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The Concept of Preaching Example

The concept of preaching

Chapter Two

Contextual Literature Review

2.1 Establishing a starting point.

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

If challenged, those who speak of preaching in such pejorative terms will often cite the cultural distance in practice and understanding between contemporary society and the sermon form as the basis of their judgment. Mention will be made of the social irrelevance of the content of typical sermons, the perceived authoritarian position of the preacher, and the strangeness of the environment in which sermons usually occur. It is also likely that the methodology employed will be judged anachronistic, static, long-winded, and overly didactic for people used to the methods and time-frames of electronic media. The implication is that preaching is somehow out of place in modern society and that, therefore, the negative attitudes displayed in the colloquial use of the term 'preaching' is something new. It is fashionably contemporary to adopt a contemptuous or at best a jocular attitude towards preaching. I use the term 'fashionably' to emphasize that preaching is not the only discourse to receive such widespread opprobrium: advertising is similarly widely scorned yet, given the vast sums of money spent on it, is evidently effective nonetheless (Kilbourne, 1999: 34). Voiced contempt of preaching as a worthwhile activity is not necessarily to be taken at face value.

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

That many studies (for example, Ford. (1979); Bausch, (1996); and Day, Astley and Francis, (2005)) have observed that since at least the 1960s the idea of preaching as a worthwhile arena of social discourse has been repeatedly and vigorously questioned is part of the contextualization with which this thesis is concerned. That the very word 'preaching' brings with it negative connotations that touch even regular Christian worshippers, as N.T. Wright observes in his foreword to the *Reader on Preaching* (Day, 2005: ix), is part of the social understanding this study aims to examine. The colloquial usage that applies the word 'preaching' to the expression of any unsubstantiated opinions, or any speech delivered in a tedious manner, is not a prejudice that serious homiletic theory can simply ignore. That usage is widespread and is, for example, represented in the 1995 edition of the *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* where the second definition of 'preach' is 'give moral advice in an obtrusive way'. Similarly, the use of the word 'preaching' as a highly critical or even condemnatory epithet is too frequent in newspapers to need much supporting elaboration. Andrew Rawnsley writing in *The Observer* on 13th July 2008 is but one example of a continuing journalistic convention. Rawnsley cited the drawbacks for politicians who preach in their campaigning via a long catalogue of negatives about the idea of preaching which included 'delivering patronising lectures from a position of immense privilege', 'wringing their hands about the sins of the world without offering any practical answers to improve society', and 'simplified to the point of parody'. These kinds of associations related to the idea of preaching cannot be simply dismissed if it is to be argued that the practice of preaching within the churches is closely related to wider social trends. Instead, the contemporary bias that associates preaching with that which is intellectually lazy, emotionally sterile, untrustworthy, or simply pass©, must be treated as a factor that needs to be addressed in considering the mechanisms of collective memory.

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

There is, perhaps, no greater hardship at present inflicted on mankind in civilized and free countries, than the necessity of listening to sermons. No one but a preaching clergyman has, in these realms, the power of compelling an audience to sit silent, and be tormented. No one but a preaching clergyman can revel in platitudes, truisms, and untruisms, and yet receive, as his undisputed privilege, the same respectful demeanour as though words of impassioned eloquence, or persuasive logic, fell from his lips. No one can rid himself of the preaching clergyman. He is the bore of the age, the old man whom we Sinbads cannot shake off, the nightmare that disturbs our Sunday's rest, the incubus that overloads our religion and makes God's service distasteful. We are not forced into church! No: but we desire more than that. We desire not to be forced to stay away. We desire, nay, we are resolute, to enjoy the comfort of public worship; but we desire also that we may do so without an amount of tedium which ordinary human nature cannot endure with patience; that we may be able to leave the house of God, without that anxious longing for escape, which is the common consequence of common sermons. (Trollope, 1995: 43-44)

