular language, and "significance," which names a relationship between the author's meaning and something else (*Validity*, 4-5, 8; cf. *Aims*, 79-80). Building on Hirsch's original theory in *Validity* is Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., the evangelical exegete who has most fully expounded the single intent of Scripture. See, for example, from among his numerous writings on the subject: "The Single Intent of Scripture," in *Evangelical Roots: A Tribute to Wilbur Smith*, ed. Kenneth S. Censer (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 125-139; idem., "A Response to Authorial Intention and Biblical Interpretation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, 441-447; and idem., *Toward An Exegetical Theology*, 30-36, 106-114. Kaiser describes this approach: "In speaking of meaning as intention, we do not profess to get into the mind, psychology, or feelings of the author. We have no way of obtaining or controlling such data. Instead, we are interested only in the *truth*-intention of the author as expressed in the way he put together the individual words, phrases, and sentences in a literary piece to form a meaning" ("The Meaning of Meaning," in *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 37); there are, however, evangelicals who criticize Kaiser for equating the meaning of a biblical passage with the human author's intention and for insisting that the passage had only one meaning because the author had only one intention; for a summary of the criticisms and Kaiser's response, see Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation*, 14-19; for Erickson's sympathetic critique of the Hirsch and Kaiser view, and his proposed correctives, see *ibid.*, 19-32. See also Elliott Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics*, who applies Hirsch's hermeneutical principles to the grammatical-historical method; for discussion of the close relationship between "Hirschian Hermeneutics and Expository Preaching," see Blue, 261-269, who encourages expositors to "welcome the work of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and integrate his contributions into a deepened understanding of their task" (269).

⁹⁶Hirsch later emended his original views in *Validity* which has been called the "Hirschian shift" by some; Blue, 254-261, traces this shift and questions whether or not Hirsch still staunchly supports authorial intention; Kaiser applauds Hirsch's distinction between "meaning" and "significance," but criticizes him for the change which "undermined his own fine analysis of the normative power of the author's intention as found in the text by allowing the interpreter to frequently usurp the right of the author to say first what he means to say" (*Uses of the Old Testament in the New* [Chicago: Moody, 1985], 204-203); Dale Leschert, however, maintains that Hirsch is consistent with his former theory in *Validity* and actually strengthens it ("A Change of Meaning, Not a Change of Mind: The Clarification of a Suspected Defection in the Hermeneutical Theory of E. D. Hirsch, Jr." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35/2 [June 1992]: 183-187).

scholars Jerry Vines, David Allen,⁹⁷ and Sidney Greidanus.⁹⁸

For Robinson, then, the way to find out about the author is to examine Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias where questions about when or where a biblical book was written and its author will be answered.⁹⁹ The way to know the meaning of what the author has said is to examine the broad, immediate, and detailed context of the writing,¹⁰⁰ and to ask the two fundamental questions above.¹⁰¹ Sitting down “before the biblical writer” and trying “to understand what he wanted to convey to his original readers” helps the expositor

⁹⁷Jerry Vines and David Allen, “Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Proclamation,” *Criswell Theological Review* 1 (Spring 1987): 315-16.

⁹⁸Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 107. For defense of the author-oriented interpretation against its critics, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, who defends “authorial-discourse interpretation” in *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks*; see especially his critiques of Paul Ricoeur (130-152) and Jacques Derrida (153-170); see also Kevin J. Vanhoozer’s *Is There a Meaning in This Text: The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), where he provides a defense of the concept of an author and hermeneutic realism. He argues that there is a meaning in each text and that it can be discovered with relative adequacy. Furthermore, he critiques Jacques Derrida’s post-structuralism and Stanley Fish’s neo-pragmatism and employs a number of philosophical resources, such as the speech-act philosophy of J. L. Austin and John Searle, in presenting a revised understanding of authorial intention (see chapters 2 [43-97] and 5 [201-280]). Vanhoozer thus defines the text as “a communicative act of a communicative agent fixed by writing” (225). Noteworthy is his recasting, yet maintaining, of Hirsch’s distinction between meaning and significance (259-263). For others who maintain authorial intention, see, for example, Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 46; Meir Sternbert, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 9; and John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 46-47; Robert H. Stein, “The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44/3 (September 2001): 451-466; and Dwight Poggemiller, “Hermeneutics and Epistemology: Hirsch’s Author Centered Meaning, Radical Historicism, and Gadamer’s Truth and Method,” (<http://www.trinitysem.edu/journal/poggemillerpap.htm> [11 August 1999], 1-13).

⁹⁹Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 63. He also writes here: “Because of different reference works display different strengths, and examination of the same subject in several different encyclopedias and dictionaries enables you to achieve both balance and completeness. In addition, through the use of bibliographies found at the end of each article, you can pursue a topic to even greater depth.”

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 59-61.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 43.

“comprehend what he meant in his own terms.”¹⁰² Such is the importance Robinson places on the biblical author and his writing as the determiner of textual meaning.

4.3 Robinson’s Definition of Expository Preaching

Robinson’s definition of expository preaching emerges as consistent with his conservative hermeneutic—the literal-sense hermeneutic with its author-oriented approach discussed above. The definition is presented at the outset of *Biblical Preaching* as a “working definition.” It reads:

Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.¹⁰³

Robinson breaks this definition down into five distinct but related components¹⁰⁴ in

¹⁰²Ibid., 87.

¹⁰³Ibid., 21. Robinson has stated this definition in a slightly different form on several other occasions. See his “Evangelicals Believe in Preaching,” delivered at Harvard Divinity School’s preaching symposium, “Secure Enough to Risk Justice,” on October 30, 1997, www.bu.edu/sth/BTI/ecudocs/robin.htm (9 January, 2001); and Robinson and Derek Morris, “Bullets or Buckshot? An Interview with Haddon Robinson,” *Ministry* 73/9 (September 2000): 22; the first published form of this definition was in “What is Expository Preaching?” 57. It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a technical analysis of the merits or demerits of Robinson’s definition. On definitions and how to evaluate them, see Hugh R. Walpole, *Semantics: The Nature of Words and Their Meanings* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1941); Ralph Borsodi, *The Definition of Definition: A New Linguistic Approach to the Integration of Knowledge* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1967); Raziel Abelson, “Definition,” in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 6:314-324; Richard Robinson, *Definition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); Irving M. Copi and Carl Cohen, *Introduction to Logic*, 8th. ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990), 128-158; G. Aldo Antonelli, “Definition,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia*, 2:845-849. See also Edward A. Yonan, “In Search of Definitions: An Agenda for Religious Studies and the Liberal Arts,” in *Criterion* 26 (Spring 1987): 7-10; Stephen J. Casey, “Definitions of Religion: A Matter of Taste? In *Horizons* 11 (Spring 1984): 86-99; Homiletic scholar Harold T. Bryson has analyzed Robinson’s definition in light of definitions on expository preaching and calls it a “substantive definition,” which emphasizes that the expository sermon “must be drawn from a Bible text, irrespective of how long or how short it is” (22-25).

¹⁰⁴Robinson told the researcher that each of these components could be considered as presuppositions to his ten-stage method of preparing expository sermons (Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001). On presuppositions, see Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 351; Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 69-71; and especially Anders Nygren, *Meaning and*

the following order: (1) the passage governs the sermon; (2) the expositor communicates a concept; (3) the concept comes from the text; (4) the concept is applied to the expositor; (5) the concept is applied to the hearers. Two features are important to note concerning these five components. First, the biblical passage and its concept are the dominating factors in the definition. Second, these five definitional components follow a definite sequence of interpretation-application: components 1 - 3 relate to interpretation and components 4 - 5 relate to application. These features will be highlighted in a closer investigation of each component, to which we now turn.

4.3.1 First Definitional Component: The Passage Governs the Sermon

Robinson contends that in expository preaching “first and above all, the thought of the biblical writer determines the substance of an expository sermon.”¹⁰⁵ At its “core,” he emphasizes, “expository preaching is more a philosophy than a method.”¹⁰⁶ It is a way of thinking: “Whether or not we can be called expositors starts with our purpose and with our honest answer to the question: ‘Do you, as a preacher, endeavor to bend your thought to the Scriptures, or do you use the Scriptures to support your thought?’” Expositors, therefore,

Method: Prolegomena to a Scientific Philosophy of Religion and a Scientific Theology, trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 160-166, 187-225; see also Paul Helm, “Understanding Scholarly Presuppositions: A Crucial Tool for Research?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44:1 (1993): 145-146; Graham Stanton, “Presuppositions in New Testament Criticism,” in *New Testament Interpretation*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1977), 61; Avrum Stroll, “Presupposing,” in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 6:446; and Ronald Nash, *Life’s Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 19-20. For discussion on the role of presuppositions in preaching, see A. Duane Litfin, “Theological Presuppositions and Preaching;” Peter Adam, “The Preacher and the Sufficient Word: Presuppositions of Biblical Preaching,” in *When God’s Voice is Heard: Essays on Preaching Presented to Dick Lucas*, eds. Christopher Green, and David Jackman (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1995), 27-42; Al Fasol, *Essentials for Biblical Preaching*, 21-24.

¹⁰⁵Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 21.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 22.

should be willing to re-examine their doctrinal convictions, reject the judgements of their most respected teachers, and “make a U-turn” in their “previous understandings of the Bible should these conflict with the concepts of the biblical writer.”¹⁰⁷

The above statement that “preaching is more a philosophy than a method” reflects Robinson’s theological and hermeneutical methodology.¹⁰⁸ Essentially the issue is this: because the Bible is the inspired Word of God, one should approach it with humility, surrendering his or her presuppositions, biases, or denominational beliefs, to its authoritative teaching, which is derived from applying the grammatical-historical-theological method. Such is the methodological framework of expository preaching in Robinson’s thinking.

An issue he must address, however, is to what extent his presuppositions or “doctrinal convictions” affect his interpretation of the Bible. Can he or any other expositor actually cleanse or purge himself of his presuppositions? Can exegetical tools alone determine the pure teaching of Scripture? How does he know that his understanding of the Bible after exegetical study is the true meaning of the text?¹⁰⁹ Could he, for example, fall prey to a circular movement without any progressive possibilities? Is it possible to begin with an attitude of openness toward the text and interpret it thinking that one is laying aside one’s own doctrinal beliefs, only then to conclude that its interpreted meaning harmonizes with one’s beliefs and thus end up with the same beliefs he started with. This is a serious

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸See previous chapter and in this chapter, 4.2.4.

¹⁰⁹Reflecting Gadamer’s metaphor “fusion of horizons” (*Truth and Method*), Thiselton addresses the issue behind these questions when he states, “The interpreter, in any case, cannot simply step out of his own horizon, and look at the text as if he were detached from his own time and his own tradition” (*The Two Horizons*, 439-440).

methodological issue that Robinson should address in some detail.

Following the above statements, he makes an attempt to address this issue. He writes that an attitude such as the one he expresses above “demands both simplicity and sophistication.” Thus,

On the one hand, expositors approach their Bible with a childlike desire to hear the story. They do not come to argue, to prove a point, or even to find a sermon. They read to understand and to experience what they understand. At the same time, they know they live not as children but as adults locked into presuppositions and world views that make understanding difficult. The Bible is not a child’s storybook; rather it is great literature that requires thoughtful response. All its diamonds do not lie exposed on the surface. Its richness is mined only through hard intellectual and spiritual spadework.¹¹⁰

Two issues need attention in this paragraph. First, Robinson acknowledges that adults do have “presuppositions and world views” which hinder understanding of the biblical text. We are not immune to our personal interests and presuppositions; rather, we are “locked” into them and cannot change them easily. Unfortunately, this is all he says about presuppositions.¹¹¹ Other evangelicals have discussed the significant influence of

¹¹⁰Robinson, 22.

¹¹¹Evangelical scholar Craig C. Broyles, however, provides a full description of the role presuppositions play in approaching the Bible: “The first subject for the interpretation of the Bible is thus not the Bible, but the interpreter. Before we consider the object of our study, we must consider our perspective or view point. . . . The telling question each must ask is, What are my vested interests and how might they bias and prejudice my reading of the Bible? What assumptions, presuppositions, and tendencies do I bring to the text? As humans, we must acknowledge our tendency to avoid the light the Bible cast upon us, especially its diagnosis of sin in the human condition. We all bear cultural assumptions. In North America, for example, we tend to focus on techniques and technology when faced with problems, rather than on character. We all bear theological or denominational assumptions that act as eyeglasses. Passages that are an integral part of our theology are brought into focus, while the rest remains a blur. We all carry personal assumptions, which are the hardest to discern. We may, for example, hold a belief tenaciously, not because we are exegetically and logically convinced, but simply because a trusted and beloved Bible teacher told us so” (“Interpreting the Old Testament,” in *Interpreting the Old Testament*, 16); Thiselton emphasizes, “the modern interpreter, no less than the text, stands in a given historical context and tradition” (11).

presuppositions on the interpretive process and how to deal with them.¹¹²

The second issue in this paragraph is Robinson's recognition that the process of yielding to the Bible's teaching only takes place "through hard intellectual and spiritual spadework." What is involved in this "intellectual and spiritual spadework?" Does it involve the grammatical-historical-theological method? Does this spadework cleanse the expositor of his presuppositions or does it help him deal with them during the process of interpretation? Again, no discussion follows these words; the issue is left hanging.¹¹³ While he does discuss interpretation later,¹¹⁴ more needed to be said here.

One might wonder at places such as this whether or not Robinson is aware of or hiding his methodology? It can be detected throughout his text, *Biblical Preaching* (and thus his awareness of it is revealed), but at certain times (like this), it needs more discussion.

¹¹²Thiselton says that the goal of biblical hermeneutics is to bring about an active and meaningful engagement between the interpreter and text, in such a way that the interpreter's own horizon is re-shaped and enlarged" (xix); Broyles suggests "successive readings" of the text "and approximations of its meaning, each time—theoretically at least—moving closer to fusing our horizons" (17); Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard discuss "pre-understandings" at length and suggest ways interpreters can deal with them in relationship to the text (98-116).

¹¹³One evangelical methodological approach, which Robinson could have discussed or at least referred to, is the "hermeneutical spiral." Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard provide a description of this spiral: "Every interpreter begins with a pre-understanding. After an initial study of a Biblical text, that text performs a work on the interpreter. His or her pre-understanding is no longer what it was. Then, as the newly interpreted interpreter proceeds to question the text further, out of this newly formed understanding further—perhaps, different—answers are obtained. A new understanding has emerged. It is not simply a repetitive circle; but, rather, a progressive spiral of development" (114); Osborn, in *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, describes it as an "open-ended movement from the horizon of the text to the horizon of the reader. I am not going round and round a closed circle that can never detect the true meaning but am spiraling nearer and nearer to the text's intended meaning as I refine my hypotheses and allow the text to continue to challenge and correct those alternative interpretations, then to guide my delineation of its significance for my situation today." He further explains that in this model: "The text itself sets the agenda and continually reforms the questions that the observer asks of it. The means by which this is accomplished is twofold: grammatical-syntactical exegesis and historical-cultural background. These interact to reshape the interpreter's pre-understanding and help to fuse the two horizons" (6, 324); see also Larkin, 302.

¹¹⁴See below, 5.4.

Rather than hiding it Robinson seems to choose not to discuss his methodology directly. As he remarked to the researcher concerning some authors of homiletic texts: "One of the difficulties is they, I think, try to cover too much." Thus, "in covering too much, in covering everything, they cover nothing."¹¹⁵ This seems to have been Robinson's guiding principle on what to put in or leave out of his text, whether it be discussions on methodology, method, or other issues. The view taken here is that his text is weakened in places because of an absence of methodological discussion.

Summing up this definitional component, since the Bible is the Word of God, the biblical author's meaning should be discovered through a careful hermeneutical process and then accordingly become the center of the sermon.¹¹⁶ As expositors then listen to the text, they attempt to reshape their thoughts to the teaching of the text, while recognizing the influence of their presuppositions and world views. They then allow the concept in the text to govern the content of sermon. In this sense, Robinson means the "thought of the biblical

¹¹⁵Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001.

¹¹⁶Conversely, New Homiletic theoretician David Buttrick argues that preachers should "not expound texts slavishly week by week." He asserts that "what is essential in scripture is the story of God-with-us, and not discrete texts basking in their own inerrancy." He writes: "Let us be willing to say baldly that it is possible to preach the Word of God without so much as mentioning scripture. Preachers will receive scripture as a gift of grace, and they will delight in scripture, study scripture, live with scripture so as to be grasped by the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, preachers may indeed wish to preach from scripture as they interpret things of God to a being-saved community in the world. But we must not say that preaching from scripture is requisite for sermons to be the Word of God. An authority model descending from God to Christ to scripture to sermon could lead to a terrifying arrogance that not only contradicts gospel but destroys preaching" (*Homiletic*, 458); see chapter 15 of *Homiletic* for a full treatment of Buttrick's view of authority as it relates to preaching; elsewhere he says, "We are preachers of the gospel, *not* necessarily of the Bible" ("The Use of the Bible in Preaching," 190). Robinson and Buttrick thus approach Scripture and preaching with different presuppositions.

writer determines the substance of an expository sermon.”¹¹⁷

4.3.2 Second Definitional Component: The Expositor Communicates a Concept

This is a central feature in Robinson’s approach to expository preaching.¹¹⁸ Speaking of the definition as a whole, he says it “emphasizes that the expositor communicates a concept.” While preachers examine words in the text and sometimes deal with individual words in preaching, “words and phrases should never become ends in themselves.”¹¹⁹ Only words linked together convey meaning. Robinson explains:

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 21-22. Robinson echoes the conviction of many homiletics who wrote during the decades prior to the first edition of *Biblical Preaching* (1980). See, for example, Merrill F. Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955), 33-36; Donald G. Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1957), 21, 26; Charles W. Koller, *Expository Preaching Without Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), 15-16; H. C. Brown, Jr., H. Gordon Clinard, and Jesse J. Northcutt, *Steps to the Sermon: A Plan for Sermon Preparation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1963), 34; Nolan Howington, 61-62; Greer W. Boyce, “A Plea for Expository Preaching,” *Canadian Journal of Theology* 8 (January 1962): 14-16; Siegfried Mever, “What is Biblical Preaching?” *Encounter* 24 (Spring 1963): 183-185; Faris D. Whitesell, *Power in Expository Preaching* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1967), 31ff; Robinson’s earlier article, “What is Expository Preaching?” (1976); and Klyne R. Snodgrass, “Exegesis and Preaching: The Principles and Practice of Exegesis,” *The Covenant Quarterly* 34 (August 1976), 3ff. Subsequent to 1980, see, for example, Liefeld, 6; Stott, 126; Mayhue, 12-13; Louis Goldberg, “Preaching with Power the Word ‘Correctly Handled’ To Transform Man and His World,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27/1 (1984): 3-17. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 15; Vines and Shaddix, 28-32. Two sources on shaping sermons according to the form of Scripture are, Don M. Wardlaw, ed., *Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983); and Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989); articles continue to come off the press on this issue; see, for example, the recent series by Steven J. Lawson, “The Priority of Biblical Preaching: An Expository Study of Acts 2:42-47,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158/630 (April-June 2001): 198-217; *idem.*, “The Power of Biblical Preaching: An Expository Study of Jonah 3:1-10,” *ibid.*, 158/631 (July-September 2001): 331-346; *idem.*, “The Pattern of Biblical Preaching: An Expository Study of Ezra 7:10 and Nehemiah 8:1-18,” *ibid.*, 158/632 (October-December 2001): 451-466.

¹¹⁸See Willhite and Gibson, *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*. Willhite says this book “provides an apologetic for Robinson’s approach to expository preaching” (“First Reads in Preaching: An Annotated Bibliography,” *Preaching* 16/1 [July-August 2000]: 17); see also reviews, Kromminga, 285; and Fink, 150. In his 1997 interview with Morris, Robinson declares straightforwardly: “preaching is the proclamation of a concept derived from the scripture” (Robinson and Morris, “Bullets or Buckshot,” 22).

¹¹⁹Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 23.

In our approach to the Bible, therefore, we are primarily concerned not with what individual words mean, but with what the biblical writers mean through their use of words. Putting this another way, we do not understand the concepts of a passage merely by analyzing its separate words. A word-by-word grammatical analysis can be as pointless and boring as reading a dictionary. If we desire to understand the Bible in order to communicate its message, we must grapple with it on the level of ideas.¹²⁰

Accordingly, Robinson introduces the reader to the term “ideas”¹²¹ in the context of preaching. He then cites a passage from Francis A. Schaeffer’s book, *True Spirituality*¹²² to illustrate the importance of ideas in preaching:

The preaching of the gospel is ideas, flaming ideas brought to men, as God has revealed them to us in Scripture. It is not a contentless experience internally received, but is contentful ideas internally acted upon that make the difference. So when we state our doctrines, they must be ideas, and not just phrases. We cannot use doctrines as though they were mechanical pieces to a puzzle. True doctrine is an idea revealed by God in the Bible and an idea that fits properly into the external world as it is, and as God made it, and to man as he is, as God made him, and can be fed back through man’s body into his thought-world and there acted upon. The battle for man is centrally in the world of thought.¹²³

The issue of an expositor communicating a concept or idea in the sermon is so important in Robinson’s thought that he devotes all of Chapter 2 to explaining it: “What’s the Big Idea?”¹²⁴ At the outset of this chapter he states that this part of his definition

¹²⁰Ibid. Thus, Robinson distinguishes between merely reciting the details of the text and preaching the idea of the text. John MacArthur (340-341) prefers preaching verse-by-verse, whereas Robinson prefers preaching biblical “ideas.” See Mark Barger Elliot, *Creative Styles of Preaching* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 133-135, who briefly compares and contrast the two styles of Robinson and MacArthur.

¹²¹It should be noted that in Robinson’s explanation of this definition, the terms “concept,” “idea,” and “truth,” are used interchangeably (ibid., 23, 24, 25, 27). “Idea,” however, becomes the dominant term (33-50).

¹²²Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1971).

¹²³Cited in *Biblical Preaching*, 23; Schaeffer, 121-122

¹²⁴Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 33-50.

(“expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept,”¹²⁵) is a “major affirmation.”¹²⁶ He specifies:

A sermon should be a bullet and not buckshot. Ideally each sermon is the explanation, interpretation, or application of a single dominant idea supported by other ideas, all drawn from one passage or several passages of Scripture.¹²⁷

Robinson then argues for the importance of a “single idea” for every sermon.¹²⁸

Historically, rhetoricians and preachers have insisted that a speech or sermon should embody “a single, all-encompassing concept.”¹²⁹ To ignore the principle “that a central, unifying idea must be at the heart of an effective sermon is to push aside what experts in both communication theory and preaching have to tell us,” he asserts.¹³⁰ Duane Litfin buttresses

Robinson’s argument:

There exists a remarkable consensus among those who have studied and practiced public speaking over the last twenty-five hundred years that the most effective way to structure a speech is to build it around a single significant thought. From the ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians to the latest communication theorists, from the preaching in the Bible to the sermons heard in pulpits today, from the political oratory

¹²⁵Ibid., 35.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸In the Festschrift to Robinson, *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*, Keith Willhite provides the premise to the book in the following claim with its two strands of evidence: “Claim: Developing a single idea in a sermon is the best way to preach, or at least, to learn to preach. (Why?) Evidence: Developing a single idea or proposition in a sermon grows from evangelical hermeneutical commitments. Evidence: Developing a single idea or proposition in a sermon grows from a long-accepted body of rhetorical theory and practice.” He calls this single-idea preaching “propositional preaching.” (“A Bullet versus Buckshot,” 13-14). Thus, this same argument Robinson advanced in *Biblical Preaching* (1980), 33f, continues today through evangelical colleagues (see the preaching texts by: K. Willhite, *Preaching With Relevance*; and Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, as well as in the second edition of *Biblical Preaching* (2001), 35f.

¹²⁹Ibid., 36.

¹³⁰Ibid., 37.

of democracies long past to the persuasive messages of our own times, the history of public speaking and the lessons we have learned from that history unite to argue forcefully that a *speech, to be maximally effective, ought to attempt to develop more or less fully only one major proposition.*¹³¹

So important is this principle to Robinson that if preachers “will not—or cannot” think clearly enough so that they say what they mean, then they “have no business in the pulpit.”¹³²

Robinson defines an idea as “distillation of life” that “abstracts out of the particulars of life what they have in common and relates them to each other.”¹³³ The formation of an idea involves two essential components: a subject and complement. The term “subject” is not the same as a subject in grammar. While the grammatical subject is usually a single word, the homiletical subject of a sermon idea can never be only one word. “It calls for the full, precise answer to the question, ‘What am I talking about?’”¹³⁴ Since the subject cannot stand alone, it needs the complement which “completes the subject by answering the question, ‘What am I saying about what I am talking about?’”¹³⁵ Thus, “an idea emerges only when the complement is joined to a definite subject.”¹³⁶

H. Grady Davis in his influential *Design for Preaching* first discussed the “anatomy”

¹³¹Duane Litfin, *Public Speaking: A Handbook for Christians*, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 80; italics his.

¹³²Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 41.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 39.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, 41. Litfin, who follows Robinson’s approach closely, writes that “whereas the grammatical subject is determined on the basis of the rules of syntax and grammar, *the subject of the idea is determined on the basis of thought and meaning.* The grammatical subject is pinpointed more or less mechanically, but the detection of the subject of the idea is a far more subtle, complex, an delicate process” (Litfin, *Public Speaking*, 86).

¹³⁵Robinson, 39.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

of an idea.¹³⁷ He described a “complete idea” as “a complete thought expressed in a complete sentence with subject and predicate.”¹³⁸ He taught that the two questions or elements, “what is talked about and what is said about it, constitute the organic structure of any developed idea.”¹³⁹ The first question “points to the true subject, what is actually talked about.”¹⁴⁰ The second question “completely answered, supplies in condensed form the full body of predication, everything the speaker or writer says.”¹⁴¹ Robinson has refined Davis’s teaching on the idea and openly admits in the preface of *Biblical Preaching*, the first edition (1980), that Davis made a “special contribution” to his thought. “As I was attempting to find my way,” Robinson recalls, “his book found me *Design for Preaching* proved yeast for my thinking.”¹⁴²

To avoid any confusion, Robinson adds a paragraph of clarification concerning his teaching on the subject and complement, which was not in the original 1980 edition:

Moreover, behind every subject there is a question either stated or implied. If I say that my subject is “the importance of faith,” the implied question is, “What is the

¹³⁷Davis, 18-40.

¹³⁸Ibid., 22.

¹³⁹Ibid., 25.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 24.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 25.

¹⁴²Robinson (1980), 10-11. He cites Davis several times in discussing the “idea” concept (see *Biblical Preaching* [2001] 37, 42). Riegert correctly states in his review that *Biblical Preaching* “owes its source and much of its substance to Henry Grady Davis” (Riegert, 129). It should be noted that Davis’ book has been influential in the non-ideational New Homiletic (see above, 23, note 20). Yet, while Davis departed from the traditional approach to sermon form, he maintained the traditional ideational approach: “A well-prepared sermon is the embodiment, the development, the full statement of a significant thought. . . . So it seems natural to speak of *the idea* of a sermon” (Davis, 20; italics his). See Thomas Long’s discussion on the traditional and non-traditional aspects of Davis’ homiletical approach, “Form,” 147. Robinson drew from both the traditional and non-traditional aspects of Davis’ thought (see discussion below, 5.10).

importance of faith?" "The people that God justifies . . ." forms a subject because it answers the question, "What am I talking about?" But the unstated question is, "Who are the people God justifies?" If the words *subject* and *complement* confuse you, then try thinking of the subject as a question and your complement as the answer to that question. The two together make up the idea.¹⁴³

The route to finding the single idea of the expository sermon, therefore, is pursuing the subject and complement of each passage of Scripture. Robinson summarizes his case:

Finding the subject and complement does not start when we begin construction of our sermons. We pursue the subject and complement when we study the biblical text. Because each paragraph, section, or subsection of Scripture contains an idea, we do not understand a passage until we can state its subject and complement exactly. While other questions emerge in the struggle to understand the meaning of a biblical writer, the two ("What precisely is the author talking about?" and "What is the author saying about what he is talking about?") are fundamental.¹⁴⁴

New Homiletic theoretician Richard Eslinger believes the "ideational approach" Robinson espouses is "critically, if not terminally ill."¹⁴⁵ It is an "old model" which "no longer serves the church well."¹⁴⁶ He claims that this "'distillation' approach to the meaning of

¹⁴³Robinson (2001), 41 (*italics his*); cf. Robinson (1980), 40.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 41. Several homileticians since the first edition of *Biblical Preaching* (1980) have employed Robinson's terms "subject" and "complement" in explaining the "idea" of the biblical sermon. See, for example, James Braga, *How to Prepare Bible Messages*, 115-120; especially Litfin, *Public Speaking*, 83-89; Reg Grant and John Reed, *The Power Sermon: Countdown To Quality Messages for Maximum Impact*. See also Willhite and Gibson, *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*.

¹⁴⁵Eslinger, *A New Hearing*, 11. In the context of this statement Eslinger is speaking of the Traditional Homiletic in general, not specifically of Robinson's subject/complement approach. Although, he would certainly include Robinson's approach in his critique.

