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**Homiletics as mnemonic practice:
collective memory and contemporary Christian
preaching, with special reference to the work of
Maurice Halbwachs.**

**Thesis submitted in accordance with the
requirements of the University of Liverpool
for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy**

by

Christopher Paul Burkett

December 2009

Christopher Paul Burkett

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**collective memory and contemporary Christian preaching,
with special reference to the work of Maurice Halbwachs.**

Abstract:

In his book *Twilight Memories* Andreas Huyssen (1995) famously described contemporary Western culture as ‘a culture of amnesia’. That concern about social memory is evident in many areas of contemporary discourse. Social memory’s confabulatory, subjective, and ambiguous nature makes its analysis an arena of conflicting and diverse opinions. Drawing on Maurice Halbwachs’ concept of ‘collective memory’, and its use in more recent sociological studies, this study uses preaching theory and practice as a way of addressing those wider memory concerns in the life of the church. In particular, the profound challenge of memory work to Christianity’s insistence on remembrance as the foundation of its authenticity is examined through contemporary homiletic practice. It is argued that, alongside the familiar didactic, cognitive, epistemological and contextual categories employed in preaching practice, the current crisis of memory requires a new emphasis on memory maintenance. Sermons are presented as mnemonic events essential to the ongoing living tradition of the faith.

This work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning.

Signed

This thesis contains 99,897 words.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 The topic of enquiry.

This thesis argues that the maintenance of collective memory must be the principal task of Christian preaching. It aims to offer an analysis of preaching practice that goes beyond familiar didactic, cognitive, and contextual categories towards a new appreciation of the significance of memory for the life of faith. As such, it is both an assessment of the decay of shared Christian memory in contemporary British society and a call to rediscover the importance of shared memory in Christian living. Preaching is the locus of that assessment and call because of its character as a representative vocalization of faith's inheritance. Of course, many things besides preaching operate as bearers of collective memory, but preaching's role as a rhetorical articulation makes it worthy of particular consideration.

The concept of collective memory is understood here as representations of the past, and the traditions that stem from it, that are shared and rehearsed by a group so as to give substance to the group's identity and to provide resources for its continued existence and for its future. It is, therefore, orientated towards current needs, and current concerns about the near future, as much as the recollection of what has already taken place. It makes the past present in the sense of it being a vital constituent of current experience. The mechanisms by which this occurs will be examined in the light of both sociological and theological perspectives. In particular, the theory and practice of contemporary preaching within some of the churches of the British Isles will be analysed so as to understand the pressures and trends that have a direct bearing on this social process. Coupled with that focused analysis will be an assessment of aspects of more general homiletic theory. This research will ask what the consequences for preaching are of recent studies of religious social memory. This will necessitate the evaluation of sociological works

by Grace Davie (2000a and 2002) and Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2000) and the theoretical foundation of their approach in the work of Maurice Halbwachs (1980 [in French 1950] and 1992 [in French 1941 and 1952]).

Although Halbwachs' concept of collective memory has been much debated amongst historians and sociologists (for example, Connerton (1989); Burke (1989); Funkenstein (1989); Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983); Middleton and Edwards (1990); Le Goff (1992); Terdiman (1993); Zelizer (1995); Scudson (1997); Olick (1999); Wertsch (2002); Misztal (2003)) and this study will utilize those discussions, it is the intention here to apply the concept to an area of discourse not previously addressed in such terms. The preacher will be presented as an agent who employs a tool-kit of inherited ideas and cultural associations to make accessible and to sustain the tradition of faith. In other words, the practice of preaching will be viewed primarily as a mechanism of collective memory maintenance within the church. This is not to say that other ways of understanding preaching are invalid, but rather to focus on the communicative and homiletic implications of changes in collective memory and memorizing as a way towards delineating issues sometimes not apparent from other perspectives.

1.2 Scope of enquiry.

By way of orientating the reader to the place of this study in relationship to both contemporary homiletics and the sociology of religion in Britain a few other markers need to be made explicit at the outset. In terms of practice, the focus will be almost exclusively on preaching within the Anglican and Nonconformist traditions of Christianity, sometimes rather colloquially labelled as 'mainstream' or 'mainline' Protestant denominations (see, for example, this usage in Carroll (2006), Hunt (2005), and Percy and Markham (2006)). Renewed concern with homiletics in the Roman Catholic Church, as evidenced in the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales document *The Gift of Scripture* (2005) requires the picture to be broadened somewhat, but the discussion will not range outside these traditional arenas of practice. It is, of course, the case that much might be learnt from the

examination of preaching in the many so-called 'post-denominational' and 'new' churches now present in the British Isles (Hunt, 2005: 107); but as historical memory in a given social context is a primary framework for this study, churches active only in more recent times have been excluded. This potentially very fruitful enquiry into what constitutes social memory and how it is changing in these often vibrant bodies must be left to others. Likewise, since this research is concerned with Christianity in relation to collective memory, no account will be offered of preaching in other faith communities. Again, there are reasons to believe that much could be gained by a similar study in these communities, but it is not an aspect of this thesis.

In terms of geographical boundary, Great Britain will be the principal area of focus. No consideration will be given to preaching in Northern Ireland due to the uniqueness of its religious history and the consequent difficulty of extrapolating generalizations applicable elsewhere without detailed and distracting commentary. Practice and theoretical insights from the United States must be extensively considered because that country is the source of by far the most numerous and most academically rigorous homiletical literature in English. That American dominance will itself be part of the evidence adduced in the argument later. Parallels with other parts of Western Europe will be detailed on occasions when what is shared, or not, in European collective memory is identified in the analysis.

Inevitably such a geographical boundary requires that this study should address very directly some of the issues raised in the rejuvenated debate about secularization and the place of religion in the contemporary social world (see, for example, Davie (2002); Bruce (2002); Martin (2005); Davie, Heelas and Woodhead (eds.) (2003); and Beckford (2003)). The arguments presented here, however, will not seek in any direct way to substantiate one or other of the conflicting judgements arising from the secularization debate. Instead, the emphatic focus will be on what the various conclusions drawn by scholars of very differing opinions in that disputation might mean for the practice of preaching. The intention is that clear boundaries to the area of Christian practice addressed in this study will allow contextual aspects to be examined in depth and so be more closely related to the

theoretical perspective this thesis will advocate, namely, preaching as a social mnemonic practice.

1.3 The concept of collective memory.

This theoretical perspective will require detailed attention to ideas such as ‘social mnemonic’ and ‘collective memory’, for, as James Wertsch observes, the very concept of ‘collective memory’ is a term in search of a meaning (2002: 30). Such analysis of the terms employed in the examination of social remembering will form a substantial component of the argument of this thesis, but two points need to be noted at this introductory stage by way of orientation. First, memory is understood here as more about what a person *does* than what a person *has*. As Halbwachs originally suggested, memories are created by communication within social milieux (1992). In other words, memories are taken to be ordered constructs reliant on social and personal influences and needs rather than simply casually retained information. A number of psychological studies support the understanding of memory as, at least in part, a determined action seeking order and meaning (see, for example, Bartlett (1995); Schacter (1996); and Rose 2003)). Second, memories are understood here to be purposeful; that is they make the past usable and thereby significant in the present. Again numerous studies from a range of disciplines support this understanding (for example, Schudson (1992); Middleton and Edwards (1990); Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983); and Bal, Crewe and Spitzer (1999)). Such a sense of memories’ usability and current significance closely reflects the Christian usage of the term anamnesis; a correlation that will be examined later in this thesis.

In terms of collective memory theory the understanding of preaching utilized in this study is that of a practice characterized as ‘consumptive production’. That term, arising out of de Certeau’s discussion of ‘making do’ (1984: 31), is inelegant but nevertheless accurate in that it suggests a sermon is created, or ‘produced’, in the process of being ‘consumed’ by its hearers. In other words, a sermon as a mnemonic device is more than a text delivered to a congregation; rather its delivery is but one stage in a process of what is essentially a social

production. This study will argue the case for locating preaching within an ongoing process of memory articulation and creation. The ultimate goal is to delineate preaching's role in the maintenance and creation of Christianity as a lived wisdom.

Scholars on all sides of the secularization debate (for example, Davie (2000a); Bruce (2002); and Brown (2001)) agree that the social significance of a socially recollected Christian faith in contemporary Western culture is undergoing a shift so profound that it can be properly termed as social amnesia of the Christian tradition. Such judgements are confirmed by recurrent items within the media highlighting the inability of large sections of the British population, for example, to understand what membership of the church involves (BBC Faith Day Survey 14 November 2005) or to be able to name at least one of the four Gospels (Mori poll, August 2003). This amnesia is especially difficult for an anamnestic faith such as Christianity since the expression 'I believe' only works if it is embedded in a sense of social continuity and legitimized by a validating tradition (Hervieu-Léger, 2000: 97). In a social world dominated by change—actually and ideologically—continuity and tradition become problematic.

It would seem that for many people discerning and appreciating the Christian tradition is a laborious and difficult process. Objects that even in the recent past would have been recognized as religious, whether their more profound meaning and purpose was understood or not, are no longer so recognized. Of course, the reverse also applies; things that were previously not religious are now labelled as such (for example popular astrology, or the concept of Gaia). As a consequence of these changes the practice of preaching is threatened by both marginalization as a social discourse and an apparently ever diminishing repertoire of usable symbols as the number of socially recollected Christian understandings shrink. The argument of this study must, therefore, also address missiological issues prompted by the way in which religious symbols in the widest sense are used, or are failing to be used, in contemporary European social discourse. Undoubtedly, some religious symbols have lost, or are in the process of losing, their social resonance; whilst others are being reconfigured in ways previously unseen (for example the use of crosses and rosaries in promotional

videos by popular cultural ‘icons’ such as Madonna and David Beckham) as the social memory of Christian faith disintegrates.

In terms of preaching, the principal ecclesiological motif for the church used in this study will be that of a canonical community—by which is meant a body of people who attempt to orientate themselves in living according to the canon of Christian practices and texts. Christians, it will be argued, are in a constant cultural negotiation that works to order their lives in relation to the canons of the faith and life as it is presently lived and understood. Accordingly, collective memory will be presented as at the heart of the canon, and preaching as a major component of memory maintenance. Through the voice of preaching the tradition speaks, as it were, to itself, to remind, reinvigorate, reinterpret, and re-appropriate the canon of Christian understandings in order that they can continue to be a lived wisdom for the people who call themselves Christians. To use one of Hervieu-Léger’s terms, preaching is about the ‘management of memory’ (2000: 126), and, as she observes, ‘it is the recognized ability to expound the true memory of the group that constitutes the core of religious power’ (2000: 126). Such religious power, however, is significantly undermined in an environment in which collective memory of the Christian tradition is fast eroding. It is becoming more and more difficult for individuals to recognize things as religious symbols because categories of mental classification and association based on tradition and memory no longer work. In Hervieu-Léger’s terms again, the chain of memory has been broken (2000: 124-140). How preaching might be re-modelled so as to contend more directly with these disadvantageous social changes is one of the goals towards which this study is aimed.

1.4 A working definition of preaching.

The sociological and theological definitions of preaching will of necessity be repeatedly addressed in what follows. As a starting point, the provisional generic definition of preaching employed here is ‘an authoritative and authorized voice in a congregation giving expression to the Christian tradition in

such a way as to encourage and enable it to be applicable in some measure in the lives of the hearers'. Needless to say such a definition is nearer to an ideal type than a straightforward literal definition, and a number of qualifications might need to be added by way of strict accuracy and application: for example, it could be objected that preaching can employ more than one voice; might use music or images; can take place in an environment other than a congregation; does not always have the Christian tradition as its prime focus; and need not necessarily be about the lived application of that tradition.

Nevertheless, without further qualification that definition provides a skeleton that is accurate enough to be recognisable as an expression of so-called 'classical preaching' that speaks from faith, to faith, for faith. Or, as Barth expressed it:

We walk by faith not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). If in this present time we were living by sight, we should have nothing to wait for: there would be neither yesterday nor tomorrow. But we live by faith, that is to say, we come from Christ and are going to Christ. Peace and joy abound on either hand, but on this journey we go from riches to destitution and from destitution to new riches. The preacher must show the real nature of this journey in faith. (Barth, 1963: 17)

Such a Christological rootedness is the very heart of the memory deployed in the kind of preaching advocated here.

The expected and assumed components of Christian preaching implicit in the definition used here amount to ten distinct aspects: (i) preaching is something spoken; (ii) it generally uses one voice addressed to a number of people; (iii) that one voice has usually been given authority to so speak, often by an authorizing institution other than those immediately gathered; (iv) preaching normatively takes place within a specialized gathering called a congregation, whose purpose is more than just hearing the sermon; (v) preaching's subject matter is at least partially controlled by its relationship to an inherited tradition that principally, but not exclusively, consists of the Bible; (vi) the social purposes of preaching are determined by the needs of the congregation, at least theoretically, and the

inherently missiological character of the New Testament; (vii) preaching is expressive in the sense that it gives voice to the tradition in such a way that it impacts on the hearers' emotional, cognitive, intellectual and practical needs and understandings; (viii) it enables the hearers to link within their thoughts what is experienced within the congregation and what they experience in other aspects of their living; (ix) preaching is to some degree authoritative in itself in that hearers are willing to receive it with generally only indirect ways available to them to offer meliorating feedback (that said, the contractual-like nature of preaching means the preacher is aware that there are boundaries of style and content that may not be crossed); and (x) preaching is performative in the sense that the preacher is expected to do more than simply read a text.

Given these components of preaching it is hardly surprising that homiletic theory and commentary often dwells on issues that revolve around the two associated foci of hermeneutics and communication. Homileticians are of necessity keen to establish well-grounded and justifiable methods of interpretation matched to effective and ethically sound means of communicating those interpretations. In this way homiletics identifies itself as an applied discipline as distinct from theoretical or 'pure' knowledge. The dominant issues addressed within the literature cluster around 'how to' type questions, as against the 'knowing about' type statements used within more theoretical discourse (see, for example, Day, Astley and Francis (2005), Day (2005), Rogness (1994), Bausch (1996), and Jensen (1993)). The homiletician primarily asks how to make the truth of a doctrine or biblical text explicit in such a way as to have a direct impact on the lives of those hearing it, rather than seeking to establish through evidence and argument the contours and validity of a given understanding. The latter style of presentation is, of course, never completely excluded but it is usually not the dominant aspect. No doubt stated in such bald terms this is a crude dichotomy that underplays both the intellectual rigour of homiletics and the extensive debates about the nature of theological method evidenced in such texts as Tracy (1981), Browning (1996), Forrester (1990), Volf and Bass (2002), and the like. Nevertheless it is the case that just such simple distinctions underlie many of the ongoing debates within contemporary homiletics: for example, the

debate about the so-called ‘New Homiletic’ as against the ‘old’ or ‘traditional homiletic’ that figures so prominently in recent homiletic literature revolves around just such a dichotomy (see, for example, Long (2009), Allen (ed.) (1998), Graves (ed.) (2004), and Schlafer (2004), as some amongst the many works that might be cited). This debate will be analysed later in this study, but at this point it offers an illustration of the way a complex issue can be so easily almost bowdlerized in an arena of discourse where the imperatives of practice are paramount.

1.5 The approach of the New Homiletic: effect as a way of initiating understanding.

The New Homiletic/old homiletic dichotomy contrasts the widely adopted strategy of moving to an experientially focussed sermonic style that is evocative, plot laden and involving, in preference to a linear, rational and argued development of ideas. Something almost like a mythology has grown around this shift of emphasis (see Eslinger, 2002); indeed the colloquial way in which the details are usually framed is in itself an indication of just how sharp the distinctions are that New Homileticians want to make between their approach and that of a more traditional style. Accordingly, the story is recounted in conversation-like terms which say that the American New Testament scholar and preacher Fred Craddock was approached one day by a church member who said to him that his talks at the local Lion’s Club with all their stories, asides and anecdotes were great but that his preaching in church was cold, tedious and distant. Fred Craddock went home to think about the criticism and discovered Kierkegaard. He was particularly moved by the following passage in *Practice in Christianity*:

By means of its favourite way of observing what is the essentially Christian, which is just by ‘observation’ and ‘observations’, the sermon presentation has abolished what Christianly is decisive in the sermon presentation—the personal: this *You and I*, the speaker and the one being

spoken to; this, that the one who is speaking is himself personally in motion, a striver, and likewise the one spoken to, who he therefore stirs up, encourages, admonishes, and warns, but all with respect to a striving, a life; this, that the speaker will continually not go away from himself but come back to himself and will help the listener, not to go away from himself but to come back to himself. In our day, the sermon presentation has itself totally disregarded, and subsequently has contributed to its being totally forgotten, that the Christian truth cannot really be the object of 'observations'. (Kierkegaard 1991: 233)

At the core of this challenge is the realisation that *knowing about* is not the same as *knowing*, and Craddock sought to establish a homiletic method that would serve such a kind of knowing. The 1971 book *As One Without Authority: Essays on Inductive Preaching* was the result. In the years since, this publication has been widely cited as marking a fundamental shift in homiletic method (see, for example, Eslinger, (2002); Edwards, (2004); and Day, Astley and Francis, (2005)). Whether such a claim is justifiable will be an issue discussed in the literature review that follows, but at this introductory stage the differing approach of the 'Old' and New Homiletic provide good examples of why social mnemonics are so important to preaching and thus offers supporting evidence for the approach this thesis adopts.

For practitioners of the old, so called 'traditional', homiletic, (Ford, (1979); Willimon, (1994); Coggan, (1996); and Stott, (1982)), the social memory issues seem plain enough: the preacher's power is based on familiarity with the tradition and ability to expound it; from that power flows the authority to determine what aspects of the tradition should be given pre-eminence; the sermonic style teaches the tradition directly and is primarily pedagogical; and the methodology aims to build within the listening community an increasing familiarity with the tradition and a remembering of it. The crucial task is advancing the listener's ability to recognize what is authentically religious, and authentically Christian. In terms of the wider social memory, the assumption is usually that the weakening of supporting social understandings requires increasing explanation of the tradition so the pedagogical aspect tends to be

emphasized even more, and more and more *information about* is given. In this way the Christian memory becomes another part of the information overload of contemporary society. The question of how to relate information to a lineage in which people can see themselves as belonging (Hervieu-Léger 2000: 128) is just as problematic in the church as elsewhere. Being the receiver of a stream of information does not of itself incorporate the receiver into the shared heritage that is its source. Social boundary mechanisms have to be established to support the memory; one of the most innovative strategies being the use of branding as an evangelistic tool by the Alpha Course (see Hunt (2001)). Such strategies, however, do not overcome the pressures of subjectivization and individualization, and the collective memory continues to be at the mercy of personal choice in the context of a highly fragmented society. Simply because the old homiletic asserts itself as the guardian of the collective Christian memory does not make it such.

Implicit in the New Homiletic is a much stronger appeal to subjectivism than is the case in the methodology of those sympathetic to the old homiletic. This has a direct bearing on the issue of memory since that subjectivism works towards pushing religious memory more and more into the personal domain of private knowledge; a process also recognized in other areas of contemporary society (see Fentress and Wickham, 1992: 8). Even at this early stage in the discussion it is worth elaborating the point a little in order to establish more clearly a distinction that will figure prominently later.

1.6 The New Homiletic and collective memory.

Practitioners of the New Homiletic, (as exemplified by Wilson (1988), Craddock (2001), Lowry (2001), Jensen (1993), Bausch (1996), Eslinger (1995), and Troeger (1990), amongst many others), eschew the notion of boundaries. As Craddock puts it, the purpose of preaching is to:

... engage the hearer in the pursuit of an issue or an idea so that he or she will think his or her own thoughts and experience his or her own feeling in the presence of Christ and in the light of the gospel. (1971: 157)

The preacher retains power, but only in so far as he or she is willing and able to engage the imaginative and reflective abilities of the hearers. Via such a tactic the aim is to overcome the contemporary suspicion of authority figures and give proper authority to the autonomy of the hearer. This may, however, be something of a subterfuge since by the very act of preaching the preacher has, of course, already made authoritative decisions about what is to be given priority in the tradition. Inevitably, choices about what parts of the collective memory are most significant are not limited to the co-action of the preacher and the hearers in the preaching-event. Likewise, post the preaching-event, precisely how what has been experienced and reflected upon is incorporated in the memory of both individuals and the wider church is wholly undeterminable. The incremental, syllabus-like incorporation evident in the old homiletic simply does not apply. The New Homiletic is over optimistic in what it assumes about the social memory of the Christian tradition. The experience it aims to evoke cannot be produced *in vacuo*; a point amplified by Thomas Long (2009: 7-10). Without pre-existing mental categories to which the ideas and understandings presented by the preacher can be associated, recognition of the Gospel tradition as such by the hearers remains problematic. The redefinition of the 'preached-to' to the 'preached-with' of the New Homiletic offers nothing at all by way of certainty that those who have become the 'preached-with' have an effective enough access to the collective memory to be able to incorporate their reflective preaching experience into an authentic expression of the Christian tradition. As Hervieu-Léger says:

In the fluid, mobile domain of modern belief liberated from the hold of all-embracing institutions of believing, all symbols are interchangeable and capable of being combined and transposed. All syncretisms are possible. (2000: 75)

The methodology of the New Homiletic is unable to guard the collective Christian memory. It can easily become little more than the telling of human(e) stories.

In their advocacy of an inductive sermon style, the New Homileticians are in avowed revolt against preaching that they see as inappropriately dominated

by a propositional methodology born of academic theological training. Their criticism takes as its starting point the ineffectiveness of the earlier methodology, made ever more apparent by the human perception and attention shifts prompted by the use of televisual media. Using an explicit 'how to' style of justification, the New Homileticians seek to recast preaching as in itself a sensory experience of Christianity as a vital way of being. In so doing, they in effect privilege skills knowledge ('how to') and experiential knowledge ('experiences of') above propositional knowledge ('knowing about'). Whether or not this strategy makes the practice of preaching so subjective that it further erodes the very social authority it aims to enhance is a question that will figure prominently in later chapters, where the arguments will be examined more closely.

Like the sharp dichotomy between objective facts and subjective beliefs identified by Newbigin (1989) and others (for example, MacIntyre, 1985) as a hallmark of contemporary Western social discourse, the appeal to skills-dominant, sensory-rich preaching also draws a sharp boundary between subjective experience and objective knowledge. Although, given the nature of the preaching task, practitioners inevitably retain a strong commitment to the truth of the Gospel, the consequence of adopting a more narrative, discursive, and imaginative sermon delivery is that the nature of the truth the sermon attempts to communicate is received as being of a rather different order from that communicated in a more propositional way. As Newbigin suggests, in the marketplace of everyday conversation, those things categorized as objective facts are weighted as much more significant than subjective interpretations and beliefs (Newbigin, 1989: 37). A similar kind of weighting spills over into everyday understandings of memory. For example, conversational personal reminiscences are not usually subjected to the rigorous examination as to their absolute veracity in the way that the recounted memory of a road traffic incident might be. Some things are remembered as facts, whilst others are remembered as interpretations, feelings or habits (compare to the varied types of remembering in Casey, 2000). These divides usually serve individuals well when it comes to action and discernment, but a moment's reflection reveals them as simply convenient analogies (Fentress and Wickham, 1992: 5). In terms of personal thought we treat facts as having an

existence separate from our thinking selves in a way that we do not treat our interpretations and feelings. In reality, however, as far as our state of mind is concerned all kinds of memories are simply that—memories.

When it comes to articulating those memories they are likely to be expressed in ways that conform to acceptable social conventions. What are judged to be facts, interpretations, or feelings, will be expressed in ways appropriate to that judged understanding. Often when that does not happen, for example if a fact is expressed as a feeling, or an interpretation as a fact, embarrassment or confusion follows (notwithstanding, of course, that there are some circumstances when such transpositions are expected). In other words, how memories are used conforms to social patterns, so that what was termed above as ‘weighting’ has direct social ramifications. If preaching is viewed in an increasingly subjective way, and its use in memory is therefore consciously or unconsciously placed wholly within a framework of interpretation and feeling, the further articulation of those memories will tend to be within a referencing set only appropriate to subjective expression. In this way, an iron circle of subjectivism threatens to entangle preaching to such a degree that it is rendered all but socially voiceless.

While in the highly subjectivizing and individualistic culture of Western Europe a way to halt that encirclement is not readily apparent, an analysis of the workings of social memory might provide some clues to a tentative beginning. That analysis of memory and the Christian tradition will recognize the need to go beyond knowledge in the conceptual sense. It must also examine relationships to the physical (the lived-in place, and the locality); the context of felt belonging (the parish, the institution of the church, and the congregation); and our emotions (observance of rules and duties, as against a life of increasing personal choice).

1.7 Communal memory and contemporary Western Christianity.

The argument that this thesis aims to develop is that contemporary homiletic theories, and the practices that flow from them, are failing to address the profound consequences of the loss of social memory and are thereby also

failing to develop strategies for coping with that loss. Hervieu-Léger makes the point that Christianity is especially destabilized when it comes to matters of authorized memory. Unlike Judaism or Islam, Christianity does not generally make fulfilment of observances an absolute criterion of religious belief and, coupled with that, tends to give particular prominence to the believer's personal faith (2000: 170). Consequently, those from within the Christian tradition relatively easily adopt a highly subjectivized attitude to collective memory, and with that there is also sometimes a relative easy accommodation of the idea that meanings are beyond institutional control or regulation. To use the traditional versus the New Homiletic debate as an example again, in both perspectives the communal holding of memory remains a core, and often unacknowledged, problem. For those who seek authority primarily in a message rather than an institution, the prospect of an ever greater divergence and division of supporting social structures must pose a threat to the very existence of a shared faith memory. Whereas for those who find their belonging primarily in a community of faith rather than an explicit submission to a body of beliefs, the threat is that shared inheritances and understandings may become so attenuated that the very basis of the community that was at first so attractive ceases to provide the sense of belonging that created it in the first place. The inherent individualism involved in both approaches, strongly reinforced by wider social fragmentation and individualization, works towards the undermining of a collectively held faith memory. For Hervieu-Léger hyper-individualism undermines the obligation and belonging essential for all social living. She puts the issue starkly in terms of religion:

How can religious institutions, with their prime purpose of preserving and transmitting a tradition, reform their own system of authority – essential for the continuity of a line of belief – when the tradition is thought of even by believers, not as a sacred trust, but as an ethico-cultural heritage, a fund of memory and a reservoir of signs at the disposal of individuals?
(2000: 168)

Can a reappraisal of preaching in terms of memory and its maintenance provide part of the answer? The intention of the arguments to be developed in this thesis

is to seek an answer to that question. Giving voice to and bearing a tradition, and relating that tradition socially to current needs in an authoritative way, are aspects of social mnemonics drawn directly from Halbwachs' pioneering work on the concept of collective memory. His ideas, and the way in which other scholars have developed them, must form a significant part of this study. In Halbwachs' final and incomplete text of *The Collective Memory* he says:

The whole art of the orator probably consists in his giving listeners the illusion that the convictions and feelings he [*sic*] arouses within them have come not from him but from themselves, that he has only divined and lent his voice to what has been worked out in their innermost consciousness. In one way or another, each social group endeavours to maintain a similar persuasion over its members. (Halbwachs, 1980: 45)

In the perspective adopted and analysed in this study such interplay between individual response and things that are more contextually dependent social processes will be seen as being at the heart of preaching.

1.8 Methodology and structure of the thesis.

This brief chapter has introduced some of the key issues in the relationship between preaching and collective memory in order to present a justification for the unique analysis that follows. The later parts of this study will return to topics introduced here in order to present a more detailed and nuanced account of them. Hopefully, however, enough has been said at this point to provide a framework from which the argument can be developed.

This thesis aims to offer a singular and distinctive assessment of the goals of Christian preaching in contemporary British society. It will present an entirely novel application of collective memory theory to homiletics. Consequently the methodology employed is that of close assessment, analysis, and correlation of pertinent texts. The methodology's aim is to establish conceptual and contextual relationships that at present go largely unnoticed in

homiletic theory. From those correlations this thesis aims to develop an understanding of preaching as mnemonic practice.

As a first step, the chapter that follows presents a literature review of significant modern homiletic texts. This review will provide some contextual comment alongside the trends evident in the texts under consideration. The aim is to establish in broad outline the concerns that have dominated recent homiletic theory in order that the relationship between those concerns and collective memory can be more accurately assessed. There will then follow a chapter that examines the concept of collective memory in some detail. In particular, it will assess the pioneering work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and the aspects of his work that will undergird the argument that follows. As Halbwachsian categories have been extensively employed by the sociologists of religion Danièle Hervieu-Léger and Grace Davie, their work will then be considered. The purpose of that chapter is to offer evidence of the significance of the concept of collective memory in the examination of the contemporary practice of Christian faith. Hervieu-Léger's understanding of religion as a chain of memory will be presented as a concept of specific pertinence to the argument offered here. At this point in the thesis, having established a conceptual and contextual framework, the focus returns to homiletic theory.

Three predominating strands are identified in recent homiletic theorizing which have direct relevance to this discussion; namely, the appeal to psychological salience, rhetorical impact, and contextual connection. These strands are examined through the analysis of three representative texts. The aim of the chapter is to indicate how influential those strands are, to assess the position each adopts, and to make connections to the 'missing strand' of collective memory. Attention is then directed to the memory work aspects of theology itself, and the nature of the Scriptures as tradition is particularly identified as a key aspect of what makes them so fertile and generative in both believing and preaching. The attributes of Christian remembering in the expression and actions of faith are examined, and the presentist nature of collective memory is related to that remembering by attention to its eschatological

and epicletic components. Remembering and acting, it is argued, are inextricably linked; and preaching must always serve that linkage.

To conclude, the thesis returns to the substantive issue, and the mechanisms of collective memory as identified by Halbwachs are employed to support the idea of preaching as a mnemonic practice. Theological and sociological categories delineated earlier in the thesis are adduced to reinforce the necessity of homiletics as memory work. A brief summation that includes potential extensions to the enquiry undertaken here draws the discussion to a close.

Chapter Two

Contextual Literature Review

2.1 Establishing a starting point.

Sermons are not a kind of discourse given much serious public attention in twenty-first century Britain. The very concept of preaching often brings with it negative connotations. To accuse any contemporary commentator of ‘preaching’ is to suggest that unsubstantiated opinions are being delivered in a tedious manner. That in such common usage ‘preaching’ is almost invariably a highly critical or even condemnatory epithet indicates something of the social standing of the practice of preaching. Preaching is not an activity that is generally thought of as either intellectually or emotionally engaging. It is, rather, something that is considered to be at best passé, and at worst wholly untrustworthy.

If challenged, those who speak of preaching in such pejorative terms will often cite the cultural distance in practice and understanding between contemporary society and the sermon form as the basis of their judgment. Mention will be made of the social irrelevance of the content of typical sermons, the perceived authoritarian position of the preacher, and the strangeness of the environment in which sermons usually occur. It is also likely that the methodology employed will be judged anachronistic, static, long-winded, and overly didactic for people used to the methods and time-frames of electronic media. The implication is that preaching is somehow out of place in modern society and that, therefore, the negative attitudes displayed in the colloquial use of the term ‘preaching’ is something new. It is fashionably contemporary to adopt a contemptuous or at best a jocular attitude towards preaching. I use the term ‘fashionably’ to emphasize that preaching is not the only discourse to receive such widespread opprobrium: advertising is similarly widely scorned yet, given the vast sums of money spent on it, is evidently effective nonetheless (Kilbourne,

1999: 34). Voiced contempt of preaching as a worthwhile activity is not necessarily to be taken at face value.

As has been stated in the introduction, this thesis seeks to present an analysis of contemporary British preaching as a practice of social mnemonics. As the idea of 'social practice' in that terminology refers to the whole of society rather than an interest group or a few like-minded people gathered together, such a perspective may appear to be an oxymoron given that recent polling suggests only just over six per cent of the adult population of the UK are churchgoers (see Brierley, 2008). This literature review will, nevertheless, seek to establish that Christian preachers who have reflected in depth on their practice in recent generations have invariably assumed that homiletics is an aspect of public discourse rather than an institutionally confined and specialized type of communication. In recent times, justifying that assumption has become more and more difficult, as this review will demonstrate. It has to be admitted that preaching no longer has the place in society-wide awareness it once enjoyed, despite the occasional headline making exceptions, such as Archbishop Robert Runcie's sermon at the Falklands War Memorial Service on 26th June 1982 that reportedly so annoyed the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher (Brown, 2000). Despite the decline in preaching's social status, this study argues that there are always connections between homiletic theory and wider social discourse, and that discovering those connections is a mnemonic skill required of all preachers.

That many studies (for example, Ford, (1979); Bausch, (1996); and Day, Astley and Francis, (2005)) have observed that since at least the 1960s the idea of preaching as a worthwhile arena of social discourse has been repeatedly and vigorously questioned is part of the contextualization with which this thesis is concerned. That the very word 'preaching' brings with it negative connotations that touch even regular Christian worshippers, as N.T. Wright observes in his foreword to the *Reader on Preaching* (Day, 2005: ix), is part of the social understanding this study aims to examine. The colloquial usage that applies the word 'preaching' to the expression of any unsubstantiated opinions, or any speech delivered in a tedious manner, is not a prejudice that serious homiletic theory can simply ignore. That usage is widespread and is, for example, represented in the

1995 edition of the *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* where the second definition of ‘preach’ is ‘give moral advice in an obtrusive way’. Similarly, the use of the word ‘preaching’ as a highly critical or even condemnatory epithet is too frequent in newspapers to need much supporting elaboration. Andrew Rawnsley writing in *The Observer* on 13th July 2008 is but one example of a continuing journalistic convention. Rawnsley cited the drawbacks for politicians who preach in their campaigning via a long catalogue of negatives about the idea of preaching which included ‘delivering patronising lectures from a position of immense privilege’, ‘wringing their hands about the sins of the world without offering any practical answers to improve society’, and ‘simplified to the point of parody’. These kinds of associations related to the idea of preaching cannot be simply dismissed if it is to be argued that the practice of preaching within the churches is closely related to wider social trends. Instead, the contemporary bias that associates preaching with that which is intellectually lazy, emotionally sterile, untrustworthy, or simply passé, must be treated as a factor that needs to be addressed in considering the mechanisms of collective memory.

That said, it must also be acknowledged that the assertion that preaching’s low social esteem is a modern phenomenon is not wholly true. Like the contemporary negative connotations of preaching, the characterization of preaching as formerly being held in great social esteem, is a generalization that obscures as much as it discloses. In the famous passage concerning preaching in Anthony Trollope’s novel *Barchester Towers* the negativity usually judged as ‘modern’ is apparent even at the so-called ‘high-point’ of Victorian religious practice. Written between April 1855 and November 1856, Trollope’s words contain the same kind of criticisms and sense of hostility encountered colloquially nowadays. He wrote:

There is, perhaps, no greater hardship at present inflicted on mankind in civilized and free countries, than the necessity of listening to sermons. No one but a preaching clergyman has, in these realms, the power of compelling an audience to sit silent, and be tormented. No one but a preaching clergyman can revel in platitudes, truisms, and untruisms, and yet receive, as his undisputed privilege, the same respectful demeanour

as though words of impassioned eloquence, or persuasive logic, fell from his lips. . . . No one can rid himself of the preaching clergyman. He is the bore of the age, the old man whom we Sinbads cannot shake off, the nightmare that disturbs our Sunday's rest, the incubus that overloads our religion and makes God's service distasteful. We are not forced into church! No: but we desire more than that. We desire not to be forced to stay away. We desire, nay, we are resolute, to enjoy the comfort of public worship; but we desire also that we may do so without an amount of tedium which ordinary human nature cannot endure with patience; that we may be able to leave the house of God, without that anxious longing for escape, which is the common consequence of common sermons. (Trollope, 1995: 43-44)

Only the assumption that Sunday worship is the norm and the invariable gender of the preacher signifies Trollope's diatribe as of another age. The notion of a static audience enduring a platitudinous and boring verbal presentation has an altogether familiar ring about it. As Colin Morris (1996: xi) points out, it is significant that the first series of the Lyman-Beecher Lectures on Preaching established at Yale University in the 1870s ended with a lecture entitled, *'Is Preaching Finished?'* Needless to say, the lecture firmly declared that preaching had a future; but, put alongside Trollope's criticisms, it demonstrates that negativity about sermons predates the age of mass electronic communication. In recent years, numerous influential homileticians have described preaching as being in crisis (for example, Jensen, (1993); Wilson, (1988); Morris, (1996)), but too often such worried analysis has overstated the contemporaneity of the problem.

2.2 The perception of a crisis in preaching.

Three recurring emphases are common to the arguments of those who see the crisis in preaching as something of recent origin, namely: a widespread loss of confidence in institutions; a change in socially learnt communicative skills; and

the all-pervasive influence of television and associated vehicles of mass communication. So, to amplify those three aspects, the argument is usually made in the following kinds of terms.

First, not only has the severe decline in commitment to religious institutions in recent times resulted in far fewer people actually hearing sermons, even those who do experience preaching at firsthand are much less likely to treat sermons as being particularly significant than did their immediate forebears. Scepticism, and a questioning outlook that constantly raises issues of credibility, is part of the very air of social intercourse, and preaching has no social independence from such an atmosphere. Like every other voice, the preaching voice is one voice amongst a myriad of other voices, and is just as harried by questions of authenticity, doubt and competition as any other voice. Contemporary European society, it is said, has a fundamentally anti-authoritarian aspect to it that will not allow any single voice ultimate authority. Preaching, therefore, which is usually considered to require special and very particular authority being attributed to the preacher, is especially suspect. This, in turn, has ramifications for those who preach, since as individuals they are just as much influenced by these contextual pressures as anyone else. This means that preachers, whatever they claim in public, almost inevitably have less confidence in the preaching task than even their recent predecessors.

Second, in what the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo (2001: 230) has termed 'a society of generalized communication', the very nature of communication itself has profoundly shifted. It is as if everything in human experience has become an object of communication. This shift is often associated with consumerism because, it is argued, such a process of ever widening objects of communication allows more and more events, things, and relationships to become marketable commodities. This expansion, however, brings with it three difficult consequences: it vastly increases the number and range of communication 'events' each person encounters day by day, with a resulting loss in focus, concentration, and time spent on each one; it so stimulates the psychological and physical experience of each person that people's boredom

thresholds have decreased dramatically; and it makes communication itself part of the constantly changing, consumption dominated, arena of style and fashion. These things are particularly problematic for preaching since they mean hearers have ever shortening attention spans, feel they need to be stimulated by what they hear, and employ fashion-like judgements to both their readiness to listen and their willingness to respond (Rogness, 1994: 27-29). Coupled with these changes comes an emphasis on technique in communication, and a preference for labelling unacceptable ideas or challenges as a failure in communication. As a result preachers face intense pressures to conform, both in terms of the content of sermons and the techniques of presentation, to what is socially acceptable simply to gain a hearing. Accordingly, it is argued that the requirement to attract attention and engagement is of a wholly more onerous intensity than it ever was in past times. In the distracted age that is contemporary society the static commitment and attention required of sermon audiences is so counter-cultural as to be almost unachievable.

Third, the argument gives prominence to the absolute dominance of television as the popular medium, and characterizes contemporary culture as televisual and post-literate. It is said that through television, for the first time in the history of humanity, children are being socialized into image use prior to word use (see Warren, 1997). Consequently, the use of words is likely to no longer occupy the pole position in social discourse, but rather to occupy an inherently second order, commentary position. In other words, our culture has shifted from a reading-formed preference towards the ear over the eye, to an image-formed favouring of the eye over the ear, with an obviously detrimental effect on a word dominated form like preaching. Television also appears to be an open and democratized form of communication that offers the prospect of an absolutely free flow of information. It tantalizes with the notion that anything that happens will be almost instantaneously communicable; an impression further reinforced by the Internet. Of course there are serious criticisms to be made of these judgements, but they are nevertheless widely persuasive, at least at face value, both because of the sensory immediacy of the medium and because of the entertainment factors closely allied with it. In comparison preaching seems a highly subjectivized

personal choice in which the preacher demands of an audience assent without prior consent and justification, and in which the factor of entertainment does not figure at all.

In a televisual world of a seemingly infinite number of stories, preaching's insistence, as it is perceived, on the one story of God's relationship with humanity in Jesus Christ seems partial and even tedious. Those who lived before the development of electronic media lived lives in which stories, colour, and pictures were rare and precious events; people of the televisual age inhabit a world alive with an ever changing array of images, colours and narratives. Is it any wonder then that preaching that developed as a communication technique in that pre-television world is thought of as having become outmoded?

Such are the usual parameters of the argument—broadly stated, no doubt, and perhaps caricatured a little—of recent scholarly analysis of the social location of the practice of preaching in contemporary European society. Interestingly, it is apparent that the scholarly commentary not only echoes colloquial opinion about the recentness of the relative decline of the authority afforded preaching, but also the reasons given for that decline. One of questions which this thesis seeks to address is whether such judgements adequately represent what is actually going on in the act of preaching, and whether by an all too easy assumption of preaching as an essentially distinctive activity somehow distanced from other forms of discourse such analysis does not fall prey to the very forces it is trying to counter.

After the hiatus caused by World War II, the BBC resumed television broadcasting in 1946, and the commencement of broadcasting by commercial stations in 1955 accelerated the use of the medium. By 1958 the number of British households with a TV exceeded those with only a radio (Mathias, 2006). Given the above discussion of the widely perceived influence of new electronic media and TV's escalating use, the 1950s seem an appropriate starting point for the consideration of publications dealing with preaching. Quite apart from this more commonplace sense of a shift having taken place, scholarly analysis of both Church history and homiletics tends to support the idea that very significant

changes relevant to the thesis topic did in fact occur at this period. Those changes were not necessarily recognized at the time; perhaps an indication of the lag that occurs as the memories of one generation gives way to those of a succeeding one. One British preacher, however, was alert to the possibility that something profound was happening. That preacher was a R. E. C. ‘Charlie’ Browne, a Manchester vicar, whose 1950s reflections on the preaching task turned out to be amazingly prescient of things that would become major concerns years later. Browne serves as a marker of change. It is sensible, therefore, to examine Browne in some detail before returning to the more general overview.

2.3 R. E. C. Browne as a marker of the changing social location of preaching.

R.E.C. Browne’s *The Ministry of the Word* was first published in 1958 in a series of short works entitled *Studies in Ministry and Worship* under the overall editorship of Professor Geoffrey Lampe. Lampe’s editorship lent theological credibility to a series that was notable on two counts. First, it was decidedly ecumenical (for example, two of the studies were by Max Thurian, who later became internationally known as the theological expositor of the ecumenical Taizé community); and second, it was written from a perspective that only later would be widely termed ‘applied’ or ‘practical’ theology. Browne’s book is the acknowledged masterpiece of the series and has been reissued three times since its first publication (1976, 1984 and 1994), as well as being published in the United States in 1982. Writing in 1986, Bishop Richard Hanson said of it:

This is no little volume of helpful hints about preaching but a profound study of the meaning and use of language in relation to theology and to faith, and one that will outlast all the ephemeral booklets about how to preach. (in Corbett, 1986: v)

Just why this work has been so frequently referred to in a wide variety of Christian traditions will be considered later, but for the purposes of the present discussion the crucial point is the historical context of its writing and publication.

Browne wrote the book whilst he was Rector of the parish of Saint Chrysostum, Victoria Park, Manchester in the 1950s. Ronald Preston, in a foreword to one edition of *The Ministry of the Word*, describes Victoria Park as having ‘moved rapidly since the 1920s from the remains of enclosed and privileged nineteenth-century affluence to near disintegration’ (in Browne, 1976: 10). He notes also, however, that the St Chrysostum’s relative proximity to the university and the city’s main teaching hospital made it a base from which Browne’s influence spread widely. Hanson records that it was a parish where the personality and abilities alone of the incumbent cleric could attract worshippers (Corbett, 1986: iv). In other words, several aspects of the social world that historians like Hastings (1986), Welsby (1984), and Hylson-Smith (1998) have characterized as typical of the 1950s were clearly likely to have been there in Browne’s experience of the ministerial life. For example, Welsby commenting on the monthly journal *Theology* in the two immediately post-war decades notes how it was widely read by parish clergy and acted as a connecting bridge between the concerns of academia and local church life, and concludes:

It is significant, however, that fundamental matters, such as belief in God or in Christ were seldom discussed in its pages, as though these theological foundations were secure and might be taken for granted. This could be a symbol of much of the theology of the forties and fifties. There was a self-confidence and security so that even those who did write about God, Christology, of the Church did so as though the basis of belief was unquestionably right. (Welsby, 1984: 67)

Elsewhere in the same book Welsby notes that the seeds of radical change were present in the 1950s but went unperceived, and he describes the atmosphere in the Church of England as one of ‘complacency and an apparent unawareness of trends already present which were to burst to the surface in the sixties’ (1984: 94).

Browne most certainly did not share that unawareness and frankly acknowledged

the difficulties of communicating the gospel despite the relatively secure social position of theological thought and institutional belief. Far from being in an unassailable authoritative position, he described preachers as living and preaching ‘in an age when there is general perplexity and bewilderment about authority’, and as all too unwittingly signifying that perplexity in the language and thought expressed in the pulpit (Browne, 1976: 33).

Browne would probably have concurred with Adrian Hastings’ opinion that in the ebb and flow of the intellectual tide in the twentieth century, the 1950s marked a high water point of sympathy for the Christian faith in contrast to the high point for secularism immediately after World War I (Hastings, 1986: 491), but he nevertheless argued that effective preaching required new symbols because new human knowledge has disabled the old ones (Browne, 1976: 107). Hastings, looking back on the times in which Browne wrote, asserts:

There was never a time since the middle of the nineteenth century when Christian faith was either taken so seriously by the generality of the more intelligent or could make such a good case for itself.

(Hastings, 1986: 491)

Browne himself is rather more querulous in his reflections and quotes approvingly from Emmanuel Mounier:

There is a comfortable atheism, as there is a comfortable Christianity. They meet on the same swampy ground, and their collisions are the ruder for their awareness and irritable resentment of the weakening of their profound differences beneath the common kinship of their habits. The prospect of personal annihilation no more disturbs the contented sleep of the average radical-socialist than does horror of the divine transcendence or terror of reprobation disturb the spiritual digestion of the habitués of the midday Mass. Forgetfulness of these truisms is the reason why so many discussions are still hampered by naïve susceptibilities. Emmanuel Mounier, *The Spoil of the Violent*, Harvill Press, 1955: 25 (as cited in Browne, 1976: 109)

Browne was conscious that amongst the comforts of wide social acknowledgement and respect other more challenging forces were becoming apparent.

Browne is wary of any intellectual triumphalism on the part of preachers and insists that in attempting to address the atheist, or the wholly religiously indifferent 'unperturbed' post-atheist, it is always necessary to establish pastoral rapport first (1976: 110). Sometimes, he admits, such rapport will be impossible to establish (1976: 110). Paradoxically, as Hastings notes (1986: 492, 496), the 1950s were at one and the same time an era in which religion was considered seriously by a number of the great cultural and intellectual figures of the day (such as Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957), Carl Jung (1875-1961), Graham Sutherland (1903-80), Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), to name just a few) and in which the radical agnosticism and secularism born of earlier times also flourished (for examples see the works of A.J. Ayer (1910-89), C.P. Snow (1905-80), A.J.P. Taylor (1906-90) and Hugh Trevor-Roper (1914-2003)). Perhaps it was that Browne realized in a way other preachers did not, that although these two worlds of thought existed side by side the competition between them was not in any way equal. As Hylson-Smith observes, by the end of World War II the environmental context of all cultural activity was essentially secular (1998: 212). That point was a matter of essential concern to a preacher like Browne who regarded sermons as an artistic activity requiring similar processes of social understanding and interaction as those necessary to the production of music, poetry or painting (Browne, 1976: 18). Browne writes rather ruefully:

Christians have the naïve idea that the arts, specially drama, could and should be extensively used for the proclamation of the gospel. In the first place Christian artists cannot easily and quickly find a way of expressing Christian doctrine in a community which is not moved by Christian symbols. Indeed at present there is no common symbolism Christian or otherwise and Christian artists are found incomprehensible and disturbing by their fellow Christians who cannot justify the authority of new forms and somehow feel that old forms might be patched and

brought up-to-date. In the second place whenever the church tries to use art as a method of propaganda her integrity and authority are severely questioned by just those whose conversion would be most significant. (1976: 35)

There is here an early recognition of that social forgetfulness of Christian symbols that would a generation later become a commonplace assessment of religious traditions in contemporary Britain.

For Browne the preacher's purpose was to seek answers about the most profound aspects of human concern and experience with the single-mindedness and commitment of an honest artist. Easy answers to difficult questions, or formulaic responses to deep questioning, were to Browne a betrayal of preaching's very purpose. For him nothing less than the artist's earnest wrestling to express the inexpressible was good enough. It is hard to imagine that Browne was untroubled that the things of artistic expression, with one or two notable exceptions, seemed less and less concerned with religious ideas, and that the churches appeared indifferent to the fact (Hylson-Smith, 1998: 212).

As favourable to inherited ideas of religious expression as the climate of the 1950s appears viewed from the beginning of the twenty-first century, Browne, as a preacher active during those years, offers an altogether less sanguine appraisal. That his book dwells extensively on the issue of meaning and the use of language in relationship to the expression of faith indicates that he did not share the easy certainties regarding the communication of religious ideas that were still prevalent within the institutional church of his day. Browne's commitment to preaching as a necessary part of Christian community life is absolute, but his insistence that its practice is most like the creation of a work of art or a poem makes plain its inherent limitations: the sermon can no more readily define the truth in absolute terms than can the artist or poet (1976: 18). Such an insistence shifts the authority given to preaching from one of power, described as 'six foot above contradiction', to the altogether different position implied in later years by terms such as Ford's communicative 'expertise which is self-authenticating' (Ford, 1979: 235), or Taylor's 'fragile words' (Taylor, 1998: 121). Like such

later homileticians, Browne believed preachers should not claim too much for their efforts.

That reserve, however, should not be mistaken for a hesitation about the necessity or value of preaching. In his work there is no hint of the thought of later theorists who sought to abandon preaching completely. Browne's reserve is a perceptive awareness that, to use the terminology of Adrian Hastings, although the 'comfortably traditionalist' church of his times was undergoing 'a period of confident revival' (1986: 504) it was in fact finding it harder and harder to connect with the generality of people in terms of shared symbols and meanings. Browne was ahead of his time in his recognition that the changing social context of ministry had direct ramifications for the power and authority of the preacher. He wrote:

What ministers of the Word say may seem too little to live on, but they must not go beyond their authority in a mistaken attempt to make their authority strong and clear. That going beyond is always the outcome of an atheistic anxiety, or a sign that the man of God has succumbed to the temptation to speak as a god, to come in his own name and to be his own authority. (Browne, 1976: 40)

Such sentiments are echoed in the more recent application of contemporary philosophy to preaching by the American scholar John S. McClure (2001). Nevertheless, in terms of homiletic theory in Britain in the twentieth-century, Browne's was a voice that offered a new appreciation of the actual communicative environment in which sermons were placed. His book demonstrates that the radical calling into question of the methodologies of preaching pre-dates both the crisis noted by such commentators as Ford (1979) or Jensen (1993) and the colloquial assumption that in the 1950s, before the widespread use of television, the place of the sermon was assured.

This concern about preaching's power to engage attention indicates that the shifts that will be analysed when this study returns to the consideration of collective memory must extend wide enough to include responses such as those of Browne. The unease with homiletic methodology that Browne's work expressed

provides a justification for this review using his analysis as its historical starting point. Consequently, there now follows an overview of trends in preaching since Browne's book that aims to provide both general orientation and a framework within which works discussed later can be placed.

2.4 Trends in the theory and practice of preaching since the mid 1950s.

O.C. Edwards in his *A History of Preaching* notes that the 25 year period ending in 1955 turned out to be the high-point of the social standing and influence of traditional Protestant churches (2004: 665). Whilst that judgement may seem too effusive and unqualified when applied to the United Kingdom, it does, nevertheless, indicate the reality of the institutional confidence that was prevalent in churches on both sides of the Atlantic at the time. That confidence had direct ramifications for preaching: as Hastings puts it, 'in the immediate post-war years preaching as both art and edifying was still alive and cherished' (1986: 462). The comment comes in a passage in *A History of English Christianity 1920 - 1985* (1986: 436-472) that deals with the Free Churches, in which Hastings cites the influential preaching ministries of Leslie Weatherhead (1893-1975), W.E. Sangster (1900-1960), and Donald Soper (1903-1998)—all of whom drew large numbers to hear them preach. In the same section of his book, however, comes this stark conclusion:

The mid-1950s can be dated pretty precisely as the end of the age of preaching: people suddenly ceased to think it worthwhile listening to a special preacher. Whether this was caused by the religious shift produced by the liturgical movement or by the spread of television or by some other alteration in human sensibility is not clear. But the change is clear. (1986: 465)

Hastings is perhaps a little too hesitant in his judgement about what prompted this change. Although numerous theological and social factors were obviously

significant, the turn towards television as a predominating pastime must surely have been the crucial prompter of change in the way people spent their time.

That preaching, at the beginning of the 1950s at least, remained dominated by agendas and styles drawn from previous generations is evident in the fact that a number of books from those earlier times remained in frequent use. Bishop Phillips Brooks had delivered his eight lectures on preaching at Yale Divinity School in the Lyman Beecher Lectureship of January and February 1877, but his advice was still considered pertinent enough to warrant the publication of a British fifth edition in 1957. Similarly, Harry Emerson Fosdick's Lyman Beecher lectures of the winter of 1923-4, entitled *The Modern Use of the Bible*, were last re-issued in their published form as late as 1961; and Leslie Weatherhead's Lyman Beecher lectures of 1948-9, although only published in part in his book *Psychology, Religion and Healing* in 1957, was re-issued in 1974. Two crucial points are suggested by the longevity of these works: first, although the 1950s do indeed mark a watershed in preaching's social location, it is clear that the consequences of that change were not apparent with the same force, nor at the same rate, everywhere in the English-speaking world; and second, the Lyman Beecher Lectureship itself is potentially a very useful barometer of key issues in homiletic theory through the period of time with which this study is concerned.

The Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching at Yale Divinity School was established by the gift of a wealthy businessman called Henry W. Sage on 12 April 1871. It was awarded in memory of Lyman Beecher (1775 - 1863), a Presbyterian and Congregationalist minister who had studied at Yale College and one of whose sons, Henry Ward Beecher, was the minister of Sage's church. The gift specified that the lectureship be given to 'a minister of the Gospel, of any evangelical denomination who has been markedly successful in the special work of the Christian ministry' (Bibliography of the Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching, 2007: 1). As the award is occasionally shared, there have been more than 60 lectureships since 1950. Most of the lectures have been published in book form. Many of those who have been lecturers have been leading practitioners of preaching within the various homiletic movements this review

will describe. For example, both Harry Emerson Fosdick (1923-4 series) and Leslie Weatherhead (1948-9 series) gave prominence to the problems of ordinary life in their preaching and are exemplars of a sermon style that was eager to use psychological insights; H.H. Farmer (1945-6 series) had much more sympathy with the biblical theology movement and, like James Stewart (1951-2 series), saw preaching as first and foremost an exposition and proclamation of the divine revelation contained within Scripture; Fred Craddock (1977-8 series) was the founder of the New Homiletic movement and along with C. Frederic Buechner (1976-7 series) gave prominence to narrative and an inductive style of presentation; Gardner C. Taylor (1975-6 series) and Henry H. Mitchell (1973-4 series) are both distinguished orators within the African-American tradition and are exemplars of a virtuoso ‘oral art’ style of sermonising. Social activism has been represented in the lectureship in the persons of Donald Soper (1959-60 series) and William Sloane Coffin (1979-80 series); feminist perspectives are present in the persons of Phyllis Tribble (1981-2 series) and Margaret Farley (1990-1 series); and the reinvigorated interest in homiletics within the Roman Catholic community is represented by Walter J. Burghardt (1993-4 series). Although not every significant movement in homiletics within the period is mentioned—for example, liturgical, evangelistic, and post-Christendom models are absent—nevertheless the lecture series offers some firsthand evidence for the changes that are the concern of this study.

The content of the various lectureships, along with more general changes and developments in preaching practices and styles, are grouped by Edwards into eight broad areas. Those categories are: (1) pastoral counselling through preaching, (2) the impact of biblical theology, (3) the influence of the liturgical movement, (4) the emergence of African American preaching in the majority culture, (5) new forms of social protest preaching, (6) the homiletical results of the widespread opening of ordination to women, (7) changes in evangelistic preaching, and (8) the trends referred to collectively as ‘the New Homiletic’ (1986: 664).

Edwards’ typology is, of course, based primarily on the contemporary American scene out of which he writes. Nevertheless, with a few necessary

provisos, the schema provides a fair representation of British changes as well. That said, it is not the case that British and American experiences can be simply and straightforwardly woven together as directly comparable without further comment. Significant contextual and epistemological differences cannot be ignored—as will become more obvious when collective memory and sermon practice are examined in later chapters. In recent generations the absolute dominance of American scholarship in matters of homiletic theory means that it forms the backdrop of all serious discussion of the issues. That influence and the fortuitous nature of a shared common language mean that there has been, and remains, a constant interweaving of interests, concerns, and methodologies between Britain and the USA. At least six Lyman Beecher lectureships since 1950 have been awarded to ministers of British origin—although, interestingly, all of them in the earlier years of the period under review. Given that close relationship, this review of necessity draws extensively on American texts.

Edwards' eight categories are not to be taken as subsequent to each other, and most of the trends identified are still developing and changing. For example, it is as yet unclear whether recent works like *Get Up Off your Knees: Preaching the U2 Catalog* (Whiteley and Maynard, 2003), and similar efforts at working closely with materials drawn from popular culture, should be viewed as an outworking of the logic of the New Homiletic, a development of evangelistic style, or a new genre in its own right. Likewise, the application of deconstructionist thought and linked contemporary philosophical perspectives seen in works such as *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (McClure, 2001) and *Preaching with a Cupped Ear: Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics as Postmodern Wor(l)d* (Bullock, 1999) are, arguably, taking matters into whole new areas of practice. Whilst acknowledging, then, both the awareness that this schema of trends does not necessarily include every significant development and that the trends detailed are not in any sequential order, the contours of an historical pattern has been established well enough to provide a framework in which particular texts can be situated.

2.5 Representative preaching practitioners and theorists.

The biblical theology movement, particularly influential from the mid-1940s until the mid-1960s, with its ‘salvation-history’ approach to the Scriptures, had a profound effect on sermonic style (McKim, 1996: 30). In the UK, that effect is perhaps most clearly exemplified in the preaching and academic works of Norman H Snaith (1898-1982), see for example his *Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (1944). The biblical theology movement, although fluid and diverse, was often reinforced by the neo-orthodox reaction against liberalism, and drew inspiration from influences that were current well before the period under review. For example, Karl Barth’s seminal *Commentary on the Epistle to the Roman*, first published in English translation in 1933, and C.H. Dodd’s tiny but profoundly influential *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development* of 1936. From such works, and others, there has developed a sermonic style that sees preaching as the tool of an encounter between God and humanity that should disclose the distinctive worldview of the Bible. Following Barth, it urges the primacy of God’s revelation over any human thought and action, and, with Dodd, it requires that preaching, if it is to be in the New Testament pattern, must be an act of proclamation that provokes decision and change.

In contrast, in liturgical preaching the focussing motif is no longer decision but rather incorporation. Drawing its inspiration from the continental liturgical movement and the initial work of Dom Lambert Beauduin (1873-1960) on the centrality of worship in discipleship, and the flowering of that understanding in the liturgical reforms of Vatican II (1962-5), liturgical preaching has come to be a principal form in many Christian traditions. It is often associated with a communitarian outlook, and aims to adopt a participative style that draws the congregation into a shared tradition. The liturgical calendar and the lectionary, usually in the form of the three-year *Revised Common Lectionary* (1992), are the organising bases for sermons that are always closely related to other aspects of the liturgy in which they are placed.

Preaching based on the perspectives of the pastoral care movement, like that related to the biblical theology movement, draws its primary influences from a time before World War II. Its most influential practitioner by far was Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878 - 1969), whose impact on the practice of preaching whilst he was Minister of Riverside Church, New York (1931-51) can hardly be exaggerated. Fosdick required that every sermon should preach to a problem and that out of that consideration faith should spur people to overcome the problem. The listener had to be challenged to live by what was said; and in this sense the preacher is always primarily a pastor. This was an approach that was always willing to draw heavily on the social sciences, exemplified in this country by Leslie Weatherhead's ministry in the City Temple from 1936 to 1960 and his extensive use of psychology (Weatherhead, 1952).

A very different style is apparent in modern evangelistic preaching which, whilst being highly critical of 'worldly ways', often wholeheartedly employs modern media techniques. Billy Graham is perhaps the most widely known of this kind of preacher: from 1949 he utilized radio, films, and television in the service of a direct and person-focussed call to response (Graham, 1959). The insistence on a personal conversion experience has become a style absolutely at home in a media world, at once both wholly accommodating of consumerist communication values yet insisting on the sinfulness of human institutions. This is a homiletic style that is at home with mass audiences through whatever medium and yet remains intensely practical and expository. While the British version of this perspective has been less engaged with mass media expression, it is nevertheless just as wholeheartedly committed to personal conversion. Influential examples of this style of practice in Britain include Lloyd-Jones (1971); Stott (1982, 1996, and 2003); and English (1996).

Homiletic texts that have remained in print and in use many years after their original publication (for example, Brookes 1877, and Fosdick, 1924) assume that the preacher is male, which is likely to be one of the factors why they can no longer be counted as contenders to remain in use in many Christian churches. As Day puts it:

The pulpit is a place of power and it is not surprising that much [recent homiletic] writing has concentrated on the role of the preacher, particularly when he is male, white and Western, himself a representative of the mighty who are due to be put down from their seats.

(Day, 2005: 4)

Although male preachers remain in the majority, the increasing numbers of female practitioners is undoubtedly changing both the content and style of contemporary preaching. Whether practitioners claim a feminist perspective or simply require that a genuinely different authority and style be acknowledged, it is clear that women bring distinctive assumptions and new ways of approaching the task (see for example, Walton and Durber (1994); or Tisdale, (2001)). Out of these changes comes concern with social inclusion, inclusive language, modified images, and an appeal to a more communal basis for the preacher's authority that at the same time is willing to include personal stories.

Of the trends Edwards (2004) identifies, that of the emergence of African American preaching into the majority consciousness appears at first sight to be the most difficult to transpose into the British scene. Perhaps, however, that hesitancy is more about differing timescales, TV exposure and political circumstance, than a comment on the relative importance of the experiences of Black Christians. The vitality of Black churches in England (according to Brierley, 2003: 9.14, African and Caribbean Pentecostal Churches in England have more than doubled their membership in the last 15 years) and the media prominence of Joel Edwards (General Director of the Evangelical Alliance 1997 to 2008), are indicators that the distinctive voice of Black preaching is increasingly important. This is not to suggest, however, that Black preaching in England should be viewed through the lens of American experience, but rather that such commonalities as the emphasis on performance, musicality and a presentation that recognizes the importance of folk idiom, cannot be ignored in reviewing contemporary homiletic practice.

An awareness in recent times of social activism as a key homiletic focus almost certainly finds its origin in the preaching of one African American, namely

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-68). Whilst the American civil rights movement of the 1960s gave a particular prominence to the eloquence and power of the pulpit it was not the only area where sermons have been explicitly framed to work for social justice. In his London preaching ministry Donald Soper consistently spoke in terms of social salvation and social justice. John Collins (1905-82), Colin Winter (1928-81), Trevor Huddleston (1913-98), and others, repeatedly used the pulpit as a platform against apartheid in South Africa. And Mgr Bruce Kent (born 1929) has similarly utilized the sermon in the service of nuclear disarmament. The perspectives of liberation theology have found their way into homiletic theory through the influential collection of dialogue-sermons *The Gospel in Solentiname* (Cardenal, 1977), which transcribes group reflections on lectionary texts based around the community work organized by Cardenal, a Roman Catholic priest, then working in an impoverished area on the shores of Lake Nicaragua. In all these expressions of preaching, history is seen as the arena of redemption and concern for the material welfare of people—especially the poorest—is paramount. This is preaching that is absolutely explicit in its contextual perspective or provenance, and which asserts a clear social location as its principal strength and obligation.

The final trend identified by Edwards (2004), namely those ideas and methods that are termed the New Homiletic, has already been mentioned in the introduction but, for the sake of clarity, some of its identifying components need to be detailed here so that texts mentioned later can be placed in an appropriate developmental framework. By the 1950s the notion that preaching had become overly propositional and didactic was becoming more and more commonplace (see Browne, 1958; and Davis, 1958), albeit Fosdick had taken this line as early as the 1920s. By the 1970s that criticism had started to become an explicit movement within the practice of preaching that shifted the process of sermon creation and delivery from a deductive, logical style where all the authority lay with the preacher, to an inductive, open-ended approach requiring participative creative effort from the listener as well as the preacher. Instead of depositing information in the minds of the hearers, those who follow this method try to evoke participation through a suspense-filled and engaging process of discovery.

In this method, preaching begins with concrete experience; the first person voice predominates, and much stress is given to narrative, plot and dramatic expectation. Fred B. Craddock's *As One Without Authority* (1971) is generally cited as the first book to offer a full and reasoned advocacy of this position. The New Homiletic is the most extensively distributed and applied of all the trends Edwards details, and although not every preacher employing this method claims the title 'new homiletician', its impact is clear in the work of Gilmore (1996), Dennis (1992), Buechner (1977), Taylor (1998), Lowry (1997) and Bausch (1984), and in the publications and practice of numerous other individuals.

2.6 The measure of criticism or sympathy: the cultural dilemma of preaching.

For the purposes of this thesis the trends in preaching style identified above were detailed in order to facilitate an examination in this section of what social mnemonics are embedded, explicitly or implicitly, in the practice each author advocates by example or theoretical reflection. Of course, sometimes those social mnemonics are obvious and apparent in the perspective adopted. Preaching methodologies that seek to give new prominence to voices previously marginalized or ignored often do so via an explicit appeal to memories that need to be recovered or re-constructed. The point is forcefully made by the title of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's 1983 study *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. Although that work is not directly aimed at homiletics, many preachers sympathetic to her analysis share the concern to reconstruct that which has been disregarded or deliberately silenced (see for example Walton and Durber (1994), or Tisdale (2001)). A very similar sense of the recovering of something forgotten is also present in preaching and Biblical interpretation from the perspective of poverty; examples include Cardenal (1977), Gutiérrez (1997), and Sugirtharajah (1991).

In other styles of preaching, however, the appeal to recollection, recovery, or maintenance of memories, is neither explicitly stated nor even

implied. This is perhaps the most serious criticism that can be levelled against the inductive method of the New Homiletic. In its employment of ‘life situations’ as starting points from which the preacher is to induce dynamic connections to Biblical texts it assumes a pre-knowledge no longer there. Arguably, most contemporary believers in Britain no longer have the inherited or formally learnt framework of Christian narrative, symbols and doctrine that was commonplace in previous generations. This is an issue that will be returned to in the later chapter on the contemporary sociology of religion. In the meantime it is worth making the point that even those at home in preaching practices of a much more traditional hue than the New Homiletic face very similar problems. A concern to guard either the authority of Scripture, or the worshipping tradition in which it is heard, does not necessarily make it any easier for the understandings and practices advocated to be incorporated into a vital and ongoing memory. Halbwachs’ ideas are suggestive of a need for strong group bonds to be essential to such remembering if wider social supports no longer apply. The growth of churches with explicit and clear boundaries established around the place afforded the Bible, ethnicity, or particular worship practices, are perhaps evidence of that.

All the various identifiable movements in preaching mentioned can be clearly located as broadly either culture-sympathetic, or culture-critical, in terms of the relationship with cultural discourse beyond the confines of the congregation. The strategies and arguments, as applied to preaching and other Christian communication, can be situated along a continuum from a cultural pessimism, which requires a separation of preaching practice from the ‘ways of the world,’ to a cultural accommodation which requires preaching to apply new techniques drawn from the wider communicative world.

At the culturally pessimistic end, Michael Budde, is perhaps typical. He writes:

In our day, after centuries of understating the demands of the Christian life, church leaders confront a situation in which the thin formation offered to the majority of Catholics is so easily overwhelmed by the global culture industries that have captured and monopolized the

attention of nearly everyone in advanced industrial countries. (Budde, 1997: 95)

Budde's pessimism is profound: and he writes of television destroying the learning responses essential to the maintenance of the faith. In other words, his is a point of view that sees the Christian social memory as being destroyed by changes in the surrounding culture. His development of the contextual argument outlined previously suggests that television is so accessible because its 'codes' of understanding and representation 'ape' those of the human mind and its processes. This means that people need very little mental effort to become relatively deeply engaged with a television programme (Budde, 1997: 76). Television fools viewers into believing that they belong to a new community of people identified by whatever motifs dominate in the genre of programme to which they have become attached. Budde contrasts this with traditional religious expression, which often needs both effort and sustained training if it is fruitfully to engage people (69). At one level, public religious expression often seems over elaborate and complex in comparison to a television programme, yet at the level of technology and rehearsal the reverse is actually the case. In effect, almost by sleight of hand, television destroys the viewer's skill for sustained religious learning (82f).

Budde supports the view that the fragmented form of television presentation, demonstrated in quickly changing images and short spoken sections, has become our preferred communication form. As a consequence, sustained attention becomes difficult in all areas of living. According to Budde, TV culture thereby alters the pace of all lived experience (1997:88). Traditionally, he says, religious expression has worked in an incremental way where over the course of years an individual develops religious wisdom allied to sacramental type expressions of growing maturity (69). He poses the question that perhaps the constant flow of information and entertainment is displacing entirely older notions of value formation and habit formerly employed by religions. The echo in this of collective memory's insistence on the significance of a gradually changing social

milieu is significant. The gradualism of traditional patterns does not fit easily with the immediacy of TV culture.

According to Budde, television is essentially consumerist in that it turns everything into a commodity to be consumed by the viewer (1997: 77). This means that what is produced must be easily 'buyable': in other words, intellectually demanding thoughts, and arguments that require subtlety and long development, do not feature. The viewer is trained to believe all thought can be instantly and easily accessed. The comfort, colour, endless variety, and accessibility of the shopping mall is the model against which television measures itself (44). Anything that cannot be 'packaged' and consumed in this way is simply not voiced; and since television appears to cover all the essentials of existence, these unvoiced elements must be non-essentials. Budde asserts that this is precisely the position of serious religion; television culture reduces it to a non-essential. The fact that even regular worshippers spend enormously more time on TV than on their practice of religion supports the point, according to Budde (82). Again a thought allied to collective memory's understanding of the part played in memory by an active sense of social belonging.

In Budde's analysis of popular usage television is assumed to be able to describe anything. It is all-embracing, and the need to fill hours of programming time means it is constantly expanding the areas it regards as appropriate to the medium. Nothing of real consequence is left with any autonomy in terms of social space and time. This is particularly the case with faith, which is seen as having no space of its own. With the prime time of attention filled by culture industries, what remains for prayer is marginal, residual and second-rate (1997: 87). Such is the power of TV, that even the best and most committed of contemporary religious practice appears enfeebled when compared to what happened in the past. Budde's conclusion is stark:

With so many hours of human existence in the thrall of commercial culture industries, with human attention surrounded by barkers and enticers and noisemakers, the quiet but single-minded call to the gospel cannot be heard. (1997: 96)

For Budde, the Church's very survival depends on a renewed and empowered ecclesiology that can create and maintain intentional gathered communities of disciples who find their primary point of reference and identity (1997: 125) within those communities. Preaching, like every other faith activity, needs to have the maintenance of such communities as an essential priority. For Budde, and the numerous theologians who follow similar but varying perspectives (see for example, Milbank (1990), Hauerwas and Willimon, (1989), or Newbigin (1989)), preaching as part of the corpus of Christian lived tradition must inherently be a sustained critique of the consumption dominated culture of wider society, both in content and presentation style. Without such an essentially negative stance, preaching is reduced to a pointless and ineffective toying with ideas on the margins of largely godless consumer populism. Inevitably, therefore, for analysts adopting this perspective, Christians have little or nothing positive to learn from modern communications practice.

Christian strategists at the cultural accommodation end of the spectrum are much more willing to employ methods and understandings drawn from the populist communications world. Richard A Jensen is a theologian and preacher who has published numerous works (for example, 1980, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2005) addressing the issues of preaching in a cultural environment dominated by the mass media. His discussion of how preaching is related to wider developments in society generally is worth examining in some detail because, unlike Budde, he lays great emphasis on the way that culture prior to the electronic era has given shape to the very thing we call preaching (1993: 33). In terms of the argument of this thesis, Jensen's perspective suggests that a sense of Christian belonging, and the memory that goes with it, are profoundly shaped by whatever is the dominant form of communication in a given society. The logic of Budde's argument is that earlier cultural discourse was preaching-friendly in a way that contemporary culture is not. Jensen suggests a rather more complex developmental dynamic in which the preaching form has shifted with cultural changes. Jensen believes that what we generally understand by preaching has been wholly shaped by printing and the huge growth since early modern times of the number of those who can read. He terms this as preaching in a literate culture, and marks the year 1454,

when the first movable type printing in Europe began, as the beginning of the process (1993: 27).

Jensen (1993) divides the history of Christian communication into three eras: Pre-literate; Literate; and Post-literate. In the Pre-literate era—the first fourteen hundred years of Christianity—oral forms of communication were absolutely dominant. In the Literate era, the written form dominated communication practice, and produced a spoken version of itself in which concepts and ideas were the currency. In the Post-literate era, now rapidly advancing because of the electronic media, the written form is giving way to a new orality which is much more closely related to pre-literate forms (45-55).

According to Jensen (in this he is following Marshall McLuhan, 1962), the printing press greatly accelerated changes that had already begun with the use of a phonetic alphabet (1993: 30). Such an alphabet produces a break between eye and ear, between semantic meaning and visual code, as meaningless signs are linked to meaningless sounds. For example, the expression ‘a bat’ is in no way directly representational of the thing to which it refers; the code – the letters ‘a’ ‘b’ and ‘t’ and the way they are ordered – signifies a sound which represents an object (or a creature!) without any picture or picture-like presentation of the object signified. Printing, by allowing a speedy and cheap reproduction of such codes, exponentially increased the number of codes, and prompted in human discourse a profound and irretrievable break in the primitive association between seeing and meaning. Where the old oral culture massaged the ear, writing and the printing that followed it, massages the eye. Accordingly, printing produced a radical shift in human consciousness. Indeed, says Jensen, it amounted to new software for the brain and vastly increased the use and range of words (31). People learnt to think in linear patterns, so the mind learnt to think like an eye.

Jensen says these social changes clearly had a radical impact on the practice of preaching. Print is situated in space and, therefore, spatial categories came to dominate preaching (1993: 37-38). This means that preachers at home in the context of the literate era, first structure their ideas in space, and then design

their sermons in ways consistent with the patterns of the printed page. The ‘typographical mind,’ as Jensen terms it, produces an oratory consistently marked by three design elements, namely: it is propositional in content and communicates ideas in a largely assertive style; it demands to be understood, and therefore dwells on explicit meanings and seriousness of intent; and finally, it follows a line of thought, that is, it is logical in argument and form (37).

The typographical mind produces what Jensen calls ‘Gutenberg homiletics’, which are aimed first and foremost at the hearers’ minds (1993: 7). The goal of such preaching is to teach the lessons of the text, which usually involves abstracting points of meaning from the text. These points are developed into a spoken presentation that orders them in a logical, sequential and linear manner (38). The sermon, although it may be delivered in any one of a number of ‘voice styles’ (conversational, rhetorical, didactic, etc.), is prepared under the criteria that apply to written materials. The faith engendered in the hearers is ‘faith’ that the ideas are true (55). Accordingly, Jensen suggest that ‘print shaped preaching’ is always a structuring of ideas in space, as it were, where propositions are the main content and the style is relatively distant and analytical. Such preaching is generally highly conceptual, even abstract in tone; and if it uses stories they are likely to be employed only as dispensable illustrations.

Like Budde, Jensen is concerned that preaching in what might appropriately be labelled the ‘traditional’ mode no longer easily finds a response in contemporary society. Some of the reasons cited by Jensen for that lack of social connection reflect conclusions of Budde’s analysis. For example, just like Budde, Jensen makes much of the enticing character of television. He says television is polymorphic in that at any one time it appeals to a range of human emotions and needs; it massages many human senses simultaneously (1993: 47). By comparison, traditional preaching born of ‘Gutenberg homiletics,’ seems cold, uninvolved, boring and remote. Like Budde, Jensen notes the inherently deeply engaging nature of television which involves the whole of a viewer's sensorium. For example, a TV prize quiz show seems easily to incorporate components including emotional, intellectual, entertaining, and envious aspects that excite and

stimulate, whereas preaching looks like nothing more than unmoved listening. Unlike Budde, however, Jensen advocates not an intentional withdrawal from the styles and structures of the mass media age but rather a close attention to those structures in order to incorporate appropriate aspects of them into homiletic practice. For Jensen, the changes prompted by the development of the technology of movable type printing, provides a model for responses to the development of the technology of electronic media (114).

Jensen asserts that in order to speak to changed people in a changing communicative world the Church must speak in changed ways. Preaching should not have understanding as its goal, but a properly nuanced proclamation that is alert to the positive changes in the communicative environment in which it is set (again he is closely following McLuhan, (1962) and (1964); as well as Ong, (1981) and (1982)). For this proclamation Jensen espouses a deliberate recovery of the skills of an oral culture, since they are much closer to those used in a televisual culture than the methods of the typographical age. In particular, from his analysis of how television programmes are designed and engage their audience, Jensen strongly asserts the need for a return to the prominence of story in both sermon design and delivery. He writes:

Frankly, it is difficult to communicate ideas through the mass media. Mass media seldom attempt to communicate ideas. Mass media almost always work through story. People are accustomed to experiencing reality through story. Sermons that work in story fashion imitate the way television most usually works. (Jensen, 1993: 63)

Changed to such a story style, sermons would include lots of repetition, a tone of conflict working towards resolution, and be situational in content with stories simply ‘stitched’ together (109-110). Television is best at narrative not data; therefore narrative has become the reflexive way of processing reality.

Translate this into preaching and the appropriate sermon style for the twenty-first century is one that is intimate, self-disclosing, and conversational, in which narrative and metaphor are paramount and the older linear, argued, and

conceptual approach is to be dispensed with entirely. Jensen believes the gospel is never an idea, and that attention to the preferred methods of the electronic media can restore to Christians their connection with the faith as a tradition to be lived rather than a body of knowledge to be assimilated. This means thinking in story as well as delivering stories. He asserts:

We simply let the story do its work. We let the story work because the reality we are seeking to bring alive is something more than idea. Through the stories we tell we are seeking to make the gospel happen in human lives. This is a very different goal from one that seeks to explain the gospel. (Jensen, 1993: 113)

Here is the conception of the sermon as ‘gospel event in itself’ rather than as a distanced ‘teaching about’ that must be remembered in order to be applied outside the forum of worship. This style gives full credence to the power of narrative; but perhaps, in the current social climate, naively assumes a powerful pre-existing familiarity with Christian tradition and symbols on the part of the hearers.

2.7 Acknowledging contemporary cultural change in the practice of preaching.

Although the analyses of both Jensen and Budde have in common many of the details of the diagnosis of the changed relationship between preaching and the wider patterns of human discourse in contemporary society, their proposals about what this then requires of preachers could hardly be more different. Jensen advocates applying methodologies from contemporary social communication structures in ways that encourage preachers ‘to preach differently’ (Mitchell, 1999: 15) in the expectation of thereby restoring the effectiveness and authority of preaching. Budde believes those same communication structures to be so inherently corrosive of gospel values that they must be systematically avoided in order to create a social space in which intentional communities owing nothing to their methods can be established. In terms of the relationship between preaching

and culture, the contrast is between reluctant accommodation or intense critique, between worried utilization of common culture's methods or a troubled absolute withdrawal from that culture, between culture appropriated as a tool or alienation from culture's methods and understandings.

The core issue this thesis seeks to examine is the role of contemporary preaching in the maintenance and creation of Christianity as a lived wisdom. That lived wisdom that maintains, consciously and unconsciously, distinctively Christian sets of ways of seeing life, is understood here as a Christian *habitus*—to apply a term borrowed from Bourdieu (1977). Further, this aims to be a study of what those currently involved in the practice of preaching actually 'do' with it, in the sense of what it achieves socially, and what preachers and hearers as 'producers' 'make' from it. This thesis will re-describe the practice of preaching as essentially consumptive production, that is, a discourse in which understandings and values are produced by a complex interplay of numerous social influences. The primary issue is not why preaching is so widely dismissed as an irrelevance, as Jensen and those of a similar persuasion might put it, but rather why in our secularized social environment preaching and listening to sermons, in relative numerical terms, still engages so many people. Can the endeavour of we who preach, and we who are preached to, be reframed as the maintenance of habitus without us all becoming Hauerwas and Willimon's (1989) 'resident aliens'? Budde's pessimism about the communicative environment in which we live becomes not a call for an impossible separation of preaching from that wider environment, but rather an examination of how the semeiocracy that is the Church can sustain itself, as it must if it is to survive, in a society 'in the thrall of commercial culture industries' (Budde, 1997: 96).

Although, as was pointed out above, both Budde and Jensen are exemplars of distinctive perspectives concerning the methods of preaching in a social milieu dominated by mass media, the notion that preaching had by the mid-twentieth century become overly propositional and didactic has been current since at least the 1950s. Two texts were especially significant in the beginnings of what eventually became a profound shift away from the dominance of the

propositional-didactic style, namely from the United States, H Grady Davis' 1958 book *Design for Preaching*, and from the United Kingdom, R.E.C. Browne's already mentioned work *The Ministry of the Word*, also published in 1958.

Davis maintained that content and form must not be treated as separate entities in the preaching task, but rather that sermons must always be designed with those two elements clearly congruent with one another. He wrote:

The relation of substance and form in the communication of thought is the kind of relation that exists between living tissue and organism. All life, every living thing we know, comes in some organic form. (Davis, 1958: 1)

Accordingly, he taught that a sermon, like a tree, should be alive in many parts, with each distinctive stem, branch, root and leaf serving the needs of the whole organism. Sermons were not to be ideas to be argued, but acorns to be grown. Davis' book created a new core organic metaphor for the task of preaching that came to overturn the cold propositional logical formalities of preaching.

Browne similarly saw preaching as a creative poetry-like encounter rather than a straightforwardly instructional exchange. He wrote, 'ultimately the preacher's work is to help people to be in a state of mind where perception is possible, that is, in a state where their minds are open and receptive to divine action' (1958: 80). Interestingly, given the date of its publication, Browne's study made much use of the idea of images; but in a more far reaching sense than the usual use of the term as referring to that which illustrates or simply attracts attention. For Browne, images were things which evoke the active participation of the will and the emotions, creating for the hearer/viewer new possibilities of understanding and experience. He wrote:

When a preacher releases his fellows from sightlessness and narrowness he is making a practical expression of his love of God and of his fellows which art makes possible. (1958: 27)

Accordingly, Browne asserted:

In a sense the sermon does not matter, what matters is what the preacher cannot say because the ineffable remains the ineffable and all that can be done is to make gestures towards it with the finest words that can be used. (1958: 27)

Browne was clear that preaching is more than either instruction in the faith or exhortation to encourage particular behaviour:

Sermons weighed down with instruction and exhortation breed images of inferiority which dominate the minds of those who preach them and of those who attend to them. The Gospel contains within it both instruction and exhortation; its presentation in clear images makes the best teaching possible, that is, when speaker and listeners are not too aware of teaching and learning. In the same way the best exhortation is made when speaker and listeners are not conscious of what is being done. To preach is not to teach a lesson nor is it to give moral exhortation; it is to make a statement which has the power to widen and deepen men's minds, stirring their desire to know and understand, moving them towards the discovery of the resolutions each should form. (1958: 89)

The preacher's skill, according to Browne, is to continually seek through doctrinal and Biblical awareness, combined with prayerful attention to people's lives, for the images that hearers can utilize for themselves:

The preacher does not seek to possess and direct others, he hopes that others may possess and control themselves. To this end he must have a threefold aim: first, to release people from all tautness of mind; secondly, to free them from the dominance of others and so deliver them from the burden of false obligations; thirdly, to prevent or break their dependence on him. In order to do this his language needs to be as evocative through its imagery as it is stimulating in the variety of its rhythms. It can be evocative in its imagery because he gives himself over to frequent and regular contemplation of the truths of the Gospel; it can be stimulating in its rhythms because of the deep confidence that comes

from accepting that the untidy mind is the truthful mind and that the untidy mind can only express itself in ambiguous language, rich in imagery. The minister of the Word's imagery is made powerful by his frequent attention to doctrine and to the concrete circumstances of particular men and women. Reflection on the particular gives rise to the metaphor to describe it and out of such metaphor universal images emerge. Images of universal stature cannot be intellectually constructed, they can only be recognized when they appear in the mind and they only appear in the mind that is both expectant and patient. (1958: 89)

Browne understood preaching as a work of art, with all the creative struggles and failures implied by such a description. Indeed, the notion of 'untidiness' in the process of development (though certainly not in delivery) is a theme that recurs frequently in his book. Like Grady Davis, Browne found preaching constructed in a deterministic propositional form an unconvincing, artless and emotionally remote process. For both of them, analogy and metaphor were the crucial tools of preaching: as Davis writes, 'the truth we preach is not an abstract thing. The truth is a Person' (Davis, 1958: 19).

2.8 The reactive nature of the New Homiletic.

Davis and Browne were, in their different ways, the earliest proponents of what was to become that profound shift in preaching practice and theory later known as 'the New Homiletic'. The organic sermon design of Davis and the poetic images of Browne became in the hands of the New Homileticians a conversation-like, multifaceted and suspense driven process in which the exegete was not the preacher but the listeners. As was mentioned earlier, starting from concrete experience rather than general principles, the New Homiletics saw itself as a liberating, inductive style of discourse in contrast to the authoritarian assumptions of a deductive style of thinking. Indeed Fred B Craddock, who is

often cited as the first full-blown advocacy of the New Homiletics, said that general truths and conclusions arrived at by the preacher in the privacy of the study always tended to oppress since, by their very nature and process of production, they treated a listening congregation as less than fully faithful and capable in thinking (1990). Accordingly, Craddock said the inductive process of discovery that preachers employed for themselves in the creation of a sermon, with its many loose ends and exciting twists-and-turns, should be replicated in the sermon itself. A sermon should not primarily deposit information in the mind of a hearer, but rather evoke a participation in a suspense-filled and deeply engaging process of discovery. In this style of preaching a first person voice predominates, with a great deal of stress given to narrative, plot, sequential movement of word images, and a sense of dramatic expectation. A comparison between the style and methodology of the New Homiletic and those of the inherited 'traditional' preaching methods produces sharp and distinctive contrasts: here sermons are shaped from the particular to the general, not from the generalized to the particular; the process in the pulpit is one of induction not deduction, and has about it a feeling of mobility that requires participation as against the logical, linear and ultimately 'remote' voice of the authoritative preacher of the earlier approach. Clarity of structure is provided in a life-like, story sense, not via a rational, systematized ordering of ideas. The New Homiletic aims to be evocative and plot-like rather than dependent on stimulating ideas expressed as such; in this way it is deliberately digressive and multi-layered without any sense of 'distilling texts' in order to express a yet deeper truth. Simply put, the New Homiletic works from 'itch to scratch', not from idea to application.

Even this cursory introduction to the New Homiletic makes plain the essentially reactive nature of the response advocated. In a culture in which public discourse is frequently characterized as having been democratized (in the sense of every person supposedly having a voice and in which the authoritative privileging of any one voice is highly suspect), the New Homileticians provide a methodology that fits with these assumptions. That the assumptions in themselves may mask profoundly disquieting social structures of unaccountable power and influence is, however, all too frequently sidestepped in the pursuit of a

homiletic that engages. Where that urge to engage becomes the all-dominating motivation of the sermon, the overall content inevitably tends towards an endless procession of human 'life stories', in which the gospel is obscured as much as disclosed. The things of Christian collective memory can be all too easily reduced to that which suits the inclinations of the individual, or which the preacher believes will suit the inclinations of the majority of the people present.

A key issue in this thesis is how preaching can be socially challenging or prophetic whilst at the same time employing the methodological strategies required of any public discourse in a mass media age. If the authority for meaning rests ultimately with the hearer/receiver, how can disquieting and challenging proclamation receive a response that does not blunt that edge of criticism? Or, to rephrase the question in a more sociological way, can preaching both conform to the competitive environment of a mass media world and challenge it? Collective memory has a direct bearing on the issue because, as will be discussed later (sections 6.6 and 7.5), to acknowledge its presentist force does not mean abandoning any notion of critique within its processes.

The analyses of both Jensen and Budde utilize the critique of 'traditional' preaching adopted by the New Homileticians; but, as has been said, they come to radically different conclusions about the continuing development of preaching in contemporary Western society. William Fore (1993: 61) alerts Christians to the dangers inherent in the fact that television (and one assumes by extrapolation, other aspects of mass media) in its fundamental connection with the spirit of capitalism may distort any religious message beyond recognition. Fore believes that people of faith should only 'use' television with the greatest of care, and should seek to give expression to alternate views of reality that are not subservient to capitalism (1993: 63). No doubt Budde's 'intentional gathered communities' should properly be associated with that concern. Jensen, however, is ready to adopt strategies and methodologies directly from the practices of the mass media in order to enable preaching to gain an audience. For him, those methodologies do not necessarily bring with them unacceptable and corrupting values. These two contrasting conclusions about the social location of preaching indicate the

broadness of the surrounding arena of debate to which the much more closely focussed argument of this thesis relates.

2.9 Towards the recovery of a proper homiletical rhetoric.

Although the problem of preaching in relationship to the wider communications environment has been introduced here as an issue consequent upon the changes produced by the contemporary dominance of the mass media in human discourse, the central question of the proper use of rhetoric in preaching has a very long history indeed. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430) prior to becoming a priest and bishop was the holder of the office of the imperial chair of rhetoric in Milan. Rhetorical practice was viewed with suspicion in the Church of the time, both because of its pagan associations, and its emphasis on technique which seemed to undervalue the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching. In *On Teaching Christianity (De doctrina Christiana)*, Augustine restated the principles of classical rhetoric, but transposed them into a close relationship with an authoritative view of the Bible. For Augustine, a proper use of rhetoric was a way of arming Christians to defend themselves against their detractors. As he wrote:

Rhetoric, after all, being the art of persuading people to accept something, whether it is true or false, would anyone dare to maintain that truth should stand there without any weapons in the hands of its defenders against falsehood; that those speakers, that is to say, who are trying to convince their hearers of what is untrue, should know how to get them on their side, to gain their attention and have them eating out of their hands by their opening remarks, while these who are defending the truth should not? That those should utter their lies briefly, clearly, plausibly, and these should state their truths in a manner too boring to listen to, too obscure to understand, and finally too repellent to believe? That those should attack the truth with specious arguments, and assert falsehoods, while these should be incapable of either defending the truth or refuting falsehood? That those, to move and force the minds of their hearers into error, should be able by their style to terrify them, move

them to tears, make them laugh, give them rousing encouragement, while these on behalf of truth stumble along slow, cold and half asleep? Could anyone be so silly as to suppose such a thing? (Augustine, 1992: 201)

At first reading such a strong advocacy of learnt technique might be taken as grounds for supporting Jensen's perspective on the preacher's contemporary dilemma; but Augustine's insistence on what he considered to be the essential functional components of eloquence requires a more nuanced appropriation of his thought. According to Augustine (borrowing from Cicero (106-43 BC) *De Oratore* 21, 69), Christian eloquence involves three components: the speaker must use speech so as to teach (that is, to be understood); to delight (that is, to engage attention and emotions); and to sway (that is, to make possible an ethical response in actions):

Of these three, the one put first, that is the necessity of teaching, is to be found in the things we are saying, the remaining two in the way we say it. Therefore the person who is saying something with the intention of teaching should not consider he has yet said anything of what he wants to the person he wishes to teach, so long as he is not understood. If on the other hand he also wishes to delight the person he is saying it to, or to sway him, he will not succeed in doing so whatever his way of saying it may have been; but in order to do so, it makes all the difference how he says it. (Augustine, 1992: 215)

In other words, Augustine believed that content and method need to work together and that none of the components of teaching, delighting and swaying can be ordinarily removed from the processes of Christian eloquence. He offers detailed advice on how to mix those three styles, and what weight to give to each in a variety of circumstances. Augustine quotes Cicero with earnest approval: 'Teaching your audience is a matter of necessity, delighting them a matter of being agreeable, swaying them a matter of victory' (1992: 215).

Thomas Long (2009), says that Augustine's typology can serve as markers of 'seasons' in the history of preaching in English over the last hundred

or so years. He says that the season of teaching gave way in the 1950s to the season of delight clearly exemplified by the exponents of the 'New Homiletic', but that the crisis to which that season was a response, namely the boredom created by overly didactic preaching in a time when television was becoming ever more popular, is no more. He argues that social change has altered the communicative context so profoundly that the narrative strategies of the New Homiletic cannot function effectively. He cites critics of the narrative focus of the New Homiletic from a variety of theological perspectives, and, in particular, notes that the inductive method depends on there being something 'out there' that can be educed in a sermon. Where that theological pre-knowledge is absent no such induction can take place (Long, 2009: 12). In a Biblically illiterate and theologically amnesic age the preaching style of delight is left with the impossibility of evoking engagement and understanding out of nothing. The basic vocabulary of faith is now so attenuated in public discourse that it cannot possibly function as ground from which to grow competent Christians. In the face of an absolute loss of knowledge, Long argues for a recovery of teaching in sermons that conscientiously works with all three aspects of Augustinian eloquence (2009: 18).

Long's anxieties raise, in a sharp way, the problems associated with the time-lag that exists between changing homiletic practice and the changing social context. Although the New Homiletic provides much in the way of method that connects directly to the expectations created by exposure to the mass media (as Jensen argues), it also fails to recognize and deal with the issue of power (as Budde argues) or the shifting intellectual pressures of recent social change (as Long argues). The totalizing action of the storytelling New Homiletician seems to absorb all human experience into a preacher devised narrative, and therefore appears as authoritarian as the principle-dominated propositional preachers of old.

It is clear that preaching as a problem is more than a fashionable prejudice born of a social world that is less and less sympathetic to institutional religion. Our symbolic environment is changing, not least as a consequence of the dominance of consumerism and the mass media in the life experience of most

people in the so-called Western world. This thesis argues that the powers of implicit values hidden within the processes of consumption and wielded by the institutions of consumption are both matters with which preaching style and content must contend. If the Church in the world is a canonical community of people who attempt to orientate themselves in living according to a canon of Christian practices and texts, it cannot be otherwise. Christians are in a constant cultural negotiation that works to order their lives in relation to the canons of the faith and life as it is presently lived and understood. Memory is the heart of the canon. Where the holding of a communal Christian memory goes unacknowledged it is in constant danger of being displaced by yet more persuasive and socially prevalent traditions. The problem of preaching in the circumstances of the present requires that the mechanics of social memory be analysed in some detail, and it is to that topic that this study now turns.

Chapter Three

Collective memory: making memory maintenance an imperative in preaching

3.1 Memory in society.

A review of references to the word ‘memory’ in contemporary homiletical literature is likely to disclose advice concerning strategies to aid sermon delivery through improved text recall from the preacher’s memory and little else (for example, Willimon and Lischer, (1995); Rogness, (1994); and Webb, (2001); a notable exception is McClure, (2001)). Amongst preachers and homiletic theoreticians, memory is most often treated in an instrumental and presentational frame, albeit very occasionally extended into consideration of receiver recall as an adjunct to discussion of human attention spans in a communicative environment dominated by television. In other words, memory is viewed in a psychological and largely individually focussed way. Undoubtedly such a perspective could fruitfully be extended by more vigorous application of psychological and brain science insights directed towards preaching in ways similar to those adopted by Atkins in considering liturgy more generally (Atkins, 2004). As the focus of this investigation, however, primarily addresses issues of theology and sociology, and their interrelationship, a more distinctly social dimension is its concern. Like recent works in historiography, for example Fentress and Wickham’s *Social Memory* (1992), and in cultural analysis, for example Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer’s *Acts of Memory* (1999), this analysis is directed towards memory in society rather than the individual.

As memories themselves are self-evidently held within individual minds such a social focus might, at first glance, seem problematic; but, as will be apparent in the discussion that follows, academic discussion across a range of

disciplines supports the potency of the concept of memory as a social fact (Fentress and Wickham, 1992: 7). This chapter will examine the foundations of that concept in the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), whilst a following chapter will examine the use of Halbwachs' work by contemporary sociologists of religion. Underlying the discussion is the argument this thesis seeks to advance, namely that preaching is a key aspect of the process of maintaining Christianity as a lived tradition. After the sociological usage of the concept of collective memory has been examined critically, the discussion in the latter part of this study will shift to applying the term to the practice of preaching, and to the provision of a sustained justification of preaching as memory management. This chapter, therefore, aims to provide some critically evaluated foundations on which to locate preaching within an ongoing process of memory articulation and creation. The ultimate goal is to delineate preaching's role in the maintenance and creation of Christianity as a lived wisdom.

3.2 The collective memory.

The concept of collective memory was first formulated by the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s in a development of perspectives associated with his mentor, Emile Durkheim. In the period 1925 to 1944 Halbwachs wrote three major works on the topic, namely *The Social Frameworks of Memory (Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire)* first published in 1925 and reissued in 1952; *The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land (La Topographie Légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte: Etudes de Mémoire Collective)* published in 1941 and reissued in 1971; and the incomplete text *The Collective Memory (La Mémoire Collective)* posthumously published in 1950, reissued in 1968, and published in English in 1980. Sections of the first two works, edited by Lewis Coser, were published in English in 1992.

According to Halbwachs, people normally acquire their memories in society (1992: 38): in other words, social relationships provide frameworks within which an individual is able to locate and thereby recollect memories. These

frameworks are localized, in the sense that they are provided by specific groups with ongoing rules and customs (1992: 55) to which individuals belong (52). They are also localized in the sense that they are generally related to specific places and times. Without such frameworks memory is simply impossible. Halbwachs cited dreams as indicators of just how fragmented and nonsensical memories are without society-provided frameworks (40). In dreams fragments of memory are so mixed up and disordered that the individual is unable to recognize them as memories. When memories are attached to social relationships, however, belonging, reasoning, and comparing come into play and give memories order and integrity. Halbwachs described that ordering as being related to discernible epochs in an individual's life and the dominant social grouping relevant at each stage. For example, childhood memories are largely structured by the family group, and then school; adolescence memories by perhaps the community of the local neighbourhood and learning institutions; working life memories by the social relationships of the factory, office, or other arena of labour (Fentress and Wickham, 1992: vii). Accordingly, Halbwachs saw memories changing alongside a person's points of view, principles, and judgements as that person passed from loyalty and involvement with one group to another (Halbwachs, 1992: 81). In this understanding memories are essentially group memories. Halbwachs wrote:

Individual memory is ... a part or an aspect of group memory, since each impression and each fact, even if it apparently concerns a particular person exclusively, leaves a lasting memory only to the extent that one has thought it over ... to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu. (1992:53)

Or, as Fentress and Wickham so directly put it, memories are made social by being talked about (1992: x), that is, social groups construct their own images of the world via a version of the past established through communication rather than private remembrance. Memories can only be said to be uniquely individual in that the ways in which a person's group memberships operate and intersect are unique to that individual. Halbwachs believed that every group develops a memory of its own to serve its unique identity, and thereby maintain its boundaries and reinforce the sense of belonging of its members.

For Halbwachs, what is remembered always serves the *current* commitment, values and aspirations of the group. This insight is immensely significant for this study as it makes plain that the preached tradition must serve the current social needs of the church if that tradition is to survive. As Barbara Misztal puts it, remembrance serves the politics of the present (2003: 51). This suggests that preaching, if it is to contribute to the maintenance of the very tradition from which it draws its inspiration, must be undertaken with direct reference to the current political or social needs of that tradition. According to Halbwachs, when a group's existence ceases, the group memory is soon evacuated of social significance and rapidly disappears. Here he acknowledged forgetting as well as remembering. He commented:

The most painful aspects of yesterday's society are forgotten because constraints are felt only so long as they operate and because, by definition, a past constraint has ceased to be operative. (1992: 51)

Although continuity and stability are key elements in Halbwachs' understanding of the mechanisms of collective memory, he also demonstrates its ability to cope with change and social variation. In his terms, reconstruction of memory due to social pressure is a constant possibility. He wrote:

Society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess. (1992: 510)

As Halbwachs developed a detailed application of his theory to the religious collective memory, it is worth considering that material in itself; but before doing so a summary of the points made so far will aid both that consideration and a later critique of Halbwachs' perspective. In summary, all individual memories to be memories require a social framework; these frameworks are born of the groups to which individuals belong; memories are collective, or social, in that they are created by communication within a social milieu; memories change over time as groups change and as an individual's membership of groups changes; memories always serve the current needs of the group; and finally,

memories may be reformulated, or disappear altogether, as a consequence of the pressure of society. In Halbwachs' own words:

Society admits all traditions (even the most recent), provided that they are indeed traditions. In the same way, society admits all ideas (even the most ancient), provided that they are ideas, that is, that they have a place in its thought and that they still interest present-day people who understand them. From this it follows that social thought is essentially a memory and that its entire content consists only of collective recollections or remembrances. But it also follows that, among them, only those recollections subsist that in every period society, working within its present-day frameworks, can reconstruct. (1992: 188)

3.3 Religious collective memory.

Halbwachs was aware that his understanding of collective memory faced a serious challenge when applied to an historical faith like Christianity. Simply put, how can a collective memory that always serves ever-changing present social needs possibly function in an institution based on an authoritative set of memories where that very authority rests on the unchanging nature of those memories? Issues of continuity, social serviceability, and behavioural constraints dealt with in Halbwachs' concept of collective memory appear at first sight as inimical to Christianity.

Halbwachs' concept of collective memory cleverly reconciles social stability and social change in a dynamic of recollection and forgetting. His is a perspective that sees forgetting as an inevitable, indeed essential, aspect of change in institutions and individuals (1992: 73). Christianity's appeal to a repeated recollection of memories that are held to be foundational makes giving such prominence to forgetfulness problematic. To countenance forgetfulness of aspects of its own tradition appears to contradict a fundamental tenet of Christian faithfulness. This contradiction is further compounded by Halbwachs' suggestion that memories that are no longer useful fall by the wayside, as it were, to be

replaced by memories serviceable to the present (see, for example, his discussion concerning nobility (1992: 132)). Usefulness in present circumstances is, according to Halbwachs (49), a prerequisite of a memory's persistence, whereas Christianity requires repeated recollection as a dominical mandate whether that remembering is obviously socially serviceable or not. It is not sufficient here to assume that these two approaches can be reconciled by an appeal to a proper Christian critique of present social circumstances. Although Christian collective memory may well present an alternative view of society, and in that sense be counter-cultural, that is of a rather different order from the collective memory process as described by Halbwachs. He sees memory-based constraints that were previously exacting in their operation as simply ceasing to be and thereby creating space for new imperatives in the light of social change, whereas Christianity has a foundational commitment to an ethic related in a powerful way to the notion of an unchanging faith. For Halbwachs, tradition always yields to the present (183): in other words, innovation occurs for social good, or explicitly, need steers memory. Halbwachs was well aware that if this rule of collective memory was to be verifiable it had to be shown to apply as much to the institution of Christianity as to the family or social class. Consequently a substantial part of his work was directed explicitly to this issue.

According to Halbwachs, the essential prerequisite for Christianity to establish itself as a religion was that it was presented as in some senses a continuation of Hebraic faith (1992: 87). Saint Paul, for example, although characterizing faith in Christ in terms opposed to the Judaism of his day nevertheless employs extensively terms and interpretation drawn from that same Judaism (85). Throughout the New Testament its authors take care to emphasize both explicitly and more covertly parallelisms between Christ's life and words and material in the Hebrew Scriptures (see Trompf, 1979). In this way Halbwachs saw the earliest development of Christianity as a kind of grafting on to the still living traditions of Judaism that was, in effect, a reframing of tradition into a collective memory for the fledgling church.

If this kind of memory reframing is a manoeuvre anticipated by Halbwachs' theory, the other element of the memory innovation he identified in the

earliest days of the church is uniquely Christian. He notes that all the components of the Christian cult are essentially commemorations of a period or event in the life of Christ (1992: 88). Indeed he asserted that the entire substance of Christianity consists in the remembrance of Christ's life and teachings (88). For Halbwachs' analysis, of course, that raised the issue of how a religion entirely orientated to the past can still present itself as a permanent social institution. Halbwachs' solution is that Christ is not remembered as a dead figure of the past but as an ever-present figure. He writes:

Christ is not only a 'knower' or a saint; he is a god. He does not limit himself to indicating the road to salvation to us; yet no Christian can attain salvation without the intervention and the efficacious action of this God. After his death and resurrection Christ did not lose contact with humankind, but rather remains perpetually within the bosom of his Church. There is no ceremony of the cult from which he is absent; there is no prayer and act of adoration which does not reach up to him. The sacrifice through which he has given us his body and his blood did not take place a single time. It is integrally renewed every time believers are assembled to receive the Eucharist. What is more, the successive sacrifices—celebrated at distinct moments and in distinct places—are but one and the same sacrifice. (1992: 90)

In this way what might have been a dead memory becomes eternal and immutable, a certainty attested by infinite repetition in a uniformly recognizable way. Whilst other memories are ephemeral, this one is thereby created definitive by its relationship to a privileged period (the lifetime of Christ) and its repetition and preservation by a group solely dedicated to those functions (the church) (1992: 93).

Halbwachs saw the Constantinian peace as the period of time when the religious memory and its functions changed from being actions of the whole group of believers, however varied in power and influence individual voices were, to being the preserve of a clerical hierarchy. The establishment of this hierarchy was, in effect, the creation of a closed group, impervious to direct worldly influence, and turned entirely to the past, which it was continually and exclusively occupied with

commemorating (1992: 98). In the establishment of a hierarchy were the beginnings of a rigidity and formalism that could preserve the memory of the church despite constant changes in the social milieu (105); but, of course, the necessity of memory serving present needs can never be entirely and finally overcome.

As the original meanings of beliefs grew ever more distant with the passing of time, Halbwachs saw them becoming solely dependent on the authority of the church manifested as dogmas (1992: 116). This was somewhat counterbalanced by rites, by which Halbwachs meant actions, gestures, words and liturgical objects in material forms (including texts), which because of their materiality and constant reproduction are better at retaining memories than beliefs alone. Nevertheless, some remembrances were inevitably lost. Neither dogmas nor rites can be explained by wholly rational motives; their grounding, as Halbwachs put it, is the past (1992: 178).