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

2.2 The perception of a crisis in preaching.

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

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

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

Second, in what the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo (2001: 230) has termed 'a society of generalized communication', the very nature of communication itself has profoundly shifted. It is as if everything in human experience has become an object of communication. This shift is often associated with consumerism because, it is argued, such a process of ever widening objects of communication allows more and more events, things, and relationships to become marketable commodities. This expansion, however, brings with it three difficult consequences: it vastly increases the number and range of communication 'events' each person encounters day by day, with a resulting loss in focus, concentration, and time spent on each one; it so stimulates the psychological and physical experience of each person that people's boredom thresholds have decreased dramatically; and it makes communication itself part of the constantly changing, consumption dominated, arena of style and fashion. These things are particularly problematic for preaching since they mean hearers have ever shortening attention spans, feel they need to be stimulated by what they hear, and employ fashion-like judgments to both their

readiness to listen and their willingness to respond (Rogness, 1994: 27-29). Coupled with these changes comes an emphasis on technique in communication, and a preference for labelling unacceptable ideas or challenges as a failure in communication. As a result preachers face intense pressures to conform, both in terms of the content of sermons and the techniques of presentation, to what is socially acceptable simply to gain a hearing. Accordingly, it is argued that the requirement to attract attention and engagement is of a wholly more onerous intensity than it ever was in past times. In the distracted age that is contemporary society the static commitment and attention required of sermon audiences is so counter-cultural as to be almost unachievable.

Third, the argument gives prominence to the absolute dominance of television as the popular medium, and characterizes contemporary culture as televisual and post-literate. It is said that through television, for the first time in the history of humanity, children are being socialized into image use prior to word use (see Warren, 1997). Consequently, the use of words is likely to no longer occupy the pole position in social discourse, but rather to occupy an inherently second order, commentary position. In other words, our culture has shifted from a reading-formed preference towards the ear over the eye, to an image-formed favouring of the eye over the ear, with an obviously detrimental effect on a word dominated form like preaching. Television also appears to be an open and democratized form of communication that offers the prospect of an absolutely free flow of information. It tantalizes with the notion that anything that happens will be almost instantaneously communicable; an impression further reinforced by the Internet. Of course there are serious criticisms to be made of these judgments, but they are nevertheless widely persuasive, at least at face value, both because of the sensory immediacy of the medium and because of the entertainment factors closely allied with it. In comparison preaching seems a highly subjectivized personal choice in which the preacher demands of an audience assent without prior consent and justification, and in which the factor of entertainment does not figure at all.

In a televisual world of a seemingly infinite number of stories, preaching's insistence, as it is perceived, on the one story of God's relationship with humanity in Jesus Christ seems partial and even tedious. Those who lived before the development of electronic media lived lives in which stories, colour, and pictures were rare and precious events; people of the televisual age inhabit a world alive with an ever changing array of images, colours and

narratives. Is it any wonder then that preaching that developed as a communication technique in that pre-television world is thought of as having become outmoded?

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

After the hiatus caused by World War II, the BBC resumed television broadcasting in 1946, and the commencement of broadcasting by commercial stations in 1955 accelerated the use of the medium. By 1958 the number of British households with a TV exceeded those with only a radio (Mathias, 2006). Given the above discussion of the widely perceived influence of new electronic media and TV's escalating use, the 1950s seem an appropriate starting point for the consideration of publications dealing with preaching. Quite apart from this more commonplace sense of a shift having taken place, scholarly analysis of both Church history and homiletics tends to support the idea that very significant changes relevant to the thesis topic did in fact occur at this period. Those changes were not necessarily recognized at the time; perhaps an indication of the lag that occurs as the memories of one generation give way to those of a succeeding one. One British preacher, however, was alert to the possibility that something profound was happening. That preacher was a R. E. C. 'Charlie' Browne, a Manchester vicar, whose 1950s reflections on the preaching task turned out to be amazingly prescient of things that would become major concerns years later. Browne serves as a marker of change. It is sensible, therefore, to examine Browne in some detail before returning to the more general overview.

