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Preaching in the Churches of Christ: Moving Toward a Theology¹

DAVID FLEER

You and I have gleaned from our experiences humorous stories about preaching—enough to fill an article. These are tales of mispronounced words, dogs wandering into the service, elders falling asleep and wakening babies, intercepted CB conversations, and an electrical outage that plunged the entire auditorium into darkness at the climactic moment of the sermon, “Jesus the Light of the World.” These wildly facetious scenes do more than take away the sermon’s hopes for impressiveness. Their telling defines preaching as a tedious experience that longs for relief.

We preachers, however, probably prefer these tales of mirth over the pejorative use of the term “preaching”—understood commonly as a form of verbal abuse as referenced in the retort, “Don’t preach at me.” Yet, we know from other encounters that preaching can be something other than the source of ridicule. Once past the deflective humor of Eutychus and his kin, we confess that we remember sermons that so seriously challenged or stimulated us that we were pressed to locate adequate vocabulary to describe the richness of the event.

MEANINGFUL PREACHING

Here is one well-articulated story of the Gospel’s transforming power displayed in preaching from novelist and minister Fred Buechner.

At 27, living alone in New York trying with no success to start a novel and in love with a girl who was not in love with me, I went to hear a famous preacher preach one morning although I had no idea at the time that he was famous and went only on impulse, I was not a churchgoer. ... All I remember of what he said is ... that Jesus Christ refused a crown when Satan offered it in the wilderness or something like that. ... He said that unlike Elizabeth’s coronation in the Abbey, this coronation of Jesus in the believer’s heart took place among confession—and I thought, yes, yes, confession—and tears, he said—and I thought tears, yes, perfectly plausible that the coronation of Jesus in the believing heart should take place among confession and tears. And then ... he said in his odd, sandy voice, the voice of an old nurse, that the coronation of Jesus took place among confession and tears and then, as God was and is my witness, great laughter, he said. Jesus is crowned among confession and tears and great laughter, and at the phrase great laughter, for reasons that I have never satisfactorily understood, the great wall of China crumbled and Atlantis rose up out of the sea, and on Madison Avenue, at 73rd Street, tears leapt from my eyes as though I had been struck across the face.²

For Buechner, a series of incidents unfolded. He had an awakening or conversion and promptly enrolled in seminary. Today he is famous for his writing and his preaching. Here, then, is an example of preaching that transformed a life that has been used to transform thousands more. Not all sermons will elicit this kind of response. But we, too, have accounts to reveal. We have known faithful preaching which is biblical

because it comes up out of scripture and relevant because it speaks to people in these times and thus creates space in which God and the gospel move. Our lives have been profoundly impacted over time as they have on a particular occasion. One reason we hold preaching in such high regard is because we have experienced the effects of faithful preaching.

Our experience is rooted in a belief that has developed from a close reading of scripture. We believe that God spoke to our Christian ancestors, in the past, through the prophets and that God has spoken to us, in the last of days, through a Son. We also believe that Jesus is a living word, and that as we preach he lives and speaks.

Although we avoid nonbiblical words like *inerrancy* and *infallibility*, we believe that the biblical texts have unparalleled power to shape our lives. We may even say that a close and faithful reading of scripture implies an engagement so serious that the world of scripture ultimately sets agendas and invents expectations for our lives. And, as shared stories hold together a family, so the narratives of the Bible can hold together the church. We believe God speaks to us through preaching.

People attend church for innumerable reasons. Many of us participate in Sunday worship because we long for the Transcendent One to make sense of our lives. So, for several minutes each Sunday, the preacher has opportunity to help us reflect on the meaning of life by engaging scripture and our lives through the power of God. We may go several places searching for ultimate reality, from NPR to Rush Limbaugh, but only in the church's sermon is the communicator held accountable to God's steadfast love and the intentions of scripture.

Years after Buechner wrote *The Alphabet of Grace*, describing God's work in preaching, he spoke again of its possibilities. I cite the oft-quoted work here because it sets forth our challenge and evokes our dilemma.