In the struggle to control memory Halbwachs contrasted two ever present and conflicting religious currents that strive to go back to the origins of the faith: the dogmatic and the mystic. By the term dogmatic Halbwachs meant a systematized ordering of doctrines, propositions and symbols that preserves meanings and understandings by historical methods of definition and preservation. Dogmatics are not concerned for 'living' the past but rather attempt to conform to the teachings of the past in so far as they can be reconstructed, preserved and understood. In Halbwachs' terminology, current meaning is sought on the outside, by which he meant by reference to authoritative bodies and individuals such as councils, popes, and Church Fathers. What he termed 'atemporal truth' is the aspiration of dogmatics (1992: 179). Here tradition becomes more or less formulaic.

The second current, which Halbwachs labelled 'mystic', does not hold systematized and regulated doctrine in as high esteem as the dogmatic does. It is not exterior authority that holds the ultimate power but rather an interiorized sense of recovering the tradition in its most pure form and living it. The mystic seeks an interior light that is an authentic expression of the earliest faith and practice. The

mystic current gives preference and value to aspects of the earliest Christian history that the 'official' dogmatic current has for one reason or another curtailed, overlooked, or destroyed (1992: 100). The mystic aspires to an intimate communion of thought and being with the divine (179). This is tradition as lived remembrance.

In the struggle to return to, or retain, the tradition both currents are always in danger of losing contact with the ever precious heritage. Both currents have such a strong commitment to the authority of the original tradition that any 'new' elements must be linked to that tradition, indeed such is the power of the sense of origin that it is impossible for new data to be acknowledged as really new. Instead, new data is always characterized as a recovery of the tradition. In this way contributions from the mystic current of Christian practice are incorporated without weakening the accepted tradition. As an example of the process Halbwachs cites Saint Francis:

When Saint Francis consecrates himself to poverty, he stands in opposition to the Church of his time which does not despise wealth; he believes he is returning to the truth of the Gospels. But poverty does not have the same meaning, nor perhaps the same moral efficacy, in the Italian society of the eleventh century as in the time of Jesus. Saint Francis's "Lady Poverty" is a kind of medieval and romanesque entity: is she really the correct image of evangelical poverty? Do these mendicant friars perhaps come nearer in many aspects to Buddhist monks than to members of the early church? The type of asceticism that they practice may be more removed from the Christianity of the first centuries than is the simple Christian charity recommended by the Church of the time to believers anchored in their own century. (1992: 108)

Halbwachs reasoned that at the core of Christianity there are many collective memories each claiming to reproduce the essential tradition, namely the life and teaching of Christ, more faithfully than any other. As these memories rise and fade through contemporary social pressures conflicts ensue. Halbwachs saw such conflicts as always present in one form or another (1992: 115).

Accordingly, although at first sight an historical religion such as Christianity appears to follow a memory logic different from other groups, on closer analysis the same social mechanisms of memory are at work. As Halbwachs put it:

Although religious memory attempts to isolate itself from temporal society, it obeys the same laws as every collective memory: it does not preserve the past but reconstructs it with the aid of the material traces, rites, texts, and traditions left behind by that past, and with the aid moreover of recent psychological and social data, that is to say, with the present. (1992: 119)

Halbwachs reasoned that ‘if society were purely logical it would allow only that which is serviceable to the present’, whereas ‘if society were purely traditional it would not allow any idea in disagreement with its oldest beliefs’ (1992: 188). Such a sharp dichotomy was evident in the contrast between Halbwachs’ collective memory theory and historic Christianity given at the opening of this section. But in reality, said Halbwachs, social thought is never that abstract:

Even when they correspond to and express the present, the ideas of society are always embodied in persons or groups. Behind a title, a virtue, or a quality, society immediately perceives those who possess them. Those groups and persons exist in the passage of time and leave their traces in the memory of the people. In this sense, there is no social idea that would not at the same time be a recollection of the society. But on the other hand, society would labour in vain if it attempted to recapture in a purely concrete form a particular figure or event that has left a strong imprint in its memory. As soon as each person and each historical fact has permeated this memory, it is transposed into a teaching, a notion, or a symbol and takes on a meaning. It becomes an element of the society’s system of ideas. This explains why traditions and present-day ideas can exist side by side. In reality present-day ideas are also traditions. (1992: 188)

In Halbwachs’ terms, the very particular Christian memory of Christ which forcefully combines recollection ordinarily understood with an immensely powerful sense of Christ’s constant presence within the body of believers works to make

Christian memory immutable. Regulated via the church's authoritative dogmatic teaching, present needs that in other institutions would radically change social memories are curbed in their direct power, but still exercise a constant pressure. Innovation occurs through a mechanism of rediscovery and an appealed to return to a yet more authentic expression of the original tradition. The components of Halbwachs' theory, such as social construction, competing memories, memory reconstruction, forgetfulness, social serviceability, and participation, are all as present within the religious sphere as in other areas of social interaction.

3.4 Halbwachs' theory and preaching: preliminary remarks.

Although criticisms of Halbwachs need to be considered before asking just what his ideas may contribute to the practice of preaching, some of the key issues are now signalled as markers to be returned to. As will be apparent, as well as their likely importance for preaching within the contemporary Christian Western European tradition, Halbwachs' ideas also apply more generally to many aspects of church life in contemporary Europe.

Firstly, as Halbwachs assumed a significant degree of participation in order for the collective memory to be kept alive the issue is raised as to what the decline in contemporary religious observance means for the process.

Secondly, Halbwachs also pointed to the requirement of 'the dogmatic current', in his terms, to defend and maintain the memory through its power in preserving and 'owning' the meanings of doctrine. He no doubt had in mind the centralized institutions and authority of the Roman Catholic Church, but his notes make it plain that he was also well aware of processes to achieve similar ends in the Protestant traditions (1992: 90). Whether by hierarchical power, bureaucracy, denominational identity, or the assumed power of doctrine itself, a strong legitimizing agency beyond the most immediate small church group is required in Halbwachs' account. The power of such structures continues to weaken in contemporary society, as is evidenced by divergent sexual mores, increased denominational affiliation change by individuals, and the readiness of local

congregations to challenge the requirements of central authorities. Can the legitimizing role be maintained when accepting the authority of legitimizing structures is more a question of choice and consent?

And thirdly, Halbwachs saw social memory as operating through the activity of being sociable; that is, it needs communication between individuals concerning the memories themselves and the actions that flow from them. As he wrote, ‘most of the time, when I remember, it is others who spur me on: their memory comes to the aid of mine and mine relies on theirs’ (1992: 38). There is then within Halbwachs’ account an implicit requirement of face to face communal bonds and actions that are not necessarily as powerful now as when he wrote. As a faithful pupil of Durkheim, Halbwachs worked with a notion of a certain organic quality of community when it came to religious observance. If that is essential to the working of collective memory, the individualism of contemporary culture expressed in an often highly privatized expression of religion must call it into doubt. The often repeated characterization of Western European society as irreligious in terms of observance, as well as pluralistic, individualized, subjectivized and choice rich, raises profound questions for the mechanisms of social memory (see Bruce, (2002); and Davie, (1994)).

3.5 Criticisms of Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory.

The originality and potential of Halbwachs’ work on the sociocultural place of memory appears to have been less than fully recognized when *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* was first published in 1925. That a famous and widely influential text of the same era, F.C. Bartlett’s *Remembering* (1932), offered an interpretation of a fundamental point that was a misunderstanding of Halbwachs probably did not help to promote serious consideration of Halbwachs’ ideas outside France. Bartlett accused Halbwachs of saying that social groups remembered in literally the same sense as individuals do, thus implying that he believed in a rather naïve social collectivism, which he most certainly did not (Bartlett, 1995: 294-296).

Halbwachs' personal intellectual development well equipped him to offer a Durkheimian perspective not subject to the excessive organismism so often levied as a criticism against that stream of sociological thought. When at school in Paris, Halbwachs was much impressed by the young Henri Bergson who, just beginning an academic career, was one of his teachers. Bergson's highly individualistic philosophy, as evidenced in his work *Matter and Memory* (first edition 1896), was initially very attractive to Halbwachs, but as his interests in the years immediately prior to the First World War shifted from philosophy to sociology he adopted a more Durkheimian collectivist view that was to remain his hallmark throughout the rest of his life. Bergson's thought, however, remained as a prompter for Halbwachs' analysis even as he rejected its subjectivism, antagonism to objectivism, and anti-intellectualism (see Middleton and Brown, 2005). In *The Social Frameworks of Memory* Halbwachs refers to ideas from Bergson's *Matter and Memory* in order to contrast his own insistence on the material qualities on which time and memory perceptions are based to those of Bergson's highly subjectivized interior time (1992: 47).

Far from promulgating the existence of an unsubstantiated social mentality, Halbwachs was well aware that actual remembering is situated within individuals. The social dimension locates that memory in time and place, supporting it in order that it may be an actual memory. For Halbwachs social groups determine what is memorable and how it will be remembered, but there is no social entity that remembers. Individuals do the remembering and identify with what is important to the group or groups to which they belong and thereby have a memory of a good deal of what they have not experienced directly. Halbwachs' theory should not be dismissed as the extension of a psychological concept merely by the addition of the word 'collective'. It has to be admitted, however, that Marc Bloch, Halbwachs' colleague at the University of Strasbourg, did make just that criticism in his review of the book (Bloch, 1925: 73). Bloch went on to use the term 'collective memory' extensively in his own work, and with particular renown in his study *La Société Féodale* first published in 1939 (Bloch, 1989).

3.5.1 The social psychology critique.

These very early criticisms of the concept of collective memory indicate what has remained a very contentious aspect of the theory, namely the linkage between individual consciousness and the group which provides the framework for the memory. For Fentress and Wickham (1992) the concept is so suggestive of a Jungian-style notion of a collective unconscious that they abandon its use entirely in favour of the term 'social memory'. Others have employed the concept of reference groups to bridge the gap between social experience and individual memory (for example, Grenz and Franke, (2001)). In societies composed of many groups and communities with differing values individuals chose groups that support their particular worldviews. The group's definition of the situation constitutes a plausibility structure for the person's perspective, and is therefore his or her reference group. The individual 'refers', whether consciously or unconsciously, to the group to give form to attitudes, beliefs and values that constitute a sense of identity. This fits well with the social constructivist logic of Halbwachs' own argument, and seems to support the way he describes the group providing a framework for remembrance.

Grenz and Franke use Josiah Royce's idea of a community of interpretation from his pre-World War One lectures delivered in Boston and Oxford (1913). They note how a community functioning as a reference group can give new direction to perspectives developed in the past, in other words to memories, so as to create identity in community (2001: 220). Royce believed that a necessary condition for the existence of a community was a remembered past and an anticipated future (1913: vol 2, 59). Such communities are bodies of both memory and hope: memory, in the sense that each member accepts as part of his or her individual life the self same past events that each of the other members accepts; and hope, in the sense that each member accepts as part of his or her own life the same expected future events that each of the other members accepts. One commentator on Royce, John E. Smith, described such a community as:

One in which its members not only love it, together with its past and its anticipated future, but also they understand the part which they are to play in

the successful completion of such goals as may be projected and striven for.
(Smith, 1950: 76)

Royce's own analysis of such community required of it three essential elements: one, the power of an individual self to extend his or her life, in an ideal fashion, so as to regard it as including past and future events which are far away in time (1913: vol 2, 59); two, the presence of distinct selves capable of social communication in the world (vol 2, 61); and three, the inclusion in the ideally extended past and future of these community-belonging selves at least some events which are for all of them identical (vol 2, 68). For the purposes of Grenz and Franke, Royce's concept of a community of interpretation provides a structure which allows personal narrative to be a bearer or carrier of an evolving tradition whilst retaining a sense of corporate history. Although at first sight their application of Royce seems close to Halbwachs' analysis of collective memory, a more considered analysis produces several critical differences.

In the Grenz and Franke's usage there is an individual intentionality quite unlike Halbwachs' social processes of relationship and interactions. Royce assumed, in the community he described, shared past experiences and a mutual commitment to the future; whilst Halbwachs saw collective memory as an evocation of the past that may well not have been a shared experience and which is utilized for the purposes of the present, not the future. In the urge to identify memory as something that connects people and the meanings they feel to be significant, Grenz and Franke underplay the provisionality that figured so prominently in Halbwachs' consideration of social memory mechanisms. The notion of community of memory that they draw from Royce requires a sustained loyalty that goes much further than the changing group membership Halbwachs saw in collective memory (Smith, 1950: 9). In other words, although some of the terminology is similar, the processes delineated are quite different. The language of reference groups, even when communally reframed as by Grenz and Franke, suggests a rather more individually determined use of memory than Halbwachs thought real.

As Peter Burke acknowledges from an historian's perspective, one of the lasting legacies of Halbwachs' work has been an appreciation that neither memories nor histories are as objective as they once seemed (Burke, 1989: 98). The irony is that Halbwachs himself made a sharp distinction between the social construction that is collective memory and written history which he reckoned to be much more objective. As Patrick Hutton puts it, Halbwachs had a distinctively positivist slant to his view of history (Hutton, 1993: 76). Collective memory confirms similarities between past and present, deals with repeated customary events, and has a sense of the past coming alive once more. History, on the other hand, establishes differences between the past and the present, and uses verifiable and durable data to reconstruct from a critical distance, or so Halbwachs assumed (Hutton, 1993: 76). The irony of this is compounded by the fact that academic historians have widely used a Halbwachs-type analysis for the purposes of historiography—see, for example, the work of Le Goff, (1992), and Nora, (1996)—and that his works have come to be seen as key texts in a relativistic view of history (Burke, 1989: 98).

3.5.2 The historiographical critique.

Just as Halbwachs is unclear about the mechanisms of the relationship between individual consciousness and the group memory, likewise his understanding of the relationship between memory and history is less than sufficient. His work was, undoubtedly, a factor in leading others to treating memory itself as an historical phenomenon; the social history of remembering as a logical next step to his remembering of social history (Burke, 1989: 100). Halbwachs' social frameworks of memory are thereby converted into the schemata of memory communities that preserve traditions for the purposes of power. For the historian, the foundational question becomes whose version of the past is being recorded: or, in Burke's phrase, 'Who wants whom to remember what and why?' (Burke, 1989: 107). In this light Halbwachs' insistence on collective memory serving the present needs of the group appears all too sanguine. Like his famous teacher Durkheim, Halbwachs was so focused on social solidarity and issues of

cohesion and consensus that, whilst recognising the presence of conflicting memories, he understated their power.

Barbara Misztal contrasts two understandings in historical writing of the way power is exercised through social memory; what she terms ‘presentist memory’ and ‘popular memory’ (2003: 56, 61). The presentist approach extends Halbwachs’ idea of memory serving the needs of the present by indicating how memory can be used to serve the needs of those in power. In this understanding, traditions, customs and commemorations are invented so as to exercise social control. The prime mover in such constructions is the State: so they are developed from ‘above’, as it were. The purpose of these constructions is to legitimize institutions, symbolize social cohesion, and socialize people to the status quo. History that adopts this perspective is exemplified by Hobsbawn and Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition* (1983). The popular memory approach also starts from present needs but seeks to identify those memories which come from ‘below’—that is, those that serve the needs of local groups excluded or ignored by society-wide power blocks. These memories may, or may not, be in conflict with the status quo, but they always represent a counter-voice to powerful totalizing narratives. The effort of the Popular Memory Group—in works such as Johnson, McLennan, Schwartz and Sutton’s *Making Histories: Studies in History Making and Politics* (1982)—is an exemplar of this perspective.

Current historiography, therefore, offers ample evidence that the mechanisms of social memory cannot be separated from issues of social power and conflicting memories. If, as this study contends, preaching is a specialized form of memory maintenance then its practice must be examined in terms of power issues and with a critical eye on whose memories are being best served in its usage. In Halbwachs’ analysis of the religious collective memory, the development of a commemorating hierarchy with its associated dogmas (1992: 98) was an imposition on the laity and represented a disengagement from temporal society. He saw this as a necessary step in maintaining the Christian memory when the more usual mechanisms of memory related to present needs would have endangered that memory (113). The historiographical criticism of Halbwachs’ underplaying of the dynamics of conflict in social memory requires that the memory management

component of preaching must likewise take seriously the question of the social power of the memories involved.

3.5.3 The anthropological critique.

As the first criticism of Halbwachs was broadly in the area of social psychology, and the second prompted by historiographical concerns, so the third is drawn from another distinct arena of discourse, namely anthropology, and revolves around the idea of tradition. As has been said, Halbwachs' understanding of tradition always yields to the social consciousness of the present (1992: 183). This seems a straightforward expression of the idea that the continuity of traditions is moulded by the circumstances and social requirements of the present. For example, any person of mature years is likely to be able to cite examples of traditional practices familiar in times past that are no longer widely undergone. In the experience of the writer, New Year firstfooting (that is uninvited visiting from house to house to receive automatic hospitality), has largely disappeared. Similarly, the churching of women after child-birth has also ceased as a social custom. Both these very different traditional actions have no doubt disappeared due to the lack of necessitating or supporting factors in contemporary society, exactly as Halbwachs' theory suggested. The difficulty arises because Halbwachs' conception of tradition is altogether more embracing than a simple dichotomy of immediate thought/action and traditional thought/action. In Halbwachs' terminology, 'in reality present day ideas are also traditions' (188). What he means by this is that because social memories rooted in time and space are transposed into shared and repeated ideas, teachings, and structures of meaning, those very conceptions, and the actions that flow from them, are in effect traditions. The logic of this position is that an easy definition of societies into traditional as against modern makes no sense since all that such a distinction really indicates is a variety of traditions. But if all is tradition, the charge may be levied that nothing more significant is being said other than that human beings inherently seek and follow patterns.

The criticism is well put in Pascal Boyer's *Tradition as Truth and Communication* (1990). Boyer declares himself eager to avoid using the concept of collective memory because of the 'superorganic' view of culture he believes it entails (1990: 18). According to Boyer, the commonsense notion that traditions are conservation mechanisms held together by underlying ideas that describe the world is simply wrong (5-6). He notes that the crucial factor is that people believe traditions to be time-tested rather than that there is actual permanence across time (8), and that the link between the surface phenomenon and underlying ideas is impossible to achieve (9), so it cannot be proved that there are deeply felt shared worldviews underlying traditions. He goes on to add that reforming the model so that the repeated actions and utterances of traditions are the site of conservation (i.e., that the surface actions are what is conserved: not any underlying ideas or worldviews that may or may not be there (13, 14)), is also unconvincing. Reforming the model, says Boyer, still does not account for the salience of traditions, since why should conservatism of itself be a necessary or sufficient condition for the preservation or repetition of a tradition? For Boyer, there is no direct relationship between wanting to remember and remembering (16). Furthermore, if memory itself is the filter, the argument becomes entirely circular: what is repeated is memorized, and what is memorized is more memorable and is repeated (18).

In place of the two views of tradition he finds inadequate Boyer posits traditional phenomena as communicative events in themselves (1990: 20). What he means by this is that although participants will have different representations of the interaction, indeed may barely understand what is going on, the very repetition itself and the attention it gains may be sufficient reason for its repetition (20, 79). Traditions in these terms are non-expressive, stripped of everyday ostensive presentations, and all the more psychologically salient because of the specialized nature of their communicative power (79, 109). Ritualized speech is one of the examples Boyer uses to illustrate the likely veracity of his approach (80), and he notes how these utilize utterances by 'experts', mental representations that vary from participant to participant, and the memorization of specialized ostensions. Boyer offers a tentative definition of tradition as:

A specific type of communication, not in the restricted sense of a transmission of information, but rather as a type of interaction which modifies people's representations in a relatively organized way.

(1990: 109)

In Boyer's understanding, the intention and meaning of traditional repeated acts cannot be read off from those acts in a straightforward and commonsensical manner. The memory and the memorization involved in traditions, whilst serving cognitive purposes, cannot therefore simply be assumed as having essentially similar commitment from everyone involved. It is the tradition itself which is the vehicle of communication rather than the tradition necessarily standing for something else. Comparing this perspective to Halbwachs' more directly utilitarian understanding of traditions raises issues of social conceptualization and group memory as a meaning-making activity. It is not that Boyer denies the existence of worldviews and hidden understandings underlying observable traditions, nor that he denies that meanings exist at a variety of levels, but simply that those traditions cannot be assumed to be instrumental bearers and conservers of those underlying meanings (Boyer, 1990: 14). Halbwachs' theory, at first sight at least, understands traditions as in themselves being bearers of ideas (Halbwachs, 1992: 184). The contrast may not, however, be as sharp as it appears.

In both Halbwachs' and Boyer's analyses, traditions as repeated observable events are key instances of a group demonstrating to itself that it is indeed a group. In this sense traditions are always a group memorization, that is, a remembering of the group as a group. Boyer's analysis suggests, however, that traditions are not necessarily the way the group's memory, in the sense of meanings and worldviews, is passed on. Instead, he asks that they be considered as communication events in which psychologically salient actions modify, or draw together in a more or less organized way participants' representations, that is, they are steps in a process of incorporation and renewed incorporation. Like language, it is not that definitions are always so precise that they are easily shared, but rather that, when the necessary conditions are not sufficient for mental definitions to be held in common, the ostension of stereotypes allows sensible communication to

take place (Boyer, 1990: 38). In using language as an example of the process, Boyer cites the word 'giraffe':

Terms like 'giraffe' are not represented with a definition. But people have representations that help them use the term in a meaningful way. To take a common philosophical view, people must have a certain stereotype of giraffes, which help them in identifying giraffes and telling them from lions or tigers. ... a stereotype gives properties which are used to identify singular objects as members of the class, although they are neither necessary nor sufficient. Giraffes for instance may be identified because of their long neck, but exceptionally short-necked giraffes are still, unambiguously, giraffes; the property, although it is frequent, is only typical. (1990: 38)

Traditions, Boyer maintains, work in a similar way.

Boyer's questioning of the commonsense understanding of traditions can be read as a possible enhancement of Halbwachs' idea of collective memory rather than a negative criticism. Halbwachs maintained that the ideas that shape and reframe collective memory (which become traditions) are collective experiences (1992: 184); an understanding that is not too distant from Boyer's account of traditions as psychologically salient communication events (Boyer, 1990: 109). In both understandings it is the experience of the tradition, however expressed, that is its fundamental component. The presentist force of Halbwachs' theory finds some echo in Boyer's understanding that traditions are first and foremost communication events directed to modifying people's representations. The concept of modification is suggestive of currently usable representations, rather than the repetition of wholly historical versions. What Boyer's work brings to a consideration of Halbwachs' theory is a need to incorporate in its use greater awareness of both the cumulative and performative aspects of tradition.

If Halbwachs' presentist approach is taken too far historical continuity is sundered. Boyer demonstrates how, while remaining expressions of an ongoing heritage, traditions serve present communicative needs. As Coser puts it, 'we may indeed never step twice into the same river, but it still has persistent characteristics, qualities that are not shared by any other river' (1992: 30). Similarly, Boyer's

insistence that traditions, even when not straightforwardly understandable, are attention demanding and psychologically purposeful requires those who use collective memory theory to be aware of ways of thinking other than the rational. Halbwachs appealed repeatedly to processes of reasoning and rational activity in reconstructing memories (for example, 1992: 183f); an outworking, no doubt, of his Durkheimian loyalties and his sensitivities about over-subjectivism. Where Halbwachs did recognize more than purely rational motives, he sought a substantiating commitment to historical origins as the justification for that motivation (1992: 178). Whether such recall still has that power in social circumstances dominated by the ideas of fashion and ‘the new’ is a question to which this analysis will return. Meanwhile, in terms of the contemporary application of Halbwachs’ ideas, an account of social memory processes needs to recognize more strongly the power of emotional, non-propositional, and symbolic categories alongside his appeal to the strictly rational. Commemorative ceremonies and social mnemonic practices are often rich in such non-rational aspects (see Connerton, 1989), and are of crucial importance in the maintenance of collective memory. The performative language and actions of traditions may be ‘non-expressive’—that is, in Boyer’s terms, not directly definitional, propositional, and straightforwardly understandable (Boyer, 1990: 79)—but they can still be effective and highly significant social actions.

3.6 Homiletics as a rhetoric of memory.

This chapter has argued that the practice of preaching in the ongoing tradition of the Christian Church operates as a mechanism of memory maintenance and management. In contemporary society such a role is likely to be viewed in increasingly subjective terms. Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory has been evaluated as a potentially useful way of delineating preaching’s social significance avoiding both that subjectivism and overly authoritarian ideas of the nature of Christian traditions. Three major criticisms of Halbwachs’ theory have been addressed, namely: the linkage between individual consciousness and the group

framework which structures the collective memory; the issue of power in the process of collective remembering; and the nature of tradition and what it achieves socially. Underlying all these criticisms is a repeated concern about the presentist assumption inherent in Halbwachs' theory, and how that can be related to the very strong appeal to historicity that is fundamental to Christian faith and the preaching that flows from it. In a social environment dominated by ideas of change, choice, consumption, and movement, that concern is especially pertinent. If preaching is a rhetoric of memory, contemporary society requires that rhetoric to convince in a milieu in which the most absolute kind of presentist memory reconstruction is commonplace. The hierarchical and dogmatic structures, which Halbwachs saw as the special mechanisms that the church employed to make the memory it holds at the same time both immutable and presentist, are strategies that worked in cultures with a strong sense of social obligation. In consumer cultures, in which choice has replaced obligation, those mechanisms no longer have the same effect. The hierarchical structures are viewed with increasing suspicion, and the dogmatic structures become ever more subjectivized and privatized.

Halbwachs was, of course, alert to the consequences of changes in the social structures that undergird collective memory. For example, he suggests that memories are displaced when supporting structures, objects or places are destroyed. Collective memory when it survives such displacement does so by active resistance, utilizing 'all the force of its traditions' (Halbwachs, 1980: 134). This is the action of the group which 'searches out and partially succeeds in recovering its former equilibrium amid novel circumstances' (134). There is a correspondence here with what the anthropologist Anthony Cohen (1985) recognizes in community boundaries. According to Cohen, when a community's physical boundary is breached, say by incorporation into a larger urban entity, there is a tendency for the power of the symbolic identity and boundary of the community to increase (Cohen, 1985: 50). If collective memory works in a similar way, current circumstances are in effect 'forgotten' in order to shore up the reality of the collectively remembered past. This is an essential component of Halbwachs argument in *The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land* (in Halbwachs, 1992), in which he suggests that the place being remembered because it is a site mentioned in the

Gospels may take on a mystical status at odds with the significance given to the place by the memory's originating group or its use by subsequent groups. Contemporary collective frameworks reach, as it were, into the past and take up previous frameworks or their conception of what previous frameworks were, and utilize them to support present needs and concerns. One of the strengths of Halbwachs' theory is its recognition of this dynamic aspect of collective memory. By the processes of displacement, resistance, and reincorporation, meanings, images and significations are woven into evolving networks of memory. Memories are reinvigorated and extended beyond the confines of personal experience and physical geography. At the same time forgetting allows for the disposal of elements that are no longer purposeful and creates space for new remembering. It is within this dynamic processing of collective memory that individual and community identity and belonging is forged.

Given the pronounced shifts in the relationship between religious collective memory in Britain and other collective memories, the question at the heart of this thesis is how preaching can be empowered to be a rhetoric of Christian memory. The social significance of Christianity in contemporary Britain and Europe, and the place of preaching within the churches, has a direct bearing on the possibilities of such a rhetoric. In order to be able to develop further the theoretical perspective presented here, the next chapter will examine recent uses of Halbwachs' work in the sociology of religion in Europe. This is done with the aim of establishing what the consequences of recent memory shifts in contemporary society might be for the continuing tradition of Christian faith.

Chapter Four

Collective memory and contemporary sociology of religion: an examination of the concept in the works of Danièle Hervieu-Léger and Grace Davie

4.1 The social ‘weightiness’ of preaching.

In order to locate this chapter more adequately in the overall argument, and before reviewing how religious collective memory and associated social mechanisms have been treated in some recent sociological texts, it is necessary to reiterate briefly why the issue is so significant for Christian homiletics. As discussed earlier (see section 1.4), the generic definition of preaching employed here is ‘an authoritative and authorized voice in a congregation giving expression to the Christian tradition in such a way as to encourage and enable it to be applicable in some measure in the lives of the hearers’. This definition indicates that, at its best, the sermon gives voice to the Christian tradition in such a way that it impacts on the hearers’ emotional, cognitive, intellectual and practical needs and understandings. Such impact to be effective is assumed to be more than momentary.

Although the sermon, like the act of worship in which it is set, shares some of the sociable and entertaining characteristics of other participative communal events, there is also an inherent assumption that it is about more than those things. Preaching to be preaching must, in some sense, draw from both the preacher and the hearer a commitment to apply what is being said and heard to life beyond the confines of the worship event. It enables members of a congregation to link within their thoughts what they hear and experience in the worship event with what they experience in other aspects of their lives. Preaching has a certain ‘weightiness’ about it that makes it more than commentary, conversation or entertaining

diversion, although it may contain elements of all those things. Even where a pulpit is not used, that ‘weightiness’ is still emphasized by associated actions that can be as diverse as prayer, quiet group attentiveness, vocalized responses, silence, note taking, and head nodding. The sermon is to be not merely informative, but transformative; not merely emotionally moving, but motivating; not merely entertaining, but encouraging; and not solely individually focused, but incorporating the individual into an awareness of purposeful group belonging. As Tisdale in her study of preaching and context puts it, the congregation is ‘a school of faith’ (1997: 15) and preaching within it ‘has to do with the formation and transformation of Christian identity—not only of individuals but also of congregations’ (57). Implicit in this formative ‘weightiness’ is a sense of preaching’s role and responsibility in the continuance of the tradition from which it speaks.

There is, therefore, a seriousness of intent signified in preaching practice that emphasizes both its importance in building a sense of social belonging and in discerning ways to live out the faith. The sermon acts to incorporate individuals into the life of the church, and to empower those individuals to live that incorporation day by day. Or, in terms of the church’s collective memory, preaching acts as a means of memory maintenance and management. A comment from Peter Atkins’ study *Memory and Liturgy: The Place of Memory in the Composition and Practice of Liturgy* concerning the whole of liturgy applies with equal vigour to the homily:

The corporate memory of a community begins to fade whenever a sense of belonging weakens, when the application of the memory no longer seems appropriate to the new context, when ritual ceases to engender a sense of emotional support, and when the corporate memory is fractured by arguments about how the rituals should be conducted or by divisions about the truth of the statements of faith. (Atkins, 2004: 72)

As Atkins perceptively further puts it, it is memory that ‘allows Christ to be “present” to the situation of the moment’ (2004: 66) since memory links in a unifying way past, present and future ‘without losing the reality of time’ (xi).

Perhaps mnemonic mechanisms are more easily apparent in the ongoing shape and repeated forms of the liturgy, but that should not deflect from the acknowledgement of very similar mechanisms within the freer shape and form of the sermon.

Inevitably from his liturgical perspective, Atkins sees individualization as the greatest threat to corporate memory (2004: 72). Likewise, it is necessary to note the corrosive consequences for social memory of the increasingly subjective terms in which memory functions are viewed. The amazing ubiquity of the concept of preaching as truth conveyed through personality, since Phillips Brooks first suggested the idea in 1877, has worked to reinforce subjectivism in homiletic theory and practice. The argument of this thesis is that Halbwachs' theory of collective memory offers a way of rehabilitating preaching as socially as well as psychologically purposeful. An acknowledgement of the role of collective memory in preaching practice works towards freeing it from both over-subjectivism and overt dogmatism. In other words, social salience in terms of the incorporation and empowerment of individuals within the group, the creation of a sense of belonging, and the ongoing maintenance of the church's memory and its application in the lives of believers, are seen here as core aspects of preaching.

The argument of this thesis is that the social memory aspects of preaching should be given greater prominence. That is not to say that more familiar didactic, psychological and kerygmatic aspects are unimportant, but simply that their usual predominance in homiletics fails to give sufficient emphasis to the importance of memory maintenance. Just why that memory work is so important will be made plain through the sociological analysis that follows.

4.2 Outline of areas to be considered.

The following discussion of recent sociological studies has several distinct parts. It will begin with Danièle Hervieu-Léger's notion of contemporary European society as amnesic since this provides an avenue into her unique understanding of the processes of secularization. Her understanding of religion as being about links across time before it is about the substance of belief will be examined so as to

disclose why the chain of memory is so important to the sociological account of believing she presents. The distinction between ‘believing’ and ‘beliefs’ will be considered alongside the process of metaphorization Hervieu-Léger sees as occupying social religious space whilst at the same time further weakening traditional religion.

Next, the paradox of modernity as a social environment that is destructive of believing yet creative of belief will offer a way into Hervieu-Léger’s understanding of the fluidity and transferability of symbols and meanings. Such fluidity at the service of individualism is, according to Hervieu-Léger, the principal reason for the crumbling of collective memory and the discussion will turn to what the end of the social privileging of the past means for traditional institutions of religion. The dynamic between the repeated liturgical rehearsal of the memory and its exposition as a body of belief is fundamental to Hervieu-Léger’s understanding and is addressed as a key issue for homiletics.

From a discussion based in Hervieu-Léger’s theory of religion, the focus will shift to Grace Davie’s schema of memory variations as a systematized way of understanding the possible consequences of changes in social memory. Those variations also offer a potential framework around which the practicalities of a memory maintaining homiletic might be developed. The idea of preaching as bricolage will be introduced. And finally, John McClure’s delineation of the memory work inherent in the preacher’s use of Scripture will be discussed as a possible bridge between the sociological and theological.

Underlying the whole discussion is the issue of whether the essentially anamnestic character of the church can retain its resonance in society. Some of the profound challenges inherent in attempting to maintain a memory that serves religion in contemporary Britain will become all too evident in what follows.

4.3 The idea of an amnesic society.

Davie makes the handing-on of authorized memory the principal theme of her book *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (2000a); the

implication being that such handing on is, at the least, more difficult than it was in the past or perhaps even almost impossible. Elsewhere she writes of ‘the growing number of British people who have ... lost their moorings in the institutional churches’, and whose beliefs have as a consequence become individualized, detached, undisciplined and heterogenous (2000b: 120). Interestingly, that judgement echoes precisely words from her disputative interlocutor, Steve Bruce, who writes, ‘the diminishing number of people who continue to do religion do it in an increasingly individualistic and idiosyncratic manner’ (1996: 223). Bruce and Davie disagree profoundly about how to characterize the relationship of religion to the wider European society: Bruce is a thorough-going secularist who sees decline in religious practice inevitably being followed by decline in belief (see, for example, his texts published in 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002); whereas Davie sees belief as rather more independent of practice, and points to the varying, and sometimes surprisingly persistent nature of belief where practice has declined and is declining (see, for example, her texts published in 1994, 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2007). The so-called classical theory of secularization (see Gorski, 2003) delineates two well substantiated developments in modernity as indicators of the process, namely the expansion of secular institutions of education, care and other social services once provided almost exclusively by the churches and the long-term decline in orthodox Christian practice since the late nineteenth-century, albeit at varying rates across time and geography. That such developments have taken place is not a matter of dispute; but what those things mean for religious belief is, and this is where the debate relates directly to the argument of this thesis.

If practice and belief are inextricably linked, and their demise embedded in changes in society that are probably irreversible, then no amount of re-theorizing homiletics will re-establish its social utility. Bruce puts the issue sharply:

Shared belief systems require coercion. The survival of religion requires that individuals be subordinated to the community, ... in the stable affluent democracies of the Western world the individual asserts the rights of the sovereign autonomous consumer. We believe we have the

right to choose our electrical goods; we claim the same right in delineating the supernatural. Unless we can imagine some social forces that will lead us to give up that freedom, we cannot imagine the creation of detailed ideological consensus. It is not enough to point out that some social calamity may disrupt our complacency. Without a preexisting common culture, large numbers will not interpret a disaster in the same way and hence will not respond collectively. There was no religious revival in Europe during either of the twentieth century's world wars. When the common culture of a society consists of operating principles that allow the individual to choose, no amount of vague spiritual yearning will generate a shared belief system. (2001: 262)

Bruce's analysis brings with it an understanding of religious belief that is much more tightly bounded than that which Davie uses. His is a perspective that sees a clear distinction between what religion is, and what it is not. The practice of preaching, like the religious institutions it serves, is in inevitable and probably unstoppable decline.

If, however, belief is not totally subsumed in clearly identifiable religious practices and understandings but is linked somehow to wider human categories of experience then there is at least the possibility that the homiletic task may work to the enhancement of those links. The issue then becomes a matter of just how difficult it is in early twenty-first century Britain to keep alive, or indeed awaken, the collective Christian memory even amongst that minority of the population who are regular worshippers. Both sides of the secularization debate agree on the fact that remembering the Faith has become ever more socially problematic, and that even those who identify themselves as clearly within the church are in some sense forgetful of the Faith (for example, in a poll conducted on behalf of the Bible Society in 1997 (Taylor Nelson AGB, May 1997) fewer than 1 in 5 churchgoers read anything from the Bible each day, and nearly a third of those asked had either not read anything in the last twelve months or ever in their lives). It is as if society is suffering amnesia when it comes to the Christian faith, and that amnesia is impacting even those who see themselves as ardent believers.

‘Amnesic societies’ is a term coined by Hervieu-Léger (2000) to describe the current nature of Western European societies. Behind her use of the concept lies the conviction that an awareness of shared memory is an essential component of individual and social identity. Following Halbwachs, she believes that without shared memory societies (and indeed individuals) have difficulty in looking towards a future. For Hervieu-Léger this is about social processes at the widest levels, and she uses religion as a way of disclosing the problematic nature of cross-generational social transmission in all areas of contemporary European societies. She employs Halbwachs’ earlier analysis to delineate two fundamental concepts: the chain of memory, and the collective memory. She describes the chain as that mechanism which makes the individual believer a member of a community—community in the sense of that belonging that gathers together past, present and future members; and the collective memory as that on-going tradition that is the basis of that community’s existence.

For Hervieu-Léger, contemporary European societies are not less religious because they are increasingly rational—an argument that those within the churches who advocate a strongly counter-cultural edge to mission seem to validate by their insistence on strongly counter-cultural mission. Instead, she categorizes European societies as less religious because they are less and less capable of keeping memory-chains in working order. Hence, as regards religious existence, they are amnesic societies. Her analysis supports the idea that Christian mission is extremely difficult in such circumstances, but offers less encouragement for the suggestion that that problem can be overcome by a straightforward appeal to counter-cultural alternatives.

4.4 Religion as a chain of memory.

Hervieu-Léger’s description appears at first tantalisingly simple, but given that it arises in a text that is concerned with the vexed problem of a sociological definition of religion, that simplicity soon evaporates. Issues arise about what traditions are legitimate, how the authority of a tradition is

established, and in what sense the believing community exists? If the incorporating mechanism, the chain, is so crucial, who judges which links in the chain should be included, and what criteria are to be employed to make that judgement? These sorts of questions indicate why Hervieu-Léger's development of Halbwachs is so potentially fruitful for this study. If preaching is, as is argued here, a principal mechanism of collective memory maintenance within the church, then the preacher has a significant role in forging those chains of memory that enable congregations, and individuals within them, to retain a sense of belonging to a common tradition. Sociologically this is one of the reasons why in the churches under consideration those who preach are generally authorized and accredited by a body wider than simply the congregation in which the preacher operates. As a direct conduit of the tradition, and the principal arbiter of how that memory is articulated locally, the preacher holds immense power in the process. The particularity of individual preaching practice determines how the mechanisms of collective memory are applied. It is worthwhile, therefore, to examine Hervieu-Léger's argument in a little detail so as to amplify its potential fruitfulness in homiletics.

The chain metaphor is the very essence of Hervieu-Léger's understanding of religion since it is not the actual substance of belief that is the crucial factor but rather the imaginative link across time which establishes 'the religious adhesion of the members to the group they form and the convictions that bind them' (2000: 81). The concept of the chain also serves to accentuate the 'joined-together' and corporate nature of believing; for meanings to have effect meanings must be shared, and the links of understanding must be joined to one another (82). Again the echo of Halbwachs is clear: understandings and behaviour which may at first sight appear to be individually constructed turn out to require attestation by others if they are to be maintained. In this the chain of believing provides social confirmation of the individual's worldview and actions.

Hervieu-Léger is not unaware of the shortcomings and failings of memory—she admits that reference to the past can sometimes be inconsistent and even fanciful, and that religion is not only about continuity—but, nevertheless, lineage is essential to religious believing and belonging. She writes:

It is not the continuity in itself that matters but the fact of its being the visible expression of a lineage which the believer expressly lays claim to and which confers membership of a spiritual community that gathers past, present and future believers. In certain cases, breaking continuity may even be a way of saving the essential link with the line of belief. This functions as an imaginary reference, legitimizing belief. It functions inseparably as a principle of social identification, *ad intra* (through incorporation into a believing community) and *ad extra* (through differentiation from those who are not of this lineage). Seen thus, one might say that a religion is an ideological, practical and symbolic system through which consciousness, both individual and collective, of belonging to a particular chain of belief is constituted, maintained, developed and controlled. (2000: 82)

Here believing is understood to be those individual and collective persuasions that give meaning and coherence to the subjective experiences of those who hold them. In this alone is its validity, since it cannot be verified, and is not subject to the usual ways knowledge is recognized or controlled (2000: 72).

This distinction between believing and belief is a significant one that is particularly pertinent to this thesis. Hervieu-Léger uses it in order to make plain that the lineage of which she speaks is not restricted to formal beliefs, which are often expressed cognitively, but also includes ‘all the resources of observance and language and the involuntary action which such belief in its multiple forms displays’ (2000:72). Believing, in this understanding, goes beyond beliefs as such to include all the practices, gestures, specialized words, and spontaneously generated physical responses through which beliefs are manifested. Like Halbwachs before her, she is concerned to emphasize that belonging, and incorporation through the mechanisms of memory, require participative actions as much as formalized and rationalized beliefs. She would, perhaps, concur with the Jewish historian Yerushalmi, who asserts that ‘those who are alienated from the past cannot be drawn to it by explanation alone; they require evocation as well’ (Yerushalmi, 1996: 100). That thought supports the contention of this thesis that preaching must go beyond the categories of didacticism. The decline in the

widespread knowledge of the tenets of the Christian faith tempts preachers towards a teaching mode that meets secular assumptions but unintentionally undermines the significance of incorporation into an ongoing tradition.

Hervieu-Léger's analysis takes the argument further than Halbwachs by drawing attention to the fact that believing, understood in these terms, has become increasingly more difficult in the social milieu of modernity as the institutional control of believing becomes ever more attenuated. She writes:

In the fluid, mobile domain of modern belief liberated from the hold of all-embracing institutions of believing, all symbols are interchangeable and capable of being combined and transposed. All syncretisms are possible, all retreads imaginable. (2000: 75)

At this point it should be emphasized that she really does mean all symbols. As has already been noted, the fundamental discussion in which Hervieu-Léger is engaged is about the definition of religion itself. Her search is for a definition that falls prey neither to religion as the endless proliferation of meanings about what appears ultimate (2000: 34) nor to the evermore confining definition that excludes all except the appeal to what is supernatural or socially utopian (35). She writes:

If the functional definitions of religion prove incapable of containing, as they do, the unlimited growth of phenomena, and thereby lose all heuristic relevance, substantive definitions of religion, constructed in fact by reference only to traditional religions, paradoxically condemn sociological thought to the role of guardian of the authentic religion that major religions see themselves as incarnating. Functional definitions can only testify to the dispersion – intellectual beyond control – of religious symbols in contemporary societies; while substantive definitions can do no more than reiterate analysis of the loss of religion in the world. (2000: 38)

To the one perspective religion is everywhere, and to the other it is nowhere; which, as Hervieu-Léger says, 'in the end comes to the same thing' (2000: 38).

Neither perspective offers anything other than a relentless corrosion of religious social memory's ability to maintain itself.

In seeking a way to avoid these snags to the theoretical discussion of contemporary religion in Europe, Hervieu-Léger uses the work of a fellow French Sociologist, Jean Séguy, and his close re-reading of Max Weber. Séguy (see Cipriani, 2000: 214) noticed that Weber's ideal-typical outline of religion which contains the elements of group action, the other, the supernatural, worship, individual experience, and the like, does not contain all Weber's references to religion (Hervieu-Léger, 2000: 66). Weber also uses religion when he describes social and political phenomena in which belief plays a part. In this way, says Séguy, Weber was making metaphorical use of religious concepts (Séguy, 1986: 132). For example, in modernity conflicts of values become an analogical religion that shares many of the characteristics of religion in the theoretical sense (like meaning making, transcendence, and a going beyond the everyday) but without any reference to supernatural powers (Séguy, 1986: 131). Hervieu-Léger agrees with Séguy that this 'metaphorization' is one of the features inherent to modernity, and she writes:

Far from being an indication of the disintegration of religion in societies where politics, science, art, sexuality and culture have gradually broken free from the control of traditional religions, metaphorization testifies to the fact that their new autonomy has made them available for a new kind of religious function. (2000: 67)

This new autonomy is what makes all symbols available for use. No longer controlled by institutions of believing, particularly religious institutions, belief may now be expressed in individualistic, subjective, and diffuse forms which can be combined and re-ordered into a multiplicity of meanings, orderings, and combinations (2000: 74). It is not that contemporary Western society has forsaken belief, but rather that it has been re-shaped with a fluidity that fits the radically changed circumstances of the current social milieu.

In terms of systems of meaning the combined pressures of pluralization, subjectivization and individualization have cast contemporary individual

expressions of faith free on an ocean of radical choice (Hervieu-Léger, 2000: 30). That fluidity, no doubt, operates at different levels, and to different degrees, according to place, circumstance and history; but, nevertheless, it is clear that, as Grace Davie puts it:

There has been some sort of ending in Europe; i.e. that the taken-for-grantedness of a shared religious memory, held in place by the historic churches can no longer be assumed. (Davie, 2007: 61)

According to Hervieu-Léger the crumbling of collective memory parallels precisely the destruction of the plausibility of religion in contemporary European society (2000: 127). Translate this shift into a consideration of preaching and it is hardly surprising that the very idea of its social purposefulness is questioned.

4.5 The collapse of memory.

When Hervieu-Léger asserts that modern societies are no longer societies of memory she adds her voice to the long list of those who see Western society as somehow in a memory crisis (see for example, Terdiman, (1993); or Huysen, (1995)). In a world dominated by change the old order is constantly overtaken by movement; heteronomy is displaced by individual autonomy; and the reproduction of what is inherited holds little cachet (2000: 123). These may well be the identifying marks of advanced capitalism and the consumerism that goes with it. Indeed this is perhaps where Hervieu-Léger's reflection began, in that in an early article she drew attention to modern capitalism's need of an interiorized religion freed from faith associations (1973: 29). By 1993, the time of the French first edition of *Religion as Chain of Memory*, her understanding of just how corrosive memory loss is to traditional religions had become very apparent. Her commentary is, of course, strictly sociological; but its force brings to mind theological convictions that must also concern the present study. For example, the Jewish historian, Yosef Hayin Yerushalmi, in a postscript to his

widely discussed Stroum Lectures of 1980, wrote:

The Bible only knows the terror of forgetting. Forgetting, the obverse of memory, is always negative, the cardinal sin from which all others will flow. The *locus classicus* is perhaps to be found in the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy:

Beware lest you *forget* the Lord your God so that you do not keep His commandments and judgments and ordinances ... lest you lift up your hearts and *forget* the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage ... And it shall come to pass if you indeed *forget* the Lord your God ... I bear witness against you this day that you shall utterly perish (Deut 8:11, 14, 19).

(Yerushalmi, 1996: 108)

Yerushalmi's lectures establish a clear distinction between Jewish memory and historiography—a distinction Halbwachs also sought to establish between his concept of collective memory and history. Similarly, Hervieu-Léger acknowledges that in both the Jewish and Christian traditions the past is given a privileged position that is more than historical, and that this privileging allows core events (for example, the exodus of the Jewish people, or the crucifixion of Jesus) to be repeatedly magnified in time. The whole significance of experience of the present is contained in these foundational events in which the past is made immutable (2000: 124). Here Hervieu-Léger is closely following Halbwachs; and her voice, like his, is presented as one of dispassionate observation. Like Yerushalmi, however, this study must also concern itself with theological imperatives, so Hervieu-Léger's account of the 'crumbling' of memory (2000: 127) must be examined to see if there are any correlations between it and practical theology.

The issue is considered by the New Homiletician Craddock (2004) in these terms:

Even in those barren places where the funds of Christian memory are noticeably insufficient and preaching finds little information in the

hearers on which to draw, still the sermon is heard as memory. How so? The experience of the listeners, if not their knowledge, confirms the truth from the pulpit. Let me be clear: that which is preached is not the experience of the preacher or of the hearers. In other words, neither speaker nor listener is the source of the message. The source of Christian preaching is the Scripture, the normative record of God's revelation to us and in our behalf, but this revelatory material resonates with our experiences. ... Probing the heart of the text is probing the heart of the listener. (Craddock, 2004: 71)

In other words, even where the tradition of Scripture per se is highly attenuated the nature of those Scriptures is such that when they are 'well told' they resonate in insightful and creative ways with the dynamic interplay of the hearers' lives and knowledge and their reflection on those things. This kind of resonance Craddock associates with similar connections made through literature, drama, poetry, and cinema (2004: 72). The idea of preaching as art, as suggested by Browne (see section 2.7), immediately comes to mind. The concept of resonance will be discussed in a later chapter (see sections 6.5 and 6.6), but for the moment Craddock's perspective is noted in order to raise the issue as to whether that connecting resonance is genuinely there and whether it is sustainable in present social circumstances. Craddock most certainly does not base that connection on an appeal to shared experience, but just what it is that 'connects' is often not immediately apparent. There is, perhaps, a correlation here with Halbwachs' idea of the invisibility of the social thought that sustains memory (1980: 38). According to Halbwachs, those invisible social influences generally only come to light when they are resisted. It is the upsetting of collective memories by whatever change is occurring that discloses their power. The ideological privileging of a group or institution's memory does not necessarily of itself guarantee the maintenance of the collective memory so privileged. The resonance Craddock points to has to be more than either creedal or fortuitous. As Hervieu-Léger insists, the power of religious institutions to guard the content and nature of believing is much reduced and that, in turn, must have consequences for those connections Craddock sees so positively.

As was said earlier (section 4.4), according to Hervieu-Léger (2000: 125), lineage of belief is the determining characteristic of religious memory. This lineage is given visibility, and repeatedly affirmed by the group, in the recalling of the past as a way of giving meaning to the present and hope for the future (125). Through this regular practice of anamnesis, says Hervieu-Léger, the foundational events are recalled, the passage of time is made plain, individuals are incorporated into the chain, and the power of the chain to persist despite whatever has or will happen is affirmed. Again Hervieu-Léger remains very close to Halbwachs' ideas; like him she sees the way memory is managed as varying in religious groups according to their various distinguishing characteristics, and, also like him, she points out the highly conflictual character of religious memory (126). For both of them, the core of religious power is the ability to expound the true memory of the group and the recognition and authorization of that ability in an individual—the significance of this for homiletics needs no further amplification at this point.

Where Hervieu-Léger advances the discussion beyond Halbwachs' ideas is in her recognition of the dialectic that necessarily exists—indeed she terms it 'the central dynamic of all religion' (2000: 127)—between the emotional and highly symbolic liturgical rehearsal of the chain and the expounding and discussion of the actual body of belief which gives access to it and legitimizes participation in it (128). Both aspects of that dialectic vary enormously, as indeed does just how any particular grouping operates the relationship between them. For Hervieu-Léger, the pressing issue is whether that dynamic can still function in a society where the power of an integrating memory has all but been obliterated. If that dynamic fails the preacher is left with a dislocated body of ideas and symbols that are more and more difficult to make sensible—in both the intellectual and physical meaning of that word. Without the lineage of concepts provided by memory, the supporting, structuring, and sense making framework on which exposition depends is destroyed.

According to Hervieu-Léger, two contemporary social trends account for the disintegration of collective memory: namely 'the expansion and homogenization of memory' (2000: 128) and the 'limitless fragmentation of

individual and group memory' (129). The first trend is an outworking of capitalism where all the old idiosyncrasies of the differing groups in a traditional ordering of society are homogenized into a rationalism that serves the needs of an economy based on technology and production. As Hervieu-Léger notes, this 'shallowing-out' of collective memory identified by Halbwachs has become all the more marked in an image-led world of mass communication:

The complexity of the world shown in the vast incoherent mass of available information is decreasingly amenable to being ordered in the more or less impromptu way that collective memory was able to achieve by finding explanatory links. Such links, it is true, contained much that was illusory or mistaken; they constituted the essence of the preconceptions which science in its analysis of reality was bound to cast out; but with all their frailty at least they afforded an immediate and effective basis for developing individual and collective systems of meaning. (2000: 128)

And she concludes of this trend:

The spontaneously generated interpretative process ... dissolved under the weight of image-fed information only to be replaced by anomic memory, made up of isolated recollection and scraps of information which are increasingly incoherent. (2000: 129)

Any contemporary preacher is likely to recognize the signs of 'anomic memory' in things such as people's inability to relate different aspects of Christian faith to each other, negative reactions to material not recognized as genuinely part of the Christian heritage, or reactions of surprise when some aspect of the Bible is encountered as for the first time.

The second trend is a consequence of the first; as individualism has become ever stronger so any sense of unifying memory becomes ever more difficult to achieve. The proliferation of groups and identities alongside the emphasis on individual autonomy destroys any possibility of a single construction of memory, everything becomes composed of 'bits and pieces' (2000: 129). Here Hervieu-Léger is returning to a problem first discussed at length by Karl

Mannheim—namely that of inter-generational transmission of understanding and culture (see Mannheim, 1952). As she puts it, what is at issue is whether in this climate of fragmentation young people have the ability to organize the mass of information that comes at them in relation to a lineage to which they see themselves as belonging (Hervieu-Léger, 2000: 130). The link between what comes before and the individual's own experience seems to be missing. Her question is whether in such a social climate a group can possibly recognize itself both as a link in a chain of belief and as entrusted with extending that chain into the future. That sociological question has immediate bearing on the nature of homiletics since only a practice of preaching that recognizes the issue has any chance of providing resources to answer such a question positively.