¹⁴⁶*Idem.*, *Pitfalls in Preaching*, 74. Another critic of the traditional homiletic, Lucy Rose, does not completely discard it as Eslinger does. She sees a place for it in the contemporary church. "This theory is important," she writes. "It underscores the fact that sermons do function to gain acceptance for and transmit Christian beliefs. When the persuasive communication of a faith claim is the primary task which the preacher sets for the sermon, then traditional homiletical theory can aid the preacher in accomplishing that task. When, for example, the sermon's explicit purpose is to elicit assent to a particular doctrinal formulation, to persuade the congregation to act, or to challenge heresy, then the preacher who is trained in traditional homiletics has helpful tools for preparing sermons" (Rose, "Preaching in the Round-Table Church," 42-43). New Homiletic sympathizer, Thomas Long, suggest a possible renaissance of traditional sermon form: "What is underplayed, of course, in the more recent understandings of sermon form is exactly what was emphasized in the traditional

Scripture can no longer be sustained, its conceptual language no longer functions very well rhetorically, and its methodology of assembling ideas into points and propositions has become almost impossible for hearers to follow.”¹⁴⁷ This “sermonic trading in ideas,” Eslinger contends, “is a static, lifeless, and reductionist enterprise.”¹⁴⁸

One reason Eslinger and others find the traditional, evangelical expository homiletic reductionistic and obsolete is because they believe it suppresses the nature of Scripture. Edward Farley, for example, claims that the “atomism” of dividing Scripture passages into pericopes and assigning a necessary truth to each one suppresses the “power and beauty” of Scripture. “To see a letter of Paul, a Gospel, or a prophetic tract as an aggregate of diverse units is surely to miss the writing as an argument, a polemic, a set of imageries, a theological perspective, a narrative.” He insists: “The very thing that gives the writing its power is its unity, its total concrete vision, its total movement.” Thus, to think of Scripture in terms of a preaching idea, “an aggregate of thousands of small units, each with its lesson for life casts

models: ideational content and didactic purpose. Ironically, the future may hold a renaissance of traditional sermon form as the pulpit increasingly faces a church unaware of its tradition and woefully lacking in knowledge of the basic content of the faith” (Long, “Form,” 151).

¹⁴⁷Ibid. Eslinger’s alternative is Lowry’s “narrative time” (Lowry, *Doing Time in the Pulpit*, 62ff), which emphasizes process and events rather than structure and theme (Eslinger, 74-76; Lowry, 27). Contra to Eslinger, Litfin argues that the human mind craves unity, order, and progress, and that a “central idea within a speech promotes not only unity, but order and progression as well.” Hence, he argues that unified, orderly speeches and sermons are easier for hearers to follow (Litfin, 80-83). Robinson, whom Litfin credits much of his knowledge about public speaking (ibid., 13), concurs (Robinson, 35-39).

¹⁴⁸Idem., *A New Hearing*, 85. Evangelical homiletician Donald Hamilton asserts that Eslinger “condemns the concept of propositional truth . . . exclusively through means of propositional argumentation” (Hamilton, 28). He points out that “Eslinger himself organizes his materials according to a rational structure” (ibid., 30, note 18). Thus, those “involved in espousing a ‘new homiletic’ seem to be contradictory in the way they communicate *their* ideas about preaching in comparison to the way they say sermonic ideas themselves must be communicated” (ibid., 28).

a dark veil over the Scriptures.” The loss is “the grandeur, beauty, and moral vision of the Pentateuchal narratives, the prophetic theology, the radicality of Jesus’ message, and the dramatic birth of the early Christian movement.”¹⁴⁹

Robinson would respond by emphasizing that “each paragraph, section, or subsection of Scripture contains an idea.”¹⁵⁰ These ideas are subservient to the larger idea in the biblical section or book. To isolate the smaller ideas in a passage while acknowledging the larger idea does not violate the context.¹⁵¹ The two diagnostic questions of the text—“(1) What is the text talking about (subject)? (2) What is the text saying about the subject (complement)?”¹⁵²—seek to expose rather than suppress the beauty, power, and total vision of the genres of Scripture.¹⁵³ “Our linguistic and grammatical analysis must never become an end in themselves, but rather should lead to a clearer understanding of the passage as a whole.”¹⁵⁴ The subject and complement approach to finding the idea, Robinson insists, works reliably in all biblical genres.¹⁵⁵ “To find the idea in any of them, we must be aware of the kind of

¹⁴⁹Edward Farley, “Preaching the Bible and the Gospel,” *Theology Today* (April 1994): 95-96.

¹⁵⁰Robinson, *Biblical Peaching*, 42.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, 59-62.

¹⁵²Willhite, “A Bullet versus Buckshot,” 17.

¹⁵³The way in which these two diagnostic questions expose the total vision of biblical genres will be discussed in 5.5, during the discussion on stage three.

¹⁵⁴Robinson, 66.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 68. For examples of how Robinson’s subject/complement approach is applied to different biblical genres, see the contributions in Willhite and Gibson. Willhite states: “Robinson’s two diagnostic questions of the text, and later of the audience, are the genius of his entire paradigm” (“A Bullet versus Buckshot, 17).

literature we are reading and the conventions that are unique to it.”¹⁵⁶ Once the unit idea is isolated, it is preached in such a manner that the totality of the passage is kept in view.¹⁵⁷ Thus, rather than “veil” a Scripture passage, Robinson believes this approach seeks to “uncover” the biblical author’s idea¹⁵⁸ and effectively communicate it to the audience.¹⁵⁹

In the twenty-one years between the first edition (1980) and the second edition (2001) of *Biblical Preaching*, Robinson has maintained his original procedure: “sermons must deal with ideas or they deal with nothing.”¹⁶⁰ For him, ideational preaching is not a reductionist enterprise, but the most effective means to preach the message of the Bible. He writes:

If God superintended the writing of Scripture and protected its details, then biblical preaching must reflect God’s thought both in theme and development. Should a minister protest that such sermons suffer from a variety deficiency, he might discover that submitting his thought to the biblical author can produce vitality that no other homiletical method could offer.¹⁶¹

Hence, the statement that the “expositor communicates a concept” in the sermon is foundational to Robinson’s homiletical thought. Understanding this key presupposition is essential to understanding his ten-step method of expository preaching.

4.3.3 Third Definitional Component: The Concept Comes from the Text

Robinson explains that the “emphasis on ideas as the substance of expository

¹⁵⁶Robinson, 68.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 73-106.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 70.

¹⁵⁹Farley would still disagree with Robinson due to his presupposition that the “sermon is first of all a preaching of the gospel, not a preaching of a passage” (idem., 103). He views the gospel as separate from the text of Scripture whereas Robinson views the two as one (Robinson, 20-21).

¹⁶⁰Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (2001), 10.

¹⁶¹Idem., “Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” 808.

preaching does not in any way deny the importance of vocabulary or grammar.” This definition, he says, “goes on to explain that in the expository sermon the idea is derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context.” This highlights two aspects of expository preaching: first, “how expositors come to their message,” and second, “how they communicate it.” He explains:

In their study expositors search for the objective meaning of a passage through their understanding of the language, backgrounds, and setting of the text. Then in the pulpit they present enough of their study to the congregation so that their listeners may check the interpretation for themselves.¹⁶²

Thus, both preachers and the listeners have a responsibility. Preachers, on the one hand, must attempt to work their way “back into the world of the Scriptures to understand the original message.”¹⁶³ They must “seek a firsthand acquaintance with the biblical writers and their ideas in context.”¹⁶⁴ The natural way for the evangelical to do this is through the historical-grammatical-theological method as discussed above which seeks the “objective meaning” of the passage. The listeners, on the other hand, “have a responsibility to match the sermon to the biblical text.”¹⁶⁵ They should “decide for themselves if what they are hearing is indeed what the Bible says.”¹⁶⁶ Hence, the centrality of the biblical text and its context for both preachers and listeners is vital in Robinson’s approach to expository preaching.

This definitional component, like the first one above, emphasizes the governing

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Ibid., 25.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 24.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., 25. See above discussion of Robinson’s second hermeneutical presupposition, 4.3.2.

influence of the text over the entire sermon. Furthermore, it builds on Robinson's three hermeneutical presuppositions discussed earlier in this chapter and on his evangelical understanding of language noted in the previous chapter that the human language of the Bible can convey divine truth and the words in a sermon are equivalent with objective reality.¹⁶⁷

Up to this point, the focus has been on interpretation—grammatical-historical exegesis. The next two components of the definition focus on application. For Robinson, application is not a part of the process of exegesis but a result of it. It thus comes after the “objective meaning” of the text is determined through the interpretation process.¹⁶⁸

4.3.4 Fourth Definitional Component: The Concept is Applied to the Expositor

Robinson believes that the “truth must be applied to the personality and experience of the preacher.” Consequently, God's dealing with the preacher is “at the center of the process.”¹⁶⁹ When church audiences hear a sermon, they do not really hear a sermon, they hear a person. He thus admonishes expositors:

Distinctions made between “studying the Bible to get a sermon and studying the Bible to feed your own soul” are misleading and even false. A scholar may examine the Bible as Hebrew poetry or as a record of the births and reigns of long-dead kings and yet not be confronted by its truth. Yet no such detachment can exist for one who opens the Bible as the Word of God. Before we proclaim the message of the Bible to others, we should live with that message ourselves.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷See above 3.2.1.2.3.1-2.

¹⁶⁸Robinson thus follows a principle stated in Ramm's classic evangelical work on hermeneutics: “It is therefore mandatory for a preacher to realize that interpretation of the meaning of the text is one thing, and the range of application is another, and that he must always keep these two matters separate” (*Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3d. rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 113; Packer, however, views interpretation as encompassing exegesis, synthesis, and application (*God Has Spoken*, 97-102).

¹⁶⁹Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 25.

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 26.

“Ultimately,” Robinson concludes, “God is more interested in developing messengers than messages, and because the Holy Spirit confronts us primarily through the Bible, we must learn to listen to God before speaking for God.”¹⁷¹

While this is a strong appeal for the preacher to apply the truth to his or her personal life, Robinson never discusses how the preacher should engage in such an activity. He claims that “many preachers fail as Christians before they fail as preachers because they do not think biblically,” but provides no guidance on how the preacher can think biblically in daily living.¹⁷² Although Robinson neglects to provide counsel on how the expositor should “live” with the message of the text, other expository homiletic scholars have devoted significant discussion to this subject.¹⁷³

It should be noted that the definition does say that it is the “Holy Spirit” who “applies” the biblical concept “to the personality and experience of the preacher.”¹⁷⁴ But no discussion on the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of illumination follows. Consequently, Robinson’s strong emphasis on the importance of the expositor’s personal application of the message is weakened by the lack of discussion on the methodological issue of the Holy Spirit’s relation to the preacher. Again, this is a case where Robinson could have, but chose

¹⁷¹Ibid., 27. Stephen Olford also places heavy emphasis on personal application of the message to the preacher’s personal life (Olford and Olford, 177-179).

¹⁷²Ibid., 26.

¹⁷³See, for example, Kaiser, *Toward An Exegetical Theology*, 235-247; Erroll Hulse, “The Preacher and Piety,” in *The Preacher and Preaching*, 62-90; MacArthur, Jr., “The Man of God and Expository Preaching,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 85-101; Chapell, 25-32; especially Olford and Olford, who discuss the expository preacher’s personal spiritual life, 7-65; the spiritual side of sermon finalization, 156-182; personal consecration for preaching, 214-228; spiritual illumination, 241-250; and spiritual motivation for the ministry of preaching, 294-303.

¹⁷⁴Robinson, 21.

not to, discuss the work of the Holy Spirit. This omission could be construed as hiding his methodology, yet Robinson would explain it as part of his concern for putting too much information in the text.¹⁷⁵

4.3.5 The Concept is Applied to the Hearers

Robinson provides a synopsis of his view on application under this definitional component. Later in *Biblical Preaching*, he will address it again in stage four of the ten stages.¹⁷⁶ The purpose of the discussion at this point is to present the main points of his synopsis and briefly interact with them. As such, the discussion on application begins here, continues in the next chapter,¹⁷⁷ and culminates in Chapter 6.¹⁷⁸

According to Robinson, expositors should think in three areas: the meaning of the biblical writer, how God wants to change the preacher, and what God wants to say to the congregation through the preacher.¹⁷⁹ Application, which relates to the latter two areas, is thus a significant part of Robinson's preaching philosophy.¹⁸⁰ He believes it is "not incidental

¹⁷⁵Idem., Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001.

¹⁷⁶See below, 5.7.3.

¹⁷⁷See *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸See below, 6.2.6

¹⁷⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰See *ibid.*, 86-96, and *idem.*, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 808-813, where Robinson develops application theologically in relation to the text; see also *idem.*, "The Heresy of Application: An Interview with Haddon Robinson," 20-27; and *idem.*, "Blending Biblical Content and Life Application," 55-65. Application has received significant attention in several other homiletic texts on expository preaching since the first edition of *Biblical Preaching* (1980): see, for example, Liefeld, 95-114; Chapell, 199-225; Bryson, 383-390; and Olford and Olford, 251-260. Jay E. Adams devoted an entire book to application in preaching: *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). See also, James Earl Massey, "Application in the Sermon," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1992), 209-214; John F. Bettler, "Application," in *The Preacher and Preaching*, 331-349.

to effective expository preaching, it is crucial.”¹⁸¹

“Application gives expository preaching purpose,” he asserts.¹⁸² Expositors, therefore, “relate to the hurts, cries, and fears” of their congregants. They study the Scriptures “wondering what they can say to people living with grief and guilt, doubt and death.” In Robinson’s view the Scriptures are “to be applied” to the needs of men and women, which issues in purpose.¹⁸³

“Dull expository sermons,” according to our author, “usually lack effective applications.”¹⁸⁴ These kinds of sermons “evoke two major complaints.” First, the preachers lack creativity in their applications and sometimes give no application at all. Robinson laments: “‘May the Holy Spirit apply this truth to our lives,’ incants a minister who does not have a ghost of a guess as to how the biblical content might change people.” The second major complaint is that “the sermon does not relate to the world directly enough to be of practical use.” At this point Robinson introduces a question he will significantly develop later: “So what? What difference does it make?” He explains that normal people “do not lose sleep over the Jebusites, the Canaanites, or the Perizzites, or even about what Abraham, Moses, or Paul has said or done.” They lie awake, he says, “wondering about grocery prices, crop failures, quarrels with a spouse, diagnosis of a malignancy, a frustrating sex life, or the rat race where only rats seem to win.” So if “the sermon does not make much difference in that

¹⁸¹Robinson, “What is Expository Preaching?”, 60.

¹⁸²Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 27.

¹⁸³Ibid. See also *ibid.*, 106-108, for his fullest discussion of sermon purpose—to be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁸⁴Ibid.

world, they wonder if it makes any difference at all.” He then continues:

We should forget about speaking to the ages, therefore, and speak to our day. Expository preachers confront people about themselves from the Bible instead of lecturing them about the Bible’s history or archaeology. A congregation does not convene as a jury to convict Judas, Peter, or Solomon, but to judge themselves. We must know the people as well as the message, and to acquire that knowledge, we exegete both Scripture and the congregation.¹⁸⁵

When God spoke in the Scriptures, according to Robinson, he “addressed men and women as they were, where they were.” Likewise, “expository sermons today will be ineffective unless we realize that our listeners, too, exist in a particular address and have mind-sets unique to them.”¹⁸⁶ It should be noted that Robinson says nothing at this point on how the expositor can “exegete” the “congregation.”

To successfully travel from exegesis to application, then, Robinson counsels expositors to ask some “life-related and sometimes perplexing questions.” He writes:

In addition to grammatical relationships, we also explore personal and psychological relationships. How do the characters in the text relate to one another? How are they related to God? What values lie behind the choices they make? What apparently went on in the minds of those who were involved? These questions are not directed to the “there and then,” as though God dealt with men and women only back in the “once upon a time.” The same questions can be asked in the “here and now.” How do we relate to one another today? How does God confront us about similar issues? In what way does the modern world compare or contrast with the biblical world? Are the questions dealt with in Scripture the questions people ask today? Are they put forth now in the same way or in different forms? These probings become the raw material of ethics and theology. Application tacked on to an expository sermon in an attempt to make it relevant skirts these questions and ignores the maxim of our Protestant forebears: “Doctrines must be preached practically, and duties doctrinally.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵Ibid., 28.

¹⁸⁶Ibid.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., 29.

Robinson's understanding of application in expository preaching finds expression in John Stott's "bridge-building metaphor." Stott describes a "chasm" or "deep rift between the biblical world and the modern world."¹⁸⁸ Expository preaching is the bridge that brings these two worlds together. He insists:

Our bridges . . . must be firmly anchored on both sides of the chasm, by refusing either to compromise the divine content of the message or to ignore the human context in which it has to be spoken. We have to plunge fearlessly into both worlds, ancient and modern, biblical and contemporary, and to listen attentively to both. For only then shall we understand what each is saying, and so discern the Spirit's message to the present generation.¹⁸⁹

In explaining the nature of application, Robinson also uses this bridge-building metaphor: "The biblical preacher builds bridges that span the gulf between the written word of God and the minds of men and women." The Scripture, therefore, must be interpreted "so accurately and plainly" and applied "so truthfully that the truth crosses the bridge." As such, application brings the truth of the ancient biblical text and the contemporary audience together into meaningful dialogue.¹⁹⁰

Edward Farley believes that this approach of building a "bridge" from the "truth of the specific passage" to the situation of the congregation" is a "failed paradigm."¹⁹¹ It fails because it "requires us to think about the Bible as a collection of passages, each of which contains a preaching word or truth of God."¹⁹² Accordingly, the preacher sets out to locate

¹⁸⁸Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 137-138.

¹⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁹⁰*Idem*, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 815.

¹⁹¹Farley, "Preaching the Bible," 93.

¹⁹²*Ibid.*

an “X” (“preachable element”) in the passage which “must be made into a lesson for life.”¹⁹³ But since “what most biblical passages are up to, judged on strict exegetical grounds, is not to provide such lessons, the preacher must wring an “X” out of the exegeted passage.” In doing this, the preacher “must abandon exegesis and move to ‘interpretation.’” In the interest of interpretation the preacher crosses the bridge “by applying ‘X’ to the life situations of the congregation.” But the “application then has the character of a stipulation, an invention, a making up something about the passage.”¹⁹⁴ Farley explains:

Thus, the preacher is not really starting with the text but with the lesson for life she knows is pertinent to the congregation. Rhetorically, the sermon may sound like it marches from the passage to the situation. Actually, the route is the reverse, from the situation, the in-the-light-of problem, to a constructed ‘X’ of the text. The passage or its preachable X is not really that-which-is-preached, but the rhetorical occasion that jump-starts the sermon. Interpreting the passage, then, is a modification of the exegeted content so that the passage’s lesson for life can be applied.¹⁹⁵

This false application of the “preachable X,” in Farley’s mind, “shows that the bridge paradigm is a failed paradigm.”¹⁹⁶

Robinson, of course, would disagree that the “bridge paradigm” fails. His difference with Farley is on the level of presuppositions. Farley believes that biblical passages cannot be reduced to a “preachable element,” whereas Robinson believes “each paragraph, section, or subsection of Scripture contains an idea” that is preachable.¹⁹⁷ Robinson also believes

¹⁹³Ibid., 96.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 97.

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

¹⁹⁶Ibid.

¹⁹⁷Robinson, 42.

finding the preachable idea of a biblical passage involves a careful exegetical process that seeks to avoid what Farley describes as wringing “an ‘X’ out of the exegeted passage.” Moreover, Robinson emphasizes that once the expositor has engaged in exegesis, he or she “must define the situation into which the revelation was originally given and then decide what a modern man or woman shares, or does not share, with the original readers.”¹⁹⁸ Thus, in Robinson’s thinking, while application is a one-way movement from exegesis to modern people, it involves interaction between the ancient text and the contemporary audience. The expositor seeks to understand both the text and the people, and to bring the two together through meaningful application.¹⁹⁹

So Robinson would answer Farley’s critique by saying that strong sermons are “bifocal.” They focus on the text and the listener during both sermon preparation and delivery. As such, they root themselves solidly in careful exegesis of the text, extract an exegetical idea from that process, and contextualize or apply²⁰⁰ that idea to a specific audience. “Through bifocal preaching,” Robinson concludes, “those who hear come to

¹⁹⁸Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 87.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 28-29. Evangelical scholar Grant Osborn also affirms the bridge-building metaphor: “The sermon is a bridge-building mechanism that unites the ancient world of the biblical text with the modern world of the congregation. Contextualization is the mortar that binds these two worlds together, as the preacher attempts to help the congregation understand the relevance of the text for their own lives. The sermonic process is a continual bridging enterprise in which the preacher helps the audience to relive the drama and spiritual power of the text for its original audience and then to understand how that original message relates to similar situations in their own lives” (Osborn, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 339); earlier Osborn states it is important to note that what missiologists call “‘contextualization’ is identical with what homiletics call ‘application’ ” (ibid., 318). For full discussion on contextualization, see ibid., 318-338; B. J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1979); B. C. Fleming, *Contextualization of Theology: An Evangelical Assessment* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey, 1980); and D. J. Hesselgrave and E. Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989).

²⁰⁰See Osborn, 318-338.

understand and experience what the eternal God has to say to them today.”²⁰¹ Accordingly, application plays a significant role in Robinson’s understanding of expository preaching.

Issues such as what Robinson means by exegeting the present-day audience, feedback from the hearers, and inaccurate application will be addressed below in the next chapter.²⁰² One issue that is appropriate to address now is the evangelical rationale for application which undergirds Robinson’s approach.

When the subject of application emerges in evangelical discussions on hermeneutics, E. D. Hirsch’s distinction between meaning and significance is frequently referenced (see above 4.2.3.2.3). Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, for example, refer to Hirsch in their discussion of application:

The terminology adopted for the stages of application varies. Some speak of application as part of interpretation, while others think of it as a separate step. Some talk of what the text *meant* versus what it *means*. One of the most popular distinctions that evangelicals have utilized follows E. D. Hirsch’s discussion of meaning vs. significance. “Meaning” refers to the ideas the biblical text originally intended to communicate to its readers; “significance” refers to the implications of that meaning in different, later situations. From this vantage point, therefore, the meaning of any given passage of Scripture remains consistent no matter who is reading the text, while its significance may vary from reader to reader.²⁰³

Hirsch’s *Validity in Interpretation*, where he offers his crucial distinction between meaning and significance, is most often referenced. He writes:

Meaning is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use

²⁰¹Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 245. With this statement, Robinson concludes *Biblical Preaching*.

²⁰²See below, 5.7.3.

²⁰³Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, 402; also see, for example, Blue, 255; Stein, “The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach,” 457-461; E. Johnson, 226-229; McCartney and Clayton, 291; Osborn, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 6-7; Freeman, 387; Dockery, “Hermeneutics for Preaching,” 32; and Vanhoozer, 259-263.

of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or conception, or a situation or indeed anything imaginable. . . . Significance always implies a relationship, and one constant, unchanging pole of that relationship is what the text means. Failure to consider this simple and essential distinction has been the source of enormous confusion in hermeneutic theory.²⁰⁴

Evangelical scholars emphasize that when applying Hirsch's categories to biblical interpretation and exposition, significance should issue out of the intended meaning. I. Howard Marshall, for instance, asserts that "it is of special importance to recognize that the significance flows out of meaning." Thus, there "can be no by-passing of exegesis on the way to exposition and significance."²⁰⁵

Jerry Vines and David Allen insist that both "meaning and significance or interpretation and application are two foci which the exegete must constantly keep in mind."

They explain:

When the biblical exegete comes to a text of Scripture, he can proceed on the premise that there is a determinate meaning there. His job is to discover this meaning through exegesis. Having done this, there remains the further task of applying this meaning to modern day man.²⁰⁶

Robinson reflects this evangelical understanding, although he never mentions Hirsch. For example, he insists that "perceptive application" must be based upon "accurate exegesis," which is what the "biblical writer" meant "in his own terms." Once the "situation into which the revelation was originally given" is defined, the expositor should "decide what a modern

²⁰⁴Hirsch, *Validity*, 8; for a concise summary of criticisms advanced against Hirsch, see Vanhoozer, 82-85; for an evangelical defense of author-oriented hermeneutics, see *idem.*, 201-280.

²⁰⁵Marshall, "How Do We Interpret the Bible Today?" *Themelios* 5/2 (1980): 5.

²⁰⁶Vines and Allen, 315.

man or woman shares, or does not share, with the original readers.”²⁰⁷ This process involves, therefore, as the five components of Robinson’s definition of expository preaching suggest,²⁰⁸ a movement from exegesis to application.²⁰⁹

One other view, different from Robinson’s, is that information from the Bible should be critically integrated with the audience rather than applied to them. This approach wants to relate, enrich, and augment scriptural insight with empirical knowledge concerning the contemporary audience. As such, this approach rejects the one-way application of Robinson and views the contemporary context of the audience as making a very important contribution to the understanding and interpretation of the text. Thus, that which is studied is more the actions of the audience than the book of the Bible although the Bible does have indirect insights to yield.²¹⁰

While operating with different assumptions than Robinson and most evangelicals, this view accents the importance of the audience in the hermeneutical process and offers a corrective which could bring balance to a strict one-sided approach to application that ignores the audience. One evangelical scholar has suggested a way forward in bringing balance between both sides of the hermeneutical-application process which will be discussed below

²⁰⁷Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 87.

²⁰⁸See above 4.3.

²⁰⁹Robinson, 21-30. Robinson views this process as “traveling from exegesis to application” (*ibid.*, 29).

²¹⁰See J. A. Wolfaardt, *Practical Study Guide: PTA200-W*, rev. ed. (University of South Africa, 1992), 6, 7-9.

in Chapter 6.²¹¹

4.3.6 Robinson's Summary of the Five Components in His Definition

Robinson offers his own summary of the definition:

We have studied a passage in its context, giving attention to its historical, grammatical, and literary setting; we have in some way experienced, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the power of our study in our own lives; and from this, we shape the sermon so that it communicates the central biblical concept in a way that is meaningful to our hearers.²¹²

Such is Robinson's understanding of expository preaching.

4.4 Conclusion

It was demonstrated in this chapter that Robinson's hermeneutical approach is the evangelical grammatical-historical-theological method and that this approach emerges as a natural outgrowth of his high view of Scripture. Three hermeneutical presuppositions were found in relationship to expository preaching: First, the practice of exegesis and hermeneutics is essential to effective expository preaching. Second, the authority of the expository sermon comes from the message derived from applying the principles of hermeneutics and exegesis to the text. Third, an author-oriented view of hermeneutics is essential to expository preaching.

Robinson's definition of expository preaching consequently emerged as consistent with this literal sense, author-oriented view of hermeneutics and his high view of Scripture. From this definition three basic ideas surface as dominant in our author's homiletic methodology: the authority of the biblical text over the sermon (components 1 and 3), the

²¹¹See below, 6.2.6.2.

²¹²*Ibid.*, 30.

focus on one biblical idea during the sermon (components 2, 3, and 5), and applying the text according to its purpose in the sermon (components 4 and 5). These three basic ideas, expressed in the five definitional components, undergird the ten stages.

Just how this view of hermeneutics and definition of expository preaching are worked out in the ten stages will be addressed in the next chapter. Having completed this groundwork, we can now engage in the formal evaluation of Robinson's homiletical method—the ten stages.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF ROBINSON'S TEN-STAGE METHOD

5.1 Introduction

Thus far in this study we have examined Robinson's methodology. His theological methodology, reflected by his view of Scripture,¹ is the basis of his hermeneutic, which is the basis of his definition of expository preaching,² which is the basis of his ten-stage method. Starting with the foundation—his view of Scripture—each aspect of Robinson's methodology—his grammatical-historical-theological hermeneutic and definition of expository preaching—therefore forms an indispensable plank in the platform upon which the ten stages are built. This three-fold platform constitutes Robinson's expository methodology, which is a reflection of the evangelical expository homiletic to which he ascribes.³

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the ten stages, individually and collectively, to determine their strengths and weaknesses. The criterion for this evaluation will be Robinson's expository methodology as discussed in the previous chapters, and the methods of other homileticians within the evangelical expository homiletic. This chapter is organized according to the ten stages, and the basic tenets of each stage will be set forth in summary form, interspersed with evaluative discussion.

5.2 The Ten Stages Collectively

By way of introduction, we now turn to the ten stages collectively as Robinson

¹See Chapter 3.

²See Chapter 4.

³See 2.3

introduces them. Writing in the preface to the first edition of *Biblical Preaching* (1980), Robinson explains that he is passing “on a method to those learning to preach or to experienced people who want to brush up on the basics.”⁴ He explains that “while the stages for preparation are treated in sequence, they sometimes mix.”⁵

The ten stages, as Robinson summarizes them, are:

1. Selecting the Passage
2. Studying the Passage
3. Discovering the Exegetical Idea
4. Analyzing the Exegetical Idea
5. Formulating the Homiletical Idea
6. Determining the Sermon’s Purpose
7. Deciding How to Accomplish This Purpose
8. Outlining the Sermon
9. Filling in the Sermon Outline
10. Preparing the Introduction and Conclusion⁶

Reviewers of the first edition expressed appreciation for the clarity and “lucid outline” of this ten-stage method.⁷ The fact that it remained unchanged in *Biblical Preaching* during the twenty years between the first edition (1980) and second edition (2001) evidences its

⁴*Biblical Preaching* (1980), 10.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Biblical Preaching* (2001), 165. For other specifically devised steps or stages for biblical sermon preparation, see, for example, the eight steps in H. C. Brown, Jr., H. Gordon Clinard, Jesse J. Northcutt, and Al Fasol, *Steps to the Sermon: An Eight-Step Plan For Preaching With Confidence*; Bryan Chapell’s fourteen steps (332); Wayne McDill’s twelve skills (*The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*); Lloyd M. Perry’s ten steps (*Biblical Preaching For Today’s World*, 52-75); Donald Hamilton’s various steps for different types of sermon structure (*Homiletical Handbook*, 32-116); and the fifteen stages in Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 91-226. Two homileticians, onetime colleagues of Haddon Robinson, follow his methodology closely: Duane Litfin and John Reed. See Grant and Reed, *The Power Sermon*, for their eleven-step model. Duane Litfin follows Robinson the closest in his approach to preparing speeches and his seven stages for expository sermon preparation (Litfin, *Public Speaking*). Litfin writes in the Preface to the second edition of *Public Speaking*, “Many seminary students have also used this text, often in conjunction with Haddon Robinson’s popular book *Biblical Preaching*. These seminarians . . . have encouraged me by letting me know how well the two books complement one another” (9).