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

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

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

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

Browne wrote the book whilst he was Rector of the parish of Saint Chrysostum, Victoria Park, Manchester in the 1950s. Ronald Preston, in a foreword to one edition of *The Ministry of the Word*, describes Victoria Park as having 'moved rapidly since the 1920s from the remains of enclosed and privileged nineteenth-century affluence to near disintegration' (in Browne, 1976: 10). He notes also, however, that the St Chrysostum's relative proximity to the university and the city's main teaching hospital made it a base from which Browne's influence spread widely. Hanson records that it was a parish where the personality and abilities alone of the incumbent cleric could attract worshippers (Corbett, 1986: iv). In other words, several aspects of the social world that historians like Hastings (1986), Welsby (1984), and Hylson-Smith (1998) have characterized as typical of the 1950s were clearly likely to

have been there in Browne's experience of the ministerial life. For example, Welsby commenting on the monthly journal *Theology* in the two immediately post-war decades notes how it was widely read by parish clergy and acted as a connecting bridge between the concerns of academia and local church life, and concludes:

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

Elsewhere in the same book Welsby notes that the seeds of radical change were present in the 1950s but went unperceived, and he describes the atmosphere in the Church of England as one of 'complacency and an apparent unawareness of trends already present which were to burst to the surface in the sixties' (1984: 94). Browne most certainly did not share that unawareness and frankly acknowledged the difficulties of communicating the gospel despite the relatively secure social position of theological thought and institutional belief. Far from being in an unassailable authoritative position, he described preachers as living and preaching 'in an age when there is general perplexity and bewilderment about authority', and as all too unwittingly signifying that perplexity in the language and thought expressed in the pulpit (Browne, 1976: 33).

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

There was never a time since the middle of the nineteenth century when Christian faith was either taken so seriously by the generality of the more intelligent or could make such a good case for itself. (Hastings, 1986: 491)

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

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

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

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

18). Browne writes rather ruefully:

Christians have the naïve idea that the arts, specially drama, could and should be extensively used for the proclamation of the gospel. In the first place Christian artists cannot easily and quickly find a way of expressing Christian doctrine in a community which is not moved by Christian symbols. Indeed at present there is no common symbolism Christian or otherwise and Christian artists are found incomprehensible and disturbing by their fellow Christians who cannot justify the authority of new forms and somehow feel that old forms might be patched and brought up-to-date. In the second place whenever the church tries to use art as a method of propaganda her integrity and authority are severely questioned by just those whose conversion would be most significant. (1976: 35)

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

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

As favourable to inherited ideas of religious expression as the climate of the 1950s appears viewed from the beginning of the twenty-first century, Browne, as a preacher active during those years, offers an altogether less sanguine appraisal. That his book dwells extensively on the issue of meaning and the use of language in relationship to the expression of faith indicates that he did not share the easy certainties regarding the communication of religious ideas that were still prevalent within the institutional church of his day. Browne's commitment to preaching as a necessary part of Christian community life is absolute, but his insistence that its

practice is most like the creation of a work of art or a poem makes plain its inherent limitations: the sermon can no more readily define the truth in absolute terms than can the artist or poet (1976: 18). Such an insistence shifts the authority given to preaching from one of power, described as 'six foot above contradiction', to the altogether different position implied in later years by terms such as Ford's communicative 'expertise which is self-authenticating' (Ford, 1979: 235), or Taylor's 'fragile words' (Taylor, 1998: 121). Like such later homileticians, Browne believed preachers should not claim too much for their efforts.

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

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

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

This concern about preaching's power to engage attention indicates that the shifts that will be analysed when this study returns to the consideration of collective memory must extend wide enough to include responses such as those of Browne. The unease with homiletic methodology that Browne's work expressed provides a justification for this review using his analysis as its historical starting point. Consequently, there now follows an overview of trends in preaching since Browne's book that aims to provide both general orientation and a framework within which works discussed later can be placed.

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

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

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

Hastings is perhaps a little too hesitant in his judgement about what prompted this change. Although numerous theological and social factors were obviously significant, the turn towards television as a predominating pastime

must surely have been the crucial prompter of change in the way people spent their time.

