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DISCERNMENT

Theology and the Practice of Ministry

Reading in Frames: A Guide for Homiletics

Mason Lee

Abstract: The past thirty years have witnessed an explosion in volume of work produced within homiletics. The sheer variety of topics, questions, themes, orientations, and points of emphasis can make it intimidating for a working preacher to engage in these resources or know where to begin. The options seem too broad; the approaches, issues, and resources so diverse as to become unwieldy. Said differently, those of us within the field of homiletics are prone to look upon this expansion as a form of “Pentecost” in which diversity is a gift that can lead one to better preaching. Yet the question remains of how to help working preachers – those who engage in the practice while perhaps not participating in the conversations about the practice to the same degree – orient themselves to this diversity so that they too can experience it as a Pentecost and not a Tower of Babel. This article intends to help with just this issue; offering both a heuristic way of organizing the literature one finds within the field of homiletics and an annotated bibliography of representative works from which one might launch an exploration.

Introduction

Homiletics is the critical reflection upon, and study of, preaching. While it is true that preaching is at least partly a gift of the Holy Spirit, there are nevertheless knowledge and skills within that can be taught, learned, and honed. The field of homiletics is that academic discipline that explores these dimensions of the practice. The past thirty years have witnessed an eruption of new work within the field, and this is both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, the volume of new work creates something of a “Pentecost” in which the field’s great diversity opens our imagination to the preaching’s potential and insights for improvement. On the other hand, this volume and variety can make it difficult to know where to begin or understand the ongoing conversations. The options seem too broad, the approaches too diverse, the field too unwieldy. Thus, the arises of how to help working preachers—those who *engage in* the practice while perhaps not participating in the *conversations about* the practice—orient themselves

to this diversity so that they too can experience it as a Pentecost and not a Tower of Babel.

This article intends to help with just this issue. It offers a heuristic way of organizing homiletical literature and an annotated bibliography of representative works, aimed at helping the preacher enter the homiletical conversation. This project proceeds in several parts. First, I deploy the language of *frames of reference* for mapping the field of homiletics. Homileticians have invoked the concept of “frames of reference” for some time, and I find it a helpful way of conceptualizing the diversity present within the discipline.¹ I briefly describe what a frame of reference is and name four primary frames of reference within Homiletics: theology, rhetoric, poetics, and ethics. The next four sections of the article focus on these frames. I summarize their primary features and provide an annotated bibliography of representative works. The article’s conclusion suggests ways working preachers might utilize this guide in their own preaching.

First, a word on methods and choices. It is the nature of any heuristic device to break down at the edges. A thing under investigation always becomes more complex the more one focuses on it. This reality makes labeling difficult. My use of “frames of reference” as an organizational structure for homiletical literature is no different.² Preaching is a complex practice, and any homiletical work includes aspects of all four frames. A book I locate in the rhetorical frame, for example, will also have features of theology, poetics, and ethics. My locating a book within a particular frame is not a denial of the presence of other features. It speaks to my understanding of the work’s primary orientation towards preaching.

Readers will note an absence of critique in my descriptions. Since the purpose of this article is not to endorse one frame of reference over others, I leave potential issues and critiques unexplored. I attempt to present each frame in its best light, allowing the reader to make their own judgments.

¹ James F. Kay, *Preaching and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 1-3. In his book *As One Without Authority*, Fred Craddock argues that his work occurs within a “hermeneutical frame.” I have decided not to include hermeneutics as a frame of reference because of my larger convictions about the inevitability of hermeneutics. All these frames are hermeneutical, so to make a separate “hermeneutical frame” would be redundant. On this point, see Sally A. Brown, “Hermeneutics in Protestant Practical Theology,” in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction* (eds. Kathleen Cahalan and Gordon Mikoski; New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 115-132.

² To ask about a heuristic device’s comprehensiveness is, in many ways, the wrong question. The most important question is how well it helps one navigate the thing it maps. Maps are only useful to the degree they help one understand and travel a given area. But this is a separate from identifying every dirt road, stream, or hill. The two tasks overlap at some points but diverge (or even conflict!) at others. Thus, any heuristic device negotiates a tension between comprehensiveness and serviceability.

The goal is not conversion to a particular frame but to help preachers navigate a discipline and develop their own homiletical voice.

I also recognize any selection of books is a subjective exercise. A different homiletician would almost certainly choose different books. There are dozens of books not named in these lists that are worth engaging. Readers should not interpret my specific choices as a dismissal of other homiletical literature. I also do not intend these lists as a ranking or “top 10” list. The field of homiletics is too broad and diverse for those kinds of lists.³ Such rankings are always contextual and speak as much to the situation and needs of the one ranking as the works themselves. I have chosen these books because I believe they are good points of entry for the homiletical conversation from within a particular frame of reference. Readers will also note that none of these authors wrote their books with the intention of serving as an illustration of a particular frame of reference. They make other important arguments about the practice of preaching. Yet they make those arguments from a set of normative assumptions about the practice that evidence one of these frames.

I have also made the decision to limit my selection of books to those written over the past thirty years (1994-2024). I recognize this range excludes many historically significant works (for example, Fred Craddock’s *As One Without Authority*, David Buttrick’s *Homiletic*, and Thomas Long’s *The Witness of Preaching*). This delimitation does not intend to diminish those foundational books and their influence on the homiletical conversations since their publication. They are important and still have much to offer the interested reader. My choice to limit my focus to the last thirty years aims to help chart the discipline since their publication.⁴ My hope is that as preachers explore these frames of reference and accompanying book lists, they might find a frame with which they most identify, discern their own commitments, encounter topics and issues that interest them, and have a starting point for their own growth.

³ My desire to avoid any kind of ranking leads me to list them in alphabetical order by the author’s last name.

⁴ My experience is that preachers either read these books in school or had them recommended to them early in ministry. The question they bring to me is always what to read *next*. This guide assumes familiarity with these basic works and focuses on the resources and voices that have arisen in this next phase of the field’s development.

Frames of Reference & Homiletics

The notion of “frames of reference” is not unique to homiletics. It enjoys widespread use across disciplines.⁵ This concept reflects the ways our engagement with the world occurs from particular points of view. We investigate phenomena or explore some feature of our world from a particular location and with assumptions and values that enable us to assess and evaluate the thing considered. This location, with its assumptions and values, composes the frame within which we operate. Because we are unable to have either unmediated or comprehensive encounters, such frames of reference are vital to our ability to perceive and understand the world around us. Without them, we would be unable to engage or understand phenomena.⁶

Moving into the field of homiletics, we quickly recognize there is no universal position from which to view the practice. Homiletics does not have—indeed has never had—a unified theory for preaching. Homiletics has always had a diversity of methods and approaches for understanding and engaging in preaching. While lacking a unified theory, homiletics does have fixed points for navigating the field. These fixed points—these frames of reference—can serve as starting points for engaging the literature, assessing one’s preaching, and growing in the practice. Each frame of reference provides us with real knowledge about preaching, so to focus on one to the exclusion of the others would result in a diminished practice. But it is also the case that each homiletician assumes one of these as a starting point which exercises a normative claim over how they use the others. The field of homiletics has four such frames of reference, each of which has a long history and at various points has enjoyed periods of dominance.⁷ These four frames of reference are: theology, rhetoric, poetics, and ethics.