⁷Engle, 110f; see also, Lugakingira, 72; and Kromminga, 287.

viability in Robinson's mind. Furthermore, the fact that this ten-stage method has been one of the most widely used methods in evangelical circles over the last twenty years indicates its viability to evangelical homileticians.⁸ Thus, from an evangelical perspective, Robinson was correct in not changing the order and summation of the stages in the second edition. However, some of the specific content in several stages reveal deficiencies, according to this researcher. We thus turn to the stages individually.

5.3 Stage One: Selecting the Passage

According to Robinson, expository preaching starts with the biblical text: "From what passage of Scripture should I draw my sermon?" Consequently, a "conscientious ministry in the Scriptures" will involve careful planning. "Sometime before their year begins," he writes, expository preachers "force themselves to decide Sunday by Sunday, service by service, what passage they will preach." A part of this planning will involve sensitivity to the needs of their particular congregation. Thus, their "insight and concern will be reflected in what biblical truths they offer to their people."⁹ Yet how to do this our author does not say.

Robinson stresses a "general principle" in this first stage: "*Base the sermon on a literary unit of biblical thought.*"¹⁰ In making the preaching calendar, therefore, expositors will read through books of the Bible "several times" in order to "divide them into portions" that can be expounded in "particular sermons."¹¹ They will "examine the paragraph

⁸See above, 24-25.

⁹Ibid., 54.

¹⁰Ibid., 55 (italics his).

¹¹Ibid., 54.

breakdowns in both the original texts and the English translations.” They will “select the divisions of the material that seem to be the most logical, and use them as the basis of their expositions.”¹² Their focus is on finding the “biblical writer’s ideas.”¹³

The above issues of planning ahead, deciding on the text, and determining its parameters are common principles in the evangelical expository homiletic.¹⁴ Not only is Robinson consistent with them, but his straightforward approach yields itself especially well to the beginning student in preaching. Furthermore, Robinson remains consistent with his view of Scripture and definition of expository preaching—the inspired text governs the sermon.¹⁵

One deficiency, however, presents itself in this section. Robinson places great emphasis on the paragraph breakdowns in the biblical text, but says little about the needs of the listeners in choosing the text. According to others in the evangelical expository homiletic, preachers need to understand the importance of not only knowing how to divide biblical passages into preachable units, but how to consider their listeners in this choice.¹⁶ Thus, more attention needs to be given in this first stage to considering the needs of the audience in

¹²Ibid., 55. Robinson reminds the reader to be genre sensitive. For example, in treating narrative sections of Scripture the expositor will “more likely deal with a literary unit larger than a paragraph or two” (ibid.). Poetry as well as Proverbs have their own rules (ibid., 55-56).

¹³Ibid., 54.

¹⁴See, for example, Stott, who discusses four main factors which influence an expositor’s choice of a text (213-220); Vine and Shaddix, 92-96; and Brown, Clinard, Northcutt, and Fasol, 28-31.

¹⁵See above, 4.3.1.

¹⁶Notice Stott spends time on the “pastoral factor” which is sensitivity to the needs of the congregation in regards to choosing a sermon text (216-218); see also Brown, Clinard, Northcutt, and Fasol, 32-35; especially Willhite, *Preaching With Relevance*, 21-33.

choosing a passage for the sermon.

Robinson goes on to say that while expositors normally work their way “through entire biblical books or extended passages in Scripture,” they will “at some time or another during the year . . . preach on topics.”¹⁷ Robinson suggests that topical preaching¹⁸ should really be what he calls “topical exposition.” This approach, he says, “differs from the so-called topical sermon . . . in that the thought of the Scripture shapes all that is said defining and developing the topic.”¹⁹

Two problems face topical exposition, Robinson says. First, the topic under consideration “may be dealt with in several passages,” and “each of the individual passages” should “be examined in its context.” Topical exposition, then, when done correctly, “takes more study than exposition based on a single passage.” Second, the expositor may have the tendency to “read something into the scriptural account in order to read something significant out of it.” Eisegesis and proof texts, therefore, are temptations for the expositor engaged in

¹⁷Robinson, 56. These topics can be seasonal such as Easter and Christmas; or “theological topics such as the Trinity, reconciliation, worship, God’s concern for the poor, or the authority of the Scriptures”; or “personal concerns” such as guilt, grief, forgiveness, loneliness, jealousy, marriage, and divorce (ibid.).

¹⁸For discussions on the classification of sermons, see “Appendix B: Literature on the Classification of Sermons,” in Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching the Topical Sermon* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 146; see also David Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching*, 30-33; Bryson, 11ff, and Markquart, *Quest for Better Preaching*, 102-104. For early discussions on topical preaching, see “Appendix A: Earlier Discussions of Topical Preaching,” in Allen, 145-146.

¹⁹Robinson., 57-58. Irvin A. Busenitz takes a similar approach to topical messages: “Just as verse-by-verse preaching is not necessarily expository, preaching that is *not* verse-by-verse is not necessarily *non*-expository. Granted, some topical approaches are not expository, but such *need not* and certainly *should not* be the case. No book deals with topics that directly impact daily life more than the Bible. Thus, to be effective, all topical preaching and teaching, whether the topic be thematic, theological, historical, or biographical, must be consumed with expounding the Word (“Thematic, Theological, Historical, and Biographical Expository Messages,” in MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 255 [italics his]). For a treatment of topical preaching with less adherence to the expositional aspect, see Francis C. Rossow, “Topical Preaching,” in Duduit, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 84-91.

topical exposition. Robinson does not point out with equal force the possibility of this happening to the expositor who works with only one text.²⁰ It is, however, an issue that faces any preacher who attempts to interpret a biblical text, regardless of the approach, topical or expository. At any rate, for Robinson, when the topical sermon texts are finally chosen, each biblical passage must be allowed “to speak for itself.”²¹ This statement reflects his hermeneutical approach to Scripture, which applies to the text grammatical-historical exegesis. The results then become the truth that the text speaks.²²

A final factor that Robinson says should be considered “in choosing what to preach is time.” Whether the expositor has “twelve to fifteen minutes” or “forty-five minutes” for the sermon, choices must be made on “what to include or exclude in a particular sermon.” While exposition can be done with either time amount, the expositor must sense when to “settle for a bird’s-eye view of a passage” or “a worm’s-eye analysis.” Thus, both “the units of thought and the time allowed to cover them” should be taken into account when selecting “a passage to be preached.”²³

As a whole, this first stage offers practical counsel to the novice expositor in choosing a biblical passage for the sermon. The drawback is that not enough emphasis is put on the needs of the listeners in choosing the passage. It should be kept in mind that adding new material here or elsewhere in the other stages does not require an advanced detailed

²⁰See Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, who reminds biblical interpreters that they stand in their own horizon of context and tradition (xix; 11, 15-16, 439-445).

²¹*Biblical Preaching* (2001), 57.

²²For discussion, see above, 4.2.3.2.2

²³*Biblical Preaching*, 58.

discussion. To do so would diminish the effectiveness of this text as a beginning preaching text. During this evaluation, as suggestions are made for changes or additional material throughout the ten stages, the intention is to maintain Robinson's focus on beginning preachers.

5.4 Stage Two: Studying the Passage

In this second stage Robinson identifies "several things we should consider."²⁴ First, the selected passage must be examined in its context. "If you were reading any other book, you would not open it to page 50, read a paragraph, and from that, assume that you could speak with some authority about the author's meaning." Neither should you treat the Bible this way. "The old saw still has a sharp edge," he says; "The text without the context is a pretext." Thus, the expositor should consider the entire context of the biblical paragraph.²⁵

Study of the passage begins, Robinson asserts, "by relating it to the broader literary unit of which it is a part." This demands reading the larger book context of the passage "several times and in different translations." Using the different English translations can help in understanding the broad context of the passage.²⁶ Thus, the expositor seeks to fit the biblical paragraph "into its wider unit of thought."²⁷

After considering the broad context, the expositor studies the passage in relation to "its immediate context." In Robinson's thought, the immediate context is the "surrounding

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., 59.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., 60. Robinson suggest that "introductions to the Old or New testament and introductory sections of commentaries offer great help in considering the broad context of a passage (ibid.).

context” of a passage, what “precedes it” and “what follows it.” In 1 Corinthians 13, for example, “we must understand that it is part of a larger unit dealing with spiritual gifts in chapters 12-14.”²⁸

Robinson at this juncture suggests to take notes while reading the passage in different translations. “Write out as precisely as possible the problems you have in understanding the passage.”²⁹ Also, begin the process of stating “in rough fashion” the subject and complement(s) of the passage. If stating the subject is troublesome at this point, the expositor should write down any questions about the biblical author’s subject, which will help in determining that subject.³⁰

Once the passage is placed within its broad and immediate context, the expositor should examine it in its details. In genre such as “the Epistles and parts of the Gospels, this means examining the vocabulary and the grammatical structure of the passage.” In genre such as narrative, this means looking “for statements by the author that explain what is taking place.”³¹

Thus, studying the passage in its context to determine its overall idea involves considering its broad literary context, its more immediate context, and its detailed context. Using the biblical languages is a definite advantage during this process. Furthermore, linguistic tools are available for the expositor who does not have expertise in the Hebrew or

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., 61.

³¹Ibid.

Greek languages. “Accuracy, as well as integrity,” Robinson insists, “demand that we develop every possible skill to keep us from declaring in the name of God what the Holy Spirit never intended to convey.”³²

Robinson then lists and briefly discusses “six different aids” available to the expositor in examining the text: lexicons, concordances, grammars, word-study books, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, and commentaries.³³ He comments on two other aids: bibliographies and study aids on CD-ROM.³⁴ He ends the discussion on this second stage by suggesting the expositor take notes with a pen and pad or a computer. “However you do it,” he concludes, “you need a place to record your findings.”³⁵

This stage involves Robinson’s discussion of his exegetical procedure.³⁶ His discussion of the broad, immediate, and detailed context is simple yet at the same time simplistic. While,

³²Ibid., 62.

³³Ibid., 62-64. This discussion has been significantly updated from the first edition of *Biblical Preaching* (1980), 60-66. There Robinson provided an annotated bibliography in each of the six aids. Some of those sources have been updated or gone out of print since 1980. The present discussion is more functional because Robinson focuses more on what the tools do rather than to provide a bibliography. For recent discussions of study tools by homileticsians, see, for example, James F. Stitzinger, “Study Tools for Expository Preaching,” in MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 177-208; Chapell, “Appendix 9: Study Resources,” 351-358; Bryson, 46-50. See also David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Matthews, and Robert B. Sloan, eds., *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation: A Complete Library of Tools and Resources* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1994).

³⁴Ibid., 64-65.

³⁵Ibid., 65.

³⁶Typical evangelical exegetical procedure involves analysis in the following areas: historical/cultural, literary, grammatical/syntactical, semantic, and theological; for evangelical discussion on these areas, see, for example, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 155-214; Osborn, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 19-147, 263-317; McCartney and Clayton, 119-221; Bruce Corley, “A Students Primer for Exegesis,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 2-19; Tolar, “The Grammatical-Historical Method,” 21-38; and Gugliotto, 20-139.

according to evangelical standards³⁷ he correctly focuses on the literary context, his examination of the textual details needs more discussion. For example, he makes a reference to “examining the vocabulary and the grammatical structure” in the epistles,³⁸ but does not explain in any detail to the reader how to engage in proper semantic and grammatical analysis. He does briefly mention word studies while discussing “lexicons,” and “word-study books,” and grammatical study while discussing “grammars,”³⁹ but does not provide any specifics. Other evangelical hermeneuts⁴⁰ as well as expository homiletics,⁴¹ however, spend significant time on this type of exegetical analysis.

Another area that Robinson excludes from this discussion is specific instruction on how to analyze the historical context of the passage—author, recipients, date, situation, culture, geography, etc.⁴² While he refers the expositor to Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and commentaries for this information,⁴³ the dynamics of synthesizing such information during sermon preparation are left out.⁴⁴ Also, the theological component which examines the

³⁷See sources in previous note.

³⁸*Biblical Preaching*, 61.

³⁹*Biblical Preaching*, 62-63.

⁴⁰See, for example, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 183-214; Osborn, 41-126; and McCartney and Clayton, 120-144; and Gugliotto, 49-71.

⁴¹See, for example, Bryson, who provides a concise discussion of word study and syntactical analysis, 164-169; Vines and Shaddix, 105-115; Olford and Olford, 115-125; and George J. Zemek, “Grammatical Analysis and Expository Preaching,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 154-176.

⁴²For discussions on this, see, for example, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 172-183; Osborn, 127-139; and Gugliotto, 72-119.

⁴³*Biblical Preaching*, 63.

⁴⁴For expository homiletics who provide discussion on this aspect of exegetical analysis during sermon study, see Olford and Olford, 112-114; Vines and Shaddix, 96-99; and Greidanus, 80-101.

passage in its larger canonical context is missing.⁴⁵ Robinson refers to this aspect later in the book, but it needed a brief discussion at this juncture.⁴⁶ Thus, while our author does touch on some important aspects of the evangelical grammatical-historical-theological method, yet as a whole his discussion is sketchy and lacking some vital specifics.

One other issue was missing in our author's hermeneutical procedure: a discussion on the role of prayer and illumination from the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷ Other evangelical hermeneuts⁴⁸ and expository homileticians⁴⁹ provide significant discussion on these two spiritual dynamics during the hermeneutical process, but not our author.

5.5 Stage Three: Discovering the Exegetical Idea

The first step in this stage is establishing the idea of the biblical passage, which Robinson calls the "exegetical idea."⁵⁰ He thus states: "As you study the passage, relate the parts to each other to determine the exegetical idea and its development." He explains the connection of this stage with the previous one:

⁴⁵For a detailed discussion on this aspect from another expository homiletic scholar, see Greidanus, 102-121.

⁴⁶*Biblical Preaching*, 92.

⁴⁷See discussion above, 4.2.3.2.2.

⁴⁸See, for example, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 84-85; Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 380, 382; Broyles, "Interpreting the Old Testament," 25-27.

⁴⁹See, for example, Olford and Olford, 6-65, 241-250; and MacArthur, "The Spirit of God and Expository Preaching," *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 102-115.

⁵⁰Other homileticians describe the exegetical thought of the text differently: "central idea of the text" (Al Fasol, 56; Vines and Shaddix, 129; Brown, Clinard, Northcutt, and Fasol, *Steps to the Sermon: An Eight-Step Plan for Preaching With Confidence*, 65; and Donald G. McDougall, "Central Ideas, Outlines, and Titles," in MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 229-233); "exegetical central proposition" (Grant and Reed, 27); "essence of the text in a sentence" (Bryson, 316); "concerns of the text" (Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, 147); "central proposition of the text" (Richard, 67); "textual idea" (McDill, 88); "dominating theme" (Olford and Olford, 143-145).

Our linguistic and grammatical analysis must never become and end in themselves, but rather should lead to a clearer understanding of the passage as a whole. The process resembles an hourglass that moves from synthesis to analysis and back to synthesis. Initially we read the passage and its context in English to understand the author's meaning. Then through analysis we test our initial impressions through an examination of the details. After that we come to a final statement of the subject and complement in light of that study.⁵¹

This stage is, therefore, a continuation of stage two, which we think could be improved by further discussion on the details of exegetical analysis.

According to Robinson, the key question to be asked throughout this process is "Exactly what is the biblical writer talking about?" Once a possible subject surfaces, "go back through the passage and relate the subject to the details." Our author suggests several questions to help relate the subject to the details:

- Does the subject fit all the parts?
- Is it too broad? How would you narrow it?
- Is it too narrow? Is there a larger subject that accounts for all the parts?
- Is your subject an exact description of what the passage is talking about?⁵²

Often the "initial statement of a subject" is too broad. To narrow it, Robinson suggest the expositor test the subject "with a series of definitive questions." These definitive questions will always begin with one of six words: how, what, why, when, where, or who.⁵³ Because the subject "can always be stated in the form of a question," applying these six words to the "proposed subject" will help the expositor be more precise.⁵⁴

⁵¹*Biblical Preaching*, 66. For discussion of what the subject and complement is, see *ibid.*, 33-50; and above, 4.3.2.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 67.

Robinson provides James 1:5-8 as an illustration:

Our initial response to this paragraph might be that James is talking about wisdom. While wisdom emerges as a major element in the passage, it is much too broad a subject because James does not discuss what wisdom is, why we need it, or when we need it. Looking at the passage more closely, we find he is talking about “how to obtain wisdom,” a more precise statement of the subject. An awareness of the immediate context, however, enables us to limit the subject even further. The preceding paragraph, verses 2-4, demonstrates that joy is the proper response to trials, and our paragraph extends that discussion. Therefore, a more complete subject for James 1:5-8 would be “how to obtain wisdom in the midst of trials.” All the details in the paragraph, directly or indirectly, relate to that subject. When a proposed subject accurately describes what the author is talking about, it illuminates the details of the passage; and the subject, in turn, will be illuminated by the details.⁵⁵

Once the subject is isolated, according to Robinson, the expositor must study the “structure of the passage and distinguish between its major and supporting assertions.” This process helps bring into view the complement or complements “that complete the subject and make it into an idea.” Once the subject is stated, often the “complement becomes immediately obvious.”⁵⁶ Robinson again turns to James 1:5-8 as an illustration:

In the James 1:5-8 the complement to the subject “how to obtain wisdom in the midst of trials,” is “ask God for it in faith.” The complete statement of the idea, then, merely joins the subject with the complement: “Wisdom in trials is obtained by asking God for it in faith.” Everything else in the paragraph supports or elaborates that idea.⁵⁷

In looking for ideas in Scripture, the expositor must be aware of the different kinds of genre in the Bible such as “parables, poetry, proverbs, prayers, speeches, allegories, history, laws, contracts, biography, drama, apocalypse, and stories.” “To find the idea in any of them,” Robinson says, “we must be aware of the kind of literature we are reading and the

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., 67-68.

conventions that are unique to it.”⁵⁸

Once the biblical writer’s idea has been established, the next step is “to discover how the idea is developed in the passage.” The statement of the idea, the subject joined to the complement, should be run “back over the passage,” our author counsels. The question “Can you explain how the parts fit your idea?” should be asked. Development will be different according to genre, but the various parts of a passage should illuminate its idea.⁵⁹

Robinson suggests that paraphrasing the passage in one’s own words may be helpful in discovering its development. “Be exact in thought,” he counsels, “and carefully state the relationships you see within the text whether the biblical writer explicitly states them or not.” This process of paraphrasing the passage may cause you to “alter the statement of your exegetical idea to fit the parts of the passage.” And he admonishes: “Don’t bend the passage to fit your statement of the idea.”⁶⁰

When the expositor has completed this stage of the sermon preparation enterprise, he or she should “be able to do two things,” according to Robinson. “First, to state the idea of the passage in a single sentence,” which is its subject and complement combined. Second, to

⁵⁸Ibid., 68; see Willhite and Gibson, *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*, which contains essays by evangelical scholars who attempt to demonstrate how Robinson’s exegetical idea approach applies to different genres in Scripture; for expository homileticians who discuss biblical genre and preaching, see, for example, Greidanus, 188-341; Hamilton, 118-198; and Michael Duduit, ed., *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 247-389; for hermeneuts on biblical genre and interpreting it, see, for example, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 259-374; Osborn, 149-260; Corley, Lemke, and Lovejoy, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 244-354; McCartney and Clayton, 223-242; and Gugliotto, 35-41; numerous specialized books on various biblical genres are found in the bibliographies of these works; from a literary perspective on biblical genre, see Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman, eds. *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic and Professional, 1993).

⁵⁹Ibid., 70.

⁶⁰Ibid.

“state how the parts of the passage relate to the idea,”⁶¹ which is its development.

The above-described procedure is consistent with Robinson’s evangelical expository methodology: the idea for the sermon should come from the text because it is the inspired word of God.⁶² Other evangelicals have found this procedure for determining the exegetical meaning of a biblical passage helpful.⁶³ Keith Willhite, for example, who helped edit the Festschrift to Robinson, *The Big Idea of Preaching*,⁶⁴ believes that “Robinson’s two diagnostic questions of the text (“What is the text talking about [subject]? and “What is the text saying about the subject [complement]?”), and later of the audience, are the genius of his entire paradigm.”⁶⁵ Similarly, Ralph Partelow stated in his review of *Biblical Preaching*:

The Big Idea concept yoked to expository preaching is Robinson’s genius in this book. While other homileticians have stressed the importance of focusing on one central thought from the text in sermon building, this author has put real substance to the “science” part of preaching.⁶⁶

The researcher concurs with this assessment. For those evangelicals espousing ideational preaching, our author’s approach with the two diagnostic questions facilitates the application of an author-centered, literal-sense hermeneutic to the text.⁶⁷ According to

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²See above, chapters 3 and 4.

⁶³See, for example, Litfin, 83-89, 342-343; and Grant and Reed, 25-27.

⁶⁴This entire book is a celebration of Robinson’s idea approach to expository preaching. It was the “1999 Book of the Year,” in *Preaching* (January/February 2000): 6.

⁶⁵Willhite, “A Bullet versus Buckshot,” 17.

⁶⁶Partelow, 67.

⁶⁷See Johnson, 82-85, 294-300, who also applies Robinson’s diagnostic questions in the context of the grammatical-historical method.

evangelical homiletics, it has been a useful tool in homiletics classes for teaching ideational preaching.⁶⁸ To be sure, this procedure of determining the exegetical idea of a biblical passage has been a very central and influential contribution to evangelical homiletics.⁶⁹

Up to this point, the first three stages have focused exclusively on the exegetical context of the sermon passage, but nothing has been said about the relationship of the expositor's presuppositions to interpretation. It was noted earlier that Robinson did not discuss this methodological issue in the explanation of his definition of expository preaching.⁷⁰ Evangelical scholars, however, have recently devoted significant attention to the influence of presuppositions or pre-understanding upon the interpretation process.⁷¹

The most notable evangelical contribution is the "hermeneutical spiral,"⁷² which is a creative process whereby the interpreter's presuppositions are acknowledged and related to the text. The interpreter engages his or her pre-understanding with the text to the extent that a new understanding emerges concerning the text. Thus, one's understanding of the text spirals nearer and nearer to the biblical author's intended meaning. "The text itself sets the

⁶⁸Willhite, 17; the researcher also uses this approach in his homiletics classes at Southern Adventist University, where he teaches preaching.

⁶⁹See Willhite and Gibson, *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*.

⁷⁰See 4.3.1.

⁷¹See, for example, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 98-116, who describe pre-understanding as "the total framework of being and understanding that we bring to the task of living: our language, social conditioning, gender, intelligence, cultural values, physical environment, political allegiances, and even our emotional state at a given time. These elements construct and govern our individual worlds. They formulate the paradigm that helps us function and make sense of the world" (100).

⁷²See *ibid.*, 114; and Osborn, 6, 324; see also above, 130, note 113.

agenda and continually reforms the questions that the observer asks of it.”⁷³ The means by which this is accomplished is grammatical-historical exegesis. Pre-understanding is, therefore, not discarded but acknowledged as a part of the interpretive process.⁷⁴

Built into the hermeneutical spiral approach is the recognition of the possibility of an interpreter using Robinson’s approach to determine the exegetical idea and yet still imposing his or her own idea into the text, different from the biblical author’s intended meaning or idea. A year later, however, the same interpreter might, after more interaction with the same text, come up with a new exegetical idea which is closer to the intended meaning of the text, reflecting a gradual but developing understanding. Such is the power of one’s preunderstanding.⁷⁵ Some scholars would argue that finding the true intended meaning of the text is difficult if not impossible because of, among other reasons, our pre-understanding.⁷⁶ But in conservative evangelical thought, acknowledging one’s pre-understanding, continually engaging it with the grammatical-historical-theological method applied to the text, and praying for the illumination of the Holy Spirit will help to ensure a gradual understanding of the biblical author’s intended meaning,⁷⁷ which these evangelicals believe to be the Holy

⁷³Osborn, 324.

⁷⁴This approach reflects the conservative hermeneutical methodology: the biblical author’s intended meaning is the goal; see above, 4.2.4.3; see also Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 88.

⁷⁵See Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 100, who declare, “We cannot avoid or deny the presence of pre-understanding in the task of biblical interpretation. Every interpreter comes to study the Bible with prior biases and dispositions.”

⁷⁶For a summary of the arguments, see Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*, 43-97.

⁷⁷See above, 4.2.3.2.2.

Spirit's meaning.⁷⁸

Our point is that the hermeneutical spiral and the issues associated with it should have been addressed, albeit briefly, in stages two and three of our evangelical author's homiletical method. Neophyte evangelical expositors especially need to be reminded of the significant influence of their own pre-understanding and presuppositions as they learn how to engage exegetically with the biblical text. Because "expository preaching is more a philosophy than a method," as Robinson says, and the expositor thus seeks to bend his or her thought to the Scriptures rather than the reverse, the role of presuppositions cannot be ignored or set aside. Thus, Robinson is consistent with his expository methodology when he admonishes expositors to "reexamine their doctrinal convictions," but inconsistent when he omits a discussion on how to engage in this process during hermeneutical procedure.⁷⁹

5.6 Introductory Remarks to Stage Four

Robinson's preface to the fourth stage is significant enough to warrant a category of its own. While expository sermons "consist of ideas drawn from the Scriptures," the "ideas of Scripture must be related to life." Thus, to "preach effectively . . . expositors must be involved in three different worlds: the world of the Bible, the modern world, and the particular world in which we are called to preach."⁸⁰ So far Robinson has been discussing the biblical world and how to access it.

The second world that the expositor must consider is the modern world—the

⁷⁸See above, 3.2.2.1.

⁷⁹See Robinson, 22; and above, 4.3.1.

⁸⁰Ibid., 73.

philosophical, sociological, and cultural “currents swirling across our own times.” Those “who speak effectively for God must first struggle with the questions of their age and then speak to those questions from the eternal truth of God.”⁸¹

The third world in which expositors “participate is our own particular world.” Robinson believes the “profound issues of the Bible and the ethical, philosophical questions of our times assume different shapes in rural villages, in middle-class communities, or in the ghettos of crowded cities.” Preachers do not ultimately address everyone, they “speak to a particular people and call them by name.” Thus, shepherds must know their particular flock.⁸²

At this point, a discernable two-part order emerges in the ten stages. Stages one through three focused exclusively on the original meaning of the biblical passage. But “in the following stages,” Robinson explains, “we endeavor to bring the ancient world, the modern world, and our particular world together as we develop the sermon.”⁸³

In making the transition into stage four, he writes:

To expound the Scriptures so the contemporary God confronts us where we live requires that we study our audience as well as our Bible. It also means that some very nuts-and-bolts questions must be asked and answered to discover how the exegetical idea and its development can expand into a sermon. We relate the Bible to life as we enter the next stage of our study.⁸⁴

5.7 Stage Four: Analyzing the Exegetical Idea

The focus in this stage is to bring the exegetical idea to life, otherwise it “can lie in our

⁸¹Ibid., 74.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid., 75.

⁸⁴Ibid.

notes like a bowl of soggy cereal.” Thus the expositor is faced with the question: “How can we bring snap, crackle, and pop to the exegetical idea so that it develops into a sermon that is vital and alive?” The answer to this “practical question” lies in the way “thought develops.”

Whenever an expositor makes a declarative statement, only four things can be done with it: “we can restate it, explain it, prove it, or apply it.” That is all, “nothing else” can be done with it. “To recognize this simple fact,” Robinson explains, “opens the way to understanding the dynamic of thought.”⁸⁵

Restatement, saying the same thing in different words, is used frequently throughout Scripture, especially in Hebrew poetry. While it “takes up a great deal of space in written and especially oral communication . . . restatement does not develop thought.” Development of thought occurs in one or more of three ways: explanation, validity, or application. Based on these three ways of developing thought, Robinson suggests that expositors use three developmental questions⁸⁶ to help expand the exegetical idea and its development into a sermon.⁸⁷

5.7.1 First Developmental Question: “What Does This Mean?”

The first developmental question, centering on explanation, asks “What does this

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Grant and Reed call them “three focusing questions” (50). Several reviewers of the first edition flagged these three questions in their review as helpful to the expositor: Lugakingira, 72; Engle, 110-111; Kromminga, 286.

⁸⁷*Biblical Preaching*, 76-77. In a footnote, Robinson admits indebtedness to H. Grady Davis: “H. Grady Davis has developed these questions extensively in relation to the sermon. I am indebted to him for this approach to thinking. It is beyond the scope of Davis’s book to apply the questions to the study of Scripture” (ibid., 77, note 2). Robinson doesn’t provide the references where Davis addressed thought development; they are found, however, in Davis, 24-40, 79-97, 242-264.

mean?” It can be first “directed toward the Bible.” Various particulars in the text may need explaining. Especially should the following question receive attention: “Is the author in the passage before me developing his thought primarily through explanation?” Certain passages in Scripture will need more explaining than others.⁸⁸

Second, this first developmental question “may also probe the audience.” This probing may take several forms. If the exegetical idea were simply stated, would the audience understand its meaning? “Are there elements in the passage that the biblical writer takes for granted that my audience needs explained to them?”⁸⁹ Furthermore, the expositor’s language may be unclear to the listeners. “Theological jargon, abstract thinking, or scholars’ questions become part of the intellectual baggage that hinders preachers from speaking clearly to ordinary men and women.”⁹⁰ Robinson emphasizes, therefore, that expositors must “anticipate” what their hearers “may not know” and, by their explanations, “help them understand.” Thus, this first developmental question addresses issues relating to both the “passage and the people” that need explanation.⁹¹

5.7.2 Second Developmental Question: “Is it True?”

The second developmental question, centering on validity, asks: “Is it true?” Can it be proven? “An initial response of those of us who take the Scriptures seriously,” Robinson contends, “is to ignore this question.” Many expositors “assume an idea should be accepted

⁸⁸Ibid., 77-78.

⁸⁹Ibid., 78.

⁹⁰Ibid., 79-80.