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

The Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching at Yale Divinity School was established by the gift of a wealthy businessman called Henry W. Sage on 12 April 1871. It was awarded in memory of Lyman Beecher (1775 - 1863), a Presbyterian and Congregationalist minister who had studied at Yale College and one of whose sons, Henry Ward Beecher, was the minister of Sage's church. The gift specified that the lectureship be given to 'a minister of the Gospel, of any evangelical denomination who has been markedly successful in the special work of the Christian ministry' (Bibliography of the Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching, 2007: 1). As the award is occasionally shared, there have been more than 60 lectureships since 1950. Most of the lectures have been published in book form. Many of those who have been lecturers have been leading practitioners of preaching within the various homiletic movements this review will describe. For example, both Harry Emerson Fosdick (1923-4 series) and Leslie Weatherhead (1948-9 series) gave prominence to the problems of ordinary life in their preaching and are exemplars of a sermonic style that was eager to use psychological insights; H.H. Farmer (1945-6 series) had much more sympathy with the biblical theology movement and, like James Stewart (1951-2 series), saw preaching as

first and foremost an exposition and proclamation of the divine revelation contained within Scripture; Fred Craddock (1977-8 series) was the founder of the New Homiletic movement and along with C. Frederic Buechner (1976-7 series) gave prominence to narrative and an inductive style of presentation; Gardner C. Taylor (1975-6 series) and Henry H. Mitchell (1973-4 series) are both distinguished orators within the African-American tradition and are exemplars of a virtuoso 'oral art' style of sermonising. Social activism has been represented in the lectureship in the persons of Donald Soper (1959-60 series) and William Sloane Coffin (1979-80 series); feminist perspectives are present in the persons of Phyllis Tribble (1981-2 series) and Margaret Farley (1990-1 series); and the reinvigorated interest in homiletics within the Roman Catholic community is represented by Walter J. Burghardt (1993-4 series). Although not every significant movement in homiletics within the period is mentioned—for example, liturgical, evangelistic, and post-Christendom models are absent—nevertheless the lecture series offers some firsthand evidence for the changes that are the concern of this study.

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

Edwards' typology is, of course, based primarily on the contemporary American scene out of which he writes. Nevertheless, with a few necessary provisos, the schema provides a fair representation of British changes as well. That said, it is not the case that British and American experiences can be simply and straightforwardly woven together as directly comparable without further comment. Significant contextual and epistemological differences cannot be ignored—as will become more obvious when collective memory and sermon practice are examined in later chapters. In recent generations the absolute dominance of American scholarship in matters of homiletic theory means that it forms the backdrop of all serious discussion of the issues. That influence and the fortuitous nature of a shared common language mean that there has been, and remains, a constant interweaving of

interests, concerns, and methodologies between Britain and the USA. At least six Lyman Beecher lectureships since 1950 have been awarded to ministers of British origin—although, interestingly, all of them in the earlier years of the period under review. Given that close relationship, this review of necessity draws extensively on American texts.

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

2.5 Representative preaching practitioners and theorists.

The biblical theology movement, particularly influential from the mid-1940s until the mid-1960s, with its 'salvation-history' approach to the Scriptures, had a profound effect on sermonic style (McKim, 1996: 30). In the UK, that effect is perhaps most clearly exemplified in the preaching and academic works of Norman H Snaith (1898-1982), see for example his *Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (1944). The biblical theology movement, although fluid and diverse, was often reinforced by the neo-orthodox reaction against liberalism, and drew inspiration from influences that were current well before the period under review. For example, Karl Barth's seminal *Commentary on the Epistle to the Roman*, first published in English translation in 1933, and C.H. Dodd's

tiny but profoundly influential *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development* of 1936. From such works, and others, there has developed a sermonic style that sees preaching as the tool of an encounter between God and humanity that should disclose the distinctive worldview of the Bible. Following Barth, it urges the primacy of God's revelation over any human thought and action, and, with Dodd, it requires that preaching, if it is to be in the New Testament pattern, must be an act of proclamation that provokes decision and change.