[It is Sunday morning and in] the front pews old ladies turn up their hearing aids, and a young lady slips her 6-year-old a Lifesaver and a Magic Marker. A college sophomore home for vacation, who is there because he was dragged there, slumps forward with his chin in his hand. The vice-president of a bank who twice that week has seriously contemplated suicide places his hymnal in the rack. A pregnant girl feels the life stir inside her. A high-school math teacher, who for twenty years has managed to keep his homosexuality a secret for the most part even from himself, creases his order of service down the center with his thumbnail and tucks it under his knee. ...

The preacher pulls the little cord that turns on the lectern light and deals out his note cards like a riverboat gambler. The stakes have never been higher. Two minutes from now he may have lost his listeners completely to their own thoughts, but at this minute he has them in the palm of his hand. ... Everybody knows the kind of things he has told them before and not told them, but who knows what this time, out of this silence he will tell them?

Let him tell them the truth ... let him use words, but in addition to using them to explain, expound, exhort, let him use them to evoke, to set us dreaming as well as thinking, to use words as at their most prophetic and truthful, the prophets used them to stir in us memories and longings and intuitions that we starve for without knowing that we starve. Let him use words which do not only try to give answers to the questions that we ask or ought to ask but which help us to hear the questions that we do not have words for asking and to hear the silence that those questions rise out of. ... Let him use words and images that help make the surface of our lives transparent to the truth that lies deep within them, which is the wordless truth of who we are and who God is and the Gospel of our meeting.³

And so in our congregations today we all gather, young and old, men and women, the bored, the frightened, and the hiding. Why are we here? Some of us may be intellectually alert and morally sensitive. All of us, we choose to believe, desire to be challenged, to be pushed beyond ourselves, to experience God, to find

meaning, to have courage, and to possess hope. Longing for something more than humor or relief from tedium, we ask for sermons that grant God the space to act, and thus create the potential for new awakenings. With this ideal, how shall we assess the status of preaching today, where are we headed, and what should be our compass?

THE TALE OF MAINLINE CHRISTIANITY

This very issue has been addressed in the mainline Protestant world⁴ through the work of Tom Long, one of homiletic's best contemporary guides. Since his 1989 publication of the *Witness of Preaching*,⁵ Long has been an irreplaceable resource for preaching in mainline Christianity and in Churches of Christ. Early in his writing career and again quite recently, Long has turned to Augustine as a template to assess preaching's most recent past⁶ and forecast its immediate future.

In evaluating preaching of the past half century, Long reframes Augustine's threefold composition of the sermon (to teach, delight and persuade) as "seasons" in the life of the church.⁷ Long describes the 1950s as a time when teaching dominated mainline pulpits. In contrast, the 1960s demanded a season of persuasion. During the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war, pulpits in mainline churches emphasized a total and comprehensive response to the gospel, preaching to activate church audiences to participate in protests and other means of effecting social justice.

Still recovering from an era of dull sermons, a completely different season surfaced in the 1970s, a time Long characterizes as one of delight. The first sign of seasonal change appeared with the 1958 publication of Grady Davis' *Design For Preaching*, a book that offered a new metaphor for the discipline. The "old homi-

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letic" had envisioned the sermon as a house to be built and was characterized by the title of that era's dominating text, *The Craft of Sermon Construction*.⁸ Davis shifted the primary metaphor, saying the sermon should not be an idea that is unpacked or argued but rather a living organism that moves and breathes and is dynamic.

In 1971, the season of delight came into full bloom with the publication of Fred Craddock's *As*

One Without Authority.⁹ Craddock asked, "Why are sermons so boring?" The answer, he said, is that the "logic of the study" differs from the "logic of the pulpit." Under the old homiletic, here is what happened in the study: On Monday morning the preacher sat down with a Bible and a blank piece of paper. And, he sat there. No ideas came running. Nothing. He got up, sharpened his pencils, still nothing. Desperate, he went off on a mission. He knocked on doors, shook handles, peered through windows, did his word studies, looked at commentaries, and hit dead ends. And then, the preacher encountered an "aha!" The idea came at the end of a process of discovery. But, sadly, the preacher in the old homiletic turned this process of discovery, a private and inductive exegesis, on its head and forced it into a public deductive sermon that began, "My thesis this morning, is ..."