⁹¹Ibid., 80.

as true because it comes from the Bible.” This is not “necessarily a valid assumption,” because “psychological acceptance” may need to be gained “through reasoning, proofs, or illustrations.” Even the biblical writers, who were inspired, “established the validity of their statements . . . by referring to common life as well.”⁹²

Robinson illustrates how this developmental question should work in a sermon:

Imagine that you were to state to a modern congregation the mighty affirmation of Paul, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28 NIV). Most people greet that statement with raised eyebrows: “Is that true? Can we believe that?” What about the mother who was killed by a hit-and-run driver and who left behind a husband and three children? What about those Christian parents whose four-year old son has been diagnosed with leukemia? How is that good? What’s “good” about a young missionary drowned in the muddy waters of a jungle river before he has witnessed to even one national? To work with this passage and fail to address those perplexing questions is to miss the audience completely.⁹³

Thus, a “congregation has the right to expect that we are at least aware of the problems before we offer solutions.”⁹⁴ Robinson suggests the expositor should work though the “ideas in the exegetical outline” and address the question, “Would my audience accept that statement as true?”⁹⁵ Specific questions that come, along with possible answers, should be written down. “Before long,” he promises, “you will discover much that you and your hearers have to think about as the sermon develops.”⁹⁶

These first two developmental questions are important questions every expositor

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid., 83.

⁹⁴Ibid., 85.

⁹⁵Ibid., 85-86.

⁹⁶Ibid., 86.

should ask⁹⁷ and will help pave the way from exegetical idea to sermon, according to our author. The third developmental question deals with the complex issue of application.

5.7.3 Third Developmental Question: “What Difference Does it Make?”

Through this question Robinson stresses the vital importance of application and purpose. “While it is essential that you explain the truth of a passage,” he declares, “your task is not finished until you relate that passage to the experience of your hearers.” The people in the pew ultimately hope that the questions, “So what? What difference does it make?” will be answered in the pulpit. Every Christian has “a responsibility to ask these questions because they are called to live under God in the light of biblical revelation.”⁹⁸

Robinson expresses concern that homileticians have not “given accurate application the attention it deserves.” He states: “To my knowledge, no book has been published that is devoted exclusively, or even primarily, to the knotty problems raised by application.”⁹⁹ Consequently, he laments, church members hear many a sermon void of specific application and suffer accordingly.¹⁰⁰

Preachers must understand that “accurate exegesis” is basic to “perceptive application.” They must “define the situation into which the revelation was originally given

⁹⁷The issue of explanation and validity are addressed in other expository homiletic texts; see, for example, Bryson, 375-383; Fasol, *Essentials for Biblical Preaching*, 73-76, 79-83; McDill, 180-197.

⁹⁸*Biblical Preaching*, 86.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 86. In the evangelical context, this statement was true when Robinson first wrote it in *Biblical Preaching* (1980), 89-90. Since then, Jay E. Adams wrote *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching*, and even cited this statement by Robinson (Adams, 9). Adams wrote in the preface of the book: “This book does not address the reasons for the homileticians’ lack of concern about application, but rather, it presents what I hope you will agree is a cogent, biblical philosophy of application, together with practical suggestions about how the busy preacher can readily implement it” (Adams, 10).

¹⁰⁰*Biblical Preaching*, 86.

and then decide what a modern man or woman shares, or does not share, with the original readers.”¹⁰¹ Thereupon, application is derived from the “theological purpose of the biblical writer.”¹⁰² No passage can be truly applied until its context has been thoroughly studied. “Only after mastering the larger passage do we find the clues for understanding what the smaller texts mean and why they were written.”¹⁰³

A discussion on Robinson’s expository methodology and application is appropriate at this juncture. It is important to recognize that he reflects the evangelical one-way approach to application.¹⁰⁴ That is, the divinely inspired text viewed as revelation, realizes “itself in the present situation across a gap of two thousand years” and thus has an application in the contemporary setting.¹⁰⁵ The movement is from the text (exegesis) to the present situation (application) and not vice versa. Homiletician, Timothy S. Warren, poses a question to evangelical expository homileticians which reflects such methodology: “How does the preacher prepare and preach with the audience in mind, yet without allowing the audience to

¹⁰¹Ibid., 87.

¹⁰²Ibid., 88.

¹⁰³Ibid., 89.

¹⁰⁴For a notable critic of this view see Edward Farley’s arguments, above 4.3.5; for a summary of criticisms against various aspects of this approach, see, Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 236-255.

¹⁰⁵See E. van Niekerk, *Systematic Theology* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1988), who discusses the hermeneutical dogmatic paradigm, which he says is basic to all traditional theologies. He says this paradigm can be termed “revelational positivism” where “the text is viewed as revelation realizing itself in the present situation across a gap of two thousand years” (136); drawing from G. C. Berkouwer’s *Die Heilige Schrift I*, 206, he explains that the “ever widening gap between the biblical text and the modern reader’s context is harmonized by a concordat or agreement, which makes the modern reader’s experience now correspond with the Bible” (135).

influence either the exegetical or the theological process?"¹⁰⁶ The audience is an important factor in influencing the form of the sermon, but it cannot provide any feedback that will change the truth content of the biblical text, according to the evangelical expository homiletic.¹⁰⁷ This is the identifying methodological characteristic which sets this approach apart from other approaches that emphasize the influence of the contemporary audience more than the Scripture text or view a correlative relationship between the contemporary audience and the content of Scripture.¹⁰⁸

Robinson states: "In application we attempt to take what we believe is the truth of the eternal God, which was given in a particular time and place and situation, and apply it to people in the modern world who live in another time, another place, and a very different situation."¹⁰⁹ One can detect behind this statement the Hirschian hermeneutic with its authorial intention (meaning) and present application (significance) which undergirds most evangelical practice of application.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶Timothy S. Warren, "A Paradigm for Preaching," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (October-December 1991): 469.

¹⁰⁷That such objectivity is possible has been seriously challenged by modern hermeneutical theory in general; for coverage of these theories, see Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* and *New Horizons*; and Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*; these same texts, especially Vanhoozer, engage these theories in light of the evangelical understanding of authorial intention.

¹⁰⁸See, for example, Wolfaardt, where three different approaches to practical theology are discussed: "a *confessional approach*, which adheres to Scripture as the sole source of practical theological knowledge; a *correlative approach*, which wants to relate, enrich and augment scriptural insight with empirical knowledge from the secular sciences; and a *contextual approach*, which seeks even closer links with the situation than either of the others" (5-12); Robinson's evangelical approach to Scripture and application is one emphasis which fits under the umbrella of the "confessional approach."

¹⁰⁹Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," 22.

¹¹⁰See above, 4.3.5.

This evangelical insistence on the content of the biblical text remaining unchanged by the contemporary audience does not rule out the audience's significant influence during sermon preparation, however.¹¹¹ Robinson, for instance, believes it is important to get feedback from the audience to better understand their needs:

Feedback, however, begins as the sermon is still brewing. Here pastors hold an advantage over other speakers, since they interact daily with members of the audience. Yet this advantage is not automatic. To benefit, preachers must listen: to questions people ask, and for answers they seek. They must observe: needs (expressed or unexpressed, admitted or denied), relationships (personal, family, community), experiences, attitudes, and interests. Jotting down what they observe each day will help take note of the passing parade. This in turn colors and shapes the handling of biblical material and the approach to the message. Let a preacher take a truth from Scripture and force himself to find twenty-five illustrations of that truth in daily life, and he will discover how much the world and its citizens have to tell him.¹¹²

Thus, the audience can color and shape "the handling of biblical material and the approach to the message." It can affect the shape of the sermon, the introduction and conclusion, the type of illustrations, and style. But in Robinson's expository methodology, this significant audience influence still does not override the truth content of the text—this remains unchanged. He thus maintains consistency with his one-way hermeneutical methodology.

In another article, Robinson suggests a way expositors can connect with the contemporary audience during sermon preparation:

Another way effective preachers connect with the audience is to sit six or seven specific flesh-and-blood people around their desks as they prepare. I have assembled such a committee in my mind as real to me as if they were there.

In that group sits a friend who is an outspoken cynic. As I think through my

¹¹¹Larsen points out in *The Anatomy of Preaching* that, "Both careful foundational work in the text and sensitive knowledge of the people are requisite for effective application" (ibid., 99).

¹¹²Robinson, "Listening to the Listeners," *Leadership* 4/2 (Spring 1983): 68-71; reprinted in Gibson, 131.

material, I sometimes can hear him sigh, "You've got to be kidding, Robinson. That's pious junk food. What world are you living in?"

Another is an older woman who is a simple believer, who takes preachers and preaching very seriously. While I prepare sermons, I ask, "Am I raising questions that will trouble her? Will my sermon help her?"

A teenager sprawls in the circle, wondering how long I'm going to preach. I can make the sermon seem shorter if I can keep him interested.

A divorced mother takes her place feeling alone and overwhelmed by her situation. What do I say to her?

Those are four of my seven. Another is an unbeliever who doesn't understand religious jargon and yet has come to church but doesn't quite know why. Another makes his living as a dock worker. He has a strong allegiance to his union, thinks management is a rip off, curses if he gets upset, and enjoys bowling on Thursday night.

The last is a black teacher who would rather attend a black church but comes to a white church because her husband thinks it's good for the kids. She is a believer, but she's angry about life. She's very sensitive about racist remarks, put-downs of women, and will let me know if my sermon centers on white, middle-class values dressed up as biblical absolutes.

I change the group from time to time. But all of them are people I know. They have names, faces, and voices. I could prepare a vita on each of them. While they do not know it, each of them contributes significantly to my sermon preparation.¹¹³

Thus, the needs of the contemporary audience are a significant influence on how Robinson prepares sermons. It should be noted that the first two developmental questions also manifest an audience focus.¹¹⁴ But again, in terms of methodology, this influence is on form (shape of sermon, illustrations, etc.), rather than on the truth content of the text. Our author attempts to derive the truth content, as far as possible, from the text and its context through grammatical-historical-theological exegesis. The audience, therefore, does not influence the interpretation of this textual content. Such is Robinson's expository methodology, which is

¹¹³Idem., "What Authority Do We Have Anymore?" *Leadership* 13/2 (Spring 1992): 24-29; reprinted in Gibson, 32-33.

¹¹⁴See above, 5.7.1-2.

typical of the evangelical expository homiletic.¹¹⁵

It should be pointed out that this form/content or “husk/kernel” distinction is viewed as binary modernistic thinking by post-modern theologians.¹¹⁶ The issue is how can Robinson and those in the expository homiletic change the form of the sermon—its illustrations, shape, use of language, style, etc.—from one audience to another without changing its truth content? The typical evangelical response is expressed by John MacArthur, who remarked, concerning the influence of a specific audience on the crafting of the sermon, “I can’t say that it doesn’t have any influence—if I were talking to junior high kids it might be different than if I were talking to senior citizens, I would pick different illustrations, a different style.” But as to content, he says, “the heart and soul of the message would be the same.” Thus, in MacArthur’s view, content does not change. But “I might need to do some adjusting in the illustrative or in the introductory material to identify with people,” he says.¹¹⁷ The post-modern call is for more wholism and unity rather than an atomistic, binary opposition between form and content.¹¹⁸ Does Robinson in any way ever attempt to unite form and content in his method? This issue will be discussed below under 5.10.

As to the biblical truth content of Robinson’s expository methodology, several factors

¹¹⁵See, for example, Bryson, 383-390; Chapell, 199-224; and Vines and Shaddix, 181-189.

¹¹⁶See discussion in van Wyk, 91-92.

¹¹⁷See Michael Boys, “Preaching That Teaches: Crafting Sermons That Facilitate Biblical Learning in the Evangelical Congregation,” (D.Min. dissertation, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2000), 165, who interviewed MacArthur.

¹¹⁸See discussion in van Wyk, 92-97.

should be discussed. First of all, the hermeneutical spiral, as discussed above,¹¹⁹ should not be forgotten. Presuppositions and pre-understanding cannot be ignored in the evangelical process of interpretation and application.¹²⁰

The second factor to consider concerning biblical content is inaccurate application. Robinson expresses concern that expository preachers might “apply the text in ways that might make the biblical writer say, “Wait a minute, that’s the wrong use of what I said.”¹²¹

He writes:

A text cannot mean what it has not meant. That is, when Paul wrote to people in his day, he expected them to understand what he meant. For example, we have some thirty different explanations for what Paul meant when he wrote the Corinthians about the baptism for the dead. But the people who read that letter the first time didn’t say, “I wonder what he meant by that.” They may have had further questions, but the meaning of the subject was clear to them. I cannot make that passage mean something today that it did not mean in principle in the ancient world. That is why I have to do exegesis. I have to be honest with the text before I can come over to the contemporary world.¹²²

His solution to this issue is the “ladder of abstraction,” which is the third factor to be discussed. The ladder of abstraction “comes up from the biblical world and crosses over and down to the modern setting.” Robinson explains:

I have to be conscious of how I cross this “abstraction ladder.” I want to make sure the biblical situation and the current situation are analogous at the points I am making them connect. I must be sure the center of the analogy connects, not the extremes.

¹¹⁹See 5.5

¹²⁰van Niekerk reminds conservatives that they, “like anyone else, interpret biblical texts fundamentally in terms of their own situation, however much they pretend that this is not the case” (162).

¹²¹Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 21.

¹²²Ibid., 23; this is another example of where Robinson’s one-way application methodology manifests itself; the biblical text is the governing influence for the present-day application, which should not have any influence on the exegetical meaning.

Sometimes as I work with a text, I have to climb the abstraction ladder until I reach the text's intent.¹²³

He explains further with an example:

Leviticus says, "Don't boil a kid in its mother's milk." First, you have to ask, "What is this all about?" At face value, you might say, "If I have a young goat, and I want cook it in its mother's milk for dinner tonight, I should think twice." But we now know the pagans did that when they worshiped their idolatrous gods. Therefore, what you have here is not a prohibition against boiling a kid in its mother's milk, but against being involved in the idolatry that surrounded God's people or bringing its practices into their religion. If that's the case, it does no good for the preacher to bring this text straight over. You must climb the ladder of abstraction a couple of levels until you reach the principle: You should not associate yourself with idolatrous worship, even in ways that do not seem to have direct association with physically going to the idol.¹²⁴

The way to climb this abstraction ladder is to ask two questions. First, "What does this teach about God?" Every passage has a vision of God, our author says, such as Creator or Sustainer, and can be abstracted up to God. The second question is "What does this teach about human nature?" Or "What depravity factor in humanity rebels against a particular view of God?" "These two questions," he says, "are a helpful clue in application because God remains the same, and human depravity remains the same." In 1 Corinthians 8, for example, where "Paul addresses the subject of eating meat offered to idols," the "vision of God" is that He is our redeemer." Paul argues, therefore, "I will not eat meat, because if I wound my brother's weak conscience, I sin against Christ, who redeemed him." The "depravity factor" would be: "People want their rights, so they don't care that Christ died for their brother."¹²⁵

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Ibid. Some scholars would not consider every textual datum, such as Robinson's example of boiling a kid in its mother's milk, as containing applicable truth to our experience today (van Niekerk, 163).

¹²⁵Ibid., 24; cf. *Biblical Preaching*, 94-95.

Robinson summarizes that some texts go straight across such as “Love your enemies.” Others, such as the one above about the kid being boiled in its mother’s milk, must be abstracted to their intent.¹²⁶ Such is his attempt at maintaining faithfulness to what he believes is the intended meaning of the text and finding its applicable principles for today. Evangelicals have employed other approaches using the same methodology.¹²⁷

In the evangelical context, Robinson’s ladder of abstraction is helpful in bringing an application from the text over to the contemporary situation. Unfortunately, this ladder was not discussed in the second edition of *Biblical Preaching*. It would have improved the clarity of the discussion if it were inserted in the context of this third developmental question.

The discussion on this third developmental question is more extensive than the previous two because Robinson provides the expositor with several sets of diagnostic questions. Each set of questions is meant to help the expositor maximize the multifaceted

¹²⁶Ibid., 25.

¹²⁷See, for example, Thiselton’s metaphor of the fusing or merging the horizons of the author and reader, *The Two Horizons*, 445; Stott’s bridge-building metaphor, see above, 147; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 401-426, who propose a four-stage approach: 1) “Determine the original application(s) intended by the passage.” 2) Evaluate the level of specificity of those applications. Are they transferable across time and space to other audiences?” 3) “If not, identify one or more broader cross-cultural principles that the specific elements of the text reflect.” 4) Find appropriate applications for today that embody those principles” (407ff); Jack Kuhatschek, *Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), who proposes a three-step approach: 1) Understand the original situation described in the biblical passage. 2) Determine whether the biblical text in that situation reflects a specific application of a broader principle. 3) Apply that principle to situations we face today; Dave Veerman, *How to Apply the Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1993), who proposes five steps: 1) Read the text. 2) Understand the text’s context. 3) Comprehend the biblical principles or timeless truths God wants to communicate. 4) Apply these principles to your personal life. 5) Design an action plan to obey God; and Roy B. Zuck, “Application in Biblical Hermeneutics and Exposition,” in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, ed. Donald K. Campbell (Chicago: Moody, 1982), 15-38, who proposes three steps: 1) Determine the meaning of the passage to its original audience. 2) Write out the principle. 3) Decide on a specific action/response; again, the one-way movement from the text to the contemporary situation is discernable in these approaches; for a concise discussion on the debates within contemporary evangelicalism on the problem of biblical content and cultural context, see Koranteng-Pipim, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Interpretation,” 259-264.

process of the evangelical approach to application.

The first set of diagnostic questions are meant to help the expositor discover the theological purpose of the biblical author:

1. Are there in the text any indications of purpose, editorial comments, or interpretive statements made about events? . . . 2. Are there any theological judgements made in the text? . . . 3. Narrative passages of the Bible offer special difficulties to the interpreter. In addition to the questions normally raised, we should ask, Is this story given as an example or warning? If so, in exactly what way? Is this incident a norm or an exception? What limitations should be placed on it? . . . 4. What message was intended for those to whom the revelation was originally given and also for subsequent generations the writer knew would read it? . . . 5. Why would the Holy Spirit have included this account in Scripture?¹²⁸

These five questions are relevant to the issue of finding purpose for the sermon. The theological purpose of the biblical writer is the starting place for the expository preacher who desires a purpose for the sermon.¹²⁹ The other sets of diagnostic questions focus on helping the expositor apply the truth content of the text to the contemporary audience in various ways, and continue to reflect his one-way approach to application.¹³⁰

Robinson concludes his discussion on this third developmental question by exhorting expositors to “relate biblical truth to life.” People need sermons that apply biblical truth “in a specific, not a general way.” Putting it another way, he writes: “Our hearers need both truth to believe and specific, life-shaping ways to apply it.”¹³¹

In summary of his discussion on the three developmental questions, Robinson remarks

¹²⁸*Biblical Preaching*, 89-90.

¹²⁹For further discussion on this, see below, 5.9.

¹³⁰See Robinson, 91-96, where these questions are discussed.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 96.

that they “prod our thinking and help us decide what must be said about our passage.” Directing these three questions “toward the details” of the text and toward the audience will help expositors know whether or not they have a sermon and “what kind of study” they will need to do to make the sermon effective. He encourages expositors to note “that the questions build on each other.” Meaning leads to validity, and validity leads to application.¹³² While an expositor may “deal with all three questions in the development” of the sermon, only “one of the three predominates and determines the form” the message will take. This probing all leads toward the homiletical idea and the sermon purpose statement.¹³³

This fourth stage forms an important bridge between the biblical world and the world of today.¹³⁴ It takes the exegetical work and helps expand it into a sermon, thus reflecting the movement in Robinson’s definition: interpretation to application. Ultimately, it breaths life into the exegetical process and enables it to result in meaning, validity, purpose, and relevancy for the expository sermon.

These three developmental questions are only found in the literature of those other expository homileticians who follow Robinson.¹³⁵ We consider these questions to be helpful to the evangelical expositor because they serve the vital role of bringing relevancy and vitality

¹³²Litfin writes: “Notice that these three categories represent a progression. Understanding precedes belief, and both understanding and belief precede acting upon what we believe. Thus we might settle for trying to explain something without proving it, but we cannot settle for proving something our audience does not understand. In the same way, showing the implications of something requires that we first explain what it is and prove it to be true” (Litfin, 126).

¹³³Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 96.

¹³⁴See above, 149.

¹³⁵See the three developmental questions in Litfin, *Public Speaking*, 125-140, 343-345; Grant and Reed, 50-54; and Willhite, *Preaching With Relevance*, 82-86.

to the exegetical idea.

In considering the stages collectively, the first four stages have prepared the way for the next two. Selecting and studying the passage, discovering the exegetical idea and its development, and submitting the exegetical idea to the three developmental questions have prepared the way for the task of formulating the homiletical idea and determining the sermon's purpose. These next two stages, five and six, deal with the heart of the expository sermon: truth and purpose.¹³⁶

5.8 Stage Five: Formulating the Homiletical Idea¹³⁷

This memorable sentence, described as the "homiletical idea,"¹³⁸ should be articulated "in fresh, vital, contemporary language." Says Robinson: "People are more likely to think God's thoughts after Him, and to live and love and choose on the basis of those thoughts, when they are couched in memorable sentences."¹³⁹ This sentence becomes the integrating, unifying center to the expository sermon—its bullet.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶"Whereas the idea states the truth, the purpose defines what that truth should accomplish" (*Biblical Preaching*, 107).

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, 103. For similar discussion, see Litfin, 345-346, where he calls it the "speech idea."

¹³⁸Ideational homileticians use different terminology to describe this sentence; for example: "proposition" (Broadus and Stanfield, 45; Braga, 113; Chapell, 140; Perry, 57; Vines and Shaddix, 134); "sermonic thesis" (Craig Skinner, *The Teaching Ministry of the Pulpit*, 163); "idea of a sermon" (Davis, 20); "thesis" (Fasol, 57); "heart of the sermon" (J. Daniel Baumann, *An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching*, 126); "central idea of the sermon" (Cox, 77); "target idea" (Harry Farra, *The Sermon Doctor*, 39-40); "key sentence" (Brown, Clinard, Northcutt, and Fasol, 65); "focus statement" (Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 86); "sermon idea" (McDill, 125-126); "essence of the sermon in a sentence" (Bryson, 320); "central proposition of the sermon" (Richard, 87); "dominating theme" (Olford and Olford, 141); "concerns of the sermon" (Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, 164); "theme statement" (*idem.*, *The Four Pages*, [Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1999], 38; Wilson is not considered an ideational homiletician).

¹³⁹*Biblical Preaching*, 104.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 35.

The homiletical idea is always derived directly from the exegetical idea. Consequently, the statement of the homiletical idea “may be identical to the statement of the exegetical idea.” For example, the “universal principles” such as “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not steal,” or “Love your neighbor as you love yourself” do not need “translation into the twenty-first century.” Robinson says “they are already here.”¹⁴¹ But most often, exegetical ideas will need translation into homiletical ideas that are “more contemporary and less tied to the words of the text.”¹⁴²

Among the examples he provides, one reads:

The exegetical statement of Romans 6:1-14 might be, “Through their union with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection, Christians have died to the rule of sin and are alive to holiness.” Here is a more striking statement for that idea: “You are not the person you used to be; therefore, don’t handle life as you used to handle it.”¹⁴³

Thus, “the homiletical idea is the biblical truth applied to life.”¹⁴⁴

Robinson provides the expositor with several “general suggestions” for wording the homiletical idea. First, “state the idea as simply and as memorably as possible.”¹⁴⁵ Second, state the idea in concrete and familiar words.” Third, “state the idea so that it focuses on response.” Fourth, “state the idea so that your listeners sense you are talking to them about them.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹Ibid., 104.

¹⁴²Ibid., 105.

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 106.

The communication of this single idea is at the heart of Robinson's approach to expository preaching,¹⁴⁷ and is considered to be the "genius" of *Biblical Preaching* to those who espouse ideational expository preaching.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, this stage and its contents remain consistent with Robinson's definition of expository preaching which emphasizes the communication of one central idea derived from the biblical text that governs the sermon. The researcher, who teaches ideational preaching in his homiletics classes, agrees with Willhite that this approach is helpful to beginning students in the evangelical context.¹⁴⁹

5.9 Stage Six: Determining the Sermon's Purpose

For greater clarity, this stage can be organized under four headings: the importance of sermon purpose, the meaning of sermon purpose, a theology of sermon purpose, and the procedure for articulating sermon purpose.¹⁵⁰

5.9.1 The Importance of Sermon Purpose

The discussion on both the sermon purpose and the homiletical idea occur in chapter five of *Biblical Preaching*.¹⁵¹ Immediately following the first section of the chapter, which deals with the homiletical idea, Robinson launches into a discussion on the importance of sermon purpose in a subsection titled, "The Power of Purpose."¹⁵² There he introduces the

¹⁴⁷See *ibid.*, 21-46; see also above, 4.3.2.

¹⁴⁸Partelow, 67.

¹⁴⁹Willhite and Gibson, *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*, 17.

¹⁵⁰Robinson does not use these headings in his discussion. We have provided them for the purpose of clarity.

¹⁵¹*Biblical Preaching*, 101-113.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, 106-107.

“key question” for a sermon in terms of its purpose: “Why are you preaching that sermon?”¹⁵³

He laments the way this question is often handled by preachers:

That obvious questions faces all of us as we prepare, and it receives many inadequate answers. For example, “When 11:25 comes on Sunday morning, I’ll be expected to say something religious.” Or “Last week I covered Genesis 21, so this week I’ll preach on Genesis 22.” Sometimes our response to the question, “Why are you preaching that sermon?” is a clear as a thick fog: “I’m preaching this sermon because I want to give the people a challenge.” Such answers, usually implied rather than stated, produce sermons that resemble a dropped lemon meringue pie—they splatter over everything, but hit nothing very hard. They lack a definite purpose!¹⁵⁴

Thus, the preacher who fails to understand how a “particular sermon should change lives in some specific way” should “be pitied.”¹⁵⁵ So important is purpose to Robinson that he states emphatically: “No matter how brilliant or biblical a sermon is, without a definite purpose it is not worth preaching.”¹⁵⁶ It is, therefore, no small wonder that the task of determining the sermon’s purpose finds itself at the center of Robinson’s sermon preparation process.¹⁵⁷

5.9.2 The Meaning of Sermon Purpose

At the outset of the discussion under stage six, Robinson explains the meaning of sermon purpose. He stresses that the “purpose behind each individual sermon is to secure

¹⁵³Robinson told the researcher that this is the “key question” in terms of sermon purpose (Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001). See also, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 808.

¹⁵⁴Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 106.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁵⁷Other evangelical expository homileticians consider sermon purpose to be very important as well: see, for example, Greidanus, *The Ancient Text and the Modern Preacher*, 120; Liefeld, 95; Grant and Reed, 47; Chapell, 40; Bryson, 322; Olford and Olford, 152-153; Vines and Shaddix, 137; Richard, 77-78; Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance*, 68; and Mathewson, 108.

some moral action.” Putting it more formally, he declares: “purpose states what you expect to happen in your hearers as a result of preaching your sermon.”¹⁵⁸

To further clarify the meaning of purpose, Robinson distinguishes it from the homiletical idea: the idea of the sermon is like an arrow, the purpose like a target.¹⁵⁹ He writes:

A purpose differs from the sermon idea . . . in the same way that a target differs from the arrow; as taking a trip differs from studying a map; as baking a pie differs from reading a recipe. Whereas the idea states the truth, the purpose defines what that truth should accomplish.¹⁶⁰ Henry Ward Beecher appreciated the importance of purpose when he declared: “A sermon is not like a Chinese firecracker to be fired off for the noise it makes. It is a hunter’s gun, and at every discharge he should look to see his game fall.”¹⁶¹

Thus, for Robinson, purpose answers the question, “Why are you preaching that sermon?” or, put another way, “What do you expect to accomplish by that sermon?”¹⁶²

Sermon purpose, therefore, is the specific “moral action,”¹⁶³ “measurable result,”¹⁶⁴ or

¹⁵⁸*Biblical Preaching*, 107.

¹⁵⁹Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001. It is noteworthy that in the first edition of *Biblical Preaching* (1980), 107-113, Robinson devoted one small chapter to sermon purpose, “The Power of Purpose.” In the second edition (2001) he combines the homiletical idea and sermon purpose in one chapter appropriately titled, “The Arrow and the Target.” Furthermore, the discussion on sermon purpose is enlarged, as will be shown below.

¹⁶⁰In *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, Robinson expands the concept behind this sentence: “While the idea of the sermon is the truth to be presented, the purpose describes what the truth is intended to accomplish. A statement of purpose recognizes that truth exists not as an end in itself but as an instrument through which men and women establish a relationship with God and one another” (808).

¹⁶¹*Biblical Preaching*, 107-108.

¹⁶²Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001.

¹⁶³*Biblical Preaching*, 107.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 111.

“observable behavior”¹⁶⁵ that the sermon’s truth or idea should produce in the listeners.¹⁶⁶

5.9.3 A Theology of Biblical Purpose

In the midst of his instruction on how to determine sermon purpose, Robinson provides the reader with a brief theology of biblical purpose. It should be noted that his view of sermon purpose issues from his expository methodology: the inspired human authors had a purpose in mind as they wrote their books.¹⁶⁷ He thus remarks that none of the biblical writers “took up his pen to jot down ‘a few appropriate remarks.’” They all “wrote to affect lives.”¹⁶⁸ Our author then refers to three passages where he believes the biblical author states his purpose: 1 Timothy 3:15,¹⁶⁹ Jude 3,¹⁷⁰ and John 20:31.¹⁷¹ “Whole books,” he contends,

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 109.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., 107; other expository homileticians have termed purpose thus: “telos,” (Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 27ff); “function” (Liefeld, 98ff); “fallen condition focus” (Chapell, 42); “objective” (Bryson, 322); “motivating thrust” (Olford and Olford, 152-153); most term it “purpose” (for example, Grant and Reed, 47; Vines and Shaddix, 142; Richard, 77-78; Willhite, 68; and Mathewson, 108).

