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THE INTEGRATION OF POSTMODERN VALUES AND RHETORICAL
ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

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

by
C. L. Heacock

December 2010

ABSTRACT

THE INTEGRATION OF POSTMODERN VALUES AND RHETORICAL ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY

Clint L. Heacock

Both traditional preaching theory and the listening context of the hearers have undergone radical changes within the last thirty years. Contemporary preachers no longer can assume the authority inherent in their position or preaching methods, and postmodern listeners exhibit the desire for increased diversity and points of view in sermons. This thesis will address these challenges by advancing the notion that attention to rhetorical criticism in the exegesis of biblical texts sheds new light on the nature of preaching in terms of form and function. The resulting multi-vocal and non-hierarchical leadership orientation has application for postmodern audiences.

The methodological structure of theological interpretation undergirding this thesis involves four tasks of the hermeneutical cycle adapted from Richard Osmer's approach. This approach engages in the task of contextual interpretation that connects with both Christian tradition and Scripture, and furthermore leads to the construction of a pragmatic plan for future homiletics.

Chapter 1 introduces the problem facing contemporary homileticians: the changed context of preacher and hearer. The chapter advocates that one way forward for preaching involves the use of rhetorical criticism as the exegetical basis for a values-based homiletic, and then finishes with an overview of the thesis chapters. Chapter 2 demonstrates the fourfold task of the hermeneutical cycle by establishing the provenance of the method, critiquing it and grounding the approach of the thesis in the contemporary postmodern setting. Chapter 3 engages in a contextual interpretation of historic shifts in the fields of rhetoric, biblical studies and homiletics, analyzing and evaluating these trends. The chapter concludes by constructing a pragmatic plan for future biblical studies, a rhetorical-critical-narratological methodology that will be applied to the text of Ezekiel. Chapter 4 demonstrates that a contextual interpretation, evaluation and analysis of the New Homiletic results in the formation of a values-based approach to preaching and leadership orientation that is appropriate to postmodernity.

Chapter 5 builds upon a contextual interpretation of synchronic and diachronic methodologies and advances a complementary approach to exegesis. The chapter then applies the rhetorical-critical-narratological approach developed in Chapter 3 to the discourse of Ezekiel to establish its contextual and rhetorical situation. The chapter then engages in a close rhetorical-critical-narratological reading of the literary unit of Ezekiel 15. Chapter 6 engages in a contextual interpretation and evaluation of three Ezekiel commentaries and sermons from Ezekiel 15, locating them along the pendulum-like series of shifts identified within Chapter 3. Chapter 7 demonstrates the integration of biblical studies and homiletics with the production of a sample multiple point-of-view sermon based upon the exegesis of Ezekiel conducted in Chapter 5. The chapter critiques the sermon and provides an example of the rhetorical-critical method applied to a discursive genre from 1 Corinthians 4.18-5.13. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by reviewing the contributions made by the study, proceeds to interpret contextually the challenge of postmodern homiletics, and finishes with recommendations for areas of future studies outside the scope of the thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

TEXT AND SERMON: CONTEMPORARY HOMILETICS

From the time of Augustine until the late nineteenth century, Christian preaching has placed its major emphasis upon “the authority, formation, and holiness of the one who is appointed to preach.”¹ The preacher traditionally served as the central focus of the action, both speaking and finishing the sermon for the hearers. The task of the congregation was simply to hear the sermon, and the test of its value lay in what was heard.² Conventional forms of preaching, viewing listeners as passive recipients of the sermon, reflected the authority inherent within the institution of the church, its ordained clergy or the Scriptures.³ The intonation and manner of the preacher nonverbally conveyed a clearly discernible authoritarianism, and the form and movement of the sermon also verbally reinforced the authority of the preacher.⁴

Emerging from the period of the Enlightenment and into the early twentieth century, contemporary traditional homiletics “attempted to offer an understanding of Christian faith that was consistent with Enlightenment presuppositions concerning truth.”⁵ Displacing the earlier concept of preaching as persuasive rhetoric, such homiletical forms attempted to convey “the clear, logical, and rational presentation of ideas derived from the gospel.”⁶ These time-honoured preaching forms involved the preacher stating a proposition drawn from Scripture, demonstrating the validity of that proposition through a variety of rhetorical strategies and finally restating and applying the initial proposition.⁷

In order to overcome the chasm between the ancient world and the contemporary context, preachers utilized historical-critical exegetical methods to abstract timeless truths, framing a theological proposition from the text or the world behind the text.⁸ These truths were then applied “to the concrete situation of the contemporary congregation.”⁹ The sermon thus functioned as a conduit bridging the historical-cultural gap between the original recipients of Scripture and the world of

¹ Lischer, *Theories of Preaching*, 3.

² Van Harn, *Preacher Can You Hear Us?* 11.

³ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵ Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism,” 35.

⁶ Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 200.

⁷ Duck, *Finding Words for Worship*, 51.

⁸ Farris, “Limping Away,” 362. He notes that “the role of careful historical-critical exegesis was to provide a tested and defensible proposition from the particular text for the particular sermon” (361).

⁹ Spears, “The Theological Hermeneutics,” 3; Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 88-96.

the contemporary situation of the congregation.¹⁰ In order to deliver such sermons these approaches utilized rhetorically applied exegesis, thereby turning the biblical text into aggregates of authoritative and preachable passages.¹¹ Preachers favoured such deductive and propositional forms as the most effective way to preach the unadulterated Word of God to a congregation.¹² Listeners of these linear, propositional and deductive sermon forms faced only two possibilities: they could either accept or reject the interpretative conclusion at which the preacher had previously arrived through careful exegesis.¹³

Within the last three decades homileticians have engaged in a variety of critiques of these traditional exegetical and homiletical approaches. Critics have demonstrated that historical-critical methods were neither neutral nor free from ideological bias. Therefore, preachers could no longer be certain of a “nonintrusive viewing of the text in its own historical milieu.”¹⁴ Moreover, homileticians have noted that traditional exegetical approaches fundamentally altered the nature of both the communication and rhetorical accomplishments of biblical forms and genres. Such approaches analyzed a particular biblical form to ascertain its meaning, dispensed with that form and subsequently stated its message as a proposition.¹⁵ The task of restating a biblical text as a proposition regardless of its form or genre built upon the presupposition that rhetoric could be divided into separate considerations of content and form of expression.¹⁶

Virtually at the same time homileticians were critiquing traditional preaching methods, the “listening context” of the hearers of sermons also experienced radical change. Celebrating diversity and demanding increased tolerance for multiple points of view, postmodern thought since the 1960s has brought about the breaking of the binding force of traditional ecclesiastical authorities.¹⁷ Certainly since the turbulent

¹⁰ Long, “The Use of Scripture,” 341.

¹¹ Farley, *Practicing Gospel*, 83, 98.

¹² Miller, *The New England Mind*, 328.

¹³ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 36.

¹⁴ Long, “The Use of Scripture,” 342; Farris, “Limping Away,” 361. Farris notes that whilst these methods enhanced knowledge of the biblical world and the origins of its texts, oftentimes they were speculative and irrelevant for the task of preaching.

¹⁵ Long, “The Use of Scripture,” 16.

¹⁶ Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 16. Chapter 3 will develop further the impact of the Ramistic divisions of rhetoric into the categories of dialectics and stylistics. Craddock notes that “wherever this assumption exists, almost invariably content is on the inside and style is on the outside; content is essential and form is accessory, optional” (16).

¹⁷ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 20. Chapter 2 will engage in a discussion of postmodernism in terms of both a philosophical and sociological understanding of the term.

1960s era within Western cultures, traditionally accepted authority figures no longer gain automatic acceptance.¹⁸ Furthermore, contemporary preachers can no longer rely upon the authority inherent within their position as clergy, the institution of the church itself, the Scriptures or particular exegetical methods.¹⁹ Communicators committed to biblical preaching currently face the reality that within Western societies the Bible no longer serves as a basic point of reference.²⁰ Preachers are increasingly preaching to people who have minimal knowledge of Christ, the Scriptures, church history, doctrine or tradition.²¹

Within this contemporary situation, the inherited language used within churches may not be able to express the realities that people currently experience.²² Such expressions of reality will most likely not be located within the words, propositions and carefully reasoned arguments of traditional preaching forms based upon propositional revelation and didactic portions of Scripture.²³ The task facing contemporary churches involves identifying and addressing the variety of cultural accretions that ultimately “hide the gospel behind forms of thought and modes of expression that no longer communicate with the new generation, the emerging generation.”²⁴

The liberating movement away from deductive, linear and propositional sermons has led to the exploration of inductive, evocative and transformational preaching forms. These new homiletical styles attempt to elevate the role of the listener from passive recipients to active participants.²⁵ Contemporary preaching theory explores this situation, emphasizing a growing awareness of how people listen to a sermon.²⁶ Postmodern and emerging congregations desire active participation rather than passivity, embracing collaborative preaching styles that do not close down interpretative options but rather open up the Word so that listeners can interactively participate in the making of meaning.²⁷ One such possibility involves multi-vocal and multi-perspectival preaching that listens to and honours various stories in their

¹⁸ Troeger, “Emerging New Standards,” 118.

¹⁹ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 46; Dickson, “Creative Tensions,” 4.

²⁰ Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching*, 38.

²¹ Lind, “Alpha, Omega, and Everything in Between,” 71.

²² Troeger, “Emerging New Standards,” 117.

²³ Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching*, 40.

²⁴ Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 12.

²⁵ Smith, “Preaching,” 91.

²⁶ Duck, *Finding Words for Worship*, 46-47.

²⁷ Craddock, *Preaching*, 195; Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 36; Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 31; and Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 84.

diversity. Such participatory preaching forms potentially engage hearers and enable them to make connections with their lives.²⁸ Open-ended sermons do not state their points in so many words, thereby allowing the listeners to draw their own conclusions. Sermon form, therefore, is an essential component in the task of enabling listeners to participate actively in the communication event of preaching.²⁹

Within the past three decades, the issue of the relationship of biblical form to sermon form has become a major issue within homiletics. In the early 1970s, Fred B. Craddock's critique of deductive preaching "awakened interest among homileticians in the rhetorical genre or form of the biblical text."³⁰ This concept fit neatly with the rising interest in biblical rhetorical criticism advocated by James Muilenburg in his 1968 Society for Biblical Literature address. At that time, Muilenburg called for critics to pay attention to issues of form, genre, literary structures and patterns of the biblical text.³¹ Although Craddock's *New Homiletic* brought about a surge of interest in the literary forms of biblical texts, he did not specifically utilize rhetorical criticism as his exegetical basis. Moreover, homileticians did not conscientiously adopt literary-critical methods as an exegetical basis for preaching, but were impacted to a greater degree by narrative theologies.³²

In recent years, homileticians have attempted to utilize rhetorical criticism for preaching. For example, in a 1996 article³³ Koptak advanced the notion that rhetorical criticism can serve as an effective exegetical basis for preaching. However, the homiletical example arising from his rhetorical-critical study demonstrates little relationship between the form of the biblical text and that of the sermon. The sermon utilizes third-person explanatory language speaking about the text and makes no

²⁸ Duck, *Finding Words for Worship*, 48.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁰ Farris, "Limping Away," 363. Long indicates that homileticians had been critiquing idea-based sermon forms for decades, and those attacks increased in the 1950s and 1960s. However, with the publication of Craddock's *As One Without Authority* in 1971, "a direct hit was scored... This little book, which represents an early phase in Craddock's homiletical thought, still stands as one of the most important and influential books on preaching written in the last century" (Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 102).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 364. Muilenburg stated that his interest was "in understanding the nature of Hebrew literary composition, in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or prose, and in discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated into a unified whole. Such an enterprise I should describe as rhetoric and the methodology as rhetorical criticism" (Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," 57).

³² *Ibid.*, 364.

³³ Koptak, "Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible," 26-37. Koptak uses a method of rhetorical criticism to analyze the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, and then provides a sample sermon of his treatment of the text.

attempt to replicate either the rhetorical dynamics or multivalent nature of the biblical text.³⁴ This thesis maintains, therefore, that rhetorical-critical methodology has not been completely explored as a possible way forward to address the challenges raised by preaching in a postmodern context.

This thesis will advance the notion that attention to rhetorical criticism in the exegesis of biblical texts can shed new light on the nature of preaching in terms of form and function. Adopting the stance that proclamation is a normal and natural outcome of exegesis,³⁵ this thesis will integrate biblical studies and homiletics by demonstrating that the rhetoric of preaching can be as varied as the rhetoric of scriptural genres and forms.³⁶ This thesis will demonstrate that rhetorical criticism serves as a useful exegetical basis in order to accomplish this task. Scripture involves polyvalent, multidimensional sets of writings that lead to the potential of multiple interpretations. Accordingly, this new paradigm of preaching “will give way to a multivalent use of Scripture.”³⁷ The multi-vocal preaching form and non-hierarchical congregational leadership orientation resulting from this study will potentially form an approach that has applicability for postmodern audiences, who evince a desire for the particularity of various positions and points of view.³⁸ Jost, for example, notes that the polyvalent nature of OT texts corresponds to the challenge offered by the pluralistic postmodern paradigm. The preacher can incorporate the various, and sometimes competing, points of view found within the OT without attempting to reconcile them.³⁹

In terms of methodology the thesis will utilize an adaptation of Richard Osmer’s fourfold tasks of the hermeneutical cycle⁴⁰ in order to construct a measured and pragmatic plan for future homiletics that has application for postmodern

³⁴ Ibid., 35-37.

³⁵ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 98.

³⁶ Ibid., 45.

³⁷ Farley, *Practicing Gospel*, 92; Willimon, “Postmodern Preaching,” 109.

³⁸ Kynes, “Postmodernism,” 2.

³⁹ Jost, “Preaching the Old Testament,” 39. The approach taken in this thesis to the text of Ezekiel 15 embodies just such an approach by offering a multiple-point-of-view sermon without seeking reconciliation or application for the listener. This approach mirrors the rhetorical dynamics of the unit itself, which does not demonstrate whether or not Ezekiel was successful in achieving the goals Yahweh set for him in delivering this particular oracle to the exilic audience.

⁴⁰ In chapter 1 of his work *Practical Theology*, Osmer utilizes the term “pastoral cycle” to distinguish his four steps of theological interpretation. For him this is a hermeneutical task, as he builds upon the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer in order to construct his approach. Therefore as this thesis engages in the task of theological interpretation, it will consistently use the term “hermeneutical cycle” rather than the “pastoral cycle.” Chapter 2 will engage in a contextual interpretation regarding the provenance of this cycle in greater detail.

audiences. This thesis will demonstrate the movement of that cycle in its chapters, moving from contextual interpretation to analysis, evaluation and the formation of a pragmatic plan. The contextual nature of the methodology will allow the thesis to enter into a conversation with voices from church history, the contemporary world and Scripture.⁴¹

This thesis will demonstrate an interdisciplinary approach to the contexts of both academic and ministry settings, emphasizing the interconnectedness between the two disciplines. This cross-disciplinary methodology will allow the thesis to eliminate the sharp divisions that oftentimes have been formed between these disciplines as a result of increasing academic specialization.⁴² Furthermore, since preachers address people not as individuals but as persons within a communal context,⁴³ the approach of this thesis will underscore the interconnectedness of the congregation and its wider societal context.⁴⁴

Thesis Chapters

Chapter 2 will establish the methodological approach of the thesis by utilizing the four tasks of Osmer's hermeneutical cycle model. The chapter will engage in a discussion related to the provenance, methodology and critiques of the hermeneutical cycle, thus locating the approach of this thesis within the contemporary landscape of theological reflection models. The chapter will advance the notion that the church in the Western tradition currently exists in a state of liminality, caught in a marginal position between the shifts from late modernity to postmodernism,⁴⁵ and that the measured response of this thesis serves as a potential way forward for biblical studies and homiletics.

Chapter 3 will construct a pragmatic plan for future biblical studies based upon a contextual interpretation that analyzes the evolutionary nature of preaching from within Christian tradition. This will be accomplished by constructing a descriptive overview of the intrinsic and historic relationship between the disciplines of classical rhetoric, biblical studies and preaching. Such a study will establish as well as interpret three examples of the tendency to separate theory from practice in

⁴¹ Allen, "Preaching as Mutual Critical Correlation," 7; Graham, Walton and Ward, *Theological Reflection*, 1.

⁴² Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 15; Dickson, "Creative Tensions," 5.

⁴³ Eslinger, *Pitfalls of Preaching*, 2.

⁴⁴ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 1; Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 15.

⁴⁵ Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation*, 26-27.

preaching, and further will illustrate subsequent reactionary movements to this trend. Based upon this contextual interpretation, the chapter will conclude by developing a pragmatic plan for future biblical studies. Such an approach will involve a measured rather than reactionary response to the trends identified earlier within the chapter by constructing an integrated rhetorical-critical-narratological exegetical methodology.

Chapter 4 will advance the goals of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by demonstrating that a contextual interpretation of the New Homiletic can result in the formation of a values-based homiletical approach applicable to postmodernity. Interacting with the tasks of the hermeneutical cycle, the chapter will begin by utilizing the systematic information-gathering process in order to demonstrate that a variety of cultural and intellectual shifts identified in Chapter 3 contributed to the formation of the New Homiletic. The chapter then will then investigate other derivative homiletical models that arose from the New Homiletic, and will note its current status. In order to establish the conceptual basis for its values-based homiletic, this section will analyze and critique various strengths and weaknesses of the normative practices of Craddock's New Homiletic.

Based upon this contextual interpretation, the chapter will engage the final task of the hermeneutical cycle in order to construct a pragmatic plan of action by constructing a values-based homiletical approach. The chapter will advance the notion that certain recovered values of Craddock's New Homiletic can be employed in the formation of a multi-vocal and non-hierarchical preaching form that is applicable to postmodernity. Based upon the rhetorical-critical-narratological exegetical method advanced in Chapter 3, the values-based approach to preaching will allow preachers to open up biblical texts interpretatively by allowing the variety of indigenous literary biblical forms to impact the structure and rhetoric of the sermon. The formation of the values-based homiletic in Chapter 3 will advance the goal of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by demonstrating the convergence between historical theology and the current need for revitalization in the preaching ministry within an increasingly postmodern cultural context.

Chapter 5 will apply the rhetorical-critical-narratological exegetical approach developed in Chapter 3 to the discourse of Ezekiel, illustrating the goal of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by demonstrating the natural movement from

exegesis to proclamation.⁴⁶ The chapter will demonstrate that a contextual interpretation of the contemporary landscape of approaches to biblical studies can lead to the development of a pragmatic plan for exegetical approaches. Such a complementary approach will utilize elements from both diachronic and synchronic readings, and avoids the charge of lazy eclecticism by thoughtfully engaging with elements from both diachronic and synchronic methodologies.⁴⁷

The chapter will begin its study of Ezekiel by first analyzing the outer framework of the contextual situation of the discourse. Utilizing both synchronic and diachronic approaches, the study will clarify the genre of the discourse as a monologic first-person autobiographical presentation of the character-narrator Ezekiel. The assessment of the rhetorical situation of Ezekiel will begin by engaging in a critical modification of Bitzer's model of the rhetorical situation. Utilizing this modified understanding, the study will analyze Ezekiel and establish that not one but two rhetorical situations exist within the discourse, and will discuss the implications of such an observation. The study of the rhetorical situation will clarify issues related to the competing interpretations of the exigence, putative versus actual audience, and finally the constraints utilized by Yahweh the rhetor in order to influence the exilic audience to adopt his interpretation of the exigence. Finally, the section will conclude its discussion of the outer framework by analyzing the overall effectiveness of the discourse in achieving its rhetorical goals. The resulting study of the outer framework of the discourse will demonstrate that the discourse itself displays an open-ended structure, and that this rhetorical form will influence the rhetoric of the sermon in Chapter 7.

Following the development of the contextual situation, the chapter will next narrow the focus of the study by developing a close, rhetorical-critical-narratological reading of Ezekiel 15 that builds upon the work of Daniel Block and Michael V. Fox. Block's approach seeks to articulate the rhetorical function of prophetic texts and their impact upon the audience, whilst Fox adds narratological elements to the task of rhetorical criticism in the effort to understand the suasive functions of the text apart from structural and stylistic matters.⁴⁸ The study will articulate the persuasive function of the literary unit by integrating narratology to the task of rhetorical

⁴⁶ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 98.

⁴⁷ Joyce, "First Among Equals?" 17.

⁴⁸ See Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 11; and Fox, "The Rhetoric of Ezekiel's Vision," 1.

criticism, following the five-step rhetorical-critical methodology advanced in Chapter 3. The first step will establish the boundaries of the literary unit, and the second step will analyze the rhetorical situation of the unit as located within the first rhetorical situation previously established. The third step will add narratology by analyzing the stance of the rhetor and clarifying voice hierarchies within the unit. The fourth step will demonstrate the variety of rhetorical strategies Yahweh the rhetor employs within the unit, and the fifth will conclude the study by discussing the effectiveness of the literary unit in achieving its rhetorical goals.

The results of the study will demonstrate that Yahweh the rhetor employed the character-narrator Ezekiel to deliver an oracle to his actual exilic audience. Yahweh will draw upon the rhetorical strategies of analogy, innovation and tradition by comparing the vinestock to legitimate lumber from trees of the forest. The study will demonstrate how Yahweh's quasi-argument advances through a series of rhetorical questions, and will lead to the inexorable conclusion that just as the vinestock had been deemed worthless upon the grounds of utilitarian uselessness, so also would the Jerusalemites face certain judgement based upon the grounds of their unfaithfulness to Yahweh. The study will discuss the implications of this strategy, which potentially could lead the actual exilic audience to question their future faithfulness to Yahweh in light of the impending doom of the Jerusalemites. Subsequent to this analysis of the unit, the chapter will conclude by drawing dynamic equivalents between both historic and contemporary audiences, thereby illustrating the utility of the rhetorical-critical-narratological methodology for contemporary homiletical applications.

Following the exegetical treatment of Ezekiel, Chapter 6 will engage in a contextual interpretation of three major Ezekiel commentaries and three sermons based upon the unit of Ezekiel 15. The purpose of this analysis and evaluation will allow the chapter to engage in a conversation with prior treatments of the book from the perspective of biblical studies and homiletics,⁴⁹ and will locate both commentaries and sermons along the pendulum-like continuum of shifts identified within Chapter 3. The contextual nature of the evaluation of the commentaries of Zimmerli, Greenberg and Block will demonstrate that Ezekiel studies in general have been influenced by various cultural, intellectual and hermeneutical shifts. The chapter will show that the three major phases of Ezekiel studies correspond with post-nineteenth century

⁴⁹ Allen, "Preaching as Mutual Critical Correlation," 7.

uncritical readings of the book, early- to mid-twentieth century increasingly radical historical-critical treatments of the text, and current readings of Ezekiel that view the work as a literary unity whilst not discounting its literary genesis.

The evaluation of the commentaries will involve a discussion of various areas of continuity and discontinuity between the approaches of the commentators and that of this thesis. This analysis will locate the approach of this thesis within the third phase of current Ezekiel studies, and furthermore that the complementary approach developed within Chapter 5 will serve as a potential way forward for biblical studies by avoiding the charge of lazy eclecticism.

Following the contextual interpretation of the Ezekiel commentaries, the chapter will engage in a contextual interpretation and evaluation of the normative task of preaching by analyzing three sermons based upon Ezekiel 15 from Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, and Chuck Smith. The chapter will illustrate the variety of influences upon their preaching by contextually interpreting each sermon, analyzing and evaluating the exegetical approaches and rhetorical strategies adopted by each preacher. This contextual evaluation of the rhetorical and exegetical influences upon each preacher will lend credence to the observation in Chapter 3 that the genre of preaching experiences continual evolution for a variety of reasons. As a measured response to this trend, this thesis will address the challenges preaching faces within an increasingly postmodern societal context by placing homiletics in an anticipatory rather than reactionary stance for future congregational leadership and preaching.

Chapter 7 will demonstrate the culmination of the goal of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by exhibiting a sample sermon based upon the literary unit of Ezekiel 15. This multi-vocal sermon will draw upon the values-based homiletic advanced in Chapter 3 by allowing the rhetoric of biblical forms to influence the rhetoric of the sermon. Furthermore, the sermon will illustrate the exegetical results of the rhetorical-critical-narratological study of the discourse of Ezekiel, as well as the close reading of Ezekiel 15 in Chapter 5. The clarification of voice hierarchies, rhetorical situation, stance of the rhetor and resulting potential implications for the hearers will influence the multiple-point-of view form of the sermon. The sermon form will illustrate the open-ended nature of the discourse itself by evaluating the results of the rhetorical strategies of the unit from the points of view of Ezekiel the character-narrator, the exiles and Yahweh the rhetor. Such a multi-

vocal sermonic form will potentially increase the engagement and ownership on the part of the hearers and by its very nature will encourage a non-hierarchical and collaborative roundtable discussion format. The results of the sermon will illustrate that attention to rhetorical criticism in the exegesis of biblical texts sheds new light upon preaching forms, and will result in a multi-vocal and non-hierarchical homiletic that is applicable to postmodern audiences.

Following the sample sermon, the chapter will engage in a critique of its relative strengths and weakness. This critique will demonstrate that the multi-vocal sermon form is but one of several possibilities in which preachers could potentially engage, and will note the difficulty encountered in attempting to replicate homiletically the genre and rhetoric of Ezekiel 15. In order to demonstrate utility of the rhetorical-critical approach for homiletics from differing biblical genres, the chapter will engage in a case study of a literary unit from the discourse genre of 1 Corinthians 4.18-5.13. The study of this literary unit will follow the five-step rhetorical-critical method outlined in Chapter 4. The analysis of the unit will investigate issues related to the contextual and rhetorical situation, the variety of rhetorical strategies in the unit, the stance of the rhetor and finally the effectiveness of the unit in achieving its rhetorical goals. The chapter will conclude by advancing a variety of homiletical strategies based upon the study that demonstrate how the rhetoric of the text can influence the rhetoric of the sermon.

Chapter 8 will conclude the thesis by presenting four contributions this study has made to scholarship. The chapter will demonstrate that the thesis has contributed to scholarship by advancing a coherent method of theological interpretation that connects both with Christian tradition and Scripture. This forward-looking response will connect both the academy and the pulpit with its cross-disciplinary approach, and furthermore accentuates the interconnectedness between the life and practices of the church and that of the wider society. Additionally, the chapter will discuss the variety of contributions the thesis has made to biblical and Ezekiel studies alike. Following this discussion, the chapter will suggest three areas for further studies engendered by this project. This will involve a discussion of the future of preaching in light of its potential deconstruction and future functionality, as well as the implications of implementing increasingly multi-vocal and non-hierarchical preaching and leadership forms. Finally, the thesis will engage in a contextual interpretation concerning a variety of responses to the task of preaching in an increasingly

postmodern cultural context, and will conclude by discussing implications for the future task of the ministry of preaching.

CHAPTER TWO

THESIS METHODOLOGY: THE HERMENEUTICAL CYCLE AS A METHOD OF CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION

Introduction

This thesis builds upon the observation that both academics and congregational leaders can make use of the tasks of practical theological interpretation.⁵⁰ Taking place within the specialized academic subdisciplines of practical theology, practical theological interpretation furthermore characterizes the interpretative tasks of congregational leaders. The acknowledgement of this common structure within both the academy and in ministry fields enables practitioners of the tasks of theological interpretation to recognize the interconnectedness of ministry.⁵¹ For example, Osmer points out that the normative task of Christian preaching does not take place in a vacuum, but rather addresses a particular congregational and cultural context.⁵² In light of this observation, any attempt to formulate a coherent response to this situation must be contextual, taking into account both past and contemporary developments within the fields of biblical studies and homiletics as well as attending to the wider societal context within which the church is currently located.

This thesis will therefore engage in the task of contextual interpretation and evaluation of past and present practices located within both normative Christian tradition and biblical studies. These contextual interpretations and resulting analyses will lead to the shaping of a measured response to the shared events of the Christian community and its wider societal context.⁵³ Such a contextual theology not only demonstrates an awareness of its context, but also actively seeks to change the context.⁵⁴ Typically, received understandings of practical theological reflection tend to be under-theorized and narrow, failing to connect adequately with Scripture and historical scholarship.⁵⁵ This thesis will avoid those shortcomings by engaging with two traditional Christian sources: Christian tradition and Scripture.⁵⁶ The aim of this thesis is to integrate exegetical and homiletical theory together with practice, treating

⁵⁰ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 12, 13.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁴ Bergmann, *God in Context*, 5.

⁵⁵ Graham, Walton and Ward, *Theological Reflection*, 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7. The authors observe: "The analysis of local contexts and socio-economic factors, which theological reflection frequently requires, is often more accomplished than engagement with Church history, doctrine, and Bible" (7).

the outworking of homiletics as developed within elements adapted from Richard Osmer's pastoral or hermeneutical cycle.⁵⁷

In order to engage in the undertaking of contextually-based interpretations and evaluations, this chapter will demonstrate the structural methodology undergirding this thesis, which involves utilizing the four tasks of Osmer's hermeneutical cycle. The first task involves a descriptive systematic information-gathering that assesses both "past and present practices of the Christian tradition that provides normative guidance in shaping the patterns of the Christian life."⁵⁸ The second task concerns a contextual interpretation of those descriptive analyses attempting to make sense of the information gathered. The third task involves an evaluation of the normative tasks of biblical studies and preaching, learning from and evaluating the prior historical overview of exegetical and homiletical practices. The final task concerns the development of a pragmatic plan of action for the future, which involves an effective response to the first three processes that takes action to shape events toward desired goals.⁵⁹

The remainder of the chapter will articulate the four steps of the pastoral cycle in order to ground the approach of the thesis within contemporary approaches to theological interpretation. The critical analysis of approaches to theological reflection will demonstrate that this thesis builds upon the strength of the method to engage in the formation of a pragmatic plan. Moreover, this thesis will avoid the inherent weaknesses within such approaches to engage in superficiality by connecting with Christian tradition and Scripture. The following demonstration of the steps of the hermeneutical cycle in this chapter will enable this thesis to grasp accurately the nature of the situation faced by the Western church, which will in turn prepare the thesis to advance its response to the context by advocating its pragmatic plan of action for future homiletics and congregational leadership appropriate to postmodernity.

⁵⁷ I am adapting elements of the basic structure undergirding approaches to practical theology as laid out in Osmer's *Practical Theology* Chapter 1. Note, however, that the four are not linear, but more like a circle or spiral; the tasks interpenetrate each other, interacting and mutually influencing each other; this is what distinguishes practical theology from other theological disciplines (*Practical Theology*, 10). For a discussion of other approaches to the pastoral cycle see Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 43-54.

⁵⁸ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-10. Heitink notes that since the 1960s practical theology is no longer satisfied with its former role of applying already worked-out theology, to which it was relegated in the past, "but now identifies itself as a theological *theory of action*" (*Practical Theology*, 1, italics his).

Theological Reflection: Provenance, Methodology and Critique

Within the field of practical theology, the changes that have occurred since Schleiermacher's conception of it in the nineteenth century are well-documented and need not be repeated here.⁶⁰ Of primary importance is to note that the major shift since the eighteenth century has been a move away from "applied theology" to that of "theological reflection." The second half of the twentieth century witnessed both the recovery of the notion of the "priesthood of believers" within Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions alike, as well as the introduction of Latin American liberation theologies to Western practical theologies.⁶¹ As a result these shifts have brought about a more integrated and inductive approach to practical theology that refuses a separation between theory (or systematic theology) and practice (or pastoral studies). Current practical theology involves "a dynamic process of reflective, critical inquiry into the praxis of the church in the world and God's purposes for humanity, carried out in the light of Christian Scripture and tradition, and in critical dialogue with other sources of knowledge."⁶² The application of Schön's work in professional identity and Kolb's work in adult experiential learning has resulted in a theological curriculum that seeks to produce "reflective practitioners" that views theological discourse as a process rather than a product.⁶³

The notion of a fourfold method of theological interpretation used within this thesis is a deliberate placement "in an important tradition in sociology of knowledge and Christian social thought, which has adopted a typological approach to the diversity of expressions of theological discourse and Christian witness."⁶⁴ Although the method can trace a deeper continuity throughout history, the modern notion of the pastoral cycle developed from Roman Catholic priests in Europe between the two World Wars and was crystallized in the 1960s by liberation theologians in Latin America with the application of Marxist Christianity.⁶⁵ Currently the influence of the

⁶⁰ For an overview of pastoral/practical theology from the first century see Graham, Walton and Ward, *Theological Reflection*, 2-5; since Schleiermacher, see Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 231-241.

⁶¹ Graham, Walton and Ward, *Theological Reflection*, 3.

⁶² Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 22.

⁶³ Graham, Walton and Ward, *Theological Reflection*, 3-5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁵ Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 18; Lartey, *In Living Color*, 116; Graham, Walton and Ward, *Theological Reflection*, 171. Graham, Walton and Ward demonstrate that the notion of praxis and an authentic Christianity can be traced throughout history: from biblical roots (the Sheep and the Goats) through the writings of Gregory I in his *Book of Pastoral Rule*, the Quakers in the seventeenth century, and Kierkegaard in the nineteenth century (172-182).

method extends beyond the immediate impact of liberation theology.⁶⁶ The current consensus view involves a “pastoral cycle” hermeneutical model that generally employs four tasks depicted as a circle or spiral: experience, exploration, reflection and action.⁶⁷

The method of theological reflection this thesis will use is an adaptation of Osmer’s fourfold hermeneutical cycle, which involves the descriptive, the interpretive, the normative, and the pragmatic tasks as the basic structure of theological interpretation.⁶⁸ Osmer’s model is useful for this thesis because his approach bridges the interconnections between normative tasks of ministry such as preaching, the academy and ministry, and finally between the congregation and their wider cultural context—the “web of life” in which ministry takes place.⁶⁹ By demonstrating such integration between all four tasks of the pastoral cycle, Osmer’s approach conceptualizes the “endstates” of theological reflection and thus goes beyond task competence. His approach fosters cross-fertilization between various disciplines, ensuring that task competence is not understood in a decontextualized manner.⁷⁰

The major strength of “process” or “praxis” approaches is their rooting in the realm of the practical. Even the more theoretical study of Scripture, Christian tradition and doctrine serves this practical end. They also take seriously the experiences of the Church and its struggles throughout the centuries.⁷¹ Due to its roots in the praxis of liberation theology, such approaches have as their goal not the statement of clearer doctrine or theory but rather right action for change. Viewed in this manner, orthopraxis becomes crucial for theological engagement rather than merely formulating orthodox statements of belief with little appreciable action.⁷²

⁶⁶ Graham, Walton and Ward, *Theological Reflection*, 188.

⁶⁷ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 67; Heywood, *Divine Revelation*, 6. Originally taken from the Young Christian Workers’ “see-judge-act” model, the hermeneutics of Ricouer, and Segundo’s *The Liberation of Theology*, current adaptations on the pastoral cycle include for example Green’s method, which involves the steps of experience, exploration, reflecting, and responding (*Let’s Do Theology*, 19-25); or Lartey’s five-fold model of concrete experience, situational analysis, theological analysis, situational analysis of theology, and response (“Theological Reflection,” 133).

⁶⁸ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 12-18. In the construction of his method Osmer builds on the work of such scholars as Don Browning and his work in ethics (147-150); Miller-McLemore for her conception of the “web of life” (15-18); the leadership model of Gerkin (18-19, 24-25); and the hermeneutics of Heidigger and Gadamer (20-23).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 221-222. Here he utilizes Gardner’s conception of “endstates.”

⁷¹ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 67.

⁷² Lartey, *In Living Color*, 122.

This thesis will utilize the strengths of these approaches by advocating an eminently practical goal, which is the attempt to solve the problem of the need for a coherent theory of preaching in light of postmodern cultural shifts in the Western tradition. This will be accomplished through a contextual study based on the interpretation of normative experiences of preaching in the church, examining the historical theology of exegetical and homiletical practices. The approach is also interdisciplinary, instigating a cross-fertilized dialogue between the fields of classical rhetorical theory, biblical studies, rhetorical criticism, narratology, homiletics and historical theology. The end result is the application of a method that demonstrates a process of theological reflection, culminating in a pragmatic plan of action for future desired outcomes in the fields of exegesis, leadership and homiletics.

“Praxis” approaches also have demonstrated weaknesses. Like any model, there can be the tendency toward over-simplification and shortcuts, overvaluing method at the expense of content.⁷³ This can induce superficiality by scavenging within various other disciplines—even theological ones—“in the hope of finding appropriate themes for the reflection stage.”⁷⁴ Often theological reflection is weak in its use of the traditional Christian sources, analyzing local contexts and socio-economic factors rather than engaging the Bible and Church history.⁷⁵ This thesis will avoid the charge of superficiality and lack of content by bringing academic rigour to the various cross-disciplinary tasks of historical theology, exegesis and homiletics. Engaging both historical theology and Scripture using the hermeneutical cycle, this thesis demonstrates the ability to bring several disciplines to bear on a research subject as well as following the trend within current practical theology to move away from specialization and toward cross-disciplinary approaches.⁷⁶

Finally, one certainly must recognize that every theology has a geographical, cultural and historical context, understanding that “theological reflection is neither neutral nor universal in origin, but emerging from and reflecting its interests and authors.”⁷⁷ This thesis maintains with Green that if done with sensitivity, it is possible to construct an incarnational theology

⁷³ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 68; Lartey, “Practical Theology,” 131.

⁷⁴ Lartey, “Practical Theology,” 131.

⁷⁵ Graham, Walton and Ward, *Theological Reflection*, 7.

⁷⁶ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 236.

⁷⁷ Graham, Walton and Ward, *Theological Reflection*, 197; and Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 12-13.

...that allows for the careful critical reading of each context so that our theology can derive not from abstract assumptions, but is instead substantial, pertinent theology that speaks from, and is relevant to, real people in their specific culture, place and time.⁷⁸

The development, expansion and evolution of the hermeneutical cycle specifically within the last twenty years demonstrates that one can develop such an incarnational theology by engaging in a robust conversation with other disciplines, including theology, the arts and sciences.⁷⁹ Whilst making the move toward a theology that is firmly rooted in practice, this thesis does not attempt to obscure the need for the development of good theory. Moreover, this thesis locates itself in the movement away from the “applied theory” of foundationalist approaches and instead aligns itself within contemporary practical theologies that utilize a “practice-theory-practice” model. Such a pastoral and learning cycle better fits the learner-centred approach of a postmodern society rather than the traditional authoritative and authoritarian modes of communication in Christian education and preaching.⁸⁰

The Descriptive Task: The Church and Western Society

As one discipline within the wider field of theology, practical theology must focus on the issues of Christian life and practice within the church as well as the relationship of those practices to the wider society.⁸¹ Practical theology embraces both the interconnectedness between the Church and the societal context in which it is located. As Anderson notes, however, the application of the scientific study of biblical data in the modernist era divorced theory from practice, and biblical studies from preaching. As a result the practices of ministry became relegated to the application of skills and methods based solely upon theory.⁸² The educational pattern in most Protestant divinity schools and seminaries often continue to maintain this legacy, which has led to a focus upon increasingly specialized academic disciplines.⁸³ The resulting sharp divisions between scholarly fields and subject areas in the curriculum leads students to focus exclusively upon courses such as preaching, systematic theology, biblical studies, pastoral care or education. As a consequence many future

⁷⁸ Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 13.

⁷⁹ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 240.

⁸⁰ Heywood, *Divine Revelation*, 7.

⁸¹ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 1.

⁸² Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 18.

⁸³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 231. These are: 1) biblical studies; 2) church history; 3) dogmatic theology; and 4) practical theology.

congregational leaders are unprepared to grasp the interconnections between their particular discipline and the wider social and cultural context.⁸⁴ The ultimate outcome of this educational pattern is that congregations likewise may fail to connect ministry interaction between its own congregational system and their wider cultural environment.⁸⁵

Postmodernism and the Secularization Thesis

The notion that Western societies can be characterized as “post-Christian” or “postmodern” needs further development, especially in light of the homiletic offered within this thesis that aims to be contextual in response to cultural paradigmatic shifts. Currently many preachers still utilize a modernist approach to theological investigation, seeking to identify propositional points from texts in order to communicate theological ideas from the Bible clearly and persuasively,⁸⁶ but they increasingly find themselves preaching to audiences less and less receptive to these traditional forms. In this regard, preachers have “come to recognize that communication can be distorted by the distinct personal and social situation of the audience.”⁸⁷ How one goes about preaching in such a context is proving to be increasingly difficult.⁸⁸ According to Allen there is not a “single” way of preaching in the postmodern understanding. He states that “by definition, preaching from postmodern perspectives is multifaceted and pluralistic”.⁸⁹ The physical and social location of the preacher involves the need to be aware of the broader cultural context. For example, European or British audiences will likely evince a different set of traditions, history and expectations than that of North American audiences. This thesis seeks to formulate an approach to biblical studies and homiletics that is applicable to this shifting cultural paradigm. In order to understand this paradigm, the section below will examine postmodernity from first a philosophical and then second from a sociological point of view.

From a philosophical understanding, as a concept, mood or worldview, postmodernism is “slippery” and notoriously difficult to characterize. Docherty notes that since its inception, postmodernism was characterized by ambiguity in the writings

⁸⁴ Long, “A Crisis in Practical Theology,” 31.

⁸⁵ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 15.

⁸⁶ Allen, *Preaching and the Other*, 15.

⁸⁷ Jost, “Preaching the Old Testament,” 37.

⁸⁸ Willimon, “Peculiar Truth,” 27.

⁸⁹ Allen, *Preaching and the Other*, 2.

of Toynbee and Auerbach. Postmodernism, he believes, can be described as simply the historical period following modernism on the one hand, or on the other hand as “a desire, a mood which looks to the future to redeem the present.”⁹⁰ Specifically in terms of its reactionary tendencies, Thiselton points out that postmodernism involves the “dethronement of Enlightenment rationalism and positivism”⁹¹ in the attempt to undermine foundationalist ways of thinking. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century perceptive thinkers such as Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Marx and Freud “explored the extent to which our supposedly objective understanding of the world or God is always already affected by such factors as our education, upbringing, economic position and psychological make-up.”⁹² This led to the unmasking of the Enlightenment quest for objectivity and rational reflection as oftentimes self-deception and subjectivity in interpretation.

Postmodernism can therefore be characterized as “the critique of ideology” since “it questions the extent to which any existing understanding of the world is able to really express anything objective about how the world really is.”⁹³ This questioning of the Enlightenment quest for objectivity has resulted in a condition that seeks radically to undermine any system that declares itself to be an absolute authority on any particular subject or discipline, be it educational, political or religious. As noted earlier, as a movement reacting against Enlightenment totalizing claims to truth, postmodernity appears to resist characterization and definition as a distinct worldview.⁹⁴ Rather than defining it in the singular as a univocal and monolithic movement, postmodernism can be better described in terms of perspectives, some of which bump up against each other.⁹⁵ The undermining of traditional formulas—both substantive and methodological—has resulted in an emerging situation in both Eastern bloc and Western societies that is both complex and “qualitatively different from that which preceded it.”⁹⁶ Postmodernity is therefore becoming “the void left

⁹⁰ Docherty, “Postmodernist Theory,” 474, 476.

⁹¹ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 327

⁹² Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 9.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹⁴ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 24.

⁹⁵ Allen, *Preaching and the Other*, 16. Allen notes that for postmoderns, this condition does not pose a threat, however: “To be postmodern is also to respect difference and Otherness, to appreciate pluralism and particularity, and to recognize the social conditioning and relativity of all awareness” (15).

⁹⁶ Davie, *Religion in Britain*, 196.

with the demise of an epoch” and ultimately points to change resulting in a radically different cultural paradigm.⁹⁷

The complex situation of pluralism and secularism involves the current situation in which Christianity no longer possesses the monolithic and authoritative position it once maintained. Beyond the loss of authority from a philosophical point of view, postmodernism can be observed from a sociological perspective also. Postmodernism and its effect on the authority of the church can be pointed to in terms of cultural or structural changes that are economic and social.⁹⁸ Western societies such as contemporary Britain (and much of the Western world in the later decades of the twentieth century) have all experienced the metamorphosis from agrarian to industrial to post-industrial societies.⁹⁹ This transition from agrarian to industrial involved numerous amounts of people moving from urban to rural settings and disrupted religious life, particularly in Europe. Many sociologists observed this shift and subsequently predicted generally pessimistic views regarding the future of religion in Western society. These observations directly resulted in the formulation of the secularization thesis.¹⁰⁰

The concept of the “secularization thesis” stems from writings by sociologists in the 1950s and 1960s, but nonetheless has its roots in Enlightenment thinking. Leading Enlightenment figures in the fields of philosophy, anthropology and psychology “postulated that theological superstitions, symbolic liturgical rituals, and sacred practices are the product of the past that will be outgrown in the modern era.”¹⁰¹ Seminal nineteenth-century social thinkers such as Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Weber, Marx and Freud carried on this thought, believing “that religion would gradually fade in importance and cease to be significant with the advent of industrial society.”¹⁰² The secularization thesis, according to Berger, is simple to express in terms of its inevitability: “Modernization necessarily leads to a decline in religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals.”¹⁰³

Despite this confident stance taken by sociologists decades ago, “this thesis of the slow and steady death of religion has come under growing criticism; indeed

⁹⁷ Jost, “Preaching the Old Testament,” 36.

⁹⁸ Davie, *Religion in Britain*, 191.

⁹⁹ Davie, *Religion in Britain*, 193.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁰¹ Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, 1.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰³ Berger, “The Desecularization of the World,” 2.

secularization theory is currently experiencing the most sustained challenge in its long history.”¹⁰⁴ Berger, for example, was once a proponent of the secularization thesis, but has recanted his earlier position and now states that its key idea is fundamentally wrong. While he admits that modernization has had some secularizing effect in some places more than others, he notes that secularization has provoked some powerful counter-secularization movements. Furthermore, although certain religious organizations have lost influence and power in many societies, “both old and new religious beliefs and practices have nevertheless continued in the lives of individuals, sometimes taking new institutional forms and sometimes leading to great explosions of religious fervor.”¹⁰⁵ The world today, he believes, “is as furiously religious as it ever was.”¹⁰⁶

In this connection, Davie notes that the secularization thesis

is far from straightforward; it is complex, nuanced and at times contradictory. At its best, the debate is highly illuminating. It has, moreover, provided an effective way forward, a framework for organizing a wide range of ideas and information about religion in contemporary society, particularly in its North European forms.¹⁰⁷

In particular she notes that it “is becoming clearer almost by the day that an approach based on the concept of secularization is getting harder and harder to sustain. For not all the religious indicators are pointing in the same direction.”¹⁰⁸ She lists three factors as to why this is the case. First, within Western societies, the indices of religious belief have not dropped off in a way that previous generations of sociologists may have predicted. Second, religious controversies have not ceased to capture the public’s imagination and third, in terms of religion and government, political leaders are increasingly faced with ethical, moral and religious decisions in light of scientific advances.¹⁰⁹ Advancements in scientific technology have at the same time both solved and created societal problems, and in this connection one witnesses “the increasing tendency for politicians and other public figures to consult the religious sector about matters they know to be beyond their competence.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Berger, “The Desecularization of the World,” 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁷ Davie, *Religion in Britain*, 7.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

The debate remains far from settled as regards the secularization thesis. Norris and Inglehart maintain that to speak of the thesis as dead and buried is premature, and that the critiques of the thesis rely “too heavily on selected anomalies and focuses too heavily on the United States (which happens to be a striking deviant case).”¹¹¹ They maintain that in effect the thesis needs updating, and that in general the theory is a tendency and not an iron law of inevitability. Despite the reality that church attendance has declined in nearly all post-industrial nations in the twentieth century, and that observable trends of secularization have occurred, nonetheless the world as a whole has not become less religious. On the one hand, they note that the publics of virtually all advanced post-industrial societies “have been moving toward more secular orientations during the last fifty years.”¹¹² On the other hand the “world as a whole now has more people with traditionally religious views than ever before—and they constitute a growing proportion of the world’s population.”¹¹³

Despite these broad tendencies toward secularization within Western (and ostensibly Christian) societies, fundamental differences exist between Europe, Britain and North America. Whereas Britain and Europe have a constitutional connection between the Church and State as part of their history, the sharpest point of contrast is that the United States has no such connection.¹¹⁴ Martin notes that the United States “represents a very high degree of differentiation in that church is formally separated from state and even religion from school, and yet the overall social order is maintained by a pervasive civil religion.”¹¹⁵ This civil religion illustrates a basic Protestant tendency, yet nonetheless is one in which a psychic and social space has been created whereby a universality of experimental religion can occur. Martin observes that in the American context “major shifts become possible by individual contagion and incorporation, not structural oppositions and overturning. The transition to post-modernity and individualistic self-expression can be made by contagion.”¹¹⁶ In essence the church in the United States can be characterized as rival

¹¹¹ Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, 1-2 (parenthesis theirs).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 3. They state: “Practically all of the countries in which secularization is the most advanced, show fertility rates far below the replacement level—while societies with traditional religious orientations have fertility rates that are two or three times the replacement level. They contain a growing share of the world’s population. The expanding gap between sacred and secular around the globe has important consequences for cultural change, society, and world politics” (3).

¹¹⁴ Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case*, 3.

¹¹⁵ Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, 28.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

religious “entrepreneurs running varied religious services on a mixed laissez-faire and oligopolistic model.”¹¹⁷ The status of clergy, however, remains low although the church plays a large role in the interstices of American society.

Despite the encroachment of secularization within the post-industrial American society the level of religious activity nonetheless remains high. Even when one takes into account the regional and other variations, Davie reports that “there is still a marked difference in levels of religious activity between America and most, if not all, European countries.”¹¹⁸ This can be partially explained by the American model, which as noted above relies essentially upon competition among religious bodies for membership in order to continue sustaining themselves. This system in turn “generates energetic churches that collectively maximize the religious recruitment of a population.”¹¹⁹

As noted, Europe and Britain evince a strong relationship between the Church and the State, a situation that has dominated much of European history. Going back to the time of Constantine, these shared legacies “are deeply embedded in the European psyche, though the particular forms they have taken in later centuries vary very considerably.”¹²⁰ Europeans are the exceptional case, argues Davie, because they tend to demonstrate the concept of “vicarious religion.” Significant numbers of Europeans, she notes, “are content to let both churches and churchgoers enact a memory on their behalf... [and are] more than half aware that they might need to draw on the capital at crucial times in their individual or their collective lives.”¹²¹ As a result within British and European societies, as distinct to that of the United States, “the Church has indeed lost its role as the keystone in the arch of European culture, but no identifiable institution is emerging to take its place.”¹²²

Preachers attempting to proclaim the text of Scripture must therefore be aware of these shifting cultural paradigms in light of postmodern and post-industrial Western societies. Ballard and Pritchard point out that due to these fundamental cultural paradigm shifts one can no longer assume Christianity to be the normative expression. They maintain that “we now live in an increasingly pluralistic society in which different faiths, religious or humanistic, sit side by side in various states of co-

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 28.

¹¹⁸ Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case*, 29.

¹¹⁹ Stark, *What Americans Really Believe*, 13.

¹²⁰ Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case*, 2.

¹²¹ Ibid., 19.

¹²² Ibid., 4.

operation or competition.”¹²³ Increasingly characterized as a “post-Christian” culture, the influences and values within Western society are no longer generally aligned with Judeo-Christian values and ethics. Within this increasingly post-Christian culture, emerging generations do not have even a basic understanding of the Scriptures and are increasingly open to all types of faiths and mixtures of religions.¹²⁴ Whether tagged as post-Christian or postmodern the world is profoundly different than it was at the middle of the last century. The Western church is in the midst of a shift similar to the epochal transitions of ancient to medieval church and medieval to modern church.¹²⁵

McNeal believes that the response of many North American churches to the encroachments of postmodernism involve “heavy infusions of denial, believing the culture will come to its senses and come back around to the church.”¹²⁶ This denial manifests itself in several ways: withdrawal from the community, attempting to “fix” the culture by flexing political and economic muscle, or obsessing over internal theological-methodological debates designed to separate out true believers.¹²⁷ Moreover, as the modernist worldview that has largely been embraced by mainstream, traditional Christianity fades away, the desire for theological certitude increases. Whether in conservative or liberal traditions, this trajectory has led to a lack of vitality in ministry combined with an avoidance of engaging the contemporary culture. Brueggemann points out that “the church is so fully enmeshed in the dominant values of our culture that freedom for action is difficult.”¹²⁸

Since many Western traditional churches have bought deeply into the value system of the dominant modernist culture, they have become largely incapable of acting with intentionality both in terms of internal life and practices as well as relevant external engagement with the wider culture. When viewed from the perspective of planned leadership movement, engaging in the values-based approach to homiletics and leadership described in this thesis allows congregational leaders to act with intentionality while at the same time adopting an anticipatory leadership stance that is open to future trends and changes within both the church and the wider society.

¹²³ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 3.

¹²⁴ Kimball, *They Like Jesus*, 15.

¹²⁵ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 2.

¹²⁶ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 2.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²⁸ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 7.

Interpretive and Normative Tasks: The Activity of Preaching

Constructing a theology of preaching involves describing not only the normative practice of preaching within the church but further exploring the notion of preaching as an activity of God. Viewed in this way, a theory of preaching becomes both a practical and a dogmatic theology.¹²⁹ As a result of the profound shifts within Western society in this post-biblicist culture, preaching “no longer enjoys the honour which used to be accorded to it.”¹³⁰ Stott points out nonetheless that the task of “preaching is central and distinctive to Christianity,” a reality that has been recognized throughout the Church’s long and colourful history.¹³¹ Quicke concurs, stating that “the church’s story cannot be told without reference to its preaching. Preaching is a part of the DNA of church; it is not just a part of its high profile moments but its daily life.”¹³² Stott further maintains that the fundamental conviction supporting all Christian preaching is a solid theological foundation grounding the preacher both in terms of insights and incentives for faithful preaching.¹³³ This theological conviction involves two elements: first, the basic belief that God has spoken to the prophets, the apostles and to his Son; and second, that he continues to speak through his Spirit, “who himself bears witness to Christ and to Scripture, and makes both living to the people of God today.”¹³⁴

Adam builds upon the notion that preaching is a theological activity, asserting that it “derives its theological character from the biblical basis for all aspects of the ministry of the Word.”¹³⁵ His theology of preaching involves three elements: first, that Scripture bears witness that God has spoken; second, that certain of these words, through the process of inscripturation, have been preserved in the writings of the Old and New Testaments; and finally, that preachers are commissioned by God “to preach, teach and explain [the Scriptures] to people and to encourage and urge them to respond.”¹³⁶ As a fundamental element of the Christian religion, Stott maintains that preaching “is God’s speech which makes our speech necessary. We must speak

¹²⁹ Long, “Theology of Preaching,” 462.

¹³⁰ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 50.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹³² Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 29.

¹³³ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 92. In his view, “true Christian preaching” is biblical or expository preaching; 92.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³⁵ Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 15.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

what he has spoken. Hence the paramount obligation to preach.”¹³⁷ Adam agrees, stating that “the basis for any true human speaking for God is that God is a speaking God. Any human ministry of the Word depends on a God who is not silent.”¹³⁸

This study recognizes that a practical theology of preaching begins not with pure theory but with concrete activity, addressing the question of the relationship of theory to practice.¹³⁹ In this regard one typically has two options: theory preceding and determining practice, or practice taking priority over theory. When theory precedes and determines practice, typically practice tends to be concerned primarily with methods, techniques and strategies for ministry and thus lacks theological substance.¹⁴⁰ Conversely, when practice takes precedence over theory, ministry tends to focus on pragmatic results with little or no theoretical basis. Epistemologically, if one places theory over practice or practice over theory, this move “tends to undermine a holistic grasp of the phenomenon under investigation.”¹⁴¹ Anderson comments that

...the relation of theory to practice is no longer linear but is interactive. Theory is no longer regarded as a set of mental constructs that can exist independently of their embodiment in the physical, psychological and social structures of life. Theory and practice inform and influence each other in such a way that all practice includes theory, and theory can only be discerned through practice.¹⁴²

When viewed in this context, practical theology becomes “a dynamic process of reflective, critical inquiry into the praxis of the church in the world and God’s purposes for humanity, carried out in the light of Christian Scripture and tradition, and in critical dialogue with other sources of knowledge.”¹⁴³ Thus, whilst practical theology is indeed a discipline with its own proper function within theology, it is not undertaken in isolation from other theological disciplines, “for all theology is indeed essentially a single and practical activity.”¹⁴⁴ In its attempts to engage in the various tasks of practical theology and the pastoral cycle, this thesis seeks to integrate a multiplicity of disciplines, trends and patterns, methods and approaches. This cross-

¹³⁷ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 15.

¹³⁸ Adam, *Speaking God’s Words*, 15.

¹³⁹ Long, “Theology of Preaching,” 462. Anderson notes that central to “the discussion of the nature of practical theology is the issue of the relation of theory to praxis” (*The Shape of Practical Theology*, 14).

¹⁴⁰ Anderson, *The Shape*, 14.

¹⁴¹ Hastings, *Practical Theology*, 2.

¹⁴² Anderson, *The Shape*, 21.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁴⁴ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 5.

disciplinary approach ideally maintains the necessary tensions between the life and practices of the church and its relationship with the wider society in which it is located.

Pragmatic Task: Integrating Biblical Studies and Homiletics

The integrated theoretical and practical approach espoused in this work does not seek to reduce the text to a clear, singular meaning as in contemporary traditional homiletics, but rather allows the preacher to showcase the beautifully varied and complex descriptions of God found in Scripture. Rollins points out that the biblical text, representing a multiplicity of ideological voices all held together in creative tension, ensures the impossibility of any final resolution.¹⁴⁵ In terms of relating theory to practice in light of the pastoral cycle, this element draws from habitus/virtue models, which view the end task of practical theology as less about providing skills and methodologies and more about providing a training of the mind and heart.¹⁴⁶ For example, Stott indicates that the preacher should be mastered by certain convictions rather than mastering certain preaching techniques and methods.¹⁴⁷ This thesis holds as its fundamental conviction that “our various interpretations of [biblical] revelation will always be provisional, fragile, and fragmentary.”¹⁴⁸ Viewed in this manner, a values-based approach to homiletics ideally allows the preacher to form his or her own theory and theology of preaching, and then to outwork the implications of that approach within the context of a supportive and accepting community. Such an approach will produce a preaching theory that is multi-vocal, non-hierarchical in terms of its leadership orientation, and thus is appropriate to postmodernity.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the use of the hermeneutical cycle for the task of contextual theological interpretation can lead to the formation of a pragmatic plan for future homiletics and congregational leadership. Since the church in the Western tradition exists in a state of liminality between late modernity and

¹⁴⁵ Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 12, 13. Brueggemann points out that this approach is not relativism but pluralism; objectivity in interpretation destroys community as well as the chance to receive new truth together. Thus preaching, in a pluralistic context, makes proposals and advocacies, but does not advance conclusions (*The Word Militant*, 22).

¹⁴⁶ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 68.

¹⁴⁷ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 92.

¹⁴⁸ Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 18.

postmodernity, this thesis accentuates the interconnectedness between the life and practices of the church and its wider societal context by constructing a coherent and measured response to this situation. The resulting pragmatic plan for future homiletics and congregational leadership involves forming a cross-disciplinary methodology integrating biblical studies and homiletics. The formation of these integrated approaches will consistently involve a contextual interpretation, analysis and evaluation taking into consideration the variety of elements impacting preaching and biblical studies within Christian tradition and biblical studies.

The following thesis chapters will demonstrate that the tasks of the hermeneutical cycle will move from contextual interpretation to analysis, evaluation and the formation of a pragmatic plan for the future. Chapter 3 will formulate its plan for future biblical studies based upon a contextual interpretation and evaluation of the historic disciplines of rhetoric, biblical studies and homiletics. The resulting rhetorical-critical-narratological exegetical method will be applied to the text of Ezekiel in Chapter 5. Chapter 4 will formulate a pragmatic plan for a values-based homiletic based upon a contextual interpretation, analysis and evaluation of the New Homiletic. The integration of biblical studies and homiletics will be demonstrated with a sample sermon in Chapter 7, as well as a rhetorical-critical study of the discourse of 1 Cor. 4.18-5.13.

CHAPTER 3

A CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF RHETORIC, BIBLICAL STUDIES AND HOMILETICS

Introduction

In order to achieve the goal of this thesis that seeks to integrate biblical studies and homiletics, the aim of this chapter will be to develop a rhetorical-critical-narratological approach to biblical studies. The hermeneutical cycle will be used to engage in a contextual interpretation of specific transitional periods within the disciplines of rhetoric, biblical studies and preaching from within the Christian tradition.¹⁴⁸ This contextual study will demonstrate that as a genre preaching historically evolves due to a variety of influences. Such a reflection on the praxis of biblical studies and preaching not only validates current experiences and practices, but further serves the larger project of reimagining and enriching homiletics.¹⁴⁹

Based upon its contextual analysis the chapter will develop a pragmatic future plan by establishing a rhetorical-critical exegetical approach that will be integrated with the values-based homiletic developed in Chapter 4. As one way to exhibit the use of rhetorical criticism for biblical texts and preaching, this exegetical approach will be applied to the discourse of Ezekiel and then Ezekiel 15 in Chapter 5. The results of that study will be demonstrated homiletically in Chapter 7 with the production of a sample sermon, as well as an example of the method applied to a biblical discourse genre.

As a contextual interpretation of the disciplines of classical rhetoric, biblical studies and homiletics, this study is not intended to be an exhaustive overview of these subjects, which have been covered in greater detail elsewhere.¹⁵⁰ Rather, by utilizing the hermeneutical cycle, this chapter will systematically gather information related to specific transitional periods in the history of these disciplines. The resulting contextual analysis will demonstrate three trends: first, in the Western tradition rhetoric “has always existed in a symbiotic relationship with society, expanding or

¹⁴⁸ The accepted view of “the history” of rhetoric is largely a male and elite narrative. But this “history” has come under serious scrutiny. Glenn argues that “the proliferation of new rhetorical maps as well as new ways of interpreting any rhetorical map—often conflicting, necessarily fragmented, never final—have allowed us to see that historiographic rhetorical maps never reflect a neutral reality” (“Remapping Rhetorical Territory,” 291). This chapter dips into this history at certain points where something new and significant took place (see Iser, *The Implied Reader*, xii).

¹⁴⁹ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 3.

¹⁵⁰ See for example: Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*; Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition*; Richards, *Rhetoric*; and Dixon, *Rhetoric*.

contracting itself according to the demands that a social group places upon it.”¹⁵¹ The application of rhetoric within societies is coloured by various traditions and conventions.¹⁵²

Second, the chapter will demonstrate the tendency for practice to separate from initial theory. When this occurs preaching forms tend to become overly logical, abstract and technical, and thus lose sight of classical rhetorical theory that takes into account the multiplicity of ways speakers can engage audiences. Third, the chapter will demonstrate the tendency in preaching for reactionary movements to arise that attempt to redress the overly-logical imbalance. These homiletical forms often seek to balance theory and practice by engaging the emotions as well as the intellect of the audience.