Craddock asked what might happen if the pulpit could parallel the inductive process experienced in the study, not opening the Greek lexicon to the same page or trailing the minister into the hospital room but moving inductively to experience a second "aha." The *congregation*, Craddock proposed, would be filled with suspense and participation and their own sense of discovery. This idea was the basis for the not-so-rational revolution in homiletics.¹⁰ It was a season of delight, and for the next two decades the literature, with titles such as *The Homiletical Plot*¹¹ and *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery*,¹² reflected this trend.

But the season has passed, claims Long. In the 1970s Craddock applied Soren Kierkegaard's 19th-century question, "What do you say to those who have already heard?" Craddock answered with Kierkegaard,

“You speak indirectly.”¹³ That question, Long contends, has become moot because we no longer live in a Christian land and folks don’t know. Now, Long claims, people have not heard it all before; they do not know. The new crisis in the mainline Protestant churches is a lack of knowledge. The call to homiletics is for an Augustinian season of *teaching*.

A DIFFERENT STORY IN CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Long’s thesis initially strikes a familiar chord in Churches of Christ where many are troubled over what they detect as a growing biblical illiteracy. Certainly it is true that in our churches, “People don’t know the Bible like they used to.” The problem with our appropriation of Long’s solution, however, is that our homiletic history is radically different from that which Long rehearses.¹⁴

During the last 50 years, preaching in Churches of Christ has not paralleled the mainline experience. Church of Christ pulpits did not rally marchers to protest Vietnam. Our pulpits were essentially silent on civil rights issues.¹⁵ Our expression of persuasion, limited to and revealed in the ever-present sermon invitation, has narrowly targeted the unimmersed and members in need of repentance.

In the 1950s and 1960s, we were not swept up in an exciting season of persuasion but were busy continuing a homiletic tradition inherited from Alexander Campbell, an approach to preaching that had didactic origins and didactic intentions. Early in our movement, concordance preaching dominated both understanding of scripture as well as the form of the sermon. Verses of scripture, like pieces of a puzzle, were pulled together around a specific subject, often baptism, church government, worship, or salvation. Each Sunday, the preacher worked like a systematic theologian, using the sermon as a teaching tool and scripture verses like trump cards. The problems with this approach are several and have been chronicled elsewhere,¹⁶ but the point here is that the essential function of the concordance sermon was didactic.

Through the influence of our Christian colleges, expository preaching began to find its way into pulpits in the 1950s and dominated subsequent decades. This sermon genre focused on a single text revealing the preacher’s exegetical work, highlighting historical and grammatical details and ending with an application. While adherents trumpeted the technique’s superiority to concordance preaching, the expository method showed little interest in “pleasing,” was at a loss on how to persuade, and retained its predecessor’s single goal: teaching.

Harry Fosdick, as early as the 1920s, observed, “Only the preacher proceeds still upon the idea that folk come to church desperately anxious to discover what happened to the Jebusites.”¹⁷ In Churches of Christ, expository preaching, long judged elsewhere as boring and irrelevant, continued the long-parched season of teaching.

We missed the full force of the “revolution” associated with Craddock; in fact many didn’t know one existed. While the mainline world is now waving good-bye to Craddock, I suspect most Churches of Christ today would consider a Craddock inductive sermon novel and fresh and find their hearts strangely nurtured or challenged *by scripture*.¹⁸ In short, the mainline turn to a season of teaching misses our past experiences and present needs.