Theological Frame of Reference

The theological frame of reference is perhaps the originating frame for Christian preaching. As early as the Apostle Paul we find the claim that the word proclaimed about Jesus Christ *becomes* the Word of power itself.⁸ This

⁵ The notion of “frames of reference” was first used by physicists in the late 19th century as they searched for ways to speak about celestial mechanics and the question of whether the earth or sun was at the center of the universe.

⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

⁷ For an excellent history of preaching, see O.C. Edwards Jr., *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

⁸ On this point, see 1 Corinthians 1:17-25 in which Paul argues that the power of the Cross which saves (v. 17) is also present in the “message about the Cross (v.18). Paul further claims that God has chosen Paul’s proclamation as the vehicle of God’s saving action among the community (v.21). Paul, and later Christians, recognized that the message about Christ – the *Kerygma* – continues to serve as an event of divine

connection between the preached word and divine revelation led to the development of a theological orientation towards the practice of preaching. While initially the central frame of reference for preaching, it slid from its dominant position as preachers and others became more comfortable with the conscious use of rhetoric in the sermon. Following this shift, the theological frame existed at the margins of the practice until the 1930's with Karl Barth's emphasis on the preached word as an event of divine encounter. In Barth's conception, God serves as both Agent and Subject of preaching.⁹ In recent years, several homileticians have revived the theological frame of reference as their governing orientation.¹⁰

The theological frame of reference places priority on divine agency in the event of preaching.¹¹ What makes the practice of preaching the thing it is, according to the theological frame, is that God is the ultimate agent of preaching. This means that a proper understanding of preaching must begin with the confession that preaching is first something God does. Thus, preaching within this frame is shaped by a theological wisdom that seeks to participate in God's continuing speech to God's people; taking place in, with, and through the initiative and activity of the Triune God.¹² Preaching is best understood as initiated by God and given as a gracious gift to the Church, which preachers in themselves have no power to bring about. Rather, God chooses to activate human speech to participate in God's ongoing speech to God's people. If asked, "What is Christian Preaching?" The theological frame would answer, "It is the site of divine encounter in which a gracious God comes again to God's people."

revelation through which God continues to address and make God's-self present to God's people. For a conversation on the exegetical and theological points raised here, see, James F. Kay, *Christus Praesens: A Reconsideration of Rudolf Bultmann's Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

⁹ Barth argued that Christian preaching begins with the claim that God has spoken such that preaching is humanity's attempt to say the same Word in the manner that God has said it. Karl Barth, *The Preaching of the Gospel* (trans. B.E. Hooke; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 9.

¹⁰ At the forefront of this theological turn is David Schnasa Jacobsen, the founder of the Homiletical Theology Project. Jacobsen identifies five "intersections" of the theological frame in homiletics: 1) Theologies of the Gospel that reflect on the Gospel as a lens for preaching, 2) Theologies of preaching that reflect theologically on the act of preaching, 3) Theologies of the Word and sacrament that reflect on the means of grace in the context of worship, 4) Theologies of preaching that focus on the content of theology in sermons, and 5) Theologies of preaching that emphasize the theological methods of preaching that make preaching a form of practical wisdom. David Schnasa Jacobsen, "Introduction," in *Homiletical Theology: Preaching as Doing Theology* (ed. David Schnasa Jacobsen; Eugene: Cascade, 2015), 10-13.

¹¹ As Jim Kay observes, the theological frame's emphasis on divine agency will lead this frame to wax and wane in its standing as accounts of divine agency are more or less robust among preachers and Christians in a given period. See, James F. Kay, "Preacher as Messenger of Hope," in *Slow to Speech and Unclean Lips: Contemporary Images of Preaching Identity* (ed. Robert Stephen Reid; Eugene: Cascade, 2010), 14-15.

¹² Michael Pasquello III, *Christian Preaching: A Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 13.

This grounding in divine agency leads to a particular set of emphases within the theological frame. First, preaching in this frame places a heavy emphasis on sermons focusing on God.¹³ Because God is the ultimate Agent of preaching, God is also the primary Subject of preaching. More than a sermon on “how to be a better spouse, “how to stop worrying,” or even “what this biblical text says,” the theological frame asserts that our deepest and most important need is to “have *the Word* spoken to them, *the Word*, which promises grace in judgment, life in death, the beyond in the *here and now*.”¹⁴ Second, the priority of God’s activity in the preaching event fosters an emphasis on the spirituality of the preacher. If preaching is the human articulation of the speech of God through which the Spirit is about the work of transformation, then preaching is always an act of speaking after which calls the preacher into the dispositions of silence, prayer, and listening for the God who speaks. It calls for formation in the theological virtues so that the preacher can hear the God who speaks in, with, and through the sermon.¹⁵ Finally, because God is the primary agent, the *telos* of preaching in a theological frame is transformation and doxology. God speaks through the human words of the sermon, and in this divine encounter transforms the community into one that rightly worships.¹⁶

Homiletical Works in a Theological Frame

Bartow, Charles. *God’s Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

Bartow develops a theology of preaching from the perspective of the practice’s performative aspects. For Bartow, the preacher’s performance of the sermon participates in the divine performative begun in Scripture. What arises from this claim is a theological vision in which the sermon “refigures” the world of the preacher and the congregation. Bartow then identifies a set of criteria preachers can use to assess the “theological liveliness” of their own sermons (for example, “being in the present tense,” “emphasizing the divine initiative,” and offering “a Christian interpretation of life”). Readers will find here a theologically robust and

¹³ Pasquarello III, *Christian Preaching*, 46. Concretely this works out in sermons which are first about God and only then about us. This is because the theological frame would argue we can only rightly understand ourselves by first understanding the God who speaks to us.

¹⁴ Karl Barth, “Need and Promise of Christian Proclamation,” in *The Word of God and Theology* (trans. Amy Marga; New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 111. Emphasis original.

¹⁵ Mason Lee, *Learning to Speak of God: Patience as a Homiletical Virtue* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2024), 38-63.