These moves and subsequent reactions must be balanced by the observation that as a genre, preaching continues to evolve as its best practitioners modify it.¹⁵³ The nature of practical theological interpretation as demonstrated in this chapter will account for these changes both in the life and practices of the church as well as that of the wider society.¹⁵⁴ In part this continual evolution can be attributed to the alteration of societal worldviews, shifts in biblical studies, and changes to contemporary views of rhetorical theory.¹⁵⁵ The chapter will show that biblical studies and homiletics are closely related; as the course of one goes, so goes the other.¹⁵⁶ As a result of this intimate connection these disciplines exhibit a pendulum-like nature as they react and counter-react to these various trends. These shifts will be further demonstrated in Chapter 6 as it engages with Ezekiel commentaries and sermons from Ezekiel 15, locating them along the continuum identified within this chapter.

The contextual interpretation of classical rhetorical theory will further show that for two reasons, the terms and concepts of classical rhetoric still have a contribution to make to the critical theory and practice of biblical studies and homiletics.¹⁵⁷ First, biblical scholars and homileticians alike viewed classical rhetoric as an indispensable tool for both disciplines until the Enlightenment, when rhetoric

¹⁵¹ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 3.

¹⁵² Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 10.

¹⁵³ Edwards, “The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards,” xi.

¹⁵⁴ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 1.

¹⁵⁵ For an expansion of these additional influences see the essays in *Modern Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*.

¹⁵⁶ Achtemeier, “The Artful Dialogue,” 18-19.

¹⁵⁷ Dixon, *Rhetoric*, 76.

experienced a period of decline from which it has never fully recovered. However, biblical scholars and preachers alike are rediscovering classical rhetorical theory as an indispensable aid for the interpretation of biblical texts.¹⁵⁸ This chapter will demonstrate that the integration of classical and modern rhetorical theory results in an exegetical method that allows the preacher to replicate the rhetorical-literary artistry of the multiple forms of biblical texts.

Second, since the sixteenth century the term “rhetoric” has been viewed with suspicion and denounced in favour of a univocal “scientific language” shorn of all figures of speech.¹⁵⁹ These negative connotations continue to taint biblical studies and preaching alike.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, the separation of rhetoric into dialectics and stylistics led to a systematic and deductive mode of exegesis and preaching, modes of which are still currently practised.¹⁶¹ The application of this approach separates matter from manner of speaking as separate identities. Rhetoric is reduced to stylistics, and style of expression is regarded as separate from, subsequent and accessory to content.¹⁶² Sermons in this mode force the text to bypass strict exegesis in the attempt to invent applicable content. Thus Scripture is potentially distorted or even ignored as it is reduced to an aggregate of authoritative and preachable passages.¹⁶³

The evolutionary nature of the disciplines of rhetoric, biblical studies and homiletics reveals the need for the continued reimagining of exegetical and homiletical forms. The contextual analysis in this chapter will establish the relevance of constructing both an exegetical and homiletical approach that is not only faithful to the varied rhetoric of scriptural forms, but also is appropriate to the rhetoric of the particular era in which it is located in terms of content, language and form.¹⁶⁴

Trends in Rhetoric, Biblical Studies and Homiletics

Classical Rhetorical Theory

¹⁵⁸ Wuellner, “Rhetorical Criticism,” 156, 159.

¹⁵⁹ Richards, *Rhetoric*, 74.

¹⁶⁰ On this see Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 5.

¹⁶¹ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 13; Wuellner, “Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?” 462.

¹⁶² Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 16, 17; Wuellner, “Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?” 453.

¹⁶³ Farley, *Practicing Gospel*, 83.

¹⁶⁴ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 13.

This descriptive systematic information-gathering and contextual analysis of classical rhetorical theory will establish two points relevant to the discussion of rhetoric, biblical studies and homiletics. First, since classical rhetoricians discovered rather than invented rhetoric, its use for biblical rhetorical criticism and homiletics is not anachronistic. Classical rhetoricians defined rhetoric as “the art of persuasive communication”¹⁶⁵ or “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.”¹⁶⁶ Rhetoric as a persuasive art figured prominently in Hellenic society for centuries prior to the compilation of the first rhetorical handbook. Classical rhetorical theory arose “inductively from a study of the long-standing practice of that discipline.”¹⁶⁷ More prescriptive than descriptive in form, this theory “has long been recognized as the systematization of natural eloquence”¹⁶⁸ or a set of rules derived from the study of accepted practice.¹⁶⁹ Richards notes that “in its inception the art was nothing more than an attempt to reflect on ‘natural’ eloquence. The [rhetorical] handbooks set out to describe what persuades in *practice*.”¹⁷⁰

Ancient rhetoricians did not generally theorize about criticism, instead focusing their scrutiny on the work of the artist. In an attempt to make creativity systematic they formulated technical principles that artists could use.¹⁷¹ Although classical rhetoricians originally gave names to various rhetorical techniques, critics have discovered these concepts in the rhetoric of cultures worldwide. Classical rhetorical theory refers to the organization of rhetorical techniques into a system that could be taught and learned; it “is this structured system which describes the universal phenomenon of rhetoric in Greek terms.”¹⁷² On this basis the terms and concepts of classical rhetoric still have a part to play in critical theory and practice; on a basic level rhetoric provides a solid body of theory against which to argue and formulate a case.¹⁷³ As this chapter will later point out, one can legitimately study the biblical text utilizing terms from classical rhetoric; indeed, biblical critics may have little choice but to employ them to describe the logical and structural features of the text since the

¹⁶⁵ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 1.

¹⁶⁶ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book 1 Part I.

¹⁶⁷ Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 540.

¹⁶⁸ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 1.

¹⁶⁹ Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 540.

¹⁷⁰ Richards, *Rhetoric*, 3 (italics hers).

¹⁷¹ Black, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 2, 3.

¹⁷² Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 10-11.

¹⁷³ Dixon, *Rhetoric*, 76.

taxonomy has been inherited from classical rhetoric.¹⁷⁴ However, classical rhetorical categories become limiting when solely used for biblical rhetorical criticism. Whilst helpful as a starting-point these categories become too narrow because they do not “address all theoretical, practical, philosophical questions posed by speech.”¹⁷⁵ When constructing its rhetorical-critical approach, therefore, the chapter will demonstrate the necessity to supplement classical rhetoric with additional findings taken from modern rhetorical theory.

The second point concerns the issue of the close relationship between rhetorical theory and practice in classical society. Rhetorical theory first developed from observed practice in Athenian society,¹⁷⁶ and by the second century B.C. Greek rhetoricians began teaching in Rome, and with great success.¹⁷⁷ In Roman society rhetoric became an indispensable part of Roman education as the teaching of rhetoric, along with grammar and philosophy, was considered an honourable profession.¹⁷⁸ Roman rhetoricians made Greek rhetoric even more systematic but added little of their own original thought to the Greek corpus.¹⁷⁹

The relationship between theory and practice brings about two observations. The first is that Greco-Roman rhetoricians viewed the relationship between theory and practice as integral. Rhetoricians trained students in rhetorical theory so that they would succeed in the practice of public speaking. Second, as it existed in a symbiotic nature within classical society Greco-Roman rhetoric changed and adapted to meet demands within that society. Over the centuries rhetoric expanded from primary to include secondary rhetoric and set the stage for the future studies of any persuasive discourse.¹⁸⁰ Rhetoricians expanded Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as “discovering in any given case the available means of persuasion”¹⁸¹ to include the broader concept of the art of speech and composition. Viewing tropes and figures of speech as illuminating substance, rhetoricians held that the concept of “organic unity,” the relationship of the parts to the whole, actually shaped the nature of communication.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁷⁵ Watson, “Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament,” 114.

¹⁷⁶ For more information on this period see Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 1-149; Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 6-9.

¹⁷⁷ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 11.

¹⁷⁸ Malina, “Social Levels, Morals and Daily Life,” 383.

¹⁷⁹ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 12. On the contributions of Cicero to rhetoric see Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 7.

¹⁸⁰ For a discussion of primary and secondary rhetoric, see Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition*, 2-4.

¹⁸¹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Chapter 2, 6.

These features in the continuing evolution of rhetoric provide a major component in the background of biblical rhetorical criticism.¹⁸² The concern of current rhetorical criticism therefore becomes the study of persuasive oral or written discourses that attempt to influence others.¹⁸³ This thesis will advocate a rhetorical-critical exegetical approach that allows the preacher to comb the text for signs of literary-rhetorical persuasive artistry and further to identify and replicate that persuasive function homiletically.¹⁸⁴

Evaluation

This contextual interpretation has demonstrated that in its development from primary and secondary rhetoric, classical rhetorical theory profoundly influenced generations of biblical scholars and preachers alike. Throughout the time of the church fathers, they and other learned Jews and Christians made use of their training in rhetoric to interpret Scripture.¹⁸⁵ The foremost example of the ability to relate rhetorical theory to exegetical and homiletical practice from classical times concerns Augustine in his work *On Christian Doctrine*. Using rhetorical elements for exegesis, Augustine studied the Old Testament most specifically but also included the writings of Paul and the gospel narratives.¹⁸⁶ Augustine's work is the most influential book ever written on homiletics,¹⁸⁷ and his understanding of the purpose of preaching influenced generations of preachers. Augustine integrated biblical studies and homiletics, holding as an important principle that the preacher is both an interpreter and teacher of Scripture. He argued that preachers should defend the faith by teaching what is right and refuting what is wrong. In terms of audience, Augustine stated that

¹⁸² Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 8-9.

¹⁸³ Black, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 14, 15. This observation brings up the point upon which later methods of biblical rhetorical criticism would disagree: is the purpose of rhetorical criticism to understand the structure and aesthetic/stylistic values of a text (i.e., Muilenburg), or to understand the persuasive elements of a text? (Kennedy, Gitay, *et. al*). This thesis will demonstrate later that one can blend elements of both approach, noting structure, style and persuasive artistry. This complementary rhetorical-critical approach will be demonstrated on the discourse of Ezekiel and Ezekiel 15 in Chapter 5.

¹⁸⁴ Koptak, "Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible," 31.

¹⁸⁵ Medhurst observes that "Rhetorical dimensions in the Bible have been apparent almost from the beginning... Whether Origen's *De Principiis* or Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, dimensions of the art of rhetoric have long been used to interpret and understand the biblical text" ("Rhetorical Dimensions," 214). For more examples see Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*, 260-264, and Skarsaune, "Biblical Interpretation," 661.

¹⁸⁶ In Book IV Chapter 7, 11-12 Augustine refers to Paul; in Chapter 7, 13, the Old Testament prophets.

¹⁸⁷ Spears, "The Theological Hermeneutics," 2. Roberts indicates that up until 1200, there was no rhetoric of preaching other than Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* (Phyllis B. Roberts "The *Ars Praedicandi* and the Medieval Sermon," 41).

the preacher must in the performance of his duty conciliate the hostile, rouse the careless, and warn the ignorant of what is occurring at present and what likely may occur in the future.¹⁸⁸

In his discussion of how Christian teachers and preachers can effectively employ rhetoric categories, Augustine utilized Ciceronian terms sublimated to new meanings and transformed to new uses to state Christian doctrine.¹⁸⁹ Adopting an apparently pragmatic attitude toward rhetoric, he held that the art of rhetoric is an amoral tool available for enforcing either wrong or right. On this basis he asks “why do not good men study to engage it on the side of the truth?”¹⁹⁰ Augustine held that whether learned formally or informally, Christian exegetes and preachers should make use of rhetoric. His work essentially concerns the application of exegesis to homiletics—the explanation of Christian texts to an audience, be it employing majestic, temperate, or subdued styles.¹⁹¹ Augustine gave examples from Scripture and from others such as Ambrose who made use of these styles, the object of which was either to teach, to give pleasure, or to move an audience.¹⁹² Augustine serves as an example from antiquity as a scholar who successfully integrated biblical studies with preaching. This was accomplished by placing the sermon on a continuum from exegesis to its subsequent potential application by various audiences.

Transition: Classical to Medieval Society

Following the collapse of classical society, the medieval period witnessed a fragmentation of the understanding and role of rhetoric within society, and the beginning of the separation of rhetorical theory from practice. External and internal factors alike contributed to this fragmentation. Externally, due to destruction or damage at the hands of successive barbarian invaders, many of the major rhetorical texts either disappeared or survived only in damaged form.¹⁹³ Internally, and perhaps

¹⁸⁸ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* Book IV, Chapter 4, 6.

¹⁸⁹ McKeon, “Rhetoric in the Middle Ages,” 5.

¹⁹⁰ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* Book IV, Chapter 2, 3.

¹⁹¹ See *On Christian Doctrine Book IV* Chapters 20-28 for a discussion of styles used in Scripture and in preaching.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, Chapters 17, 34.

¹⁹³ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 215. For more on the impact on rhetoric in this period see: Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*, 272; *Christian Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition*, 196; and Deanesly, *History of the Medieval Church*, 29-30.

more damaging, their contexts fragmented.¹⁹⁴ As conceptions of rhetoric adapted and changed in Western society it became less operative in the realm of civic oratory and shifted instead toward the analysis and writing of texts.¹⁹⁵ For medieval rhetoric this loss of context from classical rhetoric had two important consequences: first, theory and practice split as certain elements of rhetoric became highly theoretical while other elements concerned the purely practical.¹⁹⁶ Second, cut of from its persuasive context in the public sector, rhetoric reduced from a two-way to a one-way, self-contained system and lost its audience.¹⁹⁷

Evaluation

Rhetoric fragmented due to the collapse of classical society and therefore underwent a long rebuilding process in the medieval period. Due to its symbiotic relationship within Western society rhetoric took on many different forms due to the demands medieval society placed upon it as social and cultural ideas changed.¹⁹⁸ In the medieval period the relationship between society and rhetoric was not as fundamental as it had been within classical society. Although it remained a unifying force in education, public rhetoric declined with the advents of the increasingly hierarchical nature of the medieval ruling class system.¹⁹⁹

Medieval rhetoricians made four major contributions to rhetorical theory whilst adapting a fragmented understanding of classical rhetoric to the needs of medieval society. First were the numerous and extensive commentaries on *Rhetoric for Herennius* and *On Invention*, while second were the many handbooks on letter-writing (*ars dictaminis*). Third were handbooks on verse composition (*ars poetriae*) and fourth were the many handbooks on thematic preaching.²⁰⁰ However, as the fifteenth century witnessed the rediscovery of certain classical rhetorical manuals,

¹⁹⁴ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 217. For more on the issue rhetoric in medieval society as compared to classical society see Scott D. Troyan, "Unwritten Between the Lines"; and Payne, "The Boundaries of Language and Rhetoric," 114-115.

¹⁹⁵ To meet the needs of lawyers, notaries, and ecclesiastical officials, the discipline of rhetoric turned to the creation of the art of letter-writing, the point of which was a well-written document that observed the rhetorical conventions of the time (Kennedy, *Christian Rhetoric*, 212, 214).

¹⁹⁶ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 225.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 228. While the theoretical aspects of rhetoric were obsessed with stylistic terminology, practice became increasingly elaborate. As a result practical techniques arose having no theoretical justification as theory and practice continued to go their separate ways.

¹⁹⁸ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 214-215.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 214-215. As society shifted from democratic rule to the rule of emperors and dictators, the resulting administrative correspondence brought about the need for a formal letter-writing: the *ars dictaminis*.

²⁰⁰ Kennedy, *Christian Rhetoric*, 220.

Renaissance humanists began to shift their attention increasingly away from medieval authorities and toward the original texts themselves.²⁰¹ This shift in methodology—from dialectic to grammar, the disciplines of textual criticism and philology—engendered disputes between medieval scholastics and Renaissance humanists and further planted the seeds of the Reformers’ break from the Catholic Church.²⁰²

The following section will demonstrate that preaching experienced its first major transition as it evolved from the simple homily into the medieval Scholastically-inspired thematic sermon. Finally, the Renaissance epideictic sermon arose as a reaction to perceived excesses within increasingly complex scholastic sermon forms.

Medieval Thematic and Renaissance Epideictic Sermon Forms

Though not the only form of Christian preaching, in the main the homily was the mode for Christian oratory in the early church²⁰³ and influenced preaching from the time of Jesus and Paul up to the middle of the eleventh century. Typically based upon an exegesis of a biblical passage, this simple sermon that followed the daily liturgy was later used for all preaching forms in the early medieval period except the epideictic²⁰⁴ or panegyric sermon. Serving primarily as a commentary on the gospel of the Mass, most early medieval homilies involved essentially clerics preaching to audiences of other clerics.²⁰⁵ As late as the eleventh century, most lay people would likely have never heard a sermon unless they lived near a cathedral or a reformed monastery encouraging lay attendance at chapel, as most priests were not licensed to preach.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ For more on this resurgence of rhetoric see Richards, *Rhetoric*, 5-6; Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*, 14; and Gray, “Renaissance Humanism,” 498.

²⁰² The debate between the humanists and scholastic theologians concerned the role of philology in biblical studies and more broadly the role of secular, human skills for the interpretation of the biblical text (Erika Rummel, “Et cum theologo bella poeta gerit,” 714).

²⁰³ Roberts, “The *Ars Praedicandi*,” 43. Roberts notes that the early church utilized four major forms of preaching: first, the evangelistically-inspired missionary sermon; second, the hortatory prophetic sermon; third, the homily, or the oral interpretation of Scripture; and finally, the epideictic or panegyric sermon. The early church followed the tradition of Augustine, who went beyond Cicero by grounding his rhetoric in Scripture and the church fathers, and thus established the tradition of rhetorical preaching. The history of medieval preaching noted in this section involves the transition from the simple patristic homily to the more complex sermon forms of the high and later middle ages (43).

²⁰⁴ Kennedy, *New History of Classical Rhetoric*, 258. This epideictic sermon is not to be confused with the Renaissance epideictic sermon that developed in the mid-fifteenth century.

²⁰⁵ Roberts, “The *Ars Praedicandi*,” 44.

²⁰⁶ Hamilton, “Religion and the Laity,” 500.

During the high and later middle ages, the more complex thematic or university sermon began to replace the patristic homily form of the early medieval period as preaching transitioned from a monastic, clerical audience to that of a more popular composition. Following decrees from the Fourth Lateran Council in the thirteenth century, together with calls for Church reform by Pope Innocent III (1160-1216), the Church required bishops to equip men to preach to lay people.²⁰⁷ Additional influences involved the rise of towns and commerce, the Crusades, the need to combat heresies and medieval schools and universities.²⁰⁸ This fresh emphasis on popular preaching to the laity, the increasing specialization of university preaching and the need for training of preachers all contributed to the rise of thematic preaching. These factors “coincided with the growth of a substantial didactic and rhetorical literature consisting of treatises known as the *artes praedicandi*.”²⁰⁹ During this renaissance of preaching mendicant preachers helped to spread popular preaching throughout Europe in the first decades of the thirteenth century.

By the fourteenth century, however, preaching became increasingly specialized and professional, and the thematic sermon developed into the favoured homiletical form. Influenced by scholastic methods,²¹⁰ the progressive development within medieval universities of biblical exegesis and preaching skills along with the rise of numerous preaching manuals, thematic sermons became increasingly complex.²¹¹ At times even extending to encompass “a sermon within a sermon,” the sermon’s primary purpose shifted from popular preaching to teaching believers through the exploration of disputations and answers to increasingly obscure theological questions.²¹²

In order to persuade audiences of the validity of their message thematic sermons built upon scholastic methodology and logical syllogisms, using abstract

²⁰⁷ Canon 10 of the 4th Lateran council reads: “Wherefore we decree that bishops provide suitable men, powerful in work and word, to exercise with fruitful result the office of preaching; who in place of the bishops, since these cannot do it, diligently visiting the people committed to them, may instruct them by word and example” (Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils*, 237).

²⁰⁸ Roberts, “The *Ars Praedicandi*,” 44-45.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

²¹⁰ For further information on scholasticism and its methodologies see van Asselt, “Scholasticism, Medieval,” 509-512.

²¹¹ Not missionary preaching, the thematic sermon instructed listeners in the meaning of Scripture and was closely linked to exegesis. This systematic form sharply contrasted with the relatively informal and un-structured medieval homilies (Roberts, “The *Ars Praedicandi*,” 50).

²¹² This preaching form drew upon the Scholastic method and its employment of the *quaestio* format whereby disputed theological issues were raised, discussed, and solved (van Asselt, “Scholasticism, Medieval,” 509).

argument forms and logical proofs.²¹³ Due to the increasing emphasis on teaching and theological disputation, thematic sermons became progressively oriented towards learned and distinguished audiences rather than the general public as the Fourth Lateran Council decree intended. Thematic sermons departed from the original theory of dedicated and equipped preachers preaching to lay audiences in understandable terms. Thematic preaching did not intend to win converts to the faith, focusing instead upon the theological and biblical education of those already converted.

By the late medieval and early Renaissance periods, preaching became one aspect of the general religious crisis.²¹⁴ As noted, thematic sermons followed scholastic methods, relying heavily upon a syllogistic structure of raising questions and subsequently answering them with a multiplicity of convincing proofs. Renaissance humanists condemned the medieval attitude toward knowledge that privileged the abstract and the intellectual, arguing that their homiletical method had little utility or direct impact on human life. Humanists believed that the very form of the thematic sermon itself served as evidence of the scholastics' failure to be able to communicate important truths with little or no persuasive effect on the audience.²¹⁵

Inspired by the revival of classical rhetoric, Renaissance humanists criticized thematic preachers for being at the very least simply boring, for attempting to persuade those who already believed to believe, or for reiterating the same theological points to theologians year after year.²¹⁶ Renaissance preachers reacted to this overly logical form, believing that the scholastically-influenced thematic sermon had lost sight of the fullness of classical rhetorical theory. Humanists held that the rhetor can teach by logical means, but can also delight or seek to move the emotions of the audience.²¹⁷ This fuller understanding of the principles of the revived rhetoric of classical antiquity would later become integral to Renaissance Humanism.²¹⁸

By the mid-fifteenth century preachers in the papal court began to experiment with the epideictic sermon form, which sought to move audiences by appealing to emotion rather than simply teaching by means of logical proofs. Epideictic preachers celebrated the mercy and generosity of God and Christ and further emphasized the

²¹³ O'Malley, *Praise and Blame*, 44.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

²¹⁵ Gray, "Renaissance Humanism," 501.

²¹⁶ O'Malley, *Praise and Blame*, 76.

²¹⁷ Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 23. These correspond to Aristotle's categories of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* respectively (See *Rhetoric*, Book 1, Chapter 2).

²¹⁸ O'Malley, *Praise and Blame*, 38.

congregation's potential for good.²¹⁹ Their attempts to move and please their audiences and bring about a fuller understanding of classical rhetoric in their sermons reunited rhetorical theory with practice.²²⁰

Evaluation

This contextual interpretation of the first major transition between preaching forms illustrates the three points with which the chapter began. First, the roles, understanding, and application of rhetorical theory within society can impact both exegesis and homiletics.²²¹ Whereas scholastic scholars maintained that dialectical methods of argumentation were required to construct doctrinal formulations, humanists challenged this status quo by maintaining that knowledge of biblical languages was necessary for understanding Scripture and derivatively theology as well.²²² Second, as rhetorical theory separated from practice in medieval times, Renaissance epideictic preachers attempted to correct this imbalance by reuniting rhetorical theory with preaching practice. Finally, as thematic preaching had become overly logical and rationalistic, Renaissance epideictic preachers sought a more balanced preaching form that appealed to the emotions as well as the intellect.²²³

The resurgence of interest in classical rhetoric in the Renaissance lasted for some three centuries followed by a period of decline. From the mid-fourteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, rhetoric regained an importance not possessed beforehand or afterwards.²²⁴ Despite its ultimate declivity in the Enlightenment this renaissance of rhetoric had a profound and long-lasting impact on both biblical studies and homiletics due to its development by Renaissance and Christian humanists alike.

Transition: Renaissance to Reformation

The conflict over rhetorical form versus philosophical content pitted humanists against scholastic theologians and found its culmination in the Reformation

²¹⁹ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 291.

²²⁰ O'Malley, *Praise and Blame*, 44. (44).

²²¹ Ibid., 49. A reflection of humanist philological exegesis, O'Malley states that sermons at the papal "court evince a tendency to look upon Scripture more as a history of God's actions and less as a manual of doctrinal proof-texts or a book of artfully disguised philosophical principles" (49).

²²² Rummel, "Et cum theologo," 714.

²²³ The epideictic preacher "was not trying to expound these mysteries as in a classroom, nor was he trying to refute heretical adversaries to them. By his orthodox, yet attractive, presentation, he was trying to move his listeners to wonder, to love, to admiration, and to praise" (O'Malley, *Praise and Blame*, 70).

²²⁴ Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*, 13-14.

when the debate entered the sphere of doctrinal dispute.²²⁵ The controversy between the Scholastics and the humanists provided the immediate context into which was injected Luther's new and more significant debate, and this controversy further conditioned the earliest reactions to his ideas.²²⁶ A complex and heterogeneous movement concerned with a far broader agenda than the reform of the doctrine of the Church,²²⁷ from one point of view the Reformation can be analyzed as yet another phase in the scholastic-humanist debates in which questions of magisterium and orthodoxy came to the forefront.²²⁸ Humanists such as Lefevre (1455-1536) and Clichtove (1472-1543) had earlier paved the way for the Reformation by questioning the traditions—and by implication, the authority—of the Catholic Church. They constructed their argument on the basis of scriptural and patristic evidence as well as linguistic and historical criteria used by the humanists in their evaluation of classical literary texts.²²⁹ A shift had taken place from the medieval scholastic reliance on past authorities to an emphasis on reason.²³⁰

Utilizing a dialectical methodology the scholastic method based its support principally upon previous authorities such as medieval theologians and scholars. The humanists rejected this speculative theology and instead adopted a philological approach to exegesis. The major issue at hand was whether or not the humanists were entitled to apply their skills to scriptural texts,²³¹ and the mainstream reformers such as Calvin and Luther argued that the church should return to Scripture as the primary and critical source of Christian theology.²³² Luther's attacks on the methods of medieval scholastic theologians demonstrated his desire to return to the pure Christianity of the Bible and the Church Fathers.²³³

The reformers followed the example set by Erasmus, who argued in the preface of his Greek New Testament that theology must be rooted in exegesis. Though Erasmus was Catholic, albeit a critical one, as a Christian humanist his biblical scholarship laid the foundation for the later work of both Luther and Calvin. One can trace the theological roots of the Reformer's doctrine of atonement to his

²²⁵ Ibid., 713-714.

²²⁶ Nauert, "The Clash of Humanists and Scholastics," 4.

²²⁷ McGrath, "The Transition to Modernity," 240.

²²⁸ Rummel, "Et cum theologo," 713.

²²⁹ Nauert, "The Clash of Humanists and Scholastics," 15.

²³⁰ McGrath, "The Transition to Modernity," 230.

²³¹ Rummel, "Et cum theologo," 713-714.

²³² McGrath, "The Transition to Modernity," 244.

²³³ Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 64

study of Pauline theology.²³⁴ By undermining the credibility of the Vulgate translation Erasmus accomplished two results: first, he opened the way to theological revision on the basis of a better understanding of the biblical text; and second, he determined the importance of biblical scholarship in relation to theology.²³⁵ Therefore the humanists' "claim to determine the wording and meaning of authoritative texts did pose a serious challenge to the older academic culture by pointing to vulnerable spots in the medieval intellectual tradition."²³⁶ The insistence on the importance of grammar, textual criticism, study of the original languages and philology brought the humanists into conflict with the scholastic dialectic method. This major cultural shift laid the groundwork for historical investigation, which as a revolutionary method "subjected all ideas and institutions to the cold light of document-based historical criticism."²³⁷

Choosing to follow the lead of Erasmus, the early reformers produced biblical commentaries rather than works of systematic theology by using the tools of philology and rhetoric as opposed to the dialectic approach of the scholastics.²³⁸ While originally connected in their quest for an unadulterated text and an accurate translation of the Bible, the reformers and the humanists differed in their approaches to exegesis and its subsequent implications. Both faced a dilemma but chose different options for its resolution: synthesis or divorce. If their interpretations disagreed with the Church, the humanists sought either to divorce sacred from secular studies or somehow to synthesize the two.

Erasmus, for example, remained Catholic and thus maintained this difficult synthesis; however, though his approach inspired many, few adopted it.²³⁹ Conversely, the reformers held to no such synthesis, rejecting outright or declaring non-binding any doctrine that could not be demonstrated to be grounded in Scripture.²⁴⁰ They demonstrated the willingness to divorce from the Church over the issue of interpretation if philological analysis and textual criticism warranted such a break. Thus the revived rhetoric of Renaissance humanists together with the

²³⁴ Mullett, *Calvin*, 8.

²³⁵ McGrath, "The Transition to Modernity," 239.

²³⁶ Nauert, "Humanism as Method," 438.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 438.

²³⁸ Burnett, "The Educational Roots," 299.

²³⁹ Rummel, "Et cum theologo," 724-725. Larsen maintains that "He was too perceptive to support Catholicism and too evasive to support Protestantism" (*The Company of The Preachers*, 150).

²⁴⁰ McGrath, "The Transition to Modernity," 244.

development of philological approaches to Scripture impacted the exegesis of the reformers, and ultimately contributed to their break with the Church.

Lutheran Preaching and the Pietist Movement

The second example of the continuing evolution of rhetorical theory and practice concerns the shift from the preaching of Luther himself to the Lutheran orthodox sermon. Pietistic preaching would arise as a reactionary movement to Lutheran orthodoxy. Changes in biblical exegesis and theological method begun by the humanists and furthered in the Reformation impacted Reformation preachers,²⁴¹ who closely tied scriptural exegesis to proclamation. Not only did the Reformation engender a preaching of reformation, it also brought about a reformation of preaching and produced a distinct school of preaching.²⁴² Luther's breakthrough to a new understanding of justification "led to both a theological and a practical reform of preaching."²⁴³ The Reformers' view of scriptural authority made biblical preaching a necessity; Luther, Calvin and Zwingli all held a common view of Scripture, which concomitantly led to a positive view of preaching.²⁴⁴ Sermons, as the most effective vehicle to transmit the claims of the Reformers to a largely unschooled and illiterate audience, served as an essential component of the establishment and spread of the Reformation.²⁴⁵

While Luther neither theorized about preaching nor wrote any treatises on preaching, one can observe his homiletical approach from the more than two thousand extant sermons and two postils he left behind.²⁴⁶ A product of his medieval times, his early sermons and lectures followed the pattern of the medieval scholastics.²⁴⁷ Following his conversion experience he departed from the thematic style recommended in the medieval *artes praedicandi* and adopted a style more in common with the patristic homily. His view of *sola Scriptura* and his kerygmatic exegesis that broke away from the medieval four senses of biblical exegesis led him to adopt an

²⁴¹ At this point I refer to Reformation preaching (by which I mean both Lutheran and Reformed/Calvinist) preaching. For further work on preaching in this period see Taylor, ed., *Preachers and People*.

²⁴² Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures, Volume 4*, 1.

²⁴³ Haemig, "Preaching, Reformation," 532.

²⁴⁴ Larsen, *The Company of The Preachers*, 142, 152.

²⁴⁵ Karrant-Nunn, "Preaching the Word," 194.

²⁴⁶ For Luther on preaching see "Of Preachers and Preaching," *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, 179-192.

²⁴⁷ Larsen, *The Company of The Preachers*, 153.

expository style of preaching.²⁴⁸ Stressing simplicity and subordination of rhetorical style to content, Luther's sermons "generally followed a verse-by-verse method of explication, though sometimes he focused on one or two verses as the central message of the text."²⁴⁹

Holding preaching in high regard,²⁵⁰ Luther believed that preachers ideally should remind people firstly of their sins and debt to the Law and then secondly give them the Gospel. Similar to Augustine, Luther held that the purposes of preaching were to edify the flock and to resist false doctrine. In the performance of his duties, therefore, the preacher should be both a soldier and a shepherd.²⁵¹ As his interpretive key, Christ determined the goal and contents of his preaching: the Christ-centred truths hidden in the text concerned law and gospel and grace and faith over works.²⁵² For both Luther and later Lutherans true preaching involved the context of the worship service whereby the preacher becomes the medium communicating to the audience the living Word.

During the period of Lutheran orthodoxy the work of Melanchthon and Hyperius brought about a change in Lutheran exegesis and homiletics from Luther's original conceptions of the task. Melanchthon, though himself not a preacher, brought academic fibre to the Reformation as an academician.²⁵³ The publication of his two rhetorical manuals—in which he adapted classical models of rhetoric for the preaching task²⁵⁴—dominated Lutheran preaching in the latter half of the sixteenth century.²⁵⁵ Melanchthon's work in developing preaching theory had a twofold impact: first, he clarified of the purpose of preaching, and second, he developed a method of biblical exegesis. In terms of the purpose of preaching, his approach consisted of the

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 157.

²⁴⁹ Haemig, "Preaching, Reformation," 532. Luther's exegetical and homiletical method was as follows: 'A preacher should be a logician and a rhetorician, that is, he must be able to teach, and to admonish; when he preaches touching an article, he must, first, distinguish it. Secondly, he must define, describe, and show what it is. Thirdly, he must produce sentences out of the Scriptures, therewith to prove and strengthen it. Fourthly, he must, with examples, explain and declare it. Fifthly, he must adorn it with similitudes; and, lastly, he must admonish and rouse up the lazy, earnestly reprove all the disobedient, all false doctrine, and the authors thereof; yet, not out of malice and envy, but only to God's honor, and the profit and saving health of the people" (*Table Talk*, CCCCXIX).

²⁵⁰ See for example Martin Luther, "Of the Office of Preaching and of Preachers and Hearers," Section 1, I: "True Preachers of the Word Must Be Regularly Called," 374.

²⁵¹ Luther, *Table Talk*, CCCC.

²⁵² Kreitzer, "The Lutheran Sermon," 43.

²⁵³ Old, *Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures Vol. 4*, 90.

²⁵⁴ Melanchthon's *De officiis concionatoris* in 1529 and the *Elementa rhetorices* in 1532 were his two most well-known and influential works, which were not actually homiletic manuals but were treatises on the application of rhetoric.

²⁵⁵ Haemig, "Preaching, Reformation," 533.

two genres of exhortation and teaching. He divided exhortation into two parts concerning the exhortation to faith and the exhortation to good morals. Melanchthon believed that preachers could effectively communicate the Reformation message of sin and grace, Law and Gospel. In distinction to Luther's preference of verse-by-verse expository preaching Melanchthon's second major influence on Lutheran preaching was his exegetical loci method that focused upon preaching biblical topics rather than a verse-by-verse exegetical method. For Melanchthon, the *genera* related to teaching were in fact far more important than that which dealt with action.²⁵⁶

Andreas Gerhard of Ypres, known as Hyperius (1511-1564) produced the first actual Protestant homiletic textbook in 1533, applying elements of classical rhetoric to preaching.²⁵⁷ The work of Hyperius proved influential in England as well as on the Continent into the seventeenth century. In accordance with Lutheran tradition he asserted that biblical exegesis formed the basic element of preaching. In his *De formandis concionibus sacris* he claimed Pauline authority for preaching as opposed strictly to categories from classical rhetoric. His work, drawing its authority from the Bible rather than from traditional rhetorical genres, "reflects a more general tendency to reject or marginalise the persuasive art evolved in pagan antiquity, including its style."²⁵⁸ Hyperius's homiletical categories "were linked to inherited rhetorical concepts in a way which would help preachers to focus their persuasive effects."²⁵⁹ Hyperius classified these persuasive effects into three categories relating to the effect of the sermon on the audience. Doctrine and reproof were for teaching; instruction and correction of behaviour were to move, while consolation was to please.²⁶⁰

The emphasis on homiletical theory brought about a shift in Lutheran homiletics from the earlier theories and practices of Luther. Luther typically preached verse-by-verse expository sermons while Melanchthon advocated the preaching of topics. Whereas Luther viewed classical rhetoric with a degree of objectivity,²⁶¹ Melanchthon and Hyperius developed more fully its use for the task of preaching.

²⁵⁶ Kreitzer, "The Lutheran Sermon," 49.

²⁵⁷ Hyperius believed the goal of preaching was always to further the reconciliation between God and humankind, but adopted the formal characteristics of the rhetoric: to teach, to delight, and to influence (Kreitzer, "The Lutheran Sermon," 51-52).

²⁵⁸ Cockroft, *Rhetorical Affect*, 71.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁶¹ Old observes that Luther received the standard training in rhetoric as part of a typical university education in the late Middle Ages. He was critical of both Aristotle and Augustine but adopted elements of Quintilian (*Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures Vol. 4, 6*).

This shift in Lutheran homiletics that “focused on propositional and dialectically-arranged doctrine may have unintentionally led to a reemergence of scholastic forms and models in later sixteenth and seventeenth-century preaching.”²⁶² As scholars developed Melancthon and Hyperius’s treatment of Lutheran homiletics in the early modern period, “a new orthodoxy, sometimes rigid, developed that unwittingly encouraged pietistic preaching.”²⁶³

In mainland Europe in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists occupied much of the same physical space and thus sought to distinguish their doctrinal differences from one another. Each began this task by carefully articulating increasingly precise doctrinal formulations as well as engaging in polemics with the other two. The shift toward Protestant scholasticism²⁶⁴ thus came about for two reasons: polemics and the need for a confessional basis. In terms of polemics this “new form of scholasticism began to develop within both Protestant and Roman Catholic theological circles, as both sought to demonstrate the rationality and sophistication of their systems.”²⁶⁵ This new emphasis on reason appeared the only way ahead for a mediating theology. In order to meet these new polemical demands²⁶⁶ Protestant scholars returned to the dialectical scholastic methods repudiated by the earlier Reformers in favour of humanist philological approaches. This philological approach initially formed the basis of their exegetical and homiletical methods and had been partly responsible for the initial theological break from the Catholic Church. Later, however, the evolution of dialectic into a tool of textual analysis rather than simply a form of argumentation made its reappearance possible in theology, not in competition with, but as a tool of, scriptural exegesis.²⁶⁷

The second influence on Protestant scholasticism concerned the need for a confessional basis in light of the proliferation of Protestant educational institutions. Though the early reformers were less concerned with methodology, later Protestant scholasticism “codified and perpetuated the insights of the reformers through the

²⁶² Kreitzer, “The Lutheran Sermon,” 49-50.

²⁶³ Taylor, “Preface,” xii.

²⁶⁴ For more information on Protestant Scholasticism see van Asselt. “Scholasticism, Protestant,” 512-515.

²⁶⁵ McGrath, “The Transition to Modernity,” 249.

²⁶⁶ For instance Protestant scholars faced the continuous and incisive critiques of their theology by Catholic Cardinal William Bellarmine (1542-1621), which were scholastic in nature. To answer him they utilized the same scholastic apparatus.

²⁶⁷ Burnett, “The Educational Roots,” 317.

development of a series of systematic presentations of Christian theology.”²⁶⁸ By reinforcing the doctrines of the first generation of Reformation scholars with the tools of late medieval scholasticism, theologians “hoped to construct a firm edifice of dogma that could be effectively transmitted to upcoming generations.”²⁶⁹ As successive generations of Reformation theologians faced new pedagogical contexts they engaged in “the task of giving expression to the significance of the Reformation in a new ecclesial and academic context.”²⁷⁰

Protestant Scholasticism, with its emphasis on abstract creeds and scholastically-inspired doctrinal formulations, “gave rise to an absent God who was known only indirectly—and then through the mind rather than the imagination.”²⁷¹ The failure of the Lutheran church to connect with the life experiences of ordinary Christians appalled many German Protestants. Lutheran theology now appeared to imitate many of the worst features of medieval scholasticism with its indulgence in theological debates over matters about which few seemed to care.²⁷² Lutheran Orthodoxy assumed a text-centred understanding of the Christian faith, viewing “preaching as nothing more than teaching the contents of the Bible and spirituality as a deepened understanding and internalization of its message.”²⁷³ Viewing Scripture as the sole authority and as the chief source of knowledge, Lutheran Orthodoxy claimed that its “essential content was held to be summarized and contained in definitive dogmas.”²⁷⁴

Based on the homiletics of Melanchthon and Hyperius, in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries orthodox or confessional preaching became the standard method of Lutheran preaching. Unlike Luther’s plain or expository sermon, it was characterized as increasingly formal, rule-bound and focused on law.²⁷⁵ Beyond insisting that sermons must be an exegesis of Scripture, Luther and early Lutheran preachers brought about an advance in terms of their pedagogical content. Melanchthon, for example, extended Luther’s belief that the primary purpose of preaching was the edification of the congregation and encouraged “pastors to use the

²⁶⁸ McGrath, “The Transition to Modernity,” 246.

²⁶⁹ Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed*, 329.

²⁷⁰ van Asselt, “Scholasticism, Protestant,” 513.

²⁷¹ McGrath, *Twilight of Atheism*, 203.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁷³ McGrath, *Twilight of Atheism*, 213.

²⁷⁴ Mirbt, “Pietism at Halle,” 60.

²⁷⁵ Kreitzer, “The Lutheran Sermon,” 52.

sermon as the primary vehicle for instructing their audience in the true faith and the Christian way of life.”²⁷⁶ Preachers in the age of orthodoxy sought consistently and repeatedly to provide these levels of instruction and education to their audiences, but with the additional element of polemics against various opponents both inside and outside of Lutheranism.²⁷⁷ During this stage “both the style and the content of sermons were adjusted to meet the perceived needs of church leaders and educators.”²⁷⁸ The spirit of the time in this period—characterized by vicious doctrinal strife—“demanded additional guarantees that every preached word conformed to the overseers’ expectations. In such an atmosphere, only the verbatim reading of printed prayers and sermons could assuage theologians’ anxieties.”²⁷⁹ The pedagogical and polemical context shifted the focus in the late sixteenth century regarding the contents of sermons; no longer could the Lutheran preacher expound from the text as Luther had done. This milieu resulted in sermons that were increasingly formal, rigid and less in touch with the emotions of the audience.

One reaction to this perceived sterility and formality of Lutheran Orthodoxy involved the seventeenth-century German Pietist movement, which “demanded a complete reorientation of preaching as well as the disciplines of prayer.”²⁸⁰ Pietism did not attack any particular Lutheran doctrines or institutions, but instead involved a protest against Lutheran absolutism and exaggerated ecclesiasticism.²⁸¹ Early influences on Pietism include Johann Arndt (1555-1621), who heralded a shift in Reformation theology. Whereas the earlier Reformers had emphasized justification by stressing sanctification, Arndt accentuated the interiority of the Christian life. A second influence was Johann Valentin Andrae (1586-1654) who characterized Lutheran preachers as “lazy,” arguing that they contributed to the crisis in preaching by failing to engage their congregations and delivering sermons going over their heads.²⁸²

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 59.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 52-53.

²⁷⁸ Krietzer, “The Lutheran Sermon,” 53.

²⁷⁹ Karant-Nunn, “Preaching the Word,” 203. She observes the irony that authorities compelled better-trained pastors to conform to the late medieval pattern of reading aloud sermons and other parts of the service of worship (203).

²⁸⁰ Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures, Volume 5*, 69. However, Old is careful to point out that “Orthodox Lutheranism was much more interested in the inner life than is so often claimed. Luther himself was, after all, warmly pious” (69-70).

²⁸¹ Ibid., 60.

²⁸² Lindberg, “Introduction” 6.

Lutheran preacher Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705), dubbed “the father of Pietism,” critiqued the deplorable condition of the church in all three estates: civil, preachers and laity alike. Calling for nothing less than a thorough reform of German Protestantism, Spener argued that Lutheran churches in Germany had failed to accomplish the goals of the Reformation, had fundamentally misunderstood Luther and further needed to recover personal piety.²⁸³ Spener held that Lutheran “sermons should be prepared on a more edifying plan, with less emphasis on rhetorical art and homiletic erudition.”²⁸⁴ He also believed that the lack of true living faith within the church could be countered by “by bringing God’s Word more fully into the church and world through reading and discussing the Bible in devotional assemblies.”²⁸⁵ By 1670 Spener’s *Collegia Pietatis* began meeting twice a week in his home with the goal to arouse and maintain a personal and vital Christianity through preaching and ecclesiastical discipline.²⁸⁶

Spener’s 1675 work *Pia Desideria* involved “a scathing attack upon the moral laxity and absence of true spirituality within the Lutheran Church” as well as a description of helpful measures for specific reforms.²⁸⁷ One such reform included a call to reform legalistic, formal orthodox preaching in favour of more edifying and practical preaching.²⁸⁸ Spener believed that the narrow Lutheran expository preaching on a specific text of Scripture was not enough; all of Scriptures should be opened to the church and explained in their context.²⁸⁹ For Spener, the surest route to Church reform involved pastors not only preaching the Word in services but also holding informal meetings in homes where all believers could discuss and apply the Scriptures. Thus as a reactionary movement, the Pietists accentuated “the importance of the emotional experience of rebirth, the importance of sanctification as a corollary to justification, and the fellowship of disciplined Christian laity in small groups devoted to mutual encouragement and oversight.”²⁹⁰

Spener’s work shifted the focus from orthodox concern with the maintenance of correct doctrine to conduct and personal piety. In terms of preaching he discerned

²⁸³ Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures Vol. 5*, 72.

²⁸⁴ Grüberg, “Pietism,” 54.

²⁸⁵ Lindberg, “Introduction,” 8. For more information see Spener’s work *Pia Desideria*.

²⁸⁶ Grüberg, “Pietism,” 54. Spener’s most important contribution was the animation and improvement of the catechizings held each Sunday through catechetical sermons.

²⁸⁷ Kuenning, “Spener, Phillip Jakob,” 475.

²⁸⁸ Kreitzer, “The Lutheran Sermon,” 53.

²⁸⁹ Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 91.

²⁹⁰ Holifield, *Theology in America*, 399.

and combated the major defects in Lutheran orthodox preaching with its neglect of biblical exegesis and excessive stress on polemics and formal rhetoric. His belief that the foremost purpose of preaching was to edify, to induct listeners into the Scriptures and also to foster and awaken personal piety and living can be viewed as an attempt to recover the purposes of preaching articulated by Luther, the aims of which he believed Lutheran orthodoxy had lost sight.²⁹¹ While Pietism failed to produce an epoch in the history of German preaching it did succeed in making the entirety of the Scriptures available for homiletical purposes.²⁹²

Pietism spread in the late seventeenth century through appointments of pastorates and professorships with men sympathetic to the movement. The work of Spener's contemporary August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) spread the teachings of Pietism from the University of Halle.²⁹³ Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) studied under Francke at Halle and went on with the help of the Moravians to establish a foreign missions movement built on missionary preaching. Pietism influenced the Wesleys and the Methodist movement as well as the eighteenth century American Great Awakening, which exhibited pietistic features.²⁹⁴ This rise of "experiential religion" did much to blunt the force of the criticisms of religion in this period, and re-established "the connection between religion and the individual subjective consciousness, ensuring that it was experienced as a living reality."²⁹⁵

Evaluation

The rise and spread of Pietism once again illustrates the point with which the chapter began. As both biblical studies and preaching became overly logical, rational and propositional in Lutheran orthodoxy, emphasis was laid upon teaching correct beliefs and doctrines. The adaptation and use of categories of rhetoric partly explains the shift from Luther's own theories and practices related both to exegesis and homiletics. Under the influences of scholars such as Melanchthon and Hyperius through the period of Protestant Orthodoxy, Lutheran preaching became increasingly formal and rigid. As Renaissance epideictic preachers before them reacted to excesses

²⁹¹ Grüberg, "Pietism," 56.

²⁹² Mirbt, "Pietism at Halle," 61. Spener argued that "all scripture, without exception, should be known by the congregation if we are all to receive the necessary benefit" (*Pia Desideria*, 91).

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁹⁴ Erb, for example, calls Wesleyan Methodism the "stepchild of Pietism" and traces its development from its initial successes in Europe to Britain and North America (*Pietists: Selected Writings*, 25-26).

²⁹⁵ McGrath, *Twilight of Atheism*, 18.

in the medieval thematic sermon, so too Pietist preachers reacted against the formal rhetoric and narrow exegesis of Lutheran orthodox preaching. They felt that Lutheran theologians had reduced theology to philosophy and that Protestant theology had become “head knowledge” rather than “heart knowledge.”²⁹⁶ Pietism in many ways involved a return to the authority of Scripture over orthodox creeds and dogmas and the concerns for personal piety shared by Luther himself. As the movement grew beyond its European roots, in particular within its North American descendants the emphasis on knowledge of God was reduced to an emotional experience. This radical division between head and heart led to attitudes of anti-intellectualism as well as intolerant religious separatism.²⁹⁷

Transition: Enlightenment to Modernist Era

The period of the Enlightenment during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries serves as a key transitional era in terms of the symbiotic relationship between society and rhetoric and the subsequent impact upon homiletics. Rhetoric suffered a near-fatal decline from which it almost failed to recover, but in the late nineteenth century and twentieth century it experienced resurgence. Whereas in the early Renaissance period in the fifteenth century rhetoric had been raised to centre stage in school and university curricula, by the sixteenth century rhetoric began to deteriorate in its formal description as an art. Sixteenth-century English handbooks on rhetoric began a mechanical prescription of narrowing the art to a style involving a taxonomy of linguistic devices.²⁹⁸ Enlightenment scholars dismissed this conception of rhetoric in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, attacking it on both moral and aesthetic grounds.²⁹⁹ Whilst much has been written on the subject of rhetoric in this period, this section briefly examines the following three developments in rhetoric: first, the impact of Ramus; second, the treatment rhetoric received during this period; and finally, the renascence of rhetoric in the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. All three of these developments have left their imprint upon biblical exegesis, rhetorical criticism and homiletics.

Similar to the period following the collapse of classical society, in the sixteenth century rhetoric fragmented once again with the work of the French scholar

²⁹⁶ Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, Vol. 5, 72.

²⁹⁷ Erb, *Pietists*, 25.

²⁹⁸ Richards, *Rhetoric*, 6. Though seemingly advanced, rhetoric once again fragmented (67).

²⁹⁹ Dixon, *Rhetoric*, 64.

Peter Ramus (1515-1572), who engendered a revolution in rhetorical studies. Ramus “took up the question of the relationship of rhetoric to dialectic where Agricola had left it, reduced it to a method of teaching, and further decreased the realm of rhetoric.”³⁰⁰ Corbett notes that “Dissatisfied with the repetitiveness and vagueness that prevailed in the teaching of the subjects of the *trivium*, Ramus distributed the traditional parts of rhetoric between logic and rhetoric.”³⁰¹ As a strict compartmentalization of knowledge, the outcome of this move separated logic and rhetoric and the intellect from the imagination.³⁰² An unintended consequence of the Ramist reform involved “the strengthening of the rhetoricians’ tendency to concentrate on stylistic matters, even to equate rhetoric with style.”³⁰³ In the Ramist scheme rhetoric became subservient to logic, confined to bedecking a logically-proven argument with rhetorical tropes and figures both to aid its reception and move the affectations. The content of oration became a matter of reason and method whereas style became a matter of rhetorical decoration.³⁰⁴

Current modes of biblical rhetorical criticism still bear witness to the effects of this split. Ramus’s dividing of rhetoric into the categories of dialectics and stylistics resulted in an aesthetecizing and a “preoccupation with biblical stylistics which has remained for centuries formalized, functionless, and contextless.”³⁰⁵ Ramus further had a profound impact upon homiletics, specifically in the realm of the Puritan aesthetic as well as preaching as plain thinking. Similar to the medieval thematic sermon, in the Ramist scheme the composition of a sermon became chiefly an act of logic, using logic rather than rhetoric as the primary means of persuasion.³⁰⁶ Ramism therefore serves as a correlation between medieval scholasticism and the Puritans as displayed by their preference for the plain style of preaching. Chapter 7 will demonstrate in greater detail that Ramism spread from the preaching manuals of such

³⁰⁰ Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 250. For more on the impact of Agricola see Burnett, “The Educational Roots,” 302.

³⁰¹ Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 556.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 556. Ramus’ scheme separated the teaching of the two arts while logic and rhetoric in practice combined and worked together. Arrangement and judgment were assigned to the intellect, while the “dress” or “ornament” that style gave to matter fell to the lot of the imagination.

³⁰³ Dixon, *Rhetoric*, 65.

³⁰⁴ Miller, *The New England Mind*, 317, 319.

³⁰⁵ Wuellner, “Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?” 462.

³⁰⁶ Spears, “The Theological Hermeneutics,” 11.

Puritan scholars as William Ames to the British Colonies in America at Harvard, and would later influence the preaching of Jonathan Edwards.³⁰⁷

The second development concerns the treatment rhetoric received during the Enlightenment period. By the late sixteenth century the emergence of the scientific spirit of inquiry, with its scepticism and distrust of established authority, helped to weaken the hold of rhetoric even more.³⁰⁸ Scholars still engaged in the study of rhetoric but reduced its usage to lists of tropes and figures of speech: the pupil memorized these lists and then utilized them in the correct situation. Due to this treatment rhetoric came to be regarded as flowery speech having little or no significance in reality other than to manipulate others for potentially suspect ends.³⁰⁹

The seventeenth century witnessed the growing preoccupation with rhetorical rules as well as a concern for the development of a simple, utilitarian style based on incipient scientific interests. The Enlightenment project sought to construct a new scientific and precise language favouring clarity and literalness in order to bypass the flowery speech of rhetoric. Scholars attempted to maintain the distinction between literal (scientific and precise) and figurative (rhetorical) language.³¹⁰ Due to the privileging of univocal scientific discourse the close relationship of religion to rhetoric worked to the detriment of both. Examples include the Western preoccupation with theology at the expense of religion³¹¹ and in rhetorical criticism an aesthetecizing preoccupation with stylistics.³¹² In homiletics, the Puritan plain style of preaching required the arts of rhetoric to interpret Scripture but for the preacher to conceal those arts in the delivery of the sermon. In this mode preaching should plainly clarify doctrine whilst at the same time avoiding rhetorical ostentation.³¹³

The final issue concerns the resurgence of modern rhetoric in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth,

³⁰⁷ Ong, *Ramus, Method*, 4, 15. For more on the connection between Ramus and Puritan preaching see Miller, *The New England Mind*, 312-330. The rhetorical evaluation of Jonathan Edwards in Chapter 6 will explore in greater detail the influence of Ramus on his preaching style.

³⁰⁸ Dixon, *Rhetoric*, 66.

³⁰⁹ For more on this period see Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 270ff; and Dixon, *Rhetoric*, 66.

³¹⁰ Scholars applied the scientific method to the biblical documents and the life of Christ with the result that the history of the Jewish and Christian religions became a description of a social process. This led to the rise of biblical historical criticism in its varied forms (Kent, "The Enlightenment," 259).

³¹¹ Wuellner, "Rhetorical Criticism," 169.

³¹² Due to the Ramist division between rhetoric into dialectics and stylistics, Wuellner argues that biblical exegesis has been stuck in a "ghetto of an estheticizing preoccupation with biblical stylistics which has remained for centuries formalized, functionless, and contextless" (Wuellner, "Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" 462).

³¹³ Blacketer, "William Perkins," 46.

rhetoric had become narrowly defined as “an art, a body of rules.”³¹⁴ Rhetorical tradition indeed played a part in this conception, but only a truncated and minor part at best.³¹⁵ However, in the nineteenth century scholars began to find the Enlightenment conception of rhetoric increasingly lacking, and their critiques of Enlightenment rhetoric led to a resurgence of classical rhetoric in the twentieth century.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), for example, critiqued the commonplace Enlightenment distinction between natural and rhetorical expression in language as being fallacious by overturning the distinction Enlightenment rhetoricians made between literal and figurative language.³¹⁶ Nietzsche maintained the basic philosophical conviction that “philosophy and science, even the abstract symbolism of mathematics and logic—are fundamentally, inescapably metaphorical.”³¹⁷ When dealing with language, he noted, humans can only use metaphors to refer to things in the world “which do not at all correspond at all to the original entities.”³¹⁸ Only metaphors are appropriate to express the relationship between things and people. Nietzsche argued that humanity believed that rationalistic and scientific language brought about true and infallible knowledge of the world, but this view of language depended upon “presuppositions with which nothing in the real world corresponds.”³¹⁹ Truth, for Nietzsche, consisted rather of a “mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms” that refer to human relations that have been embellished poetically and rhetorically.³²⁰

Nietzsche contested the then-commonplace conception that rhetoric represents a mere resource upon which the skilled orator draws. His major “insight is that the figures of speech classified in traditional rhetorical manuals do not represent a special case of linguistic variation and ornamentation; rather, these constitute all language.”³²¹ Nietzsche recovered a Sophistic view of rhetoric, arguing that “language itself is the result of purely rhetorical arts”³²² as compared to the Socratic

³¹⁴ Richards, *Rhetoric*, 102.

³¹⁵ Medhurst, “Rhetorical Dimensions,” 214.

³¹⁶ Richards, *Rhetoric*, 134.

³¹⁷ Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology, and Metaphor*, 10.

³¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric*, 249.

³¹⁹ Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, 11.

³²⁰ Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 46-47.

³²¹ Richards, *Rhetoric*, 11.

³²² Nietzsche, *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric*, 23.

philosophers who, similar to Enlightenment scholars sought objective “truth” rather than rhetorical victory.³²³

In the twentieth century Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), with his programme of deconstruction, contributed two further elements to the new understanding of rhetoric. First, Derrida build upon Nietzsche’s conception of the inescapable rhetorical nature of philosophical language. Derrida pointed out the paradox that “natural and universal writing, intelligible and nontemporal writing, is thus named by metaphor... It is not, therefore, a matter of inverting the literal meaning and the figurative meaning but of determining the ‘literal’ meaning of writing as metaphoricity itself.”³²⁴ Second, Derrida explored “how the opposition to rhetoric in the writings of Plato established that entrenched attachment in Western thinking to binary opposition.”³²⁵ Derrida’s deconstructive notion of “différance” invites the reader to question such binary opposition and “to undo the need for balanced equations, to see if each term is not after all an accomplice of the other.”³²⁶

A further influence on the revival of classical rhetoric within the first half of the twentieth century involved American colleges such as Iowa, Wisconsin and Cornell beginning graduate programs in speech. Of the three Cornell’s Speech Department fostered the resuscitation of classical rhetoric by drawing strongly upon classical roots.³²⁷ Moreover, authors such as I.A. Richards and Kenneth Burke helped to develop the “new rhetoric,” which “is said to have profited by what it appropriated from the modern refinements in psychology, semantics, motivation research, and other behavioral sciences.”³²⁸ By 1936, Richards began to reconstruct classical rhetoric, taking into view much of Croce’s earlier criticism that rhetorical form had been separated from content. Rather than critiquing rhetoric as Croce had, Richards attempted to build a new rhetoric to replace the old.³²⁹ Unlike the earlier work of Locke, who tried to expunge rhetoric of its perceived abuses and unnecessary elements, the task of the new rhetorician attends closely to the meaning and behaviour

³²³ Consigny, “Nietzsche’s Reading of the Sophists,” 10.

³²⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 15.

³²⁵ Richards, *Rhetoric*, 135.

³²⁶ Spivak, “Translator’s Preface” to *Of Grammatology*, lix.

³²⁷ Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 572; Olbricht, “The Flowering of Rhetorical Criticism,” 84.

³²⁸ Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 572.

³²⁹ Dixon, *Rhetoric*, 71.

of words in their contexts. Such a task involves attending to the ambiguous nature of language and the transaction between author and reader.³³⁰

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca have also contributed significantly to the development of the “new rhetoric.”³³¹ The authors point out their devotion to the study of argumentation and its connection with the ancient tradition of Greek rhetoric and dialectic. Such a move, they state, “constitutes a *break with a concept of reason and reasoning due to Descartes* which has set its mark on Western philosophy for the last three centuries.”³³² They hold that by the twentieth century, despite three centuries of publications related to faith and preaching, logicians and modern philosophers had become almost completely disinterested in the topic of rhetoric. What makes their rhetoric “new” involves their return to Renaissance humanist concerns and beyond them to certain Greek and Roman rhetoricians “who studied the art of persuading and of convincing, the technique of deliberation and of discussion.”³³³ Building on Aristotle’s dialectics while neglecting other aspects of classical rhetoric, they attempt to go beyond classical conceptions of rhetoric by exploring the realm of argumentation in light of an audience.³³⁴

Evaluation

The above discussion of the treatment, understanding and applications of rhetoric during the periods of the Enlightenment and modernism sets the stage for the third and final example of the tendency to separate theory and practice in the field of homiletics, as well as reactionary movements that seek to embrace emotive preaching forms. The modernist era witnessed the near-demise of rhetoric due to its conception as mere bombast, ostentation or empty speech. Attempting to maintain the distinction between literal and figurative language, scholars increasingly viewed rhetoric with suspicion and attempted to craft a scientific language pruned of all tropes and figures. Enlightenment scholars believed that language constituted a tool or resource for clarity in communication and instruction.³³⁵ The following section demonstrates that this approach to language would have an impact on homiletics during this period and into the twentieth century as proponents of the New Homiletic reacted against

³³⁰ Ibid., 71-71.

³³¹ Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 573.

³³² Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 1 (italics theirs).

³³³ Ibid., 5.

³³⁴ Ibid., 5

³³⁵ Richards, *Rhetoric*, 134.

traditional homiletical forms that utilized Enlightenment conceptions of rhetoric and language.

Traditional Homiletics, the New Homiletic and Narrative Preaching

The final example of the separation of theory and practice in homiletics involves the New Homiletic as a reaction to and critique of traditional homiletics. Modernist preachers “attempted to offer an understanding of Christian faith that was consistent with Enlightenment presuppositions concerning truth.”³³⁶ Influenced by higher criticism, Enlightenment rationalism and the subsequent view of rhetoric, the “propositional sermon” form of traditional homiletics utilized a conceptual, analytical, linear, and explanatory mode of preaching that explained ideas using deductive forms.³³⁷ In this understanding, meaning describes grasping a biblical proposition or idea and then re-presenting that meaning or interpretation to an audience consisting of passive receivers of meaning.³³⁸ This approach “represents hermeneutical and homiletical approaches in which the content of texts could be separated from the form and made the subject of some other form of communication.”³³⁹ Echoes of Ramist doctrine can be seen in traditional homiletics’ conception of the sermon as a bridge by which, through rhetorically applied exegesis, the preacher brings preachable truths from the ancient biblical world across to the current world of the listeners. In this “rhetorical-interpretative event” the preacher presents textually-derived propositions via logical argumentation and then utilizes emotional appeals to drive home applications at the conclusion of the sermon.³⁴⁰

During the period involving the general breakdown of societal authority in Western society in the late 1960s and early 1970s, The New Homiletic arose in a milieu of dissatisfaction with authoritarian modes of church and authoritative preaching methods. Reacting against the authoritarianism of preachers and the passivity of congregational audiences, proponents of the New Homiletic instead advocated a sermon theory that elevated the role of the listener by involving him/her

³³⁶ Ronald J. Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism,” 35.

³³⁷ Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 111.