THE EVANGELICAL CHALLENGE

The didactic nature of the Church of Christ sermon has not gone unchallenged from congregants. During the past two decades, many congregations have experienced a difficult rift as younger members ask that the preacher address the myriad of concerns that dominate their lives: finances, raising children, divorce recovery, sexuality, etc. Those making requests for more relevant sermons claim that the ones seeking help, members and “seekers,” should be at the center of concern, with the sermon being shaped to fit their needs. For every minister who has lived through the “exit interview,” the impasse is exceedingly real and painful. Family units, couples, and talented young singles have left our churches, not abandoning faith, but quite the

opposite, finding relationship with God through creative worship and service opportunities in the community churches.

Two years ago I began a project to study and absorb the growing community church movement. For three months, I attended the Kensington Community Church in Oakland County, Michigan. Kensington is a 12-year-old church in the Willow Creek family, now with 5,000 people attending four weekend services and a handful of largely successful daughter churches in the area. Kensington's auditorium is large, with padded, rocking, theater seats. In fact, Kensington's building, both inside and out, has the look and feel of a state-of-the-art theater. No cross. No altar. No stained glass or church furniture. The front of the auditorium has a stage with curtains; if you arrive early you can see a band instruments idle on stage. Light jazz, rock, or other contemporary music plays as worshipers enter for the 75-minute service that features the best drama, video, and music to be experienced *anywhere*.

One Sunday's theme was the "Greatest Stories Ever Told;" the senior pastor, seated on a pastel colored Queen Anne chair next to a matching couch, interviewed three recent converts. When these conversations

ended, the building darkened, and a screen was lowered from the ceiling and so we could watch a fourth interview.

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The subtly told and emotional story was of a marriage that encountered early joy, then growing separation, and finally a palpable hollowness. The film first focused on him, and then on her, effectively imaging their divide. Then, the story revealed

that she converted and he soon began to study the Bible. Finally, in the closing scene, the first moment that the visual story pictured the two of them together, he said he had just become a Christian and had even taken to writing "God songs."

The tape ended, but the auditorium remained dark as a spotlight illuminated the portion of the stage where a man sat on a barstool cradling a guitar as he sang of his life in the shadow of God. The performance pleased and delighted the audience when we realized, on our own, that the singer was the husband from the film. It was indirect teaching at its best. I would reveal the content of the song, but overcome with emotion, I was unable to record the words.

The video engaged listeners in form (the music and aesthetically pleasing images) and in content (a move to God that was at first hesitant but finally convincing). The music, audio-visual, and accompanying choreography, often better than "professional," were indirect and subtle, and at once taught, pleased, and persuaded.

This is the setting for an intriguing irony. In stark contrast to the rest of the service, Kensington sermons are typically used as teaching instruments, always with "fill in the blank" three-point outlines for the congregation to mechanically follow. Pens and programs are handed to congregants as they enter the auditorium.¹⁹ The irony, then, is that the same worship that creatively employs all facets of Augustine's "trinity" (to teach, please, and persuade), abandons two of the three in the sermon.

For readers of this journal, however, the more problematic irony is the current mimicry of the truncated sermon in Churches of Christ. Our fellowship has historically imposed "heavy import taxes" on film and drama, with "threats of expulsion" for importing music. Yet we are now implementing, without qualm, the community church model of preaching (complete with fill-in-the-blank, three-point outlines). Although the community church argues that these teaching sermons best meet the needs of their seeker audience, Churches of Christ are embracing but one more didactic model that continues to avoid two thirds of the Augustinian trinity. Has our theology of homiletics been so vacuous that we have come to the wholesale adoption of a foreign import without so much as sensing a problem?

AUGUSTINE: MOVING TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF PREACHING

With a captivating metaphor, church historian Richard Hughes claims that Churches of Christ are rapidly moving into the “Evangelical orbit.”²⁰ According to Hughes, this intentional absorption into one particular wing of Protestant Christianity is a full-fledged abandonment of our fellowship’s theological identity. Hughes’s image certainly characterizes our failure to assess the genre of preaching that is making its way into our pulpits. Where might we turn to claim a homiletic identity? How might we begin thinking about a theology of preaching that respects our heritage and addresses our current state?