4.6 Religion and memory work: a summary.

The account here of the sociological analysis of memory work in contemporary European religion has so far been given in wholly theoretical terms. This now needs to be amplified by reference to some more practice based examples which will bring more definite form to social processes that have so far been seen largely in terms of decline and a reduction of possibilities. Before doing so the discussion so far is presented in a summary form to provide a platform for that further discussion.

European society has been characterized as amnesic in terms of collective memory. This makes the maintenance of memory linkages with their associated sense of belonging ever more difficult to maintain. For religion this is particularly problematic in that believing itself is essentially concerned with the continuity of linkages experienced both personally and socially. Not only does the inability to maintain the chain of memory threaten a group's present identity but it also brings into question the group's future since it is from the spontaneous reflexivity of shared memory that religion is enabled to be forward looking. In religion without a memory chain of believing the future becomes less imaginable. Society has simply become forgetful of traditional religion.

Forgetfulness of tradition, however, does not mean that religion has disappeared from the social arena. In place of the endless debate about whether religion should be defined in a functionalist or substantive way, a new autonomy for religious ideas is suggested that enables them to ‘float’ in the social arena so as to be available to multiple purposes not previously possible. In the individual sphere multifarious ideas and practices are employed and set-aside in a consumerist way as the individual sees fit. In the social sphere religious ideas are metaphorized into areas of discourse and practice not obviously religious in the traditional sense but which come to act as religious analogues. Freed from institutional control, religious ideas and symbols take on a fluidity that fits the social milieu of contemporary modernity—an account of present circumstances that echoes the ideas of Zygmunt Bauman writing on others areas of human experience (see for example Bauman, 2003). Forgetfulness has not destroyed believing, but it has both ended its social taken-for-grantedness and its control by traditional religious institutions.

Where collective memory was strong, religious power was based on an individual’s power to sustain and properly expound the memory. With the crumbling of that integrating memory the basis of religious power evaporates—a process perhaps covertly acknowledged in a body such as the Church of England in the 1980s onwards move away from a fourfold core curriculum of Biblical, Historical, Dogmatic and Pastoral studies in ordination training (Ministry Division, 2006: 3) and a widening of the base of those who are authorized ministers of one sort or another. Anamnesis, a repeated active re-calling of the tradition in liturgy and exposition, has been the usual way of incorporating people into the memory and maintaining it, but the decline in worship practice and the crumbling of collective memory raises questions about its continuing efficacy. The image-dominated world of mass communication and consumerism makes for a homogenization of social memory at the same time as the individualization it promotes creates highly fragmented and capricious individual memories. As Hervieu-Léger sums it up, ‘in all domains the conviction of believing, founded on reference to a tradition which is there to be preserved and passed on, is disintegrating’ (2000: 137). The potency of tradition is leached away by the

combined corrosive powers of contemporary individualism, pluralism and subjectivism.

4.7 The management of memory in a forgetful milieu.

In English, Hervieu-Léger's work has been most extensively discussed by Grace Davie, most particularly in her *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (2000a), but also in *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (2002) and *The Sociology of Religion* (2007). In the first text (2000a) Davie provides a framework of the variations of memory that offers the possibility of a path towards a clearer delineation of preaching as social production. She delineates nine variations (2000a: 36), namely:

1. *Vicarious memory*. This is the, perhaps essentially European, notion that a minority may maintain a tradition on behalf of the majority. Davie writes:

For particular historical reasons (notably the presence of a state church), significant numbers of Europeans are content to let both churches and churchgoers enact a memory on their behalf (the essential meaning of vicarious), more than half aware that they might need to draw on that capital at crucial times in their individual or collective lives. (2001: 271)

This is a conception of social memory that can be closely associated with the idea of social capital (see Bourdieu, (1986); Putnam, (2000)). Social capital is generally understood to be those social resources, norms, networks, and bonds of trust that facilitate mutual co-operation and mutual benefit. The dilemma for the churches is that such capital does not necessarily carry with it much of a weight of believing. Indeed, to increase the emphasis on believing might be seen as inimical to social capital because it draws distinctions between people that, arguably, reduce networking or trust. If that is true at an institutional level, then it is all the more an issue at the level of preaching and congregational life. Preaching appears by definition to be about profound believing, so it can easily be suspect as a medium of meanings in forums that are wider than groups of

believers. There is, perhaps, evidence of this reservation in the way sermons at funeral services have been de-emphasized as eulogies have become more prominent.

2. *Precarious memory.* In terms of the concerns of the historic churches which are the focus of this thesis, this is most particularly about generational change (though, of course, not exclusively so, since any vicarious memory by definition is precarious). Mention has already been made of how difficult it is for younger people to be part of the lineage of religious memory. That difficulty is evidenced in how the institutional churches have effectively lost touch with younger generations, and how religious teaching in schools has moved away from a catechetical to a wholly information orientated mode (Davie, 2000a: 180). The sermon as a form of communication is less and less likely to have been experienced by younger people.

3. *Mediated memory.* All religious memory is, and has always been, mediated by something or somebody (Davie, 2000a: 184). As was noted above, Hervieu-Léger suggests that the sheer volume of information in an era of mass communication coupled with the way images predominate, inexorably changes social memory processes. Whether that is too stern a judgement is a very difficult issue to determine, but what is clear is that the media cannot either police the tradition in the ways that churches previous did, nor reinforce it through pastoral contact. It is also arguably the case that the metaphorization of religion to which Hervieu-Léger draws attention applies forcefully to the media—that is, they are in some sense an analogue religion in contemporary society.

4. *Alternative memories.* This variation draws attention to diversity within particular traditions; the presence of religions relatively new to much of Europe (for example Islam or Hinduism); and innovative forms of religious expression that lie outside any religious organizations (for example New Age spirituality). Davie notes that in the first category there have emerged divisions that lie across rather than between European churches on matters as diverse as the European Union, human sexuality, ecology, liturgy, and the understanding of women in leadership (2000a: 185). Different opinions draw on different versions

of religious memory, and the notion of Christendom competes with traditions of national identity. Preachers negotiate this territory with difficulty: all too aware that competing and mutually exclusive understandings can easily dislodge previously precious memories.

5. *Symbolic memories.* This refers to that memory that is cultural and aesthetic traditions embedded in art, architecture and music, as well as the phenomena of symbolic representations enacted in various ways and with varying degrees of intensity (Davie, 2000a: 189-192). Some of these representations—like the holidays of Christmas and Easter—are part of that embedded, taken-for-grantedness that discloses the continued dominance of the Christian memory despite its fragility in other areas. More ambiguous examples are evident in memorialization of one kind or another where Christian categories are readily mixed up with other ways of understanding—an example of the ‘bits and pieces’ use of memory Hervieu-Léger describes. In the world of art the Christian heritage of Europe continues to be much in evidence, but perhaps tempered by an increasing awareness of the need to explain a symbolic language with which the public are no longer familiar—for example, the National Gallery’s very successful 2000 exhibition *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art* was accompanied by a television series and a book of a distinctly explanatory character that assumed traditional symbolism would largely not be understood by the audience. The drawbacks, identified by Browne (see section 2.3), to an easy assumption of the utility of art to the preacher need always to be taken into account.

6. *Conflicting memory/memories.* This category points not only to the instances where violence has clearly had a religious aspect, such as in the Balkans and in Ireland, but also the less dramatic instances of conflict around the specifics of Christian believing and practice, and the nature of the relationship between religion and other social issues such as national identity (Davie, 2000a: 187). Halbwachs believed religious collective memory to be inherently conflictual, and it is perhaps the case that conflicts around questions of the authenticity of the tradition become more pronounced as the social stress of holding the memory

increases. Certainly current disputes within the Church of England could, arguably, be analysed in these terms.

7. *Ruptured and/or rediscovered memory.* It is clearly the case that chains of memory are occasionally completely broken or ruptured (Davie, 2000a: 37). What is not as easily seen is the fact that, given the right circumstances, they can be recovered or re-established. An example of this process is the annual Remembrance Sunday observance focused on memories of the First and Second World Wars. During the 1970s attendance was in marked decline, and there was much questioning about how long the commemoration would remain feasible. That all changed with the Falklands War of 1982 and the day quickly reverted to the prominence it had enjoyed in earlier times.

8. *Extinguished memory.* The possibility that vital components of the inherited religious memory will entirely disappear must be part of the analysis provoked by Hervieu-Léger's schema (Davie, 2001: 273). That said, it is clearly the case that her analysis is not simply a reworking of the so-called classic theory of secularization. What Hervieu-Léger sets before us as fragile is the inherited memory chain of religion as traditionally expressed in its varying forms in Western Europe, not the human propensity towards some kind of religious expression and belief. As Peter Berger so famously put it, the modern world is 'as furiously religious as ever' (1999: 2). For the preacher, however, the prominence of religion in the news can reinforce negative estimations of preaching and increase a sense of religion as inevitably disputational. The very prominence of the media account of religion does not necessarily work to the benefit of the relatively small-scale participational quality of most worship events.

9. *Mutating memory.* This is the concept that is the overarching motif of Davie's book of 2000 and directs attention towards the reconstructions of religion taking place in European religion as it responds and adapts to changed circumstances. A crucial point brought to light by Davie is that many of the continuity problems of the historic churches have been created by their over-dependence on the 'centre' of West European society, whether expressed

culturally, economically or politically. As that centre has itself become fragile and insecure so have the churches (Davie, 2000a: 192). As churches have become more socially marginal their membership has become a more self-selecting constituency (Davie, 2007a: 252) and less one of obligation, or nationally ascribed identification. Church-going is no longer the experience of a large section of the population; instead, it is an action chosen by individuals within the voluntary or leisure sphere of their lives (Davie, 2007: 126). Although what this will ultimately do to the linkages of Hervieu-Léger's chain of memory is not clear, what is certain is that individualized forms of spirituality have become paramount and that it is more and more difficult in any geographical area to countenance the idea of a collective memory. The issues then become how the plurality of memories is maintained, how memories are related to one another, and where and how the boundaries of authenticity are set.

The implication of Davie's categorizations in terms of preaching's symbolic production and social utility are profound. Two examples will perhaps suffice as indicators of issues that will surface again later in this thesis. First, as Davie points out, the notion of vicarious memory immediately raises the question as to whether a relatively small number of people can 'look after' the Christian memory on behalf of others. The prevalence and appeal of that idea in England is reflected in the widespread use of the designation 'vicar'. In one sense the preacher is always in the 'on behalf of others' mode, but if, as has been argued earlier, the practical theology that is preaching is essentially a task within a wider cultural matrix then it cannot allow its terms and references to be wholly contained within what becomes a sub-cultural ghetto. Davie puts it like this:

Doing something on behalf of others must imply, surely that the majority as well as the minority has some idea of what is going on; in other words that they are not entirely indifferent to the activities of the religious institutions even if they take no—or very little—part in them. (2000a: 178)

Preaching, like numerous other aspects of religious experience, can only function 'on behalf of others' if there is sufficient engagement with the 'other'. The absence of the 'other', even in categories of imagination and intellectual sympathy puts a large question mark against the practice of contemporary

preaching. Arguably, the implicit assumption of ‘a common human experience’ in much preaching is already a denial of ‘the other’. Or, as a second example, if the focus is shifted to mediated memory and the obvious point that religious memory has always been mediated by something or somebody, the realities of how a sermon is produced in its delivery and reception shifts profoundly. The preacher has always been a mediator. But now, it is argued, the environment of that mediation has changed radically, not only because of the shifting place of religious institutions, but even more markedly because of the quantum leap that is the mass media. Here television is taken to be the principal shaper of how that operates for individuals. The workings of television as a means of mediation works in ways quite unlike earlier media (see Warren, 1997): it is inevitably undemanding intellectually, emotionally, and even physically; what it offers is largely rationally determined on a calculated economic basis (perhaps ameliorated occasionally by public service considerations); it is inevitably wholly constructed in an industrial way because of the complexity of the technology required; it is by nature over-simplifying and has difficulty presenting complexities that cannot be expressed visually; entertainment is so predominant as its principle *raison d’être* that it curtails other modes of expression; by definition and practice it always aims to be ‘popular’ and, as such, finds it difficult to give expression to serious things in other terms, like, say, asceticism; and, since it goes directly into homes and is wholly consumer choice driven, it is independent of any direct community sanction or support, and corrosive of participatory gatherings. Characteristics such as these make television particularly unyielding and difficult when it comes to the more traditional mediating forms that the church has used for centuries. The sermon itself looks strangely monological, difficult and long-winded in televisual terms.

That said, the characterization of the ways in which television works can be turned with a more positive spin. For example, the lack of inter-personal engagement might prompt people to consciously look for such engagement elsewhere. Or again, is the culture of consumption inevitably destructive of effective preaching? Categories of consumer evaluation might actually lead to a more self-consciously designed sermon construction that could assist the

preaching task. Whatever else is said, the consumptive process of sermon utilization is inevitably set within an environment dominated by the mass media so preaching can never be wholly divorced from its influence. Bricolage, a term derived from anthropology and cultural studies, is a useful way of describing that process in contemporary church practice. Bricolage describes those social processes that create something out of whatever symbolic ‘materials’ come to hand so that the outcome and the structure created are more important than their constituent parts. It is a process of transforming the meaning of objects or symbols through their novel or unconventional use. In applying it to preaching, I mean that, in an environment where collective memory linkages are weakened, participants in the preaching event assemble the ideas, meanings, and symbols they gather from the sermon with elements from their experience and understanding, and create what is useful or worthwhile to themselves. A process that is often extremely vexing to preachers who assume propositional statements will be taken on board literally by those amongst whom they preach. It is, nevertheless, a process that is closely related to the ‘bits and pieces’ utilization of collective memory in the milieu of late-modernity.

4.8 An anamnestic community.

If the church is a canonical community—that is, a body of people who attempt to orientate themselves in living according to the canon of Christian practices and texts (see Gittoes, 2008)—then Hervieu-Léger’s analysis offers a stark assessment of its likely future in Britain and other parts of Europe. In that constant cultural negotiation between the canons of the faith and life as it is generally lived and understood that Christians must undertake, it seems that the Christian dimension is constantly losing ground. The memory work that is at the heart of the social utilization of the canon is more and more difficult to sustain. Structures that previously undergirded that memory work have disappeared, or are much weakened. The churches of much of Europe can therefore be characterized as anamnestic communities set within amnesic societies.

Many worshippers, although they would not use the terminology of collective memory theory, would apply interpretive, experiential and remembering kind of language to preaching. It would be recognized that the preacher's task is interpreting the text of Scripture and relating it to people in a way that connects to lived experience. The homiletician John McClure (2001) has identified three forms of memory traditionally at work in that interpretative process and it is worth detailing them so as to provide something of a theological framework for the conclusion of this chapter.

First, McClure identifies that method of memory work that finds its origin within the oral culture in which Christianity first arose; this he terms *kerygmatic memory* (2001: 29). In this mode the preacher re-adapts the living customs that developed around the sacred words of Scripture (37). McClure summarizes:

Implicitly or explicitly, each Sunday morning, preachers transport themselves and their hearers (back?) to this originary scene. Even though we know that the words on the page barely scratch the surface of it, in an act of memory we gather at this scene for some event, encounter, or manifestation signalled in the biblical words. ... Movement to this originary scene is somehow crucial to our memory—and our negotiation of tradition. (2001: 30)

From work on the text, the preacher 'hears this or that said', and consequently names 'this as this' and 'that as that' (2001: 31). Things are identified as 'gospel', or 'evil', or 'the transfiguration', or 'the resurrection', or some other theological motif; and in this naming 'the preacher selects a set of (often textual) holy words that become mnemonic markers (*topoi*) around which the flux of memory can be assembled' (31). In this process imagination and memory ultimately become almost interchangeable since it is in the holding of memory that the past exists; as Hervieu-Léger's analysis suggests, the linkages of memory are crucial to the survival of the past.

The second mode of memory work McClure delineates is that which comes out of the transition between oral and manuscript culture; this he terms

mimetic memory (2001: 33). In this the preacher analogically imitates or copies the scriptural original (37), and looks to create some sort of dynamic analogy or equivalence between the biblical text and contemporary experience. McClure writes:

In mimetic memory, the desire to remember the beloved past makes us strike a pose, reset the table, say the words again. We do this even though the body that poses, the table that is set, and the words that we speak are not the same, because of the fact that the codes of body language, eating, and speaking of such things have changed. (2001: 33)

This is the memory as imitation, so the words of the Bible are not organized so as to be topical markers, but rather as an original to be copied. McClure follows closely Paul Ricoeur's understanding of mimesis, as developed in *Time and Narrative* (1984), and says that the preacher needs three competencies for such memory work: the capacity to identify action via its structural features (*that* textual act from the past and *this* act in the present exist in the same semantic field); the capacity to identify that in the analogy being made roughly similar symbolic values are shared within a similar, but not identical, hierarchy of values (for example, in the Bible a Samaritan stands in relation to Jewish culture as *x* stands to *y* in our culture); and finally the capacity to create a narration. McClure sums it up:

The preacher must be able to help the church today to dynamically imitate its revelatory past by organizing analogous acts into a coherent faith narrative involving the actual stuff of daily life. The narrative grammar of the biblical story is massaged into the pores of the life-story of those who hear the sermon—and vice versa. (2001: 35)

Beyond these three competencies the preacher also imitates 'the literary or rhetorical shape of the biblical text and its performative force' (35), opening, in a phrase from Ricoeur (1984: 64), 'the kingdom of the *as if*'. This mimesis asserts the fragmentation that comes with distance in time since it testifies by its very nature to something that is absent.

The third mode of memory work McClure describes is that which arises out of the move to a culture of print. This he calls *historicist memory*, since with the printed text there is a drive to be historical in a formal sense, and dates and timelines become predominating mnemonic devices. This is memory that attempts to historically locate dates, authorship, audience and context of the Scriptures. In an historicist mode, preachers strive to recollect and reconstruct the past with much emphasis on the context of the text and an encouragement to hearers to live in continuity of ‘intention and purpose with reconstructed faith communities from the past’ (2001: 37). In this mode, according to McClure, ‘memory is shaped in preaching as a process of discerning accurate continuity or discontinuity with the past, trueing-up the sermon’s remembering’ (2001: 37).

McClure characterizes memory here as:

... an endless process of archiving. The more carefully the reconstruction of the past, and the more the past is archived, the more discontinuity overtakes continuity in preaching. Ultimately, therefore, a historicist homiletic memory remembers our alienation from the past. (2001: 39)

Preachers who adopt such an historicist approach aim to operate as unbiased historians: using rational enquiry and careful weighing of facts they objectify the past. Because of their commitment to the processes of factual historiography, the past remains the past. According to McClure, the historicist preacher, however, cannot help but be influenced by the presuppositions that stem from kerygmatic and mimetic uses (2001: 38). I think that here he is echoing Gadamer’s discussion (1989) of the way interpretation is influenced by pre-understanding. Preachers well versed in historical-critical methodology cannot help themselves. Being situated within a living tradition makes it almost impossible for them to step outside the Christian community’s shared pre-understanding. Anamnesis wins out over forensic reconstruction every time.

McClure sees all three modes of memory interrelated in contemporary homiletics; critical historical objectivity, kerygmatic *topoi*, and artful mimetic analogy are all employed—but in hierarchies of use, priority and relationship to

one another that suit the predilections of the preacher and a local church's theological particularities. According to McClure, historicist memory, with its supporting sanction of scholarly authority, has become a kind of 'official memory'; but the widely acknowledged problems of historiography mean it cannot stand alone as a purified form of memory. He writes:

In preaching, this official memory is once again recycled in relation to the kerygmatic and mimetic memories of preachers and congregations. As the particulars of this official memory are brought into interaction with the well-formed 'habits of mind' (customs, rituals, etc.) and mimetic patterns that shape a preacher's and congregation's memory, the past is retrospectively restructured and rendered to memory as history in preaching. (2001: 39)

This brings McClure to consider the possibility of another memory mode, namely counter memory; a possibility that will allow this discussion to return to Hervieu-Léger as a way of summarizing this consideration of the sociology of memory work as it bears on preaching.

4.9 The future for anamnestic communities in an amnesic world.

Everywhere in Europe the religious memory (or perhaps more accurately a range of memories) is shifting profoundly; old structures are dissolving as former shared meanings no longer make sense, and new belongings are being created as novel and innovative memories gain prominence—whilst, at the same time, traditional memory work continues in some areas with apparent resilience. Using the chain of memory metaphor, it is clear that in some places it hangs by a thread; in others it is forged anew of strange materials that may change it into something else—similar but different—and, in yet others, repairs and sustained use suggest it is receiving ongoing maintenance, albeit with rust damage. The complexity and variation is an indication that secularization, as so far experienced, has not led to the disappearance of religion, but to 'an ongoing re-organization of the nature and forms of religion into configurations which are

compatible with modern living' (Davie, 2007: 60). Davie's judgement discloses the issue that gnaws away at the confidence of the traditional churches, namely how far their relationship to an increasingly indifferent social world has fuelled that process either by too much or too little compromise. Such self-criticism often, of course, finds expression in preaching as well as formal theology and institutional reports and debates. For Hervieu-Léger those worries, as understandable as they are, are not the fundamental matter, indeed they may be little more than an inevitable aspect of the de-institutionalization of the religious. The crucial issue for traditional institutions of religion lies elsewhere. She writes:

The real problem that concerns the future—perhaps the survival—of traditional religious institutions has to do with their ability, as an essential part of their function and a mark of their credibility in the world of high modernity, to give serious attention to the flexible nature of believing as it affects them, and which must oblige them to come to terms with the dynamics of the propagating and reprocessing of religious signs, itself a negation of the traditional mode of administering authorized memory. (2000: 168)

The very nature of religious institutions as religious institutions is called into question by the shift away from the acceptance of an authorized collective memory. A new subjectivism is asserting itself and it is far from clear that it requires or needs institutional expression in the way that earlier believing did. Hervieu-Léger puts the issue in very stark terms:

How can religious institutions, with their prime purpose of preserving and transmitting a tradition, reform their own system of authority—essential for the continuity of a line of belief—when the tradition is thought of, even by believers, not as a sacred trust, but as an ethico-cultural heritage, a fund of memory and a reservoir of signs at the disposal of individuals? (2000: 168)

That is a worrying and profound question in terms of the continuance of the traditional church in contemporary European society. At this point Hervieu-Léger's analysis adds weight to those secularization theorists, such as Bruce, who

see the demise of inherited religious institutions as inevitable—and in a more recent un-translated book (2003), Hervieu-Léger does suggest that for French Catholicism the memory chain is now broken. As important as that issue is, this thesis must concern itself with the smaller question of what those ongoing changes in memory mean for the practice of preaching embedded in those religious institutions.

At first sight McClure's search for a counter memory might be thought suggestive of a possible way forward. His is an attempt to take absolutely seriously the deconstructionism of writers such as Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), and Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), with their ideas of how traditions become conventions that legitimize the power of some whilst denying power to others. The deconstructionists also suggest that traditions are easily utilized by capitalism and used as marketing tools. In particular they point to their use in simulations and simulacra, by which they mean, those images and signs that are essentially constructed by cultural and media workings in order to sell things. According to Baudrillard, simulacra and simulations have no genuine reference in reality, and are entirely fabricated (Baudrillard, 1994). McClure uses these ideas to require of homiletic practice an openness to 'the other' that has been silenced by traditional preaching, a de-centring of previous authority, a new awareness of the physicality of the communicative environment, and a certain playfulness in the utilization symbols and history (2000: 41-44). Reason, experience and tradition are to be reframed in an ethically tested and determined homiletic that he terms 'other-wise preaching' (133).

McClure's argument has direct bearing on the use of collective memory, and how it relates to homiletics. He writes:

Preaching is going outside this house of memory, abandoning memory's 'being,' its essence, in order to find its memory of what is otherwise. Outside this house, on the scene of representation, the preacher hesitates again with the others, listens for the designations of the others, is torn from memory by the others, experiences the glory of the Infinite in the vulnerable faces of others, articulates a resounding new kerygma full of

joyful possibility, and errs again. When this happens, the memory that shapes preaching becomes otherwise than memory (countermemory); the anamnesis of the church moves toward its others; and preaching, the steward, but no longer the caretaker of the house of memory, becomes other-wise preaching. (2001: 45)

The critical, emancipatory, and ethically formed homiletics McClure believes to be developing renders preaching ‘a public, ethical, anamnestic, and eschatological event designed to create significant forms of solidarity, collaboration, or affinity between and across groups’ (2001: 108). It is here that the application of McClure starts to be problematic. Unlike the traditions contained in the three forms of memory—kerygmatic, mimetic and historicist—McClure identifies as parts of the interpretative process, his counter memory seems wholly related to an American experience of religion. For all its use of ideas drawn from European authors’ discussions of postmodernism and deconstructivism, it presupposes an authority for religion and for preaching that does not pertain in Europe. He can countenance the abandonment of the preacher’s caretaking of memory because of his essentially optimistic judgement about the gospel-friendly nature of influences in wider society (echoed perhaps in Craddock’s idea of resonance, as discussed in section 4.5). If Hervieu-Léger’s social diagnosis is accurate, McClure’s countermemory seems more like the outworking of a potentially destructive metaphorization, rather than the re-creation of an emancipatory memory.

What McClure does offer to this discussion, however, is the realization that institutional decline and other measurable social changes are not the only challenges to preaching as memory maintenance. Alongside them must be placed the voices of radical hermeneutics, deconstruction, and postmodernism, with their deep suspicion of all overarching generalization. The New Homiletic that incorporates kerygmatic and mimetic memory within an inductive use of images, metaphors and symbols, is no less under suspicion from those voices than older deductive styles. All are criticized as basing themselves on an appeal to common human experience that is in reality hegemonic. A deconstructionist analysis requires the preacher to ask whose interests the memory actually serves. Similarly, the use of both traditions and symbols are also challenged as subtly

hegemonic and exclusivist. Where are the voices that have been silenced in the juxtapositions the preacher is at home with? And the deconstructionist insistence that the idea of language serving an ontological function is questionable requires of preachers at least a willingness to take account of that possibility. Words at their best can only hint at what remains always beyond words.

Whilst acknowledging those issues, in terms of Hervieu-Léger's analysis, McClure's way forward retains the framework of 'believing' that no longer applies in a European context which is more and more at home in the much looser framework of 'beliefs'. His willingness to engage with the challenging voices of postmodernism and deconstruction for the cause of reshaping preaching is impressive, but it is ultimately too sanguine about the structure of religion itself to be applicable this side of the Atlantic. For most of the traditional churches of Europe, claiming even the stewardship of memory has become problematic. Where that is not the case, memory maintenance is achieved by a solidifying of a strong boundary between belief and wider society that pushes religion even further towards the margins of the public square.

Hervieu-Léger terms the late twentieth-century generation as 'the first post-traditional generation', by which she means a situation of structural uncertainty in which all markers become mobile, reversible and transferable (2000: 164). Meanings, values and behaviours have become much more fluid than previously. As has already been said, she considers this fluidity to be highly corrosive of tradition but not necessarily of religious believing. Paradoxically, contemporary outlooks and understandings both nourish and destroy religious believing.

Davie's commentary on Hervieu-Léger offers an account of this paradox. In the contemporary social milieu, individuals, she says, 'are encouraged to seek answers, to find solutions, to make progress and to move forwards' (2007: 60). Indeed such aspirations have become an increasingly normal part of human experience; the novelty of which in terms of the whole of human history we often do not notice. The realization of those aspirations is, and will always remain, problematic (60). The goal sought always, but always, recedes; 'there is a

permanent gap between the experiences of everyday life and the expectations that lie on or beyond the horizon' (60). This utopian space is what, in Hervieu-Léger's understanding, generates the need for the religious, but what is generated must conform to what is compatible with modern living and useable within it. In this utility model of being religious, membership is chosen in a consumerist sense, finds its usability in things like emotional community and firm indicators of identity, and tends towards individualistic expression. Davie sums up the emerging pattern in this way:

I go to church (or to another religious organization) because I want to, maybe for a short period or maybe for longer, to fulfil a particular rather than a general need in my life and where I will continue my attachment so long as it provides what I want, but I have no obligation either to attend in the first place or to continue if I don't want to. (2007: 96)

Whether such coming together is religion is a mute point for Hervieu-Léger. People coming together in fraternities of free choice may even clash with religion, since those fraternities put the unity of the emotions and minds of its members above fidelity to the chain of belief (Hervieu-Léger, 2000: 152). In Hervieu-Léger's terms, the grouping only becomes religious when it feels itself needing to have a continuing representation of itself that goes beyond its members' relationships and will continue across time (2000: 152). Again the paradox is evident; individuals are drawn to find fulfilment of needs in religious or quasi-religious ways, but that very individualism works to counter the establishment of, or the incorporation into, a tradition of religion. Whether in these circumstances preaching can be reframed in such a way as to resource that incorporation is a key issue. If it cannot, preaching is reduced to a brief explanatory sales pitch to an ever numerically diminishing and increasingly transient audience. Ultimately, the sociology of Hervieu-Léger and Davie highlights the profoundly challenging nature of homiletics as memory maintenance in contemporary society. The next chapter will examine some of the recurring themes of contemporary homiletic theory in order to assess how far that challenge has been acknowledged in the practice of preaching.

Chapter Five

Impact, event, and context in contemporary preaching

5.1 Mapping the commonalities.

The diversity of the trends identified in the earlier review (sections 2.4 to 2.8) presents a particular challenge to the analysis of justifiable generalizations about homiletic theory and practice in the last half-century. As Edwards observes, ‘there seem to be more forms of preaching today than in all previous Christian centuries put together’ (2004: 835). Furthermore, Edwards judges that ‘preachers during the late-twentieth century tried to accomplish a greater variety of things through their sermons than any of their predecessors attempted’ (2004: 663). Allen, Blaisdell and Johnston similarly describe the current homiletical scene as a ‘smorgasboard of approaches’ and cite no less than eleven identifiable contemporary styles of preaching (1997: 171).

According to Edwards two developments account for this diversity: namely, the sheer number of people who designate themselves as Christians (in the 20th century Christianity became the most extensive and universal religion in history (Barratt, 2001: 3)), and the huge proliferation of organizational bodies within which preachers are operative (2004: 835). The work of the statisticians Barratt, Kurian and Johnson supports Edwards’ judgement; in their *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2001) they estimate that in the year 2000 Christians of all kinds numbered 2 billion people in 33,820 distinct denominations (2001: 10). They observe that ‘there are today Christians and organized Christian churches in every inhabited country on earth’ (2001: 3). The impact of this globalization is significant even in the much narrower geographical confines of this thesis, and it is inconceivable that an accurate appraisal of preaching practice and theory could be made apart from a ready acknowledgement of the forces and influences that

are properly termed global. The indicators of institutional decline apparent in the churches of the Western world have to be set against rapid and continuing growth in other parts of the globe. This shift of numerical strength inevitably has consequences for preaching as for other aspects of church practice and faith. The presence in the UK of Christian personnel from the southern parts of the world, increased congregation to congregation contact made possible by cheap air travel, and the development of Internet usage, all offer new understandings and strategies from elsewhere in the global church in ways much more directly influential than even in the immediate past. The practice of preaching, like most other human endeavours in the early twenty-first century, takes place within a pluriform social environment in which many and diverse influences from the widest possible arenas of human activity have a bearing. That said, preaching, in social terms, remains predominantly a locally-focused activity, and sermon style and content are usually closely related to the specifics of the sub-cultural frames in which the life and self-understanding of the congregation is set. Consequently, the power of the local context is another factor underlying Edwards' observation of the immense diversity of contemporary sermon styles. As Edwards puts it, such diversity shows 'how radically *ad hoc* all Christian preaching is' (2004: 835). That is not to say, however, that such enormous diversity denies the possibility of any sensible generalization. In particular, as was suggested in the earlier review, three aspects are identifiable within contemporary preaching practices that have particular significance for collective memory—namely, awareness of a sermon's psychological engagement, communicative salience and contextual pertinence. In other words, those aspects of preaching that deal with a sermon's impact on the hearer; its purposefulness as an event in its own terms; and its relationship to the context in which it is delivered and heard.

In order to establish an analytical framework that is not too unwieldy three texts that are in some sense representative documents will be analysed closely. Other texts that develop, challenge, or amplify the issues disclosed will be added to the discussion as the argument requires. The representative texts have been selected as indicative of three prominent strands in the ongoing discussion of homiletic practice: firstly, continuity in terms of issues of concern

and of practice methodology; secondly, change in practice and the philosophical and technical components that undergird it; and thirdly, reorientation that aims to subtly change the locus of practice itself. The first text will utilize a perspective from prior to the 1955 to 2005 period under review that still has currency, albeit in terms significantly altered from earlier years. The second will analyse a perspective of more recent origin that signifies contemporary concerns with philosophy and communications theory and the technical practice that flows from them. And the third will examine a perspective that sees the local context of preaching as fundamental to homiletic activity rather than just the arena in which it takes place.

The first text is Phillips Brooks' Lyman Beecher Lectures of 1877, last reissued in book form as recently as 1987, and described by Killinger as 'one of the most readable and inspiring volumes on preaching ever penned' (1985: 207). The version used here will be the 1904 edition, published in London under the title *Lectures on Preaching*. No attempt will be made to alter the gender specificity of Brooks' words since, although this study readily acknowledges that the preaching task belongs as much to women as to men, the assumptions of his text in this area are a clear marker of changes that have taken place even under the cover of longstanding common concerns.

David Buttrick's 1987 book *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* is the second focus. At more than 500 pages, this is a monumental work in size, as well as scope and influence. Edwards (2004: 806) describes Buttrick's work as being as influential and significant as Fred Craddock's pioneering of the New Homiletic, and Lischer (2002: 337) credits him with the first homiletic in theory and practice 'geared to our [present day] culture of images'.

The final representative text is Leonora Tisdale's 1997 work *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, which asks preachers to become ethnographers of their congregations in order to understand the 'human nature' of their hearers from the inside as it were. Tisdale is one of a new movement of homiletic practitioners and theoreticians at home with anthropological and sociological models in Christian ministry and alert to cultural-linguistic issues. Her work

provides a way into the insights of those who acknowledge that preaching's former authority has all but evaporated, but who see a radical social re-encounter as being a real possibility for a reshaped sermon practice.

5.2 Continuities of concerns and practice: Brooks and contemporary preaching.

As was noted earlier (Section 2.5), Brooks' Lyman Beecher Lectures remained much used as a guide to homiletic practice well into the period under review. Indeed such has been the influence of his insistence on preaching as 'the bringing of truth through personality' (1904: 5) that Brooks' expression continues to be repeated in exactly the same terms in contemporary works, such as those of Day (1998: 6) and Killinger (1985: 8). In dwelling on the preacher's personality Brooks managed to encapsulate what, in the 1870s, was a new and burgeoning interest in the human psyche. It was hardly coincidence that his lectures were delivered in the same decade in which William James became America's first professorial-level teacher of psychology (Harvard in 1875) and G. Stanley Hall the country's first PhD in psychology. Unwittingly no doubt, Brooks reflected on novel intellectual ideas of his own day and, in doing so, identified within preaching practice what was to become a major preoccupation in many areas of discourse in the twentieth-century: namely, the human psyche and its relationship to action and truth. It is pertinent, therefore, to examine what Brooks understood by personality and its relationship to Christian truth in order to appreciate how his ideas were developed by homiletic practitioners in the period under review. What might appropriately be termed *personalist* (i.e. an emphasis in preaching on the personal religious experience of the hearer somehow addressed very directly by the preacher) has been, and continues to be, a major component in sermon delivery and design. Brooks' concept of preaching as 'truth through personality' became a kind of slogan for many preachers in the twentieth-century, and indeed remains a very influential mantra for many practitioners to this day. In Brooks' lectures that sloganized thought had a rather more nuanced definition:

Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. It has in it two essential elements, truth and personality. Neither of those can it spare and still be preaching. The truest truth, the most authoritative statement of God's, communicated in any other way than through the personality of brother man to men is not preached truth. Suppose it written on the sky, suppose it embodied in a book which has been so long held in reverence as the direct utterance of God that the vivid personality of the men who wrote its pages has well-nigh faded out of it; in neither of these cases is there any preaching. And on the other hand, if men speak to other men that which they do not claim for truth, if they use their powers of persuasion or of entertainment to make other men listen to their speculations, or do their will, or applaud their cleverness, that is not preaching either. The first lacks personality. The second lacks truth. And preaching is the bringing of truth through personality. (1904: 5)

For Brooks, the two components of truth and personality had to stand together, since their meeting was the point at which the universal and the particular met. It would be an exaggeration to say that Brooks viewed religious truth as essentially something that can only be known in personal experience; but he did believe that truth was at its most effective and powerful when known and expressed in personal terms. He understood the truth of the Christian faith to be universal and invariable, with personality as the site where it was 'realized' through variable and particular understanding and appropriation (1904: 15). Thus although he was clear gospel truth was a message to be transmitted, he insisted that it could only be transmitted via the voice of a witness, i.e. someone for whom it had become an indispensable part of that person's own experience (14). In terms of memory maintenance, Brooks' approach assumes that the preacher is deeply cognizant of the Christian tradition and is, as it were, a bearer of it in his or her own person.

5.2.1 The personal characteristics of the preacher.

Being such a bearer of the tradition required of the preacher exacting personal characteristics. The rigour Brooks brought to the personal qualities required of the preaching ‘witness’ continues to be challenging reading for anyone pursuing such a role. Alongside a deep personal piety (1904: 38), Brooks listed mental and spiritual unselfishness (39), ‘hopefulness’ as against judgmental fear (40), a vigorous commitment to physical health along with the offering of the whole of life in ministerial service (40), and an enthusiasm that made for a keen joy in preaching (42). Brooks saw the task of preaching as always needing an essential grounding in the very personhood of the preacher, by which he meant truth communicated through personality in an absolutely literal sense.

The second of his Lyman Beecher Lectures, entitled *The Preacher Himself*, amplified the point in this enumeration of the qualities necessary for success in preaching: purity and uprightness of character; lack of self-consciousness founded on absolute trust in God; genuine respect for those preached to; thorough enjoyment of the task; gravity of intent in all things; and courage to speak out (1904: 49-60). At first sight the list appears remote from more recent homiletic theory’s concern with techniques and philosophical issues, and therefore it might appear as less accessible and relevant to practitioners since the 1950s watershed in preaching identified earlier. Such personal qualities can seem to be more easily related to an era when the person of the preacher was regarded as carrying more authority than nowadays. Although in terms of wider social recognition the preacher is no longer a star of oratory, similar attributes are still sought after—but for rather different reasons.

Killinger (1985), for example, stresses the importance of the physical and mental health of the preacher as an aspect of communication, since troubles in those areas are signalled subconsciously to an ‘audience’ and work towards undermining the intended message. He writes:

Suppose we are preaching about wholeness and reconciliation but actually conveying a message about fragmentedness and despondency. The words may sound right, but there is something about the tune, about the look in our eyes, about the tension in our faces, that counters what we are saying. At best, people get a double message. It is very important, therefore, for the preacher to be as healthy and joyous as possible. Anything less impedes his or her message about the life-giving community of God. We are working at our preaching, for this reason, even when we are taking care of ourselves. (1985: 198-199)

Although the point is expressed in the idiom of late twentieth-century communications theory the reasoning is clearly akin to that of Brooks. For both, emphasis on the physicality of the preacher is an aspect of how the message will be received in the light of how the hearers' perceptions of the speaker. The body of the preacher, as well as his or her mental and spiritual capabilities, is, in this sense, a tool in the preaching witness.

Contemporary women homileticians have also emphasized physicality; but from a perspective that radicalizes it by making the woman preacher's bodily experience a site of homiletic resource. In Walton and Durber (1994), the negative, indeed destructive, consequences of a profound prejudice in the Christian tradition against women's bodies are highlighted. They note that in the light of this shameful history and despite occasional counter-tradition movements, the advent of more widespread preaching by women with the rise of Nonconformity did not generally challenge the unembodied nature of homiletic practice. Until the rise of the Women's Movement, women preachers, like their male counterparts, stressed a common rationality and a universal human nature that was blind to the particularities of embodied experience (Walton and Durber, 1994: 2). In more recent years, however, some women homileticians have striven to speak from their bodily experience and utilize both the negative and positive aspects of femininity, conception, pregnancy, birth, health and nurture in their theology of preaching (for example, Ward, Wild and Morley, (1995); Gjerding and Kinnamon, (1984); Riley, (1985); *By Our Lives*, (1985); Maitland, (1995);

and Marva Dawn in Graves, (2004)). According to Walton and Durber, such efforts are part of a new emphasis that is fuelling developments across the whole spectrum of theological enquiry. They write:

Sexuality and suffering are still rarely named within a Christian tradition that prefers to speak of the spirit rather than the body, light rather than darkness and a God who creates life but bears no responsibility for pain and dying. Women who have begun to preach from their bodies are not merely redressing an existing imbalance and enriching the storehouse of Christian metaphors and symbols but are also provoking new theological debates close to the very heart of the faith. (1994: 4)

This emphasis on the body as a resource for preaching content rather than solely the necessary vehicle of delivery as it were, certainly takes Brooks' focus on personhood further than he could possibly have imagined. That said, even here there is a certain congruence between what Brooks said and these very contemporary concerns. He did, after all, insist that the needs and preoccupations of no one sex or age should monopolize the life of the congregation, and that 'ministrations to it must be full at once of vigour and of tenderness, the father's and the mother's touch at once' (1904: 207). Brooks could not have possibly foreseen the Women's Movement and its repercussions for preaching, but his unease with a domineering and authoritarian style in the pulpit—mediated through his lasting influence—at least readied some preachers for a message that needed to be heard.

The physical and personal qualities of the practitioner described neither in terms of communication theory nor embodied theology, but in ways even more reminiscent of Brooks' own characterization of the preacher, have reasserted themselves through organization theory and the study of leadership. As the authority of the church, in terms of rules and obligations, has ebbed away, and the legitimacy of power based on tradition more and more questioned, it is perhaps the case that authority based on exemplary character has increased in relative importance. Certainly in the world of commerce and business the significance of the personal qualities of leaders and managers has been extensively theorized and

debated. In the use of terms such as ‘sapiential authority’ and ‘referent power’, organization theorists have pointed up the crucial importance of a personal knowledge and skill that readily communicates itself to others, and a personality-based ability to influence by attracting loyalty (Rees and Porter, 2001: 82). Other theorists, e.g. Charles Handy, talk in terms of ‘the invisible but felt pull’ that is described as ‘magnetism’ (1985: 135). Handy writes:

Aspects of magnetism, the unseen drawing-power of one individual, are found all the time. Trust, respect, charm, infectious enthusiasm, these attributes all allow us to influence people without apparently imposing on them. The invisibility of magnetism is a major attraction as is its attachment to one individual. (1985: 136)

Brooks himself used the very term ‘magnetism’ and described it as:

the quality that kindles at the sight of men, that feels a keen joy at the meeting of truth and the human mind, and recognizes how God made them for each other. It is the power by which a man loses himself and becomes but the sympathetic atmosphere between the truth on one side of him and the man on the other side of him. (1904: 42)

Excluding the gender specificity, Handy might have written in very similar terms. (Comparable thoughts, although using other nomenclature, can also be found, for example in Schein, 1992: 229; Zohar and Marshall, 2000: 259; and Nelson, 1999: 76). The significance of the personal charisma of the preacher is, perhaps, in the process of rehabilitation via business practices that readily recognize the importance of personal as well as systemic qualities in the effective functioning of organizations. With the support of such an appreciation, a contemporary homiletician, such as Day, can assert, without risking suspicion and disapprobation, that ‘the hope of the sermon lies in the authenticity of the preacher’ (1998: 147). As regards the maintenance of tradition as collective memory, the resurgence of individualized authority raises the question whether organizational structures within the churches are strong enough to prevent intentional or unintentional abuse of that corporate memory bearing responsibility.

5.2.2 The preacher as learner and as pastor.

Before leaving issues associated with personhood, two of Brooks' themes regarding the preacher's actions are worth considering since, again, they are things that continue to be widely discussed in the literature; namely, the preacher as learner and the preacher as pastor.

After considering the dangers to the preacher's personality of self-conceit, over-concern with failure, self-indulgence, and narrowness, Brooks brings his second lecture to a close with a vigorous plea for what would now be called lifelong learning. He writes:

In [Christian ministry] ... he who is faithful must go on learning more and more for ever. His growth in learning is all bound up with his growth in character. Nowhere else do the moral and intellectual so sympathize, and lose or gain together. The minister must grow. His true growth is not necessarily a change of views. It is a change of view. It is not revolution. It is progress. It is a continual climbing which opens continually wider prospects. It repeats the experience of Christ's disciples, of whom their Lord was always making larger men and then giving them larger truth of which their enlarged natures had become capable. (1904: 70)

What Brooks' discerned as an essential component of the preacher's disposition has nowadays been widened to embrace all who claim to be faithful believers. Discipleship as lifelong learning is a concept in wide contemporary currency in the churches, and is discussed, for example, in documents such as the published strategies of the Church of England, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church for training, detailed in the reports *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church* (2003) and *Shaping the Future: New patterns of training for lay and ordained* (2006). The notion of Christian leaders needing to be exemplars in this ongoing commitment to learning and personal growth figures in much of the literature on congregations and pastoral ministry, such as Mead

(1994), Baumohl (1984), Hawkins (1997), and Anderson (1997); albeit these and numerous other authors, make it plain that the goal of such action is the enhancement of learning in the whole church. In the preaching literature, allied perspectives are expressed in such concepts as ‘local theology’ (Tisdale, 1997), ‘conversational preaching’ (Rose, 1997), ‘listening “to or with” sermon preparation’ (Van Harn, 2005), ‘embodying the scriptures communally’ (Davis and Hays, 2003), and ‘interactive preaching’ (Hunter, 2004). Through these and other mechanisms, Brooks’ call for continuous learning on the part of the preacher finds its contemporary expression in practices that aim to widen that learning to include the whole body of people who are party to the sermon and the preacher’s and their own wider ministry. As Anderson puts it, ‘every act of ministry teaches something about God’ (1997: 8). That is a sentiment to which Brooks would have been sympathetic given his emphasis on the absolute core of preaching as the widest of concern for souls. Learning, in collective memory theory, is often associated with the changing of the meanings and understandings of memories, and the processes by which traditions are appropriated by individuals. As aspects of learning clearly related to relationships they echo contemporary concern in the church about ‘whole body’ learning.

In Brooks’ description of the preacher as pastor this analysis reaches very familiar territory, in that such a description probably remains the pre-eminent designation of the homiletician within the churches. Brooks’ thought on this matter was absolutely unequivocal:

The preacher needs to be pastor, that he may preach to real men. The pastor must be preacher, that he may keep the dignity of his work alive. The preacher, who is not a pastor, grows remote. The pastor, who is not a preacher, grows petty. Never be content to let men truthfully say of you, ‘He is a preacher, but no pastor;’ or, ‘He is a pastor, but no preacher.’ Be both; for you cannot really be one unless you also are the other. (1904: 77)

The conviction remains no less powerful more than a century after Brooks’ lectures: for example, Eric Devenport writing in 1986 could assert, without fear

that his opinion would be controversial:

Preaching and pastoral work go hand in hand. This is one of those truths that has to be proclaimed time after time, for unless it is heard, then most preaching will not only be dull but dead. (in Hunter, 2004: 145)

Clearly, at different times and in different church structures, the nature of pastoral practice has been viewed in a variety of ways. Sometimes it has been mutual support in discipleship, and at other times psychotherapeutic intervention. In some circumstances it has been *ad hoc* care and conversation, and in others programmatic structures of community creation. Amongst these and many other activities, those who would preach have frequently seen such pastoral practice as a fundamental adjunct to the homiletic task. Although the influence of the problem centred preaching method of Henry Emerson Fosdick, mentioned above (section 2.5), has waned in recent decades, the notion that preaching must somehow relate to the felt life-concerns of those in the congregation is still the key to good practice for many preachers. Whether the emphasis is Tisdale's (1997) preacher as the caretaker of local theology, Willimon's (1979) or Long's (1989) straightforward emphasis on the role of pastor, Pasquarello's (2005) preaching as the development of communal wisdom, Buechner's (1977) telling the truth in love, or Van Harn's (2005) insistence on listening in preaching, the overarching perspective is that of pastoral care to individuals and groups. The tradition as collective memory must, in these circumstances, serve pastoral needs. Here the link to the presentist character of collective memory appears strong.

5.2.3 Preaching's first purpose and the style appropriate to it.

Returning to the issue of preaching as art.

From Brooks' paramount concern with personhood and themes that flow from it, this discussion now turns to two other aspects of his lectures that remain significant concerns in homiletic literature: style of language, and preaching's first purpose. In his emphasis on preaching as witness, Brooks made a distinction

that continues to figure prominently in homiletic texts to this day: namely, the difference between preaching *about* Christ and *preaching Christ* (1904: 20). Preachers, Brooks insisted, should announce Christianity as a message and proclaim Christ as a Saviour, not discuss Christianity as a problem (1904: 21). He asserted:

Definers and defenders of the faith are always needed, but it is bad for a church when its ministers count it their true work to define and defend the faith rather than to preach the Gospel. Beware of the tendency to preach about Christianity, and try to preach Christ. (1904: 21)

This distinction continues to be vigorously promoted, particularly amongst the New Homiletic advocates of an inductive sermon methodology. From the distinction there comes an emphasis in sermonic style on a demonstrably engaging, emotionally affective, and inclusivist presentation, rather than a detached, analytical or objective stance. Brooks would have undoubtedly concurred with David Bartlett's worries about sermon style that appears to make sin more interesting than grace, and 'evil more lively than goodness' (in Graves, 2004: 25). Bartlett suggests that sermons too often misdirect their hearers by putting active or abstract language and thoughts in the wrong places. He writes, 'For the most part we *show* evil and then *tell about* goodness. We *show* judgment and then *talk about* the doctrine of mercy' (in Graves, 2004: 25). Yet again, Brooks' lectures were extraordinary prescient of a concern that has become commonplace these many years later.

Likewise, Brooks' conviction that a sermon is essentially a tool and not an end in itself is also a perspective that continues to be vigorously debated (Brooks, 1904: 110). Unlike Browne (1958), Brooks was insistent that preaching is not an art form. He wrote:

The definition and immediate purpose which a sermon has set before it makes it impossible to consider it as a work of art, and every attempt to consider it so works injury to the purpose for which the sermon was created. Many of the ineffective sermons that are made owe their failure to a blind and fruitless effort to produce something which shall be a work

of art, conforming to some type or pattern which is not clearly understood but is supposed to be essential and eternal. (1904: 109)

In many ways, Browne's advocacy of the sermon as art-form (1958: 76) was a reaction to those who had taken Brooks' evident pragmatism and utilitarianism as regards technique and turned it into a bald instructionalism that claimed too much for itself and was simply tedious. That was not Brooks' intention, however, as his aim was an absolute focus on 'the tumultuous eagerness of earnest purpose' (1904: 110). His overriding concern was that sermons should engage and communicate in such a way as to affect and mark personalities at their most profound level. As such, his understanding of the nature of sermonic engagement serves the purposes of collective memory.

His objection to preaching as an art-form was the tendency he saw for art to be an end in itself—over concerned with pure forms and the abstractions of principles (see, for example, pages 110 and 267 of the 1904 edition). These many years later, art operates, and is applied within immensely diverse environments wholly unknown when Brooks lectured: so his criticism is, perhaps, no longer apposite. On the other hand, how far and in what ways artistic expression relates to and uses tradition is a question rather more vexed now than in Brooks' day. The one aspect of artistic endeavour Brooks' was willing to concede was art in the sense of an awesome appreciation of the mysteriousness of life. This was something Brooks regarded as an essential component of the preacher's outlook, and was the reason for his advocacy of the preacher as, at least in some measure, a poet (1904: 262).

Preaching as art form brings to the forefront of homiletic awareness the sermon's place in the imaginative construal of engaging gospel alternatives to commonplace understandings and outlooks. Collective memory theory suggests that affiliation to group identity is an essential element in the continuity of memory. What the emphasis on preaching as art form does is alert the preacher to the need to create in preaching that sense of engagement, creativity and exploration that aims beyond utilitarian instruction. Here, preaching is seen as genuinely performative. Like the repeated performances of a classic drama, a

sermon hearer can become intensively engaged again and again with material that, although familiar, becomes in the engagement surprisingly new. Likewise the preacher as performer or artist, works with familiar texts in order to render them creatively new in a sermon. From both sides of the sermon event collective memory is supported via the performative interaction.

The discussion of art related issues in contemporary homiletic literature largely supports this assessment. Morris, in his *Raising the Dead: The Art of the Preacher as Public Performer*, makes performance the guiding principle of all homiletics and insists that preaching should delight and enrich in ways similar to other mediums (1996: 19). Gilmore, in his *Preaching as Theatre* (1996) shares the same concern with performance, and designates preaching as a dramatic event that happens. He writes:

As long as preaching is seen as lecturing or teaching, then, in order for it to be effective, listeners have to go away and do something about it. If it is art, they don't. By the time it is over something has happened, or has failed to happen. This is what makes preaching as an art distinctive, more exciting and satisfying when it works, more depressing and worrying when it doesn't. (1996: 7)

Other homileticians are a little more reserved and tend to use the idea of art or artistic endeavour as but one tool the preacher can employ. For example, in Allen (1998), the appreciation of works of art and artistic frames for sermons are advocated as ways to create spheres of perception into which hearers are invited; in Troeger (1999), there is a plea for preaching as a way to revitalize faith through the enlargement and stimulation of imagination, with frequent appeals to poetry as evidence of the process he wishes to invoke; in Schlafer (2004), there is a recasting of preaching through the poetic strategies of metaphor; and in Jensen (2005), a case is made for thinking in pictures, although he is unwilling to wholly abandon conceptual and narrative frames.