³³⁸ Cosgrove and Edgerton, *In Other Words*, 5, 15.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁴⁰ Farley, *Practicing Gospel*, 84, 97-98. Stott’s work *Between Two Worlds* may be the clearest example of an argument for this mode of preaching.

in the inductive process of discovery, thus engaging both the minds and emotions of the hearers.³⁴¹

Although he was not the first to do so, Fred B. Craddock in his 1971 work *As One Without Authority* heavily criticized traditional propositional preaching theory.³⁴² As the title of Craddock's work indicates, Western societal consensus declared that preaching was dead and moreover that the voice of the preacher carried no more authority. The traditional relationship between authoritative preacher and passive listener had broken down. In a post-Christian culture, with the collapse of the scaffolding of traditional supports, preachers could no longer assume the inherent institutional authority of their denomination or church, their status as clergy, or in the Scriptures.³⁴³ Preaching had been ruled an anachronism. A further complication to the preaching task concerned the seemingly insurmountable gap between the pulpit and pew. The rise of increasingly speculative biblical historical criticism in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries had only served to widen the gap between the world of the ancient text and the current world, making the task of preachers increasingly difficult. Due to the hegemony of historical-critical methods, for example, many seminarians were taught that they must preach the meaning found in the reconstructed events from the ancient world behind the text rather than the meaning found within the text itself.³⁴⁴

Craddock held that by the 1970s, in general preaching had failed because it had become an entrenched, traditional institution often marked by poor or lazy preaching and low expectations on the part of the audience. In place of traditional authoritative and authoritarian deductive homiletical theories Craddock advocated the New Homiletic, which sought to replace the deductive sermon with an inductive sermon style. Modernist-influenced deductive sermons, he argued, proceeded "from the general truth to the particular application or experience, while induction is the reverse."³⁴⁵ This homiletical form involved the listener in the same inductive process the preacher underwent in the exegesis portion of the sermon preparation. For

³⁴¹ Craddock argued of inductive preaching that "The sole purpose is to engage the hearer in the pursuit of an issue or an idea so that he will think his own thoughts and experience his own feelings in the presence of Christ and in the light of the gospel" (*As One Without Authority*, 15).

³⁴² Craddock scored a direct hit with his publication and currently it "stands as one of the most important and influential books on preaching written in the last century" (Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 102).

³⁴³ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 14.

³⁴⁴ Farris, "Limping Away," 361.

³⁴⁵ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 45.

Craddock, theory became combined with practice in the very act of preaching itself by elevating the role of listener from passive recipient to active participant in the meaning-making process of interpretation.

Since its inception, however, Craddock's inductive preaching theory became subsumed under the heading of "narrative preaching" as homiletical practice followed. Long argues that in the 1970s and 1980s, "Craddock was not the main voice in the period calling for narrative preaching, and, in fact, his own theoretical approach to preaching, which he called 'inductive preaching,' is not narrative at all."³⁴⁶ Whilst Craddock's inductive method can certainly use stories it does not demand them; however, Craddock's practice more than his theory placed him at the forefront of the renaissance of narrative preaching.³⁴⁷ Seemingly Craddock, as a narrative preacher, failed to explore fully the connections between his inductive theory and his narrative preaching practice. As time went on, practitioners of narrative sermons continued to separate practice from original theory using childish stories, relating playground anecdotes to illustrate the gospel, focusing on stories about certain kinds of people while excluding others or creating shifty trapdoor sermon plots in the attempt to keep their listeners amused.³⁴⁸ Preachers in this mode have been charged with crafting sermons that degenerate into mere entertainment or the attempt to manipulate hearers through appeals to emotions. Such preaching forms produce listeners who may be entertained but spiritually ignorant due to lack of appreciable content.³⁴⁹

Evaluation and Conclusion

The contextual interpretation of the above trends has demonstrated that preaching forms change, adapt and are influenced by changes within rhetorical theory and biblical studies. In the process of this evolution they often exhibit the tendency to separate practice from original theories, producing preaching forms that can become overly logical, rational and formal. Consequently reactionary preaching forms arise that attempt to redress this imbalance in rhetorical theory by seeking to engage the totality of the listeners' logic and emotions in practice. Based upon this contextual analysis one can project that as a genre, homiletics will continue to evolve as it has throughout its long history. In order to develop a pragmatic plan for future biblical

³⁴⁶ Long, "What Happened to Narrative Preaching?" 10.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 (italics his).

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁴⁹ Radford, "The New Homiletic," 8.

exegesis and homiletics, this chapter will next turn its attention to the task of constructing a contextually-based rhetorical-critical methodology. The section below will discuss the subject of biblical rhetorical criticism, engaging first in a contextual interpretation of its development in the twentieth century and second constructing a theoretical methodological approach.

Whilst certainly not exhaustive this contextual analysis of rhetoric, biblical studies and homiletics has demonstrated the profound influences of rhetorical theory within the disciplines of biblical studies and homiletics. This thesis attempts to integrate rhetorical theory and practice by advancing an exegetical method that goes beyond utilizing rhetorical criticism purely to interpret the biblical text without application, or merely listing its stylistic elements. Rather, the chapter will suggest that rhetorical criticism, when integrated with modern rhetorical theory and narratological elements, can serve as an exegetical basis for a values-based approach to homiletics. Such an approach connects to the values-based homiletical approach within Chapter 4 by advancing the notion that the rhetoric of preaching ideally should replicate the variety of rhetorical forms found within Scripture, thereby resulting in a multi-vocal and non-hierarchical homiletic appropriate to postmodernity.

Contextual Interpretation: Rhetorical-Critical Theory³⁵⁰

Developments within Contemporary Rhetorical Criticism

In order to develop its pragmatic plan of action for the integration of biblical studies and homiletics, this thesis constructs its approach by utilizing elements of current approaches to biblical rhetorical criticism. A contextual interpretation of contemporary rhetorical-critical theory reveals that it has undergone two important shifts since the late 1960s.³⁵¹ First, primarily diachronic exegetical approaches tended to raise more questions about the text and brought about debates over historical issues

³⁵⁰ This overview is not intended to be an in-depth study of the history of twentieth-century rhetorical-critical theory. For more information on the development of biblical rhetorical criticism and the impact of critics such as Wilder, Muilenburg and Kennedy see: Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 20-21; Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians*, 46-47; Medhurst, "Rhetorical Dimensions," 214; Wuellner, "Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" 451; Kessler, "A Methodological Setting," 4; McDonald, "Rhetorical Criticism," 599; and House, "Introduction to 'Form Criticism and Beyond,'" 48.

³⁵¹ Critics trace the impact of Muilenburg's 1968 SBL Presidential address, "Form Criticism and Beyond," as the seminal event establishing current approaches to biblical rhetorical criticism. Although intended as a supplement to form criticism, Muilenburg's method gave rise to biblical rhetorical criticism as a "full-fledged discipline evoking a rich heritage and enjoying a vital presence" (Tribble. *Rhetorical Criticism*, 5).

such as redactional layers and the dating and authorship of multiple source materials. Ultimately these methods undermined the overall unity of a text by seeking tensions and inconsistencies, separating books into layers of prose and poetry and attempting to place original source materials within their various historical contexts. Current approaches to rhetorical criticism have shifted the attention of the interpreter away from diachronic historical and precompositional matters to synchronic readings of the final form of the text. The critic need not choose one approach over the other, however; Chapter 5 will demonstrate that one can construct a complementary approach to these two seemingly diametrically-opposed disciplines.

Present literary and synchronic approaches to the biblical text enable the critic to note the “integrity of the whole, the way its component parts interrelate, its effects upon the reader, or the way it achieves its effects.”³⁵² The discovery of the variety of artistic and rhetorical elements used in the major Old Testament (OT) passages allows the rhetorical critic to accent the wholeness and unity of many chapters and books.³⁵³ This paradigm shift in rhetorical criticism places the OT in an entirely new light by giving each text individual value and showcasing the biblical writers’ distinct powers of artistic expression. Rather than seeking interpretation in the historical contexts behind the text, critics now focus attention upon the interpretation of the text itself in the final form of as received.³⁵⁴ Biblical passages no longer simply serve as avenues by which to reconstruct ancient Israelite history.³⁵⁵ Due to this shift preachers no longer have to struggle in the attempt to preach the meaning drawn from the world behind the text.³⁵⁶

Biblical rhetorical criticism in its contemporary form can therefore be categorized as a form of literary criticism in which the critic builds upon the knowledge of literary conventions practised in ancient Israel and its environment. This allows the critic to view literary units as well-composed pieces by the standards of literary composition of ancient Israel, rather than judging them by modern literary

³⁵² Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 3.

³⁵³ Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, 87.

³⁵⁴ Floss speaks of the issue of the more recent polarity between the two (historical and literary methods). Literary approaches speak of the need to study only the ‘final form’ of the text: “But the inappropriateness of such an opposition is indicated by the emphasis on the term ‘final form’. This indicates, by definition, that a text has experienced successive forms of literary genesis” (“Form, Source, and Redaction Criticism,” 593).

³⁵⁵ House, “The Rise and Current Status,” 8.

³⁵⁶ Farris, “Limping Away,” 361.

standards.³⁵⁷ Such a study seeks to discover and to analyze the peculiar literary artistry found within a specific literary unit of OT text. This artistic analysis underscores the harmony and value of the final written passage within the critic's current context, brings about a deeper appreciation of the text and potentially enriches one's scriptural readings.³⁵⁸ Critics further can discuss both the message of the text itself as well as its impact upon its various audiences.³⁵⁹ As Chapters 5 and 7 will demonstrate, clarification of rhetor and the audience, together with an analysis of the rhetorical situation, becomes a helpful resource for sermons attempting to replicate homiletically the rhetorical dynamics of biblical texts.

Second, current rhetorical-critical approaches have rediscovered elements from the conceptual framework of classical rhetoric but have adapted them to fit the contemporary context. As this context is far more diverse and complex than classical rhetoricians ever realized, this observation "necessitates the utilization of the insights of modern rhetoric."³⁶⁰ Critics such as Wuellner call for a new rhetoric that "goes back to the classical definition of rhetoric as the art of persuasion"³⁶¹ in order to avoid the charge of reducing rhetoric to stylistics. Modern scholars using classical rhetoric have found "rhetorical criticism as a method to be quite heuristic."³⁶²

For example, Kennedy's approach to rhetorical criticism, builds "on the legacies of Hellenistic-Roman textbooks on rhetoric adapted to modern use."³⁶³ Medhurst further notes that modern rhetorical critics building upon the insights of classical rhetoric have discovered the renewed understanding that "effective speech or writing is contingent upon audience and situation, that different parts of the discourse are adapted to achieve specific artistic purposes."³⁶⁴ Critics have also pointed out that "the purposive use of language is reflected in *all* choices made by the communicator."³⁶⁵ Based upon this new understanding of rhetoric, contemporary

³⁵⁷ Hauser, "Rhetorical Criticism," 7.

³⁵⁸ Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, 87.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4. Chapter 5 will discuss in greater detail the issue of audiences and contexts the critic can attempt to reconstruct.

³⁶⁰ Olbricht, "The Flowering of Rhetorical Criticism," 101.

³⁶¹ Lessing, "Preaching Like the Prophets," 398.

³⁶² Medhurst, "Rhetorical Dimensions," 224.

³⁶³ Wuellner, "Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" 455. Kennedy discusses and applies his method in *New Testament Interpretation*.

³⁶⁴ Medhurst, "Rhetorical Dimensions," 225.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

biblical critics “are discovering a tool with great interpretive and explanatory power.”³⁶⁶

Contemporary approaches to rhetorical criticism can be located at a crossroads whereby its choices include either embracing a form of literary criticism or a form of practical criticism. On the one hand, defining rhetorical criticism as a form of literary criticism potentially leads to a restrained rhetoric that reduces rhetoric to stylistics and stylistics to tropes and figures. On the other hand, practical criticism re-values or reinvents rhetoric “in which texts are read and reread, interpreted and reinterpreted.”³⁶⁷ This approach studies rhetorical devices of disposition and style and their impact on readers by examining the social relationship between writer and reader. The critic’s concern with classical rhetorical categories stands in the gap between the two approaches. Critics attempting to study the persuasive elements of a text tend to focus less on literary devices and structure and more upon the purpose for which those literary devices are used.³⁶⁸ This shift heralds a return to Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as “discovering the available means for persuasion,” which holds the advantage of integrating the formal and the functional aspects of rhetorical criticism.³⁶⁹

However, critics attempting to utilize classical rhetoric for biblical studies face the possibility of “a too rigid application of rhetorical categories to the biblical texts.”³⁷⁰ Using “only classical tenets of rhetoric as units of analysis in criticism” brings about the danger of ignoring “a large body of new scholarship in and thinking about rhetorical principles.”³⁷¹ Classical rhetorical handbooks “were written at a time and in the context of cultures that were different in values, orientation, and knowledge from ours.”³⁷² One must not assume that the ideal rhetorical principles espoused then function the same today. In order to avoid anachronistic criticism, Watson recommends an inductive approach that seeks to uncover the existing rhetorical strategies and techniques used in the compositions of Scripture, whether consciously or unconsciously applied to the text.³⁷³ The critic should avoid simply utilizing

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 225.

³⁶⁷ Wuellner, “Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?” 453.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 4.

³⁶⁹ Kessler, “A Methodological Setting,” 2; Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Chapter 2, 6.

³⁷⁰ Watson, “Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament,” 111.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 26.

³⁷² Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 26.

³⁷³ Watson, “Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament,” 112.

wholesale categories and observations of classical rhetoric and forcing prophetic texts to conform to them. Moreover the critic must note when those texts differ from classical rhetorical categories, perhaps in significant ways.³⁷⁴

For example, the application of the approach to Ezekiel will not only draw upon rhetorical-critical theory but will integrate this approach with elements from narrative theory in order to understand, analyze and evaluate the text as a narrative.³⁷⁵ Narrative criticism seeks to understand the ways in which narrative texts serve to frame experience and thus how they advocate a particular view of the world. In order to convince the readers of the plausibility of their viewpoints, biblical narrators make use of the persuasive arts of rhetoric, or the art of convincing with words. On this basis a sound narratology is largely a form of rhetorical analysis;³⁷⁶ therefore, by analyzing narrative texts in this fashion the critic can understand not only the argument being made but also the potential in its gaining adherence for the point of view it represents.³⁷⁷

With the addition of elements of modern rhetorical theory such as narrative criticism, the new rhetoric contains the capacity to address issues not fully addressed within traditional rhetoric. Further, it anticipates postmodern theoretical concerns, such as the effort to integrate truth and persuasion.³⁷⁸ Modern rhetorical theory moves beyond solely appealing to rationality and cognition and instead embraces emotive and imaginative elements. In terms of the relationship between the reader and the text, contemporary approaches confront “the long-established perception of authors as active and readers as passive or receptive by showing the rationale for readers as active, creative, productive.”³⁷⁹ Moreover, by moving from diachronic to synchronic readings, modern rhetorical theory challenges the notion that critics should read texts for the sake of knowledge alone to an appreciation of “the practical, the political, the powerful, the playful, and the delightful aspects of religious texts.”³⁸⁰

³⁷⁴ Lessing, “Preaching Like the Prophets,” 407.

³⁷⁵ Bal, *Narratology*, 3.

³⁷⁶ Fokkelmann, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 55-56.

³⁷⁷ Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 400.

³⁷⁸ Wuellner, “Rhetorical Criticism,” 156, 163-163.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 461.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 461.

Rhetorical-Critical Methodology

Many contemporary approaches to rhetorical criticism follow essentially a five-step process. Typically the first task is to determine the boundaries of the literary unit to be studied, while the second task involves the analysis of the rhetorical situation or problem. The third task incorporates a consideration of the rhetorical arrangement of the unit, whilst fourth is an analysis of the various devices of style. Finally, most approaches conclude by discussing the rhetorical effectiveness of the unit in meeting the rhetorical situation.³⁸¹

The approach taken in this thesis will follow the general rubric of approaches that seek to uncover the persuasive force of the discourse rather than focusing solely upon its structure or formal literary features.³⁸² The methodology will conform to the first two steps regarding the definition of the literary or rhetorical unit and the analysis of the rhetorical situation. The approach differs at the third step by incorporating narratological elements from the approach of Fox, who recommends a consideration of the stance or point of view of the rhetor and the resulting rhetorical function of that stance.³⁸³

In order to aid in this step, the approach utilizes a variety of narratological tools to elucidate the stance and point of view of three elements: one, Yahweh the rhetor; second, Ezekiel the character-narrator who delivers the oracle from Yahweh; and third, the exilic audience. These three points of view will be explored further in the sample sermon in Chapter 7. The fourth step seeks to extend Block's awareness of the rhetorical function of prophecy by analyzing the rhetorical strategies of the unit. Here the structural and stylistic elements of the unit are viewed not as aesthetic ends in themselves, but rather as rhetorical strategies within their persuasive context.³⁸⁴ Finally the approach concludes in the fifth step by evaluating the rhetorical effectiveness of the unit in meeting its rhetorical goals. Whereas most rhetorical-critical models stop at this point, this approach attempts to go beyond that stage by

³⁸¹ Adapted from Kennedy's approach to rhetorical criticism as outlined in *NT Interpretation*, 33-38. For a discussion of an alternate approach see Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond."

³⁸² Wuellner points out "the theorists in the Muilenburg School failed to realize how much the prevailing theories of rhetoric were victims of that 'rhetoric restrained,' i.e. victims of the fateful reduction of rhetorics to stylistics, and of stylistics in turn to the rhetorical tropes or figures" ("Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" 451).

³⁸³ Fox, "The Rhetoric of Ezekiel's Vision," 1.

³⁸⁴ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 11.

viewing the rhetorical effectiveness of the unit within the context of the book as a whole.

Conclusion

Based upon its contextual analysis, this chapter has demonstrated that as a genre preaching historically evolves due to shifts within the fields of rhetoric and biblical studies. The close connection between rhetoric and homiletics opens up the possibility for preachers profitably to utilize the knowledge gleaned from an inductive study of the unique rhetorical features of the OT. Such a reading enables the critic “to understand how the literary conventions used in ancient Israel were given particular shape and content in order to convey a specific, unique message.”³⁸⁵ This approach involves a twofold goal. The first element is to analyze the literary features of the text from within the perspective of the discernible literary style of the Israelite authors, and the second is to articulate the impact of the literary unit on its audience.³⁸⁶ This inductive approach neither identifies the prophetic texts with strict Aristotelian rhetorical species nor analyzes “the text’s rhetorical techniques and strategies according to the traditionally prescribed list.”³⁸⁷

The chapter has furthermore demonstrated that elements of modern rhetorical theory can be profitably utilized in order to develop the potential of the method. The approach to rhetorical criticism thus includes “not only the identification and description of classical rhetorical figures (tropes and schemes), but also the widened perspectives of the new rhetoric.”³⁸⁸ However, even within this widened spectrum the method faces the danger of becoming hegemonic or normative, in which case it will have failed.³⁸⁹ For example, the situation in the first half of this century whereby historical-critical methods dominated the scene and tolerated no challenges must not be allowed to occur again.³⁹⁰ Whilst rhetorical criticism can be supplemented with findings from classical and modern rhetorical theories the resulting approach should be adaptable and flexible, keeping the way open for continued findings, new research and interdisciplinary approaches.

³⁸⁵ Hauser, “Rhetorical Criticism,” 4.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁸⁷ Lessing, “Preaching Like the Prophets,” 407.

³⁸⁸ Kessler, “A Methodological Setting,” 10 (parenthesis his).

³⁸⁹ Medhurst, “Rhetorical Dimensions,” 225; Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 294.

³⁹⁰ Kessler, “A Methodological Setting,” 14.

Having constructed the conceptual basis for its rhetorical-critical approach, the following chapter will entail a contextual interpretation of the New Homiletic that will lead to the production of a values-based homiletic. Chapter 5 will demonstrate the application of the rhetorical-critical-narratological approach outlined in this chapter by assessing first the entire discourse of Ezekiel, and then focusing upon a close reading of the literary unit of Ezekiel 15. Chapter 7 will integrate the elements of biblical studies and preaching in the production of a sample sermon drawn from the text of Ezekiel 15 and further will showcase a brief application of his method as applied to a genre of biblical discourse.

CHAPTER 4

A CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW HOMILETIC

Introduction

The aim of this chapter will be to engage with a contextual interpretation of the New Homiletic that will lead to the construction of a values-based homiletical approach. Following the contextual interpretation in the previous chapter that analyzed past and present trends within rhetoric, biblical studies and homiletics, this chapter continues within that trajectory by focusing more closely upon the normative practice of preaching within the Christian tradition. In order to develop a pragmatic plan for future homiletics, in particular this chapter critically evaluates the contributions of certain recovered values drawn from Fred B. Craddock's conception of the New Homiletic. Based upon that evaluation, the chapter seeks to construct a values-based homiletical approach that anticipates current and future homiletical changes.

Preaching is currently in the midst of a remarkable renewal in its Western traditions. For example, preaching handbooks abound and are marked by their sheer volume, diversity and quality. Theological schools continue to add homiletics courses and faculty, whilst voices from local congregations demand competent, relevant preaching. Finally, due to the ongoing online conversation, the global community continues to shape the influence and methods of preaching as never before.³⁹² As Chapter 2 notes, however, since Western cultural norms continue to shift toward an increasingly postmodern culture, the need arises for revitalization and cultural relevance for the church and its preaching ministry.

In light of these observations this chapter will demonstrate that certain recovered values drawn from the New Homiletic, now more than two generations beyond its inception, can function as an adequate and faithful response to preaching in a postmodern and post-Christendom society. Such a reimaged approach to homiletics becomes the application of a pragmatic plan of action serving a new generation characterized by a postmodern scepticism concerning the possibility of hope in God.³⁹³

³⁹² Eslinger, *Web of Preaching*, 11.

³⁹³ Reid, "Postmodern and the Function," 3.

The contextual analysis in the previous chapter demonstrated that due to the nature of its symbiotic relationship with society, rhetoric expands or contracts to meet the demands placed upon it by social groups.³⁹⁴ Due to its historically close association with rhetoric, preaching forms and methods likewise change and adapt due to the impact of various cultural and intellectual movements.³⁹⁵ Particularly in light of the compartmentalization of disciplines and privileging of univocal scientific discourse since the Enlightenment,³⁹⁶ this chapter attempts to re-integrate exegetical and homiletical theory and practice, form with content, and interpretation and application. Although recognizing that exegesis and preaching are not wholly identical, proclamation is a natural and proper fulfilment of biblical exegesis.³⁹⁷ Therefore as preaching consists in large measure of the exposition of normative texts, then homiletics involves not only the skills of rhetoric and oral communication in delivery but also those of exegesis and hermeneutics.³⁹⁸

Hermeneutics plays a decisive role in determining the homiletical shape of a sermon.³⁹⁹ Craddock affirms this close relationship between exegesis and homiletics as necessary and appropriate when he states: “Preaching is not an appendix, an unscientific postscript, or an application totally independent of exegesis itself.”⁴⁰⁰ While exegesis and proclamation permit only relative separation from each other, the degree of that distinction must be preserved for the health of both. This thesis argues that sermons ideally should not involve a strict exposition of texts distilled into propositional form regardless of genre, but rather involves the proclamation of that which the text proclaimed.⁴⁰¹ The task of discovering the rhetorical function of a text is intimately related to sermon preparation, especially if the sermon intends to do and say what the text does and says.⁴⁰² While not discounting entirely authorial intent,⁴⁰³

³⁹⁴ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 3.

³⁹⁵ Eslinger, *Web of Preaching*, 17.

³⁹⁶ Miller, *New England Mind*, 330; Wuellner, “Rhetorical Criticism,” 169. Chapter 2 demonstrated this tendency toward sharp divisions between various disciplines that can be seen clearly in the doctrines of Ramus and Talon.

³⁹⁷ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 98. Clearly not only one type of exegesis is possible or even desirable; differing theological aims can produce widely divergent interpretive results (diachronic/synchronic, feminist, liberation, queer, post-colonial theological readings, etc.). Rather the emphasis here is on the reality that proclamation is a logical and natural extension of the exegetical process.

³⁹⁸ Craddock, “The Sermon and the Uses of Scripture,” 7.

³⁹⁹ Howell, “Hermeneutical Bridges and Homiletical Methods,” 5, 9.

⁴⁰⁰ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 98.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴⁰² Eslinger, *Web of Preaching*, 24.

the exegetical aim of this thesis seeks to avoid “the intentional fallacy”⁴⁰⁴ by focusing upon the dynamics of the interaction of writer and reader through the medium of the text.⁴⁰⁵ Viewed as an act of rhetorical communication, the preaching event contains similar dynamics: the “communication triangle” consists of a speaker, a message, and an audience.⁴⁰⁶ Each must receive balanced focus for the message to succeed in achieving its (ideal) rhetorical aim. The *ethos* and exegetical/homiletical facility of the speaker are important,⁴⁰⁷ as well as the matter and manner of the sermon and the audience, who are increasingly viewed as active participants in the communication process.⁴⁰⁸

In order to give the preacher increasing facility in both exegesis and proclamation, this thesis follows in the tradition of proponents of the New Homiletic, who “insist that the *what* and the *how* of biblical texts cannot be separated.”⁴⁰⁹ Rhetorical criticism serves as an access point into the alternative world of the text and enables the preacher to communicate elements of the *what* and the *how* of a biblical text to an audience.⁴¹⁰ Such an approach helps to “ensure a fundamental integrity to preaching by deriving both the message and design of the sermon from the same biblical source.”⁴¹¹

⁴⁰³ Here I follow Longman, who refers to ‘the author’ as the final shaper of a canonical book. He states that “The intention of the author is hypothetically reconstructed through interaction with the text” (*Literary Approaches*, 66) and not a biographical study of the real author.

⁴⁰⁴ Wimsatt and Beardsley argue “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (“The Intentional Fallacy,” 3). Longman holds that their argument had validity: “Traditional critics spent so much time discussing the life and habits of authors that they lost sight of the text before them.” The service done by the New Critics was to direct “attention to the text itself in the interpretive process” (*Literary Approaches*, 20, 49).

⁴⁰⁵ Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 61.

⁴⁰⁶ Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric*, 5. This concept, however, goes back at least as far as Aristotle, who in his *Rhetoric* identified three parts of a speech: a speaker, the subject of the speech, and the hearer to whom the speech is addressed (*Rhetoric*, Book 1, Part III).

⁴⁰⁷ Both Aristotle and Quintilian believed *ethos* to be of primary importance. Aristotle argued: “Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible... character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses” (*Rhetoric*, Book 1, Part I). Quintilian stated he did “not merely assert that the ideal orator should be a good man,” but rather “that no man can be an orator unless he is a good man” (Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian Volume 4*, Book XII, Chapter 1, 3).

⁴⁰⁸ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 100.

⁴⁰⁹ Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul*, 4, italics his.

⁴¹⁰ Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 61-62. Wilder indicates that to separate out the *what* from the *how* in reality “is a false distinction. The two really cannot be separated, but they can be looked at separately” (*Early Christian Rhetoric*, 10). The larger and more important issue is to understand how the *what* and the *how* of biblical texts function together to achieve various rhetorical functions, and how to replicate them homiletically.

⁴¹¹ Eslinger, *Web of Preaching*, 31-32.

In order to achieve the goal of integrating biblical studies and homiletics, this chapter will attempt to recover certain reconstructed values found in aspects of Craddock's New Homiletic. An understanding of these homiletical values creates a space whereby larger—and perhaps more important—contextual issues can be raised such as preaching theory,⁴¹² the purpose(s) of preaching,⁴¹³ the role(s) of the congregation, church culture and the philosophy of congregational leadership. Rather than adhering to a particular homiletical shape or construct a methods-based approach, the thesis seeks instead to construct a values-based theology of preaching. Such an approach gives the preacher the facility to explore a variety of creative homiletical forms that nonetheless are consonant with the performative aspects of the text when utilizing rhetorical criticism.

In order to construct its contextual interpretation the chapter will utilize the hermeneutical cycle by first engaging in a brief systematic information-gathering and overview of homiletical shifts that contributed to the rise and early success of the New Homiletic. The focus will then narrow to observe other derivative homiletical models that arose from the New Homiletic, and will next analyze its current status. Following this contextual overview the chapter will analyze and critique the strengths and weaknesses of the normative practices of Craddock's New Homiletic. The chapter will discuss how certain recovered values of the New Homiletic can impact the understanding of not only homiletical form but the potentially larger issue of the purpose of preaching. The chapter will also demonstrate how other homileticians have adapted elements of the New Homiletic for contemporary preaching forms. Finally, the chapter will conclude by developing a pragmatic plan for future homiletics, involving the construction of a values-based theology of preaching that is multi-vocal, non-hierarchical and appropriate to postmodernity.

⁴¹² Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 1. She notes that even after eight years of parish ministry and seven years of teaching homiletics, she discovered she “could not articulate a coherent theory of preaching” (1).

⁴¹³ A good example of the multiplicity of purposes for preaching can be seen in Jana Childers' work *The Purposes of Preaching*. One contributor states “we must think in the plural” as to the purposes of preaching (Mary Donovan Turner, “Disrupting a Ruptured World,” 139, 140).

Trends Shaping the New Homiletic

At this juncture little need exists to reconstruct an exhaustive history of the New Homiletic as this has been done extensively elsewhere.⁴¹⁴ What is important to note for the purposes of this thesis is that the New Homiletic, as has been well-documented, was the result of a series of cultural and intellectual movements that served to bridge the chasm between the old era in homiletics and the New. These factors include cultural and societal movements, the role of the media, advances in biblical studies and contemporary hermeneutics, and the rapidly shifting nature of public language.⁴¹⁵ This observation is consonant with the observations drawn in the previous chapter: the genre of the sermon, like many genres, constantly changes and evolves as its best practitioners modify it.⁴¹⁶

Scholars point to the work of homiletician H. Grady Davis as beginning the shift from old to new homiletics. More than a decade before Craddock's work, H. Grady Davis in his 1958 publication *Design for Preaching* criticized the old deductive homiletic and called instead for an organic union of form and content in preaching.⁴¹⁷ His dissatisfaction with the traditional three-point sermon led to his focus upon the shape and movement of the sermon in connection with its content.⁴¹⁸ Davis argued that "the right form derives from the substance of the message itself, is inseparable from the content, becomes one with the content, and gives a feeling of finality to the sermon."⁴¹⁹ The shift continued a decade later as homiletician David James Randolph coined the term "the new homiletic" in his 1969 work *The Renewal of Preaching*. Utilizing elements drawn from the new hermeneutics of Fuchs and Ebeling, Randolph's major contribution was to characterize preaching as an event whereby the preacher interprets the biblical text in order that its meaning would come to expression within the concrete situation of the listener.⁴²⁰ He further emphasized

⁴¹⁴ On this history see: Howell, "Hermeneutical Bridges and Homiletical Methods," Chapters 1-2; Spears, "The Theological Hermeneutics," Chapters 2-3; Shawn D. Radford, "The Impact of Fred B. Craddock's Understanding"; Lovejoy, "A Critical Evaluation"; Rose, *Sharing the Word*, Chapter 3; Eslinger, *Web of Preaching*, Chapter 1; and Gibson, "Defining the New Homiletic."

⁴¹⁵ Eslinger, *Web of Preaching*, 17, 19.

⁴¹⁶ Edwards, *Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*, xi.

⁴¹⁷ Radford, "The Impact," 62.

⁴¹⁸ Rudy-Froese, "The Preached Sermon," 6.

⁴¹⁹ Davis, *Design for Preaching*, 9.

⁴²⁰ Gibson, "Defining the New Homiletic," 21; Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching*, 19.

wrestling with the intentionality of the text and the construction of sermons whose form is consistent with content.⁴²¹

Three years later Fred B. Craddock continued this trend by writing his groundbreaking work *As One Without Authority*. His 1971 book was timely, resonating “widely and deeply among homileticians because it brought together concerns that were already widely shared.”⁴²² Craddock drew upon Davis’ conception that the sermon should be an organic union of form and content, as well as Randolph’s conception of the sermon as an event. In light of the “multi-faceted social revolution of the 1960s, preachers could no longer assume that they were recognized authority figures, and thus could no longer assume that preaching, which merely articulated dogma, or exacted moral demands, would be perceived by the average congregation as an authoritative word.”⁴²³ As Davis had noted years earlier, Craddock similarly recognized that the traditional deductive three-point sermon “was rapidly losing currency in the early 1970s and thus a new form was needed.”⁴²⁴ Craddock argued at that time that many of the blows struck against the pulpit were not necessarily due to its particular faults, but that it was attached to a traditional and entrenched institution. At that time all such traditionally authoritative institutions—whether religious, educational, or political—were being called into question.⁴²⁵

One such institution being called into question was that of traditional homiletics, which built upon an Enlightenment rationalistic hermeneutical paradigm that attempted to distil texts into propositions regardless of form or genre.⁴²⁶ The goal of this ideational redaction was to grasp the ideas that resided in or behind a passage—the cognitive content of the text or reconstructed historical event—and then to communicate that meaning to the listener through a series of propositions or assertions.⁴²⁷ Challenging the hegemony of these traditional modes of hermeneutics and homiletics, Craddock argued that a cognitive-propositional modes of understanding leads to deductive homiletical methods, and that “when the mode of

⁴²¹ Hull, *Strategic Preaching*, 10.

⁴²² Cosgrove and Edgerton, *In Other Words*, 7.

⁴²³ Halvorsen, “The New Homiletic,” 91-92.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴²⁵ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 5-6.

⁴²⁶ Eslinger, *Web of Preaching*, 77.

⁴²⁷ Cosgrove and Edgerton, *In Other Words*, 12. Allen points out that the “modern preacher attempted to offer an understanding of Christian faith that was consistent with Enlightenment presuppositions concerning truth” (Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism,” 35).

understanding shifts, the homiletical method needs to shift as well.”⁴²⁸ Craddock’s proposed inductive sermon model shifted meaning-making from strictly the side of the interpreter or preacher, and held that the listeners could and should participate in the making of meaning, thereby allowing them to own meaning for themselves. This homiletical form would come to be known as the “new homiletic” which “is new in that it is a turning away from the old traditional preaching and the kerygmatic preaching of Karl Barth.”⁴²⁹

In turning away from kerygmatic preaching and the “old homiletic,” with its propositional, deductive sermon models, Craddock developed the “inductive sermon” form which sought to recreate imaginatively for the congregation the movement of the preacher’s own thought whereby he⁴³⁰ came to that conclusion.⁴³¹ The essence of Craddock’s New Homiletic lies in its listener-oriented sermon form whose productive unity is seen primarily in its “concern with affective stylistics, with the interpretive experience of listeners...In this context it implicates an integrative event in which preacher and congregation participate in a coming to understanding of text together.”⁴³² Building upon the New Homiletics’ understanding of preaching where the sermon becomes a “speech-event which discloses its meaning through its relationship to its context, to the faith, and to the listener and community,”⁴³³ the goal of this preaching form is “to create an experience of ‘the Word of God’ in the listeners in order to effect a hearing of the Gospel.”⁴³⁴

Craddock’s inductive homiletics gave birth to the New Homiletic by on the one hand challenging traditional homiletics with its authoritarian preachers, deductive-propositional sermons and passive audiences. On the other hand Craddock advocated an inductive sermon format that sought to elevate the roles of the listeners in the preaching event.⁴³⁵ Craddock’s conception of the inductive sermon was not entirely new; both H. Grady Davis and W.E. Sangster had proposed induction as a viable homiletical method years earlier.⁴³⁶ Craddock’s unique contribution attempted to build community by lowering the status of clerical prestige while at the same time

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁴²⁹ Gibson, “Defining the New Homiletic,” 19.

⁴³⁰ Writing in the early 1970s, Craddock was not gender-inclusive when referring to preachers.

⁴³¹ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 48.

⁴³² Reid, Bullock and Fleer, “Preaching as the Creation of an Experience,” 2.

⁴³³ Gibson, “Defining the New Homiletic,” 21.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁴³⁵ Radford, “The New Homiletic,” 4.

⁴³⁶ Radford, “The Impact,” 82.

elevating the role of the listeners to new prominence in the preaching event, allowing them to participate in the interpretative process of the making of meaning.⁴³⁷

Contemporary Applications of the New Homiletic

The common feature in the various forms of expression found within the New Homiletic involves the sermon as the creation of an event whereby the preacher and the listeners are co-creators of the sermonic experience.⁴³⁸ Gibson maintains that “Craddock’s emphasis on induction, plot, and movement in the sermon has inspired preachers in their conception and practice of sermon structure.”⁴³⁹ Forms of expression by homileticians influenced by the New Homiletic include some of the following homileticians: Eugene Lowry’s narrative preaching or “homiletical plot” form,⁴⁴⁰ David Buttrick’s phenomenological sermon form,⁴⁴¹ and Lucy Atkinson Rose’s conversational preaching model.⁴⁴² This approach seeks to eliminate entirely the concept of a gap between pulpit and pew and replace it with a “roundtable” dialogical preaching model in which all voices are heard before, possibly during, and after the preaching event.

Reflecting on Craddock’s impact some thirty years later, Long believes that he scored a direct hit with *As One Without Authority*, which “still stands as one of the most important and influential books on preaching written in the last century.”⁴⁴³ This thesis will explore the notion that in terms of recovered values, the influence of the New Homiletic can currently be brought to bear on the preaching task within the Western tradition. Currently preachers are charged with the task of preaching to the children of those listeners that Craddock’s revitalized sermons attempted to address a generation ago.⁴⁴⁴ Thompson cautions that a “homiletic that solved the problems of preaching in the final days of a Christian culture is not likely to be the solution to the problems of preaching in a post-Christian culture.”⁴⁴⁵ Furthering this point, Quicke argues that within the increasingly postmodern and post-Christian context, preaching occurs in the midst of change:

⁴³⁷ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 26-27.

⁴³⁸ Gibson, “Defining the New Homiletic,” 22-23.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁴⁰ See Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*.

⁴⁴¹ See Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*.

⁴⁴² Rose’s homiletical model as articulated in her work *Sharing the Word*.

⁴⁴³ Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 102.

⁴⁴⁴ Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul*, 1.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

Some preachers in well-established congregations that are biblically literate and expect traditional preaching can sit back and claim that the effects of culture shift are overstated and that the old ways are the best. Other preachers seem to plunge too quickly into novelty. Instead, preachers need to develop an anticipatory style of leadership in which they learn, listen, and dare to preach afresh. One aspect of such leadership is a preacher's self-awareness of where he or she is in the range of preaching opportunities in the twenty-first century.⁴⁴⁶

Perhaps the more important issue for preachers, as those in congregational leadership roles, is to formulate a preaching theory that is values-based in its approach rather than seeking to emulate a methodological formula. Congregational leaders should avoid seeking to imitate a particular homiletical model or form, denying the culture shift, or plunging into homiletical novelty for its own sake. The recovery of certain of Craddock's homiletical values to form a theory of preaching can have potential applicability both within a traditional church setting or a postmodern, emergent church context. The connection between preaching and anticipatory styles of leadership becomes a crucial issue within the church in the exploration of new preaching opportunities. The chapter now evaluates Craddock's preaching theory by first engaging in critiques by homileticians and second by evaluating the approach of this thesis. This critique will establish the conceptual basis for the construction of a values-based preaching theory of the New Homiletic later in this chapter.

A Critical Evaluation of the New Homiletic

The first of four critiques of Craddock's New Homiletic by homileticians concerns his claim to divest preaching of points and propositions. While appearing to block them at the front door he effectively welcomed idea-centred preaching through the back door.⁴⁴⁷ Long states that "True enough, in Craddock's scheme the preacher engages in an exciting inductive search through the text, but, when all is said and done, the goal of this adventure, the object of this quest, is an idea."⁴⁴⁸ This can be demonstrated with reference to *Preaching*, where Craddock argues that in the exegetical portion of sermon preparation the interpreter should be able to state the message of the text as simply as possible in a single sentence.⁴⁴⁹ Whatever it is

⁴⁴⁶ Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 110.

⁴⁴⁷ Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 104.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴⁴⁹ Craddock, *Preaching*, 122.

termed—theme, statement, governing idea, single affirmative sentence⁴⁵⁰—this single-sentence message should ideally flow from one’s interpretation of the text. This governing idea, maintains Craddock, creates a unified sermon.⁴⁵¹ In Craddock’s scheme, though the preacher may never actually directly state the proposition during the sermon, the audience inductively arrives ideally at the same (or a similar) conclusion. Thus Long observes that “upon closer examination, it turned out after all that ideas from the text do come across Craddock’s bridge between text and sermon.”⁴⁵²

Based on these observations, homileticians pointed out that Craddock appeared to be bound to a rationalist hermeneutic whereby a biblical text could in fact be reduced to a single idea. Nonetheless, Craddock’s position was homiletically pivotal in the sense that “the homiletical world turned around him. He stood at the junction between a deductive, idea-centered approach to preaching and an inductive, process-fueled, aesthetic approach, and he had one foot planted in each.”⁴⁵³ Although Craddock’s argument was compelling and intriguing, homileticians found it confusing and therefore it “formed something of a standoff among homileticians themselves.”⁴⁵⁴ The issues can still be seen currently. For instance, whilst on the one hand criticizing Craddock for holding to idea-based sermons, on the other hand Long’s “preacher as witness” model has a similar goal of bringing an idea across the “bridge” that moves from text to sermon. He states that a good function statement—what the sermon will say based upon what the text says—should be “expressed as content, *as an idea*.”⁴⁵⁵ The issue of the function and movement of the sermon is clearly an important one for the discussion of preaching theory. Does the sermon function to convey an idea or proposition from the biblical text regardless of form, or can it seek to achieve different purposes, such as doing and saying what the text does and says?

The goal of this approach is bring about homiletical replication of the rhetorical dynamics and tensions found within the text, accomplished using the tools of rhetorical criticism and narratology. These exegetical and homiletical tools can function equally well to produce propositional or narrative-styled sermons, depending upon the genre and rhetorical strategies of the text and those of the preacher.

⁴⁵⁰ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 85.

⁴⁵¹ Craddock, *Preaching*, 155.

⁴⁵² Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 104.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 110-111 (italics mine).

Furthermore, by introducing a dialogical element into the sermon event that potentially includes preparation, delivery and after the sermon, the aim becomes less about seeking interpretive closure and more about seeking the elusive meaning that may be well in front of the interpretive community of a local congregation.⁴⁵⁶

The second critique involves the notion that the New Homiletic, with its concern for the sermon as an event that creates an experience for the listener, has opened the door to a host of other problematic issues. Whilst the concern for the listener and the attention to the affective experience for the audience are two particular contributions of the New Homiletic,⁴⁵⁷ in the quest for creating an experience for the listener some preachers have tended to trivialize the message by turning sermons into mere entertainment or homiletical gimmickry. Further to this Radford argues that the shifting of emphasis from preacher to listener has also brought about a shift in authority from text to listener. The concern of the preacher is less upon conveying biblical content than that of creating an experience.⁴⁵⁸

Due to this emphasis on experience over content, it is alleged that New Homiletic sermons do not bring about for the listeners a deeper understanding of the faith, and it is proposed that to accomplish this goal one should employ other sermonic forms. Radford argues moreover that the content of preaching has suffered with the application of New Homiletic principles; what listeners need, he believes, is not an individualistically-oriented, experiential sermon but rather the background literary and historical contexts of the text so they can make informed decisions based upon their own experiences of the text.⁴⁵⁹

Radford's critique of the New Homiletic, however, appears to reflect his desire for an evangelical, literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic as the authoritative interpretive framework. This model makes the preacher the authoritative exegetical expert who alone has access to the historical "world of the author" or "original readers" that he or she conveys to the audience. One must also question the issue of the "audience's own experiences of the text" as advocated by Radford.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁶ Brueggemann, *The Word Militant*, 22. This is not relativism but rather pluralism; seeking objectivity in sermons and interpretations destroys community as well as the chance to receive new truth together. Thus preaching, in a pluralistic context, makes proposals and advocacies, but does not advance conclusions.

⁴⁵⁷ Gibson, "Defining the New Homiletic," 26.

⁴⁵⁸ Radford, "The Impact," 167-168.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

This model casts the preacher as the exegetical expert, but still gives the ultimate interpretive decision-making capability to the audience members' own experiential particularities. Whilst not seeking to create "an individual experience" for listeners Radford's model makes the arbitration of the interpretation of the message an individualistic process. The preaching model he advocates may still be preferred by those in more traditional churches, but whether or not a postmodern or emerging church audience would agree with his assessments remains to be seen.

Craddock demonstrates awareness of this very issue, arguing that a gap exists between the world of the biblical text and the world of today. The factors of time, space, language, historical circumstances and worldview create a distance between the text on the one hand and the listeners on the other.⁴⁶¹ The textual quality of historical particularity seems to withhold the text from availability or relevance for later readers. Craddock argues that the "negotiation of that distance is central to the preaching and teaching ministry of the church."⁴⁶² For Craddock, the transfer value of a biblical text lies in its particularity, and thus the text assumes universal value as the audience finds analogies and points of identification to their own concrete experiences in the specifics of the text's recorded events and relationships.⁴⁶³ Craddock argues further that biblical criticism should not be viewed as the enemy of the pulpit, but rather should be viewed "in the scientific sense of careful and methodical investigation."⁴⁶⁴ This critique of Craddock demonstrates the earlier point that he appears to have one foot in the world of historical-critical exegesis whilst at the same time attempting to balance that with concern for the reception of the message by the audience. Nonetheless in Craddock's model the preacher as an exegete serves as the expert who negotiates this gap on behalf of the hearers.

Additionally, Craddock did not intend for sermons to degenerate into homiletical gimmickry, mere emotionalism or experience for its own sake. As noted earlier many of its detractors have argued that derivative New Homiletic sermon forms have deteriorated either into mere storytelling or efforts to manipulate the emotions of the audience. Long clarifies the situation by observing that just as classical rhetoric developed from observed theory, similarly in homiletics practice

⁴⁶¹ Craddock, *Preaching*, 125.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

typically precedes theory.⁴⁶⁵ As Chapter 3 pointed out, Craddock's New Homiletic became closely identified with "narrative preaching" when homileticians began to refract the practices of storytelling through theoretical lenses.⁴⁶⁶ Long observes that "what has been for the last thirty years called 'narrative preaching' has too often devolved into a hodgepodge of sentimental pseudo-art, confused rhetorical strategies, and competing theological epistemologies."⁴⁶⁷

However, as noted earlier, Craddock did not intend for his homiletical model to be utilized in these ways. Sermons, he believed, should establish relevance, hold interest and make an impact upon an audience by "identification of the audience with characters and critical events portrayed."⁴⁶⁸ Maintaining that sermons should be presented with genuine insight, Craddock held that preachers should give primary attention "to the specific and particular rather than the general," and that sermon materials should be "realistic, rather than contrived for homiletical purposes."⁴⁶⁹ Further to this he argued that people do not identify with the unreal, the exaggerated, and the artificial, and warned against attempting to manipulate an audience. Craddock notes that "if a speaker tries to milk all the emotion out of an event, emotion becomes emotionalism, and listeners sense the exploitation."⁴⁷⁰ Rather than generating an experience for its own sake, crafting dubious trapdoor plots or mere storytelling, the preacher should ask instead: "How can I capture and hold their attention long enough for them to hear and experience the text?"⁴⁷¹

Nonetheless, homileticians still take issue with the concept of the "sermon as an experience" even if the listener inductively experiences the text as Craddock initially advocated. For example, Rose points out that "homiletical scholars recognize that to expect a sermon consistently to change people may be expecting too much.

⁴⁶⁵ Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 1.

⁴⁶⁶ Long, "What Happened to Narrative Preaching?" 10.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁶⁸ Craddock, *Preaching*, 162.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 167. This issue of the use of emotionalism for its own sake has been an issue since classical times. Aristotle, for example in his *Rhetoric* Part 2 states that one should not avoid appeals to emotion as a rhetorical strategy for persuading an audience; however, this is linked to the ethos of the speaker as well as the logical soundness of the case presented. Mere emotionalism, he states in Part 1, such as "the arousing of prejudice, pity, anger and other similar emotions" has little to do with the actual facts of the case being presented. This thesis argues that as the sermon is influenced by the text itself that transference of rhetorical dynamics may well produce an emotional response in certain audience members, but that the preacher should not contrive to produce emotions artificially.

And a number of scholars admit that preaching does a poor job of changing lives.”⁴⁷² Experiential sermons can not realistically be expected to transform a congregation week after week. Whilst a sermon can transform, not every sermon should seek weekly transformation as its primary goal.⁴⁷³ Transformative preaching still puts the onus on the preacher to provide a self-contained experience for the listeners. In an increasingly postmodern ethos, however, seeking to involve the audience in the communication often process makes that process riskier but potentially more effective. Postmoderns, for example, tend to be more interested in the performance or the process itself rather than in the finished work.⁴⁷⁴ In the pluralistic interpretative context of a local faith community, postmodern preaching becomes an open-ended adjudication by means of a trustful and respectful conversation.⁴⁷⁵

The third critique of the New Homiletic centres on the gap between pulpit and pew—the very gap Craddock aimed to eliminate or at least to narrow. Rose, however, completely rejects the gap metaphor believing it is largely a result of male-dominated theological and hermeneutical systems in the Western tradition, which values separateness and casts the preacher as a separate knower with knowledge to impart to the congregation.⁴⁷⁶ Rose points out that although the New Homiletic took steps to close the gap nonetheless it remains because “the preacher remains in the privileged position of the one who has already experienced the transformation that the congregation now needs to experience.”⁴⁷⁷ In Craddock’s conception of preaching the congregation still remains in the subordinate position as “recipients whose options are rejecting or receiving those images and patterns, sights and sounds capable of effecting transformation.”⁴⁷⁸ Whilst induction appears to elevate the role of the audience to active participants, the preacher may engage in manipulation as he or she attempts to guide them to previously decided insights, experiences or exegetical conclusions.

⁴⁷² Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 84.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁷⁴ Goldingay, “Postmodernizing Eve and Adam,” 55. Traditional homiletics, on the other hand, argues precisely the opposite. Broadus for example stated that the purpose of preaching—save in exceptional cases—is to present results and not demonstrate one’s exegetical processes (*Treatise on the Preparation*, 146).

⁴⁷⁵ Brueggemann, *The Word Militant*, 22.

⁴⁷⁶ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 30.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

On closer inspection, Craddock's inductive sermon form does not advocate that the audience arrive at exactly the same conclusion already reached by the preacher. Craddock states to the contrary that "it is also true that preaching that re-creates the experience of arriving at a conclusion would for the minister differ from her own study in all the ways that private experiences differ from those shared with others and in all the ways that people differ from books."⁴⁷⁹ Theological conservatives in particular are troubled with this open-ended element of the New Homiletic, feeling that it is too risky to allow the congregants to finish the sermon for themselves. In the quest to explore preaching theory, the questions for the preacher include the following: is the purpose of this sermon to guide the listeners to *my* already-decided interpretative conclusions, applications or experiences? Or, on the other hand, is one of the purposes of this sermon to begin to relinquish control over the final interpretive or experiential outcomes, and put more control in the hands of the audience? Within certain emerging and postmodern churches, there is already experimentation of a context where "increasingly the congregation is part of the act of sermon composition and design."⁴⁸⁰ Sweet believes that in the future of homiletics the shape of sermon forms will be less about the dynamics of human absorption than the dynamics of human interaction.⁴⁸¹

The final critique of the New Homiletic is that whilst transformational preachers presuppose "the power of language to shape consciousness, they generally do not address the biased and limited nature of language that reflects its historical conditioning."⁴⁸² Rose argues that "Language is powerful. It can create new worlds in consciousness. But it is also limited and participates in the sins and distortions of the generations and cultures that use and reshape it."⁴⁸³ These issues raised by Rose direct the discussion back to the issue of preaching theory. What exactly is the role of the preacher? What role or roles does the congregation play in the preaching process? Or does the claim that all language is irrevocably biased preclude the preacher's discovering an intention, voice, or experience that purports to be the text's intention, the voice of God or a paradigmatic gospel experience?⁴⁸⁴ One cannot escape the reality that "the Bible requires and insists upon human interpretation, which is

⁴⁷⁹ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 100.

⁴⁸⁰ Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 84.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴⁸² Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 81.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

inescapably subjective, necessarily provisional and inevitably disputatious.”⁴⁸⁵ Rather than interpretative tentativeness that hardens into absoluteness, Brueggemann maintains that “all of our interpretations need to be regarded, at the most, as having only tentative authority.”⁴⁸⁶ While this thesis aims to uncover and analyze the rhetorical and textual dynamics of the biblical text, the interpretative conclusions reached should be viewed in terms of tentativeness and relinquishment. Preaching that aims at interpretive objectivity potentially destroys community and the chance to receive new truth together. By contrast, preaching in a pluralistic context makes proposals and advocacies but does not advance conclusions.⁴⁸⁷

Additional Critiques of the New Homiletic

In addition to those above this thesis offers three further critiques of Craddock’s New Homiletic. First, Craddock assumes a liturgical context that very much still fits into a traditional church paradigm, stating that worldwide, there is a weekly gathered assembly of believers who engage in worship. This act of worship involves narrating “in word, act and song the community’s memories and hopes, glorifying the God who redeems, enables, and sanctifies...And in this time and place of prayer and praise we will preach.”⁴⁸⁸ Furthermore, when considering sermon delivery, he believes that the preacher must keep two factors in mind: first the physical context (a church building with a pulpit, a lectern and a choir) and second the liturgical context.⁴⁸⁹ Thus for Craddock, preaching involves the normative activities of a sermon which takes place in a church building on a weekly basis, combined with worship and an order of service.

Whilst this assumption of Craddock’s still fits the majority of traditional churches in the West it does not anticipate future changes in postmodern or emergent church contexts, or the effects of globalization upon local churches.⁴⁹⁰ For example, house church movements see little need for buildings; such informal gatherings may not have a choir, an order of service or even a sermon. This model focuses upon open-

⁴⁸⁵ Brueggemann, “Biblical Authority,” 15.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁸⁷ Brueggemann, *The Word Militant*, 22.

⁴⁸⁸ Craddock, *Preaching*, 42.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁴⁹⁰ Reader argues that in this era of globalization and movement churches can no longer appeal to a “sense of place” as defined by a specific locale. In the traditional view “the underlying supposition is still that this relationship between people and a specific building is the ideal configuration” (*Reconstructing Practical Theology*, 19).

participatory mutual exhortation as a primary purpose for church gatherings rather than listening to a sermon delivered from a pulpit.⁴⁹¹ Furthermore, Allen observes that in the continuing evolution of preaching homiletics itself needs to be deconstructed. Such moves push the preacher and congregation to face the weaknesses in the act of preaching and may ultimately call into question the continuing efficacy of preaching itself. Preaching as deconstruction may force “the Christian community to consider whether the act of preaching is worth continuing.”⁴⁹² If preaching is deemed irrelevant perhaps the church should cease that activity and put its energy into other more fruitful witnesses to the gospel. Conversely, if sermons are still deemed relevant, this may reinforce the church's confidence in preaching. In this scenario sermons will continue not out of habit alone but because the community has a fresh sense of their importance.⁴⁹³

Beyond this realization as to the continuing status of preaching, some emerging and postmodern church contexts substantially revise the model of the preacher as the authoritarian leader.⁴⁹⁴ Postmodern churches explore leadership and preaching models that are increasingly “nonhierarchical, heuristic, and communal” and are “rooted in a relationship of connectedness and mutuality between the preacher and the worshipers.”⁴⁹⁵ Craddock’s assumption of a traditional liturgical context may not have relevance for future congregational leadership models seeking to narrow or to eliminate altogether the gap between pulpit and pew.

The second critique concerns the issue of multiple point-of-view sermons. Buttrick observes that traditional homiletical models typically involve third-person speech, which over time serves to shape the consciousness of the congregation. He argues that the “grave difficulty with a third-person observational language in preaching is that it usurps God’s position and, in so doing, turns God into an ‘object,’ and God’s Word into a rational truth.”⁴⁹⁶ Craddock states further that the form of the sermon gains and holds interest, shapes the listener’s experience of the material as well as the listener’s faith, and determines the degree of participation demanded of the

⁴⁹¹ Viola, *Reimagining Church*, 59.

⁴⁹² Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism,” 39.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁹⁴ Viola, *Reimagining Church*, 57. He notes that “in the typical institutional church, the spiritual nourishment of the believer is limited to and dependent on the spiritual and academic preparation of one or two people: the pastor and the Sunday school teacher” (57).

⁴⁹⁵ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 3.

⁴⁹⁶ Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 56.

hearers.⁴⁹⁷ To combat the tendency to utilize God-objectifying, third-person language week in and week out, Craddock advocates that one should represent at least one point of view from the text. Craddock neither uses the terms “point of view” nor “focalization,” and he does not deal with the issue of narrative levels. However, he focuses instead upon the exegetical goal of “identification with the text.”⁴⁹⁸ This in turn raises the question the interpreter should ask of the text: “At what point did I identify with the text?”⁴⁹⁹ By this he refers to “the relation to the text which has developed in the process of the exegetical work,”⁵⁰⁰ the point at which the preacher distances herself from the text, always keeping in mind that she must share that message with an audience. Craddock’s point is that the interpreter may identify with or against certain characters or their actions within the text, usually quite unconsciously.⁵⁰¹ When constructing the sermon, the preacher must consciously turn away from the tendency to identify with what he terms are “the best seats in the text”⁵⁰² and make the effort to articulate alternate points of view.

Whilst providing a helpful point in advocating exegetical and homiletical balance, Craddock does not promote multiple points-of-view sermons, believing that audiences cannot track with more than one shift in point of view. Ideally events should be viewed from a single perspective unless the preacher specifically warns the audience of a shift to a second or third angle of vision. If the shifts are not signalled clearly, he warns that:

... confusion destroys identification and the hearers feel the disadvantage... The choice of perspective is determined by the desire to hear and receive the story, but once the choice is made, looking at the parable from other angles should be reserved for other sermons... [one cannot] experience a sermon and identify with anyone or anything if the perspective is altered frequently.⁵⁰³

In terms of delivery Craddock’s point is well taken. If a preacher decides to present multiple angles of vision in terms of characters’ perspectives, she should inform the audience that they will be hearing a variety of points of view in the sermon

⁴⁹⁷ Craddock, *Preaching*, 172-174.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 164-165.

and those shifts should be clear.⁵⁰⁴ Returning to Buttrick's insight that point-of-view in sermons shape congregational consciousness, he recommends that the preacher should regularly give "voice to different perspectives as a rhetorical device" when preaching⁵⁰⁵ and not as an occasional rhetorical device. Arguing that all language is perspectival, Buttrick states that "we must understand that point-of-view is *always* in language and, therefore, must be integral to sermon design and development."⁵⁰⁶ This is the case because "language actually shapes perspectives in congregational consciousness...Every shift in point-of-view will act on congregational consciousness, however—whether we know it or not."⁵⁰⁷

Balancing Craddock and Buttrick's points, a skilfully delivered multiple point-of-view sermon can have tremendous value in bringing out heretofore-unheard points of view of a variety of biblical characters. Regular shifts in point-of-view combat the tendency to turn the text into rational truths that tend to objectify God. From a narratological standpoint, the exegete can decide whose point of view with which he or she will identify: for example, characters on the discourse level including God, or that of the narrator. Multiple point-of-view sermons can fit well within a postmodern context by giving previously-unheard voices a say in the conversation. The presentation of several characters' focalizations without interpretative comment allows the audience the possibility to engage and to wrestle with their interpretations of a passage, potentially viewed from new frames of reference. A sermon presented as a narrative with multiple points-of-view can offer a potentially "heuristic form that allows the worshipers to overhear multivalent proposals, interpretations, or wagers and, by the aid of the Spirit, decide their own conclusions."⁵⁰⁸ While this approach may be viewed as risky or "unsatisfactory" due to an apparent lack of interpretative closure, it is equally risky for the audience not to participate. Sweet notes in this regard that despite the risks of participatory homiletical strategies, nonparticipation carries with it a greater risk.⁵⁰⁹

The third critique focuses on the issue of "the sermon saying and doing what the text says and does"—that the content and rhetorical function of the text should be

⁵⁰⁴ The multiple point-of-view sermon should signal that possible interpretive meanings are multiple as well, and that there are more ways to understand a particular text than there are characters in the text.

⁵⁰⁵ Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 57.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 57 (italics his).

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁰⁸ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 7.

⁵⁰⁹ Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 84.

mirrored in the content and rhetorical function of the sermon. Craddock argues that because “a text is a communication from one person to another or to others, the text is doing as well as saying...Here, then, one is simply asking what the text is doing.”⁵¹⁰ For Craddock, the answer to the “what” is found in the form of the text: “Whether a text is correcting, instructing, celebrating, or probing will often be revealed by its form.”⁵¹¹ He argues that if the sermon attempts to do what the text does, then the preacher should appropriate the form since it captures and conveys function, not only during the interpretation of the text but also during the designing of the sermon. The sermon form may not be the same as that of the text; that is, while “a sermon on a psalm may not itself be a psalm, still one does not want to move too far from the form of the text.”⁵¹²

As noted previously, oftentimes traditional homiletics simply mined Scripture and distilled it into propositions, themes and assertions regardless of biblical genre. Textual form had little if any impact upon homiletical form. Until the time of homileticians such as Davis and Craddock, the view that the genres and forms of the text should inform the type of sermon form chosen had rarely been a homiletical consideration. This thesis holds that the identification of biblical genres and forms becomes one of the critical steps in a rhetorical-critical approach to exegesis, and further that genre and forms can and should have direct bearing on the homiletical form chosen. In this regard, Quicke points out that Scripture “comprises a fertile diversity of genres that should stimulate preachers to explore a range of preaching options.”⁵¹³ Rhetorical criticism thus becomes a worthwhile tool in the assessment of biblical forms and rhetorical dynamics, and also informs the preacher’s rhetorical and homiletical strategies.

Probing further into the issue, however, brings about the need for further elucidation. The question “What is a narrative discourse trying to accomplish rhetorically?” proves to be difficult to answer in light of narrative levels. Answers to this question depends in part upon which level one considers—story level, discourse level, narrator’s level, implied author’s level, real author’s level, or book level. Viewed from these perspectives, the text may be attempting to do many things, the least of which is simply to narrativize various elements of the story to readers on the

⁵¹⁰ Craddock, *Preaching*, 122-123.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵¹³ Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 105.

discourse level. Whilst these elements can be theoretically separated for purposes of discussion, they all combine to produce the “narrative world” presented by the narrator to readers.⁵¹⁴

Fokkelmann points out this essential and radical hierarchical difference between the characters on the discourse level and the narrator’s level. One should not equate a particular character’s point of view with that of the narrator and the real author. As language signs existing upon particular diegetic level, the characters know less than the narrator and are unable to escape their particular level and address either the narrator or the readers.⁵¹⁵ The critic must consider carefully the points of view of the various characters, the persuasive purposes of the narrator and the ideologies of various readers. For example, performing a feminist reading of the narrative of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife in Gen. 39, Bach maintains that both characters and narrator utilize ideologically the coat Joseph left behind when he fled. By accepting his wife’s version of events, Potiphar proves blind and uncritical of her self-serving reasons. His wife’s use of the coat as a signifier of sexual meaning illustrates her resentment and rebellion against the dominant patriarchy. The anonymous narrator embraces the patriarchal structure Joseph serves, and therefore the coat proves Joseph’s righteous innocence. By comparing the tensions on the differing diegetic levels of individual characters and narrator, she concludes that “the position of the biblical narrator is no more ‘neutral’ than that of the feminist reader.”⁵¹⁶ This potentially deconstructive interpretation militates against readings that promote social closure, oppression or suffering.⁵¹⁷

Craddock fails to take into account the issue of the potential binary oppositions that may operate between narrative levels when by simply advocating that preachers should “do what the text does.” One of the particular values of the rhetorical-critical study of the book of Ezekiel and Ezekiel 15 in Chapter 4 is that it will take into consideration the impact of the rhetorical dynamics upon the characters

⁵¹⁴ The narrator introduces to the reader “the narrative world of the text, its characters, values, norms, conflicts, and the events which constitute the plot of the story” (Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 4).