Given our history and the recent developments in Christian preaching, I propose that we return with Tom Long to Augustine for homiletic mooring. Augustine’s work was the most perceptive treatise on preaching for more than a millennium of Christian history.²¹ We, too, may find his definition of preaching and discovery of eloquence in scripture helpful guides to define what we mean by a sermon so that we might begin to imagine a biblical theology of preaching.

Some say that Augustine wed rhetoric to Christianity. But that relationship really began in scripture, where Christian writers employed the art of persuasion.²² Herein lies the genius of this resource: Augustine was reconnecting a *biblical* relationship. Paul, Luke, and other canonical writers used the basic tools of the rhetorical arts. Rhetoric’s five canons—*invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery*, with their artful possibilities—were the means these writers employed to persuade centuries of listeners and readers.

As time passed, however, rhetoric proved to be a soul-less art. On its own, it had no conscience or moral base. For proof, consider the most effective orator of the 20th century, Adolf Hitler. By itself, rhetoric has always been shifty and unconcerned with truth.

No wonder Jerome had a dream about a worrisome confrontation with God. Transported before the Lord, Jerome was asked his profession. “I replied, ‘I am a Christian.’ Whereupon He who presided, thundered: “Thou dost lie—thou are not a Christian, but a Ciceronian [rhetorician]. Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also.”²³ Here was evidence that Christianity and rhetoric had parted company. Christians forced a dichotomous choice between eloquence and truth with the former labeled and discarded as a secular tool.

Reconciliation came in the fifth century in the first Christian homiletic, Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine (De Doctrina Christiana)*.²⁴ The first three quarters of the book finds in scripture what to preach with the final portion consumed with how to preach. It is here that Augustine reincorporates rhetoric’s service to the church. While Jerome asked Christians to “lay aside the weapons of the heathens,” claiming it is better to have a “just unlearnedness than an evil wisdom,”²⁵ Augustine argued for a different end, maintaining, “If philosophers have said things which are indeed true and are well accommodated to our faith, they should not be feared.”²⁶ Instead, he added, “What they have should be taken from them as unjust possessors and converted to our use.” Finding an analogy from the Exodus narrative, he advised Christians to plunder the rhetoric of the pagans as Israel did the wealth of the Egyptians, to “take their treasure ... for the just use of teaching the Gospel.”²⁷

I propose that where Augustine is typically faulted, we need him most, especially his intricate weaving of style into the fabric of a full-bodied sermon that teaches, pleases, and persuades.

Augustine’s prevailing hierarchy in *De Doctrina* is that eloquence without wisdom is harmful and should be prevented but that wisdom *without* eloquence is of some benefit. However, he shatters Jerome’s dichotomy when he insists that wisdom, coupled *with* eloquence, is of great benefit and heard with pleasure.

Our fellowship has sided with Jerome and heard only the first and second options, pitting truth (wisdom) against eloquence, misconstruing persuasion as “manipulation” and pleasing as “entertainment.” Augustine’s paradigm is based on the hope that the just rather than the wicked will be heard willingly, which will occur

when the former speak pleasingly. We might begin by accepting that eloquence is, when wed to wisdom and truth, one of the preacher's most appropriate tools.²⁸

Augustine asks how the eloquent preacher should speak in order to be heard intelligently, willingly, and obediently.²⁹ This desired threefold response requires that the preacher (1) *teach* for an intelligent hearing, (2) *please* for a willing hearing, and (3) *persuade* for an obedient hearing. Applying to the sermon Cicero's advice for the speech, Augustine articulates his foundational theology of the sermon, that teaching is a *necessity*, pleasing is *sweetness*, and persuading is the *victory*.³⁰