Those who advocate art as a tool in preaching present a methodology that always brings with it the risk of serving a social memory other than the one Christian preaching seeks to support. The painting, poem, novel or whatever,

may in itself be such a powerful expression of a particular tradition that the focus shifts to it rather than the gospel tradition it was meant to serve. Of course, the problem of the secondary aspects of a sermon out-weighting its primary purpose is widely recognized, and the skill to manage such components so as not to have that effect is a required preacher competency. A focus on collective memory, however, makes the problem all the more significant. In an amnesic social environment memories of a tradition that can be strongly evoked may be all the more powerfully attractive than in an environment where social memories are relatively distinct and stronger. Introducing an associated but extraneous tradition within the sermon may, in that circumstance, not only divert attention from the core faith tradition but actually promote an alternative. Hervieu-Léger's noting of how in contemporary European societies symbols are interchangeable and transposable needs to be constantly kept in mind. In order to maintain the chain of memory, the preacher needs competence in recognizing what may support sturdy links and what might snap those links.

Preaching as art form, as distinct from art as a tool of preaching, puts the performance of the Christian tradition at the core of what it seeks to create. The sermon itself is a gospel event through which participants are drawn again, and yet anew, into the ongoing stream of Christian tradition. It seeks to identify listeners as themselves already belonging; and yet incorporates them again and again as if they are coming anew to the good *news*. Like any artistic creation, it presents form and content that may be very familiar and, somehow, changes it to another way of seeing, engaging or understanding that comes as something fresh.

5.3 Preaching as word event and more: Buttrick's phenomenology.

David Buttrick's (1987) text, although lengthy and immensely detailed in its argument, is essentially concerned only with sermon design procedure, and broader matters, like the place of preaching in worship and congregational psychology, are not discussed. Buttrick, in marked contrast to Brooks' lectures, offers no comment at all on the character of the preacher. Instead, he focuses

exclusively on a phenomenological analysis of preaching that aims to describe 'how sermons happen in consciousness' both during their production and their hearing (1987: xii). From that analysis he formulates the sermon design strategies that he believes should be adopted to most effectively advance such happenings.

On the grounds of easy style and his introductory intentions, Buttrick deliberately omits any specific reference in the text to the phenomenologists whose work provides the foundation for his argument. The omission of theoretical support for his bold assertions about the mechanics of understanding has been the grounds for vigorous criticism from some quarters, see, for example, Long (1988) and Melloh (1988). A brief annotated bibliography appended to the book implies that he has drawn inspiration from the work on language of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and Michel Foucault (1926-1984), but that is as far as it goes. Certainly, like those scholars, Buttrick is concerned with an examination of the intellectual processes involved in the experiencing of phenomena, and, in particular, the assumptions that undergird social knowledge and its transmission. In other words, Buttrick is keen to detail the complex mechanisms of understanding and appropriation involved in the sermon-event, and to emphasize that they go well beyond a common sense understanding of such things. This makes his analysis useful in the consideration of collective memory and preaching, since the workings of social memory also go beyond common sense understandings.

Following closely the phenomenological perspective, the perceiver's intention, and how it operates in understanding the world, is seen by Buttrick as being as much a part of the reality of any phenomena as is that phenomena's existence in the physical world. This consciousness, or lived experience, shapes the world in that it creates out of thought, ideas and things a particular world from all the possible worlds that could be shaped. It is this formation of a reality in

consciousness, and preaching's ability to effect that, that so excites Buttrick. He writes:

By naming, we think the world we live. For not only does language constitute the world-in-consciousness, it enables us to conceive of ourselves as selves-in-the-world. (1987: 7)

Buttrick's catchphrase for the whole enterprise is Paul's insistence in Romans (10:17) that 'faith comes from hearing'. The book could well be viewed as a heartfelt attempt to restore the church's confidence in words in the midst of a culture that he believes increasingly devalues them. Mistrust and scepticism have made the church's words as inconsequential as the verbiage that surrounds them in popular mass culture. Accordingly, Buttrick insists that preachers have a vital task in reinstating the crucial task words have in our lives. 'Like diapered Adam, every baby learns to name the world' (1987: 6), and, according to Buttrick, in every person's life 'stories conjoin in consciousness to tell *us* who we are and where we are in the world' (10). Within this naming the specific task of preaching is to 'rename the world "God's world" with metaphorical power' (11), and 'change identity by incorporating all our stories into "God's story"' (11). Buttrick insists that 'preaching constructs in consciousness a "faith-world" related to God' (11), and it is from that conviction that his whole homiletic is derived.

Buttrick emphasizes that the construction of consciousness the preacher aims to achieve has to be directly related to how consciousness functions within the biblical texts. Accordingly, he repeatedly appeals to three scriptural characteristics that he believes should be echoed in preaching: first, that biblical texts must be set in a communal consciousness to be understood aright, since 'virtually everything in scripture is written to a faith-community, usually in the style of communal address' (1987: 276); second, that such consciousness in Scripture always has a double character of 'being-saved in the world' so it has to be read through a similar double consciousness of being-saved and being in the world (277); and third, that 'the world in consciousness is ever-changing' and the preacher has to find language and frameworks appropriate to current changing consciousness, not just read off first-century forms (269). These shaping

characteristics mean that (in sharp contrast to Brooks) Buttrick is highly critical of American preaching's preference for the personal. He writes:

The fact is, all preachers serve Christ in brokenness, trusting in grace alone. The Pietist error, in both conservative and liberal communities, has endorsed personality-cult preaching ('Truth through Personality') to the detriment of the gospel. We ourselves are never Word of God. (1987: 459)

He is similarly scathing about the 'triumph of the therapeutic' in preaching, which he sees as peddling a false theology and an impoverished picture of God (422).

His phenomenologist convictions about the inadequacy of an easy division of experience into subjective and objective means he is equally unhappy with preaching that dwells exclusively on the social world. He writes:

Is it conceivable that, in the name of relevance, both personalist preaching and social-gospel preaching have ended up addressing abstractions in a subjective/objective split? Personalism aims at a self-without-a-world, and social-gospel preaching views a world-without-a-self, and both are obvious unrealities. (1987: 420)

Buttrick's insistence on the intimate relationship between the self and the social world is suggestive of the mechanisms of collective memory, since, as he puts it:

We live in a shared world construct that has been internalized and is, therefore, always with us. In consciousness, there is always a self-in-a-social-world and a social-world-within-the-self. (1987: 421)

Halbwachs' observation—that not all the social influences that work on collective memory are readily apparent and that what works for or against remembering often goes unrecognized or hidden from view—comes to mind (Halbwachs, 1980: 45). Buttrick's understanding of the internalized aspects of the social world his methodology aims to address lends psychological and philosophical support to Halbwachs' perspective.

Edwards perceptively remarks that Buttrick's book is 'essentially a preaching rhetoric' since its principal focus is on the ways in which language can

be transformative, and, as such, it has been a force working towards the reinstatement of rhetorical skills and methods in preaching practice (2004: 809).

Day notes the return to the consideration of rhetorical methods and states:

Sermons aim to do something; they are in the business of persuasion. Homiletics needs to take account of rhetoric in order to ensure that it is used skilfully, self-consciously, purposefully, responsibly and with integrity. (2005: 4)

Similar concern about the effectiveness and rectitude of appropriate rhetorical strategies is amplified in Hogan and Reid's (1999) *Connecting with the Congregation: Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching*. In the contemporary social climate, in which the word rhetoric generally has a negative epithet associated with it, such renewed interest in this ancient art would have been unlikely without Buttrick's efforts. The rehabilitation of rhetoric may be an essential component in a reassertion of the significance of memory and tradition amongst preaching practitioners who have been confined by an interminable demand for relevance. It suggests that perhaps gospel shaped sermons require as a first priority concern with the advocacy of a distinctive Christian worldview.

5.3.1 Moves and other practicalities.

In Buttrick's terminology, preachers must develop their sermons through 'moves' and not 'points'. The change is crucial since Buttrick believes that sermons must have a movement of language that is sequential because that is how oral communal language forms in the mind. This sequential movement must, therefore, be as obvious to the hearers as a plot would be to the audience of a drama. In developing a sermon, a preacher must use stock genres and repertoires so as to communicate in consciousness, in order that what is heard can be plotted scenarios for consciousness. The sequence chosen will be an act of interpretation dictated by a theology.

Buttrick describes the patterns in which ideas and structures are sequenced as ‘modes’ and he believes that three legitimate modes are identifiable: namely, immediacy, reflective and praxis. In the immediacy mode, the sermon consists of moves that follow the biblical text, usually a narrative passage, but in a way that more than simply retells the story, and which relates the biblical and contemporary worlds and generates understanding ‘through analogies of experience’ (1987: 321). In the mode of immediacy, analogies of understanding in consciousness produce shifts in consciousness now. In the reflective mode, the moves follow the movement of the preacher’s own reflection, and, therefore, imply some distance from the text in the process as fields of lived experience are aligned with meaning structures (325). In this mode, there is a standing back and considering in which the preacher and the hearers look through a structure of meaning to fields of lived experience. In the praxis mode, the plot consists of the steps needed to make a theological analysis of the topic and come to a Christian understanding that leaves the worldly construal of the issue behind and reframes it in the light of Christ. He insists that the praxis mode must not be the development of a contemporary problem with ‘The Bible says...’ as a response, but rather a genuine movement of thought (327). In the mode of praxis the sermon looks at what is being done, and what *should* be done.

Numerous practicalities follow from his insistence on moves, such as: preachers should never refer back, since oral language cannot bear it (1987: 75); the structure of the sermon should not be given away ahead of time in a pedantic fashion, as that will encourage boredom (85); opening sentences should be short and simple without much weight, as the hearers are only beginning to focus (87); preachers should not be casual in style, as this contradicts the urgent character of the gospel (77); sermons should never begin with a personal narrative, as this will cause split focus at the very beginning (94, 142); there should be no more than one example per move (135); ideas should never be reviewed in a sermon nor previous content brought back into the discussion, as such redundancy invites the mind to wander (164). Despite their very different perspectives, there is something reminiscent of Brooks in Buttrick’s detailed insistence on such practicalities. That his philosophy of homiletics produces what amounts to a list

of rules for the act of preaching has provoked some criticism, see, for example, Long (1988: 111) and Allen (1998: 88). The assertion of so many rules reinforces the doubt that he is, perhaps, over confident in his analysis of how language and consciousness work in general, and in preaching in particular.

5.3.2 Images and language.

Buttrick is forcefully aware that the contemporary social world is one that is dominated by images, and he enjoins preachers to take full advantage of the opportunities this offers. Sermons that are too often sterile ideas must be replaced by words that make convincing images, and, ‘good preaching involves the imaging of ideas, the shaping of every conceptual notion by metaphor and image and syntax’ (1987: 27). For Buttrick, ‘homiletic thinking is always a thinking of theology toward images’ (29), since preachers do not explicate teachings, but rather they explore symbols. Buttrick’s aim is that sermons should ‘build a world, a faith-world, in consciousness’ (17) that is formed from images, metaphors, illustrations and examples. In Buttrick’s homiletic, the language of the image is itself given by the congregation in which preaching takes place. He asserts that an American theological graduate is likely to have a vocabulary of 12,000 words, whereas an average congregation member who is neither illiterate nor overly erudite will have a vocabulary of 7,500 words. When technical words associated with particular occupations and interests are taken away from the sum the common vocabulary is reduced to about 5,000 words (188). According to Buttrick, this common shared vocabulary should be the language of preaching, since the preacher must speak words so that people can see and understand, and a ‘separate in-church code of religious clichés only serves to alienate faith from life’ (216).

As well as vocabulary, Buttrick also has strong opinions about the tense of speech in that he is insistent that blocks of past-tense language must be avoided in preaching. Again the rule is based on his understanding of consciousness, since, from his perspective past events are *present* in consciousness, so if

preachers want to relate to that consciousness they need to work with the present tense (1987: 220). There is also here a direct correlation with the presentist character of collective memory. All those sermonic descriptions of ‘things as they were in Jesus’ day’ prompted by preachers’ training in historical-critical methods must go. In others words, the Scriptural tradition, or memory, is best expressed homiletically as current rather than past, not to avoid the acknowledged cultural distance between the text and the sermon, but rather to allow mediation through personal and communal consciousness between that pastness and present life experience. Again, a description of a process familiar in collective memory theory. Buttrick is eager to avoid ‘the pulpit’s chronic third-person-objective point-of-view’ and turn talking about God into ‘being with God in faith’ (320). Through such mediation (one of Buttrick’s preferred terms to describe preaching) a faith-world can be built in human consciousness.

The concepts of ‘mediation’ and ‘faith-world construction’ are fundamental to Buttrick’s whole homiletic system and are suggestive of the importance of memory maintenance to the expression of faith, although he does not address the issue in direct terms. For Buttrick, the authority for preaching rests neither with the Bible itself nor with the ongoing tradition, but in Christ crucified; and it is no exaggeration to say that ‘*solus Christus*’ is his overriding slogan. The preacher stands before Christ crucified as part of a ‘being-saved community’ within the communal faith-consciousness of the church. Hence his use of the term ‘mediation’ as his favoured characterization of preaching acts:

Preaching remembers Jesus Christ crucified in the midst of a being-saved community; thus preaching is the articulation of Christian faith-consciousness. Preaching searches the mystery of Jesus Christ crucified through scripture in the light of tradition’s grasp of being-saved. Thus, at the outset, we will define preaching as mediation. Preaching gratefully turns to scripture and speaks at table, standing before Christ crucified, God-with-us, in the midst of a being-saved community. Preaching is mediation. (1987: 249)

The preacher's role is to interpret Christ in the light of the communal and individual experience of being-saved-in-the-world, so the hermeneutic task is always the double one of interpreting revelation in the light of being-saved and understanding being-saved in the light of revelation (258). People drift, as it were, into church with a world already constructed in consciousness, that is the world in which they live, work, play, and possess their souls. In this world-in-consciousness, Jesus Christ is simply a generalized social memory, a legendary figure from the past who founded a church. Similarly, in that world-in-consciousness the church is just one social grouping amongst the many available to any one person. The purpose of preaching, according to Buttrick, is nothing less than the transformation of that world-in-consciousness. The preacher places contemporary human stories within the story of God-with-us and, by so doing, sets the social self-images of the whole group membership reflectively before Jesus Christ, 'the Living Symbol' (261). He concludes:

By preaching, our lives and, indeed, our world constructs are located in a larger world, a world in God's consciousness of us. Preaching thus builds a new faith-world in which we may live. In mediating a new world, preaching participates in the work of the Mediator, Jesus the Christ. (1987: 261)

Buttrick tantalizingly raises the issue that memory building might be a highly significant aspect of preaching, but without any further consideration of the possibility (327). Nevertheless, it is clearly the case that Buttrick's analysis and methodology offers strong supporting evidence for the significance of the interplay between what is social and what is individual in the life of faith. As such it is suggestive of ways in which preaching can better serve that interplay which is so vital in collective memory.

5.3.3 Preaching as craft not art.

Unlike Browne (1976), Buttrick insists that preaching is not an art, but in that insistence he is not prepared to go as far as Brooks (1904) in his total refusal

to countenance any methodology that might obscure a single-minded determination of purpose. Instead, Buttrick describes preaching as an artful craft; and in an aside, perhaps aimed at those who have taken Brooks' words about the preacher's personal character too far, he writes:

The odd idea that preachers whose hearts have been strangely warmed will spill out sermons, instantly compelling and exquisitely formed, is, of course, nonsense. Just as a carpenter must learn to use tools in order to make a box, so preachers must acquire basic skills to preach. Though some preachers may be unusually gifted, preachers are *not* born, they are *trained*. We learn our homiletic skills. (1987: 37, italics in original)

To the charge that close attention to words and language structures requires preachers to be verbal artists, he responds with the assertion that he is actually advocating a considered craft not an artistic ability (193).

Buttrick's text ends with a brief chapter that addresses the question: 'Why do preachers preach?' The chapter title – 'A Brief Theology of Preaching' – is especially significant since it is the only one out of 26 similar headings that uses the word 'theology'. After 450 pages dominated by rhetorical concerns, Buttrick is at pains to make it absolutely clear that, despite his profoundly action-based philosophy and his focus on practicalities, his is not a functionalist perception of preaching. He asserts that, from a social perspective, 'preaching may be superfluous' and that 'reasons for preaching can only be found in faith' (1987: 449). Given his earlier insistence on a close relationship between consciousness and social construction, the point seems strangely overstated. It might have been expected that he would conclude, in part at least, with a rather more nuanced appreciation of preaching's place in the creation of that faith-consciousness of being-saved-in-the-(social)-world implied by his homiletic. Nevertheless, his wholly theological answers to the question 'Why do preachers preach?' are insightful and need to be considered since they potentially provide avenues towards the consideration of collective memory and preaching not countenanced in Buttrick's own discussion.

Buttrick presents five reasons for preaching. First, he says that our preaching, commissioned by the resurrection, is a continuation of the preaching of Jesus Christ, and out of it we become ‘a joined-to-Jesus-Christ community’ (1987: 451); a thought to which this thesis will return (section 7.4). Second, that ‘in our preaching, Christ continues to speak to the church, and through the church to the world’ (451) and, as such, it is not concerned with institutional survival or seeking members but only with Christ’s use of our words for salvific work. Third, preaching’s only purpose is ‘the purpose of God in Christ’, that is, the reconciliation of the world (452). Fourth, preaching is for response, and that response is a response to Jesus Christ (453). Fifth, participating in God’s purpose, initiated by Christ and supported by the Spirit in community, preaching is the ‘Word of God’ (457, quotation marks original). This last point he makes as a ‘modest claim’ about Christ’s grace in using broken vessels, and not as an appeal to authoritarian fundamentalism, nor as a naïve claim of absolute Spirit empowerment, nor an insistence on the power of the preacher’s personality. All five reasons, as theological as they are, are also likely to have profoundly social consequences in terms of collective memory. The issues raised by this kind of reasoning will be examined in the next chapter.

At the time of writing this thesis, Buttrick’s *Homiletic* had been in print continuously for just over twenty years—an amazing feat for such a technical book, and a clear indication of its influential nature. Whether Buttrick’s strategy is *the* method for preaching in an image dominated world is arguable; but that every preacher *must* address the power of the image in her or his methodology and presentation style is no longer argued. Undoubtedly, Buttrick’s work, in its rigour and range, has been a key factor in the widespread recognition of that profound shift. If imagery, thinking in images, and the ramifications of visual culture in preaching are now conceded in most schools of homiletic thought, the same cannot be said of rhetoric, which remains a contentious issue.

Similarly, although Buttrick’s presentational methodology of moves, plots, and sequence, is widely emulated (for example, amongst those who claim the title New Homileticians), its reverse side—i.e. how the Biblical text is actually used—is not. Distilling portions of Scripture to propositional points, extracting

ideas and conceptual themes from narratives, and isolating texts without regard to context, remain principal methods for many preachers (Eslinger, 2002: 194).

Buttrick, from his phenomenological perspective insists that the objective/subjective divide is unreal and therefore, in the use of Scripture as much as in the actual presentation of the sermon, the double consciousness of being-saved-in-the-world must always be addressed. The idea that content can be objectively separated from words, or be translated from one time-language to another without being fundamentally changed, or that content can exist as objective truth apart from datable words, is simply nonsense according to Buttrick (1987: 265). Few preachers have been ready to concede those points in practice.

Buttrick's ideas on preaching and the formation of consciousness go some way towards providing an answer to the question of how tradition is communicated by sermons. His is a profound plea for clear acknowledgement by preachers and the congregations they serve of the importance of words. It is hard not to be moved by words such these:

In a halting way, we have begun to rehabilitate the 'house of language,' to reinstate the miracle of speaking. Words beckon the world into consciousness. Words give us our storied identity. Preachers use words. So preaching can reshape the world in consciousness and transform identity: Preaching can build a faith-world in human consciousness. If preaching speaks boldly then, perhaps, like astonished Adam, once more we may walk God's mysterious world, name it good, and see ourselves with tender wonderment as characters in God's great story of salvation. (Buttrick, 1987: 20).

And yet it is perhaps the case that, despite Buttrick's observation that what the individual internalizes has its origins in the social, ultimately he places rather too much emphasis on the cognitive abilities of the individual.

5.4 Towards the sermon as a congregational event.

In terms of a general homiletic, the methodology advocated by Brooks is much more strongly individually focussed than that of Buttrick. For Buttrick the advocacy of a distinctive Christian worldview is only possible via a close attention to wider processes of social consciousness. Of course such a difference could be little more than a reflection of the social plurality of the 1980s as against the more easily assumed social uniformity of the 1870s. The continued use of Brooks in contemporary homiletic debate noted earlier suggests, however, that more than the social circumstances of writing *per se* underlie this difference. In relation to social memory the difference of focus represents two distinctively contrasting approaches to the mechanisms of social memory maintenance and the way individuals are incorporated into the ongoing tradition.

The personalist approach of Brooks understands the preacher to be in his or her own person the carrier of the tradition and the means by which other individuals are incorporated into it, or encouraged in their continuing loyalty to its ongoing existence. As noted above, Brooks applies psychological categories in his account of what preaching achieves to emphasize his understanding of the way truth is embodied, as it were, in order that it may be effective. The implication is that the preacher is, in a straightforward way, both a bearer of the church's memory and the mediator of that memory to others.

Buttrick employs phenomenological categories in order to make plain his conviction that lived experience goes beyond common sense understandings. For Buttrick analysis of any phenomenon must take account of socially constructed ideas and the personal intentions that flow from them, as well as the event itself, in a complex dynamic of actions and the 'world in consciousness'. Here, like Brooks, preaching is a mediation; but the nature of that mediation is radically different. For Buttrick, that mediation must be from within a being-saved community (i.e. a group of people being-saved-in-the-world) and any easy division of experience into subjective and objective aspects is suspect. The

immediacy of belonging to a being-saved community requires of preaching a voice that speaks principally in the present tense. Buttrick's methodology applied to the idea of collective memory seems to reinforce the notion that such memory always serves present social needs. What is less clear is whether he thinks that beyond Scripture itself there are mechanisms that provide the preacher with coherent boundaries for this transforming world-in-consciousness building. It is to just this kind of issue that the third representative text is addressed.

Leonora Tubbs Tisdale's *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (1997) quotes, approvingly, Buttrick's assertion that 'Biblical preaching that will not name God out of narrative and into the world is simply *unbiblical*' (Buttrick, 1987: 18), but goes on to insist that such naming requires homiletical effort that engages deeply with congregational subculture (Tisdale, 1997: 97). Like other practitioners of the New Homiletic, Tisdale is insistent that the particular is the only sermonic way to communicate the universal. What she adds to that insistence is a new appreciation of congregations as primary sites of particular identities and understandings. She writes:

Our quest, then, is for preaching that is more intentionally contextual in nature—that is, preaching which not only gives serious attention to the interpretation of biblical texts, but which gives equally serious attention to the interpretation of congregations and their sociocultural contexts; preaching which not only aims towards greater 'faithfulness' to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but which also aims toward greater 'fittingness' (in content, form and style) for a particular congregational gathering of hearers. (Tisdale, 1997: 32)

Tisdale's book is a work born from a relatively new field of study. From the early 1980s 'Congregational Studies' began to be used in the USA as a term for a distinctive area of study and research. Two books were of immense influence in the advancement of this subject area: a volume, edited by Carl Dudley, entitled *Building Effective Ministry* (1983), and James Hopewell's posthumously published *Congregation: Stories and Structures*, (1987).

The title of Dudley's book inadequately discloses its content. It is, in fact, a wide-ranging analysis by an interdisciplinary team of scholars of the life of the congregation of one Protestant church in a town in the Northeastern USA. The congregation is examined from the perspectives of sociology, psychology, anthropology, history and theology in order to 'provide new routes into the social and spiritual dynamics of the local church' (Dudley, 1983: xii). Similar cultural analysis is at the heart of Tisdale's homiletical method.

Hopewell's book uses narratives as a way to understand congregational life. Employing the narrative genres identified by the scholar Northrop Frye, and research methods from anthropology and sociology, Hopewell analyses congregations as story bearing and creating entities by which people identify themselves. He asserts that the 'we' of a congregation is primarily established and maintained by the story of themselves, and themselves and God, to which people adhere (Hopewell, 1988: 29). Again, such an understanding correlates well with the identity and belonging aspects of collective memory. Tisdale draws extensively, though not uncritically, on Hopewell as she argues the case for preaching as a bipolar hermeneutical enterprise that must interpret not only the texts of the inherited Christian tradition but also the 'text' of congregational life and activity. Tisdale can properly be seen as a work of practical theology that aims to apply to preaching some of the insights of the burgeoning field of congregational studies in the American academic world (see, for example: Holmes (1978), Carroll, Dudley and McKinney (1986), Fowler (1991), Browning (1991), Wind and Lewis (1994), and Ammerman, Carroll, Dudley and McKinney (1998), amongst many other published texts). It might be objected that Tisdale's very clear location in this highly specific American field of research makes her work unsuitable as a representative text in this study. It is certainly the case in the UK that her book has neither the currency of Buttrick's volume, nor is it likely to have the ongoing influence of the lectures of Phillips Brooks. Nonetheless, the broader perspective of her efforts to use social scientific methods in the practice of preaching does find some echoes in the British scene.

5.4.1 Tisdale's relevance to the British context.

The publication of the British edition of Hopewell's book in 1988 catalyzed a UK interest in congregational studies as a distinct field of research that brought together a range of influential concerns. In theological circles the popularity of the so-called 'Pastoral Cycle' as a way of doing theology that constantly moves between action and reflection (see for example, Green (1987) and (1990), Kinast (1996), Holland and Henriot (1983), Whitehead and Whitehead (1995), Northcott (1998), and Mudge and Poling (1987)) is suggestive of congregations as fitting arenas of such enquiry. Similarly organizational theory that sees organizations as possessing distinctive cultures (for example Brown, 1998) provides a justification for a closer examination of the life of congregations. If all organizations are viewed, as Brown puts it, 'like miniature societies with unique configurations of heroes, myths, beliefs and values' (Brown, 1998: 5) then why not apply such analysis to local churches? Like organizational theory itself, congregational studies from this perspective are often about gaining evidence to determine the leadership and management styles most appropriate to a given situation. Malcolm Grundy's *Understanding Congregations* (1998) is a text that attempts to do just that. Alongside organizational and theological methods, contemporary interest in local history also reinforces the notion that congregations are worthy of close examination. Works like Ronald Blythe's (1969) portrait of village life in his book *Akenfield* and James Obelkevich's (1976) *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsay 1825-1875* raised the awareness of the value of personal recollection, and how local particularities can provide crucial evidence of the consequences of larger-scale trends and changes, and have prompted much local research. Historical methods applied in congregational studies are something of a foil to the predominance of current programmes and structures in social science based analysis. Alongside these concerns, mention should also be made of the influence of the British tradition of community studies; exemplified in this context by the anthropological approach of Timothy Jenkins' *Religion in English Everyday Life* (1999). Likewise the ongoing vigour of sociological

studies of religion in the UK (for example, Wilson, (1990); Martin, (2002) and (2005); Davie, (2000b); Bruce, (2002); Gill, (1999); and Davie, Heelas and Woodhead, (2003)) that bear on congregational studies even though they do not directly examine individual local churches also produces a fertile environment for the style of analysis Tisdale advocates.

For all these reasons Tisdale's approach, whilst profoundly related to her American context, does provide a way into models that correlate to British developments and experiences. The publication of *Congregational Studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context* (Guest, Tusting and Woodhead, 2004), and *Studying Local Church: A Handbook* (Cameron, Richter, Davies and Ward, 2005) adds weight to the contention that Tisdale's approach of heightened contextual awareness in the practice of preaching is appropriate on both sides of the Atlantic. Whatever else Tisdale's book represents, it offers a clear appreciation that preaching as process demands an engagement that cannot rest solely on the authority of the preacher alone and must somehow address the culture/subculture in which it takes place. As Day points out in a chapter about recent trends in preaching (Day, 2005: 5), this is about more than just a contemporary appreciation of the mechanics of effective communication; it is also about empowerment, ethics and the way sermons actually achieve their ends. In this latter area, Tisdale is a good example of a much wider concern—signified by works such as Lucy Atkinson Rose's *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (1997), John S. McClure's *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (2001), Mary Catherine Hilkert's *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (1997), and Charles L. Campbell's *The Word before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (2002).

5.4.2 Tisdale on the preacher as ethnographer.

Following Hopewell (1988), Tisdale treats congregations as subcultures in themselves, and adopts a symbolic or semiotic approach in her analysis for homiletic purposes. This social semiotic perspective requires the preacher to 'get

under the skin' of a congregation—in her terms, to become an ethnographer—and to discover, beyond any propositional categories, the integrity of the way congregational members 'look-on' themselves, others, and the world.

Accordingly, she sees a congregation as primarily a place where people express their deepest longings and understandings through the medium of symbolic construction. Often these constructions do not use explicit religious language; but they, nevertheless, relate to people's profoundest understandings of God and humanity. Analysing the particularities of the subculture of a congregation can allow these motifs to surface so that they can be fruitfully worked with: ignoring them leads to dispute and dysfunction. This approach presupposes that congregations are not accidental accumulations but have a coherency about them that goes beyond formal theological, ecclesiological and geographical categories. For Tisdale (here following Hopewell) this coherency can be uncovered by identifying the symbolic constructions people use to 'think' themselves into belonging.

Like many others engaged in the academic study of congregations (for example, Stromberg (1986), Bennison (1999), and Jenkins (1999)), Tisdale is heavily influenced by the work of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. In his 1973 collection of essays called *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz detailed a semiotic understanding of culture, and advocated a process of 'thick description' for its analysis. According to Geertz, all social interaction is essentially the transaction of meanings. Every 'transaction' hangs on other 'transactions' like the strands of a spider's web. The various positions of transactions in the web determine the meanings that operate. For example, what is meant and understood by the expression 'you fool' is dependent on a host of factors besides the words themselves. If it is said between friends after something humorous it is likely to be received rather differently than if shouted from behind the steering wheel of a car to another driver. Neither instance, of course, may apply since the speaker might in reality be talking to herself because she has just stubbed her toe. All kinds of other factors, like voice tone, social circumstances, inherited traditions, and social conventions etc. might also be utilized to understand the expression. Geertz believed that cultural analysis is essentially interpretative in that it must

always be about seeking out the meanings that apply. Through participant observation and reflection the researcher produces a ‘thick description’, an account of a culture that aims to examine the many different levels, symbolic components, structures and drives that are involved. Those who, like Tisdale, apply Geertz to local churches aim to ‘read’ a congregation, as it were, in order to disclose the rich variety and depth of meanings important to its people. Hence, in Tisdale’s terms the analysis required is always a hermeneutical task since it is constantly looking for what things *mean*.

Just what kind of data is appropriate to such analysis is a constant issue. The symbolic constructions involved are often expressed in narratives, but are also discernible in numerous other things including patterns of behaviour, use of artefacts, styles of organization, and the importance given to certain festivals and actions. Tisdale admits such analysis involves a great deal of guesswork on the part of the researcher. She writes:

Such interpretations of meaning by those who are not native to a culture are always imaginative acts and are ‘fictions’ ... in the sense that they are ‘something made,’ ‘something fashioned’ (not in the sense that they are false or unfactual). (1997: 59)

Anyone familiar with ethnographic methodology will immediately recognize in Tisdale’s justification of the interpretative process long familiar dilemmas about the differing perspectives of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. At the beginning of the book Tisdale acknowledges that a prime motivator in her search for a subcultural basis for preaching was her experience of local church ministry in four predominantly rural congregations in central Virginia. In those churches she was surprised as a so-called mainstream Protestant American minister to find she experienced a sense of ‘culture shock’ similar to that she had undergone whilst serving overseas. From that she began to wonder about the significance of cultural or subcultural realities for the preaching event (1997: 11). In terms of the perspective the minister as preacher brings to research, Tisdale assumes that this will often be the dual role of both ‘insider’ (as someone to an extent acculturated to the life and idiom of the congregation) and ‘outsider’ (as someone often acting

and speaking from a worldview and value basis different from other congregation members) (51). With the Roman Catholic theologian Robert Schreiter (1985) she sees this as an advantage, since it means the preacher is likely to be more analytical and explanatory in his or her estimation of the congregational subculture, and thereby able to speak ‘tough truths’ (52). She concludes:

The contextual preacher’s stance, then, is necessarily awkward and uncomfortable. With one foot firmly planted in the congregation, and one foot firmly planted in a larger Gospel vision, the preacher straddles the abyss—striving to love and affirm the congregation, while, at the same time, prodding and stretching it toward a larger worldview and greater faithfulness to its own gospel. Out of such awkward grace, transformative proclamation is given birth. (1997: 53)

The metaphor of giving birth is particularly apposite, in that Tisdale’s methodology, like that of Brooks a century earlier, relates directly to the physicality of the preacher. Unlike Brooks, this physicality is not about how the preacher is likely to be received, in the sense of physical presence, but rather about the emotional and physical ‘load’ the preacher must in some sense carry in order to be effective. A deep appreciation of the cultural world of the congregation brings with it a ‘weigh’ of knowledge and understanding that the preacher must carry like the expectant mother must carry. The contextual preacher operates beyond conceptualism and intellectualism at a level of deep involvement and profound self-giving. Tisdale quotes approvingly Henry H. Mitchell’s conviction:

Preaching that makes meaningful impact on lives has to reach persons at gut level, and it is at this level of communally stored wisdom and cultural affinity that such access to living souls is gained.
(Mitchell, 1977: 11)

In her insistence on the preacher researching the communal and subcultural nature of the congregation Tisdale is advocating a methodology distinct from, or even contrary to, the differing approaches of Brooks and Buttrick. She is suspicious of too much concern with personality and the psychological as tending towards

reducing sermons to simply pastoral care and little more. And Buttrick's focus on the commonalities of human experience making for 'shared structures of human consciousness' she criticises as blurring genuine cultural differences that may exist in congregations or between a minister and a congregation (1997: 20). For Tisdale, this cultural awareness is a crucial aspect of a genuinely 'priestly' ministry. She writes:

A focus upon the 'cultural' in preaching pushes the pastor toward the kind of priestly listening that moves beyond the bounds of universals and individuals to consider communal traits and characteristics that unite members with one another and with other societal and ecclesial communities of belief and practice. A focus upon the culture in preaching encourages the preacher to recognize that some of the 'universals' she or he assumes in preaching may not be universals at all—but beliefs and values that are interpreted through a very particular cultural lens and vision. A focus upon the cultural in preaching encourages the preacher to address the congregation *as* congregation—a distinctive and unique community of faith that is, itself, in certain respects 'like no others'. (1997: 12)

Here is a thought that links directly to the particularities of collective memory. If the preacher is a maintainer of memory, as this thesis argues, then according to Tisdale that memory can only be adequately served by a profoundly localized understanding. The tradition that is Scripture can only be received as 'my tradition' if it is expounded through, as it were, a deep understanding of those others memories and traditions that are the particular culture of 'this people', that is the congregation in which the sermon happens. Tisdale is describing an engagement that Halbwachs would have recognized.

5.4.3 Preaching from a contextual awareness.

Tisdale's reason for insisting that preachers should adopt congregational ethnography as an essential component of their homiletic is that she believes it to

be the only way to ensure that sermons are genuinely indigenized, although her preferred term is that preaching must create what Robert Schreier (1985) calls ‘local theology’. She writes:

When preaching is viewed as ‘local theology’ the goal is not only that proclamation strive toward greater faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. The goal is also that preaching become—in its theology and its art—more fitting, seriously imaginable, and transformative for local congregations. (1997: 55)

That sense of the preacher achieving a better fit is suggestive of collective memory’s role in meeting the present needs of those who belong to the memory bearing group. Indigenization at this level is required for those participating in the preaching event to recognize the memories shared as indeed belonging to themselves.

Tisdale offers three reasons for the greater contextuality she is advocating and, although she does not use the terminology of collective memory, those reasons have a direct bearing on the memory mechanisms that theory suggests. Firstly, says Tisdale, this high level contextuality removes ‘false stumbling blocks’ that obscure or even contradict the proclamation offered (1997: 34). In terms of collective memory, it allows preachers to check the accuracy of their assumptions about what memories are significant in this particular place. Secondly, according to Tisdale, her method allows preachers to genuinely reflect in preaching the ‘accommodating’ way God deals with humanity in the record of Scripture (35), in other words, it provides a connection between memory of God in Scripture and this people’s memory now. And thirdly, she says that contextuality enables the gospel proclamation to be heard new and fresh as directed towards this particular people (36). In terms of collective memory, it provides a way of sermons being heard as addressing current needs and, thereby, sustaining the memory it rehearses. In her methodology and its theoretical undergirding, Tisdale stays resolutely close to the Geertzian insistence on all social interaction as essentially a transaction of meanings. She concludes:

Preaching, then, has to do with the construction of meaning. Its meaning is not ‘invented’ or created *ex nihilo*. Rather, meaning in preaching is forged in a metaphorical way as two things which had not previously been placed side-by-side—namely a particular biblical text (or texts) and a particular congregational context—are allowed to live together and talk together and dance with one another in the imagination of the preacher, until something new occurs through their encounter. (1997: 38)

Such preaching, she believes, will accentuate the power of the particular and celebrate the week-by-week nature of the task (40); it will be a proclamation that arises ‘out of the midst’ of the congregation and dares to speak ‘on behalf of’ that community rather than solely that which is spoken ‘to’ that fellowship (41); and it will be ‘seriously imaginable’ in that it will open up possibilities for these people in this place (43).

The goal of all such preaching, she asserts, is ‘the transformation of the imaginations of the hearers in accordance with the message of the gospel’ (1997: 46). In order to be able to do that it will always have to be a ‘hearer-orientated event’ in which all the emphasis is placed on the ability of the hearer to understand what is said within his or her own symbolic worldview (45). Since a person’s preaching has no chance of assuming such characteristics without prior profound attention being paid to the congregation’s symbolic universe, the cultural exegesis she describes is not merely a useful adjunct to homiletic endeavour but rather the very heart of it (48). Such exegesis provides a link between Tisdale’s understanding of the necessary social components of an effective homiletic and social memory theory’s insistence on the current social relevance of memories if they are to remain memories.

Tisdale believes that in proclamation in the local church three voices are operative: the biblical text, the preacher, and the congregation (1997: 50). In suggesting such a triangulation, Tisdale is simply adopting the concept proposed by Walter Brueggemann in an article in *Theology Today* published in 1990. Interestingly, Brueggemann himself was adopting a concept familiar in the clinical practice of family therapy and applying it to biblical hermeneutics. It is

hardly surprising, therefore, that Tisdale's methodology can be directly related to the social processes of collective memory. Whether the ethnographic strategies she advocates give sufficient credence to the varying memory structures operative in the differing part of her 'triangle of voices' is questionable; as is the high subjective nature of the conceptual analysis involved. The general question of subjectivity will be returned to in the next section. On the issue of memory structures, it should be noted that Tisdale is perhaps merely conforming to a general trend within applied social research that tends to under-play the importance of time in its analysis (see Ferrarotti (1990)).

Tisdale advocates contextual preaching as a method that avoids the pitfalls in the interpretative process of either giving too much prominence to human experience and thereby robbing the biblical canon of its primacy, or of giving it too little significance and thereby denuding the canon of its social relevance (1997: 96). She aims for a middle way between liberal and neo-orthodox theology. Her preferred metaphor for the mechanics of this contextual preaching process is that of the folk dance. She writes:

The sermon itself is a participatory act in which the preacher models a way of doing theology that meets people where they are, but that also encourages them to stretch themselves by trying new steps, new moves, new patterns of belief and action. In this dance, as in the circle dance, the leader must always be alert to what is happening in the life of the community—sometimes correcting, sometimes encouraging, sometimes guiding, sometimes pushing new vistas—as the need arises. (1997: 125)

Such preaching is fundamentally participative and, as such, the preacher is not the artist who creates for the edification of an audience, but is rather the skill-sharer who enables others to contribute to the creative process—hence the folk dance metaphor. She adds:

When preaching is viewed as folk dance, the goal is quite different: namely, that the leader model the dance of faith in such an accessible, imaginative, earthy, and encouraging way that everyone—young and old,

visitor and member, old timer and newcomer—will want to put on his or her own dancing shoes and join in. (1997: 125)

Hers is an understanding of performance as group participation rather than the star performance of a *prima donna*. The aim is not that congregation members should leave marvelling over the abilities and skill of the preacher as lead performer, but rather that everyone should experience themselves as having a part in what has taken place. In this the community's memories are genuinely shared, since what has been said and done is 'ours'.

5.4.4 Assessing Tisdale's approach.

As was acknowledged above, of the homiletic methodologies examined here, Tisdale's ethnographic approach appears on the face of it to be the most immediately utilizable in the mechanisms of social memory. For that reason it is appropriate to examine in a little detail the objections that are made against such semiotic cultural analysis. Underlying Tisdale's method is congregational studies' assertion that congregations are not accidental accumulations of cultural elements but have a coherence about them that goes beyond formal theological, ecclesiological and geographical categories. This coherence can be uncovered by identifying the symbolic constructions people use to 'think' themselves into belonging. This uncovering is achieved by what Geertz (1973) calls a 'thick description' (although the term itself was first coined by Gilbert Ryle 1900-1976). This description is essentially an interpretative analysis, or, as Tisdale puts it in applying it to her own sphere of interest, 'contextual preaching is an imaginative act of theological construction' (1997: 121). Like most practitioners of this style of analysis, Tisdale employs the analogy of the social phenomenon under review being likened to a text so that the analysis becomes a hermeneutical task that always looks for what things *mean*; hence her many references to exegeting the congregation.

The analysis required is essentially situational, since understanding the signs/symbols generated by each congregation *in its setting* is vital.

Consequently, Tisdale requires stories, rituals, artefacts, demographics, activities, buildings, archives, and events to be trawled for disclosures of underlying worldviews, values and ethos. Inevitably, such a wide ranging interpretive process raises questions about just where the boundaries of the data assessed should be and how objective the resulting evaluation can be. Criticisms of this approach invariably cluster around the concept of ‘meaning’ and how meanings are established.

First, how can Tisdale be sure that the meanings attributed in a semiotic analysis are anything other than her own subjective conjectures, after all she freely admits the fictive nature of the process (1997: 59)? One of her principal motivations is to avoid the promotion of a ‘false consciousness’ that implicitly tells people their own ways of knowing and expressing faith are inadequate yet her method might be criticized as simply replacing one imperious outsider attitude with another. Symbolic meaning presupposes a symbolizing intelligence, and that meaning cannot be independent of the person whose consciousness it is. How then can it be legitimate for a social analyst to attribute meanings to behaviours that are unfamiliar to those concerned? There cannot be a symbolic meaning of ‘its own’ which no social actor in anyway knows it to have (see Skorupski, 1976).

Second, how can Tisdale be sure the interpretation offered adequately penetrates the dense web of meaning semiotics assumes? How is it to be established that neither too much nor too little significance has been given to the symbols analysed? Geertz himself is well aware of this danger. The dilemma, he states, is between ‘reading more into things than reason permits and less into them than it demands’ (Geertz, 1983: 16). Tisdale’s methodology, like that of all those who follow Geertz closely, works with the notion that there is a pre-existing ‘interpretational reflex’ operating in sub-cultural frames, but it is difficult to establish criteria by which to analyse such reflexes. Such analysis turns the common idea of the two dimensions (practice and belief related to symbolic understanding) into three (external realities ‘in the world’ related to symbolic constructions related to mental maps and constructions ‘in our heads’). Banal over-simplification or cosy and uncritical sub-cultural parochialism are constant threats to the analyst.

Third, how can it be established that the characterization of a subculture produced by this method is anything more than a kind of storytelling? It might be objected that Tisdale's analysis of a congregation's worldview and ethos is literally a fiction. Furthermore, exegeting a congregation in this manner may prompt doubts about the scientific credibility of its analysis, and whether it can be productive of generalizable theories. The pathway between data and the meaning that any analyst attributes to it is far from clear. Things may be seen as symbolic by the analyst, or thought to be symbolic to the actor by the analyst, when the actor does not see them in those terms at all. It could be objected that 'thick description' has explanation and description so closely intertwined that nothing is generalizable (see Shankman, 1984). From such a critical perspective, the kind of analysis Tisdale advocates could be dismissed as, ultimately, nothing more than one person's highly subjective account of one small social phenomenon.

Tisdale's book is a decidedly practical text aimed at the preacher so although in her brief commentary on Geertz (1997: 58f) she acknowledges that there are serious conceptual issues raised by his work she makes no attempt to offer any comment on them; this discussion cannot be as sanguine. For the purposes of this study the fact that advocates of semiotic analysis insist that 'actuality' can only be adequately analysed by a critical realism that takes into account at one and the same time the objective *and* subjective nature of human knowledge is a core benefit of its application. There is no lofty vantage point from which an observer may determine what is really going on in any social phenomenon. A human being's images of the world are more than miniature projected pictures of what our optical nerves receive; they are interpreted and categorized significations. With Tisdale, this thesis sees analysing interpretations and their symbolic vehicles as a vital component in understanding what is happening in the preaching event and how social memory operates within it.

Tisdale makes a plea for the ethnographer-preacher to adopt an 'inside/outside perspective' in which he or she is both an empathetic insider and a comparing outsider (for more on this perspective see the work of the missiological anthropologist Paul G Hiebert, 1994). Semiotic analysis aims to be not simply a subjective view imposed from the 'outside' (a so-called 'etic' perspective), nor an

uncritical rehearsal of stories told from the ‘inside’ (an ‘emic’ perspective), but the bringing together of both alongside formal categories of analysis. Far from inadequacy when compared with more apparently objective approaches, semiotic contextualism gives full weight to the reality and power of lived interpretation. Indeed, it often brings to light the shortcomings of narrower approaches, such as the challenge to structural determinism offered by symbolic constructionism. As the anthropologist Anthony Cohen writes:

The greater the pressure on communities to modify their structural forms to comply more with those elsewhere, the more are they inclined to reassert their boundaries symbolically by imbuing these modified forms with meaning and significance which belies their appearance. ... as the structural bases of boundary become blurred, so the symbolic bases are strengthened. (Cohen, 1989: 44)

The semiotic contextual analysis Tisdale advocates does indeed have to be undertaken with the danger of over- or under-interpretation constantly in mind, but it can be done in a self-critical, disciplined, and self-conscious manner that takes account of the pit-falls. That said, every hermeneutic enterprise suffers the same difficulties. Tisdale’s Geertzian analysis shares the difficulty with every interpretive process. Such a criticism does not invalidate the process in other perspectives, so why should it do so for the semiotics of congregations?

Geertz always pronounced himself untroubled by the criticism that ‘thick description’ is not really analytical at all since the vital task, in his estimation, is to make ‘thick description’ possible rather than worry about, for example, valid generalizations between cases (see Geertz, 1973: 3-30). Geertz describes ‘thick description’ as a method that can be used to:

Search out and analyse symbolic forms—words, images, institutions, behaviours—in terms of which, in each place, people actually represented themselves to themselves and to one another.
(Geertz, 1983: 58)

In delineating and analysing a subculture such as a congregation, reference has constantly to be made to how the social actors themselves behave and express

their understandings. In order to get behind structural similarities, the analyst has to evaluate what is presented. The analyst's judgements may well take things further than the social actor might without being pressed, but the analyst's observations will always bear a relationship in some way to the actor's perceptions. The insider/outsider perspective has to be consciously worked with. Furthermore, when these insights are applied to a Christian congregation, doctrinal and ecclesiological considerations cannot be simply left aside; and they may also form part of an evaluative frame. Degrees of correlation, whether to theology, perceived social structures, the on-going traditions of a sub-cultural frame, or other categories, will form part of the process of descriptive analysis.

The intertwining of analysis and description in this approach does indeed produce a kind of blurred vision, but it is nonetheless a real way of seeing. It will always be intrinsically incomplete, but it does allow the actual deliberative and anecdotal way people behave and understand their behaviour in a sub-cultural frame such as a congregation, to be rigorously examined. Such a methodology gives appropriate weight to the complexity of the social world and the power of symbols within it, and is therefore particularly pertinent when matters of social memory are considered.

As a preacher clearly deeply sympathetic both to the developing academic field of congregational studies in the USA and the preaching style of the New Homiletic, Tisdale is profoundly alert to the issue of meanings and how they are communicated. Just as it can hardly be merely coincidence that Phillips Brooks delivered his lectures in the era when psychology was very publicly establishing itself, so it is more than fortuitous that congregational studies and the New Homiletic have come to prominence in an environment where the practical ramifications of sociological theory have been a major concern. In particular, three distinct streams of American sociological thought appear to have been influential in these developments—the ethnomethodology of Harold Garfinkel (born 1917), the symbolic interactionism of Herbert Blumer (1900-1987), and the phenomenology of Peter Berger (born 1929). All three schools of thought are heavily concerned with meaning-making.

Ethnomethodology assumes that the foundation of society is shared sense-making. In a circular process, we draw on our ‘background knowledge’ to fit together what we see and what we know. This shared methodology of fitting things together facilitates a shared social world. Individuals are thought of as ‘doing’ social life, creating society through shared methods of doing things. Thus analysis of individual behaviour figures prominently. Symbolic interactionism is similar in that it also pays close attention to localized contexts—but, this time, the focus is on the meanings which people give to things. These meanings emerge from the social processes in which people contribute active interpretation, as against other perspectives that suggest social structures largely determine what individuals and groups may achieve. As was obvious in the earlier discussion of Buttrick, phenomenology extends this emphasis on meaning even further by insisting on the pre-eminent power of what is wholly socially constructed. In other words, society consists of people ‘making sense’ of their experiences and interactions, and categorizing these things into ‘common sense knowledge’. Religion plays a very important part in this process in that it provides values and understandings which enable people to make sense of life. It provides a structure in which things become plausible.

The consequence of these influences is that congregational studies in the USA give prominence to the positive functions religion fulfils in a way that similar studies in the UK do not. Like Tisdale, many American texts (for example, Ammerman et al, (1998); Webb, (1993); Steinke, (1993); Dudley and Johnson, (1993); Mead, (1991); and Hawkins, (1997)) are concerned to employ sociological and anthropological methodologies in order to improve effectiveness in some aspect of a congregation’s life. British texts are much less concerned with such direct application of research. As Farnsley notes, many more resources have been given to such studies in the USA than in the UK, which is probably a reflection of both the higher level of participation in congregations by Americans and a more important social role for voluntary organizations (in Guest, 2004: 36). Simply put, UK congregations are much more peripheral in terms of the wider social context than are American congregations. Such considerations must be

taken into account if Tisdale's methodology is to be followed by the British preacher.

5.5 Three recurring themes in homiletic theory.

This chapter has been a search for common themes in the theory that undergirds the design and delivery of sermons in the contemporary 'mainstream' churches of Britain and the United States. Three areas have been identified as recurring concerns voiced repeatedly across the different Christian traditions: namely, the psychological (and physical) impact of preaching, the quality of the sermon as a purposeful event, and the relation of the sermon to the social context in which it is delivered and heard. Many texts have been cited as evidence of the prevalence of these concerns, but the principal analysis has been through the close critique of three representative works. Through that analysis a range of strategies to promote homiletic effectiveness in terms of impact, communicative engagement, and contextual connectedness has been identified.

Concern about sermons being more obvious 'embodied' events, in the sense of speaking to the whole person rather than only in cognitive categories, were seen as extensions of Brooks' 'personalitism' that fit well with modern communication techniques. Buttrick's insistence on meaning making was, similarly, seen as a determined effort to shape preaching so as to affect consciousness in an image dominated mass media culture. Furthermore, Tisdale's contextualism was detailed as a method for a localizing homiletic that can shape Christian identity in a way that profoundly resonates in the communities of faith in which it takes place.

In each of these approaches collective memory theory suggests that social memory mechanisms play a prominent part. As has been seen, however, those mechanisms go largely unnoticed by the theorists concerned. The contention of this thesis is that unless those mechanisms are clearly recognized, the strategies of Buttrick, Tisdale and their peers can too easily become overly accommodating to a popular subjectivism and hyper-individualism that is highly

corrosive of collective memory. The preacher has to negotiate requirements of impact, event, and context alongside an absolute commitment to an intentionally anamnestic awareness with regard to the memory of the Christian faith. It is to the theological resources that can sustain such intentionality that this thesis now turns.

Chapter Six

Theological markers for the use of collective memory in homiletics

6.1 The Bible and remembering.

The debate about memory in contemporary theological disciplines has yet to reach the level of intensity evident within history and sociology and their associated applied studies, but there is nevertheless evidence of a growing interest in the topic. Scholars well known for their work on social approaches to memory are increasingly cited by theologians, or are themselves offering ways into a theological extension of their works. In biblical studies, for example, the American Sociologist, Barry Schartz, presented a keynote address at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2003 (published in Kirk and Thatcher, 2005); and from this side of the Atlantic, Jan Assmann's work on cultural memory provides a way into mnemonic devices in a ground-breaking study of Mark's Gospel from the perspective of the performative oral culture in which it arose (Horsley, Draper and Foley, 2006). Such publications are the beginnings of what is likely to become a major area of interest and debate in theology and biblical studies. As exciting as that prospect is, this chapter concerns itself with one small and closely delineated area where social memory theory and theology in practice are, it is argued, closely related, namely collective memory and preaching.