¹⁶ Richard Lischer, “Preaching as the Church’s Language,” in *Listening to the Word* (eds. Gail O’Day and Thomas Long; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 113-130.

performatively insightful volume with foundations and implications to improve their preaching.

Brown, Sally A. *Sunday's Sermon for Monday's World: Preaching to Shape Daring Witness*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020.

This most recent book from Sally Brown focuses on the question of how to preach in ways that inspire and equip those who hear the sermon to live out their Christian witness amidst the everyday realities of their lives. Brown develops four aspects of such a homiletic: 1) building a vision-shaping hermeneutic of promise, 2) emphasizing communal practices as resources for discernment, 3) engaging stories from Scripture and contemporary experience so that they function as "rehearsals" for the actions to come next, and 4) shaping theological and metaphorical vision among the listeners. Through a robust conversation with (and critique of) missional theology, Brown develops a homiletical orientation that fosters discernment about what it means to participate in God's ongoing work in the world in one's everyday life.

Jacobsen, David Schnasa and Robert Allen Kelly. *Kairos Preaching: Speaking Gospel to the Situation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.

What does it mean to proclaim the Gospel within the concrete realities of the situations we often face in ministry? This book is an excellent resource for thinking and reflecting theologically on situations in ministry. A strong example of the "law-gospel" dialectic in homiletics, Kairos Preaching helps preachers develop their own theological orientation and "working gospel." The authors then provide ways one can connect that "working gospel" to the various situations into which preachers often speak. While the authors of the book develop a theology of the gospel unique to their tradition, they nevertheless provide the reader with a robust vision of the theological work the sermon can and should do.

Johnson, Patrick W. T. *The Mission of Preaching: Equipping the Community for Faithful Witness*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015.

Johnson develops a homiletical approach that revolves around a missionary encounter between the Gospel and a post-Christian North American context. Engaging the work of Karl Barth and the missional theology movement, Johnson articulates a vision of preaching that takes as its focus the equipping of the entire community to bear witness. Johnson's engagement with Barth's ecclesiology provides the preacher with a strong support for a missional perspective that does not diminish the role of the Church. His evaluative chapter on the concept of

“witness” as it has been used in contemporary homiletics is an excellent survey of an important concept.

Lammers Gross, Nancy. *If You Cannot Preach Like Paul*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

“Don’t say what Paul said, do what Paul did...” This is the central claim of Gross’s book. She encourages an approach to preaching that centers on the intersection of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and the concrete realities to which preachers speak. While the book itself is focused on theological and hermeneutical strategies for preaching Paul’s letters, it provides insights and a larger orientation for preaching from all of Scripture. The strength of this book is the relationship between Scripture and preacher that it depicts, inviting the preacher to do more than figure out and explain “what Paul meant” in the sermon. My students love this book, and I have found few volumes that energize preachers more than this one.

LaRue, Cleophus J. *The Heart of Black Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999.

This volume argues that the defining feature of Black preaching is its distinctive theological hermeneutic. Central to this hermeneutic is God’s care and concern for the African American community. It emphasizes divine action in ways that liberate, deliver, protect, provide, empower, and transform. LaRue’s work develops that theological hermeneutic and identifies five “domains of experience” in which it operates: 1) Personal Piety, 2) Care of the Soul, 3) Social Justice, 4) Corporate Concerns, and 5) Maintenance of the Institutional Church. While this volume focuses on Black Preaching, its insistence on a theological hermeneutic for preaching and its helpful identification of “domains of experience” to which that hermeneutic speaks make it a must-read for all preachers.

Matsen Neal, Jerusha. *The Overshadowed Preacher: Mary, The Spirit, and the Labor of Proclamation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020.

The Overshadowed Preacher develops a theological account of Christ’s presence in the preaching event through preaching’s nature as an embodied practice. Neal uses the biblical account of Mary’s pregnancy with the Christ-child as a metaphor for preaching. Here, it is precisely through our embodied existence in the pulpit that God chooses to communicate to God’s people. This volume is an excellent resource for reflecting on the theological reality of preaching as an embodied human practice and the theological implications it bears. One finds in this book a powerful theological vision for taking seriously that God uses all of the preacher—not merely their words—in the preaching event.

Pasquarello III, Michael. *Christian Preaching: A Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.

Pasquarello is one of the most explicitly theological voices in homiletics. This volume represents a fully developed theology of preaching as a Trinitarian practice through which God shapes the community of faith for right worship and enjoyment of God. Pasquarello operates from a post-liberal and neo-orthodox theological orientation, and one sees that influence in the works he cites and addresses. The chapters unfold around various components of preaching (for example, "preaching as a scriptural practice," "preaching as a pastoral practice," "preaching as an ecclesial practice") which helpfully convey the dimensions of the practice and how they connect.

Powery, Luke. *Dem Dry Bones: Preaching, Death, and Hope*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.

Dem Dry Bones argues that if preaching is to be appropriately Christian, then it needs to speak honestly about the reality of death and suffering within the human experience. Any preaching worthy of the name "Christian" must wrestle with these realities and ultimately make theological sense of them. Powery turns to African American spirituals as resources for how to do exactly this: tell the truth about death and suffering in ways that provide a real experience of Christian hope. This is a stirring historical and theological investigation of how African American spirituals can serve as "homiletical role models." Powery's work calls preachers to a robust vision of the Spirit and Christian hope that avoids religious bromides and prosperity gospel clichés. Preachers do this, according to Powery, so that they can proclaim a Gospel that is good news precisely because it can speak truthfully and inclusively of suffering and death.

Wilson, Paul Scott. *The Practice of Preaching*. Revised Edition. Nashville: Abingdon, 2007.

This book is an "advanced" introduction to preaching. Highly technical at points, it is intended to help preachers envision the entire process of sermonic process. Wilson's approach revolves around "one theme" which emphasizes God's action, "one doctrine" which arises from the theme, "one need" to which the theme and doctrine speaks. The book contains chapters on the standard aspects of sermon development, engaging those issues through wider conversations around homiletical theory. What I appreciate most about this book is how it encourages preachers to do their theological thinking in ways that are connected to the pastoral needs of the audience. Wilson helps the preacher see that "talking theology" in the sermon does not require dealing in abstractions or technical language but speaking to real human need.