The three segments of the Augustinian trinity are not completely independent nor are they equally weighted. Pleasing, for example, comes with audience comprehension and is thus dependent on teaching.³¹ Persuasion is the goal of eloquence. "If there is no persuasion, the speaker has not obtained the end of eloquence."³²

To regain persuasion's position in the sermon is to reinstate the most essential part of the trinity. Persuasion occurs when the listener is moved to *act*, when he or she

Loves what you promise, fears what you threaten, hates what you condemn, embraces what you commend. ... takes pity on those whom you place before him as being pitiful; flees those whom you, moving fear, warn are to be avoided; and is moved by whatever else may be done through grand eloquence toward moving the minds of listeners, not that they may know what is to be done, but that they may do what they already know.³³

God speaks to us in preaching and wishes to change us, to reform us more closely to his image. We should not be paralyzed by such an engagement with the world imagined in scripture that we prevent it from setting agendas and inventing expectations for our lives. Nor should we avoid taking cues from the eloquence of the writers themselves if we wish to communicate in such a way that lives might be changed.³⁴

Modern readers are often surprised that the heft of Augustine's discussion of preaching is cast in the context of style. Augustine finds several locations in scripture where stylistic tools, typically understood as pauses, rhythms, and periods, are effectively employed.³⁵ For Augustine, style is intimately involved in the process of persuasion, "Who explains something to learners ... but to be believed? And who would wish to hear him unless he could retain his listener with some sweetness of discourse?"³⁶

Some have accused Augustine of reductionism, paring down rhetoric until it concentrates largely on only one canon, matters of language, and style.³⁷ I propose that where Augustine is typically faulted, we need him most, especially his intricate weaving of style into the fabric of a full-bodied sermon that teaches, pleases, and persuades.

Although rhetoricians usually emphasize Augustine's admitted reliance on Cicero, Christians should also note his manifest dependence on biblical sources to reveal rhetorical principles.³⁸ Scripture, Augustine clarifies, contains several rhetorical ornaments, although the authors did not follow the precepts of eloquence. Nevertheless, "We do not deny that [their] wisdom was accomplished by eloquence."³⁹ Augustine could not have claimed to have wed rhetoric to Christianity. He would certainly have accepted the notion, however, that he helped bring about reconciliation. Scripture has an eloquence perfectly suited to a variety of occasions and subjects, and preachers, instructs Augustine, should take cues from these masters.

For a movement overly suspicious of pleasing and persuading, a relatively expansive definition must precede the development of a theology of preaching aware of our history and sufficient for these times. Whether preaching should emerge out of ecclesiology,⁴⁰ Christology, or postliberalism⁴¹ are issues for us to address once we have settled on what we mean by a sermon. This essay, therefore, intends to help Churches of Christ, if not avoid the gravitational pull, at least enter the evangelical orbit with some sense of an identity of preaching from scripture.

When Tom Long reframes the intent of Augustine's rhetorical trinity and calls for a "season of teaching," he has not addressed our history of didactically dominated sermons. Nevertheless, Long again proves to be an acute conversation partner in assessing preaching's trends as well as an invaluable aid by turning us to Augustine for direction.⁴²

Augustine, it turns out, provides an essential corrective to our legacy of *misunderstanding* the sermon's task. *De Doctrina*, dependent on scripture and sensitive to style, is more than a helpful tool for tracing the recent history of preaching. Augustine's trinity, which is the heart of the "first homiletic," suggests itself as an answer to how Church of Christ preachers might speak to set us dreaming as well as thinking, to stir our memories and longings, and make our lives transparent to the truth that lies deep within, the truth that Buechner calls "of who we are and who God is and the Gospel of our meeting."