⁵¹⁵ Fokkelmann, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 63.

⁵¹⁶ Bach, *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, 124-125.

⁵¹⁷ McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching*, 2. For example Spangler and Swyserda characterize Potiphar’s wife as “unfaithful and vindictive, ready to lie in order to protect herself and ruin an innocent man” (*Women of the Bible*, 79). Such a characterization of the wife as a male-threatening *femme fatale* could potentially lead to the continued oppression of women by men. Bach deconstructs the reading by showing the binary opposition between the narrator and Potiphar’s wife and thus critiques and pries open this binary operation.

as well as implied and actual readers. Further, the sample sermon in Chapter 7 will open up the reading of Ezekiel 15 by attempting to represent as fairly as possible the various points of view inherent within the literary unit.

Constructing a Values-Based Preaching Theory

Following the previous contextual interpretation and evaluation of the New Homiletic, this chapter will move into the final phase of the hermeneutical cycle by constructing a values-based preaching theory based upon certain recovered values located within a critical understanding of the New Homiletic. As pointed out earlier, due to the variety of criticisms advanced by conservatives, moderates and liberals alike⁵¹⁸ many homileticians have largely abandoned preaching forms initially espoused by Craddock and other New Homileticians. Oftentimes this is due to its negative association with the homiletical gimmickry associated with the wide variety of narrative preaching forms. Despite its contributions over the last thirty years, critics maintain that the New Homiletic has not in fact revitalized the Western church.

Preachers who initially embraced it as a new and exciting form of preaching may have ultimately focused on technique whilst neglecting the larger issue of the purposes of preaching. Within this tradition, critics allege, preaching became mere entertainment over above faithful pastoral care. Preachers gave so much emphasis to the “how” of preaching that the “what” or content of preaching became minimized.⁵¹⁹ Despite the initial influence and popularity of the New Homiletic in the 1970s and 1980s, with its decline many churches returned to traditional preaching models. The problem with this approach, Quicke argues, is that preachers returning to a traditional homiletic do not explore the homiletical cutting edge: “The suspicion is that preaching inevitably maintains the status quo and specializes in survival and playing it safe.”⁵²⁰ Homiletical safety brings with it the potential risk of homiletical stagnation.

This section will demonstrate that it is possible to recover certain values initially espoused by Craddock and, based upon these values, to construct a value-based theology or theory of preaching that is multi-vocal, non-hierarchical in its leadership ethic and thus is appropriate to postmodernity. Further, one must keep in

⁵¹⁸ For these critiques see Long, “What Happened to Narrative Preaching,” 11-13.

⁵¹⁹ Radford, “The New Homiletic Within Non-Christendom,” 7.

⁵²⁰ Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 38.

mind Craddock's warning that "the separation of method of preaching from theology of preaching is a violation, leaving not one but two orphans. Not only content of preaching but method of preaching is fundamentally a theological consideration."⁵²¹ In order to recover these five values the approach taken will be similar to that of Booth, who argued that the implied author's values can be ascertained in a work although not always clearly stated. Whilst at times Craddock explicitly refers to his values—though using the term "convictions"⁵²²—other values resonate through his writings. As Booth demonstrates, these can be identified by means of the identification of the author's presence or norms or the "picture of the author" left behind for the reader that can be constructed when reading the work.⁵²³ Where possible this section will illustrate where other homileticians have adapted elements of these values into their homiletical models. The first two values detail the implications of the shifts in the understanding of church philosophy of ministry, while the following three focus upon preaching form, the integration of hermeneutics and homiletics, and finally the role of the Spirit in preaching.

A Values-Based Homiletic: Five Homiletical Values

1. The loss of clerical prestige.

Since the nineteenth century the social context in Western society has been radically altered. In part this is due to the rise of public education, the spread of democratic values and governments, greater cultural pluralism in many Western nations and the increasing secularization of modern institutions. These shifts herald a move away from the historic traditional view of hierarchical pastoral leadership present in many churches and denominations.⁵²⁴ Craddock challenged the norm of traditional clerical status when he argued that ministers should re-examine their status as authoritarian proclaimers of authoritative messages and consider instead a reduction in clerical prestige.⁵²⁵ Beyond the loss of the preacher's clerical prestige this value involves a

⁵²¹ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 43-44.

⁵²² Craddock maintained Scripture not only should serve as the content of messages but also to teach one how to preach: based on "the conviction that preaching should be nourished, informed, disciplined, and authorized by Scripture, and the experience of being taught by Scripture that there is no single form of speech which qualifies as a sermon" (*As One Without Authority*, 16).

⁵²³ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 70-71.

⁵²⁴ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 18-19.

⁵²⁵ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 26-27.

complete redefinition of the role of “professional minister” as well as the involvement of the congregation in ministry tasks typically assigned to the paid staff. For example, Osmer builds on Gerkins’ pioneering concept of the pastor as “interpretive guide.” This involves a collaborative leadership model whereby the leader attends carefully to the resources of the congregational participants and contributes his or her expertise to the faith journey.⁵²⁶

Rose adapts this value by advocating a different role of church leadership that views preaching as a communal task, growing “out of the ethos of those gathered for worship and nurturing a larger sense of connectedness.”⁵²⁷ This model espouses a leadership ethos that is non-hierarchical, personal and inclusive.⁵²⁸ Values at the heart of this leadership model are “connectedness, the sense of community and mutual interdependence, of trust and safety that allows all participants to speak out of their personal experiences, interpretations, and wagers.”⁵²⁹

Congregational leaders can utilize the descriptive information-gathering and resulting evaluation from the hermeneutical cycle in order to gauge the receptivity of the congregational “culture” to new leadership and forms of communication.⁵³⁰ Embracing the value of a teamwork approach to preaching by soliciting the contributions of those before, during and after the sermon can help a preacher if he or she is willing to see that concept through in a healthy and productive context.⁵³¹ In this connection the credibility of the preacher becomes an issue of primary importance.⁵³² Craddock maintains that “the minister works within an unusual network of trust and intimacy that makes the separation of character from performance impossible.”⁵³³ Further to this, Quicke believes that preachers “cannot help but be leaders. Even preaching that is slightly tinged with prophetic, transformational, and incarnational qualities cannot avoid leading others.”⁵³⁴ This value holds that new power arrangements will emerge when church leadership leads others on the journey of discovering an ethic of conversational communication. Of

⁵²⁶ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 19-20. His model is adapted from Charles Gerkins’ 1986 publication *Widening the Horizons*.

⁵²⁷ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 121.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 122-130.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵³¹ Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 93.

⁵³² Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book I, Chapter 2. He maintains that “persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible.”

⁵³³ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 23.

⁵³⁴ Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 137.

necessity the role of the preacher changes from the one who provides authoritative answers or truths to that of one who builds up the community for its own formation and reformation.⁵³⁵

2. The recovery of community via the elevation of the audience.

This value relates to the second half of the equation begun with the first: the loss of clerical prestige is worth the recovery of community.⁵³⁶ Craddock does not specifically articulate what congregational involvement specifically looks like beyond stating the conviction that “listeners are active participants in preaching, whether vocal or silent in that participation.”⁵³⁷ As noted previously this value sees the congregation participating before, possibly during and after the message. In this way, their unique gifts, passions, strengths and life experiences are brought into the preaching event, making it a two-way movement instead of the traditional one-way, downward movement from authoritative preacher to passive audience.

This value further deals with the issue of the priorities and functions of leadership, as the role of leadership shifts from traditional authority figure to that of a facilitator who teaches the audience to become better and more active listeners as they increasingly begin to have a voice in the preaching event. This value further requires that the preacher keeps the audience in mind while preaching. Craddock argues that sermons should speak for as well as to the audience, and that preaching ideally becomes what people sitting in the congregation would want to say if they could say it.⁵³⁸ The recovery of community can only be accomplished by listening to the audience before and after sermons;⁵³⁹ this value therefore implies a very close relationship between leadership and congregation. This issue strikes again at the heart of the roles of church leadership and how they are to be defined. Craddock argues that in traditional preaching models the preacher felt safe because of the freedom from the contingencies or threat of dialogue and criticism.⁵⁴⁰

Preachers transitioning into this new oral-aural world of dialogue and critical response can be unsettled by this change because it demands a paradigm shift regarding traditional expectations of congregational leadership roles. Craddock

⁵³⁵ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 97-98.

⁵³⁶ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 27.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵³⁸ Craddock, *Preaching*, 26.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁴⁰ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 25.

maintains that such an adjustment “will be radical and painful for many who preach, for it demands an altered image of the preacher and of what he is doing when he preaches.”⁵⁴¹ Preaching in this mode is increasingly less about the preacher’s explications of exegetical certitude and metaphysics and more about inviting the congregation to participate in the process of exegesis and discovery.⁵⁴²

Various homileticians have attempted to adapt this value for preaching. Whilst reserving the primary tasks of exegesis and preparation to the preacher, Quicke believes that preachers should develop a team-based approach to preaching in order to involve the wider community in the act of preaching before, during and after the preaching event. Regardless of the size of the congregation, he believes that significant gains can be had by involving others in the preaching task.⁵⁴³ Rose’s roundtable model of preaching goes beyond Quicke’s concepts by insisting that the voices of other readers of Scripture be valued and heard certainly before and after the preaching event, and possibly even during if a workable dialogical model can be constructed.⁵⁴⁴ McClure advocates just such a collaborative approach by using personal testimonies in preaching drawn from pre-sermon roundtable conversations. Such preaching juxtaposes conversationally the thoughts and ideas of others in the sermon and can lead to potentially new and significant interpretative insights.⁵⁴⁵ Finally, Sweet goes even further than Rose and McClure by proposing a conversational/internet-based model. He claims that this multilayered discussion results in high levels of energy, but also warns that rather than seeking to be strategic or formulaic such a sermon should evolve organically. Sweet believes this is the case because postmodern audiences are interested in the participation itself rather than strategies of participation.⁵⁴⁶

3. *Open-ended sermons to be “finished” by the audience.*

Craddock argues that sermons should ideally be designed in such a way that the audience must engage in order to finish the process, thereby allowing them to own the various applications for themselves they have worked out, whether individually or in a community context. For example, in the context of a sermon Craddock writes that

⁵⁴¹ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 26.

⁵⁴² Brueggemann, *The Word Militant*, 30.

⁵⁴³ Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 93.

⁵⁴⁴ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 131.

⁵⁴⁵ McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching*, 148.

⁵⁴⁶ See Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 84-85.

the “Bread of Life is broken and offered, but the hearers must be allowed to chew for themselves.”⁵⁴⁷ As noted in Chapter 3, traditional preaching involved conveying deductive propositions from the biblical world to the contemporary world of the listeners. This mode of preaching gave the listeners only the option either to agree or disagree with the message preached.⁵⁴⁸ Craddock instead believes that listeners ideally want to make their own discoveries during the preaching, and for him this was accomplished through the inductive sermon form.⁵⁴⁹ Such a form is a potentially heuristic mode of preaching that invites “the congregation to work out their own meanings in a give-and-take with the Spirit.”⁵⁵⁰ This value is a further extension of the previous value that seeks to elevate the audience from that of passive recipients to active participants who participate in the meaning-making of the sermon.

This value fits with Cosgrove and Edgerton’s articulation of postmodern homiletics moving away from traditional preaching models in which the listener was not strictly necessary for the interpretation of the sermon. Cosgrove and Edgerton argue that preaching shaped by late modernity and postmodernity critiques that paradigm, embracing instead the role of imagination. This approach sees preaching as an experience of meaning-making whereby the preacher guides the listeners in a process of interpretation such that they become co-interpreters, viewing the listeners as active participants in meaning-making.⁵⁵¹ They argue, “If the dominant patterns of cognitive-propositional thinking led to a deductive homiletical practice, the newer trend is toward an inductive practice by which the listener takes up an active and necessary role in meaning-making. Thus the listener is not just the receiver of meaning but a maker of meaning.”⁵⁵² In this value the preacher is less of an explainer of exegetical conclusions already reached and more of a facilitator of participatory homiletical models.

⁵⁴⁷ Craddock, *Preaching*, 64.

⁵⁴⁸ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 61.

⁵⁴⁹ Craddock, *Preaching*, 195.

⁵⁵⁰ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 6.

⁵⁵¹ Cosgrove and Edgerton, *In Other Words*, 5.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 15.

4. *The rhetoric of preaching forms can be as varied as the rhetoric of scriptural literary forms.*

As noted previously, Craddock argues that a sermon ideally should do what the text does, say what the text says and accomplish what the text accomplishes.⁵⁵³ For Craddock, the method is the message that brings about the experience for the listeners; how one preaches is to a large extent what one preaches.⁵⁵⁴ Building upon the previous contextual evaluation of the New Homiletic, this thesis seeks to construct a rhetorical-critical exegetical method that engages the forms and genres of Scripture in terms of their persuasive function. Such an approach serves as a primary exegetical resource related to relating the “what” and “how” of biblical texts to the task of preaching.

Whilst other homileticians have embraced this value as foundational, few utilize rhetorical criticism as the exegetical tool by which to accomplish such a goal. For example, Long states that the literary form of the text can serve as a model for the form of the sermon,⁵⁵⁵ and that a key ingredient in the homiletical task is “deciding how to preach so that the sermon embodies in its language, form, and style the gospel it seeks to proclaim.”⁵⁵⁶ For Long, therefore, the connection at this point between text and sermon is “to extend a portion of the text’s impact into a new communicational situation, that of contemporary hearers listening to the sermon.”⁵⁵⁷ Long believes that one can only communicate a portion of the text’s impact because a single sermon cannot exhaust all of the possibilities for meaning present in a biblical text.⁵⁵⁸

Long argues elsewhere that although biblical texts are multifaceted with their own sets of intentionalities, their ultimate goal is to shape the identity of the faith community. This, he believes, should be the goal of the sermon also. In light of this observation, he claims that “biblical texts *say* things that do things, and the sermon is

⁵⁵³ Craddock, *Preaching*, 29.

⁵⁵⁴ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 44.

⁵⁵⁵ Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms*, 34.

⁵⁵⁶ Craddock, *Preaching*, 12.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁵⁸ Again note that the multiple point-of-view sermon may give the impression that it does present all the various interpretive possibilities, but this is merely one homiletical form with its own strengths and weaknesses. The multiple points of view are intended, among other things, to represent previously unheard positions and perspectives and to stimulate discussion. Thus preaching should be seen in this regard as an ongoing dialogue taking place before and after the actual sermon itself. Postmoderns are deeply distrustful of authorities claiming to represent a univocal “truth”; in particular “they brand anyone who disregards or supposedly suppresses the equal telling of alternate stories as intolerant or overly paternalistic” (Leiderbach and Reid, *The Convergent Church*, 65). The approach in this thesis attempts to avoid these charges by presenting as fairly as possible homiletical options with which listeners can engage.

to say and do those things too.”⁵⁵⁹ The preacher should define the dynamic between the illocutionary aspects of the text (the performative force of a statement a speaker makes when speaking, determined by situational and societal conventions) and the perlocutionary force (the effect the illocutionary act has on the hearer).⁵⁶⁰ According to Long, texts do things by saying things in certain ways, which serves as the key to building a bridge between text and sermon “in the interplay between saying and doing.”⁵⁶¹ Therefore he claims that the “bridge must be able to bear the traffic of both word and event. The preacher should bring to the sermon both what the text says and what the text does; or, to put it another way, what the text does by its saying.”⁵⁶² Quicke agrees with Long’s assessment, stating that homiletics “involves designing a sermon that says and does the same things the biblical text says and does.”⁵⁶³

As noted in the earlier critique of Craddock on this point, however, the value of “doing and saying what the text does and says” requires clarification. In order to achieve its goal of integrating both biblical studies and homiletics, this thesis develops a rhetorical-critical approach that gives the exegete facility to account for available textual and rhetorical data, the interpretive process and the move into proclamation. Chapter 5 will explore in greater detail the notion of the particular audience the exegete aims to reconstruct, which then becomes essential in validating the transference of the message of the ancient text to the sermon itself. The preacher thus helps the audience to identify with the historical audience on the oral contextual level as well as the characters on the written or literary level. As the preacher helps the listeners to participate within those contexts, the listeners thereby interact with a dynamic text meant to elicit certain responses.⁵⁶⁴ Such an approach clarifies “what the text does and says” on multiple levels and further aids the preacher by giving her multiple homiletical options by which to proclaim the perlocutionary aspects of the text to the hearers.

Although he advocated sermons that are informed by the textual form, Craddock notes that the preacher is not slavishly bound to reproduce the particular

⁵⁵⁹ Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 106.

⁵⁶⁰ Lessing, “Preaching Like the Prophets,” 403-404.

⁵⁶¹ Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 106.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵⁶³ Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 131.

⁵⁶⁴ See Mitchell, “Rhetorical and New Literary Criticism,” 617, and Beuken, “Isaiah 28,” 21-23. This connection will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5 under the discussion of a proposed complementary approach to synchronic and diachronic methodologies.

genre or form of a text in the sermon. Sermons thus attempt to express anew in the sermon the rhetorical elements which came to expression in the text.⁵⁶⁵ The preacher attempts to involve the audience inductively in the sermonic process, seeking to realize the meaning created by form and content together.⁵⁶⁶ While genre plays a major part in determination of sermonic form, the wide “diversity of communicative forms in Scripture calls for preaching that goes beyond elucidating and applying principles and speaks to the larger imagination.”⁵⁶⁷ As the sample sermon in Chapter 7 will demonstrate, while not slavishly bound to the particular genre of Ezekiel 15, the sermon builds upon the analysis of the rhetorical situation in Chapter 5. The analysis of the situational nature of the rhetoric leads to a homiletical form that reproduces the rhetorical dynamics resulting from the exigence and proposed solutions to it. This sermon will demonstrate that by use of rhetorical criticism, preachers can replicate the rhetorical dynamics of a biblical text while not being slavishly bound to its particular form homiletically.

5. *A balanced role of the Holy Spirit in preaching.*⁵⁶⁸

Craddock believed that whilst the Spirit is an active participant in all aspects of the preaching event he is not contingent, serving as neither a guarantee of homiletical success nor an excuse for poor preparation.⁵⁶⁹ Despite this claim, homileticians allege that advocates of the New Homiletic have not furthered the issue concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in the preaching event. Gibson, for example, maintains that “the responsibility seems to rest on the preacher to replicate the text or even ‘regenerate

⁵⁶⁵ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 98.

⁵⁶⁶ Cosgrove and Edgerton, *In Other Words*, 25.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁶⁸ I am attempting to chart a middle way between two extreme ends of the homiletical spectrum, one more on the charismatic side and the other more conservative or even cessationist. The first view tends to see less need for preparation with a greater reliance on the Spirit, while the other sees a greater need for preparation without necessarily clarifying the role the Spirit plays in preparation and delivery. On this second view Heisler indicates that most preaching textbooks contain only a passing reference to the role of the Spirit, and believes that conservative evangelicals have largely “failed to connect the discipline of homiletics with the doctrine of pneumatology” (*Spirit-Led Preaching*, 3). For further information on this topic see Doran, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Preaching,” 103-121.

⁵⁶⁹ Craddock, *Preaching*, 29-30. At this point there is a connection with the book of Ezekiel, as Brueggemann points out. Chapter 5 will demonstrate that the Israelite view of God made him contingent, irreversibly tied to honour their wishes and desires. If God is thus committed, he becomes reduced to the level of people’s preferences (Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 81). Thus any mode of preaching that places expectations upon the Spirit for biblical studies and proclamation makes him equally contingent.

the impact' of a biblical text so that it actually becomes the Word of God once again in the new situation."⁵⁷⁰

The earlier contextual interpretation revealed that the New Homiletic appeared to be bound to a rationalist hermeneutic that sought to reduce the text to a single idea and bring that idea across to the contemporary audience. Eslinger points out that such rationalist approaches allowed the exegete to articulate textual meaning unhindered even by the trammels of faith.⁵⁷¹ A rationalist hermeneutic may lead to a reduction of the Spirit's role in both biblical studies and preaching, and human autonomy rather than the Spirit, Scripture or the world the Gospel predominates tends to dominate "bridge paradigm" models of preaching.⁵⁷² On this basis even current modes of preaching suffer from a loss of holistic engagement with Scripture as well a poverty of the Spirit's power.⁵⁷³

Although perhaps not as well-developed as some homileticians prefer, Craddock's pneumatology views inductive preaching not only as elevating the audience by giving them increased freedom of choice, but also as spiritual people who are aided by the Spirit in the completion of the message.⁵⁷⁴ Craddock believes that the people in the pews may indeed have a distorted relationship with God, but it is a relationship nonetheless. Based upon this observation, Craddock raises the question: "Can the preacher trust them to respond to the message and 'finish' it with the aid of the Spirit?"⁵⁷⁵ This value embraces the concept that one's theology of preaching ultimately must account for the role and participation of the Spirit in both biblical studies and preaching. Relinquishing control over the outcome of a sermon involves humility on the part of the preacher by placing increased trust in both the hearers and the Spirit.

Conclusion

This chapter will conclude by building upon the earlier contextual interpretation and evaluation, seeking to evaluate the status of the New Homiletics and a values-based homiletic in light of postmodernism. Contemporary preachers face an unprecedented time in church ministry, both from their perspective and that of their congregations. Sitting in the pews of the average Western church are perhaps up to

⁵⁷⁰ Gibson, "Defining the New Homiletic," 26.

⁵⁷¹ Eslinger, "Narratorial Situations," 72.

⁵⁷² Farley, *Practicing Gospel*, 91.

⁵⁷³ Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 38.

⁵⁷⁴ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 100.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

five generations of congregants, representing on the one extreme older generations raised in a modernist context and on the other extreme younger generations raised in an increasingly postmodern context. Reid points out that those preaching to these discrete generations can be caught between the modern and postmodern worldviews. In their public role as pastors and preachers congregational leaders “speak on behalf of values and meaning rooted in the Christian tradition.”⁵⁷⁶ In private, however, they can identify with the postmodern “humor of appearance at the expense of meaning, even destruction of meaning.”⁵⁷⁷ This dichotomy leads to what Reid terms “cultural duplicity”: preachers who are at least sympathetic with postmodernism, or who are in fact postmodernists but present traditional modern-styled sermons to their congregations, many of whom expect such offerings on a weekly basis. This is seen as “getting” the prevailing scepticism of cultural postmodernism in private, while at the same time putting on a public face to a traditionalist constituency rooted in the tenets of Enlightenment modernism.

Despite the massive cultural shifts occurring worldwide, theological schools often continue to train preachers in Enlightenment modes that utilize linear, analytical thought. This process tends to produce preachers who believe that the Christian faith can be understood as well as communicated by means of propositions, statements, creeds and theologies.⁵⁷⁸ Denison believes that such “religious institutions have become associated with the analytical, scientific worldview. Indeed, they are in danger of becoming its defenders.”⁵⁷⁹ The thesis noted previously that practical theological reflection involves an understanding of the interconnectedness between the life and practices of the church and that of the wider society.⁵⁸⁰ Theological schools “not only create but reflect the general condition of the churches they serve and the cultures in which they live.”⁵⁸¹ The task ahead for preachers and theologians alike is to avoid the trap of defending an increasingly outmoded worldview while at the same time calling for a translation into the new.⁵⁸²

The current homiletical landscape also reflects this cultural shift. For example, Cosgrove and Edgerton characterize contemporary homiletics utilizing the categories

⁵⁷⁶ Reid, “Postmodernism and the Function,” 1-2.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁸⁰ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 1.

⁵⁸¹ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 5.

⁵⁸² Denison, *The Artist’s Way of Preaching*, 3.

“from” and “toward.” As the contextual analysis in Chapter 3 demonstrated, the “from” side represents traditional homiletics, the dominant homiletical paradigm grounded in the perspectives of the Enlightenment and modernity. This side produced a rationalist hermeneutic resulting in deductive homiletics. “Meaning” equalled grasping a proposition or idea from the biblical text, while “preaching” equalled the re-presentation of that meaning or interpretation to audiences, who were passive receivers of meaning.⁵⁸³ This approach “represents hermeneutical and homiletical approaches in which the content of texts could be separated from the form and made the subject of some other form of communication.”⁵⁸⁴ Biblical texts were viewed as sealed containers containing urgent theological ideas, and therefore the preacher’s task was to crack open the text and produce a sermon communicating those ideas to the contemporary situation.⁵⁸⁵

Conversely, the “toward” side of homiletics represents an approach shaped by late modernism that critiques the “from” side of traditional preaching. Cosgrove and Edgerton observe that this new homiletics involves “a certain coalescence of perspectives in a field that is, nonetheless, very much in flux and marked by variety and diversity of opinion and practice.”⁵⁸⁶ Proponents of the “toward” side of preaching increasingly adopt the position that rather than simply interpreting the text, one needs to interpret life. On this basis “the question is not ‘how can we understand this text?’ but ‘how can we understand our life?’” This newer view of homiletics “represents those approaches that seek to hold together form and content in both interpretation and meaning.”⁵⁸⁷ As noted earlier, within a postmodern communication ethos the listener actively participates with the preacher in the making of meaning.

In order to develop its pragmatic plan for future homiletics, this thesis takes into consideration the issues raised previously by the contextual interpretation and evaluation of the New Homiletic and therefore locates itself on the “toward” side of homiletics. In both theory and practice this side is very much in flux and is marked by wide diversity. But as noted by Thompson earlier, whilst the New Homiletic may have worked to solve problems faced by preachers a generation ago, that approach may not necessarily work for the children of that generation raised in an increasingly

⁵⁸³ Cosgrove and Edgerton, *In Other Words*, 5, 15.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁸⁵ Long, “The Use of Scripture,” 341.

⁵⁸⁶ Cosgrove and Edgerton, *In Other Words*, 5.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

postmodern context.⁵⁸⁸ Nonetheless, some homileticians maintain that despite the passage of nearly thirty years since its inception, the New Homiletic is better positioned to minister to postmodernists, whereas propositional-deductive preaching better serves those who still hold to the modernist worldview.⁵⁸⁹ For example, Reid maintains that the New Homiletic is neither a mere reformation of propositionalist homiletics nor is it merely a reactionary response to shifts within postmodernism. One cannot label it simply a reactionary postmodern approach because it employs assumptions concerning the significance of narrative and narrative closure.⁵⁹⁰

The New Homiletic seeks to recover a premodern sophistic rhetorical model that sought to achieve its persuasive ends by creating an experience on the part of the audience. As Chapter 3 demonstrated, the medieval scholastic movement supplanted this model of rhetoric with dialectics and relied more upon authorities and less upon displays of rhetorical eloquence as a means of persuasion. The chapter pointed out the tendency within historic and current Christian preaching to develop such overly logical preaching forms despite various attempts to recover the emotive modes of persuasion found within classical rhetoric. Reid points out that despite its decline in influence since the mid-1980s, the concepts of the New Homiletic can be productively utilized to impact a postmodern generation. Regardless of their theological tradition, Reid argues that people still desire an experience that moves them. On this basis the New Homiletic still embodies a “rhetorical strategy of preaching that is increasingly commensurate with the emerging postmodern sensibility.”⁵⁹¹

The goal of this thesis is to construct an integrated homiletic that corresponds to such emerging postmodern sensibilities. This chapter has demonstrated the construction of a values-based homiletic as a pragmatic plan for future preaching by appropriating certain recovered values taken from Craddock’s New Homiletic. This values-based approach was established in light of a contextual analysis combined with an evaluation and critique of Craddock’s own exegetical and homiletical values. The values-based approach to preaching will result in a homiletic that is multi-vocal, non-hierarchical in terms of leadership, and thus is appropriate to postmodernity. Moreover, the thesis will display the integration of the rhetorical-critical-narratological study of Ezekiel and Ezekiel 15 in the following chapter with this

⁵⁸⁸ Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul*, 1.

⁵⁸⁹ Reid, “Postmodernism and the Function,” 1-13.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11, italics his.

values-based homiletical approach with the production of the sample sermon in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 5

A RHETORICAL-CRITICAL-NARRATOLOGICAL STUDY OF EZEKIEL

Introduction

This chapter will further the thesis goal which aims to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by utilizing a complementary or compatible approach to synchronic and diachronic methodologies as a pragmatic plan for future biblical studies.⁵⁹² The chapter will apply the rhetorical-critical-narratological approach developed in Chapter 3 to the discourse of Ezekiel in order to demonstrate the use of rhetorical criticism for biblical studies and preaching.⁵⁹³ In order to accomplish this goal the chapter will treat the book of Ezekiel, and specifically Ezekiel 15, as a case study displaying the functionality of rhetorical-critical exegesis.

The book of Ezekiel has been chosen for this study because it has a well-earned reputation as being bizarre, harsh,⁵⁹⁴ and notoriously difficult to comprehend as well as interpret. The application of this approach to the complicated and difficult biblical genre of Ezekiel will provide not only a rigorous test of this rhetorical-critical-narratological methodology, but will also demonstrate its potential value both for biblical studies and homiletics. Later, Chapter 7 will continue to develop the goal of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by advancing a sample sermon that demonstrates the utility of the approach. In addition to the sample sermon Chapter 7 will also contain an example of this method applied to a discourse biblical text of 1 Corinthians. This will further demonstrate the efficacy of the method as well as its transferability across various genres of Scripture.

The approach to rhetorical criticism taken in this thesis will exhibit three main facets. First, it is adaptable and thus open to innovations of new approaches. As

⁵⁹² Whilst the distinction between compatible and complementary may seem like mere semantics, compatible carries with it the connotation that the two systems can work together without modification of either approach. Complementary, on the other hand, is more the concept of two systems completing each other or of each approach supplying what the other needs or offsetting mutual deficits. For examples of complementary approaches to biblical texts, see Spronk, "Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches," 159-186; and Ryou, *Zephaniah's Oracles*. For more on this development within biblical studies, see Beuken, "Isaiah 28"; Mitchell, "Rhetorical and New Literary Criticism"; Floss, "Form, Source, and Redaction Criticism"; Frolov, *The Turn of the Cycle*; Barton, "Historical Criticism and Literary Interpretation"; Joyce, "First Among Equals?" and "Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives"; Barton, "Historical Criticism and Literary Interpretation"; Jasper, "Literary Readings of the Bible"; Barr, "The Synchronic, the Diachronic, and the Historical"; and Clines, "Beyond Synchronic/Diachronic."

⁵⁹³ Here I am following the approach of Koptak, who demonstrates a method of rhetorical criticism on the biblical text of Genesis 39 for both biblical studies and preaching. For more on this see the article "Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible," 26-37.

⁵⁹⁴ Casson, "When Israel Loses Its Meaning," 7.

discussed in Chapter 3, this involves an interdisciplinary approach that utilizes both elements of classical rhetorical theory as well as findings from modern rhetorical theory and narratology. According to this view, rhetorical criticism proves its adaptability by allowing for other methods. Renz indicates that contemporary rhetorical criticism is “an approach rather than a method, or rather...is an approach in which several methods are applied.”⁵⁹⁵ Second, since it is inductive and based on the evidences of biblical literary techniques, it avoids the inevitability of anachronistic analysis.⁵⁹⁶ Third, its flexibility allows the approach to be employed on a small scale or successively larger scales. It is applicable to an individual discourse, to a rhetor’s entire production, to a genre or to a rhetorical movement or stages thereof.⁵⁹⁷ The study will demonstrate this flexibility by first analyzing the entire discourse and second by moving into a close reading of Ezekiel 15, thus establishing the smaller literary unit in light of the larger context.⁵⁹⁸ Ideally the critic must first grasp the whole of a particular work, and then second situate its constituent parts within the whole.⁵⁹⁹

The method utilized by this thesis will extend the exegetical and rhetorical-critical approaches of both Michael V. Fox and Daniel Block. In contrast to approaches concentrating upon stylistics, Fox maintains that rhetorical criticism should focus on the analysis and evaluation of the suasive force of discourse rather than upon its formal literary features or its structure.⁶⁰⁰ The approach of this thesis will adapt elements of Fox’s approach, which seeks to integrate narratology and rhetorical criticism. His method considers four elements: the rhetor’s situation, rhetorical goals, stance or point of view, and finally rhetorical strategies both persuasive and structural.⁶⁰¹ The method in this thesis also utilizes Block’s approach in his examination of the rhetorical functions of Ezekiel’s messages that were designed to change the thinking and behaviour of his exilic audience.⁶⁰² The complementary methodology advocated within this chapter will build upon this notion by clarifying the issue of voice hierarchy and various audience contexts that the critic

⁵⁹⁵ Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 11.

⁵⁹⁶ Eslinger, “Narratorial Situations,” 74.

⁵⁹⁷ Fox, “The Rhetoric of Ezekiel’s Vision,” 4.

⁵⁹⁸ Koptak, “Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible,” 32.

⁵⁹⁹ Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation?” 101.

⁶⁰⁰ Fox, “The Rhetoric of Ezekiel’s Vision,” 1.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶⁰² Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 11.

can seek to reconstruct. Furthermore, the application of elements of Fox's narrative criticism to the discourse as well as the discussion of the rhetorical situation will also clarify the persuasive function of the discourse of Ezekiel.

The chapter will begin by advocating a complementary approach that will establish the exegetical foundation upon which the exegesis of Ezekiel will build. Following this treatment, the study will focus upon the outer frame of the discourse of in order to clarify the contextual situation of Ezekiel by analyzing its genre, rhetorical situation and the potential of the discourse for achieving its rhetorical aims. Following the discussion of the outer framework, the chapter will move to a close reading of the literary unit of Ezekiel 15, demonstrating the integrated rhetorical-critical-narratological method that was developed in Chapter 3, and later will be utilized in the production of the sample sermon in Chapter 7.

Chapter 3 demonstrated that although historical-critical approaches freed the text from the stifling wrappings of interpretations around which it had been surrounded, this approach became hegemonic, hidebound by traditions and the expectations of the wider religious community.⁶⁰³ Contemporary literary approaches are moving away from the preoccupation with the original meaning, liberating critics from the hegemony of historical-critical interpretations by moving toward a revived interest in what the text can legitimately mean now.⁶⁰⁴ Rather than focusing on the historical context within which the Bible was written and understood, literary approaches centre upon the text of Scripture as well as its immediate interaction with the reader.⁶⁰⁵

Contextual Interpretation: Synchronic and Diachronic Methodologies

Diachronic approaches to biblical criticism often seem to have taken their rise from observed textual deficiencies in texts as systems, and therefore "a plausible case can be made for saying that synchronic study always comes first, whether logically or in practice."⁶⁰⁶ Joyce notes that for Ezekiel readings prior to the twentieth century, biblical scholars read Ezekiel from a solely synchronic perspective. The combination of its apparent orderliness and thematic sections prevented Ezekiel from being

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁰⁴ Joyce, "First Among Equals?" 20.

⁶⁰⁵ Jasper, "Literary Readings," 24.

⁶⁰⁶ Clines, "Beyond Synchronic/Diachronic," 78.

identified with the apparent textual problems detected in other prophetic books.⁶⁰⁷ The work of Hölscher in 1924 changed this interpretative landscape and historical-critical scholars began to note apparent literary, textual and theological discontinuities within Ezekiel. These critics believed the discontinuities to be evidence of a variety of sources that needed to be separated into layers and traced in each of their historical developments over time, which led to increasingly radical and differing interpretations of the tradition.⁶⁰⁸ Historical-critical approaches therefore explained the text's apparently chaotic data from the viewpoint of inconsistency rather than consistency.⁶⁰⁹

Since the mid-1950s, however, biblical scholarship has largely shifted its frame of reference to the book, arguing that these seemingly discontinuous elements are evidence of editorial shaping reflecting a compositional and thematic unity.⁶¹⁰ Many biblical critics increasingly read the book from a synchronic or holistic perspective without overlooking its rich history of editorial shaping, but increasingly without the radical assumptions that went with historical-critical approaches.⁶¹¹ The move toward synchronic readings is not simply a flight to naïve conservatism, Joyce argues, but rather the belief that historical methods of themselves are no longer adequate for the task.⁶¹² In its contextual interpretation of three selected Ezekiel commentaries, Chapter 6 will demonstrate that each of these can be located along this continuum related to the evolution within the field of biblical studies.

Although ultimately both sets of scholars have to engage with the text at some level, fundamental differences nonetheless remain in terms of theoretical aims and intentions. Historical approaches are interested in the text's history, or how it came to be, whereas literary approaches view it in its final form. Rather than maintaining this state of diametric polarity, this thesis will suggest that the two methodologies can function to complement each other. Comprehension of the text "as it stands" in its

⁶⁰⁷ The history of Ezekiel studies has been well-documented. See for example: Phinney, "The Prophetic Persona," 49-50; McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 34-35; and Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 26-27.

⁶⁰⁸ Joyce, "Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives," 116-118.

⁶⁰⁹ Barton, "Historical Criticism," 10.

⁶¹⁰ Though Fohrer and Eichrodt by the mid-1960s represented the growing consensus that Ezekiel was the product of a long tradition, Zimmerli serves as the major landmark by proposing the concept of an "Ezekiel School" to account for the marked homogeneity of Ezekiel tradition (Joyce, "Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives," 119). This move has extended to Greenberg and Boadt who, among others, argue for the compositional unity of the book.

⁶¹¹ Joyce, "Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives," 115-127. Joyce points out that despite the shift toward synchronic readings of the book, however, that there are a number of scholars who have continued to produce diachronic analyses of Ezekiel (119-120).

⁶¹² Joyce, "Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives," 121.

final form “may indeed require the interaction of the diachronic and synchronic modes of analysis.”⁶¹³ As noted previously, any mention of the “final form” of Ezekiel assumes that the book has indeed experienced a period of literary genesis.

Furthermore, when asking questions concerning the historicity of the events narrativized in the discourse of Ezekiel, one must utilize diachronic approaches. The critic can profitably utilize the findings of historical-critical methods to demonstrate the compositional nature and historical context of the final discourse. At this point the critic can depart from the historical-critical preoccupation with the potential original meaning or historical context out of which the text came in favour of a reading that does not constrain modern interpretations.⁶¹⁴ Whereas historical-critical methods can indeed inform the critic as to how a text came to be composed in terms of its literary genesis, literary approaches are needed to explain its final form, and therefore collaboration between the two methodologies can exist.⁶¹⁵

For example, the study of Ezekiel 15 later in this chapter utilizes form-critical commentaries to delineate the boundaries of the literary unit as well as to identify its genre,⁶¹⁶ but does not pursue a diachronic reconstruction of the *Sitz im Leben* or possible historical contexts of original source materials. Drawing upon diachronic elements, the study proceeds to read the unit in light of the literary and rhetorical strategies of the book as a whole from a synchronic perspective. The rhetorical-critical-narratological approach to Ezekiel aims to understand the whole in the articulation of its parts,⁶¹⁷ and thus the focus remains upon the final text and the way it hangs and works together literarily and rhetorically rather than on its historical setting. Noting that the whole is more than the sum of its parts,⁶¹⁸ the approach situates and explains the rhetorical function of Ezekiel 15 in light of the contextual and rhetorical situation of the entire discourse.

A final point to note concerns the question of the particular context this study of Ezekiel attempts to reconstruct. The various contexts that can be reconstructed

⁶¹³ Ryou, *Zephaniah's Oracles*, 4.

⁶¹⁴ Joyce, “First Among Equals?” 20.

⁶¹⁵ Barton, “Historical Criticism,” 12.

⁶¹⁶ Clines, “Methods in Old Testament Study,” 44. He notes that form criticism performs an invaluable interpretative service to the critic by classifying the types and genres of literature encountered in the biblical texts. Negatively, however, as “it attempts to reconstruct the roles of the Old Testament literature played in the life of Israel, its goal is not the interpretation as such of the biblical text” (44).

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31, 33. Clines argues that “the literary work should be studied for what it is in itself, with relatively minor concentration on the historical circumstances of its composition” (33).

⁶¹⁸ Fokkelmann, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 16.

involve utilizing elements of both diachronic and synchronic approaches, demonstrating that the critic can have recourse to both in a complementary methodology. The critic faces two possibilities related to audience contexts, namely audiences involving the oral and the written situations.⁶¹⁹ As the chapter will later make clear in terms of voice hierarchies, putative and actual audiences, the oral situation involves the character-narrator Ezekiel, his delivery of the rhetor Yahweh's oracles and the actual exilic audience(s) to which the messages were addressed. The text has been situated in a dissonant rhetorical environment or rhetorical situation, which can be addressed from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives.

The first possible audience context involves the use of diachronic methodologies, which attempt to reconstruct the events lying behind the text related to the oral or historical context on the level of story.⁶²⁰ Historical-critical readings seek to identify the *Sitz im Leben* of the audience of the oracle, or the socio-political surroundings of the prophet and his "school."⁶²¹ A strictly diachronic reading tends to project the preaching of the prophet onto the book, thereby reducing the historical situation to one dimension. Beuken points out that the "final redaction of the book, however, directs itself towards a public which stems from the contemporaries of the prophet and confers its fundamental contours on later generations, including the actual readers."⁶²² All later readers of the book are thus included in a nuclear way as part of the purview of a diachronic exegesis, and "the addressees do not constitute a historical point in time but a continuum through time."⁶²³ Diachronic readings ground the historical audience within the oral contextual level but should not ignore later readers of the discourse who can identify with the historic audience on certain levels.⁶²⁴

⁶¹⁹ Beuken, "Isaiah 28," 21, 23. Although he deals with the *mashal* found in Isaiah 28, the issues he addresses in terms of the prophet, the message, the audience (and ultimately readers) involve the same dynamics as found in the discourse of Ezekiel.

⁶²⁰ The technical terms "story" and "discourse" are utilized consistently within this thesis and are taken from narratological studies. The story level refers to the actual events that occurred in space and time, whilst the discourse level refers to the elements drawn from the story that are narrativized into a written text. See White, "The Value of Narrativity;" Bal, *Narratology*, 6ff; and Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 28ff.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶²⁴ McKnight notes that "When the Bible is approached as both an ancient document with original meaning and a living message with contemporary significance, the bridge to a comprehensive and satisfying biblical hermeneutics may have been found. The reader's final focus is not upon the original circumstances but upon the text in the contemporary context of reading" ("Reader-Response Criticism," 205).

The second audience the critic can attempt to reconstruct comprises the literary or written context on the discourse level. This context involves attempting to determine the audience of the oracle from the literary context of the discourse as well as all later readers of the discourse. A context which changes over time, this aspect involves not only the characters in the text but also “the text’s interactions with subsequent readers and environments unanticipated by the author.”⁶²⁵ This synchronic approach contains certain inherent limitations due to its ahistorical way of working. On this basis it can neglect the fact that actual readers can only accept the message of the writing prophet only when they identify themselves with the historical pluriform audience addressed by the original prophet and the tradition. Therefore, all actual readers are to some extent “addressed alongside the various historical addressees of the prophetic oracles with whom they personally identify. The synchronic method, therefore, cannot avoid paying some attention to the historical audiences.”⁶²⁶ The historical audience cannot truly be divorced from later readers, and in “principle and in fact an absolute distinction between both methodological approaches is thereby denied.”⁶²⁷

The complementary approach advocated in this chapter will take these observations into account. Diachronic methods establish the historical context of the original audience, whilst synchronic approaches deal with the literary and rhetorical contexts of both the discourse level and later readers. Viewing the final text of Ezekiel as a dynamic rhetorical work, the method of rhetorical criticism utilized in this thesis attempts to understand how the text encodes its persuasive purposes and “how readers—from various contexts—participate in that reality as they read a text which is meant to (or simply does) elicit certain responses.”⁶²⁸ Synchronic and diachronic interpretive approaches that do not take into account the rhetorical contexts of later readers tend to yield interpretations that are “truncated and incomplete, maybe even

⁶²⁵ Tull, “Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality,” 156. Iser speaks of the process of “discovery” as a reader engages a text: “...in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text...the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the esthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader” (*The Implied Reader*, xiii, 274).

⁶²⁶ Beuken, “Isaiah 28,” 22, 23.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 22. Perhaps the distinction between synchronic and diachronic is ultimately false; many diachronic analyses begin with synchronic readings, while many forms of synchronic have historical aspects. McKnight indicates that “Historical and sociological exegeses, for example, are not precluded in reader-response criticism. They are reconceptualized and relativized but not made illegitimate as such” (“Reader-Response Criticism,” 207).

⁶²⁸ Mitchell, “Rhetorical and New Literary Criticism,” 617.

irrelevant. In fact, to ignore one's own rhetorical context is to offer interpretation that is unconsciously overdetermined by one's reading practices."⁶²⁹ This chapter discusses not only the context of the rhetorical situation for Ezekiel's actual exilic audience, but will also draw dynamic equivalents from the study for contemporary readers.

Applying the Rhetorical-Critical-Narratological Approach to the Outer Contextual Framework of Ezekiel

The chapter will apply the rhetorical-critical approach outlined within Chapter 3 first to the entire discourse of Ezekiel in order to situate the smaller unit of Ezekiel 15 within its contextual situation. Just as a picture painted on a canvas is "put into context" by its frame,⁶³⁰ this approach will demonstrate that a holistic synchronic perspective establishes smaller literary units contextually prior to engaging in a close rhetorical-critical reading. These literary units can be better understood when examined with the outer frame of a broader context in place. The operative hermeneutical principle that will be used is to interpret the smaller unit in light of the larger context of the entire work. In order to construct this outer framework, the chapter will first assess the genre of Ezekiel, second examine the rhetorical situation and resulting rhetorical strategies, and finally concludes with a discussion of the effectiveness of the work in achieving its rhetorical goals.

Genre of Ezekiel and Genre Expectations

Identifying the form or genre of the literature carries several interpretative implications for the trajectory of a study in terms of the reader's assumptions and expectations. One's identification of genre engages the reader in making assumptions "not only about the form but also about the text's purposes, its subject matter, its writer, and its expected reader."⁶³¹ Genres provide expectations and conventions for the reader to engage in the interpretive task.⁶³² Since most commentators label Ezekiel as a prophetic genre, this generic assignment carries with it a set of assumptions, expectations and conventions. For example, Hals states that when compared with Jeremiah and Isaiah that "Ezekiel 1-48 is to be assessed as a PROPHETIC BOOK of

⁶²⁹ Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism," 166.

⁶³⁰ Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 52-56.

⁶³¹ Devitt, "Generalizing About Genre," 575.

⁶³² Cohen, "History and Genre," 210.

rather typical structure. Although Ezekiel has been considered a bridge between prophecy and apocalyptic, this is at most only partially true.”⁶³³

Since Ezekiel shares similar structural qualities found in similar prophetic genres such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, commentators looking to classify Ezekiel may expect it also to conform generically and thematically to that of those books. For example, various commentators note that Ezekiel displays a similar chapter structure: 1-24, 25-39, and 40-48,⁶³⁴ or 1-24, 25-32, 33-39, and 40-48.⁶³⁵ Furthermore, commentators have long noted that Ezekiel is one of the most highly ordered books in the Bible, replete with chronological statements that allow the reader to follow the progress of the prophet’s oracles.⁶³⁶ Although structurally there appears to be a corollary to these books, however, Ezekiel departs from typical features found within other prophetic texts. Scholars have encountered difficulty in the history of Ezekiel studies because in essence the book has not measured up to the expectations of critics.⁶³⁷ Rather than aligning Ezekiel generically with other prophetic texts, the approach of this thesis will view Ezekiel as an implied narrative genre—a classification which invites comparison to other similar narrative texts and furthermore establishes certain expectations for the reader.⁶³⁸ The study of Ezekiel will demonstrate that the entire discourse uniquely presents Ezekiel from a first-person narrative frame that puts forth the self-presentation of the prophet.⁶³⁹

In recent years, Ezekiel studies have focused upon the unprecedented use of narrative in Ezekiel.⁶⁴⁰ For example, Phinney identifies Ezekiel as an autobiographical self-portrayal of the prophet who views himself in a certain way and desires the reader

⁶³³ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 3 (capitals his).

⁶³⁴ Commentators who follow this structure include Hals, *Ezekiel*, p. 2; Block, who basically follows this formulation with the exception of a fourfold division highlighting Chapter 33; Allen, *The Word Biblical Commentary Volume 28: Ezekiel 1-19*; Bullock, *An Introduction to Old Testament Prophetic Books*; McKeating, *Ezekiel*; VanGemen, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 327; Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, 388; Von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, 188); and Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, xvii.

⁶³⁵ This seems to be Eichrodt’s structural outline for the book; Biggs deviates slightly: 1-3, 4-24, 25-32, 33-39, and 40-48 in *The Book of Ezekiel*, xiv.

⁶³⁶ Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, 388-389.

⁶³⁷ Childs points out that “in broad terms the problem of the book lies in the inability to construct a picture of Ezekiel conforming even in general to the main features of Hebrew prophecy which critical scholarship has come to expect” (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, 357).

⁶³⁸ Sailhamer observes, “Those who are well-read have a greater, more refined reservoir of expectations. Knowing what to expect, they often come away from a story with a greater understanding and appreciation than the one who has little idea of what stories are all about” (*The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 12).

⁶³⁹ Davis, “Swallowing the Scroll,” 84 While portions of Isaiah and Jeremiah are presented in the first-person, a third-person narrator narrates the major portion of both.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

to do the same.⁶⁴¹ Renz notes that the “book of Ezekiel can be described as an historical narrative about the activity of an exilic prophet” that serves not only to archive the works and words of the prophet, but also functions “as an argument, interpreting Ezekiel’s prophetic ministry for the following generation.”⁶⁴² Ezekiel can be classified broadly as a “monologic narrative,” which as compared to “dialogic narrative” tends toward a diegetic style.⁶⁴³ The book of Ezekiel, notes Davis, does not engage in a philosophical discourse, but rather tells a full and graphic story; the author or editor of the book “chose the unusual (for a prophet) vehicle of narrative speech as the means best suited to achieve that end.”⁶⁴⁴ Ezekiel can be broadly understood as a prophetic-narrative text, which despite being monologic in nature nonetheless still shares certain characteristics expected of a narrative text such as characters, setting, action, dialogue and narrative chronology.⁶⁴⁵

The Rhetorical Situation of Ezekiel

The behaviours and actions of the character-narrator Ezekiel are at the very least unorthodox. He speaks of the hand of the Lord physically lifting him up and transporting him to a variety of places, or of the Spirit of the Lord “moving” him. He performs symbolic actions which seem impossible for an ordinary person, such as lying on his side for three hundred and ninety days or not speaking for long periods.⁶⁴⁶ The visions recorded in the discourse are strange and other-worldly and Ezekiel’s personality betrays signs of acute abnormality. The apparent harshness and exaggeration of the rhetoric in the book have repelled some readers, and the imagery within it is often obscure or unintelligible. Ezekiel’s literary style is oftentimes repetitive, and readers can at times find the protracted narratives portraying prostitution revolting.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴¹ Phinney, “The Prophetic Persona,” 30, 51. Phinney identifies four categories of autobiographical activity that are evident in both first-person prophetic texts and Ezekiel. These include the categories of visionary autobiography, subjectivized autobiography, introductory autobiography and finally history-like autobiography. Some of the latter category involves sign-acts, while some do not. As a subset of history-like autobiography, Phinney includes the category of conversational autobiography.

⁶⁴² Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 14, 15.

⁶⁴³ Gunn and Frewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 7. They note that monologic narrative embodies long speeches, elicits narrower ranges of responses from readers, minimizes tensions and ideological pluralities and “tells” rather than “shows” through extended monologues from narrator and characters.

⁶⁴⁴ Davis, “Swallowing the Scroll,” 106, parenthesis hers.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁶⁴⁶ Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, 387.

⁶⁴⁷ Muilenburg, “Ezekiel,” 568.

In addition to these problems, the discourse presents a self-representation of a prophet who does not seem to be overly emotionally disturbed by his extreme experiences.⁶⁴⁸ Critics have therefore subjected Ezekiel to psychoanalysis, diagnosing him as an individual at best insensitive and at worst psychotic, neurotic or psychologically disturbed.⁶⁴⁹ Block maintains that the prophet remains a mystery for many Christian readers, who often struggle with the complex and bizarre nature of the book and are thus unable to give the work serious attention.⁶⁵⁰

This section demonstrates that these observations do not depict a fair representation of the prophet and his rhetorical situation, and that a careful reading reveals a different picture of his character. Yahweh informed Ezekiel upon his initial prophetic commission in Ezekiel 2-3 that his exilic audience was “a rebellious house” who would not listen to his words (Ez. 2.3-8; 3.4-11; 26-27). The exiles suffered from intense theological shock and as a result were disillusioned, cynical, bitter and angry.⁶⁵¹ As a divinely commissioned watchman tasked with the heavy responsibility of warning the recalcitrant exiles (Ez. 3.16-21, 33.7-9), Yahweh commissioned Ezekiel to break through the theological and psychological denial of his exilic audience.⁶⁵² In order to assess the rhetorical situation of Ezekiel, this section will utilize a modified approach to Bitzer’s model of the rhetorical situation, addressing the exigence, the audience and the effectiveness of the rhetor’s response. Bitzer’s model has proven its worth as a critical tool; despite being widely accepted yet deeply contested, critics no longer question the usefulness of the concept itself.⁶⁵³

⁶⁴⁸ Davis, “Swallowing the Scroll,” 120.

⁶⁴⁹ Broome, “Ezekiel’s Abnormal Personality,” 277-292.

⁶⁵⁰ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, xi.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7,8.

⁶⁵² I argue later in this chapter in the section “Identifying the Exigence” that the real audience consisted of Ezekiel’s fellow-exiles, and that they had both theological and psychological reasons for believing in the inviolability of Jerusalem as demonstrated from within the discourse itself.

⁶⁵³ Garrett and Xiao, “The Rhetorical Situation Revisited,” 30. This thesis will follow this critical process by adapting two modifications to Bitzer’s basic model. The first modification concerns the location of meaning attached to the exigence. Vatz held that according to Bitzer’s view events have intrinsic natures from which rhetoric should follow and that the situation dictates or invites fitting verbal or physical responses. In contrast to Bitzer, Vatz argued that there may be more than one “fitting” response to an exigence and moreover that not everyone may agree to the solution the rhetor offers to modify the exigence. Vatz held instead that rhetors creatively interpret events and then pass along those interpretations to audiences, thereby creating meaning rather than discovering it in situations (Vatz, “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation,” 227ff). The second modification concerns the nature of influence and the implications of that influence upon the audience. Biesecker also critiqued Bitzer’s model, maintaining that regardless of positions held or theories espoused rhetorical critics and theorists all embrace the same basic presupposition regarding rhetorical situations and the logic informing them (Biesecker, “Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation,” 232).

These modifications to Bitzer's approach demonstrate an area of critical correspondence to the book of Ezekiel by maintaining the dignity of the exiles instead of treating them as an amorphous group. For example, whilst Yahweh views Israel as a corporate entity he still evinces concern for the formation of their national identity. Fox demonstrates that this concern can be seen in particular in the rhetorical strategies of Ezekiel 37.⁶⁵⁴ Beyond this concern for the national identity of Israel, Yahweh displays a burden for the righteous choices of the individual person within the context of community (Ez. 18, 33).⁶⁵⁵ Furthermore, both modifications also have relevance for homiletics. From Vatz's point of view, a preacher presents an interpretation of a biblical text to an audience and desires a response on their part. This observation more clearly reveals various rhetorical strategies and resultant preacher-audience dynamics present in the preaching event. Biesecker gives further insights as to the nature of the preacher's influence upon the audience, as well as maintaining concern for the individual identity of the audience member whilst functioning within a communal context.

Exigence, Audience and Constraints within the Rhetorical Situation

Bitzer's "rhetorical situation" model is composed of three constituent elements. The first element consists of an exigence, which Bitzer defines as "something that is other than it should be" whether in the physical or mental environments.⁶⁵⁶ The second element constitutes an audience capable of being constrained in thought or action in order to effect a positive modification of the exigence.⁶⁵⁷ The final element comprises a set of constraints capable of influencing both the rhetor and an audience. By means of a rhetorical discourse that utilizes

⁶⁵⁴ Fox, "The Rhetoric of Ezekiel's Vision." In light of the vision of bones taking on flesh, this rhetorical strategy formed an essential element "for keeping the people together until the time comes to return, and for giving them a belief in national restoration strong enough to move them to get up and return to the ruins of Judah when the call comes to do so" (6-7).

⁶⁵⁵ One must acknowledge, however, that there is a tension between corporate and individual responsibility within the book of Ezekiel. For example, Lapsley notes that the notion of individualism in Ezekiel has been noted by scholars early on as a seeming contradiction between corporate and individual responsibility, as noted in representative chapters like 18 and 33. See, for example, her helpful overview of this controversial topic within Ezekiel scholarship in *Can These Bones Live?* 19-26; additionally see Matties, *Ezekiel 18*, 113-125, and Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility*, 177.

⁶⁵⁶ Bitzer, "Functional Communication," 23. For Bitzer the physical environment consists of all the physical elements that make up our world, while the mental environment comprises feelings, images, meanings, ideologies, etc. (23).

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

constraints as rhetorical strategies,⁶⁵⁸ the rhetor attempts to motivate the audience to act in some fashion for the purpose of bringing about positive modification of the exigence. This modification ideally restores harmony and balance to the total environment.⁶⁵⁹ In order for an exigence to exist two elements are needed: a factual condition and a related interest on the part of both the rhetor and the audience.

Identifying the Exigence

A cursory examination of Ezekiel would seem to indicate that the exigence consisted of Yahweh's judgment of the Jerusalemites and the impending doom of Jerusalem. However, a careful reading of the discourse reveals that this was not the exigence and rather that the exigence was the exile itself, which was the great crisis point in Israel's history.⁶⁶⁰ The exile presented a unique opportunity for Yahweh to employ Ezekiel in an unparalleled ministry among the exiles that would not have been possible within the context of the homeland. In terms of rhetorical situations the book presents not one but two situations. Whilst Block does not specifically incorporate this terminology, he notes that the Ezekiel's mission develops in two parts. These two parts of the discourse relate to the two rhetorical situations that are separated by the announcement of the fall of Jerusalem in 33.21.⁶⁶¹ Figure 1 below demonstrates these two rhetorical situations as seen within the discourse of Ezekiel.

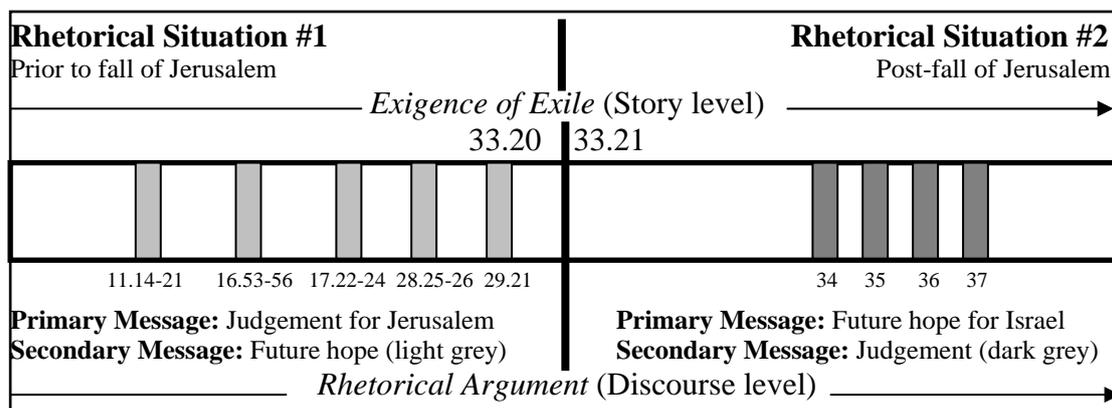


Figure 1. The two rhetorical situations in Ezekiel.

⁶⁵⁸ Smith and Lybarger, "Bitzer's Model Reconstructed," 199.

⁶⁵⁹ The combination of both the physical and mental comprises the total environment: "the total environment within which we live and constantly interact is clearly a massive and complex mix of the physical and mental" (Bitzer, "Functional Communication," 23).

⁶⁶⁰ McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 11.

⁶⁶¹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 14-15.

Figure 1 demonstrates that despite the two rhetorical situations within the discourse as a whole, the reality of the exigence did not change for the exiles, remaining static from Ezekiel 1 through 48. The diagram reveals that within the first rhetorical situation the added exigence of the impending fall of Jerusalem had not occurred. It is precisely this reality that becomes the overriding theme which Yahweh the rhetor has Ezekiel deliver to his exilic audience. Zimmerli notes that the foreground of Ezekiel's message within this first situation contains the announcement of the imminent and final fall of the city of Jerusalem, which had been spared in the year 597 B.C.E.⁶⁶²

As the chapter will later demonstrate, this reality became the primary objective factor giving rise to the rhetorical response of the oracle in Ezekiel 15. Within the first rhetorical situation, Yahweh employed Ezekiel to deliver his oracles, thus destroying the exiles' belief that Jerusalem would be spared, and in the process striking a blow at the variety of ideological pillars supporting Israel's "house of pride."⁶⁶³ As a factual condition, the imminent destruction of Jerusalem would have been an item of related interest for the exiles since Jerusalem and the Temple were, according to Yahweh, "the source of their security and pride" (24. 21, 25).

Living in Babylon as deportees from that homeland, Ezekiel and his fellow Israelites alike shared the factual conditions of exile. However, the point of departure came at the element of the related interest where two radically opposing interpretations of the implications of the exigence vied for supremacy: that of the exiles and that of Yahweh.⁶⁶⁴ Hayes points out that since the founding of Jerusalem as a city with a royal Davidic dynasty, two important traditions came into being for the nation of Israel: first, the inviolability of Zion, and second the inexorable election of Jerusalem and of David by Yahweh.⁶⁶⁵ The exiles therefore held to the belief that as long as a Davidic king sat upon the throne and Yahweh's presence dwelt in the

⁶⁶² Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope*, 116.

⁶⁶³ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 8. One must acknowledge at this point the motif of Ezekiel's dumbness, which as Kamionkowski points out "fits into a broader picture of a powerless prophet" as consistent with Isa. 57.3 and Ps.39.3 (*Gender Reversal*, 70). She notes that "the speechlessness motif fits logically into a general prophetic expression of emotional impotence. The prophet is unable to find his own voice just as he is unable to control his own body. God controls his movement, his lack of movement, and his words" (70). de Jong notes that his dumbness does not present a problem for the production of messages to the exilic audience, however; Ezek. 3.27 states that Yahweh would open his mouth when he desired him to speak to the exiles ("Ezekiel as a Literary Figure," 8). For more on this motif see Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 59; Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 120-121; Wilson, "Ezekiel's Dumbness"; and Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 56-67.