Rhetorical Frame of Reference

The rhetorical frame of reference dates to the earliest manual on preaching —Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*—in which he gives instruction on “how to present what one has learned” in their engagement with Scripture.¹⁷ It became the dominant frame for preaching during the European Enlightenment when those who studied the practice shifted their emphasis from preaching as an event of divine encounter to a form of human speech.¹⁸ The rhetorical frame rose in prominence as the study of preaching formalized into an academic discipline and participated in the interdisciplinary pairing that occurred with the development of the theological school.¹⁹ This primacy solidified when John Broaddus, in what would become the most influential preaching textbook for over one hundred years, defined homiletics as “a branch of rhetoric, or a kindred art.”²⁰

The rhetorical frame of reference begins from the conviction that sermons, at their most basic level, are speeches.²¹ Sermons are composed oratory events. The preacher develops main ideas, arranges sections, chooses illustrations and concretizations, and identifies appropriate language. This makes the sermon a rhetorical act best understood in relation to the same guidelines and practices that govern other forms of speech. As such a rhetorical act—in which rhetoric is concerned with understanding the means of persuasion—the rhetorical frame asserts that it is only *after* the preacher understands the communicative dimensions of the practice that they can explore the impact of the Christian faith’s theological specifics.²² Thus, this frame stresses how the preacher shapes the sermon to bring about the desired response of those gathered. If asked, “What is Christian preaching?” The rhetorical frame might answer, “A

¹⁷ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 4.1.

¹⁸ François Fenelon, *Dialogues on Eloquence* (ed. Wilbur Samuel Howell; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951).

¹⁹ Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2001). See also, Herbert W. Simons, ed., *The Rhetorical Turn* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

²⁰ John Broaddus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (ed. Edward Dargan; New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1870), 16.

²¹ Lucy Lind Hogan and Robert Stephen Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation: Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 11-12. Hogan and Reid distinguish between *preaching* and *sermons*. Preaching is when one proclaims the good news, either verbally or non-verbally. Sermons are a specific rhetorical act that meets the conditions of a speech.

²² Hogan and Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation*, 13.

speech through which the preacher offers good reasons to persuade those listening towards particular ends.”²³

Several points of emphasis arise from this identification of preaching with rhetoric. First, the rhetorical frame emphasizes persuasion as the primary aim of Christian preaching. Led by rhetorical best practices, the preacher aims to persuade the hearer; to believe something, to feel something, to undertake a specific action, or any number of possible outcomes. The preacher can use many different forms of argument to accomplish that persuasion—whether *ethos*, *logos*, or *pathos*—but the aim is the same: to overcome obstacles that might exist so that the hearer is persuaded.²⁴ Secondly, the rhetorical frame emphasizes the role of context within the practice of preaching. Persuasion requires the preacher to understand those to whom they preach—the recognized sources of authority, the preacher’s own standing, emotional states, and a multitude of other features—which shape what is persuasive at a given moment.²⁵ This rhetorical emphasis asks of the sermon not only what a passage of Scripture means or what God is doing, but what is necessary for the sermon’s message to persuade the intended audience. Finally, the rhetorical frame accentuates the “mechanics” of the sermon. Because this frame accentuates sermonic arrangement and structure to accomplish persuasion, it attends more deeply to issues of introductions, conclusions, transitions, and other technical components such that the sermon achieves its persuasive end.²⁶

Homiletical Works in a Rhetorical Frame

Gilbert, Kenyatta. *Exodus Preaching: Crafting Sermons About Justice and Hope*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018.

Exodus Preaching delves deeply into the prophetic-rhetorical tradition of African American preaching. What arises are insights and guidance for preachers discerning how they might preach prophetic and justice-oriented sermons in their own context. Gilbert develops “Exodus preaching” that will 1) unmask evil, 2) remain hopeful amidst communal despair, 3) connect the sermon to just acts through naming reality, and 4) maintain an impulse for beauty in language. Gilbert spends much of the book exploring classic and contemporary sermonic examples as a way of illustrating strategies for carrying out this kind of prophetic

²³ Hogan and Reid speak of preaching as “a good person offering good reasons to good people.” Hogan and Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation*, 91.

²⁴ Frank Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 56-69.

²⁵ Judith McDaniel, “Rhetoric Reconsidered: Preaching as Persuasion,” *STR* 41 3 (1998): 244-245.

²⁶ As an example, see Richard Eslinger, *Pitfalls in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

preaching. This is a helpful resource for those wondering both why they might engage in prophetic preaching and how they might do so in ways that are faithful and effective for their context.

Hogan, Lucy Lind. *Graceful Speech: An Invitation to Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006.

Hogan's Graceful Speech serves as an introduction to what many call "the preaching life." Chapters in this volume focus on the person and character of the preacher, and the process of sermon development itself. What I appreciate about Hogan's work is the emphasis she places on the person of the preacher and the role of one's ethos at various stages of the practice. One also finds here a deep commitment to the contextual realities of preaching. Hogan spends several chapters both exploring those dimensions and providing the reader with helpful insights for navigating them.

Hogan, Lucy Lind and Robert Reid. *Connecting with the Congregation: Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999.

Connecting with the Congregation focuses on the connection between rhetoric and preaching. One finds here a summary of rhetoric and explanations of how various aspects of rhetorical theory immediately apply to, and can improve, one's preaching. This volume helpfully explores the three forms of argument within rhetoric – ethos, pathos, and logos – and illustrates how that form of argument can be a powerful tool in the sermon. It also provides chapters on questions of sermonic arrangement and delivery.

Kim, Matthew. *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017.

Preaching with Cultural Intelligence addresses the reality that our hearers come to the sermon from a diverse set of backgrounds and bring with them unique cultural assumptions and values. Thus, preachers must navigate that cultural diversity faithfully and respectfully. This volume draws on the theories of cultural intelligence to chart a path for such navigation, crafting a hermeneutic for homiletical engagements across cultures. The book is written from within the stream of evangelical homiletics, and those commitments are reflected throughout. In the first half, one gets a nice introduction to the theory of cultural intelligence. The rest of the book then turns to the practice of cultural intelligence and how it might shape the message one proclaims.

Nieman, James and Thomas Rogers. *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001.

Preaching to Every Pew explores the connection between congregational studies and homiletics. Nieman and Rogers argue that every congregation contains within it multiple “cultural frames”—ethnicity, class, displacement, and beliefs—which carry with them modes of rationality, values, assumptions, and ways of understanding. These frames shape how one hears and understands the sermon. Thus, it becomes important that preachers are aware of these frames and can negotiate them well in their preaching. The book explores each of these cultural frames and provides strategies for how to preach so that those who belong within it will hear.

Reid, Robert Stephen. *The Four Voices of Preaching: Connecting Purpose and Identity Behind the Pulpit*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006.

Reid’s book begins from the assumption that anyone who preaches the gospel also communicates an implied personal identity: who they are as a preacher. This identity is the preacher’s “voice.” Reid develops four prominent voices of preaching: the testifying voice, the sage voice, the teaching voice, and the encouraging voice. Each of these voices has its own unique stance towards what one does when preaching which informs the way one goes about preaching. Reid’s work is a strong resource for preachers wanting to better understand themselves and their preaching tendencies. It is also a helpful resource for understanding how one’s particular voice may or may not be heard by their congregation. Thus, this book is useful for bridging the gap that can exist between preacher and congregation.