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END NOTES

- 1 This article was presented during different stages of development at the Pepperdine Bible Lectures, a course at Rochester College, Abilene Christian University's Lectureship, and the Central Ohio Preachers meeting in Marion in January 2003. Helpful comments and stimulating responses from each community have strengthened the article.
- 2 Fredrick Buechner, *The Alphabet of Grace* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 43-46.
- 3 Fredrick Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), 22-24.
- 4 I'm drawing on the generally accepted construct of "two parties" in Protestant Christianity, the longstanding judgment of church historians and—with the fading of denominational labels—the perception of many laymen as well. For an engaging entrée to the discussion, see Martin E. Marty, "The Shape of American Protestantism: Are There Two Parties Today?" in Douglas Jacobsen and William Vance Trollinger, Jr., *Re-Forming the Center: American Protestantism, 1900 to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 91-108.
- 5 Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989). A majority of mainline seminaries and many Church of Christ graduate programs require *Witness of Preaching* in the entry level courses in preaching.
- 6 See Thomas G. Long, *The Senses of Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988). For earlier comment on Long's use of Augustine, see my "Augustine's On Christian Doctrine, the Homiletic Work of Tom Long and the Matter of Persuasion," *Restoration Quarterly* 33 (Third Quarter, 1991): 141-55.
- 7 Thomas G. Long, "Seasons of Preaching(?)," *Tipple-Vosburgh Lectures*, Drew Theological Seminary, October 18, 2000.
- 8 W. E. Sangster, *The Craft of the Sermon: The Craft of Sermon Construction and The Craft of Sermon Illustration* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1951).
- 9 Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971).
- 10 Robert Reid, Jeffrey Bullock, and David Fleer, "Preaching as the Creation of an Experience: The Not-So-Rational Revolution of the New Homiletic," *The Journal of Communication and Religion* 18 (March 1995): 1-9.
- 11 Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980).
- 12 Eugene Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997).
- 13 Fred Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel: Preaching and Teaching the Faith to Persons Who Have Already Heard* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978).
- 14 James Thompson, dean of Abilene Christian University's Graduate School of Theology, echoes Long's judgment of the new homiletic for several reasons, including our post-Christian culture and congregations' lack of biblical knowledge. Thompson wishes to move beyond the "new homiletic," explaining that he has lost enthusiasm for Craddock's works, which he initially read "shortly after their publication." See James Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 9-14. In the bibliographic note, observe that Thompson chose to publish his book in a mainline, not evangelical or restorationist, press. Perhaps Thompson assumed, what I shall argue in the following paragraphs, that his early reading of Craddock was not common experience for preachers in his fellowship.
- 15 For evidence of this claim, see Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 266-268 (on the Vietnam war) and 270-306 (on the civil rights movement). Experientially, the contrast between the two worlds can be seen in Hughes, whose Church of Christ heritage failed "to connect with the culture in which we lived" (*Reclaiming a Heritage: Reflections on the Heart, Soul, and Future of Churches of Christ* [Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2002], 57-66); and Barbara Brown Taylor, whose Midwestern mainline church was challenged and threatened by "civil rights" (*The Preaching Life* [Boston: Cowley, 1993], 14-16).
- 16 Dave Bland and I have described this story in greater detail in *Preaching From Luke/Acts* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2000), 21-37. The stunning observation of Bill Love is that generations of Church of Christ preachers failed to preach on the cross. Bill Love, *The Core Gospel: On Restoring the Crux of the Matter* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1992).
- 17 Oft referenced, Fosdick's comment initially appeared in "What's the Matter With Preaching?" *Harper's Monthly* 157 (July, 1928): 135.