⁶⁶⁴ Vatz, "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," 228.

⁶⁶⁵ Hayes, "The Tradition of Zion's Inviolability," 419-426.

Temple, the land and city would be secure due to God's commitment to honour his covenant with the nation (cf. Gen. 12.1-3, *et. al.*). Such a view made God contingent, irreversibly tied to honour his commitment to the Temple, the Davidic dynasty and the priesthood.⁶⁶⁶

Within the discourse, Yahweh characterized Ezekiel's exilic audience as rebellious, stubborn, hard-hearted and hard of hearing (2.38; 3.7-8; 3.26-27). Making it particularly difficult for Ezekiel was the reality that the exiles had a worldview formulated from priestly and parental influences filled with misconceptions about their relationship with Yahweh whilst in Babylon. The exiles believed that God dwelt in the temple at Jerusalem and that His all-powerful presence provided certain protection against any enemy.⁶⁶⁷ Despite God's repeated words through Ezekiel to the exiles that Jerusalem was doomed, many of the exiles continued to cling to the false hope that this destruction would not happen for a long time, if at all.⁶⁶⁸ For the exiles, everything hinged upon the safety of Jerusalem, which was their treasure and source of security and pride (24.21, 25). Their position maintained that as long as Jerusalem remained standing, the exile would soon be over and they would enjoy a speedy return to the homeland. This formed the core of their belief system to which they clung.⁶⁶⁹

The exilic audience Ezekiel faced exhibited a stubborn sense of denial. For example, the people held that God could not see their idolatrous activities (8.12), stating in effect that "God no longer pays attention to what men are doing; he has left the land."⁶⁷⁰ The exiles derided Ezekiel's words, claiming that he only spoke in riddles or "figures of speech" (20.49) and complained that the prophet spoke only in unintelligible proverbs.⁶⁷¹ The exiles pretended to listen to Ezekiel but laughed behind his back with no intention of obeying (33.30-32). Ultimately, the prophet was listened to but not heard.⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁶ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 81.

⁶⁶⁷ Smith, *Introduction to the Prophets as Preachers*, 254-255.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁶⁶⁹ For example, Block indicates that the exiles' worldview consisted of four main "pillars" of support: "Israelite confidence in Yahweh was founded on an official orthodoxy, resting on four immutable propositions, four pillars of divine promise: the irrevocability of Yahweh's covenant with Israel (Sinai), Yahweh's ownership of the land of Canaan, Yahweh's eternal covenant with David, and Yahweh's residence in Jerusalem, the place he chose for his name to dwell" (*Ezekiel 1-24*, 8; parenthesis his).

⁶⁷⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 170.

⁶⁷¹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 424.

⁶⁷² Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*. James D. Martin, Trans. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983: 201.

Moreover, the exiles participated in blame-shifting, arguing that the the sins of their forefathers were responsible for their condition of exilic suffering (18.2).⁶⁷³ Greenberg argues there was a thin veil of “resentment at a divine order (or disorder) in which the evil consequences of fathers’ actions are borne by their sons... Their complaint is that the wrong people get punished.”⁶⁷⁴ Finally, the exiles placed their hope in allegiances with foreign nations, trusting that they would help defeat Babylon.⁶⁷⁵ The exiles believed there would be help from foreign powers—specifically Tyre and Egypt—and that their allies’ armies would crush Babylon and thus spare Jerusalem from destruction (17; 25-32).

A further complication to Ezekiel’s task involved competition from certain false prophets, whose words to the exiles directly contradicted the words Yahweh commissioned Ezekiel to speak to the exilic audience (13.1-16). These competing rhetors⁶⁷⁶ claimed to speak for Yahweh, proclaiming peace and security while denying that Jerusalem would be destroyed (12.24; 13.16; 14.10; 22.28). Ezekiel additionally had to deal with female prophets wearing amulets or “magical appurtenances” in an attempt to counteract Ezekiel’s prophetic message and divert the exiles’ attention away from the reality of their situation.⁶⁷⁷ These female prophets attempted to control the lives of the people (13.18) by telling the exiles what they wanted to hear, subsequently undermining the righteous and strengthening the wicked (13.22).⁶⁷⁸ Thus for the exiles, as long as everything remained intact in the homeland, they could continue to cling to the belief that the exile would be temporary in nature. Prior to the fall of Jerusalem and the inauguration of the second rhetorical situation, the exiles hoped to enjoy a speedy return to the land to resume their former lifestyles just as before the exile.⁶⁷⁹

Yahweh’s interpretation of the exigence contrasted sharply with that of the exiles. He appointed Ezekiel to a unique ministry, which in the first rhetorical situation involved a prophetic critique of popular ideology that hoped for a swift

⁶⁷³ Biggs, *Ezekiel*, 54.

⁶⁷⁴ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 328 (parenthesis his).

⁶⁷⁵ Smith, *Introduction to the Prophets as Preachers*, 255.

⁶⁷⁶ Bitzer, “Functional Communication,” 29. At this point, although Ezekiel, the false prophets, and the exiles all experienced the same factual conditions of the exigence, they all had different degrees of interest (and, of course, note the variety of proposed solutions to the exigence).

⁶⁷⁷ Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 1983: 239-240.

⁶⁷⁸ Biggs, *Ezekiel*, 41.

⁶⁷⁹ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 4.

restoration.⁶⁸⁰ In order to accomplish this mission, Yahweh employed the prophet Ezekiel to shatter the theological worldview of the exiles “by systematically attacking the pillars on which official orthodoxy constructed its notions of eternal security.”⁶⁸¹ Yahweh utilized Ezekiel to establish by various means his decree that Jerusalem was absolutely doomed. Through Ezekiel, Yahweh informed the exiles that no foreign power could save the city from certain destruction by the Babylonian army (Ez. 26-32) and moreover that surviving refugees would find no asylum in surrounding nations (Ez. 25; cf. Jer. 40.10-12). Within the first rhetorical situation, the exiles would ideally realize that no positive modification of the exigence existed and furthermore that repentance would neither save Jerusalem from annihilation nor shorten the length of exile. Renz observes that the calls to repentance located within Ezekiel 14 and 18 are in fact not directed toward those still within Jerusalem, and that

...in contrast to other prophetic books, the book of Ezekiel does not allow for a glimmer of hope of salvation for Jerusalem. The possibility of repentance averting the disaster is not contemplated. The annihilation of Jerusalem is announced from the beginning of the book as unavoidable. The introduction to the chapters suggests that the calls to repentance were directed towards the exilic community.⁶⁸²

As Figure 1 indicates, although the occasional ray of future hope shone through the gloom of the first thirty-two chapters of the discourse, within the second rhetorical situation Yahweh began to reveal to Ezekiel a fuller picture of his future restorative plan for his people. This could only occur once Jerusalem was destroyed, together with the subsequent reality of the exiles’ shattered hopes and dreams (33.21). The fall of Jerusalem initiated a fresh period of prophetic activity for Ezekiel. Once the earlier prophecies were fulfilled, Ezekiel’s mission changed in order to give “to give a new form to the community in exile.”⁶⁸³ From 33.21 to the end of the book, although many additional features are offered, in the main the discourse paints a picture of Israel in which all the wrongs of the past are redressed and the nation finally lives up to the potential promised in Yahweh’s original covenant.⁶⁸⁴

As noted earlier, within the first rhetorical situation repentance would not spare Jerusalem, and in both situations repentance could neither shorten nor erase the

⁶⁸⁰ VanGemenen, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 322.

⁶⁸¹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 14.

⁶⁸² Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 36.

⁶⁸³ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 31.

⁶⁸⁴ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 55.

exigence of the exile. Yahweh's exhortation of the exiles to repent (14.6; 18.30; 33.11-20) reflects one rhetorical goal for the exiles, which involved dissociating "themselves from a communal vision in which Yahweh is not central and to associate with the vision of a community that is first and foremost focused on and governed by Yahweh."⁶⁸⁵ This dissociative move involved both a spiritual and political transformation. Although repentance could not modify the exigence, it could bring life and hope to those languishing in exile (18.31-32; 33.11). Such a life could be made possible only through the rejuvenating work of the spirit of Yahweh, purifying them and replacing hearts of stone with hearts of flesh (11.19-20; 36.24-28). Within the second situation, Ezekiel's ministry changed as he offered the hope of Yahweh's future vision and "systematically reconstructing the pillars on which the nation's security had been based in the first place."⁶⁸⁶ The ideological pillars of support which Yahweh employed Ezekiel to topple within the first rhetorical situation could then be replaced with Yahweh's vision of the future for the nation of Israel.

Identifying the Audience

In terms of Ezekiel's physical location, scholars have posited an exclusively Palestinian ministry, a combination of Palestinian and Babylonian ministries or an exclusively Babylonian ministry. Furthermore, some scholars have suggested that Ezekiel never actually existed and that his work was a pseudepigraph.⁶⁸⁷ This thesis sides with the majority of contemporary scholars who find the origin of Ezekiel in the existence of a (probably exclusively) Babylonian prophet, and that moreover the book received its basic design during the exile. Such a view does not exclude the existence of post-exilic Palestinian material or subsequent editing.⁶⁸⁸

Although the discourse presents Ezekiel as living in Babylon (1.1-3; 3.15) among the exiles (3.11; 8.1; 14.1), many of his messages are aimed at either Jerusalemites or foreign nations. Whilst the putative audience involved those whom Yahweh had Ezekiel address, such as the Jerusalemites or foreign nations, his actual audience was his fellow-exiles.⁶⁸⁹ Commentators have noted this detail relating to the apparent dual nature of Ezekiel's messages. For example, Eichrodt states that

⁶⁸⁵ Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 229.

⁶⁸⁶ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 15.

⁶⁸⁷ For a more detailed discussion of these various positions see Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 29-31.

⁶⁸⁸ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 38.

⁶⁸⁹ Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 318.

although almost all of his oracles are aimed exclusively at Jerusalem, since Ezekiel was first and foremost a prophet for the exiles his influence on the homeland was entirely secondary.⁶⁹⁰ In terms of the oracles aimed at foreign nations, Greenberg more clearly differentiates the audiences by using the terms “ostensible” and “real” audiences. The ostensible audience consist of foreign nations, whom the messages address in the second-person plural. By contrast the exiles comprise the real audience, for whose ears the prophecy is intended and for whom it bears an important message.⁶⁹¹ The treatment of the rhetorical situation in the reading of Ezekiel 15 later in this chapter will demonstrate that the same dynamic occurs between the ostensible or putative Jerusalemite audience and the real or actual exilic audience. Since his mission was entirely aimed toward the actual exilic audience, Ezekiel’s duty within the first rhetorical situation was to explain Israel’s collapse, and within the second to give confidence and hope for future restoration.⁶⁹²

The discussion of audience leads to another point of clarification regarding narrative levels. One can term the exilic audience of the prophet on the written or discourse level the “inward audience” that functions on the level of the ideal or “implied reader.”⁶⁹³ These are described in Ezekiel 2 as the exiles living in Babylon, as rebellious toward Yahweh and as yet unaware of the impending destruction of Jerusalem. The text signals the stubbornness of this exilic audience as the major obstacle to effective communication.⁶⁹⁴ The “outward audience” can be described as the readership of the book, which involves second-generation exiles in addition to all later readers of the work.⁶⁹⁵ On this level, which corresponds to the level of the

⁶⁹⁰ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 9-10 (parentheses mine).

⁶⁹¹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 17.

⁶⁹² Boadt, “Rhetorical Strategies in Ezekiel’s Oracles,” 187.

⁶⁹³ In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth explains that the “implied” or ideal readers are “selected listeners, the special kind whom the tale both makes and relies on as it goes” (428). These are distinct from actual readers, and the belief of the implied reader must coincide with that of the author (138). O’Neill notes that “every literary text, as read by particular individual readers, demands a particular reading—or, in other words, implies a particular reader” (*Fictions of Discourse*, 74). Operating in a transactional relationship with the implied reader, the “implied author” is a projection of the real author of a work, and can be constructed by analyzing the norms, choices, techniques and values of the real author as viewed within the text (*Rhetoric of Fiction*, 73-74). The implied author is a narrative agent, neither identical to the narrator nor the real author. O’Neill states that “the implied author emerges only from our overall reading of the positions, values, and opinions espoused by the narrative text as a whole, reconstructed by that reading as the semiotically necessary authorial *stance* demanded by this particular text. These opinions and values may or may not be the same as those of the real author” (*Fictions of Discourse*, italic his, 66).

⁶⁹⁴ Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 39.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39. For Renz, the book of Ezekiel was intended to be read by the second-generation exiles. He notes that although there is a strong continuity between the prophet’s audience in the book, and the

“implied author,” the attempt is made to reconstruct from the text and its assumed context the sender and the intended recipients of its communication..⁶⁹⁶ This distinction is helpful here because at this point this chapter focuses on the inward audience of the text, but later demonstrates dynamic equivalents relating both to the inward and outward audiences as well as the fitness of the rhetoric of the book of Ezekiel for later readers.⁶⁹⁷

Clarification of putative and actual audience reveals that the future survival of the nation did not lie with the Jews living in Jerusalem prior to its fall. Ironically, on the contrary the future lay with those exiles that had been removed from the land and prevented access to the temple.⁶⁹⁸ At no point does the book demonstrate that the survival of the nation is based upon the exiles’ religious or moral pre-eminence. As he attempted to deliver Yahweh’s messages, Ezekiel faced two difficult obstacles. The first difficulty was that the exiles shared the same ideology, rebellious attitude and idolatrous defilement as the Jews still in the homeland (2.3-5; 3.7; 14.3). The exiles brought their apostasizing baggage with them from the homeland, which included the tendency toward idolatry and social evils.⁶⁹⁹ As a prophet and watchman, Ezekiel faced the monumental commission of not only shattering the exiles’ worldview and replacing it with Yahweh’s vision for them, but additionally preparing God’s people for habitation in the future purified city and Temple.

A second complication faced by Ezekiel involved an audience in danger of absorption into the relatively benign Babylonian culture.⁷⁰⁰ Eichrodt observes that the Babylonians allowed the exiles to farm land, to self-govern and to worship their own God unmolested. Due to these factors, he notes that the exiles

...did not have to face a sudden break in the whole of the pattern of their life or give up everything to which they had previously been accustomed, but were

intended audience of the book (inward and outward audiences) in terms of their basic exilic situation, one can see “the measure of resistance encountered by the prophet which requires the readership to see themselves in discontinuity with the prophet’s audience. Readers who want to resist this move and see themselves in continuity with Ezekiel’s audience would have to treat the book as irrelevant in the manner Ezekiel’s audience treated the prophet’s message” (41).

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁹⁷ Renz argues that the original audience of Ezekiel were the second-generation exiles: “The argument of the book of Ezekiel is that the [second-generation] exilic community is to define itself not by the past but by the future promised by Yahweh” (249). This would be accomplished if the exiles dissociated themselves with the response of the inward exilic audience of the text, repent, and acknowledge Yahweh’s kingship as both the beginning and future end for Israel.

⁶⁹⁸ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 54.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁰⁰ Fox, “The Rhetoric of Ezekiel’s Vision,” 6.

able to preserve a certain degree of continuity, making it easier to bear the yoke of exile. We see here, therefore, no strict imprisonment or permanent confinement under continuous hardships at the hands of brutal jailors.⁷⁰¹

Ezekiel's prophetic ministry therefore played a large part in assuring the preservation of the national psychology and identity of a nation facing absorption into its relatively benign environment.⁷⁰² For Ezekiel, the rhetorical situation was an event that made possible the production of identities and social relations on the part of his actual exilic audience by winning them over to Yahweh's interpretation of the exigence.⁷⁰³ For example, Yahweh sought to utilize Ezekiel to produce an audience composed of individuals with a sense of their moral obligations within the context of community (ch. 18). Boadt maintains that Ezekiel 18 "gives a new accent to the role of the individual person in the community. Each must decide for or against God; each must take the law into his or her heart and be able to keep it no matter what the community is doing."⁷⁰⁴ When viewed in this light, Yahweh's view of "the people" involved more than just a plural abstraction of "individual" or "person;" his goal was not for them to abandon their individuality and follow blindly what was essentially a depersonalizing political myth.⁷⁰⁵ Moreover, as the vision in 37.1-14 and the oracle in 37.15-28 presents, Ezekiel passed along to his audience Yahweh's vision of a revived, resurrected and reunited nation. Such a process sought to re-image their national psychology and identities.⁷⁰⁶ Thus Yahweh's comprehensive plan for his people involved both a total political and religious identity renovation.

Identifying the Constraints

As noted earlier, Ezekiel shared with his exilic audience the factual conditions of exile as well as an additional exigence of his own.⁷⁰⁷ The discourse portrays him as a divinely-appointed watchman constrained with the difficult moral responsibility of warning his audience (3.16-21; 33.1-16). If the prophet failed to warn the "wicked" exilic audience he would experience death, but nonetheless Yahweh would still hold

⁷⁰¹ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 3-4.

⁷⁰² Fox, "The Rhetoric of Ezekiel's Vision," 6.

⁷⁰³ Biesecker, "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation," 243.

⁷⁰⁴ Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, 394.

⁷⁰⁵ McGee, "In Search of 'The People,'" 236, 242.

⁷⁰⁶ Fox, "The Rhetoric of Ezekiel's Vision," 15.

⁷⁰⁷ Smith and Lybarger, "Bitzer's Model Reconstructed," 204.

him responsible.⁷⁰⁸ According to his commission in 3.11, he must speak whether anyone listens or not.⁷⁰⁹ The messages Yahweh had Ezekiel deliver to the exiles in both rhetorical situations made use of constraints as rhetorical strategies with which his exilic audience would have been familiar and to which they could respond. Yahweh utilized familiar images such as the vine (15, 17, 19); cedar trees of Lebanon (31); swords (5.1; 6.3; 7.15; 11.8; ch. 21); shepherds (34); smelting furnaces (22.17-22); cooking pots (11, 24); prostitution (16, 23); places such as Jerusalem (*passim*); the Temple (8.16; 10.18; 40-44); and the “mountains of Israel” (6.2; 36.1). Moreover, Yahweh appealed to such legal terms as the covenant (16.8, 59, 60, 61, 62; 17.13-20; 20.37; 34.25; 37.26; 44.7) and the Law (7.26; 22.26; 44.24). Through his prophet Yahweh accommodated his message to “fit” the experiential and psychological context of the exilic audience. As a rhetorical strategy, this accommodation carried with it the greater likelihood of the message being received and acted upon by the exiles.

Characteristically, one expects the rhetor to be actively and creatively involved in the production of the messages and rhetorical strategies used to influence audiences. Patton observes that typically the “rhetor decides about the form and content of intended discourse in accordance with operative constraints...the rhetor is an active participant in the rhetorical situation by virtue of choices made in responding to actual or potential exigences.”⁷¹⁰ A close analysis of voice hierarchies reveals that Ezekiel does not originate any oracular messages or visions but rather is always a more or less passive recipient. His stance is more of a spectator than anything else.⁷¹¹ Phinney notes that “Ezekiel goes out of his way to make clear that he is the bearer of a divine message. The message is not from his own mind or mouth.”⁷¹² Furthermore, the discourse seldom presents Ezekiel as actually delivering the message to the exilic audience. One encounters only a brief summary of his supernatural trip to Jerusalem (11.24b-25), and only in 24.20-27 does he actually address the exiles with direct speech. On this point Renz notes that “the prophet is

⁷⁰⁸ Von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, 199.

⁷⁰⁹ Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, 388.

⁷¹⁰ Patton, “Causation and Creativity,” 41-42.

⁷¹¹ Fox, “The Rhetoric of Ezekiel’s Vision,” 9. This stance gives the impression of objectivity and also makes the audience’s point of view congruent with his own.

⁷¹² Phinney, “The Prophetic Persona,” 24.

usually portrayed as someone who receives communication rather than someone who receives and conveys information.”⁷¹³

For example, the oracular statements of Yahweh to Ezekiel within the discourse consistently begin with the formula $\text{y}^{\text{h}}\text{a}^{\text{h}}\text{w} \text{h}^{\text{y}}\text{-r}^{\text{b}}\text{d}^{\text{+}} \text{y}^{\text{h}}\text{!y}^{\text{+w}}\text{~}$ (“The word of Yahweh came to me”). The resulting clarification of voice hierarchies reveals that each oracular message originates with Yahweh rather than with Ezekiel, the character-narrator. The discourse therefore presents a portrait of Ezekiel, the prophet who serves as a conduit, tasked with delivering Yahweh’s messages to the exiles. As a self-presentation of the character-narrator, the authorial stance of the discourse displays Ezekiel as a model of a human creature who hears the divine word and who responds fully and appropriately to what Yahweh is doing. Displaying that model is the purpose of the first-person narrative frame.⁷¹⁴ Moreover, as the treatment of Ezekiel 15 will demonstrate, clarifying that model carries with it important implications for discussions related to the rhetorical effectiveness of the message with regard to narrative levels as well as outward and inward audiences.

Conclusion: The Rhetorical Effectiveness of Ezekiel

The final step in the discussion of the outer framework concerns an evaluation of the effectiveness of the rhetor in achieving the particular rhetorical aims of the work. This discussion concerns two issues related to the fitness of the rhetorical response to the exigence. First, on the communicative level of the inward audience of Ezekiel, the discourse appears to present two alternative and seemingly contradictory positions. On the one hand, at times the exilic audience seems to pay attention to Ezekiel by responding to a sign-act (12.7-9) and to the circumstances surrounding the death of his wife related to his lack of mourning (24.18-19). On the other hand, within both rhetorical situations the discourse presents the exiles as not listening to his words. Within the first rhetorical situation Ezekiel complains to Yahweh that his audience accused him of speaking in riddles (20.49). Despite the reality of the fall of Jerusalem within the second rhetorical situation, Yahweh subsequently reveals to Ezekiel that his audience only appeared to listen to his words (33.30-33). On the communicative level of the outward audience, readers must wrestle with these two

⁷¹³ Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 17.

⁷¹⁴ Davis, “Swallowing the Scroll,” 115 and 120.

options of the fitness of Ezekiel's ministry. In this regard, the first-person narrative frame of the discourse itself may provide a clue.

The discourse of Ezekiel functions as a homodiegetic narrative, identified by Genette as "a story with the narrator present as a character in the story he tells."⁷¹⁵ As a narrator, however, Ezekiel does not function as the "hero" of the story, but plays a secondary role primarily as an observer and witness. The point of view is fixed, remaining solely his and not varying from character to character. All of the events witnessed within the discourse, and the words of Yahweh, pass through him and are mediated by him to the reader.⁷¹⁶ His point of view is temporal, retrospective and limited to the diegetic level of a character. This narratorial strategy forces the reader to adopt his perspective and to identify with his frame of reference, knowing nothing more about the future than does the character-narrator.⁷¹⁷ Other characters on the discourse level remain ignorant of what occurs all around them on an even more "limited" existential level, but the reader only receives information with Ezekiel as Yahweh reveals it to him (as in 14.3; 14.22-23; 24.2-14; 24.16-17). This narratorial strategy aligns the reader with Ezekiel's privileged position of knowing more than certain characters in the discourse. Such insight only occurs through the agency of the omniscient character Yahweh, who displays his omniscience through his actions and by predicting future events.⁷¹⁸

Such a narratorial strategy calls upon the reader to make a decision over whether to identify with him and dissociate with the response of the exiles, or whether to side with his hard-hearted and rebellious exilic audience (2.3-8).⁷¹⁹ Although the discourse presents Ezekiel as obedient to Yahweh in the main, his various protests in the discourse (4.14; 9.8; 11.13) lead one to speculate whether or not he was entirely willing to obey every injunction, or if he became discouraged with his mission (20.49). Since Ezekiel's narratorial point of view very rarely intrudes into the discourse the reader must further wrestle with the issue of whether or not Ezekiel himself accepted Yahweh's interpretation of the exigence or militated against it. This

⁷¹⁵ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 245.

⁷¹⁶ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 190.

⁷¹⁷ Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 27-28.

⁷¹⁸ Watts, "From the Whirlwind," 169.

⁷¹⁹ Renz observes that one can see "the measure of resistance encountered by the prophet which requires the readership to see themselves in discontinuity with the prophet's audience. Readers who want to resist this move and see themselves in continuity with Ezekiel's audience would have to treat the book as irrelevant in the manner Ezekiel's audience treated the prophet's message" (*The Rhetorical Function*, 41).

unique narratorial self-presentation allows for both reader and preacher to engage on a deeper level with the profundity of Ezekiel's messages and the sensitivity of his personality. What other prophets merely spoke of, Ezekiel suffered personally. Uniquely empowered by the Spirit of Yahweh, Ezekiel was gripped, called and equipped to carry out his task.⁷²⁰

Furthermore, the construction of the first-person narrative frame compels the reader to make a choice. One can decide that Yahweh's judgment of Israel is just and that involvement in his future plans for Israel necessitates both repentance and acceptance of his sovereign kingship. Conversely, one can side with those audience members who accused Ezekiel of speaking in riddles (20.49) and who listened to his words but paid little attention even after the fall of Jerusalem (33.30-32). The fall of Jerusalem would ostensibly seem to confirm Ezekiel's prophetic legitimacy. Either possibility intersects with one crucial and overriding issue: Yahweh's singular concern as voiced throughout the discourse always returns to the point "Then they will know that I am Yahweh" (hw`hy+ yn]aE-yK! Wud+y`w+). The reader must deal with the questions as the exiles may have done: do the actions taken by Yahweh, as well as his words to the exiles through Ezekiel, result in the people coming to a greater knowledge of him? Did the exiles in fact repent, turn from their incomplete belief system and embrace the life offered by Yahweh? The discourse does not provide the information as to whether or not Yahweh's rhetorical strategies for his people actually accomplished what he intended. As above, this observation has an application for open-ended homiletics: the discourse models this very aspect of open-endedness by presenting conflicting views of audience reception, Ezekiel's struggles with his tasks and questions of theodicy. The sermon in Chapter 7 will demonstrate the open-ended nature of the discourse by presenting three points of view, but will leave the interpretation open to the hearer.

A Rhetorical-Critical-Narratological Reading of Ezekiel 15

Following the discussion of the outer frame of the discourse of Ezekiel, the thesis will apply the rhetorical-critical-narratological approach developed in Chapter 3 by engaging in a close reading of the literary unit of Ezekiel 15. This unit concerns the disputation oracle of the vine-stock and Yahweh's subsequent judgment upon the

⁷²⁰ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 11.

Jerusalemites for their unfaithfulness. This reading will continue to employ a complementary approach to both diachronic and synchronic readings, utilizing diachronic methods to delineate the literary unit and synchronic methods in order to understand that unit in light of a holistic reading of the entire discourse.

The treatment of Ezekiel 15 has been chosen for the following two reasons. First, the continued application of the rhetorical-critical-narratological method outlined in Chapter 3 to the text of Ezekiel 15 serves as an example of useful exegetical basis for a values-based approach to homiletics. The clarification of voice hierarchy, putative versus actual audience and rhetorical strategies will allow the sermon to replicate the variety of rhetorical dynamics within the unit. Second, since it is a relatively small literary unit comprised of only eight verses, Ezekiel 15 generally receives little attention within biblical commentaries. Most commentators devote between one and three pages of comments to it before moving on to the controversial extended allegory in Ezekiel 16. However, the rhetorical-critical reading of the unit will reveal that its rhetorical strategies make a contribution to the discourse as a whole. By putting these methods to use, this thesis will extend the trajectory of Block by seeking to understand the rhetorical function of prophecy in its attempt to change the thinking and behaviour of its audience.⁷²¹

1. *Establishing the boundaries of the literary or rhetorical unit.*

The approach begins by determining the boundaries of the literary or rhetorical unit, in order first to delimit it and second to bring clarification to the following questions that relate to its rhetorical situation and global theme. Zimmerli maintains that the messenger formula with which the unit begins, “even where no date follows, delineates the introduction of a new speech unit, which is thereby marked out as possessing the character of an event.”⁷²² Hals agrees, stating that Ezekiel 15 should be viewed as a distinct unit based on its opening and closing formulae:

This section is manifestly a unit by itself, beginning with the prophetic word formula, ending with the prophetic utterance formula, having a consistent common subject, and being followed by the beginning of a separate unit [16] with a new prophetic word formula.⁷²³

⁷²¹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 11.

⁷²² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷²³ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 98. Commentators unanimously agree regarding the demarcation of this literary unit.

Based upon these observations, Ezekiel 15 can safely be delineated from 14 and 16 with its opening and closing formula and also distinctly comprises a rhetorical or literary unit defined as an argument by analogy (vv. 2-5) connected to its subsequent interpretation (vv. 6-8).

2. *Identifying the Rhetorical Situation.*

Following the preliminary determination of the rhetorical unit, the second rhetorical-critical element in the unit involves determining the rhetorical situation of the unit.⁷²⁴ The rhetoric involves a response to a particular situation, and therefore this step involves analyzing and reconstructing the point of departure of the address.⁷²⁵ The study limits itself to the rhetorical situation on the level of inward audience, which involves the characters in the book on both the oral and written level. One must distinguish at this stage the difference between the inward and the outward audience consisting of all later readers of the book on the written or discourse level.⁷²⁶ As noted earlier in the discussion of the outer frame of Ezekiel, the rhetorical situation of chapter 15 occurs within the first rhetorical situation of the book. This occurs prior to the news of the fall of Jerusalem reaching Babylonia in 33.21 and the inauguration of the second rhetorical situation (see Figure 1). Chapter 15 serves as an example of yet another of Yahweh's negative "pronouncements of judgment upon his people for their infidelity to the covenant" that cut across prevailing opinion hoping Yahweh would rescue the Jerusalemites.⁷²⁷

As noted previously, the actual audience of the oracle consisted of Ezekiel's fellow-exiles as distinguished from the putative Jerusalemite audience.⁷²⁸ Although he does not use these two terms specifically Zimmerli notes that the text makes three clarifications in regards to audience: the first concerns Ezekiel as the recipient of the oracle, the second relates to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, whilst the third concerns the exilic audience. The text addresses the putative Jerusalemite audience in the third person plural in 15.7a while the actual exilic audience exiles are referred to in the

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 34, italics his.

⁷²⁵ Gitay, "Reflections on the Study," 215.

⁷²⁶ Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 19.

⁷²⁷ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 14.

⁷²⁸ Dillard and Longman, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 318. While at this point the historical audience (oral level, time of delivery) and the audience found in the text (written level, characters) may be one and the same, I am not attempting to reconstruct the historical context of the time the oracle was delivered using a diachronic approach.

second person plural in 15.7c. Zimmerli clarifies this distinction by stating that the exiles were “those who are summoned to acknowledge Yahweh’s judgment upon Jerusalem.”⁷²⁹ In agreement with Zimmerli, Cooke observes that whilst the inhabitants of Jerusalem are named in 15.6-7, it is precisely the exiles to which the oracle is addressed. The exiles are those who ideally “will recognize the justice of Jahveh in the fate of the city.”⁷³⁰

As noted earlier in the discussion of the exigence of Ezekiel, no amount of repentance by the exiles would avoid the imminent destruction upon Jerusalem. At this point within the first rhetorical situation, identifying the actual audience from the putative audience becomes important not only for identifying the rhetorical strategies of Ezekiel, but also has implications for the homiletical strategy of the sample sermon in Chapter 7. Such clarifications can help the preacher to replicate the rhetorical dynamics of the biblical text in terms of rhetor, message and recipients.

3. Analyzing and Evaluating the Stance of the Rhetor.

At this step in the process the study focuses closely upon the persuasive elements of the literary unit by analyzing the stance or point of view of the rhetor.⁷³¹ Clarifying the voice hierarchies within the unit becomes a matter of critical importance for establishing the stances of both Yahweh and the character-narrator Ezekiel, whom Yahweh tasked with delivering the message. On this issue many commentators tend to conflate this issue by overlooking the matter of voice hierarchy within the book.⁷³² The resulting position makes Ezekiel the originator of the various oracles, allegories and parables contained in the book and possibly also even the author of the book. However, a closer examination of the voice hierarchies and narratorial strategies in the unit reveals that the oracle does not originate with Ezekiel, but rather he serves as a passive recipient and subsequent messenger.

In order for prophetic rhetors to convince both the hearts and heads of their audiences, Tromp observes that they must take the concrete situation of their audiences into account. In order to win them over to his position, the prophet adjusts himself to their level by attuning “himself to them in order to convince them of his

⁷²⁹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 318.

⁷³⁰ Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 158.

⁷³¹ Fox, “The Rhetoric of Ezekiel’s Vision,” 1.

⁷³² See for example the following treatments of this passage in: Schofield, *Law, Prophets, and Writings*, 191; Boadt, “Mythological Themes,” 230; Smith, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 256; Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 156, 157-158; and Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 268.

message...The rhetorical skill of the orator guides him in selecting the most effective arguments.”⁷³³ A carefully analysis of the voice hierarchy in the unit consistently demonstrates, however, that Ezekiel is not actively involved in the production or creation of the message⁷³⁴ but rather functions as a passive recipient of Yahweh’s oracles. As speakers, preachers and proclaimers, prophets address audiences consisting of people living in concrete historical settings, imparting to them the will of Yahweh.⁷³⁵ As a rule biblical prophets function as receivers as well as the public announcers of Yahweh’s messages. Typically they announce that the messages they deliver originated from Yahweh and not their own mind, beginning “their speeches with the assurance that they are authorized by God to deliver his message.”⁷³⁶ As one who received his messages directly from Yahweh and passed them along to an audience, Ezekiel fits within this pattern.

Clarifying the voice hierarchies in the unit reveals both the stance and point of view of the character-narrator as well as the resulting rhetorical function of that stance. The determination of precisely who speaks and the direction of that speech to the addressees lays a foundation for the discussion of all that concerns the “point of view” in a piece of writing.⁷³⁷ The introductory messenger-formula with which the unit begins reveals the voice hierarchy. The first voice the reader encounters is that of the character-narrator Ezekiel stating that “the word of Yahweh came to me, saying...” (רַמְּאֵלֵי הַיְהוָה רַב־דָּבָר יְהוָה וְיָבִיאָ). The second voice belongs to the rhetor Yahweh, who addresses Ezekiel in the second verse: “Son of man...” (בְּנֵי אָדָם). Zimmerli notes this voice distinction when he states, “After the formula for the coming of a message there follows first an address to the prophet.”⁷³⁸ This analysis reveals that Ezekiel is not the originator of this oracle but rather is the recipient of it. He functions as the messenger, reporting what he hears from Yahweh and faithfully delivering the message to the exiles.

Distinguishing Yahweh as the rhetor and originator of the oracle and Ezekiel as the recipient reveals four important rhetorical functions. First, when observed in terms of speaker and audience dynamics, the recognition formula establishes

⁷³³ N.J. Tromp, “Amos V 1-17,” 57, 60.

⁷³⁴ Phinney, “The Prophetic Persona,” 24.

⁷³⁵ Tromp, “Amos V 1-17,” 57.

⁷³⁶ Gitay, “The Realm of Prophetic Rhetoric,” 219.

⁷³⁷ LaDriere, “Voice and Address,” 441-443.

⁷³⁸ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 319.

Ezekiel's credibility or personal-ethical presentation.⁷³⁹ Gitay observes that the prophetic messenger formula accomplishes exactly this function. In order to engage in the pragmatic attempt to persuade their audience, prophets must establish their authority and integrity in order for the audience to trust them. Therefore, the style of prophetic speech is specifically "designed to reflect an intimate notion of God who spoke directly to his prophet."⁷⁴⁰ Wilson further points out that the entire discourse characterizes Ezekiel as one who consistently and faithfully "speaks only the divine word that is put into his mouth (cf. 3.27) and does not elaborate the message in any way."⁷⁴¹ Ezekiel cannot be charged with "stealing" oracles from other prophets, with reinterpreting genuine oracles or of speaking falsely. Whoever hears Ezekiel hears God's word directly, and therefore Ezekiel serves as the conduit through which the unaltered divine word comes.⁷⁴²

The second rhetorical function of this formula establishes Ezekiel's authority as a legitimate prophet by stressing his close relationship with Yahweh. The discourse characterizes Ezekiel almost as an automaton, as one whose personality seems almost completely subsumed by the divine will.⁷⁴³ Whilst this may seem like a negative trait, positively this characterization confirms the closeness of the relationship between Ezekiel and Yahweh. Due to the proximity of this connection the prophet makes the claim that the prophetic word is actually Yahweh's and not his own, which places responsibility for the prophecy on Yahweh and not on the prophet.⁷⁴⁴ As the one who transmits the message to his fellow-exiles, Ezekiel cannot be ultimately held responsible for the content of the message.

This observation leads directly to the third rhetorical purpose of the formula. Since the word is Yahweh's and not that of the prophet, the potential for hostility on the part of the exiles is decreased. Such a stance places Ezekiel in the unique position of not being the exiles' direct adversary, but rather as one tasked with passing along a message he only received. Such a stance, notes Gitay, "decreases the potential for a

⁷³⁹ Classical rhetoricians agreed that one of the most important aspects of a speech is the establishment of the credibility or ethos of a speaker. For example Aristotle maintained that "Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible... his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses" (*Rhetoric*, Book 1, Part 1).

⁷⁴⁰ Gitay, "The Realm of Prophetic Rhetoric," 226-227.

⁷⁴¹ Wilson, "Prophecy in Crisis," 165 (parenthesis his).

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, 165.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁷⁴⁴ Berquist, "Prophetic Legitimation in Jeremiah," 139.

hostile attitude towards his public appearance...Such an approach intends to invite the audience to listen to the speaker without rejection."⁷⁴⁵ As the bearer of the message Ezekiel tacitly aligns himself with the audience. This stance not only gives the impression of objectivity, but additionally by taking the audience's point of view he makes it congruent with his own. Such a move encourages alignment of both perspective and belief.⁷⁴⁶

The final rhetorical function lays the foundation for the refutation of the audience's belief system by directly contradicting the hope the exiles had that Jerusalem would be spared. These are not the words of a mere mortal but the very authoritative words of Yahweh as he predicted the future.⁷⁴⁷ Although the exiles most certainly did not welcome the message, that the oracle originated from Yahweh and not Ezekiel sets the stage for what follows in the remainder of the discourse. At this point in the first rhetorical situation Ezekiel's accuracy as a prophet was still in question. Although he continued to predict the fall of Jerusalem, it had yet to occur. An examination of the weight of Ezekiel's overall prophetic career⁷⁴⁸ demonstrates that the events taking place after 587 B.C.E. bore witness to the truth of the messages of judgement in chapters 1-24: Ezekiel was a partially vindicated prophet.⁷⁴⁹ Within the second rhetorical situation, God's word in exile had been confirmed.⁷⁵⁰

As the divinely-appointed watchman functioning as the direct recipient of the divine message, Schofield notes that "nothing relieves him of the dread responsibility of utterance, of passing on to his fellows the message whenever he hears a word from God's mouth."⁷⁵¹ Although this was Ezekiel's personal exigence, the reality that he served merely as the obedient conduit of the divine message carried with it the possibility of predisposing his audience to listen to his words as authoritative and not reject them outright.⁷⁵²

⁷⁴⁵ Gitay, "Rhetorical Criticism and the Prophetic Discourse," 21.

⁷⁴⁶ Fox, "The Rhetoric of Ezekiel's Vision," 9.

⁷⁴⁷ Adapted from Gitay, "Rhetorical Criticism and the Prophetic Discourse," 21.

⁷⁴⁸ Fox, "The Rhetoric of Ezekiel's Vision," 5.

⁷⁴⁹ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 5.

⁷⁵⁰ VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 327.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁷⁵² In addition to this discussion, one must examine the communicative situations both within the discourse (on which this thesis largely builds) and the communicative situation for which the book is the medium. Renz, for example, believes that whilst the book faithfully records the activities and words of the prophet, in terms of rhetorical function as a finished work, its communicative situation as a finished text was aimed squarely at a second-generation exilic readership. These readers must, upon reading the work, dissociate themselves from the actions and attitudes of the exilic audience characterized in the book, and align themselves with Yahweh's perspective. (See his discussion in *The*

4. *Assessing the Rhetorical Strategies.*

The fourth element of the rhetorical-critical study of Ezekiel 15 concerns both structural and rhetorical elements. This section examines the organization of the rhetorical unit and the particular rhetorical and persuasive function of each section in light of the whole. Here the approach of the thesis distinguishes itself from one drawback of the so-called “Muller School” of rhetorical criticism, which displays the tendency to focus on structural or stylistic elements largely for the sake of aesthetics. In so doing this approach avoids the charge of “rhetoric restrained,” which is the reduction of rhetorics to stylistics, and of stylistics in turn to the rhetorical tropes or figures.⁷⁵³ Rather the focus is on persuasion in context, evaluating each part of the address in terms of its own rhetorical function that leads gradually to the programmatic goal.⁷⁵⁴ Gitay brings clarification to the discussion by stating that prophetic discourse

...is not a political speech, not a court speech, but a religious discourse: an address which seeks to alter the opinion of an audience already persuaded to accept a view opposite to that of the narrator. The narrator did not choose to confront such a dispute by reason, which can be answered by another argument.⁷⁵⁵

Ezekiel 15 consists of a religious discourse whereby Yahweh seeks to alter the opinion of the exilic audience not by means of rational argumentation but through a disputation utilizing comparative analogy and other rhetorical strategies. As noted earlier, the character-narrator presents the oracle to the exiles as he received it from Yahweh, neither arguing for its validity nor asking the audience to accept it as truth. Such a request would potentially invite refusal and such an argument could invite refutation.⁷⁵⁶ The following section discusses both the structure of Ezekiel 15 as well as the various rhetorical strategies Yahweh employs in his endeavour to motivate the exiles to embrace his plan for their future.

Rhetorical Function, 1-11). This thesis acknowledges this communicative situation, but focuses more upon drawing a dynamic equivalent for modern-day readers, noting that one must in some sense identify with the historical readership of the work (See the discussion regarding historical audience versus contemporary readers in Beuken, “Isaiah 28,” 21-23).

⁷⁵³ Wuellner, “Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?” 451. As noted in Chapter 2 this is one effect of the rhetorical reforms of Ramus, still felt currently in biblical rhetorical criticism. Chapter 6 will discuss the impact on Ramus for homiletics, particularly seen in Puritan preaching.

⁷⁵⁴ Gitay, “Reflections on the Study,” 217.

⁷⁵⁵ Gitay, “Rhetorical Criticism and the Prophetic Discourse,” 17.

⁷⁵⁶ Fox, “The Rhetoric of Ezekiel’s Vision,” 9.

Structure of Ezekiel 15

Most commentators view Ezekiel 15 as a two-part oracle, comprised of a poetry-like parable and a corresponding application section divided into vv. 1-5 and 6-8. Other commentators see a similar two-part structure to the unit, but separate v. 1 or v. 8 from the main body of the oracle. Therefore, structural options would include a division of 1-5 and 6-8, or a threefold division of 1, 2-5, and 6-8.⁷⁵⁷ Eichrodt follows a similar organization with one key difference. He views the unit as comprising two sections, the parable in vv. 1-5 and its interpretation in vv. 6-7. He differs from most commentators by excising v. 8 from the unit, arguing that it does not fit following the concluding formula in v. 7 about the knowledge of God.⁷⁵⁸ Zimmerli, on the other hand, argues for the inclusion of v. 8, maintaining that at this point a later hand has sought to expand further the description of the judgment by taking up the formula of v. 7a α , but with a slightly altered wording that extends the threat to the desolation of the land.⁷⁵⁹ Upon this basis he does not exclude the line as Eichrodt does. Furthermore, Block points out that although v. 8 appears anticlimactic after the recognition formula in v. 7, its lexical connections with 14.12-23 tie it in to the previous oracle. Block maintains that this verse belongs to the unit because the concluding signatory formula seals the Jerusalemites' fate.⁷⁶⁰

Although this unit can be divided a number of ways, this approach follows the three-part structure that includes v. 8. This study agrees with the approach of Zimmerli and Block that even if a later hand added the verse, it nonetheless fits in thematically into the overall argument of the unit and the book as a whole. For

⁷⁵⁷ Structurally some commentators include verse 1 in the first section (1-5) such as Cooper, who calls the unit a parable or "brief prophecy." He notes that "Verses 1-5 present the parable and vv. 6-8 the interpretation and application of the parable" (Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 166). Block follows a similar arrangement, labeling vv. 1-5 a "word picture" and vv. 6-8 "the interpretation" (Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 456, 458). Biggs also divides the unit into two, but demarcates the first unit at 1-6 rather than 1-5, basing his division on the four rhetorical questions that are then applied to the inhabitants of Jerusalem in 7-8 (Biggs, *Ezekiel*, 45). While not commenting specifically on the structure of the unit, Hals feels that it follows a typical shape of a three-part prophetic proof-saying genre due to the use of the recognition formula near its end in 7b (Hals, *Ezekiel*, 99). Zimmerli also views the unit as consisting of two parts that follow the introductory formula of v. 1: a parable of the vine (vv. 2-5) and an interpretation (vv. 6-8) that is rounded off by the concluding formula for a divine message (Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 318). Greenberg follows suit, dividing the oracle into two parts: a reflection on the ill-fated vinestock (vv. 2-5) and a comparison to it of the inhabitants of Jerusalem (vv. 6-8). He further argues that the unit becomes an allegory only when the comparison with Jerusalem is broached in v. 6, which then transforms the vine image into that of an allegory (Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 266, 268). Cooke also divides the unit along similar lines, vv. 2-5 containing a little poem on the wild vine, and vv. 6-8 the application of the parable (Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 156, 157).

⁷⁵⁸ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 193, 194.

⁷⁵⁹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 319.

⁷⁶⁰ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 458-459.

example, the charge that Israel has “acted unfaithfully” (lu[^]m[^] lu^{*}m+ll) is used of the nation in 14.13, of Zedekiah in 17.20 and again of the people in 39.23 as justification for Yahweh’s judgments. Moreover, rather than dividing the first section of the unit into vv.1-6, the word *laken* (/k@*) with which v. 6 begins demarcates the second half of the oracle ending with v. 5, with the resultant interpretation and application following in 6-8. Zimmerli notes that the discourse in vv. 1-5 and its resultant interpretation in vv. 6-8 are clearly divided.⁷⁶¹ Greenberg remarks of a similar usage of /k@* in Ezekiel 17.19 whereby the use of the word serves as a structural marker and “advises us that only now have we arrived at the consequential part of the oracle.”⁷⁶² Whilst not overlooking the rhetorical function of any one of the sections of the unit, this study of 15 will follow a three-part division of the unit: first, the introductory formula in v.1; second, the poetry-like argument by analogy in vv. 2-5, and third, the interpretation or application of the analogy in vv. 6-8.

Rhetorical Strategies of Ezekiel 15

Greenberg demonstrates in a study of Ezekiel 17 that the rhetorical strategies employed therein develop the allegory of the vine and eagles and make use of two “planes” or argumentative levels.⁷⁶³ Chapter 15 displays a similar use of argumentative levels by beginning on the plane of nature and moving to the divine plane, and thereby is “halved” into an A and a B section.⁷⁶⁴ Section A, on the plane of nature (vv. 2-5), propounds a theme as the parable-like analogy develops, which is typical for parables as they point from a human reality to another reality in an aura of mystery.⁷⁶⁵ Section B, on the divine plane in vv. 6-8, interprets and applies the implications drawn from the analogy developed on the first plane. The first half of the unit involves the rhetorical strategy of quasi-argument that involves the analogous comparison between the vine-stock and trees from the forest. In this case the premise of the argument is entertained rather than directly asserted.⁷⁶⁶

Yahweh the rhetor proceeds to construct his quasi-argument from the analogical basis that the wood from the vine-stock is inferior to that of legitimate

⁷⁶¹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 30.

⁷⁶² Greenberg, “Ezekiel 17,” 151.

⁷⁶³ See Greenberg, “Ezekiel 17: A Holistic Interpretation.”

⁷⁶⁴ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1*, 25.

⁷⁶⁵ Solomon, “Fable,” 119.

⁷⁶⁶ Strawson, “‘If’ and ‘□’, 177.

lumber from trees. This rhetorical strategy “intentionally avoids creating an intellectual ‘platonic symposium’ to debate controversial topics particularly about matters that might be conceived by the addressees as disputable.”⁷⁶⁷ In order to construct his analogous quasi-argument, Yahweh utilizes both tradition and innovation and then extends these by employing repetition and rhetorical questions.⁷⁶⁸ Such an argumentative strategy brings about the potential engagement of his audience’s emotions.⁷⁶⁹

Level A: The Plane of Nature

Yahweh the rhetor did not engage in a comparison between the vine and the trees of the forest in terms of fruitfulness, which the exilic audience might typically expect. Instead, his rhetorical strategy of quasi-argument appears to be a thematic argument through the analogous comparison between the *wood* of the vine ($\text{p}\#\text{G}\#\text{h}^{\wedge}\text{J}\text{u}\text{Q}$) and the wood produced by trees of the forest ($\text{ru}\sim\text{V}\%h^* \text{y}\text{Q}\text{x}\text{G}\text{B}\text{B}^{\wedge}$). Rather than dwelling on the positive value of the fruitfulness of the vine, the quasi-argument instead centres on the lack of utilitarian usefulness of the vinestock through the rhetorical strategy of repetition of $\text{hk}^*\text{a}^*\text{m}+\text{!}$, which is repeated four times in vv. 3, 4 and 5.

The quasi-argument advances by employing the strategy of five rhetorical questions, each of which serves as a guide along the interpretive path and thus calls upon the hearer for an answer.⁷⁷⁰ Yahweh addressed the rhetorical questions to Ezekiel ($\text{m}\text{d}^*\text{a}^*/\text{B}+$, v. 2a), and their subject relates to the putative Jerusalemite audience. As noted earlier, however, the questions are aimed squarely at the actual exilic audience as noted by the concluding formula addressed to them (7b). The five rhetorical questions follow in sequence, the first of which reveals the basis of the quasi-argument. Yahweh asks, “Son of man, how is the wood of the vine (superior) than the whole of the wood of the branch which is in the trees of the forest?” (v2).⁷⁷¹

⁷⁶⁷ Gitay, “The Realm of Prophetic Rhetoric,” 225.

⁷⁶⁸ Tromp, “Amos V 1-17,” 61.

⁷⁶⁹ Gitay, “Reflections on the Study,” 214.

⁷⁷⁰ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 318.

⁷⁷¹ While this translation is based on the possibility of the preposition $\text{Q}/\text{m}!$ being rendered as a comparative, Olley argues on the basis of the LXX and the thrust of the Hebrew text that it should be rendered as a partitive, based on the Greek preposition ek . This, he maintains, changes the thrust of verse 2 to focus on the destiny of the vine rather than its value as compared to wood from the forest, which is contra the translation of the NRSV (*Ezekiel*, 318). This is consistent with Block’s rendering, of the verse: “‘What becomes of the wood of the vine from all the trees of the branch that was among

At this point the quasi-argument rhetorical strategy merely asserts a claim and does not attempt to justify it on a logical or thematic basis. The audience of the oracle might be taking smug refuge in the tradition of Israel, and could rest in the assurance that the vine will come off well when compared to the trees of the forest on the basis of fruitfulness.

As a rhetorical strategy, analogy functions effectively as the comparisons themselves carry the weight of the quasi-argument. Comparison allows the object being compared to speak for itself and thereby enables the speaker to make the point clearly with no further explanations.⁷⁷² In this case, Yahweh's analogous comparison of the wood of the vine and the wood of the trees may seem forced or even wide of the mark, or perhaps even unfair. Eichrodt observes that "the comparison goes so obviously against all the natural facts as to make obvious the intention with which it was made."⁷⁷³ The very apparent unfairness of the analogy in itself is an effective rhetorical strategy in that this quasi-argument arouses the hearer's emotions. Gitay points out that "The function of emotion in an argumentative discourse is important since it influences in a way which cannot be achieved by purely reasonable argument."⁷⁷⁴ Hals maintains that "a mocking tone pervades the unit. To switch the discussion of the value of a vine from its fruit to its wood is deliberately and perversely to 'stack the deck' in favor of a hostile verdict."⁷⁷⁵ Greenberg agrees, pointing out that comparing a "vinestock to Jerusalem (a surrogate for Judah/Israel) is a grotesque distortion of the traditional use of the vine as a figure for Israel."⁷⁷⁶ Even if the hearer believes that the comparison is unfair and his or her anger is aroused in defensiveness, the possibility exists that Yahweh has achieved his rhetorical goal of engaging the hearer in the argumentative process. Yahweh's rhetorical strategy of

the trees of the forest?' Contrary to virtually all translations, the issue here is not a comparison between not the quality of a vine and other trees, but a comparison of their destinies. The question *mah-yihyeh*, 'What will be...?' Always concerns a person's/object's fate, whether it be the outcome of a specific circumstance, the course of one's life, or one's final disposition. Here the question is how the fate of the vine branch will be distinguished from the rest of the trees" *Ezekiel 1-24*, 456. On this point Bloc utilizes Simian-Yofre's article in *Ezekiel and His Book*, p.237. In contradistinction to this translation, this thesis translates the preposition as a comparative, as in the translations of Hals, *Ezekiel*, 98; Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 163-4; Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 157-8; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel I*, 317; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 191-2; and Clements, *Ezekiel*, 65. Regardless of the translation of *min* as a comparative or partitive, the focus of the rhetorical questions in vv.2-5 still points toward the inexorable nature of the final destiny of the vine-stock as worthless on any utilitarian grounds and therefore rightly condemned to destruction.

⁷⁷² Gitay, "Reflections on the Study," 218.

⁷⁷³ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 193.

⁷⁷⁴ Gitay, "Reflections on the Study," 218.

⁷⁷⁵ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 100.

⁷⁷⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 268 (parenthesis his).

quasi-argument deliberately distorts the traditional image of the vine for rhetorical effect.⁷⁷⁷

Continuing with the development of the quasi-argument, Yahweh employed the rhetorical strategy of tradition and innovation. This rhetorical strategy utilizes Israel's tradition to a point but then breaks from it, thereby arresting the attention of the exilic audience. Gitay maintains that the creation of an entirely new way of expression is impossible, and that "to do so can ruin in advance any channel of communication with the audience."⁷⁷⁸ In order to avoid this error, Yahweh drew upon the deeply-rooted traditions engrained in the literary tradition of Israel, but at a certain point utilized the element of innovation as a deliberate attempt to break the literary tradition and create a potentially effective appeal to the exilic audience.⁷⁷⁹ The audience would have understood his message because he was not entirely disconnected from the communicative code, but his development of the code did not follow expected routine.⁷⁸⁰ In the employment of this strategy, the rhetor follows a certain communicative code while at the same time avoiding stereotypical language and cliché.⁷⁸¹ The use of cliché could be the death knell for a rhetor's message as it involves routine, and the rhetor faces the immediate danger of his audience responding passively.⁷⁸² In order to avoid passivity, the rhetor attempts to raise the hearer's "expectations beyond the routine, to encourage the addressees to respond by stimulating their curiosity."⁷⁸³ Such a protest against old social-religious conceptions requires a style that cannot merely imitate the conventional. The strategy of tradition and innovation engages the audience and potentially leaves a personal impression.⁷⁸⁴

Beginning in the realm of tradition, Yahweh's rhetorical strategy utilized the image of the vine from Israel's literary and historical tradition, and from which Israel took pride.⁷⁸⁵ Breaking from expected tradition, Yahweh engaged in a strategy using

⁷⁷⁷ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 456. The sample sermon located in Chapter 7 attempts to reveal for modern audiences the rhetorical dynamics of the use of the analogy by showing its potential effects on the exilic audience.

⁷⁷⁸ Gitay, "Reflections on the Study," 213.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 213-214.

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁷⁸² Lessing, "Preaching Like the Prophets," 408.

⁷⁸³ Gitay, "Rhetorical Criticism and the Study of the Prophetic Discourse," 14.

⁷⁸⁴ Gitay, "Reflections on the Study," 221.

⁷⁸⁵ Many commentators have observed the employment of tradition in this oracle, though most term it a metaphorical usage in Ezekiel 15. Cooper argues, "The representation of Israel as a vine is not unique to Ezekiel. There was a well-established pattern among Old Testament prophets of using the vine to represent Israel" (Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 166). Smith states that as a nation, Judah "thought of themselves as

not a developed metaphor but rather an analogy. A metaphor is defined as “the substitution of one thing for another, or the identification of two things from different ranges of thought.”⁷⁸⁶ Metaphors refer to two things that normally are not alike, focusing upon some quality shared by the two. In contrast to analogies, metaphors assume this resemblance as an imaginary identity rather than directly stating it as a comparison.⁷⁸⁷ Yahweh’s comparison of Israel to dross in Ez. 22.17⁷⁸⁸ fits the category of metaphor.

Conversely, analogies are frequent devices in arguments and are defined as “stated likenesses” or an “inference that things alike in some (supposed basic) respect are alike in others.”⁷⁸⁹ Analogies serve as extended similes, illustrating ideas “by means of a more familiar idea that is similar or parallel to it in some significant features.”⁷⁹⁰ Roehm and Sternthal highlight the persuasive factor of analogy by maintaining that “an analogy compares a known base item to an unknown target item with which it shares a relational structure among attributes, but not surface features.”⁷⁹¹ The function of analogy is seen when surface attributes are set aside and structural relations are transferred from base to target.⁷⁹² In the case of Ezekiel 15, common attributes can be mapped from the vinestock base to the target, which is lumber from trees. Whilst the two share in common their essential wood-like nature, they differ widely in regards to utilitarian usefulness. It is precisely their structural similarities and differences between the two that gives persuasive force to the analogy and the argument.

Rather than allowing the exiles to take refuge in the security of Israel’s proud national heritage, Yahweh’s quasi-argumentative rhetorical strategy breaks from this

a noble vine of God” (Smith, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 207). Clements notes that “As a plant, the grapevine came to symbolize for Israel all that was rich and desirable about life in a settled agricultural land” (Clements, *Ezekiel*, 66). Commentators tend to assign this figure in 15 to the category of metaphor mainly due to this metaphorical development in Israel’s literary tradition. Eichrodt points out that because of its value due to its fruit-bearing capacity the vine was a favourite popular image expressive of the nobility and superiority of Israel (Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 193), while Cooper states that “There was a well-established pattern among Old Testament prophets of using the vine to represent Israel” (Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 166). Cooke observes that “Other prophets and poets compare Israel to a vine, but to the cultivated, fruit-bearing sort...” (Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 156). Prophets such as Hosea (10.1), Isaiah (5.1-7) and Jeremiah (2.20-21) all made profitable use of the metaphor. Other OT passages identifying Israel as the vine of Yahweh include Gen. 49.22; Deut. 32.32; and Ps. 80.8-16.

⁷⁸⁶ Shipley, “Metaphor,” 197.

⁷⁸⁷ Baldick, “Metaphor,” 134.

⁷⁸⁸ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 32.

⁷⁸⁹ Shipley, “Analogy,” 13.

⁷⁹⁰ Baldick, “Analogy,” 9.

⁷⁹¹ Roehm and Sternthal. “The Moderating Effect of Knowledge,” 257.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, 257.

tradition through innovation, focusing instead upon the unexpected and non-traditional. His analogy thus compares the vinestock to trees in terms of utilitarian usefulness as wood, rather than focusing upon the expected subject of the fruit of the vine. In this connection Eichrodt observes that none “has ever claimed that the vine wood possesses any exceptional quality...The value of the vine does not depend on that; it shows its value by its fruit.”⁷⁹³

By placing their confidence in the proud Israelite tradition of the vine and its fruitfulness, the exilic audience would potentially be emotionally aroused by Yahweh’s apparently deliberate rhetorical distortion. Yahweh’s rhetorical strategy employing further rhetorical questions would begin to undermine this position by asking the second question in 3a. “Can wood be taken out from it to make (something) of use?” At this point the exiles could answer in the affirmative, and thus perhaps hope still existed for their ideological point of view. Unfortunately for the exiles, the third question begins the march toward the inexorable conclusion that the vine is not fit for any utilitarian purpose. In 3.b the next question asks, “Can they select from it a peg upon which to hang any utensil?” In point of fact the wood of a vine was useless as a source of lumber; it was not good for making furniture or even for use as a peg for a tent or a wall hanging.⁷⁹⁴ It cannot be used for construction or for any of the great many uses to which more solid and straight-grained timber can be put.⁷⁹⁵ This relentless series of rhetorical questions has undermined the exiles’ confidence in the utilitarian usefulness of the vinestock.

Not content to leave the argument unfinished, Yahweh’s next rhetorical strategy demolishes any lingering notions of the usefulness of the vinestock. Whatever confidence the exiles had in the vinestock would now be shattered when Yahweh asks in the fourth rhetorical question, “Behold (hN@j!), if it has been placed (/T^n!) into the fire for consumption, (and) both ends are consumed in the fire, and the middle has been scorched, is it good for any use/service?” (hk*al*m+!), v.4. If the wood of the vine could not be used for utilitarian purposes, its status could only be lowered if it were placed into a fire.

Yahweh has reached this conclusion by 5a. “Behold (hN@j!), while it existed whole, it was not used for useful service” (hk*al*m+!). By answering each rhetorical

⁷⁹³ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 193.

⁷⁹⁴ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 166.

⁷⁹⁵ Clements, *Ezekiel*, 66.

question in turn, the engaged exilic hearer would have reached this same conclusion. However, the fifth and final rhetorical question drives the last nail into the coffin when Yahweh asks in 5b, “How much less, when fire has devoured it, and it has been scorched, can it be made again for useful service?” (hk*al*m+!). The vinestock, worthless for utilitarian purposes when compared to lumber from trees of the forest, now suffers the ultimate degradation. The verdict has been rendered: it is useless and worthless, either for making a tool or a peg. How much more worthless it is if it has been burnt at both ends, leaving the middle still filled with sap.⁷⁹⁶ On the level of the plane of nature, the quasi-argumentative strategy, tradition, innovation and use of rhetorical questions have guided the hearer along until the sure interpretation is agreed. The vine-stock of the vine is worthless for any purpose, utilitarian or firewood, when compared with “legitimate” lumber and firewood from forest trees. That verdict is abundantly clear from the first plane of the unit, and the exiles, whether they liked it or not, may have likely agreed at least in principle.

Level B: The Divine Plane

The change to the second argumentative plane, part B or the divine plane of the unit, is heralded by the use of /k@* in 6. This word informs the reader that, as Greenberg notes, the main consequence of the first plane is yet to come.⁷⁹⁷ Verse 6 acts as a “bridge” between the two planes due to the switch of subjects: the last mention of the vine (/p#G#) flows into the first mention in the unit of the Jerusalemites (m*lv*Wry+ yb@v+y)). On the argumentative level of the divine plane, Yahweh drove home several points based upon the conclusion already reached via the first plane. Through verbal repetition in a series of propositional statements, six points are made on this second level that draw their rhetorical strength from the reality that Yahweh has already passed judgment on the vine for its utter worthlessness.

The first point made is the statement that just as Yahweh had given up (y!lt^n+) the vine to the fire, so had he given up (y!lt^n*) the inhabitants of Jerusalem (v. 6). Here the connection between the destruction of the vine and the imminent doom of Jerusalem are made clear. Second, Yahweh stated that his face is set against (y!lt^n*w+) the inhabitants of Jerusalem (7a, 7c). This phrase is repeated twice, but the second usage utilizes the word mWt, indicating Yahweh has set his face against them

⁷⁹⁶ Muilenburg, “Ezekiel,” 577.