If, as it is being argued in this thesis, the practice of Christian preaching in contemporary European society must consciously address the mechanisms of collective memory and the issues raised by the decay of that memory, what are the theological resources available to support that task? This chapter seeks to answer that question within a theological discourse that views use of the Bible as the primary step in such ongoing resourcing. Just as Christian preaching in order to be Christian preaching cannot be seen in isolation from the biblical text, so this chapter

will argue that a theological understanding of Christian tradition as memory cannot be isolated from an understanding of social memory work present in those same biblical texts. Consequently, this chapter seeks to establish that memory and remembrance, understood as fundamental components of a life-creating faith, are evidenced in the biblical texts themselves. It will be argued that our forebears in the continuing tradition of Abraham's faith were conscious users of the social dimensions of memory. Establishing this point is key to the whole thesis, since it indicates that the homiletic theory advocated here is more than a knee-jerk response to the social amnesia indentified as being so destructive of Christian social memory. In straightforward terms, memory work will be established as a core component of Scripture and, therefore, a core component of preaching that seeks to use those same Scriptures for the remembering of Christ.

That theological resourcing of the tasks of Christian collective memory will be established through an examination of some key concepts developed in the work of the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann. Brueggemann's work is a good place to begin because he writes as a Christian preacher as well as a biblical scholar. The fact that he has also addressed memory issues very directly in his recent work adds a third justification for the focus of the analysis that follows. After the examination of some of Brueggemann's ideas, consideration will be given to the mechanisms of collective memory with particular regard to issues of boundary and development, and how these things are evidenced in Scripture. From New Testament evidence the focus will shift to worship and God as the ultimate referent of Christian memory.

6.2 Imagination as interpretative tool in the works of Walter Brueggemann.

The American Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann delivered the 1988-9 Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching with the title *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation*. The somewhat enigmatic quality of the title is typical of Brueggemann's style, and his published papers have included

experience in an authentically American idiom of English. In that sense the poet comes last, as it were, to take imagination to shores far beyond those to be reached by rail or sea. As the poem concludes:

For we are bound where mariner has not yet dare to go,

And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

O my brave soul!

O farther farther sail!

O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?

O farther, farther, farther sail!

Imagination that goes beyond the immediately obvious; creativity that constructs alternative ways of giving an account of reality and interpretive language that profoundly resonates with the contemporary are themes that figure prominently in Brueggemann's work. In his *Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*, he writes:

The tradition that became Scripture ... is not merely descriptive of a commonsense world; it dares, by artistic sensibility and risk-taking rhetoric, to posit, characterize, and vouch for a world beyond the 'common sense'. (2003a: 9)

This interpretive imagination that enables ancient texts to speak with forceful authority to the contemporary believer is at the heart of Brueggemann's hermeneutic. His conviction is that engagement with the biblical texts can be creative of real alternatives to the prevailing and destructive dominant worldviews. His insistence on 'not what the text "meant" but what it "means"' (2007: 83) presents a striking challenge to biblical methodologies that dwell on historical understandings of the text. In Brueggemann's work, both historical and redactive analysis are but steps towards this more fundamentally purposeful interpretation. His work is, therefore, of particular importance to this study since it so clearly demonstrates ways in which the biblical text can be interpreted anew so as to offer a fresh and challenging voice amidst the clamour of contemporary society.

It is hardly surprising then that Whitman's poetic 'fresh voice' provides Brueggemann with the teasing frontispiece to his lectures on preaching 'as a poetic construal of an alternative world' (1989: 6). Nor is it surprising that in the years since his Lyman Beecher lectures, beyond his major studies (for example, *First and Second Samuel* (1990); *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (1997); and *Deuteronomy* (2001)) Brueggemann has written extensively about the preaching task (for example, in works such as *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles* (1997); *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a Post-Christian World* (2000); *The Word Militant: Preaching a Decentering Word* (2007)). His is an approach to Scripture that is essentially homiletical since, whilst remaining academically rigorous, it always looks to how the text resonates with contemporary existence. Indeed, Brueggemann asserts that 'the key hermeneutical event in contemporary interpretation is the event of preaching' (2007: 92).

6.3 Imaginative remembering as a way into the text.

In his use of tradition Brueggemann's method is presentist in just the way that collective memory theory suggests. He writes that remembering 'is itself shot through with imaginative freedom to extrapolate and move beyond whatever there may have been of "happening"' (2003a: 7). Accordingly, his determination is to 'make the interface of ancient text and contemporary community more poignant and palpable' (2003a: xi). In this he is following an understanding of how classic texts work in the life of faith that has an ancient pedigree and is exemplified in contemporary scholarship by David Tracy:

I will understand not merely something that was of interest back then, as a period piece, whose use, although valid then, is now spent. Rather I will grasp something of genuine here and now, in this time and place. I will then recognize that all interpretation of classic texts heightens my consciousness of my own finitude, my own radically historical reality. I

can never repeat the classics to understand them. I must interpret them. Only then, as Kierkegaard insisted, do I really 'repeat' them.
(Tracy, 1981: 103)

In this understanding, interpretation, even when it appears novel (as long as that novelty is in an appropriate measure consistent with the tradition), is a legitimate extension of the tradition as represented by the text. Hence, for Brueggemann, what he terms 'imaginative remembering' (2003a: 8) is both a way of understanding the formation of the text and an essential way into the text now. He writes of the Old Testament:

What parents have related to their children as normative tradition (that became canonized by long usage and has long been regarded as normative) is a world of meaning that has as its key character YHWH, the God of Israel, who operates in the narratives and songs of Israel that are taken as reliable renderings of reality. Given all kinds of critical restraints and awarenesses, one can only allow that such retellings are a disciplined, emancipated act of imagination. (2003a: 8)

This retelling is, in Brueggemann's methodology, a necessary extension of the memory work evident in the Old Testament texts with which he works, since those texts are themselves

... a sustained memory that has been filtered through many generations of the interpretative process, with many interpreters imposing certain theological intentionalities on the memory that continues to be reformulated. (2003a: 4)

Brueggemann is at pains to assert the force of this continuity right up to the present time. The preacher, in his understanding, does not stand as a remote and objective commentator on the text, nor as a skill-laden technician who applies ancient wisdom to contemporary life, but is rather in her or his labours at one with and contributing to the ongoing flow of a living stream of tradition:

All the forces of imaginative articulation and ideological passion and the hiddenness of divine inspiration have continued to operate in the ongoing

interpretive task of synagogue and church until the present day.
(2003a: 12)

This ongoing process of memory work that makes faith possible for the next generation Brueggemann terms 'traditioning' (2003a: 9). Although he does not use the language of collective memory theory in his writings, it is clear that he is alert to the mechanisms it suggests. For example, he points out that each version of retelling has as its intention the notion that it should be the final retelling that presents the newly interpreted or understood correct version. As that retelling comes to prominence and wide use, however, it is itself subject to further retelling that will eventually be productive of a fresher version that will displace the earlier version, partly or wholly (2003a: 9).

It is not hard to see in this process what Halbwachs described as new memories created by the pressure of current needs and relationships and the forgetting of other memories that no longer have a supporting social framework. For Brueggemann, this process of retelling and discarding works to reinforce his demand that an exegetical and homiletical use of the text that is creative and imaginative is both legitimate and advantageous. The exegete or the homiletician can use the traces of earlier memories in the ongoing task of traditioning. Brueggemann writes:

The complexity of the text evident on any careful reading is due to the happy reality that as new acts of traditioning overcome and partly displace older materials, the older material is retained alongside newer tradition. That retention is a happy one, because it very often happens that a still later traditionalist returns to and finds useful older, 'discarded' material thought to be beyond use. (2003a: 9)

Brueggemann's usage also echoes Halbwachs' contention (see section 3.3) that changes in religious collective memory are often strengthened by an appeal to the recovery of ancient memory that has somehow been forgotten. What marks the difference between the two approaches is that Brueggemann sees this reclamation as necessary for a creative and imaginative handling of tradition rather than simply a way of socially legitimizing what might otherwise seem to be corrosive of the

tradition. In collective memory theory as delineated by Halbwachs, change and development in Christian religious memory is seen as inimical to faith, whereas Brueggemann believes that variations over time are not only conducive to faith but are required if the text is to retain its power to change perceptions in every age. In acknowledging this process, Brueggemann also acknowledges that the memory held is far from being a straightforward and simple storage of information, or, as he terms it, ‘an innocent act of reportage’ (2003a: 9). Far from seeing the social construction of memory as a denial of faith, Brueggemann uses that constructionism as a way to advance a socially responsible close engagement with the biblical text. This bears on the subject of this study in two very direct ways.

6.4 Living tradition as a field of artistic endeavour.

First, it is important to acknowledge that although Brueggemann’s hermeneutical method is an expression of impatience with biblical scholarship that dwells on historical, redactional and textual issues to the exclusion of social concerns; it is also more than that. His conviction is that the logic of modernity with its passion for linear, objective, and systematized thinking, and its insistence on only working with the ‘given facts’, has too often effectively silenced the Bible even in the churches (2003a: 28). He writes:

Our technical way of thinking reduces mystery to problem, transforms assurance into certitude, revises quality into quantity, and so takes the categories of biblical faith and represents them in manageable shapes. (1989: 2)

His is a style of engagement with the biblical text that goes beyond historical and technical categories (though readily employing those tools when needed) to imaginative and rhetorical aspects embedded in the text so as to focus

... not on the ‘cognitive outcomes’ of the text (though there finally are cognitive outcomes) but on the artistic processes that operate in the text and generate an imagined ‘world’ within the text. Such artistic

attentiveness takes seriously the exact placement and performance of words and phrases, of sounds and repetitions that give rise to an alternate sense of reality. (2007: 76)

In terms of homiletic theory this emphasis on ‘artistic attentiveness’ calls to mind the work of R.E.C. Browne (1976) (see sections 2.3 and 5.2.3 above) and the suggestion he first voiced in the 1950s that preaching is an artistic activity requiring similar processes of social understanding and interaction as those necessary to the production of music, poetry or painting (Browne, 1976: 18). Indeed Brueggemann is arguably more in sympathy with the approach of Browne than with his American New Homiletic colleagues. The inductive methodology of New Homiletics beginnings all too easily with human experience, and, according to Brueggemann, its effort to induce from understandings of human experience connections to the biblical text is the wrong starting point. He cites what he perceives to be an increasing inclination amongst seminarians

... who prefer for preaching some idea, some cause, some experience, some anything rather than the text. A community without its appropriate text clearly will have no power or energy or courage for mission; it will be endlessly quarrelsome because it depends on ideology and has no agreed-upon arena where it adjudicates its conflicts. (2007: 42)

With the New Homileticians Brueggemann is determined to connect the text and the world, but since his homiletic conceives the text as always challenging and critiquing commonplace understandings of experience and reality, those commonplace understandings cannot be the interpreter’s beginning.

Interestingly, the word ‘relevance’ is a term he studiously avoids in his consideration of how preaching properly works. Indeed, in a recent article he asserts ‘the text is not directly addressed to us, and we should not work too hard at making it immediately relevant’ (2007: 39). As an alternative he uses the term ‘resonates’ as a way of indicating that the preacher’s task is to enable a word to be heard that comes ‘from outside our closed system of reality’ (2007: 4). Preaching, he insists, must always be subversive (2000: 6) and he means that literally: it offers

a version of faith lived in reality that gets under the dominant versions and opens new ways of existing. He writes:

My theme is alternative, sub-version to version, the sermon a moment of alternative imagination, the preacher exposed as point man, point woman, to make up out of nothing more than our memory and our hope and our faith a radical option to the normalcy of deathliness. (2000: 9)

So, far from being a simple preservation mechanism, traditioning, in Brueggemann's methodology, becomes a creative activity in which each generation of faith reworks the tradition so as to maintain its liveliness:

We now know (or we think we know) that human transformation (the way people change) does not happen through didacticism or through excessive certitude but through the playful entertainment of another scripting of reality that may subvert the old given text and its interpretation and lead to the embrace of an alternative text and its redescription of reality. (2007: 26)

This is a radical understanding of faith's collective memory in that it lays the emphasis on tradition's continuity being found in the telling and retelling which is properly productive of changes and shifts in tradition's content. Here, the maintenance of a living tradition is clearly paramount; but processes of that maintenance are acknowledged as continually bringing to birth new ways of understanding how that tradition is experienced as living. The ways collective memories change are an aspect of how tradition functions effectively rather than being seen as a threat to the preservation of tradition. Brueggemann's traditioning works towards the creation of world-views in the anthropological sense; it is an insistence on an epistemology that shuns a too strident and dominating objectivism. As he puts it:

Reality is not fixed and settled ... it cannot be described objectively. We do not simply respond to a world that is here, but we engage in constituting that world by our participation, or action, and our speech. As participants in the constitutive act, we do not describe what is there, but we evoke what is not fully there until we act or speak. (1988: 12)

In this Brueggemann offers an understanding of the preacher's task that is akin to David Buttrick's phenomenological approach (Buttrick, 1987) in that it calls forth a sermonic language that can construe the world in new ways. Thus Brueggemann's definition of imagination is:

The God-given, emancipated capacity to picture (or image) reality — God, world, self — in alternative ways outside conventional, commonly accepted givens. Imagination is attentiveness to what is 'otherwise,' other than our taken-for-granted world. (2001: 27)

This imaginative ability allows new insights and understandings to develop from within tradition. Processes of displacement and forgetting may indeed be at work in this, as collective memory theory suggests; but that does not necessarily mean that previous memories are just abandoned. Rather, imagination enables a reviewing incorporation of new perspectives that are beyond the easy conventions previously assumed.

6.5 Preaching as contested production.

Preaching is at heart, according to Brueggemann, about the construal of alternatives. This assertion discloses a second point about how his work has a direct bearing on this study; and that shifts the focus from the nature of tradition to the practice of preaching.

If traditioning is fundamentally about epistemology then preaching, as a mechanism of memory maintenance, must itself be productive of this shift in knowing. Consequently, preaching is, in Brueggemann's estimation, always a dangerous, indeed hazardous, activity since it is essentially a process of production understood in its widest creative sense. Like any productive process there is much that can prospectively go wrong in the process itself, let alone in its ultimate 'consumption' as a product whose characteristics are potentially suspect or unwelcome. The dominant worldview in which both preacher and hearer exists is one in which reductionism with its relentless crude simplification of complexities

and subtleties holds sway most of the time (1987: 13). In such circumstances preaching that is a creative weaving of the tradition into fresh resonant patterns can come as an unwelcome shock; it appears to put a question mark against more usual didactic, doctrinal or moralizing homiletical styles (2007: 29). That, of course, is precisely Brueggemann's purpose:

Preaching is a peculiar, freighted, risky act each time we do it: entrusted with an irascible, elusive, polyvalent subject and flying low under the dominant version with a *subversive* offer of *another version* to be embraced by *subversives*. (2000: 6, italics original)

Brueggemann situates preaching in precisely that area of contestation and change related to operative social frameworks that is familiar to collective memory theorists. That Brueggemann applies notions of production and consumption to the text and its exposition might seem strange in that kindred concepts such as commodification and consumerism are things he frequently criticises severely. In doing so he is, perhaps, making the point that the tendency of the dominating economic model to corrupt and distort underscores its seriousness and makes using its terms all the more resonant when applied to preaching.

Preaching is to be taken with the utmost seriousness precisely because the world it aims to create offers a profound alternative to the dominating economic worldview. Preaching presents a new choice which challenges the hegemony of the usual way of viewing production and consumption, but the resonance of that choice is such that terms themselves are appropriately used:

When the community has thus produced a text, it is the task of the community to consume the text, that is, to take, use, heed, respond, and act upon the text. The entire process of the text, then, is an act of production and consumption whereby a new world is chosen or an old world is defended, or there is transformation of old world to new world. The purpose of using the categories of production and consumption is to suggest that the textual process, especially the interpretative act of preaching, is never a benign, innocent, or straightforward act. Anyone who imagines that he or she is a benign or innocent preacher of the text is

engaged in self-deception. Preaching as interpretation is always a daring, dangerous act, in which the interpreter, together with the receivers of the interpretation, is consuming a text and producing a world. (2007: 87)

In other words, to facilitate this consumptive production, it is essential that the text 'be kept in conversation with what the congregation already knows and believes' (2007: 100). This conversation is at its most effective when it is clearly opposed to both 'a false kind of objectivity that assumes the world is a closed, fixed, fated, given' and 'a kind of subjectivity that assumes we are free or able to conjure up private worlds that may exist in a domesticated sphere without accountability to or impingement from the larger public world' (2007: 100). Preaching has to keep the conversation going—an inevitable conclusion, given Brueggemann's dynamic understanding of tradition.

It is intended that this analysis of Brueggemann's writings will have made plain the numerous points at which his thought provides fruitful links to the subject of this study. However, before moving to an examination of continuity and community in relation to collective memory it is worth reiterating some of the keys issues at a little length. In particular, the relationship between tradition, as represented by the Scriptural texts and contemporary concerns, will be examined further. That in turn will allow some extended discussion of the way in which this tradition is able to generate more than a straightforward replication of itself out of those contemporary concerns. Tradition is seen here as an environment within which the preacher is empowered towards an imaginative and artistic creativity that both sustains and develops that environment. That discussion will provide a conceptual bridge into the consideration of a brief but significant essay contributed by Anthony Thiselton to the 1981 Doctrine Commission of the Church of England's report *Believing in the Church*. Through Thiselton's work, issues of continuity and transmission will be directly addressed.

6.6 The presentist use of tradition.

Brueggemann's perspective on the preaching task fits well with

collective memory theory in that it is essentially presentist in its nature. Indeed, Brueggemann's insistence on what the text means *now* provides a positive theological and ministerial undergirding of the processes of collective memory. His understanding of imaginative remembering as the core tool of the preacher's interpretation re-positions those collective memory processes as purposeful rather than simply inevitable. The preacher as *hermēneutikos* enters the stream of the ongoing flow of a living tradition and strives to be part of that lively continuity through homiletic activity; what Brueggemann understands as a continuing process of 'traditioning'. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Brueggemann places this dynamic understanding of tradition at the very centre of faithful living. If so fundamental to the practice of faith, then that traditioning must also be essential to Christian mission. As Rowan Williams puts it:

The Christian is at once possessed by an authoritative urgency to communicate the good news, and constrained by the awareness of how easily the words of proclamation become godless, powerless to transform. The urgency must often be channelled into listening and waiting, and into the expansion of the Christian imagination itself into something that can cope with the seriousness of the world. It is certainly true that, for any of this to be possible, there must be a real immersion in the Christian tradition itself. (2000: 40)

In Brueggemann's thought, preaching becomes a key component of contemporary biblical interpretation in that it makes explicit in a demonstrable way just how tradition works. The essential rootedness of homiletics in a faith tradition becomes its greatest strength.

This point needs to be underlined because it is not to be taken as special pleading for preaching as an exceptional kind of communication that must by its nature be allowed an ideological position inappropriate elsewhere. Instead, this is a declaration that the explicit rootedness of preaching exposes the reality of similar, but frequently denied rootedness, in other areas of discourse.

Furthermore, that that very rootedness provides a platform for a sometimes radical re-evaluation of realities previously simply assumed—what Brueggemann understands as a construal of alternatives. In terms of collective memory, the recasting of memories becomes not the rather defensive mechanism Halbwachs described in his consideration of religion, but a creative and imaginative weaving of new possibilities out of the warp and weft of what has been inherited. This allows an adjustment of Halbwachs' rather positivistic functionalism towards a more phenomenological perspective that is alert to the dynamism inherent in the tradition itself. Some words from Peter Ochs' study of Peircean pragmatism in relation to Scripture seem apposite:

For the Christian community, the Bible is thus not a sign of some external reality, but a reality itself whose meanings display the doubly dialogic relationships between a particular text and its context within the Bible as a whole, and between the Bible as a whole and the conduct of the community of interpreters. (1998: 309)

The denial of an objectivizing distance between the preacher and the text may be justly assumed in the ministry of preaching, but Ochs' study and Brueggemann's practice are suggestive of more than that: they point to a kind of knowing and learning only available through tradition. What is being challenged here is the easy assumption that a tradition-free, abstract, universal rationality is superior to such tradition-embedded thinking. Indeed, 'traditioning' considered in the widest terms must put a question mark against the very idea of tradition-free knowing. In considering the influential works of Michael Polanyi (1891-1976), Alasdair MacIntyre (born 1929), and Charles Taylor (born 1931) Bruggemann makes the point that the imagination so crucial to development and change is generated from within tradition (2001: 31).

6.7 The generative nature of Scripture as tradition.

Although, as acknowledged earlier, the relationship of tradition and rationality raises large epistemological issues beyond the direct scope of this

thesis the subject needs to be broached here since it draws attention to an important aspect of tradition, namely its ability to seed fresh, creative understandings that are generative of new developments whilst retaining congruity with the tradition from which they arose. Colloquial usage of the term ‘tradition’ makes it synonymous with preservation, but that fails to acknowledge this generative ability. Brueggemann sees generative traditioning at work throughout the Scriptural text itself in that it is never solely a description of the commonsense world but always points to what is beyond the commonsense (2003a: 9). The contemporary user of the text merely does what the formulators of the extant text did, who themselves did what those who used these stories and words before them did. Again a passage from Peter Ochs is worth quoting at length because it provides a complementary philosophical insight to the usage suggested by Brueggemann:

The world of experience is served by a finite set of common-sense beliefs, and there are terrible occasions when this world breaks down and common sense is confounded. There is more than *this* world, however: for scriptural pragmatists, there are resources *out* of this world for correcting the inadequacies *of* this world. The source of this correction is of this world in the sense that it is written in the language of this world, but it is not only from this world. It is written in texts whose plain sense belongs to everyday language and respects the rules of common sense but which, to the attentive reader, also displays certain errors and vaguenesses that cannot be resolved within the rules of common sense and the terms of everyday language. Discomforted by what appears to be the text's burdens, the attentive reader is stimulated into a process of corrective rereading that, at some point, may disclose two surprising features of the discomfort. For one, the discomfort appears, after all, to have been *of* the reader as well as *about* the text: the text's ailments appear to mirror the reader's own, and these appear, on reflection, to concern the reader not as individual, but as a member of a community of readers – and of a society and culture or, in other words, a common-sense world. The discomfort is thus an

attribute of the relation between text and common-sense world. For two, this discomfort does not bring with it the kind of epistemological distress that accompanies other uncertainties of comparable gravity. To the contrary, as the process of rereading continues, the very text that gave rise to the discomfort also gives rise to an unexpected sense that, while as yet inapparent, a solution is also available. (1998: 319)

Although Brueggemann does not directly use the language of formal pragmatism, his impatience with a static understanding of tradition and the metaphysical preoccupations that go with it (2007: 30), coupled with his demand that preaching must enable the text to resonate with contemporary concerns, suggests a sympathy towards a philosophy so clearly associated with the particularities and specificities of everyday practice. It is not fanciful to suggest that Brueggemann's insistence on the 'evangelical imagination' would lead him to offer a sturdy 'Amen' to the Jewish Ochs' definition of Scripture:

A text of this world that delivers a corrective to this world as guided by rules that are not only of this world. These rules and the scriptural text are called 'holy' as a sign both of their ultimate worth as ultimate sources of corrective rules ('holy' as 'praiseworthy' in contemporary English) *and* of their *otherness*, or being not only of this world ('holy' as in the Old English term *weird*, and in the Hebrew term, *kadosh*, whose etymological root refers to 'separateness' or 'removal'). (1998: 320)

That the 'not of this world' quality of Scripture means that its exposition is often productive of surprising insights is a fact that will be readily substantiated by any serious imaginative preacher. Indeed, bringing that 'not of this world' character of the text to the forefront of the preacher's work allows the text to have a proper strangeness that is especially conducive to the generative task. Familiarity and repetition all too easily degenerates into a stultifying lack of imagination that works to silence the text. As Brueggemann asserts, recognition that the text is not directly addressed to *us* who are the contemporary church is crucial to freeing the text to voice, in his terms, 'God's

otherwise' (2007: 39). Consequently, he says, the preacher should not pursue a method of exposition that strives too eagerly at immediate relevance (2007: 39).

What seems at first sight a wholly counter-intuitive insight is in fact a tactic essential to a proper appreciation of the text's authority. Rowan Williams makes a similar point in his postscript to his study *Arius* (1987) when he writes:

Scripture and tradition require to be read in a way that brings out their strangeness, their not-obvious and non-contemporary qualities, in order that they may be read both freshly and truthfully from one generation to another. (1987: 236)

Homiletics, and the congregations that homiletics serve, are 'outside' the text in this sense and are therefore required to give it that heightened attention and seriousness of consideration demanded of people traversing 'a strange land'. Travellers make things difficult for themselves by the very fact of travelling, but the exhilaration of new possibilities, discoveries and achievements are not available without that risky venture. Similarly, working with Scripture and tradition requires a 'making things difficult' in order that their essential beauty and simplicity can be discovered anew. Otherwise, as Williams puts it:

... we read with eyes not our own and think them through with minds not our own; the 'deposit of faith' does not really come into contact with ourselves. And this 'making difficult', this confession that what the gospel says in Scripture and tradition does not instantly and effortlessly make sense, is perhaps one of the most fundamental tasks for theology. (1987: 236)

However, like the traveller, those engaged in the homiletic task also seek, as it were, the advice of earlier travellers, follow paths new to them although they have been travelled by others in the past, and aim to appreciate the sights others have found impressive.

Inevitably, the elements of surprise, discovery and reclamation inherent in this approach to working in and from tradition mean that that exposition will always have about it a certain provisionality. The preacher is always in the

middle of things, often quite literally, in that most preachers are also engaged in multifarious other activities alongside homiletical endeavour, but also in terms of the living tradition from which and in which he or she speaks. The generative nature of tradition, as described, is such that it is productive of inexhaustible discussion. The preacher dares—again an idea frequently used by Brueggemann—to pin-down that discussion in sermons directed towards the purposes of God for these particular people in this particular time. In terms of Brueggemann's thought, something is being produced and consumed in and for the present time out of the canon of inherited scripts. That new scripting, if authentic to the tradition from which it is seeded, confronts the scripts people live by that are provided by common-sense and the status quo. Preaching is not to be a generalized, abstract truth that is easily avoided but a particularized interpretation that offers an empowering and often contested alternative in real and present circumstances. Brueggemann writes:

All parties to this act of interpretation need to understand that the text is not a contextless absolute, nor is it a historical description, but it is itself a responsive, assertive, imaginative act that stands as proposal of reality to the community. As the preacher and the congregation handle the text, the text becomes a new act that makes available one mediation of reality. That new mediation of reality is characteristically an act of fidelity, an act of inventiveness, and an act in which vested interest operates. Moreover, the preacher and the congregation do this in the midst of many other acts of mediation in which they also participate, as they attend to civil religion, propaganda, ideology, and mass media. (2007: 93)

Such particularity is of the essence of the preaching task. The tradition is reworked and reframed so as to resonate *now*. Inevitably, that particularity will mean that changes of time and circumstance require further reworkings and reframings.

Framing, or reframing, is a key part of how the individual relates to collective memory according to Halbwachs (1980: 76). It is the structure

provided by shared experience—the framework, in Halbwachs' terms—which enables the individual to remember and relate those memories to the wider group's shared memories. The theological insistence on the particularities of preaching underscores collective memory theory's disclosure that shared, pertinent experience is vital to the maintenance of social memory. Without the shared experience, however mediated, memory dies (82). The preacher, in the exposition of what this text means in the particularity of here and now, aims to address directly the current experience, both of the corporate body as well as of individuals. In so doing, the preacher acts effectively as a maintainer of the collective memory of the church, or as Brueggemann would put it, the preacher is engaged in traditioning. The theological point about the generative nature of the Scriptural tradition, and the issue of how the developments born of that generative quality remain authentically Christian, make the sociological identification of the fact that social memories change with experience all the more challenging.

Of course, the church has always been in the business of passing-on the gospel inheritance. What has changed is that the value of that passing-on is less appreciated in society as a whole than previously, and there has been a significant decline in the numbers of people who are familiar with the living stream(s) of the Christian tradition. Simply put, if speaking from the tradition is so vital to living faith, inarticulacy in the tradition, for whatever reason, poses a real threat to the tradition itself. A theology that adds weight, as it were, to the significance of telling and retelling the tradition in the imaginative construal of alternatives embedded in human experience, only serves to emphasize all the more strongly the urgent challenges to Christian social continuity discussed in earlier chapters.

6.8 The problem of continuity.

In addressing continuity, Anthony Thiselton's essay 'Knowledge, Myth and Corporate Memory' in the Anglican report *Believing in the Church* (1981)

presents some potentially very fruitful ideas about the transmission of corporate knowledge and memory. It is to that essay this discussion now turns, with the aim of delineating something of a theological and philosophical corporatism that might undergird the application of collective memory to homiletic practice in contemporary Britain. In his criticism of Enlightenment rationalism that has an ‘obsessive suspicion of tradition’ (1981: 50), Thiselton shares the concerns of both Brueggemann and Ochs about an overweening rationalism in many areas of public discourse. There is no need to repeat those concerns, save to say that Thiselton is emphatic about the ‘corporate foundation of all human knowledge’ (47) since a shared public world always pre-exists any individual’s thinking and it is, therefore, impossible for knowledge to begin *de novo*. In other words, the characterization of tradition presented here is not to be seen as a valorizing of a process unique to religion. Because religion is readily identified by its propensity for handing down a ‘deposit’ of faith does not mean that very similar processes are not at work in all other areas of human knowledge; although the deposits and the handing down mechanisms may be hidden or obscured by other things. Knowing and understanding, he suggests, no less than believing, ‘depends on some kind of sharing and on some kind of expression of continuity’ (49). With Karl Mannheim (1936) in his work on the sociology of cross-generational knowledge, Thiselton insists that all human thought is essentially a ‘thinking further’ of what other people have thought before us. He writes:

Tradition transcends the scope of immediate individual knowledge and experience, and provides a framework within which one’s own thought develops and becomes critically sharpened. (1981: 52)

The relationship of such ‘thinking further’ to memory hardly needs any further emphasis.

Although epistemological concerns are paramount in Thiselton’s account, it is not hard to discern his underlying sympathy with the more sociological analysis of continuity exemplified by Hervieu-Léger and her use of Halbwachs. Indeed, although he mentions neither writer, he is explicit about

‘corporate memory’, as he terms it, providing a frame of reference in the light of which knowledge is assessed and interpreted and procedures determined in the *present* (1981: 53). He amplifies his understanding of corporate memory, and the mechanisms necessary to its functioning, as follows:

If the corporate memory of a community constitutes an important source of its knowledge, and if the biography of the individual thinker represents no more than an episode in its transmission and critical control, it follows that the community which wishes to preserve its knowledge, experience and cultural identity will employ *instruments for the transmission and institutionalization* of its corporate knowledge. What is recollected in corporate memory will be transmitted in proverb, story, sermon, myth or, equally, in (for the scientific sub-community) the pages of a modern technical journal. What is believed to be of value for the community, or on which its cultural identity is thought to depend, will be *reiterated in formulae* such as laws, ethical maxims, creeds, rites, songs and so on. In the context of religious or specifically Christian belief, *the reiteration of shared knowledge* on the basis of corporate memory finds expression in creeds, sacraments, sermons and the reading of narratives of the foundation-events out of which the community was born. (1981: 53)

At first sight such a strong emphasis on the social might seem an unlikely place to seek support for the individualized expression that preaching is by nature. A proper estimation, however, of the relationship between the individual and the corporate memory quickly dispels any such worry. Thiselton’s strong emphasis on the significance of the corporate does not mean that he thinks the individual’s contribution is insignificant. It is, rather, that he sees corporate remembering and knowing as fundamental aspects of the individual’s resources for both critical thinking and authentic faithfulness. He insists that there must be dialectic between the communal and the individual, and that neither part should ever be underestimated (1981: 60). Moreover, neither of those aspects of knowing should be thought of as denials of the possibility of insights born of an unmediated (or apparently unmediated) experience of God (60).

He is eager that his understanding of the corporate dimension of faith should not be an excuse for an uncritical traditionalism, nor a reduction of faith to ‘a mere acceptance of “orthodoxy”’ (1981: 60), and he appeals to exemplars of faith in order to declare that:

A faith that merely takes up the routines prescribed by a tradition is for Kierkegaard (and for Paul and for Jesus) not ‘true’ faith. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to assume that this contradicts the notion of a *corporate framework* of knowledge *within* which the individual may reach authentic faith. Jesus, Paul, Luther and Kierkegaard were all conscious of the limitations and seductions of tradition; but all lay down their calls to faith within a framework of knowledge and experience which transcended individual autobiography. (1981:61)

Questions of authenticity and boundary immediately come to the fore: how does the individual’s expression of faith remain authentic to the inherited corporate memory? How are developments of that memory to be judged as conducive and appropriate? And are the reiterative mechanisms of corporate memory sufficient of themselves to maintain the identity of the believing community so that it remains *this* community and not another? It is to these types of issues that Thiselton brings specific and illuminating ideas that can move the argument of this study forward, since, as he avers, continuity is necessary for identity (1981: 64) and collective memory is rooted in identity. He writes:

Corporate memory (especially as this is articulated and preserved in the biblical writings) represents much more than a mere ‘source’ for knowledge of the past. Corporate memory is the frame of reference which gives meaning to the present, and even guides present action. ... The possession and ‘effective history’ of corporate memory is what makes a society (or a nation, or a church) *this* society, and not some other. (1981: 66)

Here, Thiselton provides a much needed corrective to a Halbwachsian tendency to down-play the importance of actual traditions and memories in favour of social

constructions adopted solely on the basis of their utility in meeting current felt needs. Continuity is more than an internalization of what is useful to current belonging. It has to be a genuine expression of the inheritance that is the incorporating body.

6.9 Habituation as providing role standards for the believer.

At heart, the memory process Thiselton describes is intense, but simple: the present community of faith utilizes corporate memory to reflect on the founding events of the faith, and out of that reflection pledges itself anew to the contemporary significance of those events and their practical effectiveness here and now. As has been said, the vehicles of the reiteration at the centre of that reflection are formulae which have a direct connection to the founding events of the faith, and which usually have a liturgical or mantra-like quality to them, that is, they are patterned words or actions that can bear frequent repetition without becoming tedious or unmeaningful. According to Thiselton, it is that quality of pattern that allows what is done or said to be recognized as part of the tradition and community that is Christian (1981: 64). Through repetition and habituation the believer adopts the role 'expected' of the Christian believer. The authoritative nature of the tradition provides the relative stability necessary to enable that habituation to take place. At first sight, this habituation within tradition might seem profoundly backward-looking, conservative and a long way from Brueggemann's imaginative and creative use of traditioning; but closer examination discloses that not to be the case. The key lies in a proper estimation of the word 'role'.

A role requires a pre-existing pattern, or body of knowledge, that determines what the role actually is. What pre-exists provides an objective standard, as it were, against which the role is measured as it is enacted—just as an actor in a drama follows a script in developing and acting out an assigned role. In that sense, the tradition of faith, and the collective memories that go with it provide the script, the patterned body of knowledge, from which the

believer acts. As is the case for an actor in a drama, the believer performs the role rather than just repeating what has been received ‘parrot fashion’.

Performance always involves interpretation, and interpretation always involves artistry, creativity and imagination. The metaphor that Thiselton uses is that of the musician playing from a score; the good musician provides an interpretation of the music, but it also remains a *faithful* rendition of *that particular* work (1981: 74). Habituation related to role performance now looks much more like Brueggemann’s traditioning.

Thiselton’s thought provides a practical, yet intellectually rigorous additional way of understanding how the preacher can use Christian tradition as more than a means of incorporation. In summary, the concept of faithful role-performance provides a way of tempering the imaginative construals of alternatives seeded by the generative quality of the Christian tradition. It offers a way of maintaining identity without curbing creativity—a kind of standard to act as a guide. Thiselton writes:

To be able to speak of standard role-performance, it is certainly not necessary that *every individual* who claims to be part of the Christian community should *actually perform* every role prescribed as standard to Christian belief. What matters, from this standpoint, is whether, when deviation or eccentricities occur, they are indentified as permitted *deviations or eccentricities*. (1981: 67 italics in original)

In these terms the preacher is a model of role-performance.

The concept of role-performance also brings with it other congruities with Brueggemann’s concept of reimagination: both emphasize that living faithfully in the tradition involves more than intellectual conformity; both are alert to truth communicated through analogy, modelling, metaphor and symbol as much as rational argumentation; and both are concerned that tradition be expressed in ways that draw people into an experience of lived tradition in the present.

6.10 Eschatology as an essential linkage between event and action in sermons.

Despite the assertion that tradition-based thinking is productive of radical social challenge, the discussion in this chapter so far has been essentially presentist. This prompts the concern that the presentist assumptions of collective memory theory, so closely echoed in those determined on a missiological exposition of the tradition, may in fact be a dampener on the very engagement those expositors seek to pursue. If, as collective memory theory suggests, present experience and relationships are determinative of what is remembered, how does remembering facilitate change? Part of the answer to that question lies in the nature of a Christian remembering that is never simply recollection in either an intellectual or experiential sense. The bounds of Christian memory, although firmly anchored in the here and now, have their outer perimeter, as it were, neither in human cognition nor human action, but in God. The inter-play of Christian memory work is not just between the present and the past, but between those things within the overarching purposes of God. Halbwachs recognized the reality of this in his observation that Christian collective memory fulfilled the requirements of present imperatives by the expedient, in his terms, of re-describing Christ as the ever-present Lord rather than the dead martyr. By this mechanism the Christian collective memory can be constantly reinvigorated by the present needs and experiences of believers as they become aware of the yet more authentic call of Christ, however mediated.

Halbwachs, as a sociologist, necessarily sees this process wholly in terms of providing those changing social frameworks that facilitate the shifts of collective memory. The Christian believer, however, must look beyond categories of memory theory towards the theological realities that support a faith-based approach to historiography. This should not be understood as either naïve determinism or imperialistic ideology: but rather as a powerful, yet humble certainty that human history has a purpose hidden in the heart of a

loving God and, consequently, human hopelessness is not the last word in any circumstance. As Johann Baptist Metz puts it:

It is because we believe in a definite eschatological meaning of history that we can face the negativities, the catastrophes, without irrationally dividing or denying our responsibilities, without developing excuse-mechanisms. (Metz, 1987: 42)

It is the ultimately eschatological character of Christian social memory that enables it to be productive of change instead of merely an outworking of what is. Accordingly, this final section of the chapter looks at the relationship between memory and action, or tradition and behaviour, in order to examine how the preacher's construal of alternatives, as Brueggemann puts it, is necessarily linked to activity in the world as well as the construction of the sermon as an event within the worshipping congregation.

The linkage suggested here between the sermon as purposeful in itself (a production in Brueggemann's terms) and Christian action beyond the confines of the worshipping congregation is the essential point. Without that linkage, homiletics is always in danger of being reduced to the purposeless chatter its critics so often suggest it is. What prevents the sermon degenerating into stereotypical platitudinous advice, inane moralizing, socially disconnected biblical commentary, overtly authoritarian personal opinion, or any of the other denigrating characterizations of its form and presentation, is this crucial link. As collective memory theory suggests, it is the linkages that keep memories alive. The sermon, in this analysis, is a mechanism by which links are maintained and created. The preacher works to let the texts of Scripture speak with renewed power by forging (the metaphor is deliberate) links between that tradition, present experience, and God's purposes. That forging is of itself productive activity, since, like any memory work, it provides the group which is part of it with resources of identity, location, purpose and exposition essential to its well-being and continuance. What prevents that memory work from becoming self-absorbed and inward looking is that the Christian tradition, or memory, always has God as its referent. Or to make the same point in more

theological terms, the eschatological nature of the Christian tradition exerts the irresistible pressure of eternity in the here and now, and that pressure inevitably prompts a radical calling into question of current social arrangements and purposes. As part of this proleptic pressure, preaching, to be Christian preaching, has to be itself both a purposeful event and a motivator of action beyond the homiletic arena. What follows is an examination of ideas expressed in three very different theological traditions that serve to support that conviction: namely from the political theology of the German Roman Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz (born 1928), the biblical studies of the Norwegian Lutheran scholar Nils Alstrup Dahl (1911-2001), and the liturgical studies of the Estonian born Russian Orthodox Church historian Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983).

6.11 Johann Baptist Metz on Christ as dangerous memory.

Metz, like others mentioned earlier who offer social commentary from a wide range of perspectives (for example, Hervieu-Léger, Davie, and Brueggemann, to cite but three amongst many) regards contemporary society as widely forgetful. Also, like others he regards the dominant power of the market—with its short-term goals and instrumental logic—as being at the heart of this corrosive forgetfulness. Indeed, he believes the style of thinking generated from the dominance of the market is so pervasive that other ways of thinking are relegated to little more than superstition. He writes:

Everything in our consciousness that is determined by memory, everything outside the calculations of our techno-pragmatic reason, will be equated with superstition and left to the private whim of the individual. But this does not necessarily mean that we are freer and more enlightened. We merely fall prey to the dominant illusions all the more easily. (1980: 110)

For Metz the only way out of those illusions is what he terms ‘the dangerous memory of the freedom of Jesus Christ’ (1980: 88). Here, he must be quoted at

some length because this concept is so clearly of importance to the idea of the sermon as both event and action:

The Church must understand and justify itself as the public witness and bearer of the tradition of a dangerous memory of freedom in the 'systems' of our emancipative society. This thesis is based on memory as the fundamental form of the expression of Christian faith and on the central and special importance of freedom in that faith. In faith, Christians accomplish the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesus Christi*. In faith, they remember the testament of Christ's love, in which the kingdom of God appeared among men [*sic*] by initially establishing that kingdom between men, by Jesus' confession of himself as the one who was on the side of the oppressed and rejected and by his proclamation of the coming kingdom of God as the liberating power of unconditional love. This *memoria Jesus Christi* is not a memory which deceptively dispenses Christians from the risks involved in the future. It is not a middle-class counter-figure to hope. On the contrary, it anticipates the future as a future of those who are oppressed, without hope and doomed to fail. It is therefore a dangerous and at the same time liberating memory that oppresses and questions the present because it reminds us not of some open future, but precisely this future and because it compels Christians constantly to change themselves so that they are able to take this future into account.

(1980: 90)

The insistence that the future that is anticipated is not any possible future but the future as disclosed in Jesus Christ is telling. This future is the horizon to which faith looks and towards which the sermon must spur its hearers. This is memory work because it is rooted firmly in the reality of Jesus' life, death and resurrection and the church's continual reframing of those realities in its collective memory. Brueggemann's concepts of 'traditioning' and 'reimagination' immediately come to mind.

Like Breuggemann, Metz sees this memory work as subversive and he writes of the *memoria Jesus Christi*:

This definite memory breaks through the magic circle of the prevailing consciousness. It regards history as something more than a screen for contemporary interests. It mobilizes tradition as a dangerous tradition and therefore as a liberating force in respect of the one-dimensional character and certainty of the one whose hour is always there (John 7.6). It gives rise again and again to the suspicion that the plausibility structures of a society may be relationships aimed to delude. It also refuses to measure the relevance of its criticism in accordance with what 'an elderly, rather sleepy business man' would regard unquestioningly as relevant 'after lunch' and what often functions as a secret criterion for rationality and a sense of reality. Christian faith can and must, in my opinion, be seen in this way as a subversive memory. (1980: 90)

Again, the issues of the radicalizing and challenging aspects of Christian collective memory come to the fore. These are issues that must be recognized and given full significance if memory work is not to be constrained by the status quo.

6.12 Dangerous memory as subversive.

Metz contrasts this subversive dangerous memory to comforting reminiscences, or a nostalgia that censors the harshness of the past (1980: 109). Instead, he allies this Christian memory with memories that we find difficult because they make demands on us now and challenge what is otherwise simply assumed in our structures of what is plausible. Such memories, he insists, have 'a future content', because they require to be taken into account and cannot be dispassionate recollection. Above all, it is the memory of human suffering that makes such demands and forces a radical reappraisal of history, tradition, and

practice. He puts it thus:

The memory of human suffering forces us to look at the public *theatrum mundi* not merely from the standpoint of the successful and established, but from that of the conquered and the victims. This recalls the function of the court fool in the past: he represented an alternative (reject, vanquished or oppressed) to his master's policy; his function was strictly political and in no way 'purely aesthetic'. His politics was, so to speak, a politics of the memory of the suffering—as against the traditional political principle of 'woe to the conquered', and against the Machiavellian ruler. (1980: 105)

Although Metz does not use the reference himself, the passage above presents a tantalizing echo of the thought expressed by Saint Paul:

For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. We are fools for the sake of Christ.

(1 Corinthians 4.9-10 NRSV)

The image of a foolish spectacle, whether of the court jester or the captive destined for death in the victor's triumphal procession, is one of the powerlessness to effect change. Nevertheless, the fool in both circumstances remains a spectacle—a signification of the possibility of something other than the status quo, and even by weakness a question mark against overweening power. Both spectacles are kindred in some small way to the spectacle of the Son of God crucified. As Paul writes earlier in 1 Corinthians: 'the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God' (1 Corinthians 1.18). The profundities of the theology of Christ's death are beyond the immediate concerns of this study, but the issue must be raised here because of the prominence it receives in Metz's understanding of memory. The 'foolishness of the cross' is the very thing, according to Metz, that allows the possibility that power does not always triumph and that suffering may be redeemed or changed. This is a kind of anti-history in which those of no-account are taken into account. As he puts it:

Christian faith declares itself as the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*. At the midpoint of this faith is a specific *memoria passionis*, on which is grounded the promise of future freedom for all. We remember the future of our freedom in the memory of his suffering—this is an eschatological statement that cannot be made more plausible through any subsequent accommodation, and cannot be generally verifiable. This statement remains controversial and controvertible: the power to scandalize is part of its communicable content. (1980: 111)

According to Metz, the memory of Christ's death has constantly to be associated with memories of human suffering if the inevitable hopelessness of that suffering is to be challenged. Without that association, the necessities of history become an endless cycle of despair and human anguish. The linkages of collective memory have, accordingly, the most profound of theological consequences:

Memory has a fundamental theological importance as what may be termed anamnestic solidarity or solidarity in memory with the dead and the conquered which breaks the grip of history as a history of triumph and conquest interpreted dialectically or as evolution. (1980:184)

In this view, the collective Christian memory literally takes the inevitability out of history in that it opens a way out of the determinisms we too easily believe hold humanity entirely in their thrall. Metz adds:

The eschatological truth of the *memoria passionis* cannot be derived from our historical, social and psychological compulsions. This is what makes it a liberating truth in the first place. (1980: 111)

And again:

This memory breaks through the grip of the prevailing consciousness. It claims unresolved conflicts that have been thrust into the background and unfulfilled hopes. It maintains earlier experiences in contrast to the prevailing insights and in this way makes the present unsafe. (1980: 200)

Here is an understanding of memory serving faith that puts a profound question mark against the straightforward, and apparently easy presentism so often assumed in collective memory theory.

6.13 Social memory as a means to personal appropriation.

Although the terminology is different, Metz, like Brueggemann, presents memory work in the church as an absolutely core part of faithful living. Both are concerned to make plain that the tradition the believer lives within and from has about it an essential ‘otherness’. This ‘out of this world’ quality at one and the same time both profoundly challenges everyday certainties and dismays, and also incorporates the believer in an eschatological context that constantly exerts a pressure towards the fulfilment of all things in God. Both would agree that the purpose of memory work in the church is the transformation of communicative salience, what I have termed ‘sermon as event’, and of practical engagement, the aspect that I have called ‘contextual pertinence’ (see sections 5.3 and 5.4.2).

Both also agree that the content of Scripture has a unique authority within the tradition, although the focus of that authority is drawn rather differently: for Metz, it is located in the story of Jesus, and particularly his passion; for Brueggemann, it is more diffuse, in that the content and the method of use of tradition in the whole of Scripture is pertinent. That is not to say that Brueggemann disagrees about the cross of Christ being of primary significance, but that he approaches that event from the conviction that the whole of Scripture discloses something of that radical alternative that the cross presents. This differing locus is clearly an outworking of the different traditions from which the two authors come. For Metz, the dangerous memory of Christ presents a radical critique of conventional wisdom that requires of the would-be disciple a life lived in the pattern of Christ. His theology becomes a restatement of what could appropriately be called ‘classical’ Roman Catholic *imitatio Christi* spirituality—but with a political edge directed to the issues of contemporary society. Though political in consequence, Metz’s conception of Christian memory is both doctrinal and

mystical. Brueggemann also believes the inherited Christian memory brings a sharp critique to bear on conventional wisdom and social practice, but for him this radical edge is expressed most cogently when Scripture is given its proper authority as ‘another voice’. His is a perspective born of a tradition that puts the Bible in pole position as arbiter of faithful living. Brueggemann undoubtedly connects readily with the task of the preacher, but that easy application should not divert attention entirely from Metz’s complementary insights. His insistence on the power of the *memoria passionis*, doctrinally understood, as a way that eschatological hope breaks into current practices offers a dogmatic tool that can serve to enhance the preacher’s ‘construal of alternatives’. Since it draws explicitly on the church’s development of doctrine, it serves to underscore the collective nature of the enterprise. As Metz writes:

The process by which a memory is made present and the present is overcome, cannot exclusively or even primarily take place in the individual. As formulations of the collective memory, dogmas may therefore have an entirely new part to play here. They can, as it were, compel me to recollect in the present something that I cannot grasp or realize on the basis of my own personal knowledge. (1980: 202)

In Metz, as in Brueggemann, the social dimension of Christian memory extends far beyond the confines of the believing community. He writes:

Christianity does not introduce God subsequently as a kind of ‘stop-gap’ into this conflict about the future; instead, it tries to keep alive the memory of the crucified Lord, this specific *memoria passionis*, as a dangerous memory of freedom in the social systems of our technological civilization. (Metz, 1980: 109)

It is the recognition of the memory as dangerous that is the very quality that renders it salvific and of universal consequence.

In summary, Metz reinforces the argument presented here that memory has an essential role in Christianity and that consequently preaching should strive to support and maintain that memory. Metz places eschatology at the heart of Christian social memory, and suggests that this is the aspect that makes

it especially productive of a powerful critique of accepted social conventions of thought and action. In particular, that eschatological imperative keeps in memory the vanquished and oppressed, and parts of human experience otherwise consigned to oblivion. From a focus on the cross, both doctrinally and as an historical fact, Metz directs attention to discipleship as the means of following the way of the cross and seeking to live in the pattern of Christ. As such, he sees Christian memory as transformative of both people's perspectives and actions. In terms of Halbwachs' understanding of collective memory, Metz's theology shifts the insistence on memory serving present needs towards memory serving present needs mediated by the proleptic force of an eschatological understanding of Christ's death.

This chapter began with a consideration of Brueggemann's understanding of tradition and the generative possibilities inherent in that understanding. From his ideas of imaginative remembering and the sermon as creative production, the discussion turned to Thiselton's ideas on frameworks of knowledge, and his conception of performance as a way of habituating thinking. Habituation led the argument into a discussion of the eschatological element of memory through consideration of the work of Johann Baptist Metz. As Metz is particularly concerned that his theology should serve Christian praxis, the argument now shifts to memory and action in the work of Nils Alstrup Dahl. Dahl offers a way of adding a decidedly New Testament aspect to the discussion, and that will be augmented by the addition of a liturgical dimension via the work of Alexander Schmemmann, before the whole is concluded with a resumé that will connect all of these elements to Brueggemann's notion of the sermon as hazardous production.

6.14 Dahl on remembering in the New Testament: memory as performative.

Dahl observes that, unlike philosophers such as Aristotle, the writers of the New Testament nowhere elaborate on the idea and function of memory

itself and that ‘to remember’ in the Christian Scriptures is consequently used in an imprecise way similar to ordinary everyday usage (1976: 12). The term and its analogous phrases are used not only of something in the past, but also of things in the present (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 1.2 or Colossians 4.18) or the future (e.g. Hebrews 11.22—here Joseph literally remembered his own burial). As in ordinary usage, ‘remembering’ is used not only of recollection but also of thinking of someone or something, or thinking about in prayer, or keeping in mind (in the sense of providing aid). Even when the object refers to the past, the principal concern is often more than just recalling an event. For example, in John 16.21 the woman who has given birth no longer remembers her anguish because of the joy of bringing a child into the world; and similarly Paul in Philippians 3.13 forgets the past, in the sense that it no longer shapes his life, although he still remembers it. From these and numerous other examples Dahl draws the conclusion that ‘to remember’ in the New Testament ‘signifies almost always to recall something or to think about it in such a way that it is expressed in speech or is formative for attitude and action’ (1976: 13). In other words, memory is here intimately connected with the actualities of human endeavour and expression. Such an understanding closely parallels Halbwachs’ observation that collective memory ‘truly rests not on learned history but on lived history’ (1980:57). Halbwachs was insistent on a clear distinction between history and collective memory. Accordingly, he asserts in *The Collective Memory* that ‘history starts only when tradition ends and the social memory is fading or breaking up’ (1980:78). This distinction has been extensively debated in historiography (see for example, Le Goff (1992), and Climo and Cattell (2002)) and will not be repeated here; but alongside that debate a more theologically orientated analysis of the relationship between memory and history has disclosed just how profound the connection is between an historical awareness and an understanding of God as active within it.

The highly influential Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (first published 1982, with further editions in 1989 and 1996), as one exemplar of that analysis, will serve as reinforcement of Dahl’s

insistence that social memory understood in terms of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures always has a performative aspect to it.

Yerushalmi makes the point that unlike other nearby religious systems, ancient Israel shifted the encounter between humanity and the divine away from nature and the cosmos towards the more mundane realm of social human activity. He writes:

The pagan conflict of the gods with the forces of chaos, or with one another, was replaced by a drama of a different and poignant order: the paradoxical struggle between the divine will of an omnipotent Creator and the free will of his creature, man, in the course of history; a tense dialectic of obedience and rebellion. (1996: 8)

Through this understanding of history, the Hebrew peoples' actions in remembering become a religious imperative.