Resner Jr., André. *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Preacher and Cross focuses on the kind of character needed by those who preach, particularly, what role the Cross should have in shaping the kind of person the preacher is. Along the way to addressing that question, Resner provides an excellent survey of rhetorical ethos and its place in preaching. The book engages Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians to develop an understanding of preacherly ethos that is cruciform in shape. Through this book, Resner presents the importance of ethos in the act of preaching and encourages preachers to a vision of homiletical ethos that is shaped by the Savior who suffered and died on a cross.

Thomas, Frank. *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016.

Thomas explores the homiletical and rhetorical traditions of African American preaching. The book also serves as an excellent homiletical history, covering the period from 1750 to the present day. Yet this book is not simply a history or survey of African American homiletical theory. It works to reveal and demonstrate the best of this tradition in the hopes that those who read will find resources to utilize. That tendency makes this an invaluable resource for those looking for fresh ideas, new strategies, or deeper wells from which to draw for their own preaching.

_____. ***They Like to Never Quit Praising God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997.**

One of the first books to explore African American homiletics, this book develops the notion of “celebration” as a distinctive mark of African American preaching. Thomas helps the preacher understand the emotional process that leads to culminating celebration in the sermon and explores the homiletical strategies within African American preaching for reaching it. While this book focuses on African American homiletics, preachers everywhere can benefit from Thomas’s emphasis on the emotional process’ role in preaching and homiletical strategies to engage it.

Poetics Frame of Reference

The poetics frame of reference emerged as a distinct homiletical frame in the late 1960s with the publication of David Randolph’s book, *The Renewal of Preaching*.²⁷ Fred Craddock cemented the prominence and popularity of the poetics frame with his *As One Without Authority*. In this now-famous work, Craddock insisted that when it comes to the study of preaching, “All considerations of structure, unity, movement, use of text, etc. must wait upon the prior consideration of what words are and what they do.”²⁸ The work of Randolph and Craddock led to a homiletical sea change that resulted in what became known as the *New Homiletic*.

If the theological frame focuses on God as the Agent and Subject of preaching, and the rhetorical frame focuses on preacher and congregation in the process of persuasion, then the poetics frame focuses on language

²⁷ David J. Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969). One can trace influences that pre-date Randolph’s work, but the basics of the frame are first connected and articulated there. For an intellectual genealogy of this frame, see O. Wesley Allen Jr., ed. *The Renewed Homiletic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 1-18.

²⁸ Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 112.

and texts. The poetics frame starts with the power of language and attends to the ways that narrative fosters a transformative experience in the consciousness of the hearer. This frame recognizes that as people we rarely change because we have been persuaded (at least in the ways that rhetoric understands persuasion). Rather, we change because we have experiences that leave us impacted in some way. The poetics frame recognizes that conversion and transformation are experiential realities. Consider, for example, the profound experience we may have upon reading a book or hearing a story. The poetics frame would tell us this is not because those things persuade us through rhetorical or logical argument. It was because that novel or movie *did something* to us. This recognition leads the poetics frame to argue for the performative capacity of human words and language.²⁹ Language does not merely describe. It performs, accomplishes, and elicits action.³⁰ Thus, the poetics frame emphasizes the eventfulness of human speech to bring about new realities. Preaching in this frame, as a result, focuses on the artistic work of the sermon and the ways meaning is experientially constructed through language and narrative. If asked, “What is Christian Preaching?” The poetics frame might answer, “An event of language which fosters an experiential encounter in the listener to bring about a new reality.”³¹

This emphasis on the creative power of language and narrative leads to several homiletical priorities. First, the performative understanding of language results in renewed attention to the language and literary forms within Scripture. The poetics frame seeks to better understand how the forms and language of the biblical text—as the starting point for the sermon—not only *say* something (provide content) but *do* something (foster an experience). Meaning and form are inseparable such that a preacher must ask not only what a text *says* but what the form of the text seeks *to do*.³²

²⁹ In this way, the poetics frame is heavily indebted to the New Hermeneutic. Space does not allow for a treatment of that movement here. For such a treatment, see Paul J. Achtemeier, *An Introduction to the New Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969).

³⁰ J. L. Austin provides the classic example when he notes that a minister making the statement, “I now pronounce you man and wife” is not simply describing a reality but creating it. Once the utterance is made, a new reality exists: a marriage. See, J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). For a more recent treatment, see David Bromwich, *How Words Make Things Happen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

³¹ Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, 9. This emphasis on experience echoes the theory of divine revelation articulated by H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006).

³² For a classic treatment on the connection between biblical form and function, see Thomas Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989). Within homiletics this concretizes in an expectation that sermons have a *function statement* which identifies the sermon’s hoped-for result. See Thomas Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 3rd edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 113-136.

Second, the poetics frame and its emphasis on language leads to a two-fold “turn to the hearer.” The first aspect of this turn is a shift in emphasis from building an argument to how the listener hears. Taking seriously the mantra, “It isn’t what I said, it’s what they heard,” the preacher chooses language that invites the listening community into a particular kind of experience. A second aspect of this turn to the hearer understands the one who listens to the sermon as having a constructive role in the creation of sermonic meaning.³³ What is offered in the sermon is merely the beginning of the process. The sermon may foster or bring about the experience in the consciousness of the hearer. Having done this, it becomes the hearer’s responsibility to determine the meaning for them and how it impacts their life. Rather than persuading the hearer to assent to a particular claim or take a specific action, this frame encourages an open-ended and under-determined conclusion that invites the listener to discover for themselves any next steps.³⁴ Finally, this focus on the power of language leads to an exploration of sermonic forms. If listeners are participants in the creation of meaning and language works by fostering experience, then the poetics frame involves a consideration of the kinds of sermon forms that will best facilitate that experience. Arguing that God’s truth comes to us in narrative, myth, poetry, and metaphor, this frame endorses sermonic forms that mimic those same poetic forms and recreate the experiences they encourage.³⁵

Homiletical Works in a Poetics Frame

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Word Militant: Preaching a Decentering Word*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007.

Few writers so clearly embody a poetic vision of preaching as Brueggemann. This volume articulates an understanding of preaching as re-imagination and engagement with the poetic power of the biblical text. At the heart of this vision is a renewed call to engage the witness of Scripture in imaginative and constructive interpretive acts that “redescribe” the world in light of an active God. A collection of his writings on preaching, this volume contains chapters on the larger aims of preaching, on the hermeneutics of preaching, and preaching in a post-Christian

³³ In some ways this affirms Calvin’s definition of the church. Calvin argues, “Whenever we see the Word of God sincerely preached *and heard* [emphasis mine], wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the church of God has some existence...” For Calvin, the Word must also be heard, not merely preached, within the church. This hearing assumes the gathered community and gives them a principal standing in any ecclesiology. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.9.