¹⁶⁷Robinson believes the Holy Spirit inspired the author in his choice of words to express his thought and through the divine-human concursus. Thus the purpose of the inspired human author as expressed in the text is the purpose of the Holy Spirit (see above, 3.2.2.1-2; Robinson, “What is Expository Preaching?” 59; idem., “Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” 808). J. I. Packer writes that because the “Bible is as fully human as it is divine,” the “way to get into the present mind of God the Holy Spirit is by getting into the expressed mind of His human agents” (“The Adequacy of Human Language,” 211). By “expressed mind,” Packer means what is expressed in the text by the “biblical authors, God’s penman” (ibid.); elsewhere Packer says: “The identity of what the writers say about God with God’s own message about himself is the truth that has historically been indicated and safeguarded by calling the biblical books inspired” (“In Quest of Canonical Interpretation,” in *The Use of the Bible in Theology*, 42); hence, the conservative evangelical theological methodology or “revelational positivism” as van Niekerk, 136, terms it.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 108.

¹⁶⁹Robinson writes: “For instance, when Paul wrote to Timothy, he did it ‘so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth’ (1 Tim. 3:15 NASB)” (ibid.).

¹⁷⁰Robinson writes: “Jude changed purposes for his letter after he sat down to write. ‘While I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation,’ he confesses, ‘I felt the necessity to write to

“as well as sections within books, were written to make something happen in the thinking and the actions of the readers.”¹⁷² Thus, “behind every section of the sacred writings lies the reason why the author included the material.”¹⁷³

According to Robinson’s understanding, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 provides the general purpose of the Scriptures and gives counsel to the expository preacher on how to accomplish biblical purpose in the sermon:

The inspired Scriptures were given so that we could be “adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17 NASB). It follows from this that you should be able to put into words what beliefs, attitudes, or values should change or be confirmed, or

you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints’ (Jude 3 NASB)” (ibid.).

¹⁷¹Robinson writes: “John designed his account of Jesus’ life to win belief in Jesus as ‘the Christ, the Son of God’ and to secure in believers ‘life through his name’ (John 20:31 KJV)” (ibid.); see also Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, who cites the same texts with a few others, and then remarks, “Wherever these obvious statements are lacking, interpreters will have to search the text carefully for other clues to the author’s purpose” (ibid., 110); note also Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 77-78; opponents of the view that texts have authorial intention would see no validity in an author stating his purposes for writing—such as Stanley J. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980); and Derrida, *Dissemination*.

¹⁷²*Biblical Preaching*, 108.

¹⁷³*Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 809; the authorial “reason” Robinson has in mind is found in the content of the text rather than in the psychological state of the author at the time of writing, which is sometimes called “external intention” (for discussion on this, see Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 108-109; Philip B. Payne, “The Fallacy of Equating Meaning with the Human Author’s Intention,” *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 20/3 [September 1977]: 243-252; and Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* [Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985], 8-9). Sternberg explains: “As interpreters of the Bible, our only concern is with ‘embodied’ or ‘objectified’ intention. . . . In my view, such intention fulfills a crucial role, for communication presupposes a speaker who resorts to certain linguistic and structural tools in order to produce certain effects on the addressee; the discourse accordingly supplies a network of clues to the speaker’s intention. In this respect, the Bible does not vary from any other literary or ordinary message except in the ends and rules that govern the forms of communication.” Thus, “‘intention’ no longer figures as a psychological state consciously or unconsciously translated into words. Rather, it is a shorthand for the structure of meaning and effect supported by the conventions that the text appeals to or devises; for the sense that the language makes in terms of the communicative context as a whole” (9). Payne emphasizes, “Ultimately all argument about meaning or the author’s intention must be rooted in the text if it is to be objective” (8); for a summary of criticisms on this view, see Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* 37-195.

what quality of life or what good works should result from the preaching and hearing of your sermon. You accomplish that purpose, Paul told Timothy, through (1) teaching a doctrine, (2) refuting some error in belief or action, (3) correcting what is wrong, and (4) instructing people on the proper handling of life.¹⁷⁴

Thus, in Robinson's thinking, the biblical writers have a purpose¹⁷⁵ in their writings and this purpose can be discovered by the careful expositor.

¹⁷⁴*Biblical Preaching*, 108.

¹⁷⁵Some consider Robinson's view that a passage has one main purpose (Homiletics and Hermeneutics, 808-813) too simplistic. Erwin Lutzer, who provided a response ("A Response to Homiletics and Hermeneutics" in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, 833-837) to Robinson's paper, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," takes issue with the view that biblical passages have only one main purpose. "Might not an author have one main purpose but also other subsidiary purposes in writing what he did? Is it unreasonable to suppose that John may have written about Christ's conversation at the well to give a discourse on eternal life but also to provide a model for how it should be presented?" ("Response," 835). He believes that "logical deductions" can "be drawn from the Scripture which are quite different than the author's intended purpose" (ibid.). Lutzer then states: "I think it is necessary to recognize that though a text has only one meaning, an author may write what he did for a variety of reasons; he may wish to communicate several ideas rather than the one that may be uppermost in his mind" (836). Thus, "we must distinguish between the intended meaning of the text (which is one) and the intended purposes for writing (which may be many)" (837); Greidanus, 109; and Payne, 244-246, concur with Lutzer on subsidiary purposes; Payne, for example, writes: "Often there are many reasons for, or intentions behind a work. Why did Luke write Luke and Acts? Was it as an evangelistic work, or to encourage Christians, or to propound a particular theological viewpoint, or to vindicate Paul, or out of interest in the early history of the Church? No single answer would exhaust Luke's reasons for writing. . . . The complexity of intention applies on other levels as on that of books. Frequently the author has more than one reason for writing a chapter, paragraph, sentence, or word. Therefore to limit meaning to 'the intention of the author' as if he had *only one* intention may truncate the meaning he intended to convey" (245; italics his). Payne concedes, however: "This is not to deny the importance of an author's having a specific purpose in mind, one that gives his writing coherence. Nor is it to deny that it is crucial for exegetes to recognize what is primary in any given text" (ibid.). Thus, while Lutzer, Greidanus, and Payne see multiple purposes at work in Scriptural texts, they agree with Robinson that texts have purpose.

Another issue related to authorial intention and purpose is *sensus plenior*, the fuller sense, which is the view that passages of Scripture contain meaning or meanings intended by God in addition to the historical meaning intended by the human author (Kaiser and Silva, 286); it is beyond the scope of this study to fully discuss this issue; for discussion, see, for example, Raymond Brown, *The "Sensus Plenior" of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore: St. Mary's University, 1955); idem., "The 'Sensus Plenior' in the Last Ten Years," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963): 262-285; Wilfred J. Harrington, *The Path of Biblical Theology* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), 293-313; Greidanus, 110-113; and Douglas J. Moo, "The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 179-211; for discussion of *sensus plenior* in the context of typology see Richard Davidson, *Typology In Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical 'typos' Structures*, Andrews University Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 2 (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1981), 103-104; see also Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*.

5.9.4 Procedure for Articulating Sermon Purpose

It should be pointed out that Robinson does not explain this procedure in terms of specific “steps.” We consider this a weakness and therefore attempt to describe his method in terms of “steps” for greater clarity. The first step in articulating the sermon’s purpose in our author’s approach, then, is to discover “the purpose behind the passage you are preaching.” The expositor should thus ask questions such as, “Why did the author write this?” and “What effect did he expect it to have on his readers?”¹⁷⁶ These questions are best analyzed during Robinson’s second stage of exegesis.¹⁷⁷ Often, the expositor must discover the author’s purpose “through a study of the broad sweep of the content.”¹⁷⁸ Unfortunately, beyond the above questions for probing the text on its purpose, Robinson provides no

¹⁷⁶*Biblical Preaching*, 108. These questions echo earlier questions Robinson suggested for determining the theological purpose of a biblical author (89-90; 103).

¹⁷⁷Robinson has reminded expositors that “it should be kept in mind that while the stages for preparation are treated in sequence, they sometimes mix (*Biblical Preaching*, 53); thus while discovering the biblical purpose is the sixth stage, it should begin during the exegetical process of stage two.

¹⁷⁸“Homiletics and Hermeneutics,” 809. Linguistic scholars John Beekman, John Callow, and Michael Kopesecc claim in their *Semantic Structure of Written Communication* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1981), that the written discourse in the Bible has authorial purpose from the book level down to the paragraph level (29-30). They explain that when the “overall” purpose of a biblical book is “not stated explicitly, the other thematic material at the higher levels will implicitly indicate the author’s purpose.” In the case of paragraphs, a “particular paragraph may have a discernible purpose, but it is more commonly the case that purpose becomes discrete and storable when paragraphs are combined into sections. The purpose of units below such levels appear to simply contribute to the higher-level purpose” (30). Thus, when Robinson says the biblical author’s purpose may have to be discovered through a “study of the broad sweep of the content,” he reflects the linguistic approach of discovering meaning and purpose in written discourse from the “top downwards” (high-level sectional units) rather than from the “bottom upwards” (words and sentences); see also Kathleen Callow and John C. Callow, “Text as Purposive Communication: A Meaning-based Analysis,” in *Discourse Description: Diverse Linguistic Analysis of A Fund-Raising Text* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1992), 7-8, who argue that whenever “human beings communicate verbally, they do so about something, and for some purpose;” that biblical authors have discernible purpose in their paragraphs is demonstrated in John C. Tuggy in “Semantic Paragraph Patterns: A Fundamental Communication Concept and Interpretive Tool,” in David Alan Black, ed. *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 45-67; on this, also note Beekman, Callow, and Kopesecc, 129-130; for argumentation that all verbal or written communicative attempts have purpose, see Kathleen Callow, *Man and Message: A Guide to Meaning-Based Text Analysis* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1998) 23-33, 97-137.

exegetical specifics on how to find a biblical author's purpose.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, this first step is foundational in his thinking because an expository sermon "finds its purpose in line with the biblical purposes." Thus, the expositor "must first figure out why a particular passage was included in the Bible,"¹⁸⁰ and then align the sermon's purpose with the "aims of the biblical writer."¹⁸¹

Robinson's next step in articulating sermon purpose is for the expositor to decide, based on the purpose of the biblical author, what God desires to accomplish through the sermon in the hearers today.¹⁸² The contemporary purpose Robinson proposes for the sermon

¹⁷⁹In his "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," Robinson asserts that the biblical sermon finds its purpose "primarily" through "exegesis and hermeneutics" (809); but he provides no procedural specifics. Evangelical exegete Walter Kaiser, however, provides a procedure for discovering biblical purpose in *Towards an Exegetical Theology*, where he describes four levels of context for exegetical study: the immediate context, sectional context, book context, and canonical context" (69-85). In discussing the book context, Kaiser addresses the "overall purpose and plan of the book" (77; cf. Terry, 210ff). He cites several passages (Eccl. 12:13; Luke 1:1-4; and John 20:30-31) where he believes the writer "bluntly tells us his purpose," and then says: "These are examples of books that give us an explicit and stated goal by which to judge their total progress as the sections unfold" (ibid.). But in other books the "overall purpose must be ascertained by the contents and the transitions from section to section and paragraph to paragraph . . . (ibid.); consequently, Kaiser provides "four ways to ascertain the intention of the writer as far as his general scope and plan are concerned." "Search first to see if the writer himself clearly sets forth his purpose in the preface, conclusion, or body of the text." Second, "study the parenthetical sections (the hortatory aspect), particularly of the New Testament Epistles. . . . Usually an author's exhortations will flow out of his special purpose for writing this book." Third, in historical narrative, observe what details the author "selected for inclusion and how he arranged them." This should provide a "clue as to the writer's overall purpose in collecting and editing history or narrative." Fourth, "when no other clues are available, the interpreter must work out his own statement of the author's purpose. The interpreter will begin by studying how the topic sentences of individual paragraphs work together to explicate the theme of a given section. Then he will proceed to study the themes of all the sections and to evaluate the connections between and within sections. Only when this has been completed will the interpreter experience any kind of confidence in stating what the author's implied theme is" (79). Thus, Kaiser provides specific steps on how to determine the biblical author's purpose in the text. No such steps are found in Robinson's discussion (*Biblical Preaching*, 107-108; and "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 809-813); Robinson's discussion on determining sermon purpose would be enhanced if Kaiser's four-step procedure was employed.

¹⁸⁰*Biblical Preaching*, 108.

¹⁸¹*Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 809.

¹⁸²*Biblical Preaching*, 108.

is called the “purpose statement.”¹⁸³ To help expositors articulate this statement with precision, our author turns to the “instructional objective” used by educators for the classroom.¹⁸⁴ “While preaching differs significantly from lecturing,” he writes, “stating the purpose of a sermon as though it were an instructional objective makes the sermon more

¹⁸³*Biblical Preaching*, 109; *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 808.

¹⁸⁴The evangelical understanding of education and theology together should be addressed at this juncture. Modern educational philosophies carry their own theories and assumptions; on this, see George Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University, 1980), 90-126, for detailed description of the following educational philosophies and theories: perennialism, essentialism, behaviorism, progressivism, reconstructionism, romantic naturalism, and existentialism. Conservative evangelical educators, however, true to their theological methodology, attempt to draw much of their philosophy of education from biblical data (for example, Perry G. Downs, “Theology and Education,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, ed. Michael J. Anthony [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001], 693-696). How, then, do these evangelicals relate to secular educational theories? Evangelical educational specialist William R. Yount identifies a mainstream evangelical assumption when he writes: “Faith focuses on the supernatural and subjectively sees with the heart’s eye the Creator who made us. Scripture, the objective anchor of our subjective experiences, is a record of personal experiences with God through the ages. Science focuses on the natural and objectively gathers data on repeatable phenomena, the machinery, so that we may better understand how the world works. There is no conflict between giving our hearts to the Lord and giving our minds to the logical pursuit of natural truth. All truth is God’s truth. Therefore the objective pursuit of truth does not conflict with faith. Educational psychology is a scientific discipline which focuses on the nature of the teaching-learning process. It does not—it cannot, by definition—speak to faith issues. But it can, and does, provide wonderful insights for those who wish to excel in helping others learn” (*Created to Learn: A Christian Teacher’s Introduction to Educational Psychology* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 36-37). It is from this perspective that Robinson attempts to utilize insights from secular educational practice; for discussion on merging education and theology from the evangelical perspective, see the many entries in Anthony’s, *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, which contain numerous bibliographies of evangelical sources on this issue; for more general discussion on blending education and theology or Christian education, see, for example, the important work of Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1980); and Harold W. Burgess, *Models of Religious Education: Theory and Practice in Historical and Contemporary Perspective* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House, 2001), who identifies and discusses four major contemporary models of theological education: classical liberal, mid-century mainline, evangelical/kerygmatic, and social science models; see also, for example, Rupert E. Davis, *A Christian Theology of Education* (Nutfield, Surry: Denholm House Press, 1974); Iris V. Cully and Kendig Brubaker Cully, eds., *Process and Relationship: Issues in Theory, Philosophy, and Religious Education* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1978); Randolph Crump Miller, *The Theory of Christian Education Practice: How Theology Affects Christian Education* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1980); Norma H. Thompson, ed., *Religious Education and Theology* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1982); John L. Elias, *Studies in Theology and Education* (Malabar, Fl.: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1986); Leslie J. Francis and Adrian Thatcher, eds., *Christian Perspectives for Education: A Reader in the Theology of Education* (Leominster, Ma.: Fowler-Wright Books, 1990); Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis, eds., *Christian Theology and Religious Education: Connections and Contradictions* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996).

direct and effective.”¹⁸⁵

Educators recognize that “an effective statement of purpose” or instructional objective “goes beyond procedure and describes the observable behavior that should come as a result of teaching.” Likewise, the purpose statement of a sermon should not only describe the destination and route the sermon will follow, but tell how the expositor can know if he or she has arrived. “If we are not clear about where we are going, we will probably land somewhere else.”¹⁸⁶ For Robinson, then, the instructional objective is an helpful pattern of how a sermon purpose statement should be written.

It is at this point a footnote is added referencing an educator. The footnote reads: “For a discussion of instructional objectives helpful to any teacher, see Robert F. Mager, *Preparing Instructional Objectives*, 2d ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Fearon, 1975).”¹⁸⁷ This is the only direct reference Robinson makes to an educational specialist.¹⁸⁸ Two other specialists in developing the instructive objective¹⁸⁹ whom our author did not mention are Norman E. Gronlund¹⁹⁰ and

¹⁸⁵*Biblical Preaching*, 109.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 109, note 3. Robinson left this footnote to read exactly as it did in the first edition of *Biblical Preaching* (1980, 110, note 2). Mager, however, revised his text in 1984 (*Preparing Instructional Objectives*, 2d. rev. ed. [Belmont, Calif.: Lake Publishing Company, 1984]).

¹⁸⁸Robinson does reference Roy B. Zuck, a theologian who has specialized in educational theory; see discussion below.

¹⁸⁹Yount believes four theorists “have greatly influenced the development and use of instructional objectives:” Robert Mager, Norman Gronlund, E. W. Eisner, and Leroy Ford (135-139).

¹⁹⁰Gronlund is an educational specialist in measurement and evaluation in teaching and the instructional objective; see, for example, *Measurement and Evaluation for Classroom Instruction*, 6th. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1990); and *How to Write and Use Instructional Objectives*, 5th. ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1995); he is noted for his use of Bloom’s taxonomy and examples of verb lists for stating learning outcomes; on Bloom, see below, note 195.

LeRoy Ford.¹⁹¹ Ford, Professor of Foundations of Education at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, 1966-1984, has influenced Christian educator's views on the instructional objective as much as the secular educators Gronlund and Mager.¹⁹² Each of these educational scholars offer methods widely used by educators to write classroom instructional objectives. According to evangelical education scholar William R. Yount, the methods offered by these scholars are useful and appropriate in the Christian evangelical educational setting.¹⁹³

To write the sermon purpose statement like an instructional objective, Robinson suggests using a verb list. This verb list, drawn from theologian Roy B. Zuck,¹⁹⁴ is "valuable for stating course objectives." Utilizing the language of educators, Robinson explains: "These verbs are useful for dealing with the purpose of giving knowledge and insight (the cognitive domain) and changing attitudes and actions (the affective domain)."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹Ford follows Gronlund in his approach to instructional objectives, but applies it in the Christian evangelical setting; see his major text, *Design for Teaching and Training: A Self-Study Guide to Lesson Planning* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1978); and idem, *A Curriculum Design Manual for Theological Education: A Learning Outcomes Focus* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1991), where he provides detailed procedures on developing a theological curriculum using instructional objectives.

¹⁹²Yount, 373, note 19.

¹⁹³Ibid., 135ff.

¹⁹⁴Robinson writes: "Roy B. Zuck has drawn up a list of verbs valuable for stating course objectives" (ibid., 109). This statement remains unchanged from the first edition (1980, 110). This is the only time Zuck is mentioned and all that is said about him. Zuck, who has a Th.D. from Dallas Theological Seminary, is senior professor emeritus of Bible exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary, where he has taught since 1973. While he has authored more than forty books and numerous scholarly articles, a significant portion of his writings have been devoted to education/teaching; see, for example, *Teaching as Jesus Taught* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); *Teaching as Paul Taught* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); *Spirit-filled Teaching: The Power of the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Publishing, 1998).

¹⁹⁵*Biblical Preaching*, 109; Robinson doesn't provide the source, but these terms come from the work of Benjamin Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Book 1 Cognitive Domain* (New York, NY: Longman, 1956); and David R. Krathwohl, Benjamin S. Bloom, and Bertram B. Masia, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Book 2 Affective Domain* (New York: Longman, 1964), who pointed out the domains for human learning: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor or behavioral; furthermore, Bloom developed a system to categorize the process of learning into a hierarchical chart of the different levels in the cognitive

Robinson reproduces the list in his book as "Table 1" on page 110. The following table is identical to Robinson's except that it has no vertical lines:

TABLE 1
ROBINSON'S VERB LIST

If the Goal is:	Knowledge	Insight	Attitude	Skill
Then the verb can be:	List	Discriminate between	Determine to	Interpret
	State	Differentiate between	Develop	Apply
	Enumerate	Compare	Have confidence in	Internalize
	Recite	Contrast	Appreciate	Produce
	Recall	Classify	Be convinced of	Use
	Write	Select	Be sensitive to	Practice
	Identify	Choose	Commit yourself to	Study
	Memorize	Separate	Be enthusiastic about	Solve
	Know	Evaluate	Desire to	Experience
	Trace	Examine	Sympathize with	Explain
	Delineate	Comprehend	View	Communicate
	Become aware of	Reflect on	Plan	Assist in
	Become familiar with	Think though	Feel satisfied about	Pray about
	Become cognizant of	Discern		
	Define	Understand		
	Describe	Discover		
	Recognize			

Notice the list is composed of four columns with the respective target areas: Knowledge, Insight, Attitude, and Skill. Under each target area is an appropriate list of verbs. The Table is designed to read as follows: "If the goal is" one of the target areas, "then the verb can be:." Thus, the expositor can choose the appropriate verb for the domain targeted.¹⁹⁶

domain such as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (18); Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia suggested the following levels in the affective domain: receiving, responding, valuing, organization, and characterization (176-185). Based on appropriate verb lists in each level, educators have used these taxonomies to write instructional objectives (Yount, 140ff). This is the basis from which Zuck and Robinson derive their approach.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 110. Robinson told the researcher he thought this list of verbs "would be suggestive to somebody" who had never used "different words to produce the different objectives or different levels of

Zuck evidently developed this list of verbs based on the work of educational specialist Leroy Ford.¹⁹⁷ Thus, Robinson utilizes an educational format to help the expositor articulate the sermon purpose statement.

Our author provides several sermon purpose statement examples “stated in measurable terms”¹⁹⁸ with the verb lists (the verbs from the “verb list” will be italicized).¹⁹⁹

- The listener should *understand* justification by faith and be able to write out a simple definition of the doctrine. (Whether the hearers actually write out the definition or not, you will be much more specific if you preach as though they will.)
- A listener should be able to *list* the spiritual gifts and determine which gifts he or she has been given.
- A listener should be able to *write* down the name of at least one non-Christian and should resolve to pray for that individual each day for the next two weeks. (If listeners do something for two weeks, they have a better chance of doing it for several months.)
- My hearers should *identify* one morally indifferent situation about which Christians disagree and be able to think through how to act in that situation.
- Members of the congregation should *understand* how God loves them and explain at least one way in which that love makes them secure.
- Christians should be able to *explain* what people must believe to become Christians and should plan to speak to at least one person about the Lord in the coming week.

learning” (Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001).

¹⁹⁷See Zuck, “Application in Biblical Hermeneutics and Exposition,” 25, where he mentions the four target areas in Robinson’s “Table 1” and cites Ford. On the same page Zuck offers a brief verb list under each target area.

¹⁹⁸*Biblical Preaching*, 109.

¹⁹⁹The italics are mine.

- Listeners should *be convinced* of the necessity to study the Bible and should enroll in a church Bible class, a home Bible class, or a Bible correspondence course.²⁰⁰

It will be observed that Robinson pulls the italicized verbs directly from the list on page 110. He thus provides examples of a format or pattern for the expositor to emulate in writing sermon purpose statements. This format can be set forth in the following template: The audience should (verb) + (behavioral specifics).²⁰¹ This template is general because Robinson doesn't always follow the same pattern.

Two issues present themselves concerning our author's approach to stating the sermon purpose statement. First, his material needs to be presented in a more user-friendly format with a specific template provided. The second issue is whether or not our derived template from Robinson's examples of purpose statements is the most helpful to expositors? Is it specific enough? Does it need more precision in terms of format? With some minor modifications based on insights from the examples and templates of Gronlund,²⁰² Ford,²⁰³ Larry O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt,²⁰⁴ and Yount,²⁰⁵ we believe our author's pattern can

²⁰⁰Ibid., 109, 111.

²⁰¹Nowhere does Robinson indicate that this format is the only way to write sermon purpose statements.

²⁰²Gronlund mainly provides an exhaustive treatment of illustrative objectives and verbs in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (*How to Write and Use Instructional Objectives*, 102-107).

²⁰³See Ford's *A Curriculum Design Manual*, 97-122, for examples in all three domains.

²⁰⁴Richards and Bredfeldt provide a specific template in *Creative Bible Teaching*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1998); "Students will (learning verb) the (learning concept) by (learning response)." Three examples in all three learning domains illustrate this template: "Content Aim (Cognitive): Students will discover the three primary life implications that grow out of the priestly work of Christ by doing an inductive study of Hebrews 10:19-25." "Inspiration Aim (Affective): Students will commit themselves to the practice of encouraging one another in times of persecution and difficulty by agreeing to meet together for prayer before school twice each week." "Action Aim (Behavioral): Students will draw upon three vital means of survival

become a better template to aid expositors in articulating sermon purpose.²⁰⁶

As to Robinson's verb list developed from Zuck, the verbs are suggestive to preachers who have never attempted to produce sermon purpose statements.²⁰⁷ He admits they are not "by any means, exhaustive,"²⁰⁸ but sufficient to help preachers get started. Leroy Ford offers other attitudinal words for the affective domain which could enlarge and improve Robinson's "Attitude" list.²⁰⁹

Following the example sermon purpose statements, Robinson writes:

Framing purposes that describe measurable results forces you to reflect on how attitudes and behavior should be altered. That, in turn, will enable you to be more concrete in your application of truth to life. After all, if a sermon accomplishes anything, it must accomplish something.²¹⁰

The focus for Robinson in articulating sermon purpose, then, is to obtain "measurable results" in order to be as concrete as possible in application of truth to life. And because these "measurable results" are so important to the ten stages, they should be stated with more consistency and clarity than Robinson suggests.

in the midst of persecution and difficulties—prayer, perseverance, and people—by meeting together each week to "spur each other on" (143-144); notice the example's consistency in following the template.

²⁰⁵Yount's template reads: "Learners will demonstrate (domain) of (content) by (action)." Some of his numerous examples stated according to this template read: "Knowledge: Learners will demonstrate knowledge of John 3:16 by writing the verse from memory." "Valuing: Learners will demonstrate a change in attitude concerning John 3:16 by committing themselves to witness to at least one person this week" (152-153); again, notice the example's consistency in following the template.

²⁰⁶For a proposed template, see below, 6.2.8.2.

²⁰⁷Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001.

²⁰⁸Ibid.

²⁰⁹Ford, *A Curriculum Design Manual*, 116-119.

²¹⁰*Biblical Preaching*, 111.

It is at this point our author enlarges his discussion of sermon purpose from the first edition.²¹¹ He suggests that “one effective means of incorporating the purpose into the sermon . . . lies in writing out a conclusion with the purpose in mind.” It should be stated in a “rough way” what the expositor is asking the congregation to do as a result of what has been preached. “Be as specific as possible,” Robinson counsels. “If someone came to you next week and said, ‘I have been thinking about what you preached last Sunday, but I don’t know how what you said applies to my life,’ would you have an answer?” Thus, says Robinson, “picture the truth you have preached being acted upon in some specific situations” and “then put that into your conclusion.”²¹²

Again, he provides the expositor with practical examples:

- Is there someone with whom you have a broken relationship? A spouse, a parent, a friend? As a follower of Jesus Christ, you need to take the first step today to make it right. Is there a letter you should write? Is there a phone call you should make? Is there a visit you should make or a conversation you should have? Then will you ask God for the courage to make that contact and take that step to get that matter settled?
- Your job is the will of God for you. Tomorrow when you go to work, take out a Post-it note and write “God has put me here to serve Him today” and then place it on your desk or in your locker—some place where you can see it easily. Whenever you look at that note, breathe a prayer, “Lord, I’m working this job for you. Help me to do it to please you.” In that way you can remember the workday to keep it holy.²¹³

Based on these two examples, one can see Robinson’s attempt at connecting application and purpose. This writing out of the conclusion “with the purpose in mind” in advance has an

²¹¹*Biblical Preaching* (1980), 112; *Biblical Preaching* (2001), 111-112.

²¹²*Biblical Preaching* (2001), 111.

²¹³*Ibid.*, 111-112.

advantage. Says Robinson, “You concentrate your thought with greater efficiency if when you begin, you know what you intend to accomplish.” Although the conclusion may change later in preparation, “you have determined where you purpose to go.” Thus, Robinson completes his discussion of stage six.²¹⁴

Stage five, articulating the homiletical idea, and this stage, articulating the sermon purpose, stand at the center of the ten-stage process. Stages one through four lead into the sermon idea and purpose, and stages seven through ten issue out of them. Thus, the homiletical idea and the sermon purpose significantly influence the remaining stages, especially the next stage.

5.10 Stage Seven: Deciding How to Accomplish This Purpose

Robinson points out at this juncture that several important things have happened so far in this process. The exegetical idea was established through a thorough study of the passage in its context; next, the exegetical idea was probed with the three developmental questions; from this, the homiletical idea was framed and a sermon purpose established. He then writes:

At this point, therefore, we should know what we have to preach and why we are preaching it. Now the question before us is this: What must be done with this idea to carry out the purpose? What shape will the sermon assume?²¹⁵

Thus, the homiletical idea and sermon purpose significantly influence this seventh stage.

At the outset Robinson provides an overview of three major sermon arrangements:

²¹⁴Ibid., 112.

²¹⁵Ibid., 116.

deduction,²¹⁶ induction,²¹⁷ and semi-induction. First, in deductive sermon arrangement,²¹⁸ he explains, “the idea is stated completely as part of the introduction to the sermon, and then the sermon develops out of that idea.” Second, in the inductive sermon arrangement,²¹⁹ “the introduction leads only to the first point in the conclusion, then with strong transitions each new point links to the previous point until the idea of the sermon emerges in the conclusion.” Third, semi-induction, or induction and deduction combined,²²⁰ can take two forms. In one form, the introduction “may state only the subject” of the sermon, and “then each point in the sermon presents a complement to the subject.” In the other form, the introduction can lead up to the first point and “develop it inductively.” This can be done for the second point where, for the first time, the “complete statement of the idea” is revealed. Once the idea has been stated, “the sermon must proceed deductively to explain or prove or apply the idea.” Thus, Robinson introduces the reader to the “major ways” sermons develop.²²¹

After this “overview” Robinson discusses in more detail each of the three sermon

²¹⁶For a concise list of homiletic texts advocating deductive methodology for preaching, see Cothen, “An Examination of Recent Homiletical Criticisms,” 11-12.