Man in Hebrew thought comes to affirm his historical existence despite the suffering it entails, and gradually, ploddingly, he discovers that God reveals himself in the course of it. Rituals and festivals in ancient Israel are themselves no longer primarily repetitions of mythic archetypes meant to annihilate historical time. Where they evoke the past, it is not the primeval but the historical past, in which great and critical moments of Israel's history were fulfilled. Far from attempting a flight from history, biblical religion allows itself to be saturated by it and is inconceivable apart from it. ... Ancient Israel knows what God is from what he has done in history. And if that is so, then memory has become crucial to its faith and, ultimately, to its very existence. (1996: 9)

Yerushalmi echoes something of Halbwachs distinction between memory and history, in that the remembering of what God has done in history that he notes as being so crucial to Jewish identity is not achieved primarily by systematic written history, but by ritualistic and liturgical commemoration. Accordingly, these actions are more effective as vehicles of memory over many generations

than any written history could ever be. Dahl provides an insightful analysis of these processes detailed in Scripture.

6.15 God’s remembering and the maintenance of human remembering.

The linkage between memory and action is made very clear in biblical passages in which God is the subject. For example, when God hearing the cries of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt remembers his covenant, he determines to act to free them (Exodus 6.5); or again, when God receives his people’s confession of disobedience he remembers the covenant, and that moves him to remember the land for good (Leviticus 26.40-45); and similarly, Zechariah’s prophecy after the birth of his son John says that the raising up of a Saviour is the consequence of God remembering ‘his holy covenant’ (Luke 1.67-79). Likewise, when God no more remembers his people’s sins he pardons them—an association of the act of mercy with forgetting that occurs, for example, in Hebrews 8.12 and 10.17; Jeremiah 31.34; and Isaiah 43.25. In the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures God’s remembering and forgetting has a direct consequence for human lives. It is not an exaggeration to say that salvation is a consequence of God’s remembering—a thought expressed by Alexander Schmemmann:

Salvation consists in this: that in Christ—perfect God and perfect man—memory comes to reign and is restored as a lifecreating power, and, in *remembering*, man [sic] partakes not of the experience of the fall, mortality and death, but of overcoming this fall through “life everlasting.” For Christ himself is the incarnation and the gift to mankind of *God’s memory* in all its fullness—as love directed towards each man and toward all humanity, toward the world and all creation. He is the Saviour because in his memory he “remembers” all, and through this memory he receives all as his own life, and he gives his own life to all as their life. But being the incarnation of the memory of God, Christ is likewise the manifestation and fulfilment of man’s perfect remembrance of God, for in this *memory*—love, self-sacrifice

and communion with the Father—is his entire life, the entire perfection of his humanity. (1987: 128)

According to Dahl (1976: 14) the close association of memory and action meant that the great festivals of the Jewish faith and the ritual actions that were part of them operated as mnemonic signs. In these actions Israel ‘remembered’ Yahweh and caused Yahweh ‘to remember’ his people anew, and ‘past salvation became once again an actual and present reality’ (14). Although in the earliest days of the church memory work was not as formalized as it was becoming in rabbinic Judaism, nevertheless rooted in the same tradition there was a strong emphasis on remembering as an essential component of community faithfulness. Dahl writes:

The initial acceptance of the gospel puts the whole of life under obligation. A community of baptized Christians which has come to share in the gospel and which has received basic catechetical instructions already knows what must be done. They have received the Holy Spirit and are on the right road. They need to preserve what they have received and to remind themselves of it in order to live out the reality into which they have been introduced. The first obligation of the apostle vis-a-vis a community is to make the faithful remember what they have received and already know or should know. (1976: 15)

Dahl cites Paul’s repeated use of the formula ‘just as you know ...’ in 1 Thessalonians (1:5; 2:1,4,11; 3:3,4; 4:2; 5:1f); Jude’s use of the expression ‘the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints’ (verse 3); and 2 Peter’s ‘I intend to keep on reminding you of these things, though you already know them’ (1:12) as typical of this kind of thinking in the earliest Christian communities (1976: 15). This analysis leads Dahl to the bold assertion that

for the early Christians, knowledge was anamnesis, a recollection of the *gnōsis* [*sic*] given to all those who have believed in the gospel, received baptism, and been incorporated into the church. ... Clearly, there always remains a possibility of growing in knowledge; but this

essentially signifies an ever growing assimilation and an ever more perfect application of what has been once for all received. (1976: 16)

Based on that assertion, Dahl makes a distinction between preaching as missionary proclamation to those who do not yet know Christ—properly encompassed by the term *kērygma*—and preaching that takes place within the body of believers. Although both types of preaching share the same essential core in terms of content, the style and purpose of each is quite different. Dahl writes:

The faithful already knew the message; they had been made participants, they had been made part of the divine work of which the kerygma was a proclamation. That is why, precisely when it is a question of the very core of the gospel, the preaching to the communities was more recollection than proclamation. Thus what we understand generally by ‘to preach’—namely, to deliver a sermon in the church—no longer corresponds to the *kēryssein* of the New Testament, but rather closely to *hypomimēskein*, to restore memory. (1976: 19)

Dahl justifies that distinction by reference to New Testament passages that support the idea of preaching within the church as memory work (for example, 2 Timothy 2:14; Titus 3:10; Jude 5; 2 Peter 1:12; and 1 Corinthians 4:17). That the purpose and style of preaching changes in relationship to the social composition and religious experience of those hearing the preaching is an idea akin to Halbwachs’ observation that collective memories are closely associated with the epochs of an individual’s or a community’s life. Dahl identifies three types of preaching: evangelistic public heralding, catechetical instruction and incorporation, and ongoing encouragement in the communal life of a believing community (1976: 19). It is only the last category, that of leaders striving to maintain the communal life of faith, that Dahl understands to be concerned with the restoration of memory. The idea of restoration suggests that even in the earliest years of the church’s existence the Christian social memory was under threat as adherents forgot essentials of the faith, or laboured under

misapprehensions about what its content was, or simply had experiences that put faith in question. Considered in the light of this forgetfulness, contemporary worries about the corrosion of Christian memory are perhaps not quite as daunting as they at first appear to be.

6.16 Memory work as more than recollection.

Dahl's analysis adds weight to this study's contention that preaching within Christian congregations is memory work. His identification of the link between remembering and action in Scripture also supports the argument, presented earlier, that being part of an ongoing tradition is more dynamic and purposeful than mere recollection. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that Dahl's analysis establishes memory work as the very motor that sustained the burgeoning life of the earliest Christian communities; an understanding of tradition's significance that has more recently been developed at length in the work of the British theologian David Brown (1999 and 2000).

As Dahl puts it, 'To "remember Jesus Christ" does not mean to preserve in memory an image of him but to let this memory form our thoughts and actions' (1976: 20). Although Dahl's analysis cannot answer the sociological issue of how that remembering can be sustained in contemporary society, his approach does at the least demonstrate that similar concerns have been part of the Christian experience from the very earliest times. Saint Paul's avowal in his letter to the Roman Christians that 'I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder' (Romans 15.15) is, accordingly, but an exemplar of a determination to keep memories alive voiced frequently elsewhere in the New Testament. Again and again the young churches were exhorted to keep in mind the founding truths that had been delivered to them and on which their faith was grounded (e.g. 1 Corinthians 3.10ff.; Colossians 2.6-7; Hebrews 2.3f.; Revelation 1.3): and the authors of the epistles often feel it necessary to be explicit about the task of 'reminding' as a prime reason for their writings and actions (1 Corinthians 4.17; 2 Thessalonians 2.5; 2 Timothy 2.14; Jude 5; 2

Peter 1.12-13). In Dahl's understanding, memory is a core aspect of the gospel. As he readily acknowledges, not everything in the New Testament is concerned with tradition and memory (1976: 17), but, nevertheless, the prominence of that concern is sufficient to support the contention that remembering, in social as well as personal terms, was understood as a fundamental aspect of maintaining the faith in apostolic times. The angel's words to the Christians of Sardis, 'Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent' (Revelation 3.3) disclose a concern that is both perennial and immediate within the church.

6.17 Worship as participation in God's memory: the liturgical theology of Alexander Schmemmann.

Dahl appeals to Semitic ideas to support his close association of memory with action, Schmemmann does likewise, but develops them differently in that he insists that the fundamental category is what God remembers before any estimation of what humanity does or should do. He writes:

In the biblical Old Testament teaching on God, the term memory refers to the attentiveness of God to his creation, the power of divine providential love, through which God "holds" the world and *gives it life*, so that life itself can be termed abiding in the memory of God, and death the falling out of this memory. In other words, memory, like everything else in God, is *real*, it *is* that life that he grants, that God '*remembers*'; it is the eternal overcoming of the 'nothing' out of which God called us into 'his wonderful light'. (1988: 125, italics original)

And again:

'Remember, O Lord ...' Without any exaggeration one can say that the commemoration, i.e., the referral of everything to the *memory* of God, the prayer that God would 'remember', constitutes the heartbeat of all Christian worship, her entire life. (1988: 123, italics original)

Given that he was an Orthodox scholar, the point should be made that this insistence on the absolute and primary nature of God's remembering is prior to any consideration of the Eucharist. In other words, Schmemmann sees everything, including the church's eucharistic life, as grounded in the pre-eminent memory of God. Starting from this position is of crucial significance to Schmemmann in that it allows him to challenge sharply what he sees as the false reduction of worship to psychological and subjective categories. He is keen to resist the suggestion that symbols can be reduced to illustrative tools that disclose the meanings of past events, or that worship should be understood in terms of its psychological utility. By his emphasis first on God's memory, actualized particularly in Christ, Schmemmann is eager to avoid any sense of memory as a nostalgic looking back to Christ, or as the garnering of historical knowledge about Christ. Instead, he asserts that Christian memory work is participation in salvation. As he puts it:

From the very first day of Christianity, to believe in Christ meant to *remember* him and keep him always *in mind*. It is not simply to "know" about him and his doctrine, but to *know him*—living and abiding among those who love him. From the very beginning the faith of Christians was memory and remembrance, but memory restored to its lifecreating essence—for, as opposed to our 'natural', 'fallen' memory, with its illusory 'resurrection of the past', this new memory is a joyous recognition of the one who was resurrected, who lives and therefore is present and abides, and not only recognition but also encounter and the living experience of communion with him. It is no longer the 'past' that we remember, but *Christ himself*, and this remembrance becomes our entry into *his* victory, over its collapse into 'past', 'present' and 'future'. It is an entry not into some abstract and motionless 'eternity' but into 'life everlasting', in which all is *alive*, everything lives through the lifecreating memory of God, and *everything is ours*. (1988: 129, italics in original)

For Schmemmann as an Orthodox Christian, the Divine Liturgy, the Eucharist, is the pre-eminent site of this effective remembering, but it is so only as a sign of what that commemoration says of the whole of existence. He writes elsewhere:

The church is the sacrament of the Kingdom—not because she possesses divinely instituted acts called ‘sacraments’, but because first of all she is the possibility given to man to see in and through this world the ‘world to come’, to see and to ‘live’ it in Christ. It is only when in the darkness of *this world* we discern that Christ has *already* ‘filled all things with Himself’ that the *things* whatever they may be, are revealed and given to us full of meaning and beauty. A Christian is the one who, wherever he looks, finds Christ and rejoices in Him. And this joy *transforms* all his human plans and programs, decisions and actions, making all his mission the sacrament of the world’s return to Him who is the life of the world. (1973: 113, italics in original)

It would not be an exaggeration to say that for Schmemmann participation in the Eucharist is a firsthand experience of the parousia, such is his insistence on the actualized memory of God. In this sense, the purpose of the whole worshipping and witnessing life of the church is to make all time eschatologically transparent. To live within the memory of God is to live in reality itself and, from that perspective, all human memory must essentially be a memory of loss.

From his profoundly sacramental theology Schmemmann arrives at an understanding of Christian social memory with precisely the character of perpetual Christly presence that Halbwachs identified:

After his death and resurrection Christ did not lose contact with humankind, but rather remains perpetually within the bosom of his Church. There is no ceremony of the cult from which he is absent; there is no prayer and act of adoration which does not reach up to him. (Halbwachs, 1992: 90)

No doubt in Halbwachs’ terminology that sense of abiding presence is associated with the mnemonic power of actions and words, rather than theological conviction per se. Nevertheless, those mechanisms are fundamental

components of the practice of the anamnestic theology being advocated here. For Schmemmann, knowing oneself to be alive in Christ is the essence of living the faith. Remembrance cannot, therefore, be about retaining or reinvigorating knowledge about Christ; it can only be participation in Christ. Morrill's comment on Schmemmann is apposite:

The definite content of faith is not merely an idea but a reality in which believers participate, a knowledge that transforms their view of the world and their roles within it. (Morrill, 2000: 154)

Just how profoundly costly that participation may be is well illustrated by William Cavanaugh's discomfiting study *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics and the Body of Christ* (1998) detailing the way the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church unwittingly ceded authority to the brutal Pinochet regime in Chile. Out of a close examination of the realities of church experience in circumstances of despair and horror, Cavanaugh writes of Christ's abiding presence in the Eucharist in terms that are highly reminiscent of Schmemmann:

This gathering is eschatological. The body of Christ is never guaranteed by the past or by any formal institution, but only comes epiclestically, in the constantly renewed pleading of the faithful that the Holy Spirit enact the Kingdom in their midst. Historical continuity never determines the presence of Christ; the eschaton rules history, but is also enacted *in* history. The Eucharist is therefore an "event" in the sense of an eschatological performance in time which is not institutionally guaranteed, but it is an event which is ontologically determinative. (Cavanaugh, 1998: 270 italics original)

And again:

Because the church lives from the future, it is a thing that is not. The church inhabits a space and time which is never guaranteed by coercion or institutional weight, but must be constantly asked for, as gift of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist is the imagination of the church, but it is not our imagination in the sense that Christians build the church. The Eucharist is God's imagination of the church; we participate in that imagination insofar

as we are imagined by God, incorporated into the body of Christ through grace. (1998: 272)

For Cavanaugh, as for Schmemmann, the work of the Holy Spirit mediated through the sacrament raises the believer into salvation and the new life God has created. The participation experienced is first and foremost an ascent into what God has already accomplished and continues to accomplish. It is a space in which categories of recollection and anticipation give way to the experience itself, and secular, commonplace estimations of time and space are challenged by the reality that is life everlasting. That experience is then lived by the church, by believers active in everyday realities, until the next time the church is gathered together at the Eucharist. In that living, this participation is not held like some kind of bank deposit over which the believer retains control, but is rather given away as a gift, as it were, as the memory of it motivates and inspires action until the next time that memory is eucharistically renewed.

Given the proleptic and epicletic emphasis of Schmemmann, it is surprising that Morrill in his close reading of him is highly critical of his analysis of the outworking of participation (Morrill, 2000: 131). The criticism is worth examining in a little detail in that it is indicative of a concern often cited that the kind of anamnestic theological work advocated here tends towards an amorphous and principle-less kind of theology. Morrill sees an unhelpful abstraction in Schmemmann's thought in that the participation he describes is too often framed by the category 'man', used in the sense of abstract humanity, which Morrill believes obscures the ethical and moral obligations of worship and thereby threatens to reduce it to merely cultic activity (154).

Such criticism fails to appreciate the weight and power of the generalizing terms Schmemmann uses. It is not necessary to share completely his Orthodox understanding of the Eucharist to appreciate the way his exposition of it discloses its power to transcend past, present and future. Far from being an almost amoral abstraction, his sense of entering into the memory of Christ sees that anamnestic action as of universal relevance and as the ultimate antidote to hyper-individualism. He writes:

The Church is a union of love ... not only in the sense that her members are united by love, but above all in that through this love of all for each other, through love as life itself, she manifests Christ and his love to the world, she witnesses to him and loves and saves the world through the love of Christ. In the fallen world, the mission of the Church, as salvation, is to manifest the world as regenerated by Christ. (1987: 136)

Assembling as the church brings with it action outside the assembly as a necessary and inevitable consequence. Participation both recalls believers to their place in God's memory and enables them to locate that memory as the ground and goal of all living. What Morrill criticizes is in fact an indicator of the profundity of Schmemmann's account of memory in the church rather than a circumventing of its ethical requirements, a fact supported by Cavanaugh's account in very similar terms working from the hard realities of Chile in the 1970s and 80s. It is not that memory work in the church requires ethical social decision making and action as an applied consequence, but that living in the memory of God inevitably creates a new quality of existence which is shaped by God's life-creating memory.

A similar point about presence which 'transcends comprehension' yet is nonetheless concretely apprehended is made from the perspective of aesthetics by Douglas Hedley in his *Living Forms of the Imagination* (2008: 244); so Schmemmann cannot be dismissed as suspect on the grounds of the particularity of his own faith tradition. The objectivizing and subjectivizing 'decision for action' advocated by Morrill (2000: 189) may be a useful tool in prompting behaviour, but in terms of participation in godly memory it systematizes something that goes beyond such an objective category. Schmemmann writes:

Out of all creation it is given to man [*sic*] alone to *remember* God and through this remembrance to truly live. If everything in the world witnesses to God, declares his glory and renders him praise, then only man 'remembers' him and , through this memory, through this living

knowledge of God, comprehends the world as God's world, receives it from God and raises it up to God. To God's remembrance of him, man answers with his remembrance of God. If God's remembrance of man is the gift of life, then man's remembrance of God is the reception of this lifecreating gift, the constant *acquisition* of and increase in life. (1987: 125 italics in original)

In other words, such a memory is something we inhabit, not something we direct or chose to apply. It is, as it were, the vision with which we see, the air with which we breathe, the language with which we speak, or the metaphor with which we think. In Halbwachs' terms, such a memory provides a current of social thought which ordinarily is 'as invisible as the atmosphere we breathe' (Halbwachs, 1992: 38). No doubt such terminology would not have appealed to Schmemmann. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Halbwachs believed such currents of social thought are generally only recognized when change prompts resistance to them; a thought that is not far from Schmemmann's identification of the psychologizing and subjectivizing tendencies of contemporary social discourse as profoundly destructive of inherited Christian traditions.

6.18 Conclusion.

David Brown in his study *Tradition and Imagination* observes that most contemporary Christians, just like their forebears in the faith, are heavily conditioned in their understanding of any passage of Scripture by what they have already learnt from worship and sermons (1999: 122). The appropriation of understandings and the creation of meanings are always related to previous understandings and meanings, and the intellectual processes involved cannot be entirely separated from the bodily and spatial context in which they take place. Worship and preaching take place in a gathering of people in a particular place where particular relationships are sustained and certain codes of action pertain. In terms of collective memory, the form of presentation, the content offered, the

relationships established and the place in which it all happens provide rich resources for the frameworks necessary for social remembering. It is surely not accidental that this is the case. The argument presented here has offered plenty of evidence of these processes stretching back in time to the earliest days of the church, and beyond that to the faith of ancient Israel. The works of Metz, Dahl and Schmemmann, from their varied perspectives, support Brueggemann's contention that memory work that is more than recollection—in his terms 'traditioning'—is essential to the maintenance of faith. As Halbwachs insisted, the individual does the constructing of memory, but does so using guidelines laid down by other remembrances and by the remembrances of others (1980: 76). 'Chains of memory' understood in this dynamic way are an essential component of what Christianity is. In striving to be part of the chain of memory, contemporary believers are doing what earlier believers did, but that does not mean such memory work is confined to simple incorporation, repetition and mimicry. Social remembering means more than a replication of what went before.

Brueggemann, as was detailed earlier, understands that 'more than' as being at work within the Scriptural texts themselves since they are always more than a straightforward account of the commonsense world (2000: 9). That 'more than' offers a re-imagination of the world with God as the ground of its existence and as its purpose. That is a subversive reality which challenges the status quo and our everyday assumptions of reality and power. What Brueggemann identifies is the immensely generative and creative power of the tradition. At first sight this might appear as a potentially destructive mechanism conducive to an anarchic and relativistic developmentalism, but the generative process is controlled by the fact that it is memory work. The collective memory of the church, seen as tradition in use, is able to generate imaginative developments whilst retaining congruity with the originating tradition. Here Thiselton's ideas on frameworks of knowledge and performance as a way of habituating thinking provide insights into the mechanisms that ensure continuity. The inherited tradition as collective memory provides a communally authenticated and authorized script from which

is improvised new variations on the 'old, old story'. An apposite metaphor is that of tradition as a musical score from which the performer interprets faithfully that particular work and not some other (Thiselton, 1981: 74). In this understanding of tradition the preacher is empowered to work with the collective memory with imaginative and artistic creativity that not only sustains corporate memory but also develops it.

That tradition as social memory is so creatively generative is a consequence of its eschatological and epicletic nature. Following Metz, this study suggests that placing eschatology at the heart of Christian social memory makes it a source of powerful critiques of all social conventions of thought and action. It is the eschatological character of Christian social memory that enables it to be productive of change instead of merely an outworking of what is. That power can only be enhanced by Schmemmann's description of the Eucharist as the site at which participants enter life everlasting in a proleptic encounter with the complete fulfilment of God's purposes. That prolepticism is, in its turn, an outworking of the effective memory of God. Thus remembering becomes not a recollection of the past but a remembering that we are remembered by God, whose memory is reality and everlasting life. That the Christian tradition or memory always has God as its referent is the crucial factor that prevents our remembering becoming self-absorbed and subjectivized.

The practical realization of God's memory as the referent is the work of the Holy Spirit, who directs our lived remembering not only as a gathered people but also in our lives beyond the confines of the sanctuary. This memory is transformative of both perspectives and actions. Indeed the eschatological imperative of the Christian collective memory keeps in remembrance parts of human experience otherwise consigned to oblivion. In Metz's terms, this dangerous memory keeps in mind the vanquished, the suffering and the oppressed, and calls us into a discipleship that follows the way of the cross and seeks to live by the pattern of Christ. This keeping in mind means that Christian memory work is always committed to the story of human history understood in the widest terms. The application of such an anamnestic

theology to an Halbwachsian understanding of collective memory shifts the focus from the serving of present social needs towards those same needs mediated by the proleptic force of an eschatological understanding of Christ's death. Spurred by the force of this prolepticism, remembering and acting are inseparably linked. As Dahl demonstrates, this is an understanding of memory's use that is clearly evident in the New Testament itself.

This study argues that making that memory-action linkage operative is a crucial part of the preaching task. At one and the same time, a sermon needs to be purposeful in itself, a genuine performance of aspects of the collective memory in its own right *and* a mechanism that offers resources for making that memory an effective memory in the world beyond the worship gathering. What collective memory theory brings to homiletics is a forceful insistence that such linkages are vital to the maintenance of memory itself. It is linkages that keep memories alive. Without the linkages provided by social frameworks memory die. This is the hard social fact that the work of scholars such as Hervieu-Léger and Davie demonstrates. If Christian faith is at heart a remembering of the fact that we are remembered by God, then sustaining that memory becomes the principal task of the church. This requires that all believers, and preachers as their ministers, be concerned with the processes that sustain collective memory. Homiletic methodology that simply assumes that it speaks within an overarching Christian collective memory finds itself more and more diminished in social impact, and may even be destructive of the very memory it assumes it operates within. This study advocates, instead, homiletic practice that is intentionally anamnestic in content and consciously productive in presentation. The preacher must work to let the texts of Scripture speak with renewed power by forging (that is, producing with the materials of the social, psychological, performative and traditional resources that are to hand) links between the inherited and would be continued tradition, present experience, and God's ultimate purposes. This in itself is productive, since, like any memory work, it provides the group with those things of identity, location, belonging and purpose that are essential to its well-being and continuance. In a society that is amnesic of the Christian tradition, Christian preaching has to be both a

motivator of efforts to live the Christian memory in the world and itself a purposeful celebration of that collective memory.

Having examined in this chapter some key theological components of Christian memory work in relation both to the use of Scripture and to Halbwachs' ideas, attention must now turn very directly to homiletics. The next chapter will draw together the theological and sociological aspects of the argument.

Chapter Seven

Preaching as memory maintenance: a contemporary imperative

7.1 The perspective of this thesis.

Our story is narrated by a fallible witness called a ‘preacher,’ on the basis of smallish and sometimes ambiguous stories called ‘texts,’ amidst a less-than-powerful minority group called a ‘congregation.’ That it identifies itself as a witness or a confession testifies to its vulnerability in a world of totalizing discourse. (Lischer, 2005: 101)

Such is Richard Lischer’s judgement in his 1999 Lyman Beecher lectures of preaching’s place in contemporary discourse. His assessment of the foolishness of preaching (cf 1 Corinthians 1.21) and its humble place in our contemporary social circumstances is a fitting backdrop to the argument presented in this thesis. The preacher’s recounting of ‘the story’ is part of a battle to be heard and to be attested as being worth hearing, for, as Lischer puts it, the Christian lives ‘waist-deep in competing narratives’ (2005: 101). Whatever else the argument of the current thesis demonstrates, it clearly discloses the precariousness and vulnerability in our society of that story that is the Christian tradition of faith.

It has been argued in this thesis that the nature of that vulnerability in Britain underwent a decisive gear-change in the 1950s. As the negative impact of that gear-change on the public awareness of the Christian tradition was increasingly recognized so homiletic theory sought to develop strategies to ameliorate its consequences. Much of that theory originated in the United States where its development, at least in the earlier part of the period under review, was prompted not so much by a sense of preaching’s social weakness as by a new appreciation of social pluralism and what that means for public discourse generally. Coupled with both the awareness of preaching’s social vulnerability as

a form and the recognition of a new social pluralism was a widespread sense that the communication techniques of preaching were not as good as they needed to be in a mass media world. On both sides of the Atlantic, the publication of books of sermons was replaced by the publication of theoretical and applied practice books concerned either to make sermons better or to establish that a particular voice or style was an authentic example of Christian preaching. The sheer volume of American texts published meant they increasingly dominated in influence and in the diagnosis of need and strategy, despite differing social contexts.

The consequence of such dominance, as was noted earlier (sections 1.2 and 2.3), is that many of the ‘voices’ of preaching recognized as distinctive—for example, black preaching, liberationist preaching, and feminist preaching—have about them a markedly American tone, even if the commentary originates elsewhere. Likewise, the most influential theoretical and strategic studies this thesis has examined, namely Buttrick’s phenomenological approach (section 5.3), the New Homiletic prompted by Craddock’s inductive method (sections 1.5, 1.6 and 2.8), or the contextually related hermeneutic of someone like Tisdale (section 5.4), are all American; Browne’s preaching as art form (sections 2.7 and 5.2.3) being the one British exception. Arguably the beginnings of such American hegemony goes right back to Phillips Brooks’ *Lectures on Preaching* of 1877 (section 5.2). Certainly those lectures have been strikingly influential for an amazingly long period of time, and the psychological awareness inherent in Brooks’ preaching methodology was prescient of what has become *sine qua non* in preaching practice (section 2.4).

One of the increasingly common themes of the theoretical work mentioned has been a focus on practice in the light of intellectual paradigms such as postmodernism, deconstruction and radical hermeneutics that are deeply suspicious of all overarching generalizations. The emphasis on delineating schools of preaching that have previously been unnoticed, giving new prominence to ‘recovered’ styles, or the advocacy of a radical diversity of voices as a good, can be seen as an outworking of this focus. For those at home with the idea of postmodernism, preaching is assumed to be part of that totalizing speech characteristic of an overweening modernity that claimed too much authority for

what is actually but one take on reality amongst many others (section 1.6). In that sense, preaching is inevitably imperialistic in that it seeks to convert the hearers to a hegemonic worldview, or so goes the argument. In this estimation, the New Homiletic with its inductive use of images, metaphors and symbols is no less under suspicion than older deductive styles. To critics such as McClure (2001) and Long (2009), all such developments are criticized as having based themselves on an appeal to common human experience that is in reality hegemonic. Those taking this line ask where are the voices that have been silenced in the juxtapositions the preacher unhesitatingly adopts. They also point out that deconstructionists insist that the notion of language serving an ontological function is, at the least, questionable. It is opined that words at best can only hint at what always remains otherwise than Being. The preacher speaks too easily of God, denuding God of the otherness that makes God *God*. Ironically, despite the philosophical complexities raised, in the contemporary social shift towards the spiritual as opposed to the religious, these ideas appear to fit comfortably with populist notions of ‘mystery’ and the inadequacy of language to express what the spiritual seeker needs. As this thesis has noted repeatedly, that sort of radical questioning put alongside the mass media pressure towards simple, personal-expressive, and brief communication, has inevitably reinforced doubts about the very notion of preaching as a purposeful task, even within the churches themselves (see for example, the website Interactivepreaching.net, which challenges the purposefulness of what is termed ‘monological preaching’). Underlying this thesis is a belief that the commonplace nature of such arguments works to obscure the essential part played by collective memory in preaching (and indeed in all areas of discourse).

If, as the theory examined here insists, all meaningful discourse is rooted in memory, and if an individual’s memory can only function in relation to social interactions, then participants in any social discourse need to be alert to memory mechanisms as inevitably operational in what they say and do. Making such processes apparent is all the more significant in discourses that are explicitly and foundationally dependent on right remembering. The Christian faith is one such discourse. The unique contribution to that ‘making apparent’ this thesis seeks to

advance is the part preaching has in that memory work. It is not that critiques of homiletic practice or the focus on distinctive preaching voices are inappropriate strategies, but rather that, without a prior appreciation of the processes of collective memory, they are likely to be of little avail.

The argument defended here can be outlined in straightforward terms: Christian faith is focused in a right remembering of the action of God in Jesus Christ; it is therefore essentially a *living from* an inherited tradition; to be creatively operative in this way tradition is formed out of collective memories; to remember we need the support of social belonging and action; preaching is a key component in the maintenance of collective memories, but it can only be so if the power of social frameworks are properly acknowledged since present needs determine the liveliness and continuity of collective memories; preaching therefore has, at one and the same time, to contend with the decay of memories on which it is reliant and rework present memory resources so as to enable them to become collective memories. Preaching understood in this way validates tradition's immense creativity by itself being a practice of faithful living, imaginative construal, and social criticism born of tradition. Such memory maintenance is of necessity centripetal and inclusive of the other because social memory can only work in a participatory social environment.

This, then, is the broad outline of the argument of this thesis. Before drawing together its conclusions and by way of an orientating restatement, this chapter now briefly returns to the social and theological concerns that prompted it in the first place.

7.2 The social significance of the problem restated.

This thesis argues that utilizing the processes of social memory is an essential part of the contemporary homiletician's task. Underlying that argument is a conviction that the collective memory of the Christian tradition, understood in its widest terms, has severely decayed in recent years in British society. The erosion of the inherited cultural references, spiritual consciousness, and social and

personal knowledge, of the Christian faith means that the preacher cannot rely on a currency of common symbols and understandings in ways preachers previously did. Of course, the prevalence of that socially located awareness of the faith in earlier times should not be over emphasized. As this study acknowledged at the outset, concerns about preaching's lack of social connection were voiced vigorously in Victorian times. The fact that First World War military chaplains were dismayed at the profound ignorance of the faith amongst the troops (Wilkinson, 1978) should make for a proper hesitation about any sense of a golden age in terms of this aspect of homiletic practice. Nevertheless, as was argued in earlier chapters, since the 1950s, the direction of social change has been relentlessly that of an accelerating decline in the social memory of the Christian faith.

Symbols, stories, and codes of behaviour based in the Christian faith no longer connect with many people in the way that they did in earlier generations. That statement might properly prompt many different approaches to the analysis of the place of religion in contemporary British society. This thesis, however, concerns itself with just one closely defined area: what that change means for the practice of preaching. The current proliferation of preaching styles, it has been argued, is a direct consequence of that erosion. What was once characterized as 'the voices', or even 'the voice', of Christian preaching has morphed into a highly heterogeneous cacophony of expression and style. It might be objected that although often unacknowledged such a plurality of approaches was in reality always the case. What is different is that the multiplication of approaches is now often assumed to be a positive and proper response to divergence in all kinds of arenas of discourse in the wider society. Where once the sermon as a well structured and biblically focused monologue was almost unconsciously considered a proper vehicle of expression in all circumstances, that propriety is now challenged by a plethora of sometimes mutually exclusive approaches. Preachers alert to the radically changed communicative environment in which they work have responded by diversifying the ways in which they operate. And that diversity represents a huge variety of judgements about what should be the

determining criteria of effective homiletic practice in current social circumstances.

An understandable urge to preach so as to be relevant to contemporary society has prompted a thorough reworking of practice and theory, as witnessed in the proliferation of books published. The sermon as Christian practice has been, and continues to be, extensively analysed in terms of Scriptural authority, hermeneutical authenticity, communication design, contextual engagement, and psychological salience. That in all these areas the issue of social relevance figures prominently, but generally without any reference to the mechanisms of social remembering, is from the perspective of this study, a major cause for concern.

The case being made here is that preaching is an aspect of the ongoing maintenance and creation of the lively and life-giving tradition that is the Christian faith. When the notion of the faith is abstracted from the tradition as a body of knowledge, or some other separated and bounded content however described, without reference to lived and social memory frameworks, its ability to perpetuate itself is damaged. Without the social framework of communal religious experience, the ability to connect religious ideas and teachings with life as ordinarily experienced becomes ever more attenuated. The shift in society noted here presents a very real challenge to the continuity of the memory for Christian faith in the light of Halbwachs' assertion that that collective memory truly rests not on what is learnt but what is lived (Halbwachs, 1980: 57). Amplifying the consequences of that distinction is something to which this chapter will have to return at a later stage. For the moment, however, attention must be drawn again to this study's contention that its close focus on the practitioner dilemmas of the contemporary British preacher does not mean that its argument is irrelevant to broader issues. Consequently, in the section that follows issues of social memory, in its widest terms, are briefly examined. The purpose in so doing is to underline the fact that the problems of homiletic practice being examined here do have some bearing on wider social concerns about memory in contemporary Western society.

7.3 The preoccupation with memory in Western culture.

In public arenas as diverse as museums, wayside shrines to road accident victims, family history websites and associated software, public policy concerns about an ageing population, battle re-enactment societies, the interpretation of works of art, food marketing, and car boot sales, concerns about memory are exposed. The urge to recover memories believed to have been lost, or to create memories to serve the purposes of marketing or commemoration, or to establish ways in which the future of memories can be assured, are activities recognizable in a diverse range of settings. At one and the same time, both nostalgia and ahistorical novelty are used as marketing tools. Ours is a world in which events of a distant past require apologies, while the immediacy of a furiously changing cultural environment seems to deny any value to inherited forms. Our society so often appears ill at ease with memory. Such concern is, as Gibbons observes (2007: 5), surely related to the often noted discontent with modernity's universalizing and objectifying tendencies. The sense of coherence and progress so confidently expressed in the idea of modernity has given way in many quarters to an altogether more subjective and relativizing postmodernity. Starkly put, everything seems less simple, less rationally determined, and less certain than in even the recent past; questions of contingency and relativism touch everything. Ambiguity is the order of the day. In such circumstances, what to remember and how to remember have become pressing topics.

According to Andreas Huyssen, whose 1995 collection of essays *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* has been highly influential amongst cultural analysts in many different subject areas, this amounts to a crisis in the way time is perceived and experienced. He suggests that the information revolution works towards making categories such as past and future, experience and expectation, and memory and anticipation, obsolete. Accordingly, he sees the preoccupation with memory as an effort to recover a mode of contemplation outside the universe of simulation and high-speed information networks. Rapid technological changes are indicators of a widespread and

threatening cultural heterogeneity, lack of synchronicity, and information overload that makes experience puzzling and rootless (1995: 7). For Huyssen, the turn towards memory is a desire to find a way of anchoring ourselves in a world of increasing instability.

That is not to say, however, that memory can be a tool to somehow replicate the former certainties of modernity. It is the very ambiguities of memory, its subjectivity and its confabulatory nature, that makes it so significant in many areas of contemporary discourse. Thus, Susannah Radstone (2000: 9-11) writes of the tensions and equivocations produced by the ambiguities of memory as crucial elements in its social value. She notes that memory tends to occupy a range of threshold or liminal positions: not only between subjectivity and objectivity, the outer and inner world, the self and society; but also between forgetting and remembering, and she suggests that these tensions have enormous implications for the purposeful use of memory (2000:11). Colloquial discourse frequently works to make a distinction between the highly variable and unreliable aspects of memories and a verifiable and scientifically reliable idea of memory. Here, the metaphors of memory popularly employed are drawn from the world of computers, although they hark back to the permanence and reliability of the ancient world's use of the image of marks in a wax or clay tablet. In this contemporary usage, religious social memory is bracketed with transient and fleeting memories rather than permanently recorded memory. That distinction, however popular in everyday discourse, is unsustainable.

The neurobiologist Steven Rose makes the point that the prominence of computer and technological metaphors for memory in effect constrains appreciation of the radical indeterminacy, complexity and subtlety of the human brain (Rose, 2003: 69-114). If that is a problem for the neurosciences, it is even more of a problem for religion in a secularized environment. Recognition of the problem in the highly rationalized discourse of molecular biochemistry, however, suggests that collective or social memory is as generally significant as Halbwachs claimed it to be. Rose writes:

Brains do not work with *information* in the computer sense, but with *meaning*. And meaning is a historically and developmentally shaped process, expressed by individuals in interaction with their natural and social environment. Indeed, one of the problems of studying memory is precisely that it is in this sense a dialectical phenomenon. Because each time we remember, we in some senses do work on and transform our memories, they are not simply being called up from store and, once consulted, replaced unmodified. Our memories are re-created each time we remember. (2003: 104 italics in original)

Later in the book Rose talks of ‘re-remembering’ as ‘active re-making of the memory’, or a process of ‘reconsolidation’ (2003: 380). Although Rose does not directly discuss Halbwachs’ work (indeed he uses the term ‘collective memory’ in a rather narrow way as only referring to shared artificial, emotional or ideological remembrances) his terminology and understanding is redolent of the social mnemonic processes Halbwachs described. That a distinguished scientist with a life-time of memory research behind him recognizes the crucial significance of social factors in the dynamics of memory as a biological process is a heartening reinforcement of the worth of examining those processes within a field as small and specialized as homiletics.

The position of a scientist like Rose, which admits of the significance of elusive social and psychological aspects to measurable and observable physical changes, lends weight to the argument that the concept of social memory is more than a narrative or interpretive convenience. That admission should not, however, be used to sidestep issues of veracity. Recognising the power of factors that are sometimes disputed, contradictory, conflictual and prey to self-serving fictions does not mean that memory is, or should be, wholly abandoned to a sea of relativism. Yet it is the case that contemporary usage sometimes seems to point in that direction. As Gibbons observes:

The subjective, or even fictionalized, aspects of memory now seem to take precedence over trained and disciplined memory and its equivalent in history in the negotiations of the world. This is not to say that

memory is no longer a vital agent of knowledge, without which our experience of the world would be ever transient and ever instantaneous; it is simply to say that the contingency of the knowledge that is held by memory is now widely understood, and that this has occasioned changes in its status and in the roles that it is given as a tool for understanding and navigating the world. (Gibbons, 2007: 5)

That the highly subjective, or indeed the fabricated, can be a significant part of an individual's mnemonic processes is self-evidently true. As I have argued, however, that is not to claim that collective memory can be indifferent to the idea of veracity.

7.4 Memory as a problem for the practice of Christian faith.

The acknowledgement that estimations, such as those of Gibbons, about memory's place in contemporary discourse raises profound and disquieting issues for the practice of Christianity has been a recurrent theme of this thesis. As I have argued, questions of authenticity and legitimization are matters which Christian memory cannot treat lightly. They are also, however, issues that have been troubling parts of the very concept of collective memory from the beginning, since the power given to the presentist determination of what is remembered has prompted critics to question the genuineness of the memories evoked. If ambiguity, contingency, and subjectivity are significant aspects of what makes memory such a vital element in discourses as diverse as art, history, literature and journalism, the same is not true of Christian discourse—where such things can appear as threats rather than positive motivators. 'Trained and disciplined memory', to use Gibbons' (2007: 5) expression again, has usually been thought of as an essential part of faith formation; so memory work that plays down the significance of that rigour in memory is difficult, and all the more so because that playing down is widely socially affirmed. As Halbwachs so clearly understood, the mechanisms of collective memory he delineated present a particularly sharp challenge to Christianity's insistence on historical remembrance as the foundation

of its authenticity. That challenge is made all the more powerful by the contemporary ubiquity of memory work and the almost playful use of memory categories in so many areas where cross-disciplinary and ‘multi-vocal’ perspectives figure strongly. As Hervieu-Léger observes, in contemporary systems of meaning the forces of pluralization, subjectivization and individualization work together against the maintenance of collective memories that formerly united people with a sense of mutual belonging (2000: 30). Paradoxically, however, that very disintegration of collective memory structures works to spur ever more ardent preoccupation with memory work. Hervieu-Léger sums it up:

In the fluid, mobile domain of modern belief liberated from the hold of all-embracing institutions of believing, all symbols are interchangeable and capable of being combined and transposed. All syncretisms are possible. (2000: 75)

This leaves memory work in preaching as a particularly difficult task. As discussed earlier (section 5.5), none of the rhetorical strategies popular in homiletics in recent decades, namely an appeal to psychological impact, to authoritative teaching, to contextual connection, or to phenomenological engagement, provide resources to address directly collective memory maintenance, nor to deal with the profound shift towards subjectivism and ambiguity in the social understanding of memory itself.

This thesis has argued that memory occupies a central place in the Christian faith. Indeed, Volf’s assertion that ‘every single Christian confession is an exercise in memory’ is far from being hyperbole (2006: 97). As he points out, even the simple faith exclamation ‘Jesus is Lord!’ is, in effect, a memory statement, since it invokes the name of a person who lived in a particular time and place in the past. Christianity always, and in all circumstances, looks to the saving acts of Jesus Christ in history; and is not conceivable as Christianity without so doing. The oft repeated ‘do this in memory of me’ of the Eucharist signifies in bodily actions what is the Christian’s constant faith commitment to remember Jesus in all aspects of living. This remembering goes far beyond

simple commemoration; it connects every believer in the body of believers with Christ as a living presence. It is indeed, as Rowan Williams has suggested, a way of ‘becoming contemporary with Jesus’. He writes that it involves

... an openness to those other believers, past as well as present, in whom Jesus is believed to be active. Mature Christian identity is at home with the past—with diverse aspects of it, in diverse ways, but always as posing the question of relation with Jesus. (Williams, 2005: 91)

Halbwachs was indeed correct in his assertion that the Christian’s need to overcome the distance memory imposes between the believer and Christ is fundamental to faith. From the perspective of faith, however, the methods employed to overcome this distancing identified by Halbwachs, give a less than adequate account of the relationship between the believer and the founding events of the faith.

This memory of the community of memory serves present imperatives in just the way Halbwachs described: but in doing so the believer claims authenticity for the memory that goes way beyond a convenient congruence. As the memory is rehearsed in worship and prayer, spoken of in sermons and decision making, and associated with places and social interactions, it incorporates people in a web of memory that each person can identify as ‘mine’. Such remembering spurs further action and touches every component of a believer’s life—emotional, cognitive, personal and social.

As Dahl demonstrates (see section 6.15), this kind of memory work has been a fundamental aspect of maintaining the faith since apostolic times, and draws on earlier Jewish associations of memory with action. This memory work requires a repeated requirement to celebrate, reflect on, and rehearse the memory concerned. In other words, its usage is structured and disciplined, and is recognized as formative within the body of believers. Incorporation of the Christian memory into the lived experience of the believer is a primary way of being a faithful believer. The faith’s symbols and meanings can only become resources for ongoing discipleship if they are embedded within social frameworks that enable them to be remembered, or perhaps more accurately re-membered.

There is an inherently cyclical nature to this remembering; as a group practices its memory it provides the framework that enables others to become part of that experience and shared memory, which in turn creates a new group of practice. But, as I have demonstrated, such structured formation from tradition is a social practice that often appears more and more problematic in contemporary Western society. It is pertinent to recall Hervieu-Léger's fundamental question: 'What constitutes the foundation of obligation in a society of individuals?' (2000: 115). There is a double bind here: if obligation is dependent on shared memory which can only be shared memory if individuals share actions, or at least an appreciation of potentially shared actions, how is it possible to share and sustain that memory when no obligation exists to share action? If the symbols no longer connect because they have fallen out of memory and it is impossible to prompt the actions that would operationalize that memory because the symbols no longer exist, then the links in the chain of belief, action and memory are well and truly broken. The evidence of such a break is, of course, varied and ambiguous; in some places the links appeared weakened but still intact, whereas in others they seem largely shattered (this being Hervieu-Léger's (2003) own estimation of the Roman Catholicism of her French homeland).

Cultural change, the varied nature of tradition, and how traditions gain or lose public recognition are topics that Graham Ward (2005) has recently addressed at length. One comment of his is particularly relevant to this study's emphasis on the preacher's place in sustaining tradition. He writes:

Traditions can be authoritatively stronger or weaker, more authoritarian or less. The authoritative strength or weakness of any tradition is governed by a number of factors such as the length of its history, its geographical distribution, its ideological content, the organisational structure that has given and continues to give that tradition its current public recognition, the character of that public recognition (whether the tradition is seen as significant, useful, good in any number of senses in which those terms might be interpreted), and the *charisma* of the figures who gave or give it public prominence. This authority, then, maps only to some extent on the tradition's symbolic capital, for it is an authority

that is stronger or weaker with respect to its power to discipline the desires (and therefore the bodies) of those committed to and situated within it. (Ward, 2005: 83)

A Halbwachsian perspective might raise several objections to Ward's account; not least concerning the significance of the length of history of a tradition and the omission of any reference to the dynamics between the social and the individual in terms of how a tradition is recognized. Nevertheless, Ward raises two important issues that apply to the assessment of preaching's role in the maintenance of tradition—namely, the charisma of the preacher and the bodily effect of preaching. On both counts, contemporary British preaching appears weak if these things are indeed indicators of a tradition's authority. For example, in contemporary society preachers are not generally considered as charismatic communicators: a fact well illustrated in popular culture by the BBC's highly successful Public Speaking Award show (first run in 2007) that has included broadcast comment from a huge range of 'good' speakers from the arts, the media, politics, entertainment and business but has never included a preacher. Likewise, within the Roman Catholic Church the acknowledged weakness of preaching about that Church's teaching on sexuality in effecting behavioural compliance with such teaching suggests that preaching is often weak in its ability to direct action. Of course, it is not sensible to place too much weight on such cursory evidence, and certainly the suggestion that these aspects were substantially stronger in the past is not necessarily wholly accurate; yet it remains the case that, as popularly perceived, these are indicators of a weakening of religious tradition and the memory that goes with it. The perception is that affiliation and memory links that were once strong are no longer so; that things that were socially, as well as personally significant, have shattered.

The evidence around that perception of shattering is, of course, contentious and debatable. Nevertheless, as I have reiterated, it is clear that the sustaining of a lively and living Christian memory is a pressing issue in contemporary Britain, since even where the links are not broken they are decidedly decayed. This is more than the application to the Christian religion of a widely appreciated social concern for memory; this is about the very possibility of

Christian believing in a society like ours. It is to preaching's part in that possibility that this chapter now turns.

7.5 Preaching in an anamnestic community.

The churches of Western Europe have been characterized in this study as anamnestic communities set within uneasily amnesic societies. I take the church to be a canonical community; that is, a body of people who strive to orientate themselves in living according to the canon of Christian practices and texts. Christians in this understanding are in a constant cultural negotiation that works to order their lives in relation to the canons of the faith and life as it is presently lived and understood. Memory is the heart of the canon. Thus, as was said earlier, the quite literal statement in the canon of the Eucharist, 'Do this is remembrance of me', is a sign of an even wider and all embracing remembrance that is the living out of the canon. This understanding reinforces the insistence that word and sacrament belong together. Both components reinforce and sustain the memory from which each finds its origin, as well as, in their differing ways, expressing the continuing power of that same memory.

The earlier analysis of the works of Metz, Dahl and Schmemmann (sections 6.11 to 6.17), arising from their varied Christian traditions, established that contemporary believers, in striving to assimilate their thought and action into the links of an inherited 'chain of memory', are doing what earlier believers did. Such memory work, however, goes beyond simple incorporation, repetition, replication or mimicry, into what Brueggemann terms 'traditioning'. The collective memory of the church as a tradition in use, rather than as historically distanced by mere acknowledgement, is able to generate imaginative developments whilst retaining congruity with the originating tradition. As was seen in the previous detailed discussion (section 6.18), that generative ability is largely a consequence of the tradition's eschatological and epicletic nature. The remembering to which the preacher is called, and to which the preacher re-calls the worshipper, is fundamentally a remembering that we are remembered by God,

whose memory is reality and eternal life. It is of God's nature to remember; an understanding of God's nature that goes beyond ideas of impersonal timelessness to an engaged and engaging relationship with human action and memory.

This emphasis on the power of an inherited stream of understanding, and how indwelling that stream functions purposefully in the here and now, is reminiscent of Alasdair MacIntyre's argument in his influential study in moral theory *After Virtue* (first edition 1981). This thesis echoes MacIntyre's point that an adequate and lively sense of tradition opens up future possibilities, since it discloses to the present things made available from the past which are not otherwise accessible (MacIntyre, 1985: 223). MacIntyre's conclusions about the character of a living tradition are worth quoting at length, since they demonstrate a fruitful symmetry with some of the mechanisms of collective memory examined in the present thesis. He writes:

A living tradition [then] is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition. Within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations. Hence the individual's search for his or her good is generally and characteristically conducted within a context defined by those traditions of which the individual's life is a part, and this is true both of those goods which are internal to practices and of the goods of a single life. [Once again] the narrative phenomenon of embedding is crucial: the history of a practice in our time is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer history of the tradition through which the practice in its present form was conveyed to us; the history of each of our own lives is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer histories of a number of traditions. I have to say 'generally and characteristically' rather than 'always', for traditions decay, disintegrate and disappear. (1985: 222)

MacIntyre makes much of the narrative quality of existence and how the story a person believes him or herself to be part of has determining consequences for action. It is not an exaggeration to say that his is a narrative view of the self. Although he believes that that story of the self is always embedded in a communal story and that to over emphasize individualism underplays the significance of larger social forces (1985: 221), nevertheless, his focus is properly and primarily on those things that pertain to a unified moral self. Consequently, although several parts of MacIntyre's discussion appear to echo Halbwachsian memory mechanisms (for example, his observations about tradition as socially embedded argumentation, his ideas about the decay of tradition, and what he says about the role of tradition in making things intelligible), some proper caution is, nevertheless, necessary in pressing that congruence. As MacIntyre is highly critical of social science generalizations that claim too much for their predictive power (1985: 88-108), it could be considered bizarre to adduce his work in support of a wide-ranging and sometimes contentious sociological theory.

Hopefully, however, the application of that theory has been tempered sufficiently in this thesis to allow the point that although MacIntyre's work should not be subsumed into an unthinking reinforcement of Halbwachs, his work does offer some supporting insight. His repeated insistence that the concepts, arguments and judgements of moral philosophy are embodied in social groups and their continued existence through time, lends weight to collective memory theory. MacIntyre's account of rationality as tradition-guided enquiry, like Thiselton's account of habituation described earlier (sections 6.8 and 6.9), offers insights that work towards undergirding the notion of memory work advocated here. It is not necessary to share Halbwachs' ideas of social determinism in memory processes in order to acknowledge the significance of inherited wisdom and the threats to that inheritance in an environment such as ours which is often contemptuous of tradition. Reliance on a canon, in the sense of a body of understandings passed through time because their importance and authority is recognized, is an essential way of knowing. To be forgetful of that way of knowing, or to be dismissive of its significance, is indeed to become amnesic.

Within a canonical community, as I have characterized the church, ways of rehearsing, reiterating and recalling the canon are essential to the community's continuing existence. Without that memory work the community ceases to be. Where right remembering (see section 1.3) is a fundamental category of a group's very existence, failures in mnemonic awareness and practice are catastrophic; a point made powerfully from their varied perspectives, as has been discussed, in the works of Hervieu-Léger (2000), Brueggemann (2007), and Yerushalmi (1996). The argument presented here is that the Christian preacher has a particularly significant role in that memory work, and that the failure of preachers and the communities of faith which they serve to appreciate that role is destructive of the very faith they seek to advance. The preacher is a community authorized bearer of memory, a role acknowledged in one way or another in the polity of many Christian churches. The processes of collective memory are regarded in this analysis, therefore, as things a preacher needs to keep constantly in mind, since they are aspects of the way a tradition is maintained as a lived tradition. It is to those processes that this chapter now turns in order to delineate the contours of that 'keeping in mind.'

7.6 The processes of collective memory.

Halbwachs' concept of collective memory is properly located within the orbit of what a person does. This is an understanding that contrasts sharply with the colloquial notion of memory as something that a person has, in the sense of what a person possesses. Colloquial usage suggests that memories are filed like so many papers within a cabinet, and that the mysterious capabilities of the brain lift out, as it were, from their storage place the appropriate page/memory when needed and then files it again after use ready to be lifted out anew when it is required further. Such metaphors of storage and retrieval have a very long heritage that goes right back to Plato's *Theaetetus* (section 191c-e). Current usage, unlike the ancient texts, however, tends to underplay the active processing involved in favour of an altogether more static notion of possession drawn from

comparison with computer memory chips. Contemporary scientific research into the processes that generate the engram, the memory trace within the brain, support the contention that memory is altogether more dynamic than simple storage and retrieval (see, for example, Rose (2003); Edelman and Changeux (2000); and Damasio (2000)). At its least contentious, the concept of collective memory suggests that such dynamism within the brain is echoed in the social dynamism of human interactions that provide the stimulus for memory work in the brain.