- 18 Although one might find an abundance of evidence for this claim in Craddock's numerous Bible commentaries, consider the following anecdote. During a recent "Craddock Day" at Cherry Log Christian Church, Craddock was asked how much time he spent in sermon preparation. He replied, "About fifteen hours with the text before I begin to form the sermon." After a significant pause, he added, "I've always been suspicious of the easy way" (E-mail correspondence with Josh Graves, Nov. 20, 2002). Both Craddock's training and discipline should resonate within Churches of Christ. This is not to advocate that we reinvent the history of preaching and pretend that substantive critique of Craddock does not exist. Instead, I am advocating that we be thoughtful about where we are heading. For a credible assessment of Craddock and other "new homileticians," see Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
- 19 Through a sociological lens, Donald E. Miller viewed a large number of "seeker sensitive" churches and similarly described the preaching in *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), 36, 86.
- 20 Richard Hughes, "Why Restorationists Don't Fit the Evangelical Mold; Why Churches of Christ Increasingly Do," in Jacobsen and Trollinger, *Re-Forming the Center*, 212.
- 21 Most would argue that Augustine was the only perceptive homiletic for at least 1,200 years. Homileticians have long noted Augustine's importance.
- 22 Rhetoric is the art of discovering the available means of persuasion, claimed Aristotle. For background and scholarly integration of the two disciplines see Ronald E. Osborn, *Folly of God: The Rise of Christian Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1999), especially the chapter "Rhetoric and Humane Education," 51-70; or George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition From Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999, revised), 174-182.
- 23 Jerome, *Epistle XXII*, cited in James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from St. Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 53. For an intelligent and very readable introduction to the temper of these times, I recommend Murphy, 47-64.
- 24 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine (De Doctrina Christiana)*, translated by D. W. Robertson, Jr., (New York: Macmillan, 1989).
- 25 Cited in Murphy, 54.
- 26 *De Doctrina*, II, xl. 60. My emphasis.
- 27 *De Doctrina*, II, xl. 60.
- 28 Our first move will demand that, when speaking of that which delights, we drop the pejorative word "entertainment" in order to hear the variety of ways God moves hearers through scripture and preaching.
- 29 *De Doctrina*, IV, xxvi. 56.
- 30 *De Doctrina*, IV, xii. 27.
- 31 *De Doctrina*, IV, x. 25.
- 32 *De Doctrina*, IV, xxv. 55.
- 33 *De Doctrina*, IV, xii. 27. My emphasis.
- 34 I am aware of the challenges to this thesis, both from homileticians (Richard Lischer, "Why I Am Not Persuasive," *Homiletic* 24 Winter, 1999: 13-16) and rhetoricians. Based on a variety of Augustine's works, Murphy claims that he believed "rhetors do not persuade but that hearers move themselves [as] teachers do not teach, but instead that learners learn" (Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 289). For one rejoinder, see Lucy Lind Hogan, "Rethinking Persuasion: Developing an Incarnational Theology of Preaching," *Homiletic* 24 (Winter, 1999): 1-12.
- 35 Augustine spends a significant portion of book IV finding in scripture *caesa, membra, and circuitus*.
- 36 *De Doctrina*, IV, xxvi. 56
- 37 Barry Brummett, *Reading Rhetorical Theory* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2000), 400-401. Kennedy is more explicit, "The fourth book of *De Doctrina* canonized the view that rhetoric is largely a matter of style ... [which is] the weakness of his treatise" *Classical Rhetoric*, 158-159.
- 38 *De Doctrina*, IV, vii. 10. Andre Resner scolds Augustine for seeing rhetoric as a neutral tool and misunderstanding Paul at one passage. See Andre Resner, Jr. *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 39-82. Even if we grant both points, however, Augustine still finds scripture enveloped with rhetorical methods as the Bible writers employ all of their skills to teach, please, and persuade readers and hearers.
- 39 *De Doctrina*, IV.vii.10. Richard Lischer clarifies, "Not only does the preacher exegete scripture, he uses it as a stylistic model for the sermon," Lischer, ed., *The Company of Preachers: Augustine to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 277.
- 40 For his proposed theology, see Thomas G. Long, "And How Shall They Hear? The Listeners in Contemporary Preaching," in *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, ed. T. G. Long and G. R. O'Day (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 167-188.
- 41 See Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
- 42 Long's essential contribution is to keep Augustine before us amidst our current difficulties. In his own work, (Long, "Seasons"), he acknowledges Augustine's intent for each sermon but adds, "This is a bit ambitious for my preaching. My sermons tend to have a center of gravity. ... It takes a whole diet of my preaching to get the teaching, delight and persuasion".