²¹⁷For a concise list of homiletic texts advocating inductive methodology for preaching, see *ibid.*, 12-14.

²¹⁸For discussion on how homileticians define and explain deductive methodology, see *ibid.*, 23-59.

²¹⁹For the influence of inductive reasoning on preaching, see James Douglas Deuel, “Inductive Reasoning and Its Influence on Contemporary Preaching Theory,” Th.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989.

²²⁰Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis also discuss the inductive-deductive combination in *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1983), 103-120.

²²¹*Biblical Preaching*, 116; he tells the reader this discussion “should not be considered exhaustive but suggestive” (131).

arrangements.²²² He starts with the deductive arrangement and points out that “our homiletical ideas expand in line with the broad purpose of the sermon” and sermon ideas “demand explanation, validation, or application.”²²³ Deductive sermons, therefore, can take three forms, which correspond to the three developmental questions: “What does this mean?” “Is it really true?” and “What difference does it make?”²²⁴

The first deductive form “an idea to be explained” should be used when the “purpose requires that we explain a concept.” Corresponding with the first developmental question, it offers the audience “a clear explanation” of the biblical passage. “In the introduction to such a sermon,” Robinson explains, “we state the complete idea; in the body we take the idea apart and analyze it; and in the conclusion we repeat the idea again.” The advantage of this form is “clarity.”²²⁵

The second deductive sermon form is “a proposition to be proved.” Sometimes “an idea requires not explanation, but proof.” In this form, the “idea is stated in the introduction, and the major points defend it as a series of arguments.” It answers the second developmental

²²²Throughout this stage Robinson reworks the seminal concepts of H. Grady Davis (Riegert, 129) found in chapter nine, “Organic Forms,” of *Design for Preaching*. There Davis discusses the following sermon forms: a subject discussed, a thesis supported, a message illumined, a question propounded, and a story told (Davis, 139-162).

²²³*Ibid.*, 118

²²⁴*Ibid.*, 116. Litfin adds clarity to this point in his discussion “the first step toward determining a clear purpose for your speech is to weigh the idea you have chosen and the audience you will address and then to decide which of the three types of material will dominate your message: explanation, proof, or implication” (Litfin, 131).

²²⁵*Ibid.* Throughout this discussion, Robinson provides several example sermon outlines from other preachers that illustrate the different sermon forms. For full sermon manuscripts critiqued by Robinson, which illustrate these different sermon forms, see Robinson, *Biblical Sermons*. There he provides examples of deductive, inductive, and semi-inductive sermons (11).

question, “Is it really true?”²²⁶ In this case, the purpose is to prove the idea, rather than explain it. Thus, “sermons expand in different directions to accomplish different purposes.”²²⁷

The third deductive form is “a principle to be applied.” It issues out of the third developmental question, “What difference does it make?” The purpose of this type of sermon is to “establish a biblical principle” in either the introduction or the first major point and then apply it or explore its implications throughout the remainder of the sermon.²²⁸ These three deductive forms are all similar in that the “idea is stated in the introduction or the first major point,” and everything else in the sermon “relates back to the idea.”²²⁹

The next sermon arrangement Robinson discusses is the semi-inductive arrangement. He explains two forms. The first semi-inductive form is “a subject to be completed,” which “presents only the subject in the introduction, not the entire idea, and the major points complete the subject.” This “form of development,” says Robinson, “is the most common one used in our pulpits, and many preachers never vary from it.” This pattern is simple to use and can produce tension and strong climax when prepared with skill.²³⁰

The other semi-inductive form Robinson discusses is the “induction-deduction” combination. The main idea is stated somewhere in the middle of the sermon. “The introduction and first or second point will lead up to the idea, then the remainder of the

²²⁶*Biblical Preaching*, 121.

²²⁷*Ibid.*, 122.

²²⁸*Ibid.*, 122-123.

²²⁹*Ibid.*, 124. See Cothen for a helpful study on advocates and detractors of deductive methodology.

²³⁰*Ibid.*, 124, 126.

sermon proceeds deductively to explain, prove, or apply the idea.” This sermon form works well with “life situation” preaching.²³¹

The third major sermon arrangement is the inductive development.²³² After reviewing the nature of the inductive sermon, Robinson emphasizes the importance of “transitions.” The audience “cannot refer back” to a “central idea,” which has not been stated. If the transitions are not clear and do not remind the audience of “where they have been,” they will be lost. “Congregations who have been exposed to an inductive sermon at the hands of an amateur may still be wandering around, trying to find their way home.”²³³

Inductive sermons have some distinctive advantages, according to Robinson. First, they “produce a sense of discovery in listeners.” They can experience “learning truth for themselves.” Second, inductive sermons “are particularly effective with indifferent or even hostile audiences.” While an audience may not accept an idea presented at the beginning of a sermon, through induction the preacher can prepare them to accept that idea at the conclusion.²³⁴

One form of inductive preaching Robinson discusses is the problem-solution. The problem-solution sermon starts with a problem and explores it in terms of human experience. It raises questions that require an answer and climaxes in the solution found in the biblical idea

²³¹Ibid., 126.

²³²Robinson updated this discussion significantly from the first edition of *Biblical Preaching* (1980), 125-127. He adds more discussion on the nature and advantages of inductive preaching (*Biblical Preaching* [2001], 126-129).

²³³Ibid., 127.

²³⁴Ibid.

of the passage.²³⁵ Robinson reminds expositors, “While it is tempting to talk about the problem, you must spend enough time showing your listeners the solution in the biblical account and the solution at work in life.” This type of sermon “is closer to a conversation than to a lecture.” The expositor must know how people “think and act” so that when they hear the sermon, they feel “that could be me.” In addition, the expositor must know how to lead the listeners back to the Scriptures. “Inductive sermons work best,” Robinson says, “when, from beginning to end, from current problem to biblical solution, we are talking about actual people, not about cardboard characters in tissue-paper plots.”²³⁶

The other inductive form Robinson discusses is “a story told.” This is the narrative sermon that especially appeals “to inhabitants of a culture dominated by television and motion pictures.” Today’s culture, he says, is “a storied culture.” Induction saturates the media.²³⁷ Furthermore, anyone “who loves the Bible must value the story, for whatever else the Bible is, it is a book of stories.”²³⁸

In his approach to narrative preaching, Robinson asserts that the “major idea” holds the story together. The “details of the story are woven together to make a point, and all the points develop the central idea of the sermon.”²³⁹ He points out that whether the “points are stated or only implied” depends on the skill of the preacher, the purpose of the sermon, and

²³⁵Ibid., 128.

²³⁶Ibid., 129.

²³⁷Ibid.

²³⁸Ibid., 130.

²³⁹Ibid.

the expositor's awareness of the audience.²⁴⁰

In summarizing the discussion on this seventh stage, Robinson writes:

In the final analysis, there is no such thing as “a sermon form.” God’s truth would be better served if we didn’t think about preaching a sermon at all. When we have arrived at what we believe is the meaning of a passage and have thought about the needs and questions of our audience, then the question is, What is the best way for this idea to be developed? The shoe must not tell the foot how to grow; therefore, ideas and purposes should be allowed to take their own shape in your mind. To test a form, you should ask at least two questions: (1) Does this development communicate what the passage teaches? (2) Will it accomplish my purpose with this audience? If your development communicates your message, by all means use it; if it gets in the way of your message, then devise a form more in keeping with the idea and purpose of the Scriptures and the needs of your hearers.²⁴¹

A key concept emerging several times throughout the discussion of this stage was that both idea and purpose should dictate the form of the sermon.²⁴² Put another way, whether the sermon is deductive, inductive, or semi-inductive in form depends on the nature of the biblical idea and purpose. As shown above, Robinson believes that preachers should be careful not “to pour the truth into a certain mold.”²⁴³ Thus, the expository preacher should not start with sermon form,²⁴⁴ but with the sermon idea and purpose based upon the biblical idea and purpose.²⁴⁵

Consequently, the expositor is then “free to work the biblical material in any manner

²⁴⁰Ibid., 131; see Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, for the application of Robinson’s ten stages to narrative preaching from Old Testament narratives.

²⁴¹Ibid.

²⁴²See Davis, 139ff.

²⁴³Robinson, “When Flint Strikes Steel,” *Reformed Worship* 40 (1996): 17.

²⁴⁴*Biblical Sermons*, 194.

²⁴⁵*Biblical Preaching*, 23-25, 33-46; and idem., *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 808-811.

that will tellingly communicate the message of a text to the listener."²⁴⁶ Any sermon form "that communicates the message of a passage clearly so that the listeners understand it, accept it, and know what to do about it is adequate."²⁴⁷ Thus, according to Robinson's approach, articulating the big idea and purpose of the sermon first is paramount before moving on to sermon form.

This lengthy overview of Robinson's teaching on sermon form has served to demonstrate that for him, sermon form is an important stage in sermon preparation. Deciding on the best form to communicate the content of the biblical passage is thus the logical step after determining the sermon idea and purpose. This stage also demonstrates Robinson's attempt to allow content to influence form. Earlier in this chapter it was pointed out that Robinson allows the audience to influence sermon form, but seeks to avoid letting the contemporary audience influence the interpretation of the text in any way.²⁴⁸ But here he advocates bringing content and form together in a different direction. That is, the sermon shape, structure, or form the expositor chooses for the sermon should follow organically the nature of the sermon idea and purpose, which have been formulated from the content of the text. In this sense, the truth content of the text along with the audience influences the form of the sermon. Thus, Robinson does unite form and content, albeit one-way—from content to form rather than the reverse.

Summarizing this stage, Robinson has provided a straightforward discussion of

²⁴⁶*Biblical Sermons*, 257.

²⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 194.

²⁴⁸See above, 178-179, 182.

sermon form with example outlines from well known preachers of the past.²⁴⁹ For beginning expositors, this stage remains helpful in its approach.²⁵⁰

5.11 Stage Eight: Outlining the Sermon²⁵¹

Robinson calls the sermon outline the “blueprint.” It benefits the expositor in several ways. First, the expositor can view the sermon as a whole, and this heightens the sense of unity. Second, the outline clarifies “the relationships between the parts” of the sermon. Third, the outline “crystallizes the order of ideas” so they can be given to the listeners “in the appropriate sequence.” Forth, an outline helps the expositor recognize places in the sermon “that require additional supporting material that must be used to develop” the points.²⁵²

Outlines, Robinson says, “usually consist” of three components: first, the introduction which “introduces the idea, the subject, or in the case of inductive sermons, the first point;” second, the “body which elaborates on the idea”; and third, the conclusion which “brings the idea to focus and ends the sermon.”²⁵³

Robinson provides several tips for outlining throughout this discussion. First, recognize that sometimes “the arrangement of ideas in the biblical passage will have to be altered in the outline.”²⁵⁴ Second, remember that while the sermon “is made up of a multitude

²⁴⁹*Biblical Preaching*, 119-125.

²⁵⁰For a more advanced discussion on sermon form, see Bryson, 339-372, who advocates a variety of sermon forms; for example, he discusses nine “didactic designs” (deductive), five “explorative designs” (inductive), and six “narrative designs”; see also Hamilton, 32-116, who suggests a variety of sermon forms.

²⁵¹*Biblical Preaching*, 131.

²⁵²*Ibid.*, 132.

²⁵³*Ibid.*, 132-133.

²⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 132.

of ideas,” only the “most fundamental ideas become the main points and make up the basic framework around which the sermon is built.”²⁵⁵ Third, use Roman numerals for these major points, capital letters for supporting points, and Arabic numbers for further subordination.²⁵⁶ Fourth, “keep in mind that each point in the outline represents an idea and thus should be a grammatically complete sentence.”²⁵⁷ Fifth, “each point should be a declarative sentence, not a question.” Sixth, carefully construct transitions in advance. Seventh, remember that the “congregation does not hear an outline,” but rather “hears only the content of the outline.”²⁵⁸

The outline of the sermon will obviously reflect the form of the sermon chosen in the previous stage. It simply provides a “blueprint” of how the expositor plans to communicate the idea and accomplish the purpose of the sermon. Once again, the sermon idea and purpose provide the substance for successfully moving thorough another stage.

Engle, in his review, says that some readers might wish that in this stage Robinson “had discussed the use of the imperative in the main points of outlines as an aid to counter the tendency of some preachers to slip from the preaching stance into the lecture stance.”²⁵⁹ This is a valid criticism. A discussion at this point on the modes of preaching would have been helpful and appropriate. H. Grady Davis, who influenced Robinson’s homiletical thought, provides an insightful discussion of three modes in preaching based on the three modes of the

²⁵⁵Ibid., 133.

²⁵⁶Ibid, 133-134.

²⁵⁷Ibid., 134.

²⁵⁸Ibid., 135.

²⁵⁹Engle, 111.

English verb: the indicative mode—characteristic of announcement and proclamation—says “it is thus and so”; the imperative mode—characteristic of command and exhortation—says “do this, let us”; and the conditional mode—characteristic of an act or state, not as fact, but as contingent or possible—says “if . . . then.”²⁶⁰ Had Robinson summarized Davis’s discussion at this point and showed the expositor how one or more of these modes can be integrated into the sermon outline, the issue Engle raises would have been satisfactorily addressed.

Another issue that should be pointed out is Robinson’s consistency with his understanding of pulpit language discussed earlier in this study (3.2.1.2.3.2). Because words correspond with objective reality, the language of preaching must be clear and precise. His approach to the sermon outline emphasizes the importance of visual clarity. The expositor should be able to see the main points of the sermon precisely written on paper, especially “carefully constructed transitions” which promote clarity.²⁶¹ This is consistent with our author’s view that the language of preaching should be characterized by clarity of expression because it deals with divine truth.

5.12 Stage Nine: Filling in the Sermon Outline

Robinson likens filling in the sermon outline with supporting material²⁶² to covering bones with flesh and skin or putting up walls to frame a house. “An audience does not respond to abstract ideas,” he writes, “nor have many people ever been moved to faith by

²⁶⁰Davis, 209-219.

²⁶¹*Biblical Preaching*, 135.

²⁶²Supporting material for sermons is covered in most homiletical textbooks. What Robinson calls “supporting material” has traditionally been called “functional elements” (see the discussion in Bryson, 373-375; see also Vines and Shaddix, 174).

reading an outline of Romans.” Listeners need ideas in the outline amplified, explained, proved, or applied so that they are appealing and understandable. To accomplish this, the expositor should “use a variety of supporting materials” in the sermon.²⁶³

Throughout the discussion in this stage, Robinson lists and explains eight supporting elements for filling in the sermon outline. The discussion is practical, suggestive, and well illustrated. The eight supporting elements are repetition, restatement, explanation, definition, factual information, quotations, narration, and illustrations.²⁶⁴

A glaring absence in this discussion, however, is the relationship of these eight elements to the main idea of the sermon. Robinson discusses them in the context of amplifying various “ideas” in the sermon or filling in the outline, but not with reference to the main idea. While this supporting material should be tied to the immediate supporting idea, its ultimate determinant should be the unifying factor of the sermon, the homiletical idea. This is consistent with our author’s expository methodology concerning the centrality of the homiletical idea.²⁶⁵ The question should therefore be asked of each supporting element in the sermon: Does this repetition, restatement, explanation, definition, factual information, quotation, narration, or illustration amplify the homiletical idea of the sermon or not? If not, then it should be discarded. Robinson may assume that the reader understands the importance of evaluating every supporting element in light of the main idea. But to not discuss an issue so methodologically important to his entire homiletical method is a significant absence.

²⁶³*Biblical Preaching*, 139-140.

²⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 140-162.

²⁶⁵See above, 4.3.2.

Another missing determinant in this discussion is the purpose statement as a measuring standard for how supporting material should be employed in the sermon. The specific “moral action”²⁶⁶ the expositor wants the sermon to produce will provide influence and guidance on how each supporting element can best serve the sermon. Another question, then, should be asked of each supporting element in the sermon: Does this repetition, restatement, explanation, definition, factual information, quotation, narration, or illustration support the purpose of this sermon or not? If not, then it should be discarded.

Our point here is that by not discussing these above two issues, Robinson weakens the structure of his ten stages, which have at their center stages five and six—the homiletical idea and the sermon purpose statement. These two stages are the methodological center of the ten stages. To be consistent, therefore, Robinson needed to stress the connection of every supporting element, not only with its immediate idea, but with the homiletical idea and sermon purpose statement.

5.13 Stage Ten: Preparing the Introduction and Conclusion

Robinson points out that the introduction introduces the audience to two things: to the speaker and to the “central idea” of the sermon, or in the case of an inductive sermon, to the first point. He then discusses several “characteristics of effective introductions.” First, an effective introduction “should command attention.”²⁶⁷ Second, it “uncovers needs.”²⁶⁸

Third, an effective introduction should “orient the congregation to the body of the

²⁶⁶*Biblical Preaching*, 107.

²⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 166.

²⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 168.

sermon and its development.” Robinson says “at the very least, the introduction introduces the “sermon’s subject” so that the major points can complete it in the body. But the introduction “may go beyond the subject and orient hearers to the main idea.” Once the “complete idea” is stated in the introduction, one of the three developmental questions dealing with either explanation, validity, or application should be raised.²⁶⁹ While the expositor may not use the “exact words” of the particular developmental question chosen, it is used to “expand the idea” for the rest of the sermon. In the case of an inductive development, the introduction introduces only the first point.²⁷⁰

After explaining these three “non-negotiable” characteristics of effective introductions, Robinson discusses several other factors “that usually appear in good introductions.”²⁷¹ They are to be contemporary, personal, and short. Moreover, a good introduction “should not promise more than it delivers.”²⁷² In concluding the discussion on introductions, he adds practical counsel on reading the text, using humor, and dealing with nervous tension.²⁷³

In opening the discussion on the sermon conclusion, Robinson stresses its weight by saying that “the conclusion possesses such importance that many ministers sketch it after they have determined the sermon idea and the purpose for preaching it.”²⁷⁴ While not all ministers

²⁶⁹Ibid., 171.

²⁷⁰Ibid., 172.

²⁷¹Ibid.

²⁷²Ibid., 172-173.

²⁷³Ibid., 174-175.

²⁷⁴Ibid., 175.

will use that technique, the conclusion must still receive special attention. “Otherwise everything else comes to nothing.”

Robinson explains the purpose of the conclusion:

The purpose of your conclusion is to conclude—not merely to stop. Your conclusion should be more than a swipe at getting out of an awkward situation: “May God help us live in the light of these great truths.” It should be more than asking the congregation to bow in prayer so you can sneak off the platform when they’re not looking. You should conclude, and the conclusion should produce a feeling of finality. Like an able lawyer, a minister asks for a verdict. Your congregation should see your idea entire and complete, and they should know and feel what God’s truth demands of them. Directly and indirectly, the conclusion answers the question, “So what? What difference does this make?” And your people face another question as a result of an effective conclusion: “Am I willing to allow God to make that difference in my experience?”²⁷⁵

Two key points emerge from this statement. First, the conclusion brings home the central idea of the sermon and, second, it calls for specific, obedient action. Hence, the conclusion, in Robinson’s mind, is of major consequence to the success of the sermon.

Throughout this stage, he discusses seven shapes a conclusion can take: a summary, an illustration, a quotation, a question, a prayer, specific directions, and visualization. Each of these conclusions in one way or another serves as a way to emphasize the main idea and call for specific moral action.²⁷⁶

Robinson concludes his discussion on conclusions by adding three tips. First, “Don’t introduce new material in the conclusion.” The final moments of the sermon should be spent “driving home the central idea of your sermon.” Second, don’t “tell your congregation that you intend to conclude and then fail to do so.” Third, keep conclusions on the short side. “At

²⁷⁵Ibid., 176.

²⁷⁶Ibid., 176-180.

times a sudden stop can have a powerful effect.”²⁷⁷

It should be noted that the homiletical idea and the sermon purpose impact both the introduction and conclusion in the expository sermon. The introduction should, in the deductive sermon, introduce in some way the homiletical idea to the audience. In the case of the inductive sermon, the introduction should begin to create an appetite for the main idea, which will be introduced later in the sermon. The conclusion serves to drive the homiletical idea home as well as to call the hearers to a specific moral action based on the sermon purpose statement. Thus, like stages seven through nine, a fully articulated homiletical idea and sermon purpose statement are indispensable to the successful completion of this final stage.

In this final stage, Robinson comes full circle in preparing the expository sermon by discussing its beginning and its ending. This stage effectively completes the process of preparing the expository sermon and covers all the essentials of sermon introductions and conclusions. Furthermore, Robinson remains consistent with the centrality of the homiletical idea and the purpose statement in discussing sermon introductions and conclusions.

After the formal presentation of the ten stages, the last two chapters of the book provide the expositor with practical counsel on style²⁷⁸ and delivery.²⁷⁹ An added feature of the second edition of *Biblical Preaching* is an Appendix containing a sample sermon by Robinson with his own evaluation. The expositor is thus enabled to see how Robinson applies

²⁷⁷Ibid., 180-181.

²⁷⁸Chapter nine: “The Dress of Thought,” in *ibid.*, 183-198.

²⁷⁹Chapter ten: “How to Preach so People Will Listen,” in *ibid.*, 201-220.

the ten stages in an expository sermon.²⁸⁰

5.14 Conclusion

This chapter can be summarized as follows. Stages one through three, the first division of the ten stages, have an exclusive focus on understanding the biblical world of the text in its historical, grammatical, and literary context. The study is all exegetical in nature. Accordingly, in stage one the expositor determines the textual parameters of the passage to be preached. The sermon should be based on “a literary unit of biblical thought.”²⁸¹ Our evaluation revealed a need for more emphasis on how to consider the needs of the audience in choosing the passage for the sermon.

In stage two the expositor studies the passage in its broad, immediate, and more detailed literary context. The right study tools are used and notes are taken. The problem with this stage is the lack of detail in explaining the exegetical process and a need for discussion on the role of prayer and the Holy Spirit. Stage three focuses the expositor on determining the exegetical idea and its development. The subject and complement of the passage are analyzed and synthesized to determine the main idea of the passage. Then the biblical author’s development of the idea is written out as precisely as possible. Thus, at the end of stage three the expositor should have in writing the exegetical idea in a single sentence and a statement on how the “parts of the passage relate to the idea.”²⁸² This stage also needs more emphasis on the role of prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit. Also, both stages two and three

²⁸⁰“Appendix 2: Sample Sermon and Evaluation,” in *ibid.*, 229-245.

²⁸¹*Ibid.*, 55.

²⁸²*Ibid.*, 70.

should be engaged in the context of the hermeneutical spiral, which recognizes the influence of the interpreter's pre-understanding.

Stages four through ten, the second division of the ten stages,²⁸³ maintain the focus on the biblical world in the text, but add the modern world and the expositor's particular world to the process. Thus, stage four relates the exegetical idea to life by submitting it to three developmental questions which explore its meaning, validity, and relevance for today's audience. These three developmental questions prod the expositor's thinking, helping him or her decide what must be said about the passage. Only one of the three questions predominates and determines the form the sermon will take. This probing leads to the next two stages, formulating the homiletical idea and determining the sermon's purpose. It was demonstrated that Robinson's approach to application is the one-way approach and that the role of presuppositions should be kept in mind during the process. Furthermore, the "ladder of abstraction" would aid the discussion on application in the third developmental question.

It was noted in this chapter that the first four stages lay the foundation for stages five and six. Now that the expositor has an exegetical idea probed for its relevance today, he or she is in a position to translate that exegetical idea into the homiletical idea—stage five. This involves stating the exegetical idea in contemporary and memorable language. The homiletical idea becomes the "bullet" for the sermon, the truth or main idea to be communicated. Next, in stage six, the expositor determines the purpose for the sermon. This process culminates in a concise sentence describing what the sermon is to accomplish in the lives of the listeners. Like the homiletical idea, the purpose statement is founded upon the work of the first four

²⁸³Ibid., 75.

stages. Especially in stage four, where the exegetical idea is probed by developmental question three, does the expositor explore the theological purpose of the biblical author. The theological purpose is then translated into the contemporary purpose of the sermon. Our evaluation pointed out the lack of a user-friendly approach in explaining how to state the sermon purpose statement, as well as the need for an exegetical approach for discovering the purpose of the biblical author. It also revealed the need for a more precise template to aid expositors in articulating the sermon purpose statement.

This chapter also noted that stages five and six greatly influence the direction of the final four stages. Even the words of stage seven reveal their influence: "Thinking about the homiletical idea, ask yourself how this idea should be handled to accomplish your purpose."²⁸⁴ In this stage, the expositor decides on the best way to shape the sermon. There are a variety of ways to do this that can be grouped into three basic categories: deductive, inductive, and semi-inductive arrangements. The expositor chooses a form that best develops the homiletical idea and accomplishes the sermon purpose. Two questions should be used to test any form: "(1) Does this development communicate what the passage teaches? (2) Will it accomplish my purpose with this audience?"²⁸⁵ Thus, the homiletical idea and sermon purpose significantly influence stage seven, deciding the form of the sermon.

Stage eight also reveals its connection to stages five and six in its wording: "having decided how the idea must be developed to accomplish your purpose, outline the sermon."²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴Ibid., 116.

²⁸⁵Ibid., 131.

²⁸⁶Ibid.

The outline is the “blueprint”²⁸⁷ of how the expositor plans to communicate the homiletical idea and accomplish the purpose of the sermon. It provides visual clarity of how everything in the sermon relates to the main idea and purpose. Our evaluation presented the need for a discussion on the modes of preaching—indicative, imperative, and conditional—which would provide the expositor with direction on which mode to use while completing the sermon.

Stages nine and ten are also affected by stages five and six. In stage nine the expositor fills in the sermon outline with supporting materials such as repetition, restatement, explanation, definition, factual information, quotations, narration, and illustrations. Our evaluation discussed the need for the supporting materials be tied not only to the immediate supporting idea, but also to the central homiletical idea of the sermon. In addition, each supporting element should be measured by the purpose of the sermon. The lack of stressing these factors was shown to be inconsistent with Robinson’s emphasis on the centrality of the homiletical idea and sermon purpose statement.

Stage ten brings the expositor through the process of preparing the introduction and conclusion. This stage is appropriately the last because it is significantly affected by the previous stages, especially stages five and six. In the deductive sermon, on the one hand, the introduction introduces the homiletical idea. In the inductive sermon, on the other hand, the introduction begins to create an appetite for the main idea, which is introduced later in the sermon.

The conclusion serves to bring the sermon to a “ ‘burning focus’ on the great idea of

²⁸⁷Ibid., 132.

the sermon.”²⁸⁸ Moreover, the conclusion calls the listeners to a specific moral action based on the sermon purpose. Thus, stages seven, eight, nine, and ten are significantly influenced by the homiletical idea and the sermon purpose statement.

It has also been shown in this chapter that the ten stages have a two-fold division. In the first division, stages one through three focus on the biblical world through exegetical analysis and synthesis. In the second division, stages four through ten focus on the modern world and the expositor’s particular world in addition to the biblical world. Thus, the expositor starts in the biblical world and, as the stages progress, moves more into the contemporary world. As noted before, this movement from the biblical world to the contemporary world is consistent with the movement in Robinson’s definition of expository preaching: interpretation - application.²⁸⁹ The ten stages, therefore, are “bifocal.” When fully implemented in the sermon preparation enterprise, they help the expositor, one: “focus on the idea and the development of the text,” and two: “focus on the listener.”²⁹⁰

Moreover, this chapter has shown that the first four stages lead into stages five and six, and that the last four stages issue out of them. Put another way, the homiletical idea and sermon purpose statement build upon stages one through four and then cast their influence upon stages seven through ten. Thus, stage five—formulating the homiletical idea, and stage six—determining the sermon’s purpose, stand at the center of Robinson’s ten-stage process

²⁸⁸Ibid., 244.

²⁸⁹See below, 4.3.

²⁹⁰Ibid., 245. In the context of this statement, Robinson is talking about what strong sermons do throughout the ten-stage method.

of preparing expository sermons.²⁹¹

In conclusion, the ten stages as a whole reflect an inner consistency not found in most other methods of preparing sermons. While stages one, two, three, four, six, eight, and nine have deficiencies in our view, the collective focus of the stages basically remains consistent with Robinson's expository methodology—his view of Scripture, hermeneutical approach, and definition. The next chapter addresses specific pointers emerging from this study.

²⁹¹While this is true, it should be pointed out that the ten stages are an organic unit. The lack of attention to any stage will diminish the work done in the others.

CHAPTER 6

AN EVALUATION OF ROBINSON'S METHOD: NEW POINTERS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapters of this study have provided an analysis and evaluation of Robinson's methodology and method of expository preaching. More specifically, the last chapter evaluated his ten-stage method of preparing expository sermons by discussing its positives and negatives. This chapter will now build upon these previous chapters by addressing the deficiencies found in Robinson's approach and thereby provide theoretical pointers for future textbooks on expository preaching. It should be noted that these pointers will be from an evangelical perspective and thus many questions outside of this perspective will not be addressed.¹

6.2 Issues and Their Pointers

Each issue will be discussed in terms of its problem in Robinson's text and then a pointer will suggest a new theoretical and procedural approach for expository homiletics. It will be observed that in most cases the pointers suggest adding more discussion. The purpose of this added discussion is to address problems and issues that Robinson does not address. Furthermore, each pointer is intended to be only suggestive and not exhaustive.