In *The Collective Memory*, Halbwachs discusses the difference between remembrances a person can evoke at will and those that cannot be recalled readily, or are only recalled with difficulty and great effort (1980: 46). He notes that the first type is also familiar or accessible to other people; whereas the second type is only available, as it were, to the individual concerned. Remembrances evoked with the most difficulty appear to be uniquely individual possessions, as against remembrances that appear most significant to the individual yet are readily available to other people. Paradoxically, remembrances that escape the purview of others only do so at the expense of oneself also (1980: 47). Halbwachs explains this difference in terms of social relationships. That which is easily remembered is preserved in the groups we easily and repeatedly enter in which relationships are known and familiar. That which is remembered with difficulty is associated with groups that are more remote to the individual's present experience, or where contact is accordingly intermittent or non-existent. As Halbwachs puts it:

Groups that associate frequently enable us to be in them simultaneously, whereas others have so little contact that we have neither intention nor occasion to trace their faded paths of communication. (1980: 47)

In other words, as an individual's memory within the brain is a system property which cannot be simply equated with any one component—synaptic changes, circuitry, biochemistry, or whatever—so the relationship of that activity to what the individual is physically and mentally doing cannot be simply equated with an individual's awareness or cognizance. The dynamics and complexities of social

relationships are always part of remembering (and forgetting), and any activity explicitly concerned with the creation and preservation of memories must, if it is to be effective, acknowledge that fact. For the preacher, recognizing these communal dimensions and working positively with them becomes a crucial task, since felt common experience is vital to memory. As Halbwachs put it:

To be aided by others' memory, ours must not merely be provided testimony and evidence but must also remain in harmony with theirs. There must be enough points of contact so that any remembrance they recall to us can be reconstructed on a common foundation. (1980: 31)

In terms of the subject of this study, it could be objected that this is, in effect, little more than an appeal to the idea of preachers as individuals called out from a community to be representative voices of the communities from which they came. More positively, the theory of collective memory brings reinforcement to the value of the preacher as a person engaged and involved in the social relationships and institutional life of the group in which he or she preaches. As was acknowledged earlier (section 4.5), these aspects of engagement bring with them issues of power. As Hervieu-Léger puts it: 'the recognized ability to expound the true memory of the group ... constitutes the core of religious power' (2000: 126). Even in a society in which the social status of the preacher is much reduced from that of earlier times, the power inherent in the public voicing of the memory has not evaporated. Those who are holders, in a sense, of a collective memory, cannot avoid the fact that with that holding there is power, and the responsibilities that come with power. An individual voicing a group's memory on its behalf will inevitably be authoritative, in terms of collective memory.

That, however, must be tempered by an awareness of the fact that not all social influences are easily apparent. Much that works for or against the remembering the preacher is striving to achieve is hidden from view, or goes unrecognized. This is an aspect of how collective memory works on which Halbwachs was most insistent; and he was convinced that supporting social structures often go unnoticed, and that most of the social influences we obey remain largely unperceived (1980: 45). He wrote:

A current of social thought is ordinarily as invisible as the atmosphere we breathe. In normal life its existence is recognized only when it is resisted. (Halbwachs, 1980: 38)

Those words bring to mind Ricoeur's more recent expression 'the available belief structure of an era' (Ricoeur, 2004: 199). The expression comes at that point in Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting* at which he is discussing the historiographical shift between the consideration of mentalities and representations, a discussion beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, a point is made there that is pertinent to Halbwachs' notion of unnoticed social structures of thought and what that concept might mean for the preacher's task.

Ricoeur notes how different discourses inevitably focus on their own substantive concerns to the exclusion of other aspects. Thus, for example, the history of ideas considers only ideas and thoughts, the sociology of knowledge focuses on ideologies or social superstructures, and psychoanalysis looks at competing psychological drives detached from any social history (2004: 208). As useful as such foci might be, according to Ricoeur human habitus is constituted by a psychic economy that is altogether more integrated and holistic. Habitus, argues Ricoeur, lies at the crossroads of 'historical psychology', what is conceivable and believable in any age, and 'social cohabitation', the nature of human interrelationships and their social settings (2004: 208).

The present thesis is a defence of preaching as memory work which sustains Christian faith as a lived wisdom—that is, as essentially a Christian habitus. It goes without saying that to advance that lived wisdom the preacher must be both competent in and knowledgeable of the faith—a required competence widely recognized in the procedures adopted for the authorization of preachers in many churches. Alongside that competence, preachers are usually also required to demonstrate the skills necessary for effective communication, for presiding at worship, and for relating matters of faith to life in contemporary society. Collective memory theory, however, suggests that sustaining a Christian habitus requires all those things and more.

If the social structures that undergird memory are, as Halbwachs insisted, often hidden from view, and if, as Ricoeur suggests, habitus is formed in the interplay of what is conceivable and life lived in place and relationships; then the preacher must, at least, be alert to these processes and subtleties. The preacher's task becomes one of constant cultural negotiation in which the dynamics are not only those between the inherited faith tradition or Scripture and contemporary experience, but also those concerning an assessment of what may be conceivable in the social circumstances of the community in which the preaching takes place. The preacher needs to be alert to what undisclosed or unrecognized social factors are impinging on social memory, and what physical, emotional and social interrelationships are at work. Of course, that assessment is very difficult or even impossible to achieve in the sense of an absolute and verifiable analysis, but that does not mean that attempts at achieving it, even in a limited sense, cannot work to the benefit of the homiletic task. As in Clifford Geertz's famous defence of 'thick description' as a methodology, the issue is to make such assessment possible rather than worry about its completeness or generalizability (Geertz, 1973: 3-30). Such assessment offers at least the possibility that the preacher's activity will challenge the power of the cultural forces that drive the forgetfulness of faith.

7.7 Collective memory and the practice of preaching.

According to Halbwachs, the inherently social reference of memory leads to several other invariable elements in the processes of remembering. Although these elements have all been discussed in earlier chapters, they are returned to at this point in order to re-emphasize their direct relevance to the circumstances of contemporary preaching.

7.7.1 The individual and the group.

Halbwachs points out that an individual's movement between different groups, often associated with aging and development in experience, causes memory change (see for example, sections 3.2 and 3.5 above). He writes:

The groups to which I belong vary at different periods of my life. But it is from their viewpoint that I consider the past. As I become more involved in each of these groups and participate more intimately in its memory, I necessarily renovate and supplement my remembrances.
(1980: 73)

The issue of renovation will be returned to below (see section 7.7.3), but at this point the emphasis is on group experience and what that says about the preaching event.

The prevalence and popularity of technological media, utilized at the whim of the person employing them, works to reinforce a widespread notion of communication as the delivery of messages to individuals. On the face of it, the individual is the arbiter of what is communicated—whether the medium be the Internet, a cell phone, a personal music or video player, television, radio, or the printed word. Of course, a moment of critical reflection discloses that the individual's use of the medium, and indeed the very existence of the medium, relies on a vast array of technical and economic activity and that the content the medium delivers also consists of a huge array of signs and significances reliant on even wider cultural signs and significances. Without entering the complexities of communication theory (see for example, Schirato and Yell, (2000); or Peters, (1999)), it is clear that all communication practices and media are inherently cultural; and that all communication, even when it appears easy and unskilled, actually requires a sophisticated cultural awareness and learning that can properly be called a necessary literacy for human existence.

Communication, whether interpersonal or more widely social, is only possible within an environment of social-learned skills and knowledge. Despite

that fact, however, when day to day communication is felt to occur satisfactorily its semiotic and systemic complexities go largely unnoticed. It would, of course, be both tedious and unproductive to be constantly analysing the cultural embeddedness of every conversation, joke, or song, but that absence of noticing does sometimes have consequences. When it comes to preaching, the all too prevalent avoidance of any notion of cultural literacy works to undermine further an appreciation of preaching as a socially valuable activity. Here, preaching is seen as being akin to ordinary conversation in that it employs speech that is mostly in the form of common parlance which is directed in a straightforward and unmediated way towards hearers. In this view, electronic speech enhancement through amplification and the dominance of one voice in the group are thought of as minor matters in comparison to the overwhelmingly conversational character of what is going on. Judged in these terms, preaching is found wanting because it often lacks apparent immediacy and social engagement.

It is not only in the realm of a conversational kind of discourse that the dynamic of the individual and the group has changed. If preaching is viewed not in conversational terms but rather as a specialized religious form of discourse, other issues come to the fore. It will be remembered that Hervieu-Léger's concept of metaphorization suggests that in contemporary society symbols have achieved a new autonomy largely free from older institutional control. The individual is now able to express belief in subjective and diffuse forms which can be combined and reordered into a multiplicity of meanings, orderings and combinations. As was detailed earlier (section 4.4), Hervieu-Léger uses Séguin and Weber to show how things such as values become an analogical religion. In this process things that are characteristically religious, for example, meaning-making, transcendence and appeals to that which is beyond the everyday and mundane, are utilized but without any reference to supernatural powers. In terms of symbols and their use, Hervieu-Léger employs these changes as indicators of the fluidity and a stark individualism that denudes religious institutions of their power. Of course, that is not to say that the general power of the group to shape memory in Halbwachsian terms is any less, but rather that it is more difficult for

religious memory to function in these circumstances and that other things come to occupy those spaces that were previously considered wholly religious.

7.7.2 Changing relationships and changing memories.

Halbwachs also suggests that as a person's relationships and group affiliations change so does that person's perspective on collective memory. He writes:

Each memory is a viewpoint on the collective memory ... this viewpoint changes as my position changes, and [that] this position itself changes as my relationship to other milieus change. (1980: 48)

In other words, it is not just that memories are remembered in relation to social frameworks, or that when a social framework no longer exists in any form the memory also ceases—both of which are clear conclusions in Halbwachs theory—but also that the milieux of a person's life should be seen as overlapping, as it were, and that overlaps provide sufficient social support for memories to continue whilst at the same time shifting that support far enough to change a person's estimation of the shared memory. Halbwachs here talks of the 'intensity' of a remembrance and how that varies from person to person.

Applying that point to preaching means that even sermons heard as having a high degree of pertinence and experienced as having a significant charge in terms of both memorability and the memories provoked do not retain that charge indefinitely. Something rather more subtle is being said here than merely the self-evident truth that the remembrance of spoken words decays with time. The point is that, even on those occasions when a sermon is received as especially significant and the tenor of it is remembered as such, what that remembrance means shifts in terms of the part of the collective memory it undergirds as relationships change. Even when the person remains associated with the group in which the event originally took place, the meaning of the memory will change as the person physically ages. For example, conceptions of calling and vocation might make a sermon particularly significant to a young adult considering those things for his or her own life, and that in turn may relate to a prominence given to

the wider congregation's self-understanding as a body that has special talents and responsibilities in nurturing young adults. This congregational self-understanding will be perpetuated by, and be associated with, recurrent theological themes concerning finding one's vocation and answering God's call, as long as there are personnel involved to whom these things are current concerns. A person who has drawn much from that emphasis and moved on in life conscious of a sense of calling will relate that consciousness to those earlier thoughts and experiences so long as a sense of calling remains pertinent to that person's experience.

Similarly, that person will also relate that sense of calling to the life of other congregations which she experiences, and may become indignant or disaffected if ideas of vocation do not have the prominence thought proper. On the other hand, should that person remain in the original congregation she will reinforce its self-understanding as a nurturing congregation through her own testimony and presence. Over time that contribution will change as her own life experience shifts from the necessary decisions of early adulthood towards the responsibilities of later life. In these circumstances her estimation of the memory of calling will inevitably change. If the congregation has a relatively constant flow of younger adults it may well succeed in maintaining its sense of being a nurturing and vocational body, but the estimation of what that means for those who remain within its orbit from earlier years will not be the same as that of those who are much younger. If, as is probably rather more common, the congregation does not replace each young adult group by another, or indeed ceases to attract young adults at all, the memory will change from a sense of ongoing lived practice to one of nostalgia, or even loss.

In such circumstances the task of preachers becomes a difficult one of negotiating fading memories and present social realities without reinforcing disengaging nostalgia or guilt. Changed experience changes both the individual's and the group's memories, and the preacher needs to work with those movements.

7.7.3 Renovation.

As was noted above, Halbwachs understands the individual's conscious and unconscious reworking of memory as the person's quality of relationship with the group changes as being one of renovation. Halbwachs' use of the term predates by several generations the notion of 'reconsolidation of memory' now widely used by brain scientists (Rose, 2003: 380). Both concepts, from their differing perspectives, point to the fact that remembering requires an active re-making of memories. In Halbwachs' understanding, the processes of renovation mean that a person cannot completely clarify remembrances until that person is a full and actual part of the group; and, furthermore, that the group's remembrances must have some connection with events that are part of the person's own past (Halbwachs, 1980: 73). In other words, a person may well have an inkling of memories that are significant to a group, but it is impossible to make those memories fully one's own prior to becoming incorporated into the group. Before that incorporation, those memories are little more than observations or a generalized awareness that something is significant to the group; after incorporation, the same perceptions take on new power as their significance to the group is reinforced in the newcomer's own experience of being part of the group. The social framework supporting memory is at its most powerful when its significance is shared via participative belonging. In that participation group remembrances become part of each person's own past in a way that is altogether more emotionally and intellectually involving than simple assent. Renovation is, therefore, a profound and deeply significant process that makes effective in remembering social bonds that have come to be of vital importance to the individual, and vice versa, those bonds are made all the stronger by being part of remembering.

It is not difficult to see the outworking of memory renovation in the experience of social groups, although its prevalence is often masked by other more readily acceptable group processes. For example, the existence of organizational cultures (or perhaps, more accurately organizational sub-cultures) is widely understood in people management (Hofstede (1994); Brown (1998); Daft (1988)). Consequently, the need to incorporate new workers into an organization's culture via familiarization and induction mechanisms is recognized

extensively. Similarly, coping with the pressures of adaptation, as required in response to an organization's changing circumstances, is also often analysed in terms of cultural change and how it might be managed. Some management texts acknowledge that dealing with organizational culture involves memory work (for example, Brown (1998)), but many do not. Halbwachs' theory suggests that, whether memory renovation is acknowledged or not, in any group that is truly significant to the individuals involved such memory work will inevitably and invariably take place. Renovation, whether it is subtle and involves only a colouring and reordering, as it were, of memories, or whether it is of a more radical and reconstitutive character, is as much a part of the social aspects of memory as reconsolidation is in the mechanisms of the brain.

7.7.4 Memory and space.

Another invariable aspect of collective memory upon which Halbwachs insists is that of its spatial framework. He writes:

Space is a reality that endures: since our impressions rush by, one after another, and leave nothing behind in the mind, we can understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings. It is to space—the space we occupy, traverse, have continual access to, or can at any time reconstruct in thought and imagination—that we must turn our attention. Our thought must focus on it if this or that category of remembrances is to reappear. (1980: 140)

In associating memory with space, Halbwachs is, of course, following a very ancient tradition that goes back to the Greek era: although its first written account is in the Roman Cicero's (106-43 BCE) description in his *De Oratore* (ii.86) of its discovery as a mnemonic technique useful for public speaking (Yates, 1966: 17-18). According to Cicero, the poet Simonides of Ceos (c. 477 BCE) was engaged to recite a lyrical poem in honour of a Thessalonian nobleman named Scopos at a banquet the nobleman has arranged. In the performance, Simonides gave more

prominence to Castor and Pollux than pleased the host, so he determined to pay the poet only half the agreed fee and told him to get the rest from the twin gods he had so praised. Later, Simonides is told that two young men are outside wanting to see him. He goes out, but can find no one. Whilst Simonides is away, the roof of the banqueting hall collapses crushing Scopus and all his guests. The relatives of the victims are unable to take them away for burial because the bodies are so mangled as to be unidentifiable. Simonides, however, is able to recall just where each guest had been sitting and is, therefore, able to identify each body. The invisible callers, Castor and Pollux, thus, in effect, handsomely paid Simonides for his poem by saving his life and putting him in a position to discover the art of memory (see Yates (1966)).

That the story of Simonides reappears frequently in Medieval and Renaissance texts concerning mnemonic techniques can easily divert attention from its direct connection of actual space with memory. Similarly, Cicero's account goes on to talk of location memory as being like inscribing letters on a wax table—a storage metaphor which, as stated earlier, underplays drastically the dynamism of memory—but that should not obscure the point that his interest in the craft of memory discloses the importance of physical location (*De Oratore*, ii.88). Homileticians have often only referred to memory in terms of mnemonic techniques for recalling a sermon script as it is presented, or as ways of making the content of that presentation more memorable to the hearer. In that usage they place themselves in that long tradition going back to Cicero and beyond. It may well be the case that serious attention to the long mnemotechnic tradition would benefit homiletic practice in our own day. If preaching, as I have repeatedly insisted, has artistry to it, then surely the ancient arts of memory (Yates, 1966) remain pertinent even in our technological and consumerist age. As fruitful as that possibility might be, the focus in these concluding remarks is on memory's relationship to the world of space and objects. Halbwachs' interest in location is not about how remembrance can be enhanced, but rather about spatial relationships as an ever present aspect of collective memory. That said, Ciceronic categories do figure in Halbwachs' discussion because his notion of the representation of space is much more extensive than just referencing those who

currently share the same physical location (for example, 1992: 123). What Halbwachs means by representation of space requires some amplification because he sees it as particularly important to religious memory.

By spatial framework, Halbwachs means spaces and mental representations associated with a group's activity and purposes, as well as the shared physical location in which a group exists and operates (1980: 156). In other words, alongside the physical distribution of a group's members within a given area there are also other places where the group's existence and activity, and the memory that goes with it, are marked in space. Halbwachs cites several different examples of this: ownership is not only about that which is owned but also about other places marked by the relationships of ownership or its absence; economic goods acquire a value when offered in some kind of marketplace, and ascertaining that value needs memory work that involves places of trade wider than where the goods actually are; and finally, in an example most pertinent to the present study, the spacial framework of religious groups extends beyond the particular building in which a group meets to other locations associated by things such as type, historical continuity, or the distinction between sacred and profane.

Spatial frameworks, according to Halbwachs, work in a way not unlike the mechanism employed by the classical methods of memory training. As he writes:

The reason members of a group remain united, even after scattering and finding nothing in their new physical surroundings to recall the home they have left, is that they think of the old home and its layout.

(1980: 130)

Halbwachs, however, does not view the mental representations of space as a first concern but rather as a consequence of the experience of actual locations. His understanding is that memory is written, as it were, into the very physical environment we inhabit. He writes:

Religions are rooted in the land, not merely because men and groups must live on the land but because the community of believers distributes its richest ideas and images throughout space. (1980: 139)

As a physical being a person inhabits zones of relationships where the very contours of the material world operate to support and maintain memory—the process Halbwachs terms ‘localization.’ Using religion as an example of the process, Halbwachs writes:

The believer entering a church, cemetery, or other consecration place knows he will recover a mental state he has experienced many times. Together with fellow believers he will re-establish, in addition to their visible community, a common thought and remembrance formed and maintained there through the ages. (1980: 151)

This localization is not about any particularly religious understanding of the world, and Halbwachs would not have any sympathy with interpretations that link place and memory in mystical or spiritual terms. His is an understanding that is entirely about social relationships and how these are territorialized by their attachment to place. In this way, social memories are ‘objectivized’ and given credibility that both extends further than an individual’s remembering and at the same time supports that remembering, individually and socially.

In terms of preaching, these spatial and locational processes should prompt a renewed attention to the physical environment in which sermons are heard and the mental structures of location that might strengthen their contribution to collective memory. If spatial relationships (both physical and mental) are ever present aspects of collective memory, then the disregard of those relationships by preachers can only further undermine the very memories they are striving to maintain. For example, the restructuring of sermons into short ‘slots’ in the manner of television presentation, may so disrupt the locational shape of the liturgy that its ability to sustain collective memory is damaged. Similarly, the physical reordering of buildings in which preaching takes place can, by the shifting of the way things are marked in space, be detrimental to the collective memory. This should not be heard as a justification for an unchanging conservatism in homiletic practice, but rather as a call to recognize the significance of spatial frameworks and the power of localization.

7.7.5 Memory sets.

When we recollect memories from the far distance ‘we have a habit of recalling them in organized sets’ (1980: 70), that is, the ordering is a function of memory, not a recalling of events in the order they actually took place or in the relationship of different components that applied when the event took place. For example, time may be concertinaed—early school experience recalled as belonging together when in order of occurrence they were separated by months, and the like. Some remembrances stand out very clearly, but in the process of recall they are associated with other elements that may, or may not, find their origin in the same event as that which is clearly recalled. Halbwachs uses the example of the way a person’s reading of factual or fictional accounts of a child entering a class for the first time become entwined with the reader’s own experience of actually entering a class for the first time (1980: 70). That entwining eventually means that what a person may hold as beyond doubt a personal memory has in actuality come to be composed of other people’s testimonies and stories. As Halbwachs puts it, ‘the past as I once knew it is slowly defaced’ (1980: 72).

The remembrance of religious experiences is, undoubtedly, as much subject to such processes as any other area of human activity. That admission has particular significance for the preacher, in that the sermon has often been characterized as the part of Christian practice that explicitly relates the canon of Scripture to contemporary human experience. In performing that task the preacher will often be aware of organizing sets in a congregation’s remembrances, and the power of memories that are not necessarily related to firsthand experience, whether individually or more socially perceived. Indeed, negotiating the interplay of such things, and utilizing their significance in what is said in sermons, and how it is said, is widely perceived as a core skill in preaching, albeit usually expressed in terms of engagement, relevance and context rather than memory. Halbwachs’ ideas, however, extend somewhat further than merely underscoring the significance of this part of the preacher’s skill. That

extension requires an acknowledgement of how the preacher is as much subject to collective memory processes as are the congregations she or he serves. Because preachers generally receive training in skills, and are often authorized and vetted before being allowed to exercise their homiletic functions, it is easy to assume that collective processes weigh less heavily on them, or that they are somehow more objective in their use of Christian tradition than the average worshipper. Applying Halbwachs' thought to the preaching practitioners puts a question mark against that assumption.

In Halbwachs' understanding, the renovation of memories by way of organizing memory sets and the entwining of other elements from a person's wider knowledge and experience is further complicated by what he terms 'zones of technical activity' (1992: 180). By this Halbwachs means the formal procedures, abstract rules, and technical decisions to which members of a group consistently adhere. In other words, the things that might nowadays be more frequently called the competences, procedures and codes of practice by which a person skilled and qualified in a particular area operates. For Halbwachs, despite the fact these rules and practices appear rigid and technical they are part of the relationships that compose the social frameworks of collective memory. The example he cites is that of the legal system, in which he suggests, rules and procedures appear entirely impersonal but, in practice, technical decisions fit with the personal, 'localized' and situated judgements that are part of the legal functionary's social frameworks. As Middleton and Brown put it, according to Halbwachs, 'the local and particular [then] absorb and modify the general and the impersonal' (2005: 169). Interestingly, Halbwachs' discussion of technical activity is part of his analysis of the traditions of social classes since he sees these common processes of social life as invariably mediated through 'the tastes, preferences, and prejudices—recent or antiquated—of a social circle or class' (1992:163) and, consequently, deep-seated and profoundly significant in how the structures of society operate. Needless to say, the point is contentious and a matter of debate (see, for example, Misztal (2003); Middleton and Brown (2005); Wertsch (2002)). Although that discussion is beyond the scope of this study, the concept of zones of technical activity is mentioned here because it is another

indication of the power that social frameworks have over remembering (and forgetting). Halbwachs insists that even in social infrastructures where technical thought apparently dominates, the processes of social remembering still operate. By this insistence Halbwachs is underscoring his claim that collective remembering embraces a far wider area of human activity than might appear at first sight.

As far as preaching is concerned, this aspect of Halbwachs' thought underscores the necessity that in a community whose very purpose is sustaining the memory of faith, those who preach as part of that purpose must recognize their own need to be continuously formed themselves by that memory. The critique homileticians must subject themselves to, for the good of the memory community they serve, concerns not only the veracity and authenticity of the tradition they seek to expound and their competence in communicating it, but also their own appropriation of traditions of memory.

7.8 Preaching in a society desensitized to tradition.

The church has, of course, always required a deep appropriation of its faith tradition by those authorized to preach. What has changed, this thesis has argued, is the nature of the social supports that enable such appropriation to happen. It is clearly the case, as the work of numerous sociologists suggests, that social structures outside the churches that support Christian remembering have weakened substantially in the United Kingdom, as in other Western European countries (and indeed in some measure in North America as well). The factors that are less clearly understood are the consequences of that weakening for those who remain practising believers. This study has sought to shed light on some of those consequences by focusing closely on one area of Christian practice. Contemporary Christian preachers in the UK not only labour at a task widely considered to be of less and less social significance, but also do so in an environment stripped of the social supports that would formerly have undergirded both their Christian memory and that of the congregations they serve. This is

about more than a social forgetfulness of the tenets of the Christian faith and the narrative and content of the Scriptures. The inability to handle the things of tradition in ways that maintain the processes of tradition touches believers as well as unbelievers. As Halbwachs' writings make plain, memory work is much more than the assimilation of knowledge, and preachers as memory workers have to inhabit the Christian collective memory if they are to promulgate it effectively. In an amnesic society that mnemonic habitation often appears as too difficult and too time consuming, so the preacher faces, as does every believer, a constant temptation towards nostalgia, entertainment or shallow technique.

Church gatherings that once acted as social frameworks for collective memory such as Sunday schools, men's fellowships, family outings, church associated sports clubs, youth clubs, women's circles, etc., have either disappeared or are much reduced in influence. Such decline in participation has a direct bearing on memory, according to Halbwachs. Participation and the self-identification of a group as important in a person's life facilitates remembering; non-participation and non-identification with a group does not. Accordingly, Halbwachs' theory suggests that where little else besides gathering for worship supports the self-identification of the group as important, the need to make that gathering significant becomes all the more pressing in terms of maintaining the Christian memory. If this is indeed the case, and the increase in the numbers of religious congregations with sharp boundaries between themselves and the communities in which they are set suggests it is, the repercussions on how religion is expressed are likely to be intense. For the subjects of this study, the narrowing of participation has a paradoxical consequence; as preachers' general social status based upon homiletic practice declines, so the significance of that practice in terms of the church's memory increases. It is not only that as communicators preachers must now compete for attention in a mass media environment saturated with communication, but also that they have to operate in an atmosphere where their vocalization of the Christian memory is heard as strangely isolated—a hard to hear whisper in an ocean of raucous voices—even by those who are believers. If, as Hervieu-Léger suggests, the ability to expound the true memory of the group is what constitutes religious power, then this

isolation is highly problematic. Preachers are all the more literally bearers of the collective memory in their very selves, but that responsibility of itself challenges their ability so to do.

Again, there is a correspondence here with a similar thought in Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. MacIntyre makes the point that a person's answering of the question 'What am I to do?' is dependent on the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' (1985: 216). Or, to put it another way, a person's understanding of the overall purpose, direction and goal of life, whether expressed philosophically, socially or individually, determines in large measure what that person considers to be right or appropriate action. That sense of purpose, direction and goal does not arrive in a person's perceptions *in vacuo* but is rather, in one way or another, a formation born of what has gone before; it is an inheritance. As MacIntyre puts it:

What I am ... is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition. (1985: 221)

According to Halbwachs, the privileged position of the past in Christianity is more than historical, and, as has been discussed earlier (see section 3.5.1), he insists on a clear distinction between history and memory. MacIntyre's use of the term 'history' at this point is arguably closer to what Halbwachs understood as collective memory since it concerns that inherited sense of belonging to an ongoing social tradition that is fundamentally about social memory. History in this usage prioritizes lived experience over a distanced appreciation of what occurred in the past. It is the past present, in the sense of the presentist orientation of collective memory in Halbwachsian terms, not the past past as that which once happened and is now only available through a systematic process of historical analysis and discernment. This past present is the substance of the memory or tradition that the person carries, whether that person, as MacIntyre puts it, likes it or not.

It may be assumed that preachers will indeed ‘like it’, since as trained, authorized and commissioned representative speakers they have volunteered themselves for this role. That ‘personalitism’ required of the preacher by Phillips Brooks in his 1877 lectures is effectively reasserted in a new and more burdensome way by the preacher’s new responsibilities in memory maintenance. The concept of collective memory suggests that the bearing of tradition is all the more onerous than it was previously—even in the recent past, let alone in Brooks’ day. That means that alongside the general reduction in the social status afforded religious functionaries like preachers, and the other societal changes detailed earlier (see sections 2.1 and 2.2) that press on the Christian religion, must be added the consequences of those changes for the mechanisms of collective memory not only socially but personally. If personal memory is as closely related to the people and places of a person’s current experience as Halbwachs and others (e.g. Casey, (1987); Connerton, (1989); and Fentress and Wickham, (1992); amongst the many who could be cited) then personal memories, and the ways that those memories are deployable, are profoundly affected by social changes. The preacher’s role as bearer of memory may have an enhanced significance because of collective memory loss, but the practices that enable that memory bearing are at the same time eroding the preacher’s facility actually to remember. To return to Davie’s terminology (section 4.7), ‘precarious memory’ is an everyday reality and ‘extinguished memory’ a real possibility (Davie, 2000a). Or, in Hervieu-Léger’s terms, the chain of memory—that mechanism which makes the individual believer a member of a community, in the sense of a belonging that gathers together past, present and future members—is being strained to breaking point.

In Hervieu-Léger’s analysis, European societies are less religious because they are less and less capable of keeping memory-chains in working order. There is a subtlety in that thought that is often overlooked since it refers, in the first instance, not to the forgetting of Christian collective memory but to the decaying of the mechanisms that in earlier times made collective remembering possible. Keeping memory-chains in working order is not a bad description of what this thesis advocates as a principal task of homiletics. As was established earlier in the discussion (section 4.4), Hervieu-Léger’s concept appears at first

sight as tantalisingly simple, but as it arises in a discussion about the vexed problem of a sociological definition of religion, that simplicity soon evaporates. Given that concern, it is inevitable, as we have seen, that Hervieu-Léger's text addresses issues about what traditions are legitimate, how the authority of a tradition is established, and in what sense the believing community exists. These issues are directly echoed in this study's advocacy of the preaching role as one of repeatedly delineating the boundaries of the tradition. Since the mechanisms of incorporation in the links of the memory-chain are so crucial, judgements about which chain-links should be included, and which criteria are employed to make those judgements become key homiletical tasks.

7.9 Christian remembering when memories are weak or conflicting.

To return again to Davie's terminology (2000), all the variations of memory she delineates have a bearing on the contemporary preacher's tasks and problems: 'precarious memory' and 'extinguished memory' are all too obvious, and it is more and more difficult for the preacher to be a bearer of 'vicarious memory', but the other elements of her typology must also figure. The preacher has to weigh what 'alternative memories' might be quarried as possible new frameworks to support gospel imperatives, as well as determinedly resisting those that cannot be so used. Likewise, the preacher must be aware of 'memory mutation' and change that threatens to destroy connections that were previously part of a particular inheritance, tradition, or commemoration. In coming to those judgements the preacher will be all too aware of 'conflicting memories' or 'ruptured memories', and will, therefore, find difficult and contested choices to be an increasing part of the everyday repertoire of the homiletic task.

Of course, all these aspects of memory work are things that in varying degrees face every believer, but they impact with particular force on preachers because of the simple fact that they of necessity must give voice to the Christian tradition in a representative way. Furthermore, the character of that representative way is less supported by common social frameworks than

previously. Consequently, preachers find themselves with fewer memory resources from their own specialist arena of discourse to support their efforts to keep the tradition of faith lively whilst the overarching society-wide power of the mass media to mediate memory seems ever more powerful. Add to that the mass media's ability to foster symbolic representations that create new 'symbolic memories' (for example, turning older forms of social activity into spectacles in things as diverse as the New Year celebrations in London, Princess Diana's funeral, or competitive ballroom dancing), and what the preacher can achieve in the minds and emotions of a congregation appears almost flimsy. Countering such an estimation of preaching's frailty is the motivation underlying the argument presented in this thesis.

As was noted earlier (section 4.8), few homileticians have directly addressed memory work in their theoretical analysis of the preaching task. One notable exception to that judgement is John McClure in his *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern ethic for homiletics* (2001). It will be remembered that McClure (2001: 29) identifies three forms of memory traditionally at work in the interpretative process of preaching: kergymatic, mimetic and historicist. Kergymatic he understands as fundamentally oral, imagination dominated and naive in that it avoids technical difficulties about cultural change, transmission and historiography (2001: 31). Mimetic memory is about an imitative representation which inevitably recognizes the distance between the biblical text and current experience and so tends towards a sense of incompleteness (2001: 33). Finally in this typology comes a historicist memory that is vigorously academic and systematic in tone and works towards an objective reconstruction of the past (2001:37). McClure makes the point that the historicist preacher cannot help but be influenced by the presuppositions that stem from kergymatic and mimetic uses of memory (38). The preacher as one situated within a living tradition finds it almost impossible to step outside the Christian community's shared pre-understanding. Habitus asserts itself, and an anamnesis coloured to varying degrees by its kergymatic and mimetic characteristics wins out over systematic reconstruction every time. Accordingly, for those wrapped, as it were, in the chains of memory, the power of collective memory is awesome. Applying

McClure's typology then becomes as assessment of how lively and available those kerygmatic and mimetic memories are.

The argument developed in this thesis, however, suggests that McClure's analysis, as welcome as it is in examining so directly preaching and memory, is altogether too sanguine. It has been argued at length here that social changes in contemporary Britain have made it more and more difficult for all believers, preachers included, to inhabit Christian tradition in the way McClure describes. It is, perhaps, the case that it remains relatively easier to do so in the United States of McClure's own ministerial experience, but even there more and more voices suggest otherwise (for example, Taylor, (2007); Miller, (2004); Berger, *et al.*, (2008)).

What McClure's typology does, however, is lend support to the recognition that the continually reconstructivist aspect of memory work is never worked out on a *tabula rasa*. Ward is surely correct in his judgement that Christian speech is constructed out of whatever cultural materials are at hand (2005: 47). Christian utterance is, as he puts it:

Not homogenous but always hybrid, improvised, syncretistic and implicated in networks of association that exceed various forms of institutional, individual, or sectarian policing. Furthermore, since Christians are also members of other associations, networks and institutions, what is both internal and external to Christian identity (and its continuing formation) is fluid. (Ward, 2005: 47)

It is unavoidable that personal memories are steeped in the associations and understandings born of collective memory, but even for those highly committed to the Christian faith the relative weight of memories related to the Christian gospel as against memories located in other discourses has diminished. The issue now is not the preacher's ability to step outside the Christian pre-understanding, but rather the opposite. In McClure's terms, it is not simply that a strictly historicist approach is impossible, but that the kerygmatic and mimetic aspects are just as muted as the historicist by what has been forgotten of the Christian inheritance.

Social memory processes are always at work; so where the Christian memory no longer figures prominently other memories are supported by the action of whatever groups have replaced that experience formerly provided via the local church. If, in Terdiman's (1993) evocative phrase, memory is 'the present past', the past now made present has less and less connection with the remembrance of the Christian faith expressed through Christian institutions and practices. This state of affairs can only be made worse by reluctance on the part of Christians to admit the crucial importance of tradition in faith. Hervieu-Léger's observation that religious symbols are now free-floating and not dependent on institutions of believing (2000: 127) presents very particular difficulties to a role like that of preaching which is exercised within those very institutions of believing. As Hervieu-Léger also observes, this change in the social frameworks of symbols does not mean that they are thereby entirely free of institutional linkages. Instead, other institutions, such as retailers, museums, and the nostalgia industry have become 'holders' of what was previously held by religion. The contemporary preacher has, therefore, to negotiate these changed linkages in order to re-establish connections now severed. As was argued in chapter six, this is not about making the Christian faith relevant to contemporary life, but rather about critically addressing changed memory frameworks in ways such that 'thinking out of the tradition' of the Christian faith can be heard anew. The contemporary preacher must be not only a memory manager within the church, but also a memory critic within the wider structures and discourses of society. Halbwachs' account of the conflicted nature of religious memory resonates with the changed dynamics of religious expression. The difficulties and pressures of such criticism cannot be avoided.

Again, Ward in his book *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (2005), makes a connection between cultural hermeneutics and social critique that is apposite to this aspect of the preacher's task. He says it is impossible to begin with a reading of culture, of 'the signs of the times', without already being implicated in a cultural production. There is, he maintains, no outside of cultural production where the critic can stand. Furthermore, the interpretations the critic employs are always governed by what is available and

what is recognized as legitimate (2005:62). The preacher as memory critic works with similar boundaries. There is no ‘outside’ of collective memory from which to assess how collective memories are operating. Instead, the complexities and subtleties of divergent memories, and how they are socially supported can only be teased out from within the orbit of social memory. That social memory mechanisms continuously operate within every discourse must be the rhetoric of memory work in every circumstance. As Ricoeur disarmingly puts it, ‘We have nothing better than our memory to assure ourselves of the reality of our memories’ (2004:2 78).

7.10 Preaching as re-membering.

O my God, profound, infinite complexity, what a great faculty memory is, how awesome a mystery! It is the mind, and this is nothing other than my very self. What am I, then, O my God? What is my nature? It is teeming life of every conceivable kind, exceeding and vast. See, in the measureless plains and vaults and caves of my memory, immeasurably full of countless kinds of things which are there either through their images (as with material things), or by being themselves present (as in the knowledge acquired through a liberal education), or by registering themselves and making their mark in some indefinable way (as with emotional states which the memory retains even when the mind is not actually experiencing them, although whatever is in the memory must be in the mind too)—in this wide land I am made free of all of them, free to run and fly to and fro, to penetrate as deeply as I can, to collide with no boundary anywhere. So great is the faculty of memory, so great the power of life in a person whose life is tending toward death! What shall I do, then, O my God, my true life? I will pass beyond this faculty of mine called memory, I will pass beyond it and continue resolutely toward you, O lovely Light. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 10, chapter 17. (Augustine, 1997a: 254).

Augustine's treatment of memory in books ten and eleven of *The Confessions* associates it closely with a sense of time and interiority. He speaks there of three tenses of the present. Since neither the past nor the future exists it cannot be true that there are three times, past, present and future. Instead, he refers to the present of the past which is memory, the present of the future which is anticipation, and the present of the present which is observation (Augustine, ET by Wills, 2002: 211). Human beings are caught in the constantly eroding present tense, but the Christian is also aware that eternity obtrudes on that present. In eternity there is neither past nor present, yet eternity determines both past and present (Long, 2009: 45). It is as if the things of eternity are constantly disarrayed because the present's connection to it is all the time decaying. This discordance is made known to the human soul through memory. This is not to be understood as pushing God, as it were, out of any relationship with time into a disconnected sphere of timelessness. Augustine's distinction between God creating the world 'with time' (*cum tempore*) as against 'in time' (*in tempore*) used in this context directs the preacher to remember that God remembers without turning either to anthropomorphism or abstractions. It is not so much a comment on the difficulties of relating time and eternity as a plea to keep close to a godly prolepticism that is always mindful of God's promises in Scripture.

According to Augustine, memory is vast in the scope of the things it contains, and awesome in the way it also allows access to intelligible ideas. This vast power of memory is the power of mind—for mind and memory are one and the same (Wills, 2002: 53). Here, according to Ricoeur (2004: 94), begins the long tradition of interiority or inwardness that has so profoundly coloured both Christian thought and the Western intellectual tradition. Augustine's usage finds its source in his own experience of conversion. It should not be assumed, however, that Augustine's sense of his own inner realm can be identified with modern notions of identity, self-consciousness, and subjectivity. To suggest otherwise would be wholly anachronistic—a point that Ricoeur (2004) stresses again and again. Augustine is, rather, making the point that—in contradistinction to an Aristotelian explanation of time's passing wholly based on cosmic motion—time in his view is measured in the mind. This has a bearing on the notion of

collective memory since Augustine's view is not a rejection of public time as such, but a relating of it to his own remembering. In Ricoeur's interpretation of Augustine this is seen as a conciliation 'between the time of the soul and the time of the world' (2004: 101). Ricoeur goes on to wonder whether a similar relationship cannot be applied to current concerns about individual memory and collective memory. If that suggestion is appropriately translated into an insistence on holding together memory's interiority and its social frameworks in order to serve a continuing remembrance that profoundly touches both the individual and the world, then it describes what preaching as memory work is about.

In a social environment where discordance is all too apparent the preacher struggles to be heard as a voice of eternal verities. So much conspires towards a forgetfulness of the memory from which that voice speaks, and to which that voice gives enabling testimony. Yet the preacher still speaks: turning this way and that, between text, memory and world; striving, in a largely amnesic society to create something out of whatever materials come to hand; trying to shape in words that generative drive that is tradition's gift; and exemplifying in that trying what is the calling of every believer—to live in the memory of Christ. In the words of Augustine, the preacher prays:

[Lord,] you have honoured my memory by making it your dwelling-place.

Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.25

(Augustine, 1997a: 261)

Chapter Eight

Summation

8.1 An original and innovative correlation of collective memory theory and homiletics.

This thesis has dealt with a unique area of enquiry within an otherwise crowded topic of discourse. As this thesis has had frequent cause to note, the issue of social memory and all that flows from it is widely discussed and debated in all sorts of arenas. How memory should be appropriately handled and a sense that memory is somehow weakening are matters of intense speculation amongst academics and the public alike. It is not an exaggeration to say that ours is a society obsessed by memory and the fear of its loss. Memory related issues are constantly rehearsed in the popular press on topics as diverse as false memory syndrome; the last living witnesses to significant past events; the manipulation of memories by the powerful; nostalgia generated fashion; the relation of human memory to electronic memory; and, repeatedly perceived failures to learn from the past. The variety evident in popular discourse is no less evident in academic discussion. In disciplines as wide ranging as historiography, literary theory, New Testament studies, cultural analysis, semiotics, brain science, sociology, politics, and social psychology there are innumerable recent publications. In particular, the inter-subjective, variable, and disputational qualities subsumed in the concept of collective or social memory has prompted an enormous output of scholarly research and debate in recent years.

Wherever collective memory, or associated variations drawing on the idea but designated differently (such as cultural or social memory), is seriously examined, the name of Maurice Halbwachs will almost certainly be mentioned. What strikes the reader, however, is that time and again 'mentioned' is literally all that the reference to Halbwachs amounts to. In recent publications in English, Halbwachs is often cited as the originator of the concept of collective memory, but

his ideas about its processes are rarely analysed as such (Middleton and Brown's *The Social Psychology of Experience* (2005) being a notable and praiseworthy exception to this generalization). Similarly, at the time of writing only one doctoral level thesis in English focussing on Halbwachs has been undertaken, and that more than a generation ago by Susan Vromen (1975). It might have been supposed that the publication of English translations of *La mémoire collective* and *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* with *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte*, in 1980 and 1992 respectively, would have prompted further close engagement, but that does not seem to have been the case. Certainly the sociologist Lewis Coser, editor and translator of the second volume, intended that his efforts would lead to Halbwachs' work being examined in depth (Halbwachs, 1992: 28). Coser notes that, near the time of the book's publication, studies of various associated topics such as memory across generations, artistic reputation, and the recovery of the memory of Masada in Israel had been published, and he took that as a harbinger of what was to come. In terms of the ubiquity of the concept of collective memory and its application and development he was correct, but in terms of the specifics of Halbwachs' ideas, he was not.

This thesis has sought to be a contribution towards redressing that omission by examining in detail the processes of collective memory identified by Halbwachs. The purpose here, however, is not so much to advance Halbwachs' conception of collective memory as a sociological theory, but rather to ask questions of his theory when its power is explicitly acknowledged in a particular social practice. The argument offered here is presented as an application of Halbwachs' perspective in relationship to the dominant themes of recent homiletic theory and the context in which those themes have arisen. In the examination of that relationship it brings to the practice of preaching an original way of assessing its possibilities and purposes in contemporary society. Although collective memory is a subject of increasing interest in biblical studies, its extension into practical theology is as yet significantly underdeveloped. Again, this thesis has sought to take steps in the direction of a theology of preaching practice recreated as an informed and purposeful mnemonic rhetoric. Its intention has been a re-

conceptualization of what Christian preaching is about in order that homiletics can both vigorously draw from and sustain the tradition of faith.

The ultimate goal of this thesis is to offer resources that might sustain and re-enliven preachers in a time when their craft is socially undervalued. As such, it has not aimed to be a dispassionate and distanced account of preaching as an observed religious practice, but rather an analysis arising from a committed practitioner's own practice. Effort has been made to ensure that that prior commitment has not been allowed to blunt either the rigor of the analysis or the depth of the argument. The discomfiting realities of the decay of inherited traditions and the memories that go with them have been frankly acknowledged. Indeed, those pressing present concerns have enabled the identification of a creative dynamic between those very concerns and the collective memory that it is has been argued preaching should primarily serve. The dominical command to remember, understood as collective remembering, becomes an imaginative construal or re-construal of memories that meet present needs even as they are born of ancient traditions. The generative power of tradition enables it to answer collective memory's presentist pressure without losing the connection to a living heritage of faith. What this thesis advocates is an intentional deployment of that dynamic in preaching.

It is perhaps the case that the relative neglect amongst English speaking scholars of Halbwachs' ideas per se rests partly on the strength of his insistence on the absolutely presentist nature of collective memory. That insistence can all too easily be taken as a wholly cavalier approach to the veracity of memories, but that is not Halbwachs' intention. Similarly, another reluctance to utilize his thought directly is found in what is often taken to be his displacement of individual memory into the collective. Like Ricoeur (2004: 122), many commentators think Halbwachs has 'crossed the line' between the truth of 'no person ever remembering alone' to an indefensible position of 'no person is the authentic subject of his or her own memories'. Whilst this thesis has not attempted to defend the Halbwachsian perspective in these terms, it has made a case for recognizing that present needs and group relationships are more powerfully at work in traditions, and the memories associated with them, than is often acknowledged. What has been argued here is

that these things, and the other processes of collective memory, have a particular bearing on preaching since preaching must inevitably serve the purposes of remembering the action of God in Jesus Christ. In a canonical community such as the church, those who vocalize its tradition must, for the good of that tradition, do all that they can in the use of the canon to sustain the canon. What acknowledgement of the power of the processes of collective memory does is disclose that sustaining such 'living from' the tradition requires of preachers more than didacticism or topical and contextual relevance.

If the argument offered here has about it the unique quality intended, then it can properly be thought of as something of a prolegomena to further work. In order to suggest some possible avenues for such work this chapter now turns to a brief résumé of the structure of the argument. The intention being that this focus will, in the light of earlier content, disclose possible avenues for further enquiry.

8.2 The structure of the present argument and its possible developments.

From the very beginning this thesis has acknowledged the tension inherent in the fact that although the practice of preaching in the island of Britain is its focus, the supporting theoretical and history of preaching work comes overwhelmingly from the United States. Indeed, the establishment in 1995 of Alban Books, a UK marketing and distribution office owned by a range of American publishers especially strong in homiletical literature, has only served to strengthen that American hegemony. The particularities of collective memory processes and how they relate to the social location of religion means that a straightforward reading from American theory into British practice is less than helpful. For example, as productive as the turn to the New Homiletic has been, it is undergirded by American assumptions about the prevalence of Christian categories in hearers' pre-understanding that do not apply in Britain. The New Homileticians' inductive methodology is productive of a new seriousness of intent when it comes to sermonic design and delivery, but that serious analysis needs to be rooted in the actualities of the social environment in which preachers operate. This thesis has

aimed to serve such a purpose, and has, therefore, returned often to the ideas of the New Homileticians; but in that area of homiletic theory, as in others, a distinctively British voice needs more prominence. Recent books by Stevenson and Wright (2005), Littledale (2007), and Jolyon Mitchell (1999) are, perhaps, stirrings of a re-awakened British concern with aspects of preaching practice at a level deeper than texts of the 'how to preach' style. That said, the prevalence of homiletic theoretical studies in the United States is itself an indicator of the social location of religion in American society, and a renewed British homiletic would of necessity be of a quite different order. A closer examination of why homiletic theory has developed so strongly in the USA is a question that could fruitfully be addressed.

As the argument of this thesis turned towards the historical boundaries of its analysis the strength of both sociological and historical studies of the place of religion in British society became very apparent. Although the recent history of preaching in Britain has no contemporary account comparable with that of Davies (1963) more general questions are well served. The shift in perception that undermined the idea of the sermon as public event, identified as having taken place in the 1950s, is closely related, it was argued, to the development of electronic mass media. Browne (1976) was noted as a prescient text that directed preachers' attention to that shift at a time when most preachers were altogether more sanguine. If, these years later, Browne's call for preaching as creative art is to be advanced, much more detailed work is required on what the ever-present influence of the mass media means for such a task. An outline of some issues is included in this thesis, but there is much more to be said. In particular, judgements made at the macro-level of wide social influences need to be tested out at the micro-level of the practicalities of preaching in congregations. A pertinent extension of the present study would be a close analysis of some preaching *in situ* and over time, in order to detail the outworking of memory issues and how preachers and congregations do, or can be encouraged to, live from the tradition. The value of studying the social semiotics, and related components of congregational life evident in the burgeoning field of 'Congregational Studies' (see Cameron *et al*, (2005) and Guest *et al*, (2004)) is reinforced by the conclusions of this thesis.

From representative texts on preaching, the argument of this thesis shifted to the concept of collective memory itself. Enough has already been said here about the need to address the Halbwachs' theory directly, rather than as little more than as an aside. Some of the criticisms of Halbwachs have been examined directly and their pertinence assessed. In the case of Boyer in particular (see section 3.5.3), those criticisms have been seen as productive of a positive re-assessment of the purposefulness of tradition. This is a perspective that offers support from a surprising source for the theological emphasis on the generative nature of tradition in a later chapter (sections 6.6 and 6.7). The contemporary extension of Halbwachs' perspective by Hervieu-Léger and Davie has been assessed as disclosing issues that bear upon the topic of this thesis not apparent in other analyses. The metaphorization of religion and the widespread abandonment of authorized memory were noted as presenting particular challenges to an activity such as preaching. Of a rather more positive tone is their idea of the utopian spaces opened up by the relentless quest in contemporary society for fulfilment. Chapters six and seven of the present thesis can be seen as providing resources to enable preachers to offer something to those utopian spaces.

From memory in recent sociology of religion, the focus of the thesis then turned back to specific texts on preaching as exemplars of recurring themes in homiletic theory that have particular significance for collective memory. Those themes—psychological engagement, communicative salience, and contextual pertinence—were examined in detail as drawing attention to the importance of sermons being impactful events in their own terms, and contextual in the way they are delivered and heard. It was suggested that preachers must constantly negotiate those aspects, whilst being intentionally anamnestic and consciously productive in their imaginative use of the Christian tradition. There is, therefore, a performative aspect to preaching that is aware of the needs of collective memory. That detailed consideration of preaching as performance is absent from this thesis—an omission of which the author is all too conscious. In particular, material from Black Christian communities alert to both the significance of memory and the performative quality of preaching could only have benefited the analysis here (see Aldred (1998), and LaRue (2003) and (2009), as exemplars).

In chapter six, how preaching, when understood as consumptive production, can be theologically resourced was the issue examined. The generative nature of tradition, its appropriation by individuals and communities, and how it works towards challenging and purposeful construals of faithful living was examined through the work of a range of theologians from differing traditions. The awareness of memory work as more than recollection was seen to be profoundly rooted in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. It was suggested that, theologically, collective memory is something we inhabit before it is something that we chose or apply. Collective memory allows individuals to habituate their thinking in an ongoing stream of generative possibilities that nevertheless always retains its essential authenticity, character and direction. These qualities were seen as the consequences of the eschatological and epicletic nature of Christian tradition. From these theological considerations, the thesis returned to the processes of collective memory in order to ascertain whether the dynamics Halbwachs described can be productive for preaching. It was concluded that preaching has to, at one and the same time, contend with the decay of memories on which it is reliant and rework present memory resources so as to enable them to become collective memories. In doing so, preaching must be a ‘living from’ tradition that resources ‘living from’ tradition. Understood in this way, preaching validates the immense creativity of memory and tradition by itself being a practice of faithful living, imaginative construal, and social criticism born of tradition. If, in Hervieu-Léger’s terms, the lineage of faith is so crucial to the maintenance of faith—and this thesis has argued that it is—then preaching must consciously concern itself with sustaining the links of collective memory.

8.3 Extending the boundaries of homiletics.

In conclusion it is fitting to recall again Halbwachs’ comment about oration, made almost as an aside in the section on individual memories in *The Collective Memory*, as the intersection of collective influences. He writes:

The whole art of the orator probably consists in his [*sic*] giving listeners the illusion that the convictions and feelings he arouses within them have come not from him but from themselves, that he has only divined and lent his voice to what has been worked out in their innermost consciousness. (Halbwachs, 1980: 45)

The contention of this thesis has been that collective memory processes are at work in every gathering of Christians and in every sermon prepared, delivered, and heard. According to Halbwachs that is inevitably so, since collective memory figures in all human endeavours. His acknowledgement that the processes of that memory are often hidden means that most of the time, and in most circumstances, these things are not given a second thought. In times of serious change or conflict, however, what was previously hidden often comes to the fore with startling power. The sociology of Hervieu-Léger and Davie (and indeed of many other sociologists) indicates that this is a time of serious change for religion in Western Europe. Indeed, in terms of the Christian heritage of faith current society seems intensely forgetful. In these circumstances, this thesis has argued, those who vocalize the Christian tradition must be alert to collective memory and to their own mnemonic responsibilities in ways that can meet the challenges and needs of the times. The argument made is, therefore, an extension of collective memory theory into the theory and practice of homiletics. It is a plea for a sociologically aware preaching that can sustain the tradition from which it arose.

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