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

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

A very different style is apparent in modern evangelistic preaching which, whilst being highly critical of 'worldly ways', often wholeheartedly employs modern media techniques. Billy Graham is perhaps the most widely known

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

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

The pulpit is a place of power and it is not surprising that much [recent homiletic] writing has concentrated on the role of the preacher, particularly when he is male, white and Western, himself a representative of the mighty who are due to be put down from their seats. (Day, 2005: 4)

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

Of the trends Edwards (2004) identifies, that of the emergence of African American preaching into the majority consciousness appears at first sight to be the most difficult to transpose into the British scene. Perhaps, however, that hesitancy is more about differing timescales, TV exposure and political circumstance, than a comment on the

relative importance of the experiences of Black Christians. The vitality of Black churches in England (according to Brierley, 2003: 9.14, African and Caribbean Pentecostal Churches in England have more than doubled their membership in the last 15 years) and the media prominence of Joel Edwards (General Director of the Evangelical Alliance 1997 to 2008), are indicators that the distinctive voice of Black preaching is increasingly important. This is not to suggest, however, that Black preaching in England should be viewed through the lens of American experience, but rather that such commonalities as the emphasis on performance, musicality and a presentation that recognizes the importance of folk idiom, cannot be ignored in reviewing contemporary homiletic practice.

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

The final trend identified by Edwards (2004), namely those ideas and methods that are termed the New Homiletic, has already been mentioned in the introduction but, for the sake of clarity, some of its identifying components need to be detailed here so that texts mentioned later can be placed in an appropriate developmental framework. By the 1950s the notion that preaching had become overly propositional and didactic was becoming more and

more commonplace (see Browne, 1958; and Davis, 1958), albeit Fosdick had taken this line as early as the 1920s. By the 1970s that criticism had started to become an explicit movement within the practice of preaching that shifted the process of sermon creation and delivery from a deductive, logical style where all the authority lay with the preacher, to an inductive, open-ended approach requiring participative creative effort from the listener as well as the preacher. Instead of depositing information in the minds of the hearers, those who follow this method try to evoke participation through a suspense-filled and engaging process of discovery. In this method, preaching begins with concrete experience; the first person voice predominates, and much stress is given to narrative, plot and dramatic expectation. Fred B. Craddock's *As One Without Authority* (1971) is generally cited as the first book to offer a full and reasoned advocacy of this position. The New Homiletic is the most extensively distributed and applied of all the trends Edwards details, and although not every preacher employing this method claims the title 'new homiletician', its impact is clear in the work of Gilmore (1996), Dennis (1992), Buechner (1977), Taylor (1998), Lowry (1997) and Bausch (1984), and in the publications and practice of numerous other individuals.

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

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

In other styles of preaching, however, the appeal to recollection, recovery, or maintenance of memories, is neither explicitly stated nor even implied. This is perhaps the most serious criticism that can be levelled against the inductive method of the New Homiletic. In its employment of 'life situations' as starting points from which the preacher is to induce dynamic connections to Biblical texts it assumes a pre-knowledge no longer there. Arguably, most contemporary believers in Britain no longer have the inherited or formally learnt framework of Christian narrative, symbols and doctrine that was commonplace in previous generations. This is an issue that will be returned to in the later chapter on the contemporary sociology of religion. In the meantime it is worth making the point that even those at home in preaching practices of a much more traditional hue than the New Homiletic face very similar problems. A concern to guard either the authority of Scripture, or the worshipping tradition in which it is heard, does not necessarily make it any easier for the understandings and practices advocated to be incorporated into a vital and ongoing memory. Halbwachs' ideas are suggestive of a need for strong group bonds to be essential to such remembering if wider social supports no longer apply. The growth of churches with explicit and clear boundaries established around the place afforded the Bible, ethnicity, or particular worship practices, are perhaps evidence of that.

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

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

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

(Budde, 1997: 95)

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

Budde supports the view that the fragmented form of television presentation, demonstrated in quickly changing images and short spoken sections, has become our preferred communication form. As a consequence, sustained attention becomes difficult in all areas of living. According to Budde, TV culture thereby alters the pace of all lived experience (1997:88). Traditionally, he says, religious expression has worked in an incremental way where over the course of years an individual develops religious wisdom allied to sacramental type expressions of growing maturity (69). He poses the question that perhaps the constant flow of information and entertainment is displacing entirely older notions of value formation and habit formerly employed by religions. The echo in this of collective memory's insistence on the significance of a gradually changing social milieu is significant. The gradualism of traditional patterns does not fit easily with the immediacy of TV culture.