³⁴ Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 78.

³⁵ Allen, *The Renewed Homiletic*, 9.

context. Readers who enjoyed Brueggemann's Prophetic Imagination and Finally Comes the Poet will find much to appreciate in this volume.

Eslinger, Richard. *The Web of Preaching: New Options in Homiletic Method*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2002.

What became known as the "New Homiletic" is really a collection of approaches all centered on the role of language and experience in faith. Eslinger's volume introduces the various options that comprise the New Homiletic: from Craddock's inductivity to Buttrick's moves, from Lowry's loops to African American story. Eslinger explores the underlying commitments of each homiletic method and details the significant features. This is a volume that maps the "narrative landscape," allowing the preacher to incorporate these methods into their own practice. Any preacher who is curious about the movement known as the New Homiletic or who wants to explore narrative modes of preaching will find a valuable resource in Eslinger's work.

Farris, Stephen. *Preaching that Matters: The Bible and Our Lives*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998.

Preaching begins with the biblical text. Yet preachers often struggle to discern how a particular text might speak to their listeners. Farris's book is a method for doing exactly that. Building on the concept of analogy, Farris develops an approach to interpretation that helps preachers identify their hearers in various characters and aspects of the biblical text. This book walks the preacher through the process of making connections and developing robust analogies between the biblical text and contemporary context. The result is an approach that allows their audience to experience the text for themselves.

Frymire, Jeffery. *Preaching from Inside the Story: A Fresh Journey into Narrative*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2022.

Narrative preaching is a well-known homiletical form. But in this book, Frymire takes up the work of Lowry and Craddock and places their narrative homiletics in conversation with our contemporary moment. Written from an evangelical homiletical perspective, this work engages current research understandings of narrative from hermeneutics, neuroscience, and philosophy. Thus, it takes the New Homiletics' initial emphasis on narrative and experience and updates that perspective in light of advancements made since. For those interested in what has come after the New Homiletic for narrative preaching and who might identify as preaching from a more evangelical theological orientation, this work makes a helpful conversation partner.

Graves, Mike. *The Sermon as Symphony: Preaching the Literary Forms of the New Testament*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1997.

The connection between form and function within the New Homiletic resulted in a plethora of homiletical works that focused on the various genres of Scripture. The Sermon as Symphony is an excellent example of that kind of homiletical work. Taking the different literary genres of the New Testament as its focus, the chapters of this book develop a working hermeneutic for attending to literary forms within the Bible. It describes the various forms and how one might approach them homiletically. This book is a helpful resource for preachers looking to engage the various genres of Scripture seriously in the belief that such literary differences should matter for the kinds of sermons we preach. It provides an overall framework for understanding the significance of genre and immediate suggestions for appropriating them homiletically.

Graves, Mike and David Schlafer, Editors. *What's the Shape of Narrative Preaching?* St. Louis: Chalice, 2008.

A collection of essays in honor of Eugene Lowry, this volume is a helpful next step for those who possess some familiarity with the basics of narrative preaching and want to take a next step. This collection considers questions like "What are the strengths and weaknesses of narrative preaching?" "How does narrative preaching work in a context of rising biblical illiteracy?" and a host of others. It has chapters from many major homiletical voices. One gets here a quality historical investigation of narrative preaching, foundations of narrative preaching, and multiple new directions for narrative preaching.

Hughes, Robert and Robert Kysar. *Preaching Doctrine for the Twenty-First Century*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

The emphasis on religious and lived experience is a foundational commitment within the New Homiletic and narrative preaching. This volume explores how the preacher might still engage in doctrinal preaching within that experiential framework. How does one preach the classical doctrines and commitments of the Christian faith – how does one engage in catechetical preaching – while still maintaining that experiential emphasis? Hughes and Kysar articulate an approach to doctrinal preaching that relies on the development of images as a central way of concretizing Christian doctrine within lived experience. This would be an excellent volume for those who want to explore Christian doctrines within their preaching but worry about sermons that spend all their time "explaining."

Long, Thomas. *Preaching from Memory to Hope*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009.

Few voices have impacted contemporary homiletics as deeply as Thomas Long. In this volume—the published version of his 2006 Beecher Lectures—Long provides an exploration of narrative preaching: addressing its critics, making connections between narrative and human experience, and exploring theological commitments within the framework of narrative understandings. Additionally, Long provides an excellent introduction to the philosopher Paul Ricoeur and develops from his theory of narrative a homiletical structure. A short and accessible book from one of the great voices of contemporary homiletics, this is a helpful resource for preachers seeking to strengthen their preaching in a narrative form.

Schmit, Clayton J. *Too Deep for Words: A Theology of Liturgical Expression*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002.

This volume on preaching and worship calls on preachers to consider the artistic and aesthetics of the preaching event. By thinking of the artistic aspect of preaching, Schmit wants preachers to recover the performative component of their work and the ways in which that performance participates in the facilitation of the experiential. Schmit helps us see it is not only the words on the page that matter. Rather, the physical manifestation of those words in the event of preaching facilitates the experiential. It gives both a rationale for why preachers ought to attend to the aesthetic dimensions of their practice and specific exercises and practical ideas preachers can incorporate into their work.

Troeger, Thomas. *Wonder Reborn: Creating Sermons on Hymns, Music, and Poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Troeger suggests that great art can bear the weight of Gospel proclamation, not simply ornament it. This belief undergirds this book and leads Troeger to develop a homiletical approach for crafting sermons based on music, hymns, and poetry. Basing a sermon on a non-Scriptural source might sound strange to many, but Troeger suggests that artistic beauty has its own kind of holiness which God can use to enlarge our vision and understanding of the world. The book includes example sermons from prominent figures that demonstrate the homiletical vision Troeger endorses. This is a helpful volume for thinking about the connection between Scriptural and non-Scriptural sources, and how the relationship between the two can deepen the preacher's interpretive and preaching practice.

Ethical Frame of Reference

Ethical concerns, and the ethical frame, have been a part of homiletics and preaching since its beginning. Historically, these concerns involved the

preacher's duties and responsibilities: plagiarism, rhetorical manipulation, how to preach on ethical issues, or other "professional ethical practices."³⁶ Yet at the turn of the century, the frame shifted to larger, more philosophical visions that focused on the relationships and dynamics inherent to preaching.³⁷ Facilitated by postmodern and critical theories, the ethical frame began to explore preaching from the vantage point of the relationships, communicative morality, and power inherent to the practice. The ethical frame has risen in popularity since that shift, opening several new avenues of study that focus on the issues of justice, mutual responsibility, and structural obligations.