⁷⁹⁷ Greenberg, “Ezekiel 17,” 151.

in opposition. The third declaration indicates that although the Jerusalemites may have escaped one fire, the fire will ultimately consume those survivors. Yahweh indicates, “They came out from the fire (vāḡ), but the fire (vāḡ) will consume them.” While Jerusalem was only charred in the earlier invasions, the coming judgment was to be decisive.⁷⁹⁸

The fourth proclamation ensures that Yahweh will be known by these actions, as seen in the self-recognition formula hw`hy+ yn]aḡ-yk! <T#u=d~yw+. This statement thematically ties the unit to the extensive usage of the same formula throughout the discourse. As noted previously, Zimmerli pointed out that the recipients of this oracle are not the Jerusalemites, but rather consist of the exilic audience addressed by Yahweh in the second person plural in the recognition formula.⁷⁹⁹ Zimmerli further maintains that the rhetorical function of “the concluding recognition formula also affirms that this sequence of judgements is to reveal Yahweh in the mystery of his person to those whom the prophet addresses.”⁸⁰⁰ When the devastation of Jerusalem occurs, the exiles should acknowledge the hand of Yahweh at work.

The fifth point made by Yahweh is that in addition to the inhabitants of Jerusalem suffering judgment, he will also make the land desolate, thus completing the totality of destruction even as the vine was burned and charred in the fire. He states in 8a, “And I will deliver up the land (yṭ!t^*w+) for devastation.” The basis for this judgment arrives in the form of the sixth and final point in 8b. The destruction of Jerusalem is imminent “‘Because (/u^y^ they acted unfaithfully,’ declares the Lord Yahweh.” As the unit concludes Yahweh finally revealed outright the reason behind the judgment upon the Jerusalemites, explicitly mentioning the guilt of the people in a tardily placed motive clause.⁸⁰¹ Rhetorically, an effective epilogue dwells on the major points but does not repeat them exactly, thus continuing to attract the hearer’s attention and strengthen as well the core of the speech.⁸⁰² By developing the argument on the first plane by way of comparison, rhetorical questions and quasi-arguments, Yahweh effectively sets the stage for the epilogue in vv. 6-8 as signalled by the use of /kḡ* in v.6.

⁷⁹⁸ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 167.

⁷⁹⁹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 319.

⁸⁰⁰ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 320.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁸⁰² Gitay, “Rhetorical Criticism and the Prophetic Discourse,” 23.

Evaluation

The implementation of the various rhetorical strategies within the unit reveals Yahweh's intention to destroy the exiles' popular fantasy built upon a delusive presumption.⁸⁰³ In this case Yahweh mocks the people listening because they had taken refuge in the "dignity and privilege flowing from the Lord's gifts of grace"⁸⁰⁴ and as a result viewed themselves as something special. By the end of the oracle, the exilic audience may have been outraged at the seeming unfairness of the analogy between the vinestock and lumber. Nonetheless, agreement with the implications of the analogy would place the exiles in the position of agreeing with Yahweh that the verdict rendered over Jerusalem is legitimate. Greenberg states that "the focus is from the start [of the unit] on career and destination, as the single explicit point of comparison with Jerusalem."⁸⁰⁵ Yahweh's use of the term "unfaithful" in 15.8 (lu[^]m[^] lu^{*}m+!) when viewed against the backdrop of passages charge Israel with the same sin (1 Chron. 5.25; 10.13; 2 Chron. 12.2; 28.19; 29.6; 30.7 and 36.14) sets the OT contextual stage for Yahweh's indictment of the Jerusalemites. Furthermore, the use of lu[^]m[^] Wlu[^]m~ within the larger context of Ezekiel (14.13; 17.20; and 39.23) substantiates Yahweh's charge in 15.8 that Israel's judgment of the Jerusalemites on the grounds of unfaithfulness is just.⁸⁰⁶

5. Analyzing the Rhetorical Effectiveness of the Unit.

The fifth and final element of the study concerns the rhetorical effectiveness of the unit in achieving its rhetorical goals as well as its potential for modifying the exigence. Wuellner states that at the end of the study the critic must "review the whole of this critical enterprise in all of its diachronic parts...in this concluding stage

⁸⁰³ Hals, *Ezekiel*, 100.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁸⁰⁵ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 269.

⁸⁰⁶ Again, this point focuses upon the communicative situation *within* the discourse itself, addressed to the exilic audience on the narrative diegetic level, as opposed to the communicative situation of the book addressed to second-generation exiles. Beuken points out that the "final redaction of the book, however, directs itself towards a public which stems from the contemporaries of the prophet and confers its fundamental contours on later generations, including the actual readers." All later readers of the book are thus included in a nuclear way as part of the purview of a diachronic exegesis, and "the addressees do not constitute a historical point in time but a continuum through time" (Beuken, "Isaiah 28," 21-23). Strictly diachronic readings, on the other hand, tend to ground the historical audience within the oral contextual level. However, one should not ignore later readers of the discourse who can identify with the historic audience on certain levels. McKnight states that "when the Bible is approached as both an ancient document with original meaning and a living message with contemporary significance, the bridge to a comprehensive and satisfying biblical hermeneutics may have been found. The reader's final focus is not upon the original circumstances but upon the text in the contemporary context of reading" ("Reader-Response Criticism," 205).

of rhetorical criticism the whole of what is being analyzed must appear as greater than the sum of its parts.”⁸⁰⁷ Kennedy advises the rhetorical critic that once a particular literary unit has been analyzed, “it will be valuable to look back over the entire unit and review its success in meeting the rhetorical exigence and what its implications may be for the speaker or audience.”⁸⁰⁸ This concluding step therefore discusses the possibility of whether the rhetor Yahweh crafted a fitting response to the exigence by employing suitable means of persuasion fitted to his audience. Finally, this step demonstrates whether the actual exilic audience’s response be demonstrated from the passage.

When examining the possible rhetorical success of the unit, understanding the audience at which the analogy is aimed is of crucial importance. Roehm and Sternthal maintain that analogies can have a potentially greater impact than other comparison types such as literal similarities.⁸⁰⁹ The ability of an audience to detect and map common relations, in the absence of surface attributes and their available cognitive resources for processing the analogy, determine its potential success.⁸¹⁰ Therefore, for analogies to function effectively the target must not be abstracted too far from the base in terms of their common structural relations.

Ezekiel’s exilic audience would have grasped the common structural relationship between the image of the vine as the base of the analogy and trees as the target, and furthermore would be able to identify the trees as the target without the need for overt surface cues or literal comparisons.⁸¹¹ For the exilic audience to move from the base to the target would not have been a difficult move, as the analogy is not overly abstract. Yahweh established the surface cues by demonstrating that both vinestock and lumber consist of wood with the common attribute of flammability. On this basis Roehm and Sternthal conclude that analogies are “likely to be more persuasive than a literal similarity when a message recipient is an expert in the base domain, but not when the recipient is a novice.”⁸¹² The audience did not consist of novices for whom the analogy would be highly difficult to process.

⁸⁰⁷ Wuellner, “Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?” 458.

⁸⁰⁸ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 38.

⁸⁰⁹ Roehm and Sternthal, “The Moderating Effect,” 258.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁸¹² *Ibid.*, 258.

A further significant factor in the success of an analogy is the mood of the recipient.⁸¹³ If the audience is not in a position to devote the necessary cognitive resources to process the analogy, then the analogy will likely fail. Since the analysis of this unit has shown that the results of Yahweh's rhetorical strategies cannot be demonstrated, two possibilities present themselves. On the one hand, the exilic audience may have identified with the analogy and Yahweh's subsequent treatment of it, which leads to the possibility of acceptance of his interpretation in vv. 6-8. On the other hand, those exiles clinging stubbornly to the inviolability of Jerusalem would have likely rejected the analogy, its interpretation and the potentially dangerous repercussions to their theological worldview. As noted previously, the discourse of Ezekiel bears witness to these two potentialities. At times Ezekiel's audience appear to listen to him (33.10; 37.11) whilst on other occasions they apparently reject his messages outright (12.27; 20.49). Ultimately one must appeal to the broader contextual situation of the book as a whole in order to gain a sense of the apparent rhetorical success or failure of this unit.

Conclusion

This chapter has advanced the goal of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by demonstrating the utility of the rhetorical-critical-narratological approach advocated in Chapter 3. The contextual interpretation of the diachronic and synchronic approaches led to the construction of a complementary approach to biblical studies that drew upon both disciplines for its rhetorical-critical analysis of Ezekiel. The analysis of the entire framework of the discourse of Ezekiel clarified its genre and rhetorical situation, concluding by analyzing the effectiveness of the work in achieving its rhetorical aims.

Having established the contextual situation of the discourse, the chapter next moved to a rhetorical-critical reading of the literary unit of Ezekiel 15. By analyzing voice hierarchies within the unit, the study made the distinction between putative and actual audiences. This clarifies the point that although the unfaithfulness of the Jerusalemites serves as the ultimate basis for judgement, the unit is aimed at the ears of the actual exilic audience. The closing statement in v.8 calls the exilic community to future faithfulness, and this becomes the major issue with which the exilic audience

⁸¹³ Ibid., 258.

must wrestle if they would participate in Yahweh's future. The exilic community cannot simply build on the assumption that Yahweh will prove himself loyal to them if they continue to be unfaithful to him.⁸¹⁴ Conversely, if the exiles embraced the analogy and its subsequent interpretation, then the foundation could be laid for their future spiritual and national renewal (Ez. 36-37).

As noted previously, analogies allow the audience to make the parallel connections by comparing two or more objects that are similar enough to make easy comparison possible.⁸¹⁵ Although the audience response cannot be gauged within this unit, this particular strategy of analogy utilizing a base and target with which its audience would have been familiar enjoyed a high likelihood of its successful reception. The audience not only could have easily understood it and applied it to their lives, but as a bonus may have caught an uneasy but perhaps useful glimpse of their own possible future.⁸¹⁶ The analysis of the outer framework reveals that some of the exiles were openly hostile, dismissing Ezekiel's messages as entertaining prattle,⁸¹⁷ while others appeared to listen.

This study of Ezekiel in this chapter illustrated that a rhetorical-critical-narratological approach to biblical studies can serve as a useful exegetical base when allied with a values-based homiletic. Such an approach gives the exegete flexible and adaptable tools by which to analyze a narrative discourse, clarifying voice hierarchies and audience levels, the stance of the rhetor, the rhetorical situation and rhetorical strategies. The analysis of the situational nature of the rhetoric involved aids the preacher in replicating those same dynamics in a multi-vocal preaching format that allows hearers to experience and also to identify with the various points of view represented within the text. The open-ended nature of this representation potentially leads to a collaborative homiletic that encourages further dialogical interaction between preacher and listeners.

Furthermore, this study has demonstrated that the book itself is open-ended regarding the question of the rhetorical effectiveness of Yahweh the rhetor, which lends itself to more of an open-ended homiletical form. This observation connects with the values-based homiletical approach advanced in Chapter 4, which advanced the notion that the rhetoric of preaching should be informed by the rhetoric of the

⁸¹⁴ Ibid., 76.

⁸¹⁵ Bivins, "The Analogy," 93.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., 94.

⁸¹⁷ Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 313.

biblical text. The multiple point-of-view sample sermon in Chapter 7 will explore these potential responses of both Ezekiel and his exilic audience as each grappled with the implications of the argument of this unit.

CHAPTER 6

A CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF EZEKIEL STUDIES AND EZEKIEL 15 SERMONS

Introduction

This chapter will continue to develop the aim of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by engaging in a contextual interpretation Ezekiel studies, and three sermons based upon the text of Ezekiel 15. This interpretation will be based upon the tasks of the hermeneutical cycle by engaging in a systematic information-gathering and evaluation of commentators and preachers. The purpose of this chapter is to locate both Ezekiel studies and sermons based upon the literary unit of Ezekiel 15 within the continuum of the pendulum-like shifts that have occurred within biblical studies and homiletics as identified in Chapter 3.

The sermons of Edwards, Spurgeon and Smith were chosen as the only available homiletical examples based upon the fairly obscure unit of Ezekiel 15. Since they are located within the eighteenth, nineteenth and twenty-first centuries respectively, this will allow the chapter to locate them within the continuum described within Chapter 3. This critical evaluation will demonstrate first how various elements have contributed to shaping their approaches to homiletics and second, by learning from their normative practices, will show how these homileticians have combined biblical studies and homiletics in their proclamation of Ezekiel 15. The analysis of the sermons will detail how the homileticians' understanding and applications of rhetoric are also shaped by cultural, intellectual and theological trends and forces operating within societies. The contextual interpretation of the sermons will conclude by evaluating areas of continuity and discontinuity between the sermons and the rhetorical-critical approach taken in this thesis.

The chapter will conclude with an evaluative summary regarding the various forces and trends that shaped both the commentators and preachers alike. As illustrated in Chapter 3, this evaluation will demonstrate that preaching continues to evolve due to a variety of forces. Such an observation will serve the thesis goal of developing a pragmatic plan of action for future homiletics that is a measured response to these trends, rather than merely reactionary.

Contextual Interpretation: Ezekiel Studies

Chapter 3 demonstrated that similar to rhetoric and homiletics, the field of biblical studies evinces the tendency to react and change due to a variety of shifts. Although the history of Ezekiel studies has been well-documented in greater detail elsewhere and does not need to be restated here,⁸²³ what is essential for the purpose of this chapter is to note three major movements in these studies. These three movements correspond to the pendulum-like trends that affect biblical studies and preaching identified within Chapter 3. The first movement concerns the shift from largely uncritical synchronic readings to the second stage: that of historically-critically influenced diachronic readings. The third movement relates to the current trend within Ezekiel studies, entailing a return to synchronic readings that nonetheless acknowledge redactional activities.⁸²⁴

With its discussion of synchronic and diachronic methodologies, Chapter 5 noted that scholars have reacted in a variety of ways to the phenomenon of the homogeneity of the Ezekiel tradition. Within the first phase of Ezekiel studies prior to the turn of the century, scholars noted the homogeneous nature of the book utilizing synchronic readings,⁸²⁵ but merely agreed as to its authorial unity and general integrity.⁸²⁶ Prior to the end of the nineteenth century, scholars read Ezekiel basically uncritically, siding with Driver's position that no critical questions arise within the book since it bears the stamp of a single mind.⁸²⁷ Although textual difficulties were noted by the turn of the century, scholars such as Redpath held that "scarcely any doubt has ever been cast even by the extremest critics upon the unity and authenticity of the book."⁸²⁸

Following the turn of the century, historical-critical methods began to have an impact upon Ezekiel studies. From approximately the 1900s to the 1950s scholars utilizing diachronic methods began to view the text as heterogeneous, separating the various texts into multiple layers believed to have been added by different hands at different times. Commentators drawing upon increasingly radical historical-critical

⁸²³ See for example most Ezekiel commentary introductions; also McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 30-42; Robson, *Word and Spirit in Ezekiel*, 6-11; Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 5-9; and Boadt, "Mythological Themes," 211-212.

⁸²⁴ For shifts in Ezekiel studies since Zimmerli see Boadt, "Mythological Themes," 211.

⁸²⁵ Joyce, "Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives," 116.

⁸²⁶ Robson, *Word and Spirit*, 6.

⁸²⁷ Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature*, 279.

⁸²⁸ Redpath, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, xiv.

methodologies produced theory after theory regarding the origins of the book, each seemingly more extreme than the last.⁸²⁹ Toward the end of this second phase, scholars such as Fohrer, Eichrodt and Zimmerli, while acknowledging the long history of tradition, began to view the book in terms of continuity instead of fundamental discontinuity. For example, Zimmerli explained the book's heterogeneity in terms of an Ezekielian "school," which involved a long period of accretion and redaction.⁸³⁰ The publication of his first commentary marked the decisive turning point toward the third phase of scholarship. Although Zimmerli was influential in moving scholarship toward a unified view of the book, his commentary nonetheless depended largely upon diachronic, form-critical methodologies.

Since the mid-1960s commentators have largely distanced themselves from radical historical-critical diachronic methodologies. This current phase in Ezekiel studies has reinstated the prophet by adopting the majority opinion that "Ezekiel was a real figure with a real ministry in Babylon during the early part of the exile, and that significant parts of the book of Ezekiel reflect accurately his words and ministry."⁸³¹ Scholars hold that much of the material within the book "goes back to the prophet himself or at least to the exilic period close to his lifetime."⁸³² This phase, currently a move toward synchronic readings based on a redactional unity,⁸³³ views the book as homogeneous rather than heterogeneous. Commentators increasingly accept that although the core of the book may relate to Ezekiel and the exilic period "it has received considerable additions and expansions, probably in a multiplicity of stages and over a very long period."⁸³⁴

Contemporary Ezekiel commentators and monographs written in English within the last thirty years have adopted this majority position, which involves three elements. The first element is the essential accuracy of the prophet's words as portrayed in the book, while second is the view that Ezekiel was active solely in Babylon. Finally, scholars believe that the bulk of the book was also written in Babylon, much of it possibly by Ezekiel himself, and with the likely possibility of

⁸²⁹ McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 31.

⁸³⁰ Joyce, "Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives," 119.

⁸³¹ Robson, *Word and Spirit*, 8. Robson points out, however, that despite the restatement of the prophet, this did not necessarily lead to a reinstatement of the *book*.

⁸³² McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 44.

⁸³³ Robson, *Word and Spirit*, 9.

⁸³⁴ McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 44.

some post-exilic editorial additions.⁸³⁵ Commentators adopting some or all of the elements of this view include Cooke, Fohrer, Eichrodt, Wevers, Zimmerli, Greenberg, Marsingh, Hals, Allen and Block.⁸³⁶

Greenberg shifted Ezekielian studies closer toward Ezekielian authorship by advancing a holistic, synchronic reading of the work. Although he did not break entirely from Zimmerli's form-critical methodology, his approach differs significantly from Zimmerli in that he attempted a "holistic" approach to Ezekiel, concentrating more on the final form of the text.⁸³⁷ Greenberg worked with the assumption that Ezekiel was the product of art and intelligent design and accordingly read the book holistically and synchronically.⁸³⁸ Block also follows this tradition, but from more of a conservative evangelical position. Block chose to adopt Greenberg's holistic method rather than expending energy isolating an original and genuinely likely Ezekielian core from later layers of interpretation.⁸³⁹ Additionally, his commentary seeks to relate the "permanent theological lesson" of the text to the New Testament and the life of the church today.⁸⁴⁰

Chapter 5 demonstrates that oftentimes it is unfruitful or conjectural for the critic to attempt to reconstruct diachronically the historical *Sitz im Leben* behind a particular literary unit. The study of Ezekiel 15 illustrates that the critic can nonetheless utilize diachronic methods to delineate the boundaries of that unit and to help identify its genre or form. Rather than separating Ezekiel 15 into perceived "original" and "secondary" layers, the chapter assessed the text in terms of its rhetorical function as a productive literary unity. Therefore, this approach attempts to understand the artistic, rhetorical and compositional unity of the biblical text as viewed in light of the coherence and literary unity of the entire discourse.

Furthermore, the approach in the previous chapter demonstrates that the critic must pay attention to the setting of the historical audiences on the oral and discourse levels whilst at the same time extending applications to later readers. Rhetorical criticism accomplishes just such a goal since it seeks not only to ascertain the literary and rhetorical features of biblical texts, but also to articulate the impact of the

⁸³⁵ Robson, *Word and Spirit*, 9.

⁸³⁶ Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 29-31.

⁸³⁷ Dillard and Longman, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 318.

⁸³⁸ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 26.

⁸³⁹ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 24 fn. 33.

⁸⁴⁰ Harland, Review of *Ezekiel 1-24*, 408.

literature upon its various audiences.⁸⁴¹ The complementary approach to biblical studies therefore brings clarity to the appropriation of both synchronic and diachronic methodologies, and further provides a means by which the preacher can draw dynamic equivalents for contemporary listeners. Moreover, a holistic approach to Ezekiel such as that taken by Greenberg can profitably view the book as a unified whole from a literary point of view. The complementary approach began from a synchronic perspective but also took into account elements from a diachronic perspective as well. Whilst not denying the book's redactional history, the study in Chapter 5 engages the book in terms of its final form and continuity rather than its fundamental discontinuity.⁸⁴² The approach investigates Ezekiel "as a basically integrated and coherent text—indeed, with an articulated, artful design—reflecting the context of exile [which is a] defensible and critical position when textual and redactional issues are carefully weighed."⁸⁴³

Contextual Interpretation: Ezekiel 15 Sermons

Jonathan Edwards: Rhetorical Influences

This treatment of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) does not attempt to trace his achievements as a theologian or philosopher, as that has been done extensively elsewhere.⁸⁴⁴ Rather, the contextual interpretation of his preaching of Ezekiel 15 will allow for the location of his homiletical approach along the continuum identified in Chapter 3.

As a product of colonial America, Edwards was also a natural heir of New England Puritanism.⁸⁴⁵ Living in Puritan New England prior to the Revolutionary War, Edwards existed in a context that had much in common with English Puritans. Both Edwards and English Puritans shared many of the same insights related to the centrality of the ministry of the Word and its place in the worship of the church, as well as the Puritan "plain style" of preaching. However, the New England context differed significantly from England, as Puritans were a majority force both in the

⁸⁴¹ Hauser, "Rhetorical Criticism," 14.

⁸⁴² Viewed synchronically the compositional nature of the final form can aid the critic in the understanding of its literary coherence as a text artfully and intentionally shaped.

⁸⁴³ Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 5.

⁸⁴⁴ For more on the philosophy and theology of Edwards see: Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal*, 1990; George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 2004; Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp, eds., *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, 2003; and Michael James McClymond, *Encounters With God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 1998.

⁸⁴⁵ Old, *Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures Vol. 5*, 248.

shaping and guiding of New England society. Puritan New Englanders expected more from the preaching ministry than perhaps any other society, and “looked to it for guidance in all aspects of life.”⁸⁴⁶ New Englanders listened intently to sermons, supported and trained up preachers and took the reading and preaching of Scripture with the utmost of seriousness. As Edwards “undertook preparation for the pulpit, he began by assimilating a rich tradition of English pulpit oratory and sermon literature” derived from conventions of English Puritan pulpits that were further shaped by nearly a century of New England Puritan thought.⁸⁴⁷

Edwards had at least three direct influences shaping his preaching style. First, he inherited the conventional tripartite sermon from the pulpit ministries of his father Timothy Edwards and his grandfather Solomon Stoddard, both of whom were respected ministers in New England.⁸⁴⁸ Chapter 3 demonstrated that the genre of preaching evolves, and Puritan preaching experienced just such a transition between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The earlier seventeenth-century model was highly complex, with many points and subheads. By contrast the eighteenth-century model evolved to a simplified format of one point of doctrine, with several points accompanied by multiple applications. Stoddard used this new threefold form but continued its evolution by reducing the number of subheads.⁸⁴⁹

The well-established congregation at Northampton, long accustomed to years of Stoddard’s preaching in this genre, expected its familiar pattern to continue upon Edwards’ installation as pastor following the death of his grandfather.⁸⁵⁰ Edwards adopted the sermon forms of his father and grandfather but maintained its evolution by formally simplifying the sermon, reducing “discursive subheads drastically, permitting a fuller development of each point and facilitating a more focused overall line of argument.”⁸⁵¹ Edwards experimented with various modifications particularly between 1730 and 1733, introducing various organizational complexities. He

⁸⁴⁶ Old, *Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures Vol. 5*, 168.

⁸⁴⁷ Kimnach, “General Introduction,” 10.

⁸⁴⁸ Marsden notes that “New England’s Congregational clergy were the most revered men in the provinces. They were the best educated and had long held a near-monopoly on public speaking, preaching at least two sermons a week. Their churches were ‘established’ as state institutions supported by taxes. They were usually full, due to either law or custom” (*A Short Life of Jonathan Edwards*, 5). Valeri adds that “In Northampton, as in most towns in colonial New England, the sermon was the central event of worship, and accordingly crucial to the corporate religious life of its people” (“Edwards’ Homiletical Method,” 15).

⁸⁴⁹ Valeri, “Edwards’ Homiletical Method,” 13.

⁸⁵⁰ Following the death of Solomon Stoddard, Edwards took over as pastor of his Northampton, Mass., church, but largely did not modify the received homiletical form.

⁸⁵¹ Edwards, *Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*, xiii.

compounded the Text-Doctrine-Application format with the addition of multiple doctrinal points and uses, but never varied from the basic tripartite structure.⁸⁵² The use of a formal sermon structure established shared expectations between audience and preacher; his audiences would have expected it and would not necessarily have been open to an obvious innovator.⁸⁵³

Edwards' three-part approach to biblical exegesis demonstrates that for him, biblical studies and homiletics were closely related. First Edwards would make observations on the text, second distil propositions from the text and third would develop the text by exegesis, treating the doctrine in an expository fashion as he carefully built up the sermon.⁸⁵⁴ This exegetical approach flowed naturally into the received form inherited from his Puritan forebears. Edwards constructed his sermons by following in the tradition of Wilkins' threefold homiletical approach of explication, confirmation and application. Based upon this pattern, Edwards typically divided his sermons into a tripartite structure consisting of the clarification of the biblical text, elaboration of the doctrine implicit in the text and finally application of the text and doctrine to the lives of his listeners.⁸⁵⁵ As a significant part of the appeal of the sermon, this tripartite structure enabled attentive audience members to follow along with the sermon and facilitated note-taking.⁸⁵⁶

The second rhetorical influence upon Edwards' preaching occurred while he was a student at Yale. Here the philosophy and rhetoric of Peter Ramus further influenced Edwards.⁸⁵⁷ Chapter 4 demonstrated that Ramus's division of the categories of classical rhetoric into logic and rhetoric had a profound impact upon both biblical studies and preaching alike. Among Calvinist scholars and preachers in

⁸⁵² The only variation Edwards introduced was the "lecture" sermon, which propounded more abstract theological doctrines with a few brief points of application, and had no formal Application section (Edwards, *Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*, xiii).

⁸⁵³ Cady, "The Artistry of Jonathan Edwards," 71. Kinnach states that "Edwards became a master of his inherited sermon form, but in the 1730s, at the zenith of his mastery, he began experimenting artistically with the sermon. He apparently did everything he could do without actually abandoning the old form entirely, and the only possible conclusion one can draw from the manuscript evidence of his experiments is that he was searching, consciously or unconsciously, for a formal alternative to the sermon itself" ("General Introduction," 40-41).

⁸⁵⁴ Turnbull, "Jonathan Edwards—Bible Interpreter," 429.

⁸⁵⁵ Cherry, "Symbols of Spiritual Truth," 264.

⁸⁵⁶ Kinnach, "General Introduction," 33-34.

⁸⁵⁷ Edwards was highly influenced by Harvard thought: his grandfather Solomon Stoddard graduated from Harvard in 1662 and his father in 1691 (Kinnach, "General Introduction," 4). Editions of Ramus' works spread all over Europe, and "both British and Continental editions make their way to the British Colonies in America, and especially to Harvard" (Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, 15).

particular, Ramus's comprehensive new development of logic and rhetoric gained lasting favour. Ramist humanism formed the philosophic backbone of much of Calvinist theology by the late sixteenth century.⁸⁵⁸ Ramus served as a connecting link between scholasticism and Puritanism, establishing "in the Puritan mind its obsession for logic and distaste for symbolism, shaping its views of nature, determining its literary preferences and style, and in great part accounting for its attitudes, if any, toward epistemology."⁸⁵⁹ The Puritans adopted Ramean rhetoric primarily because it was advantageous to their creed, since his "dialectic seemed a more efficient method than the logic of the schools for interpreting Scripture, and his rhetoric more suited to preaching the unadulterated Word."⁸⁶⁰ On this exegetical and homiletical basis Ramus became the most direct and decisive influence upon the development of the Puritan "plain style" of preaching.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that rhetoric and society exist in a symbiotic relationship, and further that the dynamics of this relationship affects the evolution of preaching methods. For example, the Puritan "plain style" of preaching originated within the context of the widespread seventeenth-century attitude toward logic and rhetoric that assumed substance and expression to be distinct and separable elements.⁸⁶¹ Ramus stressed dichotomies whereby broad questions could be divided into various choices, "each of which could in turn be further divided as the thesis systematically ascended from easily demonstrable arguments to the more elusive and intricate."⁸⁶² In the Ramean tradition the content of oration became a matter of reason, logic and method, whilst rhetoric served as a subservient and stylistic vehicle by which one delivered the content of the oration. According to this reasoning, the affections of the listeners "would be moved most cogently if presented with that which is in itself true and has been proved dialectically to be as the thing is, with no

⁸⁵⁸ Kuklick, "Seven Thinkers," 126. He notes that in the late sixteenth century at Cambridge, Ramean philosophy and rhetoric was important to the writings of Richardson and Ames. Amesean ideas and texts became central to American Puritanism, forming the core of their thought following the founding of Harvard in 1636. Philosopher Samuel Johnson, one of Edwards' tutors at Yale, saw himself as standing very much in line with this tradition. Edwards inherited a Ramist framework, but "modernized" Calvinist theology through the lens of Locke comprehended in a Cartesian context, through the Newtonian rationalist view of Samuel Clarke. Old points out that while at Yale, Edwards had "read John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which provided a philosophical matrix for him to understand his religious experience" (*Reading and Preaching Vol. 5*, 249).

⁸⁵⁹ Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, 4.

⁸⁶⁰ Miller, *New England Mind*, 328-329. He notes that "it is eminently worth noting that Puritans were herein not following a course of their own setting, but one laid out by scholars rather than by divines, and not as primarily determined by piety" (329).

⁸⁶¹ Kimmach, "General Introduction," footnote 2, p. 23.

⁸⁶² Vaughan, *The Puritan Tradition*, 82.

other enhancement than pleasing figures of speech and appropriate gestures.”⁸⁶³ The Puritan preacher first worked out the content of the sermon through logical means, and only after this clothed it with stylistic elements for its ultimate delivery.

Based upon a Ramist framework, according to Puritan homiletic theory preaching had two distinct purposes. The first and most important purpose was for the preacher “to impress doctrinal propositions upon the understanding of his congregation,” and then only “secondarily was it his task to rouse the emotions and raise the affections.”⁸⁶⁴ In the development of the “plain style” of preaching “the logical act was always prerequisite to the rhetorical, and the art of an oration was to be not so much ‘concealed’ as not permitted to obscure the theme.”⁸⁶⁵ Puritan scholars believed that the use of Ramist methodology made for sermons that were relatively easy to follow and as a result more easily understood and potentially likely to be acted upon by their listeners.

In addition to the Puritan rhetorical tradition, Edwards’ theology further impacted his sermon design. Although Edwards was highly interested in the study of religious affections, his homiletical style was not designed primarily to stir the emotions nor was it filled with grandiloquence. Whilst he believed that religious affections motivated human behaviour, as a true Calvinist Edwards felt that they arose solely at God’s initiative. Only by the Word, the sacraments and prayer could the Holy Spirit be expected to work. Old concludes that if Edwards had infused his preaching with emotional appeal, such an approach “would have been much too Arminian, much too Pelagian, much too manipulative for Edwards.”⁸⁶⁶

The third rhetorical influence upon Edwards was the various preaching manuals that further shaped his understanding of preaching.⁸⁶⁷ William Perkins (1558-1602) first advanced and formally defined the Puritan plain style of preaching in light of Ramist logic and rhetoric in his treatise on preaching entitled *The Art of Prophecy*.⁸⁶⁸ According to this method preachers were to organize their sermons according to a formal structure, speak only in the vernacular and avoid “the

⁸⁶³ Miller, *New England Mind*, 317.

⁸⁶⁴ Buckingham, “Stylistic Artistry,” 137.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁸⁶⁶ Old, *Reading and Preaching Vol. 5*, 254.

⁸⁶⁷ Kimnach notes that Edwards, as a careful scholar, probably studied “at least one” of the many available preaching manuals of his day. Certainly the works of Mather and Edward are listed in his “Catalogue” of books, and both find expression throughout his works (“General Introduction,” 10, 16).

⁸⁶⁸ Turnbull, “Jonathan Edwards,” 430. Perkins first published a Latin edition in 1592; following his death in 1602, Thomas Tuke translated his work into English in 1606.

temptation to demonstrate erudition by quoting passages from Latin or Greek texts.”⁸⁶⁹ A chronological succession of Puritan preaching manuals unswervingly followed this classic exposition, reaffirming and developing the teaching of Perkins and establishing the doctrines of sermon organization, form and technique.⁸⁷⁰ Most American Puritans encountered Ramean logic through William Ames (1576-1633), who was tutored at Cambridge by Perkins and undeniably embraced the doctrines of Ramus.⁸⁷¹ Edwards further studied John Wilkins’ 1646 *Ecclesiastes* and John Edwards’ 1705 *The Preacher*, each of which developed further the Puritan notion of preaching.⁸⁷² Finally, Cotton Mather’s 1726 *Manuductio ad Ministerium* also shaped his understanding of preaching.⁸⁷³

Rhetorical Evaluation: “Wicked Men Useful in Their Destruction Only.”

Based upon Ramistic doctrine, Puritan homiletic theory held that the preacher should aim at the heart and soul only after the intellect of the hearers had firmly grasped the Gospel.⁸⁷⁴ As noted earlier, Edwards closely followed this homiletic theory, albeit with some exceptions and modifications.⁸⁷⁵ In his adoption of straightforward and unadorned prose, maintains Buckingham, “it is not that as a ‘spontaneous’ writer he cared nothing for style and method; rather he is closely following the prevailing homiletic tradition.”⁸⁷⁶ Puritan divines held that the art of oratory was to conceal that art, and that a “natural” style was seldom an effortless achievement. In his development of stylistic elements utilized for his sermons, “Edwards’s avoidance of decoration and florid themes reflects not so much spontaneous self-expression as thoughtful and deliberate choice of a suitable prose vehicle.”⁸⁷⁷ In his “Wicked Men” sermon, Edwards follows the tradition by first

⁸⁶⁹ Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power*, 14-15.

⁸⁷⁰ Miller, *New England Mind*, 335.

⁸⁷¹ Miller, *New England Mind*, 339.

⁸⁷² Though the Puritan “plain style” underwent changes by many hands, generations of student-preachers viewed Wilkins’ 1646 work *Ecclesiastes* as an authority. This work “dichotomizes and distributes all things into their proper categories. Thus, it is not only clear in its exposition of the sermon form, but it gives a vivid impression of the mentality which gave birth to the classical Puritan sermon” (Kimmach, “General Introduction,” 28).

⁸⁷³ Kimmach “General Introduction,” 20.

⁸⁷⁴ Miller, *New England Mind*, 344.

⁸⁷⁵ While always operating within typical Puritan sermon structures, “without actually abandoning either the traditional sermon form or the manner of the plain style, he experimented and innovated to a surprising degree, considering the limitations imposed by such conservative allegiance” (Kimmach, “General Introduction,” 180).

⁸⁷⁶ Buckingham, “Stylistic Artistry,” 137.

⁸⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

appealing to the intellect of his hearers in the introduction and Doctrine sections, constructing his argument according to both logic and theology; the use of exempla in the Doctrine section serves to reinforce his logical and theological argument. Only secondarily does Edwards make use of rhetorical strategies designed to appeal to the emotions in his Application section.

Edwards' argument in his sermon resembles more of a tightly-reasoned philosophical or theological treatise and less an expository verse-by-verse development of the argument of Ezekiel 15. His introduction utilizes but one aspect from the text of Ezekiel 15.2-4: the issue of the fruitfulness or fruitlessness of the vine, from which he proceeds to build his entire argument. In his view, God created humanity for one purpose alone, which is the "ultimate end" of humanity: to bring forth fruit to God, by which he means "to glorify God." Edwards makes use of an "excluded middle" rhetorical strategy by setting up an either/or paradigm. Either humanity can act by actively pursuing their ultimate ends and glorifying God, or if they do not work toward those ends, then they can only passively be acted upon when God destroys them in hell. However, the title of the sermon makes clear that the wicked can serve as passive examples of God's justice toward them and of God's love and mercy toward the saints spared the agonies of hell.

Edwards establishes his Doctrine section upon four points that develop this tightly-reasoned logical argument. First, he argues that one can either act or be acted upon. Here Edwards displays his argument by stating categorically that there is no middle ground and that a man can only do something or be the subject of something done to him.⁸⁷⁸ Second, he maintains that the only active use for a person is to bring forth fruit unto God. For Edwards, the ultimate end of humanity is "to serve and glorify his Maker."⁸⁷⁹ He admits that there are other ends that one can achieve in life, but these are "subordinate" or "inferior" ends as compared to one's "ultimate end" of bearing fruit for God. Third, he argues that if one does not bring forth fruit unto God, the only passive use is that person's destruction. The final point concludes the Doctrine section by stating that the destruction of the wicked becomes the only means by which he or she can be useful.⁸⁸⁰

⁸⁷⁸ Edwards, "Wicked Men," 205.

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁸⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

As Edwards reaches the third section of his tripartite sermon format—the Applications for the listeners—the language of the sermon becomes more emotive. Following Ramist principles, after constructing his case with unassailable logic, Edwards can now begin to clothe that logical approach with the rhetoric of style and emotion in order to raise the affectations of his hearers. Here he has four points, some of which contain multiple sub-points. Edwards here utilizes the rhetorical strategy of posing one or more rhetorical questions followed typically by a citation of Scripture as its answer. By posing questions to the hearers Edwards would have drawn them in and made them think through their own answer, then by providing Scripture as the answer to the question Edwards would draw upon its authority to solidify his point.

Edwards additionally employs the rhetorical strategy of shifting from third-person plural to second-person plural language when addressing his audience. His first application point utilizes third-person plural language when referring to “the wicked,” which puts him and his audience in an “us and them” frame of reference: “we the righteous” are “over here” observing “the wicked” rightly consigned to judgement “over there.” By the end of this first point, however, he personalizes his challenges by changing to the second-person when he advises, “Let those among *us* consider this...” what “if God should utterly destroy *you*.”⁸⁸¹ This rhetorical strategy effectively points the finger directly at the listeners and forces them to engage with his rhetoric, especially as Edwards continues his use of rhetorical questions. This use of address continues through the second, third and fourth applications. Only at the very end of the sermon does Edwards revert back to the third-person, again placing him and audience in the “us and them” frame of reference.

The Application section builds primarily upon the single proposition with which he began the sermon and never abandoned throughout his tightly-reasoned argument. The linearity of the sermon’s argument proceeds forward by excluding any possibility that a “wicked person” could be productive in any way. Upon examination, if the listener concludes that he or she is in fact useless on the grounds of non-fruit bearing then what should that person do? Such a person should use their reason and rationality to ponder the logic that since God has made us to be superior to the beasts of nature, one should be ashamed on the grounds of unprofitability. Such an exalted position of potential is all the more tragic, laments Edwards, when such a “noble and

⁸⁸¹ Ibid., 216 (italics mine).

excellent piece of divine workmanship should fail of its end, and be to no purpose!”⁸⁸² One should respond to God’s general and special revelation by seeking to bear fruit in honour of God in gratitude for his grace and abundant provision. The person who denies God’s efforts at communication through these means of revelation is indeed a “mere nuisance” and ‘burden to the earth.’⁸⁸³

Edwards’ final point of application exhorts his listeners “by all means to bring forth fruit unto God.”⁸⁸⁴ By synthesizing biblical imagery he alludes to the parable of Luke 13 and frames a rhetorical question designed to prove the legitimacy of God’s own justice. If one had a barren tree in the orchard, or weeds and tares in the fields, would not the logical course of action be to destroy such a thing? Edwards declares therefore that the sovereign “God will have his end; he will accomplish it.”⁸⁸⁵ None shall frustrate the purposes and plans of God; God’s final judgement awaits those trees that bear no fruit (Matt. 3.10) and every tare masquerading as legitimate wheat (Matt. 13.30).

Edwards’ final point of application warns his audience that in light of this certain judgement, if they continue in their unprofitable ways and bring forth no fruit to God, “hell will be the only fit place for you.”⁸⁸⁶ By switching back to second-person pronouns, such a strategy reverses the position at the end of the sermon and personalizes the frame of reference: *you* become the unprofitable sinner. Such a strategy puts the listener in the uncomfortable position of imagining the torments in the flames of hell, observed by all the hosts of heaven, as they praise God for his justice in judging the wicked and sparing the saints.

Critical Evaluation: Edwards’ Ezekiel 15 Sermon

This critical evaluation of the preaching of Edwards will engage with the following six points in this section. First, although the sermon is ostensibly based on the text of Ezekiel 15.2-4, after the Introduction Edwards virtually departs from all exposition of the text of Ezekiel 15. He refers to Ez. 15.6-8 as “God’s explanation of the allegory” in the introduction, and later in the introduction he develops vv.3-4. From the Doctrine section onward, however, Edwards’ argument is clearly not based

⁸⁸² Ibid., 218.

⁸⁸³ Ibid., 220.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid., 220.

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., 221.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid., 222.

upon an expository development of the text of Ezekiel 15. Rather, the sermon moves forward in a linear fashion and is centred upon Edwards' argument related to the ultimate outcome of non fruit-bearing people. This observation reveals that Edwards' biblical studies are not entirely treated in an expository fashion, but rather that his theological views tend to overshadow the biblical text. Second, Edwards' exegesis as to the referent of the vine is also ambiguous. From his opening argument, it is not entirely clear exactly to which people the vine in 15.2-3 refers. The vine appears to refer to the Jews in Jerusalem, the visible church of God in the OT alone or the NT church also.⁸⁸⁷ Furthermore, the comparison with the vine may refer to all of humanity in general. Edwards eventually seems to settle upon the final possibility and proceeds to build his either-or construct related to fruitfulness or fruitlessness upon this basis. However, what is not entirely clear from his exegesis is how he is able to make this connection.

Third, there is no mention of how Ezekiel 15 fits into its contextual situation, either in the book of Ezekiel or even its general historical context. A cursory reading of Ezekiel 15 would indicate that must have something to do with the impending destruction of Jerusalem, but Edwards does not mention this aspect dealing even from a historical perspective. Jerusalem is only mentioned in the initial two paragraphs of the introduction, whilst the remainder of the sermon is devoted to his development of his "fruitful or unfruitful" paradigm. Fourth, Edwards does not distinguish voice hierarchies between Yahweh the rhetor and originator or the oracle, and Ezekiel the one who delivered the oracle to the actual audience. The only reference to this occurs when he states that God provides the interpretation to the allegory in vv. 6-8, which would make at least God the speaker at that point.

Fifth, Edwards' Reformed Calvinist theology highly influences his exegesis and pulpit rhetoric and thereby puts him into a resulting rhetorical bind in this sermon. At times Edwards appears to develop his argument from within a limited-atonement perspective, but this is not entirely clear. Though he does not mention "elect" or "non-elect" at any point in the sermon this nonetheless appears to be his basic construct. He

⁸⁸⁷ Edwards argues in relation to the question of who should be admitted to partake of communion that, according to Matt. 20.16 and 22.14 that "*many are called, but few are chosen*. By which it is evident, that there are *many* who belong to the *visible church*, and yet but *few* real and true *saints*; and that it is ordinarily thus, even under the *New Testament*, and in days of gospel-light: and therefore that *visibility* of *sainthood*, whereby persons are visible saints in a scripture sense, cannot imply an apparent probability of their being *real* saints, or truly gracious persons" (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. I*, Objection V: "Many are Called, Few Are Chosen," italics his).

argues that the chief end of humanity is to serve and glorify God, and that God created humanity for that express purpose. Humanity thus falls into two categories: fruitful or unfruitful—those fit for heaven and those fit for destruction. Working against this construct are his concluding exhortations to his audience that they should first consider their own potential fruitlessness and second make the decision to bear fruit unto God. This makes it appear that Edwards believed that his audience had at least some choice in the matter, which would imply a level of free will.⁸⁸⁸

The sixth and final critical evaluation is that Edwards' entire construct revolves around the issue of fruitfulness or fruitlessness; however, the reading of Ezekiel 15.2-5 in Chapter 5 demonstrates that this is not the basis of the analogy. Here Edwards seems to be more influenced by the argument of John 15 and the parable found in Luke 13 rather than a careful exegesis of Ezekiel 15.2-5. Although he identifies the unit as an allegory, Chapter 5 of this thesis illustrates that the unit functioned rhetorically as an argument by analogy, developed primarily through a series of rhetorical questions. The strength of the analogy lies in its comparison of the vinestock with lumber from trees of the forest. Thus on the basis of utilitarian uselessness are the vine, and ultimately the Jerusalemites, judged and pronounced worthless. The final charge of faithlessness in 15.8 seals the fate of the vinestock, which has already been weighed and found wanting on the basis of usefulness. Therefore for Edwards to conclude his sermon by exhorting his listeners to "bear fruit for God" appears entirely to miss the rhetorical point of the unit.

This contextual interpretation of Edwards' historical context demonstrates that his preaching form can be located along the continuum identified within Chapter 3. Although influenced by Enlightenment thinkers, Edwards existed in an era in which higher criticism of the Bible had not fully impacted upon biblical studies.⁸⁸⁹ As a product of eighteenth-century colonial New England, Edwards was clearly influenced

⁸⁸⁸ Edwards held the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity, stating "that all mankind are by *nature* in a state of *total ruin*, both with respect to the *moral evil* of which they are the subjects, and the *afflictive evil* to which they are exposed, the one as the consequence and punishment of the other; then, doubtless, the *great salvation* by Christ stands in direct relation to this *ruin*, as the remedy to the disease; and the whole *gospel*, or doctrine of salvation, must *suppose* it; and all real belief, or true notion of that gospel, must be built upon it" ("The Great Doctrine of Original Sin Defended," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 1*, 1:1, italics his). For Edwards, the totality of the effects of sin makes humanity's desires for good and proper choices often turn into improper and wrong choices (*Freedom of the Will* Section IV, "Of the Distinction of Natural and Moral Necessity, and Inability"). Though he does not develop it in this sermon, Edwards held that only through the gospel can one's nature be changed such that one's inclinations be changed to please and glorify God (Tchividjian, "Reflections on Jonathan Edwards' View of Free Will," 4).

⁸⁸⁹ Cherry, "Symbols of Spiritual Truth," 271.

by the Puritan development of Ramist rhetorical categories. The rhetorical evaluation of his sermon illustrates his dependence upon this conception as he moved from logical argument within the Doctrine section to emotive appeals in the Application section. Finally, his sermon demonstrates that for Edwards, his Calvinist theology may have overshadowed his exegesis of the text.⁸⁹⁰

Charles Spurgeon: Rhetorical Influences

The contextual interpretation in Chapter 3 demonstrates that rhetoric exists in a symbiotic relationship within society, and further showed that its applications as developed from this basis can impact upon preaching theory and practice also. Termed the “Golden Age of Preaching,” Victorian homiletics in Britain stands as an example of the various shifts in the understanding of rhetoric that have impacted upon and continue to impact the theory and practice of preaching.

Chapter 3 illustrates that sixteenth-century Renaissance humanists reacted to medieval scholasticism—a shift which would later impact nineteenth-century British Victorian preaching. As the first example of vernacular rhetoric in England, Leonard Cox argued for the Ciceronian doctrine of invention in his 1530 work *The Arte or Crafte of Rhethoryke*. His was the first work on rhetoric in English printed in England and displays a dependence on the work of the humanist Melanchthon.⁸⁹¹ In Britain this reliance on Ciceronian categories continued into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The dominant “neo-Ciceronian” rhetoricians objected to Ramus’s division of rhetoric into the categories of dialectics and stylistics. Until the eighteenth century, Cicero’s six-part oratorical structure also remained a prominent aspect of pre-Victorian sacred oratory.⁸⁹² As the eighteenth century progressed, some preachers began to modify Cicero’s six-part concept. Preachers considered as optional five of the original six categories and began to favour argumentation and application as the central parts of the sermon.

Despite its modifications, Ciceronian rhetoric nonetheless indirectly influenced Victorian preaching by demonstrating a degree of association with the

⁸⁹⁰ Kimnach states, “Although each of Edwards’ sermons begins with a scripture passage and seems to be immediately derived from that passage, it is now clear, from examination of the sermon notebooks, that the sermon frequently originated in an occasion or personal inspiration of Edwards himself and that he subsequently located a biblical text to match the preconceived doctrine” (“General Introduction,” 207-208).

⁸⁹¹ Carpenter, “Leonard Cox,” 293.

⁸⁹² Ellison, *Victorian Pulpit*, 22.

classical rhetorical tradition.⁸⁹³ Ellison points out that “by the nineteenth century, however, even this ‘residue’ [of classical tradition] had virtually vanished from homiletic theory, and the structural elements of a sermon were ignored or rejected far more than they were emphasized.”⁸⁹⁴ By the nineteenth century, Victorian preachers retained two elements of classical rhetoric: the first element related to an emphasis upon persuasion within the application portion of the sermon, whilst the second component consisted of the structural element of “heads” or “partitions.” According to Cicero, partitions concern the setting forth of the matter the speaker intends to discuss within a speech in a methodical way, thus outlining the contents of the speech for listeners.⁸⁹⁵

In terms of language and style, in contrast to the sixteenth- through eighteenth-century era high church divines’ development of highly ornamented and elaborate preaching, Victorian preachers avoided the overuse of quotations from classical and patristic literature and instead developed a plainer, more natural and more literary approach in their sermons.⁸⁹⁶ In this they followed in the trajectory of Reformed scholar William Perkins, who during the Elizabethan period advocated the use of a “plain style” of preaching. In his *Arte of Prophecy* Perkins held that “while the preacher must use the arts to get at the meaning and application of the biblical text, they must be concealed in the delivery of the sermon, so that the only thing on display is the Spirit of God, and not the eloquence of the preacher.”⁸⁹⁷ Victorian homileticians preached in the context of a highly literate society, a time “when even the common people had access to a highly cultivated language, and understood it and appreciated it.”⁸⁹⁸ Given these shifts toward literacy and orality, the expectation placed upon the Victorian preacher was that he should “exhibit the ethos of the classical orator while delivering sermons exemplifying the literary sophistication of the accomplished essayist.”⁸⁹⁹

In contrast to the preaching of Edwards’ generation, Victorian preaching exhibited the juxtaposition of the spoken and written word, and thus moved the

⁸⁹³ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁹⁵ See for example Cicero, “A Dialogue Concerning Oratorical Partitions,” In *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero Vol. 4*: 533-580.

⁸⁹⁶ Ellison, *Victorian Pulpit*, 28.

⁸⁹⁷ Blacketer, “William Perkins,” 46.

⁸⁹⁸ Old, *Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures Vol. 6*, 441.

⁸⁹⁹ Ellison, *Victorian Pulpit*, 15.

sermon toward the intersection of orality and literacy. Victorian sermons came to be regarded not primarily as orations but as “written pieces” judged by the standards applied to writing. These reforms would lead to a conflation of the oral and written traditions, as preachers were expected to utilize literary means in order to achieve orality-based ends. Preachers aimed to persuade their congregation to embark on a spiritually beneficial course of action. This conflation, notes Ellison, is the most significant element of the theory of Victorian preaching.⁹⁰⁰

On the Victorian homiletical continuum of orality-literacy, Spurgeon’s sermons fall into the category of orality-based preaching despite the fact that large numbers of Spurgeon’s sermons were published in a written format. Ellison observes that Spurgeon’s “theory and practice were grounded in the oral tradition”⁹⁰¹ as opposed to that of the literacy tradition. Both the context and circumstances of Spurgeon’s life and ministry place him within an orality-based context, despite the reality that much of his popularity and influence can be attributed to his many published sermons. Although largely self-taught, the well-read Spurgeon “was a craftsman of words and sentences and paragraphs. He was not a master of the written word but of the spoken word.”⁹⁰²

In terms of both structure and style, the rhetoric of his sermon on Ezekiel 15 demonstrates Spurgeon’s penchant for delivering orality-based sermons aimed squarely for the ears of his listeners. A preacher largely to the working class, Spurgeon serves “as an outstanding example of an age in which the common people were coming into their own.”⁹⁰³ Both his educational circumstances and ministerial context led him toward an orality-based style. Although Spurgeon typically preached to largely working-class people, nonetheless many of them were highly literate.⁹⁰⁴ Furthermore, since Spurgeon spoke extemporaneously, his delivery tended to be more animated in terms of gestures and vocal inflection and thus had more of an impact upon a live audience.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., 31-32.

⁹⁰¹ Ibid., 56.

⁹⁰² Old, *Reading and Preaching Vol. 6*, 440.

⁹⁰³ Ibid., 423. Old points out that Spurgeon was both a product of his age and an expression of it: as a preacher to the working class, “His was not so much a voice for the people as a voice of the people” (424).

⁹⁰⁴ Though well-read, Spurgeon neither held education in high regard nor believe that preachers should read sermons from manuscripts. Instead he would prepare in terms of the thoughts of the sermon, and leave the words to be found during the delivery. Thus it was that the circumstances of his life “created an atmosphere conducive to an oral style of preaching...he invested his London pulpit with the energy and passion of the classical orator” (Ellison, *Victorian Pulpit*, 63; see Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 153).

Rhetorical Evaluation: “The Fruitless Vine.”

Spurgeon’s orality-based rhetorical strategies can be demonstrated in several ways from his sermon on the text of Ezekiel 15. The first rhetorical strategy can be demonstrated in terms of the structure of the sermon. Following a short introduction, Spurgeon divided his sermon into two points: the first point is a “Lesson of Humility” for believers and the second is a “Lesson of Search” for those he terms “fruitless professors.” In his construct, fruitless professors are men and women apparently masquerading in churches as true Christians. Under this second point Spurgeon had four sub-points framed as rhetorical questions that further analyze and predict the potential outcome of fruitless professors. Such a structure is typical of a Spurgeon sermon and would have been easy for a listening audience to follow. In true Ciceronian fashion, at the ending of the introduction he informed his audience of what his upcoming two points will be. As the sermon proceeded, he signalled his transitions throughout with the words “and now” or “and again,” thus informing his audience that he has transitioned to another point. Such strategies reveal his penchant for orality-based sermons that allowed his audiences to follow his line of argumentation and transitions more easily.

The second rhetorical feature concerns Spurgeon’s main point, which he reiterated several times in the sermon lest the audience lose the impact. His central idea dealt with the vine’s lack of fruit. Although he did not develop this concept in detail, the introduction observes that the Jewish nation’s lack of fruit led directly to its judgment by God. This is the only point at which Spurgeon mentioned the historical context, instead spending the remainder of the sermon developing his argument for his contemporary context. The major focus of the sermon therefore concerns both those who are true believers and those who are allegedly masquerading as such.

The third rhetorical strategy showcases Spurgeon’s use of stylistic elements. Throughout the sermon Spurgeon made of illustrative anecdotes drawn from the everyday life-world of his congregation.⁹⁰⁵ In his treatment of the fruitless professor,

⁹⁰⁵ Old, *Reading and Preaching Vol. 6*, 441. Spurgeon believed firmly in the power of illustrations, and his theory follows in the tradition of establishing an argument by logical means and then illustrating that abstraction. He argued in his *Lectures to My Students* that “Often when didactic speech fails to enlighten our hearers we may make them see the meaning by opening a window [of illustration] and letting in the pleasant light of analogy” (349).

Spurgeon made use of illustrative hypothetical conversations⁹⁰⁶ using third-person language referring to “they” or “him.” In an extended hypothetical conversation intended to establish the worthlessness of a man who is a fruitless professor, Spurgeon asked a series of rhetorical questions of the man’s church, of his son, his wife, his servant, his employees, and ultimately God. Each character gives their assessment, and the man is ultimately found wanting due to his lack of fruitfulness.⁹⁰⁷ This tacit strategy enabled Spurgeon to align the audience with his point of view by constructing a hypothetical situation and inviting them to participate in the resulting final assessment.

The fourth rhetorical-oral feature is his use of repetition, alliteration and metaphor as verbal devices designed to pique the interest of his audience. Spurgeon claimed that fruitless professors are “neither speaking for Christ; nor praying for Christ, nor giving to Christ, nor living to Christ.”⁹⁰⁸ Elsewhere he utilized alliteration to refer to his “hard-hearted hearers” and used the metaphors “the little farthing rushlight of their own hopes” and “the bleeding of their own conscience was a killing by the hand of God.”⁹⁰⁹

The fifth rhetorical strategy can be demonstrated by Spurgeon’s use of rhetorical questions, which he employed copiously throughout the sermon as both rhetorical strategies and structural transition markers. Spurgeon seized upon the rhetorical question posed within Ezekiel 15.2 and referred back to it throughout the sermon, drawing upon it to frame his rhetorical questions to his listeners. Closely aligned with his use of rhetorical questions is the sixth rhetorical feature, which is his use of personal pronouns when referring to his audience. He referred to himself often with the first-person “I,” “me” and “my” and used “we,” “us” and “you” when referring to his audience. Spurgeon also used direct address when referring to his “dear brother,” “dear friends,” and “my young friend,” all of which spoke directly to his hearers. Spurgeon often combined rhetorical questions with personal pronouns or direct address, as for example when he stated “Yea, look upon thyself as thou art now. Does not thy conscience reproach thee?”⁹¹⁰

⁹⁰⁶ Even though the construct is hypothetical, it is nonetheless drawn from true-to-life examples from the everyday life-world of his audience. He even goes so far as to say, “I am describing real cases and not fictions” (“The Fruitless Vine,” 69).

⁹⁰⁷ Spurgeon, “The Fruitless Vine,” 68-70.

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

The final rhetorical strategy concerns Spurgeon's combination of personal pronouns and direct address with the applications developed in his sermon designed to drive points more clearly home to the hearts of his listeners. He states: "My young friend, I do not want to check any of you in joining a church; but I do say to you, make sure work before you make a profession."⁹¹¹ These applications, scattered throughout and reiterated again at the close of the sermon, drove home his argument that is intimately tied to his main point related to fruitlessness. If the listener of the sermon has indeed become convicted that he or she is indeed a fruitless professor, Spurgeon allows but two options for such a person: one, admit to being a fraud and resign the church; or two, be honest and repent before God.⁹¹²

Critical Evaluation: Spurgeon's Ezekiel 15 Sermon

The contextual evaluation of the preaching styles of both Edwards and Spurgeon demonstrates that both men preached during eras where both preacher and Scripture held positions of inherent authority. Similarly to Edwards, Spurgeon's rhetorical strategy appealed to this authority as a matter of course. For some listeners, amongst whom there may have indeed been "fruitless professors," an appeal to the truths of Scripture combined with an argumentative strategy would indeed convict and motivate them enough to comply with the desired applications.⁹¹³ Although he assigned somewhat dubious motives to fruitless professors, who apparently join churches for economic or social benefit, his authoritative conclusion at the end allowed for only two possible choices: fruitless professors either must repent or leave the church. Either option is framed as an imperative that essentially forces the listener into an "either-or" framework somewhat akin to Edwards' argument and concluding applications.

Regarding the connection between biblical studies and preaching, similar to Edwards Spurgeon spends little space exegetically developing the unit itself beyond vv. 1-2. He dedicates the bulk of the sermon to the treatment of hypocritical fruitless professors, but aside from the introductory comments he rarely returns to develop exegetically or homiletically the text of Ezekiel 15. As mentioned previously he

⁹¹¹ Ibid., 66.

⁹¹² Ibid., 72.

⁹¹³ For example, Spurgeon advised preachers: "If we give our people refined truth, pure Scriptural doctrine, and all so worded as to have no needless obscurity about it, we shall be true shepherds of the sheep, and the profiting of our people will soon be apparent" (*Lectures to My Students*, 78).

merely alludes to the rhetorical question of the utilitarian uselessness of the vine in 15.2. No mention is made of the interpretation found in vv. 6-8 and its implications, either for the Jerusalemites or fruitless professors.

Spurgeon, as Edwards did also, made no mention of the context or argument of the unit in light of Ezekiel or historical background other than an oblique reference to Israel in the first two paragraphs. Subsequently, all of Spurgeon's development takes up issues related to his current church context. Again as Edwards did, Spurgeon focussed upon the issue of the fruitlessness of the vine; however, the study of Ezekiel 15 in Chapter 5 demonstrates that this is not the rhetorical strategy of the unit. Although he mentions the text itself nowhere within this sermon, Spurgeon seems to be more influenced by the argument of John 15, transporting Jesus' words about fruitfulness and fruitlessness back into Ezekiel 15. Further, he makes no mention of v. 8's claim that judgment is warranted on Jerusalem because of unfaithfulness, not fruitlessness.

Spurgeon does not distinguish the recipients of the oracle other than the brief mention of Israel in the introduction, nor does he mention Ezekiel's role in it as a passive messenger. Finally, he labels vv. 2-3 as a parable;⁹¹⁴ however, this classification is not strictly accurate, as observed previously in the critique of Edwards. Chapter 5 demonstrates that Ezekiel 15 is rather an argument by analogy that develops along the lines of rhetorical questions and subsequent applications.

This contextual interpretation and evaluation of Spurgeon's sermon on Ezekiel 15 has demonstrated that like Edwards, Spurgeon was a product of his times. The clash between the humanists and scholastics in the sixteenth century would still be felt three centuries later within the context of Victorian preaching. Victorian preaching combined Ciceronian ideals of a unified and persuasive speaking approach with a plain style of preaching aimed at an increasingly literate society. Spurgeon's sermon can be located within the continuum of the evolution of preaching within an Enlightenment-inspired era that was beginning to feel the impact of higher criticism within biblical studies.

⁹¹⁴ Spurgeon, "The Fruitless Vine." He states that "He [God] checks their [Israel's] pride and humbles them, with the parable we have here before us" (59).

Chuck Smith: Rhetorical Influences

The final contextual interpretation of Ezekiel 15 sermons concludes with an analysis of a sermon delivered by Chuck Smith in 2005. As noted in Chapter 3, with the advent of the New Homiletic, North American homiletics experienced a major shift from deductive to inductive preaching forms. New Homileticians criticized traditional preaching forms and fostered a turn toward the experience of the listener. Although the inductive forms of the New Homiletic have largely been abandoned by most contemporary preachers, Smith's preaching can be viewed as one response to the continuing evolution of homiletics and the challenges of postmodernism. In order to understand the Calvary Chapel phenomenon,⁹¹⁵ one must locate the movement within the broader religious and cultural context of nineteenth and twentieth century America. Viewed against the larger backdrop of the restructuring of American Protestantism, the Calvary Chapel movement flourished by discovering culturally appropriate ways to meet the 1960s counterculture generation's felt needs for ultimate meaning.⁹¹⁶

Despite denominational differences, American preachers within the mid-nineteenth century were unified regarding an optimistic view of the future coupled with the preaching of revival and reform at the time. Church leadership generally agreed that the purpose of American democracy was to build a new social order characterized by freedom from slavery and the end to political tyranny, ignorance and poverty.⁹¹⁷ By the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, American scholars and clergy alike increasingly began to wrestle with the issue of acceptable levels of compatibility between Enlightenment scientism and mainline Christianity.⁹¹⁸ Within the early part of the twentieth century, the advent of social, intellectual, religious and

⁹¹⁵ Smith, *Harvest*, 10. Calvary Chapel affiliates currently number over one thousand churches worldwide. In their move away from modernist, top-heavy denominational models, Calvary Chapel churches do not form a denomination as such but rather exist in a loose association or fellowship. "There is no attempt to centralize authority or offer programmatic materials... This is a movement built on relationships, not centralized authority or reporting structures" (Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 35-36).