According to Budde, television is essentially consumerist in that it turns everything into a commodity to be consumed by the viewer (1997: 77). This means that what is produced must be easily 'buyable': in other words,

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

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

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

For Budde, the Church's very survival depends on a renewed and empowered ecclesiology that can create and maintain intentional gathered communities of disciples who find their primary point of reference and identity (1997: 125) within those communities. Preaching, like every other faith activity, needs to have the maintenance of such communities as an essential priority. For Budde, and the numerous theologians who follow similar but varying perspectives (see for example, Milbank (1990), Hauerwas and Willimon, (1989), or Newbigin (1989)),

preaching as part of the corpus of Christian lived tradition must inherently be a sustained critique of the consumption dominated culture of wider society, both in content and presentation style. Without such an essentially negative stance, preaching is reduced to a pointless and ineffective toying with ideas on the margins of largely godless consumer populism. Inevitably, therefore, for analysts adopting this perspective, Christians have little or nothing positive to learn from modern communications practice.

Christian strategists at the cultural accommodation end of the spectrum are much more willing to employ methods and understandings drawn from the populist communications world. Richard A Jensen is a theologian and preacher who has published numerous works (for example, 1980, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2005) addressing the issues of preaching in a cultural environment dominated by the mass media. His discussion of how preaching is related to wider developments in society generally is worth examining in some detail because, unlike Budde, he lays great emphasis on the way that culture prior to the electronic era has given shape to the very thing we call preaching (1993: 33). In terms of the argument of this thesis, Jensen's perspective suggests that a sense of Christian belonging, and the memory that goes with it, are profoundly shaped by whatever is the dominant form of communication in a given society. The logic of Budde's argument is that earlier cultural discourse was preaching-friendly in a way that contemporary culture is not. Jensen suggests a rather more complex developmental dynamic in which the preaching form has shifted with cultural changes. Jensen believes that what we generally understand by preaching has been wholly shaped by printing and the huge growth since early modern times of the number of those who can read. He terms this as preaching in a literate culture, and marks the year 1454, when the first movable type printing in Europe began, as the beginning of the process (1993: 27).

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

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

Jensen says these social changes clearly had a radical impact on the practice of preaching. Print is situated in space and, therefore, spatial categories came to dominate preaching (1993: 37-38). This means that preachers at home in the context of the literate era, first structure their ideas in space, and then design their sermons in ways consistent with the patterns of the printed page. The 'typographical mind,' as Jensen terms it, produces an oratory consistently marked by three design elements, namely: it is propositional in content and communicates ideas in a largely assertive style; it demands to be understood, and therefore dwells on explicit meanings and seriousness of intent; and finally, it follows a line of thought, that is, it is logical in argument and form (37).

The typographical mind produces what Jensen calls 'Gutenberg homiletics', which are aimed first and foremost at the hearers' minds (1993: 7). The goal of such preaching is to teach the lessons of the text, which usually involves abstracting points of meaning from the text. These points are developed into a spoken presentation that orders them in a logical, sequential and linear manner (38). The sermon, although it may be delivered in any one of a number of 'voice styles' (conversational, rhetorical, didactic, etc.), is prepared under the criteria that apply to written materials. The faith engendered in the hearers is 'faith' that the ideas are true (55). Accordingly, Jensen

suggest that 'print shaped preaching' is always a structuring of ideas in space, as it were, where propositions are the main content and the style is relatively distant and analytical. Such preaching is generally highly conceptual, even abstract in tone; and if it uses stories they are likely to be employed only as dispensable illustrations.