¹For critical questions of evangelicalism's methodology, see the works of Barr; for example, *Fundamentalism*; and *Beyond Fundamentalism*; for critical questions of the evangelical expository homiletic, see, for example, Buttrick, *Homiletic*; and *A Captive Voice*; and Eslinger, *A New Hearing*; *Pitfalls in Preaching*; and *Web of Preaching*.

6.2.1 The Issue of Theological Methodology and Expository Preaching

6.2.1.1 Problem

It was noted in this study that Robinson chose not to discuss his theological methodology throughout *Biblical Preaching*² because he felt that a basic text in homiletics should be more practical and not address too many detailed theological issues.³ Even though he alludes to his theological methodology occasionally,⁴ he assumes that most readers already understand it.⁵ This tendency motivated John MacArthur's complaint that Robinson assumed too much in the paper, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics."⁶

As such, his approach is pre-scientific and lacks a theological theoretical foundation. Unfortunately, since Robinson does not discuss in any detail his theological understanding of Scripture elsewhere, he cannot refer the reader outside of *Biblical Preaching* for his own view. As well received as this functional approach has been in evangelical circles, it still needs more discussion on theological theory concerning the nature of Scripture.

6.2.1.2 Pointer

J. I. Packer argues that evangelical theology is characterized methodologically by its "insistence on the clarity and sufficiency of the canonical Scriptures."⁷ This methodological

²See above, 132-133.

³See above, 89-90.

⁴*Biblical Preaching*, 20, 22, 23, 26.

⁵See above, 57, 89-90.

⁶See above, 89.

⁷Packer, "Encountering Present-day Views of Scripture," 63.

characteristic is at the heart of the evangelical expository homiletic⁸ and any beginning text on expository preaching needs to address this important subject. It should be more than just “assumed.”

We suggest, then, at the outset of any homiletic textbook, particularly one dealing with expository preaching, that the author should briefly discuss the nature of Scripture and how it relates to the particular homiletical method prescribed. Otherwise, the reader is left wondering exactly what is meant by certain phrases loaded with presuppositions.

For example, what exactly does Robinson mean when he refers to the Bible as “the Word of God” and the “orthodox doctrine of inspiration” in *Biblical Preaching*?⁹ Even in today’s evangelical community, this could mean different things.¹⁰ Without explaining these terms, an evangelical reader oriented toward Barth’s view of Scripture might read into the “Word of God” something Robinson never meant.¹¹ What does he mean by the “orthodox doctrine of inspiration?” This study has demonstrated that for Robinson, this means the concursive verbal theory espoused by conservative evangelical theologians such as B. B. Warfield, J. I. Packer, Carl Henry and Millard Erickson.¹² But in his textbook Robinson never spells this out for the reader.

⁸See above, 2.3.

⁹Robinson, 23, 26.

¹⁰See above, 55-56, notes 16-19; and 58, note 25.

¹¹See above, 56, note 19, on Grenz’s using Barthian terms to describe Scripture. This is not to imply that such a person would not find Robinson’s method useful. But, most likely, such thinking would be more attracted to the New Homiletic (see above, 2.2.2.3).

¹²See above, 3.2.2.1.

Our point is that any introductory evangelical textbook on expository preaching should briefly elucidate the theological concepts of revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, and authority. Because of the variety of evangelical thought on each of these concepts,¹³ such a discussion is necessary. While theoretical, this discussion does not have to be lengthy or complex; it can be straightforward and explain how each concept relates to the task of expository preaching.¹⁴ Thus, a methodological foundation is laid which will provide theoretical focus for the evangelical homiletical textbook, albeit introductory.

What would such a discussion look like? First, the foundational nature of revelation could be concisely set forth: the relationship of revelation and the biblical text, propositional and personal revelation, and the meaning of the phrase: the word of God. This discussion need only take several paragraphs. Second, based on the discussion of revelation, the nature of inspiration could be explained in the context of expository preaching, which should only take a page or so. Third, only a brief discussion on the issues of the trustworthiness of Scripture and its authority would be necessary since they both root in a high view of revelation and inspiration. The total discussion on these theological issues would require only a few pages.

The rationale behind a discussion of this nature is to provide the reader of the text with the theological and theoretical basis for the functional approach taken in a particular expository method. Functional helps need a theoretical basis.¹⁵ It should be noted that if a

¹³See the above discussions on the evangelical context of Robinson's view of revelation (3.2.1.1), inspiration (3.2.2.1), inerrancy (3.2.3.1), and authority (3.2.4.1).

¹⁴An example of this type of discussion can be found in Vines and Shaddix, 48-59.

¹⁵See Wolfaardt.

homiletician has dealt with Scripture in other writings, the reader could be directed there.

6.2.2 The Issue of Verbal Inspiration and Word Studies

6.2.2.1 Problem

While Robinson espouses verbal inspiration, he expresses a concern that the expositor might take it too far when analyzing individual words in the text. Thus, instead of studying the word in its literary context, the expositor might isolate the word and fall into the error of eisegesis.¹⁶ The error of eisegesis is a concern of other evangelical hermeneutical and linguistic scholars who assert that “the basic unit of meaning is not the word, but the sentence.”¹⁷ Our author then makes the curious statement, “words are stupid things until linked with other words to convey meaning.”¹⁸ It was pointed out in this study that this statement is inconsistent with the verbal theory of inspiration. If words and ideas cannot be separated, as Robinson asserts, then stupid words mean stupid ideas.¹⁹ This hardly fits the “high view of inspiration” which embraces every word in the text.

6.2.2.2 Pointer

The view of verbal inspiration or a similar high view of inspiration does not have to lure the expository preacher into lexical fallacies.²⁰ Robinson could have pointed out that in the evangelical understanding, God inspired both the thoughts and the words which cannot

¹⁶See above, 82-83.

¹⁷McCartney and Clayton, 123.

¹⁸See above, 83.

¹⁹See above, 84.

²⁰See Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, chapter 1, “Word-Study Fallacies,” 27-64, for discussion on the nature of lexical fallacies and how to avoid them.

be separated from each other. Thoughts find expression in words, which form sentences, paragraphs, as well as the entire discourse. Understood this way, verbal or entire²¹ inspiration does not have to lead to an unhealthy focus on individual words, but can focus on the larger picture—sentences, paragraphs, etc. Again, this is a place where Robinson needed to explain his theological methodology and its relationship to semantics. Such an explanation would have canceled any need to call individual words “stupid.”

Although Robinson admits to espousing the view of “verbal inspiration,” it is possible that he might unconsciously embrace a more dynamic, holistic view of inspiration.²² His burden to shift the emphasis of the expositor away from individual words to larger units of thought could be a possible indication of this view.²³ A question emerges at this point: Does “verbal” inspiration constitute the only “high view” of Scripture?

As noted above, we prefer the term “entire inspiration” rather than verbal inspiration.²⁴ Verbal inspiration is continually faced with the challenges of forced harmonization, mechanical dictation, and the dilemma of the human element.²⁵ Entire inspiration, while similar to verbal inspiration, is more inclusive of the multifaceted nature of Scripture’s genres. As such, entire inspiration views parts of Scripture as verbally inspired only where sentences,

²¹This term is our preferred way of describing inspiration in the conservative context. It terminologically broadens the focus of inspiration to include the entire discourse as well as its individual units (see above, 81, note 139).

²²See his discussion above, 82-83; see Lemke, “The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture,” for discussion of a more holistic view of inspiration he calls the “multi-methodological approach to inspiration,” 182-183.

²³See above, 82-83.

²⁴See above, note 21.

²⁵Lemke, 181.

paragraphs, or even chapters are attributed to God as the speaker. Other parts of Scripture, however, are inspired through different processes: the Psalms reflect more of a worship response through poetry, the wisdom literature reflects the wisdom of inspired sages, the narrative and historical portions of Scripture reflect the inspired historian gathering material together into a story, and the epistles reflect the inspired apostle addressing various issues in the church.²⁶ Thus, the different processes of inspiration are more dynamic and fluid, reflecting a holistic approach to the text rather than a more narrow focus on individual words. Nonetheless, the product of these different processes of inspiration, in our view, results in a high view of Scripture with reference to authority.

Entire inspiration, then, emphasizes both the human author as well as the text in the production of the Bible.²⁷ As such it brings into balance the tension between the human and divine elements found in Scripture and avoids the charge of mechanical dictation and the problem of forced harmonization.²⁸ A high view of Scripture compatible with expository preaching, therefore, does not have to be strictly “verbal” in nature. It can reflect the multifaceted nature of Scripture and still find it entirely inspired.

What would a discussion of semantic methodology in the context of this conservative evangelical view of inspiration look like? First of all, the inclusive, comprehensive scope of this understanding of inspiration would be discussed. For example, it could be pointed out

²⁶For similar discussion, see Lemke, 181-182; and John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

²⁷The term “plenary” is often used to refer to both author and text as inspired (Dockery, *Christian Scripture*, 55).

²⁸See Lemke, 181-182, on how a more holistic view of inspiration avoids these problems.

that this view embraces the linguistic principle of communication that each element of text “is dependant upon the next higher level of discourse for its meaning.” That is, “the meaning of a phoneme (a sound that is differentiated from other sounds in a language) is derived from the syllable in which it occurs; similarly, a syllable within a word, a word within a phrase, a phrase within a sentence, a sentence within a paragraph, a paragraph within a particular discourse, and a discourse within the works of a particular writer.”²⁹ Our view of entire inspiration thus presupposes this linguistic principle which reflects the human dynamic of Scripture. As such, the issue of context should run like a thread through the entire discussion.³⁰ It could be explained that inspiration affects the entire discourse context and every part of the text should thus be studied in light of the whole. Secondly, the issue of synchrony and diachrony could be discussed. The value of the synchronic approach could, therefore, be stressed—how the word was used at the time of writing rather than the history of its development.³¹

A discussion such as this would help the expositor to maintain balance between an evangelical high view of inspiration and semantic analysis. Moreover, it would keep the focus where it ought to be—on the entire discourse context rather than on isolated units.³²

²⁹McCartney and Clayton, 336, note 7.

³⁰See Osborn, 78-80, 89-92, who stresses the importance of context in relationship to semantics.

³¹For discussion see Silva, *Biblical Words*, chap. 1, 35-51.

³²Discourse analysis, a subdiscipline of general linguistics called “text linguistics” in Europe (according to Walter Bodine, in “Introduction,” *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It is and What it Offers*, ed. Walter R. Bodine, Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Series [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995], 2), is the study of units of verbal utterances or written texts larger than the sentence (see Michael Shaw Findlay, *Language and Communication: A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia* [Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, Inc, 1998], 49f). Pertaining to written text a “text linguist would like to know how the individual parts of a discourse combine to produce the text’s overall meaning. Until relatively recently, how discourses operated was considered mysterious and unobservable, a phenomenon few had tried to analyze. However, advance in text linguistics have led to a growing understanding of the mechanisms by which discourses function” (David

6.2.3 The Issue of Language and Preaching

6.2.3.1 Problem

Robinson spends significant time stressing the importance of clarity and precision in the language of preaching.³³ He spends no time, however, discussing the issue of the validity and reliability of human language for expository preaching.³⁴ Furthermore, he spends no time discussing the metaphysical limitations of language.³⁵ Most homileticians in the evangelical expository homiletic have followed Robinson in this regard.³⁶

6.2.3.2 Pointer

The validity and reliability of language is a methodological issue that should receive more attention in evangelical homiletic textbooks. It provides the reason why clarity and precision is important in the expository sermon. Furthermore, because the conservative evangelical preacher espouses propositional revelation, a discussion of the validity of language is essential. John McClure discusses the vital role a theory of language plays in a preaching

Allen Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications* 2d. rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988, 1995], 170); for introductory studies in discourse analysis, see, for example, M. Coulthard, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* (London: Longman, 1977), who focuses more on conversation; R. de Beaugrande and J. W. Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (London: Longman, 1981) have a more textual focus; note also Joseph Brimes, *The Thread of Discourse* (The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1975); see also Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); W. A. Pickering, *Framework for Discourse Analysis* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1978); and especially Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse*; and Beekman, Callow, and Kopesec, *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication*.

³³See above discussion, 72-74.

³⁴For the reasons why, see above, 76.

³⁵See above, 76-77.

³⁶See above, 76, note, 118.

paradigm³⁷ and whether evangelical or not, a preacher should understand the particular language theory he works with.

For the expositor, the evangelical view of language could briefly be set forth in the expository text. What would such a discussion look like?³⁸ First, a brief overview of different theories of language could be provided. Then the reasons why evangelicals believe human language is reliable and how this relates to expository preaching could be discussed. Finally, the metaphysical limitations of language and how the expositor can approach this issue could be dealt with.³⁹ The evangelical studies of Frame, Packer, Bartentsen, and Henry could be referred to as sources for further study.⁴⁰

While this issue has not received much attention by evangelicals, it is important to the evangelical expository methodology behind expository preaching. As a result, the expositor will be equipped with an understanding of the presuppositions undergirding the evangelical mandate for clarity in preaching.

6.2.4 The Issue of Christ-Centered Preaching

6.2.4.1 Problem

As noted earlier in this study, Robinson says very little in *Biblical Preaching* on the issue of how the expositor can incorporate Christ into the expository sermon. He does, however, refer the reader to other books on the subject: Sidney Greidanus's *Preaching Christ*

³⁷McClure, "Theories of Language," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 292-295.

³⁸Our purpose here is not to provide the details of how this discussion would proceed, but to suggest a theoretical framework for such discussions in future expository textbooks.

³⁹On this see, White, 190.

⁴⁰See above, 68, notes 73-76.

from the Old Testament and Graeme Goldsworthy's *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*,⁴¹ who both stress the importance of presenting Christ in the expository sermon.

6.2.4.2 Pointer

Both of the above evangelical texts by Greidanus and Goldsworthy provide a methodological framework with practical suggestions for preaching an expository sermon centered in the Gospel. One other text is Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching*, which has become an evangelical favorite on this subject.⁴² Chapell also provides a methodology as well as a specific procedure for preaching expository sermons which focus on the redemption in Christ.

Notice the contributions of Greidanus, Goldsworthy, and Chapell to Christ-centered preaching, which reflect the reformed evangelical way of understanding Scripture.⁴³ Greidanus's approach to sermon preparation, for example, involves a ten-step procedure with step six focusing on what he calls "redemptive-historical christocentric interpretation." This methodological approach seeks first to understand an Old Testament passage in its own historical-cultural context and then moves on "to understand this message in the broad context of the whole canon and the whole of redemptive history" at which point "questions

⁴¹See above, 61-62.

⁴²Duduit, "What is expository preaching? An interview with Bryan Chapell," 6-9.

⁴³A reformed classic on the progressive fulfillment in Scripture is Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948); see also Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (London: Tyndale Press, 1962); and Willem VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981); and idem, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1991).

concerning Jesus Christ, the center, emerge.”⁴⁴ He emphasizes that his “concern is not to preach Christ to the exclusion of the ‘whole counsel of God’ but rather to view the whole counsel of God, with all its teachings, laws, prophecies, and visions, in the light of Jesus Christ.” The issue, then, is “not to read the incarnate Christ back into the Old Testament text, which would be eisegesis,” but to “look for legitimate ways of preaching Christ from the Old Testament in the context of the New.”⁴⁵ Based on this methodology, Greidanus discusses seven christocentric ways of preaching Christ-centered expository sermons from the Old Testament: redemptive-historical progression, promise-fulfillment, typology, analogy, longitudinal themes, New Testament references, and contrast.⁴⁶

Goldsworthy provides a similar methodology of Christ-centered preaching which involves studying and preaching the text in light of the historical-redemptive progression of salvation history in Scripture.⁴⁷ His distinctive focus is on how the literary genre of any text should be identified in the framework of the major epochs of salvation history and linked to the contemporary hearer.⁴⁸ Each literary genre is thus examined in light of how “it testifies to Christ and is given its final significance by Christ.” Out of this framework, Goldsworthy suggest that the preacher ask the question of every sermon, “Did the sermon show how the

⁴⁴Greidanus, 228.

⁴⁵Ibid., 227-228.

⁴⁶Ibid., 234-277.

⁴⁷Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 1-139.

⁴⁸Ibid., 140-244.

text testifies to Christ?⁴⁹

Chapell also reflects this reformed epochal approach to Scripture. He explains that a “passage retains its christocentric focus, and a sermon becomes Christ-centered, not because the preacher finds a slick way of wedging a reference to Jesus’ person or work into the message but because the sermon identifies a function this particular text legitimately serves in the great drama of the Son’s crusade against the serpent.”⁵⁰ The preacher’s task, then, is to “explain the role of any epoch, event, person, and passage within the divine crusade of redemption; i.e., the sovereign victory of the Seed of the woman over Satan.”⁵¹ To accomplish this, every biblical passage should be studied and explained in the context of one or more of four “redemptive foci.” These are: 1) predictive—is the passage predictive of God’s redemptive work in Christ such as in the messianic psalms; 2) preparatory—how does the text prepare the people of God to understand aspects of the person and/or work of Christ; 3) reflective—how does the passage reflect key facets of the redemptive message when there is no direct reference to Jesus’s person or work; 4) resultant—in what way does a particular blessing, teaching, or command result from Christ’s ministry.⁵²

The above three approaches of Greidanus, Goldsworthy, and Chapell blaze new trails in developing evangelical christocentric expository methodology. Our pointer is that future evangelical expository texts should incorporate a hermeneutic procedure for Christ-centered

⁴⁹Ibid., 138.

⁵⁰Chapell, 293.

⁵¹Ibid., 297.

⁵²Ibid., 275-280.

expository preaching reflecting this methodological framework. Such a procedure would involve several steps in finding the Christ-centered redemptive element in a biblical passage.

The first step of this suggested procedure would involve the exegetical process of determining the grammatical-historical meaning of the passage.⁵³ After the process of grammatical-historical exegesis has been completed, the second step would involve asking the question of the passage: How does this passage relate to Christ and his redemptive work? This immediately leads to another question based upon Chapell's four redemptive foci:⁵⁴ Is this passage predictive, preparatory, reflective, or resultant of Christ's redemptive ministry? One other step would be useful: Look for a later passage in the Old Testament or in the New Testament that develops and expands the literal sense of the earlier passage. A simple procedure such as this can be plugged into the larger exegetical procedure and provide help to the expositor looking for the redemptive element in every passage.⁵⁵ In addition to this procedure, several pages could be devoted to explaining the centrality of Christ to all of Scripture and why this is important methodologically to expository preaching.⁵⁶

The reason for this type of approach roots in the evangelical understanding that every passage of Scripture testifies to Christ and reflects the overall structure of revelation which

⁵³See below, 6.2.5.2, on suggested steps for exegetical procedure.

⁵⁴See Chapell, 275-280.

⁵⁵See below, 6.2.5.2, where this procedure is plugged into our suggested exegetical procedure for expository preaching.

⁵⁶Insights from methodological approaches of Greidanus, Goldsworthy, and Chapell would be useful here.

finds its coherence in the person and work of Christ.⁵⁷ To be consistent with this principle, therefore, a christocentric hermeneutic should be an integral part of any expository methodology and its procedure.

6.2.5 The Issue of Exegetical Procedure and Sermon Preparation

6.2.5.1 *Problem*

Robinson's theological methodology, which views the text of the Bible as revelation and thus the inspired Word of God, manifests itself in his grammatical-historical-theological hermeneutic. Thus, the goal of interpretation for our author is to discover the literal meaning located in the divinely inspired text. It was pointed out in the evaluation that his exegetical procedure in the second stage falls short in its relationship to evangelical hermeneutical standards. That is, his exegetical procedure lacks depth and detail.⁵⁸ Leaving out these vital details is inconsistent with his hermeneutical methodology, which has at its core the grammatical-historical-theological method. While in theory he espouses grammatical-historical-theological exegesis, he only uses or applies an abbreviated version of it in his method.

6.2.5.2 *Pointer*

To be consistent with the evangelical grammatical-historical-theological method,⁵⁹ a biblical passage should be approached with all the necessary steps in the exegetical process. To leave any step out or cut it short, even for the sake of simplicity, short-circuits the process.

⁵⁷See Goldsworthy, 21.

⁵⁸For discussion, see above, 5.4.

⁵⁹For discussion on this method, see above, 4.2.2.

We suggest a full-orbited exegetical process for the student of expository preaching.

First, the student should finalize the textual parameters. If the text is part of a systematic expository series, then the parameters already set from previous study can be used. Second, the student should get an overview of the passage by reading it prayerfully and meditatively several times. Third, the student should determine the genre of the passage and apply the special rules of the particular genre to the passage during detailed exegesis. The possible options are: narrative, poetry, wisdom, law, prophecy, gospels, acts, parables, epistle, and apocalyptic. Various books on hermeneutics provide these rules. Fourth, the student should analyze the literary context of the passage by studying the book context, the section context (chapter or chapters), and the immediate context (surrounding paragraphs, sentences/verses). Then a structural display of the passage should be made.

Fifth, the student should analyze the historical/cultural context of the passage by using the following research tools: Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, specialized studies on the historical/cultural context of the Bible, and commentaries. Notes should be taken in the following areas appropriate to the text: author, recipients, date, situation, culture, politics, and geography. Sixth, the student should analyze the passage in detail. The grammar and syntax of the passage, its significant words and genre should be analyzed with the following research tools: Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic texts, lexicons, concordances, grammars, and word-study books. Seventh, the student should analyze the theological/canonical context of the passage by studying relevant passages in other books in the same testament or the other testament. At this point, the three steps of finding the redemptive element in a passage as suggested

above could be applied.⁶⁰ Eighth, the student should consult the commentaries and make notes of any relevant insights that apply or make any needed changes in conclusions thus far.

Such an approach⁶¹ covers all the major steps of exegesis in a step by step procedure which provides guidance for the beginning student of expository preaching. Early on in the process of sermon preparation it is very important for the student to have as full an understanding as possible of the issues in the passage. Moreover, this approach is consistent with expository methodology, which emphasizes the importance of a complete exegetical procedure as the foundation for effective expository sermon preparation.⁶²

6.2.6 The Issue of the Audience and Application in Expository Preaching

6.2.6.1 Problem

While Robinson focuses the expositor on how to choose a preaching text in stage one, the role of the audience merits more discussion than he allots it. He does suggest that sensitivity to the needs of the particular congregation should be part of this planning process,⁶³ but neglects to discuss how to integrate it into that process. Moreover, one will find that in stage four, where Robinson attempts to bring the world of the Bible and the world of the contemporary audience together as the sermon is developed,⁶⁴ he still spends little time discussing how the preacher can know his audience better. This is a noticeable absence in light

⁶⁰See above, 243-244.

⁶¹The sources used in putting this suggested procedure together can be found above, 119, note 67.

⁶²See, for example, Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics*; and Osborn.

⁶³*Biblical Preaching*, 54

⁶⁴See above discussion, 5.6.

of his philosophy of preaching which stresses that expositors “must be as familiar with the needs of their churches as they are with the content of their Bibles.”⁶⁵ In a text with such a practical focus, how to integrate the needs of the audience into the process of preparing the expository sermon should have received more attention.

It was also pointed out in this study that Robinson’s approach to application and the contemporary audience is one-way: from the text to the present audience and not vice versa.⁶⁶ While this approach does not rule out the significant influence of the audience during sermon preparation, it endeavors to avoid going the other direction—letting the audience influence the exegetical meaning of the text.

Two issues thus present themselves for this discussion: Is Robinson’s one-way application process the only valid evangelical approach or is there a way to go both directions and have the two meet in the middle? And how can the expositor gain a knowledge of the contemporary audience and integrate this into the sermon preparation process?

6.2.6.2 *Pointer*

Anthony Thiselton suggests that the problem in contemporary hermeneutics is whether the center of gravity lies in the past of the text or the present of the interpreter. He points out that recent hermeneutical theory has moved the center of gravity away from the historical context of the text to the present context of the interpreter. Consequently, any interpreter of Scripture must recognize that “the modern interpreter, no less than the text, stands in a given

⁶⁵*Biblical Preaching*, 54.

⁶⁶See above discussion, 180-181.

historical context and tradition.”⁶⁷ As such, the interpreter cannot detach himself from his own time, his own tradition, and his own pre-understanding.

Thiselton’s evangelical response to this problem is not to capitulate in the direction of the view that the text can be understood only on the basis of the modern interpreter’s presuppositions. Neither does he capitulate in the direction of those who believe that the interpreter’s presuppositions must be ignored and the text objectively interpreted in its historical context and then applied to the present.⁶⁸

Drawing from Hans Georg Gadamer,⁶⁹ his solution is to engage the two sets of horizons—those of the ancient text and of the modern reader or hearer. The horizon of the text is its historical setting, grammar, language, etc. The horizon of the contemporary reader is “a network of revisable expectations and assumptions which a reader brings to the text.” The term “horizon” “calls attention to the fact that our finite situatedness in time, history, and culture defines the present (though always expanding) limits of our ‘world’, or more strictly the limits of *what we can ‘see.’*”⁷⁰ The goal of hermeneutics, therefore, is “that of a steady progress towards a fusion of horizons.” This “is to be achieved in such a way that the particularity of each horizon is fully taken into account and respected,” which “means *both* respecting the rights of the text *and* allowing it to speak.”⁷¹ Thiselton, however, does not fully

⁶⁷Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 10-11.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 439ff.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, xix; see Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, from which Thiselton significantly draws.

⁷⁰*Idem.*, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 46; italics his.

⁷¹*Idem.*, *The Two Horizons*, 445; italics his.

explain how to accomplish this fusion of horizons.⁷²

For evangelicals, the most significant contribution of Thiselton's "fusion of horizons" is the dual focus on both sides of the hermeneutical endeavor—the past and present. It seeks to avoid a one-sided interpretive approach from the text to the present or from the present to the text. It should be noted, however, that there is a leaning toward the side of the text, for "there is an ongoing process of dialogue with the text in which the text itself progressively corrects and reshapes the interpreter's own questions and assumptions."⁷³ This reflects Thiselton's evangelical orientation.

As such, Thiselton's approach provides the theoretical context for our own approach to the audience and application issue. First of all, we affirm that the viewpoint or horizon of the expositor and his audience is an extremely important presence in the hermeneutical process and thus makes a significant contribution during sermon preparation. Accordingly, the expositor must take time to understand and reckon with his own horizon first and then that of his hearers in addition to the horizon of the text.

Secondly, as to his own horizon, the evangelical expositor can employ the hermeneutical spiral,⁷⁴ which fully acknowledges his own horizon (historical context and pre-understandings) and engages it with the horizon of the text. The best description of this spiral is found in Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard's evangelical *Introduction to Biblical*

⁷²He does refer to the "hermeneutical spiral" and its "ongoing movement and progressive understanding," but does not fully explain it (ibid., 104).

⁷³Ibid., 439.

⁷⁴For discussion on this, see above, 132, note 113, 172-173; for a visual of the hermeneutical spiral, see the Appendix.

Interpretation:

Every interpreter begins with a pre-understanding. After an initial study of a Biblical text, that text performs a work on the interpreter. His or her pre-understanding is no longer what it was. Then, as the newly interpreted interpreter proceeds to question the text further, out of this newly formed understanding further—perhaps, different—answers are obtained. A new understanding has emerged. It is not simply a repetitive circle; but, rather, a progressive spiral of development.⁷⁵

Throughout this process the expositor thus reckons with his own horizon but also allows the text to reshape and reform it. Our first pointer for this section, therefore, is that the evangelical hermeneutical spiral should be discussed and explained as a viable methodological approach to exegetical process in future texts on expository preaching. Presently, the hermeneutical spiral is rarely mentioned in evangelical expository homiletic textbooks.⁷⁶

Thirdly, concerning the horizon of the audience, the expositor must seek to understand it as thoroughly as possible in order to effectively communicate the Gospel. Thus, the best methods of research for understanding the audience should be employed. This derived understanding can then be engaged with the text through a process similar to the hermeneutical spiral.

For researching the audience, a pointer is found in the first chapter of Keith Willhite's *Preaching with Relevance*,⁷⁷ where he discusses tools for audience analysis. He first lists and

⁷⁵Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, 114; for more discussion, see above, 130, note 113; Bryson describes this process thus: "It involves personal experience with the text, and it involves both interpreting the text and allowing the text to interpret the interpreter" (175).

⁷⁶One exception, for example, is Bryson, 175; but he calls it the "hermeneutical circle" instead; it should be noted that Bryson's text is a more advanced text rather than a beginning text for expositors; see also Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 104, for discussion on the different ways the term "hermeneutical circle" is used.

⁷⁷Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance*, 21-33.

describes a variety of sources that will help the expositor gather general information about the community and culture in America such as various studies on American culture. Next he provides the minister with sources for analyzing the city and neighborhood of his local church. Finally, he provides forms for theological analysis, psychological analysis, and demographic analysis of one's congregation. This information could be referred to regularly during sermon preparation. Also, Robinson's suggestions on how to understand one's audience found outside of *Biblical Preaching* are helpful at this point.⁷⁸

Another pointer we suggest, as noted above, is a process of engagement between the audience and the text for application similar to that of the hermeneutical spiral. We call this the "expository spiral" where the expositor goes beyond his own horizon and engages the horizon of his audience with the horizon of the text. Like the hermeneutical spiral, this is a process of questioning the text in light of the audience's issues and thus expanding the horizon of the audience in relation to the text. It attempts to bring together the past of the text with the present of the audience, but ultimately it is the text that "reshapes and enlarges," to use Thiselton's terms,⁷⁹ the audience's horizon in relation to understanding the teaching and requirements of the text.

As such, this process is not the same as critically integrating information from the biblical text with the contemporary audience in such a way that the audience influences the meaning of the text.⁸⁰ Rather, the "expository spiral" places the center of gravity more on the

⁷⁸See above, 182-183.

⁷⁹Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, xix.

⁸⁰See above, 154.

original meaning of the text. This evangelical approach places heavy emphasis on implementing the exegetical procedure discussed above in 6.2.5.2 in the framework of the hermeneutical spiral to get as close to the original meaning of the text as possible. This derived meaning or horizon of the text is accordingly engaged with the horizon of the contemporary audience. It is in this way that the “expository spiral” attempts to avoid a strict one-way application from text to audience while ignoring the horizon of the audience in the process.