The ethical frame arose in its current form during the postmodern turn of contemporary homiletical theory and reflects the schools of thought and philosophical orientations that marked that turn. Learning from the postmodern rejection of metanarratives and its emphasis on the constructive power of language, the ethical frame recognizes preaching's provisional and socially constructed nature. Preaching is not a practice that descended from heaven. It has been built up over the Church's history through a complex interaction among actors, communities, traditions, and the exercise of power among them. As a result, the ethical frame focuses on the dynamics of those relationships. Reflecting its engagement with various hermeneutics of suspicion and critical theories, the ethical frame considers how preaching has participated at various points in both the oppression and flourishing of individuals and communities.³⁸ It also explores how the practice might better undertake its work in more just and inclusive ways. The ethical frame is concerned with inclusion and human flourishing, applying its critical vision and philosophical starting points to investigate and move the practice toward these ends.³⁹ If asked, "What is Christian Preaching?" The ethical frame might respond, "A means of bringing about God's flourishing for all."

From this several key emphases emerge. First, the ethical frame stresses preaching's reality as an embodied practice. Preaching involves real, physical human bodies: the body of the preacher and the bodies of those gathered to hear. Because of this, we are right to attend to the ways in

³⁶ Raymond Bailey, "Ethics in Preaching," *Review & Expositor* 86 (1989): 533-537. Arthur Van Seters, *Preaching and Ethics* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004) speaks primarily within these dimensions of the "ethics" of preaching.

³⁷ John McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001).

³⁸ Ted Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1-14.

³⁹ Adam Hearlson, *The Holy No: Worship as a Subversive Act* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

which Christian preaching has included or excluded certain bodies. Practices occur within traditions and social imaginaries that entail relational dynamics and ordering.⁴⁰ Thus, the ethical frame pays attention to the ways that those with bodies historically considered “non-normative” —gendered bodies, bodies with dark skin, disabled bodies, and other marginal orientations—have been marginalized or excluded from the practice.⁴¹ By attending to those bodies and how they navigated their marginal position, we might learn from their experience and expand our vision of preaching.⁴² Secondly, the ethical frame recognizes the power dynamics of preaching and seeks to cultivate less domineering and more “horizontal” forms of relationality.⁴³ Recognizing how the power dynamics within preaching can lead to abuse, this frame both critiques abusive forms and seeks better ways of stewarding power. The result is a shift from views of the preacher as one “over,” “above,” or “in charge” to one “among” or “in relation to.” This leads to an emphasis on communal and conversational homiletical forms that prioritize non-hierarchical relations and dynamics.⁴⁴ Finally, the ethical frame recognizes that preaching always expresses larger cultural assumptions and practices. These cultural forms are in some sense relative and cannot claim authority as the normative expression of the practice. Thus, it argues for a homiletical plurality that resists establishing one cultural form of preaching as dominant over others.⁴⁵ It seeks to avoid theological colonialism by identifying and developing homiletical forms that arise from and reflect the theological and cultural assumptions of specific communities.⁴⁶ Thus, it attends to localized communities and their embedded religious beliefs with an eye to how they shape homiletical practice. Thus, this frame values diversity and indigenous expression over a uniform homiletical approach.

⁴⁰ On “social imaginary” see Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁴¹ For example, what might it communicate about which bodies are authorized to preach that one must first climb a set of stairs to get to the pulpit or stage? Such a reality excludes those with bodies that are physically unable — for one reason or another — to climb stairs.

⁴² Lisa Thompson, *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), xi-xv.

⁴³ Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 135-137.

⁴⁴ “In conversational preaching, the preacher and the congregation are colleagues, exploring together... labels like clergy and laity disappear and... believing or wanting to believe are all that matters.” Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 4. See also, *Under the Oak Tree: The Church as Community of Conversation in a Conflicted and Pluralistic World* (eds. Ronald Allen, John McClure, and O. Wesley Allen Jr.; Eugene: Cascade, 2013).

⁴⁵ Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene: Cascade, 2014), 1-12.

⁴⁶ See, for example, the chapters in *The Future Shape of Christian Proclamation: What the Global South Can Teach Us About Preaching* (eds. Cleophus LaRue and Luiz Nascimento; Eugene: Cascade, 2020).

Homiletical Works in an Ethical Frame

Carter Florence, Anna. *Preaching as Testimony*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007.

What does it mean that the earliest preaching within Christianity took the form of the testimony of the women at the empty tomb? Working from this observation and question, Carter Florence explores the notion of testimony as a homiletical form with a history of empowering those traditionally unauthorized to preach. Beginning with the stories of women preachers, this book engages philosophical understandings of testimony and explores this as a fruitful homiletical form. What results is a vision of “preaching as testimony” with homiletical insights and suggestions for one’s preaching practice which incorporate one’s own personal experience and the experience of others within the community, empowering them to bear witness to their experience of God.

González, Justo and Catherine González. *The Liberating Pulpit*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994.

*What is the connection between one’s theological and hermeneutical orientation and the homiletic one practices? This is the question at the heart of *Liberating Pulpit*. González and González operate from within a liberation theology framework to show how this theological orientation and the contextual realities from which it emerged shape every part of the preaching practice: how one engages Scripture, the theological themes that are given priority, and the obligations of preaching to mirror God’s “preferential option” for the marginalized. This volume serves as an excellent introduction to liberation theology and the ways in which the ethical orientation of that theological commitment shapes one’s preaching practice.*

González, Justo and Pablo Jiménez. *Púlpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.

This work by González and Jiménez is not an “introduction” in the typical sense of the term. The authors present a historical reflection and cultural analysis with which to understand Hispanic preaching within the Hispanic Protestant tradition. They trace the development of a uniquely Hispanic homiletic that began with the “implantation” of White, Anglo-European homiletical theories but which quickly gave way to homiletical approaches that reflected the cultural and historical realities of the Hispanic communities in which they occurred. The authors give attention to issues that characterize many Hispanic communities in the United States today and how those issues and their homiletical responses can enrich anyone’s preaching practice.

McClure, John S. *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2001.

No contemporary homiletician has explored the ethical dimensions of preaching more fully than John McClure. In this volume, McClure develops an ethical approach to preaching that takes seriously our postmodern context. To do so, he engages the method of deconstruction in relation to the traditional authorities of preaching—the Bible, tradition, experience, and reason—to show what could be “other-wise” within our practice. He also engages the philosophical work of Emmanuel Levinas to develop a vision of preaching that occurs and unfolds in relation to the “other” to whom we must give account. By no means an easy book to read, it provides introductions to ethical and philosophical thought as it relates to preaching.