Like Budde, Jensen is concerned that preaching in what might appropriately be labelled the 'traditional' mode no longer easily finds a response in contemporary society. Some of the reasons cited by Jensen for that lack of social connection reflect conclusions of Budde's analysis. For example, just like Budde, Jensen makes much of the enticing character of television. He says television is polymorphic in that at any one time it appeals to a range of human emotions and needs; it massages many human senses simultaneously (1993: 47). By comparison, traditional preaching born of 'Gutenberg homiletics,' seems cold, uninvolving, boring and remote. Like Budde, Jensen notes the inherently deeply engaging nature of television which involves the whole of a viewer's sensorium. For example, a TV prize quiz show seems easily to incorporate components including emotional, intellectual, entertaining, and envious aspects that excite and stimulate, whereas preaching looks like nothing more than unmoved listening. Unlike Budde, however, Jensen advocates not an intentional withdrawal from the styles and structures of the mass media age but rather a close attention to those structures in order to incorporate appropriate aspects of them into homiletic practice. For Jensen, the changes prompted by the development of the technology of movable type printing, provides a model for responses to the development of the technology of electronic media (114).

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

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

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

Translate this into preaching and the appropriate sermon style for the twenty-first century is one that is intimate, self-disclosing, and conversational, in which narrative and metaphor are paramount and the older linear, argued, and conceptual approach is to be dispensed with entirely. Jensen believes the gospel is never an idea, and that attention to the preferred methods of the electronic media can restore to Christians their connection with the faith as a tradition to be lived rather than a body of knowledge to be assimilated. This means thinking in story as well as delivering stories. He asserts:

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

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

2.7 Acknowledging contemporary cultural change in the practice of preaching.

Although the analyses of both Jensen and Budde have in common many of the details of the diagnosis of the

changed relationship between preaching and the wider patterns of human discourse in contemporary society, their proposals about what this then requires of preachers could hardly be more different. Jensen advocates applying methodologies from contemporary social communication structures in ways that encourage preachers 'to preach differently' (Mitchell, 1999: 15) in the expectation of thereby restoring the effectiveness and authority of preaching. Budde believes those same communication structures to be so inherently corrosive of gospel values that they must be systematically avoided in order to create a social space in which intentional communities owing nothing to their methods can be established. In terms of the relationship between preaching and culture, the contrast is between reluctant accommodation or intense critique, between worried utilization of common culture's methods or a troubled absolute withdrawal from that culture, between culture appropriated as a tool or alienation from culture's methods and understandings.

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

Although, as was pointed out above, both Budde and Jensen are exemplars of distinctive perspectives concerning the methods of preaching in a social milieu dominated by mass media, the notion that preaching had by the mid-twentieth century become overly propositional and didactic has been current since at least the 1950s. Two texts were especially significant in the beginnings of what eventually became a profound shift away from the dominance of the propositional-didactic style, namely from the United States, H Grady Davis' 1958 book *Design for Preaching*, and from the United Kingdom, R.E.C. Browne's already mentioned work *The Ministry of the Word*, also published in 1958.

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

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

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

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

When a preacher releases his fellows from sightlessness and narrowness he is making a practical expression of

his love of God and of his fellows which art makes possible. (1958: 27)

Accordingly, Browne asserted:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.8 The reactive nature of the New Homiletic.

Davis and Browne were, in their different ways, the earliest proponents of what was to become that profound shift in preaching practice and theory later known as 'the New Homiletic'. The organic sermon design of Davis and the poetic images of Browne became in the hands of the New Homileticians a conversation-like, multifaceted and suspense driven process in which the exegete was not the preacher but the listeners. As was mentioned earlier, starting from concrete experience rather than general principles, the New Homiletics saw itself as a liberating, inductive style of discourse in contrast to the authoritarian assumptions of a deductive style of thinking. Indeed Fred B Craddock, who is often cited as the first full-blown advocacy of the New Homiletics, said that general truths and conclusions arrived at by the preacher in the privacy of the study always tended to oppress since, by their very nature and process of production, they treated a listening congregation as less than fully faithful and capable in thinking (1990). Accordingly, Craddock said the inductive process of discovery that preachers employed for

