PREACHING: CONTENT AND FORM (PART 2)

Last time, we talked about the homily's focus and function statements, and reviewed the differences between deductive and inductive preaching. In this column, I will very briefly present some of the more common inductive homiletic <u>forms</u> (or structures); I would recommend reading some of the "overviews" listed under the resources if you want to get a general idea of what these preachers are doing—and then delve into their primary texts if you want to go deeper.

Thomas Long
Long argues that the homiletic form must be particular for each preaching event—since the assembly and the scriptures will be different each time one preached. This does not meant, however, that the preacher must invent a new form each time he or she preaches. Rather, the preacher might borrow from the "stockroom" of forms that others have used and adapt them to his or her needs.

Fred Craddock
As with Long, Fred Craddock does not offer a single homiletic form. Rather, he emphasizes a number of qualities that ought to be present in inductive preaching: movement, unity, and imagination. The homily moves towards a conclusion; therefore, the preacher must create and sustain a sense of anticipation. The homily should have a single point towards which everything is directed. Perhaps the form of the homily might be derived from the biblical text itself; such an approach would help to keep form and message interrelated as well as lend variety to the preaching task.

Eugene Lowry
Eugene Lowry stresses that preaching begins with a "felt need"—an "ambiguity" which cries for resolution. The preacher's task, then, is to bring the gospel to bear on that problem. In order to be heard, in order to maintain the listener's attention, Lowry structures his preaching along the lines of a narrative plot—moving from initial ambiguity, increasing tension, and eventual resolution. Lowry structures his plot in five stages. (1) Upsetting the Equilibrium ("oops!"); (2) Analyzing the Discrepancy ("ugh!"); (3) Disclosing the Clue to Resolution ("Aha!"); (4) Experiencing the Gospel ("Whee!"); and (5) Anticipating the Consequences ("Yeah!").

Paul Scott Wilson
For Wilson, a homily must be marked by unity: one text, one theme, one doctrine, one need, one image. The homily itself is built of four "pages" (plus an introduction and conclusion); the metaphor of "pages" is not to be taken literally, but is Wilson's way of speaking of the four moments in the homily ensuring that each of them is roughly equal in length. In the first page, the preacher draws out the trouble or crisis presented in the scriptural text; in the second page he or she names the analogous trouble in the present. Such trouble may refer to the sinful human condition and individual sins, or may come in the form of social sin and human suffering. The third page is especially crucial, for this is where God's grace-filled action in the scripture passage is highlighted; it is here that the theme sentence can help the preacher keep focused on God's actions and not on human works. In the fourth page, God's action in

the contemporary setting is identified and named; it is from naming that activity that the human response (mission) arises.

David Buttrick

According to David Buttrick, the building block of any homily (or sermon in his tradition) is the "move"—consisting of an opening theme sentence, a body, and a terse closing statement which connects to the opening theme. By placing these moves in sequence, analogous to a series of still photographs, a sermonic plot unfolds in a way that is natural, congenial to the way people normally think and listen.

Imaginal Preaching

According to Richard Eslinger, "[t]o preach in nonimagistic ways is in this postmodern context to lose the vernacular of our people" (Eslinger, 280). The use of images in preaching—whether visual or linked to any of the other senses—is more than just rhetorical flourish; images are how we come to know; they mediate "between the self and the world" (Eslinger, 251). A homily in this mode of preaching might be structured as a series of images—either contemporary or historical/biblical—all reflective of a central theme or master image derived from the scriptures.

Mystagogical Preaching

According to Emily Besl and Jeffrey Kemper, mystagogical preaching "illumines the deep meaning of the liturgical act by reflection upon: the mystery (specific salvific event) of Jesus Christ, the story that reveals the mystery (Scripture), the ritual that renders the mystery present (Liturgy), and the lived situation of the people participating in the liturgy."

Resources:

Overviews

Allen, O. Wesley, Jr. *Determining the Form: Structures for Preaching*. Elements of Preaching Series. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008.

DeBona, Guerric. *Fulfilled in Our Hearing: History and Method of Christian Preaching.* New York: Paulist Press, 2005.

DeBona, Guerric. *Preaching Effectively, Revitalizing Your Church: The Seven-Step Ladder toward Successful Homilies.* New York: Paulist Press, 2009.

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

Wilson, Paul Scott. *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*. Preaching and its Partners Series, ed. Paul Scott Wilson. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004.

Primary Texts

Burghardt, Walter J. *Preaching: The Art and the Craft.* New York: Paulist Press, 1987.

Buttrick, David. *Homiletic: Moves and Structures.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Craddock, Fred B. *As One Without Authority.* Revised edition. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001.

Craddock, Fred B. *Preaching.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985.

Long, Thomas. *The Witness of Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989.

Lowry, Eugene L. *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form.* Expanded edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Wilson, Paul Scott. *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999.