McCray, Donyelle. *The Censored Pulpit: Julian of Norwich as Preacher*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019.

This volume is a historical investigation into the person and work of Julian of Norwich through a homiletical lens. McCray endorses Julian as an important figure for the history of preaching in whose life and work we also consider larger questions about what it means to preach. As one who did not have the Church’s official authorization to preach, Julian’s life and work nevertheless took on a “sermonic form.” What results from this historical investigation is a reimagining of the entire preaching process: from the preacher’s authority and relation to tradition to the role of Scripture in proclamation. Thus, this volume is an excellent example of how attending to marginal voices can deepen and enrich our own practice, even if we might not identify with that specific voice.

Rose, Lucy Atkinson. *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997.

The relationship between preacher and congregation is a perennial issue within homiletics. Rose seeks to “close the gap” between the two and develop a homiletical approach that envisions the preacher not as “preaching to” the congregation, but “preaching with” them. This requires nothing less than a reconfiguration of how the sermonic process proceeds. Rose constructs a vision of the sermon as a “round table” at which the members of the community are gathered. The act of preaching becomes a highly collaborative and relational process that emphasizes mutuality rather than preacherly authority. This volume would be a helpful resource for preachers considering the inherent power dynamics of the practice and seeking ways to make their congregation more active participants in the preaching process.

Thompson, Lisa L. *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2018.

This volume explores the practice of preaching from the perspective of African American women. It attends to the ways African American women—a group historically denied access to the pulpit within their traditions—have nevertheless negotiated those traditions in ways that allowed them to live into their preacherly calling. By centering these histories and stories, Thompson considers what they might teach all of us about preaching and how to do it well. What results is a homiletical vision that emphasizes an improvisational and creative relationship with one’s tradition in ways that gesture towards greater inclusivity and hospitality. This is a timely book for all those preaching in contexts where the old forms are fading and questions about what comes next abound.

Tisdale, Leonora Tubbs. *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997.

Groundbreaking at its publication, this book combines the field of congregational studies with preaching. Tisdale encourages cultural and contextual exegesis that gives rise to a vision of preaching as doing “local theology.” Preaching articulates and expresses the embedded theological beliefs and convictions of the community so that the sermon becomes a statement of communal identity. This volume encourages forms of preaching that do more than “apply” a biblical text or import theologies external to the community. Instead, it asks preachers to engage in deep contextual analysis of their congregation so that the sermon becomes a constructive act in which the congregation has a part.

Travis, Sarah. *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space*. Eugene: Cascade, 2014.

What does it mean that Christian preaching occurs within a context of empire? How might preaching participate in the dismantling of empire and colonial forces, thereby cultivating a larger theological imagination and hospitality? These are the questions at the heart of Travis’s work. In this volume, she provides the reader with an excellent introduction to postcolonial theory and how it illuminates the historical and contemporary context of preaching. Travis moves us towards a postcolonial homiletic (using social theories of the Trinity) that responds to the tendencies of empire and colonialism that still haunt us. This is an excellent volume for considering the wider forces of our preaching context and locating strategies to develop a more postcolonial, and hospitable, approach to preaching.

Wagner, Kimberly. *Fractured Ground: Preaching in the Wake of Mass Trauma*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2023.

The conversation between trauma studies and homiletics is a growing edge within the discipline. Wagner provides an excellent introduction to the phenomena and experience of group and community-level trauma. She identifies the features of such trauma and the challenge they present to preaching in such situations. Wagner develops a homiletical response that is responsive to traumatic events. She becomes as specific as recommending various sermonic forms that reflect the needs and challenges of group trauma. If one ministers to a community long enough, it is not a question of if one will face these kinds of traumatic circumstances, only when and how. Wagner's book provides a robust account of trauma and the homiletical guidance to address it within one's preaching ministry.

Conclusion: Suggestions for Using This Guide

Theology, rhetoric, poetics, and ethics. These four frames serve as fixed stars and orientations for understanding the ongoing homiletical conversation. Each of these frames helps us better understand the practice of preaching. And each of these frames has its own assumptions that allow us to make judgments about what "good preaching" entails. There is always more to say and any attempt at mapping an entire discipline will belie its complexity. But I hope this article provides the reader with a basic layout of the field and a place from which to begin their explorations. With this in mind, and with the realization that readers are free to do with this guide what they wish, I suggest three potential uses.

First, a preacher might use this as a tool for discerning their own working orientation. Growth begins when we become self-aware of our commitments and position in the practice. As they read my description of the frames above, the preacher might attend to which one best captures their current preaching practice. Which best articulates their own assumptions, concerns, and interests? Using this device to gain a measure of clarity around their own preaching voice and orientation will give them a place from which to start. It will also help them better grasp what it would mean to improve in the practice and discern the norms they (perhaps unconsciously) already use.

Secondly, a preacher might use this guide to improve specific aspects of their preaching. Often a preacher will be weaker in the frame that is furthest from the one with which they identify. One might use this guide to develop those places where they have not previously given much homiletical thought. For example, if a preacher finds they are most deeply shaped by the rhetorical frame, perhaps the theological or ethical frames

might be places where they can address needs in their practice. Or if one is heavily influenced by the theological frame, then they might consider the perspectives of the poetics frame and how its emphasis on experiential encounter might improve their weekly preaching. This could work in any number of ways, but the point is the same: we all have areas of needed growth in our preaching, and it might be that one frame offers the resources to address that growth area. Each frame gives us real information about the practice and can offer aid.

Finally, the preacher might think about the community to which they most often preach. Just as the preacher will operate from one of these frames, so too the congregation will listen from one. For this reason, the preacher could consider how these different frames might better form their community in its various seasons. The preacher might first establish the community's "working frame." What are the communal expectations around what preaching is and should do? Then the preacher might consider potential growth areas in the congregation's current practice. From this assessment, the preacher can deploy various frames for a season to contribute to the holistic formation of the community over time. Thus, a working preacher might use this device and the resources named as a framework for developing and exercising an intervention in congregational leadership. Using their preaching ministry and these frames as an opportunity to enlarge the communal vision and formation.

However one chooses to use this resource, I hope readers find it helpful in better grasping the layout of the field of homiletics. And that by having such a grasp, they might feel energized for their own preaching practice and growth in excellence. I believe any revival of the Church will include, in part, a revival of the Church's preaching. And for that reason, such homiletical excellence has never been more needed or important. Preachers have important and good work to do, and my prayer is that this resource can play a small part in helping them do it.

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