themselves in the creation of a sermon, with its many loose ends and exciting twists-and-turns, should be replicated in the sermon itself. A sermon should not primarily deposit information in the mind of a hearer, but rather evoke a participation in a suspense-filled and deeply engaging process of discovery. In this style of preaching a first person voice predominates, with a great deal of stress given to narrative, plot, sequential movement of word images, and a sense of dramatic expectation. A comparison between the style and methodology of the New Homiletic and those of the inherited 'traditional' preaching methods produces sharp and distinctive contrasts: here sermons are shaped from the particular to the general, not from the generalized to the particular; the process in the pulpit is one of induction not deduction, and has about it a feeling of mobility that requires participation as against the logical, linear and ultimately 'remote' voice of the authoritative preacher of the earlier approach. Clarity of structure is provided in a life-like, story sense, not via a rational, systematized ordering of ideas. The New Homiletic aims to be evocative and plot-like rather than dependent on stimulating ideas expressed as such; in this way it is deliberately digressive and multi-layered without any sense of 'distilling texts' in order to express a yet deeper truth. Simply put, the New Homiletic works from 'itch to scratch', not from idea to application.

Even this cursory introduction to the New Homiletic makes plain the essentially reactive nature of the response advocated. In a culture in which public discourse is frequently characterized as having been democratized (in the sense of every person supposedly having a voice and in which the authoritative privileging of any once voice is highly suspect), the New Homileticians provide a methodology that fits with these assumptions. That the assumptions in themselves may mask profoundly disquieting social structures of unaccountable power and influence is, however, all too frequently sidestepped in the pursuit of a homiletic that engages. Where that urge to engage becomes the all-dominating motivation of the sermon, the overall content inevitably tends towards an endless procession of human 'life stories', in which the gospel is obscured as much as disclosed. The things of Christian collective memory can be all too easily reduced to that which suits the inclinations of the individual, or which the preacher believes will suit the inclinations of the majority of the people present.

A key issue in this thesis is how preaching can be socially challenging or prophetic whilst at the same time

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

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

2.9 Towards the recovery of a proper homiletical rhetoric.

Although the problem of preaching in relationship to the wider communications environment has been introduced here as an issue consequent upon the changes produced by the contemporary dominance of the mass media in human discourse, the central question of the proper use of rhetoric in preaching has a very long history indeed. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430) prior to becoming a priest and bishop was the holder of the office of the imperial chair of rhetoric in Milan. Rhetorical practice was viewed with suspicion in the Church of the

time, both because of its pagan associations, and its emphasis on technique which seemed to undervalue the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching. In *On Teaching Christianity* (*De doctrina Christiana*), Augustine restated the principles of classical rhetoric, but transposed them into a close relationship with an authoritative view of the Bible. For Augustine, a proper use of rhetoric was a way of arming Christians to defend themselves against their detractors. As he wrote:

Rhetoric, after all, being the art of persuading people to accept something, whether it is true or false, would anyone dare to maintain that truth should stand there without any weapons in the hands of its defenders against falsehood; that those speakers, that is to say, who are trying to convince their hearers of what is untrue, should know how to get them on their side, to gain their attention and have them eating out of their hands by their opening remarks, while these who are defending the truth should not? That those should utter their lies briefly, clearly, plausibly, and these should state their truths in a manner too boring to listen to, too obscure to understand, and finally too repellent to believe? That those should attack the truth with specious arguments, and assert falsehoods, while these should be incapable of either defending the truth or refuting falsehood? That those, to move and force the minds of their hearers into error, should be able by their style to terrify them, move them to tears, make them laugh, give them rousing encouragement, while these on behalf of truth stumble along slow, cold and half asleep? Could anyone be so silly as to suppose such a thing? (Augustine, 1992: 201)

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

Of these three, the one put first, that is the necessity of teaching, is to be found in the things we are saying, the remaining two in the way we say it. Therefore the person who is saying something with the intention of teaching

should not consider he has yet said anything of what he wants to the person he wishes to teach, so long as he is not understood. ... If on the other hand he also wishes to delight the person he is saying it to, or to sway him, he will not succeed in doing so whatever his way of saying it may have been; but in order to do so, it makes all the difference how he says it. (Augustine, 1992: 215)

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

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

Long's anxieties raise, in a sharp way, the problems associated with the time-lag that exists between changing

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

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