⁹¹⁶ Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 28-29.

⁹¹⁷ Old, *Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures Vol 6*, 445.

⁹¹⁸ Shires notes that the American post-war formula for success built on "technocracy": the efficient and productive use of technologies. Technocracy itself drew upon "scientism," which was rooted within the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment worldview. By its very nature materialistic, technocratic science "did not dabble in the supernatural or pause over spiritual or moral questions but kept focused on measurable sensorial phenomena." Based upon the Enlightenment belief that the methods and assumptions of the scientific method could be applied to all disciplines, scholars held that all phenomena—including the alleged miracles of Scripture and the supernatural—should be reduced to natural explanations (*Hippies of the Religious Right*, 21).

political crises and the impact of higher criticism upon hermeneutics made it increasingly apparent there were two radically differing responses to this issue: the modernists and the fundamentalists.⁹¹⁹

Liberal Protestants, termed “modernists” by their detractors, “were concerned to present Christianity in a positive light to their contemporaries.”⁹²⁰ Liberal Protestants essentially denied Scripture on an historical level while affirming what was believed to be the true ethical teachings of the historical Jesus on an essential level. Preaching a social gospel, liberal Protestants hoped to establish the kingdom of God through individual conversions and by means of policies carried out through large-scale institutional, university and philanthropic agencies. They believed that these approaches would construct and sustain a Christian civilization.⁹²¹ This inclusivist view attempting to reconcile Christianity with modern science ultimately permeated both Sunday school lessons and the American educational system by the 1950s. Many of those constituting the 1960s “counterculture” generation were those raised within this religious and educational context and would later reject many of its inherent values and perceived shortcomings.

On the opposite side of the debate were the exclusivists, who sought to defend the Bible from its critics. These fundamentalists held that even when the Bible appeared to conflict with modern science the gospel of personal salvation was still clear and that was all that was deemed necessary.⁹²² Rather than preaching a liberal social gospel, fundamentalists preferred large-scale Bible revivals while staunchly defending from pulpits the two hallmark fundamentalist doctrines: creationism and dispensationalism.⁹²³ The fundamentalists believed that modernism and evolution had undermined the biblical foundations on which American society was built. In its public attempts to purge the church of modernism and the schools of Darwinism, by

⁹¹⁹ Miller, *Harry Emerson Fosdick*, 125. Rather than using the terms “modernists” and “fundamentalists,” or “liberals” and “conservatives,” Miller argues a better terminology would be that of “inclusivists”—those who attempted to include the findings of modern biblical criticism into their faith—and “exclusivists”—those who fought against what they believed to be the ever-encroaching negative influences of historical criticism and liberalism.

⁹²⁰ Worrall, *The Making of the Modern Church*, 117. The foundational tenets of inclusivists were an underlying rationalism, an optimistic view of human progress, a high view of the moral perfectibility of humanity, a desire to separate the “husk” from the “kernel” of Christianity; that is, the teachings of Jesus as opposed to those *about* him. Finally, they believed in the use of historical-critical methods to strip away the dogmatic accretions overlaying the historical Jesus

⁹²¹ Hart, “When is a Fundamentalist a Modernist?” 618.

⁹²² Old, *Teaching and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 448.

⁹²³ Hart, “When is a Fundamentalist a Modernist?” 613.

the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the movement became characterized as separatist, militant, anti-scientific and anti-intellectual.⁹²⁴

By the 1930s fundamentalists had begun to engage in positive evangelistic movements in an effort to change this largely negative and separatist image. The “neo-evangelicals” in the 1940s established organizations such as Youth for Christ and the National Association of Evangelicals. By the 1950s the emerging movement began referring to themselves as “evangelicals” in distinction to those fundamentalists demanding ecclesiastical separatism.⁹²⁵ By the 1960s the evangelical movement took on different emphases, one of which was the charismatic movement with its focus on the experiential and therapeutic elements of Christianity, combined with a sense of closeness to Jesus through the indwelling Spirit.⁹²⁶ As an evangelical movement combining charismatic experiential Christianity together with a conservative view of Scripture, the Calvary Chapel movement struck a chord with many disaffected youth from the counterculture generation.

Many of the generation raised and educated in an environment shaped by reactions to Enlightenment modernism would ultimately radically reject many of the values of the mainstream culture with its associated characteristics. These values included liberal theology, militant fundamentalism, scientism, intellectualism and affluence. While the 1960s generation did not entirely reject the values of the “golden rule” ideal and personal freedom, they rejected what they perceived as conformism, hypocrisy and intolerance within older generations.⁹²⁷ As the counterculture movement gained momentum, American society in the 1960s underwent a period of major cultural disruption. Evidence of this upheaval included the civil rights movement in the South, the murder of Martin Luther King, anti-Vietnam War protests, psychedelic drug experimentation, the sexual revolution and “acid rock” music. In their rejection of mainstream values with the empty materialism, affluence and pragmatic materialism of their parents, the counterculture generation embarked on a spiritual quest and ultimately gained a new identity.⁹²⁸

The Calvary Chapel movement, associated with the larger cultural movement known as the “Jesus movement” of the late 1960s and early 1970s, helped some

⁹²⁴ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 3-8.

⁹²⁵ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 69-69, 73.

⁹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

⁹²⁷ Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 21.

⁹²⁸ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 242; Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 20.

within the counterculture generation to form and to gain this new sense of identity. These young people “brought their counter-culture lifestyles of communal living and rock music into the churches that would welcome them.”⁹²⁹ Calvary Chapel was one such church seeking to welcome large numbers of the “Woodstock Generation” who had reacted against the liberal theology of their parents. Many of this generation found an authentic experience in the experiential neo-evangelicalism represented by Calvary Chapel. Calvary Chapels continued within the evangelical trajectory of repudiating mainstream denominations in favour of independence, whilst retaining certain elements of conservative evangelical doctrines.⁹³⁰ Rather than emphasizing a fundamentalist exclusivism, Calvary Chapels are associated with inclusive evangelical movements.⁹³¹ The movement can be located within the evangelical spectrum between Baptists and Pentecostals. Calvary Chapels agree with Pentecostals regarding the active gifts of the Spirit, and share the belief with Baptists related to the teaching of the Bible as the central goal of worship.

In the late 1960s Smith was pastor of a small congregation in Corona, California, at which point he became convinced that he and his church should begin reaching out to the surfers and hippies congregating on the local beaches. Though initially repulsed by them, Smith began to meet hippies through friends of his college-age daughter, “many of whom discovered in Christianity an answer to their intellectual searching, and a cure, sometimes instantaneous, for their drug dependencies.”⁹³² This movement of bringing sixties’ hippies into the church brought about two important shifts in church philosophy of missions and evangelism: first, it brought youth back into a multigenerational setting; and second it fostered a generational reconciliation born of give-and-take on both sides.⁹³³ These counterculture youth became characterized as “twice dropouts” since they had left behind their parents’ belief systems and secular culture and had dropped out of traditional religious systems. In this process this generations essentially reinvented ministry by modelling how ministry could adapt to local culture.⁹³⁴

As a result of this trajectory, the Calvary Chapel movement stands as an example of a church in transition from the modern to the postmodern era at the nexus

⁹²⁹ Williams, “Theological Perspective,” 165.

⁹³⁰ Ibid., 34, 36; Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 71.

⁹³¹ Miller, *Reinventing*, 36.

⁹³² Balmer, *Mine Eyes*, 19.

⁹³³ Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 125.

⁹³⁴ Witham, *Who Shall Lead Them?* 122.

between the evangelical and countercultural generations. The Calvary Chapel movement “became, in effect, a new denomination that updated informal forms of Pentecostal traditions.”⁹³⁵ Calvary Chapel was able to synthesize their brand of conservative evangelicalism with the openness of counterculture generations. On the one hand, this movement embraces the fervency of conversion and subsequent experiences with the Spirit, while on the other hand it holds to a dispensational theology supported by a rational hermeneutic that claims to interpret Scripture literally.⁹³⁶ In their rejection of their parents’ liberal rationalism and values, counterculture youth looked for a deeper, more fulfilling meaning to life. This generation subsequently found fulfilment in the combination of Smith’s personable, unaffected and simple approach to church leadership as well as his straightforward, informal style.⁹³⁷

Adopting an easygoing, almost conversational style of preaching, Smith is not known for dynamism or rhetorical flourish, but often uses personal examples to illustrate the text or scriptural passages to prove a point. Smith’s pulpit rhetoric carries with it perhaps echoes of Ramist doctrine. Typically his first move is to explain the text, usually through a linear, logical explanation regardless of genre. His second move is to suggest applications to the hearer through more direct address. In terms of the connection between biblical studies and preaching, Smith’s exegesis exhibits two characteristics: first he insists upon individual interpretation and second he believes that the plain reading of the text is the proper one.⁹³⁸

Although raised, educated and ordained within the International Foursquare denomination, as a preacher Smith disliked the emphasis on topical preaching covering the major concepts and doctrines of Christianity, which were major efforts to prepare. Since its inception, the trademark doctrine of Smith and Calvary Chapel is the verse-by-verse exposition of the Bible. He and other Calvary Chapel pastors teach consecutively through the Bible, typically book by book.⁹³⁹ This emphasis on the

⁹³⁵ Roof and Silk, *Religion and Public Life*, 73.

⁹³⁶ Williams, “Theological Perspective,” 166; Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 126-127.

⁹³⁷ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 243; Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 126-127.

⁹³⁸ Balmer, *Mine Eyes*, 24. He states: “Underlying this insistence on individual interpretation is the assumption (which received explicit sanction in the philosophy of Common Sense Realism in the nineteenth century) that the plainest, most evident reading of the text is the proper one. There is no longer any need to consult Augustine or Thomas Aquinas or Luther about their understanding of various passages when you yourself are the final arbiter of what is the correct reading” (24, parenthesis his).

⁹³⁹ Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 36.

systematic study of the Scriptures has been the hallmark for most of Smith's pastoral career.⁹⁴⁰ Furthermore, Calvary Chapel has consistently been known for its informal style, biblical exposition, evangelistic fervour, culturally current music, belief in the current gifts of the Spirit and a focus on the imminent return of Christ and the end of the age.⁹⁴¹

The Calvary Chapel movement has successfully appealed to countercultural generations by synthesizing a blend of seemingly contradictory elements. Though informal, it is conservative; it is both charismatic and experiential, while at the same time systematic in its approach to Scripture. Within the continuing evolution of homiletics and congregational leadership, the Calvary Chapel movement stands as one possible response to the challenges posed by the current cultural paradigm shifts.

Rhetorical Evaluation: "The Parable of the Vine."

This particular sermon on Ezekiel 15 is but part of a larger sermon, which also covers Ezekiel 16. This is typical with Smith's approach to the text, covering whole chapters at a time in his systematic approach through the Scriptures. Fairly short in length, the sermon spans less than fifteen minutes total. Unlike the other two preachers and consistent with his systematic exegetical style, Smith preached an expository verse-by-verse sermon through all eight verses of the unit. Smith divided the unit into two sections consisting of vv. 1-5 and the subsequent interpretation in vv. 6-8. Unlike Edwards and Spurgeon, who exhibit three- and two-point outline structures respectively, Smith's treatment of the passage does not reveal any type of outline format or formal structure other than the divisions in the text. Beginning with vv. 1-5, Smith labelled the genre of the unit as a parable and then proceeded to develop the Old Testament metaphorical background of Israel being likened to a vine, referencing God's planting and care of Israel as a vine in passages such as Isa. 5 and Ps. 80.

As do both Edwards and Spurgeon, Smith maintained that the sole purpose of the vine was to bear fruit, which similarly serves as the basis of his argument and subsequent concluding application. Here he appealed to Jesus' statements regarding fruitful vines in John 15 as proof of this statement. On this basis, Smith claimed that the purpose of Israel as a nation was to bring forth fruit unto God by serving the Lord.

⁹⁴⁰ Balmer, *Mine Eyes*, 16.

⁹⁴¹ Williams, "Theological Perspective," 166; Witham, *Who Shall Lead Them?* 25.

Israel would ideally demonstrate to the world the blessings available from serving God in a theocratic kingdom. However, he noted that Israel failed in this pursuit by not bringing forth fruit unto God and thus deserved judgement. Smith confirmed this point by again referring to Jesus' argument in John 15 that all vines not bearing fruit are rightly consigned to the fire.

Moving to the interpretation of the parable in vv. 6-8, Smith stated that in Babylon Ezekiel proclaimed God's message in the face of false prophets. These prophets predicted Jerusalem's victory over Babylon and encouraged people in their rebellion against Babylon. These false prophets attempted to persuade the exiles by arguing that Jerusalem would be spared and that the people should stand up and resist. In this regard, Smith noted that Jeremiah had similar clashes with false prophets in Jerusalem. He concluded the sermon with the application apparently drawn from this passage and John 15 that believers should strive to "bring forth fruit, more fruit, and much fruit," and that for Christians "God wants your life to be fruitful."⁹⁴² There is no purpose and meaning in life outside of this other than bringing forth fruit. Here Smith sided with both Edwards and Spurgeon, both of whom made the same point that the highest duty of humanity is found in bringing forth fruit to God. Smith, however, did not make the same move as do Edwards and Spurgeon, stating nowhere in the sermon that unfruitful people are consigned to hell. Rather, he concluded the homily on a positive note by exhorting his audience to "bring forth fruit, that the Father may be glorified."⁹⁴³

Critical Evaluation: Smith's Ezekiel 15 Sermon

Of the three sermons, Smith spends the highest amount of expository time developing the actual text of Ezekiel 15. He discusses the literary and historical background of Israel as the vine metaphor as viewed in the contexts of Isaiah and Psalms. He further places Ezekiel clearly in Babylon during the exile, and also discusses briefly Ezekiel's struggle with the false prophets. He labels the genre of the unit as a parable (vv. 2-5) with an attendant interpretation (vv. 6-8). As noted within the critical evaluation of the previous two sermons, the exegesis of the previous chapter labels the genre of vv. 2-5 as an argument by analogy rather than a parable.

⁹⁴² Smith, "The Parable of the Vine."

⁹⁴³ Ibid.

Whilst Smith is the only preacher to mention the false prophets of the exile, in terms of rhetorical dynamics he does not develop further the tension between Ezekiel and the false prophets. Smith maintains that the false prophets' rhetorical goal was to have the exiles "stand up and resist," but he does not demonstrate what they hoped to gain by this resistance. Furthermore, Smith does not clarify the originator of the oracle or its audience, whether on the oral or written level, and does not deal with any issues of voice hierarchy. In his development it is unclear whether the oracle originates either with Yahweh or Ezekiel. Unlike Edwards and Spurgeon, Smith deals with the text in a verse-by-verse commentary-style fashion but makes no mention of the rhetorical strategies employed in the unit, how they function rhetorically or what aim these strategies attempt to achieve in terms of their addressees. His application in light of the text and John 15 that believers "bear much fruit and glorify God" implies that this is the point of the unit, but the application is high upon the ladder of abstraction.

Positively, unlike the other preachers Smith develops both the OT contextual background of Israel and the vine metaphor and discusses briefly the exiles' situation with the false prophets. Like Spurgeon and Edwards, however, he does not mention how chapter 15 fits thematically into the contextual situation of the book of Ezekiel. Moreover, he does not clarify voice hierarchies or the identity of the actual audience of the oracle. Smith does not discuss the various rhetorical dynamics between Yahweh, Ezekiel and audience other than his brief mention regarding the role of the false prophets. Rather, as with Edwards and Spurgeon, his development and application of the unit seems more dependent upon the argument of John 15. This text seems to function for Smith almost as a one-for-one correlation basis, in that the point of John 15 transfers directly back into Ezekiel. He takes as the only point of contact between the two passages the issue of fruitfulness and fruitlessness. However, as demonstrated both in Chapter 5 and the above two critiques, the argument of Ezekiel 15 consists of a quasi-argument that employs analogy in the comparison between the vinestock and lumber from trees. Therefore, for Smith to correlate the argument of Ezekiel 15 with John 15 would seem to miss the rhetorical strategy of the unit.

Conclusion

Both the Ezekiel commentaries and preachers alike bear witness to the impact of various cultural, intellectual, theological and hermeneutical shifts and trends. For example, the contextual interpretation of the Ezekiel commentaries allows one to locate them along the continuum of these shifts and trends as outlined within Chapter 3. The first phase of Ezekiel studies corresponds to the pre-critical era up to the late nineteenth century, whilst the second phase relates to the period of increasingly radical historical-critical methodologies applied during the early twentieth century. The final phase corresponds to the current increasingly balanced view that takes into account both diachronic and synchronic observations regarding the homogeneous nature of Ezekiel. In essence the advent, rise and subsequent decline of the hegemony of historical criticism correspond to the lines of demarcation for the three major stages of Ezekiel studies.⁹⁴⁴

Although none of the preachers whose sermons are evaluated in this chapter make explicit mention of the impact of historical criticism upon their exegesis of Ezekiel 15, the ministry contexts of all three were shaped to various degrees by trends within the understanding of rhetoric and currents of biblical studies. This demonstrates the trend observed within Chapter 3 that biblical studies and homiletics are closely related. For example, within the eighteenth-century American Puritan context Edwards faced the issue concerning the contested quality of the interpretation of Scripture that arose from the impact of the new Enlightenment scholarship. Whilst on the one hand Edwards consistently rejected the radical implications of the emerging historical criticism, on the other hand he found useful insights at times from commentators who vigorously contested his theological positions.⁹⁴⁵ Edwards also disputed deists who sought to discredit the Bible through the use of early historical criticism, and opposed their view of a mechanistic universe run by natural laws whose Creator was distanced from its everyday operations.⁹⁴⁶ Edwards countered these secularizing Enlightenment trends by instead advocating the view that God is personally and intimately involved with his creation. Rather than through church authority, regeneration of the individual becomes a voluntary act that is at the same time initiated by the direct involvement of Christ. In this regard Edwards can be

⁹⁴⁴ See for example Boadt, "Mythological Themes," 211-212; Joyce, "Synchronic and Diachronic," 116.

⁹⁴⁵ Stein, "Editor's Introduction," 83-84.

⁹⁴⁶ McDermott, "Present at the Creation," 3; Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 130.

viewed “as representing the culmination of American Puritanism” and as a preacher who “played such a large practical role in helping to establish America’s long-lasting revivalist tradition.”⁹⁴⁷

Ministering within the nineteenth-century context, Spurgeon much more keenly reacted against what he termed the “deadly cobra” of Germanic higher criticism invading the British church.⁹⁴⁸ As an avowed Calvinist, Spurgeon stood firmly in the Puritan tradition and held Edwards in high esteem. Puritan theology also played a great role in the development of his spirituality.⁹⁴⁹ Furthermore, the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century significantly touched Victorian British Baptists.⁹⁵⁰

Consistent with Puritan homiletical tradition, Spurgeon argued that the preacher’s chief object is the glory of God, the aim of which is achieved by “seeking the edification of the saints and the salvation of sinners.”⁹⁵¹ Like the Puritans and Edwards before him, Spurgeon held that conversion is properly a direct work of the Spirit achieved through the prominent teaching of Scriptural truths. Such preaching involved an emphasis on humanity’s depravity, the certainty of punishment, justification by faith and the love of God in Christ Jesus. Spurgeon held that these aims could be achieved by using a variety of modes of instruction including teaching, appealing to the understanding through logical means and emotional persuasion, which could involve threatening as well as invitation.⁹⁵²

Located within a twenty-first century North American context, Chuck Smith and the Calvary Chapel movement can be situated within the tradition of American “neo-evangelical” reformers of fundamentalism. These neo-evangelicals viewed themselves as standing firmly in the tradition of Whitefield, Edwards, Finney and D.L. Moody. Such a stance represented the “long-standing transdenominational center of the American evangelical tradition.”⁹⁵³ Reacting to what they perceived as the

⁹⁴⁷ Marsden, *A Short Life*, 136, 137.

⁹⁴⁸ Spurgeon, “Another Word,” 1. The nineteenth century witnessed the encroachment of higher criticism in Britain. As a result Spurgeon spent the final four years of his life fighting the trends of early modernism, which he saw as a threat to evangelical, biblical Christianity. Spurgeon’s involvement in the “Down-Grade Controversy” raised public objections that Arminianism, evolutionary thought and higher criticism were making negative inroads into British theology (See MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, 21; Swanson, “The Down-Grade Controversy,” 5).

⁹⁴⁹ Gladstone referred to Spurgeon as

⁹⁵⁰ Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, 259, 572.

⁹⁵¹ Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students*, 336.

⁹⁵² *Ibid.*, 340-324.

⁹⁵³ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*, 64.

negative elements within modernism, the neo-evangelicals of the 1940s organized themselves around the belief that they could represent a formidable force to the dominant trends moving toward increasing secularism in the West. However, by the 1970s this movement had fragmented into multiple and widely divergent evangelical streams, including for example black Pentecostal, Mennonite Peace Churches, Episcopal charismatics, Nazarenes, Southern Baptists and the Calvary Chapel movement.

Despite their independent status and wide diversity, evangelicals agreed with their Puritan forebears regarding the authority of Scripture and salvation as a life-transforming experience of Christ as wrought by the Spirit.⁹⁵⁴ Smith continues in this tradition by affirming the inerrancy, authority and centrality of Scripture and expository over topical sermons.⁹⁵⁵ Just as Perkins argued in the sixteenth century, Smith affirms Nehemiah 8.8 as his model for systematic expository preaching, which involves the consistent reading of Scripture and making its meaning clear to the congregation.⁹⁵⁶ As both Edwards and Spurgeon did, Smith holds that conversion is a work of the Holy Spirit. True to his charismatic heritage, unlike Edwards and Spurgeon, Smith holds that there can be an empowering experience of the Spirit that is separate and distinct from conversion.⁹⁵⁷

Finally, all three preachers have been shaped by incipient evangelical traditions located within the Puritan movement. These traditions include the belief in the authority of the Scriptures, the importance of a heartfelt conversion and the urgency of missions and evangelism.⁹⁵⁸ William Perkins, whose *Art of Prophecy* shaped the Puritan plain style of preaching, stressed biblical preaching of the authoritative Scriptures that edified the individual through clear teaching and also led to the salvation of one's neighbour.⁹⁵⁹ Although each made use of differing homiletical forms, regarding the purposes of preaching all three preachers held to the centrality of biblical preaching and its subsequent role within the task of evangelism.

This evaluation of both the commentaries and preachers demonstrates the notion advanced within Chapter 3 that biblical studies and homiletics are impacted by a variety of cultural, intellectual and theological developments. Both the

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid., 65.

⁹⁵⁵ Smith, *Calvary Chapel Distinctives*, 7-8; 32.

⁹⁵⁶ Old, *Reading and Preaching Vol. 4*, 262; Smith, *Calvary Chapel Distinctives*, 33.

⁹⁵⁷ Smith, *Calvary Chapel Distinctives*, 18.

⁹⁵⁸ Marsden, *A Short Life*, 135.

⁹⁵⁹ Old, *The Reading and Preaching Vol. 4*, 262.

commentators and the preachers evince certain reactions against various trends, but at the same time are also products of their cultural and intellectual environments. This thesis has consistently demonstrated thus far that homiletics as a genre has evolved historically, and will continue to do so in an increasingly postmodern era. The contextual interpretation both in Chapter 3 and this chapter have demonstrated this to be the case, and the resulting evaluation of this analysis has led to the construction of a pragmatic plan for future homiletics. As a measured response, the approach of this thesis seeks a balanced approach to congregational leadership and homiletics. Such an orientation avoids adopting a reactionary response, since it embraces the classical rhetorical concept of engaging both the mind and emotions of listeners as well as placing importance upon the ethos of the congregational leader.⁹⁶⁰

In order to achieve the goal of the thesis which aims to integrate biblical studies and homiletics, Chapter 5 applied the rhetorical-critical-narratological approach developed within Chapter 3 to the discourse of Ezekiel. The resulting study of Ezekiel and Ezekiel 15 demonstrated that a reading of the discourse as a monologic narrative presented from a first-person character-narrator framework reveals an entirely new set of expectations. Such a reading enables interaction with the discourse from within a fresh frame of reference, and subsequently gives the preacher facility in replicating the rhetorical dynamics located within the text. In Chapter 7 the thesis will demonstrate an example of how this can be achieved as it will integrate exegetical theory with homiletical practice. The sample sermon from Ezekiel 15 will draw upon the variety of textual rhetorical and narratological dynamics based upon the study in Chapter 5. Following the critique of the sample sermon, Chapter 7 will furthermore compare areas of continuity and discontinuity between the three sermons evaluated in this chapter and that of the sample sermon.

This thesis therefore continues in the trajectory of the hermeneutical cycle by developing a pragmatic plan for future practice, seeking to take action to shape events toward the desired goal, which involves an anticipatory leadership stance that takes into account available preaching opportunities for the twenty-first century.⁹⁶¹

⁹⁶⁰ As noted in Chapter 3. See Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian Volume 4*, Book XII Chapter 1, 3; Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book 1, Part I.

⁹⁶¹ Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 110.

CHAPTER 7

THE INTEGRATION OF BIBLICAL STUDIES AND HOMILETICS

Introduction

Following the previous chapter's contextual interpretation of Ezekiel commentaries and sermons based upon Ezekiel 15, this chapter represents the culmination of the goal of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics with the production of a sample sermon. As a measured response, this goal concerns the utilization of rhetorical criticism for biblical exegesis in order to produce a multi-vocal and non-hierarchical homiletic appropriate to postmodernity. As a task of pastoral theology, the development of a pragmatic plan for future congregational leadership and homiletics concerns itself with the task of expression within "a pluralistic society of diverse religio-cultural assumptions, differing cultural disciplines, and conflicting ethical patterns of life."⁹⁶² The development within this thesis of this measured response therefore becomes a practical theological work, since it discerns the theological meanings inherent in the ongoing activities of the church as well as that of the wider society.⁹⁶³

This multi-vocal sermon will combine theory and practice by integrating the exegetical elements of the rhetorical-critical-narratological method developed in Chapter 3 with the values-based approach to preaching developed in Chapter 4. The resulting multiple point-of-view sermon draws upon the reading of Ezekiel and Ezekiel 15 in Chapter 5. The open-ended preaching form which this sermon will follow bases its rhetoric upon the open-ended nature of the discourse itself, thus replicating the rhetorical dynamics located within Ezekiel 15.⁹⁶⁴

The chapter will then engage in a critical evaluation of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the sermon, and will furthermore discuss areas of continuity and discontinuity with the approach of this thesis and the sermons evaluated in Chapter 6. Following this assessment the chapter will also demonstrate a sample rhetorical-

⁹⁶² Browning, "Pastoral Theology in a Pluralistic Age," 91.

⁹⁶³ Long, "Theology of Preaching," 462; Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 1.

⁹⁶⁴ The final step of the rhetorical-critical analysis of Ezekiel and Ezekiel 15 in Chapter 5 demonstrated that the rhetorical effectiveness of the book (and the unit of Chapter 15) cannot be gauged from within the discourse itself. The reader of the discourse will be left to wonder if Ezekiel's mission was ultimately a success or a failure in terms of its rhetorical aims. One can only appeal to later tradition to judge its effectiveness in terms of the communicative situation which gave rise to the text. Renz, for example, concludes his work on the rhetorical effectiveness of the work by appealing to later sources to judge the effectiveness of the message of the book to the second-generation of exiles. On this see, for example, the section entitled "What Happened After the Exile?" in *The Rhetorical Function*, 235-246.

critical reading of 1 Corinthians 4.18-5.13 in order to demonstrate the utility of the rhetorical-critical approach of this thesis for homiletics upon a genre of discourse literature. The chapter will conclude with a critical assessment of the integration of the elements of theory and practice for the normative practice of preaching within liturgical contexts.

Hermeneutical Scope and Aims

In terms of the aim and scope of the hermeneutical approach to the text, the approach of this thesis recognizes that the text of Ezekiel represents an act of communication to those living in another time and a different context than our own. Chapter 4 represents an attempt to read and understand the text of Ezekiel on its own terms as much as is possible, and the sermon in this chapter represents an attempt to respond to, and apply, that text for a listening audience.⁹⁶⁵ In this connection, one must clarify the distinction between explanation and understanding. In the role of explanation or knowing, the text of Ezekiel in its final form is the primary the object of scrutiny.⁹⁶⁶ This study was accomplished in Chapter 5 with its rhetorical-critical-narratological approach to the discourse of Ezekiel and Ezekiel 15. Focusing upon the text as the primary object of scrutiny, however, does not involve a solely rationalist, brittle and closed approach to the text. Rather, as Thiselton notes, the approach to understanding “depends more fundamentally on the receptivity of the hearer or reader to *listen with openness*” and therefore invites engagement and self-involvement.⁹⁶⁷

This hermeneutical process can be described as an act of communication whereby the text, as the source of the subject matter, conveys a message to target audiences who seek to understand, appropriate and apply that message.⁹⁶⁸ The analysis of audiences in Chapter 5 clarified both the historical audience *within* the diegetic level of the discourse itself and all later readers *of* the text as a finished literary work. As was pointed out earlier, to some extent all later readers must identify on some level with the historical and pluriform audience to which the prophet addressed his messages. The audience to which the text was addressed, however, change continually over time.⁹⁶⁹ The following sermon represents a provisional way

⁹⁶⁵ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 1.

⁹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 7,8 (italics his).

⁹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁶⁹ Beuken, “Isaiah 28,” 23.

in which to help later reader identify with the historical audience since it draws upon the wider picture of Ezekiel as a whole and the individual literary unit of Ezekiel 15 as a smaller “piece of the puzzle.”⁹⁷⁰ Rather than forming direct applications from the text for hearers, as many traditional sermons seek to do, the sermon instead seeks to reflect the reality that the responsiveness of the actual exilic audience to this particular oracle cannot be demonstrated from within the text. Therefore the sermon, like the text itself, is intentionally open-ended, opening up the way for continued dialogue. The hermeneutical and homiletical approaches represent a preliminary understanding or provisional “way of finding a bridge or starting point toward further, more secure understanding.” As a dialogical rather than a monological model, and moreover as a work in process, the approach taken in this thesis is therefore capable of correction and readjustment.⁹⁷¹

Theoretical Approach of Sample Sermon

The following multi-vocal sermon integrates the values-based approach to preaching advocated in Chapter 4 with the study within Chapter 5 which investigated the rhetorical and narratological dynamics of Ezekiel 15. This sample sermon illustrates the concept that the preacher can replicate the rhetorical dynamics of the biblical text within the rhetoric of the sermon form. Sermon form plays an important role in achieving the preacher’s hoped-for homiletical goals, potentially gaining and holding interest, shaping listeners’ experiences of the material and their faith and determining their degree of participation.⁹⁷² In contrast to the passive nature of an audience subject to deductive preaching, sermons attempting to re-create experiences for the listener embrace conative aspects of change by engaging both the mind and the emotions.⁹⁷³

This open-ended homiletical approach allows for alternative interpretations and moreover trusts the audience to respond with the aid of the Spirit.⁹⁷⁴ Although potentially creating insecurity or frustration in certain church cultures, dialogic or

⁹⁷⁰ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 14. Thiselton utilizes the parable of putting a puzzle together as an illustration of the hermeneutical spiral, noting that “...this dialogue between pre-understanding and understanding merges into a further process of examining the parts or pieces of the puzzle that we handled initially and relating them to an understanding of the whole picture” (14).

⁹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁷² Craddock, *Preaching*, 172-174. Of course these rhetorical goals are to some extent theoretical in terms of what the preacher aims to accomplish with the sermon itself.

⁹⁷³ McDonald, “Rhetorical Criticism,” 600.

⁹⁷⁴ Craddock, *Preaching*, 17, 30, 136.

intentionally open-ended sermons carry the increased possibility of higher ownership on the part of listeners choosing to engage in the process.⁹⁷⁵ The following sample sermon presents the rhetorical and narratological aspects of Ezekiel 15 in relation to the rhetorical dynamics of the book of Ezekiel by representing three points of view. The first voice encountered is the character-narrator Ezekiel, whom Yahweh tasked with delivering the oracle. The second voice heard is that of an exilic spokesperson as a member of Ezekiel's actual audience. Finally, the voice of Yahweh the rhetor concludes the sermon.

Sample Sermon: Ezekiel 15, “The Worthless Vinestock”

Point of View 1: Ezekiel, the Character-Narrator

I've just returned from delivering yet another of Yahweh's oracles to my fellow-exiles here in Babylon. Quite a lot of time may go by in between them—days, weeks, months or even years—and then the word of Yahweh comes to me again. His oracles always begin the same way. Whenever I hear those fateful words, “Son of man...” I know I have yet another message to deliver.

Let me guess what you might be thinking. Why did Yahweh choose me, as if I haven't been through enough? Briefly, I will tell you my story. Back in our homeland I was all set to become a priest, trained for a lifetime of service in the Temple. But I never really had the chance to serve in the Temple. When the Babylonian army besieged Jerusalem, many of us Jews were deported off into exile. So here we sit, along the banks of the Kebar River in Babylon, our whole existence summed up in one word: survival. And as if that wasn't enough to have to deal with, Yahweh chose *me* to be his prophet to the exiles.

Perhaps you are wondering how all of this came about. How is it that I ended up a prophet to a bunch of Jewish exiles in Babylon? Yahweh commissioned me a few years ago, not that long after we had arrived here. I was thirty years of age when I saw an overwhelming vision of Yahweh in the skies near the river. Yahweh informed me that he had appointed me to be his prophet sent to my fellow-exiles. Even describing the vision later I struggle to explain it. Afterwards, I couldn't even speak

⁹⁷⁵ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 14, 46. Sweet argues: “Despite the risks, there are even greater risks in nonparticipation” (*The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 84).

for a week. I was completely dumbfounded, and I supposed that people thought I had gone completely out of my head.

But there was one major problem in carrying out his commission. Yahweh informed me that I wouldn't exactly have an easy ministry. He told me that my fellow-exiles were stubborn, rebellious and hard-hearted. They weren't going to listen to the words he would have me speak. However, he promised to make me tough enough to stand up to the task. At all events, this toughness has turned out to be a lifesaver for me, since he has ordered me to perform some incredibly difficult and frankly humiliating exercises in front of the exiles.

Why didn't I complain? Why didn't I ask Yahweh to find somebody else to do the job? In our Scriptures, we read how Moses, Jeremiah and Gideon all protested that God should choose somebody else who would be up to the task. I had no illusions about the complexity of the situation. I knew that we were in exile precisely because of our defilement. As a people we had disobeyed Yahweh, broken his covenant scores of times over and committed idolatry along with multiple other violations of the Law. Perhaps I thought that I could serve as an example to my fellow-exiles. The oracles of Yahweh I delivered might just convince them that he had not abandoned us in exile.

What about this oracle that Yahweh had me deliver? I'll grant him two points: first, it was short, and I was able to deliver it in just a few moments and second, it was very clever. The first part involved just asking my fellow-exiles a few questions. As a treasured symbol of our national identity, we Israelites love the image of Israel as a fruitful and blessed vine that grows in a well-watered place of peace and safety. But he took that image and gave it a clever, subtle twist. Rather than focusing on what my fellow-exiles might expect, which was the fruit of the vine, he focused instead on the wood of the vine—the vinestock.

All of his questions related to the uselessness of the vinestock, especially when compared to lumber and firewood taken from the mighty trees of the forest. Can that skinny little vinestock be used to build useful structures? No. Can one even use it to make a peg to hang a pot on the wall? No. Is it useful as firewood? No. One can't get much of a fire from thin little vinestocks. Furthermore, once the vinestock has been burned and charred, can anything useful be made from it? No. It was virtually useless for any serviceable purpose before being put on the fire! What about afterwards? The verdict was clear, that the vine-stock had absolutely no productive value. At this point in the oracle, the audience were nodding in agreement. They may

not have enjoyed his focus on the vine-stock instead of its fruit, but still the audience understood and even agreed with Yahweh's argument.

If only Yahweh had allowed me to stop at that point perhaps none of my fellow-exiles would have been offended. Unfortunately for both me and my audience, the oracle contained a second half. The only possible use for the vine-stock was as firewood, and even then one can't get much warmth. Toss a bundle of vines on to the fire! Burn it up, enjoy the few minutes of precious heat before the fire consumes them. Even with that point my audience agreed. But then Yahweh had me tell them that just like the useless vine-stock burning in the fire, the same fate awaits those still living in Jerusalem. What?

Yes, it was all too true. To those exiles that stayed to hear the rest of the oracle, I had to inform them that Yahweh set his face against the Jerusalemites. This statement, however, posed a serious problem. My fellow-exiles will certainly wonder if anybody in Jerusalem will survive apparently certain doom. Imagine picking up the charred ends of the vine-stock that have fallen out of the fire. What does one do with them? Of course one would throw the ends back into the fire. Yahweh's point was that Jerusalem will suffer the same fate when it falls, and even those who survive the initial onslaught will be annihilated.

For certain this message of Yahweh was grim. And worse yet, if it were possible, he had me tell them that even the homeland will become desolate. I am sure my fellow-exiles must have wondered how such a situation could come to pass. The last line of the oracle revealed the reason. Yahweh indicated that the Jerusalemites had been unfaithful to him. But this presented a major problem for me and my fellow-exiles since the Jerusalemites would never hear this oracle of impending doom. The only ones who heard it were the exiles standing before me. One may ask why Yahweh had me deliver this message to the exiles, since we were hundreds of miles from home and are unable to alter the fate of Jerusalem.

My fellow-exiles had to face the sobering reality that if Yahweh would not spare the Jews in Jerusalem for their unfaithfulness, he may not spare any of the exiles who are unfaithful to him in Babylon. But this statement involves the ultimate irony: for Yahweh, the future of his people no longer lies with the Jerusalemites, but with these unfaithful and defiled exiles! However, Yahweh's glorious vision of the future will not take place if my fellow-exiles persist in their unfaithful behaviour.

But now perhaps one might ask if I be certain that Jerusalem will in fact be destroyed. What if it never comes to pass? Does this proclamation put me in a precarious situation, along with the other prophecies I've been asked to deliver? According to the Law I can be stoned as a false prophet if Jerusalem never falls. My only defence is to reply that I am only acting in my capacity as a watchman. I deliver oracles exactly as I hear them from Yahweh and submit to his will in the hope that I might set an example for my fellow-exiles. Although at times I have disputed with Yahweh, nonetheless I submit and obey. I am deeply concerned about my audience, but I am not responsible for their choices. I can only make my own choices, which free me to act with intentionality.

I have few illusions about my audience. I have known since my prophetic commission that they would not listen to my words. My resounding message from Yahweh to my fellow-exiles is clear: *Jerusalem is doomed*. If the city falls, then these exiles will be shaken down to the very core of their beings. Yahweh's message involves knocking down every pillar of support in which they believe, and upon which they base their future hope and security. But to be perfectly honest, I don't believe they will listen.

Point of View 2: An Exilic Spokesperson

We have just heard the "prophet" Ezekiel deliver the latest oracle that he insists comes directly from Yahweh. Some of us discussed the possibility that what he said might be true, as well its implications. We were even able to reach a conclusion of sorts. Before I tell you what we concluded, I need to explain a bit of our history. Although we would certainly rather be back in our homeland, in point of fact life in exile is not all that bad. It may not be a perfect life, but for the most part the Babylonians leave us alone as long as we keep to ourselves, act like good citizens and perform what they ask of us. Having said that, though, let me be clear on one point. Just because this exile is not terrible does not mean that we want to live here indefinitely! Above all else, we exiles are certain that our situation will soon be put to rights, we will be home shortly and this experience will fade into distant memory.

One might ask: how could we be so certain of this claim? The answer is straightforward. For those of us in exile, Jerusalem represents everything. As long as the city stands, we know that this exile will soon be over. Furthermore, we are absolutely certain that the city will never fall. Jerusalem forms the very foundation of

our hope, our security and our very theology. To put it bluntly, we know for certain that Yahweh will never—I repeat *never*—allow Jerusalem to be destroyed. In this regard, we have an absolutely unassailable argument built on a strong history of teaching and traditions that have been handed down among our people for generations. Please allow me to explain.

Yahweh makes his home in the Temple. I cannot make my point any clearer. We know that Yahweh will never stand idly by and let pagan infidels destroy his home. Did not Yahweh inform King Solomon upon the dedication of the Temple that his name would be there forever, that his eyes and his heart would always be there? He never violates his promises. What is more, Jerusalem is the holy and chosen city of Yahweh, and it houses the Temple. Look to our Scriptures and discover how many times Yahweh has saved the city from certain destruction. Did he not deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrian hordes when there seemed no way of deliverance? Scripture attests to the fact that Yahweh has committed to save his city.

What is more, on the throne we have the kingly line of David chosen by Yahweh himself. This equates to the preservation of Jerusalem as well, since Yahweh will never wipe out the chosen dynastic line. It would violate his immutable word. Scripture indicates that Yahweh promised David that one from his line would sit on the throne forever! Moreover, Yahweh chose us as his people when he made a covenant with our patriarch Abraham. Yahweh promised Abraham that the very nation that came from his line would be a blessed nation as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. For him to annihilate us would be a violation of his binding covenant. If this evidence is not enough, we possess even more proof that Jerusalem will never fall: both we and Yahweh have an emotional attachment with our homeland, since our loved ones still exist there. Clearly a loving God would not destroy those innocents. We know that this is not the way that he behaves.

All of this evidence from our proud tradition proves for a fact that God is on our side. We are merely asking him to honour his immutable promises and to be consistent with his nature. We know that he is a faithful God who neither leaves nor forsakes his chosen people in his chosen city.

Furthermore, we exiles have heard conflicting reports. Perhaps you were unaware that Ezekiel is not the only prophet here in Babylon. Claiming to speak for Yahweh, the other prophets insist that Jerusalem will be spared! To whom should we listen? Each prophet alleges the he speaks for Yahweh, but none of us can decide

which of these prophets are false. Finally, there is one last point to make. The facts are clear that we are not to blame for our exile, but instead we are suffering in Babylon as a result of the sins of our forefathers. Sour grapes! We would like to know why Yahweh insists upon punishing us for their sins—surely he will not hold the grandchildren responsible for the sins of the grandparents. Once this injustice is brought to his attention, our situation here will quickly be rectified and we will return to the homeland.

One may ask what if the unthinkable occurs and Yahweh completely abandons his chosen people in exile? In that case Jerusalem surely must be destroyed. However, even if Yahweh has deserted us, all is not lost. In order to safeguard our situation, we have not one but two contingency plans. First, we have our magic charms, our amulets that assure Jerusalem's safety. Those who sold them practically guaranteed a one hundred percent success rate. And second, as a last resort we believe that our leaders back home can form an alliance with one of the surrounding nations. This would not be the first time that diplomacy has saved us from a threatening situation. Even if we have to debase ourselves or have to pay tribute, it's still better than allowing Jerusalem to be destroyed.

All of these reasons provide us the certain knowledge that Yahweh will spare Jerusalem. With such certitude, it is obvious why we did not pay too much attention to this latest "oracle" Ezekiel said he received. Certainly we agreed that the wood from the vine is indeed worthless, but why compare Israel to a vinestock? The luscious fruit-bearing vine is our national symbol! The comparison between the vinestock and wood from trees frankly is unfair and also offensive. As if that weren't enough, Ezekiel crossed the line when he proceeded from that unfair comparison to several statements about how Yahweh was going to have Jerusalem destroyed. Maybe those in Jerusalem have been unfaithful to Yahweh a time or two, but name me one person who has not been unfaithful to him. Surely we exiles have not acted unfaithfully. Clearly this whole situation is little more than a misunderstanding soon to be rectified.

As I mentioned earlier, we reached a conclusion of sorts about this oracle. The reality is that we cannot come to an agreement about this latest message. Some of us think Ezekiel clearly suffers from delusions of prophetic grandeur. Remember, we speak a man who claims to be a prophet commissioned by Yahweh, which of course we regard seriously. But we have never heard of a prophet performing actions similar

to Ezekiel. Ezekiel is definitely a madman claiming to speak for Yahweh, but in reality speaks nothing more than riddles. Though interesting to hear for the moment, at the end of the day his words mean nothing more than indecipherable parables. Thus some of us maintain that Ezekiel is absolutely mistaken. Jerusalem will be spared and soon enough we will be back in our homeland, worshiping at the Temple just as before. Matters will surely be put to rights soon enough, and life will carry on without interruption.

Some of us urge caution, however. They state that even if Ezekiel is a bit mad he may in fact be correct. If the messages he delivers come directly from Yahweh then they will absolutely come to pass. Furthermore, if Jerusalem falls it would be hard to see any type of future hope for our nation. According to Ezekiel, however, Yahweh has a future plan for those of us in exile, but it is hard to see the way through to that future. It would appear that he is attempting to destroy the very foundations of everything we accept as correct, which forms our entire belief system. If we abandon those beliefs where does that leave us? Where can we go from there? Surely we have learned our lesson. Haven't we suffered enough? Why can't we simply return to our old way of life before all of this happened?

Point of View 3: Yahweh, the Rhetor

One may ask why I chose Ezekiel to reach the exiles rather than a more effective approach to communicate my purposes and plans. Why task him with such a difficult mission in Babylon? Why commission him with not one, not two, but *three* distinct offices: as a prophet; as a priest; and a watchman? Surely there must be a more effective way to reach these hard-hearted people. Yet I chose Ezekiel and tasked him to carry out my mission to the exiles. Why?

Ezekiel's assignment overwhelmed him from the beginning when he encountered a vision of me that he can never truly put into words. However, once commissioned to be my prophet and watchman, he performed every difficult task I have asked of him, although he has questioned me at times. This proves that although he submits he is not spineless. Since he suffers along with his fellow-exiles, Ezekiel has increased credibility in the eyes of the exilic community. If I had thundered down proclamations from the clouds upon their heads, they would not understand and would most likely cower in fear. This explains why I have tasked the man Ezekiel to deliver my message to them.

As he has already pointed out, the exilic audience understood the value of the vine as a fruit-bearing plant but took offence to the way in which I compared its wood to trees. I used that strategy to hammer home the point concerning the imminent fate of Jerusalem. One may ask why I had Ezekiel deliver a message about the fate of Jerusalem to exiles living nearly one thousand miles away. Surely this message would be better suited for the ears of the Jerusalemites than the exiles. In reality, however, it was precisely the exiles that needed to hear this message, since Jerusalem's doom is assured. The exiles must grasp the reality that nothing they can say or do will spare the city from imminent destruction. Moreover, if the Jerusalemites will not be spared on account of their unfaithfulness, why should I spare the exiles if they also persist in unfaithfulness? The exiles cannot appeal to their "special status" while committing the same atrocities and expect me to do nothing but turn a blind eye.

This oracle contains many implications for the exiles. They must understand first that the exile will be longer rather than shorter. They will not enjoy a speedy return to their homeland where they can live exactly as they did prior to their deportation. My plan involves wiping away virtually every aspect of their old way of life. I am about to smash into a thousand pieces everything they think they know and understand about me, their religion, their security in Jerusalem and the Temple. My desire for them is to focus on the future I have in store for them, and this means leaving the past far behind. Furthermore, the exiles can no longer view me as their contingent cosmic servant. I am not irrevocably tied to honour their every want, their every desire and every wish. I cannot be controlled and am not tied to the commitments they make for me. I must be completely free to do what I must do, even if that involves a distasteful act of judgement upon my chosen people.

My spokesman was therefore burdened with an unenviable task. I engaged him with nothing less than destroying utterly the theological worldview of the exiles. However, this task involves only one aspect of my bigger picture. Only when their entire belief system lies in ruins may the exiles finally come to the place where they can listen to my future plans for the nation. This can only take place when Jerusalem finally falls, which is the foundation forming their entire argument. One could say that the destruction of Jerusalem serves as a metaphor for the destruction of their entire theological position.

I must shatter their position because, on the one hand, it has deluded them into thinking that their position is airtight and therefore unassailable. If this belief system

is unchallenged they will never experience change. On the other hand, their position puts me into a completely untenable position. Their view makes me contingent by tying me irreversibly to honour their claims and promises that I never made, and thus makes me their servant. As a result I will never be free to carry out my plans and purposes, and this state cannot be allowed to continue.

My ultimate plan for the exiles is to preserve some sense of their national identity. I am committed to carrying out the entire strategy involving far-reaching future implications. My hope for them is that in the future, their personal and corporate identity will still be intact. Some day the people may see that it was my hand, and the work of my Spirit, that preserved them both as individuals and as a nation. But I do not enjoy having to work by these means, judging my chosen people that will always have a special place in my heart forever. I do not rejoice when my people suffer.

Nonetheless, I am committed to seeing my plan to fruition. One must realize that my people were unfaithful to me even though I have never been unfaithful to them. I would be perfectly within the legal rights of the covenant to destroy them a hundred times over for their numerous violations. Despite this situation, I could not bring myself to wipe them out utterly from the face of the earth, even though they deserved it time and again. These are my chosen people: the ones whom I love. The exiles are the future, the only hope for the preservation of my chosen people. One day in the future I will remove their hard hearts of stone and replace them with a soft heart of flesh. This will be the work of my Spirit that brings about this transformation. One day they will serve me, safe in their land once again, but it is I who will have made it all possible.

In spite of all the hammer-blows I have rained down upon them, in spite of all the hardship and the suffering, I still fear that these exiles will persist in their unfaithfulness to me. They must come to the place where they abandon the past, together with all that it holds, and embrace the glorious future I have promised for them. Hope for the future can only come from me alone and not by clinging to the illusory hope that Jerusalem will be spared. Ultimately, the exiles must make the choice to abandon their unfaithfulness and enter into my future I have for them. This is where I stand; I have made my case clear.

Critical Analysis of Sample Sermon

Potential Weaknesses

1. The argument of the points of view involving the three characters is difficult to sustain from Ezekiel 15 alone without appealing to the larger contextual situation of Ezekiel. The exiles' response is not clearly represented in this unit, although the presence of the actual exilic audience can be noted in the use of the second-person plural of 15.7a.⁹⁷⁶ Furthermore, Ezekiel's point of view in this unit is the same as Yahweh, if one understands the character-narrator to be faithfully delivering the words of Yahweh verbatim. If read in isolation, some literary units may not be able to serve this particular multiple point-of-view sermon form.

However, the study of Ezekiel 15 in Chapter 5 illustrated that the rhetorical function of smaller literary units can be located in light of the contextual situation of the entire discourse. In the case of a literary unit where the potential audience response is not readily apparent, nonetheless the preacher can accurately replicate the dynamics between various characters in light of the contextual and rhetorical situation of the entire discourse. The sermon established the exilic point of view by noting the various responses of the exiles throughout the discourse, as well as from direct statements about them from Yahweh to Ezekiel. An understanding of the situational nature of the rhetoric involved in the entire discourse becomes indispensable for establishing and replicating these points of view within the sermon.

2. Some listeners may feel uncomfortable with the presentation of Yahweh's point of view. The representation of Yahweh in this manner involves a unique perspective that perhaps receives little time in most pulpits. However, Yahweh's point of view as a character needs representation since "Scripture presents a counter-view of the world, one that militates against the dominant worldviews encountered in societies."⁹⁷⁷ Even though some may feel as if this sermon takes poetic licence with Yahweh as a character, the study in Chapter 5 demonstrated that the discourse of Ezekiel portrays him as a decisive agent who acts with intentionality.

⁹⁷⁶ Yahweh here distinguishes between the putative Jerusalemite audience ("I set my face against *them*") and the actual exilic audience of the oracle ("then *you* will know that I am Yahweh.") see Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 318; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 17; and Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 158.

⁹⁷⁷ Brueggemann, *The Word Militant*, 16. In terms of the prophets, he states, Yahweh "is a key player in the life of the world, even though YHWH as a key player had been largely excluded or domesticated by dominant descriptions of reality. That counterdescription is everywhere committed to representing YHWH as the decisive agent in the life of Israel and in the affairs of the nations" (16).

The sermon illustrates Yahweh's central concern behind the doom prophecies within texts such as Ezekiel 15, which was to convince the exiles that their hope of well-being and independence was indeed false.⁹⁷⁸ Ezekiel itself serves as a theodicy, explaining the motivation of Yahweh as evidenced by his actions of judgement upon Israel and the nations. The sample sermon represents this point of view by articulating in this theodicy, drawn from the way in which the discourse characterizes him, a careful analysis of voice hierarchy and Yahweh's role in the rhetorical situation.

3. Although the sermon attempts to portray the fairest possible point of view of the various characters, one cannot avoid making interpretative moves. Narrative-styled sermons necessitate the inclusion of subjective elements, especially when one attempts to bring a character's voice to life beyond the details found within the discourse. Whilst subjectivity in interpretation is inevitable and unavoidable, it can be balanced, controlled and employed in a disciplined way for the good of the text.⁹⁷⁹ Furthermore, the combination of gaps within the text and the way in which the narrator presents the narrative encourage or even demand interpretation.⁹⁸⁰ As noted earlier, the open-ended nature of the discourse, with its lack of clear examples of the rhetorical effectiveness of the oracles preached to the exiles, lends itself to a multi-vocal and open-ended homiletical form and allows for listeners to wrestle with their own conclusions. This is consistent with the values-based approach to homiletics advocated in Chapter 4, which seeks to construct a homiletic with applicability for postmodern audiences who resist interpretive closure and embrace the polyvalent and open-ended nature of biblical texts.⁹⁸¹

As noted in Chapter 4, this thesis locates itself within the "toward" side of homiletics, which seeks to hold form and content together in both interpretation and meaning and does not avoid interpretative possibilities.⁹⁸² Such a stance embraces the more postmodern concept that all claims to truth are perspectival. Rather than asserting dogmatic conclusions in a deductive-propositional sermon form, sermons

⁹⁷⁸ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 14.

⁹⁷⁹ Fokkelmann, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 25.

⁹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

⁹⁸¹ Jost, "Preaching Old Testament," 39. He observes that the "polyvalence of the biblical text corresponds to the post modern pluralistic paradigm. Reality cannot be reduced to a single perspective. The Old Testament text incorporates various, sometimes competing, viewpoints without trying to reconcile them. Preaching invites the audience to allow the text to catch our attention as we seek to figure out this polyvalent world of text and reader. Preachers need to condition people to relish the multiplicity of messages without becoming frustrated" (39).

⁹⁸² Cosgrove and Edgerton, *In Other Words*, 16.

such as this bring about a respectful conversation by entertaining various points of view. Encountering a different “viewpoint often challenges preachers to clarify what they commend, and what they do not.”⁹⁸³ Therefore the sermon becomes an occasion to prompt growth and new discovery rather than provide authoritative, closed interpretations.⁹⁸⁴

4. The objection may be raised that this sample sermon does not adequately replicate the particular genre of literature found within Ezekiel 15. In the development of the values-based homiletical approach, Chapter 4 articulated the value that the form of the biblical text should impact upon the form of the sermon. In particular, this criticism is aimed at the observation that the multiple point-of-view sample sermon perpetuates some level of violence toward the genre of parable-like argument by analogy of the unit because its form was not reproduced homiletically.

This objection can be answered by noting Craddock’s point that the preacher need not be devoted to reproducing slavishly each aspect of a particular biblical form or genre. While at times the preacher can carry the shape of the text over into the sermon the preacher has freedom to utilize creativity when crafting the sermon form and not distort the biblical genre.⁹⁸⁵ Rather than aiming to reproduce the technicalities of the genre of Ezekiel 15 exactly, this sermon built upon the rhetorical-critical-narratological study within Chapter 5 by demonstrating the rhetorical dynamics and tensions that occur between the three sets of characters. This interpretative move was informed by reading the unit itself in light of contextual situation of Ezekiel. Recasting the sermon as a narrative with characters creates a more accessible format with which listeners can engage yet still achieves what the text attempts to achieve in terms of rhetorical strategy. On this basis, the sermon demonstrated the ability to “do what the text does” and thus achieve what the text achieved in terms of rhetorical function.⁹⁸⁶

5. The final potential weakness concerns the objection that a multiple point-of-view sermon effectively “closes off” other interpretative options for an audience.

⁹⁸³ Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism,” 36.

⁹⁸⁴ Although one could argue that Yahweh’s point of view includes a many “closed” statements explanatory in nature, the discourse of Ezekiel serves as a theodicy of sorts as Yahweh continues to give to the exiles a multiplicity of reasons for his actions.

⁹⁸⁵ Craddock, *Preaching*, 178.

⁹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

Obviously in a single sermon, the preacher cannot possibly represent every possible interpretative option such as feminist, liberation, post-colonial and queer theologies. In order to answer this objection two points will be considered. The first point is that no single homiletical form will serve as a panacea that satisfies every objection. Multiple point-of-view sermons such as this are but one homiletical strategy available to the preacher. Chapter 4 demonstrated that a values-based approach to preaching and leadership intends to stimulate dialogue whether before, during or after the sermon. Such dialogue opens up interpretation of biblical texts by allowing for a collaborative roundtable discussion.⁹⁸⁷

As a second point, in light of the postmodern assertion that all claims to truth are perspectival the values-based homiletical approach embraces preaching forms that reflect these multiple interpretative options. The recognition that every act of awareness is interpretative calls the preacher to help the congregation interpret the act of interpretation itself. By representing fairly, for example, the theological points of view listed in this chapter's sample sermon, the preacher can enable the congregation to become cognizant of their own interpretative lenses through which they perceive life. Through this exploration, deeper and more respectful conversations can result.⁹⁸⁸

Potential Strengths

1. Multiple point-of-view sermons allow the audience a fairer representation of each of the characters' perspectives and opens up room for continued dialogue. Chapter 4 highlighted the close relationship between preaching and congregational leadership philosophy in terms of organizational culture. Not every congregation will feel comfortable with dialogical sermon models, especially those still operating within traditional liturgical contexts. Like the situation faced by Ezekiel, however, the old systems are in the process of passing away, and new modes are approaching on the horizon. Churches continue to use the inappropriate and dated categories of traditional practical theology, "but these are embedded in a world that is passing away before our eyes."⁹⁸⁹

Chapters 1 and 3 demonstrated that the preaching situation in the Western tradition continues to evolve as older modes of church absolutes are decreasingly

⁹⁸⁷ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 49; McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching*, 61-62.

⁹⁸⁸ Allen, "Preaching and Postmodernism," 36.

⁹⁸⁹ Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology*, 1, 2.

trusted. Traditional church structures are increasingly viewed as patriarchal, hierarchic, monologic and authoritarian. Clearly discernable lines of authoritarianism are nonverbally communicated not only in intonation and manner, but in the form and movement of the sermon as well.⁹⁹⁰ The Enlightenment goals of objectivity in biblical studies and preaching militate against the more postmodern value of communal learning and experiences.

In this connection, Brueggemann advances the notion that the postmodern value of pluralism represents a new reality for preaching. Such a pluralistic context involves the connection between the orientation and perspective of an interpretative community that both hears and interprets the biblical text with an awareness of the polyvalent nature of Scripture.⁹⁹¹ Within such a pluralistic context, preaching makes proposals and advocacies but does not seek to advance “objective” conclusions. This mode of preaching can only function in a conversation where no participant seeks to convert the other and no participant knows the outcome ahead of time. Rather, the discussion functions when each participant enters “with full respect for the good faith of others and the willingness to entertain the troublesome thought that new ‘truth’ received together may well be out in front of any of us.”⁹⁹²

Such a form of collaborative preaching and leadership fits within the homiletical values advanced within this thesis. This approach may well fit emerging or postmodern church contexts that value multi-vocal sermons and non-hierarchical congregational leadership forms. Such communities embrace the values of connectedness, a sense of community and dialogue whereby all participants can speak out in a context of trust and safety.⁹⁹³ Postmodernism, notes Jost, identifies the bankruptcy of individualism fostered by the Enlightenment focus on a fundamentally individualistic rationalism. A homiletic that lets the text speak “in its own voice” as much as is possible demonstrates that the biblical text refuses to whitewash its heroes. Preaching that avoids an easy moralistic solution, and that engages with a variety of points of view, fosters a more dialogic homiletic of realistic authenticity and hopeful anticipation that potentially builds authentic community.⁹⁹⁴

⁹⁹⁰ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 17.

⁹⁹¹ Brueggemann, *The Word Militant*, 23.

⁹⁹² Brueggemann, *The Word Militant*, 21-22.

⁹⁹³ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 122-130.

⁹⁹⁴ Jost, “Preaching Old Testament,” 40. He states that “the Old Testament story of the struggle for community speaks more powerfully to post moderns who are lost in the sea of individualism than a mythical communitarian ideal without struggle” (40).

2. Although this is a sample sermon, it represents merely one homiletical possibility. The values-based homiletic articulated in Chapter 4 noted that effective preaching takes place using a multiplicity of creative forms. Furthermore, preaching itself must be integrated in conjunction with leadership styles, philosophy of ministry and the culture of the particular congregation. The homiletical form chosen for the literary unit of Ezekiel 15 could involve many preaching forms that nonetheless replicate the rhetorical dynamics of the text. Examples include the following: single point of view first-person narrative sermons representing Ezekiel, the exiles or Yahweh; inductive or plot-like sermons that attempts to guide the listeners along in the interpretative process; topical sermons developing either a single or multiple themes from the unit; a more deductive sermon form that teaches content in light of the larger context of the discourse; or finally an interactive and dialogical study of the unit.⁹⁹⁵

3. The sermon demonstrates how one can begin to draw dynamic equivalents from the text and place them within the current rhetorical situation. Whilst its focus remains upon the diegetic levels of characters and narrator, the level of “inner explanation” within the sermon allows the engaged listener to identify with the individual characters. On this basis the listener can thereby draw equivalent implications for his or her own situation.

The sermon advances the goal of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by illustrating the transference between the rhetorical-critical exegesis of the literary unit and the replication of those rhetorical dynamics for the listeners. This allows the hearers personally to experience the tensions of the exigence, and fulfils Craddock’s value of allowing the audience to experience inductively the process of exegesis. In this regard, the method itself brings about the experience for the listeners.⁹⁹⁶ As an example of this notion of transference, Brueggemann establishes dynamic equivalents between the historical context of Ezekiel’s day and the contemporary North American context. Such a move involves establishing “what it meant” for the characters of Yahweh, Ezekiel and the exiles and “what it means” for current church ministry contexts in the West. On this basis Brueggemann argues that the exiles’ contingent view of Yahweh is starkly similar to that of many North American churches preaching a gospel of social utilitarianism. This viewpoint, like

⁹⁹⁵ See Duck, *Finding Words of Worship*, 52.

⁹⁹⁶ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 44.

that of the exiles, identifies God as attached to certain ideological causes.⁹⁹⁷ Although the sermon does not make this dynamic equivalent explicit, identification with the various points of view within the sermon potentially allows the engaged hearer to identify similar trends and patterns in his or her theological worldview.