6.2.7 The Issue of the Holy Spirit’s Role and Prayer During Expository Sermon

Preparation

6.2.7.1 Problem

As noted earlier in this study, Robinson mentions the Holy Spirit several times in his discussions on expository preaching,⁸¹ but never discusses in any detail the work of the Holy Spirit in relationship to illumination during biblical interpretation. The absence of this discussion is a significant void in trying to follow Robinson’s methodology. While the reader of *Biblical Preaching* can assume Robinson espouses the evangelical view of the Holy Spirit,⁸² he or she can never be certain because not enough is said.

In our author’s definition of expository preaching, the work of the Holy Spirit is mentioned in connection with application: “Not only does the Holy Spirit apply His truth to the personality and experience of the preacher, but according to our definition of expository

⁸¹See above, 122, note 77.

⁸²For evangelical discussion on pneumatology, see two major representative works: Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 861-898; and Grudem, 634-653.

preaching, He then applies that truth through the preacher to the hearers.”⁸³ This is all he says about the work of the Holy Spirit during application. By not disclosing some details about his pneumatology, Robinson leaves the door open for some readers to wonder what spirit guides expositors and how.

He does, however, give a hint on his view of the Spirit’s identity when he says “the Holy Spirit confronts us primarily through the Bible.”⁸⁴ This points to the evangelical understanding that the Holy Spirit is the one who guides Christians through the teaching of the Bible that he himself inspired.⁸⁵ But our author does not discuss how the Holy Spirit guides expositors in exegesis or application.

6.2.7.2 Pointer

While prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit are metaphysical in nature, to evangelicals they are considered a vital part of daily Christian experience. It is in this context that we suggest an expository preaching text should provide a brief theology of the Holy Spirit and explain the place of prayer during sermon preparation. Issues such as the identity of the Holy Spirit, his work and ministry in illumination should be discussed. The nature of the Spirit’s work on the expositor during exegesis and application should also be addressed.⁸⁶

⁸³Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 27.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Robinson has authored a book on this subject: *Decision Making by the Book: How to Choose Wisely in an Age of Options* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1998), which spells out in more detail his understanding of the Holy Spirit in relationship to the Bible. In short, Robinson takes the traditional evangelical view of the Holy Spirit.

⁸⁶See above discussion, 122-125; Calvin’s classic discussion on illumination would be useful at this point, *Institutes*, 1:7-9.

This kind of discussion involves presuppositions concerning the Holy Spirit that any evangelical homiletician can concisely set forth for the readers.⁸⁷ Furthermore, a discussion on the role of prayer and how to go about it in relationship to the Holy Spirit should also be included to help the neophyte expositor.⁸⁸

One other issue should be discussed. In terms of function, the preacher cannot depend on the Holy Spirit alone to give him the correct meaning of the text. "Being indwelt by the Spirit does not guarantee accurate interpretation."⁸⁹ Diligent exegetical study and prolonged exposure to the text with the hermeneutical spiral provide a safeguard against reading a personal meaning into the text and thinking it is from the Holy Spirit. The evangelical dictum is that the Holy Spirit does not work apart from hermeneutics and exegesis. He works within and through methods and techniques.⁹⁰ Understanding this function of the Holy Spirit in cooperation with human effort is thus essential.

The evangelical rationale behind such a discussion is two-fold. First, evangelicals consider the work of the Holy Spirit and prayer very important to sermon preparation because the preacher should be a person who maintains an intimate relationship with God, especially during the process of preparing a sermon. Second, this emphasis is consistent with evangelical

⁸⁷For more exhaustive discussion, see evangelical systematics Erickson, 861-898; and Grudem, 634-653; from the expository homiletic perspective, see Olford and Olford, 6-65, 241-250; and MacArthur, "The Spirit of God in Expository Preaching," 102-115; and Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing: The Preaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994).

⁸⁸On this, see, for example, Vines and Shaddix, 63-64, 68-69, 102-103, for a full discussion on prayer and the Holy Spirit in relationship to expository preaching.

⁸⁹Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, 85.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*; see also Ramm, *Pattern of Religious Authority*, 39-40.

theological methodology which stresses the initial work of the Holy Spirit in producing Scripture. The resulting corollary is that if the Spirit produced the original text of Scripture through human beings, he will also continue to help them in their quest to understand the original product.⁹¹ With such a rationale, the two issues of prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit merit special attention in connection with expository preaching methodology and procedure.

6.2.8 The Issue of Articulating Sermon Purpose

6.2.8.1 *Problem*

It was pointed out during the evaluation of Robinson's procedure for articulating sermon purpose that his discussion lacked clarity due to the lack of specific steps.⁹² According to Robinson and other expository homileticians, articulating sermon purpose is extremely important to the sermon preparation process. So important, in fact, that they believe it should be crafted into a specific sentence.⁹³ It was suggested that Robinson's template for writing this specific sentence needed modification based on insights from the learning objective templates of education scholars.⁹⁴

6.2.8.2 *Pointer*

The rationale behind articulating this statement is the evangelical belief that the biblical

⁹¹For sources on illumination, see above, 122, note 76; 123, note 80.

⁹²See above, 198.

⁹³See above, 193, note 157.

⁹⁴See discussion above, 205-206.

authors had purpose in their writings.⁹⁵ If a biblical passage has purpose, then this purpose should be reflected in the expository sermon in the form a sermon purpose statement. As such, articulating this purpose statement is a very important part of expository sermon preparation. This was reflected in the fact that the center of gravity in Robinson's ten stages was focused on the homiletical idea and sermon purpose statement.⁹⁶

Because of the importance expository homileticians place on this statement, the clarity of its articulation merits attention. The basic steps leading up to articulating this statement are: First, the expositor should determine the exegetical purpose of the text.⁹⁷ Second, based upon this exegetical data, the expositor should then determine what the contemporary purpose of the sermon should be. This step involves the "expository spiral" as discussed above in the previous section. Third, the expositor should write a one-sentence purpose statement for the sermon by utilizing Robinson's verb list.⁹⁸ Once the domain verb is chosen, the expositor should write the purpose statement using the following template: **My congregation will (domain verb) + (content) + (specific action).** The "+" allows the expositor freedom in choosing the appropriate filler words (prepositions, articles, etc.) between the domain verb, content, and specific action. An example would look like this: (Skill verb) "My congregation will pray (domain verb) about the lost in the community (content) during their morning prayers (specific action)."

⁹⁵For discussion on this issue, see above, 5.9.3.

⁹⁶See above, 228-229.

⁹⁷See Kaiser's exegetical procedure for discovering textual purpose above, 199, note 179.

⁹⁸See above, 203.

To evangelical expository homiletics this approach of distilling a single purpose for the sermon is not reductionistic. Rather, it performs a very important role in sermon preparation. Like Robinson's homiletical idea which unifies the sermon, this statement provides the function of the sermon.⁹⁹ It gives the expositor a consistent template for writing out the sermon purpose statement in a user-friendly format and motivates him to write the sentence carefully. This facilitates efficiency in the sermon preparation experience and reflects the theological importance of this process in expository methodology.

6.2.9 The Issue of Sermon Preparation and the Modes of Preaching

6.2.9.1 Problem

It was noted that Robinson needed to bring into his discussion of outlining the sermon the issue of preaching modes.¹⁰⁰ H. Grady Davis provided a seminal discussion of three modes in preaching and neither Robinson nor other expository homiletics have employed the insights from this discussion into expository methodology.

6.2.9.2 Pointer

Our pointer is essentially that Davis' discussion on the three modes—the indicative, imperative, and conditional—should be incorporated into expository sermon methodology and procedure. Each of these modes could be discussed in their relationship to the biblical text and examples provided to show how the mode of the text could be reflected in the sermon.

So important are the modes in Davis' mind that he writes: "Without doubt all modes

⁹⁹Thomas Long identifies the "function statement" of the sermon which is a description of what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen in the hearers" (*The Witness of Preaching*, 86).

¹⁰⁰On this see above, 217-218.

are proper and necessary to a full-bodied preaching of the gospel."¹⁰¹ Thus incorporating the issue of preaching modes into the discussion of expository preaching will promote variety and energy in the sermon as well as facilitate the sermon preparation enterprise.

In addition to the mode of preaching, Davis discusses the role of tense. Does the preacher speak of the text and its meaning in the past tense, as if it were finished long ago? Or does he speak of the message as if it were alive and present?¹⁰² As such, tense should be an important issue to bring into the discussions of expository preaching. Davis' discussion of both tense and mode should, therefore, be brought back into expository preaching texts.

6.2.10 The Issue of the Homiletical Idea, Purpose Statement, and Supportive Material

6.2.10.1 Problem

In stage nine, which focuses on filling in the sermon outline, it was pointed out that Robinson discusses the supporting elements in relationship to various ideas but not in relationship to the homiletical idea or the sermon purpose statement. Two questions were suggested to remedy this problem. First, does this repetition, restatement, explanation, definition, factual information, quotation, narration, or illustration amplify the homiletical idea of the sermon? And second, does this repetition, restatement, explanation, definition, factual information, quotation, narration, or illustration support the purpose of this sermon?¹⁰³

6.2.10.2 Pointer

Our pointer is essentially that the expositor should use the two above questions to

¹⁰¹Davis, 211.

¹⁰²Ibid., 203-209.

¹⁰³See above, 5.12.

keep every element in the sermon tied to the homiletical idea and sermon purpose statement in every expository sermon. The rationale behind this is found in the nature of the evangelical expository sermon itself. It is a tightly woven structure with subpoints supporting major points that flow out of the central homiletical idea. Likewise, the purpose statement manifests itself throughout the sermon often influencing the entire structure. As a result, every aspect of the expository sermon, which includes all of its supporting elements, should consequently be integrated into these two centralizing statements. Because this understanding should be clarified in the expositor's mind early on in the process, these two questions would be useful in future texts on expository preaching.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has endeavored to provide pointers of a theoretical nature along with procedural suggestions for strengthening expository methods. The ten issues addressed were suggested by problem areas in Robinson's homiletic methodology and method. Robinson's failure to address these problems merited the discussion suggested in each issue. By way of summary, the new theory suggested in this chapter for expository preaching pedagogy involves the following pointers: First, expository preaching textbooks should explain at the outset the theological methodology behind their expository method. It may be easy to assume that all texts of this nature have the same methodology but such is not the case. Presently, many expository texts do explain their theological methodology, but like Robinson some do not. Second, the evangelical view of inspiration should be explained in connection with semantic analysis to provide a holistic approach to word studies. Third, because evangelicals place a high value on clarity and precision of language in preaching, the reasons should be

addressed in a discussion of the nature of language and preaching. Fourth, because evangelicals believe the entire Bible is a manifestation of Christ and his work, expository preaching methodology and procedure should incorporate into its teaching Christ-centered expository methodology and procedure. Fifth, because the grammatical-historical-theological method is so important to expository methodology, any expository preaching text needs to present a full-orbited exegetical procedure and not short-circuit any of the processes.

Sixth, concerning the issue of the contemporary audience and application, Thiselton's metaphor of "horizons" is helpful in that it reminds expositors to focus not only on the biblical world, but on the contemporary one as well and seek to understand this world in terms of their own personal horizon and the horizon of their audience. As such, the expositor should apply the "hermeneutical spiral" approach to interpretation of the text and then apply the "expository spiral" to the audience for application. This approach attempts to help the expositor maintain a balance between both the biblical world and the contemporary world during application. These issues need discussion in expository preaching textbooks.

Seventh, because evangelical methodology views the work of the Holy Spirit and the role of prayer to be very important during sermon preparation, these two issues in connection with the concept of illumination should be clarified in expository texts in order to avoid problems of misunderstanding and abuse. Eighth, because evangelicals believe biblical authors have purpose in their writings, expository sermons should reflect this purpose. Consequently, a consistent template such as the one suggested above will aid the expositor in articulating the sermon purpose statement. Ninth, the issue of tense and mode in preaching can effectively be applied to expository preaching and will enhance the energy level of the sermon. Tenth,

because the homiletical idea and sermon purpose statement are so central to expository sermon preparation, every supporting element in the sermon must be directly tied to each one. This can be done by asking two questions of each supporting element introduced into the sermon which will promote unity.

In sum the above pointers collectively provide a suggested theoretical framework for enhancing existing expository preaching pedagogy in the evangelical expository homiletic. This study of Robinson's homiletical method, a foundational method in this newly developing expository homiletic, has found these ten issues to be areas in need of maturation.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study endeavors to investigate and assess Haddon Robinson's ten-stage method of preparing sermons and its underlying methodology. Robinson's text, *Biblical Preaching*, from its inception in 1980 has been considered a significant contribution to the field of evangelical homiletics. It was anticipated that this study may not only contribute to better understanding of the method and methodology in this text, but also to point out its specific problem areas and suggest new theory and procedure for evangelical expository pedagogy.

7.1 Summary

7.1.1 Chapter One Summary

At the outset of this study in chapter one we identified Robinson's theological and spiritual heritage. He stands in the theologically conservative tradition of American evangelicalism which accepts the full authority and sufficiency of Scripture, redemption through the death of Christ on the cross, the reality of personal conversion, and the necessity and urgency of evangelism. While contemporary evangelicalism is experiencing theological controversy concerning the nature of Scripture, Robinson's teaching remains on the conservative side of the debate.

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, to investigate Robinson's theological and hermeneutical methodology and evaluate his ten-stage method in the context of this investigation. Second, to provide pointers in the problem areas of Robinson's homiletical teaching and suggest new theory and procedure for evangelical expository pedagogy. The first part of this purpose was accomplished in chapters three through five and the second part

was accomplished in chapter six.

7.1.2 Chapter Two Summary

Chapter two provided the setting of contemporary American homiletical theory and where Robinson fits into that theory. It was found that contemporary American homiletical theory emerges out of two influential textbooks: John A. Broadus's *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, first published in 1870, which represents the traditional approach to homiletics; and H. Grady Davis's *Design for Preaching*, first published in 1958, which represents the more progressive approach to homiletics. Both of these texts represent two eras in American homiletics and continue to influence its direction.

It was also found that in 1980 when Robinson first published *Biblical Preaching* a large number of evangelical homiletic professors began to use it for teaching preaching. Between the years 1980 and 2001, an evangelical consensus seemed to develop around Robinson's text as a primary textbook for courses in preaching.

Four paradigms were identified in contemporary homiletical literature. The first is the Traditional Homiletic which reflects the legacy of Broadus and advocates the biblical, ideational approach with its logical structure to preaching. The second paradigm is the Kerygmatic Homiletic which overlaps with traditional theory, but moves beyond it by placing emphasis on the "kerygma" as the essential core of the Gospel. Reflecting the legacy of Dodd and Barth, this approach accents the event nature of preaching in the manifestation of the active divine presence and seeks to facilitate an encounter between the congregation and God. The third paradigm is the New Homiletic which reflects the legacy of Davis and more immediately Craddock. This paradigm initiated a move away from the traditional deductive

ideational approach of preaching to a more inductive, narrative, and non-ideational approach. Within the New Homiletic are five basic sermon types which emphasize experience of meaning during preaching: the inductive sermon, the story sermon, the narrative sermon, the transconscious African-American sermon, the phenomenological-move sermon, and the conversational-episodal sermon. The fourth paradigm is the Postliberal Homiletic which reflects the legacy of George Lindbeck and Hans Frei and breaks from the previous three approaches. It focuses on exploring Christian claims in the context of Scripture and tradition and seeks to engage the community in a conversation about the implications of faith.

It was found that Robinson and his approach fit in the Traditional Homiletic. A significant and growing body of literature on expository preaching, however, was found within this traditional paradigm and identified as the Evangelical Expository Homiletic. This homiletical paradigm distinguishes itself in the larger Traditional Homiletic by its focus on expository methodology. Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* was shown to be a significant influence in this expository homiletic. As such, chapter two provided the homiletical setting for this study.

7.1.3 Chapter Three Summary

Chapter three dealt with Robinson's theological methodology expressed in his view of Scripture. The chapter was organized around the classical evangelical prolegomena and thus discussed Robinson's view on revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, and authority in light of contemporary evangelical thought. Robinson's view on each of these concepts fell on the conservative side of evangelical thought rather than on the more progressive side. His approach to each concept involved basically non-scientific faith statements such as, "I believe

that the Bible is. . .”.

His view of revelation was reflected in his statement that the “Bible is indeed the Word of God.” It was shown that this understanding has significant implications for his homiletical method. First, since he believes the words of Scripture are equal with revelation, careful exposition of the text is very important in his approach. Second, because he believes that revelation is propositional, preaching is propositional or ideational to his approach. Third, because human language can convey truth about God and words correspond with reality, the language of preaching should be clear and precise.

Robinson’s view of inspiration was expressed in the statement: “I believe in the full inspiration of the Bible and I believe it is inspired to its words.” He thus reflects the conservative evangelical view of verbal, plenary inspiration. It was observed, however, that Robinson is concerned more about how the concept of verbal inspiration is used in preaching rather than the concept itself. That is, he expresses concern that an expositor might be so focused on each word because it is verbally inspired that he would ignore the literary context of the word. His way of making this point was to call isolated words “stupid.”

As to inerrancy, it was found that Robinson espouses the view of “full inerrancy,” which is part of the traditional, more conservative evangelical view of inerrancy. His view of authority also reflects the traditional evangelical view that the Bible is the supreme authority for all matters concerning Christian life, theology, and preaching. As such, the authority of expository preaching lies in the authority of the Bible. It was also found that Robinson believes that a preacher has personal authority in his delivery and character during preaching. But he sees the biblical text as the fundamental element of authority for the preacher.

Thus, it was concluded in this chapter that Robinson takes the traditional evangelical view toward Scripture in the concepts of revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, and authority. It was noted that this conservative view of Scripture is essentially the core of evangelical methodology. As such, it was pointed out that this theological methodology significantly influences Robinson's homiletical method. It should be noted that several problem areas in Robinson's theological methodology were pointed out in this chapter and addressed later in chapter 6.

7.1.4 Chapter Four Summary

Chapter 4 dealt with Robinson's hermeneutical method and his definition of expository preaching. This chapter identified Robinson's hermeneutic as the conservative evangelical grammatical-historical-theological method which endeavors to find the precise meaning which the biblical writers intended to convey. Three hermeneutical presuppositions were found in Robinson's homiletical method. First, the practice of exegesis and hermeneutics is essential to effective expository preaching. He believes that exegesis, hermeneutics, and homiletics link together as supporting disciplines.

The second hermeneutical presupposition is that applying correct principles of biblical interpretation to the text during sermon preparation and delivery give the preacher an authority beyond himself. For Robinson, this helps insure that the congregation will hear a message from the Word of God rather than the preacher himself. A concern expressed at this point was that Robinson does not address the important issue of illumination from the Holy Spirit. The third hermeneutical presupposition is that an author-centered view of hermeneutics is essential to expository preaching. Like many evangelicals, Robinson builds on the work of

literary scholar E. D. Hirsch who defended the author as the final determiner of meaning. As such, Robinson places great importance on the intended meaning of the biblical author.

This chapter also set forth Robinson definition of expository preaching. His definition was broken down into five components. First, the passage governs the sermon, which reflects the dominant influence of the text in the sermon. The second component is that the expositor communicates a concept, which reflects Robinson's ideational approach to preaching. The third component is that the concept comes from the text, which emphasizes Robinson's use of grammatical-historical-theological exegesis. The fourth component is that the concept is applied to the expositor, which reflects Robinson's understanding that the preacher is at the center of the sermon preparation process. The fifth and final component to this definition is that the concept is applied to the hearers, which reflects the importance Robinson puts on application in preaching. Thus, the definition as a whole reflects the movement from interpretation to application. Throughout this discussion on the definition several problem issues surfaced which are summarized below in 7.1.6.

It is important to note that chapters 3 and 4 laid the proper groundwork for chapters 5 and 6 in this study. They attempted to show that Robinson's theological methodology, reflected in his view of Scripture, is the foundation of his hermeneutic. His theological methodology and his hermeneutic together provide the foundation for his definition of expository preaching, which is the basis of his ten-stage method of preparing sermons. This platform provided the criterion for the evaluation of chapter 5.

7.1.5 Chapter Five Summary

Chapter 5 evaluated the ten stages individually and collectively, to determine their

strengths and weaknesses. Collectively, it was found that the ten stages function as an integrated unit with a center of gravity. This center of gravity was found to be in stages five and six which deal with articulating the homiletical idea (stage five) and the purpose statement (stage six). The first four stages lead up to stages five and six, and stages seven through ten issue out of them. Furthermore, it was found that the ten stages collectively have a two-fold division. In the first division, stages one through three, deal with the biblical world through exegesis. The second division, stages four through ten, deal more with the contemporary world. Thus, the expositor following the ten stages starts in the biblical world and, as the stages progress, moves more into the contemporary world. The individual evaluation of each stage revealed deficiencies in stages one, two, three, four, six, eight, and nine.

7.1.6 Chapter Six Summary

While chapters three through five accomplished one part of the purpose of this study, chapter six accomplished the other part: to provide pointers in the deficient areas of Robinson's homiletical teaching and suggest new theory and procedure for evangelical expository pedagogy. These pointers seek to provide suggestions for better expository pedagogy in expository preaching textbooks. This chapter discussed ten issues derived from the previous chapters in the form of problems/pointers.

The first issue dealt with theological methodology and expository preaching. Throughout this study it was observed that Robinson often assumed his theological methodology instead of explaining it. The pointer suggested here was for future expository preaching texts to discuss in a brief format the concepts of revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, and authority. The rationale behind this pointer is that the reader of an expository text needs

the theological and theoretical basis for the functional approach taken in any expository method.

The second issue addressed verbal inspiration and word studies. The problem here was how Robinson dealt with the relationship of verbal inspiration and lexical fallacies. He needed to explain how his view of inspiration embraced the literary context of words. Our pointer suggested an explanation of how entire inspiration embraces the linguistic principle of communication that each element of text depends upon the next higher level of discourse for its meaning. The rationale behind this discussion was to help the expositor maintain balance between a high view of inspiration and semantic analysis.

The third issue involved language and preaching. The problem here was that neither Robinson nor any other expository homiletician spent any time addressing this subject which is so important to the evangelical mandate of clarity and precision in preaching. Our pointer suggested a concise way of setting forth the issues of human language in such a way as to equip the expositor with an understanding of the presuppositions undergirding the evangelical view of language.

The fourth issue was Christ-centered preaching. It was noted as odd that Robinson said very little about incorporating Christ into the expository sermon when this is very important to evangelical theology. Our pointer suggested that expository texts provide a christocentric expository methodology reflecting the framework of the methodology found in the work of Greidanus, Goldsworthy, and Chapell. A concise procedure emerging out of this methodology would involve three steps and take only one section in a text on expository preaching. The rationale behind this Christ-centered focus was the evangelical understanding

that every passage of Scripture testifies to Christ and reflects the larger canonical context which finds its coherence in the person and work of Christ.

The fifth issue involved exegetical procedure and sermon preparation. The issue here was that while Robinson espouses grammatical-historical-theological exegesis, he provided only an abbreviated version of it in stage two of his method. Our pointer consisted of a full-orbed exegetical process with eight steps. The rationale behind this eight-step procedure was to equip the expositor with guidance during this important phase of expository sermon preparation.

The sixth issue dealt with the audience and application in expository preaching. The issues here were first, the need for Robinson to focus more on how the expositor can understand the audience; and second, the need to broaden the one-way approach to application. Our pointer was set in the theoretical context of Thiselton's "fusion of horizons," which emphasizes a dual focus on both sides of the hermeneutical enterprise—the past and the present. We suggested: first, that the expositor apply the hermeneutical spiral with respect to his own horizon and that of the text to bring the two together. Second, we suggested that the expositor apply tools of research to understand his audience and then apply the expository spiral in bringing his audience and the text together. It was pointed out that the hermeneutical spiral and expository spiral both place the center of gravity on the text as the factor that reshapes and enlarges the present horizon. Thus, an attempt was made to avoid a strict one-way application from text to audience while ignoring the horizon of the audience in the process.

The seventh issue was the role of the Holy Spirit and prayer during sermon

preparation. The problem noted was that Robinson never discusses in any detail prayer or the work of the Holy Spirit in relationship to illumination during sermon preparation. Yet, this is a subject of great importance in evangelical thinking. Our pointer suggested inserting a brief discussion of the nature of the Holy Spirit and prayer in the expository text. Such a discussion would involve the role of illumination and prayer during sermon preparation and would address the issue of why the Holy Spirit does not function outside of exegesis and hermeneutics. The rationale behind such a discussion is the evangelical theological methodology which stresses the work of the Holy Spirit in illumination. It is also important that the expositor understand the function of the Spirit in relationship to exegetical study.

The eighth issue was articulating sermon purpose. Robinson's discussion of sermon purpose lacked clarity due to the lack of specific steps and needed a more consistent template for articulating the purpose statement. Our pointer provided concise steps for the process of articulating the purpose statement. It also suggested a template to use every time the expositor reaches the point of readiness to write out the sermon purpose statement. The rationale behind this procedure was the importance of biblical purpose to expository methodology and the important role the purpose statement plays in the sermon preparation process.

The ninth issue dealt with sermon preparation and the modes of preaching. It was observed that H. Grady Davis's discussion of the three modes of preaching and tense would enhance the process of sermon outlining. Our pointer suggested that the indicative, imperative, and conditional modes be incorporated into the sermon preparation process along with instruction on how to use tense. The rationale behind adding this to expository pedagogy

is the variety and energy it would bring to preaching.

The tenth and final issue addressed in this chapter was the relationship of supportive material to the homiletical idea and purpose statement. It was pointed out that Robinson does not directly relate the supporting elements to the homiletical idea or the purpose statement during sermon preparation. Our pointer suggested applying two questions that would solve this problem. The rationale behind this pointer is the centrality of the homiletical idea and purpose statement to everything in the expository sermon.

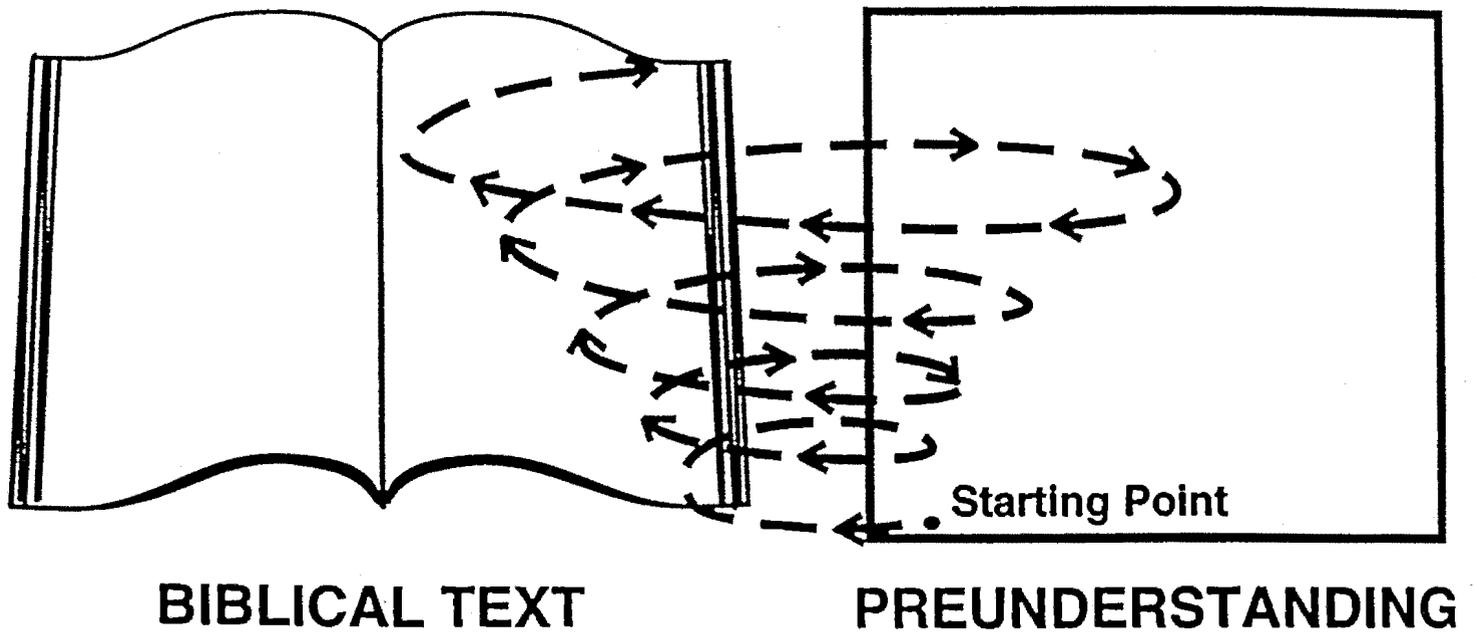
7.2 Conclusion

As a foundational text in the Evangelical Expository Homiletic, Robinson's 1980 *Biblical Preaching* set a standard for the basic content in expository pedagogy. Over the last two decades the presentation of this content in various expository texts can be categorized under two heads: expository methodology and expository procedure. For expository methodology the issues have included the meaning of expository preaching and its assumptions about Scripture, hermeneutics, the audience, and the nature of preaching itself. For expository procedure the issues have included exegetical method, articulating ideational unity and purpose, developing an integrated structure with variety, transitions, movement, climax, explanation, illustration, application, introduction and conclusion.

This study discovered ten areas of deficiency in *Biblical Preaching* related to these methodological and procedural issues. The approach was to suggest pointers which involved additional theory and procedure. In conclusion to this study, we suggest that the pointers in these ten areas contribute ways to improve expository pedagogy in general and the expository sermon in particular.

Appendix

HERMENEUTICAL SPIRAL



(Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 114)

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