Areas of Continuity and Discontinuity with Ezekiel 15 Sermons

In addition to this critical evaluation of the sample multiple-point-of view sermon, the chapter now further engages in a critical analysis relating to the Ezekiel 15 sermons assessed within Chapter 6. The purpose of this analysis is to illustrate areas of continuity and discontinuity between the homiletical approaches of Edwards, Spurgeon, and Smith and the approach of this thesis. Furthermore, such a critical evaluation provides for a demonstration of the particular contributions that the rhetorical-critical-narratological exegetical methodology makes to the production of homiletical forms.

Areas of Continuity

The single area of continuity between the approach in this thesis and the sermon evaluated in Chapter 6 is found only partially with Smith's sermon. Unlike the other two sermons, Smith makes the connection between the vine and the literary historical context of Israel. Chapter 5 demonstrated that a development of the literary history of Israel as a vine metaphor in the OT is a key element of the argument of Ezekiel 15. However, this continuity with Smith is merely partial.

The interpretation of the literary unit of Ezekiel 15 in Chapter 5 demonstrated that Yahweh's rhetorical strategy makes use of the rhetorical strategy of tradition and innovation. Yahweh begins his argument within the realm of tradition and then misdirects the exilic hearers by using the innovative strategy of a quasi-argument. Through a series of rhetorical questions, Yahweh draws the analogy between the vinestock and the lumber from trees. By redirecting the attention to the vinestock and not upon the fruitfulness of the vine itself, Yahweh's argument focuses upon the issue of the utilitarian uselessness of the vinestock.

⁹⁹⁷ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 85-87.

Within the second half of the unit, this argument extends to encompass Yahweh's subsequent issue of the judgement of the Jerusalemites upon the grounds of unfaithfulness. The resulting application for the exilic audience forces them to examine their own potential unfaithfulness in the face of Yahweh's judgement upon the Jerusalemites for the same reason. Viewed in light of the contextual situation of the discourse, this unit strikes a blow one of the exiles' ideological pillars that supported a contingent view of Yahweh.⁹⁹⁸ Rather than drawing upon a potentially weak correlation to John 15 that encourages current believers to "bear much fruit" as Smith posits, the chapter suggested dynamic equivalents for contemporary readers that are consistent with the rhetorical goals of the unit itself.

Areas of Discontinuity

There are six areas of discontinuity between this approach and those taken in the sermons evaluated in Chapter 6. First, the study within Chapter 5 demonstrated that this approach is a rhetorical-critical-narratological method that seeks to uncover inductively the various rhetorical dynamics present in the discourse. The resulting analysis of voice hierarchies clarified the distinctions between the rhetor Yahweh and the messenger Ezekiel, the contents and rhetorical effectiveness of the message, and the reception of the exilic audience. This approach follows Davis's suggestion that one should view the text in terms of the rhetorical function of its distinctive forms of speech rather than focusing upon its source history.⁹⁹⁹ None of the evaluated sermons present any of these rhetorical dynamics: they focus instead upon the issue of fruitfulness or fruitlessness and its application mainly for their liturgical context. In this regard, the preachers appear to read the text with scant regard for its meaning for the historical exilic audience in their desire to bridge the gap into their contemporary church era.¹⁰⁰⁰

Second, Chapter 5 demonstrated the contextual nature of the approach by examining the outer framework of Ezekiel from a synchronic point of view prior to reading the literary unit of Ezekiel 15. The study viewed the discourse of Ezekiel as a literary unity and sought to understand how smaller sections of the book function

⁹⁹⁸ Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 8; Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 81.

⁹⁹⁹ Davis, "Swallowing the Scroll," 716.

¹⁰⁰⁰ McKnight points out that in a sense this hermeneutic imitates a pre-critical, pre-Enlightenment reading of the text, where "the cultural and intellectual difference between the biblical world and the reader's world was small. No distinction was made between the world depicted in the Bible and the real historical world" ("Reader-Response Criticism," 203).

together to achieve its overall rhetorical aims.¹⁰⁰¹ The study also established the larger contextual frame of Ezekiel by examining the issues of genre, rhetorical situation, narratological strategies and the rhetorical effectiveness of the book as a whole. Additionally, the study demonstrated how Ezekiel 15 fits into its contextual situation, both in the literary history of the OT and the book of Ezekiel. Whilst Edwards and Spurgeon alike make scant mention of this history, Smith develops it in the greatest depth. However, none of the preachers go into any detail regarding how Ezekiel 15 fits into its contextual situation. As the sample sermon demonstrated, the resulting homiletical strategy makes use of this contextual analysis in order to replicate the exilic point of view.

Third, this approach clarifies the issue of the genre of Ezekiel 15. As noted in Chapter 5, many commentators view the vine in 15.2-3 as a metaphor set within a parable. Edwards labels it an allegory, while Spurgeon and Smith refer to it as a parable. The study of Ezekiel 15 demonstrated that Yahweh does not employ metaphor by stating that “Israel *is* a vinestock,” but rather makes the analogous comparison between the vinestock and the wood of the trees. Furthermore, nowhere within Ezekiel 15 is the unit self-labelled. It is not called a *lv*m** in the unit as in 17.1, which is the only parable in the OT explicitly labelled,¹⁰⁰² or a *hn`yql* as in 19.1. It does not seem to function as an “illustrative story” or extended metaphor as do other parables in the OT.¹⁰⁰³ Snodgrass defines parables as “stories with two levels of meaning; the story level provides a mirror by which reality is perceived and understood.”¹⁰⁰⁴ All three preachers proceed on the basis of the identification of the unit as a parable, but none of the three develop its rhetorical function as a parable. Rather, they seize upon the issue of fruitfulness or fruitlessness as the exegetical basis of their arguments and subsequent applications.

A fourth area of discontinuity concerns the narratological elements of the approach, which in the study of Ezekiel 15 clearly distinguished levels of voice

¹⁰⁰¹ Boadt’s article “Mythological Themes” demonstrates how the various larger units (1-24, 25-32, and 33-48) function together to produce a coherent and demonstrable argument (228-230).

¹⁰⁰² Snodgrass, “Parable,” 595.

¹⁰⁰³ *Ibid.*, 595. Snodgrass identifies only seven parables in the OT: 2 Sam. 12.1-10; 2 Sam. 14.5-20; I Kin. 20.35-40; Ezek. 17.2-10 and 19.10-14; and finally Isa. 5.1-7.

¹⁰⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 594.

hierarchy.¹⁰⁰⁵ Although acknowledging the presence of Yahweh to a certain extent, all three preachers tend to conflate the voices, typically making Ezekiel the originator of the various oracles found within the discourse. Except for Smith, both Edwards and Spurgeon miss the exilic audience dynamic found in the third-person address in 15.7. The exegetical approach in this thesis clarifies that the first voice the reader encounters is Ezekiel is the character-narrator. The study clarifies that the second voice heard belongs to Yahweh, who begins the oracle by speaking to Ezekiel the character-narrator as the “son of man.” By failing to take this voice hierarchy into account, the preachers overlook a major rhetorical dynamic which concerns the tensions inherent between Yahweh, Ezekiel and the actual exilic audience to whom the oracle was addressed. The study makes the distinction particularly clear between the Jerusalemites with whom the oracle is concerned and the exiles who actually heard the message.¹⁰⁰⁶

The fifth area of discontinuity between the sermons and the approach of this thesis concerns the attempt to trace the rhetorical strategies in the unit of Ezekiel 15 in light of the book as a whole. The delineation of voice hierarchies in Chapter 5 demonstrated that, within the unit, it was Yahweh who originated the oracle and subsequent rhetorical strategies, not Ezekiel. Furthermore, the rhetorical-critical study illustrated how these strategies functioned to achieve Yahweh’s rhetorical goal(s) within the discourse. The previous chapter noted that although Yahweh did not specifically mention the lack of the vine’s fruitfulness, the hearers would have inferred or supplied that connection from Israel’s literary history and this is exactly what Yahweh desired for the exilic audience. This rhetorical strategy involves misdirection due to the nature of the analogy itself by drawing attention to the utilitarian uselessness of the vine-stock when compared to useful lumber from trees. Both Edwards and Spurgeon, and to a lesser extent Smith, by placing the focus of their interpretation upon the issue of fruitfulness ironically fall victim to the misdirection strategy of the unit itself and instead follow an interpretative path leading to John 15.

The sixth area of discontinuity relates to the clarification which the approach of this thesis brings to the issue of the audiences of the oracle and of the book as a

¹⁰⁰⁵ La Driere observes that “In the analysis of a speech or literary composition, nothing is more important than to determine precisely the voice or voices presented as speaking and the precise nature of the address” (“Voice and Address,” 441-442).

¹⁰⁰⁶ Renz, *The Rhetorical Function*, 34.

whole. None of the evaluated sermons make clear at which audience the oracle is aimed. Edwards seems to relate it to several audiences, including the Jerusalemites, the “visible church” and all of humanity.¹⁰⁰⁷ Spurgeon briefly admits that the referent seems to relate to Israel, but spends the majority of his time dealing with issues of his contemporary church era. Smith does this also; however, in distinction to Edwards and Spurgeon’s fairly negativistic tone and by contrast he views the passage positively in light of Jesus’ exhortations found in John 15.

In contrast to the exegetical approach of these three preachers, Chapter 5 demonstrated a reading of the text from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives which noted the differences between the oral and written levels. This approach clarified the distinctions between Ezekiel the character-narrator, Yahweh the rhetor, the putative audience of the Jerusalemites, the actual audience of the exiles and finally all later readers of the finished text. The resulting clarifications form a critical connection for understanding the rhetorical focus and function of the discourse for both historical and literary audiences.¹⁰⁰⁸ This interpretative clarification allows the preacher to ascertain areas of possible identification between the historical audience and contemporary audiences by viewing them both as addressees of the text along a continuum over time.¹⁰⁰⁹

1 Cor. 4.18-5.13: A Rhetorical-Critical-Homiletical Case Study

Introduction

The following study of the discursive literature of 1 Corinthians demonstrates the effectiveness of the approach of this thesis when applied to other genres of biblical literature. The purpose of this section is not to engage in an in-depth exegetical study of the text of 1 Corinthians 4.18-5.13, but rather to demonstrate the rhetorical-critical exegetical approach of this thesis when applied to a biblical genre other than the monologic narrative of Ezekiel.¹⁰¹⁰ Heil points out that rhetorical-

¹⁰⁰⁷ Edwards, “Wicked Men,” 300-301.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Boadt observes that literary approaches such as this move away from exclusively historical-critical concerns for the origins and editorial development of texts, “seeking instead to interpret the biblical texts as literary objects in their own right, and at the same time to highlight the role of readers in the interpretive process” (“The Poetry of Prophetic Persuasion,” 1).

¹⁰⁰⁹ Beuken, “Isaiah 28,” 21.

¹⁰¹⁰ For an approach that combines rhetorical criticism and homiletics on a dialogic narrative text see for example Koptak’s article “Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: A Resource for Preaching,” *Covenant Quarterly* Vol. LIV, No. 3 (August 1996): 26-37.

critical approaches to the epistles of Paul are currently in vogue in NT studies due to the nature of the materials themselves. Paul, himself trained in Graeco-Roman rhetoric, transformed and adapted it for his own purposes. Furthermore he also made use of distinctive Hebrew rhetorical devices and the Septuagint when constructing his argument. Through the use of distinctive rhetorical techniques and Scripture, therefore, Paul did not merely aim at informing his listeners but to persuade and transform them in a variety of ways.¹⁰¹¹ Although 1 Corinthians can be technically defined as discourse literature as an epistolary genre,¹⁰¹² the pastoral concerns of Paul proclaim a “narrative” of sorts, as Phillips points out: “The world had come into the church. What Paul had to say about *that* is the subject matter of his Corinthian letters.”¹⁰¹³ Utilizing the method illustrated in the study below leads to an understanding of the situational nature of the rhetoric within 1 Corinthians. This approach then allows the preacher to apply a measure of exegetical rigour to the text in a step-by-step fashion. Moreover, the results of that study allow the preacher to carry across the rhetorical dynamics of the text in such a way that the audience both experiences and participates in them to a certain extent. Such an exegetical and homiletical formulation demonstrates the values-based approach to homiletics advanced within this thesis, which seeks to let the form of the text inform the strategy and form of the sermon itself.¹⁰¹⁴

The account that the Corinthian church was guilty of tolerating gross immorality reached Paul by rumour and common report, and the text bears witness to his righteous indignation at the flagrant nature of the immorality.¹⁰¹⁵ The way in which Paul utilizes various rhetorical constraints in responding to this exigence establishes his vision of Christian community that involves a high level of group consciousness. His strategies additionally sought to authenticate his status and role within a voluntaristic community.¹⁰¹⁶ The following analysis of the contextual and rhetorical situation within this literary unit will illustrate the goal of this thesis concerning the ability of rhetorical criticism to inform multi-vocal homiletical

¹⁰¹¹ Heil, *The Rhetorical Role of Scripture*, 4-5.

¹⁰¹² See Thiselton’s discussion of epistolary genre in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 44.

¹⁰¹³ Phillips, *Exploring 1 Corinthians*, 9.

¹⁰¹⁴ This echoes the sentiment of Randolph, one of the early proponents of the New Homiletic. Three decades ago he called for the renewal of preaching such that preaching would be defined as “the event in which the biblical text is interpreted in order that its meaning will come to expression in the concrete situation of the hearers” (“Toward a New Homiletic,” 1).

¹⁰¹⁵ Phillips, *Exploring 1 Corinthians*, 109.

¹⁰¹⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 152-153.

strategies. Such preaching forms are consistent with the values-based approach to homiletics that seeks to replicate creatively the rhetorical dynamics of the biblical text. Moreover, the representation of the variety of points of view within the passage can lead to a more open-ended and dialogical homiletical form that potentially increases the level of audience participation and ownership. Such a multi-vocal and polyvalent approach therefore has applications for increasingly postmodern audiences.

The Outer Framework of 1 Corinthians

As with the treatment of Ezekiel, the study of this literary unit first begins with an assessment of the contextual situation of the outer frame of the entire book prior to a close reading of the unit itself. Rather than focusing solely upon diachronic concerns related to historical context and source materials, this reading utilizes a synchronic analysis which treats the entire book holistically as a literary unit in the attempt to discern the rhetoric of the book.¹⁰¹⁷ Furthermore, the critic has two possibilities in terms of the reconstruction of the audience. On a diachronic level, one could engage in a discussion of the legitimacy of Pauline authorship, the historical context of Paul and that of the Corinthian audience, the possible sources that make up the two letters and the possible rhetorical effectiveness of the letter upon the original readers.¹⁰¹⁸ Conversely, on the level of synchronic readings level the critic could adopt a literary and rhetorical approach, reading the text as a case study in terms of Paul's rhetorical strategies when dealing with a disunified and dysfunctional church. Such a reading does not ignore the historical context of the original readers, but also involves the engaging the contexts of all later readers of the letter. This study of 1 Corinthians will adopt a complementary reading that engages with the historic audience, the rhetorical strategies located within the letter itself and all subsequent readers and environments unanticipated by the actual author.¹⁰¹⁹ Such a reading allows the preacher to draw dynamic equivalents from the context of the historical audience within the text to the contemporary homiletical situation.

¹⁰¹⁷ Gitay, "Reflections on the Study," 216; Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 33.

¹⁰¹⁸ Marshall, Travis, and Paul, *Exploring the New Testament Vol. 2*, 74; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 29-40. Some scholars believe, for example, that because of their apparent fragmentary nature both 1 and 2 Corinthians involve compilations from several Pauline letters that can be rearranged in a different chronology. Others doubt that Paul was the author of certain letters attributed to him.

¹⁰¹⁹ Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality," 156.

Classen indicates that when analyzing NT letters rhetorically, the exegete should seek to identify “the writer’s intention in directing it to an individual or a group of persons or even several groups.”¹⁰²⁰ In terms of the rhetorical situation the author uses his judgement by assessing a particular situation involving an exigence and the possible audience(s) involved. The author decides what to say and how to pose it to the listeners in the particular circumstances. Operative constraints guide the author regarding the choice of various rhetorical strategies that may or may not be effective in achieving his rhetorical goals.¹⁰²¹ On the literary level, the rhetorical situation of 1 Corinthians reveals multiple exigences which Paul attempted to address throughout the letter. The situational nature of this discursive rhetoric allows the preacher to reconstruct elements of those dynamics for an audience, rather than adopting a more traditional propositional-deductive homiletical form.

An analysis of the rhetorical situation of 1 Corinthians reveals that the major exigence Paul faced involved his audience that consisted of a church deeply divided into various schisms and factions (1.10-12; 3.1-9; 11.17-18). In short, dissension had infested the Corinthian church.¹⁰²² This overarching exigence manifested itself in multiple specific issues, which included the following examples: these included splinter groups claiming to follow differing authorities (1.12; 3.4); a party spirit and associated spiritual attitudes (1.10-4.21); sexual immorality apparently tolerated within the church (5-6.9-20); litigation in the church (6.1-7); debates over the roles and status of singles and married, and questions regarding divorce (7); the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols and idolatry (8, 10); attacks on Paul’s apostolic authority (9); divisions between rich and poor at the Lord’s Supper (11); debates over superior and inferior spiritual gifts (12-14); the status of believers who died prior to the resurrection (15) and finally the collection for the Jerusalem church (16).

In order to achieve his rhetorical goal of defusing the debates and re-unifying a fractious church, Paul made use multiple operative constraints as rhetorical strategies, involving for example: logical argumentation and rhetorical questions (*passim*), sarcasm and irony (4.8-13), image and metaphor (5.6-8; 12.14-26), quotations from Scripture (1.19, 31; 9.9; 14.21; etc.), argumentative and polemical

¹⁰²⁰ Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament*, 46.

¹⁰²¹ *Ibid.*, 46; Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” 220.

¹⁰²² Calvin, *Commentaries on Corinthians Volume 1*, 22.

statements (15.2, 36), autobiographical reference (1.14-17; 2.1-5; 15.3-11) and quotations from secular proverbs (15.32-33).

A final consideration concerns the rhetorical effectiveness of Paul's rhetorical strategies. The critic must analyze whether or not Paul achieved his goal of re-unifying this divided and schismatic church. 2 Cor. 1.12-2.12 appears to give evidence that his painful visit and earlier letter resulted in some positive outcomes within the church. However, the letter concludes on a doubtful note as he anticipates finding further schisms, outbursts and sexual immorality within the church during a subsequent visit (12.19-13.10). Clearly the relationship between Paul and the Corinthian church involved much difficulty, and one must question the rhetorical effectiveness of Paul's advice to the church located within the literary unit studied below.

A Rhetorical-Critical Reading of the Literary Unit of 4.18-5.13

The first step in a rhetorical-critical approach is to delineate the boundaries of the literary unit, recognizing as precisely as possible where it begins and ends.¹⁰²³ At this point two options present themselves regarding the division of this unit. Fee, Witherington, Phillips and Thiselton all establish the boundaries of the unit as encompassing 5.1-13, focusing upon the moral matter prior to moving on to the issue of lawsuits in 6.1ff.¹⁰²⁴ A second option is that of Calvin, who believed that 4.21 should have been made the beginning of the fifth chapter rather than as it is in current chapter divisions.¹⁰²⁵ The case can be made that the entire unit of 4.18-5.13 encloses a logical argument. As Paul discusses his potential visit in 4.18ff, in 4.21 he gives the Corinthians the choice as to what his coming visit might look like if they chose to heed or disregard his advice. The unit further displays linguistic connections as Paul characterizes the Corinthian audience as "puffed up" (ἐφυσιώθησάν, 4.18-19, 5.2) and as "boasting" (καύχημα, 5.6). This approach will adopt the second option and will treat the literary unit as encompassing 1 Cor. 4.18-5.13.

¹⁰²³ Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," 57.

¹⁰²⁴ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 194; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 151; Phillips, *Exploring 1 Corinthians*, 108; and Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 381. Fee notes, however, that there are verbal ties between 5.1 and the previous section as noted by Paul's use of the term "arrogant" in both sections (194); Thiselton maintains that links readily emerge with this new unit and 1.10-4.21 because of the common issue of community divisiveness (381).

¹⁰²⁵ Calvin, *Commentaries on Corinthians Volume 1*, 136.

The second step in the rhetorical-critical analysis is to describe the rhetorical situation. Paul the rhetor describes the exigence, which consists of two elements: the first is an apparent case of incest or at the least gross immorality (5.1b), and the second element concerns the acceptance and tolerance of the situation of the Corinthian church, who seemed proud of their open-mindedness (5.2, 6a). Paul argues that not even those within the secular world would tolerate such a situation; worse, they were arrogant about it (5.1-2a). Both culprit and church were therefore guilty, and Paul “was astounded that such behavior could be tolerated for a moment.”¹⁰²⁶ Paul faced an apparently impossible exigence that would “seem to imply that these people thought that any kind of conduct was compatible with being a Christian.”¹⁰²⁷

The third task of rhetorical criticism is to identify the stance of the rhetor. Within this unit the stance of Paul is certainly not that of a dispassionate spectator witnessing these events, but rather the stance of an active and authoritative participant in the exigence and its potential solution. In order to authenticate his role in this crisis of authority,¹⁰²⁸ Paul makes it clear that he plans on visiting them to rectify the situation in person (4.19-20) and in the meantime that their actions decided what that visit might entail. He could either come with a whip, or alternatively in a gentle spirit (4.21).

Such an active stance also reveals the constraints Paul utilized as rhetorical strategies for dealing with the exigence and to convince his audience to modify it. These strategies include rhetorical questions designed to engage the audience (5.2b; 6b; 12a-b), passing judgement on the offender by proxy (5.3-4), use of the yeast metaphor to illustrate the influence of sin in the church (5.6b-8), reinforcing the command of an earlier letter (5.9), imperative statements (5.4-5; 11-12) and finally use of biblical citation as an additional authority (5.13b). As an additional motivator, Paul revealed the potential damage if the situation were allowed to continue (5.6), and upon this basis he used an imperative to command them to expel the immoral brother from the church (5.2b-5; 13b). The focus upon the grave consequences of the wrongdoing of the church as opposed to the sins of the individual reveals that Paul is far more concerned with the church and its attitudes.¹⁰²⁹

¹⁰²⁶ Phillips, *Exploring 1 Corinthians*, 109.

¹⁰²⁷ Marshall, Travis and Paul, *Exploring the New Testament*, 82.

¹⁰²⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 195.

¹⁰²⁹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 195.

The final step in the rhetorical-critical process is to analyze the effectiveness of the rhetorical strategies used by the rhetor in achieving his goals. Scholars have been divided over this issue, but 2 Cor. 2.5-6 appears to give evidence that the Corinthians indeed followed Paul's advice in expelling the sexually immoral man from the congregation. The matter could now be brought to an end following the successful application of church discipline, which caused the offender to repent and to seek forgiveness.¹⁰³⁰ Paul's greater concern, as evidenced in both passages, involved the potential behaviour of the audience. He reveals that the reason he wrote to them was to see if they would stand the test and obey his injunctions, which apparently they did (2 Cor. 2.9). The application of strict community discipline made clear the limits of acceptable behaviour and established the moral boundaries of the community.¹⁰³¹ Having corrected their earlier clemency and carelessness, nothing now should hinder them from lifting up the downcast and repentant man.¹⁰³²

Homiletical Strategies

The next step in the process of the integration of biblical studies and homiletics concerns the formation of a homiletical strategy in order to present the findings of the rhetorical-critical reading of the text. The values-based homiletical approach advanced in Chapter 4 noted that in order to give the sermon integrity, the form of the text should ideally impact the form of the sermon, but not be slavishly bound in every case to replicate it. More important than replicating form is to discern what the text achieves rhetorically and then to design the sermon in such a way that it achieve similar ends.¹⁰³³ The situational nature of the rhetoric in the unit allows the preacher to explore a multiplicity of homiletical strategies, all of which are designed to replicate the textual dynamics and therefore engage the listeners.

For example, one could construct the sermon as a narrative, since the above observations regarding the rhetorical situation demonstrated the involvement of three "characters." The first involves Paul the rhetor, second the man involved in the incestuous relationship, and third the audience of the Corinthian church. This situation gives rise to multiple homiletical possibilities that illustrate the rhetorical dynamics of the unit. One could construct a first-person narration from any of the points of view: a

¹⁰³⁰ Marshall, Travis and Paul, *Exploring the New Testament*, 96.

¹⁰³¹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 161.

¹⁰³² Calvin, *Commentaries on Corinthians Volume 2*, 109.

¹⁰³³ Craddock, *Preaching*, 178, 179.

multiple point-of-view narration as in the sample sermon. Finally, one could design an interactive study assigning each character to a group of participants and engaging the groups to justify the particular actions of each character.

Furthermore, the preacher could also present the situational nature of the unit in terms of a “plot-like” narrative sermon style that portrays the conflict as a problem to be solved, either as a case study from ancient Corinth or as a narrative imaginatively retranslated into a current church context.¹⁰³⁴ From a deconstructive point of view, the preacher could facilitate a dialogue that “interprets interpretation” by identifying and then debating some of the various theological and leadership issues that arise from this passage. Additionally, the preacher could initiate a discussion examining how this passage has been interpreted within church tradition, or by various theological positions such as feminist, liberationist or black theologians.

Whilst this list of homiletical possibilities is not an exhaustive list, each strategy attempts to achieve what the passage achieved by revealing and exploring the dynamics of the situational nature of the rhetoric involved. By engaging within these preaching forms, the preacher need not preach the passage to the listeners in a propositional-deductive fashion, but rather can seek to involve the audience through a variety of participatory strategies.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated its advancement of the goal of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics with the production of a multi-vocal sample sermon. The sermon illustrated the culmination of the integration of the rhetorical-critical-narratological approach advanced in Chapter 3 and the values-based homiletic advocated in Chapter 4. Utilizing the study of Ezekiel and Ezekiel 15 within Chapter 5, the resulting multiple point-of-view sermon illustrated its ability to replicate the rhetorical dynamics of the biblical text. The critical analysis of the sermon demonstrated an awareness of the potential strengths and weaknesses of the sermon form, and furthermore illustrated areas of continuity and discontinuity between the approach of the thesis and that of the Ezekiel 15 sermons evaluated within Chapter 6. Finally, the rhetorical-critical reading of a discursive biblical genre drawn from 1 Corinthians demonstrated the benefits of the approach of this thesis for a genre

¹⁰³⁴ Such an approach follows Lowry’s narrative preaching model as articulated in his work *The Homiletical Plot*.

differing from that of the monologic narrative of Ezekiel. The concluding suggestions for homiletical strategies arising from the study of 1 Corinthians illustrates the potential for preachers to achieve what the text achieved in terms of its rhetorical function.

The following chapter will conclude the thesis by analyzing the contribution each chapter made toward achieving the goal of this work as well as a critical analysis of the thesis argument. The chapter will suggest areas for further studies beyond the scope of the thesis and will finish with a contextual interpretation of contemporary responses to preaching and postmodernism.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 8

THESIS CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study began by postulating that since both the preaching and hearing contexts of the Western church have experienced major changes within the last thirty years, contemporary homiletics exhibits much confusion regarding the relationship between the biblical text and the sermon.¹⁰³⁵ By way of response, this thesis addresses this issue by advocating a values-based approach that integrates biblical studies and homiletics as a productive unity. This thesis demonstrates a consistent and coherent method of theological interpretation by applying an adaptation of Richard Osmer's hermeneutical cycle model,¹⁰³⁶ thus establishing a pragmatic plan for future homiletics as a measured response to an increasingly postmodern context as heralded by major cultural paradigm shifts.¹⁰³⁷ As a practical theological work, this thesis addresses both the life and practices of the church in addition to the relationship of those practices to the wider society, focusing upon the issue of the interconnectedness of ministry as well as the relationship of theory to practice.¹⁰³⁸

The thesis consistently engages in the task of contextual theological interpretation by connecting with both Christian tradition and Scripture, moving through the tasks of information-gathering, evaluation, analysis and the formation of a pragmatic plan for future homiletics. The interpretative nature of this task has led the thesis to the formation of a rhetorical-critical exegetical approach as well as a values-based approach to homiletics and congregational leadership. In order to illustrate the outcome of the hermeneutical cycle, in the previous chapter the thesis demonstrates the results of the integration of biblical studies and homiletics approach in the production of a sample multiple-point-of-view sermon based upon the text of Ezekiel 15.

Chapter 1 introduces the problem the thesis aims to address by demonstrating that the current confusion between text and sermon exists for the three reasons. First, since the 1960s the increasingly post-Christian culture with its questioning of

¹⁰³⁵ Imminck, "Homiletics: The Current Debate," 89-90; Thompson, "Text and Sermon," 32.

¹⁰³⁶ See Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 10ff.

¹⁰³⁷ As noted within Chapter 2, postmodernism can be defined in either philosophical or sociological and economic terms. The preacher, as a congregational leader, must therefore be aware of these larger contextual issues in terms of both social standing and the wider society to which he or she is attempting to minister.

¹⁰³⁸ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 1; Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 12.

traditional authorities led to a fundamental change in the nature of the historic relationship between the authoritative preacher and the passive listener.¹⁰³⁹ Second, the rigorous application of historical-critical exegetical methods that ideally led the preacher to a nonintrusive view of the biblical text in its own milieu has been demonstrated to be neither objective nor free from ideological assumptions.¹⁰⁴⁰ Finally, the current multiplicity of rival interpretative voices has altered the landscape both for biblical studies and preaching.¹⁰⁴¹ Chapter 1 notes, however, that this variety of hermeneutical voices within the contemporary context potentially opens the way to a reimagining and reinterpretation of the preaching task.

As a measured response to the contemporary situation, Chapter 1 clarifies that the goal of the thesis was to argue that attention to rhetorical criticism in the exegesis of biblical texts sheds new light on the nature of preaching in terms of homiletical theory and practice, form and function. This integration of biblical studies and homiletics results in a multi-vocal and non-hierarchical preaching form that is appropriate to postmodernity. The chapter concludes with an overview of each following chapter and discusses how each chapter contributed to achieving the goals of the thesis.

Chapter 2 establishes the structural methodology consistently employed within the thesis by illustrating the hermeneutical process of contextual interpretation with which the thesis engages. The chapter demonstrates the four tasks of the hermeneutical cycle adapted from Richard Osmer's model. The resulting contextual interpretation and analysis advances the notion that the Western church currently exists in a state of liminality, caught in a marginal experience between cultural norms in the shift from modernist to increasingly postmodernist worldviews.¹⁰⁴² The chapter concludes firstly that in light of this observation, the Western church faces the ongoing need for revitalization and relevance in both preaching and leadership, and secondly that the approach of this thesis serves as a potential response to this need. Such a homiletic can therefore serve as a new approach for new times by attempting to converge the elements of emerging need, historical theology and careful biblical study. The methodological approach in this thesis results in an integration of "new"

¹⁰³⁹ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 14.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Long, "The Use of Scripture," 342.

¹⁰⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 342.

¹⁰⁴² See Turner's, *The Ritual Process*, 166-167, and his article "Variations on a Theme of Liminality," 87ff, as well as Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation*, 26-27.

rooted in “old” and thereby brings about lasting potency for church ministry.¹⁰⁴³ Furthermore, the chapter maintains that contextually-based approaches such as that utilized for this thesis avoid the charge that theological reflection oftentimes is weak in its use and development of traditional Christian sources, namely Scripture and church history.¹⁰⁴⁴ The chapter concludes its contextual interpretation by suggesting that the pragmatic plan developed within the thesis develops a potential way forward by addressing the variety of needs faced by the Western church, both in terms of homiletics and congregational leadership.

Chapter 3 advances the aim of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by demonstrating that a contextual interpretation of a selected history of rhetoric, biblical studies and homiletics can result in the formation of a rhetorical-critical-narratological approach to biblical studies. The analysis of that contextual information-gathering allows the chapter to establish three historic examples of the tendency in preaching to separate rhetorical theory from practice. The resulting analysis of these three examples leads to the conclusion that homiletics historically displays the tendency to utilize overly rational, linear and logical preaching forms. Furthermore, the evaluation of these forms observes that corresponding reactions arise seeking to develop more emotive and engaging sermon forms. The contextual nature of the study illustrates that the application of rhetorical theory, both for biblical studies and homiletics, is in many ways dependent upon historical and social conditions. The chapter clarifies that this trend can be viewed most clearly during transitional periods in the understanding and application of classical rhetorical theory within societies. The evaluation of this contextual interpretation in Chapter 3 leads to the observation that homiletics as a genre has not only historically evolved, but evolves presently and will continue to do so in the future.¹⁰⁴⁵

Based upon this contextual analysis and by way of measured response to the continuing evolution in homiletics, Chapter 3 constructs a pragmatic plan for future exegetical approaches. This has been accomplished by evaluating the normative tasks of modern rhetorical criticism in light of the historic developments discussed previously in the chapter. The chapter advances the notion that the rhetorical-critical-narratological approach of this thesis integrates elements of classical rhetoric with

¹⁰⁴³ Leiderbach and Reid, *The Convergent Church*, 27.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Graham, Walton and Ward, *Theological Reflection*, 7.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Edwards, *Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*, xi.

developments from modern rhetorical theory and narratology. The chapter therefore aides in achieving the goal of the thesis by constructing an exegetical approach applied thereafter to the discourse of Ezekiel and Ezekiel 15 in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 achieves the goals of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by demonstrating that a contextual interpretation of the New Homiletic can result in the formation of a values-based approach for future homiletics. The chapter begins by utilizing the systematic information-gathering process in order to demonstrate that a variety of cultural and intellectual shifts identified in Chapter 3 contributed to the formation of the New Homiletic. The chapter then investigates other derivative homiletical models that arose from the New Homiletic, and further explored its current status. In order to establish the conceptual basis for its values-based homiletic, this section of the chapter concludes by analyzing and critiquing various strengths and weaknesses of the normative practices of Craddock's New Homiletic.

Based upon this contextual interpretation, Chapter 4 engages the final task of the hermeneutical cycle in order to construct a pragmatic plan of action by constructing a values-based homiletical approach. The chapter advances the notion that certain recovered values of Craddock's New Homiletic can be employed in the formation of a multi-vocal and non-hierarchical preaching form that is appropriate to postmodernity. Based upon the rhetorical-critical-narratological exegetical method advanced in Chapter 3, the values-based approach to preaching allows preachers to open up biblical texts interpretatively by allowing the variety of indigenous literary biblical forms to impact upon the structure and rhetoric of the sermon. The formation of the values-based homiletic in Chapter 4 advances the goal of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by demonstrating the convergence between historical theology and the current need for revitalization in the preaching ministry within an increasingly postmodern cultural context.

Chapter 5 applies the rhetorical-critical-narratological exegetical approach developed in Chapter 3 to the discourse of Ezekiel, thus achieving the goal of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by illustrating the natural movement from exegesis to proclamation.¹⁰⁴⁶ The chapter demonstrates that a contextual interpretation of the contemporary landscape of approaches to biblical studies can

¹⁰⁴⁶ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 98.

lead to the development of a complementary approach to biblical studies that is neither defensive nor reactionary. Such a balanced approach draws upon elements from both diachronic and synchronic readings and thereby avoids the charge of lazy eclecticism.¹⁰⁴⁷

Chapter 5 begins its study of Ezekiel by first analyzing the outer framework of the contextual situation of the discourse. The study clarifies the genre of the discourse as a monologic first-person autobiographical presentation of the character-narrator Ezekiel. Next, the assessment of the rhetorical situation of Ezekiel engaged in a critical modification of Bitzer's model of the rhetorical situation. Utilizing this modified understanding, the study analyzes Ezekiel and establishes that not one but two rhetorical situations exist within the discourse before discussing the implications of such an observation. The study of the rhetorical situation clarifies issues related to the competing interpretations of the exigence, putative versus actual audience, and finally the constraints utilized by Yahweh the rhetor in order to influence the exilic audience to adopt his interpretation of the exigence. Finally, the section concludes its discussion of the outer framework by analyzing the overall effectiveness of the discourse in achieving its rhetorical goals. The resulting study of the outer framework of the discourse illustrates that the discourse itself displays an open-ended structure having no rhetorical or narrative closure. This rhetorical format later influences the rhetoric of the sample sermon developed within Chapter 7.

Following the development of the contextual situation, Chapter 5 then narrows the focus of the study by developing a close, rhetorical-critical-narratological reading of Ezekiel 15 building on the work of Daniel Block and Michael V. Fox. Block's approach emphasizes the rhetorical functions of the messages of Ezekiel, whilst Fox accentuates the suasive rhetorical force of the discourse by adding narratological elements.¹⁰⁴⁸ The study investigates the persuasive function of the literary unit by integrating narratology to the task of rhetorical criticism by using the five-step rhetorical-critical methodology advanced in Chapter 3. The first step establishes the boundaries of the literary unit, and the second step analyzes the rhetorical situation of the unit as located within the first rhetorical situation previously established. The third step adds narratological elements by analyzing the stance of the rhetor and clarifying voice hierarchies within the unit. The fourth step demonstrates the variety of rhetorical

¹⁰⁴⁷ Joyce, "First Among Equals?" 17.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Fox, "The Rhetoric of Ezekiel's Vision," 1; Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 11.

strategies Yahweh the rhetor employed within the unit, and the fifth step concludes the study by discussing the effectiveness of the literary unit in achieving its rhetorical goals.

The results of the rhetorical-critical-narratological study of Ezekiel 15 illustrates that Yahweh the rhetor employed the character-narrator Ezekiel to deliver an oracle to his actual exilic audience. Yahweh drew upon the rhetorical strategies of analogy, innovation and tradition by comparing the vinestock to legitimate lumber from trees of the forest. The study demonstrated how Yahweh's quasi-argument advanced through a series of rhetorical questions and led to an inexorable conclusion: just as the vinestock had been deemed worthless upon the grounds of utilitarian uselessness, so also would the Jerusalemites face certain judgement based upon the grounds of their unfaithfulness to Yahweh. The implications of this strategy would potentially lead the actual exilic audience to question their future faithfulness to Yahweh in light of the impending doom of the Jerusalemites. Following this analysis of the unit, the chapter concludes by drawing dynamic equivalents between historical and contemporary audiences, thereby illustrating the utility of the rhetorical-critical-narratological methodology for contemporary homiletical applications.

Chapter 6 engages in a contextual interpretation of Ezekiel studies and three sermons based upon the unit of Ezekiel 15. The resulting analysis and evaluation allowed the chapter to locate Ezekiel studies and sermons along the pendulum-like continuum of shifts in rhetoric, biblical studies and homiletics identified within Chapter 3. The contextual nature of the evaluation of demonstrated that Ezekiel studies in general have been influenced by various cultural, intellectual and hermeneutical shifts. The chapter noted that the three major phases of Ezekiel studies correspond with post-nineteenth century uncritical readings of the book, early- to mid-twentieth century increasingly radical historical-critical treatments of the text and current readings of Ezekiel that view the work as a literary unity whilst not discounting its literary genesis. This contextual analysis and interpretation enables Chapter 6 to locate the approach of this thesis within the third phase of current Ezekiel studies. Beyond building upon past analyses of the discourse of Ezekiel, the thesis furthers the exploration of Ezekiel as an autobiographical first-person narrative text, and moreover analyzes its implications for exegetical and homiletical purposes.

Following the contextual interpretation of Ezekiel studies, Chapter 6 next engages in a contextual interpretation and evaluation of the normative task of

preaching by analyzing three sermons based upon Ezekiel 15 from Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, and Chuck Smith. This section illustrates the variety of influences upon these preachers by contextually interpreting each sermon, analyzing and evaluating the various exegetical approaches and rhetorical strategies adopted by each preacher. This contextual evaluation of these rhetorical and exegetical influences lends credence to the observation in Chapter 3 that the genre of preaching experiences a continual evolution for a variety of reasons. As a measured response to this trend, this thesis addresses the challenges preaching faces within an increasingly postmodern societal context by placing homiletics in an anticipatory rather than reactionary stance for future congregational leadership and preaching.

Chapter 7 demonstrates the achievement of the goal of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by exhibiting a sample sermon based upon the literary unit of Ezekiel 15. This multi-vocal sermon draws upon the values-based homiletic advanced in Chapter 3 by allowing the rhetoric of biblical forms to influence the rhetoric of the sermon. Furthermore, the sermon illustrates the exegetical results of the rhetorical-critical-narratological study of the discourse of Ezekiel and the close reading of Ezekiel 15 in Chapter 5 also. The clarification of voice hierarchies, rhetorical situation, the stance of the rhetor and resulting potential implications for the hearers all bore influence upon the multiple-point-of view form of the sermon. The sermon form illustrated the open-ended nature of the discourse itself by evaluating the results of the rhetorical strategies of the unit from the points of view of Ezekiel the character-narrator, the exiles and Yahweh the rhetor. Such a multi-vocal sermonic form potentially increases the engagement and ownership on the part of the hearers and by its very nature encourages a non-hierarchical and collaborative roundtable discussion format. The results of the sermon illustrate that giving attention to rhetorical criticism in the exegesis of biblical texts sheds new light upon preaching forms and thereby results in a multi-vocal and non-hierarchical homiletic that is appropriate to postmodernity.

Following the sample sermon, Chapter 7 engages in a critique of its relative strengths and weakness. This critique demonstrates that this multi-vocal sermon form is but one of several possible forms with which preachers could potentially engage. The evaluation of the sermon notes the difficulty encountered in attempting to replicate homiletically the genre and rhetoric of Ezekiel 15. In order to demonstrate the utility of the rhetorical-critical approach for homiletics from differing biblical

genres, the chapter next engages in a case study of a literary unit from the discourse genre of 1 Corinthians 4.18-5.13. The study of this literary unit follows the five-step rhetorical-critical method outlined in Chapter 4 and illustrated in the study of Ezekiel 15 in Chapter 5. The analysis of the unit investigates issues related to the contextual and rhetorical situation, the variety of rhetorical strategies in the unit, the stance of the rhetor and finally the effectiveness of the unit in achieving its rhetorical goals. Chapter 7 concludes by advancing a variety of homiletical strategies based upon the study that demonstrates how the rhetoric of the literary unit from 1 Corinthians can influence the rhetoric of the sermon.

The following section of Chapter 8 concludes this thesis by presenting four contributions this study has made to the disciplines of biblical studies and homiletics. The chapter will demonstrate that the thesis has contributed to scholarship by advancing a coherent method of theological interpretation that connects both with Christian tradition and Scripture. This forward-looking response connects both the academy and the pulpit with its cross-disciplinary approach and furthermore accentuates the interconnectedness between the life and practices of the church and that of the wider society.

Following this discussion, the chapter will suggest three areas for potential further studies engendered by this project. This will involve a discussion of the possible future of preaching in light of the impact of postmodern thought upon its potential deconstruction and future functionality, and involves various implications of implementing increasingly multi-vocal and non-hierarchical preaching and leadership forms also. Finally, the thesis will conclude with a contextual interpretation concerning a variety of responses to the challenge of preaching in an increasingly postmodern cultural context, and will finish by drawing evaluative conclusions for the future.

Contributions of the Thesis

As a work of practical theological interpretation, this thesis makes at least four contributions to the fields of both practical ministry and academics in its attempt to integrate exegetical and homiletical theory with practice. First, each chapter demonstrates the method underpinning the thesis by utilizing consistently the four tasks of the hermeneutical cycle. Overall the thesis thereby illustrates the movement from contextual interpretation to the formation of a pragmatic plan for future biblical

studies and homiletics. The recurring use of these four tasks throughout the thesis demonstrates that they are not linear, but rather their use can be more circular.¹⁰⁴⁹ Connecting with both Christian tradition and Scripture allows the methodology used in this thesis to avoid the inherent weakness found within many contemporary contextual theologies that are often under-theorized and narrow, and fail adequately to connect with biblical, historical and systematic scholarship.¹⁰⁵⁰ Moreover, the integration of emerging sensibilities coupled with tradition and biblical care potentially revitalizes the preaching ministry of the church for the future by providing for a biblically faithful and methodologically effective disposition for the Western church.¹⁰⁵¹

Second, the contextual nature of the method of theological reflection employed in this thesis demonstrates that as a genre, preaching has evolved over the centuries. Based upon these observations, the thesis concludes that preaching will continue to evolve in order to welcome or to resist the challenges posed to it by increasingly postmodern and post-industrial Western societies. The evaluation of the various actions and reactions within the normative activity of Christian preaching has led to the development of a measured response for the future--namely a values-based homiletic that determines a forward-looking strategy of action for those involved in congregational leadership roles. The multi-vocal homiletic and non-hierarchical leadership orientation has applicability for some of the challenges raised by postmodernism, one of which involves the potential rejection of a single, authoritative interpretation of a biblical text.¹⁰⁵² The rhetorical-critical exegetical approach to biblical texts allows the preacher to explore the multidimensional nature of Scripture, and the values-based approach potentially leads to a multivalent use of Scripture for preaching.¹⁰⁵³ Furthermore, the value that communication should seek to build community emphasizes the close relationship between preaching and leadership

¹⁰⁴⁹ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4, 10. He notes that the interpenetrating nature of the four tasks demonstrates their interactive and mutually influential nature, which distinguishes the tasks of practical theological interpretation from other disciplines.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Graham, Walton and Ward, *Theological Reflection*, 1.

¹⁰⁵¹ Leiderbach and Reid, *The Convergent Church*, 22-27.

¹⁰⁵² Jost, "Preaching the Old Testament," 38.

¹⁰⁵³ Farley, *Practicing Gospel*, 92. He observes that it is "our temptation and need to resolve the situation of preaching into a step-by-step method whose product is a clearly written composition" (92). However, he maintains that this stance may frustrate some since this cannot be done due to the unfinished and exploratory nature of the paradigm itself.

ethos, and this orientation requires faithfulness and competence on the part of those within congregational leadership roles.¹⁰⁵⁴

Third, the approach of this thesis increases the level of potential connectedness between the life and practices of the church as well as its interaction with the wider society.¹⁰⁵⁵ This thesis builds upon the notion that currently within the Western context churches exist in a period of liminality, facing a time of transition in which they must move into new positions from which to minister to a rapidly-changing world.¹⁰⁵⁶ The formation of a measured response to this challenge has brought about the cross-disciplinary integration of the fields of rhetoric, homiletics, historical and biblical studies in this thesis.¹⁰⁵⁷ The contextual nature of the approach of this thesis accentuates the deep connections between various forms of ministry and furthermore addressed leadership issues that move beyond mere task maintenance. Such an orientation has implications for future patterns of theological education by ensuring that task competence is not taught in a decontextualized fashion.¹⁰⁵⁸

Building upon the notion that all of theology is indeed essentially a single and practical activity, this thesis demonstrates that the tasks of practical theology can and should be carried out in conjunction with other disciplines.¹⁰⁵⁹ The interdisciplinary approach of this thesis has allowed practical theology to be placed within the spectrum of theological disciplines as both an academic and ecclesiastical task. The end result makes practical theology a descriptive, critical and normative activity and thus narrows or helps to eliminate altogether the often sharp divide between the academic and the practical.¹⁰⁶⁰ The resulting stance integrates theory and practice, combats the tendency for increasing specialization within patterns of theological education and furthermore emphasizes the interconnectedness in ministry between the congregational system and its interaction with its context.¹⁰⁶¹

¹⁰⁵⁴ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 10.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 1.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Leiderbach and Reid, *The Convergent Church*, 75.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Graham, Walton and Ward, 8.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 221.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology*, 5. They indicate that “Theology, in its service of the community of faith, is essentially practical...all theological activity...is a resource for further action in the service of the gospel” (12).

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 9, 11-12. Reader notes: “The whole idea of an applied theology in which the real theologians do the hard thinking about the Christian tradition behind the scenes and then somehow pass it on to the front-line practitioners to work out what they are then supposed to do about it, simply reproduces that gap between theory and practice that has haunted practical theology from the beginning” (*Reconstructing Practical Theology*, 4).

¹⁰⁶¹ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 15.

Finally, this thesis makes a variety of contributions to the discipline of biblical studies. The contextual interpretation of rhetoric and biblical studies in this thesis has led to the formation of an exegetical approach that integrates elements of classical rhetoric, modern rhetorical theory and narratology. Furthermore, the contextual interpretation and evaluation of diachronic and synchronic approaches has led to the construction of a complementary reading of the biblical text that avoids the charge of lazy eclecticism. The subsequent application of this complementary rhetorical-critical-narratological approach to the discourse of Ezekiel demonstrates that the study of the entire discourse of prophetic narrative texts allows the critic to evaluate issues of genre, rhetorical situation and potential effectiveness of the work in achieving its rhetorical aims. Additionally, the critical evaluation of Bitzer's conception of the rhetorical situation clarified issues related to potential interpretations of the exigence as well as the identity of the audience. The study of Ezekiel then put this modified understanding of the rhetorical into practise by analyzing the rhetorical situation of Ezekiel. This critical analysis enabled the thesis to draw fresh conclusions related to the interpretations of the exigence by rhetor and audience, and further developed the rhetorical strategy of the discourse as related to the identity and future formation of the exilic audience in light of their reactions to the various constraints employed throughout the text.

The suggested complementary approach to synchronic and diachronic readings forges a way ahead for future biblical studies, having allowed the thesis carefully to utilize elements of both methodologies. The resulting analysis clarifies issues concerning the various addressees of the book including historical audiences, putative and actual audiences, and finally literary audiences made up of all later readers of the book. The identification with the historical audience provides the means for the thesis to draw dynamic equivalents for contemporary audiences. Furthermore, the delineation of voice hierarchies within the unit of Ezekiel 15 enables the study to draw distinctions between the character-narrator Ezekiel, the actual exilic audience, the putative audience of the Jerusalemites and Yahweh the rhetor who originated the oracle. The resulting clarification enables the study to discuss the stance of Ezekiel the messenger, the rhetorical strategies of the unit and its potential for receptivity by the exilic audience. Finally, the results of this rhetorical-critical-narratological study directly influence the sample multi-vocal sermon produced in Chapter 7 that sought to reproduce the rhetorical dynamics of Ezekiel 15 itself.

Areas for Further Studies

This section identifies three dimensions in which this work can be expanded beyond the scope of this project. The first concerns the future for the disciplines of practical theology, hermeneutics and homiletics in light of the increasing changes brought about by postmodernism and globalization.¹⁰⁶² This thesis has attempted to address this issue by advocating a values-based multi-vocal homiletic that is allied with a non-hierarchical leadership orientation. More work, however, can be done in exploring the continued evolution of preaching in an increasingly postmodern context. Perhaps in the future, as some homileticians suggest, preaching as it has been traditionally understood will be deconstructed and the very notion of preaching itself may be called into question.¹⁰⁶³ Within this period of late modernity, reports McClure, both critics and practitioners of the sermon are deconstructing preaching by investigating “various contradictions or problems within the plausibility structures (authorities) for preaching that may reorient preaching itself.”¹⁰⁶⁴ In light of these observations, the exploration of the variety of preaching forms that will replace more traditional methods represents an area for further research.

The second area for further development involves the role to be played by future congregational leadership in light of new goals and expectations for both traditional and emergent churches. This dimension involves analyzing and evaluating congregational leadership forms that are anticipatory rather than reactionary. Churches facing threats to their traditional identities can display the tendency to regress, resulting in a fundamentalist and closed reaction to changes wrought by globalization¹⁰⁶⁵ and postmodernism. Resistance to change and stagnation may well bring about the very real possibility of churches becoming irrelevant to the surrounding culture, thereby losing the influence they could otherwise have.¹⁰⁶⁶

One potential response is that of Viola, who reimages traditional and hierarchical and positional leadership forms. Rather than adopting the positional mindset of traditional authority, Viola advocates instead a New Testament functional mindset that portrays leadership authority organically by focusing attention upon the

¹⁰⁶² Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology*, 129-131.

¹⁰⁶³ See Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism,” 5-6; Loscalzo, *Apologetic Preaching*, 13.

¹⁰⁶⁴ McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching*, 3.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology*, 130.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Leiderbach and Reid, *The Convergent Church*, 76.

expression of spiritual life.¹⁰⁶⁷ This issue of future congregational leadership mindsets and orientation should be explored in greater detail, as the contexts of church ministry inevitably will continue to evolve.

The third area for expansion involves the transition between more traditional homiletics and increasingly collaborative sermon forms. Craddock asked in 1971 if preachers could realistically continue to serve up monological sermons in an increasingly dialogical world.¹⁰⁶⁸ Currently, emerging preaching forms explore increasingly dialogical formats that involve the listeners in the process of exegesis as well as application.¹⁰⁶⁹ Despite the changes wrought to the landscape of contemporary preaching within the past thirty years, however, Quicke reports that many contemporary preachers have returned to more traditional homiletical forms. Such an orientation refuses to engage the homiletical cutting edge, maintaining the status quo and specializing in survival by “playing it safe.”¹⁰⁷⁰

The latter dimension entails investigating the close relationship between congregational leadership and preaching. In order to explore new homiletical forms, congregational leaders must analyze the culture of their particular organization in terms of the receptivity to potential changes in preaching and leadership styles.¹⁰⁷¹ A corollary issue involves the efficacy of a team-based approach to preaching. Whilst the preacher may believe that involving others in the tasks of exegesis and proclamation brings significant gains,¹⁰⁷² the implementation of such teams may prove to be difficult for a variety of reasons. The task of establishing a shared pulpit ministry may directly clash with the expectations and values of traditional congregations. Furthermore, the establishment of collaborative and dialogical preaching forms involves preachers facing the difficult task of empowering the voices of those who view themselves as marginal and muted.¹⁰⁷³

Contextual Interpretation: Preaching and Postmodernism

The thesis concludes by returning to the issue with which it began. As noted earlier, this thesis is fundamentally concerned with the interconnectedness of ministry

¹⁰⁶⁷ Viola, *Reimagining Church*, 154.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 15.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 85.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Quicke, *360-Degree Preaching*, 38.

¹⁰⁷¹ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 47.

¹⁰⁷² *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁰⁷³ Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 97.

between the life and practices of the church and the wider cultural context. As a final work of contextual interpretation, this conclusion examines the issue of the impact of postmodernism upon the church in the West, and specifically upon the task of future preaching. Whilst “modernism” and “postmodernism” are neither easily defined nor easily separated, nonetheless it is clear that “we live in an age in which many of the foundations of contemporary Western culture seem to be dissolving.”¹⁰⁷⁴ It is becoming increasingly clear that churches in the West desiring to have maximum impact cannot “keep ‘doing church’ in a manner geared only to reach people who live in the context of modernity.”¹⁰⁷⁵

The implications of the current cultural paradigm shifts experienced by churches in the Western tradition will continue to exert a major influence on the disciplines of pastoral ministry and homiletics.¹⁰⁷⁶ Reid notes that the typical paradigm of Christendom that has defined the mission of the church for centuries is in the process of shifting to something new and different. This change is leaving

... behind structures of denominations, theologies, hierarchies, priorities, roles and commitments that all need to be reconfigured for a new age where Christianity can no longer be assumed as part of the cultural ethos or interests, in a world in which Christian congregations may increasingly be viewed with suspicion, incredulity, even hostility. Skepticism concerning the relevancy of Christianity and the church is no longer a prerogative of the privileged few. It is the reigning assumption of the emergent culture. Old structures, including the function of homiletic strategies, must be reconceived to meet the needs of a new missions frontier.¹⁰⁷⁷

Whilst negatively the postmodern era may lead to feelings of uncertainty or the desire for regression to familiar modernist categories amongst some, positively Graham argues that practical theology, “reorientated for a postmodern age of uncertainty, provides a method for connecting theory and practice in a reconception of faithful identity...Practical theology therefore functions in order to enable communities of faith to ‘practise what they preach.’”¹⁰⁷⁸

However, not all biblical scholars and theologians respond as positively to the challenge of postmodernism for practical theology as does Graham. Thiselton raises

¹⁰⁷⁴ Graham, “Practical Theology,” 106. Regardless of what one makes of it this shift carries implications for church leadership and preaching.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Leiderbach and Reid, *The Convergent Church*, 80.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Loscalzo states: “We live and preach between times. The dogmatism of the modern era’s pulpit has given way to ambivalence in pulpits of the postmodern era” (*Apologetic Preaching*, 11).

¹⁰⁷⁷ Reid, “Postmodernism and the Function,” 2.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Graham, “Practical Theology,” 106.

the question as to whether or not Christianity is indeed compatible with postmodernism at all.¹⁰⁷⁹ Regarding this debate, positions range on the spectrum from those who would dismiss outright any attempts at a “postmodern theology” to those who embrace a plurality of options for practical theology. For example, conservative theologian Moreland characterizes postmodernism negatively by stating decisively that it “is an immoral and cowardly viewpoint that people who love truth and knowledge, especially those of the Lord Jesus, should do all they can to heal.”¹⁰⁸⁰ Moreland’s operative thesis is that the correspondence theory view of truth statements are best because they are stated propositionally. Viewed from this perspective, postmodernism is inherently flawed because it rejects objective reality, truth, reason, value, linguistic meaning, and the conception of the self as well as other notions.¹⁰⁸¹ Ultimately Moreland rejects the values of postmodernism because it represents in his view “the easy, the cowardly way out that removes the pressure to engage alternative conceptual schemes, to be different, to risk ridicule, to take a stand outside the gate.”¹⁰⁸² Given such a view, it is difficult to see how any sort of constructive dialogue can be had in relation to the exploration of potential changes in practical theology due to the impact of postmodernism.

As an example of a more balanced approach to the issue, D.A. Carson views postmodernism from an apparently modernist point of view. Carson maintains that the total “rejection of everything postmodern is culturally backward, intellectually wrongheaded, and denies the common grace found in every culture.”¹⁰⁸³ Despite this seemingly positive statement, Carson nonetheless believes that one should be wary of those who label themselves “postmodern Christians” because they have scorned modernism, or possibly caricatures of it, whilst at the same time uncritically adopting a postmodern agenda.

Although Carson admits that postmodern openness to spirituality and the valuing of relationships over truth structures have significance, he feels that preachers should not forsake the Bible’s metanarrative in the face of postmodern scepticism. Carson displays his modernist leanings by arguing for an objectivist view to Scripture that he appears to believe apparently will settle all interpretative arguments by

¹⁰⁷⁹ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 327.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Moreland, “Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn,” 77.

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰⁸² *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁰⁸³ Carson, “Why Should Christians Think About Postmodernism?” 12.

appealing to “what God has said.” If the preacher’s interpretations are challenged, the preacher “must ask our challenger what his or her interpretation is and then examine what Scripture actually says.”¹⁰⁸⁴ Such a view appears to be based upon the assumptions that the interpreter can be truly objective when looking at Scripture, and that Scripture contains a controlling meaning that when properly understood will apparently settle all disputes.

On the more accepting side of the spectrum, Willimon takes a more positive view of postmodernism and its impact on hermeneutics and homiletics. He argues that postmodernism can serve as a liberating force from the perceived objectivity and interpretative controlling forces within modernism. Willimon observes that “postmodernity has wonderfully exposed the way that our epistemologies have been corrupted by Western, modern, democratic, and capitalist ways of knowing.”¹⁰⁸⁵ Willimon points out that the legacy of modernism fostered closed-mindedness rather than openness because modernists believed that nothing can be added from outside the natural world, including the miraculous or that which was unavailable to the knower. Willimon argues that postmodern preaching, which is by nature open to new experiences outside itself, embraces the “convoluted thickness of the biblical text” in its multiplicity of forms and genres. Rather than attempting to control the outcomes, such preaching will instead seek “to expose, unmask, and then to change the world through the generation of a countercultural community who now know something they could not possibly have thought up on their own.”¹⁰⁸⁶ Therefore, he maintains, postmodern preaching is not afraid to embrace the potential ambiguity of open-endedness. Postmodern preaching realizes the grave limits of modernity, and “will be preaching that is willing not to be heard, understood, or grasped by affluent, early twenty-first century people.”¹⁰⁸⁷ Similarly, preachers like Sweet, Jost and Allen view postmodernism as a liberating opportunity for homiletics.¹⁰⁸⁸

Perhaps the final word on the subject of the compatibility of Christianity with postmodernism should go to Thiselton, who represents a balanced approach to the

¹⁰⁸⁴ Ibid., 13.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Willimon, “Peculiar Truth: Postmodern Preaching,” 27.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ibid., 28.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ibid., 28.

¹⁰⁸⁸ See Allen, “Preaching and Postmodernism,” 34-48, and Jost, “Preaching the Old Testament.” Sweet mentions: “Authentic participation requires a diversity of participants...The more diverse the participants, the more real and original the experience” (*The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 82-85, 90).

subject. After analyzing the impact of postmodernity from a philosophical and hermeneutical point of view feels that “some of its insights are of positive value to the Christian faith, while other themes and aspects are not only mistaken but also seductive and disastrous.”¹⁰⁸⁹ As a movement that resists generalizations, postmodern approaches to the sacred and the secular represent an undermining of traditional substantive and methodological formulas.¹⁰⁹⁰ This freedom to question and critique the “theological” approaches found within large sections of the contemporary Church on the one hand represents a challenge to traditional Christianity, but on the other hand also offers the opportunity for believers in the chance to shift the discussion from the abstract to the concrete and in the process begin actively to embody their expressions of faith.¹⁰⁹¹

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the integration of biblical studies and homiletics, thus formulating a measured and coherent response to the challenges postmodernism poses to the church and its preaching ministry. The study presented here establishes that attention to the rhetorical-critical-narratological study of biblical texts sheds new light upon preaching form and function, and results in a multi-vocal and non-hierarchical form appropriate to postmodernity. Structurally, the thesis demonstrates the use of the hermeneutical cycle by approaching both Christian tradition and Scripture contextually. Based upon the various contextual interpretations involved within its chapters, the thesis constructs a rhetorical-critical-narratological exegetical approach to biblical studies combined with a values-based homiletical approach as a pragmatic plan for future preaching and congregational leadership. This task demonstrates the cross-disciplinary nature of the various tasks of theological interpretation.

The development of the rhetorical-critical approach combines elements of classical rhetoric, modern rhetorical theory and narratology, and this developed approach was then applied to the book of Ezekiel and the literary unit of Ezekiel 15. The values-based approach to preaching was then integrated with the exegetical approach with the production of a sample sermon drawn from the study of Ezekiel 15.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 331.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Davie, *Religion in Britain*, 196.

¹⁰⁹¹ Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 73.

This multi-vocal sermon achieved the goal of the thesis to integrate biblical studies and homiletics by utilizing rhetorical criticism as an exegetical basis for a values-based approach to homiletics, and furthermore illustrated the notion that proclamation is a normal and natural outcome of exegesis. This flexible, adaptable and inductive methodology shows that the forms, genres and rhetorical dynamics of Scripture can have a major influence on a variety of preaching forms. This approach allows the preacher to replicate the rhetorical dynamics located within the multiplicity of biblical literary forms and genres.

As a final consideration, since this thesis also connects the preaching and teaching of Scripture with leadership ethos, the charge is presented to those involved in the pursuit of academics and ministry vocations alike that “true interpretation of the word of truth is an act of understanding that must be proved and exhibited in practice.”¹⁰⁹²

¹⁰⁹² Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation?” 114.

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